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**Irreconcilably Past and Present: The Representation of the Archaeological Fabric of**

**Post-1989 Berlin in Six Narrative Texts**

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University College London

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.

**91,460 words**



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## Abstract

In the political and cultural discourses of the post-*Wende* period Berlin was widely seen as the symbolic force of the new united Germany. Between 1989 and 1999 much of East Berlin's urban fabric was radically altered to confirm this image. Memories of the GDR and of National Socialism were erased from the recently unified city – hence the renaming of prominent public sites, of street names and buildings and the demolition of others, mostly in East Berlin. This thesis analyses in six narrative texts a link between the unification and the erasure of Berlin's divided pasts. Both Thomas Hettche's *Nox* and Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir* focus on the night of November 9 1989 in Berlin and proffer conflicting readings of the event as well as its importance. In Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld* Berlin is represented as a site informed by an omnipresent past covering the last 150 years of German history. For the protagonist of Cees Nooteboom's *Allerseelen*, Berlin is understood as an archaeological site that invites the critical purchase of a modern, non-German flâneur to uncover the historic. For the paranoid protagonist of Friedrich Christian Delius's *Die Flatterzunge*, Berlin is experienced as a suffocating and an inescapably constant reminder of an assumed inherited National Socialist guilt. Whereas Tanja Dücker's novel, *Spielzone*, illustrates a potential liberation from the historic thematised in the previous texts by portraying Berlin as an unscribed blank urban space inhabited by a historically carefree younger generation. The six texts studied in this thesis constantly debate the function of Berlin as a site of remembering and forgetting.

To May

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Saget, Steine, mir an, o sprecht, ihr hohen Paläste!  
Straßen, redet ein Wort!

Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Römische Elegien, I



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## Introduction

This thesis asks in what way the changes to Berlin's topography following reunification might possibly represent attempts to assert and to celebrate a new Germany and a new unified city and in so doing betray a desire to de-historicize the past by muffling the historic references rooted in Berlin. East Berlin's structures, its buildings and memorials, its street names and public spaces, shed light on a collective identity that is more felt than articulated because that identity is in part communicated through a loaded urban space. Collective, and to a degree individual identity, is seen by the texts as being under threat – the common perception of the reunification was that it represented a new beginning and demanded that the burden of the painful memories of the past be lifted from Germany's shoulders. It is against this erasure that the texts position themselves by representing Berlin as a site utterly saturated with the past and utterly rooted in its traumas. This thesis addresses and analyses those pasts and traumas illustrated in the texts and asks why Berlin's topography is central to these texts.

Berlin's recent pasts were to be reinterpreted following the fall of the Iron Curtain: 'Wenn ein Herrschaftssystem verfällt oder gestürzt wird, verlieren die von ihm geschaffenen Denkmäler, soweit sie der Legitimation und Festigung des Herrschaftssystems dienten, grundsätzlich ihre Existenzberechtigung'.<sup>1</sup> This announcement by Berlin's Chamber of Deputies served as a preface to an exhibition by the French photographer Sophie Calle at the Martin Gropius Museum in Berlin in 1996. The exhibition, *Die Entfernung*, traced the removal of monuments and buildings from East Berlin, by offering the visitor in every case two photographic images

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<sup>1</sup> Mitteilung des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin, Juni 1992. Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin – 12. Wahlperiode: Drucksache 12/2743.

of particular sites, before and after the reunification. The image taken after the reunification invariably revealed an empty space, but one in which the trace of something could still be seen. A typescript of a conversation accompanied each image between the photographer and residents who were asked to record what they remember about the missing memorial, the changed street name or the demolished building. The intention was to 'photograph the absence and replace the missing monuments with their memories'.<sup>2</sup> It is my claim that the exhibition confronted the visitor with the challenge not only to remember the past, but also to read those pasts in and through the city's topography.

What Sophie Calle's photographs made clear for me was Berlin's particular uniqueness born out of its astonishing past, the Cold War division that is still strangely visible, as are leftovers of National Socialism, which in a great deal of Berlin-related literature, continues to haemorrhage into the new urban foundations. The weight of these pasts is felt in the city almost in spite of the attempts to suggest that those chapters of German history are now closed. The endless buses full of memorabilia-hungry tourists, the school groups negotiating the building works on the Potsdamer Platz and the researchers from abroad testify to the continuing importance of Berlin's topography as a prism through which Germany's past is often seen and discussed. The exhibition, in common with the six narrative texts that are central to this thesis, underscores the necessity of analysing the visual as well as literary portrayals of Berlin. Calle's photographs of Berlin, resembling random pages from a biography, also underline the city's importance as a representative force in the reunification: to speak of the German reunification is to speak of the reunification of East and West Berlin.

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<sup>2</sup> Sophie Calle, *The Detachment* – Exhibition Catalogue (G+B Arts International, Arndt & Partner Gallery).

The calls for remembrance exposed through the exhibition and those appeals for silence and forgetting to which Brian Ladd refers in his insightful reading of the urban fabric, are what this thesis is about.<sup>3</sup> But in contrast to Ladd's historical overview, this thesis will look at six narrative texts, which thematize Berlin as a site of remembering and forgetting by engaging with the city's topography or urban fabric, its buildings, street names, parks and squares at an important historical juncture. I shall address Thomas Hettche's *Nox*, Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld*, Cees Nooteboom's *Allerseelen*, Christian Friedrich Delius's *Die Flatterzunge*, and Tanja Dücker's *Spielzone*, within a framework similar to that established by Sophie Calle in her exhibition. Each of these texts debates the reunification and the weight of German history through literary representations of Berlin over a ten-year period. This thesis insists on the physicality of the city, on its stones and pavements, its rough cement and thickets and not, as numerous other studies, on Berlin as an abstract idea or notion. Through the texts the reader becomes a textual traveller, a flâneur engaging with and engaged by Berlin's many coexisting realities and histories.

First divided during the allied occupation after the war and then again in August 1961 when the first Wall was built, Berlin became a microcosm of the larger political realities of a country kept apart by the Iron Curtain. The effect of the reunification of the two German states in Berlin was no less considerable. The opening of the Wall 'und die Aufhebung der künstlichen Einschnürung des Westens, die wiedergewonnene Freiheit im Osten gaben auch den Blick frei auf eine Geschichtslandschaft von eindrucksvoller Schrecklichkeit. Vor allem die bröckelnden Stadtteile des Ostens ließen Berlin als enormes Freilichtmuseum des 20.

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997). Although Ladd's concern is historical rather than literary, I am nonetheless indebted to Ladd's insistence on the readability of Berlin's urban fabric.

Jahrhunderts erscheinen, wo alle seine Tendenzen ihre Spuren und Denkmäler hinterlassen hatten'.<sup>4</sup> The six narrative texts, which I shall analyse in the chapters that follow, explore through the critical purchase of their protagonists these historical traces and bear witness to their importance by pleading for a historical consciousness and perception of the city as a multilayered site of conflicting realities communicated through a multitude of signs.

My analysis of the representation of Berlin through the texts that follow will proceed on an understanding of the city as constituted by signs whose intent is to convey meaning to the city users. A sign is here understood to be composed of a signifier, say, a building or a public monument, and the signified, or that which the sign is intended to convey, although this interpretation excludes any inherent relationship between the sign as vehicle and that which is communicated. Signs are marks, bodily movements, or symbols used to indicate or convey meaning, information and arguably constitute 'the basis for human thought and communication'.<sup>5</sup> It is in this respect that Umberto Eco has argued elsewhere that 'all cultural phenomena are, in reality, systems of signs', which suggests that culture in its wider implications is also to be understood as communication.<sup>6</sup> It is my understanding that it is possible to read East, West and reunified Berlin's histories and cultures through the signs in the city: those signs being its buildings, street names and memorials. That it is possible to interpret the city semantically, by which I mean to engage with the city is to 'read' its signs, suggests a way of looking at the city as a textual construct. The textuality of the city space is shown both on the demonstrative level of advertisements, notices on lampposts, posters, all

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<sup>4</sup> Gustav Seibt, 'Berliner Leben', *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 4:57 (2003), p. 301.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Sebeok, *An Introduction to Semiotics* (London, Pinter Publishers, 1994), p. xi.

<sup>6</sup> Umberto Eco, 'Function and Sign: Semiotics of Architecture', in M. Gottdiener and A. Lagopoulos, eds. *The City and the Sign* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 57.

of which are 'read'; but it is also connoted through architectural forms, street names, public squares and building-facades, which are also 'read' and interpreted. Meaning is communicated beyond the semantic level of the sign: a prison building may act as a signifier and be understood as a spatial relation of social discourses on the penal code (the signified meaning). The same building built in Europe in the nineteenth century in a neo-gothic style, for example, might be interpreted as representing an attempt to infuse the social discourses on justice, which would anyway not be the same as contemporary discourses on justice today, with those of religion. Social and ideological meaning is context-based, but the difference also suggests that the spatial and symbolic representation of the prison building is communicated beyond the physical reality of the building by becoming part of a wider social discourse. In this respect, as my analysis of the six narrative texts will show, both the building as a sign as well as that which it signifies are inscriptions on a socially charged space, a space in which material objects, streets, squares and buildings become vehicles of signification, by which I mean that the symbolic act always involves some physical object as well as social discourse on it. I shall proceed to interpret the texts I have chosen as literary attempts to gauge contemporary debates, through Berlin's topography, on the historic, on German identity and the conflict between private and collective memory.

A sign functions in the city within a given space and affects how that space is understood and to a lesser degree negotiated. I refer in my analysis of the sign as a meaning-giving vehicle to Henri Lefebvre's analytical interpretation of urban space, which makes the claim that to understand what is meant by 'space' is to engage in a semiotic discourse – these texts make a cognitive demand on the reader to understand how a portrayal of Berlin's urban space might lend itself to wider discussions on identity, history and memory. Theoretically, I proceed on

the assumption that the city communicates an idea of community to the people living in that city, and it does so within a framework in which urban signs are understood to be 'preloaded' with meaning. But for a city to represent an idea, concept or belief, it must be communicated in such a way that it is intelligible to the collective. It must also be communicated in such a way that it is 'visible'. Berlin's space, being a constitutive part of a city, is here understood as containing more than one 'visible' discourse on the idea of community: the city is marked by convergent and conflicting discourses, namely those of the GDR, of the FRG and of a reunified Germany.

The city space will therefore be understood as 'a didactic instrument endowed with a concept of culture and educational purposes' because, as a conveyor of information, space becomes an important 'source of random but carefully selected information'.<sup>7</sup> That information helps in part to situate the city-user within a temporal continuum and thereby place that city-user within a historic and social framework that is meaning-giving and which determines the individual's understanding of herself as part of a wider collective. The self has a significant relational quality insofar as the self's own awareness arises, in part, from social and cultural interaction. It is the common connections and involvements that 'give us collective identities and shared orientations and values, making us people able to use a specific language or idiom and marking us with its particular styles of description, categorization, and expression'.<sup>8</sup> It is possible to extend this notion of self to argue that selfhood presupposes a collective disposition. And, by extension, 'being social presupposes the ability to experience things that

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<sup>7</sup> Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1983), p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> Jerrold Siegel, *The Idea of Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.



happened to groups to which we belong long before we even joined them as if they were part of our own personal past'.<sup>9</sup>

The complex nature of the relationship between past and present and the past in relation to the construction of identity, themes to which I take the six narrative texts to be responding, is acknowledged in psychoanalysis, highlighting two quite different assumptions concerning the processes of memory and remembering, each of which are to be found in Freud and Walter Benjamin. One model, illustrated by Freud, to which I refer in the first four chapters, by means of an analogy with archaeological excavation, assumes that the past still exists 'somewhere', waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject. The other model imagines the process of memory as one of continuous revision or 'retranslation', reworking memory traces in light of later knowledge and experience. As Walter Benjamin suggests, memory and remembrance are 'really the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been'.<sup>10</sup> With reference to Benjamin's theory of urban space and the role of the flâneur or urban walker, I analyse such interpolations in chapter three by focussing on the role of the city-walker in Nootboom's text as an archivist and archaeologist. Indeed, such models of memory are explored and explained in all chapters of this thesis. A Freud-Benjamin interpretative approach to the narrative texts analysed in the first four chapters is justified on the grounds that the protagonists of the texts engage with the city by walking along its streets and roads and in so doing, hope to uncover repressed histories assumed to be embedded within the urban fabric. That said, it is not only a question of how and what individuals remember and how societies represent collective as well as individual memories, but also

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<sup>9</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', *One Way Street*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London, Verso, 1997), p. 305.

what could possibly be termed a cultural struggle, in this case between East and West Germany, over the construction and meanings of memory within culture, the ways in which society constructs the very means and possibility of remembering. Hence I explore in chapter two Günter Grass's notion of memory as something rooted in and integral to Berlin's topography, namely in its buildings, street names and urban planning. Individual users of the city endow space with meaning, insofar as urban signs might be said to communicate personal histories and/or key biographical moments as well as abstract notions of community and social belonging. This situating of personal memories in the city promotes an awareness of the city space as constituted also by mnemonic structures that refer both to a collective past as well as individual memories of that past. I understand mnemonic structures to be devices, such as buildings, street names or memorials that trigger memory on a personal and collective level.

Continuing with this interpretation of loaded space, I argue in the final chapter that it is possible to understand space as a site of difference, or as a heterotopic site. I introduce Foucault's concept of heterotopia to ask in what way it is possible to analyse urban space as a place from which thought arises, space as a site where it is possible to think differently, that is, to think the Other and not the Same. Heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place any number of spaces, sites that are in themselves incompatible. The 'otherness' of these spaces is not a result of an ability to transcend ordinary space, but rather the way in which they interact with the everyday space, challenging, reversing and contesting it in a dialectic of difference.

In support of this perception of the ‘otherness’ of space, I also introduce Michel de Certeau’s notion of ‘urban poaching’, which suggests that it is possible for city-users to (re-)claim the city for themselves through non-conventional approaches. The term ‘to poach’ suggests an awareness of the city as a spatial order wherein streets and paths present a framework of possible movement; poaching challenges the intentionality of this framework and overturns authority by finding other ways to negotiate the urban fabric, such as walking along roof-tops or changing the function of a space into something completely different. To ‘poach’ in this sense, then, will suggest attempts to re-write the urban fabric by inscribing other meanings alongside or in place of those already present. The significance for the inclusion of the theories of Foucault and de Certeau lies in what I refer to as a ‘postmodern’ notion of space that finds its echo in the protagonists and thematic concerns analysed in the final chapter. By postmodern space I mean an awareness of the city that acknowledges the plurality of discourses, of communities and modes of existence that might be said to coexist within what is commonly understood under the rubric of city. It is an awareness of the city that is central to my analysis and conclusion in the final chapter.

That leaves me to say something about the choice of texts and the inevitably limited scope of this thesis. The texts I chose offer an informed portrayal of post-1989 Berlin, insofar as they illustrate the significance of Berlin’s topography to contemporary debates on German identity and history, and their meaning for post-reunification Germany. It cannot, however, be too strongly stressed that my thesis makes no claim to be exhaustive. Wanting to avoid a mere overview or survey of Berlin-related texts written between 1990 and 1999, I have chosen to focus on those that reflect on and interpret the Berlin theme, richly and suggestively. The justification for my choices, however, is not solely based on the fact that they share Berlin as

their central concern, but significantly on the common approaches they adopt in their negotiations with Berlin's complex topography. I refer here to the frequent use of the human body as an instrument with which to gauge, reflect on and in some cases embody Germany's astonishing history. The body is key to my analysis in the following five chapters. Through this thematic similarity of the body and city, I believe these texts establish a narrative dialogue that extends beyond the individual chapters to create a thematic unity for the thesis as a whole. The texts offer a wide-ranging perspective on Berlin over a ten-year period and do so through often-conflicting generational differences making possible a perspective that reveals how dissimilar representations of Berlin can be, indeed are, and in so doing underscore a shift in what is considered central to a representation of Berlin. As will be shown, non-convergent perspectives of the city are themselves part of the very problems Berlin is facing as it moves into its new role as the representative capital of a unified Germany. What is at issue here is what is considered to be representative of Berlin, and what is not. Or, how much of the city can be changed without affecting the city's identity? All of the primary texts not only engage with Berlin, but also with the contemporary discourses on it. Is there an ineradicable anxiety that attends the rebuilding of the city? What should be the place of the various Berlin/German pasts in the city and in which way should they be made 'visible'? What is significant is that the texts are responding to wider cultural and political debates and in so doing demonstrate why it is still necessary to look at, ponder and write about Berlin.

The main concern of this thesis, then, is with the literary negotiation of Berlin's and Germany's past in the present. Hence Cees Nooteboom's text is included in this analysis: Nooteboom is a Dutch author living in Amsterdam, but his novel is passionately engaged by

Berlin as the focus of the historicity and amnesia of the modern world. It is also a text that underscores the wider importance of Berlin representations beyond a German-German context. In the novels to be discussed, the debate on the function of Berlin as a site of remembering and forgetting dominates, as indeed does the portrayal of the urban fabric itself. It was central to my choice of texts that the city was more than background or a novel embellishment – as is the case in many novelistic Berlin portrayals. Each text has Berlin as its theme; they not only address the historic in Berlin, but do so over a ten-year time period thus introducing a chronology to the thesis. The period in question charts the development of the preoccupation with the historic from the opening of the Wall to the end of the 1990s.

In chapter one I address Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir* and Thomas Hettche's *Nox* and analyse the portrayal of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing opening up of history, and ask in what way the interpretation and narratability of this event might be conceivably problematic. Placed in relation to Thomas Hettche's *Nox*, the difference in approaches to the Wall between the two texts might seem at first glance to strain the exercise of comparative interpretation to its very limits. However, through their respective portrayals of the city's topography the two texts nonetheless offer, and strangely demand, multiple narrative perspectives on the fall of the Wall. In the second chapter I look at how Günter Grass develops this preoccupation with Berlin's past, although the focus is almost exclusively on East Berlin, in *Ein weites Feld*. The Grass text explores the period between the monetary and political reunification and sees October 3, 1990 as a threat to the history and memory of the East and also as an expression of the West's imperialism. Grass's text offers rich and detailed insights into East Berlin, its buildings and main thoroughfares and in so doing underscores the importance of urban planning and architecture to contemporary debates on memory and

collective identity. The third chapter looks at Cees Nooteboom's portrayal of Berlin as an archaeological site that invites the critical purchase of a modern flâneur to engage with and ultimately uncover and recover those histories forgotten or denied a representative voice. Borrowing heavily from Walter Benjamin, the text insists through the critical purchase of an urban flâneur on a rich common cultural heritage that is seen by the protagonist to be permanently inscribed in the city. Christian Friedrich Delius's Berlin novel, *Die Flatterzunge*, extends the theme of the confrontation with the historic in the fourth chapter, but does so by portraying the city as a site so saturated with historical references that it hinders authentic forms of individuality. Engaging as it does with current debates on the memory of National Socialism, the text illustrates somewhat provocatively the consequences of a turning away from the historic as well as vocalising a concern with an uncritical insistence on subjective experience and perception, which the text perceives to be prevalent in contemporary Berlin. The final chapter addresses Tanja Dücker's *Spielzone* from a two-fold perspective: the text represents a shift in awareness of the city by portraying Berlin as an urban blank space inhabited by an historically indifferent younger generation. Dücker illuminates an important generational shift, which expresses itself particularly in terms of a relationship (and a lack of it) to the past. Berlin's signs that dominate the urban perspective in the previous chapters no longer appear to have the same signifying power for Dücker's younger protagonists.

The progression from chapter 1 to 5 is, then, both chronological as well as generational and cultural. By which I mean that my analysis of the six narrative texts seeks to address specific topographical representations, for example, the Wall, the Potsdamer Platz and the Tiergarten, and then addresses the varied perceptions in the novels of these topographical representations

as signs. I argue that these changing perspectives of Berlin's signifiers in part underscore a shift in historical consciousness, one that radically alters how Berlin is perceived and represented. The theoretical framework, which I outlined above, namely a Freudian reading on the role of memory in urban engagement, or simply an awareness that space in the city is ideologically, politically as well as culturally constituted, makes possible an analysis of Berlin as a multi-layered site loaded with private and public histories that are in danger of being forgotten in the drive to represent Berlin as a "normal" city much like any other European capital city. The debate of how much of the past is to be given a voice in the present is not only challenged by the fragments of history that lie scattered across Berlin's scarred topography, it is also significantly undermined by a generation for whom the war and the division of Germany are distant historical echoes that have no place in their perspective of, and lives in, contemporary Berlin.

**Berlin November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 – Deconstructing the myth of unity:  
Thomas Hettche's *Nox* and Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir***

Ihr werdet mit der Wirklichkeit nie fertig!<sup>11</sup>  
Walter Benjamin

The criteria behind the choice of the two texts analysed in this chapter are twofold: the cultural/historical contexts of the authors and the motivation behind the literary representations of Berlin and the fall of the Wall. I shall ask to what degree *Nox*, by the West Berlin author Thomas Hettche, reveals an indebtedness to the so-called *Gesinnungsästhetik*<sup>12</sup> and in what way his portrayal of November 9 might be said to lean heavily on a pervasive, though not an uncontested West German perception of the Wall as a moral and just reprisal for the horrors of National Socialism. This 'moral' and historic reading of the Wall arguably influences literary as well as non-literary representations of the city: 'In Politik, Publizistik und Wissenschaft wurde die Teilung Deutschlands oft als eine gerechte Strafe für die nationalsozialistische Gewalt- und Vernichtungspolitik und die Mauer als eine zwar häßliche, aber auch logische Konsequenz angesehen. Selbst in Berlin hatte sich bis 1988 die Sprache der Volksparteien gewandelt, statt von "Mauer" wurde immer häufiger von "Hürde" oder ganz wertfrei von "Grenze" gesprochen'.<sup>13</sup> By way of contrast, I shall analyse East Berlin based writer Thomas Brussig's literary representation of Berlin and the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November in *Helden wie wir*, from which any reference to the Wall as either a punishment

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Bekränkter Eingang', *Kleine Prosa- Baudelaire Übertragungen: Gesammelte Schriften* IV:I, (Hg.) Tillmann Rexroth (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 560.

<sup>12</sup> 'Gesinnungsästhetik' translates roughly as an aesthetics of thinking and/or conviction. Its origins are to be found in the writings of post-war authors such as Walter Jens, Günter Grass and the early Martin Walser and mark a particular response to the National Socialist past and the centrality of that past in contemporary German writing.

<sup>13</sup> Edgar Wolfrum, 'Die Mauer' in: *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, vol. I (Hg.) Etienne François und Hagen Schulze (C.H. Beck, München 2002), p. 560.



inflicted by history or as a wound of the past is noticeably absent. The text is a critique of the repressiveness of the East German political system, in part manifested through Berlin's urban fabric, as well as being a damning attack on the East German citizenry for their acceptance of and social adjustment within the totalitarian system. Both texts portray the fall of the Berlin Wall from their respective 'sides', Hettche from Berlin-west and Brussig from Berlin-east.<sup>14</sup> Brussig's Berlin portrayal is a burlesque historical reckoning, and one which deflates any world-historical pretensions, seen as it is through the eyes of Klaus Uhltscht, a child growing up in East Berlin shortly before the fall of the Wall; Uhltscht's tale is a social and political perception free of the viscerally historic burden that bears heavily on Hettche's own text, one equally resistant to grand historical narratives, but a burden that nonetheless places it within a markedly West German literary tradition.

The texts adopt quasi-mythic themes in their narrative approaches to their representations of the Wall, and in doing so thematize the human body as a site on which the historic might be performed or made visible. But whereas Hettche's text appears to suggest that the physical body of the protagonist mirrors and in a way enacts the 'wound' of division, the protagonist's body is mutilated during her Berlin perambulations, with cognate metaphors of scarring, cutting and amputation that once again gain currency now that the 'wound' has been reopened, Brussig's body metaphor serves a different purpose. The body in *Helden wie wir* is fragmented and the representation focuses primarily on Klaus's abnormally large penis, a metaphor for liberation from a perverse GDR state, metonymically figured in family life, the school and workplace, which together represent a determined manipulation of the individual.

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<sup>14</sup> Exactly how varied those perceptions of the Wall were is made clear in Peter Schneider's Berlin Wall novella, *Der Mauerspringer* written in 1982. He notes that 'auf dem Westberliner Stadtplan läßt sich die Mauer kaum finden. Nur ein zartes, rosa gestricheltes Band zerteilt die Stadt. Auf dem Ostberliner Stadtplan hört die Welt an der Mauer auf'. Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1982), p. 12.

To borrow from Spivak's concept of the discourse behind the pen,<sup>15</sup> it is hardly surprising given the predominance of a working through the burden of National Socialism in post-1945 West German literature, that Hettche's text seeks constantly to anchor the discussion of the Wall within a historic framework mostly absent in Brussig's thematic portrayal, although I do not claim that Brussig's text is indifferent to the historic. In both cases the metaphoric exploration of the body and the insistence on the mythic as an alternative narrative discourse are instances of critical counter-voices in the 1989 unification era, be it in the form of a rejection of the claim that the fall of the Wall heralded a new beginning (Hettche) or a refusal to give credence to the widely held assumption that Berlin, echoing Willy Brandt's famous speech, had now 'naturally' grown together (Brussig).

By way of prelude, I shall first look at the cultural and political climate of Berlin/Germany in the period immediately following the unification. It is fair to claim that during this period there existed a media-promoted wave of *Wende*<sup>16</sup> novels, prose pieces and other literary ventures hoping to tap into the popularity of recent events. This surge of interest in Berlin and the *Wende* was triggered by the German feuilleton's repeated calls for a unification novel to represent a new, united and indeed 'normal' Berlin/Germany.<sup>17</sup> I shall also discuss why, in

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<sup>15</sup> I refer here to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in: Cary Nelson and Lawrence (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan, London, 1988), pp. 271-313. In this essay Spivak problematises the notion of representation: 'Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as "speaking for," as in politics, and representation as "re-presentation," as in art or philosophy. [...] These two senses of representation – within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other – are related but irreducibly discontinuous', p. 275.

<sup>16</sup> The term *Wende* refers to the period following the collapse of the Berlin Wall up to and including the unification of the FRG with the GDR in October 1990.

<sup>17</sup> The uniqueness of the event should also be seen as an important factor in the *Wende*-novel production. For the influence of the German feuilleton see: Helmut Schmitz, 'German Unification as Pornographic Nightmare', in Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Julian Preece, eds. *Literature, Media and Markets* (Berne, Lange, 2000); Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999); Stefan Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit in Deutschland* (A. Francke Verlag, Tübingen, 2002); Volker Wehdeking, *Die deutsche Einheit und die Schriftsteller Literarische Verarbeitung der Wende seit 1989*, Klett, Stuttgart, 1995); Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, (Aufbau, Leipzig, 1996).

this context of a new beginning, the same German feuilletons also began a witch-hunt against certain East German writers for their continued support of the Socialist system. Whether the attacks were an attempt both to discredit such writers as Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf, Herman Kant and Christoph Hein, to name but a few, and further to curtail their influence in the post-GDR era, by promoting a cultural *tabula rasa*, remains to be seen. But the influence of both the feuilleton-production in the wake of the *Wende* and the literature debate surrounding certain GDR authors is clearly addressed in both *Nox* and *Helden wie wir*. Through intertextual references, it will be shown in what way the two texts, by either rejecting or embracing dominant literary predecessors and vocal critics of political unification, Günter Grass (*Nox*) and Christa Wolf (*Helden wie wir*), undermine any notion of the fall of the Wall as a symbol of a united Germany.

### **I.1. The *Wende*-novel as *tabula rasa* and the German Feuilleton**

That the fall of the Berlin Wall was widely perceived to be a significant end-of-an-era marker should hardly come as a surprise: it certainly was a new beginning, and not only for those in the GDR. The Wall, ‘das Zeichen der Unterdrückung von einst, wandelte sich seit dem Mauerfall zu einem Symbol des gewaltfreien Kampfes für das Erreichen politischer Ziele’.<sup>18</sup> The removal of the borders between East and West Berlin was part of a chain of events that culminated in the downfall of the communist regimes in Europe. For Berlin, the consequences of the 9<sup>th</sup> November were particularly dramatic: the division of the two Germanies was more visible in this city than in any other. In its twenty-eight year existence, the Iron Curtain claimed the lives of a total of 1065 people, 172 of those in Berlin alone; the

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<sup>18</sup> Edgar Wolfrum, ‘Die Mauer’, p. 566.

Wall encircled West Berlin with enough barbed-wire to span the earth, it divided streets and houses, and was the centre stage for the ideological conflicts between East and West. Paradoxically, the divisional nature of the Wall *cemented* the identities of East and West and meant that the constructed identity of one half depended on the continued existence of the other. East and West Berlin existed in a reciprocal dialectic relationship. Seen within this historical framework, its removal appeared to have re-opened the time capsule in which Berlin had been frozen since the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1961. The opening of the Iron Curtain gave the city a perspective on itself beyond the discursive framework of the National Socialist misère and Cold War politics.

This assumed prospect of a second chance *is* the dominant discursive framework for understanding the fall of the Wall. Wide sections of the German media celebrated the fall of the Wall and the unification as a new beginning, a so-called second ‘zero hour’. The chief editor of the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Frank Schirrmacher, wrote that it should be acknowledged ‘daß Deutschland anscheinend seine zweite Stunde Null erlebt’ and his colleague in the left-wing German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, interpreted the fall of the Wall as an act of historic clemency, ‘Die Gnade der Stunde Null’.<sup>19</sup> A second zero hour suggests a *tabula rasa*, a cleaning of the slate. This self-proclaimed new beginning carried with it a collective hope that Germany be allowed to put aside its past and be seen and accepted as a modern democratic nation free of the taint of National Socialism. The German Chancellor at the time, Helmut Kohl, hoped that ‘things will normalize. That’s the most important thing for us, that we become a wholly normal country, not “singularized” in any question ... that we

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Schirrmacher, ‘Hetze? Die zweite Stunde Null’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18.06.1990. See also R. Augstein, ‘Gnade der Stunde Null’, *Der Spiegel*, 16.04.1990. See also Nikolows Habluetzec, ‘Proben für die Deutsche Stunde Null’, *Tageszeitung*, 16.03.1990; Freimut Duve, ‘Böses Erwachen in der Stunde Null’, *Die Zeit*, 16.03.1990.

simply don't stick out. That's the important thing'.<sup>20</sup> That Germany is a 'normal' nation in the way that Britain and France are 'normal' nations is beyond question, but some intellectuals saw as problematic the parallelism of normality with a historic new beginning from which the horrors of the past have been neatly removed. I discuss the wider implications of normality and the German past in relation to Berlin in both the chapters on Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld* and Friedrich Christian Delius's *Flatterzunge*. Both texts discussed in this chapter and the two mentioned above clearly show that the path toward 'normalization' is one fraught with contradictions. In the words of one critic, it will not be denied 'daß die angebliche Rückkehr zu einer angeblichen Normalität Gefahren in sich birgt. Die Betonung Deutscher Größe liefert – freiwillig oder unfreiwillig – nationalen Chauvinisten und Rechtsradikalen Munition. Man kann nicht die Augen davor verschließen, daß es solche Kreise in Deutschland gibt'.<sup>21</sup>

It is significant that it was in the feuilleton that the voices heralding a new beginning were first heard. The West German government may have interrupted a parliamentary debate to sing the national anthem on hearing reports that the Wall was open, but the stigma associated with the past and the recent notoriety surrounding the historians' debate were still too present for a German politician to make public a similar claim of a second beginning for the German nation, and particularly the claim that the National Socialist past should now be put in a historical context. But the German feuilleton has, since the founding of the FRG in 1949, frequently served as a unique forum for intellectuals, writers and academics to discuss national, social, political and cultural issues at a level and complexity unparalleled in Britain.

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Brockmann, op. cit. p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Stefan Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit in Deutschland* (Francke, Tübingen, 2002), p. 60. The consequences of 'closing one's eyes' to such problems and denying their continued existence is the prevailing motif behind Delius's Berlin representation and his critique of Martin Walser in his text discussed in chapter 4.

This testifies to the power of literature (and history) and the feuilleton in German cultural life: a brief glance at the biographies of Günter Grass and Martin Walser, for example, will show the importance of political literary discourse and the place allocated to literature in politics in West Germany as well as underpinning the influence of this discourse in determining political discussions within which politicians must justify themselves. This mutual action and reaction of 'Geist und Macht, von Literatur und Politik' has contributed significantly to the picture of the Federal Republic.<sup>22</sup> Günter Grass and Martin Walser, taken here as representatives of engaged politically committed literature, consistently situated historical memory at the heart of the image of the Federal Republic. For both 'ist die Aufarbeitung des Nationalsozialismus lange Zeit das wichtigste Thema überhaupt gewesen'.<sup>23</sup>

It was the feuilleton that was to determine the aesthetic criteria upon which national and urban representations were to be based and possibly evaluated. The demand in the media for a post-unification literature does not suggest 'dass das literaturkritische Feuilleton auf den Wenderoman wartete oder nach ihm suchte, sondern dass es ihn fand. Genauer: Es erfand den Wenderoman'.<sup>24</sup> The demand for a new literature was grounded less in aesthetic considerations than in an ideological debate concerning the interpretation and wider implications of the fall of the Wall for the political development of the German state. 'Die ästhetische Auseinandersetzung mit den Texten spielt praktisch keine Rolle. Das Urteil über Wenderomane ergibt sich aus dem Maß der Übereinstimmung mit den Bildern des

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<sup>22</sup> Helmut L. Müller, *Die literarische Republik: Westdeutsche Schriftsteller und die Politik* (Basel, Beltz, 1982), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit*, p. 365.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Gabler, 'Der Wenderoman als neues literarisches Genre. Thesen' in: Wolfgang Gabler und Nikolaus Werz (Hg.), *Umriss 4: Schriften zur mecklenburgischen Landesgeschichte* (Edition M, Weimar/Rostock 2000), p. 70. Corinna Heipcke, 'The new Berlin-Roman as paradoxical genre', in: *GFL* (1:2003), p. 45.

Feuilletons von Wende und deutscher Vereinigung.<sup>25</sup> Whether the ‘creation’ of the *Wende*-novel was aimed at pushing home the notion of a new beginning at the cost of deleting the past remains to be seen: that the motivation was, at least in part, ideological is undeniable. The preferred hobby of the German feuilleton in the years following the fall of the Wall and unification was ‘the call and search for a unification novel’, which ‘can be seen as a desire for an expression of normality achieved’: that is to say, a Berlin *Wende*-novel should demonstrate an arrival in the ‘here and now’ and as such be a literary testimony of a re-unified culture.<sup>26</sup>

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990 Frank Schirrmacher published an article in which he argued that the 9<sup>th</sup> November also signalled the end of what he referred to as the moralistic Federal Republic and its politically committed literature. Prior to the German *Wende* West German literature had served as a production site of West German identity and the ‘instrument and mirror of the collective consciousness’.<sup>27</sup> It was precisely this dialectic between West and East German society that had become redundant. As if to support his argument, the article was published on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990, the last day of the GDR’s existence and the first day of the now re-unified Germany. It would appear that the zero hour signalled by the fall of the Wall and the re-unification eleven months later was to mark an erasure of that post-war political engagement and a return to “normal” aestheticist quiescence. The normalization debates and the call for a literature to reflect the new Germany are the concerted efforts of the most

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<sup>25</sup> Gabler, ‘Der Wenderoman’, p. 91.

<sup>26</sup> Helmut Schmitz, ‘German Unification as Pornographic Nightmare: Thomas Hettche’s *Nox*’. In: Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, Julian Preece (eds.), *Literature, Media and Markets* (Berne, Lange, 2000), p. 213. For further discussions on the unification novel see Neuhaus: ‘Im Sog der Ereignisse, die durch den Fall der Mauer ausgelöst wurden, entstand ein Druck der publizistischen Öffentlichkeit auf die ost- wie westdeutschen Autoren, sich möglichst schnell möglichst positiv zur Frage der Wiedervereinigung zu äußern, sowohl in Reden und Essays als auch in ihrer dichterischen Produktion. [...] Damit korrespondiert die bis weit in die 90er Jahre hinein geäußerte Vorstellung, es müsse irgendwann *den* Deutschen Einheitsroman geben’, p. 355.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, p. 73.

influential cultural journalists, notably Bohrer, Greiner and Schirmmacher to declare an end to the era of *Gesinnungsästhetik*. This aesthetics of conscience ‘apparent in both FRG and GDR literature represented an attempt to ‘normalize’ cultural production by curtailing its involvement in moral and political issues’, a phenomenon seen as originating in the moral response to National Socialism.<sup>28</sup> These literary and cultural journalists appear to be advocating a nineteenth-century aestheticist’s claim of *l’art pour l’art* in the same vein as Ernst Nolte had leaned toward a kind of *l’histoire pour l’histoire*. An increasingly normal Germany needed for Nolte a normal history and for Schirmmacher et. al. a normal literature. And “normal” meant, in this case, an end to the supposedly excessive obsessions with the German past that had contributed so powerfully to the politicization and liberalization of German literature – and of German historiography – during the post-war period.

This rejection of a politically engaged literature appeared to concentrate on two literary representatives of the FRG and the GDR: Günter Grass and Christa Wolf. Grass’s critical position to the reunification and his fall from grace in the German media will be discussed in the following chapter. But suffice it to say that Wolf and Grass were widely seen as critical voices of the nation, and in Grass’s case, his power and prestige in post-war Germany ‘are connected precisely to his role as “conscience of the nation”’.<sup>29</sup> The political role allocated post-1945 German literature is a result not of its significance for an undefined collective, but

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<sup>28</sup> Helmut Schmitz, ‘German Unification as Pornographic Nightmare’, p. 213. Graham Jackman sums up the argument: ‘at the heart of public discussion of the Third Reich in Germany since World War II has lain a continuing tension between two contradictory impulses. The one, reflecting the quite natural desire of many to put the past behind them, thus allowing Germany to be a ‘normal’ state, might be summed up in the term ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’, implying that the past can be ‘dealt with’. This might be done by silence and repression (‘Verdrängung’) or by a perhaps perfunctory recognition of what had taken place, coupled even with the claim to have oneself been a victim. The other impulse, summed up in the term ‘Aufarbeitung der Geschichte’, suggested by contrast a need to continue to confront the past by laying bare in the fullest detail not only the facts of the Holocaust and other enormities but also the structures, mechanisms and motivations that made them possible – and by recognising one’s own involvement’. Graham Jackman, ‘Introduction’, *German Life and Letters* (LVII [4]: 2004), p. 343.

<sup>29</sup> Brockmann, *Literature and the German Reunification*, p. 5.



for German national identity. Hence, criticism against the re-unification as the path to 'normality' was interpreted as a threat to the possibility of a 'normal' healthy identity made possible now that the dialectical framework of the post-war period had become redundant. The significance of Grass and Wolf to this chapter is two-fold: on the one hand, Grass and Wolf are important to their two respective cultures as key witnesses within that broadly anxious, conscientiously critical consensus that is the two versions of the *Gesinnungsästhetik*. On the other hand, the significance of Grass and Wolf to this chapter is to be found in the critical and intertextual engagement of Hettche's *Nox* with the writings of Günter Grass, notably *Hundejahre*, and the centrality of Wolf and her literary production to Brussig's *Helden wie wir*. Both texts take issue with their literary and cultural predecessors, though in a rhetoric of dissent and displacement. But it is to the attacks against Christa Wolf in the 'normalization' debates that I shall now turn in which the author was pejoratively branded as a representative of GDR literature and a servant of the political system by some voices from the rightwing media, whereby both the person Wolf and her literary oeuvre were called into question.

If there were an author 'whose work might be considered emblematic of East German literature, it would be Christa Wolf'.<sup>30</sup> In a system in which freedom of speech and an open public sphere were lacking, writers took on a specific social and political purpose by making possible discussion and reflection on political and social problems that would otherwise have been ignored or simply remained unvoiced. Literature in the GDR assumed a privileged role by enabling a more oblique form of communication between the writer and the wider reading public. There was an unquestioned 'moral authority which critical literary intellectuals

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<sup>30</sup> Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003), p. 135.

acquired throughout the 1980s in the GDR, when they essentially constituted the only alternative discourse to that of the party and its media'.<sup>31</sup> The institutionalization of literature in the GDR meant that the writer, in this case Christa Wolf, was essentially seen as a critical medium of communication. It is a role with which many West German critics, Thomas Brussig among them, took issue. It should be of no surprise that the first significant attack on the GDR was made against a writer of Wolf's stature. It was, after all, 'in the realm of culture, not in the realm of economics, that the GDR was considered to be strong, and it was in precisely this realm that the major intellectual debate of 1990 occurred'.<sup>32</sup> The West German media critics zoomed in on two themes in their attack on Christa Wolf: her speech given at the mass demonstration on the Alexander Platz five days before the fall of the Wall and the 1990 publication of her quasi-autobiographical novella, *Was bleibt*. Both events triggered what has come to be referred to, somewhat misleadingly, as the literature debate, *Literaturstreit*. Misleadingly because the debate, if it can be called as such, was more an attack against the person Christa Wolf than a critical assessment of her work.

Over half a million people gathered on the Alexander Platz on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1989 to hear the most prominent literary figures in the GDR pronounce on that which was on the lips of all those present, democratic reforms. Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, and Christoph Hein believed themselves to be speaking for the whole of the GDR. Stefan Heym was the first to speak, pleading for 'einen Sozialismus, der des Namens wert ist' and was followed by Christa Wolf. Although the tenor of her argument differed in no way from that of Heym's, it was her speech that was particularly savaged by the critics, while Heym's remarks appeared

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<sup>31</sup> Keith Bullivant, *The Future of German Literature* (Oxford, Berg, 1994), p. 86. See also David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, p. 63.

to have passed unnoticed.<sup>33</sup> In line with her colleagues, Wolf asked her listeners to imagine a different type of Socialism in the GDR: ‘Also Träumen wir mit hellwacher Vernunft: Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus und keiner geht weg!’ It appeared to the speakers, perhaps somewhat naively, that the moment had arrived in which their hopes for a freer and more open public sphere for writers and the public had been realised. But this new freedom did not have to mean the end of the GDR. The same speakers later published an open letter, *Für unser Land*, in which they argued for a socialist alternative to the FRG. Neither the speech nor the open letter was positively received by the West. Schirmmacher rightly dismissed the call for the continued existence of Socialism as naive and added that the open letter ‘gehört zu den traurigsten Dokumenten jener Revolutionen, denn es ist ein Aufruf der Machthaber von Krenz bis Schabowski zum Erhalt der Macht’, echoing Reich-Ranicki’s accusation against Wolf as a state literary servant (*Staatsdichterin*).<sup>34</sup> However, at the time the letter was published, the concept of a political unification of East and West Germany had yet to be voiced or even imagined. It was at that time unclear which path the GDR would take. Indeed, the letter may have been a depressing document for the West, but a *Spiegel/ZDF* opinion poll taken in early December 1989 revealed that 71% of 1,032 East Germans questioned declared themselves in favour of sovereignty for the GDR, with only 27% advocating German reunification.<sup>35</sup> A large majority in the GDR, at least in early December, appeared to share Wolf’s critical position on the proposed unification.

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit*, p. 51. Further references to this speech are also taken from here.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Thomas Anz, (Hg). *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf. Der Literaturstreit im vereinigten Deutschland*. (Suhrkamp, revised edition: Frankfurt a/M, 1995), p. 257. Reich-Ranicki’s attack was first made in 1987. See Karl-Heinz Schoeps, ‘Intellectuals, Unification, and Political Change 1990: The Case of Christa Wolf’. In: Walter Pape (ed.) *1870/71 -1989/90: German Unifications and the Change of Literary Discourse* (Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1993), p. 264.

<sup>35</sup> Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, p. 54.

Frank Schirrmacher's second attack against Wolf was prompted by the publication of her book *Was bleibt* released three months before the unification on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. The short quasi-autobiographical novella charts Wolf's observation by the East German secret police in front of her apartment in East Berlin. Written after the 1976 Biermann expulsion and Wolf's "dissident" support of Biermann and her rejection of the decree by the East German writers' union to expel a further nine writers for their 'tendentious' calls for liberalization in (and of) the GDR, the text underlines the difficulty for writers and intellectuals within a troubled cultural and political atmosphere, of which Wolf herself was also a victim. Writers and intellectuals who were known to sympathize with Biermann and to oppose his expulsion were 'subject to government retribution and to surveillance and chicanery by the Stasi'.<sup>36</sup> If looked at from this perspective, *Was bleibt* is also a document of the mental strain and effects of police surveillance on the individual as well as a quest for self-identity in a changed political reality. But the publication of her text produced a whirlwind of criticism from the West with accusations of cowardice and mendaciousness, because Wolf waited over ten years before publishing; its arrival in 1990 was, according to many critics, simply too late. The same critics, Schirrmacher, Bohrer and Greiner, appeared to suggest that had the text appeared in 1979, its publication would have amounted to a crippling indictment of the East German regime and might have possibly triggered a protest movement against it.

The criticisms against Wolf were thus twofold: she was accused of cowardice for not publishing her text in 1979, but when it was no longer of any relevance; and, with particular reference to her Alexander Platz speech, she was felt to have compromised herself for

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<sup>36</sup> Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, p. 66. It is ironic that Biermann was later one of the critics who attacked Wolf for the publication of her novella, an attack to which Grass refers in *Ein weites Feld* discussed in the following chapter.

advocating a continued existence of Socialism – flogging a dead horse, as it were – at a time when it had long since been discredited in the West. But Brockmann is surely right to question in what way an early publication of her book might have influenced a literary, and possibly generated a public debate within the GDR. He observes that one of the reasons ‘for Wolf’s effectiveness as a medium for debate and reflection in the GDR was that her books were available to ordinary East German citizens in book stores and libraries’.<sup>37</sup> It is true that an exclusively West German publication of her book would have had little if any impact in the GDR for the simple reason that it would not have been available, thereby robbing Wolf of an essential dialogue with her readers. A publication outside the GDR ‘would have meant the end of that dialogue’.<sup>38</sup> However, there existed any number of “hidden” texts in the GDR, which were circulated among certain groups of writers and intellectuals, although the effectiveness of such groups as catalysts in social movements and reform is debateable.

What Christa Wolf’s antagonists in the *Literaturstreit* were arguing for was a normalization of literary and aesthetic standards and an escape from the burden of the German past in literature, as might be seen in their collective rejection of the ‘canon’ of political novelists such as Günter Grass. But whereas Schirrmacher, Greiner and Bohrer were pursuing a literary aesthetics free of a preoccupation with Germany’s history, Wolf was insisting on the sustained relevance of that past in contemporary literature and to society, as well as advocating the continued existence of the GDR at a time when for many unification seemed the only plausible way forward for Germany. *Was bleibt* was published in 1990, on the eve of the political end of the GDR; its publication date possibly marked, because of its return to specifically East German themes, the beginning of a new GDR literature. It was this new

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<sup>37</sup> Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification*, p. 68.

genre, it was feared, which was to ensure the continued existence of the GDR, and by extension the FRG, within German literary discourse. This refusal of the past simply to go away undermined the whole ‘normalization’ ethos as well as the assumption that the fall of the Wall and the unification unquestionably signalled a history-free beginning. Grass and Wolf were not lone voices in their cautious analysis of the events of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 and critical approaches to the subject of a German-German unification, nor did they represent the only literary approach to the theme of the Berlin-*Wende* and of normalization in literary discourse, but the attack against the two authors was nonetheless singular. The Brussig and Hettche texts are clearly responding to the media-orchestrated campaign to promote a new generation of authors of Berlin texts and should be read as critical responses to the *Literaturstreit* as well as to the spurious normalization debates and the implied end of a politically engaged literature. By way of prelude to the two texts, a brief glance at a selection of reviews of the two Berlin novels is telling, if only because it reveals how the ghost of ‘normalisation’ continued to haunt readings of Berlin texts six years after the initial debate.

The media responses and newspaper reviews of Thomas Brussig’s *Helden wie wir* and Thomas Hettche’s *Nox* might also be said to betray ‘ideological’ intentions. It is interesting that Brussig’s text, for example, ‘galt vielen Kritikern als “Erfolgsbuch zur deutschen Wende”, als “Wenderoman”, teilweise sogar als *der* Wenderoman, mit dem nun endlich der Forderung der Literaturkritik die Verarbeitung der Wiedervereinigung genüge getan wurde’, although the portrayal of the fall of the Wall is both highly subjective and precariously burlesque.<sup>39</sup> And yet *Die Zeit* could nonetheless observe that ‘der junge Ostberliner Autor Thomas Brussig hat den heißersehten Wenderoman geschrieben’, whereas the *Süddeutsche*

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<sup>39</sup> Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit*, p. 472.

*Zeitung* claims, perhaps somewhat ironically, that Brussig's protagonist is the hero of the hour, 'der Sieger der Geschichte'.<sup>40</sup> Dieckmann's review does address a generational difficulty with Brussig's *Wende* portrayal arguing that although *Helden wie wir* makes him laugh as a result of its scurrilous portrayals of the GDR and Berlin, 'bei Christa Wolf kann ich nicht lachen, doch sie trifft die Innereien meiner vergrübelten Generation'.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to Brussig's burlesque reckoning, Hettche's historically-focussed text was scolded for its difficult narrative structure and sexually explicit portrayals as literary tropes of unification and its pseudo-intellectualising of the *Wende*: according to Jörg Lau's critique in the *TAZ*, 'die Sexstellen sind mit Abstand das Schlechteste an diesem Buch', a surprising critique given the narrative tension surrounding the sex-scenes in the text. In a similar vein, Andreas Kilb in *Die Zeit* laments that the text is anything but a *Wende*-novel and that it confuses the reader through an incoherent and seemingly meaningless narrative.<sup>42</sup> The criticisms of the novels reveal a remarkable lack of aesthetic interest. What seems to be of concern is whether or not the promised *Wende*-novels do indeed thematize a new beginning and whether a break from the old and the particular emphasis given to Berlin in the representation of the fall of the Wall is positive or not.

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<sup>40</sup> Christoph Dieckmann, 'Klaus und wie er die Welt sah', *Die Zeit*, Nr. 37, 8<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1995; Konrad Franke, 'Sieger der Geschichte: Thomas Brussig stellt vor: "Helden wie wir"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11.10.1995; Marion Löhndorf, 'Wer hat die Mauer umgeschmissen: Thomas Brussigs Wenderoman "Helden wie wir"', *Neue Züricher Zeitung*. Internationale Ausgabe, Nr. 235, 10.10.1995.

<sup>41</sup> Christoph Dieckmann, 'Die heilige Schrift', *Die Zeit*, Nr. 42, 23.8.1996.

<sup>42</sup> Jörg Lau, 'Thomas Hettches "Nox"', *TAZ*, 23.3.1995; Andreas Kilb, 'Noxwix. Thomas Hettches Sado-Maso Roman über die Berliner Mauernacht', *Die Zeit*, Nr. 15, 7.4.1995; Michael Basse, 'Tiefer Schnitt ins deutsche Fleisch. Thomas Hettches Roman aus der Nacht, in der die Mauer fiel', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5.4.1995; Harald Jähner, 'Die Pracht der Nacht. Thomas Hettche läuft durch Berlin', *FAZ*, 11.4.1995.

## I.2. The Berlin Wall and the Night of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989

'If, in the Cold War imagination, there were an emblem of the German Democratic Republic, it would be the Wall.'<sup>43</sup> But the same would be true of West Berlin. The identity of each half was established on a basis of reciprocity with the other half, albeit an oppositional reciprocity. Perhaps there can be no common East/West consensus in German literature on how the Wall is seen, interpreted and, if possible, understood. But if the fall of the Berlin Wall signifies for *Helden wie wir* an end of the GDR, its construction once gestured, at least in Christa Wolf's novel *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), to a possible new beginning for the East German state. In terms of genre, Wolf structures and engineers the narrative of the novel in part according to the aesthetic and political constraints of the GDR. That is to say, for Wolf's text, the Wall is justified because it will guarantee the continued existence of the GDR. What is implicit in Wolf's justification of the Wall is her understanding that if the ideologies of the two Germanies were brought together in a single state, the result would be civil disorder. In other words, only with a divided earth could a divided heaven sustain itself. An equally divided perspective is given through Uwe Johnson's Berlin novel *Zwei Ansichten* (1965) written, like Wolf's, shortly after the building of the Wall. A West German photographer meets and falls in love with an East German nurse in Berlin. What divides them, as with the Brussig and Hettche texts, is ultimately their two irreconcilable perspectives/opinions (*Ansichten*). At no point in his text do those opinions structurally or thematically converge. Johnson and Wolf's texts represent two significant literary East/West attempts to thematize the Wall: placed side-by-side, the two texts also thematize the absence of a common interpretative ground for understanding and/or reading the Wall.

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<sup>43</sup> Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism*, p. 135.



### I.3. *Helden wie wir* and the Berlin Wall

The representation of the Berlin Wall in Brussig's text falls into three categories: the physical Wall as a tangible experience within the urban fabric; the Wall as a metaphorical representation of the ideological discourses of the GDR, though signified through the person of the father, and finally, the Wall as a symbol of civic impotence. I shall address all three representative modes in turn.

*Helden wie wir* is a fictionalised autobiographical narrative of Klaus Uhltscht's childhood in the GDR. His biography, narrated to Mr Kitzelstein of the *New York Times*, culminates in one significant event: 'wie ich das mit der Berliner Mauer hingekriegt habe. [...] Ja, es ist wahr. Ich war's. Ich habe die Berliner Mauer umgeschmissen'.<sup>44</sup> It is not only that Klaus sees himself as the indispensable *sine qua non* behind the fall of the Berlin Wall, but that his participation on the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 was a penile moment: 'Die Geschichte des Mauerfalls ist die Geschichte meines Pinsels, aber wie läßt sich dieser Ansatz in einem Buch unterbringen, das als eine nobelpreiswürdige Kreuzung von *David Copperfield* und *Ein Zeitalter wird besichtigt* konzipiert ist?' (7). This megalomaniacal confession describes Klaus's break from the structures of repression in the state and the family, at least his petit-bourgeois family home in East Berlin. His father is a *Stasi* officer and in keeping with the culture of repression the text thematises, the exact nature of his father's job is kept hidden from Klaus: 'als ich meinen Vater zum Feierabend fragte, wo er denn arbeitet, murmelte er was von *Außenstelle*'. (11) His mother is an equally significant and dominant presence in Klaus's life, largely because of her negative influence during puberty. She is a state 'Hygieneinspektorin' or more commonly referred to as 'eine Hygienegöttin' (25),

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Brussig, *Helden wie wir* (Fischer, Frankfurt a/M, 1998), pp. 6-7. All subsequent quotations, given in parenthesis, are from this edition.

metaphorically linked to the Stasi insofar as her function is to root out hidden 'cells' and corruptive influences. It is the mother who undercuts Klaus's attempts at self-assertion and independence. Discovering his first erection during a family evening in front of the television, Klaus leaves for the bathroom to 'investigate': "Komm, mach auf!" sagte meine Mutter durch die Tür. Sie klang streng. [...] Dann sah sie, was sie nicht sehen sollte, und sagte: "hast du wieder daran rumgespielt? [...] Erzähl doch nicht", erwiderte sie spöttisch' (68). It is clear that a reading of the Uhltscht family which plays on a representation of the GDR and its mechanisms of repression, observation and manipulation is intended. Klaus's account of his family home has everything to do with the repressiveness and oppressiveness of the culture of the GDR, which expresses itself in an unease with everything to do with sex and the human anatomy. It is significant not only that both parents work for the government, but that they function with a similar discursive framework:

Beim Abendbrot, also in einer Situation, in der auch mein Vater sein Wissen einbringen könnte, brachte ich das Thema zur Sprache. "Wenn ich ein Mann bin, habe ich dann einen großen Puller?" Mein Vater stellte die Tasse ab, daß es klirrten, und sah mit höhnischem Triumph meine Mutter an – *Was, verehrte Frau Richterin, brauchen Sie denn noch an Beweisen für das Versagertum unseres Angeklagten?* Hatte ich schon gesagt, [...] daß ich mich immer wie vor einem amerikanischen Schwurgericht fühlte? Mit meinem Vater, dem Staatsanwalt, Vertreter der auf Ruhe und Ordnung bestehenden unbescholtenen Bürger, und einer verständnisvollen Richterin, die nicht gerne strafe, aber immer und unermüdlich auf meine *Einsicht* hinarbeitete. (56)

The play on *Einsicht* underscores Klaus's feeling of being judged in court insofar as *Einsicht* reads both as insight and judgement, but also examination and inspection, his mother's dual role as judge and health inspector. The reference to the father as the representative of order is an ironic reminder of his father's role as a Stasi officer. The court simulation, protocol-style language and reporting, successfully blend the public and the private realms into one discursive framework: namely that of an all-pervasive state.

The situation Klaus portrays is both perverse and absurd. It is perverse because the parental response to Klaus's question is to make him feel embarrassed and guilty when attempting to understand his own sexuality: the perverting of his sexuality underscores for Klaus a manipulation of the individual within the system. The comical portrayal of the court scene and the exaggerated response of the father render the whole episode somewhat absurd. But in Klaus's own words, was anything else to be expected? He directs his question to the disbelieving reader: 'Was haben Sie erwartet? Ich lebte immerhin in einer Stadt, durch die ein Todesstreifen hindurchging, und nicht einmal längs eines Flusses, sondern mitten durch das dichteste Zentrum' (176). The physical Wall as a political reality itself embodies for Klaus the absurdity of the GDR. This absurdity is underlined by virtue of the fact that the Wall does not follow the contours of a river, thereby suggesting the course of a 'natural' boundary, but goes through the thick of the city centre, hence it is something forced and unnatural. References to the Berlin Wall were largely absent from GDR writing and it is rarely mentioned in official discourse, other than as the 'anti-fascist protection Wall', making Klaus's explicit reference significant. However unnatural and painful the Wall may have been to the East Berlin citizenry, it was neither permitted nor possible to voice any criticism or to refer to it explicitly. Klaus's thematizing of the Wall might be said to mark a significant (belated) shift away from GDR literature and identification within that literary framework.<sup>45</sup>

Klaus plays with this present/absent dichotomy of the Wall by suggesting that West Berlin continues to exist seemingly oblivious to its existence. Beneath the Wall and 'unter diesem

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<sup>45</sup> The Berlin Wall was a reality for East Berliners, insofar as its physical presence and what that presence meant could be hardly ignored; but it was simultaneously 'not there' because it was to a large degree absent from public discourse (Christa Wolf's first explicit reference to the Berlin Wall was made almost ten years following its removal. In her Berlin novel *Der geteilte Himmel* [1963] Wolf circumvents the blocking of the German-German frontier, even though the Wall haunts every page of the text and arguably provides a framework for the narrative through its conspicuous absence).

Todesstreifen führen Tag für Tag, zuverlässig nach Fahrplan, U-Bahn und S-Bahn hindurch' (177). The death-strip (Todesstreifen) is not made any less harmful here, but simply absurd if not perverse. The picture Klaus paints of the West Berlin metro system running according to plan (not even interrupted by the Wall) is painfully comical in its undermining of the GDR. For the young Klaus Uhltzsch, the Berlin Wall is the embodiment of the perverse: 'So wie Hollywood die Hauptstadt der Unterhaltungs-industrie ist, wird Berlin die Metropole der Perversionsindustrie. Wo, wenn nicht hier, in der Stadt des Todesstreifens, unter dem die U-Bahnen im Fünfminutentakt hindurchfahren, ist die Perversion zu Hause!' (249). In his portrayal of the Wall that is both present and absent, a possible reference to the all-pervasive Stasi that plays a similar game of hide-and-seek in East German society, Klaus is voicing a clear moral judgement against the system and society.

The father figure in *Helden wie wir* also functions as a metaphor for the repressiveness of the GDR and the manifestation of this repression in East Berlin. This interpretation is based on an understanding of the city as a legible construct, to which I referred in the introduction. The textuality of the city space is shown both on the demonstrative level as well as being connoted through architectural forms, streets names and building façades.<sup>46</sup> At his father's deathbed, Klaus is overcome by a belated urge to rebel: 'Da lag sie, die Scheiße in Menschengestalt. So einer hat mir gezeigt, wo's langgeht. [...] Er ist erst zum Arzt gegangen, als ihm nicht mehr zu helfen war, weil er sich sonst verweicht vorgekommen wäre. [...] So einer hatte mal Einfluß auf mich. So einer hat mich gemacht und großgezogen und dominiert' (267). There is a possible interplay in this description between his father, Eric

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<sup>46</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Espace et Politique*, 2e edition (Paris: Anthropos, 2000), p. 28. Lefebvre argues that to understand space, 'on pourrait élaborer une sémantique des discours sur l'espace. On pourrait concevoir aussi une sémiologie de l'espace, partie d'une sémiotique générale'.

Honecker and the GDR state. Honecker also died of stomach cancer, as did the father; the last minute attempts at democratic reform by the last GDR government following the fall of the Wall were widely portrayed as belated attempts to resuscitate a dying state. The West was portrayed as decadent, 'effeminate' in its assumed subservient role to the US and therefore opposed to the East, which promoted, with its painted banners celebrating the working man, an ethos of physical strength and resistance. The father's death symbolises the breakdown of that symbolic order: 'das erste, was ich tat, nachdem er tot war: [...] Ich könnte für zwanzig Sekunden seine Eier quetschen. Er hat meine zwanzig Jahre gequetscht, so wie sie aussehen' (268). His relationship with his father at the moment of death is punned as a *Grenzerfahrung* (268), experiencing a border, meaning somewhat playfully both the border between life and death, but also the border that encircled the city, which Klaus overcomes in a symbolic act of crushing his father's testicles, an ironic play on the GDR's discourse of power, but also a playful symbol of that which is absent in mainstream GDR culture – the necessary will to revolt against the system.

Finally, the Wall is understood by Klaus as a symbol of civic impotence. Following his father's death and his own liberation from his mother, the significance of which will be discussed later, Klaus sees a crowd gathering at the Bornholmerstraße checkpoint:

Es waren *Tausende*, und sie standen ein paar Grenzsoldaten gegenüber, die das Gittertor bewachten [...] Dann begannen die Volksmassen zu schieben, allerdings nur symbolisch, aber was will man erwarten von einem Volk, das sich in seinen Revolutionsreden hoch anrechnen läßt, daß es seine Proteste behördlich genehmigen ließ. [...] So artig und gehemmt wie sie dastanden, wie sie von einem Bein aufs andere traten und darauf hofften, sie dürften mal [...] ein solches Volk hat einen zu kleinen Pimmel. (315-16)

The image is provocative, insisting as it does on a suggested weakness of the crowd facing a small number of border guards. Yet the penile reference might be read as suggesting an

œdipal dependency: the crowd stands hopping from one leg to the other in the manner of an indecisive child. The small penis underlines perhaps a symbiotic relation between the state and the people, with the latter showing either reluctance (hopping) or an inability (requesting official permission to demonstrate) to break from the dominant discourse. The image is a criticism of a corporate pusillanimousness. However, the reference to sexuality underscores the theme of repression observed in Klaus's confrontation with his family and gives wider currency to the portrayal of the Wall (das Gittertor) as a symbol of oppression within a totalitarian semantic framework and a city made up of petty bourgeois enclaves (school, home, workplace) in which surveillance is omnipresent.

The absence of any reference in the text to a pre-division Berlin or Germany is noteworthy, insofar as it is a constant theme for many West Germans from the 1960s on. Nor does Brussig show any concern, common in West German literature, with the representation of the Wall as a historic wound or a scar, or the reasons for the division. Grand historic considerations are largely absent from the text. This absence might even suggest a criticism of the GDR's failure to 'honestly' negotiate the past, certainly the National Socialist and Russian Occupation. To underline this unique historic position, *Helden wie wir* is written as an autobiographical narrative, which inevitably brackets out perspectives that are not of immediate concern to the autobiographical narrator – again possibly suggesting a critique of the GDR's approach to the past. As one critic remarked, the 'historisch-politische Geschichte als intime Geschichte zu erzählen, markiert Geschichte zunächst als eine Leerstelle, die vorerst noch umschrieben werden muß'.<sup>47</sup> Brussig uses irony as an attempt to renegotiate and

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<sup>47</sup> Petra Kuhnau, 'Geschichte als Geschlecht: Thomas Brussigs *Helden wie wir* und Grit Poppes *Andere Umstände* zwischen Pathos und Ironie', in Volker Wehdeking (Hg.), *Mentalitätswandel in der deutschen Literatur zur Einheit: 1990-2000* (Erich Schmidt Verlag, Berlin, 2000), p. 195.

even dismiss the grand historical narratives, but it is not the case that history for the text is a 'Leerstelle' as suggested above. The text is at once playing on Klaus's representative status as a victim of oppression in the GDR as well as a voice of opposition to that oppression, while at the same time insisting on the right of subjective historic perspectives, which however gesture towards to a wider historical context. For Klaus Uhltscht, the Wall might be perverse and absurd, brutal and repressive, but it is something that is there, and has, for Klaus, always been there, and as such requires no further justification or historical context: the Wall is the GDR. Roberto Simanowski sums up Brussig's position: 'Man fühlt allmählich, daß es in Wahrheit gar kein Vergangenheitsproblem gibt. [...] Brussig hat den Wenderoman geschrieben, weil er die 'system-kompatible Spätlings-Generation' von ihrem schlechten Gewissen und vom Nachwendetrauma der Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung befreit.'<sup>48</sup> And yet *Helden wie wir* is clearly a historical reckoning. Is it also not clear whether Brussig and/or the text liberates the later generation from a guilty conscience and a need to negotiate the past if only because the text insists renegotiating that past and might be said to refuse any suggestion of historical closure.

Brussig's illustration of the Wall might also be said to mark a significant generational, if not oedipal break from the Christa Wolf generation of writers, for whom the GDR past and founding history is a key concern. This generational shift in negotiating the past is addressed in the analysis of Dücker's text in chapter 5. *Helden wie wir* rejects Wolf's call for a historical debate on the GDR and deliberately deflates the significance of that meta-narrative, by insisting also on the right to verbalise an individual past: 'Ich entdeckte, das ich eine *Vergangenheit* habe und daß diese Vergangenheit eine *Bedeutung* hat' (293). The text

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<sup>48</sup> Roberto Simanowski, 'Die DDR als Dauerwitz?' in: *Neue deutsche Literatur* (2:1996), p. 162.

‘überzeugt im Vergleich zu früheren Versuchen, die Vereinigungszeit literarisch zu erfassen, die zu sehr von den Vergangenheitsbewältigern dominiert waren. Besonders westdeutsche Versuche zur Wende oder Vereinigungszeit wie Grass’ Roman *Ein weites Feld* könnte die DDR-Situation nicht erfassen’.<sup>49</sup> The comparison with Grass’s Berlin novel is problematic and unconvincing, as will be argued in the following chapter. But if *Helden wie wir* does signify a conscious move away from the grand historical narratives as a mode of discourse, it does so within the literary framework established by the feuilleton. Both the rejection of Christa Wolf’s text *Was bleibt* (‘Wie Sie sehen, interessierte ich mich nach einer halben Seite mehr für die Autorin als für ihre Geschichte’ 297) as well as a refusal to allocate the historic any signifying function within unification Berlin discourse support this claim.<sup>50</sup>

#### **I.4. *Nox* and the Berlin Wall**

The representation of Berlin, the Wall and the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 in Thomas Hettche’s Berlin text is thematically opposed to Brussig’s text. In *Nox*, the Wall is a wound, Germany’s wound, but also a wound that is felt by the body, indeed reflected by it. It is a wound that had once closed and was now again open, and with it, the memories of the past, of the instruments that inflicted the wound upon the city and the body. In *Nox*, Berlin is omnipresent but the omnipresence is so ruthlessly physical that it offers only one moment of acknowledgement of the grand historical narrative, which is precisely the wound, the wound of the divided city and country. The representation of Berlin in *Helden wie wir* on the other hand is remarkably limited: Klaus is more concerned with a description of his family, his

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<sup>49</sup> Reinhard K. Zachau, “Das Volk jedenfalls war’s nicht!” Thomas Brussigs Abrechnung mit der DDR’ in: *Colloquia Germanica* (30:1997), p. 388.

<sup>50</sup> The feuilleton reception of Brussig’s text and its subjective approach to the *Wende* was largely positive. As Stefan Neuhaus remarked, Brussig’s text ‘galt vielen Kritikern als “Erfolgsbuch zur deutschen Wende”, als “Wenderoman”, teilweise sogar als *der* Wenderoman, mit dem nun endliche der Forderung der Literaturkritik Verarbeitung der Wiedervereinigung genüge getan wurde’. Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit*, p. 472.



home and home life and such descriptions dominate in the text; Berlin is present, but through the optic of the family home. This perspective is in itself a comment on the insistence of closed, private, if not hidden life in the GDR. In *Nox*, however, the fall of the Wall is not seen as a healing, but rather a haemorrhage, thus conveying the historical metaphor of the wound into literal wounding, and the literalness challenges history in a 24-hour odyssey that is brutally physical. I shall address the portrayal of the Wall in *Nox* from within a discursive body-city framework. I shall then move from the discussion of the body to the text's insistence on the unavoidability of the historic, however visceral, now that the wound has been re-opened.

In contrast to Brussig's portrayal, Hettche begins his narrative odyssey on the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989, at which point Brussig ends his narrative, though the shadow of the past is visible throughout the 137 pages of Hettche's text and ultimately overshadows the initial euphoric celebration of the opening as a second zero hour. Passing through the crowds at the Wall the female protagonist 'dachte daran, wie sie durch die Menge zur Mauer trieb. Wie sie die Hand an die Wunde im Beton legte. Nun, dachte sie, sind alle ohne Namen wie ich. Und nur für kurze Zeit wird das aussehen wie Freude'.<sup>51</sup> This state of being nameless, of being historically un-inscribed and undefined underscores the idea of a *tabula rasa*, a rather negative image presenting the 9<sup>th</sup> November as a historical break. It was in the euphoria of the moment in which time appeared to have stopped for those at the Brandenburg Gate: 'Hier sind die Grenztruppen der DDR. Bürger, wir bitten Sie höflichst, den Platz zu verlassen. [...] Sprechchöre jenseits des Brandenburger Tores. Wir wollen raus! Wir wollen raus! Macht das Tor auf! [...] Schlafen kann ich noch im Grab' (82). But this euphoric moment, reproduced

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Hettche, *Nox* (Köln, Du Mont 2002 [1995, Suhrkamp]), p. 94. All subsequent quotations, given in parenthesis, are from this edition.

here in an almost journalistic account in its drive to recreate the events during the night, is both deceptive and short-lived: the Wall is figured as a wound, as something that has not healed, which resists closure and the public euphoria is merely simulated joy ('aussehen wie Freude'). The act of placing the hand within the open wound, which is simultaneously an act of pointing to, betrays a deeper anxiety for the past and the future because the moment is one of uncertainty. The Berlin Wall 'war der Schnitt, mit dem sich die Stadt vom Osten trennte. Wie man ein Glied amputiert [...] wie sehr doch alle Angst hatten vor dem Schmerz' (75). The pain refers both to the building of the Wall in 1961 and its opening twenty-eight years later: it is the pain of reopening that which had been, perhaps necessarily, forgotten. The image of the euphoria associated with the opening of the Wall, and an image that was sent around the world as the symbol of the two Berlins coming together, is destabilised as an accepted symbolic signifier of the unification. The image suggests that the opening of the Wall is *also* a moment of pain, and a moment of remembering that which was lost. The text forces a confrontation with the historic seen through the optic of the fall of the Wall.

*Nox* narrates the night of an unnamed female's journey across Berlin on November 9<sup>th</sup>, the night the Wall was opened and the same night in which this unnamed protagonist murders an unnamed narrator in his West Berlin apartment. This namelessness is to be resolved at the end of the novel, but not for the reader: her name, significantly, is kept from the reader, again undermining any suggestion of historical closure. Her journey takes her into a night in which East and West meet in a surreal Bacchanalian orgy of drugs, group sex, buggery, masturbation and sado-masochism. This transgression of borders, the Wall, sexual bodies, life and death is part of the protagonist's search for remembrance and unity: on the night in

which the Wall fell and the same night in which she cut the throat of an unnamed author, the protagonist forgets her own name.

Hettche's text is replete with images of scars and wounds reflecting the refusal of the past to simply go away, but also reducing this great historical juncture to a moment of blood and guts, a moment of visceral rather than monumental history, as is suggested through the protagonist's repeated confrontation with the Wall: 'Nah an einer der Aussichtsplattformen stand sie plötzlich in einem weißen Licht und wußte, das war die Wunde' (79). The raised platform and the white light evoke the actual Wall and the death strip as well as an anatomical theatre and a table upon which Berlin's past, its wound, is being scrutinised. This metaphor of the Wall-as-wound will appear again in the text, but in the anatomical theatre of the Charité hospital in East Berlin. The nameless protagonist is told at the hospital that on this night, 'Sie reißen die Narbe auf, die so gut verheilt schien. In dieser Nacht, verstehen Sie? Man muß neu begrenzen, ins Wuchernde schneidend, tief ins Lebendige hinein' (111). It is initially unclear whether it is to be on her body that the deep cut is to be made, whether it will be her nameless body that must be redefined (neu begrenzen), by cutting deep into the living flesh. This metaphor of the Wall as a scar or wound is arguably effective both as an image of terrible pain but also insofar as the image of the wound draws the reader's attention to the fact that the breeched Wall is already a metaphor. The emphasis here is on the representation of the Wall as a wound, a scar that has been reopened. As a wound it is a physical and psychological reminder of something that will not or cannot simply disappear overnight – it has already haemorrhaged. Indeed, the numerous metaphors in the text of scars, wounds and cuts are better understood as representing 'part of a connotative system in which the denotative plane is constituted by the cut/scar images and the connotative plane by the master

metaphor of the “Wunde Deutschland” to which they all allude’ and it is through this ‘master metaphor’ that they glean their evident symbolic value.<sup>52</sup> To open a wound is to re-experience the pain of the tear and the memory of that pain. This referent of the wound to which the professor refers, ‘Sie reißen die Narbe auf’, is not an event but already a metaphor.

The portrayal of the Wall as a wound has a tradition in, mostly West German, Berlin literature. Throughout its twenty-eight year history, the Wall was frequently de-contextualised in literature, politics and the media as scar (*Narbe*), a wound (*Wunde*) or simply as a disgrace (*Schandmauer*). As late as 1988 Martin Walser argued that it is imperative to keep open the wound called Germany, that it should not be healed, if healing is to be understood as a collective forgetting of that which caused the wound.<sup>53</sup> This reading of the Wall is a reflection of a deeply rooted conviction in West German society that the Wall was a just retribution for the horrors of Nazi-Germany. The Berlin Wall, following Walser, is the burden that history has placed upon post-war Germany, and a burden from which some had hoped to liberate contemporary German literature. Hettche takes up this ‘inherited’ metaphor of the ‘German wound’ and creates a counter-discourse to the idea of a unified Berlin/Germany. The text refuses to fulfil the demands for a history-free literature, for a literature from which Germany’s past has been bracketed out for the benefit of a new, unburdened beginning. For the nameless protagonist wandering across the night city, this historical wound is visible as she observes ‘wie entlang der Mauer die Narbe, die mitten durch die Stadt lief, aufbrach wie schlecht verheiltes Gewebe’ (79). The Wall is being read as an opening that prevents its erasure, that is, it refuses any interpretation of the night of

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<sup>52</sup> Schmitz, ‘German Unification as Pornographic Nightmare’, p. 216.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Walser, ‘Über Deutschland Reden (Ein Bericht)’, in *Über Deutschland reden* (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 89.



November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 as an act of closure, a healing of the past and by extension a forgetting of that past. It is a shocking and violent image of the *Wende* and is intended to function as part of a counter-discourse.

The representation of the Wall as the ‘German wound’ in *Nox* is closely related to the dilemma of narrating the event insofar as the text is searching for a different voice with which to narrate the fall of the Wall. The cutting open of the author’s throat mirrors the opening of the Wall possibly suggesting that the narratability of the Wall and its representation are being called into question. The unnamed narrator does not see the knife and shortly before news of the opening of the Wall reaches West Berlin, the protagonist cuts the narrator’s throat:

Von links nach rechts schnitt sie, und die scharfrandige Wunde klaffte sofort weit auf. Tief schnitt die in Muskeln und Fleisch, trennte den Kehledeckel vom Kehlkopf, durchschnitt Halsschlagader und Schilddrüsenschlagader, kappte mir Luftröhre und Speiseröhre und schnitt tief noch in einen Halswirbel hinein. Als die das Messer aus der Wunde nahm, zog sie keinen Menschenlaut, doch mehr als ein gurgelndes Geräusch, mit heraus. (11)

The exactness and precision of Hettche’s style reads like a pathologist’s report. It is clear that Hettche appears to be experimenting with a narrative form in which fact and fiction are blended, and are repeatedly throughout the text, to create a new narrative voice. The death of the author, with its intended pun on Roland Barthes’s famous essay,<sup>54</sup> argues for the freedom of the narrative text from traditional authorial constraints: ‘Als die das Messer aus der Wunde nahm, zog sie keinen Menschenlaut, doch mehr als ein gurgelndes Geräusch, mit heraus’. It is this new, indefinable sound that reports to the reader the decay of the author’s body as well as the odyssey of the nameless murderess across Berlin. This new voice is an

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<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The death of the author’, *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (Harlow, Longman, 1988), pp. 167-171.

acknowledgement that the *Wende* needs a narrative style, not a grand historical narrative, but rather something capable of portraying and acknowledging the complexity of representing the fall of the Wall. But Hettche's new 'voice' exists beyond a temporal framework, encompassing the past, the present and the future, as is suggested in the narrative function of a dead author narrating the events of the text to the reader: 'Etwas wie das Atmen der Dinge hörte ich, als das Dröhnen des Sterbens, mit dem der Tod meinen Körper geschlagen hatte, verebbt war, und die Stille kein Atemzug mehr störte' (27). It is a voice that refuses to reject the past and in so doing, it positions itself firmly within the trenches of the *Gesinnungsästhetik* of the West German literary tradition and against a literary aesthetics of forgetting, as Martin Walser was to advocate in his 1988 *Friedenspreisrede* in which he criticised a constant backward looking tendency in German literature. It is a position that clearly voices, through the Barthes reference, that all language, and therefore all descriptions of the Wall, is already saturated with (historical) meaning.

The claim of a literary *tabula rasa* is rejected by the text as is clear through the parallelism of the murder of the narrator with the opening of the Wall: in both cases it is a wound that has a story to (re-)narrate. The cutting of the throat is paralleled in the text with the cutting open of the Wall. At precisely 7.32 p.m. 'war der Auftrag der Landespolizei-direktion an alle leitenden Beamten ergangen, sofort an die Grenzübergangsstellen zu fahren. [...] von der Oberbaumbrücke im Süden und im Westen von der Invalidenstraße flossen die Meldungen ins Präsidium zurück und von dort wie über Synapsen weiter in alle Bezirke' (72). This flow of information from the central police organ to the peripheries is represented as a bodily process (wie über Synapsen) and indeed mirrors the same disintegration of the narrator's body as he narrates it. At precisely the same time as the flow of information outlined above,

‘Zellenzyme und Bakterien begannen in allen Organen mit dem Abbau der Eiweißstoffe, Nitridationen und Oxidationen wandelten organische stickstoffhaltige Substanzen zu anorganischen Stoffen um’ (72). A reading of the narrator’s open wound as a metaphor for the Wall is intended. The body of the author is here inscribed with the wound of history. As the protagonist reaches the Wall, ‘die Hand am rauhen Beton’ (83), she suddenly pulled back her hand, shocked by the memory of the dead narrator.

Watching the Wall-pickers chip away at the painted surface of the Wall, she is suddenly overcome by an image of an open wound: ‘Himmel, Straßen und Mauern, all das atmete und blutete um sie her’ as she sees the chisels and hammers ‘hineinbohren ins nekrotische Gewebe, klammerten sich überall im Fackelschein welche mit Hämmern und Händen an die Mauer’ (84). The image of the Wall-pickers, which was widely seen as a symbol of the people dismantling the Wall, has been transformed into a brutal and visceral image; the Wall-pick is transformed into a scalpel cutting into human flesh, ‘blitzender Stahl ins Fleisch’. The bleeding Wall and the cell tissue (nekrotische Gewebe) go beyond a simple anthropomorphising of the Wall: it would be helpful here to refer to Sigmund Freud’s analysis of the city-body equation because for Freud anthropomorphic representations are problematic insofar as the city is unsuited as a repository for memory. In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* Freud invites the reader to draw a comparison between the city and the human subconscious, because he argues, on the surface, both appear to retain coterminous existing fragments of the past, the archaeological artefacts of a city and the memory of the human mind. However, the ‘friedlichste Entwicklung einer Stadt schließt Demolierungen und Ersetzungen von Bauwerken ein, und darum ist die Stadt von vornherein für einen solchen

Vergleich mit einem seelischen Organismus ungeeignet'.<sup>55</sup> Hettche's image of the city bleeding and scarred, appear to refute this claim: 'der verwesende Erzählkörper ist der Filter, durch den die Stadt und die Geschichte wahrgenommen werden'.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that the instrumentalisation of the wound metaphor underscores an attempt to portray the fall of the Wall within an historic framework. The wound metaphor further suggests that the drive to read the event as a new beginning in the hope of overcoming the historic is an undertaking doomed to failure: 'Nichts heilt, dachte sie. Nicht wirklich. Der Schmerz bleibt, und keine Wunde schließt sich. Und dann?' (101).

The two portrayals of the Berlin Wall in *Helden wie wir* and *Nox* do not converge, other than in their rejection of grand historical narrative representations. A significant difference between East and West representations of the Wall 'liegt im Erlebnis eines tiefen Bruches auf der ostdeutschen Seite, der das ganze bisherige Leben infrage stellt, und das Erlebnis einer zumindest scheinbar ungebrochenen Kontinuität auf der westdeutschen Seite'.<sup>57</sup> Hence for Brussig, the fall of the Wall signified an end as well as a political and socio-cultural new beginning – and this perception is absent in Hettche's text. But the comparison between the two texts is perhaps unfair if the mood of the Berlin representations is taken into consideration. Hettche's thoughtful philosophic ruminations cannot be further from Brussig's comic, absurd and at times grotesque portrayal of East Berlin. It is also problematic in terms of a comparison that whereas Hettche's narrator engages with the city's topography,

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<sup>55</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Frankfurt a/M, Fischer, 1994), p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> Jörg Magenau, 'Berlin Prosa', in: Erhard Schütz und Jörg Döring (Hg.), *Text der Stadt – Reden von Berlin* (Weidler, Berlin, 1999), p. 68. Bertrand Westphal observed in a similar argument that 'la mémoire de la ville peut être confondu avec la mémoire des hommes, mais elle est d'abord la mémoire que porte le spectacle de la ville'. 'Les villes verticales. Inscription de l'Histoire et du Texte dans l'espace urbain', in: *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, vol. I (Hg.) Etienne François und Hagen Schulze (C.H.Beck, München 2002), p. 408.

<sup>57</sup> Annette Leo, 'Keine gemeinsame Erinnerung: Geschichtsbewußtsein in Ost und West' in: *Das Parlament* 29.09.2003, p. 28.



Brussig's narrator remains, for the most part, indoors and reads Berlin through his family home. But both texts do nonetheless make possible a political, historical and social reading of the city through Berlin's topography.

### **I. 5. A literary requital: *Helden wie wir*, Berlin and Christa Wolf**

Klaus Uhltscht is mockingly critical of largely West German readings of the fall of the Wall. The event was celebrated as symbolising the end of basically everything: 'die Rezensionen, der Historiker und Publizisten jedenfalls lesen sich so: "Ende der deutschen Teilung", "Ende der europäischen Nachkriegsordnung", Ende des kurzen 20. Jahrhunderts", "Ende der Moderne", 'Ende des Kalten Krieges", "Ende der Ideologien", und "Das Ende der Geschichte". [...] Sieben auf einen Strich' (70). The satirical poke at the West German media and their symbolic reading of the event is intended hyperbole: it might be the end of all of the above, but Klaus concludes his 'historic' reading by claiming that in fact it was he who brought down the Wall, though with the help of his penis, 'und das sind keine Pennälerprotzereien, sondern Mosaiksteine der historischen Wahrheit' (7). The text undermines the conclusive readings of the *Wende* through its reneging on truth and objective perception and also playing on symbolic readings of historical events. His birth, the reader is told, in echo of Grass's Oskar Matzerath's potent historicity, was equally symbolic: 'Ich darf von mir behaupten, durch ein ganzes Panzerregiment Geburtshilfe genossen zu haben, ein Panzerregiment, das am Abend des 20. August 1968 in Richtung Tschechoslowakei rollte' (5); it is the night East German tanks, at Russia's request, rolled towards Prague. The text plays with the symbols and symbolic readings: there are seven chapters; the autobiography narrates seven years of Klaus's life; Berlin is perceived as existing within a symbolic framework or order. But such mosaic pieces will not offer the reader a closed, all-rounded

view of life in Berlin both before and after the *Wende* but will remain at all times fragmentary. It is clear that Klaus's interest is not the Wall but rather his penis, his perversions and 'die Mutter aller Mütter' (320), Christa Wolf.

The function of the penis in *Helden wie wir* is equally significant within the overall structure of the text, if only because it is with the aid of his penis that he eventually liberates himself from the authoritarian structures of the GDR. Klaus's understanding of himself, of his place in society, is mostly determined by and through the discursive framework of Socialism; its discourse is made 'visible' through the urban fabric, a case in point being the nineteen meter high granite statue of Lenin in East Berlin whither he was taken in a quasi-initiation rite that 'brought' him into that symbolic order:

am Fuße des Lenin-Denkmal wurde mir, als ich zehn Jahre alt war, das rote Halstuch umgebunden. Wenn Sie das alles mal auf sich wirken lassen könnte, bekämen Sie noch heute eine Ahnung, was Totalitarismus auch bedeutet: Jeder ist nur ein Zwerg vor dem Giganten, der da steht und in eine Ferne blickt, die nur er sieht. [...] so *einem* muß doch jedes dieser unbedeutenden Menschlein am Fuße des Sockels sein unbedeutendes Leben opfern. (100)

Interpreted semantically, the Lenin-memorial signifies the dominant discourse into which the individual is symbolically contextualised, namely the Socialist/Communist ideology. The red neckerchief is a metonymic initiation of the individual into that social framework, but one in which the individual is thwarted, 'dieser unbedeutenden Menschlein', if not almost entirely erased. This is a moment of rejection for Klaus, when a spatial identification with the symbolic order is understood as a subsuming of the individual for an unreachable and largely abstract collective, 'Jeder ist nur ein Zwerg vor dem Giganten' and for an idea 'die nur er sieht'. It is a portrait of Socialism in which the self is crippled and powerless.

This participation of the individual within the collective is made visible to Klaus through the exploitation of Berlin's topography, by communicating the ideological discourse of the GDR through statues, memorials and street names. East Berlin topography functions for Klaus in precisely the same manner as the Wall, insofar as both are signifying instances of the dominant totalitarian discourse, highlighting degrees of civic powerlessness. The thwarting of the self as outlined above manifests itself in Klaus in a similar disintegration of the body and a concentration on his penis, the last aspect of his symbolic order. But his relationship to his body, and in particular to his penis, has been perverted since his rejection. 'Ich habe den kleinsten Schwanz, den man je gesehen hat. Ich habe nie einen kleineren als meinen eigenen gesehen' (101). His small-penis paranoia is directly related to his understanding of his own worth within the social order. The initiation ritual 'führte mich zu der Vermutung, und zwar, als ich von der Theorie der Wiedergeburt hörte, daß ich der wiedergeborene Kleine Trompeter bin.' After all, he laconically adds, 'zum Kleinen Trompeter gehört eine kleine Trompete – und ich hatte die kleinste Trompete' (101). The small trumpeter is an East German song that pays homage to a bodyguard of the Communist activist Ernst Thälmann,<sup>58</sup> who sacrificed his own life to save Thälmann's: 'der Schuß fiel, der Kleine Trompeter wurde getötet, Thälmann passierte nichts' (98). Communism, for Klaus, is a system that only produces sacrificial victims, nothing more. He draws a similar conclusion of the state's willingness to sacrifice the individual for 'ein abstrakter Begriff' (288) from his initiation ritual: 'Ich sah meinen Schwanz, ich sah das Lenin-Denkmal und ahnte, daß ich der Kleine Trompeter bin' (101). His small penis is suggestive of his powerlessness within the GDR, his perception of his own self has been perverted and his own identity ultimately repressed by the

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<sup>58</sup> Ernst Thälmann was a founding member of the German Communist Party and a key figure in the opposition to the National Socialists until his arrest in 1933. He was murdered at Buchenwald Concentration Camp on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1944. Thälmann's life became a corner stone in the founding myths of the GDR.

symbolic order. The family home and the city' topography function in the text to force home this idea of an inhuman totalitarian state, which sacrifices the individual for an abstract idea.

Sex and sexual perversions, 'Oh! Ich und Perversion! Tief drinnen hielt ich noch die Missionarsstellung für pervers, und nun erfuhr ich von Sex mit Tieren, Sex mit Kindern, Sex mit Urgroßmüttern und Sex mit Toten' (81), represent in the text attempts to liberate himself from the controlling influences of his family. His family home is opposite the Stasi headquarters and it is here that he experiences his first sexual fantasies. Living in the shadow of the Stasi offices, he feels threatened and continually observed: 'Ich machte die Stasi zu meinem heimlichen Feind. Ich nannte das Karree auf der anderen Straßenseite *Ministerium des Bösen*'. Threatened, he watches the building 'mit einem Fernglas stundenlang' and 'machte mir dämonisierende Gedanken. Ich führte Protokoll über meine Beobachtungen' (79). Klaus is eight years old at this stage. It is significant that Klaus is performing the prime functions of the Stasi: observation and protocol. He is already becoming an instrument of the symbolic order: 'Über die Stasi durfte ich nichts ausforschen, um meine Eltern nicht ins Gefängnis zu bringen – also befaßte ich mich mit Sex' (80). The perversion and manipulation is thus complete when the relationship of self to body and sexuality becomes a subversive practice, insofar as it is seen as something wrong and uncanny, 'Sex wurde mir immer unheimlicher' (81).<sup>59</sup> The equation of sexuality with subversive practices culminates once again in a confrontation with Berlin's topography. In possession of a West German catalogue for women's lingerie, Klaus combines his sexual fantasies with an imagined copulative act

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<sup>59</sup> The equation of sex with unorthodox and subversive practices is again experienced following his admission to his parents of his first sexual encounter with a woman he did not know and that he contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Klaus's father immediately picks up on his ignorance: 'Genau das meine ich! Da siehst du es! Er unterschätzt den Gegner'. Klaus's own response is equally revealing: 'Warum kann ich nicht mal an den Fick glauben, den ich selbst vollbracht? Weil sie sagen, daß es lebensgefährlich ist? Weil sie sagen, daß es unserer großen Sache Schaden könnte? Weil ich ein Kind dieser Eltern bin? Weil ich den kleinsten Pimmel habe?' (137-38).

with the West: 'Aber wo im Osten kann man Westfrauen schon nahe sein? So nahe, daß es Nähe nicht geht? Genau, in der Friedrichstraße, über der U-Bahn. Ich kam auf vier Meter an sie ran' (173). Sexuality, in this case masturbating above a grate under which the West Berlin metro passed, thus becomes something both subversive but also something unattainable, insofar as it heightens his and the reader's awareness as to why the women are unreachable: the Friedrichstraße was interrupted by the Wall. Klaus's association of the West as a world of sex and pornography is his riposte to the sterile and all-repressive world of the GDR.

The liberation from the repressive symbolic order that Klaus reads into East Berlin's urban fabric is in part determined through what I understand to be an oedipal break from his mother and from the city. Following a blood transfusion with Eric Honecker, the former leader of the GDR, Klaus is injected with a serum to counter-balance the excessive amount of blood donated (an image that also brings to mind the symbol of the small trumpet player and the Lenin-memorial; both signify the sacrifice of the individual). Once released from hospital, which is underground in a bunker in an obvious pun on the subversive practices of the state, he finds himself in the middle of the November demonstration on the Alexander Platz.

The confrontation with the demonstrators marks the beginning of the protagonist's departure from a Socialist order, and as such tropes Alexander Platz as a site of rupture. The trigger behind this departure is Christa Wolf. He hears a female voice, which he takes to be that of Jutta Müller (it was in fact Christa Wolf), the famous ice-skating trainer, pleading for a socialist revolution, in a language painfully familiar to Klaus: '*Jede revolutionäre Bewegung befreit auch die Sprache. Was bisher so schwer auszusprechen war, geht uns einmal frei von den Lippen*' (283). And it is here that he hears the calls for a renewed Socialism: '*Also*

*Träumen wir mit hellwacher Vernunft: Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus und keiner geht weg!* (285). His immediate response is to equate the speech and its argument with his mother, that is, to locate this revolutionary speech within the same totalitarian discursive practices that had successfully perverted his own identity. There was no liberation of language in this speech. Socialism, he asks, 'was hat das dann noch mit befreiter Sprache zu tun?' and draws attention to the speaker's deliberate misuse of language: 'dieses genüßliche Herumlutschen auf dem Wort *Wende*, und wie sie ar-ti-ku-lier-te *Wir fürchten, benutzt zu werden, ver-wen-det*, [...] ich fühlte mich wie zu Hause. Natürlich wurde aus dem Lexikon vorgelesen, natürlich das falsche Wort, wie bei meiner Mutter, die unter → *Griechenland* anschlägt, wenn mich Pimmel interessieren' (286). Klaus accuses the speaker of abusing the word Socialism in the same way: the speaker's Socialism is a linguistic construct far removed from the reality of everyday life in East Berlin: 'Angenommen [...] sie hätte im Lexikon nachgeschlagen, Vielleicht hätte sie gefunden: → *Sozialismus: Gesellschaftsordnung, die auf dem gesellschaftlichen Eigentum der Produktionsmittel beruht*. Könnten Sie davon Träumen, richtig visionär träumen?' (287). The last question is directed to the reader. The claim for a renewed Socialist vision is for the young protagonist an insult after having suffered under the system that has very little in common with its lexical referent. It is here that we find an echo of Schirrmacher's critique of Wolf's unrepentant call for Socialism as an indication of her support for a corrupt system.

'Aber selbst jetzt, wo alles *auf einmal frei von den Lippen geht*, sprechen sie vom Sozialismus und nicht davon, daß uns die Welt endlich offenstehen muß' (288). These were to be Klaus's words, his counter-argument, at the demonstration, but he tripped and injured himself before he could reach the platform. After an emergency operation at a hospital Klaus

is left with an abnormally large penis, which his mother demands should be reduced, triggering his flight and escape from the hospital and from his mother, in a symbolic performance of an oedipal break from the discourse of the 'mothers'. It is during his stay at the hospital that he discovers the real name of the speaker on the Alexander Platz: Christa Wolf. In the final chapter of the text, 'Der geheilte Pimmel', Brussig begins his scathing critique of Wolf. The chapter heading is a clear and intended pun and response to Wolf's important Berlin text, *Der geteilte Himmel*, which in part defended the building of the Wall. Klaus's penis (Pimmel) has now healed because he has broken free from the very discourse Wolf used in her Berlin novel to justify the building of the Wall. The critique against Wolf is ultimately a critique of her silence: 'Christa Wolf hat einen Roman geschrieben. Er ist irgendwie gewidmet. Sie hätte eindeutig schreiben können, wem sie ihr Buch widmet. Aber sie tut's nicht, und ich weiß nicht, was gemeint ist' (296). The book is dedicated to 'G.' (her husband), which Klaus satirically understands as a dedication to her own g-point (which he puns with 'G Punkt'). The accusation appears to be based on an assumption that Wolf deliberately veils her language and thus refuses to be politically or socially positioned. Her failure to position herself unambiguously is perceived as an indication of her support for the system, implying also her complicity in the system's abuse of the individual for an abstract cause.<sup>60</sup>

The criticism echoes that of the West German media during the *Wende* period, namely, although Wolf was now suggesting, in 1990 when *Was bleibt* appeared, that the Wall was indeed a monstrosity, this was her first explicit reference to the Wall, and her past silence

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<sup>60</sup> The protagonist asks: 'Wie kann man eine Schriftstellerin, die sich politisch fast nie verbindlich äußerte, politisch gerecht interpretieren? Wissen Sie, was Christa Wolf über Budapest 56 schreibt? Daß man mit Sorgen vor den Radioapparaten saß. Was soll das heißen? Gab es irgend jemanden, der damals erleichtert vor dem Radio saß?' (309).

could only be seen as a moral failure and an instance of political opportunism.<sup>61</sup> The critical positioning to the Wall was considered to have come too late: ‘Nachdem ich mehr als ein halbes Jahr lang ohne nennenswerte Erfolgserlebnisse ihr Gesamtwerk abgekloppt hatte, erschien “Was bleibt”, eine Erzählung, in den siebziger Jahre verfaßt, in der sich endlich ein handfester Anhaltspunkt fand’ (307). It is clear that the text claims Wolf’s language supports the very system she now purports to be rejecting by continuing to function within an unquestioned discursive framework.

It is not his perversions that trigger his actions to liberate himself from such discourse, but rather ‘die Erkenntnis des Satyrspiels eines Umfeldes, das sich bis in die Tiefen der Sprache hinein als manipuliert und indoktriniert erweist’.<sup>62</sup> Klaus also mocks Wolf’s autobiographical text through intertextual references, an aspect largely ignored by critical readings of Brussig’s text.<sup>63</sup> *Was bleibt*, as has already been remarked, portrays Wolf’s observation by the Stasi during the 1970s and the psychological burdens which surveillance imposed. At one point in 1978, the Stasi enter her apartment in her absence: ‘Außerdem haben im Bad die Scherben des Wandspiegels im Waschbecken gelegen, ohne daß sich für diesen Tatbestand eine natürliche Erklärung hätte finden lassen.[...] Einschüchterung nenne man das’.<sup>64</sup> This episode is recreated for the reader in Brussig’s text. During his brief work for the Stasi Klaus and a colleague are ordered to the apartment of a writer on the Friedrichstraße: ‘Eule (his

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<sup>61</sup> See Klaus’s remark: ‘Vielleicht hatte sie in ihrer Rede vom 4. November die Maueröffnung deshalb nicht gefordert, weil sie es in ihren Büchern schon Dutzende Male getan hatte? Vielleicht hatte sie es in der Aufregung einfach vergessen?’ (306).

<sup>62</sup> Markus Symmank, ‘Muttersprache: Zu Thomas Brussigs Roman *Helden wie wir*’ in: Matthias Harder (hrsg.), *Bestandaufnahmen: Deutschsprachige Literatur der neunziger Jahre aus interkultureller Sicht* (Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 2001), p. 189.

<sup>63</sup> Most reviews and critical analysis of *Helden wie wir* appear to suggest that Brussig only takes issue with Wolf and her works in the final chapter of his Berlin text and largely addresses her own Berlin novel, *Der geheilte Himmel*. In fact, Brussig’s critical assessment begins much earlier with his satirical reading of the later text, *Was bleibt*.

<sup>64</sup> Christa Wolf, *Was bleibt* (München, Luchterhand, 1990 [2001], p. 25.



colleague) war bei einem seiner nächsten Einbrüche so flattrig (oder vielleicht hatte sich eine – begründete – feindselige Regung gegen den *Spiegel* (a German magazine) geregt), daß ihm im Badezimmer der Fotoapparat aus der Hand rutschte und ein *Spiegel* zertrümmerte. Zu allem Unglück in der Wohnung einer Schriftstellerin, und man mußte aus Erfahrung davon ausgehen, daß...Veröffentlichung...Skandal...Blamage' (160). The meaning behind this reference to Wolf becomes clear once the reader is made aware that the author concerned, Christa Wolf, did not complain, but rather left her own report in a drawer for ten years. Hence, for Klaus, Wolf's fears appear to be unfounded because she appeared not to have acted on them. It is a criticism that ultimately attacks the acquiescence of the older generation, represented in the person of Christa Wolf (the 'mother' generation), in the system.

In keeping with his obsession, Klaus subverts the influence of the mothers and that of the symbolic order, which he perceives in the city, and also undermines the myth that the people had brought down the Wall, by challenging that symbolic order with his now excessively large penis. Satirizing the theme of *Ankunftsliteratur*, Klaus too has arrived at a point of maturity: 'Ein Mann ging hinaus in die Nacht, ein Mann mit seinem Schwanz. [...] Nix mehr mit Kleiner Trompete' (313). While the speakers at the demonstration appear to be lost in their own language ('Sie war *die* Autorin für ein Publikum, das es nicht fertigbringt, ein Dutzend Grenzsoldaten wegzuschieben' 316), thereby underlining a perceived civic impotence, Klaus overturns the symbolic order by instrumentalising his grotesque penis. I refer here to Bakhtin's interpretation of the ways grotesque representations of the human body have frequently been used to portray moments of political and/or social rupture. Through the grotesque, writes Bakhtin, 'the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented

not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people'.<sup>65</sup> If the small penis represented Klaus's perceived powerlessness within the system, the remodelled version possibly underlines his liberation from that system. The moment in which Klaus unpacks his member is a visually comical moment, possibly even carnevalesque, but also symbolic. 'The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum.'<sup>66</sup> If Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais was pursued within a transitional framework, one that marked the shift from an old order to a new one, the same reading might also be applied to the penis symbol in Brussig's text. Klaus challenges, on the verge of a transitional shift from an old order to a new one, the myth of '*Das-Volk-sprengt-die-Mauer-Legende*' (6), by highlighting society's adjustment within the system. He refuses to acknowledge the East Germans as liberators or heroes, but as losers: 'Solange sich Millionen Versager ihrem Versagen nicht stellen, werden sie Versager bleiben' (312). The opening of the Wall is a diffident muddle until Klaus's 'great' penis not only shows the way, but also makes possible a historical reckoning with the GDR. It is a harsh critique of East German society, but one clearly directed to an older generation of unrepentant defenders of the socialist ideal. Klaus further instrumentalises the penis symbol as liberation from the dominant discourse of totalitarianism and its continuation through East Berlin and the language of the intellectuals arguing for a renewed Socialism. It is such mother-personalities, Klaus's mother and Christa Wolf in her public function and literary importance, which have influenced and contributed to a socially accepted language, ultimately contextualised within the monological discourse of East German Socialism. Such women are for Klaus identical in 'ihrer Autorität und der Vorgehensweise auf dem Weg zu Ergebniskontrolle und -sicherung:

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<sup>65</sup> Pam Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader* (London, Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 205.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Sie schmeicheln und drohen, umgarnen und erpressen'.<sup>67</sup> It is not his perversions that trigger his actions to liberate himself from such discourse, but the recognition that his revolution was his penile moment: 'Weg, weg, weg mit all diese angestregten, disziplinierten, dozierten Sätzen der Mutter aller Mütter, ab jetzt wird nur noch gelallt [...] Schwanz gerettet, Kalten Krieg beendet' (320). In the context of the fall of the Wall and a perceived liberation from the social order, the symbolic function of Klaus's penis offers the reader a different narrative rendition of the events.

There is a remarkable limitation of the historic perception of Berlin's topography in the Brussig text; it rarely gestures beyond its significance to, and exploitation by the GDR. The opening of the Wall and the collapse of the symbolic order of the mothers do not lead to further speculations or ruminations on the significance of the event for Berlin and/or Germany. This absence deliberately deflates the historicity of the moment. There is only the repeated insistence to refuse to see the fall of the Wall as an heroic act: 'Ich wollte weg, ich hatte Angst, und als ich wieder eine Kamera vorm Gesicht hatte, stieß ich ein Wort aus, das aus den tiefsten Sümpfen meiner Seele kam: "Deutschland!" Die Westdeutschen nahmen es natürlich wörtlich, allerdings, indem sie es um eine entscheidende Nuance enstellten: Sie taten so, als ob alle, die *Deutschland* sagten, *Bundesrepublik* meinten' (322). The biting conclusion Klaus draws from his encounter with East Berlin on the night in which the Wall came down was that while some kind of grand unification was being performed, the truth was that there was no unification of the people because both sides were reading the events into their own ideological perception: for one half it was the chance of a united Germany, for the other an extension of the FRG.

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<sup>67</sup> Symmank, 'Muttersprache', p. 185.

## **I.6. The intertextual as a narrative mode: *Nox*, Berlin and myth**

It is clear from the portrayal and interpretation of the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 that *Nox* and *Helden wie wir* reveal conflicting readings of the fall of the Wall. *Nox* 'reads' something else into the fall of the Wall than is illustrated in Brussig's literary portrait. But, significantly, Hettche's Berlin novel does not negotiate Berlin's topography from within a comparable discursive framework. The two Berlin texts are at odds insofar as Hettche's text renegotiates a past absent from Brussig's perception: namely the National Socialist past, which it reads exclusively through the city, and moves beyond the largely closed, 'domestic' perception of *Helden wie wir*.

Travelling on the metro from West Berlin to East Berlin the unnamed woman is 'hooked' by what is suddenly revealed before her: 'Sie sah die aus der Zeit geratene Vergangenheit, die sich hier unter der Erde konserviert hatte. Vorsichtig und provisorisch die unterirdischen Brückenköpfe der Grenze mit dem vermauerten Aufgängen und Unterständen mit Sichtschlitzen' (23). Although the lines remained open, the metro stations in East Berlin were closed off in 1961. The image of a conserved past suggests a notion of layered time preserved beneath the surface of the city, an image which will appear again in Nooteboom's engagement with Berlin's topography. This archaeological image brings to mind Freud's notion of the city as a repository of the past to which I refer in the following chapter; an image, at least for Hettche, which also suggests that even the memory of the past is inscribed on the city surface.

The city-body metaphor is a common occurrence in representations of the city. Peter Ackroyd begins his biography of London (the genre itself is revealing) with the 'image of London as a human body' in which the 'byways of the city resemble thin veins and its parks are like lungs'.<sup>68</sup> In the same vein, the city of Berlin in Hettche's text also becomes a human body with 'Glieder' (71) and the internal organs of the city pump 'Worte und Bilder durch den Organismus' and 'es sickerte in sie hinein' (71). There is a similar symbiosis of the body of the unnamed woman with the body of the city, during which 'die Stadt sich um sie zusammenzog wie eine Haut über der Haut, in der sie ging' (12). Hence her walk across the city does not appear to represent a Benjaminian moment of conscious confrontation, as is the case with Nooteboom's protagonist, because she is somehow embodying the city, its wounds and scars, its division and its forgotten pasts. Her walk in the city serves to blur the lines between the two bodies: 'Es war, als entkleidete sich beim Gehen ihr Gedächtnis mit jedem Schritt. Verschwunden schon die eigene Geschichte. Wie fremde Photographien blitzten Erinnerungsbilder auf, die sie, gleichgültig, nicht mehr ordnete' (24). As with the image of the metro stations as time capsules, the figuring of the body as a repository for the memory of the city is intended. But the amnesia and the loss of identity experienced by the nameless woman are problematic: it is unclear whether the amnesia is also collective; the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> has momentarily destabilised the oppositional identities of East and West.

It is in this moment of amnesia and of being-without-identity that the historic becomes visible and felt. Near the border to East Berlin she observes similar attempts to forget, to erase the past: 'Während ringsum Häuser und Straßen wie neue Hautschichten sich gebildet hatten, abgestorben und abgeschuppt waren und wieder neu entstanden, war hier Niemandsland,

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<sup>68</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *London – The Biography* (Vintage, London, 2001), p. 1.

Ausläufer der Wunde, Narbengewebe [...] die Verwerfungen auf der Haut offen' (78). Within the same historical horizon 'ragten plötzlich die alten Botschaftsgebäude Italiens und Japans aus dem Dunkel hoch auf wie Schorf inmitten der Trümmer'. The forming of new layers of skin is a metaphor of forgetting, but possibly also moving on, of seeing the past as the past, and thereby closed. But the warps and the faults of the past, indirectly alluded to as the 'scab-like' images of the Italian and Japanese Embassies, are still present in the city, but have now been violently reopened, 'Verwerfungen auf der Haut offen'. Again, the metaphor of scarring and wounding is linked to history while the tearing open of the wound is suggestive of the re-entry of history into the *Wende*-discourse. This link the text creates between the city and the unnamed woman's body might be a tenuous link, but it is one that is nonetheless persuasive because she seems for the reader to represent or embody the city and its pasts. She walks through the city, but is also part of it, as the image of the city enveloping her like a second skin suggests. Indeed, some reviewers have argued that the unnamed woman's name is *Germania*. This figure of *Germania*, this incarnation of a nationalist myth, with its historical implications, has re-entered the political stage following her temporary banishment in 1945. Her own admission that she is part of the whole collective possibly supports this reading: 'Sie hatte das Gefühl, als gehörte sie allen' (18). The suggestion is that the *Wende* has inevitably reopened the debates on German nationalism and German identity.

The act of narrating Berlin is problematized from the outset. That the text parallels the opening of the Wall with the death of the narrator has already been shown. But it would appear that the parallelism of this narratorial death is understood as a necessary liberation from the plethora of Berlin representations already 'given' by media images, journalistic reports and of course novelistic accounts, which together create a discursive framework

limiting other possible representative approaches from which a different understanding of the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 might be gained. Any fictional account inevitably competes against the already known 'real' images. To challenge such images which promote an end-of-history interpretation, Hettche's approach is one in which the difference between the seemingly real and the purported fictive image is reduced and the portrayal is thus subsumed within the mass of seemingly authentic simulacra. *Nox* insists on the creative autonomy of the literary text as an alternative to the already existing authoritative images. Hettche's narrator gives the reader a Berlin perspective, which is at once removed from time and space as well as the framework of East and West simply because the perspective the reader is given is omniscient and all-seeing. The simultaneous recording of events happening around the city on the night the Wall fell is an act, according to the dead narrator, that is possible only in death because only the dead are liberated from temporal constraints: 'Nur, wenn man tot ist, hört man, wie in einer Stadt alles die Steine zerfrißt. Nun den Dingen gleich, öffnete die Stadt sich hinein in meinen Kopf, und mein Körper reflektierte ihren Lärm' (27). The image is one of a symbiosis of narrator and city, as with that of the unnamed woman and the city, of body and Berlin, an image in which Berlin is portrayed as something organic, something that is alive, but also 'incorrigibly plural'<sup>69</sup>: 'Meine Haut ist die Topographie eines Krieges, dachte sie. Pläne und Intrigen, Grabenkämpfe, Partisanentrupps, Bündnisse und Übergabeforderungen haben auf ihr Platz' (115-16). Her skin is plural because it is also the skin of the city, Berlin's topography, its marked surfaces and voids still speaking of Berlin's histories, such as the 1848 barricade fights.

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<sup>69</sup> 'World is crazier and more of it than we think, / Incorrigibly plural', 'Snow' in: Louis MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, ed. Michael Longley (Faber and Faber, London, 1988), p. 23.

There are two levels of perception emanating from this narrative voice: the first is a bird's-eye view of Berlin, so to speak, above the actual event taking place below; the second perspective is the perception of Berlin seen through the eyes of the unnamed murderess also narrated by the dead author. While the unnamed woman touches the open wound at the Wall, time is seemingly stopped wherein the reader is given a coterminous perception of events in the city elsewhere: 'In der Yorckstraße brannte eine Wohnung aus. Auf einem Friedhof in Neukölln wurden Grabsteine umgestürzt. In der Tunnelröhre zwischen den U-Bahnhöfen Olympiastadion und Neu-Westend entdeckte ein Zugfahrer die Leiche eines jungen Mannes, der sich aus einem fahrenden Zug gelehnt hatte und gegen einen Stahlträger geprallt war' (20). The portrayal feeds on newspaper reports of events that took place on the night of November 9<sup>th</sup> and ultimately subsumes them within the fictional account given by the text. Factual reporting is opened to allow other narratorial perspectives, although it could be argued that this strategy works in the novel's favour. What is also of interest in this perspective is the violence of the images, as if feeding off the metaphor of the violent opening of the wound/Wall discussed above. There is a suggestion that the opening of the Wall has unleashed a night of violence upon the city, a night of death, of suicide, of pain, events that might possibly be metaphors for the pain of the past. The second perspective on the events are suggested through the unnamed woman's experiences during the night, but also seen and narrated through an omniscient narrator: 'ich sah, wie die Dämmerung ihr aus der Hand fraß und wie sie hochschaute zu dem offenen Fenster im zweiten Stock, hinter dem ich lag. Verfolgte ihren Blick, zurück zu ihr und weiter in sie hinein [...] Hörte, was sie dachte, und spürte, wie sie fror' (13). It is immediately clear that it is not only a representation of Berlin during the night in which the Wall fell that is of concern here, but rather the act of narrating the event and an insistence on a part fictional part factual reporting



of the event as well as a suspension of temporal and spatial modes of perception is also problematized: The narrative mode offers the reader a perception that is outside of time and, for the narrator, in the realm of the dead. In this respect, the text is offering an alternative aesthetics of urban representation of Berlin in its refusal of a clear and definable structure and narrative thread. It is nonetheless a rejection of the feuilleton calls for a new post-*Wende* aesthetics because the narrative mode, the problematising of the authorial voice, and the blending of fact and fiction as instances of novelistic authority borrow heavily, and quite deliberately, on the writings and political criticisms of Günter Grass.

The significance of Grass's writings for Thomas Hettche's *Nox* appears to be twofold. On the one hand, Hettche's text, as does the greater body of Grass's work, also expresses an intellectual responsibility towards the *Gesinnungsästhetik* by continually negotiating Germany's National Socialist past in the text, and in so doing, continues the West German literary tradition of a politically and socially engaged literature. On the other hand, intertextual references to his novel *Hundejahre* underline a continued thematic negotiation with Germany's past. Within the discursive framework given by *Gesinnungsästhetik*, Günter Grass insisted that the literary text was the only reliable art form capable of negotiating the problematics of coterminous representation. Only the novel 'hat die Möglichkeit, die Vielzahl der Wirklichkeiten deutlich zu machen. Beim Schreiben kann man dazu verschiedene Stilebenen ausnutzen; denn die Gleichzeitigkeit von Geschehnissen, das Vergangene, das in die Gegenwart hineinreicht, die Vorwegnahme von Zukunft [...] all das verlangt nach Darstellung'.<sup>70</sup> The reading of the past in the present is central to Hettche's Berlin portrayal, as has been demonstrated, as has his experimentation with 'verschiedenen Stilebenen',

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<sup>70</sup> Sabine Moser, *Günter Grass: Romane und Erzählungen* (Erich Schmidt, Berlin, 2000), p. 17.

narrative modes, as attempts at representing the historic in the present. *Nox* shifts through its intertextual and borrowed facts from validation to signification, insofar as the latter ‘implies a pluralist view of historiography as consisting of different but equally meaningful constructions of past reality’ or in the case of *Nox*, textualised remains.<sup>71</sup> This blending of fact and fiction in historiographic writing might be said to be putting the case for a debate on the merits of postmodernism’s position on history, and thereby echoing Linda Hutcheon’s claim that history is not made obsolete in postmodern discourse. History, or its representation in *Nox*, is being rethought as a human construct and as such its narratability is called into question through the intertextual leanings and references. In so doing, the text appears to undermine the reader’s hope of gaining meaning from the events of the night of November 9<sup>th</sup>: ‘Ein Betrachter, der zwei Punkte sieht, verbindet sie automatisch durch eine Linie zu einer Strecke. Drei Punkte zu einem Dreieck. Immer ergibt sich das, was man Sinn nennt’, which leaves unanswered the question, ‘was also ist Wahrheit?’ (119-20).

Such textualised remains are at the core of Hettche’s Berlin portrayal, such as the journalistic-style of reporting events at the Brandenburg Gate outlined above. More explicit blending of the factual (historical) with the fictive is to be found in the account of Günter Schabowski’s press conference in which he announced that the Wall was to be opened. The exact time and place are given; the questions asked by the journalists and Schabowski’s speech are quoted *ad verbatim* in Hettche’s own account. The borders, he responds to a question asked by a journalist, will be open from midnight onward: ‘Damit entfällt die vorübergehend ermöglichte Erteilung von entsprechenden Genehmigungen in Auslandsvertretungen der DDR beziehungsweise die ständige Ausreise mit dem Personalausweis der

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<sup>71</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Routledge, London 2000), p. 95.

DDR über Drittstaaten' (52). From this quoted speech as an authoritative instance of *Wende* representation, the text makes a notable shift in reporting. The speaker pauses (an observation), as if unable to concentrate on the train of thoughts (an interpretation), but 'erst, als er pelzig auf der Zunge schmeckte und bitter, wie weit er sich entfernt hatte, schrak Schabowski auf. Noch einmal befühlte er die Erinnerung mit der Zunge, nahm sie dann zwischen die Zähne und zerbiß sie schnell. Wir wollten aber, sagte er' (53). This intimate modulation into the speaker's thoughts and emotions marks an important narrative movement from the factual into imaginative, non-factual reporting, without any noticeable interruption in the narrative flow. The text transforms historical data into aesthetic signifiers thereby undermining the separation of fact and fiction, of reported truth and imaginative account.

In keeping with a pluralist perception (Grass's 'Vielzahl der Wirklichkeiten') Hettche's Berlin portrayal complicates the representation of the events through its suspension of a clear narrative structure, a beginning, middle and end. What the text does offer is multiple narrative threads, though without the promise of 'resolution' at the end. The complex relationships between the past and the present, between first and second narrated accounts, between shifting temporal frameworks suggest further questions which are yet to be addressed with regard to Germany's past and the presence of that past in the contemporary. The murder, the author's own story, the urban wandering of the unnamed woman, a married couple from East Berlin and Professor Matern are all parallel narratives; it is true that their paths do cross and intersect, although the reason for such interweaving is not immediately clear. One such example is Matern, whose presence also complicates the repertoire of narrative perspectives. The professor is the director of the *Pathologische Anatomie* at the Charité in East Berlin and in charge of the museum of human deformities. Matern is

‘borrowed’ from Günter Grass’s novel *Hundejahre*. Grass’s text also illustrates the problematics of narratability when dealing with Germany’s past. His epic, *Hundejahre*, the third part of the Danziger Trilogy, underlines the primacy of the problem of narration: ‘Erzähl Du. Nein, erzählen Sie! Oder Du erzählst. Soll etwa der Schauspieler anfangen?’<sup>72</sup> Published in 1963, Grass’s novel was seen as an attempt to stimulate a discussion and a confrontation in post-war German society with the crimes of the National Socialist past.

*Hundejahre* relates in three periodic stages, in pre-Nazi Germany, Nazi Germany and post-war Germany during the boom years, the friendship of two young men, Eduard Amsel and Walter Matern, the former a half-Jew betrayed and later murdered by his friend. The Amsel/Matern dialectic is the key to all three historic periods. The novel, to draw another comparison with *Nox*, also begins with a knife, which also haunts the entire text, insofar as in both cases knives appear to signify the opening of the past. For *Nox* that opening begins with the parallelism of the opening of the Wall and the death of the author; for *Hundejahre* it is the insistent remembrance of Matern’s betrayal of his friend Eduard Amsel: ‘Wer mag alte Wunden aufreißen?’<sup>73</sup> The knife in Grass’s text, however, is a symbol of the friendship between Amsel and Matern, and subsequently becomes a symbol of betrayal and repression: Matern throws the knife into the river Weichsel in the hope of symbolically forgetting their history: ‘Was treibt ein Fluß vor sich her? Sonnenuntergänge, Freundschaften, Taschenmesser! Was bringt sich bäuchlings als Schwimmer und mit Hilfe der Weichsel in Erinnerung? Sonnenuntergänge, Freundschaften, Taschenmesser! [...] Flüsse die in die Hölle wollen, münden in die Weichsel’.<sup>74</sup> Matern represents the desire to forget the historic, his

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<sup>72</sup> Günter Grass, *Hundejahre* (Artemis und Winkler Verlag, München, 1963 [1993]), p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Grass, *Hundejahre*, p. 548.

<sup>74</sup> Grass, *Hundejahre*, p. 607.

friendship with Amsel and his betrayal of that friendship. The futility of his attempts to forget the past is suggested in the recurring image of the returning penknife. The river Weichsel becomes a metaphor for a cyclical view of history to which all returns and from which nothing is lost, and as such is the antithesis to the mythic Lethe. This imagistic language, the knife, Amsel's scarecrow collection reflecting the barbarity of Nazism, the men's lavatories at Cologne Main Station where Matern discovers the addresses of those on whom he seeks revenge written on the cubicle walls, having reversed his perception of himself from an offender to that of a victim, represent a unique attempt to signify the historic. 'So führt Grass eine neuartige Bildsprache ein, so zitiert er fragmentartig aus anderen Werken, so reißt er Wörter aus ihrem Kontext, um diese Entsprechung zwischen Sprache und Politik aufzubrechen.'<sup>75</sup> The novel deals with the relationship between fact, fiction, myth and history and portrays a complex portrait, reflected in the multiple narrative voices Grass employs, one which overturns the Hegelian view of history as an ordered and meaningful process.

Professor Matern's function as the director of the museum of human deformities (an echo of Amsel's scarecrow creations?) is brought back to life in *Nox*. In Hettche's text he is representative of a problematic historic discourse that runs counter to the plurality pursued by the text. Matern then returns to Berlin,<sup>76</sup> following his abrupt departure in Grass's text, as a restorer of history: 'Der Wiederaufbau der im Krieg nahezu vollständig zerstörten Sammlung Rudolf Virchows war Materns größtes Vorhaben gewesen, als er Direktor des Instituts

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<sup>75</sup> Manfred Durzak, *Zu Günter Grass: Geschichte auf dem poetischen Prüfstand* (Klett, Stuttgart, 1985), p. 83.

<sup>76</sup> Matern is confronted with Goldmälchen, a reincarnation of the murdered Amsel. Both meet in Berlin, at which point Amsel/Goldmälchen returns the penknife to Matern who in turn throws it again into the river: 'Und Matern wirft – na was wohl? – das wiedergefundene Taschenmesser weit von sich. Was die Weichsel, nicht ohne Gegenwehr, hergab, gibt er dem Berliner Landwehrkanal, wo er sich gabelt', to which Goldmälchen replied: 'Nun, lieber Walter, mach Dir keine Sorgen. Das ist eine Kleinigkeit für mich. Das als Fundort in Frage kommende Kanalstück wird man trockenlegen. [...] In knapp vierzehn Tagen wirst Du Dein gutes altes Taschenmesser wiederhaben', *Hundejahre*, p. 650. Matern, however, soon leaves Berlin.

geworden war' (21). This collection of deformities, which Tanja Dückers draws on in her Berlin-novel, stretches back over 100 years of Berlin's history and in so doing represents for Matern a significant 'Stück Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit' because in 'der Kombination von Geschichte und wissenschaftlichem Reichtum ist sie wohl weltweit ohne Beispiel' (23). The collection is important not only for its scientific worth, but because it becomes a metaphor for the nineteenth- and early twentieth century belief in progress, and truth, although in reality being nothing more than the product of a superstitious society.<sup>77</sup> Virchow's collection represents a linear and progressive historical understanding, which is momentarily interrupted by the Wall ('Erst mit der Mauer stockte der Zufluß an Monstren' 75), and is now once again uncritically accepted. It is the acceptance of a presupposed continuation of the historic. The collection then symbolises a singular belief that through scientific study meaning can be unquestionably gleaned from history: 'Das Wort demonstrieren, dozierte Matern gewöhnlich vor Erstsemestern, leite sich vom Lateinischen monere ab, was soviel wie anklagen, androhen, aber auch bewundern bedeute' (73-4). But as with all historical narratives it is subject to an ideological construction and selection: 'Leider kann ein Ischiopagus aus Platzgründen nicht ausgestellt werden' (22), suggesting that the historical perspective is monological and anti-plural, the opposite of what Grass refers to as the 'Vielzahl der Wirklichkeiten' of the historical experience and *Nox's* own complicated narrative structure that insists on a plurality of perspectives.

There is 'still a great deal of *the mythic* in our society: equally anonymous, slippery, fragmented, garrulous, and available both to an ideological criticism and to a semiological

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<sup>77</sup> 'Matern wußte es besser. Er wußte, die Sammlung war von einem Strom des Aberglaubens zwei Jahrhunderte lang mitten ins Herz dieser Stadt gespült worden.[...] als eine Mißgeburt aus Marienburg nach Berlin abging, deren Mutter im Begleitbrief als vermutete Ursache der Fehlbildung angab, sie sei während der Schwangerschaft durch die Meerkatze eines Gauklers erschreckt worden' (74).

dismantling'. But the aim of the unravelling of the mythic is 'not to reveal the (latent) meaning of a statement, of a feature, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning; not to change or to purify symbols, but to contest the symbolic itself'.<sup>78</sup> Myth is also, Roland Barthes writes elsewhere, 'a system of communication', insofar as myths are not understood as factual descriptions but rather models for description.<sup>79</sup> For Barthes, mythical speech 'is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication' which is to suggest that myth also becomes a form of narrative writing because the objects displayed in it presuppose a signifying consciousness and are meaningful to that consciousness.<sup>80</sup> There are two such mythic systems at play in Thomas Hettche's Berlin portrayal, the first being the myth of Diana and Actaeon and the second Plato's myth of the spherical beings, although the two strands combine at the end of the novel. Hettche frames his representation of the fall of the Wall and the pending unification within these mythic frameworks. The dog in *Nox*, an intertextual borrowing from Günter Grass's *Hundejahre*, is also part myth insofar as it is also a borrowing from the mythic dog of the underworld, Cerberus. As with the narrator, the dog in Hettche's text crosses the border between life and death, between fact and fiction.

The East German border patrol dog that escaped across the border into West Berlin at the moment of the author's death: 'Als ich starb, wechselte ein Hund über die Grenze [...] auf dem Gelände der Westberliner Stadtreinigung, die sich nahe dem Hafen Britz-Ost an die

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<sup>78</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989), p. 66.

<sup>79</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Vintage, London, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>80</sup> Barthes, p. 110. Barthes writes elsewhere that history 'confronts the writer with a necessary option between several moral options connected with language; it forces him to signify Literature in terms of possibilities outside his control', Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Hill and Wang, New York, 1968), p. 2. Myth presents Hettche with this opportunity of signifying the historic through the mythic because the material is already familiar to the reader and therefore its signifying power is ultimately beyond his control.

Kolonie SONNENGARTEN anschließt, kam er wieder an Land' (11),<sup>81</sup> suggests a thematic link with Cerberus/Pluto, the dog that guards the border between life and death. But the use of the dog as a narrative instance also brings to mind Prinz, Hitler's German shepherd that later fell into the hands of Matern in the confusion of the post-war years. A dog is also returned to Matern in *Nox* during his ruminations on the historic: 'Als man ihm einen toten Schäferhund brachte, mußte er ihn auf den Boden stellen' (17). In *Hundejahre* Grass narrates German history through the line of German shepherds: 'Es war einmal ein Hund, der hieß Perkun' which 'zeugt Senta. Die Hündin Senta, die einem Müller in Nickelswalde gehörte (Matern's father!), warf Harras. [...] Der Hund Prinz jedoch, von dem Schäferhundrüden Harras gezeit und von der Schäferhündin Thekla geworfen, machte Geschichte'.<sup>82</sup> Prinz, also referred to as Pluto in the text, 'made history' because it was given as a birthday gift by Matern's village to Adolf Hitler only later to escape during the last weeks of the war.

Pluto returns in *Nox* to represent a form of historic discourse. Having followed, and at times accompanied, the unnamed woman in her walks across Berlin, the dog suddenly appears during a staged orgy, mounts the woman and declares 'Ich bin von jenseits der Grenze' (135), invoking both the border (Grenze) of Berlin-Berlin and possibly also the border between life and death and even that between fact and fiction. Having narrated the story of the Wall seen through the perspective of a border patrol dog, 'Immer wieder erhängten sich welche am

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<sup>81</sup> In keeping with Hettches fact/fiction narrative structure, the story of the escapee border dog was taken, ad verbatim, from an article in *Der Spiegel* from an article by Marie-Luise Schere, 'Hundegrenze', February 1994 (6/94). Heide Hollmer argues that *Nox* integrates 'dokumentarisch belegbare Alltagereignisse, wie sie in Tageszeitungen gemeldet werden, sowie die entscheidenden Vorgänge im Zusammenhang des Mauerfalls', Heidi Hollmer and Albert Meier, 'Der 9 November 1989 in Thomas Brussigs *Helden wie wir* und in Thomas Hettches *Nox* in: *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. Jahrbuch 1999* (Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2000), p. 124. This use and misuse of factual information serves to undermine a claim to a dominant voice or singular historic perspective.

<sup>82</sup> Grass, *Hundejahre*, p. 390. A further intertextual reference to the Grass text in *Nox* is the site where the East German border patrol dog arrived in West Berlin. It is the same site where Matern threw the knife into the canal, and also where Goldmälchen promised that it would return.



Laufseil. Andere wurden eingeschläfert' (135), he then begins his tale, 'jene Geschichte von den kugelförmigen Wesen, die vor den Menschen auf der Erde lebten und die nur ein Geschlecht besaßen' (136). This tale is narrated by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* in a discussion on what constitutes the highest form of love. Aristophanes narrates the pride of these spherical beings and how Zeus, in his anger at their hubris, decided to cut them into two halves: "I have found a way by which we can allow the human race to continue to exist and also put an end to their wickedness by making them weaker. I will cut each of them in two".<sup>83</sup> Struck down, the spherical beings, according to the tale narrated by the dog, spent the rest of their lives longing for the other half. This myth thus re-mythologizes the metaphor of the wound and of division as discussed above, and by doing so, questions readings of the fall of the Wall as having overcome the division, by putting it within an historical context.

Shortly after the murder of the author, the unnamed woman enters a café and has sexual intercourse with two of the guests present: 'Wie heißt du? David. Fick mich, David' (39). David's own body is a mutilated surface, 'die Eichel seines Gliedes, mit einer Rasierklinge oder einem Skalpell dachte sie, tief längs gespalten war' (40), in a possible allusion to Berlin and Jewish history also reignited following the fall of the Wall, alluded to through his name and by the unnamed woman's link with the scars on his body: 'Als ich die Narbe sah auf deiner Haut, war es, als ob ich den Schmerz selbst spürte' (96). The second major sexual encounter is on a boat on the main canal in Berlin. The boat is full of the social, political and intellectual elites of West Berlin, and it is here that the unnamed woman becomes aware that the Wall is open. A West Berlin politician takes a woman from the East and penetrates her: 'und etwas, sah sie, zerbrach in seinem Gesicht, eine Verstrebung oder ein Fundament.

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<sup>83</sup> Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Penguin Classics, London, 1951), p. 60.

Lachen brannte sich schmerzlich fest, und blieb, starr, auch in seinem Gesicht, als es ihm kam' (60). He invokes history: 'Achtundzwanzig Jahre! Rief der Vollbärtige kauend. Achtundzwanzig Jahre!' (59). And yet the moment of release or resolution, the twenty-eight years referring to the Wall, is passive, 'als es ihm kam' as well as a moment of pain. At the same moment, the unnamed woman is buggered by one of the guests in an act which is metaphorically paralleled with the meeting of East and West: 'Der Schmerz brannte im Körper der Stadt, und ihre Augen zuckten hinter den geschlossenen Lidern im Schlaf, während das Schiff langsam immer weiter in sie hineinglitt' (70). The images both support the city/body metaphor dominant in the text, while simultaneously alluding to an exploitation (buggering) of the East by the West. The orgiastic headlines of the night when the Berlin Wall opens become precisely that; an orgy, a panoply of bodiliness rather than of meaning, again underscoring a visceral rather than an historical reading of the Wall. But the seemingly gratuitous sex functions on several levels. It is true that on a narrative level such scenes destabilize the reader's orientation. This matter was alluded to in the criticisms directed at Hettche's text: 'on a discursive level, it undercuts the public narrative of historicity and continuity with ahistorical images of desperation, futility, repetition, and excess' and as such constitutes a deliberate disregard of the feuilleton demands for a 'Story of Unification'.<sup>84</sup> It is through sex that the *dramatis personae* hope to overcome the division; sex reflects a human longing for unity as was narrated through the myth of the spherical beings. David and the unnamed woman have sex over the telephone and the experience is described as being outside of time: 'Beides bog die Zeit herab zu einem Augenblick, und das Gefühl geronnener Gegenwart durchsickerte ihren Körper' (100). Moments of unity are possible, but they can only be temporary, 'einem Augenblick'. After the last orgy at the Charité, the dog

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<sup>84</sup> Schmitz, 'Unification as Pornographic Nightmare', p. 223.

contextualises this longing within a mythic, that is to say, historic framework: ‘Wir alle drei, sagte er, du und ich und sie, gehören zu einer Geschichte. Zu einer alten Geschichte, die sich wieder ereignet. Warum? Wer weiß?’ (134). There are no clear or logical answers to be found in history, but it is nonetheless certain that the past, in this cyclical perception, is never forgotten. But the sex scenes are problematic and it should be conceded that *Nox* is a troubling text because of its interweaving of sex, violence and politics. It is possible to allegorize the function of sex in the text and thereby justify it; but there is, arguably, also something voyeuristic about it, which undercuts its allegorical force. Furthermore, it is a voyeurism that affects not only the characters in the text, but also, significantly, the reader in her attempts to disentangle the plethora of body parts and sexual organs.

*Nox* highlights the potential role of literature, as distinct from historiography, in addressing the complexities of representing the past as well as the East/West dialectic. It narrates the events of November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 as a story that is being retold, the mythic content already known to the reader. The story is always known – it is what is done with it that is of interest. I want to suggest that the circular repetition of Hettche’s text underlines the necessity of the construction and reconstruction of the remembered. This cyclical historical narrative, employed by Grass in *Hundejahre* and in his Berlin *Wende*-text, *Ein weites Feld*, is taken up by Hettche and narrated through the myth of Diana and Actaeon. Hettche’s text draws constantly on allusions between Diana and the unnamed woman: the description of the meeting between the unnamed woman and the author, retold constantly in the text, appears to echo Actaeon’s transgression of Diana’s grotto: ‘Ein Rot wie bei Wolken, die von der Sonne widerschein strahlen, färbte ihr Gesicht’ (20), which in Ovid’s text is given as the following: ‘Gleich dem Gewölk, das direkt von den Strahlen de Sonne getroffen, Rötlich erglänzt, oder

gleich der Purpurfarbe Auroras, /Also erglühte das Antlitz Dianas'.<sup>85</sup> The description appears to be taken *ad verbatim* from the German translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, in its account of the hidden grotto as well as the lake in which Diana bathes. Both women are depicted as hunters in the text; at the end of the text, this parallel of Diana and the unnamed woman is particularly convincing: 'Der Hund leckte ihr die Hand zur Begrüßung und kauerte sich dicht an ihre Beine. Wie müde von einer Jagd, lehnte sie sich' (137). The presence of the dog links the Diana myth with Grass's and Hettche's texts, thereby establishing a thematic link with the issues of narrative and historical discourse. But the intertext is established within a rhetoric of dissent and challenge. The most significant link between the two women is the narrative prohibition both place on those who had unwittingly crossed their boundaries. Diana declares to Actaeon: 'so, nun erzähle, du habest mich ohne Umhüllung gesehen/ Wenn du es noch zu erzählen vermagst!';<sup>86</sup> which sanctions her prohibition with a death threat: the narrator is burdened with the same narrative prohibition. In Hettche's text we read: 'Dann griff sie schnell, wie nach einer Waffe, was ihr zur Hand war, das Glas auf der Brüstung und schüttete mich mir den Wein ins Gesicht. Jetzt erzähl nur, du habest mich so gesehen. Wenn du noch erzählen kannst' (20). The narrative prohibition symbolises the text's own attempt to overcome the aesthetic criteria imposed upon the *Wende*-novel as fulfilling the expectations of a new beginning; but the prohibition might also possibly reflect the difficulty of narrating the plurality of the event, and thus raises the question: how can the story be told?

Both the recourse to myth, however, and the narrative prohibition are lifted at the end of the novel, in an instance of non-mimetic narrative discourse, which ultimately makes possible an alternative narrative form and representation of the fall of the Wall. The orgy in the

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<sup>85</sup> Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphosen*, trans. H. Breitenback (Reclam, Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 183-186.

<sup>86</sup> *Metamorphosen*, pp. 192-93.

anatomical theatre performs a search for a truth that cannot, ultimately, be found. Attempts to find the truth through a study of the human form fail: 'Sie markierte eine Stelle neben dem Bauchnabel. Was also ist Wahrheit? Sie tupfte mit der roten Spitze in das Schamhaar hinein und schraubte den Lippenstift zu' (120). This might be said to symbolise a rejection of the scientific pretension to truth. The dog whispers to the nameless woman her name, she authorizes the author, reunited with the nameless woman at the end of the text, to re-tell the story and as such lifts the prohibition: 'Du muß jetzt gehen. Sie lächelte über mich hinweg, zog den goldenen Lippenstift und das Streichholzbriefchen aus der Tasche und gab mir beides' (137). The suggested 'rationalisation' of the mythic moment in which the dog tells the unnamed woman her name, which in turn lifts the narrative prohibition, is a fictional moment because of its recourse to literature and myth. The woman, now in the form of a muse, insists on what Franziska Schößler refers to as 'eine verdinglichte Poetik'<sup>87</sup> in which the objects given to the narrator, the matches and the lipstick, serve as an inspiration for the author to return to the beginning and re-tell the story anew and from another, different perspective (the return is suggested on his meeting the murdered woman at the close of the text). There is no resolution at the close of the narrative; the story simply begins again. This poetics of reification - 'verdinglichte Poetik' - refers to the authorial autonomy of creating and narrating the events surrounding the fall of the Wall, with the incorporation of newspaper reports, speeches and 'factual' information. It is the imaginative transformation of the everyday, the factual, the referential, into a poetic form, through which another, different perspective and understanding is won. Although through the figure of Matern Grass rejected myth as a narrative form because of its potential to obscure history and repeatedly negate

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<sup>87</sup> Franziska Schößler, 'Mythos als Kritik – Zu Thomas Hettches Wenderoman *Nox*' in: *Literatur für Leser* (1999:3), p. 178. Schößler supports this interpretation. She argues that following the invitation to re-tell the story, the narrator 'wird zu der Geschichte initiiert, die bereits aufgeschrieben worden ist. Damit ist der Roman *Nox* eine zyklische Struktur unterlegt, wie sie der Mythos kennt,' p. 176.

reason, in *Nox* myth serves to re-tell the tale of ‘den nicht endenden Versuch, die Wunde zu heilen’ (136), though the re-telling attempts no rationalisation of the historic nor makes any claim to truth, emphasising at all times its fictiveness. The emphasis of a cyclical historical narrative as an alternative to linear history and the associated claim to truth and progress, suggests that a linear historical discourse, represented in the collection of deformities, is a monstrosity and as such is related to the myth of the division of the spherical beings. Hettche’s Berlin novel reminds the reader of the continuing, and growing, significance of the past as well as its retelling for the altered present of a reunified Germany. All that remains are histories, many and plural, and not a singular historical discourse: ‘Nichts von dem, was du kennst, wird nach dieser Nacht bleiben, wie es ist. Und nur die Geschichten, die man sich davon erzählt, bestimmen, was wird’ (134).

## East Berlin: History, Identity and the Urban Fabric in Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld*

Unsere Geschichten von heute müssen sich nicht jetzt  
zugetragen haben. Diese fing vor mehr als dreihundert  
Jahren an. Andere Geschichten auch. So lang rührt jede  
Geschichte her, die in Deutschland handelt.  
Günter Grass<sup>88</sup>

The previous chapter analysed East/West representations of the fall of the Wall. Both *Nox* and *Helden wie wir* challenge and debate the potency of the Wall as a monumental historical metaphor. The perspective is a largely negative reading of the unification and consequently casts a shadow on the prospect of an overcoming of the division of the two cities. I claim that both texts resist any notion of grand history and part of that quest to dismantle such meta-narratives is to be found in their intertextual debate, couched within a rhetoric of dissent and displacement with notable writers on the German dilemma, such as Christa Wolf and Günter Grass. The representation of Berlin in the two texts, however, was structured around the night of November 9, 1989. The present chapter moves forward in time to address the period between December 1989 and 1991, leaving behind the actual fall of the Wall and concentrating instead on the monetary union and the dissipation of the GDR and its absorption into the Federal Republic of Germany.

This chapter addresses the importance of Berlin's topography, its streets, buildings and public monuments to Günter Grass's novel, *Ein weites Feld*. In my analysis of this text I look at the dialectic of history and identity set in the context of the unification. Based on intertextual and

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<sup>88</sup> Günter Grass, *Das Treffen in Telgte* (Darmstadt, Luchterhand, 1979), p. 7.

chronological doublings, Fontane/Fonty, Tallhover/Hoftaller and the unifications of 1871 and 1989/90, the textual focus is confined, though not exclusively, to East Berlin, and thereby shares some similarities with Klaus Uhlztscht's singular East Berlin perspective. This singular focus insists on a reading of East Berlin's topography as a cultural and historic site independent of West Berlin: the East, according to the text, still functions as a locus of discourse and meaning. In this respect, the protagonists in *Ein weites Feld* explore the historical identity of East Berlin and perceive the city as a site that urges us in the euphoria of the reunification to remember the division and pre-division German pasts.

The central character Theo Wuttke, who in his partially self-styled likeness to Theodor Fontane is also referred to as Fonty, reads the city in much the same way as Brussig's protagonist in *Helden wie wir*, but the emphasis here (Fonty's reading of the city) is on loss and absence, rather than liberation. The portrayal of East Berlin given in the text tells a story of loss and a perceived attempt to deny the very existence of the GDR by removing references to it from the city. The loss of such historical registers will, the text suggests, bring about a resulting loss in historical memory and, with that, a loss of cultural and historical identity. But by way of a prelude to *Ein weites Feld* I also discuss two other texts by East German authors, which also comment on Berlin's problematic topography. In common with Grass's Berlin portrayal, both authors problematise the representation of the unification placing particular emphasis on the changes to East Berlin's topography. Volker Braun's poem 'Das Eigentum' (1990), and Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*, might be said to function as a literary preface of sorts to Grass's text: both also lean heavily on a notion of a common cultural federalism.



## II.1. 'Das Eigentum' and *Was bleibt*: the Textualisation of Loss

In August 1990, Volker Braun's poem 'Nachruf', criticising the economic focus of the reunification of the two German states, was published, somewhat ironically, in *Neues Deutschland*. Authors of the two German states, 'und solchen, die einmal ostdeutsche Autoren gewesen waren und nun im Westen lebten, stritten um die deutsch-deutsche Vergangenheit und die gesamtdeutsche Zukunft'.<sup>89</sup> Braun's poem is a valediction to the GDR, the country in which he lived and with which he (critically) identified. Unlike many East German writers, Braun refused to leave the GDR after the 1976 Biermann affair, refusing also to abandon the hope of a socialist state. In 'Das Lehen', published as late as 1987, he reaffirms his intention to remain in the GDR: 'Ich bleibe im Lande und nähre mich im Osten [...] noch bin ich auf dem Posten'.<sup>90</sup> Rose Sommer convincingly argues that the declaration to stay is a play on the biblical phrase 'Bleibe im Lande und nähre dich redlich' (Psalmen: 37,7), which underpins a call to be firm and to be loyal to a country that has also been divided into a West and an East, whereby the East is synonymous with Socialism.<sup>91</sup> This determination to stay is voiced three years later in his poem 'Das Eigentum', which reads:

Da bin ich noch: mein Land geht in den Westen.  
KRIEG DEN HÜTTEN FRIEDE DEN PALÄSTEN.  
Ich selber habe ihm den Tritt versetzt.  
Es wirft sich weg und seine magre Zierde.  
Dem Winter folgt der Sommer der Begierde.  
Und ich kann *bleiben wo der Pfeffer wächst*.  
Und unverständlich wird mein ganzer Text

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<sup>89</sup> Rose Sommer, 'Volker Braun: "Das Eigentum"', Anna Chialroni and Riccardo Morello (eds.), *Band Poesia tedesca contemporanea. Interpretazioni* (Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1996), 159-165, p. 159.

<sup>90</sup> Volker Braun, 'Das Lehen', *Langsamer knirschender Morgen* (Halle, Saale, 1987).

<sup>91</sup> 'Volker Braun: "Das Eigentum"', p. 159.

Was ich niemals besaß wird mir entrissen.  
Was ich nicht lebte, werd ich ewig missen.  
Die Hoffnung lag im Weg wie eine Falle.  
Mein Eigentum, jetzt habt ihrs auf der Kralle.  
Wann sag ich wieder mein und meine alle.<sup>92</sup>

In contrast to the greater majority, the poet is still there as is his faith in the socialist ideology, which he refuses to abandon. His country, however, has been thrown to the West even though its offering is but a 'magre Zierde'. The suggestion is that what took forty years to establish has been thoughtlessly given away, motivated by consumerist greed (Begierde). The declaration that the author also worked towards the GDR's downfall (Ich selber habe ihm den Tritt versetzt) might be said to guard against a critique of nostalgia for the passing of a brutal dictatorship. That said, it is a lament nonetheless, though for a socialist utopia never truly realised, 'Was ich niemals besaß wird mir entrissen. / Was ich nicht lebte, werd ich ewig missen'. The failure of Socialism and of the GDR means for Braun the loss of identity: 'unverständlich wird mein ganzer Text'. He has lost his audience: his refusal to embrace the West, which means his operative understanding of literature as contributing to societal processes, has become obsolete. And he has lost the very structures through which he established his identity. This loss refers to his home, the GDR and East Berlin, but also to his historical identity, his 'Lebenstext', which is now under threat.<sup>93</sup> The unification is portrayed in the poem as an act of theft; the claws into which the GDR have fallen are those of the eagle of the Federal Republic, which is transformed into a bird of prey that devours everything in its path. Underlying this reading is the reversed Büchner quotation, 'KRIEG DEN HÜTTEN

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<sup>92</sup> Volker Braun, 'Das Eigentum', Lustgarten, Preußen. Ausgewählte Gedichte (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp), 1996.

<sup>93</sup> This term 'Lebenstext' is borrowed from Wolfgang Emmerich's reading of this line in Braun's poem. Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, Aufbau, 2000), p. 459.

FRIEDE DEN PALÄSTEN', taken from 'Der Hessische Landbote'. The integration of the GDR into the FRG is, as far as Braun is concerned, a regressive step into pre-revolutionary Europe, which means for the text a capitalist victory, peace in the palaces, but war elsewhere. It is a reversal of the last forty years of East German socialist history and political ideology. The volte-face therefore underlines exactly which path a newly united Germany is to take, and those unhappy with this can leave: 'bleiben wo der Pfeffer wächst'.<sup>94</sup>

In a similar vein, Christa Wolf's novella, *Was bleibt*, voices a concern that the reunification might result in an erasure of East Berlin's unique identity. The novella takes the unification furore to task by depicting a city no longer certain of its identity. At the close of this reworked autobiographical text, the narrator passes through the rooms of her East Berlin apartment switching off all of the lights as she goes, until only the desk lamp is left on:

Eines Tages, dachte ich, werde ich sprechen können, ganz leicht und frei. Es ist noch zu früh, aber es ist nicht immer zu früh. Sollte ich mich nicht einfach hinsetzen an diesen Tisch, unter dieser Lampe, das Papier zurechtrücken, den Stift nehmen und anfangen. Was bleibt. Was meiner Stadt zugrunde liegt und woran sie zugrunde geht. Daß es kein Unglück gibt außer dem, nicht zu leben. Und am Ende keine Verzweiflung, außer der, nicht gelebt zu haben.<sup>95</sup>

As with Braun's poem, the allusion to East Germany is both personal and collective, clearly suggested in the repeated shift between self and city. The text throws open the question what will remain of the city now that it is in the 'claws' of the West, but deliberately leaves it unanswered. Will the city, and the author, find a new voice through its city spaces, and will

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<sup>94</sup> The line is italicised because it is a direct quotation directed at Braun by the critic Ulrich Greiner. Greiner argued in an article 'daß es gerade noch die deutsche Grammatik ist, die prominente Intellektuelle der DDR mit der Kultur der Bundesrepublik verbindet'. He therefore advised those who refuse to abandon their socialist history and separate themselves from the hope of a socialist renewal should take their ideals and 'bleiben, wo der Pfeffer wächst'. Ulrich Greiner, 'Der Potsdamer Abgrund. Anmerkung zu einem öffentlichen Streit über die "Kulturation Deutschland"', *Die Zeit*, Nr. 26, 22.6.1990. Greiner, it will be remembered, was one of the most vociferous critics of Wolf and Grass.

<sup>95</sup> Christa Wolf, *Was bleibt* (München, Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2001), pp. 102-03.

its pasts and personal histories simply disappear as if they had never existed, 'nicht gelebt zu haben'? The line 'Was meiner Stadt zugrunde liegt und woran sie zugrunde geht' is semantically linked to the conclusion that 'es kein Unglück gibt außer dem, nicht zu leben. Und am Ende keine Verzweiflung außer der, nicht gelebt zu haben'. Wolf projects onto East Berlin her own existential fear of being robbed of a voice, and therefore of an existence. The use of the possessive 'meiner Stadt' underscores her fear that the city will also be subject to a similar fate. The text is suggesting that this process of de-signification has already begun because the city remains partly anonymous in her description, although it is certainly East Berlin as the references to specific streets and buildings make clear, the city has nonetheless become strangely abstract and unreachable for the narrator as well as for the reader. To de-signify means to change the signs of the city by altering their meaning, or to remove those signs completely.

But the will to write nonetheless underscores the narrator's belief that this deferred language (eines Tages, immer zu früh, noch zu früh) might one day be possible, as is suggested by the illuminated desk lamp. The closing statement returns to the narrator and her uncertainty, also referring to the oppressive nature of spying implicit in the GDR (she is watching the observers from the window of her apartment), while also reflecting a personal as well as a collective concern. On a personal level, Wolf the writer is projecting a private sense of urgency regarding her vocation as a writer in an uncertain future, '[e]ines Tages, dachte ich, werde ich sprechen können', suggesting an inability to speak in the present of the text, the now of 1979 and of 1990, while also suggesting that there is no guarantee that this new voice will ever be heard, echoing Braun's 'unverständlich wird mein ganzer Text'. Both writers are here confronted with an inability to communicate because the meaning given through the sign

framework has shifted. The voicelessness of the 1979 text is the voicelessness of a writer routinely victimised by the East German secret police ([d]iesmal hatten sie mich aber beinahe gehabt), and her text, as Braun's poem, is a defence not of the GDR, but of a socialist ideal. The voicelessness of the 1990 revision is that of a writer without a meaningful language or cultural/historical framework.

The title, *Was bleibt*, refers to the city as well as to the author, Wolf: it asks what will become of Wolf the writer now that the ideals she defended in her earlier Berlin novel, *Der geteilte Himmel*, are null and void. The repeated use of the conditional in the present text (würde, können, hätten), throws Wolf's future as a writer in the newly unified Germany into doubt: will there also be a place for Wolf or must she too disappear (bleiben wo der Pfeffer wächst)? Indeed, the witch hunt against Wolf, to which Grass's protagonist Fonty directly alludes in *Ein weites Feld*, justifies the author's anxiety.<sup>96</sup> To quote one critic, 'im allgemeinen wird ja Literatur durch Literatur verdrängt; jetzt wollen ihr's die Literaturkritiker alleine besorgen'.<sup>97</sup> Her fear of not having lived (nicht gelebt zu haben) is further made clear through the changes enforced upon the city: that which is the very basis of both the author as well as the city, '[w]as meiner Stadt zugrunde liegt' is a sense of identification through the GDR, which is also the cause of its very destruction, 'woran sie zugrunde geht'. Put simply, that which underlines the city, which gives it its unique identity as the representative capital of the GDR is its otherness from West Germany/Berlin; it is precisely this otherness that has for many

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<sup>96</sup> The narrator of *Ein weites Feld* remarks that 'in West wie in Ost stellten Schriftsteller andere Schriftsteller an den Pranger. Um nicht beschuldigt zu werden, beschuldigten sie. Wer gestern noch hochgefeiert war, sah sich heute in den Staub geworfen. [...] Eine Heilige wurde zur Staatshure erklärt, und jedem einst vor Schmerz schluchzenden Sänger glückte nur noch des Selbstgerechten Geschrei' (600). Hence, Wolf's fears voiced in the text were almost prophetically justified in light of the attacks made against the author during the *Literaturstreit*.

<sup>97</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Vergangenheit als Zukunft*, ed. Michael Haller (München: Piper, 1993), p. 86. Habermas underpins a circularity of repression in an echo of Grass's own insistence on historical parallelisms.

become no longer acceptable now that the distinction East/West has become redundant. The capital has ceased to be: 'was ihr zugrunde liegt, richtet sie zugrunde'.

In response to the very real threat of cultural, social and historical deracination both texts attempt to resist the limitations imposed by the reunification by reaching back in time to a shared common German culture. I refer here to Herder's notion of cultural federalism connoting a sense of being German that went beyond the political boundaries embracing instead a cultural understanding of identity. 'Das Eigentum' and *Was bleibt* reach back to this cultural confederation by making visible a literary indebtedness to the eighteenth-century German poet, Friedrich Hölderlin. The title of Braun's elegiac poem is borrowed from Hölderlin's 1799 poem, 'Mein Eigentum', which illustrates a play on belongingness and loss. 'Beglückt, wer, ruhig liebend ein frommes Weib, / Am eignen Heerd in rühmlicher Heimat lebt', writes the poet, though warning also that the passage of time might also threaten such stability and continuity: 'jedem sein Eigentum, / O segnet meines auch und daß zu/ Frühe die Parze den Traum nicht ende'.<sup>98</sup> The 'rühmlicher Heimat' connotes an environment of social reciprocity between the individual and the other and absolute deracination from 'das Fromme Leben'. However uncertain life may be, the uncertainty is forestalled by his own ability to create a community of belonging through the written word, 'Gesang, mein freundlich Asyl!'<sup>99</sup> Influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, Hölderlin himself was homeless insofar as his ideas and political visions were mocked by society, but he was nonetheless able to create his own world through his poetry, which became his own possession (*Eigentum*) and home (*Heimat*).

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<sup>98</sup>Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Mein Eigentum', in *Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgarter Hölderlin Ausgabe, Friedrich Beissner (hg.), (Stuttgart, J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1946), ll. 21-22 & 50-53.

<sup>99</sup>Hölderlin, 'Mein Eigentum', ll. 18 & 41.

Braun replaces Hölderlin's possessive pronoun 'mein' with the neutral article 'das' and in so doing semantically shifts the notion of property ownership to a collective and public meaning as understood within a socialist discourse common to the GDR. Indeed, the replacement of the possessive pronoun suggests a critique of Hölderlin's retreat from the public sphere into his own private 'Asyl', which seemingly accepts a division of literature and society, turning the former into private pleasure. In an essay published in 1976, Braun criticised Hölderlin's failure to force his poetry into a constant dialogue with society and thereby establish it as a critical voice that is part of the changing times and not opposed to such change. Hölderlin's poetry, according to Braun, was a 'Protest gegen die Entfremdung der menschlichen Verhältnisse und Form der Entfremdung zugleich', precisely because he is retreating into a private world removing literature from its necessary public and political role.<sup>100</sup> While unable to create a textual space within which a sense of identity might be both preserved and communicated, Braun is in fact using the collective space of German literature as an identity-giving framework, as Grass was to do in his own novel five years later. While the elegiac poem is a valediction of sorts, it nonetheless insists on its right to maintain its unique (East German) voice because it contextualises itself as part of a constant dialogue of German literatures that is inherently plural and open - not politically or ideologically exclusive.

The act of writing as a way out of the dilemma of an existentially deracinated being-in-the-world appears in Wolf's autobiographical novella as the presentiment of literary production: '[s]ollte ich mich nicht einfach hinsetzen an diesen Tisch, unter dieser Lampe, das Papier zurechtrücken, den Stift nehmen und anfangen'. The question is rhetorical. The absence of the question mark and the illuminated desk lamp indicate that writing is no longer simply a

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<sup>100</sup> Volker Braun, 'Eine große Zeit für die Kunst?' in: *Es genügt nicht die einfachen Wahrheit* (Frankfurt a/M, Notate, 1976), p. 23.

matter of choice; it is a matter of necessity. The pen will inscribe her text into the same pan-cultural tradition as Braun's elegiac poem. The title of Wolf's text is itself most likely a borrowing from Hölderlin's 'Andenken', a poem which suggests that the sense of cultural loss and deprivation is offset by what the creative writer can say: 'Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter'.<sup>101</sup> Both Braun and Wolf then overcome the perceived limitations of the reunification and the ensuing loss of East Germany by pleading for a form of cultural heritage that at once binds both German states but at the same time creates a space for them to exist within their own meaning-giving framework.

The importance of both Braun and Wolf's texts to the critique of the unification in *Ein weites Feld* surfaces in the resort to literature as a means of negotiating the present, in particular, as an alternative prism through which to see the reunification. Although Grass was not a lone voice in the FRG expressing his concern about the form a new Germany would take, the West German author nonetheless came to be seen as representative for this dissent and has been severely criticised for his position.<sup>102</sup> In many quarters it was believed that the unification would wipe the slate clean and allow Germany finally to free itself from its burdensome past. But for Grass, as he portrays it in *Ein weites Feld*, such an act of erasure could only entail a wholesale cleaning out of the GDR, in which its closed factories and the redundant buildings would come to symbolise the redundancy of the GDR for the West. *Ein weites Feld* describes a takeover, an act of usurpation and not a reunification that automatically prevents all possibility of reciprocity. It is presented as a unification wherein

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<sup>101</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Andenken', *Friedrich Hölderlin Sämtliche Gedichte*, (hg.) Detlev Lüders (Bad Homburg, Athenäum, 1970), l. 59. This line from Hölderlin's is also a central quotation for Heidegger.

<sup>102</sup> In an interesting response to the criticisms against Grass, Wolfgang Thierse, the President of the German Parliament, remarked 'daß es für ihn irritierend sei, wie offensichtlich die Ablehnung von Grass politisch motiviert ist, weil die Meinung des Autors dem Kritiker eben nicht passe', quoted in Stefan Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit in Deutschland* (Tübingen, A. Francke, 2002), p. 437.



the more powerful Federal Republic 'schickt sich an, den Kampf um *ihre* Geschichte, den einige nach der Vereinigung in lauthals-revanchistischem Geiste begonnen haben, in aller Öffentlichkeit austragen, während die Geschichte der DDR mehr oder weniger lautlos beerdigt – und der nächsten Generation als Leiche im Keller vererbt wird'.<sup>103</sup> The changes forced on East Berlin's city spaces, such as the demolition of the Wall and the Palast der Republik, the changing of street names and public squares, signify deliberate attempts to erase, as Habermas argues, the memory of the forty-year history of the GDR. Grass's text positions itself against this tendency. It illustrates through an East Berlin-specific portrayal that 'eine halbierte Geschichte und das kollektive Selbstverständnis von Siegern wären eine bruchige Grundlage für einen tragfähigen nationalen Konsens'; the basis upon which unified Germany is built is called into question through a textual focus on the erasure of the memory and identity of the GDR as well as being a critique of the economic gains and motivation for the unification.<sup>104</sup> The intention of Grass's so-called unification novel is in part to reclaim some of those topographical absences, which mark contemporary Berlin.

Grass's novel also pits the intertext against the triumphalist recoding of the past.<sup>105</sup> The multiple intertextuality explored in the Braun and Wolf texts is therefore central to the overall intention of *Ein weites Feld*: namely, the promotion of cultural affinities between East and

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<sup>103</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Vergangenheit als Zukunft*, p. 93. Habermas argues that a transition period is needed: '[e]ine Begegnung, in der sich beide Seiten Autonomie unterstellen, würde auch verlangen, daß erst einmal jede Seite ihre eigene, getrennt verlaufene Geschichte von vierzig Jahren BRD und DDR klärt und ein eigenes Selbstverständnis gewinnt'. This position sets the tone for Grass's critique of the unification in his Berlin novel.

<sup>104</sup> Habermas, *Vergangenheit als Zukunft*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>105</sup> There is a similar anti-triumphalist moment at McDonald's across the border in West Berlin, whither Fonty and Hoftaller go to celebrate Fonty's birthday. Once there, Fonty narrates the story of the McDonald's clan in Scotland and links this with a ballad by Fontane. I argue that this scene is yet another instance through which the text resists the pan-German euphoria which is part of globalization (i.e. Americanization) in the name of an older, cultural, indeed multicultural intertwined past, voiced through Fontane's ballads and the Scottish legends to which Fonty refers. The pan-German moment just isn't German. The novel registers resistance to the claim of an end of history, or the apotheosis of a simplified teleology, by positing instead the value of indirection, clutter, pottering and flânerie.

West Germany in opposition to the singular political/economic perspective. In an interview with Harro Zimmermann, Grass opined that his opposition to the unification lay in its failure to acknowledge the fundamental differences between the East and West, and following the Braun and Wolf texts, *Ein weites Feld* promotes an alternative approach to understanding the unification of the two Germanies: 'Es geht', remarked Grass, 'um eine Kulturation aus der gewachsenen föderalistischen Struktur heraus, wuchernd mit dem Reichtum dieser Verschiedenartigkeit' through which 'wird der Osten anders sein und hat auch ein Recht darauf: Er hatte über vierzig Jahre hinweg eine andere Biographie',<sup>106</sup> or, to quote Fonty, to recognise that '[d]ie ticken doch ganz anders als wir'(269). *Ein weites Feld* may be seen as a threnody for the identity of the East which is now gone. Through intertextual references, in a manner similar to Hettche's intertextual reference to Grass's works, *Ein weites Feld* demonstrates a more profound co-joining of the two states than envisaged in the political unification of 1989: 'die noch kürzlich vom Parteikollektiv gerügte Wolf stand der Seghers nachgeordnet; Heine zu Füßen, von dem es hieß, er habe ein Bändchen Biermann-Lieder in Händen gehalten...' (50). This muddle of literary personalities in the portrait viewed by Fonty underscores precisely this historical and artistic indebtedness.

## II.2. Fonty and the Unification

The central fable of Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld* is the critical relationship of two aged men from East Berlin to the events between the fall of the Wall and the unification of East and West Berlin/Germany. Based on intertextual and chronological doublings: Fontane/Fonty (the title of Grass's novel is a quotation from Fontane's *Effi Briest*), Tallhover/Hoftaller, and

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<sup>106</sup> Günter Grass and Harro Zimmermann, *Vom Abenteuer der Aufklärung: Werkstattgespräche* (Göttingen, Steidl, 1999), p. 141.

the unifications of 1871 and 1989/90, the (inter-) textual focus is confined, though not exclusively, to East Berlin. This singular focus insists on a reading of East Berlin as a cultural and historic site independent of West Berlin: for the protagonists and their families, the East still functions as a locus of discourse and meaning. The intertextual doubling of Fontane/Fonty (alias Theo Wuttke) and Tallhover/Hoftaller establishes an historical as well as literary awareness bridging the years between Wilhemine Berlin and 1991. The two characters act as repositories of historical consciousness and are seen as functioning as such by those in their immediate environment: 'Im Prinzip lebt Vater alles noch mal durch, was längst schon verschütt ist' (217), remarked Martha. This aesthetic structure of the intertext and temporally convergent periods, in respect of the last one hundred and fifty years, demands of the reader not merely a perception of 'then' or 'now', of Fontane or Fonty/Wuttke, the German unification of 1871 or that of 1989, but also a recognition that this fluidity of literary and historical awareness works as a comparative backdrop to and a critical purchase on recent events. It is this critical perspective, stubbornly opposed to the 'Kurzlebigkeit des Gedenkens' (177), that provides the historical framework for the text as a whole. All three authors, Braun, Wolf and Grass, use literature as a means to negotiate the loss of the past. But it is through Fonty that the reader is given an (at times singular and subjective) glimpse of the past 150 years of German and later German/German culture and history.

This instrumentalising of literature as a means of negotiating the present is voiced by Fonty, who acknowledges 'daß ich [...] jenes zeitraffende Verständnis von Literatur und Geschichte habe, das mir Vergangenes in zukunftsstrunkene Präsenz [...] macht' (249). The literary doubling in *Ein weites Feld* makes possible a critical analysis of the 1989 unification in

Berlin through a historical prism, while also perceiving literature as a 'zeitraffendes' construct - a means using the past as a relevant interpretative tool in the present by exploding linear time through intertextual relations; the past is being continually brought into the present through what Grass refers to as 'Vergegenkunft', the narrative time of *Ein weites Feld* that comprises the past, the present and the future: a readable medium through which the past is visualised in the present. This layered perspective of time is performed in the text both through the exploration of the city spaces as well as through the numerous dialogues between Fonty/Fontane and the present/past.<sup>107</sup>

Hoftaller, the eternal and ever-present 'Tagundnachtschatten' (11), often accompanies Fonty on his peregrinations in Berlin and together they stand 'über allem Zeitgeschehen' (27), though the suggestion that he is in fact observing his friend is never entirely dissipated. Hoftaller is also a literary borrowing, a textual reincarnation of Hans Joachim Schädlich's figure Tallhover, a government spy who lived during Fontane's lifetime in nineteenth century Berlin. This character, diametrically opposed but inextricably linked to Fonty, is portrayed as a representation of observation and oppression and its continuity throughout periods of change in history:

Ludwig Hoftaller, dessen Vorleben unter dem Titel "Tallhover" auf den westlichen Buchmarkt kam, wurde zu Beginn der vierziger Jahre des vorigen Jahrhunderts tätig, stellte aber seine Praxis nicht etwa dort ein, wo ihm sein Biograph den Schlußpunkt gesetzt hatte, sondern zog ab Mitte der fünfziger Jahre unseres Jahrhunderts weiterhin Nutzen aus seinem überdehnten

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<sup>107</sup> 'Die Zukunft wirft ihren Schlagschatten auf zukünftiges Gelände. "Vergegenkunft" nannte ich später meinen Zeitbegriff', Günter Grass, 'Schreiben nach Auschwitz' in *Werkausgabe in zehn Bänden*, hg. Volker Neuhaus (Luchterhand, Darmstadt, 1987), vol. 11, p. 251. See also Moser: 'Wichtigstes Medium zur Etablierung solcher Simultanität ist sicherlich der Dialog, doch etabliert und visualisiert sich das Prinzip der Vergegenkunft auch in Gebäuden, bestimmten Plätzen, der Stadt Berlin'. Sabine Moser, *Günter Grass: Romane und Erzählungen* (Berlin, Erich Schmidt, 2000), p. 247.

Gedächtnis, angeblich der vielen unerledigten Fälle wegen, zu denen der Fall Fonty gehörte. (11)

Insistent intertextual references undermine perceptions of the unification as either heralding a new beginning, or even signifying a simple break from the old. In times of supposed change ‘[I]rgend etwas bleibt immer unversorgt liegen’ (91). Typical of Hoftaller’s double-dealing, Fonty’s own ‘case’ (Der Fall Fonty) refers to a file in Hoftaller’s possession containing information on his infidelity in France during the German occupation, which links to Fontane’s infidelity during his Dresden sojourn in the 1840s, ‘Dresden und die Folgen’ (101). The consequences of both acts of infidelity are exploited by the text whereby Grass takes advantage of a letter to Fontane in which it is suggested that he has two illegitimate children, and fictionalises this event on two levels: the first is to establish a genealogical link between Fonty and Fontane, namely that Fonty is in fact the offspring of one of the illegitimate children. The second transformation is the historical repetition of this infidelity (during the war in France) and that his own offspring confronts him later in Berlin, the young French student, Madeleine Aubron, who will offer yet another perspective on the unification.<sup>108</sup> Hoftaller’s thematic link between Dresden and France, although the events in question took place over one hundred and fifty years apart, again underlines the fact that although the ideological discourses may have changed, the dynamics of observation and oppression have not. Hoftaller’s motivation for bringing Fonty together with his niece lies in his role as an observer and spy: ‘ein auf permanente Rückversicherung und vorbeugende Fürsorge angelegtes System dem Jemand wie Hoftaller stets, sogar nach dessen Untergang, verpflichtet gewesen ist’ (27). That is to say, the ‘Fürsorge’ is simply another morally questionable

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<sup>108</sup> ‘Emilie Rouanet-Kummer, die Verlobte im Wartestand, dürfte nicht wissen, was für ne Hurerei sich über Jahre hinweg am Elbufer abgespielt hat’ (101). Fonty’s own illegitimate child, Madeleine, appears unexpectedly in Fonty’s life and in so doing forces him to renegotiate his own past, rather than escaping into that of Fontane.

stratagem. The friendship between Fonty and Hoftaller might be said to reflect that of the citizens of the GDR with the secret police (to which Brussig's text alludes) and its mechanisms of observation, suggestive of a relationship based on reciprocity: 'Fonty/Fontane ist der mal angepaßte, mal unangepaßte, in dieser Hinsicht durchschnittliche Deutsche, der alle politisch-historischen Entwicklungen mitgemacht hat'.<sup>109</sup> The same moral escapism is true of Hoftaller: 'bin kein Bluthund. [...] Die Politik haben andere gemacht, damals wie heute' (38).

A positive side to the Fonty/Hoftaller relationship is the latter's insistence on the unravelling of the past, even if that act of unravelling forgotten histories is uncomfortable, particularly for Fonty. On more than one occasion Fonty attempts to escape from Berlin (and from Hoftaller) and seek refuge in the Scottish highlands, '[d]a hilft nur Abschied nehmen und untertauchen' (182), as indeed Fontane had done one hundred and fifty years previously. Fonty experiences periods in which his own private histories uncovered by Hoftaller become too much for him to bear. He thus deliberately blurs the distinctions between his own and Fontane's biography, whereby he assumes the latter's memories and preferences, such as his liking for the Scottish Highlands. It is Hoftaller who, on both occasions, forces Fonty back into his own reality: 'Bestimmt hat mehr als der Hinweis "Wir können auch anders!" eine erweiterte Auskunft zum Verzicht auf die Flugreise geführt' (686), namely the fact that his eldest son, who fled to the West, was an informant for the East German state 'Einzig um Vater und Mutter vor Strafe zu schützen, sei Teddy zum Informanten geworden' (686). Fonty is thus constantly reminded of an obligation not to forget the past, if only because of the sacrifices of others. The text is always critical of the GDR. The portrayal of the unusual friendship between the two men

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<sup>109</sup> Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit*, p. 462.

also illustrates the sacrifice and sense of loss of individual experience resulting from the building of the Wall; through Fonty's relationship with Hoftaller the text is not attempting to render harmless or justify the brutality of the East German dictatorship, as some critics have argued, but rather portrays the consequences on a personal level, namely, the omnipresent intrusion into private life: 'Jahrzehntelang wurde ich unter ideologischer Aufsicht geschurigelt' (530).

Through Fonty and Hoftaller the text contextualises the unification in both historical and literary terms: 'an einem windstill klaren Dezembertag des Jahres 89, als das Wort 'Einheit' mehr und mehr an Kurswert gewann, sagte Fonty plötzlich laut [...] jenes lange Gedicht mit dem Titel 'Einzug' auf, das am 16. Juni 1871 im Berliner Fremden- und Anzeigebblatt pünktlich zum Anlaß gedruckt gestanden hatte' (19). The occasion, to which the poem referred was the German victory over the French at Sedan, which soon led to the founding of the German/Prussian Empire. The parallelism between the founding of the Empire and the unification in 1989/90 are thematised throughout the text in which the events of 1871 appear again in Grass's novel (for example, the economic development is dismissed as simply another episode of greed and exploitation: 'Deutsche Einheit ist immer die Einheit der Raffkes und Schofelinskis' (411), the incarnation of the Prussian nouveau riche). But this historical association of the 1990 unification with the founding of the German nation state in 1871 also addresses the threat of a nationalist reawakening. This would explain Fonty's wary comment on the Victory Column during a walk in Berlin: 'Ihr Ziel hieß Siegestsäule, deren krönender Engel als neuvergoldet Scheußlichkeit in der Abendsonne prahlte' (20-21). The adjective 'krönend' connotes for the reader the Prussian monarchy, which is in itself a contradiction both in its characterisation through an angel-figure as well as being

anachronistic in the narrative time of the text. The equation of the ‘Scheußlichkeit’ with the victory column is an attempt to link an apparent Francophobia (the column was erected to celebrate the wars against Denmark, Austria and of course France) with an inflated German sense of importance that arguably underscores the column’s semantic significance – the war against France was the crowning victory that asserted Germany’s dominance on the continent. Within the context of the text’s schematisation of a new German nationalism, the description of the angel as ‘neuvergoldete’ is certainly intended to provoke a critical response. That said, Fonty welcomes the collapse of the regime, but hoped the unification could have turned out differently: ‘Was ich im verflossenen November auf dem Alex gesagt habe, als da Hunderttausende standen, das gilt immer noch: “Eine neue Zeit bricht an! Ich glaube, eine bessere und glücklichere! Und wenn nicht eine glücklichere, so doch mindestens eine Zeit mit mehr Sauerstoff in der Luft’ (137-8). But the insistence on historical doubling – the first unification of 1871 ushered in only a brief period of empire which culminated in the disaster of the first world war – enables the text to shed a critical perspective on the events of the time and thereby put into context its assumed importance. That new beginning promised, however, more than it could deliver. And – so the implication runs – the new beginning of the *Wende* may be unable to fulfil its grand claims. It is those claims that Hettche takes to task through the intertext in *Nox*.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Grass observed that ‘in regelmäßigen Abständen erleben wir die großen Verkünder der neuerlichen Stunde Null und der historisierenden Erklärungen, das sei alles nun Geschichte und vorbei. Und kaum ist das ausgesprochen, holt uns die Geschichte wieder ein, bis in die neunziger Jahre hinein’. Günter Grass and Haro Zimmermann, *Vom Abenteuer der Aufklärung*, p. 138. An important trigger in the ‘Stunde Null’ and the historical revisionist debate of the 1990s was, as I have argued, Martin Walser’s 1998 speech in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt in which he argued that the past, the Nazi past, is not being allowed to close, that it is being kept ‘alive’ artificially. The media response to Grass’s novel, *Ein weites Feld*, is clearly linked to a resentment that Germany’s history was being kept open, that the past was being “dragged” into the present. An analysis of the reviews in the German press has shown that the attacks against Grass’s text, orchestrated by Marcel Reich-Ranicki in an article in *Der Spiegel* prior to the book’s publication, were of a largely political nature. Oskar Negt, ed. *Der Fall Fonty* argues that the chosen subject matter, the unification of Germany 1989/90, deliberately ‘wühlt [...] dessen gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Boden auf und bringt viel Vergrabenes – und Vergessenes



We can see this critique of the unification played out in the wedding scene between Fonty's daughter Martha, and the West German building speculator Heinz-Martin Grundmann. The union between the two also functions as a critical purchase on recent events insofar as it might be said to undermine the declared apotheosis of East and West, evocative of Fonty's own position, which is in part a critique of the economic exploitation of the East: 'Kurz vor Herrschaftsbeginn des neuen Geldes war überall Ausverkauf angesagt. Produkte aus volkseigenen Betrieben gingen zu Schleuderpreisen vom Ladentisch' (131-2). The marriage presents Grass with an opportunity to bring together East and West German ideals, if only to underline that 'die Mauer im Kopf' continues to exist on both sides.<sup>111</sup> This cultural division is satirically portrayed through his now West German son Friedel who 'verlangte nach schonungsloser Offenlegung der Schuld' of the East Germans for having supported the East German state, strangely intolerant of all 'Andersdenkenden' (302).

The wedding dinner is not a success: '[u]m den Tisch saßen wir fremd' (311) and the marriage itself is to be short-lived. Soon after the wedding, in a rather ironic twist, Martin Grundmann's Mercedes (a symbol of the West German economic power?) comes to an abrupt stop and with it his own life: 'Marthas Ehemann war verunglückt. Einer der alltäglichen Autounfälle im Beitrittsgebiet. Es war zum Frontalzusammenstoß mit tödlichen Folgen, auch für den Fahrer des anderen Wagens, eines Trabant, gekommen' (707). To

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zum Vorschein', p. 7. The criticisms against the novel revealed a 'Verzicht auf ästhetische Begründung zugunsten einer blanken politischen Verurteilung', Negt, p. 10. It became clear that Grass, by writing against what he saw as a growing historical revisionism, was the victim of a political campaign. To quote one critic, 'Grass a été victime, lors de la parution de son roman, *Toute une Histoire*, d'une lynchage médiatique sans précédent' and 'ces interrogations sur la relation de Grass à l'Allemagne constituent sans aucun doute la clef de l'affaire déclenchée autour de *Toute une Histoire*', Olivier Mannoni, *Günter Grass, L'honneur d'un homme* (Bayard, Paris, 2000), pp. 491 and 494.

<sup>111</sup> This parallel between the marriage and the unification is further supported paradoxically by a mistake on Fonty's wife's part. Emilie Wuttke was referring to the unification, but Fonty presumed 'ich hätt nach der Ehe mit Grundmann gefragt. "Was soll schon werden", hat er gesagt, "wird sich hinziehen wie jede Ehe und schlecht und recht sein"'. The last sentence might easily be applied to the pending political union.

cement this parallel between the ‘verunglückten’ marriage and the political union, Fonty reflects shortly before the news of Grundmann’s death reaches him on the pending separation of the couple: ‘daß durch den Nebensinn aller auf Teilung zielenden Verben die jüngst vollzogene Einheit der Nation fraglich werden könnte’ (651). His language is unambiguous in its association of the failed marriage with the probable but apparently inevitable failure of the political unification. Further, in the collision of two cultures (the Mercedes and the Trabant) the responsibility lies with Grundmann, ‘Er soll nicht angeschnallt gewesen sein’, (707). The suggestion is that everything is happening too quickly for both sides.

Grundmann is figured as a symbolic parody of the West, its financial greed combined with a concomitant will to institutionalize historic amnesia, ‘[w]as gewesen ist, ist gewesen’ (288). His interest in the East is purely economic and his business pursuits, significantly pursued alongside his marriage, both of which take place symbolically during the unification processes, are dismissed by Fonty as ‘legaler Betrug’ (609). The wedding scene in the text simply lays bare the financial motivations of the West :

“Wem gehört denn dieses heruntergekommene Eckgrundstück? Verstehe! Aus München haben sich Altbesitzer gemeldet, selbstredend mit Mieterhöhung. Donner-wetter, die langen aber zu. Das setzt Kasse voraus. Wird nicht einfach sein.” [...] Grundmann wünschte Glück und einen tüchtigen Steuerberater. (286)

Grundmann’s insensitive lack of interest in the cultural/sociological significance of the restaurant to the East Berlin wedding guests, and in particular to Fonty (eine, trotz Sozialismus zu einem beliebten und –“bis kurz vorm Umbruch”– immer proppevollen Künstlerlokal, 286), is suggestive of a lack of awareness of the other. His language is aggressive, his sentences brief and unengaged, suggesting indifference to and ignorance of the GDR: ‘dieser Grundmann sagt immer nur “Verstehe” och wenn er rein nischt kapiert hat

und am liebsten hören will, daß wir von früh bis spät gelitten und uns wie im KZ gefühlt haben' (327). What Grundmann lacks is precisely that ability to look more closely – and that epistemology of seeing is at the heart of the flâneric substance of *Ein weites Feld*, as will be shown in my argument below on the text's play on perspective and looking.

### II.3. Critical Flânerie

The urban perambulations of the two men in *Ein weites Feld* represent the medium through which the city is narrated to the reader, insofar as the walks are here understood as examples of urban interpretation. Such walks underline a resonant, circumstantial perception of Berlin, which registers the city's physicality while at the same time promoting an awareness of the city as a text that is constantly being read. However, a comparison between the Nootboom, Delius and Grass texts reveals that the focus of reading can vary widely. Nootboom's protagonist, Arthur Daane, insists on a filmic, if not to say imagistic, approach to Berlin's topography, based on an understanding of the image as a mnemonic repository, a topography designed to aid the memory and remembrance of the past, through the recovery of which he hopes to rescue possible fragmented images from erasure. To film street names, buildings, people and empty spaces is to store, remember as well as restore. This signifies, as I shall argue in the fourth chapter, a very different approach to flânerie as from that to be found in Delius's historically escapist protagonist. In keeping with the critique of the unification, *Ein weites Feld* might be said to suggest that the act of walking is also a kind of nemesis – both Fonty and Hoftaller are strangely unconnected to their surroundings; a reminder of the feeling of deracination explored in Braun's poem. Both Fonty and Hoftaller walk the city as if they

are in fact trying to reclaim it, and their own significance within the social-urban framework; but in so doing they draw attention to their very exclusion from that framework.

The text makes it also possible to view this mode of unconnectedness as representing a particular way of perception, which in its unsystematic approach refuses a totalising view of the city in favour of a fragmented and multi-layered one. It is through this circumstantial mode of perception that a feeling of absolute deracination, as is heard in Braun's poem, is kept at bay by a way of looking and understanding the city as a site from which the past is never entirely erased from the urban fabric, even if the past is not immediately visible. This mode of perception promoted through the urban walks, tantamount to a conscious engagement with the visible and the invisible, keeps alive an element of hope in Grass's text, which Braun has abandoned. It represents a point of view which states the city cannot in fact be represented in its entirety because the complex layers of history and ideological discourses are still present and readable – Berlin will not suffer the silent white-washing of a zero hour; indeed it cannot be silenced. In the words of one critic, '[d]ie Prägungen aus vier Jahrzehnten kommunistischer Diktatur sind geblieben'.<sup>112</sup>

It is clear through the insistence on walking in the city in *Ein weites Feld* that the text leans heavily on Walter Benjamin and indeed Baudelaire's portrayal of the nineteenth-century flâneur. However, whereas Nooteboom makes explicit reference to Benjamin in his Berlin novel, as I argue in the following chapter, Benjamin is merely alluded to in the Grass text, though a debt to the German philosopher is nonetheless visible. Through the portrayal of Fonty's urban walks, his critical perception and historical reflections, 'sortierter Rest und

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<sup>112</sup> Ulrich Schlie, *Die Nation erinnert sich* (München, C.H. Beck, 2002), p. 175.

Abraum der Geschichte' (513), appear to echo Benjamin's own writings on city walking. In Paris, akin to Fonty's perception and portrayal of East Berlin's topography, the streets are also seen as 'die Wohnung des Kollektivs. Das Kollektivum ist ein ewig waches, ewig bewegtes Wesen, das zwischen Häuserwänden soviel erlebt, erfährt, erkennt und ersinnt'.<sup>113</sup> As with Grass's text, the emphasis here is on the public realm insofar as it is the site in which the collective identity is inscribed and somehow contained. The city is thus transformed into a readable text, indeed where the act of reading is a moral obligation: 'die glänzenden emaillierten Firmenschilder [sind] ein Wandschmuck wie im salon dem Bürger ein Ölgemälde, Mauern mit der "Défense d'Afficher" sind sein Schreibpult'.<sup>114</sup> It is the legibility of the city's topography that makes it possible for the flâneur to read such signs as collective signifiers and historical jottings, randomly placed around the city. It is the urban walker's conscious engagement with these signs that makes it possible for him to gain access to these histories and identities. The circumstantiality of such markings rests in the arbitrary awareness of the object concerned; it is only to be seen if the walker happens to pass by. But, for Grass, as for Benjamin, the act of walking and that of seeing are conscious acts.

Further, the intertextual and thematic references to the tradition of the flâneur, an urban walker as an engagingly non-engaged register of parts, for whom the notion of totality is an anathema, is yet another instance of Grass demonstrating his understanding of a cultural federalism. It might even be possible to suggest that the notion of a pan-European culture even questions the necessity of a German political unification. European integration might be said to underline the redundancy of such aspirations. Fonty's peregrinatory diversion from

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<sup>113</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk: Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 2, (hg.) Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 1051-52.

<sup>114</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, p. 1052.

the jubilant crowds in front of the Brandenburg Gate takes him again to the Victory Column, which becomes a platform from which to 'see' the unification. The column, 'vom Sockel der hochragenden Säule, die bis zur Spitze des siegreichen Feldzeichens sechsundsechzig Meter mißt' provided the observer 'Gelegenheit für Abschweifungen ins historische Feld' (20). Within the context of the city as text, the Siegessäule gains a renewed prominence and significance in the light of the unification; the renewed gold coating celebrates yet another unification victory: the hugely visible crowned angel 'das in Sichthöhe Sieg nach Sieg die Einheitskriege feiert' (22). The text leaves it for the reader to decide whether the celebrated victory refers to the economic or simply the political take-over. But the monarchical statue, a reminder of the aspirations of German nationhood, becomes a potent and yet anachronistic symbol in the late twentieth-century.

Such urban walking is used to offer a critical portrayal of the unification, and as such it is possible to speak of a political critique anchored in a literary text. The two walkers both confront and reflect on their urban landscape: 'lang und schmal neben breit und kurz. Der Umriß der Hüte und der Mäntel aus dunklem Filz und grauem Wollgemisch verschmolz zu einer immer größer werdenden Einheit' (12). Grass uses the same image on the cover of the novel which is clearly intended to suggest to the reader the geographical outlines of the two German states and underpins this description with the reference to the 'grauen Wollegemisch', the coal-polluted skies and grey colour familiar to East Berlin.<sup>115</sup> Their walk, the narrator tells us, was from 'Berlin nach Berlin' (13) again underlining the right of the two cities to be interpreted as independent cultural and historical signifiers. But the walk in question becomes synonymous with a united Germany's confrontation with the past, and in

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<sup>115</sup> The drawing on the front cover of the book is Grass's own.

particular the Nazi past. It is Berlin's topography that triggers this debate: 'Schon waren sie am Haus der Ministerien [hereafter, HdM], genauer, an dessen nördlicher Flanke vorbei. Mal gestikuliert die hochwüchsige, mal die kleinwüchsige Hälfte' (13), whereby a reference to the FRG and the GDR cannot be ruled out. This scene of the two halves vigorously debating (about the building as we later discover) is part of the novel's reflection on the continued presence of the past in the present. The building, as I shall shortly demonstrate, reveals both a National Socialist history as well as a Socialist significance (the north wing is decorated with a mosaic by Max Linger celebrating the Socialist achievements and the ideals of the Communist state) and represents Berlin's complex and layered coterminous histories that will now have to be renegotiated, but this time by a unified city and country. The walk and the confrontation with the Haus der Ministerien thematize the text's concept of time; namely a continuous present, a temporal understanding 'in der die Vergegenwärtigung des Vergangenen die Vorstellung des Zukünftigen beherrscht'.<sup>116</sup>

#### II.4. Street Names

Since John Locke, memory has been seen as something radically individual because the memories of one person cannot at the same time be the memories of another.<sup>117</sup> I shall nonetheless argue that through an analysis of Berlin's topography in *Ein weites Feld* it is not inappropriate to defend some forms of collective memory. If collective memory is understood solely in terms of its analogical character, referring beyond itself to an external, other, self-

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<sup>116</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit: Erinnern – Vergessen – Verzeihen* (Essener Kulturwissenschaftliche Vorträge 2 (Göttingen, Wallstein, 2002), p. 56.

<sup>117</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ed. Peter Niddich (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975). I refer here in particular to Book I, chapters X and XXVII in which Locke argues that 'although the moral agent is the continuously existing, rational, self-aware subject of consciousness, the 'person', the identity of this subject over time is determined by the continuity of unitary consciousness, not the continuity of an immortal soul', pp. 38-9.

aware and rational subject, it might be conceivable to understand collective memory as 'ein Sammelbecken von Spuren [...] die von den Ereignissen hinterlassen wurden'.<sup>118</sup> Those traces (Spuren) are housed within Berlin's topography as portrayed not only in Grass's urban representation, but in those of Nootboom, Delius, Brussig and Hettche. With this interpretation in mind, the impassioned debate between Fonty and Hoftaller outside the north wing of the HdM can be seen as deriving from a confrontation of such traces of the past. The localising of the discussion at the 'Ecke Otto-Grotewohl-Leipzigerstraße' (12) is significant: Grotewohl was the first president of the GDR and the Leipzigerstraße was an important East/West axis that united both parts of the city. Both the names and the location in this encounter express a critique of the GDR (Grotewohl) through its division of the city as is suggested in the interruption of the East/West axis. The city is then to be understood as a social image, as well as a configuration of spaces that throughout history have 'chiefly represented the idea of community, whatever values might be attached to it in any particular context'.<sup>119</sup> As a concept, 'community' is communicated through the public space within a framework of semantically loaded urban signs, which make possible the representation of space and meaning through a selective process of ordering and structuring, such as the renaming of Wilhelmstraße to Otto Grotewohlstraße.

Such processes have a lengthy past; the sense of the community in East Berlin was achieved by replacing street names and squares with others, which helped to promote a memory of the antifascist heroes and the Socialist cause. In East Berlin those names are, among others, Ernst Thälmann, to whom I referred in the previous chapter, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg. Through these names the city space becomes both a conveyor of meaning as

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<sup>118</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit*, p. 80.

<sup>119</sup> Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1981), p. 14.



well as an essential component of an attempt to forge a collective, that is, socialist, identity. In this respect, nothing is more important for the symbolic landscape of a city than ‘die Namen ihrer Straßen, Monumente, Statuen und Gedenktafeln. Die Namen von Straßen, Statuen oder Denkmälern sind Bestandteil der individuellen und kollektiven Identität’.<sup>120</sup> The act of reading such names becomes a way of recalling the past, the national and individual struggles involved in those pasts, which in turn help to establish an individual identification with a collective identity. *Ein weites Feld* demands of the reader a critical and circumspect engagement with Berlin’s topography as well as an awareness that the city fabric is also a patchwork of historical threads visible on almost every street corner.

The panoramic view of the city given by the two flâneurs reveals ‘ein Jahrzehnte lang wüstes Niemandsland, das nun als Großfläche nach Besitzern gierte’ (13), thematizing the pending unification within the context of an economic takeover. Fonty and Hoftaller’s walk across the Berlin-Berlin border and back again is represented as a walk into a city restless in its rebuilding and construction plans for a new city, alluded to in the portrait of the Wall-chippers slowly grinding down the redundant border. For the two observers it is evident that the momentum of the unification was not to be slowed down at any cost, ‘was sich gepaart näherte, schien unaufhaltsam zu sein’ (12), a notion which is again referred to in the tragic car crash between Grundmann’s Mercedes and the east German Trabant. The metaphor of speed suggests a possible ontological and social deracination as East Berlin’s topography changes exponentially to the point of unfamiliarity: ‘Die Kollwitzstraße’, on which the Wutke family reside, ‘hieß nun anders, wie auch der Platz nicht den Namen der einst hier ansässigen Künstlerin trug; Wörther Platz hieß er, und die Straße hieß Weißenburger’ (177).

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<sup>120</sup> Régine Robin, *Berlin: Gedächtnis einer Stadt*, trans. Roland Voullié (Berlin, Transit, 2002), p. 169.

This brief genealogy behind the changing street names in Prenzlauer Berg is interesting insofar as it underpins the processes of selective communication through signifiers placed within the city-text to which I referred above. For example, Wörther Platz was changed to Kollwitz Platz in 1947 as part of a political re-codification of (now East) Berlin following the allied division of the city in 1946. The choice of Kollwitz was determined by the latter's public profile as a committed socialist and promoter of an improvement of the plight of Berlin's urban poor and deprived. Hence, street names, public squares and known public institutions were continuously transformed into commemorative registers of the political cause for which the GDR stood from 1946 up until 1989.

Perhaps it is inevitable that, after the *Wende*, such ideological signifiers are erased and the city itself sanitised of all reference to the GDR; if some memories or names do indeed survive the building fervour, they are re-signified within the discourses of unification that marked this period in Berlin:

Wenn im *Stechlin* Schickedanz sagt: "Straßenname dauert länger als Denkmal", ahnte er nichts von der bald und rabiät aufkommenden Kurzlebigkeit des Gedenkens; denn ob es bei Kollwitzplatz und der gleichnamigen Straße bleiben würde, war zu Beginn der allerneuesten Wechsel- und Wendezeit nicht sicher. (177)

In fact, street names function in the same way as monuments. This contextualising of the changing of street names within a historic and literary framework of Berlin's less recent history serves to draw an analogy between Prussian ideological expansionism and the political and economic motives of the FRG. And ironically, what should in fact survive the changing times is being uncritically and even thoughtlessly erased (*Kurzlebigkeit des Gedenkens*). The constant changing of names results in a gradual erasing of the necessity to

remember: 'Die steht dort gegenwärtig, schrieb Fonty, wie so viele Denkmäler, denen von Staats wegen Dauer versprochen wurde' (246). But that continuity is being challenged by the state, albeit a different one. The erasure of such collective histories, as well as a seeming inability to remember the past arguably undermines the very fabric of the urban collective and also a sense of collective identity, of belonging to one particular group and not another. The assimilation of the individual within a community, and this is what the Grass text is at pains to underline, can only be established if the individual parts are familiar with the collective's past and the sense of tradition born out of the historic. The self has a significant relational quality insofar as the self's own awareness arises, in part, from social and cultural interaction. It is the common connections and involvements that 'give us collective identities and shared orientations and values, making us people able to use a specific language or idiom and marking us with its particular styles of description, categorization, and expression'.<sup>121</sup> It is possible to extend this notion of self to argue that selfhood presupposes a collective disposition. And, by extension, 'being social presupposes the ability to experience things that happened to groups to which we belong long before we even joined them as if they were part of our own personal past'.<sup>122</sup> The disruption of continuity between the present and the past, suggested in the claim that the unification is a new beginning, wiping clean the slate of the past forty or fifty years, threatens communities such as Prenzlauer Berg to which Fonty's awareness constantly returns.

To return briefly to Christa Wolf's ontological argument outlined above, it is possible on the basis of the re-signification, by which I mean the changes to the meaning-giving signs that

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<sup>121</sup> Jerrold Siegel, *The Idea of Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 3.

are part of the city-structure, of East Berlin's topography not to have existed. The changes forced on the city have resulted in the very loss of representative significance which *Was bleibt* portrayed as a state of not having lived (nicht gelebt zu haben). As one critic remarked, the period between 1989 and 1991 was determined by a concerted effort on the part of the political institutions as well as the civic body to remove all traces of the GDR, that is, 'alle Zeichen und alle Symbolischen Netze zu beseitigen, die auf eine DDR verwiesen, welche [...] die Rückkehr der antifaschistischen Exilanten erlebt und sich auf der Grundlage des Antifaschismus konstituiert hatte'.<sup>123</sup> If this argument is correct, the drive to remove all traces of the GDR from the urban fabric (in itself an impossible task) is deeply questionable. Whereas Fonty laments the loss of certain memorials and the threat to the urban names-register, such as Ernst Thälmannplatz, Brussig, we recall, portrays the psychological effect of such cultural signifiers in his Berlin representation as embodying something oppressive and in keeping with the methods of repression and public observation common in and to the GDR. There is, I would argue, a generational difference in the perspective of the significance of such founding names in the urban fabric, and one that marks an unbridgeable historical perspective and understanding of the importance of the past to the present. Such historic registers (Thälmann, Lenin, Liebknecht) connote the beginnings of the GDR as well as promote the myth that the East German state has successfully freed itself from fascism, continuing a discourse that might be said to speak to a generation (to which Grass and Wolf belong) who directly experienced the war and the beginnings of the ideological schism. But this 'Gründungsmythos'<sup>124</sup> represents for Brussig the failure of the East to undergo a critical

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<sup>123</sup> Robin, *Berlin: Gedächtnis einer Stadt*, pp. 79-80. See also Moaz Azaryahu, *Von Wilhelmplatz zu Thälmannplatz. Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR*, trans. Kerstin Amrani and Alma Mandelbaum (München, Gerlingen, 1991).

<sup>124</sup> 'Die DDR ruht auf einem Gründungsmythos, der sich zum einen gegen das NS-Regime als zu überwindenden Tiefpunkt der deutschen Geschichte stellt und zum andern gegen den kapitalistischen Internationale unbeirrbar als Hort von Ausbeutung, Unterdrückung, Kriegsvorbereitung und neuen

soul searching process such as that which marked West German discourses from the mid 1960s to the present. It represents the failure to prevent such practices of brutality and surveillance. This conclusion departs from Julian Preece's argument that the East was in any number of ways more connected to the German past than the Americanised West (a claim to which even Grass would have difficulty subscribing).<sup>125</sup> The GDR had systematically manipulated the fight against the National Socialist dictatorship in a quasi Hegelian manner to suggest that the founding of the German Democratic Republic was the inevitable and progressive outcome of the struggle. Through the unification the West is seen as pursuing a similar foundation myth as the GDR forty years prior; echoing Benjamin, 'die Sieger der Geschichte brauchen keine "Vergangenheitsbewältigung"'. Or, in Fonty's own words, 'Siegen macht dumm!' (63).

## II.5. The Berlin Wall

Both Fonty and Hoftaller are examples in the text of timelessness, a counter-characteristic to the changing topography of the city, which is the main focus of their perambulations. But regardless of this ever-changing city-text, both Fonty and Hoftaller are very much an extension of the same urban fabric. This is made clear as they watch the dismantling of the Wall. Peering through a hole in the Wall (eine weit klaffende Lücke), the two offer a portrait of themselves to the reader: 'Von drüben gesehen, schaute Fonty ab Brusthöhe durch den

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"Faschismen" sah. "Antifaschismus", "demokratische Neuordnung" und schließlich "Aufbau des Sozialismus" wurden zu den zentralen, quasimythischen Sinnkonstruktion und Rechtfertigungsmustern der DDR'. Emmerich, *Kleine Literatur Geschichte der DDR*, p. 29.

<sup>125</sup> Julian Preece, *The Life and Times of Günter Grass* (New York/London, Palgrave, 2001), p. 205. Preece's unusual claim is based upon a premise that the East had systematically maintained more traditional ways of life, in contrast to the West. The East, he observes, held on to 'old, slower ways of doing things', which 'is one way of keeping in touch with the past', p. 205. The introduction of massive industrial farming, the collectivisation processes which saw the transfer of private property to state-run collective enterprises, the adoption of Soviet mass production plans as well as the general neglect and destruction of old town centres do not appear to support Preece's possibly nostalgic reading of the GDR.

erweiterten Spalt. Neben ihm war Hoftaller von den Schultern aufwärts im Bild: zwei Männer mit Hüten' (15). The emphasis is again on perspectives gleaned by looking and/or observing. If a border guard had been more attentive 'hätte er von beiden ein erkennungsdienstliches Photo schießen können' (15). The pun on shooting (schießen) however returns the reader back to the brutal reality of the Wall. This portrait of Fonty and Hoftaller at the Wall functions, in my opinion, as a reminder that however great the desire is to remove it, the Berlin Wall is an intrinsic part of the identity of the citizens of East (and West) Berlin. The photograph of the two as if framed within the Wall evokes for the reader a passport image in which the person is clearly identified within a GDR context. Within this interpretative framework, and bringing to mind Nooteboom's instrumentalising of the photographic image in *Allerseelen*, Susan Sontag writes of an imaginary taking possession of one's immediate environment through the photograph: 'Wie Photographien dem Menschen den imaginären Besitz einer Vergangenheit vermitteln, die unwirklich ist, so helfen sie ihm auch, Besitz von einer Umwelt zu ergreifen, in der er sich unsicher fühlt.'<sup>126</sup> Both characters are framed and contextualised by the Wall as well as by their desire to hold onto a past that is their own but is in danger of being erased. But the photograph also possibly suggests a critique of Wall-tourism, that is, the reduction of history to mere surface without content. The photograph has thus an ambivalent role in the text; on the one hand, the image/photograph acts as a reminder of the past, a souvenir in which a particular moment has been captured and therefore preserved. On the other hand, the image reduces, simplifies and denies complexity. In the terms of historical discourse, it prevents other ways of seeing an object and or event. Photographic tourism is a denial of experience, insofar as the image is given as an accepted

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<sup>126</sup> Susan Sontag, *Über Fotografie*, trans. Mark W. Rien and Gertrud Baruch (Frankfurt a/M, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag), p. 15.

replacement of the object itself.<sup>127</sup> Photography understood in this way might better be grasped as a way of not seeing. It is this limited perspective of the photographic image to which Hoftaller referred in his critique of two tourists who failed to note Fonty's presence next to Fontane's statue: 'Fabelhaft, wie Sie diese Touristen ignoriert haben. Sind wie ne Landplage. Müssen alles photographieren, doch genau hingucken, das schaffen die nie' (593). The circumstantial perception promoted through urban flânerie counters this limited perception offered in and through the photograph. Grass's portrayal of the Wall performs this multiple perspective approach, in contrast to, say, Brussig's representation of it in *Helden wie wir* or again in Hettche's focus on the opening of the Wall as solely a violent and traumatic experience.

The political and historical realities of the Wall are hinted at through the same hole, which also operated as a contextualising frame for the Fonty/Hoftaller portrait. Looking East, 'Sie sahen den Sicherheitsgürtel, die Hundelaufanlage, das weite Schußfeld, sahen über den Todesstreifen hinweg, sahen die Wachtürme' (15), a perspective that might have easily been taken from Hettche's representation in *Nox*. Against this violent backdrop, it is significant that the portrait is framed within a perspective of the Wall seen solely from the East, a perspective which is soon to disappear under a flood of investors, 'ein Jahrzehnte lang wüstes Niemandsland, das nun als Großfläche nach Besitzern gierte' (13). The perspective seen from the East offers the reader a visual biography of sorts of the repressive nature of the GDR. This other perspective is significant because, when viewed from a different angle, namely

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<sup>127</sup> 'Als Mittel zur Beglaubigung von Erfahrung verwandt, bedeutet das Fotografieren aber auch eine Form der Verweigerung von Erfahrung – indem diese auf die Suche nach fotogenen Gegenständen beschränkt wird, indem man Erfahrung in ein Abbild, ein Souvenir, verwandelt', *ibid.* Through this photo-tourism experience is given a manageable form: 'Nicht wissend, wie sie sonst reagieren sollten, machen sie eine Aufnahme. So wird Erfahrung in eine feste Form gebracht: stehenbleiben, knipsen, weitergehen', Susan Sontag, *Über Fotografie*, p. 15.pp. 15-16.

from the West, barring the occasional cry of the Wall as a ‘Narbe’ (scar) or ‘Schandmauer’ (Wall of disgrace) the Wall had been transformed into an artist’s tableau. It has been decontextualised insofar as the covering over also hides the realities of the Wall for those who were forced, like Fonty, to live under its shadow. ‘Mit Hammer und Meißel’, an obvious counter-image to the hammer and sickle, the symbol of the Communist reconstruction, ‘zermürbten sie den Schutzwall, dessen Westseite während der letzten Jahre seines Bestehens von anonym gebliebenen Künstlern mit lauten Farben und hart konturierendem Strich zum Kunstwerk veredelt worden war’ (14). What is of interest here is not only the suggested ‘ennobling’ or even ‘elevation’ of the Wall to a colourful work of popular art, thereby decontextualising the Wall from a purely political historical function, although this is important, but more the eroding of it. The verb ‘zermürben’, suggesting both to grind down and to wear down, contravenes an expected tearing down or even pulling down of the Wall. To grind down the Wall, suggests a thorough removal of it, not a spontaneous act of (expected) violence against it, nor a re-codification (a process that had already taken place through the transformation of the Wall into a picture tableau), but a complete and thorough erasure. Perhaps this desire to forget is in part motivated by the recognition that, despite the frequent public condemnations of the Wall by prominent and private citizens alike, the West had, to all extents and purposes, coexisted quite comfortably with the Wall for over twenty years.<sup>128</sup> Fonty’s deliberate reference to the Wall as the *Schutzmauer* underpins the often-conflicting perspectives of the Wall. Whereas in the West, it was subject to metaphoric overload, in which the West’s moral objection was couched in almost physiognomic terms with metaphors visually outlining the West’s moral objection to the concrete structure

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<sup>128</sup> One journalist observed that following the unification ‘viele (West-) Deutsche wollen heute am liebsten vergessen, daß man es über fast zwei Jahrzehnte bequem und natürlich fand, ein normales Verhältnis zum Staat DDR zu haben’. *Berlingske Tidende* (29.08.1995) quoted in Oskar Negt, *Der Fall Fonty*, p. 46.



dividing the city in two halves – *Schandmauer* or *Narbe* were frequently heard metaphors in the seventies and eighties and are also addressed in Hettche's discussion of the Wall by the politicians on the boat – the official reference to the Wall in the GDR (if mentioned at all) was the Anti-fascist Protection Shield (*Antifaschistisches Verteidigungsschild*), itself another echo of the *Gründungsmythos*.

The Wall, 'gestern noch aktuell gewesen' (14) is reduced to fragments which are then sold as souvenirs, which is critically commented on in Grass's text, and again marks a wider historical understanding of the Wall to the city in contrast, I would argue, to other Berlin novels. It is Fonty who observes this problematic dismantling:

Abseits vom Gehämmer, im sozusagen zweiten Glied der von Westen her betriebenen Demontage, lief bereits das Geschäft. Auf Tücher oder Zeitungen gebreitet, lagen gewichtige Batzen und winziger Bruch. Einige Händler boten drei bis fünf Fragmente, keins größer als ein Markstück, in Klarsichtbeuteln an (ein Stück) sollte dem Andenken dienen (14).

The image here is unambiguous: East Berlin is being sold off in a jumble sale-like manner, 'Auf Tücher oder Zeitungen gebreitet', the description even underlining an arrogance which marked the dismantling of East Berlin by the West, 'der von Westen her betriebenen Demontage', an echo of a similar critique voiced in Braun's poem, 'Das Eigentum'. But however significant the dismantling of East Berlin's structures is, the transformation of that history into a commodity parcelled off 'in Klarsichtbeuteln' is portrayed as disturbing, if not to say patronising ('Hier Opa, nur für Ostkundschaft und weil Sonntag ist'). This is not to suggest that *Ein weites Feld* mourns the fall of the Wall, or in anyway advocates a preservation of the whole structure. The numerous references to the reality of the Wall for the East German citizenry as well as the division of Fonty's own family arguably demonstrate

that this is not the case. The concern with the dismantling of the Wall has to do with the text's critique of the unification as being both something that is determined solely by the West, and perceived as part of a drive to eradicate traces of the past.

It might even be argued that the cynicism inherent in the image of the jumble sale is not without some justification: the city of Berlin recently announced plans to build a ten-thousand square meter GDR theme park in which it will be possible to relive the GDR, 'experience the Wall, 'listen in' on Stasi-police questionings or even visit the headquarters of the East German head of State.<sup>129</sup> *Ein weites Feld* clearly resists any a-historical leaning and rejects the reduction of history to a spectacle, demonstrated in the selling off of the Wall. Indeed, history is anything but spectacle: 'was wirklich ist, klebt nicht an der Oberfläche' (265). Fonty embodies the resonance of the past in the present: 'ohne ihn laufe man Gefahr, wie ohne Hintergrund zu sein' (485) and as such refuses the negation of the historic. The difference between the Berlin Wall as a political structure and the Wall as spectacle denuded, aestheticized and sold-off, is a distinction between the original and the copy. The spectacle proclaims the 'predominance of appearance and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance' existing in a continuous presence without a 'meaning-giving' background.<sup>130</sup> There are echoes of Dückers's instrumentalising of the spectacle as a way of perceiving Berlin's urban fabric as strangely free of the historic; Grass's text bitterly resists a view of Berlin from which the historic is absent.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> 'DDR Disney-park', Anonymous, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1/2<sup>nd</sup> March 2003.

<sup>130</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Zone Books, New York 1995), p. 16.

<sup>131</sup> The argument for a possible critique of a postmodern *Weltanschauung* in the text is justified for a number of reasons. The text, *Ein weites Feld*, stresses quite strongly the belief that history is being transformed into consumable souvenirs or surface images. The narrative example of blending fact and fiction while presenting itself as a historical report is a further instance of a postmodern influence. Lutz Koepnick argues, that Berlin as a whole has, since the unification, become a marketable product, demonstrated through the marketing of Berlin in

## II.6. The 'HdM'

Buildings function in the Grass text in much the same way as street names and memorials in the urban fabric - as plural spaces made up of coexistent realities permitting a similar analysis of the way social and cultural forms of identity are constructed. As was demonstrated in the introduction, that a building may also function as a signifier, like a street name, is all too obvious. This is made clear through the ideological ramifications of buildings erected, for example, in late nineteenth century England, or the Communist-style of public building in Moscow from the 1930s onward. Buildings function within a community to underpin a received understanding of a collective belonging that is also subject to re-signification in the same way as the renaming of streets and the removal of public sculptures.

The centrality of the HdM (Haus der Ministerien) building to *Ein weites Feld* lies both in its function of highlighting a coexistent historicity beginning with the National Socialist years, leading on through the Communist dictatorship and up to the present period of the text, while at the same time showing how the building has been recoded throughout the political and social changes of its sixty year history. The building, once the 'Reichsluftfahrtministerium' (Ministry of the National Socialist Air Force) and later during the GDR, the House of Government Ministries (Haus der Ministerien), housed the government department responsible for over-seeing the privatisation of GDR state-owned companies to private investors in the West. The text's focus on the HdM dominates the second half of the text, that is, after the unification has already taken place. Its very presence and aim, at least according to the portrayal in *Ein weites Feld*, heralded the beginning of the complete disappearance of

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and through the exhibit *The Story of Berlin* where historical memory is but 'a fantastic commodity'. Lutz Koepnick, 'Forget Berlin' in *The German Quarterly* 74:4 (2001), p. 343.

the GDR in post-unification Germany: 'Soviel Größe. Soviel Abstieg. Soviel Ende und Anfang' (566). Paralleling the portrayal of Grundmann in the text, the perception of the GDR was based on a purely economic basis: 'Ihr Schatten fiel auf vieltausend einst volkseigene Betriebe, Liegenschaften, Parteibesitztümer auf siebentausend geplante Privatisierungen und zweieinhalb Millionen gefährdete Arbeitsplätze' (558).

It is likely that the portrayal of the HdM/Treuhand is intended to suggest West Germany in the role of the 'Kolonialherren' (611) who have arrived in the East with the sole intent of closing everything down, 'Abwicklung' (643). The man in charge of dismantling the GDR is, although the 'Prügelknabe des Kanzlers' (576) sympathetically portrayed and becomes the focus of a great deal of Fonty's attention during the latter's work at the HdM and later the 'Treuhand'. However, both he and the department are very unpopular, 'eine kolossale Machtfülle, die eigentlich niemand gutheißen kann. Letzte Entscheidung über Menschen und Eigentum, auf die - da bin ich mir sicher - Haß antworten wird' (568), which is almost a prophecy of what is to come. The director is later murdered and his death is portrayed symbolically as yet another victim of the unification (following Grundmann's). The 'Treuhand' was so unpopular, 'Schnell privatisieren, entschlossen sanieren, behutsam stilllegen' (558), that with his typical historical awareness, his 'Hang zum alles einbeziehenden Rückgriff' (72), Fonty predicted a repetition of 1953 'so etwas wird auf Dauer nicht hingenommen' (564). The reunification is then already fraught with social tension and potential unrest. The historical analogy is not without its reason: Nazism had given way to Communism, which in turn had been subsumed by Capitalism: three ideologies rubbing shoulders under one roof: 'Nichts geschah ohne Nachspiel' (79). With so much history in one building, Fonty's description of the 'Treuhand' as 'ein Gebäude nur mit

Schatten vorstellbar'(86), evokes not only the metaphorical shadow of the 'Treuhand' affecting the lives of millions of people in the GDR, couched in a rather ironic play on the theme of light and darkness, good and evil, but the shadow image evokes the historical layers and changing ideologies that have marked the building's history. Erected in 1935 as the National Socialist air force ministry, it is still casting a long shadow over the city of Berlin: 'Hielt nur zwölf Jahre, wirft aber einen kolossal langen Schatten' (67).

The building, and in particular the northern wing, enacts the re-signification, to which I referred above, from its initial use as the ministry of air through to its present function as the 'Treuhand'. The crushing of the 1953 uprising by the Soviet army<sup>132</sup> was perversely portrayed as a victory for the Socialist cause that was soon to be narrated in a 25 meter mural by the artist Max Lingner; it is a mural 'auf dem viel Personal frohgestimmt Begeisterung bekundet' (555) and as such represents for Fonty 'den plattesten Ausdruck des sozialistischen Realismus' (555). The motivations behind the commissioning of the mural were determined by a historical and ideological revisionism or re-codification, as indeed was the decision by the post-unification government to install, as an ideological riposte, a critical photographic mural of the dramatic events of the 1953 uprising beneath the socialist installation. The building thus becomes precisely such a pluralistic site of coexistent historical realities engaged in constant ideological dialogue with the present.

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<sup>132</sup> I refer here to the civic uprising in East Berlin on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1953. The uprising was motivated by calls from the citizens of the GDR for an improvement in financial, political and social aspects. Unhappy with the apparent disparity between the economic growth of the West and the stagnant economy of the East, a large body of citizens convened outside the HdM and demanded the resignation of the complete cabinet. The uprising was brutally crushed by the Soviet army stationed in Berlin.

Fonty's own history is also full of its long shadows and runs parallel with that of the 'Treuhand', and in so doing underlines the importance of the building for individual as well as collective memory. From 1939 until the end of the war in 1945 'war Fonty während der Kriegsjahre als Soldat ein und aus gegangen' (69) in his function as 'Kriegsberichterstatter' (70) for the German air force. After the war and the creation of the GDR state, he worked as a messenger in the HdM carrying endless files and letters along its corridors and continued to do so after the reunification. It is through his continuous presence in the building that German history is paralleled and reflected through the multiple functions of the building: 'im großen Sitzungssaal des ehemaligen Reichsluftfahrtministeriums', where once Field Marshal Göring 'aus erhöhtem Ledersessel der Reichsmarschall Befehle erteilt hatte', the GDR '[wurde] ins Leben gerufen' (556). The emphasis here is on an uncritical and painless transition from one regime to another. It was at the HdM that Fonty met his wife and it is here that Fonty's histories, or the remnants of them, are hidden in Hoftaller's red sofa.<sup>133</sup> Used as a means of forcing Fonty to confront his own past, it also reinforces the intertextual doubling through references to Fontane's own biography, such as the 'Dresden years', which refer both to Fontane's infidelity with 'die aschblonde Gartnerstochter,' Lena Strehlenow (105), as well as being intended as a hint to Fonty to remind him of his own infidelity in France during the war: 'Er sank, als immer mehr Peinlichkeiten aus der anderen Sofaecke kamen, tiefer und tiefer ins Polster' (101), 'so satt war das Sofa an Geheimnis' (103). These biographical details of Fonty's working life within this historically plural building underpin an important thematic link between the inscription of collective and private memory onto Berlin's

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<sup>133</sup> The Red Sofa is both an actual piece of furniture as well as a metaphor for the repression, destruction and ultimate inevitability of historical confrontation with the past. Seated on the sofa Hoftaller confronts Fonty with his past and the consequences of that past. Hence Fonty's statement: 'Sie ahnen nicht, wieviel Vergangenheit in einem Polstermöbel Platz findet' (86). The sofa denies the ultimate erasure of history: 'Irgend etwas bleibt immer unversorgt liegen' (91).

topography. The public and the private histories of the citizens of the GDR converge to form an inextricable patchwork. The function of the building is to signify both collective as well as individual memory and history. The red sofa with the Freudian overtones and the fifty or so years of employment in this ever-changing building meant that 'der Koloß hielt sich Fonty wie einen Gefangenen' (560). A simple re-signification of the building would, the text suggests, deny him the possibility of liberating himself from the past - to liberate the self from the historical world it must first confront it, for which purpose Grass thematises the 'HdM'. Fonty's own history is undeniably linked with that of the 'Reichsluftfahrtministerium/HdM/Treuhand' as it is with other aspects of Berlin's topography, which combined, form part of the complex fabric of notions of selfhood.

In a city in which the words 'Abraum der Geschichte' echo like a leitmotif throughout post-1989 reunification discourse, the shadows of history were customarily denied or simply forgotten. In an ironic twist in the Grass text, Fonty was given the job by the director of the 'Treuhand' 'den Gebäudekomplex Ecke Leipzigerstraße- Otto-Grotewohlstraße geschichtlich erlebbar [zu] machen' (535). The plan for a commemorative volume was an orchestrated manoeuvre in light of the public criticisms of the 'Treuhand' to show that its intention was not the erasure of the memory (or re-signification) of the GDR from the city. The motto of the commemorative volume was: 'Nichts darf verdrängt werden. Indem sich die Treuhandanstalt keinesfalls der Vergangenheit und deren Altlasten entzieht, plädiert sie für Offenheit' (535). But it was to be an openness of limited scope. Histories, the distant memories of National Socialism as well as the history of the GDR although understood by Fonty as integral to the newly unified Berlin were sidelined. But in keeping with his all-embracing historical awareness (dieser besondere Blick in wechselnde Zeit, 115), the history

of the building for Fonty was part of the history of the city: 'Er begann mit der Vorgeschichte der den Gebäudekomplex flankierenden Straßen' (551), not forgetting the 'Führerbalkon' from where 'die immer häufiger versammelten Volksmassen mit gestrecktem oder angewinkeltem Arm begrüßt werden sollten' (553), and referring to the 'damalige Aufmarsch streikender Arbeiter' (564). It moves swiftly from dictatorship to dictatorship and critically includes the present building and its use within this historical dialectic, thereby forcing an awareness of the past into the present. Fonty's descriptive method reveals an acute awareness of the city as an almost organic entity from which, by conclusion, it is simply not possible to cut out unwanted parts (or if removed, the absence will paradoxically continue to testify to its presence). For Fonty, the commemorative volume represents a textualisation of the histories of Berlin and that of the 'Treuhand', which cannot be held apart. The novel again asserts the right to read the city as a text.

When towards the close of the novel the Treuhand manager is mysteriously murdered, a further instance of a textual blending of fact and fiction, Fonty parallels the murder with that of the forest warden in Fontane's *Quitt*: 'von Anbeginn ist der Leser auf seiten des Wildschützen, der wie zwangsläufig zum Mörder wird' (614). This historical parallel intends to underscore how easily drastic measures are taken by those oppressed and should be read as a critique of the economic exploitation of the East by the more powerful West, represented through the 'Treuhand'; it is a parallel to remind the reader yet again that 'Nichts geschah ohne Nachspiel' (79). The murder brought about a change in management at the HdM, which in turn effected a changing perception of the 'Treuhand' insofar as the replacement is portrayed as a cold and relentless manager who intends to pursue the transference of the 'Volkseigentum [...] zügiger und in schärferer Gangart' (636), leading Fonty to conclude



somewhat dryly that 'der Sieg über den Kommunismus den Kapitalismus tollwütig gemacht hat' (674). This change in approach was clearly to influence Fonty's own task of making the 'Treuhand' palatable to the public. The new changes mean that 'bevor die Treuhandanstalt, kurz Treuhand genannt, einziehen und sich breitmachen konnte, mußte geräumt, daß hieß wiederum abgewickelt werden' (485). 'Abwickeln' suggests both to wind up, as in dismantle as well as liquidate, implications clearly intended to underline the 'Treuhand's' intention in dealing with the GDR's urban furniture. The 'Treuhand' is to effect and promote the new face of post-unification Germany, an image in which the dialectic of East and West is no longer visible. The commemorative volume is finally rejected for focussing too insistently on the past. Fonty's draft 'sei zu sehr vergangenheitsbezogen' and although 'verdienstvoll die historischen Perioden herausgearbeitet worden seien, gehe es dennoch nicht an, daß diese gleichrangig mit der dritten Nutzungsstufe des Gebäudes in Beziehung gesetzt stünden' (637). This rejection of the past, and the belief that the present use of the building shared no historical affinities with its predecessors, is but another critique of the current understanding of the unification as a new beginning and freedom from an otherwise burdensome past. As the attacks against Grass's own novel testify, during the period 1989 to 1991 '[v]on Kontinuität zu sprechen, sei fahrlässig' particularly 'wenn man nicht berücksichtige, daß nunmehr die Marktwirtschaft Priorität beweise' (637). The depiction of the 'Treuhand' underpins an indictment both of the political and economic policies of the West German government in dealing with the GDR, but also, leaning on Braun's reading of the reunification in his poem, of German society for allowing itself to be swayed solely by economic gains.

The critique of Fonty's commemorative volume reinforces Grass's critique of the reunification as represented in *Ein weites Feld*. The evaluation of December 1989 to November 1990 illustrates society's rejection of the past born out of a misconception that 1989 was indeed a new beginning, and following Schirrmacher and Walser, the single real opportunity to finally close the chapter of National Socialism. In direct opposition to this, however, the text posits the Treuhand building as paradigmatic of how history is in fact coexistent, and representing, through the urban fabric, the individual and collective memories of the people who either inhabit or are in some way connected with the city: 'Dabei geht es um Menschen, nicht wahr?' (618). The counter-position to forgetting in *Ein weites Feld* is the Paternoster, the structural centrepiece of the Treuhand to whose workings Fonty has been indebted throughout his working life. It is an anarchic reminder of the past and at the same time a familiar and integral presence in the day-to-day business of the staff working in the building. The lift functions as an expression for the metaphorical architecture of the representation of 'Vergegenkunft' in the text: 'Im Paternoster geeint. Vom Reichsmarschall bis zum Chef der Treuhand' (568). It is through the metaphorical function of the Paternoster, as revealing endless time, that the text outlines Fonty's concept of the passage of time: 'Er begriff die Mechanik der Wende in Gestalt eines rastlos dienstwilligen Personenaufzugs. Soviel Größe. Soviel Abstieg. Soviel Ende und Anfang' (568). The Paternoster links both individual and collective history into an inseparable web: it was in the Paternoster that Fonty first met his wife, kissed her and proposed to her. It is in the Paternoster in which so much history is narrated but also sorted, filed or destroyed: 'Wenn beide mehrere Vaterunser lang eine Kabine besetzt hielten, war Hoftaller tätig. Er verlangte Einblick in die beweglichen Akten' (77). Once in the Paternoster, history was subjected to Hoftaller's archival system (also leaning on his role as a spy) of retrieval and erasure: 'Während umlaufender

Paternosterfahrten sprach er von “ner zwischen-zeitlichen Ablage”, sobald Fonty ihm den einen oder anderen Ordner geöffnet hatte. Später mußten die eingelagerten Akten verschwinden; und Hoftaller wußte, wo’ (78). The Paternoster’s grinding course around the building accords the text a visceral image of the central notion of endlessly recycled time as well as underscoring an incessant repetition of the rise and fall of political figures dominant in German history, while at the same time providing the narrative with a textual space within and through which to enact the memory of the past and its impact on the present. It creates a montage-based image in which it is possible to represent historical events as coexistent, in a pluralist form that will be used by Dückers in her Berlin novel: ‘Neben Ulbricht saß Goebbels, der Kommunist neben dem Nazi, der Spitzbart neben dem Klumpfuß’ (567). This recurring montage-like image underpins the idea that the city is made up of such historical layers, which not only refuse to go away, but continue to recur albeit it under a different guise.

This thematic linking of prominent National Socialists with the political figures of the GDR is intended as a reminder that the GDR was in fact a brutal dictatorship, which Fonty at no time seeks to defend, but merely looks at from a different perspective.<sup>134</sup> It is a perspective that while acknowledging the indeed heinous nature of the political structures of the GDR nonetheless accepts that the GDR is still home to many East Germans who pursued, for better or worse, their everyday lives of work, marriage and children. But to return to the discussion of the Paternoster, it figures in *Ein weites Feld* as a Baroque image of the wheel of Fortune

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<sup>134</sup> In a problematic critique of Grass’s novel, Reich-Ranicki argued that *Ein weites Feld* in fact an apology for the GDR and neglects to critique the regime for its political brutality. This is in fact not the case. The textual references, for example, to the separation of Fonty’s own family, brought about by the building of the Berlin Wall, the historical linking of leading Nazi-personalities with equally prominent SED figures, as well as Fonty’s clandestine meeting with Uwe Johnson in the sub-chapter, ‘Ein Mord mehr’, a reference which clearly holds the GDR responsible for the author’s death, if only because he was forcibly exiled by the regime, do not support Reich-Ranicki’s claim. See Negt, *Der Fall Fonty*, p. 7f.

and has been accordingly much discussed in textual analyses of the Grass text.<sup>135</sup> But it is the indirection of the novel, its non-emphatic nature, that promotes and makes possible a deeper historical awareness and not, as many critics have argued, the symbolic function of the Paternoster. This is not to suggest that the Paternoster is not significant to Fonty's historical awareness; but it does suggest that Fonty only reached such an understanding of history through such circumstantial perceptions, gleaned through non-intentional urban perambulations, which, because they challenge notions of linear time, make possible Grass's *Vergegenkunft*, to which I referred above. The nerve centre of the text is precisely the resonant and circumstantial perception of Berlin, namely its physicality, as registered by Fonty and Hoftaller in their walks, and not the circular course of the Paternoster.

In a novel in which everything is seen through an optic of an intertextual mode spanning over one hundred and fifty years of German history, it is hardly surprising that the text is critical of anything that proposes to be somehow final, lasting and new. The modern and postmodern city (Berlin) is always a site of memory: Berlin 'does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the grating of the windows, the banisters of the steps.'<sup>136</sup> The text registers a hope for a form of historical preservation, a belief that the GDR will not disappear completely from the post-reunification map: *Ein weites Feld* names the city and this naming, Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain and Mitte, functions as a way of asserting a possessive individual and collective right to the layered urban fabric of the city. Berlin in Grass's text becomes the symbolic site of the challenge to remember the pre-division German past. Berlin's topography functions as a way of reminding the divided Germans/Germanies of that which they have common, namely, the broader and older

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<sup>135</sup> See Neuhaus, *Literatur und nationale Einheit*, pp. 455-468; Sabine Moser, *Günter Grass*, op. cit.

<sup>136</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London, Verso, 1974), p. 48.

historical dimensions and their collective past which is the past of their shared/collective memory. It is this, the text argues, that makes them German. A sense of belonging to a 'Kulturnation', which is recognisably one regardless of the fissures and displacements that run across it. Both Fonty and Hoftaller can be Berlin flâneurs only because of this consciousness of the broader unifying historical dimension of what it is to be German. As such, both figures represent in some ways an ideal historical consciousness – the consciousness for which the novel pleads and one, which is central to the critical purchase of Nooteboom's protagonist to whom I shall now turn.

## **Walking as a Way of Remembering: Imagining the Past in Cees Nootboom's *Allerseelen***

Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed.

- Einstein in a letter to Heisenberg [1925].<sup>137</sup>

This chapter addresses the function of flânerie and filmic images in Cees Nootboom's Berlin novel, *Allerseelen*. In the previous chapter I argued that in Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld* Berlin is represented as a site informed by an omnipresent past. In *Allerseelen*, those histories are less immediate and less visible, but nonetheless present in Berlin's topography. Temporally, the text has shifted from the reunification addressed in the previous chapter to the period between 1996-97 and therefore the reunification, as such, is no longer an issue for the characters in the text. The illustrations of urban walking that permit a resonant, circumstantial perception of Berlin, which register the city's physicality and at the same time promote an awareness of the city as highly 'texted', are not the same in each work. The overriding perception of Berlin's topography in *Allerseelen* is that of Berlin as an archaeological site. Through an analysis of the text's discussion of flânerie and filmic images, I hope to reveal a dialectic in the novel between urban walking, whose purpose is the visualisation and representation of lesser known fragmentary artefacts and objects existing in Berlin's surfaces, and attempts to recover Berlin's lost or forgotten histories through a montage-based reconstruction of such recovered objects and artefacts. The city text in Cees Nootboom's *Allerseelen* is the focus of a debate on memory, on the memories of forgotten

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<sup>137</sup> See E.H. Carr, *What is History* (London, Penguin, 1990), p. 164.

histories (East and West) and on the obligation of the present to remember the past and its forgotten histories. This chapter argues that the Nootboom text gestures in a thoroughly modernist way towards contemporary memory discourse, namely in its advocacy of the image, and its reconstruction, as a possible way forward in the struggle against mnemonic erasure; it is a position that challenges Grass's criticism of the photograph discussed in the last chapter. I understand mnemonic structures to be devices, such as buildings, street names or memorials that trigger memory on a personal and collective level.

Although *Allerseelen* is a novel about Berlin in the post-*Wende* period, and one that addresses the histories of the East and West, it should be noted that the author of this Berlin novel, Cees Nootboom, is Dutch and not German. The critical purchase we are then given is that of an outsider, though one admittedly familiar with Germany, and with Berlin in particular.<sup>138</sup> This perspective gives credence to Günter Grass's claim made in the previous chapter that the significance of the Berlin-Berlin unification is not only of concern to a united Germany, but rather, echoing Grass's advocacy of a cultural federation, reaches beyond the political borders of the nation state. To recall the categories of looking and perceiving discussed in the previous chapter, *Allerseelen* is understood here as embodying precisely one of those other, non-familiar ways of looking at the city. But perhaps the foremost argument for the inclusion of the Nootboom text in this thesis is that it too is hugely engaged by Berlin, a city that is the focus of the historicity and amnesia of the modern world, as the discussions in the novel, to which I refer later, on European art, European thought and philosophy testify.

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<sup>138</sup> Nootboom has written extensively on Germany and Berlin in numerous essays, novels and newspaper articles. See, for example, *Wie wird man Europäer?* (1993), *Rückkehr nach Berlin* (1990), *Berliner Notizen* (1991), and *Nootbooms Hotel* (2000).

Arthur Daane, the main character in the text, is a Dutch cameraman who, when not freelancing, lives in a borrowed apartment in West Berlin. Except for Erna, 'seine älteste Freundin' (13) in Amsterdam, and a small number of friends scattered in Berlin, Daane lives alone.<sup>139</sup> He has a tentative, but strangely obsessive relationship with a young woman, Elik, an historian, whose own life appears to reflect Berlin's scarred history. Towards the end of the novel, Daane is brutally attacked, lies in a coma for weeks, but begins slowly to recover from his wounds. Yet such accounts as are recounted seem to tell us very little. Essentially, Daane wanders through Berlin with a film camera, reflects on his environment, on German philosophy and art. Notwithstanding the plotlessness and eventlessness of the novel, Nooteboom's text is highly discursive. It is an essay on seeing and not seeing, on remembering and forgetting. Yet these themes are deployed without much psychological context; it is difficult for us to get hold of Daane's inner life, in spite of his intense reflectivity. He has lost his family and is now alone: 'Er hatte eine Frau gehabt und er hatte ein Kind gehabt, doch weil sie bei einem Flugzeugunglück umgekommen waren, besaß er nur noch Fotos' (10). This candid use of the past perfect beguiles the reader into accepting this disturbing aspect of Daane's biography as unquestioningly and naturally as the statement that when not freelancing he chooses to live in Berlin. The use of the conjunctive 'weil' is slightly curious. One would expect a kind of simple parataxis: He had had a wife and son. But they were killed in a plane crash. All he had left *is* photographs of them. The fact that they are dead does not explain why he has only photos. He could, after all, have letters, clothes, toys, books, and the like. But it is the photographic image of his wife and son that he has retained. Perhaps this is because it is the photograph that somehow attests to their having lived, thus giving the holder of the image an imaginary possession of a past. And yet, the photographic

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<sup>139</sup> Cees Nooteboom, *Allerseelen*, trans. Helga van Beuningen (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 2000). All page references, given in parenthesis, are to this edition.



image does not necessarily call up the past, the effect it produces is ‘not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed’.<sup>140</sup>

Phenomenologically speaking, the power of authentication might be said to exceed the power of representation. Having transformed the subject of the photograph into an object of observation, the photographic image, according to Barthes, adds to that transformation ‘that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead’.<sup>141</sup> There are, it will be argued in the following pages, numerous photographic images of Berlin that are subject to intense debates.

And yet, to return to the quotation above, there is an almost logical and yet irrevocable consistency suggested in this statement (weil/doch!): that his wife and child were once ‘there’ and are now no longer suggests something that is as natural (if not logical) as the fact that their existence has now been displaced onto photographic images. The photograph plays on presence and absence, that is, that the object has indeed existed and that it has indeed been there where I see it. This play on presence and absence underscores a particular double function of the photograph insofar as it ‘becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one hand “it is not there,” on the other “but it has indeed been”): a mad image, chafed by reality’.<sup>142</sup> This is not to suggest that the death of his wife and child left him unaffected or that this transition from person to a simulacrum does not signify for Daane a loss and psychological trauma that continues to mark his life and thwart his attempts to escape his own history by pursuing an

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<sup>140</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London, Vintage, 1993), p. 76.

<sup>141</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 9.

<sup>142</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 115.

itinerant life. The memory of his family continuously haemorrhages into his every thought and deed. It is this loss that conditions him to lead an unconnected life, in a manner similar to that of Fonty and Hoftaller in *Ein weites Feld*. It is possible that precisely this unconnectedness of the protagonists in both *Ein weites Feld* and *Allerseelen* generates the perceptiveness of the flâneur, though the unconnectedness in the Grass text is motivated by political and sociological causes and not, as is Daane's case, the trauma of losing his family. That said, it is nevertheless clear that his wife and child continue to exist in some given manner in and through the photographs and that their deaths do not signify for Daane an absolute and irrecoverable absence.

The photographs come to symbolise for Danne the new form his relationship with his wife and child has taken, namely, a relationship with the dead. It is a relationship in which the dead past continues to signify in the present. But the photographs also underscore Daane's perceived obligation to preserve the past, to prevent it, alongside the memories of his family, from being forgotten by the present. He claims as much when he acknowledges that 'diese Fotos und was mit ihnen versucht wurde, mit dem zu tun hatten, was er selbst anstrebte', namely, 'das Bewahren von Dingen, die für niemanden bewahrt zu werden brauchten, weil sie im Grunde immer vorhanden waren' (113). The images to which he is referring are Stieglitz's photographs of clouds taken in Berlin during the 1920s, which, though transient in nature, are nonetheless granted the gift of permanence by the photographic image, 'der diesem Vergänglichsten aller Phänomene eine paradoxe Beständigkeit verlieh' (113). From this statement it is possible to argue that for the protagonist the photographs represent a past, however fragile that demands acknowledgement, even dialogue. It is also a perception, it will be shown, that marks his understanding of the city, namely as a site in which things, not

necessarily visible, are present and stored nonetheless. It would be correct to claim that the photographic image acts as a storehouse for Daane's memories of his family, but memories, which force dialogue in the present. As one critic observed, photographs are indeed souvenirs, that is to say, 'preservers of memories'.<sup>143</sup> But it is precisely this fact that such images are in some form souvenirs of his own past that Daane finds difficult to grasp: 'Dem Rätsel, das die Fotos aufgeben, hat er sich verschlossen, es ist zu groß, er kommt ihn nicht bei' (11). The puzzle the photographs present to Daane is that although dead, his wife and child are somehow still 'there', though naturally not as urgently 'there' as is Berlin's political past, or Germany's cultural heritage, which is omnipresent in the fabric of the city even if it is not immediately visible. On one level, it is possible to argue that Arthur Daane's situation is cognate with that of Berlin insofar as both are painfully marked and to some degree haunted by the past.

Evocative of Stieglitz's cloud images, his wife and son continue to haunt Daane's life and dreams, to stalk him during his walks across the city, and confuse his perception of past and present; it is a haunting from which he is unable to escape and suggests a degree of historic saturation equivalent to that experienced by Delius's protagonist in *Die Flatterzunge*, discussed in the following chapter. But this continued presence of his family represents for the protagonist a puzzle insofar as it appears to confuse the distinction between the past and the present by making the past an integral part of the present: 'Das war das Gefährliche am Umgang mit den Toten. Manchmal gaben sie einem einen Augenblick zurück, und für einen Moment war es, als könne man sie berühren, doch der Augenblick, der dem hätte folgen müssen, war verronnen, verschwunden' (41). The past refuses simply to go away but is

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<sup>143</sup> Anselm Haverkamp, 'The Memory of Pictures: Roland Barthes and Augustine on Photography' in: *Comparative Literature*, 45:3 (1993), pp. 258-279, p. 258.

equally difficult to grasp, which again insists on a dialectic of presence and absence suggested in Hettche and Grass's protagonists critical purchase on Berlin. However, in contrast to Hettche's unnamed woman and Grass's protagonist Fonty, Daane closes himself off from his memories and thereby his own history because he is unable to bear the reality of this cat and mouse existence of being 'there' and yet absent: 'Er hat das Haus verkauft, die Kleider und das Spielzeug weggegeben, als sei alles verseucht. Seit dieser Zeit ist er ein Reisender ohne Gepäck' (11). Daane's response is perhaps understandable given the gravity of the trauma, but the 'Reisender ohne Gepäck' also supports a reading in which the selling off of his past belongings suggests a rejection of history, his own, insofar as Daane closes himself off from the photographs and the memories they seem to store and voice.<sup>144</sup>

This flight from the memories of the past is illustrated through his walks in Berlin. Perambulating from East to West, whether crossing the former control barrier at Check Point Charlie, or viewing the building works at the Potsdamer Platz, Daane seeks to capture the city, that is, its forgotten histories, with his camera: '[e]r las die Stadt wie ein Buch, eine Geschichte über unsichtbare, in der Historie verschwundene Gebäude' (23). Unable to establish dialogue with his own memories, Daane is nonetheless driven by the anonymous dead buried in the layers of Berlin's history, and in the same manner as Fonty insists on a semantic reading of the city (er las die Stadt wie ein Buch) but in contrast, it is a reading of absence (verschwundene Gebäude) rather than visible landmarks such as the victory column. *Allerseelen* might be understood as an attempt, though ultimately unsuccessful, at dialogue with a collective dead, but a collective to which his wife and son are integral. This shift from

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<sup>144</sup> At one point in the text Daane asks what would have become of his life had his wife and child not died in the plane crash: 'Jedenfalls hätte er die Freiheit, die ihn von den anderen isolierte, nie gehabt. [...] Doch diese Freiheit bedeutete auch Kahlheit, Armut' (16).

Daane's own memories to those of the city underpins a movement from an individual to a collective reconstruction of the city's past, akin to the nameless woman's suggested role as Germania in *Nox*, thus rendering the perambulations not a private but a public act of mnemonic reconstruction established in and through confrontation with the city fabric. This act of reading the city as a book presupposes that there is a text/book there that can be read and, if hidden, uncovered and interpreted.

It has been argued that the physical reality of the city is an epistemological field constructed as much linguistically as visually, demonstrated in geographic demarcations such as East and West. The histories of Berlin, the partition of the German state and reunification in 1990, ensure that the city text is constantly being written and rewritten. The Nootboom text also invokes streets and squares as agents of historic discourse and Daane himself is marked by a 'topographisches Gedächtnis' (159). In this regard, it is fair to state that Berlin 'has become something like a prism through which we can focus issues of contemporary urbanism and architecture, national identity and statehood, historical memory and forgetting'.<sup>145</sup> This chapter analyses the readability of Berlin's histories and memories as represented in the urban topography textualised in Nootboom's *Allerseelen* and registered through the critical purchase of a Dutch cameraman whose intention is to hold, as it were, those pasts within an image in order to safeguard them against erasure. But Daane's plan does throw open the question as to whether or not it is possible to uncover the hidden histories from Berlin's topography using such techniques as flânerie, photography and filmic images, and if it indeed is possible, to what end.

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<sup>145</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 'The voids of Berlin', in *Critical Inquiry* 24:1 (1997), pp. 57-81, here p. 57.

The camera becomes the prism through which the Berlin of *Allerseelen* is made 'visible' to the reader. Although it has been argued that Nootboom's novel is in fact 'kein Berlin-Roman der Nachwendzeit, dazu ist Berlin zu wenig present,' the importance of Berlin's topography to Daane's critical engagement with forgotten and present histories should not be underestimated.<sup>146</sup> That is to say, *Allerseelen* is very much a Berlin novel and Berlin's urban fabric, its histories and numerous cultural facets are very much present in the text. If anything, the characters in the text are themselves only vehicles instrumentalised for the discussions on memory, on German culture and the past: '[d]ie gesamte Menschheit, gesehen durch das Prisma Berlins' (151). Berlin is very much present in the discussions on subjects ranging from parks, street names, paintings, philosophy and even food: 'Luther, Hildegard von Bingen, Jakob Böhme, Novalis und Heidegger haben alle diesen Käse gegessen [...] Was du riechst, dieser penetrante Gestank, das ist die deutsche Variante der Ewigkeit' (118). It is through this prism that Berlin is read and the text is that of a German if not European history. Berlin is therefore very much present in the text and its histories and those associated with it continue to linger like an insistent smell through the ages.

Looked at through this historical prism, it is not without reason that Daane's counterpart Elik is a history student: 'Steine aufheben und nachsehen, was darunter ist. Dinge entschlüsseln. Wenn ich mich mit dem hier beschäftigen würde, müßte ich das ganze Land hochheben, um nachzusehen, was darunter ist. Hier wimmelt es noch. Das ist zu groß für mich' (238). Both Elik and Daane understand history as an archaeological dig (Steine aufheben und nachsehen, was darunter ist) that demands a conscious confrontation. Elik herself is literally marked by a past, that of her childhood in North Africa where, as a ten year old, she was sexually

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<sup>146</sup> Angelika Overath, 'Dasein in absentia: Cees Nootbooms Roman "Allerseelen"' in *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 15.04.1999.

assaulted by one of her mother's drunken-lovers: 'eine dunkle Gestalt, die bei ihr aufs Bett fällt, keuchend, nach Alkohol stinkend [...] der Schmerz, der nicht vergeht, der in deinem Gesicht, deinem Körper weiterbrennt' (188). At one level, Elik's scar mirrors that of the city, and her memories are the ravaged histories of Berlin in the past one hundred years. It is the sight of the few remnants of the Wall that leads Elik to remark that the past is still very much present in the city (hier wimmelt es noch), a past which for her is a dead weight that compounds Daane's autism rather than dismantling it. Rather than face contemporary history, including her own, she flees into the security of the twelfth-century: 'Ein Teil ihrer Jugend war ihr, wie sie fand, bereits gestohlen worden, was noch davon übrig war, wollte sie so lange wie möglich auskosten. [...] und die Dissertation war ein perfektes Alibi' (210). Daane has taken a similar path, though the historic into which he has escaped is that of Berlin.

History in Berlin is still too present, too real to be negotiated and as such mirrors the psychological state of the two protagonists. *Allerseelen* is a novel about and determined by Berlin, insofar as it is specific sites, such as the Potsdamer Platz, the now-redundant death-strip, the Brandenburg Gate and the Neue Wache that serve as vehicles for the discussions on, and illustration of contemporary debates on questions of identity, memory and the past. Further, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's analysis of nineteenth-century Paris, to which I referred in the previous chapter, the figure of the flâneur is again employed as a common critical tool making possible an analysis and critique of the urban fabric, its histories and hidden codes. Arthur Daane, however, is a flâneur with a camera: 'der zwar durch Berlin läuft, aber Gespräche erinnert. Er geht ganz konkrete Strassen und Plätze ab, was ihn aber dort interessiert, ist [...] eine mystische Überwältigung der Gegenwart durch die

Vergangenheit'.<sup>147</sup> But *Allerseelen* is mystical only insofar as it undertakes to dig beneath the surface of the city's substrata in the belief that the modern urban archaeologist will find something original, also referring to origin, beneath the surface.

The histories that shadow *Allerseelen* are those histories of Berlin, which the text is at pains to portray as forgotten or deliberately covered over during the unification processes. The histories at issue embrace both fragments of individual and collective remembrances of Berlin before, during and after 1945 and 1989. An analysis of such fragmentary images asks the question to what degree the text reveals an indebtedness to Walter Benjamin's theory of history, that is, the dialectical relationship between an uncovered historical event and its representation in an image-form. A Benjaminian interpretation of *Allerseelen* is justified on the basis of the references to Benjamin and the Benjaminian influence behind the idea of historic reconstruction as developed in the Nooteboom text: 'Irgendwann einmal hatte Arthur mit Victor eine Sendung über Walter Benjamin machen wollen, die er nach einem Benjamin-Zitat über den Flâneur "Die Sohlen der Erinnerung" nennen wollen' (23). The act of walking in the city is here conceived as an act of remembering, which is supported through an intertextual dialogue with Benjamin's main thesis on urban walking. A further justification lies in the overwhelming similarities between the thematic exploration of memory, Berlin's histories and their recoverability in the Nooteboom text and the theory of historical materialism as put forward by Benjamin in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* and his unfinished thesis on nineteenth-century Paris, *Das Passagen-Werk*. But before an analysis of Benjamin's theory of history and its significance to *Allerseelen* can be pursued, it is first

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<sup>147</sup> Overath, 'Dasein in absentia', op. cit.



necessary to address the significance of Berlin's urban fabric to the text and in what way this urban fabric is both read and interpreted.

### **III.1. Potsdamer Platz**

In the Nooteboom text Berlin's topography is conceived as an epistemologically constructed field. As was outlined above, the walks are deliberative in their attempt to gauge the city in a unique way. The walk itself acknowledges the city as a historically saturated site in which not only the histories of Berlin are present, but also those of Germany and indeed the wider cultural influences of Europe. Stopping at a pedestrian crossing, for example, leads to ruminations on German identity and the German character and differences between Germany and its neighbouring countries. It is the city fabric that appears to offer itself as a springboard for such discussions as mentioned above: a walk in the city is at once a peripatetic lecture:

An der Kantstraße stand die Ampel auf Rot. Er schaute nach links und nach rechts, sah, daß keine Autos kamen, wollte die Straße überqueren und blieb doch stehen, spürte, wie sein Körper diese beiden widersprüchlichen Befehle verarbeitete, eine Art merkwürdiger Wellenschlag, der ihn auf dem falschen Bein hatte landen lassen, ein Fuß auf dem Bürgersteig, der andere auf der Straße. Durch den Schnee hindurch sah er zu der schweigenden Gruppe der Wartenden auf der anderen Seite. Wenn man je den Unterschied zwischen Deutschen und Niederländern feststellen wollte, so war das in solchen Momenten möglich. In Amsterdam war man verrückt, wenn man als Fußgänger bei Rot nicht losging, hier war man verrückt, wenn man es tat. (17)

This distinction between the Dutch and the Germans is too general to be taken as fact. But a reading of the city as an epistemological and linguistic field might shed new light on what appears to be nothing more than a cliché. Interpreted within a linguistic framework, it is significant that Daane stops at the pedestrian traffic light on Kantstraße, insofar as Daane's humorous paralysis, one foot on the pavement and the other already on the road, but unable

to move either way, might be read as a play on Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. In *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant stated 'Handle so, daß die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne', the Kantian categorical imperative.<sup>148</sup> To cross the pedestrian crossing on a red light would have presented what might be defined as a negative maxim, insofar as such an act would contravene the laws of society created for the common good of society.<sup>149</sup> Whether Daane's observation is true or not is irrelevant, but what is relevant is the act of 'reading' Germany and German identity and German characteristics in and through Berlin's topography. The narrative text is replete with ruminations on German cultural and intellectual history often triggered through a confrontation with the city. The names of Kant, Hegel, Casper David Friedrich, Heidegger and Benjamin are referred to on many occasions underlining, and insisting, I believe, on that kind of advocacy that we also know from Günter Grass's work of a cultural-historical understanding of the city in the post-*Wende* period. Such intellectual registers make possible a shift from discussions on German beer in a restaurant in Berlin to wider discussions on German belonging and identity. The references to Heidegger are a case in point insofar as identity is linked with a sense of belonging: 'vielleicht war es auch nur eine Anhänglichkeit an heimatliche Erinnerungen, an den Himmel von Meßkirch, das hielt ihn mehr, als er sich eingestand' remembers Daane, 'mehrere Jahre später, in seinem Berliner Zimmer' (203). In a recently unified city as yet uncertain of its identity, such discussions on identity as something rooted in an at times invisible cultural context are not without reason.

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<sup>148</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (London, Hutchinson, 1948), p. 402. Kant also makes the point in *Groundwork* that the incomparable dignity of human beings derives from the fact that they are 'free with regard to all laws of nature, obeying only those laws which they make themselves', p. 435. The German quotation is taken from Volker Spierling, *Kleine geschichte der Philosophie* (München, Piper Verlag, 1995), p. 217.

<sup>149</sup> In contrast to such given maxims, the 'Niederländer wollten immer selbst entscheiden, ob eine Regel auch für sie galt oder nicht, eine Mischung aus Protestantismus und Anarchie, die so etwas wie ein eigensinniges Chaos ergab'(18).

Berlin (his Berliner Zimmer), the symbolic force of the unified Germany, is also now the symbolic site in which such questions are being asked and have a particular charge.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, sites and street names function as notations of identity within society. Community is communicated through the public space within a framework of loaded urban signs (Kantstraße) that work toward the creation of a social, political and cultural framework wherein the individual can find her (cultural, political and social) self. This representative function of both space and meaning is made possible through a selective process of ordering and structuring: 'Man dürfte nicht verallgemeinern, und trotzdem besaßen Völker bestimmte Charaktereigenschaften. Woher kamen die? "Aus der Geschichte", hatte Erna gesagt' (18). This history, Berlin's identity and its history, is contained for the text in Berlin's topography. Or, to put it more simply, the given purpose of street names is to reflect a sense of history and thereby an (abstract) form of "community": 'Mommsen, Kant, Goethe, hier befand man sich stets in guter Gesellschaft' (21). These names are part of a wider collective history that links together the two German states possibly more effectively than a political reunification. But the past conveyed through such urban registers is at the same time a dead weight, a burden that is possibly too much: 'wieviel Vergangenheit konnte man eigentlich in sich selbst verkraften?' (156). The question underlines a paradox in Daane's flight *into* the collective history: this past which he reads everywhere in the city far from challenging Daane's autism, compounds it: 'die ganze Welt war ein Verweis, und alles verwies auf etwas zurück' (156). And yet, at the same time, the text and its protagonist, repeatedly underline the importance of confronting the historic situated in the urban fabric. References to street names draw the reader's attention to the fact that the changing of street names was not just 'a tinkering with the Communist city-text. It

was a strategy of power and humiliation, a final burst of Cold War ideology, pursued via a politics of signs'.<sup>150</sup>

Daane's drive is to trace those characteristics encoded in the city before they are subsumed. It is hardly surprising that *Allerseelen* instrumentalises Berlin as a platform from which to address the question of German identity given the fact that Berlin was widely seen as the symbolic force and testing ground of the reunification: 'Jetzt müssen sie mit zwei Vergangenheiten zugleich auf die Couch. Die hier haben immer gelernt, daß diese andere Vergangenheit nicht die ihre war' (138). The reunification re-opened the history debates and forced a renegotiation with histories previously assumed to have been sufficiently dealt with. But post-1989 it is no longer possible to speak of a German past, but rather of Germany's pasts.<sup>151</sup> Building and street names, integral parts of the city text, have always played an important role in determining and moulding political and national identities, and the rebuilding of Berlin as the capital of Germany gives important clues to the state of the German nation in the *Nachwende* period and about the ways Germany projects its future. It has also been argued that although abundant with historical reference and architectural pastiche, 'post-Wall Berlin seems to owe its sweeping reconstruction' to a type of architectural modernism, which redefined the architect as a social engineer 'obsessed with the idea of improving society by means of reorganizing public space'.<sup>152</sup> But this reorganization of public space, discussed in the previous chapters, is also a reorganization underlying the changed dominant discourses determining the city. There is always the threat that something may be 'lost' or

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<sup>150</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 'The voids of Berlin', p. 60.

<sup>151</sup> There is a marked difference in the East German approach to anti-Semitism to that of the FRG. As Jeffrey Herf has noted, 'East German leaders kept the Jewish question on the margin of narratives of the Nazi era, refused to pay restitution to Jewish survivors or to Israel, purged those Communist leaders who sought to give it greater prominence, and even gave tangible support to Israel's armed adversaries'. Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> Lutz Koepnick, 'Forget Berlin', in *The German Quarterly: Sites of Memory*, 74:4 (2001), p. 351.

willingly forgotten. However, sites such as the renovated Reichstag and its postmodern glass dome, the projects of critical reconstruction in Berlin-Mitte, and the new Potsdamer Platz with its historical remnants underline the fact that Berlin's urban fabric is saturated with concrete historical references, traces of original intentions and determinate meanings. Berlin, according to Daane, is a city damned 'gleichzeitig mit seiner Vergangenheit zu leben, die Zeit selbst hatte sich in all diesen Gebäuden hoffnungslos verstrickt' (165). The city is damned because it is so desperately trying to forget its past.

If *Allerseelen* is indeed an attempt at dialogue with the dead, with those forgotten histories of Berlin, it is a dialogue in part established through the uncovering, and the bringing to light of such traces of original intentions and determinate meanings that make up Berlin's topography, though seemingly lost in the passage of time. For the Nooteboom text, the Potsdamer Platz is precisely such a site of coexistent historical remnants, fragments and traces of a divided past 'there' waiting to be uncovered and 'read'.

Doch jetzt war er hier allein, auf der Jagd, bloß wonach? Nach etwas, das er damals, irgendwann gesehen hatte und nie wieder sehen würde. Oder vielleicht doch nach dem, was davor hier gewesen war, was er nur von Fotos kannte? Er wußte, was er sehen würde, wenn der Schnee hier nicht läge, eine nach allen Seiten hin aufgewühlte Erde, in der Arbeiter mit gelben Helmen in der Tiefe herumwühlten, als suchten sie die Vergangenheit persönlich. (76)

The image of the workers in hard hats digging out the heart of the city is frantic, even unsettling. But a building site is less concerned with uncovering than covering over, rebuilding and thereby re-signifying the urban fabric. According to Erna, the uncovering of the earth at the Potsdamer Platz is almost '[a]ls ob sie ein Massengrab freilegen' (76). It is not clear whether Erna's reference to the mass grave was intentional, but it nonetheless makes the statement that the confrontation with Berlin's surfaces must inevitably lead to a confrontation

with National Socialism, though in this case the desire would be to cover rather than reveal such historic references. To find this past, he has to act like a hunter or, to adopt a metaphor of Walter Benjamin's, to dig for the past beneath the layers of the city: 'Wer sich der eignen verschütteten Vergangenheit zu nähern trachtet, muß sich verhalten wie ein Mann, der gräbt'.<sup>153</sup> This returns us back to the archaeological metaphor discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Importantly, the archaeologist (as a hunter of fragments) should not shy away from laying bare the layers of earth, as at the Potsdamer Platz: 'immer wieder auf einen und denselben Sachverhalt zurückzukommen – ihn auszustreuen wie man Erde austreut, ihn umzuwühlen, wie man Erdreich umwühlt'.<sup>154</sup> It is noteworthy that Benjamin and Nooteboom employ the same verb to describe the act of uncovering the past, 'umwühlen', to plough or churn. Its rustic associations suggest a field rich in 'ploughable' fragments. To lay the foundations for a new complex of buildings on the Potsdamer Platz, as suggested in the citation above, is also to plough, to churn up the layers hidden beneath the surface.

This act of digging to uncover and to remember the past (Ausgraben und Erinnern) reveals an indebtedness to Sigmund Freud's equation of the city with the psyche and thereby shifts the verb to dig into the realms of the subconscious, as is also suggested in the paragraph above. It is possible to compare the city with the subconscious, insofar as both the city and the subconscious demonstrate an ability to retain existing fragments of the past in the present. The reader is asked to imagine that Rome were not a human city, but rather 'ein psychisches Wesen von ähnlich länger und reichhaltiger Vergangenheit, in dem also nichts, was einmal zustande gekommen war, untergegangen ist, in dem neben der letzten Entwicklungsphase

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<sup>153</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Ausgraben und Erinnern' in *Kleine Prosa - Baudelaire Übertragungen: Gesammelte Schriften* IV:I, (hrsg) Tillman Rexroth (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 400.

<sup>154</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Ausgraben und Erinnern', p. 400.

auch alle früheren noch fortbestehen'.<sup>155</sup> The application of Freud's theory of the layered subconscious to the city problematises the act of mnemonic reconstruction insofar as it brings together both collective memories, such as those of the city populace with individual memories in a psychoanalytic framework. But what is important for this interpretation is the insistence on dialogue with that past, recalling W.H. Auden's lines that it was Freud who 'taught us how to remember'.<sup>156</sup> To uncover the past is similar to psychoanalytic analysis. Nooteboom and Benjamin embrace this Freudian comparison but insist on a collective rather than individual psyche.<sup>157</sup>

To experience the Berlin of *Allerseelen* is to hear '[e]in immerwährendes Gespräch an ein und derselben Stelle' (107), in which the voices of the past continue to resonate in the present. But the representation also vacillates between light and darkness, or rather, a state of permanent semi-darkness, 'hatte er nun wirklich versucht, in diesem Halbdunkel zwischen Bauzäunen und Baggern, etwas zu erbeuten' (84). This semi-darkness, possibly an allusion to the dream-state before an awakening, but also suggesting an inability to see the city in its plurality, finds its echo in the text in the form of snow. In the case of the Potsdamer Platz, the past in the dugout earth is covered over and hidden beneath layers of snow, a blanket of forgetting. Snow veils (*verschleiern*, 29) the city, buries it in its own grave, 'dein Grab, die ganze Stadt ist unter Schnee begraben' (111), again recalling Erna's analogy of 'ein

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<sup>155</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Frankfurt a/M, Fischer, 1994), p. 37.

<sup>156</sup> W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud' in *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Mandelson (London, Faber and Faber, 1994). Auden writes, 'He wasn't clever at all: he merely told/ the unhappy Present to recite the Past/ like a poetry lesson till sooner/ or later it faltered at the line where/ long ago the accusations had begun', p. 274.

<sup>157</sup> Freud argues that the comparison is unsustainable if only because unlike in the soul, the city is subject of a continuous destruction and reconstruction and no two buildings can occupy the same site. 'Die friedlichste Entwicklung einer Stadt schließt Demolierungen und Ersetzungen von Bauwerken ein, und darum ist die Stadt von vornherein für einen solchen Vergleich mit einem seelischen Organismus ungeeignet.' In contrast to the city, 'die Erhaltung des Vergangenen im Seelenleben eher Regel als befremdliche Ausnahmestadt', Freud, *Das Unbehagen*, p. 38.

Massengrab' (76), and covers over the histories of the two halves of the city in a deceptive apotheosis: 'Berlin im Schnee der Unschuld, sämtliche Unterschiede verwischt, die perfekte Ehe zwischen Ost und West, die Apotheose der Versöhnung' (114). But according to the protagonists in the text, unification between East and West Berlin is anything but a perfect marriage, again underlining the covering aspect of snow in its function of veiling over the realities of the city.<sup>158</sup> If snow is evocative of Freud's unconscious, then the act of digging in the city is tantamount to an awakening, an uncovering of the past through the act of remembering: 'Wie war es möglich, daß seine Erinnerungen jetzt den Schnee wegfegte, den Springbrunnen springen, die Bäume blühen ließ?' (50). There is, however, a marked difference here between Freudian remembering and that posited in the Nootboom text. For Freud, remembering can have a dynamic, even liberating or therapeutic force, which is at best tentatively in evidence in the Nootboom text. Too much remains unresolved for Daane, particularly in his reflections on the past and the forgotten histories of the past. Daane's obsessive dealing with memory and history suggests that the becoming-conscious is anything but liberating.

The centrality of the Potsdamer Platz to the textual discussion of historical consciousness lies in its symbolic force to *Nachwende* Berlin. The site where Hitler's bunker once stood, 'in der Nähe auch die Folterkammern der Gestapo' (76), is a site of historic, if not to say mythic, significance to Berlin given its stained history:

Früher hatte es am westlichen Rand ein Podest gegeben, von dem man über den Platz in den Osten schauen konnte, eine weite leere Fläche [...] mit metallenen Hindernissen vollgestellt worden war, um zu verhindern, daß Menschen mit einem Auto über die Grenze flüchteten. (82)

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<sup>158</sup> For discussions of the processes of unification and the difficulties of social integration in *Allerseelen* see pp. 137, 138, 161-162.



This square, once the busiest crossroad in Germany, the heart of Nazi terror and later a no-man's-land during the forty-year division of the two Germanies, was by virtue of its chequered history, a microcosmic site representative of German twentieth century history whereas its barren emptiness came to symbolise for many the consequences of that history. If the Potsdamer Platz serves as a reminder of the unfolding of German and European history of the past eighty years, it also serves as a projection of the new Germany of the *Nachwende* period.<sup>159</sup> As with the glass dome of the newly refurbished Reichstag, the architectural transformation of the Potsdamer Platz should be understood, as it re-signifies the site, as proclaiming a different ideological discourse.<sup>160</sup> The transformation of the Potsdamer Platz to a new civic centre, shopping arcade, apartment block and (mini)-skyscrapers was a visual spectacle in which computer generated images of the architectural plans appeared to celebrate the architectural and technical achievements of the new Germany. Potsdamer Platz came to symbolise the direction of post-Wall Berlin/Germany: new, progressive and part of a new social development that is to take the city and country into the twenty-first century. Though as one critic noted, in unified Berlin '[j]eder Bauplatz wurde als "Baustein" für den Frieden dargestellt, jeder "Handschlag für den Aufbau Berlins" sollte der "Einheit Deutschlands" dienen.<sup>161</sup> And this applies more to the former East than anywhere else.

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<sup>159</sup> This argument explains the centrality of the Potsdamer Platz to many post-1989 writers: Peter Schneider's *Wende*-novel, *Eduards Heimkehr* (1999) and *Paarungen* (1994); see also Lukas Hammerstein *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* (2003), Annett Gröschner *Rest Esplanade* (1998), Michael Kleeberg *Ein Garten im Norden* (2001).

<sup>160</sup> 'Lieu représentatif de la reconstruction du centre ville, la *Potsdamer Platz* est liée à l'idée politique de la réunification, morceau de ville dans la ville de Berlin reconstruit pour la réunification'. Daniëlle Risterucci-Roudnicky, 'Le Potsdamer Platz, anti-mémoire de Berlin' in, *La Mémoire des Villes*, eds. Yves Clavaron and Bernard Dieterle (Saint-Étienne, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2003), p. 294.

<sup>161</sup> Franz Pröfener, 'Flirting with disaster. Zur Symbolgegenwart der "Baustelle"' in: Franz Pröfener (hg.), *Zeitzeichen Baustelle: Realität, Inszenierung und Metaphorik eines abseitigen Ortes* (Frankfurt a/M, Campus Verlag, 1998), p. 17.

In Nooteboom's *Allerseelen*, the Potsdamer Platz is more than a virtual reality of urban projections for a new and modern Berlin. The square is also one of those sites in which many histories and realities might be said to be housed. Such a site promotes a pluralistic 'Wahrnehmung verschiedene räumlicher Konstellationen, eine beständige Fluktuation, eine Zweideutigkeit des Raums'.<sup>162</sup> The text appears to support the notion of realities co-existing on one and the same site, insofar as Potsdamer Platz is a site of multiple histories. The new buildings rising up on top of the dust and ashes of National Socialist history do not, for Daane, displace those histories, but merely cover them beneath new foundations. The square is represented in the novel as a site of plurality and difference from which thought not only arises but also creates for the critical viewer the possibility to think differently, that is, to embrace otherness as a coexistent reality.<sup>163</sup> This pluralistic site is capable of juxtaposing in a single 'real' site any number of spaces, sites that are in themselves incompatible, for example the histories and realities of the FRG, of the GDR and of *Nachwende* Berlin. The 'otherness' of these spaces is not a result of an ability to transcend ordinary space, but rather the way in which they interact with everyday space, challenging, reversing and contesting it in a dialectic of difference. This otherness of the Potsdamer Platz, its coexistent histories, challenges and contests the building site as a suggested new beginning out of the ashes of history. However new and unprecedented the architectural forms furnishing the Potsdamer Platz are, it is still a site of plurality and difference, which will not simply go away. The square is for Daane a place:

an denen man in verschiedenen Konstellationen aufgetreten war, Gespräche, Streitereien, Lieben, und an all diesen leeren Stellen irrte ein Geist von dir

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<sup>162</sup> Heinz Brüggemann, 'Passagen', in *Benjamins Begriffe*, ed. Michael Opitz and Erdmut Wizisla, vol. II (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 584.

<sup>163</sup> For a discussion on Foucault's notion of heterotopia see the introduction of Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London, Routledge, 2002). See also the analysis of the heterotopia in Tanja Dücker's Berlin novel *Spielzone* discussed in chapter 5.

herum, ein unsichtbarer [...] eine frühere Anwesenheit, die jetzt zu einer Abwesenheit geworden war und sich an dieser Stelle mit der Abwesenheit wieder anderer vermischte, ein Reich von Verschwundenen und Toten. (50)

For Daane, the realities of the past continue to exist, if in a somewhat abstract form, and it remains the task of the hunter to uncover them. Every filled site or space 'schien ein Stück Erinnerung an das alte, liebgewonnene, seine zweifelhafte Vergangenheit nicht überspielende, ruinöse Berlin der Zeit vor der Wende zu verschwinden'.<sup>164</sup> Though paradoxically, the building site is also the locus of archaeological uncovering, which is intrinsic to its digging up and opening. Therefore, it is not the case, as has been argued, that a building site necessarily destroys the past for a distant future, but in fact, if for a brief period, lays bare those pasts.<sup>165</sup>

But in keeping with a possible suggested 'metaphysical presence' of the past in the present, the text addresses the possibility of the past influencing the present in other ways. Hoping to film the twilight (with its associations of hidden histories and the subconscious) at the Potsdamer Platz, Daane illegally enters the building site and is stopped by a police officer. The brief dialogue between the police officer and Daane is interrupted by a radio call for assistance: the officer

rannte zum Auto und setzte zurück. Gleichzeitig sprang das blaue Blinklicht an. [...] Sie gab so schnell Gas, daß das Auto sofort ins trudeln geriet. Er sah, daß sie den Mund weit geöffnet hatte und so, mit aller Macht am Lenkrad kurbelnd, frontal gegen das mit einemmal riesengroße Ungetüm von Schneeräumegerät prallte. [...] Ihr Gesicht war voller blut, das langsam in den Schnee tropfte. (78-79)

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<sup>164</sup> Pröfener, 'Flirting with disaster', p. 11.

<sup>165</sup> Bernard Dieterle has argued that the true building site signifies solely towards the future and is not to be compared with an archaeological site. 'Le véritable chantier – celui qui érige des bâtiments, pas celui des fouilles archéologiques, qui degage du passé – est tourné vers le future. Il creuse et détruit au nom d'un avenir proche'. Dieterle, 'Ruines et chantiers de la mémoire', in *La Mémoire des Villes*, p. 8. The act of opening and laying bare the foundations justifies a figurative link between such sites and archaeological ones.

The scene attempts to suggest a continuing violence historically associated with the Potsdamer Platz, and it is a violence that is somehow still being signified in the site, albeit smothered in the subconscious of fragments hidden under the homogenizing snow. The scene has the effect of a fragmented silent film: Daane sees the open mouth of the police officer, the flashing light, the spinning of the car and the blood covered face. But there is no noise; the description of a crashing sound or scream is noticeably absent. This filmic scene, very much similar to photographic images in the text, is a possible allusion in its voicelessness to the dead, the forgotten histories of which only fragments survive, as in the narrative structure of Daane's account of the crash. The visualisation of the crash mediated through snapshot frames gives the narrative an imagistic element in which the photographs tell the story. The fragments are visual, in the same manner as the shards of the past are only partially visible in Berlin's topography, but these fragments have no voice, no possibility to narrate their history. Although photographs and filmic images function in the text as storehouses of memories, their fragmentariness underlines the need for a meaning-giving context or, a narrative reconstruction. The account of the crash underlines a critique of the photographic image, namely that its voicelessness undermines both the power of authentication and the power of representation. When a photograph is defined as a motionless image, 'this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, they do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies'.<sup>166</sup> Photographs are unable to communicate, at a given moment in the future, the actual violence of the moment as it was experienced before the photograph was taken. It appears to be the case that the photographic image simply transforms the moment into a souvenir. If this temporal freezing is used as a means of verifying experience, 'das Fotografieren [bedeutet] aber auch eine Form der

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<sup>166</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 57.

Verweigerung von Erfahrung – indem diese auf die Suche nach fotogenen Gegenständen beschränkt wird, indem man Erfahrung in ein Abbild, ein Souvenir, verwandelt'.<sup>167</sup> Hoftaller voices a similar critique of the photograph as a limitation of perspective in his attack on the photo-tourism in *Ein weites Feld*.

### III.2. The Past as Guilt

We have noted how central the Potsdamer Platz is to Nooteboom's text. It is worth recalling at this juncture that the Potsdamer Platz was – and still is – the key exemplification of the architectural problems and issues inherent in the rebuilding of Berlin.<sup>168</sup> Part of the discussion surrounding the Potsdamer Platz was (as it were) triumphalist in that it asserted the importance of giving full assent to the new beginning. One thinks, for example, of the monumental skyscraper recently built on the Potsdamer Platz, which it has been claimed possesses a distinctly German architectural style insofar as it is constantly looking backward rather than forward. It is a particular architectural style that embodies the characteristics of 'vergessen und nicht beiseitigen.' Its only function is to evoke the past 'mit seinem Mätzen aus Blendmauerwerk [die] keinen anderen Zweck verfolgt, als in der Stadt von Marlene Dietrich die glücklichen Zeiten des Cabarets und der Travestieshows in Erinnerung zu rufen'.<sup>169</sup> Although this critique cannot be applied to all of the new buildings on the Potsdamer Platz, it is nonetheless true of many if not most of those now complete. The former centre of Berlin is to be rebuilt with the past in mind, albeit a parenthetical past. And

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<sup>167</sup> Susan Sontag, 'In Platos Höhle', *Über Fotografie*, trans. Mark W. Rien and Gertrud Baruch (Frankfurt a/M, Fischer Taschenbuch, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>168</sup> See Risterucci-Roudnicky, 'Le Potsdamer Platz, anti-mémoire de Berlin?': 'Après la *Wende*, reconstruire la place, c'était poser de front le problème de l'histoire: fallait-il désinscrire tout passé de la reconstruction ou, au contraire, l'intégrer? Le présent pouvait-il et devait-il faire le lien entre le passé (mais quel passé?) et l'avenir (quel avenir?)?', p. 288.

<sup>169</sup> Frédéric Edelmann, 'Neue deutsche Architektur – Eine reflexive Moderne' in: *Die Zeit* 18.7.2002.

yet a sense of history is essential if a collective sense of belonging to a given social group is to be established. It is an awareness of the past that gives society the necessary consciousness of having developed through time as an identifiable collective. Remembering the past is part of the processes that constitute social identification.

On the other hand, there can also be the danger that the past can overwhelm the present, that history might be said to silt up in a community and thereby prevent it from moving forward. This is precisely Daane's thought when, in a moment of quiet desperation, he declared 'Ich will nicht denken' (146) because to think means to remember the incommensurability of those histories. This is also the view held by the protagonist of Friedrich Christian Delius's text, *Die Flatterzunge*. In this novel Berlin is seen as a site of unavoidable confrontation with the historic: 'Unter dem Gras diese Vulkane der Vergangenheit. Je tiefer du ins Grüne vordringst, desto eher wird dir plötzlich das Blickfeld frei auf die Brocken der Geschichte'.<sup>170</sup> In this context, it is appropriate to recall Nietzsche's insistence that 'zu allem Handeln gehört Vergessen: wie zum Leben alles Organischen nicht nur Licht, sondern auch Dunkel gehört'.<sup>171</sup> The ability to forget is as necessary as the ability to remember, as Daane himself is aware: 'wieviel Vergangenheit konnte man eigentlich in sich selbst verkraften?' (156), inviting speculation that there might be a point at which too much history weakens or destabilizes, that history becomes something that can no longer be burdened. The city itself can only turn away from the realities that have marked its histories, the acts performed in the buildings and on the streets:

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<sup>170</sup> Friedrich Christian Delius, *Die Flatterzunge* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1999), p. 122.

<sup>171</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben', *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Frankfurt a/M, Insel, 1981), p. 99.

Die Berliner selbst hatten, wahrscheinlich aus Selbsterhaltungsgründen, dafür keine Zeit. Sie waren damit beschäftigt, die Narben abzutragen. Doch was für ein unerträgliches Gedächtnis müßte man schließlich auch haben, um das tun zu können? Es würde an seiner eigenen Schwerkraft zugrunde gehen, zusammenbrechen, alles würde in ihm verschwinden, die Lebenden würden zu den Toten gesogen. (37)

The suggestion is that it is not possible to negotiate the scars left behind without asking what caused them and why. But it is also clear from the quotation above that history can become too much to bear, as well as being a danger that it may, as is Daane's case, drag the living into the realms of the dead, 'ein Reich von Verschwundenen und Toten' (50). If to remember is indeed so precarious, it begs the question, is there anything to be gained by remembering the past other than the acknowledgement that it is the rough narratives of tradition that provide the skeletal structure of society? Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the construction of *Nachwende* Berlin and in particular the Potsdamer Platz; although the new centre is to take Berlin into the twenty-first century, it nonetheless acknowledges an indebtedness to historical precedents and, in so doing, in part determines the mapping out and final execution of those future projections.

By virtue of the ontological nature of the past there is an obligation on those in the present to the past; it is an obligation voiced through guilt. Guilt is the burden the past places on the present, suggested in the title of the Nooteboom text, *Allerseelen*, All Souls, the commemoration of 'all the dead who have existed from the beginning of the world to the end of time'.<sup>172</sup> In Daane's own words: 'es ging vielmehr darum, daß sich die Vergangenheit als Vergangenheit noch irgendwo befand und damit weiterexistierte, bis die Beschreibung der

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<sup>172</sup> The quotation is taken from the sermons Odilo, an eleventh century abbot of Cluny who inaugurated the tradition of commemoration of the dead and established the 2<sup>nd</sup> November as the official date for this practice. David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997).

Welt, gemeinsam mit der Welt, aufgehört hatte' (181). The crime of the present against the past is, according to Daane, 'das spurlose Verschwinden von Erinnerung' (80). According to one critic, 'die Schuld verpflichtet. Der Anspruch, den die Gewesenheit der verstrichenen Vergangenheit stellt, richtet sich an die Zukunft eines Diskurses'.<sup>173</sup> The obligation of the past on the present in the form of guilt means that 'die Vergangenheit, die nicht mehr ist, aber gewesen ist, gerade aus dem Grunde seiner Abwesenheit das Sagen der Erzählung fordert'.<sup>174</sup> It is precisely this dialogue with the past that Daane hopes to establish through the uncovering of Berlin's histories; it should be remembered that for Daane, the thought that he might forget his wife and son was intolerable: 'am schlimmsten war das Vergessen' (80). To accept the burden of guilt is to acknowledge that the past is a constitutive element of the present, or in the words of the text, regardless of how 'formlos oder unbekannt oder vergessen die Vergangenheit auch ist, sie ist es doch, die die Gegenwart konstituiert, ob wir sie nun kennen oder nicht' (378). There can be no peace from the past as long as peace is understood as a silencing of the past: 'Arno, was hat dein dämlicher Hegel gleich wieder gesagt... die Tage des Friedens sind die unbeschriebenen Seiten im Buch der Geschichte, oder so was Ähnliches ...nun, jetzt sind wir diesen weißen Seiten, und das genau ist es ja, wir sind nicht da' (122).

Guilt is not only a constitutive element of society's concept of temporality, but is equally ontologically constitutive. Danne's 'hunting' for the past in its fragmentary form, his desire to uncover Berlin's forgotten histories is inextricably linked to his own past, the loss of his wife and child, and his understanding of the individual as part of society. Guilt is inseparable

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<sup>173</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit: Erinnern - Vergessen - Verzeihen*. Essener Kulturwissenschaftliche Vorträge, trans. Andris Breitling (Göttingen, Wallstein, 1998), p. 61.

<sup>174</sup> Ricœur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit*, p. 60.



from the memory of the other: '[d]as eigentliche Ganzseinkönnen des Daseins und die Zeitlichkeit als der ontologische Sinn der Sorge' which carries both 'Tod und Schuld gleichursprünglich in sich'.<sup>175</sup> In terms of existence, actual or essential (eigentlich) being is temporally constituted by future time, namely death, as is the past through guilt, though Heidegger rightly separates guilt from the *status corruptionis* in a theological meaning-giving framework. 'Nur sofern Dasein überhaupt möglich ist als ich bingewesen, kann es zukünftig auf sich selbst so zukommen, daß es *zurück*-kommt. Eigentlich zukünftig ist das Dasein eigentlich *gewesen*.'<sup>176</sup> It is possible to apply this same distinction of an inherent and inherited temporal responsibility to the city. Daane's walks in Berlin illustrate his own existential quest insofar as the photographs of his wife and child present him with a puzzle for which he has no answers. He appears to flee from a personal history into an anonymous collective one. The suggestion is that the confrontation with the layers of history of the collective is not entirely separate from the individual and personal memories and histories.

Filming at the Potsdamer Platz Daane slips while entering the building site:

Er versuchte seine Kamera zu retten, knallte mit dem Rücken auf den gefrorenen Boden, spürte, wie ihm etwas aus der Tasche rutschte, versuchte sich aufzurappeln, kniete da und starrte auf ein Foto von Thomas, das ihm aus der Brieftasche geglitten war und ihn in mitten einiger Kreditkarten anlachte.  
(147)

Thomas is his dead son whose presence on the floor suggests to Daane that it is not by chance alone that precisely his son's photograph looks up at him during his filmic exploration:

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<sup>175</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), pp. 301 + 306.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 325. For Heidegger's distinction between ontological guilt and Christian inherited guilt see page 306, Anm. I: 'Das ursprüngliche zur Seinsverfassung des Daseins gehörende Schuldigsein ist vom theologisch verstandenen *status corruptionis* wohl zu unterscheiden. Die Theologie kann in dem existenzial bestimmten Schuldigsein eine ontologische Bedingung seiner faktischen Möglichkeit finden. Die in der Idee dieses *status* beschlossene Schuld ist eine faktische Verschuldung von völlig eigener Art. Sie hat ihre eigene Bezeugung, die jeder philosophischen Erfahrung grundsätzlich verschlossen bleibt. Die existenziale Analyse des Schuldigseins beweist weder etwas *für* noch *gegen* die Möglichkeit der Sünde. Man kann streng genommen nicht einmal sagen, daß die Ontologie des Daseins *von sich aus* diese Möglichkeit überhaupt offen läßt, sofern sie als philosophisches Fragen grundsätzlich nichts von der Sünde "weiß"'.  
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‘Seine Toten ließen ihn noch immer nicht in Ruhe’ (147). For Daane, this act of uncovering the past is inextricably linked to his desire to find peace with his own past, and, as it were, to resolve the paradox of his loss and the absence of his family. Cognate with Berlin’s situation, he is marked by the past, urgently, and autistically open to the present as a conduit of the past; but there is no clear sense that the dialogue of past and present is in any way resolved. Daane’s perception of Berlin is conveyed through the numerous conversations on German culture and history as well as through his walks in the city, and it is similar to Heidegger’s understanding of being: Berlin can only exist essentially if its pastness, its histories forgotten and visible, and its future projections, for example the Potsdamer Platz, are acknowledged in a complex temporality. Somewhat paradoxically expressed, projecting into the future means to project into the past and, equally, projecting into the past presupposes a projection into the future. Yet the process is a volatile one. The *Nooteboom* text remains unresolved.

### **III.3. Remembering Walter Benjamin**

Daane’s walks in the city are not the perambulations suggestive of nineteenth-century dandyism, but unified Berlin is nonetheless a city ‘in der man Jahre umherstreifen könnte’ (37), if only because ‘ein Spaziergang’ in Berlin is always, as with Paris ‘eine peripatetische Vorlesung’ (160). Daane’s walks reveal an indebtedness to the theory of *flânerie* put forward by Walter Benjamin in his analysis of nineteenth-century Paris. *Allerseelen* is replete with explicit and implied references to Walter Benjamin, who is also perceived as being part of Berlin’s cultural and intellectual heritage, which the text is at pains to lay bare to the reader. Benjamin should therefore be situated alongside the references to Kant, Goethe, Heidegger, Schiller and the rest as instances of a common German cultural history. The Benjaminian

influence on the text requires detailed exegesis. This sub-chapter addresses Benjamin's fragmentation of linear history and the role of the image (whose aim is to transcend facticity) in a messianic recovery of forgotten and purged histories. It is clear from Daane's flânerie in Berlin that Benjamin's influence is both linguistic and thematic, with both authors showing remarkable similarities in their understanding of history and its recoverability.

For Benjamin, streets are the storehouses of memories marking the histories of various collectives past and present; this urban awareness explains Daane's wish to produce a documentary film about Benjamin in Berlin, which he had intended to call 'Sohlen der Erinnerung' (23). In the notes to his materialist historical study of nineteenth century Paris, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin makes the claim that 'Straßen sind die Wohnung des Kollektivs. Das Kollektivum ist ein ewig waches, ewig bewegtes Wesen, das zwischen Häuserwänden soviel erlebt, erfährt, erkennt und ersinnt wie Individuen im Schutze ihrer vier Wände'.<sup>177</sup> The collective will find its traces imprinted on the streets and on the walls of buildings: 'diesem Kollektivum sind die glänzenden emaillierten Firmenschilder so gut und besser ein Wandschmuck wie im Salon dem Bürger ein Ölgemälde, Mauern mit der "Défense d'Afficher" sind sein Schreibpult'.<sup>178</sup> The spilling out of the photograph of Daane's son onto the pavement at the Potsdamer Platz suggests the inroads of the private/individual into the public realm, though without suggesting in any way an effective or dynamic dialogue between those realms.

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<sup>177</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Das Passagen-Werk. Frühe Entwürfe', *Das Passagen-Werk: Gesammelte Schriften V:2*, (hg.) Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1998), <d°,1> p. 1051.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

In a prefiguration of Daane's flânerie in Berlin, Benjamin observes 'ganze Viertel erschließen ihr Geheimnis in ihren Straßennamen',<sup>179</sup> observing elsewhere that the flâneur 'leitet die Straße in eine entschwundene Zeit. [...] Sie führt hinab, wenn nicht zu den Müttern, so doch in eine Vergangenheit, die um so bannender sein kann als sie nicht seine eigene, private ist'.<sup>180</sup> It is this notion of a collective history (the 'Müttern' suggesting a return to an origin) that Daane, as a foreigner, is tapping into through his critical purchase on Berlin's topography. The narrative of the city means for Benjamin as well (as well as for Daane) a 'Spurensuche', a task, 'die Vorgeschichte der Dinge transparent zu machen, allerdings nicht um sie rational zu bewältigen, sondern umgekehrt, um durch die Evokation geheimer Korrespondenzen eine alternative, nicht rationale Wahrheit aufscheinen zu lassen'.<sup>181</sup> Surely this non-rational truth would be the possibility of coexistent realities and truths in any given site. The verb 'aufscheinen' plays on this notion of illumination, of seeing clearly and, with regards to the past, seeing truthfully. For Benjamin, the textuality of the city is available only to the gaze of the critical streetwalker. Hence, the act of city walking is tantamount to an act of historical uncovering, insofar as to walk in a city is to walk in amongst the histories of that city and through walking, uncover those histories. Benjamin observes that the past into which the streets lead the flâneur, although not his own past, remains 'immer Zeit einer Kindheit'.<sup>182</sup> This process of co-joining the public/collective memories with private/ individual ones is achieved through an act of remembering. The flâneur remembers the past by reading the text of the city and thereby allows the private and collective memories to merge in an epiphanal moment of recognition. Benjamin notes: '[d]ie wahre Methode, die Dinge sich gegenwärtig

<sup>179</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, die Stadt im Spiegel', IV:I, p. 357.

<sup>180</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk: Gesammelte Schriften V:1*, (hg.) Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1998), <Konvulat M I, 2>, p. 524.

<sup>181</sup> Anne Fuchs, 'Phantomspuren': Zu W.G. Sebalds Poetik der Erinnerung in *Austerlitz*, in: *German Life and Letters*, (2003), 56:3, pp. 281-298, p. 291.

<sup>182</sup> Fuchs, 'Phantomspuren', p. 291.

zu machen, ist, sie in unsere[m] Raum (nicht uns in ihrem) vorzustellen. [...] Nicht wir versetzen uns in sie, sie treten in unser Leben'.<sup>183</sup> But this process of opening the self to otherness is possible both through critical reflection and through sudden revelation. It is a similar appropriation of the past that Proust describes in his reconstruction of the castle of the old Counts of Combray 'making the name of Combray connote to me not only the little town of today but an historic city vastly different, gripping my imagination by the remote, incomprehensible features which it half-concealed beneath a spangled veil of buttercups'.<sup>184</sup> The suggestion is that the past is both hidden beneath the surface but at the same time in part determines that very same fabric. For example, in Daane's first meeting with Elik the text confronts the reader with the manifestation of history precisely through such acts of remembering triggered by seemingly insignificant occasions: 'Die unsichtbare Vergangenheit, die sich in Erinnerung entlädt, bis wir genau bei dem Körper, der Haltung, der Strategie des Jetzt gelandet sind, eine Frau an einem Tisch in einer Cafeteria in Berlin' (187). This moment of historical remembering reveals itself in Daane's own private memories as a conscious transition from unknown to known, which marked the beginning of his relationship with Elik.

However, in this process of 'Geschichtliches Verstehen'<sup>185</sup>, it is nonetheless imperative, according to one critic, to attempt to understand the otherness of the past. The past is 'ein fremdes und eigentümlich Un-lebendiges' other, 'Totes in der "Traumerinnerung" wiederholt und so am Eigenen erfahren wird'.<sup>186</sup> The remembered memory retains its otherness but the

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<sup>183</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat H 2, 3], p. 273.

<sup>184</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terrence Kilmartin (London, Vintage, 1996), p. 201.

<sup>185</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N 2, 3], p. 574.

<sup>186</sup> Peter Garloff, *Philologie der Geschichte: Literaturkritik und Historiographie nach Walter Benjamin* (Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 2003), pp. 283-84. This process of 'Traumerinnerung' is strikingly

process of awakening, referred to above in the metaphor of the uncovering of snow, suggests that on awakening, memory - in der Tat ist Erwachen das exemplarische Fall des Erin<n>erns'<sup>187</sup> - is dualistic. Thus the flâneur can experience private memories, 'dennoch bleibt sie immer Zeit einer Kindheit', even though the object is part of the collective consciousness. If public memories can become a constitutive part of private memories, then the individual guilt, which Heidegger sees as constitutive of essential being, can be equally transferred into the public realm, rendering the obligation to remember the past both individual and collective.

Benjamin's method of reading history in the urban topography is in part determined by a critique of traditional historical discourse and his own historical method to recover the 'débris d'humanité'<sup>188</sup> excluded from traditional methods of historical discourse which, in Benjamin's words, signifies the dialogue of the victors, that is, a given dominant discourse: 'Ich habe nichts zu sagen. Nur zu zeigen. Ich werde nichts Wertvolles entwenden [...]. Aber die Lumpen, den Abfall: die will ich nicht inventarisieren sondern sie auf die einzig mögliche Weise zu ihrem Rechte kommen lassen: sie verwenden'.<sup>189</sup> The core of his argument is that historical discourse tends to perceive the trajectory from the past to the present as linear and always progressive. The implication is that society moves through time and constantly improves in the process. This linear perspective, however, anchors the historical

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similar to Proust's *mémoire involontaire*. The Proustian awakening of sudden memories is a private experience, one in opposition to the Benjaminian method of awakening which is decidedly public in its concern.

<sup>187</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat K I, 2], p. 491.

<sup>188</sup> Willi Bolle, 'Geschichte': Michael Opitz (hg.), *Benjamins Begriffe* (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 2000), Bd. I, p. 413.

<sup>189</sup> In his thesis on history, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Benjamin asks 'in wen sich denn der Geschichtsschreiber eigentlich einfühlt. Die Antwort lautet unweigerlich in den Sieger'. Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' in: *Abhandlungen: Gesammelte Schriften* I:2 (hg.) Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1997), [VIII], p. 696. Benjamin notes elsewhere that history 'droht zur Geschichte der Sieger zu werden und die geknechteten Vorfahren zu vergessen', Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Werke*, I:2, p. 700. And, Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N I a, 8], p. 574.

representation in a discourse of power and oppression insofar as it excludes other historical discourses. These other histories are denied a necessary representative voice and are consequently hidden from the societal framework. It is in contrast to the traditional view of history that Benjamin posits a visual, non-linear representation of history, and in so doing explodes linear projections of historical discourse:

Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heißt nicht, es erkennen "wie es denn eigentlich gewesen ist". Es heißt, sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt. Dem historischen Materialismus geht es darum, ein Bild der Vergangenheit festzuhalten, wie es im Augenblick der Gefahr dem historischen Subjekt unversehens einstellt. [...] In jeder Epoche muß versucht werden, die Überlieferung von neuem dem Konformismus abzugewinnen, der im Begriff steht, sie zu überwältigen. [...] Nur dem Geschichtsschreiber wohnt die Gabe bei, im Vergangenen den Funken der Hoffnung anzufachen, der davon durchdrungen ist: auch die Toten werden von dem Feind, wenn er siegt, nicht sicher sein.<sup>190</sup>

It is necessary to quote this passage in detail in order to underline the similarities of thought between Benjamin's thesis on historical discourse and the pursuit of the past in *Allerseelen*. History, according to Benjamin, is the seizing of memories in the very moment in which their continued existence is threatened insofar as it could have been lost in a teleological historical representation. In such a case, not even the memories of the dead are guaranteed. If an awareness of historical tradition is indeed diminished in this way an impoverishment of identity results. It is the warding off of this loss that marks Elik's task as a researcher, which she understands as an act of compassion, of cherishing, in spite of all notions of progress and historical teleology posited in the text, the sheer clutter and circumstantial weight of the past. 'Eine Liebestat soll es werden, sie wird diese Frau aus dem erstickenden Vergessen retten, aus ihrem Grab von Dokumenten und Zeugnissen' (410).

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<sup>190</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', [VI], p. 695.

Benjamin's method of safeguarding against the erasure of the past is to be found in the dialectical image (Bild) in which the memory of a given past is retained. Historical discourse and representation must be imagistic because 'Geschichte zerfällt in Bilder, nicht in Geschichten'<sup>191</sup>, that is, not in archival facts, an interpretation that underpins a dependence on Freud's image-based narrative of dreams. In the act of dreaming, the processes of thoughts are transformed into images: 'ein farbloser und abstrakter Ausdruck des Traumgedankens [wird] gegen einen bildlichen und konkreten eingetauscht. [...] Das Bildliche ist für den Traum darstellungsfähig'.<sup>192</sup> This transformation of the sub-conscious or the forgotten into an image finds its echo in the Nooteboom text in the form of the photographic image: 'Niemand hat hier einen Namen. Gedächtnis, Stapelplatz. Verdoppelung der Erinnerung. Fujicolor Negativ, eingesogen, Bilder reingerollt' (192), which establishes a clear association between memory and the image. Benjamin's leaning on Freud, however, is based on the latter's insistence that subconscious thoughts were at one stage, before their displacement in dream, both logical and formed within a coherent framework, which is then lost in the process of displacement (Verschiebung).

Benjamin develops Freud's displacement of subconscious thought in his own materialist historical framework by blasting historical objects out of the historical continuum: '[d]as destruktive oder kritische Moment in der materialistischen Geschichtsschreibung kommt in der Aufsprengung der historischen Kontinuität zur Geltung, mit der der historische Gegenstand sich allererst konstituiert'.<sup>193</sup> This levering out of a moment in time amounts to a

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<sup>191</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N II, 4], p. 596.

<sup>192</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Frankfurt a/M, Fischer, 1961), pp. 282-3.

<sup>193</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N 10 a, I], p. 594. To this blasting of the historical continuum, Benjamin: '[d]er historische Materialismus muß das epische Element der Geschichte preis-geben. Er sprengt die Epoche aus der dinghaften "Kontinuität der Geschichte" ab. Er sprengt aber auch die Homogenität der Epoche auf. Er durchsetzt sie mit Ekrasit, d.i. Gegenwart. [Konvulat N 9 a, 6].



displacement of objects or histories from traditional or linear historical representation into a visual representational form, and suggests a new and different context in which the object may be looked at. The moment in which the viewer becomes conscious of a given object torn from a linear context is tantamount to an awakening. Importantly, the construction of a new historical discourse presupposes the destruction of the existing one: '[d]amit ein Stück Vergangenheit von der Aktualität betroffen werde, darf keine Kontinuität zwischen ihnen bestehen'.<sup>194</sup> In keeping with the Freudian process of displacement, the wrenching of the historical object (the textuality of the cultural 'Dingwelt) out of the continuum is an involuntary act but one that also interrupts the otherwise accepted continuity between the object and its historical context. This wrenching out of time is opposed to traditional historical selective remembrance.<sup>195</sup> Benjamin's involuntary remembrance 'ist das Gegenstück zum intentionalen, willkürlichen "Andenken", das die Vergangenheit als "tote Habe" inventarisiert'.<sup>196</sup> It is only if the act of remembering is involuntary that forgotten or suppressed memories will surface to the conscious level of recognition, if only because their having been removed from linear historical discourse forces the interlocutor to become conscious of the historical artefact or event. Arbitrary perception is key to the urban perambulations in *Ein weites Feld* as well as to Dücker's Berlin novel *Spielzone*. Nootboom's text is also at pains to establish this link between the arbitrary image and the act of remembering. For Daane, the re-surfaced memory takes on the form of an image in its transformation from subconscious thought to conscious awakening or re-cognition: 'Erinnern, das war das richtige Wort. Kameraein-stellung, Licht, Reihenfolge' (20).

<sup>194</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N 7,7], p. 587.

<sup>195</sup> The images 'kommen, wie man weiß, unwillkürlich', Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, V:2, p. 1243.

<sup>196</sup> Dag T. Anderson, 'Destruktion/Konstruktion' in Michael Opitz, hg., p. 179.

The image thus formed makes it possible simultaneously to represent non-simultaneous individual events of a given history at any one time, and thereby undermines linear historical discourse. Image is ‘dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt. Mit andern Worten: Bild ist die Dialektik im Stillstand’ and the relation between that which is past and its existence as a moment of consciousness is not linear or continual, but rather ‘sprunghaft’.<sup>197</sup> Erratic historical understanding demands an equally erratic historical perception that leaves the viewer or in our case the urban walker with nothing but a profusion of otherwise random images.<sup>198</sup> The process of placing and shifting objects in an arbitrary combination, from which hierarchical values are omitted, suggests a possibility of keeping alive traces of forgotten memories; it is in this manner that Benjamin reappropriates and transforms a given object through the photographic image. The fact that the objects have survived time, in the same manner in which the photograph denies time, as it were, by not allowing change, lends the objects an almost talismanic aura, which elevates them to substitutes or representatives of ruined lives. Yet sometimes not even these substitutes bring consolation. One thinks of the W.G. Sebald’s work where the photographic images in no way resolve the ‘Schmerzensspuren’ of the past.

The image put forward by Benjamin is a dialectical image in suspension because, unlike linear historical discourse, the image contains all times encapsulated within it at any given time. The notion of extracting an object out of the continuum and freezing it, and yet

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<sup>197</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N 2 a, 3], pp. 576-77.

<sup>198</sup> It is a clutter of images suggestive of the *bricolage* of the junk shop in Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, a text equally preoccupied with traces of the past, to which Sebald refers as ‘Schmerzensspuren, die sich [...] in unzähligen feinen Linien durch die Geschichte ziehen’. The arbitrary collection of items in the window of the junk shop led to a non-telic perception of history in which the forgotten or hidden traces became momentarily apparent to the observer: ‘So zeitlos wie dieser verewigte, immer gerade jetzt sich ereignende Augenblick der Errettung waren sie alle, die in dem Bazar von Terezín gestrandeten Zierstücke, Gerätschaften und Andenken, die aufgrund unerforschlicher Zusammenhänge ihre ehemaligen Besitzer überlebt und den Prozeß der Zerstörung überdauert hatten’. W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt a/M, Fischer, 2003), p. 24.

suggesting at the same time that the object is still somehow historically continuous is admittedly paradoxical. The image in suspension is a monad, the crystallization of the world into an image or picture. Benjamin's monadological conception of history and historical representation, suggests that this understanding of the monad signifies an attempt 'Bilder der gegenwartsträchtigen Vergangenheit zu untersuchen, die, in ihrer Konfrontation mit dem Bild von Gegenwart, das sie anvisiert haben, sich in einer "Konstellation" mit sehr starkem "Wahrheitsgehalt" kristalisieren'.<sup>199</sup> But Sagnol erroneously assumes that this grain of truth (Wahrheitsgehalt) is somehow permanent and therefore metaphysical, a notion which Benjamin's theory does not support. The temporal confrontation made possible through the monad only envisages the uncovering of that which had been formerly hidden or simply neglected. Its truthfulness is not yet ascertained in the moment of uncovering. It is with regard to the nature and structure of the monad as a temporal constellation that Benjamin himself noted:

Daß der Gegenstand der Geschichte aus dem Kontinuum des Geschichtsverlaufes herausgesprengt werde, das wird von seiner monadologischen Struktur gefordert. Diese tritt erst am herausgesprengten Gegenstand zu Tage. Und zwar tut sie das in Gestalt der geschichtlichen Auseinandersetzung, die das Innere (und gleichsam die Eingeweide) des historischen Gegenstandes ausmacht und in die sämtliche historischen Kräfte und Interessen in verjüngtem Maßstabe eintreten. Kraft dieser monadologischen Struktur des historischen Gegenstandes findet er in seinem Innern die eigene Vorgeschichte und Nachgeschichte repräsentiert.<sup>200</sup>

Such acts of historical rescue are the guarantee that both the dead and their traditions are not lost under an homogenising blanket of linear historical discourse. But, to return to Sagnol's argument, the intention is the recovery of a dialectical image, not a metaphysical assurance. Benjamin's historical reconstruction, which is ultimately a history of remembering, 'have

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<sup>199</sup> Marc Sagnol, 'Walter Benjamin, Archäologe der Moderne'. In: *Weimarer Beiträge* 2003:2, p. 253.

<sup>200</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N 10, 3], p. 594.

sich gerade um das zu kümmern, was deren Siegeszug zum Opfer gefallen ist und ohne jede Spur geblieben sei'.<sup>201</sup> By forcing the past into the present, by which the endless suppression of difference (suppressed by the commodity<sup>202</sup>) is undermined, forgotten histories and memories are thrust into a moment of conscious awakening to which Benjamin refers as a *Jetztzeit*. Benjamin's immanent 'now-ness' again evokes a moment of consciousness experienced by Sebald's protagonist, Austerlitz, in front of the junk shop in Terezín. The *Jetztzeit* is the moment of historical awakening triggered by the image-based reconstruction of the past: '[d]ie Geschichte ist Gegenstand einer Konstruktion, deren Ort nicht die homogene und leere Zeit sondern die von Jetztzeit erfüllte bildet'.<sup>203</sup> The confrontation with the loaded image, a confrontation that suggests an awakening, insofar as it is an act of conscious re-cognition and re-remembering, marks the moment in which those histories excluded from the dominant discourse of historical representation are saved from the threat of mnemonic erasure. However, when exactly the moment of this immanent now-ness arrives is unclear; Daane throws open the question 'Wer bestimmte die Augenblicke?' (40).

#### III.4. Flânerie in Berlin with a Camera

Nooteboom's novel suggests many ways of establishing a thematic link with Benjamin's reconstruction of history through images and their montage-based reconstruction. There are various types of images discussed in the Nooteboom text although not all share this monadological characteristic of possessing truthful – momentary - content. At the corner of Mommsenstraße, Daane becomes aware of his own image reflected in the advertisement of a

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<sup>201</sup> Nicholas Pethes und Jens Ruchatz (ed.), *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung: Ein interdisziplinäres Lexikon* (Rowohlt, Hamburg, 2001).

<sup>202</sup> The protagonists in Tanja Dücker's novel, *Spielzone*, also struggle against the suppression of difference, but attempt to do so by emphasising the commodity as a medium of aesthetic differentiation and identification.

<sup>203</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', [XIV], p. 701.

shop window. Advertisements ‘würden einem stets reflektieren, sogar wenn man, wie jetzt, überhaupt keine Lust dazu hatte’ (12). These advertisements, according to Daane, attempt to undermine his own complexity of self: ‘ich sehe aus wie aus der Werbung. [...] Ich sehe einfach nicht aus, wie ich denke, daß ich bin’ (13). These mental ruminations appear to echo Benjamin’s critique of commodity addressed above, which is understood as paradigmatic of the process of historical homogenization suggested in traditional historical discourse in its suppression of difference.<sup>204</sup> Symbolically, it was the increasing accumulation of snow flakes on his overcoat that in turn undermined the authority of the advertisement: ‘Er sah im Spiegel, wie sich die leichten Flocken an seinem Mantel festsetzten. Gut, dachte er, dann sehe ich weniger wie aus der Werbung aus’ (12). A plausible interpretation of this scene might again be suggested in the symbolic role of snow in the text. Indeed it might be the case that the snow on his overcoat undermines the advertisement image precisely because it inverts the surface image by suggesting a layeredness, and by extension, a complexity that goes beyond the surface function of the advertisement image. If the function of the advertisement is indeed to suppress difference, and by extension history, which is suggested in Daane’s own claim that the image in some form restricts his self-expression, it is further significant that this critical analysis of the image takes place at the corner of Mommsenstraße.<sup>205</sup> The advertisement is an intentional image insofar as its intention is to veil over and or homogenize.

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<sup>204</sup> See for example, Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, Verso, 1981): ‘the commodity, which flaunts itself as a unique, heteroclitic slice of matter, is in truth part of the very mechanism by which history becomes homogenized. As the signifier of labour-power exchanges with another, the commodity nonetheless disguises its virulent anti-materialism in a carnival of consumption. [...] the time of the commodity is at once empty and homogeneous: its homogeneity is, precisely, the infinite self-identity of a pure recurrence, which, since it has no power to modify, has no more body than a mirror-image. What binds history into plenitude is the exact symmetry of its repeated absences’, pp. 28-9.

<sup>205</sup> Theodor Mommsen was a German historian who died in Berlin in 1903. The name Mommsen is still today almost exclusively associated with historical research. For Benjamin on the function of the advertisement: ‘Die Vergnügungsindustrie verfeinert und vervielfacht die Spielarten des reaktiven Verhaltens der Massen. Sie rüstet sie damit für die Bearbeitung durch die Reklame zu’. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat G 16, 7], p. 267.

Daane produces images as a freelance cameraman for various European news agencies. Such images, however, are intentional in their function, but ephemeral in their effectiveness. 'Kurzfristig, einen Tag, eine Woche lang waren sie in den Nachrichten [...] doch danach began es erst, die Schwarze, alles auslöschende Dunkelheit eines Vergessens, das fortan nur noch wieter zunähme' (81). These people, 'diese Toten'(81), would also soon be forgotten, their histories and traditions purged from memory. There exists no messianic moment in such images, which is why the text toys with the idea of rejecting them, but does not. Ultimately, it is not possible to engage dialectically with each and every image; any attempt to so would result in a saturation of the historic. However, the criticism that media-produced images are ephemeral does indeed echo the criticism of advertisements insofar as both imagistic representational forms, it might be argued, at times suppress difference through their suggestion of linear uninterrupted time. Daane himself 'lebte mit Fragmenten' (128) and not compounded wholes. The intentional image denies the viewer that second critical glance, in which is couched a different, alternative way of looking and understanding that which is observed. Paradoxically, the image becomes a way of both seeing and of not seeing, as has already been suggested in the analysis of Günter Grass's text. While engaged with the historical representation of the 'Treuhand' building in Berlin, Fonty is forced out of his home by 'Emmis zwar gemilderte, aber noch unmäßig vom Farbfernseher gefütterte Bildersucht'.<sup>206</sup> Two irreconcilable perspectives drive the criticism: while Fonty is engaged in historical research, his wife is subject to a passive perception of images (gefütterte), of the first Gulf War. Emmi's manner is one of passivity and unreflective speechlessness in front of the screen, which Daane believes is inherent in the advertisement. It has been argued that surface culture has become so endemic and society's contact with the phenomenal world so

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<sup>206</sup> Günter Grass, *Ein weites Feld* (München, DTV, 1997), p. 652.

permanently mediated that 'all we have left is an environment of simulation in which even warfare appears more real as a signifier than as an actual event, thanks to (say) the media coverage of the Gulf War of 1991'.<sup>207</sup> Both the Grass and the Nootboom texts are positioned against this predominance of the intentional surface image, in the Grass text it is the television and in the Nootboom text the advertisement and the news-image given as representative of a reality: 'wir registrieren diese Dinge als Fakten [...] und so werden diese Fakten, wird der Anblick dieser Fakten zu dem Panzer, der uns vor ihnen verschließt' (121-22). *Ein weites Feld* and *Allerseelen* advocate other ways of seeing, particularly in relation to Berlin.

It is apparent from the discussion above that the urban topography can and indeed should be semantically interpreted, if to read semantically means to understand the city as something that carries meaning within its structures. A semantic interpretation of the city would analyse the relationship between buildings and street names (signs) and their intended meaning (what they signify). The discourse of the city is here compared to the dominant discourse of historical representation. Just as linear historical representation is subject to a dominant discourse, so too is the urban topography. I refer to an analytical interpretation of urban space, which understands space as a semiotic framework of signifiers and signified. To read the city is to engage in a semiotic discourse.<sup>208</sup> If the city communicates its idea of community, it does so also within a framework in which urban signs are understood to be 'preloaded' with meaning. As was argued in the introduction, the reconstruction of Berlin

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<sup>207</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Sydney, Power Publications, 1995), p. 56.

<sup>208</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Espace et Politique*, 2e édition (Paris: Anthropos, 2000), p. 28. Lefebvre argues that to understand space, 'on peut élaborer une sémantique des discours sur l'espace. On pourrait concevoir aussi une sémiologie de l'espace, partie d'une sémiotique générale'.

should be comprehended as part of this discourse on the semiotics of space conveyed through signs.

One function of *flânerie* in *Allerseelen* is to engage critically with the signs of the city under reconstruction. It is in East Berlin, for example, that during one of his many walks Daane addresses the processes of reunification and the effects and consequences of such processes on the city and its inhabitants. The city, according Daane, is being re-signified and in this process something is being irrevocably lost. They once lived here,

und hier wohnten sie immer noch, nachdem ihr eigenartiger Staat aufgelöst, demontiert worden war und sein Führer vor Gericht gestellt, gefangen oder geflüchtet waren. Hier hatten sich nicht nur auf einen Schlag sämtliche Spielregeln geändert, nein, das Spiel selbst gab es plötzlich nicht mehr, Menschen waren aus ihrem bisherigen Leben herausgehoben worden, jeder Aspekt dieses Lebens, Zeitungen, Gepflogenheiten, Organisationen, Namen hatten sich geändert, vierzig Jahre waren plötzlich wie ein Stück Papier zusammengeknüllt worden, und damit war auch die Erinnerung an diese Zeit angekratzt, verzerrt, angeschimmelt. War so etwas zu ertragen? (266-67)

The re-codification of East Berlin links with Benjamin's critique of linear historical discourse insofar as it is a process suggestive of historical erasure and exclusion. The signs have been uprooted and are now semantically redundant. The crumpling up of the forty-year history of the GDR (from the city fabric), as is suggested in the simile of the urban topography as a sheet of paper that has been discarded, testifies to this interpretation of mnemonic erasure as a constitutive element in the processes of re-signification of East Berlin key also to Grass's Berlin representation. It is clear from the quotation above that it is a non-voluntary process of change, suggested in the dominant use of the passive voice (worden, worden waren), underpinning exclusion. The city was being semantically reconfigured according to the dominant discourse, in Benjamin's words, of the victors and it is against this erasure that



Daane positions himself. As a Benjaminian flâneur he is concerned with the same experience of rapture at the moment of ‘awakening’ as Benjamin himself in nineteenth century Paris: ‘Rauschen [...]. Alles, was da ist und worauf keiner achtet’ (229), an echo of Benjamin’s urban flâneur: ‘Ein Rausch kommt über den, der lange ohne Ziel durch Straßen marschierte. [...] Er steht vor Notre Dame de Lorette und seine Sohlen erinnern’.<sup>209</sup> This ‘Rauschen’ is an ecstatic moment of consciousness to which we might also refer as an awakening.

In keeping with a Benjaminian interpretation, Daane films objects in Berlin precisely not to forget: ‘am schlimmsten war das Vergessen’ (80). He uses filmic images in the same way that Benjamin understood the application of image in historical reconstruction; as storehouses which have within them the possibility of a montage reconstruction. In a thoroughly modernist vein, Daane’s film project may be seen as an attempt to reconstruct Berlin using imagistic devices. To film ‘war nicht [zu] Lesen’ (73), nor was it a passive rendering of that which is to be seen. Daane’s act of filming was without intention, ‘Ja, aber was hat er damit vor? Nichts, oder vorläufig nichts’ (74), and each image represented the attempt ‘ein Stück Zeit aus der Zeit zu schlagen’ (83), a direct echo of Benjamin’s challenge to linear historical discourse. It was clear for Daane that the filmic image would deal with ‘Anonymität, mit Verschwinden und mit [...] Abschied’, and the fact that this was the focus of the camera lens ‘war nichts, wonach er gesucht hatte, es war einfach so’ (133). It was ‘simply so’ because of the text’s insistence on an arbitrary gathering of artefacts, selected simply for their being ‘there’ and no other reason. Daane’s notion of filming such artefacts deliberately echoes Benjamin’s process of becoming conscious of the object concerned or Freud’s transformation of the subconscious thought into images at the conscious level. In an echo of Benjamin’s

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<sup>209</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat M 1, 3 and M 1, I], p. 525 and p. 524.

monadological structure, Daane notes that the world of artefacts 'ist die Welt der Dinge, die es immer gibt und die offensichtlich nicht der Mühe wert ist, gefilmt zu werden [...] das, was dasein muß, worauf aber keiner achtet' (228). It is only in the moment of fragmentation in which the object is removed from the linear framework that the objects are given the necessary recognition; necessary insofar as it saves them from becoming lost or being forgotten, hence the act of filming at the Potsdamer Platz. This world of things is Benjamin's world of things which are equally part of historical discourse: 'Geschichte schreiben heißt also Geschichte zitieren. Im Begriff des Zitierens liegt aber, daß der jeweilige historische Gegenstand aus seinem Zusammenhang gerissen wird'.<sup>210</sup> The quotation of the urban topography is always fragmentary.

The quotations taken from the material world (Dingwelt) manifest themselves visually in the form of street names, buildings, advertisements and photographs. There are references in the text to things acquiring a strangeness that allows them to reveal themselves, in a manner possibly akin to the Joycean epiphany, as was demonstrated in Daane's night excursion to the Potsdamer Platz which is described as possessing a certain 'génie de lieu' (41). It is precisely this self-narrative of the city fabric, which in the text reflects Daane's understanding of history, that suggests an indebtedness to Benjamin's non-linear conception of image-based historical discourse. This encapsulating of history into an image is intended to embrace the private histories of the citizens of the city. The text attempts to portray the private histories of the citizens of Berlin in image forms, though remaining fairly close to Daane's near-solipsism, indeed compounding it because ultimately those histories, including his own, remain beyond his understanding and outside of his reach. The images he collects forcibly

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<sup>210</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, [Konvulat N 11, 3], p. 595.

underline his loneliness. But in terms of image authentication and representation of *Nachwende* Berlin, everyone in the former East is affected to the degree that

Jeder, mit Ausnahme der Jüngsten, mußte hier eine Lücke in seinem Leben haben, sei es eine Geheimakte oder ein Schuß an der Mauer, oder einfach, wie bei den meisten, ein Foto in der Schublade in der nicht mehr existierenden Uniform der FDJ oder der Volksarmee. [...] Wie ging man damit um? Er wunderte sich immer darüber, wie wenig seine Freunde im westlichen Teil von diesen Dingen wußten oder wissen wollten. Das Verarbeiten der eigenen, mittlerweile auch schon wieder so lange zurückliegenden Vergangenheit schien sie völlig erschöpft zu haben, mit dem hier hatten sie nichts zu schaffen. (267-68)

The general comments on the attitude of his friends in the West towards the East are of interest as is the notion that the hole in the lives of the people in East Berlin is somehow captured in an image. On a superficial level, the missing awareness of the difficulties experienced by East Berlin's civic body by the West underlines a more pervasive problem of the practical implementation of the reunification in the city, to which Brussig also referred in his Berlin text. And yet the West was also exhausted because of the effort needed to come to terms with their own history; the reunification in many respects symbolised more a dealing with the pasts of two German nations than, as some have suggested, the zero hour of a new beginning. These pasts, at least in the case of East Berlin, are hidden away 'in der Schublade in der nicht mehr existierenden Uniform der FDJ oder der Volksarmee'. The function of Daane's flânerie with the camera is to try to free such images, to bring them into the public, that is to say the conscious realm, where their presence will become part of the other fragments that make up an image-based representation of East Berlin/German history. To film is to remember: 'Erinnern, das war das richtige Wort. Kameraeinstellung, Licht, Reihenfolge, ein seltsames Déjà-vu schien ihn bei allem, was er tat, zu begleiten' (20). The objects are constantly present, but are either forgotten or simply lack a signifying power.

Whether Daane is ultimately able both to free the image from linear discourses and make it erupt into public consciousness is unclear. His project of arbitrarily filming objects on the streets, in buildings or in the underground metro system remains private and is thereby reduced to a collector's album of fragmentary images: 'Seine Sammlung, so hieß dieser Stapel von Dosen, die in Madrid, in Amsterdam und hier in Berlin lagerten' (75). But to collect is itself a form of material remembering; collecting is 'eine Form des praktischen Erinnerns und unter den profanen Manifestationen der "Nähe" die bundigste'.<sup>211</sup> The problem here however, lies in the nature of a collection: it sorts the past into yet another archive. In this respect, 'als Ort der institutionalisierten Gedächtnisses ist das Archiv damit ein Instrument der politischen Macht, deren autoritärer bzw. demokratischer Charakter u.a. an der Zugänglichkeit des Archivs messbar ist'.<sup>212</sup> It has already been demonstrated that as a single instance the archive is insufficient as a critical purchase. The neglect of the images scattered throughout various cities and countries perhaps reflects the almost impossibility of establishing a dialogue between the past and the present, but does not rule out the attempt. But another possible reading of the incompleteness of the filming project lies in the text's modernist echoes of urban montage representation, which has as its structure an inherent and insistent fragmentation: Daane himself 'lebte mit Fragmenten' (128). It was shown that Daane reads the city like a book, not a novel, but rather an infinitely expanding encyclopaedic reference text of multiple histories and meanings. But, he remains, as with Fonty, Hoftaller, Delius's protagonist, at all times unconnected with the city. With this structural insistence on fragmentation and incompleteness, *Allerseelen* places itself self-consciously in the genre of modernist Berlin novels written at times of change, notably Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Ulrich Plenzdorf's *kein runter kein fern*.

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<sup>211</sup> Pethes, *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung*, p. 514.

<sup>212</sup> Fuchs, 'Phantomspuren', p. 285.

Although there is a great insistence throughout the text on the ways in which and the extent to which the past, in Daane's Berlin, haunts, stalks the present there is no suggestion that that 'pastness' in any way makes sense of or redeems the present. The past that is recalled is the political, historical past of Berlin and of Germany's culture (Kant, Hegel, Benjamin, etc.). But it is unclear how far either the political or the cultural past help with the present unconnectedness and unease. The creating of images in the text is equally problematic, in that it may be all that Daane has, and it may not help because it is far from clear whether the images either trigger or promote acts of consciousness forcing a remembrance of forgotten pasts. Indeed, nor is it clear whether the dialogue with the past, the paradox of his family's existence and non-existence is in any way resolved. If anything, the dead drive him into an increasing solipsistic existence bereft of language: 'die Worte entglitten ihm. Nie hatte er die richtigen Worte für das finden können, was er wirklich dachte' (365). Hence the reflections on language in the text, on its expressivity and limitations: language hides and covers: 'daß Deutsche Dinge als weiblich bezeichneten, die im Spanischen männlich waren, während das Niederländische seine Hände in Unschuld wusch und wegschaute, anders als das Englische, das der Sonne, dem Tod und dem Meer radikal jegliche Geschlechtlichkeit verweigerte' (93). Language in the Nooteboom text, once it attempts to cross certain borders, is robbed of its ontological structure: 'eure Wörter [werden] zu Transsexuellen, sobald sie den Rhein überqueren [...] Damit versperrt man den Weg zum Ursprung' (94). If Daane is suggesting a metaphysical origin, 'den Weg zum Ursprung', he is at odds both with his intellectual guardians and with his own project of randomly gathering images, which at no time promises access to a metaphysical origin. Language is transformed precisely at the moment it comes into contact with other borders in order to cross them. Even the quasi-authorial 'Wir', the voices that interrupt the text on four or five occasions with their timeless visions, a

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'registrierende Instanz' (65) are narratively powerless to resolve the irresolute dialogue between the past and the present.

I argue that throughout Nootboom's text there is an uncertainty as to what can be achieved by narrativity, in whatever form. History and the historical sediments of the city remain 'there' but nonetheless voiceless, as if excluded from dialogue. At one level *Allerseelen* attempts to become a mouthpiece for the dead and forgotten, but it remains unclear how this can be achieved. Again, in a modernist vein, Berlin, like Daane in his relationship with the past (his family) and in his relationship with the present (Elik), remains a focus of irresolution. Neither the Benjaminian image, nor the Freudian act of conscious remembering helps Daane to overcome his solipsistic unconnectedness. On the contrary, the threat of turning the present into the past in his obsession with history remains ever present: 'du treibst es zu weit, du bist ewig dabei, aus der Gegenwart eine Vergangenheit zu machen. Du bringst immerzu alle Zeiten durcheinander. Auf diese Weise bist du nie irgendwo richtig' (350). If anything, the constant presence of the past compounds his solipsistic state. And yet it is precisely this unconnectedness that makes it possible to perceive the city differently and thereby perhaps perceive things and meanings hidden from a purposively self-confident beholder.

**‘[D]en Rülpsern einer unverdauten Vergangenheit’: public and private  
memory in Friedrich Christian Delius’s  
*Die Flatterzunge*.**

‘If ever there were a Sisyphian image of hopelessly  
heaving weight upward, it is the German with his burden  
of history’.<sup>213</sup> Tom Freudenheim

In May 1997, the Berlin Opera was invited by the state of Israel to give a series of concerts in Tel Aviv. The event was widely seen as a gesture of rapprochement between Israel and Germany. On the fourth day of the opera tour, Gerd Reinke, the first trombone player, signed his hotel-bar tab, “Adolf Hitler”, concluding that Adolf Hitler would pay for the bill. Reinke claimed that it was merely a joke, but the incident soon became widely known following extensive media coverage both in Germany and abroad. The trombone player was sent home and sacked from his position with the Berlin State Orchestra. He later challenged his dismissal through the courts arguing that the opera’s decision was politically motivated and in no relation to his faux pas. Friedrich Christian Delius’s *Die Flatterzunge* is a fictionalised account of this now infamous incident.

The narrative begins by insisting on the novel’s declared fictionality, observing on the first page that ‘[d]ie Figuren dieser Erzählung sind keinen realen Personen nachgebildet, sondern frei erfunden’ (4). It is a statement that seemingly ignores the extensive publicity surrounding the scandal. The motive behind the preface harbours an intention to move the incident beyond Gerd Reinke and force it into the public realm, and thereby participate in the current discussions touching Germany’s obligation to remember its National Socialist past and the

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<sup>213</sup> Tom Freudenheim, ‘Confronting Memory and Museums’, in Todd Herzog and Sander Gilman (eds.), *A New Germany in a New Europe* (London, Routledge, 2001), pp. 143-166, here, p. 146.

position that past is to have in the new republic. The energy of the text testifies yet again to the importance of literature in the political arena in Germany. It is noteworthy that *Die Flatterzunge*, as with *Ein weites Feld* and *Nox*, also pillages from contemporary media sources to draw attention to the fact that Berlin's topography is as much a political concern as it is a literary or narrative one. This convergence of fact and fiction provides the text with a platform to address and analyse prevailing debates on memory and history as shaped by National Socialism through the prism of Berlin's topography. *Die Flatterzunge* is a highly political text charged with the task of re-opening the debate on the past-in-the-present and the questions posed by this coexistent present in contemporary Berlin. The text 'interessiert sich für das Verschwiegene der sprachlichen Produkte, behandelt mit Vorliebe Äußerungen, die von vornherein Öffentlichkeitscharakter haben, aber ihre ideologische Grundsubstanz im Ausdruck selber verbergen'.<sup>214</sup> Walser's *Friedenspreisrede*, it will be argued, possesses such public characteristics, which toy with the notion of historical repression or at least historical rewriting, but do so in a conditionally loaded language that refuses to be pinned down. The Delius text represents a challenge to 'das Verschwiegene' in Walser's *Friedenspreisrede*.

It is not immediately clear what urged the protagonist to pen a name that is an anathema to most Germans. His action was neither intentionally anti-Semitic, as Costabile-Heming has argued,<sup>215</sup> nor was it motivated by a desire to voice a political/social protest. Perhaps we should not consider his faux pas as something declamatory, the motivations of which remain obscure to us the reader, but as an uncontrolled quasi-autobiographical performance, what the

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<sup>214</sup> Bernard Dieterle, 'Ein Dokument der Dokumentarliteratur – Paratextuelle Überlegungen zu Delius' Festschrift "Unsere Siemens-Welt". In: Manfred Durzak and Hartmut Steinecke (hg.), *F.C. Delius – Studien über sein literarisches Werk* (Tübingen, Stauffenberg, 1997), p. 37.

<sup>215</sup> Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, 'Tracing History Through Berlin's Topography: Historical Memories and Post-1989 Berlin Narratives', *German Life and Letters* 58:3 (2005), pp. 344-356, see p. 346: 'the uncalculated action reveals a deeper, subconscious level of anti-Semitism'.



protagonist appears to refer to as a collective Freudian slip, or even a collective carnevalesque moment. Is there not after all, the protagonist Hannes inquires, ‘in jedem von uns, nicht nur uns Deutschen, der Bruchteil eines Nazis, auch wenn wir noch so demokratisch, noch so prosemitisch, noch so aufgeklärt sind?’<sup>216</sup> It was that small piece of the collective bogeyman that is buried deep within the German’s historic psyche that penned the letters ‘AH’ on his bar-tab. It is not that he was always conscious of this ‘Bruchteil eines Nazis’ that was apparently one part of his social and historic make-up, but he felt that it was always there, something akin to an itch at the back of the throat which one tries vainly to suppress without drawing attention to oneself:

Sie spüren den Hustenreiz im Hals, sie unterdrücken ihn, Sie sind sicher, daß Sie ihn beherrschen, doch gleichzeitig denken Sie an die Peinlichkeit, als Störer aufzufallen. Sie konzentrieren sich, aber der Hustenreiz regt sich neu, und Sie ringen ihn nieder mit einem fast lautlosen Räuspern. [...] Sie sind jetzt so weit, daß Sie alle Anstrengung darauf richten, nichts falsch zu machen, und in dem Moment, in dem sie glauben, gegen den Hustenreiz gesiegt zu haben, sind Sie verloren: Sie hören sich husten, obwohl Sie noch gar nicht husten, und dann husten Sie los, einmal, zweimal und nach einer Pause zum dritten Mal. (78)

The analogy of the suppressed cough is humorous, but misleading. It is certainly not unproblematic to claim that Hitler, in whatever form, continues to exist in the German psyche sixty years after the collapse of National Socialism. That said, the analogy does indirectly address a particular German neurosis towards Hitler and National Socialism and an insistence upon contemporary Germany’s identity as being not only diametrically opposed to, but in no way related to its historical antecedent. There is always the option of a cough drop, a useful palliative when dealing with an itchy throat. I argue that through the ‘itchy throat’ analogy Delius illustrates this particular German neurosis towards its immediate past as thematised in the novel by anchoring it within the Walser-Bubis-Holocaust debate between 1998 and 1999, almost two years after the initial scandal in Tel Aviv. More importantly, the text explores

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<sup>216</sup> Friedrich Christian Delius, *Die Flatterzunge* (Hamburg, Rowohlt Verlag, 1999), p. 76. All subsequent quotations, given in parenthesis, are from this edition.

both the Tel Aviv faux pas as well as the Walser-Bubis debate through a portrayal of Berlin's topography, which the text is at pains to portray as a site of cultural and historic saturation. Berlin 'trug als letzte der europäischen Großstädte noch spür- und sichtbar die politischen und materiellen Folgen jenes Krieges, der in den Kalten Krieg der politischen Großblöcke übergegangen war'.<sup>217</sup> This chapter will analyse such traces of history in post-reunification Berlin in *Die Flatterzunge*.

The reader is given the story because the protagonist is preparing an autobiographical transcript of the events for his defence. Set both in Berlin and Tel Aviv, the text is written in the form of a diary, as well as being an account of what happened for his lawyer, the significance of which will be discussed later in this chapter. It might be argued that this structure creates what the author conceives as being an inevitable and unavoidable comparison between the two cities, as understood within the historically significant framework of the Shoah. The significance of Berlin for the text lies precisely in the protagonist's preoccupation with the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust; it is the city that relentlessly confronts the protagonist with that past. That said, Hannes's Berlin is a complex concatenation of experiences embracing Germany's musical past and with it its cultural heritage, National Socialism, the resistance and theme park tourism of the post-Wall years; it is an urban portrayal in which Berlin appears intermittently and frequently in different ways and under different aspects and therefore shifts away from Grass's dominant preoccupation with East Berlin as well as those of Hettche and Brussig with the Wall. It is a poly-perspective that might be said to gesture toward a perception of Berlin as an unfinished

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<sup>217</sup> Gerwin Zohlen, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Stadt: Berliner Architektur am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2002), p. 9.

city which cannot therefore be conclusively represented; Berlin in *Die Flatterzunge* is a city without borders: 'Der mauerlose Herzpunkt der Mauerstadt' (51).

*Die Flatterzunge* is a further example of a text working through Berlin's topography as a means of confronting Germany's history, and in particular, the National Socialist past. It might be worthwhile here to look at the function of the protagonist in respect of the text's discussion on history and memory, given that the city is exclusively perceived through Hanne's subjective perspective. The text moves beyond the preoccupations of a conscious uncovering of the past as portrayed in *Ein weites Feld*, *Allerseelen* and *Nox*, by concentrating instead on an obsession with the historical past, in particular, with the National Socialist past. The representation of Berlin's topography in the text is therefore one of historical saturation that allows no other perspective on or of the city. This protagonist's reductionism represents a form of historical consciousness *in extremis*. Evidence for this reading is to be found in the protagonist's discussion of his relationship with his musical instrument, the trombone, which he claims to be equally burdened with the same National Socialist past. The instrument 'ist mir zugefallen' (10), in the same way the National Socialist history had become his lot; 'Ich gehorchte [...] wie ich immer gehorcht habe, fast immer' (10-11). The trombone has become a powerfully destructive instrument that can seemingly destroy everything 'alles kaputtmachen' (27), a reputation born out of a deliberate mistranslation, according to the protagonist. In ancient Jericho, Berlin's historic counterpart of walled cities, 'wurde das Schofar geblasen, das Widderhorn des Alten Testaments. Das klang dem Luther zu sehr nach Synagoge, zu jüdisch, deshalb machte er daraus die Posaune, die gerade erst erfunden war' (27). In an intriguing convergence of the public/collective and private/individual, the

protagonist sees himself as being the inheritor of an instrument tainted with an anti-Semitic past. He is unable to adopt a more differentiated engagement with history.

It is perhaps fair to speak of a degree of psychopathic paranoia on the part of the protagonist, paranoia analogous to extreme forms of repression and neurotic disorder. How else should the protagonist's insistence on reading the Nazi-past in and through Berlin's topography be understood? As an example of this paranoia, the protagonist, having just passed the site of the planned Holocaust Memorial, observes a butcher's lorry and remarks: ' "Metzger Dachbau", die Schrift auf einem LKW, ich las: Metzger Dachau', the Dachau Butcher (114). It is apparent that the text situates itself in a wider ongoing discourse on the memory of National Socialism and of the Shoah in post-unification Germany and the 'performance' of that past in the city fabric, but, as suggested above, it represents an attempt to address uncritical and repressive discourses dealing with German history. The concern with the National Socialist past in the text is not only relevant to Berlin but, significantly, to Germany as a whole, insofar as Berlin's signifying function as the capital extends beyond itself.

I argued in my analysis of Berlin's topography that the images which serve as vehicles for our understanding of the city also embody and reflect the changes forced upon the city, both from without and within. Understood in this way, the image and the function of Berlin as a semantic field 'ont changé au moins de sept fois, de manière radicale, en un peu plus d'un siècle, au rythme effréné des tourments de l'histoire allemands'.<sup>218</sup> I have drawn attention to such changes through the function of Berlin's buildings and monuments in the previous three chapters, arguing that Berlin's topography, its monuments and buildings, street names and

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<sup>218</sup> Boris Grésillon, 'Les Hauts Lieux Berlinois: Une Réappropriation problématique', in: *Les Temps Modernes*, Août-Novembre, 2003:625, p. 120.

public squares, are important mnemonic indicators in the Federal Republic, because those buildings and monuments are the symbolic vehicles through which the past is communicated to the present.<sup>219</sup> Mnemonic is understood here as referring to devices, such as buildings, whose function is to trigger memory. It should also be observed that the recognisable 'signs' of Berlin, the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag and the Potsdamer Platz, have, over the course of the last one hundred years, been subject to a continued re-appropriation and consequently incorporated into the current ideological discourse, such as that of National Socialism, divided and post-unification Germany. Such signs 'véhiculent aujourd'hui d'autres symboles, ceux d'une Allemagne qui se veut réunifiée et pacifiée, d'une société en quête de normalité et parfois oublieuse de son passé'.<sup>220</sup> It is precisely this quest for normality that the protagonist cynically derides following his dismissal: 'Die Oper schickt mich nach Hause, damit ich nicht noch mehr Schaden anrichte, damit alles nach entschlossenem Handeln aussieht und einer die Rolle des Bösewichts hat und nicht weiter stört bei der Versöhnung' (17). The protagonist, however, claims his dismissal was motivated because 'diese Schande will sich unsere saubere Bundesrepublik nicht noch einmal leisten, Negativschlagzeilen rund um den Globus, wieder die Karikatur vom Nazideutschland, was für ein Schaden für die Exportwirtschaft' (50).

The concept of 'normality' is a less than fortunate indicator when applied to notions such as identity and the collective; after all, to what type or standard should a nation adhere in order to be considered normal by others? Germany is a European country like any other, while at

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<sup>219</sup> In a similar vein, the images of Berlin in the Delius text at once thematize, in their performative role, the same debates on history in the capital throughout the *Nachwende* period, while at the same time pushing this historical consciousness and perception to an extreme subjective awareness, offering only a limited perception both of the city and historical remembering.

<sup>220</sup> Boris Grésillon, 'Les Hauts Lieux Berlinoises: Une Réappropriation problématique', p. 122.

the same time permeated by a sense of its uniqueness born out of a relationship to its own history. Does the claim of a nation to be seeking normality (unsere saubere Bundesrepublik) suggest that the Federal Republic has been, or indeed is, not normal?<sup>221</sup> Indeed, 'Normal', as one reviewer noted, 'ist eines der barbarischsten Wörter dieses Jahrhunderts, weil es zwingend das Wort "anormal"(sic.) fordert. Und mit dem Wort "anormal" wurden ganze Völker in den Tod geschickt'.<sup>222</sup> Normality in the context of the *Nachwende* period might be said to suggest a return to an idea of Germany before the collapse of the Weimarer Republic, that is, to the concept of the nation-state as it had existed before the advent of National Socialism in Germany, but which, echoing Adorno's dictum, may no longer be possible after Auschwitz. The collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945 sounded the death knell for nationalism, in what ever form, and came to be considered a taboo in post-war German discourse, certainly until the *Historikerstreit* of the mid to late 1980s.<sup>223</sup> Claims to normality might also harbour a desire to bracket-off history, to put the past in a parenthetical filter, to remove those elements that might be said to undermine such claims of normality.

If, for example, in *Ein weites Feld* historical consciousness, understood by Grass as an obligation not to forget the past but to incorporate it into the present, is seen as integral to a preservation of cultural and social identities, such as the uniqueness of the identity of the

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<sup>221</sup> The claim of a German 'normality' gained currency in and during the *Historikerstreit* from 1986 onward. The claim rested on the belief that the Federal Republic had shed all remnants of its National Socialist past and was clearly entrenched in the democratic institutions of Europe. Maier observes that 'this alleged search for "normalization" is what is at stake in the current controversy'. For an analysis of German revisionism and normality see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1988), here p. 70.

<sup>222</sup> Dieter Forte, 'Barbarei des Biedersinns', *Die Zeit* 18 February, 1999.

<sup>223</sup> See for example Hans-Georg Stavginski's lucid argument on the development of nationalism and German national consciousness from the nineteenth century to the present. Stavginski notes that the 'historische Bewußtsein ist gespalten, da der gesamte Bestand der Überlieferung der deutschen Geschichte bis 1945 in zwei unterschiedlichen politischen, sozialen und kulturellen Wahrnehmungs- und Interpretationszusammenhänge rezipiert wurde. Möglich scheint lediglich, an den historischen Ausgangspunkt zurückzukehren und unter dem nationalen Blickwinkel die gemeinsame NS-Vergangenheit mitsamt ihrer Verbrechen zu vergegenwärtigen'. Hans-Georg Stavginski, *Das Holocaust-Denkmal* (Paderborn, Schöningh, 2002), p. 236.

GDR, in *Die Flatterzunge* the histories of the past one hundred years only suffocate and severely restrict the contemporary inhabitant of *Nachwende* Berlin: 'Keiner kommt ungestraft nach Berlin' (93). The protagonist suggests that 'authentic' being is no longer possible in a city unable to free itself from its obsession with its own (and others) history, as is clearly portrayed through the protagonist's plans to change his name: 'Sollte mir einen italienischen Namen zulegen, mein Name ist ruiniert für alle Zeiten' (20), converging his own history with that of the Federal Republic. Further, in contrast to Grass's urban scribbler, the protagonist of the Delius text does not hope to preserve the past, nor does he in any way attempt to critically engage with it. He seeks only to avoid a past which he nevertheless understands to be inescapable and all pervasive; it is paradoxically in Israel where the protagonist feels unthreatened by memories of the past: 'Die wilde Mischung aus Orient und USA, Lärm, Beton, Staub, Schnelligkeit, Ruppigkeit, das pralle Leben am Strand und in den Läden, all das gefiel mir. Weil es mit unseren Täter-Opfer-Spielen nichts zu tun hatte. Unseren olympischen Schuld-Spielen' (86). Israel then, is the site of the Other, paradoxically free from the chains of National Socialist history, a freedom no longer experienced in Germany and in particular in Berlin where the ontological duty to remember is omnipresent. A walk in the city park underlining precisely this almost paranoid perception of the too historically saturated city: 'Jeder Baum, jeder Strauch, jede Blume spricht: Du bist mitten in Berlin, wie du dich auch drehst, wie du dich auch wendest. Unter dem Gras die Vulkane der Vergangenheit' (122). The image the protagonist evokes has nightmarish qualities, but is somewhat reminiscent of Dorothy's excursion through the poppy-field in *The Wizard of Oz*. The image of these whispering flora further suggests the paranoia of being constantly observed, even spied on 'wie du dich auch drehst, wie du dich auch wendest', again underlines an assumed inescapability from an Argos-like historically saturated Berlin. There

is possibly an intended pun on 'wenden', to turn, but the Wende is also the term for the reunification as turning point in German history – no matter how much Germany turns/changes or claims to be turning, the past will always be present. It is not enough that history be simply 'there', its presence connotes a certain danger, a threat to everyday existence in the city, as is suggested in the image of the 'Vulkane der Vergangenheit' hidden beneath the grass of the park. The vulcanized fibre of the city constantly threatens Berlin and its citizens with its multifarious pasts.

The protagonist is at pains to emphasize the convergence of the public and private, a woven tapestry of personal memories with collective histories, with a particular emphasis on the National Socialist past. He refers to his imbroglio in Tel Aviv as 'Mein Kampf mit dem Kellner' (104) in an ironic but nonetheless revealing contextualised understanding of his struggle with the past, thematically linked with his earlier claim that a small part of Hitler continues to exist in each German citizen. The reference to Hitler's own blending of autobiographical history with that of German national destiny in *Mein Kampf* clearly lends support to this reading. His own history, as that of any German, is inextricably linked with the German past, along with the problematic issue of responsibility to remember in light of the Shoah. The question of inherited guilt coupled with the National Socialist past in Germany was an issue widely debated in the ten years preceding and following the reunification.

A walk through the city makes clear however, that the protagonist engages with, and is engaged by, those hidden volcanic pockets of Berlin's history that are very much part of Berlin's topography. History cannot be ignored. The purpose of Hannes's walks is not to



engage with history to attempt to understand it, but to flee from it. His method of flight is couched in his constant insistence upon his own innocence, by claiming, somewhat outrageously, that he, and not the memory of the Holocaust, as symbolic of the perpetrator-victim binary, is the victim of history, 'bin ich nicht das Opfer, hacken nicht alle auf mir rum? (39).<sup>224</sup> It is perhaps a paradox of the text that the protagonist's desire for a form of historic oblivion, which is arguably the dominant leitmotif in the text, leads precisely to an obsession with history, manifested in and through his perception of the city as a site of historic inescapability.

The question of a possible link between the desire for historic oblivion and paranoia as discussed above must also be addressed. The protagonist's perception of public historical references and monuments in Berlin as being indices of a personal attack against contemporary German society testifies to this paranoia. The protagonist's encounter with Berlin's topography is at the very least uncritically a-historic. It is certainly the case that the *Nachwende* period forced another dialogue in Germany with its past, a point repeatedly emphasized by Günter Grass in his novel *Ein weites Feld*. But it is unclear why Hannes suggests the coexistence of the historic is an inhibiting influence, lending credence to the suggestion posited by the protagonist that authentic, individual being is no longer possible: 'Früher, das ist der Unterschied, gab es in der Verzweiflung wenigstens ein Ziel, eine Gewißheit: Irgendwann kommst du hier raus, irgendwann kommt eine andere Zeit. – Und heute? Hilft nur die totale Verwandlung?' (116). Again there are the linguistic references echoing Nazi-discourse possibly underscoring the protagonist-narrator's belief that he is

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<sup>224</sup> The German victim-status debate was given extra impetus following the publication of Jörg Friedrich's controversial book, *Als der Feuer vom Himmel fiel* (2004), which concentrates almost exclusively on the Dresden bombing victims and equates 12 January 1945 with Auschwitz.

historically and linguistically trapped by an inherited past. But the frequent uses of National Socialist language testify again to a saturation with, and uncritical use of the historical. The option open to him is that of a transformation (*Verwandlung*) into someone or something else, as mentioned above. That earlier time (*Früher*) is the time before his visit to Tel Aviv with the Berlin Opera, in whose orchestra he was the first trombone player. Life was, in one respect, easier then, that is, before he signed his hotel bar tab in Tel Aviv “Adolf Hitler”. From that moment Hannes became ‘der Teufel von Berlin, der Hund von Tel Aviv’ (14). He had broken a particular German taboo. But his engagement with the past is not only uncritical it is also dangerously individual and subjective because he refuses both an individual responsibility to the past and to acknowledge the wider implications of his egregious act. It is precisely the subjective approach that appears to deny the historical – a point underscored by the protagonist-narrator in his own admission that he lives a-historically: ‘Sorry, ich kann nur unhistorisch denken’ (33) – and consequently becomes entangled in the briar of Berlin’s layered histories. However, as one reviewer observed, ‘[d]er Autor bürdet seiner Figur zusätzlich die Funktion eines Seismographen für die Veränderungen in Berlin auf’, which establishes further a dialectic between public and private histories and urban perception and representation.<sup>225</sup> But perhaps this seismographic function serves equally to underscore the necessity to narrate, and if necessary re-narrate, a given historical event.

It will be argued that this insistence on coexistent past and present, in its various forms of either public discourse or public monuments, might be understood as responding to Martin Walser’s *Friedenspreisrede* given on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1998 at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt. I shall apply Walser’s speech as an interpretative tool in respect of the Delius text. Walser’s

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<sup>225</sup> Katrin Hillgruber, ‘Der Jericho Komplex: Friedrich Christian Delius’ Chronologie eines deutschen Fehltritts’, *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24.07.1999.

speech reignited a debate on the role and place of the memory of National Socialism in post-unification Germany. Contextually, the debate triggered by this speech echoed the *Historikerstreit* of the late 1980s. In his critique of Walser's *Friedenspreisrede*, one critic asks with particular emphasis on the period of German history between 1933 and 1945: 'welche Stellung soll diese Vergangenheit im Bewußtsein der Deutschen heute und in Zukunft einnehmen?'<sup>226</sup> I take this question to be asking whether contemporary Germany, as some critics have argued, should now 'put aside' the National Socialist 'burden' and recognise that the Federal Republic has moved on and can no longer be said to bear any resemblance to Nazi Germany. But the question also addresses the individual and collective responsibility to the past, a responsibility of remembering and atoning. By contrast, a number of commentators questioned whether acts of memory or remembering the past should be delegated to official rites and public rituals, such as the Holocaust Monument or left rather to be determined by the conscience of each individual citizen; or, as was Habermas's position, whether the memory of National Socialism should be reasserted in post-unification German public discourse and memory if only because contemporary Germany can only be understood within an inclusive historical framework. For a number of German intellectuals, Germany is 'nicht denkbar ohne Vergangenheitsbewältigung und deutsche Teilung. Ohne Nationalsozialismus und deutsche Frage kein neues Staatsverständnis. Die Voraussetzungen der Bundesrepublik erwachsen aus diesen negativen Grundlagen'.<sup>227</sup>

In his now frequently quoted speech, Walser appeared to advocate a subjective, non-instrumentalised ethos of remembering, which would, so he believed, avoid any possible

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<sup>226</sup> Johannes Klotz und Gerd Wiegel (hg), *Geistige Brandstiftung? Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte* (Köln, Papy-Rossa Verlag, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>227</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Walser's Deutschland', in: *Text und Kritik: Martin Walser*, (hg.) Heinz Ludwig Arnold, (Hamburg, 2000), p. 110.

misuse of that memory. The speech clearly underlined Walser's position in the memory debate, namely one similar to, if not the same as that of the historical revisionists, such as Ernst Nolte. I want to turn shortly to an analysis of Walser's 1998 speech and the ensuing charge of historical revisionism and repression, which that speech elicited, most notably from Ignaz Bubis, the former head of the German-Jewish council in Germany. I shall then analyse in what way *Die Flatterzunge* responds to Walser's call for a new discourse on memory in post-unification Germany and the significance of Berlin in the text's response to, or critique of, Walser's subjectively historic perception.

#### IV.1. "Geistige Brandstiftung"? – The 'Walser-Bubis' Debate

There was a great deal of excitement surrounding the much anticipated 1998 *Friedenspreisrede* to be given by Martin Walser in the historic Paulskirche in Frankfurt. The author himself acknowledged as much: '[a]uf die Rede, die der Ausgesuchte halten werde, hieß es auch öfter, sei man gespannt, sie werde sicher kritisch'.<sup>228</sup> Perhaps it was assumed that Walser would comment on the apparent social unrest in parts of the Federal Republic, in particular the attacks against foreigners and the incendiary strike on an asylum-seekers' house in Rostock. These issues were very much the focus of media attention at the time of the speech. But there was also the possibility, muted in the German press, that he would comment on his recently published novel, *Ein springender Brunnen*, a thoughtful autobiographical text addressing the difficulty of the private individual trying both only to remember his own past, and to assert the validity of personal memories and individual recollections in a cultural landscape that appeared to deny them a voice: 'In der

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<sup>228</sup> Martin Walser, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 1998: Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede* (Frankfurt a/M, Sonderdruck, edition Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 9. Hereafter FPR.

Vergangenheit, die alle zusammen haben, kann man herumgehen wie in einem Museum. Die eigene Vergangenheit ist nicht begehbar'.<sup>229</sup> The tension between public and private memories permeates both his autobiographical novel and the *Friedenspreisrede*. I argue that because of the chronological and thematic proximity between the *Ein springender Brunnen* and the *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 1998* (the speech was given two months after the publication of the novel) an analysis and comparison of the textual discussions on memory and history in the two texts is necessary. Walser himself offers no concrete suggestions to support his call for normality, nor how or in what way the past might best be approached. But with the publication of his novel he had published his own contribution to German cultural memory and engagement with the past.

The reunification of the two Germanies proceeded on the assumption of an essential cultural unity of the German people in East and West. In other words, the political developments of 1990 were acceptable to the citizens in the East and the West because the idea of the essential unity of the German people had sufficient resonance to legitimise the organizational form in which the unification proceeded. There were however critical voices warning against the prevailing euphoria for immediate reunification such as Grass's *Ein weites Feld*. The publication of Grass's text in 1997 re-opened, with its implicit critique of the reunification, a Pandora's box discussion on the Nation-State, the German National Socialist past, the GDR, and the continuance of those histories in *Nachwende* Germany/Berlin. The publication in 1997 had apparently burst the bubble of *Nachwende* Berlin's euphoria by giving particular

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<sup>229</sup> Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen* (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 9-10. Heinz-Peter Preusser rightly interprets this sentence as a 'geschichtsphilosophischen Reflexion, die dem Individuierten gegen das Allgemeine zu seinem Recht verhelfen, es einklagen und behaupten will', Heinz-Peter Preusser, 'Erinnerung, Fiktion und Geschichte. Über die Transformation des Erlebten ins kulturelle Gedächtnis: Walser – Wilkomirski – Grass' in: *German Life and Letters* (57:4 October 2004), p. 488.

weight to the historical at a time when the prevailing orthodoxy was one of collective amnesia and forward-looking optimism. Social and political discourses addressing German history were so widespread that one writer felt confident to refer to Germany as a 'Republik der Historiker', adding that the preoccupation with history might be said to function as a sort of *basso continuo* across large areas of discourse.<sup>230</sup> The debates raging in the media following the Grass publication focused largely on notions such as the nation and the collective leaving some contemporaries, such as Martin Walser, feeling that individual histories and memories were being left out of the bigger picture. However, private and individual memories and recollections 'verfahren dabei oft milder und großzügiger, in jedem Fall aber unkontrollierter als der öffentliche Umgang mit dem Nationalsozialismus'.<sup>231</sup> As will be argued, this is something Walser failed to consider in his speech.

The decade following the reunification forced both sides into a (re-)new(ed) dialogue with the past, in particular the National Socialist past and its consequences for contemporary Germany. It is within this cultural landscape that the author of *Ein springender Brunnen* and the recipient of the *Friedenspreisrede* appears to be concerned that the discussions of the past are becoming increasingly standardized, and as such defends his own individual past against the strictures of such standardizations:

In Wirklichkeit wird der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit von Jahrzehnt zu Jahrzehnt strenger normiert. Je normierter dieser Umgang, um so mehr ist das, was als Vergangenheit gezeigt wird, Produkt der Gegenwart. Es ist vorstellbar, daß die Vergangenheit überhaupt zum Verschwinden gebracht wird, daß sie nur nicht dazu dient, auszudrücken, wie einem jetzt zumute ist beziehungsweise zumute sein soll. Die Vergangenheit als Fundus, aus dem man sich bedienen kann. Nach Bedarf. Eine komplett erschlossene,

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<sup>230</sup> Ulrich Raulff, 'Bigband Zeitgeschichte', in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 May 1999, p. 49.

<sup>231</sup> Ute Frevert, 'Geschichtsvergessenheit und Geschichtsversessenheit revisited', *Das Parlament: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 29 September 2003, p. 6.

durchleuchtete, gereinigte, genehmigte, total gegenwartsgeeignete  
Vergangenheit. [FPR, 282]

The speaker's concern is based on his assumption that the past exists only at the service of the present and is as a result contaminated and degraded. The claim that the past is *durchkorrigiert* rests on the hypothesis that contemporary discussions of the past demand an approved, unambiguous lesson from the past and everything else that does not fulfil such expectations is expunged and repressed. The question the speaker appears to be asking is whether there is not the danger that one's own personal memories of the past will be lost, 'durchkorrigiert' and cleansed (gereinigt)? In the words of one commentator, 'the promise to convey the truth about the past presupposes that the presentation of that which was is always already implicated in a pre-discursive ethics before it is a conveying of facts'.<sup>232</sup> In an echo of Walser's own words, Wyschogrod concludes that 'this space prior to historical description is one in which signs disappear, of designing'.<sup>233</sup> It is precisely the standardized ethics of discussions concerned with the memories of the National Socialist past with which Walser takes issue in his speech.

Walser turns his attention to the National Socialist past and the privileged access to that past in the autobiographical novel, *Ein springender Brunnen*. But in direct contrast to the grand narratives of the *Historikerstreit* and the German-history debate in the *Nachwende* period, the author of *Ein springender Brunnen* portrays the individual memories of an old man looking back at his youth under the Nazi-regime. The text insists on the specificity of individual experience. There is a thematic link between the portrayal of the protagonist's desire to

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<sup>232</sup> Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

abstain from general historical debate, ‘Johann drehte sich zur Wand’,<sup>234</sup> the Friedenspreisrede and the revisionist policies of the German historian Ernst Nolte. In an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1986, Nolte claimed that the German past is a ‘Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will’ insofar as the past is being artificially kept alive to prevent the Germans from putting the Nazi-past behind them.<sup>235</sup> Walser was therefore not being disingenuous when he remarked that ‘people’ were expecting a critical speech; the stage had already been set both by the cultural and political events in Germany at the time of the speech and the publication of his recently published novel. Although Walser criticises Johann’s desire to forget, only two months later in his *Friedenspreisrede* he polemically supported an active turning-away from the historical. Why is there such disparity between the novel and the speech?

Although the title of his speech did not suggest anything untoward (‘a Sunday talk’), Walser indeed gave a ‘critical’ speech, couched in a conditionally-loaded language, that was to trigger yet another debate on National Socialism and the memory of the past in post-unification Germany. That said, although the style of the speech is indeed one of self-reflexion, it is still more than a ‘Selbsterkundung’<sup>236</sup> characterised by a ‘vorsichtigen

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<sup>234</sup> Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen*, p. 357. Johann turns to the Wall the moment an SA officer in the barracks starts telling him about his experience of murdering Jews because he wants to remain ignorant of what is truly happening during the war.

<sup>235</sup> Ernst Nolte’s article in the *FAZ* triggered what was to be called the *Historikerstreit* on the role of the past in contemporary German society. Ernst Nolte, ‘Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will’, *FAZ* 6. Juni 1986, quoted in *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (München, Piper Verlag, 1987), p. 39.

<sup>236</sup> This at least was Walser’s defence of his speech given in an article published in the *FAZ* in the midst of the debate. See Martin Walser, ‘Wovon zeugt die Schande, wenn nicht von Verbrechen. Das Gewissen ist die innere Einsamkeit mit sich: Ein Zwischenruf’, *FAZ* 28 November 1998. Dieter Borchmeyer, *Martin Walser und die Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 2001) however, defends Walser’s deliberately vague language as an authorial privilege, adding that the author should not be forced to express himself in a morally-burdened language. Walser, observes Borchmeyer, ‘verweigert sich also, hinter jeder Person zu stehen, ihre Gesinnung und Rede fortwährend zu desavouieren und den Leser mit warnender Stimme politisch-korrekt zu beeinflussen’, p. 24. But this is to hermetically seal off Walser from his audience and responsibility as a public intellectual.



Sprachgebrauch' (FPR, 12). The issues it touches on are too general and in a way too public to be simply private ruminations. But whereas the historians' debate of the 1980s was predominantly an academic discussion, the Walser-Bubis debate was led by two individuals with personal memories and histories of the Nazi regime, though from different sides: Martin Walser was part of the German army's anti-aircraft artillery, while Ignatz Bubis is a Holocaust survivor. The public discussion between two such prominent public figures was a discussion on private as opposed to public memory, on subjective remembering and forgetting in opposition to instrumentalised and collective forms of remembrance.

'Ich verschließe mich Übeln, an deren Behebung ich nicht mitwirken kann. Ich habe lernen müssen wegzuschauen' (FPR, 10), observes Walser at the beginning of his speech. What exactly these misfortunes (Übeln) are is not immediately clear, but his advocacy of active social repression in the face of unpleasant truths is clearly articulated in his speech (Ich habe lernen müssen wegzuschauen). He continues that when confronted with the unpalatable he finds himself unable to endorse Freud's disqualification of repression as a means of forgetting: 'An der Disqualifizierung des Verdrängens kann ich mich nicht beteiligen. [...] Ich käme ohne Wegschauen und Wegdenken nicht durch den Tag und schon gar nicht durch die Nacht' (FPR, 11). Walser's admission is that of a private individual and as such is not blameworthy; but it is problematic given that Walser's public profile loomed large in the intellectual and cultural landscape of the Federal Republic and at a time when attacks against foreigners in Germany were increasing in number. There is a discrepancy between the advocacy of repression in the speech and his critique of the same in his autobiographical novel published shortly before his speech. Johann too, it will be remembered, desired nothing more than the right physically and metaphorically to turn away from the *Übel* of National

Socialism. The repetition and exploration of forgetting and repression as means of dealing with the past invite the reader to establish a link between the narrator of *Ein springender Brunnen* and the speaker at the Friedenspreisrede in Frankfurt. Johann closed himself off from the realities of Nazism in his hometown: ‘Johann wehrte sich gegen die Angst, in der Frau Landsmann gelebt hatte. [...] Die Angst [...] engt ihn ein. Er will mit dieser Angst nichts zu tun haben’.<sup>237</sup> Walser’s assessment of the past-in-the-present in contemporary Germany is indeed a critical perspective, but one that is nonetheless deeply problematic because it brackets-out other ways of looking at the past: ‘Warum werde ich von der Empörung, die dem Denker den folgenden Satzanfang gebietet, nicht mobilisiert: “Wenn die sympathisierende Bevölkerung vor brennenden Asylantenheimen Würstchenbuden aufstellt.”’<sup>238</sup> But there is a gap of almost fifty years between Johann’s reluctance to face the present and Walser’s own acknowledgement that he too feels threatened by that past and denial appears to be the only way to deal with it.

The vocal admissions of active repression and a reluctance to accept what is happening in Germany underpins a thematic link between the author Walser and the narrator of the autobiographical text, *Ein springender Brunnen* as well as its protagonist Johann. The thematic overlaps also demonstrate that both texts are clearly part of Walser’s continued efforts to explore and simultaneously escape the burden of the German past: ‘[d]ie Geschichts- & Verdrängungspolitik von “Ein springender Brunnen” und der Friedenspreis Rede kommt aus der gleichen Quelle. Die Friedenspreis-Rede ist die aktuelle Probe auf das

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<sup>237</sup> Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen*, p. 400.

<sup>238</sup> Martin Walser, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 15.

Exempel, das “Ein springender Brunnen” literarisch gegeben hatte’.<sup>239</sup> At least with respect to the portrayal of individual struggles with the past the two texts should be considered in tandem. The speech, however, is troubling insofar as it moves beyond the realm of fiction and as a comment on social affairs in Germany, appears to fly in the face of clearly documented xenophobia in the post-unification period. Walser, the writer and public intellectual, is refusing to acknowledge and or address issues of xenophobia or to allow such issues to trouble his conscience as a German. As Stephen Brockmann polemically asks, ‘if Walser does not want to criticize repression, does that mean that he wants to praise it?’<sup>240</sup>

According to Walser, the past will not go away because a handful of intellectuals have taken it upon themselves to be the ‘Treuändern des Gewissens’, custodians of the German conscience, with a possible pun on the Treuhand institution discussed in the Grass chapter. These custodians, he argues, are determined in their efforts to establish parallels between the recent racist attacks against minority groups in Germany and similar acts of racial discrimination under National Socialism. Walser’s anger is directed against ‘Die, die mit solchen Sätzen auftreten’ and who ‘wollen uns weh tun, weil sie finden, wir haben das verdient’ (FPR, 17). The speaker is establishing a binary (Sie/wir, they/us) between the intellectuals who refuse to allow the National Socialist past to become history and the vast majority of Germans who simply want to leave the past behind and move on. There is a twofold representation at stake here and Walser perceives himself to be the representative of

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<sup>239</sup> Wolfram Schütte, ‘Naches: “Ein springender Brunnen” oder die Friedenspreis-Rede’, in *Text und Kritik: Martin Walser*, p. 119.

<sup>240</sup> Stephen Brockmann, ‘Martin Walser and the Presence of the German Past’, *The German Quarterly*, 2002, 75:2, p. 136.

a silent majority subjected to the 'constant' criticisms' of an overly critical minority. The silent majority is *de facto* a victim of historical harassment.<sup>241</sup>

It is unfortunate that in the outcry at this victim/oppressor role reversal, it was no longer possible to hear his subtler and more profound claim to the validity of a deeply personal and intimate truth (such as the early death of his father and brother during the war) that cannot be easily squared with collective memory and forms of remembering. There is a call for the authenticity of individual memories to be heard above the din of *Nachwende* discussions dealing with the past. The intellectuals, he argues, have created an environment in which 'alles gesühnt werden muß,' and in such a world 'könnte ich nicht leben' (FPR, 11). The current climate is such that the grand historical narratives that should be dormant, leaning heavily on his reading of Nietzsche to whom he refers, instead loom large and consequently overshadow equally significant individual and private histories.<sup>242</sup> The condensing of the social criticisms of Jürgen Habermas and Günter Grass to a representation of an unpleasant

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<sup>241</sup> Klaus von Dohnanyi's contribution to this debate in support of Walser supports this reading. In an article published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (14 November 1998), Dohnanyi remarked: "allerdings mußten sich natürlich auch die jüdischen Bürger in Deutschland fragen, ob sie sich so sehr viel tapferer als die meisten anderen Deutschen verhalten hätten, wenn nach 1933 "nur" die Behinderten, die Homosexuellen oder die Roma in die Vernichtungslager geschleppt worden wären'. If personal conscience is seen as the main instrument of remembering, which both Dohnanyi and Walser claim should be the case, memory thus becomes merely a depoliticised and unhistoric process of self-examination and could in some cases lead to an apologetic view of human weakness.

<sup>242</sup> While it is true that Nietzsche does indeed criticize an excessive preoccupation with history, he nonetheless acknowledges the need for historical awareness. In Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben', in *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Frankfurt a/M, Insel, 1981), he argues: the historian 'muß die Kraft haben und von Zeit zu Zeit anwenden, eine Vergangenheit zu zerbrechen und aufzulösen, um Leben zu können', p. 119. But Walser omitted the conclusion of Nietzsche's argument: 'Menschen oder Zeiten, die auf diese Weise dem Leben dienen, daß sie eine Vergangenheit richten und vernichten, sind immer gefährliche und gefährdete Menschen und Zeiten. Denn da wir nun einmal die Resultate früherer Geschlechter sind, sind wir auch die Resultate ihrer Verirrungen, Leidenschaften und Irrtümer, ja Verbrechen; es ist nicht ganz möglich, sich ganz von dieser Kette zu lösen', p. 119.

and morally dubious fraction preventing Walser, and his silent majority, from turning away when asylum homes are attacked and its inhabitants burned alive is clearly problematic.<sup>243</sup>

The ‘crime’ of these intellectuals is an insistence on the ‘Dauerpräsentation unserer Schande’ and on what he refers to as the ‘Instrumentalisierung unserer Schande zu gegenwärtigen Zwecken’ (FPR, 18). According to Walser, any reference to Auschwitz and or the Holocaust, in whatever medium, is a performative act, what he refers to as a ‘Ritualisierung’, and consequently is nothing more than a demonstration determined by the ‘Qualität (der) Lippengebet’ (FPR, 20), which is to state that memorial rituals are observed but only as empty gestures void of wider meaning or significance for society. The argument follows that such public acts of remembering can only lead to an erasure of private histories. But is it the case that a reference to the Shoah, say, in the media, must necessarily be understood as an accusation (‘attackierende Beschuldigung’ [FPR, 17]) against the German people? There appears to be very little evidence to support this statement. It is absurd to claim that the memory of the Nazi past is maintained because contemporary Germans are, in Walser’s words, on the side of the guilty. There is a political and social responsibility, and a public will, to remember the Holocaust. German history, particularly the history of National Socialism, ‘gehört der Öffentlichkeit. [...] Um sie wird gestritten, und eben dieser Streit sichert der NS-Zeit einen privilegierten Dauerplatz auf der Bühne des öffentlichen

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<sup>243</sup> ‘Jemand findet die Art, wie wir die Folgen der deutschen Teilung überwinden wollen, nicht gut und sagt, so ermöglichen wir ein neues Auschwitz’, Martin Walser, [FPR, 18]. The remark is an obvious reference to Günter Grass. Grass’ criticism of the reunification was that an opportunity had been missed to create a German ‘Mehrstaatlichkeit’, as opposed to the nation-state advocated by the political majority, which was ‘die früh geschaffene Voraussetzung für Auschwitz. [...] Der deutsche Einheitsstaat verhalf der nationalsozialistischen Rassen-ideologie zu einer entsetzlich tauglichen Grundlage’. Günter Grass, ‘Kurze Rede eines vaterlandslosen Gesellen’, in *Die Zeit*, 9 February 1990. The reference to Jürgen Habermas is a direct citation from one of the philosopher’s texts: ‘Ein wirklich bedeutender Denker formuliert im Jahre 92: “Erst die Reaktion auf den rechten Terror – die aus der politischen Mitte der Bevölkerung und die von oben: aus der Regierung, dem Staatsapparat und der Führung der Parteien – machen das ganze Ausmaß der moralisch-politischen Verwahrlosung sichtbar”’. Martin Walser, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 14.

Interesses'.<sup>244</sup> Cultural theorists argue that culture is also a form of collective and individual memory, insofar as there can not be a social group without some form of collective ritualised memory: individual memory is always 'kulturell geformt', an aspect Walser neglected to consider.<sup>245</sup> In *Ein springender Brunnen* Johann also believed himself to be personally attacked when confronted with the Nazi past by a former school friend. He felt "attakiert" and "Beschuldig[t]" by Wolfgang who expressed surprise that Johann appeared to be aware of so little in the village:

Vielleicht meinte Wolfgang, daß Johann ein Vorwurf zu machen sei, weil er all das nicht gewußt, nicht gemerkt hatte. Johann wehrte sich gegen diesen vermuteten Vorwurf. Woher hätte er wissen sollen, daß Frau Haensel Jüdin ist? Er wollte von sich nichts verlangen lassen. Was er empfand, wollte er selber empfinden. Niemand sollte ihm eine Empfindung abverlangen, die er nicht hat.<sup>246</sup>

The emphasis here is that the accusation is merely 'presumed' (vermutet), but obviously this presupposition was enough to elicit a feeling of being threatened or attacked by a reference to National Socialism. There are clear parallels between the public speaker Martin Walser, who by his own admission desires only his 'Seelenfrieden', and the fictional Johann of the autobiographical novel *Ein springender Brunnen*; both are driven by an urge to forget even if this entails repression. But if public acts of remembering are such that they result only in empty performance gestures ritualised for the sake of the past, 'Öffentlich gefordert, regiert nur der Schein' (FPR, 23), the logical consequence to be drawn from this conclusion would be the termination of public rituals of remembering. It is a logical consequence only if

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<sup>244</sup> Ute Frevert, 'Geschichtsvergessenheit und Geschichtsversessenheit revisited', p. 6. 5

<sup>245</sup> See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, C.H.Beck, 1992); Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, C.H.Beck, 1999). See also: 'Niemand lebt im Augenblick. Ein Gespräch mit den Kulturwissenschaftlern Aleida und Jan Assmann über deutsche Geschichte, deutsches Gedenken und den Streit um Martin Walser', *Die Zeit*, 3 December 1998, p. 43.

<sup>246</sup> Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen*, p. 401.

credence is given to Walser's argument that conscience cannot be delegated ('Gewissen ist nicht delegierbar'). The acceptance of Walser's argument can only result in a precarious departure from the structures of public and collective memory, which appears to be Walser's very intent.

This negation of history through public acts was made quite clear in an interview given when the debate ignited by Walser's speech was at its height. During the interview Walser repeated his argument that the continued references to National Socialism have become intolerable: 'Das können die Leute nicht mehr ertragen, und das wollen sie nicht andauernd hören, und darauf haben sie ein Recht, denn sie haben mit diesem Spuk nichts mehr zu tun': an admission stating that the Germans have a right not to be reminded of the National Socialist past.<sup>247</sup> This is not to suggest that criticisms of instrumentalisation cannot be made legitimately, as Norman Finkelstein has shown, although somewhat polemically, in his book *The Holocaust Industry*. It is legitimate to claim, as Walser does, that Auschwitz has been instrumentalised as a 'Drohoutine', and it is clearly the case that the historical is exploited to serve hidden agendas. Read in conjunction with the autobiographic (however fictional) Joahnn and his problems with the past, Walser's critique of an instrumentalisation of the NS-past becomes problematic. As Brockmann rightly observes, although his speech revolves around questions concerning the German past and a German identity, Walser appears unable or unwilling 'to bridge the gap between individual and collective, or to address ways in which collective memory could avoid a political instrumentalisation', however inaccurately diagnosed.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Frank Schirrmacher (hg), *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 449 and 453, respectively.

<sup>248</sup> Stephen Brockmann, 'Martin Walser and the Presence of the German Past', p. 142.

The reference to Martin Heidegger testifies that Walser is not advocating an absolute rejection of the past.<sup>249</sup> Heidegger maintained that a basic fundamental-ontological act of the metaphysics of Dasein is a ‘remembering back’ (Wiedererinnerung), underpinning the argument that past histories are what we are made of.<sup>250</sup> But Walser is positing against this instrumentalisation of the Shoah a claim for a subjective, individual approach as a way of dealing with the past, if only because ‘[m]it seinem Gewissen ist jeder allein’ (FPR, 22). Left alone, each person will remember the past in their own way and learn to deal with it accordingly, but this would problematise not only how the past is remembered but also what is remembered. According to Walser, not only would a private, as opposed to a public, act of remembering validate the personal memories of the past, such as Walser’s loss of his father and brother, but also, because it is not subject to rituals void of meaning, there will be a deeper connection with that past. He is advocating ‘eine neue Sprache der Erinnerung’, presumably one excluding monumentalism, instrumentalism and Shoah, but would instead focus on the private, and therefore publicly less approachable memories of the past.<sup>251</sup> But Walser’s highly personal and subjective language could conceivably problematise the communication of the past and its subsequent representation, if only because a highly subjective language will remain precariously incommunicable and closed.

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<sup>249</sup> ‘es heißt im Gewissensparagrafen von *Sein und Zeit*: “das Schuldigsein gehört zum Dasein selbst”’, Martin Walser, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 21.

<sup>250</sup> According to Heidegger, ‘[d]as eigentliche Ganzseinkönnen des Daseins und die Zeitlichkeit als der ontologische Sinn der Sorge’ carries both ‘Tod und Schuld gleichursprünglich in sich’. That is to say, actual or essential (eigentliche) being is temporally constituted by the future as well as by death: ‘Nur sofern Dasein überhaupt möglich ist als ich bingewesen, kann es zukünftig auf sich selbst so zukommen, daß es zurückkommt. Eigentlich zukünftig ist das Dasein eigentlich *gewesen*.’ Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt a/M, Suhrkamp, 1951), p. 210.

<sup>251</sup> Martin Walser, ‘Wir brauchen eine neue Sprache für die Erinnerung – Das Treffen von Ignatz Bubis und Martin Walser: Vom Wegschauen als lebensrettender Maßnahme, von der Befreiung des Gewissens und den Rechten der Literatur’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1998.



Walser is not incorrect to claim that history is instrumentalised. In his analysis of ritualistic forms of remembering the Holocaust, Jean François Lyotard, asks whether memorializing practices can indeed keep memory alive. There is a danger that representations of the Shoah produce the very opposite of their intention. It is possible that ‘through representation it turns into an ordinary repression. One will say, It was a great massacre, how horrible. Of course there have been others, “even” in contemporary Europe’. In the end, ‘one will appeal to human rights, one cries out “never again” and that’s it! It is taken care of’.<sup>252</sup> It is a critique against grand memorialization founded on generalizations and dulled by repetition, while acknowledging, at the other end of the scale, that personal history may also become mere anecdote. But is Lyotard not making a demand for a form of remembering which paradoxically acknowledges something that cannot be represented? It might also be added that public memory performance speaks not only of the past but to the present while at the same time gesturing towards the future.

Although it is true that the Shoah does pose weighty problems of representation, it is possible nonetheless to take issue with Walser’s rejection of public forms of remembering. As I argued in the Grass and Nooteboom chapters, memorials, street names or public squares, are integral to a collective notion of social identity. Walser fails to recognise the necessary meaning-giving function of the past registered in the urban fabric, which does not *a priori* suggest guilt or shame; such referencing is perhaps the recognition that ‘the other’s alterity is always incommensurable’.<sup>253</sup> A recognition of this incommensurability, with particular reference to the Shoah, might foster a sense of responsibility to the dead other. It is no longer

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<sup>252</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and the “Jews”*, trans. David Carroll (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 26.

<sup>253</sup> Anne Fuchs, ‘Towards an ethics of Remembering: The Walser-Bubis Debate and the Other of Discourse’ *The German Quarterly*, 2002, 75:3, p. 245.

a question of denial or for that matter of guilt, but rather of the dilemma of knowing how to handle the acceptance of responsibility and living with such a grotesque past. It is possible to speak of a reciprocal relationship between memory and the collective, insofar as the collective acts as a bearer of memory, and memory both supports and stabilises the sense of collective. It is in opposition to Walser's claim to the uniqueness of lived experience, which includes an apparent radical rejection of retrospective interpretation, that contemporary theory forcefully argues that collective and societal forms of remembering help the members of a given collective 'in langfristiger historischer Perspektive überlebenszeitlich zu kommunizieren und sich damit einer Identität zu vergewissern, die durch Zugehörigkeit zu einer generationsübergreifenden Überlieferung und weitgespannten historischen Erfahrungen entsteht'.<sup>254</sup> Symbols are a necessary and inevitable form in the dialogue of past-in-the-present, if only to preserve the past from being erased. In response to Walser's provocative question 'in welchen Verdacht gerät man, wenn man sagt, die Deutschen seien jetzt ein normales Volk [...]?' (FPR, 20) it should be observed that it is a peculiar form of 'normality' to which Walser refers insofar as it appears to preclude a collective sense of the past, with a sweeping distancing, tantamount to repression, from anything that smacks of retrospectivity or critical interpretation. Subjective and autonomous conscience as a mass phenomenon is an illusion and can in no way contribute to a sense of pertaining to a wider collective and its histories. According to one critic, Walser comes close to advocating a publicly acceptable discourse of repression.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Aleida Assmann und Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart, DVA, 1999), p. 50. See also Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>255</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Der Zeigefinger', in *Die Zeit*, Nr. 14, 31 März, 1999.

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## IV.2. Walled Cities and Volcanic Gardens

Hannes never quite made it to Jericho, 'der Mekka aller Posaunisten und Trompeter' (15), having been sent back to Germany following his brief performance as Adolf Hitler. But as a trombonist, he still fantasizes about playing in the desert, in the middle of the ruins of Jericho: 'Nach dem Solo vor den Mauern von Jericho die Stille. Stille, aus der die Musik lebt. Stille, die in Berlin nie wieder zu hören sein wird' (17). It is the plethora of voices of the past that deafen the protagonist and make it impossible to hear the silence in Berlin. Another significant consideration is to be found in the symbolic similarities between Berlin and Jericho. Both were walled cities, cities besieged, captured and forced to submit to occupying forces, cities famous for their walls and being walled. But do not the collapsed walls of Jericho suggest to the protagonist a metaphor of a time that has past, a history that is, so to speak, closed, if not hidden beneath the rubble of time? But Jericho is not his city, its histories are not his own, nor its memories (he is not a Benjaminian flâneur seeking to make other histories his own); the threat of any confrontation with the past has been removed by the anonymity of the site. Perhaps this is why the city is silent for him. The voices of Jericho's past are mute and lie buried beneath the rubble of the city, but those of Berlin continue to deafen the protagonist. If Jericho is silent, Berlin as a city is too saturated with a continuing past to be so. His desire to play his trombone in the desert of Jericho, to possibly give vent to an anger or frustration, 'ich hätte mich einmal richtig ausgespielt, einmal unter der Wüstensonne die Flatterzunge toben lassen' (16), would be both an act of rebellion and of destruction bereft of an audience: 'Ich hätte auf einer imaginären Posaune, hörbar nur für mich, die stärksten, die frechsten Töne geblasen, schräg, schneidend [...] Zungenstöße wie Rammstöße gegen die Steine, Phrasen wie Zündschnüre, die Takte wie Sprengsätze' (16).

The language is unusually aggressive and destructive (explosives, ramming rods), conveying an image of siege, of a desire to destroy the city, but apart from the ancient ruins, it is unclear what remains to be destroyed. His true desire is for the silence he experienced following his performance, a silence almost explosive, a silence, he claimed, 'in dem sich alles Gehörte bündelt und bricht, ein schwarzes Loch, ein weißes Loch der Stille' (7). What he desires is oblivion. The absence of this silence in Berlin suggests a forced confrontation with those voices of the past, a past that cannot be avoided; it speaks to him through the fabric of the city, in the trees and shrubs, and the rumblings of the 'Vulkane der Vergangenheit'.

The destructive nature of the trombone correlates with the protagonist's engagement with history and authority, 'Mit unseren mächtigen Instrumenten können wir alles kaputtmachen' (27). The trombone was also his sexual rite of passage. During performances at the church, he would point his instrument at the girls he desired, 'ich zielte nie in die Gesichter, ich zielte dahin, wo ihre Geheimnisse lagen' (31). The trombone became a type of penis-ersatz, 'das lange, schlanke Gestänge, das auf und nieder ging, mal länger, mal kürzer' with which he tried to attract the object of his desire. The instrument is fundamentally an instrument of opposition and rebellion: 'Mein Vater, dessen halbes linkes Bein in der Normandie geliebt war, gehörte noch zur alten Schule, bei jedem Kummer sagte er: "Schlucks runter!" (30). But the protagonist had done enough swallowing: '[d]as Spucken war der Anfang einer Opposition, die Aufforderung zu spucken eine Aufforderung zur Revolte' (30). As with his coughing, and for that matter Walser's belching (rülpsern), he was determined no longer to suffer under its power. But what he hoped to destroy in ancient Jericho remains unclear: a different trombonist had already blown down the walls. Perhaps it is less Jericho than the fact that the idea of Israel challenges him, reminds him of the past, the German past of 1933 to

1945, and consequently forces him into a role that is not his own: 'Wer bin ich? Dies Fragezeichen ging einem ja in all den israelischen Tagen nicht aus dem Kopf. Jeder gibt seine Antwort. Ich habe eine gegeben, die nicht meine war, ich Trottel' (37). His answer reflects a confusing convergence of the public and the private, a convergence that might also be applied to the trombone insofar as the protagonist shifts between its historic and autobiographical significance.

There is a structural schematic link in the text between Tel Aviv and Berlin insofar as the protagonist's reflections on the one might be said to weigh heavily on his reflections on the other, and vice-versa. His destructive urge in respect of the ruins of ancient Jericho finds its counterpart in Berlin of 1989; in a possible echo of Thomas Brüssig's protagonist, Hannes betook himself with his trombone to the Wall in 1989, 'Ja, der Größenwahn' (17), intending to contribute to its destruction: 'Von allen Seiten wurde gegen die Mauer gehämmert, die Tage der Mauerspechte, das war wie Musik [...] Ich spielte mein Solo dazu, die Stürze Richtung Osten gegen den Beton' (124). His experience at the Berlin Wall is a manifestation of his self-confessed 'Jericho-Komplex' (26). This desire to 'explode' the Wall lies less in a euphoric wish for reunification, than in the fact that the Wall was a 'lästige Monstrum, gegen das ich selber oft gestoßen war' (124); the Wall signals not only a division of East and West Berlin, but gestures more significantly to the origins of that division. His solo performance at the Wall is an attempt to force a similar silence on the city's pasts, a silence he encountered in Jericho: 'Jericho spielen mitten in Berlin' (54). There is not at any moment an attempt critically to engage with the historical. The past, if anything, is always inconvenient (lästig). Any confrontation with Judaism, the Shoah and National Socialism, such as a Mahler

recording on his Lufthansa flight to Tel Aviv, which he considers a tactical maneuver on the part of the airline, is for him yet a further reminder of his guilt:

Jeder Atemzug ist politisch ... Und wenn Sie Deutscher sind, dann wandeln sie wie Jesus auf einem Pulverfaß ... Nein, nicht wie Jesus, aber über einen Haufen von Pulverfässern ... Wenn sie von morgens bis abends und nachts im Fernsehen und nachts im Traum auf Versöhnung machen, auf Verständnis und Liebsein getrimmt sind, und jede Bewegung, jeder Schritt, jeder Satz unter dem Diktat des Bitte-recht-freundlich und Wir-reichen-euch-die-Hände steht ... Und wir, die Oper, machen es genau so. (76-77)

The powder kegs (Pulverfässern) image evokes the same destructive force as the 'Vulkane der Vergangenheit', or pockets of history that appear to make up Berlin's topography; significantly, both metaphors are explosive, they do not simply reveal history but randomly spew it forth. This critique that the Germans at times adopt an almost servile attitude to the historical, in part justified, finds a direct echo in Walser's *Friedenspreisrede*, underpinning the claim that any reference to the historical is always an instrumentalisation of it, dictating that the Germans should not be allowed to forget the past. For Walser, there are times 'wenn ich nirgends mehr hinschauen kann, ohne von einer Beschuldigung attackiert zu werden', though there is no clear indication who is doing the attacking.<sup>256</sup>

It is unclear why recognition of the incommensurability of the other – is it at all possible to *understand* the Holocaust? - is always an instrumentalised political act, in which attempts at understanding are nothing more than empty 'Lippengebet'. Do not the protagonist's actions suggest an obsession with the Jews and perhaps even a fetishized desire for guilt shown through an extreme form of philosemitism? He does not know how to negotiate the past that is lodged in the city. His fetishized guilt-desire was made clear during his visit to Israel; once

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<sup>256</sup> Martin Walser, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 17.

there he was the only one, 'der darauf achtete, keine schwarzen Hemden oder Hosen anzuziehen, keine braune Jacke usw. Ich steckte nur Kleidung mit nazifreien neutralen Farben in den Koffer' (119). This excessive attention to detail reflects a particular German pattern when dealing with Judaism and Israel; it is a fear to stand out and be classified as German. The protagonist's same fear of standing out is, I believe, paradigmatic of a perception, similar to that voiced by Walser in his speech. The National Socialist past is for both all-embracing and inhibiting. Unlike other nations, the argument follows, Germany must be constantly aware of this past, its actions are determined by it and so is its future. Both perceptions of Berlin are equally fixated. Both Walser and Hannes perceive themselves as victims of an instrumentalisation of the Shoah, and consequently forced into an unhealthy and historically over-determined relationship with the historic and the present: 'Der Irak-Krieg ist vertagt. Die große Erleichterung: Ich muß nicht bei jeder Gelegenheit betonen, daß ich für Israel bin' (90). Arguably, this legitimizing of deeds 'qua historisch-moralisch vorgegebener Wertorientierung allein scheint obsolet, Handlung wird damit in den individuellen zu verantwortenden Bereich zurückgewiesen und die Frage nach ihrer Begründbarkeit neu gestellt'.<sup>257</sup>

The obsessive preoccupation with history in Berlin takes on many forms. The city is a site of layered histories, each vying to be heard and rescued from oblivion. In Berlin, notes the protagonist, '[a]lle stolpern sie über die Pflastersteine der deutschen Geschichte. Immer wieder Peinlichkeiten, wenn die Vergangenheit droht' (32), reinforcing a negative image of history as something that exists only to threaten and undermine, though at the same time underlining a thematic link between the city and individual. It is perhaps inevitable, given a

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<sup>257</sup> Phil Langer, *Kein Ort. Überall: Die Einschreibung von "Berlin" in die deutsche Literatur der neunziger Jahre* (Berlin, Weidler Verlag, 2002), p. 140.

need for belonging within a collective, that the historical is at times exploited or mined in the service of 'gegenwärtigen Zwecken' (FPR, 18), a point reinforced in the Delius text in its engagement with urban redevelopment of the city following reunification. It is not only twentieth century history that poses weighty problems of representation, but preceding centuries too still struggle to be heard within the city text. Finding a consensus on the commemoration of the 1848 revolutionaries in Berlin proved equally problematic:

Die einen sind überhaupt dagegen, mit einem Straßenschild die 48er zu ehren [...] Die zuständigen Bezirkspolitiker sind dafür, die wollen einen möglichst großen Platz umbenannt sehen [...]. Der Verkehrssenator, von der anderen Partie [...] verkündet mit Getöse, jenes kleine Stückchen Straße sei genau das richtige, um die Märzrevolution zu würdigen, weil diese Straße auf die Straße des 17. Juni mündet, "der historische Kontext"! [...] "Alle haben sie ihre Prinzipien, ihre eigenen Barikaden", sagt Ulli[...]. "An den Barikadenkämpfen von 1848 hätten sie sich nicht beteiligt", sag ich. "Das ist unhistorisch gedacht", sagt Ulli. (32-33)

The city is portrayed here as an historical map, a symbolic text wherein every detail is of monumental significance. In the case above, the historical context is a thematic bundling of a history of Berlin's revolutions. The proposal represents an attempt to draw an historical line between the past and the present. It is consistent with this way of thinking that the street commemorating the revolutionaries of the 1848 uprisings should (thematically) link to the Street of the 17<sup>th</sup> June: two examples of attempts to liberate the city from the yoke of tyranny, the one against the Prussian monarchy the other marking an opposition to the ruling factions of East Germany. There is the suggestion of the city not only commemorating the historical but also trying to understand and contextualize it. Following the protagonist's critique of the use of the past in the present, the naming of a street to commemorate a specific historical act is a form of instrumentalisation, but not one that is cognate with guilt or disgrace. It is rather a recognition of the past-in-the-present and the need to negotiate this coexistence. But again,



Delius's protagonist is unable to establish such historical links and perceive history as something from which positive meanings at a collective level might be drawn. His 'reading' of the debate and of the city is frustratingly subjective, '[a]n den Barikaden-kämpfen von 1848 hätten sie sich nicht beteiligt', without grasping that an individual staging of the historical debate is not the issue here.

Hannes is suspicious of all forms of commemoration and the 'freezing' of parts of the Wall within Berlin's topography is met with derision: 'Die Geschichte wird umgegraben. Aus dem Todesstreifen wurde ein Tortenstück, und ich darf sagen, ich bin dabeigewesen' (108), a derogatory pun both on the transformations taking place in the city and the frequently posed media question 'where were you when such and such happened?' His perception of the mnemonic function of references to the German resistance movement in 1944 against Hitler and that of the planned Holocaust Memorial in the city is equally reductive. He derides the resistance commemoration by suggesting that such memorials only function within a victim-aggressor binary and sees himself as a victim of such discourses:

Wie stolz sind wir auf das bißchen Widerstand von ein paar zu spät aufgewachten Offizieren, daß wir sogar die Bushaltestelle benennen müssen, damit jeder Ausländer merkt oder jeder Deutsche sich noch mal auf die Schulter klopfen kann: Ja, wir hatten eine Widerstand, einen Dt. Widerstand, und wir bekennen es laut, sogar im Bus 129! (133)

His attitude toward the Holocaust monument in Berlin, whose construction triggered a highly political debate in the Federal Republic,<sup>258</sup> might only be described as bordering on ennui: 'Nah am Nollendorfplatz in einem Café, ich fing gerade an, einen Artikel über den Eiertanz um das Holocaust-Mahnmal zu lesen: nein, [...] ich las den Sportteil' (49). It is remarkable

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<sup>258</sup> See for example Hans Georg Stavginski, *Das Holocaust-Mahnmal. Der Streit um das "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas" in Berlin 1988-1999* (Paderborn, Schöningh, 2002).

that when he is confronted with the actual site during his walks in the city, slightly south of the Brandenburg Gate, 'wo das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas errichtet werden soll, habe ich nicht an meinen Fall gedacht, in keiner Sekunde' (55). The cynical critique of the reference to the German Resistance movement in 1944 might be said to betray either a threat to his self-perceived guilt complex or a fetishized inferiority complex, possibly leaning here on Walser's critique of the monumentalization of the National Socialist past. His refusal to incorporate a more inclusive grasp of the historic reveals, to my mind, the protagonist's paranoid tendency to perceive all historic registers as further instances limiting the possibility of authentic existence beyond the given historical framework.

The reference to the Holocaust monument is, however, problematic. His lack of interest in the memorial per se is of no concern. It is the fact that the confrontation with it fails to trigger any connection in his mind (ich habe nicht an meinen Fall gedacht) between his *faux pas* in Tel Aviv and the Holocaust that is confusing (the reference to Nollendorfplatz, a largely Jewish middle-class neighborhood up until 1933, evokes for the reader the absence of the Berlin Jewish community and in so doing establishes a thematic link with that which the Holocaust monument seeks to commemorate). The text threads a thematic web of history between Berlin's present and its past. This interweaving again underlines the multi-layeredness of Berlin and the problematics of representation: the text is a pattern of historic, social, political and cultural allusions, as the references to two other contemporary Berlin authors, Günter Grass and Thomas Hettche, make clear. In every respect, Berlin's topography in the Delius text suggests a vista of unavoidable confrontation with the historic.

This inability to establish a link between his performance in Tel Aviv and the commemorative function of the Holocaust monument in Berlin suggests a moment of either subjective perception or of repression, one to which Walser refers in his *Friedenspreisrede*. The Delius text explores the possible consequence of Walser's advocacy of repression in confrontation with the historic. I refer here to a crucial paper 'Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten', in which Sigmund Freud explores the analytic situation, which arises when a patient in treatment appears not to recall any previous repressed event but instead enacts a possible unresolved conflict through the relationship with the psychoanalyst. Accounting for this rift between cognitive memory and performative trauma, Freud argues that '[b]esonders bei den mannigfachen Formen der Zwangsneurose (such as the protagonist's historical obsessivity) schränkt sich das Vergessene meist auf die Auflösung von Zusammenhängen, Verkennung von Abfolgen, Isolierung der Erinnerungen ein'. Once the apparent connections between events have indeed been dissolved, 'der Analytierte erinnere überhaupt nichts von dem vergessenen und verdrängten, sondern er agiere es. Er reproduziert es nicht als Erinnerung, sondern als Tat'.<sup>259</sup> In such instances it is to be observed that 'die Übertragung ist selbst nur ein Stück Wiederholung und die Wiederholung ist die Übertragung der vergessenen Vergangenheit nicht nur auf den Arzt, sondern auch auf alle anderen Gebiete der gegenwärtigen Situation'.<sup>260</sup> The repressive act correlates here with Walser's admission of turning a blind eye to current political situations of actively repressing that which cannot be tolerated (Ich käme ohne Wegschauen und Wegdenken nicht durch den Tag und schon gar nicht durch die Nacht). Correspondingly, aligned with the Freudian analysis, it reveals how problematic a course of active repression might be. For example, might it not be argued that

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<sup>259</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten', in *Zur Dynamik der Übertragung* (Frankfurt a/M, 2000), p. 89.

<sup>260</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Erinnern', pp. 89 &90.

the moment when Hannes signed his bar-tab with Hitler's name he was in fact performing (*agieren*) that which had been repressed? In the protagonist's words: ' Ach wie gut, daß niemand weiß, daß ich Hitler Adolf heiß. Ich weiß es auch nicht, ich hab es bis dahin auch nicht gewußt.' But, he continued, 'irgend jemand in mir schreibt seinen Namen da hin, irgendein Adolf in mir schreibt seinen Adolf da hin, auf meinen Zettel, mit meiner Handschrift' (131). Is it a moment of desire or of guilt?

It is a consequence of this repression of the past that the protagonist is unreceptive to the current situation in Berlin and to a degree overwhelmed by it. On his perambulations through the city he is stopped on the Rosenthaler Platz, in a moment of acute political and social poignancy: '*Auschwitz als Allerweltsmaschinchen*. Nur diese drei Wörter stehen auf einem DIN A4-Blatt, das mir ein grauhaariger junger Mann vor einer Buchhandlung am Rosenthaler Platz in die Hand drückte. Mir!' (107). This note of protest from the heart of the New Berlin republic draws attention to contemporary debates on memory and history in Germany, the significance to Berlin in these debates and possibly to latent anti-Semitic tendencies, suggested in the critique of the uses to which Auschwitz is put. Further, if the memory of Auschwitz is, in a possible echo of Walser's critique of the instrumentalising of Auschwitz, nothing more than an 'Allerweltsmaschinchen', does this mean that because there have indeed been instances where it is possible to speak of an instrumentalization of Auschwitz that the Shoah may no longer be discussed? If this is the intention of the protest, the question as to who will remember this incommensurable past, other than the random street names that remind us only of their absence has still to be answered. 'Geschichte individualistisch zu

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denken und danach zu handeln (such as Hannes's plan to attack the German Chancellor as a mark of protest) wirkt hier nicht amüsant, sondern hat fatale Folgen'.<sup>261</sup>

A further instance of Hannes's subjective and precariously individualistic engagement with history is suggested through the narrative structure. The reader is given the text because Hannes was told by his lawyer to write down everything that might help in his defence. What we have therefore is a random accumulation of thoughts and reflections on Hannes's life and wider speculations on Germany and German history. The diaristic or autobiographical form is problematic because of its inherent subjectivity. His views of history, or on society's engagement with the historic, (the Opera decides not to perform Wagner in Tel Aviv), betray a purely individual perception from which wider meta-personal historic reflections are absent. It is for this reason that he does not refer to the actual event in Tel Aviv until the last twenty or so pages of the text. Following his failed relationship with the viola player, Hannes persuades himself that her decision to end the relationship (in Tel Aviv!) bore no relation to his *faux pas*: 'ich weigere mich, einen Zusammenhang zu sehen zwischen unserem Krach in Tel Aviv und meiner Tat' (67), while at the same time convincing himself, in an echo of Walser's critique of instrumentalisation of the past, that 'sie meiner Tat zum Anlaß genommen hat, unsere glückliche Affäre zu beenden' (18). There can be no critical reflection until responsibility is taken for individual actions.

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<sup>261</sup> Phil Langer, *Kein Ort. Überall*, pp. 138-39.

### IV.3. ‘Bin ich nicht das Opfer, hacken nicht alle auf mir rum?’

Martin Walser and Delius’s protagonist-narrator believe themselves to be victims of the historic, of the twelve years of National Socialism and the consequences of those years. Walser’s spatial metaphor of history as a museum (‘In der Vergangenheit, die alle zusammen haben, kann man herumgehen wie in einem Museum’) is here understood as referring to Berlin and its memorials, which function as ‘moral instances’ against subjective memories. It is not the purpose of this chapter to establish a hierarchy of victimhood, but it goes without saying that many Germans were also victims of the National Socialist dictatorship and victims of the consequences of the twelve-year reign. Grass promotes a similar portrayal of German suffering in his recent novella, *Im Krebsgang*. The novel explores the sinking of a German refugee ship and the expulsion of millions of Germans from their homes in parts of the Czech Republic and Poland.<sup>262</sup> That said, the Delius protagonist seems less a victim of history than of his own paranoia: ‘seit neuestem heißt es überall in der Oper: sparen, sparen, sparen. Und da wollte man ausgerechnet bei mir anfangen!’ (60). At no point in the text does he suggest that he is in any way responsible for his *faux pas*, his dismissal was on economic and not on moral grounds. His dismissal from the Berlin Philharmonic was also, according to Hannes, a public relations act born out of a need for the Germans to placate the ‘Jewish’ interests both at home and abroad, ‘damit alles nach entschlossenem Handeln aussieht und einer die Rolle des Bösewichts hat’ (17). At no point, either during his walks in Berlin where he is again confronted with the Holocaust memorial or in his own reflections on his plight does he consider himself in any way culpable of a moral error. He believes himself to be the victim: ‘Wann ich von Sozialhilfe leben muß, kann ich ausrechnen. Werde die Wohnung

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<sup>262</sup> Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang* (Göttingen, Seidl, 2002). The ship in question was the Wilhelm Gustloff, chartered by the German army to transport German civilians from the approaching Russian army. The ship, with over twenty thousand refugees on board, was sunk in the Baltic towards the end of January 1945.

nicht halten können. [...] James Levine kriegt in München ein Grundgehalt von 500 000 DM, dazu für jedes der 24 Konzerte 60 000 DM, jeden Abend netto' (55). The narrative flow of his thoughts on his own predicament betray a clear 'us/them' binary, the Germans and the Jews, a binary which might be read as suggesting (an ironic?) role reversal. The thematic link in his mind between James Levine's earnings and his own pending impecuniousness, illogical as it is, suggests a reversal in the victim/perpetrator binary, again, a possible echo of Walser's claim that 'they' – Levine is an American Jew - want to hurt 'us', 'alle Deutschen' (FPR, 17). But are the (German)-Jews also not German?

'Was suche ich, wenn ich durch die Stadt pirsche? Nichts. Ich bringe mich in die Stadt. Ich zeige mich: Ich bin noch da, verkrieche mich nicht schuldbewußt' (71). There is a note of defiance in this declaration. He will not allow himself to be dictated to by the city, by its histories, hence the insistent 'ich will'. And yet there is an inconsistency here: he claims on the one hand that he is not searching for anything in the city, and yet on the other concedes that he is in fact hunting (*pirschen*). What is the object of his hunt if not the city? It is in the city that he defies the historic by acclaiming his own victimhood, as is suggested in his confrontations with Berlin's urban fabric during his perambulations. The surface of the city, according to the protagonist, shifts under the burden of the historic: 'Sand, Bürgersteigplatten, Parkett, Beton, Linoleum, Teppich, jeder Boden schwankt in Berlin ... Du fällst immer, aufwärts oder abwärts' (92), suggesting not an unstable city, but rather an urban fabric in which the unwary citizen must watch his step, again appearing to echo Walser's suggestion that a monumental representation of the historic (such as the memorial for the murdered Jews) is an 'attackierende Beschuldigung'. But it is an image that reminds us as readers of the textuality of the city. The image of Berlin seen through Hannes's eyes is

obsessive and reductive because the city is not just a site of shifting grounds, beneath which is found a volcanic past, but rather a site of uncountable pluralities, of complex historic, cultural and social experiences that are in constant flux and can therefore hardly be contained within an urban portrait. His wish is for impermanence: 'Am liebsten suchen meine Blicke das Unfertige, den Rohzustand, den Abfall' (109). The protagonist's simplification of the city as a site of historic saturation is in itself an instrumentalisation in order to promote and justify his claim that he, and not (just) the others, is a victim of the historic.

His subjectivism lends itself to a form of persecution angst, possibly akin to a type of psychopathic paranoia: 'Im Café am Nollendorfplatz wieder auf Beobachter-Posten. Es ist eindeutig: Der Kellner hier ist der Barmann aus Tel Aviv. Endlich schieben sich die Bilder übereinander, ich sehe klar' (130). There is again the obsessive converging of Berlin and Tel Aviv, an inability to hold them apart, to read one without the other. In his flight from the café on the Nollendorfplatz, 'Ein Fünfmärkstück auf den Tisch, ich floh hinaus auf die Straße' (50), he flees to the former east, 'lieber den Kaffee am Prenzlauer Berg oder in der Mohrenstraße trinken' (51). He feels safer in the East, as indeed he felt in Tel Aviv, because it is a site of a different history, one not plagued by the post-war discourses addressing the Shoah.<sup>263</sup> It is an inconsistency manifest in the protagonist that again underlines the non-connectedness of his historical imaginings. But for the protagonist, Berlin, although desperately building for the future, only manages to uncover the past: 'Je tiefer du [...] vordringst, desto eher wird dir plötzlich das Blickfeld frei auf die Brokken der Geschichte,

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<sup>263</sup> Following the collapse of Nazi Germany, both East and West were subjected to de-nazification processes. The decline of such processes in the East can be seen from the discussion on the Gründungsmythos. According to one German historian, 'Die SBZ/DDR hatte, nach anfänglichen radikalen Entnazifizierungsaktionen in Verwaltung, Justiz, Bildung und Militär, ihre Bevölkerung kollektiv entschuldigt und die Verantwortung für den Nationalsozialismus den "usual suspects" aufgebürdet', namely, the Federal Republic. Ute Frevert, 'Geschichtsvergessenheit und Geschichtsversessenheit revisited', p. 7.



auf Trümmer von Wilhelm, von den Nazis, von Stalin, von Ulbricht, auf die Gruben und Fassaden der neuen Bundesherrlichkeit' (122). It is a understanding of the past as something that refuses to go away. In contrast to the act of walking in *Ein weites Feld* and *Allerseelen*, its function in *Die Flatterzunge* is reversed and subjectivised. Even the title of the book, *Die Flatterzunge*, a fluttering/untrustworthy tongue, may also suggest a pun precisely on this tendency to see himself as a victim, to offer rationalizations for *faux pas* rather than offer a broader and less subjectively determined understanding of events.

Textually, these flights from any form of weighty confrontation with the past are significant insofar as the place of refuge chosen by the protagonist is the Potsdamer Platz. If in Nooteboom's Berlin novel *Allerseelen* the Potsdamer Platz is a site of historical confrontation, which is actively sought, in *Die Flatterzunge* the site signifies a perceived new beginning and long-awaited break from the historic. It is a site of paradigmatic significance schematically situated opposite the city park, where the plants and trees appear to remind the flâneur of a past that cannot be avoided. It is, so to speak, rooted in the city fabric. It is worth recalling that the city park (Tiergarten) is an important vehicle for historical confrontations in Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld*. Here the city park suggests the possibility of 'Abschweifungen ins historische Feld', in which Fonty confronts both his own and Berlin's long-repressed histories.<sup>264</sup> It is precisely this ability to think historically that Delius's protagonist lacks and he therefore seeks refuge in the Potsdamer Platz precisely because it is free from such troublesome memories. But for Hannes, the Tiergarten, to return to the analogy above, signifies not only collective but also private and individual recollections and memories: 'Mit welchen Frauen bist du hier gelaufen, mit welcher Hand in Hand, mit

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<sup>264</sup> Günter Grass, *Ein weites Feld*, p. 21.

welcher im Streit, welche hast du hier geküßt? [...] Die Jahreszeiten im Tiergarten, die Jahresringe in meinem Gedächtnis' (122-23). While a wider cultural significance of the city park is recalled in a clear reference to Walter Benjamin's memories of past sexual encounters there, thereby underpinning the cultural references associated with the urban fabric, the reference is also at pains to underline that the protagonist's own history, free of any relation to National Socialism and his Tel Aviv performance, is also represented and contained within Berlin's topography. But to acknowledge as much is to recall and accept the past, the failed relationships, and in particular his relationship with the viola player, a recollection that must inevitably force a confrontation with his moment in the bar at the hotel in Tel Aviv, memories which he actively represses.

The protagonist seeks refuge in the theme park tourism at the Potsdamer Platz. Here, he is one of the many celebrating the spectacle of the new: 'Es gefällt mir allmählich, Tourist in der eigenen Stadt zu sein' (52). Seeing himself as one of the tourists suggests to the reader a sense of footlessness, not belonging, paradoxically, to his own city. The tourist was also synonymous for Günter Grass with an uncritical perception, a manner of not truly looking. Let us recall the convergence of the real and the simulation in *Ein weites Feld*, at which moment Fonty sits unperceived by the photographer-tourists next to the statue of his idol Fontane: 'Fabelhaft, wie Sie diese Touristen ignoriert haben. Sind wie ne Landplage. Müssen alles fotografieren, doch genau hingucken, das schaffen die nie'.<sup>265</sup> The circumstantial perception promoted through urban flânerie in the Grass text, but not in *Die Flatterzunge*, counters this limited perception offered in and through the tourist-photographer. But it is precisely this non-perception towards which Delius's protagonist gestures in his urban

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<sup>265</sup> Grass, *Ein weites Feld*, p. 593.

perambulations. The complex concatenation of possible experiences at the Potsdamer Platz liberates him from his own obsession with the historic, as his visit to the tourist-plagued Red Info-box makes clear. The spectacle that tourism offers removes him above the volcanic urban fabric: 'Auf einmal fühlte ich mich glücklich da oben, auf dem Dach der Info Box thronend über der Geschichte' (53). The future, in a pun on the victors of history, is now in the hands of Sony, 'Ich sehe zu, wie Sony wächst, wie Berlin wächst [...] Ich beobachte die Sieger von Sony [...] Wer gewinnt das Bauland, die Tunneltiefen, die lichten Höhen und die Spurbreiten, auf denen wir laufen mit Sony und spuren in die Zukunft' (94). The future is multinational, non-German and thereby a significant break from the past: 'Die Vergangenheit war schlecht oder schwierig und mit Geschichte belastet, die Zukunft wird gut und schön und schick' (52). The architectural plans on display in the Red Box on the Potsdamer Platz proffered a view of Berlin in the future, to which the narrator somewhat dryly refers as an 'Optimismusbunker'(52), but significantly the shadow of the other bunker is never too far away; the future lay in 'Sichtweite der unsichtbare Führerbunker' (94). The play on words here is significant: although Hitler's bunker is no longer visible, it is still in the field of vision from the Potsdamer Platz; the past, echoing Nooteboom, is still very much present, albeit buried beneath the new glass structures furnishing the square. And yet, the protagonist is critical of the developments shaping the Potsdamer Platz. The promises of a new future are heard and consequently derided: "Kultureller Verantwortung" und "urbaner Würde" seien sie verpflichtet, die am Potsdamer Platz und Leipziger Platz bauen. Wer will das glauben' (52). Equally suspect are the final projects for the square, put forward in a rhetorical style ironically echoing that of the socialist building plans for East Berlin in the 1950s and 60s: 'Nun wird das nächste, gläserne Jahrhundert hochgezogen. [...] Bald ist die Welt perfekt: interaktiv, informativ, innovativ' (53). Do not such preoccupations with the Potsdamer Platz

draw attention to its past rather than away from it? The sheer focus of the rebuilding programme in Berlin in the *Nachwende* period, shifting the centre from the West to Mitte and the Potsdamer Platz, and the self-styled celebration of the square as the representative site of Germany moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, draw attention to the fact that it is a multi-layered and historically laden site subject to plural readings.

Nooteboom also takes issue with the suggestion that the site somehow or other signifies a new beginning, free from the historical burdens of the past. Although Hannes expresses similar concerns, 'Portugiesen und Polen graben uns die Geschichte um' (109), the site is nonetheless attractive to Delius's protagonist because of its professed (assumed) a-historicism. The Potsdamer Platz is his place of refuge (mein Zufluchtsort, 133), it is the site to which he can escape, 'die Stunde in der Info Box hatte ich nicht an mein Verbrechen gedacht [...]. Alles vergessen, zum ersten Mal nach vielen Monaten' (55); the square is paradigmatically, a representative example of Hannes's uncritical engagement with the past: 'Forum Germanicum, wenn ich noch wüßte, wo ich dies Wort aufgeschnappt habe' (53). It is a site where history cannot be instrumentalised nor monumentalised because it is in the process of being erased from the fabric of the city, at least in terms of its immediate accessibility. The text might be said to address Walser's concern of a monumentalising and instrumentalising of the National Socialist past, but through the portrayal of Hanne's subjective perception turns it against him and instead creates a portrait in which it might be seen what consequences are to be reaped from a policy of active repression and subjective perception when faced with the historic. The protagonist's desire 'Jericho spielen mitten in Berlin' (54) does not only have fatal consequences in terms of his limited historical perception, but this destructive urge can only be repeated, if only because the moments

enthroned above history are too ephemeral to be lasting: 'Nie wieder, dachte ich, wird es hier so schön sein wie jetzt, wie heute, in diesen Minuten, so unfertig, vielfältig, wild, wund, lebendig, knospend und sprießend wie ein Frühling' (53).

Delius's protagonist remains an unclear and imprecise character throughout - possibly to underline a certain Everyman quality. And yet through an insistent instrumentalisation and monumentalization of Berlin's urban fabric the text polarizes, on the one hand, sites where confrontation with the historic appear inevitable, and those sites where the past is being erased; while on the other hand, this polarity illuminates via the protagonist's perambulations through the city, a national difficulty in genuinely confronting the German history vis-à-vis the Jews. Delius's protagonist might be said to suggest the man in the street, a representative of a generation that is not responsible for the period of German history discussed in the text, but nonetheless burdened with an inherited responsibility not to forget the past: 'Keiner kommt ungestraft nach Berlin' (93). It is precisely this inter-changeability as a person and collective, 'Wenn alle so frei wären wie ich, wenn alle es so machten wie ich, wenn jeder Deutsche einmal für fünf Sekunden AH wäre' (137) that is addressed in the Delius text, though its effectiveness is debatable. But the German past experienced through Berlin, and in particular the memory of the Shoah, remains incommensurable and as such challenges claims for a line to be drawn, that the past has been sufficiently negotiated and dealt with. The text, in my opinion, demonstrates that a rejection of the past and active repression of the historical will not lead to liberation from the past and a resulting 'Seelenfreiheit' as suggested by Walser in his speech, but paradoxically, to an obsession with the historical that blinkers out other possible ways of negotiating the-past-in-the-present. It is at that moment in time that the National Socialist past becomes truly monumental.

In a reversal of Scheffler's now famous dictum of 1910, that Berlin is a city 'dazu verdammt, immer nur zu werden und nicht zu sein' it is now more fitting to remark that 'Berlin nämlich immer schon war, aber eigentlich nicht mehr werden könne'; confrontation with the historic through the city is an unavoidable reality.<sup>266</sup> The only way for the protagonist to free himself from his obsessive preoccupation with the past, though not to free himself from history, is to leave Berlin/Germany all together. In an ironic twist in the text, Hannes is invited by an Israeli theatre production group to stage the 'strange moment of truth' (140) at the hotel in Tel Aviv. He is invited to be himself: 'Don't worry, we don't want you to be a parody of a new Hitler. Just be the German you are' (140). It is a poignant moment acknowledging a peculiar German neurosis about the past. For the Israeli theatre group, it is through his German-ness that the difficulty of dealing with the past vis-à-vis the Jews and the Shoah for Germans is performed. There is a need to narrate and to thematize a discussion on how problematic dialogue with the past appears to be; the text addresses how dangerous such a subjective attempt at understanding that which perhaps defies comprehension can be. There are moments when 'the intellectuals' resort to the burdensome past as a rhetorical tool, and in so doing appear to be instrumentalising that past. It might be the case, as Martin Walser observed in his speech, that 'Gewissen ist nicht delegierbar', but it is not true that the 'durchgängige Zurückgezogenheit in sich selbst [...] muß innerliche Einsamkeit bleiben' (FPR, 13, 22), as an effective means of preserving the past, if only because it radically opposes all forms of public and collective acts of remembering. There are situations when it is legitimate to endorse a form of collective responsibility, even if this implies recourse to an instrumentalising or a monumentalising of the past. Memorials delegate conscience, encourage a particular reading of an event in the past and it is from such monuments that the

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<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Gerwin Zohlen, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Stadt: Berliner Architektur am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2002), p. 24.

collective at times orientates itself in terms of its historic and collective context. An autonomous internal subjectivism, as a means of negotiating the past, is an illusion. A self-determining right for the individual conscience might also lead, as Karl Jaspers argued, to a strategy of exonerating oneself from any responsibility: 'Ich höre, daß nur das eigene Gewissen Instanz ist, andere dürfen mir keine Vorwürfe machen'.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage. Für Völkermord gibt es keine Verjährung* (München, Piper, 1979), p.54.

## Sex, Identity and Urban Poaching: Tanja Dückers's Berlin Novel *Spielzone*

*'Je ne peints pas l'estre, je peints le passage'*  
Michel de Montaigne<sup>268</sup>

In this chapter I propose to address a literary representation of Berlin from which consideration of the meta-narratives of politics and history is largely absent. I shall focus on Tanja Dückers's portrayal of Berlin in her novel *Spielzone* and ask why the text appears to rework the ambiguity of reference by rejecting a commonly held perception of Berlin as a historically saturated and ideologically inscribed site. The city text in Dückers's novel is widely seen as an un-inscribed blank sheet inhabited by a historically indifferent generation of partygoers, as is suggested in the title of the novel, *Spielzone* – play zone. If the previous four chapters have attempted to underline a dialectical relation between Berlin's urban fabric and the historic, and presented this relationship as an unavoidable fact, Tanja Dückers's Berlin novel focuses on a generation born in the decade immediately prior to or, in one instance, after the fall of the Wall, for whom the concerns of the previous generations appear to have neither place, nor indeed, moral authority. The post Cold War city has become an illusionary 'ground zero' for the young and hip that have no truck with the past, at least with the meta-narratives of twentieth-century German history. Such, as it were, anti-historical and anti-ideological representations reflect a literary development promoted by a new and largely unknown generation of young German writers to which Dückers belongs. As one critic wryly remarked, for the post 1968 Generation, it is clear 'daß mit dem Beginn der 1990er Jahre

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<sup>268</sup> Michel de Montaigne, 'Du repentir', Essai II. ii.



mehr zu Ende ging als bloß die Achtziger'.<sup>269</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that the text is in any way ludic or embodies a postmodern rejection of the historic. In contrast to the common perception of the text, I hope to show that *Spielzone* is in fact critical of the unhistorical perceptions of the protagonists, as the analysis of the Benno and Neukölln sections will demonstrate.

I have argued that previous literary confrontations with the city invariably (though not exclusively) illustrated a confrontation with the histories of National Socialism and with the political and social legacy of the GDR. It is these legacies and urban perceptions that Dückers is rejecting by re-focusing the lens of the aesthetic optic through which Berlin is perceived and transformed. Those pasts, whether individual and/or private as thematised in Brussig's Berlin novel *Helden wie wir*, or conceived structurally as an architectonic meta-narrative adumbrating both post-war and reunification German discourses – Grass, Nooteboom, Wolf and Delius – are significantly absent from Dückers's reading of Berlin's topography in her novel, *Spielzone*.<sup>270</sup> In the words of one reviewer, 'Tanja Dückers hat sich darangemacht, einen Hauptstadt-Roman zu schreiben, und sie hat dabei der Generation X, den Party-Kids und Jüngern der Love Parade, aufs Maul geschaut.'<sup>271</sup> Her intention in doing so, I argue, is to liberate literary perceptions of the city from a saturated historic optic of the post-war generation by making a reappropriation possible through a 'post-political' generation of Berlin inhabitants, but also to underline the perceptual limitations of the characters in the text. Ironically, in so doing, the text historicises the a-historical perspective of the protagonists and in so doing insists on the continued presence of the historic in Berlin.

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<sup>269</sup> Moritz Baßler, *Der deutsche Pop-Roman* (München, Beck, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>270</sup> Tanja Dückers, *Spielzone* (Aufbau Verlag, Berlin, 1999). All quotations, given in parenthesis, are from this edition.

<sup>271</sup> Sabine Doering, 'Das Leben, eine Kleiderfrage', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 14.04.1999, p. 50.

A look at the German feuilletons between 1995 and 2000 reveals that a wave of young German authors began to dominate Berlin's literary scene during this period: the themes in their Berlin portrayals are the recent fashions as well as an unremitting preoccupation and fascination with being young and hip in the city.<sup>272</sup> The drive for writers of this new generation – Wladimir Kaminer, Frank Roth, Tanja Dückers,<sup>273</sup> Sven Regener and Leander Haußmann, to name but a few – appears to be in detailing the quotidian, urban experiences of a recent 'immigrant population' of young Germans coming from Bavaria, from Swabia, and from the Ruhr-region to the new capital. What appears to interest these writers is the day-to-day lives of these people, of what they eat, with whom they sleep and how often, what they wear, and how they move about the city. A great number of these 'Berlin authors' are themselves recent arrivals to Germany's new metropolis, attracted by the promise of an exciting, happening and, in terms of its relative novelty for those coming from the West, undiscovered East. It will be seen in what way the 'concerns' of this post-Wall generation re-signify if not reappropriate Berlin's topography in a form previously unknown in post-war German literature. It might even be argued that Schirrmacher's prayer for a new German literature, apolitical and unshackled by a West German *Gesinnungsästhetik* has finally been answered.

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<sup>272</sup> For an analysis of this new generation of Berlin writers and the German feuilleton see: Moritz Baßler, *Der deutsche Pop-Roman: Die neuen Archivisten* (Beck, München, 2002). Gustav Seibt summed up the new wave of literary interest in Berlin as follows: 'Die neuen Berlin-Bücher sind von Kindern der Provinz geschrieben, bei denen der Umzug in die große Stadt mit der Lösung vom Elternhaus zusammenfiel; sie sind selten mehr als drei hundert Seiten lang, meist erheblich kürzer; ihre besten Passagen betreffen nicht Berlin, sondern bestehen aus sentimental, bittersüßen Rückblicken auf die Kindheit in der westdeutschen oder ostdeutschen Provinz'. Gustav Seibt, 'Berliner Leben', in: *Merkur* 57:4, 2003, p. 298.

<sup>273</sup> 'Im *Spiegel* hatte die Autorin, bislang hauptsächlich als gute Slam! Poetry-Interpretin aufgefallen, kürzlich unter dem Titel "Spaßhaus Mitte" ein klischeereiches Manifest der Avantgarde dieser unkonventionellen Spaßkultur im Herzen der Hauptstadt abgeliefert.' Ingo Arende, 'Gelée Centrale: Setzkasten der Trashkultur', *Freitag* 40, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1999.

It is the pop-literature generation, a term conventionally applied to the Anglo-American Beat generation of the late fifties and early sixties, as well as the critical writings of Hubert Fichte, Rolf-Dieter Brinkmann and others in Germany in the late sixties and seventies. *Nachwende* pop-literature, however, refers to a number of young German authors writing specifically on the city, of life in the city, of the here-and-now. It has been argued that this type of pop-literature differs from earlier versions by virtue of its lack of political or social concern, insofar as it is marked by ‘das Fehlen etwa sozialkritischer, gar politischer Hintergründe’, leading some to suggest that the label of pop-literature is incorrect.<sup>274</sup> There is a widely accepted consensus on post-reunification German pop-literature that in its substance the aesthetic movement appears to be both apolitical and a-historic: ‘tatsächlich gebärdet sich der heutige Pop als geschichtslos, plötzliche Erscheinung: *pop is now*. Dementsprechend spielt Geschichte für und in ihm keinerlei Rolle, sie existiert nicht’.<sup>275</sup> This emphasis on a continuous present is developed in *Spielzone* thematically and linguistically: the novel is related throughout in the present tense underscoring that there is very little memory in evidence. Critics of this literary movement argue that this type of literature, in contradistinction to earlier beat or pop-generation texts, is not only apolitical, but does not appear to have any particular agenda whatsoever. It is ‘die Politik der Nicht-Politik, der Geschmack der Geschmacklosigkeit, die Kultur der Unkultur’ and is summarily, and unfairly, accused by one critic of ‘eine radikale Verantwortungslosigkeit’.<sup>276</sup> Surely the partial refusal to pay lip service to the meta-narratives that have dominated post-war German literature is in itself an agenda of sorts. One proponent of the *Nachwende* German pop-

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<sup>274</sup> ‘Popliteratur ist eigentümlich glatt, als Begriff nicht recht faßbar, als Gesamterscheinung un-einheitlich mit sehr verschwommenen Grenzen, und die Kanten, an denen man sich zu stoßen meint, sind meist erst von der Kritik hineininterpretierte’. Marcel Diel, ‘Näherungsweise Pop’, *Kritische Ausgabe: Zeitschrift für Germanistik & Literatur* 1:2000, p. 3.

<sup>275</sup> Diel, ‘Näherungsweise Pop’, p. 3.

<sup>276</sup> Dieter Mersch, ‘Art & Pop – Kein Thema mehr?’, *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, 29:101, 1998, p. 46.

literature has provocatively argued that the reason for the negation of the historic in much of contemporary writing on Berlin by young authors is precisely because of what he perceives to be the previous generation's excessive preoccupation with the past, and in particular, 'die völlige Fixierung [des] Geschichtsunterrichts auf die Nazi-Zeit'.<sup>277</sup> But to reiterate a point I have already made, while the characters in Dücker's text may be 'anti-historical', the text itself is anything but ludic, or even a-historically postmodern. There are references to past history and what finally emerges is not a narrative amnesia, but a narrative act of exploring a generation that believes itself to live in a condition of amnesia.

Although there is no single clearly identifiable agenda in the writings of the contemporary German pop-authors, an emphasis on the urban experience, on consumerism and fashion labelling does appear to be common to most of the texts of this specific genre. It is (again) largely non-political in that it focuses at times uncritically on mass consumerism in the 1990s, and in some cases amounts to a mere listing of familiar brand names. According to one newspaper reviewer, 'Schriftsteller nahmen den Trend, formulierten Beobachtungen zu Romanen und schickten Manuskripte an Verlage. Auch dort erkannte man den Trend. Deshalb verkaufen sie sich so gut in den Kiezbuchläden: Bücher, die die Berliner Szene zwischen Buchdeckel pressen'.<sup>278</sup> The suggestion that the literary production is nothing more than a marketing strategy should be taken *cum grano salis* – there is no one single cause or motivation behind the Berlin hype that followed the reunification. That said, in the following pages I shall address Dücker's repeated emphasis on trends as an instance of individuality pursued through a bizarre form of aesthetic differentiation, as well as her portrayals of the lives of an age group between 18 and 30 in Berlin and in what way these representations

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<sup>277</sup> Florian Illies, *Generation Golf. Eine Inspektion* (Argon, Berlin, 2000), p. 175.

<sup>278</sup> Anonymous, 'Berliner Szene zwischen Buchdeckeln', *Die Welt*, 27 March 2003.

betray a postmodern perception of a blank space, affecting both the city and the self. However, the text is not defined by this generational rupture, it is about it and as such is more complex than has previously been argued.

The body or bodies play an important role in Dücker's Berlin text, and indeed there is a clear correlation of the body with the concept of urban poaching. The term 'urban poaching' is borrowed from Michel de Certeau: it suggests that it is possible for city-users to (re-)claim the city for themselves through non-conventional approaches. I have shown in the previous chapters that the city is not a blank space, but is in fact scripted and ideologically loaded. Poaching, therefore, challenges the intentionality of the urban fabric (paths and roads, for example, dictate how they are to be used and by extension how the city will therefore be negotiated) and overturns such authority by finding other ways to negotiate the city, such as walking along roof-tops or changing the function of a space into something completely different. To 'poach' in this sense, then, suggests an attempt to re-signify if not re-write the urban fabric by inscribing other meanings alongside or in place of those already present. The body is also 'poached' in a similar way in Dücker's text insofar as some of the characters seek to circumvent conventional and/or prescriptive notions of gender and identity by re-appropriating their bodies suggested through the cross-dressing and in one case, self-mutilation. I will argue that the body in *Spielzone* is used as a metaphor for describing the unfinished and in part undefined body of the city. Through a topographic representation of Berlin's urban fabric the city 'wird in der Berlinliteratur der 90er so zu einer Topographie des Seelischen, in der nicht mehr [...] die grundsätzliche Erzählbarkeit der Stadt zur Disposition steht, sondern die Frage nach der Erzählbarkeit des Unfertigen, Disparaten und (noch)

Identitätslosen von Ich und Stadt zugleich'.<sup>279</sup> This city-body analogy is not visible or relevant to all Berlin-related texts, but is present in the six narrative texts analysed in this thesis. It is an analogy that is also helpful as a tool for interpreting the use of the physical body and its relationship to the city as portrayed in Dückers's text. The illustration of the body in the novel suggests state of being (ontologically speaking) without a clearly defined identity, of being strangely unfinished and an emphasis on what has been referred to as the 'discontinuous spatial experience and confusions of the postmodern' that is pursued in the text.<sup>280</sup>

## V.1. Historicising Sesame Street

'Benno ging in Ostberlin zur Schule, dann kam die Wende, als er zehn war' (168). A brief period of uncertainty follows after the reunification, he then buys himself a guitar, forms a band, and is an apprentice to an instrument maker, which he gives up after a short time. Benno is in fact the only East Berlin 'voice' in *Spielzone*. For Benno, who makes only a brief appearance in Dückers's text, and who represents a thematic non-sequitur in relation to the other Berlin portrayals, there is something strangely unfinished about his life, something that effects his already volatile perception of who he is.

On his eighteenth birthday Benno breaks into the Charité Hospital in Berlin through a window in the war-damaged part of the hospital complex and once there, makes his way to the room in which the Virchow collection of human deformities is housed: 'Er macht einen

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<sup>279</sup> Hanna Siebenpfeiffer, 'Topographien des Seelischen', *Bestandaufnahmen: Deutschsprachige Literatur der neunziger Jahre aus interkultureller Sicht* (Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2001), p. 88.

<sup>280</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, London, 1992), p. 154.

Schritt auf die erste Vitrine zu und liest den Namen und die Jahreszahl auf dem Pappkärtchen: 1979' (161). It is the same year in which Benno was born; and the object in the glass cabinet is his twin brother: 'dieser präparierte Säugling, der auch heute Geburtstag hat und "Leo" hätte heißen sollen, ist sein zweieiiger Zwillingsbruder'. The confrontation with his brother is understood as a re-reading of his own biography but for some unknown reason, 'ist er jetzt in diesem Körper und der andere in jenem, sonst wäre er jetzt der da, und Leo würde hier stehen und in den Glasbehälter starren und Benno zum ersten Mal in seinem Leben sehen' (162). The collection of human deformities, of which Benno's twin is one part, has a two-fold function in the text: on the one level as a metaphor for the historic while at the same time it is also a symbol for a postmodern a-historic, or re-inscribable signifier in which a fictionalised past is created in place of a 'factual' one. I shall first address the collection as a metaphor for Germany's past.

Leo is one of the many specimens in the collection of human deformities, each one remaining 'unverändert' (164) through time, a fact that in itself suggests something unnatural or at least out of the ordinary when contrasted with his brother. His unchanged body might possibly even be said to suggest a certain paralysis, an inability to change because he has been strangely apart from time. While removing the lid from the glass cabinet, Benno 'hört nur das Glucksen der Formalin-Lösung, über die seit achtzehn Jahren kein Luftzug mehr geweht hat' (164). The metaphoric association of uncovering, of digging up, contextualizes "Leo" for the reader within a historic continuum, and it is a metaphor that has already been explored in chapter three. The deformed and preserved baby is part of the Virchow collection, contextualized by the date of birth/death on the card, 1979, placed in chronological order, adding to the collection's performance of an uninterrupted linear perspective of (medical)

history from the eighteenth century to the present. Leo's body, and the body of all the other human deformities, are on display as historical artefacts and as such form a discourse and type of historical representation.

Having left with his brother wrapped up in a towel, Benno turns to face the hospital wing lit up by a flood-light: 'An einem vierstöckigen Gebäudeflügel, dessen Fenster zugemauert sind, befindet sich eine riesige Uhr ohne Zeiger. Vor dem Gebäude liegen Schuttberge' (165). The handless clock is possibly a reference to preserved time, or time having come to a standstill, a metaphor for the building and its collection, whereas the heaps of debris ('Schuttberge') are thematically linked to the blackened building and the bricked-up windows, which seem to seal it off hermetically from its surroundings. This particular wing of the Charité hospital in which the collection is housed was partially destroyed during the allied bombing campaigns over Berlin. The debris functions as a signifier for the continuing presence of the past, as does the hospital complex as a whole:

Wenn Benno nach rechts schaut, kann er den modernen Bau der Charité, ein graues Hochhaus, erkennen. Da es nah an der ehemaligen Grenze steht, hatte man die Fenster, die nach Westen gehen, mit weißer Farbe zugestrichen, doch die Patienten haben immer wieder mit Besteck oder anderen Utensilien versucht, diese Farbe abzukratzen, um hinüber-schauen zu können. Einmal im Jahr kam ein Kontrolldienst vorbei, der die Löcher zugestrichen hat. Das behauptete zumindest Rainer, der Marzahner mit den tätowierten Eiern, der früher mal in der Charité gelegen hat. (165)

It remains to be seen whether the shift from the reference to the war-damaged wing of the hospital to the modern extension built in the GDR is an attempt to establish a thematic link between the 'abnormalities' of two dictatorships that are inscribed within the urban text. But it is clear that the building embodies the same linear historical perspective as is represented in and through the Virchow collection of human deformities. The war-damaged hospital wing



evokes a memory of the National Socialist dictatorship, while the modern extension functions mnemonically to evoke the GDR, recalling memories of Berlin's divided status, of the Wall, and of the ideological conflict between East and West (literally white-washing the other, as is suggested in through the painted window panes).

It would be problematic to attribute a full historical consciousness to Benno. He neither interprets nor questions why the building is darkened and almost derelict, nor indeed does he question the veracity of what he has been told about the painted windows and the hospital controllers. He simply reports what he has heard, '[d]as behauptete zumindest Rainer', disinterestedly and uncritically. Interestingly, the afterthought that he was told by someone who had had his testicles tattooed and was only occasionally ('mal') in the hospital possibly suggests that for Benno it is simply another story, which might or might not be true. The passage above is close to a form of 'erlebte Rede' in which case the text is nonetheless suggesting that Benno is in some way aware of Germany's historical meta-narrative, and therefore not entirely indifferent to it. The interpretative problem here, however, is that the text is eavesdropping as it were on Benno's inner thoughts; it is a moment when the text is resisting the pervasive condition of amnesia. Benno's seemingly indifferent position towards Germany's historical meta-narratives arguably underpins his relationship to his grandfather, the only 'representative' character embodying historical consciousness in the text. When he was ten (the year the Wall fell) Benno's parents told him that he had a twin brother who died at birth and was now simply elsewhere: 'Er ist nicht mehr bei uns, er ist an einem anderen Ort, ganz weit weg, aber da geht es ihm bestimmt gut' (168). Benno's later demands to know the exact whereabouts of his brother remain unanswered. This reluctance to name suggests an unwillingness to renegotiate the past, on both micro and macro levels. It is through his

grandfather, who is opposed to this will to forget, that Benno first learns of the collection of deformities at the Charité hospital, though this knowledge is not immediately brought in connection with his dead brother. The grandfather tells Benno 'daß eines der berühmtesten Krankenhäuser, die Charité, damals in Trümmern lag und Tausende dort aufbewahrter misgestalteter Menschen und Menschenteile in den Straßen bis Unter den Linden zu finden waren' (168). The barbarity of the war, and possibly of Nazi Germany, is metaphorically inscribed onto the city through reference to the deformed bodies and body parts littering the streets, in particular, Berlin's politically representative street, Unter den Linden. His response, however, perhaps understandably for a teenager, is one of boredom and indifference, 'übersättigt' as he was, 'mit Großvaters einzigem Gesprächsthema, Kriegsgeschichten'.

It is worthwhile exploring this analogy between the Virchow collection and recollections of the war insofar as this figuring of the collection as a metaphor for a form of historical discourse has already been explored in *Nox*. Hettche establishes a thematic link between the preserved historical deformities and the deformities of National Socialism and Communism. I argued in chapter one that the representation of the Virchow collection in Hettche's novel suggests a progressive linear understanding of history, which, as with Dückers's portrayal, is uncritically continued into the present (it is to be assumed that Leo was not the last specimen to be added to the collection and the continued representation of the collection as somehow historically representative supports my interpretation). Hettche, however, puts forward an alternative model of historical writing and representation, namely myth, which rejects a linear understanding of history as dogmatic. *Spielzone* invokes the collection to represent repressed history, non-verbalised history, though the text regrettably fails to explore this issue in greater

depth. (Although the collection of human deformities is clearly central to the Benno section, and the text is at pains to describe the building and the damage to the collection during the war, the symbolic function as repressed history - of which Leo is part - is only briefly touched upon and is not referred to again.) One further distinction between the different uses of the collection as a discourse-metaphor lies in Dücker's emphasis on personal and private histories, and not the meta-narratives that dominate Hettche's text.

Dücker's exploration of the Virchow collection, while also functioning as a vehicle for a discussion of historical repression, establishes an important generational difference in the text, at least with regards to a perception of Germany's past and how this perception is changing with time. It is the grandfather who represents the historically conscious moment in the text. This difference is clearly demonstrated in the rare moments Leo's existence was referred to in Benno's family home, at which point, although the 'vier Erwachsenen um Benno vermieden jede weitere Erwähnung Leos, der kurz nach der Geburt gestorben sein mußte' (168), the grandfather, ignoring the complaints of Benno's parents, talked about

die monströsen Mißgeburten, die er angeblich im Rinnstein gesehen hat, die vielleicht sogar ihren Eltern vor die Füße gespült wurden, über all die Kinder, von denen man nicht weiß, wo sie geblieben sind, und überhaupt die Kriegsflüchtlinge, deren Kinder verhungerten oder als Wasserleichen im Weißen See lagen, oder die Zwillinge, die mit zerfetzten Gliedmaßen in einem Keller in der Linienstraße verendeten...' (169).

The implications here are again twofold. The reference to the children and the twins that ended up in the gutter unquestionably refers to Benno's own twin brother while at the same time also verbalising a couched critique of repressed histories, of those deliberately forgotten pasts. The implication is that there is an unwillingness to negotiate the Nazi past, to confront the hardships suffered by the civilian population, and by extension, the reference to Leo adds

the GDR to this historical equation. It is significant that even after the reunification 'nichts wurde mehr über dieses Thema gesagt in all diesen Jahren' (168), that this repression of the past continued in the family. It was only through the grandfather's insistence that mention of Leo's existence could be verbalised: '[e]r war nicht nur tot, er wurde auch tot geschwiegen' (168). Benno's language betrays an uncertainty towards the veracity of his grandfather's observations. He claims to have seen the bodies lying in the gutter ('angeblich') that were perhaps ('vielleicht sogar') washed up at the parents' feet – it is difficult not to hear a tone of scepticism and possibly disbelief. Although another possible reading is that the text may be offering a criticism of Benno for not engaging with the grandfather's insistence on the past – the criticism is justified because Benno's consciousness does at least retain the grandfather's narratives. The Benno/Leo nexus has everything to do with, albeit unfocused, history. The grandfather's insistence on the past and the analogical relations he establishes between historical (personal and public/political) events that have marked Germany in the twentieth century reveals that the past is still a relatively uncharted area for many in the former East. This interpretation rests on an understanding that Benno and his family function in the text as representative instances of East Berliners living through the transition from the GDR to the FRG.

The generational difference between the grandfather and Benno thematizes in the text a paradigmatic change in the memory of the war and of the GDR and how that memory is experienced in the city. The generation of those who personally experienced National Socialism (and the founding of the GDR) is inevitably dying out, thus marking a transformation of the past from communicative into cultural memory. Forty years 'bedeuten eine Generationsschwelle: das Ende der Generation der Zeitzeugen und der Übergang aus der

gelebten, verkörperten Erinnerung in die von Generation zu Generation weiterzuehende Tradition'.<sup>281</sup> Dückers's text problematises this transitional shift by portraying a generation for whom Germany's past is read as the confused ramblings of an old man; it is a generation that even when confronted with the historic, as is the case with Benno and his dead twin brother, is unable to place the event within a wider, critical historical perspective.

The motives behind Benno's claim to his twin brother betray his desire to create a history or at least a memory of his brother, to narrate his fantasies about growing up with Leo as if those memories had indeed taken place. To celebrate their shared eighteenth birthday, Benno begins a ritual of performing a shared past and lived memories, very much in the same manner as his impulse to immerse himself in the same fluid wherein Leo had been preserved since birth: '[e]r taucht beide Hände nacheinander in die Flüssigkeit und berührt sine Gesicht, seinen Hals, seine Arme' (164). This ritual bathing suggests nothing more than Benno's desire to believe that he and Leo have shared experiences and shared memories. His partial immersion in the fluid implying for Benno that he has somehow experienced what it was like to be in a glass cabinet full of formaldehyde. His next step is to immerse Leo in his own life and past. Once in the park he chooses a site to unpack the birthday candles, the tape-recorder churning out "Happy Birthday" von Stevie Wonder und "Birthday" vom Weißen Album der Beatles' (166) and then dresses him in Benno's childhood clothes. Deliberately reminiscent of the nineteen eighties, the shrill PVC dungarees with bright green apples stitched onto the pocket at the front, and finally, 'packt er noch den orangen Pulli mit Ernie und Bert darauf

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<sup>281</sup> Jan Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zehn Studien* (Beck Verlag, München, 2000), p. 29. In light of this paradigmatic shift Heinz-Peter Pruesser argues: 'Wessen sich eine spätere Epoche Erinnern soll aus dem Fundus des Niedergeschriebenen, wird jetzt in der Schwellenzeit des Übergangs festgelegt'. 'Erinnerung, Fiktion und Geschichte. Über die Trans-formation des Erlebten ins kulturelle Gedächtnis: Walser – Wilkomirski – Grass', *German Life and Letters* 57:4, 488-503, p. 500.

aus. Den hat damals Tante Ina aus dem Westen geschickt, zu seinem dritten Geburtstag' (166). The choice of clothing, the Sesame Street pullover with Ernie and Bert on it, is deliberate insofar as it plays on the natural symmetry of the two figures on the sweater that somehow qualify and validate the biographical symmetry Benno is trying to establish with his dead brother, hence the title of the chapter, 'Ernie und Leo und Benno und Bert' (160). Leo is made to share in these well-known icons, which Benno could not have experienced growing up in East Berlin. But the effect of a shared childhood is nonetheless the same.

Benno is in fact attempting to stage, in a theatrical sense, a fictively shared memory experience. Having sat the dead baby on a branch of a tree, Benno falls back into the grass and 'schaut nach oben zu Leo. Fast ist ihm, als wäre er mit einer Zeitmaschine in seiner Kindheit angelangt: Es gibt Fotos von ihm, wo er genauso in einem Baum sitzt. So will er Leo in Erinnerung behalten. Ernie und Leo und Benno und Bert' (167). Benno is transferring his own memories, and those of his parents of himself as a child growing up in Berlin, onto Leo who, dressed accordingly, creates for Benno the fiction that Leo too had experienced the same things as a child, and thus 'will er Leo in Erinnerung behalten'. This staging might possibly suggest the performance of a repressed desire for a shared childhood with Leo. I refer here to Freud's essay, 'Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten' in which he explores in what way a repressed desire may later be enacted without any awareness on the part of the performer that what is being acted out is in fact an unresolved conflict, which in this case would be Benno's possible guilt that he is alive and not Leo. Accounting for this fissure between cognitive memory and performative trauma, Freud argues that '[b]esonders bei den mannigfachen Formen der Zwangsneurose schränkt sich das Vergessene meist auf die Auflösung von Zusammenhängen, Verkennung von Abfolgen, Isolierung der Erinnerungen

ein'.<sup>282</sup> Once the apparent connections between events have indeed been dissolved, 'der Analytisierte erinnere überhaupt nichts von dem Vergessenen und Verdrängten, sondern er agiere es. Er reproduziert es nicht als Erinnerung, sondern als Tat'. Benno has demonstrated exactly in what way he is unable to establish thematic links and the enacting of that which has been repressed is implied in his staging of Leo in a tree in the park.

An analysis of the language in the passage is of interest insofar as the use of the conditional in Benno's speech is linked to his understanding of a staging of a past. Benno's created memory of Leo remains at all times a fictive creation, but this in no way reduces its validity for Benno. 'Factual' history, or at least that which is beyond the immediate biographical concerns of Benno's own experiences, appears to have little if any importance for him. This is made clear in the park in his comment on the illuminated Victory Column seen from the branch of the tree: 'Eigentlich ist das ja eher etwas für seine Eltern, Sieges- und andere Säulen zu bewundern [...]. Benno fällt ein, daß seine Eltern mal gesagt haben, die Victoria sei ein Sieges- oder Friedenssymbol, irgend etwas mit preußischen Kriegen jedenfalls, aber für ihn ist sie einfach eine schöne Frau mit Flügeln' (167). It seems to be either a remarkable failing of the Berlin school system that after eighteen years Benno still does not know the historic significance of one of the city's most important landmarks or, Dücker is taking Benno's lack of historical awareness to an unlikely extreme. What is clear is that he is not interested (or even aware) of its wider significance or function as a mnemonic signifier, a structure the intention of which is to trigger the memory of an event, in the way that Fonty would perceive it, but Benno's interest lies in its fantastical or imaginative quality. Benno's staging of a fictive past is significant for the text as a whole insofar as it underpins Dücker's

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<sup>282</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten', *Zur Dynamik der Übertragung* (Frankfurt a/M, Fisher, 2000), p. 89.

attempt to portray a generational shift, which the text does not necessarily endorse, in the way Berlin's urban fabric is perceived. The paradox is that the act of removing Leo from his cabinet, laying him on the grass almost calls to mind the grandfather's recollections of the deformed babies littering the streets of the city. Benno himself 'stellt sich vor, wie der Tiergarten von lauter in den Bäumen sitzenden Mißgeburten mit feinem flauschigen Haar auf ihren verwachsenen Köpfen bevölkert ist, die alle wie Leo zur Siegessäule schauen' (170-1). A combination of fragmentary memories of the stories he remembers concerning the war, the human deformities on the streets, and Benno's own fantastic re-writing of it in his own mind. Interestingly, it is through this staging of Leo in the park that he too is inscribing his memories and desires upon Berlin's urban fabric.

## **V.2. From the Churchyard to the Playground: West-East Portrayals**

'Begriffe wie "Ost" und "West" greifen doch längst nicht mehr. Da ist etwas anderes entstanden. Ich will nicht sagen, etwas Neues. Aber etwas anderes' (156). This something else, which still rests on an East-West dialectic of sorts, is an illusion of Berlin – post-political, post-Wall, post-Cold War – as an urban blank space somehow semantically cleansed of the past. Berlin, and in particular East Berlin is now a play-zone made up of 'Tummelplätze für überdrehte und verschrobene Existenzen'. This at least seems to be the general consensus of most of the younger generation depicted in *Spielzone*, a generation that has come to claim the capital, or at least parts of it, as their own playground. Even though the personae in the text unquestionably reject the East-West paradigm that had shaped Berlin-Berlin's identity since the building of the Wall in 1961, if indeed not earlier, the text itself, at



least structurally, insists nonetheless on a geographical paradigm of sorts.<sup>283</sup> The first half of the text focuses exclusively on a patchwork of perceptions of the 'Thomasstraße' in Neukölln by the people living there, and the second part on the 'Sonnenburger Straße' in Prenzlauer Berg and its inhabitants, respectively. Each section is composed of ten mini-stories, in which life in the two boroughs is depicted by a medley of characters, who in some cases later return to the text in the second section. In keeping within Jameson's postmodern doctrine through the optic of which the city is perceived as a 'discontinuous spatial experience', the text does not offer the reader a meta-narrative linking all the various threads together into a narratable whole, from which a single 'story' might be gleaned. In fact, there does not appear to be any one story, but rather a composite of journalistic-like excerpts, mini-biographies and sociological studies. The representations of both streets are in no way understood as representative of Berlin as whole; the specific 'local' portrayals of the two streets do not extend beyond that which the narrators purport to represent, namely their own lives and local histories. However, the two streets do function as representations of the districts of Neukölln and of Prenzlauer Berg and in so doing, come to represent significant social, political and cultural shifts and perceptions. The necessary patchwork structure insists however on the non-relatedness and arbitrariness of the perceptions and representations of Berlin's topography, by refusing to harmonise the individual stories in the text, nor does the text seek to privilege any of the representations as incontestably true or real. The text's focus simply shifts halfway through the novel from West to East, from one street to another, though with the shift promising for the *dramatis personae* the illusion of a new beginning. It is a shift that

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<sup>283</sup> A paradigm Gerstenberger fails to address in her reading of *Spielzone*. Both Neukölln and Prenzlauer Berg are for her simply 'located outside the East-West paradigm', although the text insists, however superficially, on a number of East-West paradigms of sorts. See: Katharina Gerstenberger, 'Play Zones: The Erotics of the New Berlin', *The German Quarterly* 76:3 (2003), 259-272, p. 261.

underscores that the novel's concern is not with one central protagonist, but rather a specific group and generation.

A further distinction implied in this structural division is suggested in the text's rejection of any Cold War political baggage. It is perhaps an inevitable absence given both the age of the characters concerned (14 to 27) and the fact that with the fall of the Wall the Cold War also came to an end. The absence of such historical signifiers in the text might be said to underpin the representation of Dücker's *dramatis personae* and their insistence that the dialectic of East/West and the pre-1989 political and social discourses are by definition redundant and largely irrelevant. Indeed, there appears to be no conception that this forty-year division may have left its traces in and on the city and might have established in both East and West a collective sense of identity that did not simply disappear overnight. Nor indeed is Peter Schneider's now much quoted remark of 'Die Mauer im Kopf',<sup>284</sup> which underpins the relatively slow, and not inevitable transition from political reunification to a social/intellectual and individual reunification between the city's citizens, addressed in the text. Benno is the only character in the text born in the former East, but neither he, nor any other character, are aware of the borough as a distinctly East Berlin district, in contrast for example, to Fonty. Benno's only remark which touches on the fact that there was once an East and a West is dismissal of the new party-scene in the run-down courtyards of Prenzlauer Berg: 'Solche Höfe hat er sein Leben lang gesehen, da wächst kein Baum und nichts, nur ein paar unbelehrbare Wessis halten die für ihre neuen Abenteuerspielplätze' (165). Written only two years after Grass's text and published in the same year as Delius's Berlin excursion, Dücker's text is claiming that the social and political paradigms thematised in both *Ein*

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<sup>284</sup> Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1982), p. 110.

*weites Feld* and *Die Flatterzunge* no longer have any meaning for those too young to remember or even care about the history of the division. The realities of Berlin have changed for them, but the text itself may remember more urgently than do the characters.

This absence of any mention of a collective identity in the former East invites postmodern readings of Prenzlauer Berg by Dückers's protagonists as being something akin to a ludic blank space; at least, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter, as far as this generation of such playground-seekers is concerned. This strangely empty representation marks a significant thematic shift in how East Berlin is portrayed, as a brief comparison with Günter Grass's text, *Ein weites Feld* demonstrates. For Grass, Prenzlauer Berg possesses a uniquely East German identity – one recalls Fonty's mental and physical perambulations in the city borough through which the individual uniqueness of the East is thematised and made central to the text. There is an unquestionable sense of belonging and self-identification with Prenzlauer Berg (and East Berlin) by the civic body. 'Die Prägungen aus vier Jahrzehnten kommunistischer Diktatur sind geblieben' and it is not easy to imagine that these influences simply disappeared or became null and void overnight.<sup>285</sup> This is not the general consensus in *Spielzone*. The structural paradigm in Dückers's texts is based on a simple dialectic of old and new, of a political West and a seemingly non-political East; it is an oppositional dialectic between the 'Thomasstraße', a representation of the working class district of Neukölln in West Berlin and the 'Sonnenburger Straße', signifying the eponymous play-zone district of Prenzlauer Berg in East Berlin. I shall address both sections in turn.

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<sup>285</sup> Ulrich Schlie, *Die Nation erinnert sich* (München, C.H. Beck, 2002), p. 175.

### I.3. Die Thomasstraße

Neukölln, alongside Wedding, was West Berlin's largest working class district, with the Hermannstraße and the Thomasstraße serving as the borough's commercial hub, consisting of a milieu of clerks, small government employees and the unemployed, and has rarely, if at all, been the chosen subject for a Berlin novel.<sup>286</sup> *Spielzone* takes the reader to the heart of Neukölln: 'Die "Trashmeile", wie die Hermannstraße auch genannt wird', which 'leuchtet in einem Meer von abgewrackten Reklameschildern. Eine Kolonne von Polizeiwagen rast [...] vorbei, eine Gruppe schimpfender Leute tritt aus dem U-Bahnhof' (68). The absence of any particular action resulting from a crescendo of events, but rather the unbiased focus of a registering eye, so to speak, suggests that the depiction is random, quotidian and documentary. Again, the representation is unconnected, almost collage-like as the text registers a depressing survey of the high street: the 'Trashmeile' at dusk almost lifeless in the reflection of broken and scrapped advertisements that litter the street. The image (or metaphor) would simply be depressing were it not for the convoy of hurried police cars adding a hint of violence latent to this run-down borough. The text attempts to simply 'give' Berlin, and ask the reader to read between the lines by playing on an association of Neukölln as a site of pathos and violence, and through it sets the tone for the other nine stories set in the district: 'Für Sekunden bohrt sich die Spitze des Fleischspießes durch ihre Köpfe, die in der dunstbeschlagenen Scheibe eines Döner-Ladens gespiegelt werden. [...] Eine Bierspur auf dem Frisch gefallenen Schnee' (9). But the violent image dissipates; it is just a momentary magic-lantern illusion seen through the mirror and the window; the blood on the

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<sup>286</sup> Kathrin Röggla's *Irres Wetter* (Residenz, Salzburg, 2000) is the only notable exception to this of which I am aware. In a similar vein to the urban portrayals in *Spielzone*, Röggla's Berlin novel offers only brief glimpses into a number of Berlin's otherwise unknown boroughs.

floor is a trail of beer. The suggestion of violence is not entirely removed, but the reference to the beer permits another reading, namely one of pathos, of stagnation and of hopelessness.

This interpretation of beer as a metaphor for hopelessness (this fall from potential violence to pathos is remarkably anti-heroic and serves to set the tone for the coming representations of the district) is supported in the text through numerous references and representations of alcoholics that somehow come to be seen as representative of Neukölln. The Thomasstraße and the Hermannstraße seem to be littered with beggars ‘in einem Mülleimer wühlenden Penner’ (74), it is here that the unemployed seem to simply hang about (‘rumlungern’ 63), and the female protagonist Katharina notes the ‘stumpfen Haß’ of the people on the streets, of those who ‘will weder erobern noch begrapschen, sondern nur noch zerstören’ (100). The violence and hopelessness on the streets is for many of the characters generic to the district: ‘Als der Typ nach meiner roten Bluse faßte, dachte ich, der will mich erwürgen. Es ist das dritte Mal in diesem Jahr, daß mich irgendein wildfremder Mensch mit “Du Votze” anschreit’ (99). There is a general atmosphere of loneliness, fear and resignation, and isolation in the face of a seemingly insurmountable hopelessness as is suggested in the transformation of an unfulfilled desire into alcoholism exemplified in the drunken caretaker rubbing his Venus flytrap against passers-by in the hallway, admonishing it to ‘Faß, Hasso, faß!’ (97): or even the unfulfilled longings of an arsonist caught naked by his own work in the attic of an apartment building whose charcoaled body (die verkohlte Leiche, 102) closes the novel’s section on Neukölln, ‘in drei Stunden der Umzug’ (104), turning full circle to the first image of violence and hopelessness in the ‘Döner-Laden’ at the beginning of the section. It is clear from the few excerpts given above that the depiction of Neukölln in *Spielzone* functions as a sociogramme of a specific population, of a group of people of varying age

groups and occupations in an area of Berlin that appears to have remained relatively unchanged by the events of 1989 and is stuck in a form of urban and social paralysis.

The themes of paralysis, of loneliness and desperation are portrayed through the representation of St. Thomas cemetery in Neukölln. As a drifter and social outsider, Rainer is accustomed to wandering across the city with and without his dog, Yesterday. He has walked the city ever since his partner Julia unexpectedly disappeared, and since that time he has become something akin to Nooteboom's flâneur in search of the past: 'Beim Laufen geht es ihm immer gut, seit drei Monaten, seit Julia, läuft er ununterbrochen herum, hängt auf Schrottplätzen, Spielplätzen, Baustellen, Friedhöfen und [...] läßt sich trieben' (46).<sup>287</sup>

Wherever he goes during his walks he inscribes the city with his memories of Julia: 'Dort ritzt er mit seinem Hausschlüssel an die Wand: "Julia, ruf mich doch an, 6213594 Dein R"' (51). This act of strangely textualising the city transforms the urban fabric into an architectural memento for Rainer that has less to do with Julia (he later meets another woman, is abandoned, and pursues the same scriptural wanderings through Neukölln) and more to do with his own deracinated existence in the city and his ultimate desire to be localised within a social framework ('Rainer dachte immer, wenn er eine neue Freundin hätte, würde er wieder seßhaft, würde zu Hause CDs hören und Kerzen anzunden, die er auf Flaschenhalse gesteckt hat', 52). His perambulations are the walks of someone hoping to find

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<sup>287</sup> The similarities between Rainer and Nooteboom's Arthur Daane are striking. Whereas the latter seeks to rescue the memories of the past with his camera, Rainer demonstrates a similar intention through a compulsive need to take note of everything he arbitrarily comes across: 'Auf dem Thomas-Friedhof zückt er einen Einkaufszettel, um sich irgendwelche Namen, die ihm gerade ins Auge fallen, aufzuschreiben: Gerhard Minzlin zum Beispiel oder, wen man sich wohl darunter vorstellen kann: Isolde Senkbeil' (46). Rainer collects such random jottings and hordes them in a manner that is suggestive of Daane's own hope to recover the past albeit with collected images.

no so much Julia but himself.<sup>288</sup> The act of inscribing his name might be understood as being the result of this need to belong that returns Rainer constantly to St. Thomas's cemetery.

The cemetery underpins Rainer's longing for belonging paradoxically through a semiotic absence. The one important person in his life appears to have been his grandmother, '[d]er einzige Mensch, den ich kenne' (67), who was clearly an essential focus of reciprocal identification and meaning for him. She was buried in the cemetery: 'Meine Großmutter war auch hier auf dem Friedhof, [...] aber ich konnte das Familiengrab nicht mehr bezahlen [...] und jetzt gibt's das Grab nicht mehr...war ein schönes Grab' (66). Her remains were removed because he could no longer afford the upkeep of the grave. His aesthetic afterthought, 'war ein schönes Grab', clearly verbalises both his pain and his longing. The cemetery functions here on two levels: Rainer is drawn to it because of his grandmother who counterbalances the deracination that marks his life in Neukölln and his apparent unconnectedness to his own immediate family ('meine Eltern verblöden in Bayern', 66), and as such is therefore a metaphor for longing, but the absence of his grandmother's bodily remains at the same time underscores his non-belonging. The one thing that draws him to the cemetery is in fact not there. It is this tug-of-war attraction and frustration that ultimately paralyses Rainer because he is unable to leave a site to which he in fact does not fully belong. Absence and presence also underpins his own deracinated existence in Berlin: the textual references Rainer has inscribed on the city refer to an absence of someone else as well as his own.

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<sup>288</sup> 'Hinter einem Fenster im ersten Stock sieht er ein bis zur Decke reichendes dunkles Holzregal, auf dem sich allerhand Fläschen und Dosen und ein Totenkopf befinden. Auf den Schädel ist mit großen roten Buchstaben "INRI" geschrieben, nein, "INGRID", er hat sich verguckt' (49). The reference to Christ, however mistaken, possibly underscores the absence for Rainer of even a metaphysical consolation – his longing is absolute and his search will offer no answers or way out.

It is for the reasons outlined above that I find Corinna Heipcke's reading of the cemetery as a collective site in Dücker's Berlin text problematic. Heipcke argues that 'the inhabitants of Thomasstraße, in making the most of the locality, choose the Thomasfriedhof as their favourite spot'.<sup>289</sup> But neither the 'Rainer episode' nor the other cemetery-specific narratives support this optimistic reading. It is a need that forces the inhabitants of the Thomasstraße to seek out the cemetery and not a misguided understanding of the site as a park-alternative, or open-air community space. The first of the ten Thomasstraße representations begin with the cemetery and its 'keenest visitor' Herr Lämmle.<sup>290</sup> Lämmle is a manager of the Neukölln sewage treatment plant, married but with no children, and an aspiring, but frustrated and mediocre writer. His wish in life is simply to escape 'dem braunen Teppich' (12), which serves as a metaphor for his conventional, petit bourgeois regulated existence. His desire, in fact, is to be some one else: 'Ich will nicht mehr der sein, der für Gisela Ohrenstäbchen kauft oder Schuhcreme für sich selbst. Oder Salztangen für uns beide' (91), although he realises that ultimately he is 'zu keiner Verwandlung fähig' (93). Lämmle arguably returns the text to the theme of pathos and paralysis analysed above. His life is marked, paradoxically, by his lifeless ('Lebenslos') and uneventful and frustrated existence, 'ich glaube, ich will ihn ganz und gar nicht, meinen Körper' (91). But, strangely reminiscent of the borough of Neukölln, he also reflects its inability to transcend its present stagnation and dialectic of pathos and violence, 'zu keiner Verwandlung fähig'.

It is this state of unfulfilled longing that lies behind Lämmle's night visits to the cemetery. The cemetery is the stage from which he is able to spy into the apartment of a young extravagant couple and thereby passively fulfil his desire for otherness beyond the framework

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<sup>289</sup> Corinna Heipcke, 'The new Berlin-Roman as paradoxical genre', *GFL* 1, (2003) 45-61, p. 53.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.* The description is misleading because it underlines a positive ('keenest') reading of the site.



of his otherwise dull existence. ‘Da sind sie’, the first words of the novel, ‘[D]ie schlanke Frau in einem Nixenkleid, hautenges türkisfarbenes Nylon mit Schuppenmuster, und einer wie ein fischschwanz aufgefächerten Schlaghose, wäscht Broccoli. Der Junge mit langem blauschwarzen Haar in einem “Ziggy Stardust”–Outfit putzt Mohrrüben und preßt Zitronensaft’ (9). The attention to detail, the skin-tight clothing, the fish-tail fanned trousers and the repetition of the colour blue create for the reader an almost aquatic impression and in so doing underscores precisely the otherness of the young couple. The suggestion of an aquatic world means the possibility of an existence beyond the mundane world of shoe polish and earwax removers: ‘müssen sie nicht denn nie einmal Dinge tun, wie den Müll runtertragen oder Schuhcreme kaufen?’ (10). The exotic appearance of the two is in stark contrast to Lämmle’s own plain exterior, although the relative banality of their actions, washing broccoli and squeezing a lemon, comically undercuts and in effect ridicules Lämmle’s observations.<sup>291</sup> Their lives must be as exciting and as extravagant as is their wardrobe. He spies on them everyday from the cemetery from the roof of the Peters- family tomb: ‘Das Dach ihres Familiengrabs, zur Thomasstraße hin von Linden versteckt, dient mir als Beobachtungsplätzchen’ (13), apart from those moments in which he clandestinely follows them through Berlin, either by car or on foot. His interest does not appear to be solely motivated by a sexual voyeurism, although he repeatedly witnesses sexual acts performed in front of the window by Jason and Elida.<sup>292</sup> It is rather their insistence on being other; of establishing a fundamental difference to their environment that attracts Mr Lämmle.

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<sup>291</sup> Clothing references signify a repressed desire on Lämmle’s part: ‘Jason: mit seinen glitzernden Satinhosen, solche hab ich mir früher immer gewünscht, aber meine Mutter verdrehte nur die Augen’, 11. As such, Jason’s choice of wardrobe symbolises for Lämmle a freedom to choose who it is one wants to be, rather than have to accept a conventional, that is given, identity.

<sup>292</sup> ‘Als ich das letzte Mal Morris’s Halsmuskulatur sah, Elida bewegte sich auf seinem Schoß auf und ab, ihre langen, rotten Haare fielen über ihr Gesicht seinen Rücken hinunter bis fast zu seine Hüften, und seine schönen, sehnigen Hände hinterließen feste rote Abdrücke auf ihren Pobacken, da wurde ich so unruhig, daß es mir fast den Kopf zersprengte. Aber – ich habe in ihrem Kosmos nix zu suchen’, 16.

The couple live in an apartment that reminds him of an aquarium ('Aquariumleben', 204) and is of the locus of all of his fantasies ('mein Schloß Charlottenburg von Neukölln, 13), they have sex in front of an open window, they change their names as frequently as their clothes 'Bis morgen noch nennt er sich Jason, am Montag denkt er sich wieder einen neuen Namen aus. Genau eine Woche habe ich immer Zeit, den aktuellen herauszufinden' (11), and they live as if they were alone in the world 'mir geht ein Vergleich (with his own life) durch den Kopf. Nur so. Weil die beiden keinen Funken Interesse an ihrer Umwelt haben' (12) and as the whole street stands still to watch a suicide victim brought out of the metro, Jason and Elida 'sehen die blutgetränkte Bahre, die gerade von drei fluchenden Männern hochgetragen wird, nicht' (68). It is the constant possibility of being other, indifferent to the immediate environment as is suggested through the caesura in the quotation above, that attracts Lämmle to Jason and Elida, to what he perceives as their uninhibited freedom from social conventions, 'Ich wünschte, ich könnte Jemand ganz anderes sein. Mir ein neues hautenges Kostüm anziehen' (91).

The pathos of his existence is that the object of his desire will always remain unattainable for him. Mr Lämmle comes to represent the frustrated, unhappy lives of the small clerks, the milieu of the petit bourgeois in the Neukölln district. His thoughts and even his emotions are not his own: '[i]hre Augen haben die Farbe des Stillen Ozeans auf dem Globen im Schaufenster von Karstadt' (11), but are anchored in a culture of consumerism and advertisements. The suggestion is that his emotions, his imagination and indeed his being are simulations, of which Mr Lämmle is all too painfully aware: of his inability to emerge from his shadowy, commercially distorted existence into something approaching individuality. It transpires that Lämmle's game of spying and finding out about Jason and Elida's existence is

fake: both Jason and Elida know about Lämmle, they are aware that he watches them from his surveillance post in the cemetery; they too watch him, perform for him from their apartment; they know of his wishes, his desires,<sup>293</sup> but Jason also knows ‘sich dem Mann da draußen einmal wirklich zu nähern, das würde nicht in dessen Bild von ihm und Elida passen’ (75). As a result of which they too continue the game, ‘distanziert zu bleiben’, hence they ‘perform’ sex in front of the window both for Lämmle, but also to establish their own sense of difference. The game serves only to underline a general theme of loneliness and an absence of communication. This impossibility of fulfilment finds its voice through the significance accorded the cemetery in the text. Jason and Elida are dramatically killed off in a car crash in the first section, a fact he even dramatises to fit into his image of them: ‘Sie sind gemeinsam und sofort gestorben. Elida und Danny. So und nicht anders ist es gewesen’ (94). In fact, he does not know how they died.<sup>294</sup> Their death means for Lämmle a trapped audience; he visits their grave everyday, lays flowers, picks up the rubbish lying around it: ‘ich kann jetzt zu ihnen kommen, so oft und wann ich will, ihnen Geschichten aus meinem Leben erzählen, und die beiden können sich nicht dagegen wehren’ (95); without him, he believes, ‘verrottet ihr Fleckchen hier total. Jetzt brauchen sie mich’. The cemetery thus becomes a symbolic representation of his pathological and non-reciprocal desire. This supposed reversal in the relationship between the young couple and Lämmle underpins the relationship between the cemetery visitors and the cemetery itself: one of unreciprocated and unfulfilled need. In fact, the relationship between Lämmle and Jason and Elida has not

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<sup>293</sup> ‘Einmal haben Elida und er, nur zum Spaß, eine Liste mit all den Dingen angelegt, die sie schon über ihn wissen: Er fährt jeden Morgen um halb neun nach Tempelhof, irgendein blöder Job halt, er trägt entweder einen hellblauen oder einen grauen Anorak, irgendwelche zu kurzen Jeans zu weißen Socken, er hat eine Frau, die gefärbte blonde Locken hat, aber nie rechtzeitig nachfärbt, sie ist etwas pummelig und shopt mit so einem gecheckten Einkaufswagen von Woole auf der Hermann. Kinder haben sie nicht’, 75.

<sup>294</sup> ‘Ich mag nicht daran denken, wie sie ausgesehen haben zum Schluß, ob ihre Sachen blutdurchtränkt waren, ob sie zusammen gestorben sind, sofort, nach dem Aufproall, oder ob einer noch leidend neben dem anderen gelegen hat’, 94.

changed. The cemetery thus represents the illusion of an escape from the brutality and indeed banality of life, while at the same time underlining the impossibility of that illusion; the cemetery is the locus of paralysis and stagnation that structures Dücker's representation of Neukölln.

The cemetery is then not a neutral site as Heipcke argues, but resembles something akin to a pluralist space that is able to juxtapose several conflicting sites as well as their meanings. In every culture, besides those "normal" and dominant spaces, other sites seem to exist in which the normal socio-cultural relationships are represented, put in doubt, and reversed. An understanding of the formation and working of such sites would permit an analysis of the social and cultural formation of identity. Dücker's text represents the cemetery as a site of juxtaposed realities that somehow co-exist within the walls of St. Thomas's and therefore justifies an interpretation of the graveyard as a Foucaultian heterotopic site.<sup>295</sup> As a site of longing and unfulfilled desire, the interaction between the cemetery and the inhabitants of Neukölln also invites an interpretation of the social and cultural identity of the district, allowing for the function as a representative instance. The cemetery is a 'real place', but at the same time a 'counter-site', in which other possible uses 'are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> I refer here to Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which attempts to understand the socio-cultural spaces of difference and heterogeneity. Such sites make it possible for society and the individual to exist 'inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another'. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16:1 (1986), p. 23. I disagree with Foucault's watertight subjects of heterotopia in which various realities seem to exist in a quasi block-like construction and argue instead that the boundaries between such realities, at least in the text discussed above, are more fluid and less clearly defined.

<sup>296</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 23.

I argued in the introduction that the city is also an important provider of information. I intend to accord a similar signifying function to the cemetery in Dückers's text. The cemetery is a societal construct and as such is part of, or reflects, a type of discourse and is also provider of information and is, in Foucault's analysis, one of the most important instances of heterotopia. A heterotopic site is one which permits various realities to coexist. The cemetery is 'the strange heterotopia' because it is a space 'connected with all the sites of the city-state or society'. Importantly, such sites 'are most often linked to slices in time [...]. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with traditional time',<sup>297</sup> which I would argue has been demonstrated through Rainer and Lämmle's imagined reality of his relationship with Jason and Elida. In contrast to their desires, Lämmle and Rainer are still prisoners of traditional time, unlike, say, Jason and Elida. St. Thomas's cemetery in *Spielzone* challenges, compliments and/or reverses other sites through its complex attraction to certain sections of Neukölln's society, whereby its connectedness to the district is constantly reconfirmed. For Lämmle, it reverses the 'home-site' by revealing its limitedness through contrast with Jason and Elida's apartment, while for Rainer it represents both presence and absence, and in so doing, might be said to go beyond its primarily homogenous function as a burial ground for the dead. It is, *pace* Heipcke, its heterogeneous nature, its ability to juxtapose and its function as a societal mirror (it reflects the desires and frustrations) that draws out the inhabitants of Neukölln to St. Thomas's cemetery.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 21 & 24.

<sup>298</sup> Heterotopic sites function as mirrors insofar as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counter action on the position the self occupies: 'from the mirror I find the absence of where I am'. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 24. St. Thomas's cemetery is a heterotopic site because it is through it that Lämmle discovers this absence of 'where I am'. In Lämmle's own words, 'Früher dagegen war ich doch zu absoluter Passivität verdammt. [...] Die unzähligen Zigarettensammel hier oben legen Zeugnis ab von dieser Zeit, als ich noch in meinem Startloch saß', 95. But their continued presence underlines, at least for the reader, that his new reality at their grave is both real and illusionary.

I should like to address one further aspect of the role of the cemetery in Tanja Dückers's Berlin novel, namely its function as a site of rupture. I argue that the cemetery serves as a precursor for the generational break and the shift in the way Berlin is perceived that is central to the second section of the novel, 'Sonnenburger Straße' as well as to the novel's assumption to be representing a particular generation. To return briefly to the claim made earlier that the 'heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with traditional time', it might be fair to state that although not presuming an absolute break, *Spielzone* hopes nonetheless to portray a significant break with traditional time (as historical awareness) if time is understood here as a particular historical awareness such as is given through the dominant discourses. It is the time-concerns of the 'older' generation antonymically opposed to preoccupations that motivate a significantly younger part of society. The first unambiguous instance of this generational shift is visible in the fourteen-year-old protagonist, Laura. It is through Laura's engagement with her family as well as her 'poaching' of St. Thomas's cemetery that this rupture is thematised.

The age of the protagonist, as with all of the *dramatis personae*, is important – the text is at pains to represent Laura's generation as one at odds with previous generational role models. Their inevitably divergent interests set the tone of this rupture: 'Laura, [...]willst du nicht mal einen Abend mit uns hier sein? Es gibt im Fernsehen gerade eine sehr gute Sendung über die Gedenkstätte Plötzensee' (20). That she should decline is perhaps not unusual, particularly at a time when her only thoughts appear to concentrate on boys, sex and parties, though not always in that order; but it is her association of Plötzensee and what it means for her that is significant. She has already visited the museum: 'einmal mit der Schule und einmal, falls sie sich erinnern können, mit meinen Eltern. Ich habe jedesmal Albträume nachher gehabt, mich

hat das überhaupt nicht kaltgelassen, wie Wolf mir vorwarf, bloß weil ich da drin 'ne tüte Chips gegessen habe, was er aus irgendeinem Grund "sehr unpassend" fand' (21). There are two criticisms that seem to be related. The first is the memory of Plötzensee and the nightmares that the visits afforded her, and the second is Wolf's attack that eating a bag of crisps is somehow unfitting in such a place. It bothered her that she should have to suffer nightmares for something which is not part of her own life and that she should be made to feel guilty is equally incomprehensible to her; the bag of crisps underscores this (natural) resistance to the memory of National Socialism as well as the rejection of a socially given attitude and response towards the Nazi past. The scene as a whole might therefore be read as a way in which the National Socialist past is being negotiated by Germany's changing generations. In other words, the past is not necessarily a continuing moral authority for this generation. Her recollections and awareness of the historic are interlinked with her parents' moral dogmatism.

Laura's parents are portrayed in the text as somehow stereotypical of the German '68 generation. Their relationship with their children is a case in point, fulfilling all of the clichés of portrayals associated with this generation: a continued preoccupation with National Socialism, which because they appear to have forgotten that Laura had already visited Plötzensee is circular if not rote-like. The suggestion is that they glean their information from the television and churn it out in an equally passive manner. The parents reveal a nostalgia for the myths of the 1960s and the ideals of egalitarianism, which also have their roots in a generational rupture: 'Meine Eltern wollen Hannelore und Wolf genannt werden, nicht Mama und Papa, das finden sie zu altmodisch und auch nicht gleichberechtigt, sie nennen uns ja

auch nicht Sohnemann und Tochter (18).<sup>299</sup> This change of nomenclature underpins both a shift in identification with traditional moral and authoritative instances (mother/father, self/other), while at the same time suggesting that the absence of such clear signifiers possibly nurtures in Laura a sense of being without a social anchor and identifiable framework. Unable to find it in her parents, Laura thus begins to seek it elsewhere. She dismisses the idea of seeking value or truth and therefore self-identification through her parents; for Laura, they disqualified themselves as moral and authoritative instances through their own inconsistencies; this being the case, Laura's rejection of the past as a meaningful framework or moral instance is no different, insofar as her parents come to represent the discourses of the past.<sup>300</sup> She perceives her parents' political and historical obsessions to be uncritical and of no relevance to her own life: 'Und was mache ich? Politik oder irgendeinen anderen Mannschaftssport gibt's nicht mehr, ich habe noch keinen Freund gehabt, ich meine so einen richtigen, nicht nur Zungenkuß auf einer Party' (23). This outpouring of associations in her thought processes, the seemingly nonsensical leap from politics to losing one's virginity, and her understanding of political engagement as a type of team sport, underscore precisely this shift of meaning addressed above. This understanding of politics as a type of group sport underscores Laura's wish for an individuality outside of the given framework of her parent's world. Further, her expression mocks traditional means of socialisation conventionally established through collective meaning-giving constructs. What she is seeking

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<sup>299</sup> 'Manchmal denke ich auch, Wolf und Hannelore wollen vor uns angeben, wenn sie erzählen, was sie alles erlebt haben. Hannelore war im Mai 1968 in Paris, Wolf hat gesehen, wie auf Dutschke geschossen wurde, und ist sogar einmal selbst verhaftet gewesen. Allerdings nur für eine Nacht wegen wiederholtem Schwarzfahren, wie er später zugab', 23. There is a sense that her parents are to be seen as representatives of a generation that is constantly looking back, burdened with memories which might or might not be true.

<sup>300</sup> 'Früher wäre ich nach einer Weile Grummeln zu meiner Mutter gegangen, hätte mich beschwert, irgendwie hätten wir uns wieder ausgesöhnt, aber das mache ich jetzt nicht mehr. Mir fallen zu viele Widersprüche bei Hannelore und Wolf auf, als daß ich noch das Vertrauen für eines der früheren Klär-Gespräche hätte', 18. It is interesting nonetheless that this is one of the few instances in which Laura refers to Hannelore as mother.



is her own right to establish her identity through other discourses and meaning-giving structures.

Her engagement with the city marks an equally significant break with norms and conventions. Every night Laura visits the St. Thomas's cemetery with her friends: 'Es ist 'ne simple Angelgenheit, man fühlt sich wohl, weil man etwas Verbotenes tut, aber diese Einsicht schmälert nicht mein Glücksgefühl. Ich denke überhaupt nicht an den Tod oder solche Sachen, es ist einfach nur eine abgefahrene Party-Location' (21). The use of St. Thomas's cemetery as a meeting place is in itself not out of the ordinary; it is her consciousness of it that stands in stark contrast to the majority of other visitors to the cemetery. Her description of it, 'eine abgefahrene Party-Location' betrays the language of her older cousin Ada in Prenzlauer Berg, whom I shall address later. It is the cemetery's quality of being 'abgefahren' (wild, way-out, hip) that is important to the group, and as such is the only viable 'Alternative zur Hermannstraße' (57) as well as the morally questionable world of her home. The use of the cemetery as a site of the exotic and the anarchical ('das ist vielleicht mein Motto: abhängen und offen sein. Und ich liebe extreme Orte, 'ne normale Bar oder 'ne Disco ist doch langweilig, 60) suggests a process of creative transformation of a particular space in the city. It is in the discussion on death in the cemetery with the widow Rosemarie Minzlin, whose husband is buried in St. Thomas's and whom she visits everyday, where this rupture is again thematised. Minzlin, an intelligent and thoughtful character in the novel, enters into an almost philosophical discussion with Laura on death and the fear of death, which the latter abruptly concludes, 'Der Tod als Kardinalfeind des kapitalistischen Systems...nicht schlecht' (61-2). Laura's response is slightly dismissive, and it is clearly a discourse with which she is already familiar, as her parodying of the quotations makes clear,

and she refuses to engage with the notion further. The cemetery is the one place where she does not think about death. This wait-and-see policy ('abhängen und offen sein') suggests an opposition to her parents' at times excessive political agenda and preoccupation with National Socialism and insistence on reading everything from within this historical framework, 'das haben meine Eltern gesagt, nach einer Sendung über die Todesstrafe' (62). Laura's reading of the cemetery as a site of possibilities and amnesia evokes the reading of the site as a heterotopia. It is its extremeness, as a site that permits various and contrasting uses, that is attractive.

The cemetery offers for Laura and her friends the possibility of otherness. It represents for them a place where they meet, reveal themselves through stories, it is a place for experimentation and where inhibitions are momentarily quieted: 'Wir küssen uns alle zum Abschied auf den Mund, Rike und ich am längsten, beste Freundinnen eben', (22) in what is an otherwise stagnant and paralysed district, 'Ach was kann man hier schon groß machen, hier haste doch echt die Arschkarte gezogen' (58). The suggestion is one of geographic fatigue, implying that it is no longer possible to experience anything new or even historically free in Neukölln, which, if this is the case, might explain why Jason and Elida were killed off at the close of the first section. It also sheds some light on Laura's later abandonment of the cemetery in favour of a dumping ground. The cemetery and the dumping ground continue the metaphorisation of Neukölln as a site of paralysis and hopelessness. Jason and Elida also represent an attempt at otherness, which means an alternative to the seemingly pervasive social stagnation: "'die Glitzernden", so nennt Rosemarie das Paar [...] Sie sind auf eine so sanfte Weise unmöglich' (56). Their colourful apartment reminds Lämmle of an aquarium, their extravagant outfits, the sex acts performed in front of the window, their unconventional

habits ('Sie löffeln abwechselnd aus den drei Schokoladenbechern', 11) and their continued insistence on the present, suggested in their constant name-changing, stand in stark contrast to Dücker's portrait of Neukölln. Paradoxically, their identity, name changing and the play with mirrors in the apartment, proved to be unstable precisely because it depends on an audience, as the numerous mirrors in their apartment make clear; their other audience, however, was made up of the inhabitants of Neukölln: 'Hier auf der Hermannstraße kennt sie beinah jeder' (54). It was their retreat and secrecy that ensured the constant attention of the others, and in particular of Mr Lämmle.<sup>301</sup> This staging of their lives for others through their dramatic aplomb, works only within the space 'eines hermetischen Raumes, als nicht-kommunizierbare Absetzung von der Gesellschaft'; that is to say, life in an aquarium.<sup>302</sup> Once outside of their 'staged' apartment, their existence becomes fragile and unstable: 'wenn man sie allerdings auf der Straße begegnet, haben sie die Angewohnheit, einen entweder nicht zu sehen oder einem im letzten Moment ein flüchtiges Lächeln zuzuwerfen' (54), akin to a film star.<sup>303</sup> It is because of this hermetically sealed existence that they are never truly rooted in Neukölln; hence they make possible a longing for otherness, which is why they are killed off, and with them the hope of otherness. The narrative focus shifts from Neukölln to Prenzlauer Berg when the two die in the car accident; this shift suggests a movement from old to new, from hopelessness to the possibility of something different, which, if Jason and Elida's death is read metaphorically, is no longer possible in Neukölln. The East will come to symbolise for a particular generation the promise of a new beginning.

<sup>301</sup> Jason and Eilda are referred to in seven of the ten stories, underscoring that their performance is effective.

<sup>302</sup> Phil Langer, *Kein Ort. Überall*, p. 177. This motif of the aquarium is also suggested in Lämmle's own reference to Jason and Elida as his water-gods, 'Meine Neptunier' (15), 'der Stille Ozean' (12) and the 'Nixenkleid' (9). The colour blue, a metaphor for longing, is constantly brought into association with the two: Jason's 'blaue Augen, dieses Meerblau' (11), 'Neptunier', and the blue of their apartment.

<sup>303</sup> 'Sie nehmen sich unbekümmert aus der Außenwelt das, was sie zur Ausstattung ihrer Innenwelt brauchen' (16), again underpinning this necessary dialectic between an inside and an outside as a means of establishing their identity.

#### V.4. Die Sonnenburger Straße

*Spielzone*'s contrasting structure performs a shift from the provincial and rundown district of Neukölln to the eponymous play-zone of Prenzlauer Berg in the former East. This geographical shift from West to East will also mark a significant generational shift, though continuing the theme of rupture already illustrated in the first section of the novel, as well as underpinning a significant change in how Berlin's topography is perceived by the inhabitants of the Sonnenburger Straße. This shift in perception is to be understood as an epistemic shift, insofar as the knowledge gleaned from the visual encounters with Berlin's urban fabric is significantly altered when compared with the encounters narrated in the previous chapters.<sup>304</sup>

The theme of loneliness and isolation will continue to overshadow the individual stories, which ultimately undermines the illusion of the East, of Prenzlauer Berg embodying a new beginning. It is important to recall that the perception of Prenzlauer Berg the reader is given is that of a generation or group that moved from West to East as a way of escaping the perceived stagnation of the West, epitomised in Neukölln. Other than Benno, no generic East Berliners, or old Prenzlauer Berg residents make an appearance in the text, which is in itself quite remarkable. Perhaps this absence underscores a textual attempt to signify two worlds, that of a young mostly West German generation living in the play-zone of Prenzlauer Berg and the non-visible world of everyone else living outside of the parameters of the eponymous play-zone. It is possible that this singular perspective of Prenzlauer Berg intends to invite a reading of Berlin as a site of coterminous ontological realities, no longer the simple binary of East and West, but an endless list of possible signifiers which co-exist without ever

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<sup>304</sup> One reviewer argued, the text polarizes ways of seeing and engaging with the city. 'Der Kampf kultureller Differenz tobt zwischen Prenzlauer Berg und Neukölln, zwischen Hermannplatz und Sonnenburger Straße, zwischen Hannelore und Wolf, die sich aufführen wie Mutter und Vater, aber weder Mutter und Vater genannt werden wollen.' Verena Auffermann, 'Der schrille Blick', *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Nr. 69, 24 März 1999, p. V2.

converging. But, the depiction rather warrants a reading of an urban coexistence of very different ways of life, which is not (exclusively) postmodern, but rather realistic in its mediation of contemporary urban experience.

‘Es gefiel uns so gut, die weißen Wände, die Kisten, nichts außer meinem Bett und der Vorstellung, wie es hier mal sein könnte. Drinnen die Wohnung noch unfertig und draußen die neue Stadt’ (107). A reading of Katharina’s new apartment as a metaphor for Prenzlauer Berg would not be mistaken insofar as the analogy between the two sites lies in their state of being unfinished and relative newness. The white walls might also be the illusion of the blank urban space waiting to be filled through an imaginative act ‘der Vorstellung, wie es hier mal sein könnte’ – it is simply a matter of unpacking the boxes and beginning anew. The East, by which she means both East Berlin and the GDR, ‘war mir ja vor der Wende immer sehr suspekt [...] aber jetzt, die Sonnenburger, die Schönhauser, die Kastanienallee, eine wunderbare Grauzone, nicht mehr Osten, noch nicht Westen, genau richtig, um sich selber auszutesten’ (108). If Prenzlauer Berg is a grey zone, undefined and somehow indefinable, then those who inhabit that zone are equally difficult to categorize. It is precisely the non-classifiable towards which the characters in Dückers’s text strive. Gerstenberger, however, interprets the term ‘Grauzone’ as a reminder of the cold-war division and a ‘faint resonance of a political division that no longer exists’,<sup>305</sup> but given Katharina’s political indifference<sup>306</sup> and her own admission that the East is neither one thing nor another (‘nicht mehr Osten, noch nicht Westen’), this reading is too restrictive. What these streets signify for Katharina and the

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<sup>305</sup> Gerstenberger, ‘Erotics of New Berlin’, p. 261: ‘The term “Grauzone” also invokes the cold-war monikers “Ostzone” and “Sowjetische Besatzungszone” as a faint resonance of a political division that no longer exists’.

<sup>306</sup> From her apartment Katharina hears a demonstration marching past and thinks, as she listens to her Kenny Rogers’ cassette, ‘daß ich eigentlich runtergehen sollte, von wegen wichtiger Anlaß. [...] Ich schlendere in die Küche, esse einer “Fruchtwölkchen”-Joghurt und lege mich mit einem Buch aufs Bett. So geht das mit den politischen Ambitionen’ (112)

others who moved East after reunification is the illusion of something as yet unmade, that is, the illusion of a blank urban space, 'jeden Tag Klassenfahrtstimmung da im Osten' (58-9).

The characters in the text engage with the city insofar as they live in it, walk its streets, register its decay and frequent its shops. But in contrast to Grass and Nooteboom's protagonists, they have no interest in either recovering the historic or in moving beyond the immediate present conditioned by amnesia. In this respect, Dückers's text develops the theme of historical saturation discussed in Delius's Berlin novel, *Die Flatterzunge*, only then to take it to what might be considered the next logical step: a complete non-negotiation with the grand meta-narratives of history. The text demonstrates that the new generation of Berlin citizens is aware of the past, and I refer here specifically to National Socialism and post-war Germany, but has come to perceive it as irrelevant to their lives. It is a generation that no longer feels the same moral obligation toward the past as the previous generation. This perception is thematised through yet another generational conflict between the nineteen-year-old Ada, who 'bis vor zwei Jahren war die die absolut brave Streberin, [...] Aber seit sie im P-Berg wohnt, ist sie ziemlich anders drauf' (58) and the somewhat older Karaul who maintains that Ada and her generation are superficial and 'viel mehr für das Morgen als für das Gestern interessiert' (154), a remark qualified by Ada who believes that the concentration on the historic, and in particular on National Socialism, is too limited. And anyway, she argues, 'überall in der Stadt stehen Denkmäler rum...und in der Schule fünfmal den Zweiten Weltkrieg diskutiert...dabei hätte ich's viel spannender gefunden, mal was über die neuen Asiaten zu hören! Nee, is nich...alles noch ziemlich backward' (154). Ada historicises the past by suggesting that the past has in fact been negotiated and it is now time to move on to

something else. Her claim that the past has become a pedagogic ‘Drohoutine’<sup>307</sup> draws attention to the fact that the generational refusal to read the past in the city does not mean that the past will simply go away. On the contrary, there is indeed too much history (‘fünfmal den Zweiten Weltkrieg’) at the cost of learning about other (equally relevant?) subjects (‘mal was über die neuen Asiaten zu hören’). The textual performance of a generational rupture is clearly visible, but the text is not defined by it: it insists on a critical distance to the characters.

It is the divergent historical perspectives that mark the generational rupture, also signified linguistically through Ada’s anglicised vocabulary, and the engagement with the urban fabric: ‘Abends liefen wir über mehrere Hausdächer in der Tucholskystraße, sahen die goldene Kuppel der Synagoge ganz nah und die Hanfplantagen auf den Balkons [...] unter uns donnerte eine Trip-Hop-Party, blau leuchtete der Hamburger Bahnhof’ (108). The city is perceived and randomly registered, but there are no further reflections or comments on what is seen. There are no associations made between the synagogue and the former Jewish quarter, as would have been the case with Delius’s protagonist or Grass’s urban historian, Fonty. If anything, the random images of the city appear to confirm initial impressions of the former east as an eponymous play-area of bright lights, music and hemp. The concatenation of images and the random leap from the synagogue to the hemp plants, from the streets to the thud of the party somewhere renders any prioritising or hierarchy of the images impossible. This non-engagement with the city beyond that which is visible is suggested through the image of the group viewing the city from the rooftops: it is a perspective from which the viewer is both present and absent; the perspective is random rather than focused or specific.

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<sup>307</sup> This term is provocatively borrowed from Martin Walser’s speech discussed in the previous chapter; Walser, *Friedenspreis Des Deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 20.

The attraction to this grey-area, a 'Brachland mit den illegalen Clubs und dem Bier für drei Mark', an area that is (at that time) still 'unfertig'(107), is that it is 'spannend, grotesk, extrem. Das ist es' (60). The grotesqueness here is not pejorative, but rather underlines precisely this mixture of real and fantastic, which implies an assumed belief that the east is a non-textualised region of unlimited possibilities. The real and the fantastic underscore the seemingly unlimited possibilities of changing, extending or simply adding to notions of self and identity. Prenzlauer Berg is considered to be exciting because it is apparently liberated from the moral/social and political discourses of the 1968 generation and harbours neither the nostalgic memories of Kreuzberg's alternative lifestyles embodied in Wolf and Hannelore, nor remnants of the GDR culture, absent from the text; it is extreme in its unfinished state because for its inhabitants nothing is final, nor clearly defined and meaning itself seems volatile: it represents the illusions of an unburdened generation.

Through the repeated portrayals of parties, fashion and body aesthetics ('Hat Kohlensäure eigentlich Kalorien, Felix?' 136), of fragmented sexual and non-sexual relationships in which the majority of the figures are represented as 'superabgebrüht, supergleichgültig, superbisexuell' (112), of those who hang about in bars and clubs and whose existence is determined by "'event-hunting" rund um die Uhr' (157), Dückers has presented a generation whose lives appear to be characterised by the absence of any meaning-giving structure or agenda. They exist in a world devoid of political, social and in most cases economic responsibility. Within the interpretative framework of the text, such structures might be conventionally understood as helping to create orientation-frameworks, such as 'den Repräsentanten der Elterngeneration ihre Herkunft aus der ApO und der alternativen Subkultur mit ihren relativ fixen politischen, kulturellen und gesellschaftstheoretischen Wert-



wie Lebens-vorstellungen'.<sup>308</sup> But I would argue that it is precisely the absence of this alternative subculture, either in the form of Laura's parents, or Ada's 'Öko-Mutter, die sich immer aktiv für Kitas, Tiere, Kinder, Frauen und all so was eingesetzt hat und natürlich gegen Atomkraftwerke, Männer und Bürokratie war' (126-7), that Dückers's generation celebrates, rejecting a generation as simply irrelevant to their lives ('bitte nicht einen auf Pädagogisch, ja', 193). The listing of the mother's political engagements or concerns ultimately tarnishes the parent generation as politically active for its own sake, as being unfocused and thereby giving voice to a suspicion of political engagement as Ersatz. While the absence of conventional or traditional meaning-giving structures such as a regular job and strong social relationships, either sexual, familial or platonic, might be problematic in the long-term, their temporary absence, combined with the belief that the east was neither one thing nor another, meant that for Dückers's *dramatis personae* at least, Prenzlauer Berg was the one site where it was possible 'sich selber auszutesten' (108).

This chance of self-experimentation is largely connected with both perception and reception of the East. If Prenzlauer Berg is a grey-zone, not-yet-defined and therefore subject to constant deconstruction, then identity and sexuality are shown to be equally plural and are subject to deconstruction in Dückers's text. This shifting notion of self is demonstrated in two characters, Felix and Kiki, who live on the Kastanienallee in Prenzlauer Berg. Both characters embody the eponymous play-zone associated with the Kastanienallee and constantly play with their gender-appearance, 'ich hatte mal wieder Lust, mich als Mann zu

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<sup>308</sup> Magnus Schlette, 'Ästhetische Differenzierung und flüchtiges Glück: Berliner Großstadtleben bei T. Dückers und J. Hermann'. In: Erhard Schütz and Jörg Döring (Hrsg.), *Text der Stadt – Reden von Berlin: Literatur und Metropole seit 1989* (Berlin, Weidler, 1999), p. 77. The 'ApO' refers to the non-parliamentarian opposition groups such as student organisations, left-wing fringe groups and burgher initiatives organised in opposition to the government and or the state and active up until the 1980s.

verkleiden' (130), changing their disguises and cross-dressing, convinced that gender is subject to the same fashions as they themselves are: 'ich glaube auch, daß man die Frauen vollständig abschaffen wird. Die jetzige Mode macht aus Männern Jungen, aber aus Frauen keine Mädchen, sondern auch junge Männer, das ist gut so, sieht einfach besser aus' (134). Again, a potentially political observation is undermined and replaced with an aesthetic one, in which the transformation of men into boys and women into young men (Kiki herself looks like 'ein vierzehnjähriger Junge', and binds her own breasts 'um wie ein Junge auszusehen', 135) is welcomed as a visual improvement. The particular flippancy of their gender play is underscored by Katharina's admission of cross-dressing while in Neukölln. The violence was constant threat on the streets: '[d]eshalb ziehe ich manchmal den Nadelstreifenanzug vom Flohmarkt an, schiebe das hochgesteckte Haar unter eine Kappe und klebe mir einem kleinen braunen Schnauzbart an, [...] So läßt man mich in Ruhe' (100).<sup>309</sup> What was a real, social and sexual necessity in Neukölln (I have already referred to the attacks against Katharina) has been reduced to a play on gender aesthetics and on gender deconstruction in Prenzlauer Berg, reinforcing the suggestion of the latter as a politics-free play-zone. For what might be referred to as the post-political characters, the gender games no longer serve to liberate the individual from traditional roles, but emphasize the performance of sexuality and gender as having autoerotic quality, and in so doing, call to mind the mirrors in Jason and Elida's apartment.

This play on gender and identity as equally indefinable zones is violently thematised in Dückers's text through the sexually ambiguous figure, Ada. Although she has her own apartment, she spends most of her time in the backyard of a decaying apartment building in

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<sup>309</sup> Katharina is in fact critical of Felix's cross-dressing games: 'Ich meine, ich renne auch mal mit Schnauzbart und Anzug rum, aber ich halte es wenigstens noch für eine Verkleidung' (112).

the Sonnenburger Straße. The frequent depictions the reader is given of Ada in the building reveal an alternative approach to appropriating the urban fabric: 'Ada drapiert sich einen Fahrradschlauch als Kopfschmuck um die Stirn, Nils liest einen Comic. Es fängt an zu nieseln, Ada zieht ihre Kapuzenjacke hoch, rückt dichter an Nils' (197). It is a deliberately inverted scene insofar as the room in which both are sitting is in fact the backyard, which Ada and Nils furnished with junk left over by previous tenants. There is indeed something absurd if not grotesque in the image of two coated people sitting in the rain in a makeshift living room. This reappropriation of a public space arguably underlines a dissolving of an outside and an inside, of a public and a private; one of the neighbours complains about Ada's constant presence in the backyard, 'den du offenbar für dein Wohnzimmer hältst' (150). This image of the backyard leans heavily on Jason and Elida's seemingly transparent apartment wherein the window might also be said to function as a dissolving of the borders between public and private, between an in- and outside. Further, Ada's appropriation of the backyard might also support a reading of the site as a heterotopia, insofar as it is the transformation of a non-room (an open public space, though surrounded by the four outer-walls of the apartment buildings) into a quasi-room in which the domestic activities of the one (reading and a type of haberdashery) are transferred to the other.

It has been demonstrated that the user of the urban system engages with a textual construct of which s/he is not the author. Authorless, the streetwalker or city user may nonetheless appropriate the city in different ways – such as Fonty's act of 'framing' himself through a hole in the Wall. Following Michel de Certeau: 'Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others' whereby poaching is understood as a means of

insinuating ‘another person’s text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation’.<sup>310</sup> A spatial order, such as a street, a road, a backyard ‘organizes an ensemble of possibilities’, that is to say a framework within which it is possible to move, as well as an ensemble of ‘interdictions’, by which movement is restricted; but the user of the urban system ‘also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements’.<sup>311</sup> Such acts therefore amount to an appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the user, which in this case would be Ada and Nils. The transformation of the public space in the apartment building on the Sonnenburger Straße amounts to a playing with the ‘interdictions’ and ‘possibilities’ dictated by the backyard. The relevance of de Certeau’s theory of urban poaching to *Spielzone* is to be found in the way in which Ada poaches the backyard to realise its potential as a site of otherness precisely in contrast and opposition to the surrounding restored houses. The restoration symbolises for Ada the encroachment of conformity, or homogeneity, the very values that threaten the possibility of plurality. The restored houses have access to the backyard, which Ada and Nils have claimed as their ‘home’: ‘Doch die Leute dieses Hauses gehen meistens nicht wie die aus der Sonnenburger 78 an den Ruinen des weggebombten Vorderhauses vorbei über den mit Schutt beladenen Hof [...], sondern benutzen den Eingang von der Kopenhagener Straße’ (114). Ada has not only rewritten and transformed the public space (‘Manchmal geht sie auch hierher, um Sex zu haben, 115), but the recoding actualises de Certeau’s possibility of otherness: ‘Nur wenn sie ihren Müll herunterbringen, betreten sie dasselbe Pflaster wie die Leute aus der 78’ (114). This division of space might be said to represent a form of social rupture between the ‘respectable’ inhabitants of the restored buildings bordering the

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<sup>310</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984), pp. xii & xxi.

<sup>311</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 98.

Sonnenburger number 78 and the eponymous party-generation that has transgressed and ruptured the common public space, though not completely claimed it as their own because it remains accessible to others in its other function at all times. The backyard is a heterogeneous site (a living room, a bedroom - at least for sex - and a public meeting place) possessed of an indetermination 'by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning'.<sup>312</sup> The transformation of the backyard is the process by which sites are opened up to other users.

This interpretation is further supported in the text through the representation of Ada's relations with the other tenants of the apartment building. I refer to the encounters between Ada and an aging lesbian couple in which the latter are portrayed as representatives of a political feminism and eclectic esotericism Ada rejects as dated and restrictive. The couple is stereotypically portrayed as the incarnation of conventionality: 'Ada steht im Hof und blickt zu einem von lila Blumen umrankten Fenster im Nachbarhaus, das mit dem frisch gestrichenen Weiß-Rosa ein farbliches Disney-World entstehen läßt' (115). The cynicism in the portrayal attacks both the 'perfect-world-setting' that is akin to a Disney World film as well as the essentialist feminism underscored through the reference to the lilac flowers bordering the window frame. Purple was the adopted colour of the feminist movement in Germany throughout the 1980s and early 90s and the two women indeed represent for Ada a hangover from this generation: the door of this 'Disney-Haus [...] war über und über mit Aufklebern wie "Vergewaltiger, wir kriegen Euch", "Schießt die Männer auf den Mond!" oder "Frauensolidarität Irgendetwas" beklebt' (115), and she crossed out a postcard demonstrating 'Lila Power' and inscribed 'Lila Pause', a German chocolate brand, in its

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<sup>312</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 105. I would also argue that the act of walking on the rooftops (108) also represents a non-conventional use of the city.

place. It must be stated that Ada's confrontation with the couple is not politically motivated (Eigentlich hat Ada keine Meinung zu dem ganzen Thema, 115), nor does she appear to give much credence to the political intentions of feminism (Frauensolidarität Irgendetwas) but born out of a desire both to provoke (es macht ihr einfach Vergnügen, diese bierernsten Frauen zu provozieren) as well as to underline the incongruity of such political statements in light of their own domestic conventionality. It is also clear that she is establishing a link between the couple's political activism and that of her own mother, 'Alice erinnert sie an ihre Mutter' (126), whose political activism she also rejected.

The backyard of the apartment building is used as a stage for the confrontations and the discussions between Ada and the lesbian couple, in particular, Alice. Their communication is held mostly in the backyard with Alice speaking to her through the window of her apartment, or in the latter's kitchen. Ada challenges the couple's public proclamation of their sexuality as well as their feminist standpoint, arguing that while she too has had sexual experiences with women, she sees no reason why she should by definition identify herself through her sexual encounters or preferences. The dialogue between the two explores the same generational debates that have already discussed above:

Nun erzählt sie Ada, daß sie auch sexuelle Erfahrungen mit Männern hat, aber immer wieder die Begegnungen mit Frauen als viel erfüllender, ehrlicher und vitaler erlebt hat. Ada schweigt und schüttelt den Kopf. "Geht mir nicht so, ist doch alles eine Suppe, von hinten ist es original das gleiche, mußt du zugeben. (121)

The discussion between the two women reveals the rupture between the politically engaged generation and a seemingly politically uninvolved group, between essentialist feminism and gender performance. The androgynous Ada is caught between gender games that allow boys to become girls or vice-versa and she finds a glorification of the female body deeply

alienating.<sup>313</sup> It is against the singular logic of the feminist strand that Ada positions herself and it is because of this that she brutally mutilates her own body in what I take to be a bodily deconstructive act whereby she attempts to redefine her own body as an equally heterogeneous and strangely genderless site.

Ada sees Alice standing in front of the window breast-feeding a recently adopted baby, which she describes as having given her 'eine neue Dimension des Frau-Seins' (125). It is important to remember that Ada sees Alice within this lilac-flowered frame, which also functions as a contextual frame through which the couple and their actions might be interpreted. Speechless, yet focused on Alice breast-feeding, Ada removes a knife from her pocket, lifts up her t-shirt and cuts off the nipple of her left breast, at precisely the same moment in which Nils arrives dressed as a woman, 'Ich bin ein Mensch, als Frau verkleidet' (124). Again, the emphasis is on gender performativity as opposed to Alice's too restrictive gender-based identity ('für sie ist eine Brust nicht einfach 'ne Wölbung am Körper', 125) and conventionalism. Nils and Ada are people who dress to act in male or female roles and thereby perceive gender as an ongoing discursive practice open to intervention and reinterpretation. Her relationship with her body is problematised in the same way as her interaction with the city, in that she is searching for an authentic expression for who she perceives herself to be, and not to be pushed into a given gender-role. The cutting off of the nipple is a way of re-appropriating the body, that is, gender-based identity and liberating it from the dominant discourse: 'Von links beinahe wie ein Junge, von rechts wie ein Mädchen, und in der Mitte bin ich' (128). The

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<sup>313</sup> In the many instances of Ada's sex-games, the gender of the sexual partner becomes increasingly insignificant, or at least something that is not considered permanent and fixed. 'Schließlich knien sich Ada und Nils nebeneinander auf den Boden, ihre Körper sehen fast gleich aus, ihre schmale Hüften, ihr haarloser Anus, ihre kindlichen Schultern. Moritz schließt die Augen und weiß nicht mehr, in wen er eigentlich eindringt' (116). That their bodies are only almost (fast) the same underlines that rather than claiming to have become one or the other, male or female, the gender performance permits a temporary dissolution of both for the duration of the game. A categorisation is thus irrelevant.

middle represents the grey-area in which it is possible to experiment ('sich auszutesten') and define and re-define constructions of identity. Ada's geographic middle point echoes the blank middle signified through Prenzlauer Berg: 'eine wunderbare Grauzone, nicht mehr Osten, noch nicht Westen'. It is in this respect that I consider Ada's poaching of her body an equation of the way she poaches in and on the urban fabric, by making some possibilities 'exist as well as emerge', namely, the non-definable middle.<sup>314</sup>

This equation between the city and the body in which the body in *Spielzone* is staged as a metaphor for describing the unfinished and in part undefined body of the city returns to Siebenpfeiffer's argument posited at the outset of this chapter that 'der Erzählbarkeit des Unfertigen, Disparaten und (noch) Identitätslosen' is (at the same time) a narrative 'von Ich und Stadt zugleich'.<sup>315</sup> The representation of Berlin's topography is used as a stage whereon the performance of this narrative rupture is visualised, either through St. Thomas's cemetery or in the backyard of 78 Sonnenburger Straße. Through the performance of gender and sexual acts the body is poached in much the same way as the city, that is, by challenging the conventional usage through non-conventional acts. But it remains to be seen if the generation depicted in the text, is in fact attempting to undermine the notion of authenticity and its representation, through their rejection of clearly defined structures, geographic or gender/identity based, and whether the city is indeed nothing more than the surface images celebrated by the young-generational crowd in Dücker's portrayal of Prenzlauer Berg.

The attempt to establish identity on an aesthetic differentiation through fashion labels and marketing products, and not through the political structures of the parental generation,

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<sup>314</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 98.

<sup>315</sup> Siebenpfeiffer, 'Topographien des Seelischen', p. 88.



arguably dominates the text and at times gives the impression that the novel is bounded by the perceptual limitations of its characters, to which Doering alludes in her criticism. Laura's discussion on history and human relations with Frau Minzlin in the cemetery are interrupted by the fact that she realises they are both wearing the same blouses, 'Sie auch bei H&M' (57) or Ada's insistence on brand names when asked if she would like a drink, 'Nö, oder doch, has du Quick Orange?' (120). The emphasis on dress, cheap or otherwise, on detailed appearance ('Schließlich zieht er eine grün-orange Trainingshose, ein Ernie-und-Bert-T-Shirt', 128, 'Ada zieht sich einen Leder-Minirock und ein Color-Block-Top von H&M an', 118), and scene-bars and urban trends dominate the text. The text has been perhaps unjustly criticised in the reviews for a relentless performance of labelling and trend-scene depictions.<sup>316</sup> But in my view this aesthetic differentiation as a means of establishing some form of authenticity is linked both with the rejection of the discourses of the parent generation and the assumption of Prenzlauer Berg/East Berlin as a blank urban space, neither one thing nor another, in which it is possible to deconstruct and indeed reconstruct gender and social identities in the commodity world, which is constantly invoked through brand-names, bars and clubs as the focus of a particular group which the text thematises, without being determined by it.

I refer here to the world of the spectacle, which is at once 'the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience' in which 'social space is continually blanketed by stratum after stratum of commodities'.<sup>317</sup> If it is the case that the spectacle does indeed underpin an 'abandonment of any history founded in historical time' and as such effects a 'false

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<sup>316</sup> 'Man sollte der Autorin empfehlen, ihr nächstes Buch gleich von diesem schwedischen Bekleidungs-konzern fördern zu lassen', Sabine Doering, 'Das Leben eine Kleiderfrage', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 86, 14 April 1999, p. 50. Dorothea Dieckmann, 'Alles so schön bunt hier', *Neue Züricher Zeitung* 19 June 2001.

<sup>317</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, Zone Books, 1992), p. 26 & 29. Debord: 'spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see – commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity'.

consciousness of time', then this surface-based emphasis on Berlin's urban fabric by the pop-generation in part explains the rejection of the historical as necessary to perceptions of the city. This reading of Dückers's Berlin text as somehow leaning heavily on the simulacrum as a representative instance is supported in the text through the characters' insistent icon-referencing and indeed seeming abandonment of conventional time (which is also a prerequisite for the heterotopia): 'ihr [wird] bewußt, daß sie in den letzten Wochen kaum bei Tageslicht unterwegs gewesen ist. Sie hat sich einen Rhythmus angewöhnt, immer morgens ins Bett zu gehen und nachmittags um vier oder später aufzustehen' (203) resulting in a temporally 'hermetisches Nachtleben'. If the self is in part determined by the spectacle, then so too is the city, or at least the perception of the city, insofar as it obscures and indeed hides the historical moments. Following this argument, the spectacle must then elevate everything into a present time unburdened by the historical baggage of the past; if the self and the city exist in a continuous present, then that which came before or comes after can have no meaning or its meaning is at least not verbalised/represented. Koepnick has argued that the spectacle 'is supposed to hold the social network together' while 'commodity exchange increasingly destroys the possibility of meaningful experience'.<sup>318</sup> In other words, the representation of the spectacle in Dückers's Berlin novel sutures the spectators, Felix, Ada, Kiki, Laura, into an entertaining simulation of collectivity without, however, their overcoming the inner isolation and separateness of the participant (Felix succumbs to depression and melancholic attacks as do Jason, Ada and Katharina).

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<sup>318</sup> Lutz Koepnick, 'Rethinking the spectacle: History, Visual Culture, and German Reunification', *Wendzeiten, Zeitenwende* (Stauffenburg, Tübingen, 1997), p. 153. Koepnick basis his argument of the image through an historical reading of the spectacle in twentieth century German art and the ensuing ocularphobia in the wake of the National Socialist demise.

The city and the self is something that is subjected to continuous gender, social, artistic and sexual experimentation ('sich auszutesten') rejecting any other pretensions to authenticity, political, social or otherwise. The text appears to suggest that the appeal of the spectacle is possibly the very force that produces subjectivity to begin with, a kind of subjectivity that has always already forfeited any meaningful claim to autonomous agency and self-determination: 'Wozu sich abrackern? Es gibt doch H&M und Burger King' (204). Dücker's Berlin novel has been largely misunderstood in reviews and the small number of articles dedicated to a criticism of the text. The depiction of this scene-life in Prenzlauer Berg is clichéd, but also critical and, I would argue, ironic.<sup>319</sup>

The text criticizes the attitudes of the characters; it historicizes their aversion to history and as such is an historical novel about the a-historicity of the ludic generation. Indeed, the celebration of the present, the advocacy of the image or the simulated reality of Berlin's night-life and self-abandonment in sex parties where it is not known if the other person is male or female, are all ultimately undercut by the characters' nostalgic longing. There is a clear need for communication voiced in many ways in the text, be it in the form of the painted Tsar on the wall in an empty room in the Sonnenburger Straße, to which Ada turns as an Ersatz father, "'Schlaf gut, Daddy", sagt Ada und gibt dem Zar einen Kuß' (149), or simply the wish to verbalise a biographical narrative: 'Vielleicht werde ich sie ihm erzählen, die Geschichte von brennenden Haus, in dem ich stand. Nicht immer nur die Stories anderer

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<sup>319</sup> Doering reads the text and its author as blankly endorsing the scene-life as the only viable alternative to what is otherwise petit bourgeois and conventional: 'da die Verfasserin die Meinung ihrer Figuren zu teilen scheint, daß es nichts Schlimmeres unter der Sonne gibt als Spießler, die einer geregelten Arbeit nachgehen, sich unauffällig kleiden und womöglich auch in einer monogamen, heterosexuellen Partnerschaft leben, bevölkert sie die Berliner Straßen mit einer Menge schrille Gestalten'. Doering, 'Das Leben, eine Kleidefrage', p. 50. This position equates the position of the characters with that of the text, which is clearly not the same. The characters succumb to loneliness, depression and melancholy: Jason '[setzte] sich auf das Sofa und weinte. Er tat das manchmal, stundenlang. Er wußte nie warum', (73).

Leute' (207). At the close of the novel, Katharina and Moritz decide to give love another try away from the pressures of scene-life in Prenzlauer Berg and travel to Italy, 'wir wollen in unseren kurzen, flotten Leben noch einmal romantische Liebe probieren' (207), whereby the clichéd employment of the Italian journey is clearly intended as is the allusion to the nineteenth-century romantic literature. The move might be temporary but it suggests that something more is needed, something perhaps that the microcosm of Prenzlauer Berg cannot offer, which is why Langer rightly interprets this removal as 'das eskapistische Moment der Popliteratur'.<sup>320</sup> The insistence on living in an undefined present ultimately succumbs to the same longings and desires, conventions and domestic ambitions embodied in the rejected parent generation. That said, the opening of specific sites and the act of poaching, as a moment of opening allowing other realities to emerge, is central to this transitory existence. Dückers's text vehemently rejects a singularly historic reading of the city as too restrictive. There exist other realities and modes of being in the city that ultimately influence how the city is registered. The text's fragmented perception underpinned in the structure of the novel denies any total or absolute representative privileging. The emphasis is rather on a perception of Berlin through the optic of the pop-generation; it is a play-zone, where, if only for a brief period, the master historical narratives of Grass, of Nooteboom and of Delius are put aside to allow other perspectives emerge producing yet more Berlin myths.

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<sup>320</sup> Langer, *Kein Ort. Überall*, p. 177.

## Epilogue

There can be no final conclusion to my analysis of the significance of Berlin's topography explored by these six narrative texts. I argued in the introduction that the texts do tell of an historical sequence, or at least imply an historical argument about what happened in Berlin between November 1989 and the hedonistic amnesia of Berlin's pop culture some ten years later, but I have not been animated by a concern for historical 'representativeness'. To repeat the point I made at the outset, the present study is not a survey, it is not an overview, nor is it a narrative of historically representative texts. My criterion for textual inclusion was literary quality. And that literary quality is no mere embellishment; it is in the service of cognitive gain. That is to say: the interpretative demands the texts make on us have to do with the cognitive demands they make on us in respect of how we understand the materiality and mentality of Berlin over ten years of astonishing historical change. The issues addressed by the texts are many and complex; but the texts analysed in the five chapters do not cut corners, nor do they offer (or tremble at confronting) simplifications. The complexity of the novels derives from the complexity of the phenomena that they seek to understand.

This thesis has attempted to understand the importance of Berlin to the texts as a site strangely representative of a reunified Germany. This literary preoccupation with Berlin suggests to me that literature, at least in Germany, continues to serve as a forum for national public debates: I refer the reader to *Ein weites Feld* as an example of a literary political, social and intellectual engagement – the text analyses the consequences of the reunification from an East German perspective and concludes that the reunification is being pursued to the social and economic disadvantage of the citizens of East Berlin/the GDR; *Allerseelen* offers

us a foreigner's engagement with and perspective on Germany's past, a past which the author suggests is being dangerously revised or even forgotten, the consequences of which threaten to undermine the foundations upon which a united Germany has been built – compelling arguments given the contemporary debates on the historic and questions of national identity. In *Spielzone*, we have a narrative attempt to discuss the fading or even rejection of historical consciousness and responsibility by Germany's younger generation, a rejection demonstrated through a protracted engagement with Berlin's urban fabric. Indeed, all of the texts I chose here should be viewed as examples of a socially and politically engaged critical literature.

But it is significant for this thesis that questions on the role of the past in a reunified Germany or, indeed, what constitutes German-ness (a question raised in the Brussig, Grass, Delius, and Dückers texts) are voiced largely through literary engagements with Berlin's topography. What this study has attempted to show is that Berlin is no mere embellishment in the texts, but rather an indispensable medium through which important questions on history, on memory and on identity have been raised; Berlin is seen as possibly the only German city that uniquely reflects Germany's tortured histories of National Socialism, of division and reunification. Berlin, therefore, is understood to be the city that is the locus of questions of identity, of what to remember and the social problems of cultural integration facing Germany in the first decade after the reunification. These cognitive demands the texts make on us as readers are always infused with a belief that the astonishing changes to the materiality and mentality of Germany can be portrayed through literary representations of Berlin. It is this understanding of Berlin's representativeness that lies at the analytical core of each chapter. Indeed, I would argue that the assumption that the city is a *pars pro toto* is possibly an echo of the modernist literary engagements with the metropolis - Alfred Döblin, *Berlin*

*Alexanderplatz*, John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, James Joyce, *Ulysses* - texts which also understood the city as a medium through which it is possible to suggest a type or represent an epoch. I refer to the authors above simply to show that an historical obligation and indebtedness works on many levels and that the narrative texts of Brussig, Hettche, Grass, Nooteboom, Delius and Dücker are always responding intertextually to literary predecessors as well as to a literary tradition, as was argued in the first three chapters. If, as I claim, the six texts refute the notion of a new beginning, they do so in part through the very act of writing as part of a cultural tradition. But of course these texts do not claim to offer exhaustive portrayals of the city; *Ein weites Feld* does not make the claim that it captures Berlin, or is in any way offering a similar cartographic representation of the city as the one we find in Döblin's Berlin novel. This confidence in being able to represent the city absolutely is not present in any of the novels I address: on the contrary, it is Berlin's multi-layered complexities that are portrayed, as well as a consciousness of coexisting realities vying for signifying power, and in conclusion, an awareness that there exists no single Berlin that might claim to be representative of the city. And yet, the texts are confident that it is possible to debate on identity, on the historic, or on the reunification through literary engagements with Berlin's topography, which presupposes a need to be (re-)writing about Berlin.

The selected texts differ not only in their approach to Berlin, but also in their Berlin-focus and in so doing underline the difficulties faced by contemporary writers seeking to 'represent' Berlin for an audience. Günter Grass's thoroughly East Berlin perspective in *Ein weites Feld* as well the text's insistence on East Berlin as embodying and representing the structures of memory and identity inherent to the GDR is subtly echoed in Tanja Dücker's

concentration on the city as a possible blank urban space for a historically uninterested young urban population. The difference in perspective is not only generational: it (also) reveals a shift in what is considered to be representative of reunified Berlin for a given social and generational group. There are equally few convergent similarities between *Nox*'s nameless protagonist as she wanders across Berlin and Delius's protagonist in his flight from any confrontation with the past: both may wander across the city, but do so for very different reasons. Thematic similarities do nonetheless converge: the most important is the recurring insistence on the past, whether the emphasis is on a perceived threat to the past as something that is in danger of being erased, or simply on a need to negotiate the past and acknowledge that it continues to signify in the present.

It is remarkable that however dissimilar in their approach to Berlin and the manner in which the texts develop the thematic the confrontation with the past, they all insist on the significance of the human body in their narrative engagements with Berlin. It is a recurring theme of which I was unaware when I made my choice of texts and only became conscious while writing the individual chapters. The repeated engagement with the body and the city establishes for me yet a further thematic link. The body is present in the form of the urban flâneur in Grass, Nootboom and the Delius texts, where the act of walking makes possible an exploration of the past-in-the-present, an obligation to remember those pasts as well as asking how those uncovered pasts might be said to constitute a demand on the reader to remember the past; we might make the claim therefore that flânerie insists on a necessary dialectic between the city and the users of the city, that is to say, a representation of the city must also include the human bodies that negotiate it. In my analysis of *Ein weites Feld* and



*Allerseelen* I further argued that the identity of a city is closely related to the identity of the people who live in it.

The body is also the locus of pain in *Helden wie wir*, *Nox*, *Ein weites Feld*, *Allerseelen* and *Die Flatterzunge*: as the texts explore the role of memory in individual and collective confrontations with the loaded urban topography they do so viscerally through either the nameless woman's body in *Nox* or Daane's own body as he negotiates Berlin's streets and parks. Both Hettche's and Brussig's explorations of the body as somehow metaphorically might reflect the wounds and traumas of Berlin/Germany's histories, on the other hand, converge the city and its inhabitants and in so doing, verbalize an assumption all six narrative texts make, namely, that the changes forced upon the city affect not only the urban fabric but also the people for whom that fabric is meaning-giving. If Delius's protagonist feels threatened by the presence of the past in the city, Brussig's protagonist and the nameless woman in Hettche's text appear to embody the very traumas of those pasts. The body-city metaphor lends itself to wider debates on Berlin as strangely constitutive in the processes of memory and identity construction.

Tanja Dückers, on the other hand, establishes a narrative relationship between the body and the city to thematize a generational perception of Berlin undergoing possible semantic change: Dückers's text seeks to impress upon the reader that those parts of the city that once carried given meanings, either through buildings, street names or simply in how the city is read and used, have now become redundant as signifiers, at least for a younger generation of urban users. This shift in meaning and significance influences the characters' understanding of gender and identity: Kiki and Felix's cross-dressing and/or Ada's mutilation of her own

body correlate the body and the city as blank spaces that can be continually re-inscribed and re-scripted. Interestingly, bodily mutilation is also central to *Helden wie wir* in the text's exploration of the abuse of the individual by the dominant discourses such as the family and the state, but *Nox* explores the mutilated body as a metaphor reflecting the pain of the division and the past, such as in David's sliced penis, but also as a metaphor for longing and for unity, as the boat-orgy scene attempts to portray. By comparison, the body-sex scenes in *Spielzone* do not appear to reflect a desire for unity nor is it possible to read the portrayal as a pain-division metaphor; sex, as with the body, becomes in *Spielzone* yet a further attempt to break-free from prescriptive modes and explore the body (and the city) as strangely unmarked and as yet undefined. I would therefore argue that the body theme lends itself to an analysis of perception and how to 'look' at the city. The narrative preoccupations of Günter Grass and Tanja Dückers might indeed be dissimilar and their perceptions of Berlin's temporal and cultural complexities reflecting precisely the generational gulf to which I referred above, but both *Ein weites Feld* and *Spielzone* insist in their own way on 'looking' critically at the city (as well as exploring notions of selfhood and gender), regardless of whether that critical gaze is directed at the Wall or focussed on the style of clothing of the people in Prenzlauer Berg. Again, the literary quality is not an embellishment but is always in the service of cognitive gain.

Moving beyond the thematic concerns argued above, the kind of multi-perspective reflectivity that the six narrative texts inculcate can also help us understand a number of more recent phenomena. One is an ironically refracted nostalgia for the GDR, a kind of teasing "GDR chic" embracing cultural aspects as diverse as pickled gherkins, the Palast der Republik and a retro-revival of East German wallpaper. This nostalgia, comically thematised

in Jens Sparschuh's Berlin novel *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, strangely undermines the gradual removal of East German cultural and social icons (signifiers of there having been an East German identity) from the public arena: the protagonist's search for East German 'Spreewälder Gurken,' in the hugely successful East Berlin/GDR-theme film, *Goodbye Lenin*, is one such example of an individual fight against the erasure of the past. In a similar vein, the protagonist in Sparschuh's text unwittingly realises that indoor fountains modelled on the East Berlin television tower that he sells door-to-door in Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain and Marzahn are hugely successful. It is not only an uncritical longing for familiar 'codes' in times of change that is the determining factor behind this nostalgic current, although such pro-GDR voices were indeed to be heard, but perhaps also an awareness that East Berlin was and still is home to two million people, many of whom having lived there for the greater part of their lives. A desire to remember the past and the places associated with those memories is quite natural. The title of the 2000 special edition of the German journal *Text und Kritik*, 'DDR-Literatur der neunziger Jahre' should, in light of the above, perhaps be read as more than a provocation.

And the other phenomenon I have in mind is a more general one - that of multi-culturalism, or the idea of post-*Wende* Berlin as being a cultural melting pot. An instance of such cultural otherness is suggested in the portrayal of the migrant, or non-German arriving in Berlin and confronting the city with other epistemological realities than the otherwise familiar East-West duality. Multiculturalism, or the German-non-German confrontation rates highly among the issues voiced by Germany's conservative and rightwing parties. Emerging out of such debates on the foreign in German society and culture are complex negotiations about demarcations, whether cultural borders, legal limits, socio-political barriers or other means

which legitimise exclusionary mental and social practices. But there is a significant and important migrant literature located in Berlin, in particular Turkish and Russian authors, who portray the city as a site through which the experience of migration and cultural confrontation and exposure is mediated. This new literature is a possible point of departure into other Berlin-related literary studies. Indeed, such multi-cultural perspectives are to some degree what this thesis is about. The various historical negotiations discussed in relation to the six narrative texts are as much multi-cultural as they are multi-perspectival. The idea of the city-as-melting-pot must inevitably influence literary portrayals of the urban landscape. It is a multicultural play on history, which Monica Ali, for example, thematises in her London novel, *Brick Lane*. London's changing cultural, social and demographic realities in the East End, as portrayed by Ali, support the claim that representing the historic entails and demands different responses of diverse generations and cultural groups. This need for open perspectives might explain the range of responses addressed in the analysis of the six narrative texts: from the sheer palpability of history on the one hand, to a postmodern play and amnesia on the other. In between both lies a largely unexplored field of such shifting cultural realities in post-*Wende* Berlin. These issues will not leave us - least of all in the current cultural climate of multi-culturalism undercut by fears of terrorism, of pluralism and relativism on the one hand and fundamentalism (of many kinds) on the other.

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