Introduction

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In their introduction to a *New German Critique* special issue published in 2003, Andreas Huyssen, Werner Jung, and Peter M. McIsaac highlighted the urgency of "tak[ing] stock of the marked shifts in the literary and cultural terrain of the newly forming 'Berlin Republic.'"[1] They noted that German literature in particular was characterized by a vibrant diversity that could no longer be understood in terms of the aesthetic and political traditions of the East and the West prior to unification. Evidently, 1989 marked a rupture that dislodged the social, political, and cultural premises that had defined the postwar period. The public perception of 1989 as an instantaneously recognizable ending was subsequently translated into a discourse on normalization.[2] It anxiously posited the return to a "normal" national narrative that had previously been disrupted by National Socialism as well as by Germany's postwar division. Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany now became alternative templates on which to graft the new Berlin Republic. The special issue already challenged the one-dimensionality of this "soft" relationship to the past by exploring diverse literary responses to 1989. The editors of the present issue continue this debate through an interdisciplinary analysis of spatial tropes in contemporary literature, architecture, and photography.

1. Andreas Huyssen, Werner Jung, and Peter M. McIsaac, introduction to "Contemporary German Literature," special issue, *New German Critique*, no. 88 (2003): 3.

2. On normalization, see the contributions in Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, eds., *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

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The process of integrating the former East Germany into such an account and of choosing between its alternative heritages was not straightforward. Architects and urban planners, for instance, battled over whether Prussian classicism and its revival at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries or the Bauhaus-inflected new building of the 1920s provided the more appropriate precedent for the rebuilding of central Berlin. This was much more than a matter of taste, even if somewhat paradoxically the Christian Democrats were more supportive of modernist precedents than their Socialist opponents.[3] The politically successful relegitimization of the idea of German nationhood was accompanied, furthermore, by "memory contests" that preoccupied the public throughout the 1990s and well into the first decade of the twenty-first century.[4] These concerned the long-term legacy of National Socialism and of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), two pasts often discussed and compared with reference to totalitarianism.[5] However, the academic debate of structural parallels and differences between the two systems barely contained the heated tenor of these memory contests. The participants' enormous emotional investment in the controversies about the expellees, the air war, the Wall dead, and the Stasi not only created a victim discourse but also drew attention to the transgenerational power of personal biography and family history.

There was no escaping the multiple arenas in which these memory contests played out. Literature was one. As the distance from National Socialism grew and eyewitnesses passed away, later generations began to explore their vicarious and postmemorial connection to this period through family narratives. The discovery of the hitherto untapped archive of private family memories and the attendant upsurge in fictional and autobiographical narratives about family life during the Third Reich gave rise to a further discussion about the malleability and distortion of family memories. According to one influential study, this transgenerational interest fostered the cumulative heroization of the generation of perpetrators and thus an uncritical relationship to

3. Annegret Burg, *Downtown Berlin: Building the Metropolitan Mix* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1993), and Werner Sewing, *Bildregie: Architektur zwischen Retrodesign und Eventkultur* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003), represent two poles of this debate.

4. For a discursive exploration of the idea of memory contests, see Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, "Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and the Management of the Past," in *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 1–21.

5. For a critical response to such comparisons, see Wolfgang Wippermann, *Dämonisierung durch Vergleich: DDR und Drittes Reich* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 2009); and Michael Geyer, ed., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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the past.[6] From another perspective, however, this phenomenon could be read very differently: it was evidence of an agitated legacy that readdressed important questions of historical agency, choice, and responsibility after unification. The transference and displacement of memories across generational thresholds appeared as powerful modes of transmission, engendering a culturally productive hauntology that continued to disturb conventional proclamations about the return to national traditions.[7] In this perspective, the popular genre of the family novel in particular gave expression to deep-seated historical resonances that could not simply be bracketed off by political unification.

But the haunting is not limited to the pages of novels. It also encompasses the actual streets on which people lived, worked, and strolled, where it reaches into a past that extended much farther back than the dozen troubled years of the Third Reich. Should the Hohenzollern Schloss be rebuilt in the center of Berlin, and if so, would it necessarily convey respect for the imperial monarchy that had been its last occupants, or did it merely repair the urban fabric rent by its demolition after World War II and only partly rewoven by the East German Palast der Republik? Nor was the presence of ghosts limited to Berlin.[8] From the reconstruction of the eighteenth-century Frauenkirche in Dresden through the reinterpretation of the Ruhrgebiet's faded industrial infrastructure as experimental art *avant la lettre*, memorial culture flourished in the cityscapes of the Berlin Republic, where its remit expanded to include such structures as abandoned steel mills or places, such as the doorsteps of public laundries (where memorial tablets to former Jewish residents were inserted into Bochum's Ringstrasse), not previously understood in these terms.

6. Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschugnall, *"Opa war kein Nazi": Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002), 79.

7. On this agitated legacy, see Sigrid Weigel, *Genea-Logik: Generation, Tradition und Evolution zwischen Kultur- und Naturwissenschaften* (Munich: Fink, 2006); and Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films, and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

8. However, much of the literature on the subject certainly focused on the city. See Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Jennifer Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). Discussions of examples from elsewhere include Gavriel Rosenfeld and Paul Jaskot, eds., *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); and Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). One should also note in this context the explosion of interest in the history of memorial landscapes and historical preservation in Germany as recounted in Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

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As the mention of the Palast der Republik suggests, a second set of memory contests concern the GDR's legacy. These, too, were increasingly expressed, whether through words or actual urban interventions, in patently spatial terms. In the words of Timothy Garton Ash, "The history of East Germany increasingly looks like one of those neglected country roads that used once to be a main highway, but is now a slightly mysterious detour running more or less parallel to the motorway."[9] However, although historians agree in their evaluation of the GDR as a dictatorship that by the 1980s had become economically defunct, many former East German citizens emphasize the normality of their lives in the GDR. From the perspective of an older generation that often lost their jobs and self-esteem, the question of West German cultural hegemony remains an unresolved issue. For this group 1989 signifies not so much the normalization of history as a traumatic rupture in their biographies. As Karen Leeder argues, "The retrospective retouching of East German reality," as underlined in two surveys according to which a majority preferred life in the GDR, foregrounds fundamental experiences of dislocation.[10] However, it is not just East Germans who express grave doubts about capitalism in a globalized world. The confidence of the post-1989 era that liberal democracy and capitalism in particular represented superior historical systems was shaken by the financial crash of 2008 and a worldwide recession caused by capitalist greed. As many West Germans lost their jobs in car production and other previously vital manufacturing industries, they too began to see the world prior to 1989 in terms of a safe place characterized by economic and political stability, job security, and a functioning social welfare system that dished out generous pensions. *Ostalgie*, the return to a nostalgically reimagined past in the GDR, was now matched by *Westalgie*, the longing for the stability of the old Federal Republic. Such nostalgia does not automatically translate into a cogent critique of capitalism, but social unease about the disastrous effects of a seemingly unbridled market economy that has turned politicians into mere executioners of a higher economic necessity without alternatives is growing. Ingo Schulze, a regular commentator on German affairs, interprets 1990 as a missed opportunity for the West. The quick interpretation of this caesura in terms of the end of History (Francis Fukuyama) made all alternatives look totally utopian or historically obsolete. "The market," says Schulze, "became a holy cow, and

9. Timothy Garton Ash, preface to "From Stasiland to Ostalgie: The GDR Twenty Years After," ed. Karen Leeder, special issue, *Oxford German Studies* 38, no. 3 (2009): 234.

10. Karen Leeder, introduction to Leeder, "From Stasiland to Ostalgie," 237.

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privatization an ideology."[11] In the meantime, the experience of social exclusion has arrived at the very center of society: as the sociologist Heinz Bude argues, it is no longer just the predictable cohort of social welfare recipients that experiences social exclusion but also the formerly secure middle class, which suddenly has to cope with accelerated and unpredictable market adjustments.[12] The social-market economy of the old Federal Republic was largely a meritocracy that rewarded personal performance with increased security, higher pay, and social status. Similarly, the GDR made life predictable by rewarding loyalty to the state. In sharp contrast to the relative security of the pre-1989 era based on vertical loyalty, the new economy prioritizes unbounded flexibility, innovation, and mobility. Citizens now live in a state of precariousness where education and career choices no longer safeguard economic security and social status. As Bude comments, the social ladder has become very slippery for the middle class, too.[13]

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the question of what it means to be German in unified Germany and, above all, in a globalized world has thus gained new urgency. This is precisely the terrain of this special issue, which continues the critical investigation of "normalization" from interlocking perspectives that join architecture, photography, and literature. The articles focus on interventions that have challenged the notion that a national homecoming has healed German history. Less a trope of teleological fulfillment than a spectral figure, history disturbs and unsettles conventional notions of belonging.

Accordingly, spatial and not temporal tropes dominate the debate: while three articles concern the symbolic function of Berlin in pre- and post-*Wende* times, the other four focus either on provincial locations in the former GDR or on what, following Mary Cosgrove, one might call a *terrain vague*, exposing the treachery of a safe heritage.[14] The prevailing discourse on political

11. Ingo Schulze, "Mein Westen," in *Was wollen wir? Essays, Reden, Skizzen* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2009), 277.

12. Heinz Bude, *Die Ausgeschlossenen: Das Ende vom Traum einer gerechten Gesellschaft* (Munich: dtv, 2008).

13. Ibid., 33. The debate in the summer of 2010 over school reform in Hamburg that culminated in the defeat of changes seen as endangering the middle-class commitment to the gymnasium confirms this point. For a summary of German press reports on the topic, see "Nein zur Schulreform in Hamburg," www.n-tv.de/politik/pressestimmen/Das-Volk-sich-geraecht-article1090806.html (accessed October 29, 2010).

14. Cosgrove draws on Elke Brüns, *Nach dem Mauerfall: Eine Literaturgeschichte der Entgrenzung* (Munich: Fink, 2006), 56.

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unification seeks to establish Germany as a normal nation with a normal heritage that was interrupted by the Third Reich and the abnormality of the GDR. This does not mean that German memory politics has regressed to the 1950s when the GDR simply negated all responsibility for the past and the Federal Republic reduced the problem to a mechanism of financial compensation. While the discourse of contrition still remains a cornerstone of German memory politics, the desire to rebalance cultural memory in favor of a cautiously celebratory national culture is palpable. One recent example in this respect was the federal parliament's decision in 2007 to run a competition for a national unification monument. The parliament specified that the monument should be erected on the plinth of the former Kaiser-Wilhelm memorial in Berlin that had been toppled by the GDR authorities in 1950 alongside the Stadtschloss. Although neither the first competition nor the second one produced a winning design, the attempt to marry freedom and unity through a national monument underlines the desire to establish a symbol of a positive national heritage. Evidently, architectural restoration in the capital Berlin and elsewhere is viewed as one instrument to heal the physical wounds of the previously war-torn and divided nation, a strategy that nonetheless coexists with buildings, such as Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Felix Nussbaum Haus in Osnabrück, that purposely keep the wounds open.

In sharp contrast to attempts to reinstate a national heritage in Berlin and elsewhere, the articles in this issue explode easy assumptions. They concern highly self-reflexive positions that expose the phantasmagoric function of nationhood and *Heimat*. By exploring the transformation of German cultural identity from the center and the periphery, they highlight the fractured nature of historical experience and the emergence of multiple dislocations since 1989. Political unification has not only reinforced the economic asymmetry between the East and the West but also engendered newly desynchronized places in both East and West Germany. It is precisely because these places are out of step with their own time that they can embody a culturally productive disruption of the national narrative. Although West Germany too has been fractured into places with different speeds and varying economic and social prospects, our special issue focuses on Berlin and the former territory of the GDR. Arguably, the ambivalence of experiences and attitudes remains more acute in the eastern parts of the country where a majority still see themselves as the losers of the unexpected turn of post-1989 history.

The issue opens with Kathleen James-Chakraborty's discussion of how the fall of the Wall has generated new interpretations of the Bauhaus and, by implied extension, how the modernism of the Weimar Republic can be used to

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underpin a reunited Germany. An acceptance of consumerism and a celebration of the careers of women artists, many of whom rejected sexual as well as artistic conventions, feature prominently in recent literature about the path-breaking school. Weimar modernism has no more completely overthrown Wilhelmine respectability among contemporary artists than among postmodern architects. Discussing the construction of cultural identity in architectural photography, J. J. Long compares Florian Profitlich's post-*Wende* photographs of Berlin with the work of F. Albert Schwartz, who photographed imperial Berlin in the 1890s. While both photographers took an atemporal view of the urban space and focused on isolated monuments and self-sufficient sights, this approach serves a new purpose in Profitlich's *Berlin-Bilder* (*Berlin Pictures*). Looking back on what has been salvaged from history, Profitlich's photographs disavow precisely the German history that still lay ahead of Schwartz. However, despite the restorative agenda of this photo book, at the formal level it employs techniques associated with Weimar photography. In this way it demonstrates that "the affectionate embrace of a usable past cannot but absorb and integrate elements of the less usable past." In her discussion of Turkish German writing in Berlin, Margaret Littler investigates whether for ethnic minorities the fall of the Wall was an event that in Gilles Deleuze's sense opened up unforeseen futures. She argues that Turkish German writing has challenged the national narrative by reinscribing heterogeneity into the discourse on unification. While for Zafer Şenocak the fall of the Wall was a nonevent that deprived the city of its former openness, Emine Sevgi Özdamar explores the Wall itself as a porous and productive milieu that opens up new experiences "for one not constrained by the Cold War power structures."

Productive doubt about the achievements of unification and Germany's alleged normalization features prominently in Mary Cosgrove's, Gillian Pye's, and Karen Leeder's articles, which expand the haunted terrain of the Berlin Republic beyond the capital. Debating the notion of *terrain vague* as a particularly resonant category that captures the fascination of contemporary German literature with derelict or uninhabited spaces, Cosgrove explores the representation of provincial localities in narratives by Jenny Erpenbeck and Julia Schoch. Despite the provincial locations of the settings, both narratives expose "the deception of anthropological place" through images that undermine the solidity and stability of place. For Erpenbeck, place is treacherous because of the multiple dislocations of history that turn *Heimat* into anti-*Heimat*. Schoch is even more radical in her rejection of all nostalgic attachments: drawing out disconcerting continuities between provincial life in the GDR and provincial life in unified and globalized Germany, she recasts *Heimat* as "Ödnis," a

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barren, desolate place peopled by nonselves. In this way both narratives challenge the post-1990 historical narrative of a national homecoming. Pye's reading of waste images in Wolfgang Hilbig's work underlines the spectral preoccupation of much contemporary German literature. In *Die Kunde von den Bäumen* (*The Lore of the Trees*), a writer repeatedly visits the local dump, where objects released from function represent what no one wants to remember. For Pye, this opens up a discussion of how language itself has been reduced to rubbish and how art made from trash is able to express this. A second story, *Alte Abdeckerei* (*Old Knackers Yard*), addresses a contaminated landscape haunted by the detritus of the morally questionable industrial processes of both the Third Reich and the GDR. The spectral is similarly redefined as "what has been left behind or suppressed by history" in Leeder's contribution on the poetry of Volker Braun. Concerned with an aesthetic of spectrality, she investigates images of death and afterlife in Braun's post-*Wende* poetry, which mobilizes "a utopian resistance to the bankrupt luxury of capitalism." In *Tumulus* Braun recalls a wide range of literary sources, from Shakespeare to Karl Marx, that remain deliberately disjointed and dissonant. By employing a literal way of recalling, Braun produces "a dance of quotations" in analogy to the medieval dance of death that points to "a spectral politics of memory" and rejects the tyranny of the present. Poets like Braun therefore provide a much-needed antidote to the fetishization of authenticity that has governed so much post-*Wende* discourse.

The issue concludes with Anne Fuchs's exploration of the uses of nostalgia in Uwe Tellkamp's *Der Turm* (*The Tower*). Writing from a posthumous perspective that takes the failure of the GDR for granted, Tellkamp foregrounds in the life of Dresden's 1980s bourgeoisie a collective nostalgia that pits itself against the state's proclamation of historical progress. In the context of this novel, nostalgia is not restorative but countercultural. It appears as a form of protest against the depletion of the present that is caused by the depreciation of the past. However, the protagonists' nostalgic memory culture is not the final horizon of this ethnographic narrative. The reader's collusion with the protagonists is disrupted by a narrative voice that questions the basis of this alliance by problematizing the cultural preconceptions that inform the protagonists' nostalgia. By taking stock of widely divergent dispositions, opinions, and behaviors, Tellkamp also disperses the monolithic perception of the GDR that prevails in many Western debates about its legacy.

The soothing rhetoric of politicians focused on the largely successful integration of the Berlin Republic into the international community gives way in this special issue to expressions of self-doubt. The year 2011 was the fiftieth

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anniversary of the erection of the Berlin Wall, an event marked by at least as much popular attention, if perhaps fewer acts of official commemoration, as the twentieth anniversary of German unification in 2010. While the latter event was recalled through a *Fest der Freiheit* (freedom festival) that restaged the fall of the Wall in terms of a global party, the contributions to the present issue question such simulation by exploring the productive quality of the many fractured and less usable pasts that make up a splintered and polyphonic German cultural identity.

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