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**URBAN SPACE AND NATIONAL MEMORY: THE NARRATIVES OF
BERLIN, PRAGUE, AND GDAŃSK**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Erica Gale Smeltzer

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The Dissertation of Erica Gale Smeltzer is
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ABSTRACT

URBAN SPACE AND NATIONAL MEMORY: THE NARRATIVES OF

BERLIN, PRAGUE, AND GDAŃSK

Erica Smeltzer

This interdisciplinary dissertation project, *Urban Space and National Memory: The Narratives of Berlin, Prague, and Gdańsk*, examines the production of the built and written topographies of three cities central to the contested histories and national narratives of Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Using a variety of texts—novels and poetry as well as urban planning documents and submissions to architectural competitions—I show how the narratives of these cities reflect different modes of navigating national trauma and identity creation. I explore how these spaces, often divided culturally and physically, are used to construct a national historical narrative and project an ideal future. The dissertation maps narrative tropes such as metaphor/metamorphosis, synecdoche, and kitsch onto physical and literary urban topography to suggest how these tropes' unique representations of time act as sutures for each city's particular social and historical traumas.

research and enquiry.

INTRODUCTION

I believe it is important that I first provide a personal account of how I came to experience and choose these cities as the focus of my research and as the objects of the coming chapters. I will briefly describe how each city entered my field of vision and how I became familiar with their literary and physical spaces.

My first exposure to each of these cities was at a moment of transition. In the early years of the 21st century when my research was beginning, each city was adjusting differently to their new place in their respective national narratives. Berlin, Prague, and Gdańsk were no longer simply recovering from collapse but adjusting to the new national narratives that were just gaining currency after the decade that followed the absence of the soviet presence in East and Central Europe. The cities were and still are negotiating their place between the historical baggage of the past century, these new national narratives, and identification with larger networks such as the European and the Global.

Each city elicited a very different response from me during the time I spent there: living in the city, speaking the language (to varying degrees of success), and visiting their intentional and unintentional monuments and structures. These cities had varying relationships to the larger national narratives of which they were part, and into which they were partially constructed to interpolate me. And each city was oriented differently to their historical moments of transition.

My interest in these particular cities springs from the larger frameworks and regimes of understanding that are suggested by my first exposure to them and the

responses they engendered. In this way, I hope that my personal account does not only serve to explain my choice of objects but explain the method of my approach. I will follow each reflection with a brief outline of the argument of the chapter.

Berlin

My earliest memories of global politics are of the First Gulf War and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Both appeared on my television screen in the images that are now iconic: sandy deserts and camouflage, the wall and the Brandenburg Gate at night full of lights, people, and exhilaration. My parents sat me down in my colorful stretch pants and oversized sweater in front of our television as they tried to clumsily engage me in a discussion about the images on the screen. Together we watched the grainy unfolding of historical moments that they only understood well enough to know that I should have the memory of watching them.

Throughout my study, the division and the reunification of Germany were the key cultural talking points in German classes throughout high school and college. In this way, the news clip images of this moment gained currency and focus, albeit a focus that was developed primarily by the West German perspective.

Berlin was later the destination of my first trips abroad. This was less a consequence of the images of the Brandenburg gate at night than it was a result of the emphasis of all educational German texts and lectures on the city's significance. However, my experience of the city was not dominated by images of the fall of the wall or narratives of reunification. The city was recovering. It was in the process of

mending itself and constructing a new national and urban identity. The conversations that I had and the streets I walked were not concerned with remnants of the wall but with the destruction of East Berlin, the fate of Tempelhofer Feld, and the rapid transformation of public space, ruins, and homes into properties: people talked about the future of industry in Berlin, neighbors, architecture, slums, parks, cranes, construction sites, and all of the monuments, statues, and memorials that they disliked but supported anyway.

During this first visit to the city, like any good student of German, I carried a copy of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as I wandered the streets. I hoped that in the streets of Berlin the famously fractured narrative would also come into focus for me as I referenced the streets and spaces that I walked through. I navigated the awkward landscape of Alexanderplatz, the sore throbbing thumb of Potsdamer Platz, and the strip of the Kurfürstendamm. However, little of the insight into the social and historical dimension of the fractured streets and spaces encountered in the novel came to me. Instead I wandered through new streets full of memorials and cranes that imposed visions of the past and future.

As the city gradually opened up to me, I became interested in the distance between the affect of the past that I expected (or nostalgically hoped to access) and the pressure of the future and weight of memorialization that I found. In the 20th century, the city had adopted and abandoned multiple narratives of development and progress with more and less tragic outcomes. The city, emblematic of the nation's dilemma as a whole, was hesitant to identify a clear trajectory for the future that

might escape the blame and trauma of the past. As a result, neither the history I was familiar with nor the literature of Berlin that had affected my vision of the city was adequate to the present.

Culturally, the call for a new Berlin novel that would replace *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was well underway. There was a general desire to tap into the veins of the city's rich literary history and produce a text that would not only help navigate this new Berlin but, like Döblin's fractured modernist narrative, help represent the tempo of the unified country: a country whose two halves had been walking out of step for nearly half a century. Berlin with its historical pressures, unities, and disunities came to be seen as a synecdoche for the nation. The next great Berlin novel could help orient between past and future in this new topography. The texts that emerged out of this moment did not, as Doblin's *Alexanderplatz* did for an earlier generation, provide an answer or a narrative that could navigate the political and social realities that defined the spaces of Berlin.

The materiality of Berlin—its many projects of reconstruction, commerce, gentrification, and memorialization—has historically been made to signify different regimes of power and visions of the German nation; however, given the crisis of Germany's 20th century projects of identity, it is just this history of significance that has created the crisis of Berlin's orientation in the present. The texts of the would-be Berlin novels are attempts to articulate how these structural and symbolic pressures are lived and read. This literary dimension of built space, its symbolic function and its

potency as a dominating trope in literature, provided the germinating spark for this dissertation project.

Berlin is a place of national construction in the literal and figurative sense. This chapter argues that the narrative that positions Berlin with respect to the nation, and writes the individual into the place of citizen depicts Berlin as a space of projects. "Project" is meant to emphasize the temporal dimension of action – it is both in the projection of spatial and temporal significance onto the city's objects (memorials, monuments and façades) and projecting the city into the future. It is also a project, with emphasis on the process rather than the conclusion, of construction: the twin practice of demolition and production.

The very landscape of the city is being constantly changed in order to provide a narrative and trajectory for a German future. Berlin has taken upon itself the burden of national memorial and testament to the spectres that haunt the country's current economic success.

This chapter examines the ways in which the historical narrative is constructed within the space of Berlin using relevant texts from Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer to provide a framework for early theorizing of the city. It then traces the writing of the ahistorical Berlin of the early 20th century through novels and thought of post-WWII and Post-Wall authors. The texts that will be key to this analysis are Franz Hessel's *Ein Flaneur in Berlin* (*A Flaneur in Berlin*)*,* Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (*The Artificial Silk Girl*)*,* and Robert Walser's "Guten Tag, Riesen!" ("Good Morning, Giantess!"). From the period after the fall of

the Berlin Wall, I will examine Tanja Dückers' *Spielzone*, Inka Parei's *Die Schattenboxerin,* and Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir.*

Through these texts and an examination of specific projects of construction, urban design, and memorialization, the chapter argues that the city of Berlin navigates the tensions between the past and the present through a ratio of the modern, that is through a ratio of novelty and change that emphasizes the primacy of the present. The changing projects of nation building in Germany have had a major influence on surrounding nations and nationalisms. The other two cities that have entered my research interest since Berlin owe much of their historical significance in the 20th century and their current significance in Polish and Czech national imaginaries to their importance as uniquely sensitive Polish-German or German-Czech points of contact.

My own understanding of these cities' significance and interest foregrounds their importance in the narrative of Soviet influence and the unique position of the post-communist nation-states of East-Central Europe; however, this common thread of German cultural and geopolitical imperialism cannot be overlooked. Because of the wealth of contemporary research on Berlin as an concrete and literary object and because the German national narrative shapes through direct or reactionary means the centers of Polish and Czech political and urban national significance, the chapter on Berlin comes first in the dissertation and is followed by Prague and Gdańsk in the order in which I came to them.

Prague

Prague entered my research through the figure of Kafka, and the city's importance in my project grew as my interest in areas of resistance and post-communist identity creation developed. Both the chapter on Prague and the chapter on Gdańsk engage texts written in German about what are now considered exclusively Polish and Czech places. Much of this writing addresses this shift in discourse: between German or Soviet cultural and political hegemony and national identity.

Language study brought me to Prague for extended periods of time. And just as the Berlin Wall loomed large in the German classroom, lectures and readings in the Czech context focused on the legends of Czech princesses, forged epics, and knights of Blaník mountain. These elements of the Prague imaginary filtered into my perception of the city through the texts and lessons provided by my Czech colleagues and teachers. Through these narratives, the winding streets and the aura of magic imbued in Prague's stones began to make more sense to me as did the conflicted identity politics of Kafka's personal writing and Rilke's stories of Czech nationalism and tragedy.

The stony age of the city and the alchemy and magic foregrounded in its tourist industry as well as texts like *Prague in Black and Gold* by Peter Demetz*, Angelo Maria Ripellino's *Magic Prague*, and in folktale collections such as Alois Jirásek's *Staré pověsti české* provide a very different narrative of history, national identity, and literature than the one I experienced in Berlin. The city, of course, was not under the same transformative pressures as Berlin: it had no city center to rebuild

after the second world war, no wall to tear down, and it did not have to fight the representative power of its imperialist and nationalist past. However, Prague did have to find ways to adapt its famous assets—a rich history as a cultural and cosmopolitan hub and age and architecture that inspires the imagination—with the baggage that these assets implied. Much of the rich cultural cache of Prague was inherited from its German speaking and identifying inhabitants; the architecture, while old, was primarily built by those that the Czechs would identify as foreign occupiers; and the need to sculpt a capital of a nation-state, just as the world was pulling away from the concept of nation.

The boundaries that were semi-artificially assigned to Czechoslovakia had not constituted a nation except in the imaginary of its Czech inhabitants for two centuries, and these borders eventually proved their arbitrary origins with the velvet divorce in 1993. Thus The Czech Republic and Prague, at the time of my research, were charged with constructing a national narrative of the past and a trajectory for the future out of these artifacts of different histories. Prague as the nation's capital was under pressure to represent a coherent national identity for a country that was still negotiating its relationship to the rest of Central Europe; however, the city itself had always comfortably identified as Central European and Western more generally. The Slavic character of the Czech lands that tourists might hope to find in Prague which influences the magical character that is associated with the city and draws tourists to Prague instead of Paris or Vienna, and with which the rural areas of the Czech lands still identify (not to mention the only partially forgotten Russophilia that preceded the

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1950s) is not a concrete part of the city's built structure or historical trajectory. It is rather only a part of the representational responsibility of the newly founded state and a product of late 19th century Czech national narratives and myth.

This tension of melding narratives and architectures to create a coherent Prague and by association a viable and unified Czech nation-state has been the goal since the great wave of nationalism in the mid-19th century is what creates the slippages in time, identity, and space that can be read in the Prague novels of today. The Prague novel does not have historical precedent like the Berlin novel does; however, the authors and poets of the Czech lands (as in the Polish) have had the explicit responsibility of "carrying the spirit of the nation" while under foreign rule.

Now that a Czech nation has been achieved, the nation's authors must renegotiate their own role with respect to the nation and navigate the spaces of Prague that have taken on the burden of representation. The lack of a coherent historical and architectural current in Prague, especially after the fall of communism, has led to a reliance on tropes of transformation, magic, and exploded or ecstatic experiences of time. This approach to time and space helps to express and navigate identity, history, and the weight of the stone city and its absent statues of Stalin.

This chapter will consider the city of Prague as a text and narrative of metamorphosis. André Breton once referred to Prague as "*la capitale magique de l'ancienne Europe*" or "the magic capital of ancient Europe." In general, in tourist brochures as well as academic scholarship, the city is referred to in terms of its magical or alchemic past with particular attention to the eccentricities of Kafka or

Rudolf II, the legend of the Prague Golem or its witches. Although this is a tempting path and has been tread with admirable results,[1] this chapter does not propagate this magical narrative. Instead it focuses on magic and metamorphosis as particular strategies for narrating the relationship between past and present. Unlike Berlin, Prague forces a narrative that allows alternative temporal signifiers to exist simultaneously without demolition or obsessive construction.

Metamorphosis provides the narrative frame for what would otherwise be an indecipherable din of clashing historical and national symbols (for example, competing remnants of the reformation and counter reformation, Habsburg and Czech identity, the legacy of the German language in the city, and the varying architectural styles from Romanesque to cubism). Instead of incommunicability, transformation maintains various identities in a single medium; far from the void of history encountered in Berlin, Prague exists in a confluence of history. The fictional texts that will provide a vision of this type of historicizing are Daniela Hodrová's novel *Město vidím...* (*Prague, I see a city…*), Michal Ajvaz's *Druhé Město* (*The Other City*), and Jáchym Topol's *Sestra* (*City, Sister, Silver*). These texts address the simultaneity or "explosion" of time, space and language that is lived in Prague.

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[1] In particular Angelo Maria Ripellino, *Magic Prague* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes from the Life of a European City*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997).

Gdańsk

Gdańsk was an accidental fascination, which began with the novels of Günter Grass and ended with the nostalgia represented by the rebuilt city center. Berlin was full of movement: neon lights, nightclubs, art, and monuments that seemed simultaneously out of place and at home. Prague was solid and stony, confident in its patina of age, and full of the narrow alleys, cobblestones, and a slight unfamiliarity that passed as mystery. Gdańsk was unexpected. Beautiful and serious, the city juxtaposed clean, shiny nostalgia with used workers blocks and ports filled with defunct history.

Gdańsk is the last city that I came to in my studies and the least expected. I also came to it through my studies in German with Günter Grass and his Danzig Trilogy. Unlike Berlin and Prague, Gdańsk is neither a capital nor the center of the Polish national imaginary. However, its history as a city that was once an independent city-state and then passed between Polish and German powers has resulted in a past and an urban fabric that has been erased and reforged many times culminating in its role as the target for the opening shots of WWII and one of the focal points of the Solidarity movement.

The destruction of much of the center of the city during WWII meant that, like Berlin, after the return of Gdańsk to Poland after the war there was ample opportunity to rebuild the city center and to reimagine the city as empty of the ghosts of its German past. These ghosts, of course, were multiplied through the expulsion of the German population in 1946.

Unfortunately, because it is the city that I came to latest in my project, my intimacy with this place is much shallower than it is with the other two. Limited by time, the smaller corpus of literature addressing the city, and the relative scarcity of preexisting research, the chapter on Gdańsk does not take the same structure as the chapters that appear earlier. As a result of this and because Gdańsk is not a capital city and figures differently in the national imaginary, it appears last in the dissertation. The chapter follows from and is developed out of the analysis of figurations of the iconic urban spaces and literatures of Prague and Berlin. Gdańsk in this dissertation serves as a test case for the figurative interpretations of urban space and the relationship between nation and city that are articulated in the previous chapters.

Gdańsk's various occupations, communities and occasional freedoms lend the history of the space a narrative that is tangible in its objects, and the literature of this city tends to be a literature of historical and semantic layers that appeal to misplaced histories. Chwin's mythographic novel *Hanemann* (*Death in Danzig*) is a ready example of this: the novel offers a temporally disjointed narrative history of objects, names, and people. The discourse and silence of objects are almost as significant to the tone of this novel as those between people. Günter Grass's anti-bildungsroman *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*) depicts the tensions between technologies of identification and community within Gdańsk/Danzig. The confrontations of language and music, history and fiction, and the symbols of opposing political institutions are

all exaggerated as these elements struggle for a coherent expression in the history of the present moment.

The struggle to find new ways of narrating history, which Grass explores in *Die Blechtrommel* and in his organization of its translation, is complimented by a similar exploration of the concepts of homeland and the new experiences of global commerce and culture in *Unkenrufe* (*The Call of the Toad*). This love story, which is driven by the common goal of achieving borderlessness in death, explores modern day cosmopolitanism and capitalism in Poland. Grass continues Gdańsk's narratives of layered history by trying to overcome the national, which in *Unkenrufe* is very explicitly tied to the fate of the dead.

Methods

Through these chapters, first by exploring Berlin, then Prague, and finally Gdańsk, this dissertation focuses on the interaction between the built and the written landscape of the city. The city's topography, built up by years of intentional or unintentional monuments, growth patterns, and systems of social dynamics, represents the thickness of place in space and time. Even when the topographical map has seemingly been wiped clean, ghosts and remnants of these cities' previous lives remain in objects and in the stories written about the space.

All three cities experienced the Second World War, Soviet occupation, and the fall of communism, and all three were unique objects of German Imperialist imagination. However, they experienced these in very different ways, and their

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unique national and ethnic contexts prepared them with very individual responses. There is no comprehensive equation that binds these cities, and the ties that exist can easily be extended to other obvious cases, namely Budapest, Lwów, Warsaw, Bratislava, and Kiev. For this reason, the aim of this dissertation is not a comprehensive chronological unfolding. These cities are stitched into different temporalities but tied together by specific moments of significance and signification. This dissertation works to juxtapose these moments and compare the symbolism of these important junctions in space and time.

The chapters trace these cities' development as built and literary spaces through moments of transition in the 20th century. Because the chapters attempt to look at each city in particular moments of transition, particularly moments of transition whose primary representative mode is the relationship between the nation and the built environment of the city, these chapters do not move smoothly through time.

The chapters look at particular nodes of significance, moments where these spatial, national, and figurative issues come to a peak. These moments of transition in the city's orientation to past and present shift alongside the alteration or reinterpretation of the urban landscape. This means that although the chapters may focus on some turning points that cut across two or more of the cities, the chapters do not attempt to provide complimentary chronologies. Some chapters will be skewed towards phenomena in the latter or earlier parts of the century.

The goal of this analysis is not to provide a chronology of change in East-Central Europe during the 20th century, a goal which is easily recognized as far too broad for the scope of even a much longer project. The aim is rather to provide an account of they ways in which different urban environments and their particular histories are manipulated by national impulses or impose their own regimes of representation. This dissertation attempts to highlight and compare these moments of signification. Filling in the space between these moments is not as important as eliciting the most important junctions.

Each urban space examined has adopted its own mode of navigating historical shifts and changes, and these modes are dictated by the shored up history of the space: its layers of sediment – existing buildings, buried pasts – and its modes of reading – myths, literary traditions, and histories. Each chapter aims to explore the representational mode that embodies the city's means of navigating the traumas and the shifts in global power during the 20th century. The chapters accomplish this through a combination of in-depth textual analysis, historical context, archival research, and descriptive phenomenological engagement.

Each chapter will begin by engaging with the traditional objects of research—text and close reading. But this archive will lead us to an understanding of how each city sees itself as being part of a project of becoming. Each place is oriented uniquely to the future and helps dictate the present. The chapters will conclude by historicizing the experience of the city and anticipating how its chosen mode of representation guides the city's possible futures.

I. BERLIN

Spatial Hieroglyphs

This chapter will open by engaging two texts that address the relationship between space, architecture, and social structures. The first is a non-fiction text that emerges out of the environment of Weimar era Berlin, but the approach to space that it adopts is applicable for all of the urban spaces that will be addressed in this dissertation. The second text, while not specific to the cities examined, establishes a relationship between text and architecture that goes beyond reading the city as a text. Both engage built edifices as a special locus for social and historical inscription where truths that might otherwise be obscured can be deciphered.

In 1930, the same year that he published *Die Angestellten,* his critique of the new white-collar culture of the salaried masses, Siegfried Kracauer published an article titled "Über Arbeitsnachweise" ("On Employment Agencies") in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The article examined unemployment agencies in Berlin. Kracauer, himself a salaried editor of the magazine,[1] was not engaged in popular journalism on the plight of the jobless. Instead, he sought to judge the position occupied by the unemployed in Berlin society. Both the subject and the method of his examination were the focus of the article: a political statement about the state of Berlin's unemployed and a theoretical examination of the city as sociological text. This text on the society and built environment of Weimar Berlin outlines how the

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[1] Kracauer had begun working as an editor for the Berlin paper in the 20s and would continue to be retained as an editor until the Reichstag fire in 1933. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 8.

urban fabric of the city can offer itself up as a text to be read or manipulated as a
document of the present and past. This reading will be paired with other fictional and
theoretical texts that interpret or rewrite the environment of Berlin either to articulate
its intentional manipulation or to represent the cityscape through the eyes of those
who are framed by it. Moments of transition such as the interwar period, the division
of Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the transition of the national capital from
Bonn to Berlin, provide the city's government, urban planners, architects, and authors
rich opportunities for reshaping the physical and political orientation of the city.

For the material of Kracauer's reportage, he examined the social position of
the unemployed by looking at the map of the city and enquiring into the space (*Raum*)
of the unemployment agency. This space, according to Kracauer, was "composed by
reality itself"[2] as opposed to the ideologically manipulated material of other analyses.
In Kracauer's observation, the location and environment of the employment agency
expressed the unconscious functioning of social forces that would otherwise be
censored or avoided in more directly legible media such as reports, inquiry, personal
experience, surveys, etc. By studying the lived symbolic language of *spatial* relations,
Kracauer believed he was able to arrive at the truth of *social* relations:

> Jeder typische Raum wird durch die typischen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse
> zustande gebracht, die sich ohne die störende Dazwischenkunft des
> Bewußtseins in ihm ausdrücken. Alles vom Bewußtsein Verleugnete, alles,
> was sonst geflissentlich übersehen wird, ist an seinem Aufbau beteiligt. Die
> Raumbilder sind die Träume der Gesellschaft. Wo immer die Hieroglyphe
> irgendeines Raumbildes entziffert ist, dort bietet sich der Grund der sozialen

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[2] "der Raum des Arbeitsnachweises von der Wirklichkeit selbst gestellt ist"

Wirklichkeit dar.[3]

> Every typical space is brought about through typical social relations, and these express themselves without the nuisance of the intervention of conscious awareness. Everything that is disavowed by conscious awareness, everything that otherwise would be deliberately overlooked is involved in its construction. Spatial images are the dreams of society. Where anytime the hieroglyph of any spatial image is deciphered, there the foundation of social reality presents itself.[4]

For Kracauer space expressed what otherwise could not be said or read in traditional media. Space achieved this through its association with the typical, the everyday, and the experiential. In this dimension of the lived environment, typical spaces are molded to the function of typical social relations and these connections are lived rather than consciously composed. Space, more easily than a social system, can be revisited, entered and taken in as *Momentbilder*, pictures of moments in time—snapshots.

The examples that Kracauer uses from this experiment—the neighborhoods in which the agencies are found, the space of the waiting room, the furniture, etc.—all reflect a consistent but unconsciously engaged social logic: the type of the building, the courtyard, the placement and dimensions of the rooms, and the placards on the unemployment agency's walls. The logic of class relations and the needs of capital were legible as a physical text through location, symbolism, and juxtapositions.

Andreas Huyssen discusses this notion of the city as text in his article "The Voids of Berlin." The article traces the legibility of architecture to Victor Hugo's

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[3] Siegfried Kracauer, "Über Arbeitsnachweise," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, June 17, 1930.

[4] All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Notre-Dame de Paris, where Hugo interrupts the development of the novel's plot to

discuss architecture and its relation to the printed word. In the brief and unexpected

second chapter of Book V, "*Ceci tuera Cela*," Hugo directly addresses the reader and

analyses the remarks of archdeacon Frollo that close the preceding chapter. Frollo is

searching in the books that "are" the edifices of Paris for the secret to alchemy. Hugo

summarizes Frollo's sentiment: "This will kill that. The book will kill the edifice."[5]

In this earlier examination of the unique power of expression allowed by

architecture, Hugo comes very close to Kracauer's spatial hieroglyphs. Hugo sets out

the history of the architecture that preceded the printed word: "Architecture began

like all writing. It was first an alphabet. They planted a stone upright, and it was a

letter, and each letter was a hieroglyph, and on each hieroglyph rested a group of

ideas, like the capital on the column."[6] Hugo's chapter celebrates the new horizons

for art that were made possible by Gutenberg's invention of the printing press but also

mourns the passing of the great monuments to human labor and creativity that spoke

through the spirit of architecture and afforded a freedom of expression that could

even, at times, be heretical stating:

> When passing, each generation writes its line in the book. . . . The religious
> structure is hardly devined beneath the popular drapery. We cannot grasp the
> licenses taken by the architects, even on the churches. These are the monks
> and nuns shamelessly coupled on the capitals of the Gallery of Chimney-
> Pieces in the Palais de Justice in Paris. . . . It is a bacchanalian monk with ass's
> ears and glass in hand laughing in the face of a whole community, as on the

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[5] "Ceci tuera cela. Le livre tuera l'édifice."

[6] "L'architecture commença comme toute écriture. Elle fut d'abord alphabet. On plantait une pierre
debout, et c'était une lettre, et chaque lettre était un hiéroglyphe, et sur chaque hiéroglyphe reposait un
groupe d'idées comme le chapiteau sur la colonne."

lavatory of the Abbey of Bocherville. At this time, for the thoughts written in stone there existed a privilege exactly comparable to our present liberty of the press. It was the liberty of architecture.[7]

Victor Hugo, or his persona, sketches out the history of architecture as written text, and finally holds up late medieval architecture, which escaped the dogmatism of the church and allowed for the flourishing of artistic freedom on a grand scale, as the peak of architectural accomplishment. This odd chapter would go on to influence architects and thinkers long afterward. These included Frank Lloyd Wright, Henri Labrouste, and multiple organizations dedicated to the conservation of historical monuments.[8]

These observations lay the foundation for reading the city as text, or in Kracauer's case the documentation of social realities. By the time Kracauer wrote "Über Arbeitsnachweise" he was concerned with the ways in which built environments were able to hold onto their expressive function, but his emphasis was on the social and political construction of space and architecture rather than on architecture as the expression of an artistic will. It is not the singular building and its

[7] "Chaque race écrit en passant sa ligne sur le livre. . . . La draperie populaire laisse à peine deviner l'ossement religieux. On ne saurait se faire une idée des licences que prennent alors les architectes, même envers l'église. Ce sont des chapiteaux tricotés de moines et de nonnes honteusement accouplés, comme à la salle des Cheminées du Palais de Justice à Paris. . . . C'est un moine bachique à oreilles d'âne et le verre en main riant au nez de toute une communauté, comme sur le lavabo de l'abbaye de Bocherville. Il existe à cette époque, pour la pensée écrite en pierre, un privilège tout à fait comparable à notre liberté actuelle de la presse. C'est la liberté de l'architecture."

[8] Frank Lloyd Wright even mentions the text as a formative moment in his autobiography, and Hugo had even consulted Labrouste when writing the chapter. See Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (Petaluma, CA: Pomegranate, 2005), 78.Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673 - 1968*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 80.

historical function but space as the sum of historical context and the confluence of social forces that concerned Kracauer.

Victor Hugo's despair at the sight of cathedrals falling into disrepair, which he expresses in a moment of authorial intervention and sympathy with the antagonist Frollo, and the logic that he uses to connect the fall of the book of stone to the rise of the book of paper express a similar process of analysis that moves from interpreting concrete symbols to interpreting social and historical processes. Hugo's position as an author complicates his ideological position in the evolution of text. He both mourns and participates in the destruction of the cathedrals that he holds so dear through the speed and spontaneity of the printing press and the force of popular print culture. Kracauer's position on the other hand is not one of mourning or opposition but applied visual and political analysis, a skill that he no doubt developed through his practice as a film critic and, much earlier, as a trained architect. Both Siegfried Kracauer and Victor Hugo read these spaces as both intentionally and unintentionally inscribed, while Hugo, at least structurally, is reading cultural truths from the structure and position of the cathedral.[9]

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[9] The title of the Victor Hugo's novel foregrounds the built environment, the cathedral, over the actors present within it and highlights the importance of architecture for the novel and in addition, through his treatise, the impact of literature on architecture. In exile, Anna Segher's wrote "Zwei Denkmäler" ("Two Memorials"), where the endurance of the cathedral overshadows narratives and memories of individual experience, suffering, and loss. The story partially reiterates the sentiment that the cathedral is an enduring structure: its Roman and Gothic pillars, her teacher tells her before the second world war, are "haltbarer als die jüngeren" (more durable than the younger). Anna Seghers, "Zwei Denkmäler," in *Vom Nullpunkt zur Wende ... deutschsprachige Literatur nach 1945 ; ein Lesebuch für die Sekundarstufe*, ed. Hannes Krauss, Andreas Erb, and Klaus-Michael Bogdal, Erw. Neuausg., 3. Aufl (Essen: Klartext-Verl, 1999), 12.

Utopia

In the 20th century, the built environment of Berlin was not only read as a sociological text or written by great artists it was also shaped by a particular historical and temporal orientation.[10] This chapter argues that this orientation has been, for most of the 20th century, toward the present and the future. This perspective is the result of the city's symbolic reconstruction, which had to contend with historical traumas that made it impossible for nostalgic impulses to be directed toward the past. Berlin's orientation toward the now and the not-yet particularly was also conducive to global trends as new phases in globalization coincided with the phases of the city's concrete rebuilding. Ernst Bloch's *Princip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*) and his utopian vision will provide some context for this orientation toward the future.

Theodor Adorno identifies Ernst Bloch's openness to ongoing revision as the element of his thought that is "responsible for restoring honor to the word 'utopia.'" This openness to revision is present in Bloch's theory of montage as expressed in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (*The Heritage of our Times*). The juxtaposition of forms and shock or alienation inherent in montage resists the homogenization and synchronicity of the solid, mythologizing, symbols of fascism and the passive desires of the petit bourgeoisie. Montage, in its rejection of totalizing symbols, allows for glimpses of truth in its assemblage of cultural artifacts. In the Discussion between Ernst Bloch

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[10] Although Victor Hugo believed that the 16th century was the decline of architecture, not only because of the rise of the printing press, but because of the pastiche of past styles and lack of creativity expressed in the new architectural movements.

and Adorno, Bloch gives the following historical trajectory for the formulation of utopia:

> At the very beginning Thomas More designated utopia as a place, an island in the distant South Seas. This designation underwent changes later so that it left space and entered time. Indeed, the utopians … transposed the wishland more into the future. In other words, there is a transformation of the topos from space into time. With Thomas More the wishland was still ready, on a distant island, but I am not there. On the other hand, when it is transposed into the future, not only am I not there, but utopia itself is also not with itself. This island does not even exist. But it is not something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not *yet* in the sense of a possibility; *that* it could be there if only we could do something for it. Not if we travel there, but *in that* we travel there the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible—utopia, but with new contents. [11]

This concept of a concrete utopian perfection that must be striven for, one that exists not in space, yet, but in the future is developed in Bloch's *Prinzip Hoffnung*. These utopian wish-images "can be discussed individually according to the degree to which present conditions allow for their realization—in other words, in space, in the topos of an objective-real possibility."[12] This calls upon familiar terms—topoi, space, time and social situation—but inverses the time and space relationship that is addressed by Kracauer and Victor Hugo. This is similar to other more recent claims for the shift in emphasis between time and space, take, for example Jameson's theorizing of the postmodern and the rise of the dominance of architecture.[13] Jameson in

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[11] Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno, "Somethings Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), 3.

[12] Ibid., 6.

[13] This claim echoes Benjamin's thought in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that "[a]rchitecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction" Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age

Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism connects the rise in the dominance of architecture in today's present/now and visually oriented world to postmodern architecture's "aesthetic populism," an ahistoric pastiche of styles, and architecture's direct relationship to the economic. Architecture has taken on the power of both the virtual and the objective, real possibility.

Urban space has become the ideal space for the representation of utopia and dystopia. The powers that write cities in this way, whether through art, bombs,[14] urban planning, memorial or private investment, are always writing out of a social reality and the dreams of society.

In Susan Buck-Morr's analysis of Benjamin this is the relationship between cities as dreamworlds and spaces of catastrophe. In "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe" she describes the accidental evolution of the postmodern city of today and Benjamin's city of the early 20th century thusly: "The disintegration of cultural forms is endemic to modernity. Its temporality is that of fashion, the relentless

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of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 239.

[14] In his apocalyptic poem "Landschaft mit Argonauten," Heiner Müller writes "WAS BLEIBT ABER STIFTEN DIE BOMBEN." His oblique citation of Hölderlin's verse "Was bleibet aber, stiften die dichter" plays with the temporality of utopia. Hölderlin's poem, "Andenken" ("Remembrance"), from which the verse is taken and adapted addresses remembrance, memory of past events, while describing the landscape or remembrance in the present tense, a possibility that is the gift or donation of the poet. This utopian possibility is replaced by Müller with the landscape that is the accidental gift of the bombs: "Die Jugend von heute Gespenster / Der Toten des Krieges der morgen stattfinden wird." Whereas Hölderlin's poets can create a present tense utopia out of a landscape of memory, Müller's temporal horizon consists of war and national interests and this imagined future reshapes the present day. For a thoughtful examination of the function of myth in Müller's poem, see the chapter "Medea" in Sonia Saporiti's *Myth as Symbol: A Psychoanalytic Study in Contemporary German Literature*, where she convincingly places Müller's work in dialogue with Horkheimer, Hölderlin, and a larger mythical context. Sonia Saporiti, *Myth as Symbol: A Psychoanalytic Study in Contemporary German Literature* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 133.

production of the new—and therefore, just as relentlessly, the production of the outmoded."[15] In this fast pace of urban modernity "objects of daily use [are] called upon to provide a new, modern sensibility, a radical change in the public taste."[16] The hope for a concrete utopia of the future that was present in Ernst Bloch's socialist horizon of either destruction or perfection is replaced here with the loss of hope and a distracted "eclectic, a melange of neo-, post-, and retroforms that deny responsibility for present history."[17] For Jameson, Benjamin, Bloch, Buck-Morss, Hugo, and Kracauer, the urban environment is a privileged center for representation of the future (for Bloch), the just now (for Jameson, Buck-Morss, and Benjamin), and for the past or a distraction from it (Buck-Morss and Hugo).

The freedom of expression so long allowed to the development and use of space is what makes the study of urban topography such a fruitful source of study, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first century, when the explicit production of space has increasingly become an object of direct and intentional engagement and theoretical enquiry, while remaining, in the practice of the everyday, an unconscious participant in our social, individual and political identity. Berlin's urban environment, at key moments of reconstruction and historical revision, has been called upon to provide just these "radical changes in public taste" and temporal perspective.

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[15] Susan Buck-Morss, "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe," *October* 73 (1995): 4.

[16] Ibid., 9. A longer and more general discussion of the utopian dreams of the 20th century and the material pastiche that has replaced them can be found in Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 1. MIT Press paperback ed (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

[17] Buck-Morss, "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe," 26.

When visiting Berlin it is clear that it is a city under construction; its cranes and construction zones are now a commonplace in scholarship, literature, journalism, and even tourism. In 1995 *Der Spiegel* published an article titled "Von New York Lernen" ("To Learn from New York") which had the following to say about the state of Berlin's construction sites: "Even now, there are few places in the inner city from which no crane can be seen. 911 building sites were counted by building authority last month alone in the small district of 'Mitte.'"[18] The history of Berlin suggests that this constant construction is not a temporary state, but a symptom of the way in which Berlin has come to be understood and come to understand itself.

The landscape of the city is changed to reflect the city's current orientation to history and the future. This can be seen in the *Gedächtniskirche* while walking down Ku'damm to KaDeWe. It can be felt in the *Blitz* of Libeskind's Jüdisches Museum, engaging in a symbolic attack on its stately older counterpart. And it can be navigated along the GDR's monumental Stalinallee (Karl-Marx-Allee since 1961) built in the socialist classicism "wedding-cake style" as "Germany's first socialist Boulevard."[19] The complex relationship between Germany's past and its desire for a new image can be paced amidst the "atmosphere of confusion" created by the Stelae of Eisenman's *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* that represents an "ordered system that

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[18] Schon jetzt gibt es nur wenige Plätze in der inneren Stadt, von denen aus kein Baukran zu sehen ist. Genau 911 Baustellen zählte letzten Monat das Bauamt allein im kleinen Bezirk 'Mitte "Von New York Lernen," *Der Spiegel*, 1995, 46.

[19] "Stalinallee," *The Wende Museum*, accessed August 13, 2016, http://www.wendemuseum.org/collections/stalinallee.

has lost touch with human reason."[20] The *Denkmal* sits on what was once a representative site of the system it intends to critique, while it embodies (in its Stelae and their controversial construction) the historical ties that complicate such simple projects of destruction and reterritorialization.[21] In what was once East Berlin this process of destruction and reterritorialization is also represented by the demolition of the Palast der Republik, a center for East Berlin public life, and the controversial reconstruction of Berliner Stadtschloss. These are examples of construction and constructed space as well as carefully crafted and narrated projects of marketing for media and capital.

The space of the city promotes and makes possible the local and locatable experience of the otherwise abstract concepts of community and territory in the industrial and post-industrial world. It is where the individual accesses the effects of national memory, guilt, and division as phenomenon of social practice and state planning. This function of the city is articulated in the particularly close relationship between literature and the experience of national and urban history offered by Berlin.

The tradition of the Berlin novel was at its height in the early 20th century with

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[20] This approach is outlined in Eisenman's project text: "The project manifests the instability inherent in what seems to be a system, here a rational grid, and its potential for dissolution in time. It suggests that when a supposedly rational and ordered system grows too large and out of proportion to its intended purpose, it in fact loses touch with human reason. It then begins to reveal the innate disturbances and potential for chaos in all systems of seeming order, the idea that all closed systems of a closed order are bound to fail." Peter Eisenman, "Germany's Memorial - Memorial To The Murdered Jews Of Europe," *FRONTLINE | PBS*, accessed August 13, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/eisenman.html.

[21] For more on the *Denkmal* and the controversies surrounding ist construction see Thomsen "Von Montag an werden neue Betonstelen gegossen" and the press release "Bundestagspräsident Thierse: Am Mahnmal baut die ganze Gesellschaft mit" and Claus Leggewie and Erik Meyer, *Ein Ort, an den man gerne geht* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2005), 287–300..

the novels by Alfred Döblin, Vicki Baum, Erich Kästner, and Irmgard Keun. Of these Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* stands as the most emblematic. The Berlin novel articulated the new German identity, especially the fast moving times of the 1920s, through the environment of Berlin and its diverse array of modern characters. However, after the second world war and particularly after the division and reunification of Germany, there was a revived interest in a new Berlin novel that could help represent and help heal the traumas of the previous half-century.

This desire for a post-war, unified German national identity presents the city as the setting for personal engagement with national memory, trauma, and reconciliation. While many authors, including Günter Grass, have attempted to compose a contemporary Berlin novel, the *Hauptstadt* is still seeking its *Hauptstadtroman*. This chapter examines Berlin literature of both periods and claims that the novels of this new phase in Berlin's literature rehearse the traumas and reconciliations of the last century through spaces of disruption: construction sites, no-man's lands, and property that has fallen out of the system of debt and profit such as abandoned and re-appropriated buildings.

The physical city—the city made of concrete, stone, and lights—influences the literary imaginary and is of no less significance to the encounter with the nation's historical narrative. As a means of bridging the gap between the written and built environment of Berlin, the following sections will consider the constructed city and its less concrete counterparts: the visions of a future Berlin that existed in potentially through penciled lines and charcoal sketches in the portfolios of the many

submissions to the almost annual architecture and city planning competitions

conducted for the city as well as the symbolic and affective dimensions of the city

represented in film and in the Berlin novel.

The rest of this chapter will build from the preceding theoretical background

discussions and address the architectural history of the city of Berlin before

addressing the literature and film that explores this changing environment. Berlin's

construction projects make visible its ghosts, scars, and sites of construction. The

consistent construction moves the ideology of the city away from legacy and legend

toward projects and progress. It is focused on its futurity.

Berlin Wird: Building the Temporality of the city

Architectural and planning competitions existed in Berlin on a large scale as early as

1910 and were meant to provide guidelines for the physical and ideological

Stadtplan.[22] These planning and architectural competitions were part of what Janet

Ward has called the surface or visual culture that has defined Berlin for the last

century.[23] The submissions to these competitions throughout the century—from the

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[22] The most famous examples of these were The Greater Berlin Competition (*Der Wettbewerb Groß-Berlin*) which ran from 1908-1910 and The General City Planning Exhibition (*Allgemeine Städtbau-Ausstellung*) which took place in 1910 and of which Hegemann's *Monumental stadt* was a part. These competitions were addressed in an exhibition initiated by the Technical University of Berlin that compared urban planning trends in 1910 and 2010 in three major cities. The exhibition was titled "City Visions 1910/2010: Urban Planning in Berlin, London, Paris and Chicago 1910/2010," and ran in 2010 and 2011. For more on the 1910 Groβ-Berlin competition see Wolfgang Sonne, *Representing the State: Capital City Planning in the Early Twentieth Century* (Munich ; New York: Prestel Publishing, 2003).

[23] See Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (University of California Press, 2001). Janet Ward, "Berlin, the Virtual Global City," *Journal of Visual Culture* 3, no. 2 (August 1, 2004): 239–56.

1908 Greater Berlin Competition and 1910 City Planning Exhibition, the competition

for the Potsdamer Platz Master Plan, the reconstruction of the Reichstag, or the

competition for the Temporary Public Space Design for the Palace Area that was

meant to act as a buffer between the destruction of the Palast der Republik and the

construction of the Humboldt forum—were often never meant to be actualized and

the projects were designed with this concept of pure potentiality in mind.[24] They

acted as ideological statements rather than models for construction.

These designs were works of fiction in their own right, providing outlines for

possible futures based on interpretations of the present and past rather than laying the

concrete groundwork for an unknown and unknowable future. In this way the built

city in its concrete and ideological dimensions imposes its own unique temporality

onto the map of Berlin. The slogan of the official Berlin ad campaign of 1996,

"Berlin wird," embodies this temporality of becoming.[25]

The "Berlin wird" campaign, while almost two decades behind us now, is still

echoed in contemporary ideas of construction and making in the global city. Berlin's

Potsdamer Platz, a key symbol of the new era of construction in post-unification

Berlin, echoes this legacy of becoming with the slogan "Potsdamer Platz: the Platz to

be" emblazoned on its homepage.[26]

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[24] For an excellent analysis of the demolition of the Palast der Republik, its significance, and the controversy over the Berlin-Schloss reconstruction, see the chapter Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, & Identity in Divided Berlin*, Culture, Politics, and the Built Environment (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

[25] Andreas Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (October 1, 1997): 62.

[26] This is the same on the English and German websites: *wird* does not appear here even though it is implied in the "to be." "Potsdamer Platz: The Platz to Be," *Potsdamer Platz Homepage*, accessed June

However, this temporality of becoming is even older. Even in 1996 "Berlin wird" was already an allusion to Karl Scheffler's 1910 statement that Berlin was a city with the tragic fate "forever to become and never to be."[27] This unreal dimension of a city projected into the future was evident in the 1910 General City Planning Exhibition. In his article published in *Berliner Architekturwelt* that reported on the exhibition, Walter Lewitz remarks on this primarily symbolic rather than practical focus of the plans. Lewitz states:

> All of these proposals are of an architectural distinction that places them among the finest achievements in the entire Urban Planning Exhibition. … It might be objected that it is all too high-flown and too rhetorical, and that no single city could bear such a concentrated weight of monumental expression; but, after all, the artist intends this simply as a stimulus and as an eye-opener.[28]

And concludes that the artistic merit of the General City Planning Exhibition, despite being impractical to implement, reflects the ascendance of the "nation" explicitly: "Looking at all the suggestions for the future that are given here, and responding to the sheer profusion of ideas and the diversity of their artistic expression, one feels that things are not going downhill just yet. A nation in which so much creative power cries out for action is still on the ascendant," finally concluding, "*the artistic battles of the future must be waged on the terrain of urban planning.*" Lewitz's romantic

1, 2015, http://potsdamerplatz.de/de/home/.. The use of English signals space's orientation toward global commerce.

[27] Qtd. in Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin." The original reads: "dazu verdammt: immerfort zu werden und niemals zu sein" Karl Scheffler, *Berlin, Ein Stadtschicksal.* (Berlin: E. Reiss, 1910), 2.

[28] Walter Lewitz, "Architectural Notes on the Universal Urban Planning Exhibition, Berlin," in *Metropolis Berlin: 1880-1940*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte and David Frisby, trans. David Britt (University of California Press, 2012), 62.

image of the city planner is motivated by the fear of decline or its immanence of the horizon. The weight of the submissions' collective monumentality is oriented both toward future action and future crisis.

Werner Hegemann, who became active in urban planning debates at the inception of the Greater Berlin Competition and would later author *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der grössten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt* (1930), echoed Lewitz's optimism about Berlin Architectural and planning competitions' artistic and conceptual rather than concrete and practical outcomes. In an article published in 1911, "Major town planning competitions and town planning committees," he discussed the development of planning competitions in response to the increasing demands on cities and their populations writing that while the Greater Berlin competition did not produce much in terms of practical results, the competition helped articulate the challenges faced by the city and outlined potential solutions and new directions for city planning in general.[29]

Monumentalstadt, Bruno Schmitz's submission to the General City Planning Exhibition, embodies this symbolic function. It was probably the boldest and least practical attempt at envisioning a new Berlin. It won third prize, and was later echoed by Albert Speer. Lewitz described Schmitz's vision as a dream city on a grand scale. Schmitz depicts the city as a national monument; however, the artistic and symbolic importance of designs like those produced by Schmitz are almost playfully, and

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[29] Christiane Crasemann Collins, *Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 34. Collins' section "The Stones of Berlin" contains a discussion of the reception of Hegemann's *Das steinerne Berlin*, which includes responses from Walter Benjamin and the author Joseph Roth.

certainly practically, undermined by the comments in the Prize-Winning Explanatory report. The report suggests: "To prevent the recommendations of the competition, which are now to be implemented, from taking on boundless dimensions, we have concentrated for the time being on those things that that [sic] can be achieved or suitably prepared within one generation."[30]

Michel de Certeau rearticulates this difference between a planner's abstraction and "practicality" in *The Practice of Everyday Life.* De Certeau claims that city planners, cartographers, and space planner urbanists, regardless of the "dimensions," practicality, or "suitability" of their designs, exist in a voyeuristic and *theoretical* relationship to the city. Theirs is a totalizing view that requires abstraction and distance, and their city is limited to a "panorama-city" and a "visual simulacrum." The city planner must adopt a perspective that alienates him from the city so that he can impose order upon it.

Michel de Certeau opposes this theoretical perspective to the walker of the city. These practitioners of the city, on the other hand,

> [follows] the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. . . . The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other.[31]

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[30] Iain Boyd Whyte and David Frisby, eds., "The Greater Berlin Competition 1910: The Prize-Winning Designs with Explanatory Report," in *Metropolis Berlin: 1880-1940*, trans. Iain Boyd Whyte (University of California Press, 2012), 66. Sabine Hake also discusses the Utopic dimension that the infeasibility of construction in Weimar era Berlin opened up for architects, urban planners, artists and theorist of urban space.

[31] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1984), 93.

The pedestrian—who is not to be confused with the flâneur—writes the city through use and practice: producing a place which is networked, marked, named, and dynamic, out of space.

In her article "Berlin, the Virtual Global City" Janet Ward addresses the obsessive self-representation that is apparent in Berlin's exhibitions and virtual platforms. Text and topography have even been written into the architectural submissions that help imagine the future of the city. This is the case in project designs such as Libeskind's winning submission to the City Edge competition in 1987, which features a city wrapped in fragments of text, and his Potsdamer Platz masterplan, whose abstract and artistic sketches include text in multiple dead and living languages leveraged along colliding planes. These models of a hybrid city that would embody a global futurity reinforce this trope of city as text. As illegible hieroglyphs or collage, the city is built to be read. However, as Libeskind's visions for Potsdamer Platz were never actually constructed, this legible city remains theoretical—the intricate model of the masterplan with its blunt abstractions and references is emblematic of the elevation and distance required for the panoramic view of the city described by de Certeau.[32]

I do not intend to simply restate this trope of the city as text, which Andreas Huyssen points out in his influential article, "Voids of Berlin," has existed for centuries. The metaphor perhaps began with Victor Hugo in 1831, if not earlier, and

[32] Daniel Libeskind and Olivier Martin-Gambier, *Berlin City Edge, Bauausstellung Site Model, 1987*, Photograph, n.d., Frac centre, http://www.frac-centre.fr/collection-art-architecture/libeskind-daniel/berlin-city-edge-64.html?authID=115&ensembleID=321.

hit its peak in the 1970s and 80s with the rise of post-structuralism and the conceptual framework of "reading" and "writing" the city. Huyssen suggests that the metaphor has declined in architectural discourse and, given the new technological possibilities of the turn of the century, has been replaced by the city as image. Despite this, text and topography are the synecdochic counterparts to the two perspectives de Certeau lays out for us: those of the voyeur and the walker. And both are needed to navigate the arterial streets of Berlin, their clotted past and their flowing futures as architectural competitions continue to shape the real and potential topography of Berlin.

The projects of the city are transforming with new digital, virtual, and visual projects for the navigation of the past (reproducing spaces) and artistic projects. Huyssen and by Jameson both note that there is a movement "from script to image" in the postmodern city, and this shift toward the visual and the virtual is part of a more general movement in contemporary culture. In Berlin this movement is embodied in the temporary viewing modules overlooking construction sites, such as the former red Info Box that once looked onto the "largest construction site in Europe" at Potsdamer Platz and its contemporary iteration, the "Humboldt Box," that looks over what will be the new Humboldt Forum: the controversial construction project that includes the partial reconstruction of the *Stadtschloß*. These showspaces make exhibitions of construction and potentiality. They operate as controversial museums to the

production of the future.[33] These processes have taken on two forms: the placeless corporate modernism of Potsdamer Platz and the intentional reassertion of an uncritical cultural inheritance that is embodied in the new Humboldt Forum and erected in the form of the reconstructed Berliner Stadtschloβ.

The visual and virtual transformation of the city as a response to its rapidly transforming political and demographic identity also comes in the form of innovative art projects that focus on the domestication of iconic images. Paper panoramas and games that resemble their familiar childish counterparts represent Berlin scenes of immigrant life, and art projects like Stefanie Bürkle's "Berlinertapete" (Berlin Wallpaper) transform the iconic copper tinted glass façade of the Palast der Republik into an infinitely repeatable pattern to temporarily adorn the walls of hipster apartments, homes, and the offices of lower members of government. The artist writes of her project:

> The interior becomes the exterior the exterior becomes the interior. When I walk through the modern city, I don't see rooms or public squares, instead I see surfaces and façades. The city is a Western town, a rolling landscape in which the beautiful, sweet, life is housed behind the overhanging façades of modern construction. The series of model façades signify that the city is a Potemkin village presented as a pattern sample for investors prettily presented by architects. With the project "Berlin Wallpaper," with the Palast wallpaper I have made the interior into the exterior, the façade of the Palace der Republik into interior decoration. Forgetting the multidimensionality of the city and deconstructing its surface means to reduce it to an ornament—city walls rather than urban spaces.[34]

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[33] "Ein «Ufo» mitten in Berlin: In der deutschen Hauptstadt informiert ein Ausstellungszentrum über das geplante Schloss-Projekt," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 30, 2011, http://www.nzz.ch/berlin-info-box-humboldt-zentrum-1.11121753.

[34]"Der Innenraum wird Außenraum, der Außenraum wird Innenraum. Wenn ich durch die moderne Stadt gehe, sehe ich nicht Räume oder Plätze, sondern Flächen und Fassaden. Die Stadt ist eine

The troubling of the division between public and private space and the virtual nature of the façades created by cultural and financial investments that mark the city as "western" are all wonderfully articulated here. The political dimension of this "Potempkin Village" does not go unnoticed. These external projects map onto internal spaces. The Palast der Republik can be purchased and mobilized in the way that best fits the whimsy of the buyer: as an ironic juxtaposition, as an item of nostalgia, or as a tool for marketing your politics (as we see in some of the artist's pictures of politicians posing next to the paper in their offices).

Constructing a Homeland

The writing of a new national memory in Germany that is adequate to the crimes of the past and sufficient to support the newfound unity, or a new "national identity" that is free of the dangers that have come with prior iterations of "nationalism" is complicated by the loss of the possibility of *Heimat* or origin as a goal for art or memorial. The result is a confused and conflicting desire for a utopian and national project. The expression of this emerges in two forms: the no man's land or no place of utopian potential, and the production of a signifying temporal topography, *Heimat*,

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Westernstadt, eine Kulissenlandschaft, in dem das Schöne, Süße Leben im Dahinter, hinter den vorgehangenen Fassaden des modernen Bauwesens haust. Die Serie der Musterfassaden zeigen die Stadt als potemkinsches Dorf, als Musterprobe für Investoren von Architekten hübsch präsentiert. Mit dem Projekt „Berlinertapete", der Palasttapete habe ich den Innenraum zum Außenraum, die Fassade des Palasts der Republik zum Wohnschmuck gemacht. Die Mehrdimensionalität der Stadt zu vergessen und sie auf Oberfläche zu dekonstruieren heißt sie auf ein Ornament zu reduzieren- Stadtwände statt Stadträume" Stefanie Bürkle, "SWEET: Innen-Außenraum | Projektion : Illusion : Ornament," accessed August 13, 2016, http://www.stefanie-buerkle.de/buerkle/sweet/sweet.php.

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which is over determined by a romantic vision of society's relationship to the natural environment and a myth of origin.

Peter Blickle in his 2002 analysis of the gendered dimensions of Heimat, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Concept of Homeland*, describes Heimat as "a mythical space of innocence" that has "again and again led to borders of exclusion."[35] Blickle makes it very clear in his conclusion that Heimat has not disappeared from German discourse. Rather, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries with Germany's increasingly open borders, the discourse has shifted away from ideas of Heimat that are infused with the traditional gender roles of the bourgeois family and toward a multiplicity of new or estranged, strange, or lost Heimats. Similarly, Elizabeth Boa argues in *Heimat – A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890-1990* that renegotiation and recuperation of Heimat includes removing it from a fixed static place of heritage, making it "[*neither*] the place of origin [*nor*] the utopian place of arrival"[36] and instead creating a livable social space. However, even this progressive conception of Heimat cannot be completely emptied of roots in heritage and territory.[37]

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[35] Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 158.

[36] Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat: A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture, 1890-1990*, Oxford Studies in Modern European Culture (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 195.

[37] For an analysis of Heimat that focuses on the early German nation, see Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Confino interjects interjects into contemporary discourse around nationalism (Gellner, Anderson, Smith, and Hobsbawm) by discussion the process of national belonging. Confino argues that Germans "constructed a collective image of the nation" and bridged the

Heimat assumes that territory, as a constructed relationship to space, has a natural relationship with identity. This loss of an intimate connection between environment and identity in Berlin is expressed in burial and recovery, in erasure and remaking, in literature and architecture, and in the movement of the city. The nature of the narrative that positions Berlin with respect to the nation and writes the individual into the place of citizen is one of projects and projection. This "project" is manifold. It is a projection: the projection of significance onto intentional and unintentional monuments and memorials; a projection of the city out of the past and into a vision of a future city, one that is rooted in the present rather than chained to a painful past; and it is a project, a process of construction, the twin practice of demolition and production. Therefore, the landscape of the city is in a constant state of becoming: "*Berlin wird.*"

This structured experience of Berlin's spatial and social dimensions is affected by its temporal orientation. Historically, Berlin has defined its modernity through the concept of speed. In his 1907 essay, "Good Morning, Giantess!" ("Guten Tag, Riesen!"),[38] Robert Walser describes the experience of walking the streets of Berlin in the early morning. The description Walser uses of the waking city is much like the one that Nezval will use to describes the magic of Prague's combination of youthful present and superstitious past: "The giantess Metropolis" (*die Riesin Weltstadt*) dresses in "her shimmering, sun-drenched petticoat" (*ihr schimmernd-durchsonntes*

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social and geographical disparity between unknowable nation intimate regional identity through the concept of Heimat.

[38] The cited text that follows is from *Aufsätze von Robert Walser* (1913).

Hemd). The charms of this enchantress arise, however, not from the deep past of tradition but from the "just past" and just passed: the hurtling into the future of the metropolis and its inhabitants that only lingers long enough to be appreciated in the early morning before the trollies begin to run. Walser observes of 1907 Berlin: "This is the wonder of the city, that every attitude and behavior is submerged in all of these thousands of variants, observation is fleeting, judgment is fast, and forgetfulness is certain. Past. What has past?"[39]

Architecture is central to the temporality of Walser's depiction of movement through the city. He asks, "Whether someone can convince himself to turn around again to give the old architecture a second glance? Oh, for what. On, on."[40] The pedestrian modes in which the individual interacts with their spatial and social environment are always temporally affected. The speed at which one travels through a city determines the appearance of the buildings, not only in their perception but also in their design. Empire-style façades become forgettable while simple clean lines and planes become more appealing to the eye that can only afford a glance and a passing remark.

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[39] "Das ist das Wunder der Stadt, daß eines jeden Haltung und Benehmen untertaucht in all diesen tausend Arten, daß das Betrachten ein flüchtiges, das Urteil ein schnelles und das Vergessen ein selbstverständliches ist. Vorüber. Was ist vorüber?" Robert Walser, *Aufsätze von Robert Walser* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1913), 106.

[40] "Ob sich da einer wohl entschließen kann, sich nochmals umzudrehen, um der alten Baukunst einen Extrablick zu schenken? I woher. Weiter, weiter" Ibid.

Even the language with which one would describe this experience is rushed and cut short by the tempo in which the city exists. Walter Benjamin describes the Berliner dialect thusly:

> The Berlin dialect is a language of people who have no time, who must often with a very short remark, a glance, or a half word make themselves understood. ... There are special expressions between workmen, between athletes, between soldiers, and between thieves etc. etc. And all these languages contribute a little bit to the Berlin dialect precisely because in Berlin all these people live together as large masses in the most diverse occupations and circumstances and at a remarkable speed. The Berlin dialect is today one of the nicest and truest expression of this racing tempo of life.[41]

This is, of course, one of Benjamin's more charming pieces written explicitly for school children. His hyperbole is meant to be comic, and his ending is decidedly optimistic, but we hear in his text echoes of the fleeting glances and hurtling tempo of Walser's Berlin.

Walter Ruttman's film, *Symphonie einer Großstadt* (1927), focuses on the choreographed workings of the city. The film emphasizes the city's automaticity and its order by carefully editing around the naturally occurring chaotic elements of urban space. The city depicted in the film is ruled by the rhythm of order rather than the interruption posed by anarchy or chaos. Unlike Prague's city symphony that will be discussed in the next chapter, Ruttman's film moves from the outskirts of the city to its center citing several of Berlin's iconic buildings. The speed of the film shows us

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[41] "Das Berlinisch ist eine Sprache von Leuten, die keine Zeit haben, die sich oft mit einer ganz kurzen Andeutung, einem Blick, einem halben Wort verständigen müssen. … So gibt es auch besondere Ausdrücke unter den Arbeitern, unter den Sportsleuten, unter den Soldaten, unter den Dieben usw. usw. Und alle diese Sprachen steuern zum Berlinischen etwas bei, weil eben in Berlin all diese Menschen in den verschiedensten Berufen und Verhältnissen in großen Massen und in einem ungeheuren Tempo zusammenleben. Das Berlinische ist heute einer der schönsten und genauesten Ausdrücke von diesem rasenden Lebenstempo." Walter Benjamin, "Berliner Dialekt," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 70–71.

the quickly passing facades that Walser asked us to imagine, and integrates the concrete facades, whether modern or old, into the racing tempo of life in the big city. This tempo, the film seems to suggest through its framing devices, is determined by the rate of work, the movement of the train, and the speed of traffic.

The famous stoplight at Potsdamer Platz makes an appearance several times in the film. The chaotic intersection was the location for one of the first traffic lights and it served as an international symbol of traffic. Traffic, and by association Potsdamer Platz, came to signify movement, individuality, and progress. The obsession with these concepts associated with traffic is what allowed Marcel Breuer in the Weimar period to consider traffic and continuous movement to be the guiding concept for Berlin as a whole. In 1929 Brewer stated, "The dramatic element in a big city is the traffic and what for now is its main medium: the street." Breuer's designs strived for "continuous circulation of traffic without intersections or traffic lights."[42] Ruttman's film, like Breuer's utopic non-space, a space determined not by people or locatable objects but a space of movement, lacks the dramatic pause of a stoplight.

Breuer's design highlights two different images of individuation: the individual "driven" movement of the person in the car versus the individuation offered by opportunity for significant difference. These designs for a modern city based on traffic, which exclude the pedestrian and relegate them to other quarters, is part of what critical reconstruction took upon itself to work against, but in this attempt it also returned to a concept of individual identity that was already having

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[42] Qtd. In Hake 70.

trouble asserting itself in Weimar era Berlin: a version of the bourgeois subject

privileged over new modes of communal space.[43] Critical reconstruction was a

movement in Berlin city planning that called for the reproduction of architecture that

recreated the identity of Berlin through the "berlinisch," or a typical Berlin style.

However, any developed standard for what constitues the Berlin "type" would be

arbitrary. The desired identity that was nominated as berlinisch, Andreas Huyssen

claims in *Present Pasts*, "is symptomatically dominated by pre-World War I

architecture, the *Mietkaserne,* and the notion of the once again popular traditional

neighborhood."[44] It is significant that these "berlinisch" styles were also ones that

predated the historical traumas of the 20th century; therefore, the architectural identity

of Berlin was artificially separated from those elements of the city's history that were

less desireable. Huyssen comments on this overriding concern that critical

reconstructionists like Hans Stimmann placed on making key sites in Berlin reflect a

particular Berlin identity as opposed to unstable images and the flashy virtual worlds

of Las Vegas and Times Square: "ironically, the concern with Berlin's image,

foremost on the minds of politicians who desire nothing so much as to increase

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[43] For a comparison of social and aesthetic agendas of the IBA's projects of critical reconstruction and post unification critical reconstruction under Hans Stimmann see Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (U of Minnesota Press, 2005), 45–51. For an analysis of the individual, particularly the human figure in visual art and literature, during in the Weimar era see Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature*, An October Book (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

[44] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 61.

Berlin's ability to attract corporations and tourists, clashes with what I would describe as the fear of an architecture of images."[45]

The ideal of constant change that is built into the fabric of the city creates a "disparity between the individual and his or her environment." The pedestrian's path and purpose is as determined as the vehicle's. In his plans for Potsdamer Platz Martin Wagner, the chief city planner for Berlin from 1925 to 1933, states:[46]

> The fluent traffic inside the square must contrast with the *staying traffic*, which holds the power of consumption of the masses which cross the square. In this sense, one has to develop a concentration of buildings, which reacts with their alignment to the pedestrians' walking lines, that means to the power of consumption.[47]

It is worth pointing out that neither spaces of traffic nor spaces of consumption are places or work or labor. Wagner saw the construction of a new modern architecture in Berlin as the opportunity to produce a new marketing strategy. This marketing strategy consisted of creating modern housing complexes, for which he is now famous, as well as spaces of consumption through the manipulation of lines of pedestrian and vehicular traffic to maximize consumerism and capital.

The recognition of the necessity for developing a comprehensive architectural and urban plan for Berlin's future growth went hand in hand with the recognition of the symbolic potential for the construction of a symbolic modern Weltstadt in Berlin.

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[45] Ibid., 60.

[46] Wagner and Breuer's designs for Potsdamer Platz are also discussed in Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin*, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 55.

[47] Qtd. in Bernd Nicolai, "The Symphony of the Metropolis: Berlin as 'Newlin' in the Twentieth Century," in *The Modern City Revisited*, ed. Thomas Deckker (London: Spon, 2000), 18.

As an understanding of the city as a system and the organization of urban space as a social tool was becoming more prominent in design, the everyday experience and affect of this urban environment, was increasingly documented in films, novels, and critical works.

The privileged navigator of the city's hidden tempo in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is the city walker, the flâneur. Walter Benjamin brings the figure of the flâneur into the critical discussions of modern urban experience through his essays on Charles Baudelair, in which he writes that the flâneur is the "chronicler and philosopher" of the street. For Benjamin, the flâneur's privileged métier is itself only possible because of the specific architecture of the urban boulevard, which protects him from traffic, and the arcade, which provides him with a lighted "world in miniature." The flâneur is set against the bourgeois household that is content within its four walls or its living room. Instead the urban environment houses the flâneur: the boulevards become an "*intérieur"* and he is "at home among house facades" instead of the home's four walls.[48] The flâneur is at home in public space and exteriors instead of in the domesticated, closed off, and interior space of the home. He is open to the flow and hidden histories of the spaces he traverses, and this is possible specifically because he exists outside of the pressures of productivity. The flâneur is free to wander aimlessly. In Paris it could be said that the flâneur "suggests the contradictions of the modern city, caught between the insistent mobility of the present

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[48] Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael William Jennings, trans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), 68.

and the visible weight of the past."[49] But in Berlin of the early 20th century it was more likely the dynamism of the present that was the dominant visual mode engaged in a battle to manage the spectre of the past and to deter the recognition of collapse and political unrest that was just hidden behind the temporal horizon. The pedestrian or the car becomes Berlin's proper representative—forgetful, driven by progress, and the "not yet."

Writing the City

To discuss the affective power of Berlin during the heightened historical and technological pressures of the legacy of the first world war and the development of mass entertainment, this section explores the experience of the city through three Weimar era texts: Erich Kästner's novel, *Fabian;* Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen;* and Franz Hessel's collection of vignettes *Spazieren in Berlin.* These texts reclaim the figure of the flâneur for the purpose of teaching the reader about the changing temporal and sensory landscape of the city. The flâneur's unique position as a singular individual in the bustling and crowded urban landscape and as an ahistorical figure whose primary mode is to perceive the tempo and historical strata of the city. These texts explore how modes of perceiving in the city are taught and the ways in which the technology of the city reverberates with projected images, expectations, and plans that echo the orientation of the city toward the future.

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[49] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris As Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 80.

The environment and the pace of the city mold the rationality of the individual. We can see evidence of this in Benjamin's quaint discussion of the Berlin dialect, which is marked by the extreme pace, speed and utility built into speech, but we can also witness it in novels like Erich Kästner's, *Fabian.* The main character, Jakub Fabian, is unable to join the calculations of Berlin society. Jakub's inability to move "in time" with the fast pace of the city introduces the dissonance of being out of time, *Ungleichzeitigkeit.* Fabian, who creeps around the corners of Berlin society quietly judging the participants need not actively attempt to alienate himself because he is already a relic or better a ghost haunting brothels and nightclubs behind the veil of another time. He exists in another temporal dimension and whispers a morality that is outdated and, more importantly, out of place. In the end of the novel a river, the archaic version of the constant flow of traffic around Potsdamer Platz, swallows Jakub as he tries to rescue a little boy. Fabian is caught up in the current while attempting to reclaim a subject of future potential from the rushing stream – the onslaught of the modern.

Irmgard Keun in her 1932 novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* plays with the gender of the city walker by presenting the reader with a female flâneur and the unique experience of the single woman in the bustling world of Weimar Berlin. The projection of a woman into this traditionally male role carries with it all of the scandalous associations conjured by women and the street: the feminine and the public, the female body and commerce. The woman on the street is without a fixed

destination or destiny and escapes the preordained future of household and husband.[50]

The image of the Berlin walker par excellence—consuming and consumed,

pedestrian and traffic—is a woman.

The novel presents the reader with the rise and fall of a young woman with a

dowdy name (Doris) and glamorous ambitions. Doris's character embodies both the

flâneur—a holdover from aristocratic ideals of leisure, originality, and imagination—

and a modern and urban version of the hero of the German novel of bourgeois

formation, the *Bildungsroman*. The novel is written in the epistolary form as Doris

narrates her story through her notebook: a former office typist steals a fur and escapes

her small town to pursue her dream to become "*ein Glanz*"[51] in Berlin. The

experience she conveys is fractured into short vignettes, and it is as ephemeral as the

brilliance and glamour Doris wants to embody.

Keun's heroine moves nomadically through the city using sex to further her

goal of occupying a position of pure image: light and glamour and the absence of

work. Her dérive through the city rejects the urban environment as a place of labor

and commerce.[52] It is also a rejection of the stable and the corporeal. Her emphasis on

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[50] Doris, the protagonist is offered a version of this destiny at the end of the novel. For more on women in Weimar culture see Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and "New Objectivity,"* 1. ed (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001). Chapter 6 of McCormick addresses Keun's novel explicitly.

[51] The translation for this is unclear. A direct translation would be "a brilliance" or "a shine," and the simplest translation would be "a star" as von Ankum does in her 2002 translation; however, the later misses the emphasis on the visual and ephemeral sense of the way it is used in the text.

[52] For more on labor and commodification of women in Weimar culture and in *The Artificial Silk Girl* especially see Katharina von Ankum, "Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun's Das Kunstseidene Mädchen," in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum, Weimar and Now 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 162–84.

"*Glanz*" and image is an insistence on the superficial and fleeting. This extends to her nomadic progress through the city as she drifts from shelter to shelter insisting on anything other than steady or respectable work. Her writing responds to this visual epistemology.

Doris refuses to call her small notebook, which she has covered in paper doves, a journal, a genre that she find distasteful presumably because of its confessional nature and private audience. This genre would be "silly for a girl of eighteen who is a bit fashionable."[53] Private confession is replaced with "writing like a film" (*schreiben wie Film*). Doris sees and represents her life through the medium of the screen because representation, it seems, begets reality: "I want to write like a film, because my life is like one and will be more like one."[54] For Doris, inundated with the culturally, socially, and technologically new, simile (wie) and facsimile (artificial silk) overtake and enhance (*mehr so*) reality.

Doris's experience of the city reflects the fractured experience of Weimar era Berlin. Her way of seeing, an amalgam of media inspired images, embodies the dreams of society that Kracauer claims are built into the spaces of everyday urban life. Doris fully engages a world of surfaces and refuses the interior, here presumably, the introspective journal, but also interpretation: she reads the social hieroglyphs that

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[53] "lächerlich für ein Mädchen von achtzehn und auch sonst auf der Höhe." Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, ed. Jörg Ulrich Meyer-Bothling, Editionen für den Literaturunterricht (Leipzig: Klett Schulbuchverl, 2007), 4.

[54] "[I]ch will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein." Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*.(ibd.)

constitute Berlin's flashy nightlife but shies away from reading into them. Instead she lets them wash over her in all of their silky cinematic levity.

The reader's initial expectation of the journal as a genre would suggest that it will allow access to a certain level of intimacy with the character—interiority and confidence; however, it is unclear whether Doris is capable of depth, even in her own self-perception. Her self-image is one of surface. Doris fully identifies with the fur coat that she allows to seduce her and send her on a journey of self-imposed exile to the city. The fur offers her a new skin for which she exchanges all aspects of her old life. Even in her writing Doris poses herself for the potential reader/voyeur and conceives of space as stage, lighting, and mood: "And now I am sitting in my room in my nightgown that has slipped to reveal my shoulder, and everything about me is first class—only my left leg is thicker than my right. But barely. It is very cold, but it is more beautiful in my nightgown—otherwise I would put on my coat."[55]

Doris shifts between modes of self-understanding and representation: she moves awkwardly between surface and body, from image and imagination to the frank discussion of her corporeal existence, which is slightly asymmetrical.[56] She even endures a chill for the sake of the image, and it is unclear whether she creates this still for an imagined camera lens or for us, the reader, who in any case does not require her actual experience of the cold in order for her to compose the scene for us.

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[55] "Und jetzt sitze ich in meinem Zimmer im Nachthemd, das mir über meine anerkannte Schulter gerutscht ist, und alles ist erstklassig an mir—nur mein linkes Bein ist dicker als mein rechtes. Aber kaum. Es ist sehr kalt, aber im Nachthemd ist schöner—sonst würde ich den Mantel anziehn." Ibid.

[56] Her lamentable thick leg.

Here Doris's "writing like film" presents itself as incompatible genres. She is drawn to writing because it makes her appear more interesting. She imagines the effect her sitting smartly dressed and writing in her dove-covered journal must make on others in a café that she frequents. Writing about the image as she performs it: "that I now begin to write in my journal without a doubt makes for a very interesting impression."[57] She writes because she has no access to film or photography to "see herself in pictures." She instead substitutes *writing* like a film in order to project herself onto the page: "when I read it later, it is all like a movie—I see myself in pictures."[58] Her exposer to film and her desire for image has affected both Doris's approach to reading and her approach writing. Doris embodies the "technification of literary production" that Brecht describes in *The Three-Penny Trial: A Sociological Experiment* (1931): "The film viewer reads stories differently. But the person who writes stories is for his part also a film viewer."[59] This desire to document her life in images is the impetus for her writing, and the attempt to merge these two incompatible modes of representation reproduces the resistance she enacts on the street.

Films, according to Kracauer, are the "daydreams of society," and producers have a vested interest in maintaining the optimistic daydreams of the lower classes or

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[57] "dass ich jetzt anfange, in mein Taubenbuch zu schreiben, macht ohne allen Zweifel einen sehr interessanten Eindruck" Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, 7.

[58] "und wenn ich später lese, ist alles wie Kino - ich sehe mich in Bildern" Ibid., 4.

[59] Bertolt Brecht, "From The Three Penny Trial: A Sociological Experiment," in *German Essays on Film*, ed. Richard W. McCormick and Alison Guenther-Pal, trans. Lance W. Garmer (New York: Continuum, 2004), 113.

distracting them from injustice with romance and tragedy.[60] Doris has adopted these

daydreams, but she has also adopted the means of creating them. Doris eschews the

limitations and requirements of representational forms and imagines new possibilities,

but also displays a fundamental ignorance to the means of their manipulation.

Whereas in film a woman could not claim to be in a nightgown while she is in fact

wrapped in her street jacket, in literature no visual reality must match the images

conjured by the words on the page. Similarly, while film would mercilessly capture

inconsistent the width of her legs, it would not necessarily express her experience of

the cold. When she imagines herself as if she was watched in her bedroom, it is more

than an erasure of private space. It is a desire to be seen even if the realization of her

Technicolor dreams would entail a significant loss of authorial control. Doris exposes

the transformation of the horizons of not only her imagination but also her self-

perception through the technology of the camera lens.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Benjamin hails the

new possibilities of seeing provided by film. Architecture also holds a special place in

Benjamin's landscape of perception as the "prototype of a work of art the reception of

which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction."[61] For Doris, film

does provide a new mode of perception, but as we see in her conflation of the literary

and the filmic modes, this new way of seeing offers little more to the individual than

a new set of references for social and self-perception.

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[60] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 295.

[61] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 239.

Through Doris's hybrid text we see Berlin's storefronts, stages, bars and movie theaters become the façades upon which Doris projects her filmic vision. Franz Hessel in *Spazieren in Berlin*, produces a narrator that is more self-conscious in his engagement with the act of *flanieren* and presents a world that is as fast moving and superficial as Doris's but construes this dynamic, visual and corporeal experience of the city as textual: "City walking [*Flanieren*] is a kind of reading the street, where people's faces, displays, shop windows, Café Terraces, trains, cars, trees become letters in their own right, that together produce the words, sentences, and pages of a book that is always new."[62] This brings us back to the terms that formed the spatial hieroglyphs of Kracauer's analysis and the structure of Hugo's primitive architectural alphabet. Hessel is at home in the facades of the streets he explores, and here not just shop windows and buildings but also people's faces are integrated into the artifacts of the street that it is the flâneur's occupation to examine. The flâneur becomes the ideal reader of the city-text.

In *Ein Flaneur in Berlin* (A Flaneur in Berlin)[63] Franz Hessel comes very close to presenting the type of image-text that Keun presents through the Doris. His explicit goal is to write a picture book in words (*ein Bilderbuch in Worten*), and like Doris, his intimate exploration of the city is outside of the norms of speed, efficiency,

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[62] "*Flanieren* ist eine Art Lektüre der Straße, wobei Menschengesichter, Auslagen, Schaufenster, Café-Terrassen, Bahnen, Autos, Bäume zu lauter gleichberechtigten Buchstaben werden, die zusammen Worte, Sätze und Seiten eines immer neuen Buches ergeben" Franz Hessel, *Ein Flaneur in Berlin* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1984), 145.

[63] The text has been newly published under the title *Spazieren in Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010).

and business. In Hessel's writing the flâneur has, in some ways, maintained his ability

to remain outside of the commercial operation of the modern city. Hessel manages

this through his speed, or lack of it. Hessel writes:

> Slowly walking down a busy street is a special pleasure. You will be overwhelmed by the hurry of the others, it is a bath in breaking waves. But my dear fellow Berliners don't make it easy, even when you try to cleverly try to cleverly dodge them. I always receive suspicious looks, when I try to wander [*flanieren*] between the bustlers [*Geschäftigen*]. I think that they must take me for a pickpocket.[64]

Resisting the efficiency and consumerism of the modern city amounts to resisting the

enforced urban tempo. While Benjamin's flâneur was free to meander through the

streets carried by the secret ebbs and flows of the city's past and future, the city that

Hessel finds himself in is hostile to the careful pace of analysis. His attempt to

explore the street at a leisurely pace is pummeled by waves that push towards future

goals, and his movement is likened to a crime and to theft. The increasing immediacy

of the experience is stated thusly: "Here you must have to, otherwise you shouldn't.

Here you don't go where, but where to."[65] The aimlessness of Hessel's movement is

what renders it antithetical to the logic of the streets. These streets are now not meant

to be read but to be followed and obeyed. The flow that they suggest is not the ripples

of the past, but an intentional path oriented to the future.

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[64] "Langsam durch belebte Straßen zu gehen, is ein besonderes Vergnügen. Man wird überspielt von der Eile der anderen, es ist ein Bad in der Brandung. Aber meine lieben Berliner Mitbürger machen einem das nicht leicht, wenn man ihnen auch noch so geschickt ausbiegt. Ich bekomme immer misstrauische Blicke ab, wenn ich versuche, zwischen den Geschäftigen zu flanieren. Ich glaube, man hält mich für einen Taschendieb" Ibid.

[65] "Hierzulande muß man müssen, sonst darf man nicht. Hier geht man nicht wo, sondern wohin" Ibid., 32.

This interaction between the individual body moving through the city and finding familiarity and seduction in its façades that is evident in the novels of the Weimar period is in contrast to the themes that emerge from the writing of reunified Berlin in the post-communist era. These more recent novels retain the elements of seduction present in Kästner, Keun, and Hessel but replace the focus on the individual response to the urban environment with a reversal of signification: individual experience is mapped onto the space of the city. Whereas Doris is seduced by the exterior offered by Berlin's clubs and storefronts, the novels of Tanja Dückers, Inka Parei, and Thomas Brussig enact the trauma of division and reunification onto the body of the individual creating a mimetic relationship between the two and an intimacy between the city and the individual that is played out in human relationships.

Tanja Dücker's *Spielzone* describes the exotic and erotic treatment of Berlin's eastern districts after the fall of the wall. The spaces that exist in the scar between East and West are the playzones (*Spielzone*) in which characters feel they can explore themselves, their sexuality, and the city. *Spielzone* moves between characters in districts on either side of the city. In one scene that is indicative of the way these East Berlin spaces are perceived by West Berliners, the character Katherina, who has just moved to Prenzlauerberg from West Berlin, contemplates her new apartment and the possibilities it represents for her:

> It appealed to us so much: the white walls, the boxes, nothing except my bed
> and the prospect of how it could be here. Inside the still unfinished apartment
> and outside the new city. …The East was always suspicious to me before the
> fall, history lessons at school, and behind the curtain of my repressed
> memories, but now Sunnenburger, Schönhauser, Kastanienallee, was all a

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wonderful gray zone, no longer east, no longer west, just right for testing yourself.[66]

By creating a parallel between her unfinished move, the blank walls of her private apartment and her lack of furnishings, and the "newness" of the city, Katherina blends public and private space. The statement also elides personal trauma (signaled by repression) and the historical trauma of division and reunification. For Keun's Doris, sex and sexuality were a means of mobility in 1920s Berlin—it allowed her to move through and explore the city. This is reversed in *Spielzone*, where Berlin spaces make it possible to explore sexuality. These destinations are spaces perceived as "gray zones," and are presumed to be blank slates that can allow for self-discovery.[67]

In Inka Parei's *Die Schattenboxerin* the protagonist, Hell, is in the process of recovering from the trauma of a rape that occurred in the spring of 1989 before the confusion that surrounded the fall of the wall. The character at the center of the novel exists as one of a pair: herself and the woman who lives across the hall and has disappeared just before we enter the narrative. Their names are complimentary (light and dark: *Hell* and *Dunkel*) and so are their lives. Hell's lifestyle is independent, strong, and driven by a single goal—revenge against her assaulter. We never access Hell's past or background except that she is eligible for the orphan's benefit. Her

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[66] "Es gefiel uns gut so, 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. ... Der Osten war mir ja vor der Wende immer sehr suspekt, Geschichtsunterricht in der Schule, hinter dem Vorhang meiner verdrängten Erinnerungen, aber jetzt, die Sonnenburger, die Schönhauser, die Kastanienallee, eine wunderbare Grauzone, nicht mehr Oste, noch nicht Westen, genau richtig, um sich selber auszutesten" Tanja Dückers, *Spielzone: Roman*, 3. Aufl, Aufbau Taschenbuch 1694 (Berlin: Aufbau-Taschenbuch-Verl, 2002), 107.

[67] Katharina Gerstenberger, "Play Zones: The Erotics of the New Berlin," *The German Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 262.

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flashbacks only go as far back as the moments since and leading up to her assault.

Dunkel, her absent counterpart, who we know through Hell's exploration of her room and diary, is untidy, romantic, and her room is full of keepsakes from her childhood. In the end of the novel Hell and Dunkel are reunited, and Hell is finally able to move past the horizon of revenge and begin to recover on a psychological rather than purely physical dimension.

The rape occurs on the Westside of Berlin in a shed at the abandoned Görlitzer Bahnhof. Hell separates her life before the rape completely from her current self post-trauma. In a recollection of the day of her rape the narrator says,

> I am back in the old, now completely unreal life on the western axis of the city. Still I know nothing else. Still I get the impression that this life was an illusion, risky and careless. Lived at the expense of the present for which some days I can muster no power.[68]

Her life is split between her life before the rape on the West side of Berlin and her life post-trauma on the East side of Berlin: her knowledge of the city, limited to the West, is equated to her naivety—a life oblivious to sexual violation and separated from the East. Her violation does not coincide with the fall of the wall, but it is equated with it. The Görlitzer Bahnhof, where it takes place, is a chaotic haven for the fringes of society, a train station rendered defunct: "Cut off by the wall the traintracks lost their meaning for decades, and they fell into desert and steppe."[69] The present of the

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[68] "Ich bin wieder im alten, jetzt völlig unwirklichen Leben an der westlichen Achse der Stadt. Noch kenne ich nichts anderes. Noch fehlt mir der Eindruck, daß dieses Leben eine Täuschung war, riskant und sorglos. Gelebt auf Kosten des heutigen, für das ich an manchen Tagen kaum Kraft aufbringe"

[69] Gekappt durch die Mauer hat der Schienenstrang seit Jahrzehnten seinen Sinn verloren, befindet sich im Rückfall zu Wüste und Steppe" Inka Parei, *Die Schattenboxerin: Roman*, 3. Aufl, Fischer-

narrative takes place after the rape and after the fall of the wall, when the protagonist has already taken up residence "off the grid" in an abandoned apartment building in the East.

The reader is given every indication that Hell and Dunkel are two halves of one whole. Besides the connection provided through their names Dark and Light, Hell resembles her missing neighbor. "You look like her" (*Du siehst ihr ähnlich*) states Dunkel's childhood lover and Hell's only romantic partner during the course of the novel.[70] Their apartments are mirror images of one another, and while Hell is a squatter from the West in this dilapidated, East-Berlin apartment block, Dunkel is its "last official resident" (*letzte offizielle Bewohnerin*). There are two women, one dark, one light, one official, one "unknown and unregistered by any administration" (*von keiner Verwaltung gekannt oder registriert*).[71] Dunkel comes to represent the part of Hell that was compartmentalized after the rape – she is the weaker, more reckless girl, susceptible to romance, that Hell rejected for self-preservation. However, in her search for Dunkel, Hell shares Dunkel's lover, confronts her rape, and in the end of the novel, when the two are reunited, it appears that Hell's self-imposed exile also comes to an end.

This trauma, recovery, and reunification are mapped spatially on the city. Hell perceives the unified city, especially the seam that runs through the city's center as

Taschenbücher Die Frau in der Gesellschaft 14869 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl, 2003), 16.

[70] Ibid., 31.

[71] Ibid., 9.

alienating: "Some days I walk like a stranger through the city in which I was born."[72]

She finds the Friedrichstraße train station, whose architecture she describes as torn

apart and patched together (*aufgerissener und wieder zussamengeflickter*), an

indecipherable mixture of symbols from the socialist past and the city's new future, a

jungle of symbols (*Dschungel aus Symbolen und Beschriftungen*) that has sprung out

of the combination of two mutually exclusive systems (*gegenseitig ausschließenden*

Gesellschaftsszstemen).

In the clash of signs that are either too late and lead to parts of the building

that no longer exist—like the signs for the now unnecessary *Intershop*: a store where

items from the West could be purchased for foreign currency—or are too early—like

the label that should have led to an elevator but only took her to an open elevator

shaft under construction—Hell is not able to find an exit or legible sign and

eventually leaves after the place exhausted by the incompatible flooring, tile, and

escalators.[73]

The search for Dunkel, or her absence throughout most of the novel, reflect

one response to trauma – the shedding of memory and a lost relationship to the past

(nostalgia, or the impossibility of it) and recovery is the recovery of this ability. The

violation is intimately connected with the fall of the wall, but the divide between East

and West is peculiarly left out of the direct discussion of the novel. The reader gets

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[72] "An manchen Tagen laufe ich durch die Stadt, in der ich geboren bin, wie eine Fremde."

[73] "Nach langem Irrlauf verlasse ich den Ort, aufgerieben an zueinander unpassenden Kachel-, Boden- und Rolltreppenarten" Parei, *Die Schattenboxerin*, 76.

references to locations but not binary references to "on which side" those locations fall.

Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir* (1995, *Heroes Like Us*) and *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (1999, *On the short end of the Sonnenallee*) take a very different tone from either Parai's novel of violation and trauma or Dückers' flat characters and hypersexual themes. Both novels take place in East Berlin before the fall of the wall and end with its fall or shortly thereafter. The texts describe the relationship of a young man to the space and politics of Berlin as adolescent repression and exploration. Although Parei and Dückers both also focus on the sexual experience of young people in their journeys of development in the city, Brussig's tongue in cheek satirical tone cuts right through any quasi-nostalgic impulse to occupy a gray zone between East and West that is full of potentiality or to undergo an emotional journey toward recovery.

In *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee,* the main character Michael Kuppisch's (Micha) horizons are defined by the wall and what it has cut off. Sonnenallee, a street 40 kilometers long, was intersected by the wall leaving a small, insignificant 60-meter strip just big enough for a few small apartments and a collective feeling of incongruity and missed opportunity. It is on this short end of the street that Micha lives, confronted every day by the arbitrary cartographic decision that have had such large consequences for his young life. The wall incessantly interjects into Micha's teenage experience enacting its own version of state surveillance: first love letters fly into the death zone unread as if swept away by the censor and daily taunts come not

from Micha's schoolmates but from curious West Berliners on the observation deck on the other side of the wall, and this is in addition to the guards and patrols of the official state. Brussig's character is obsessed with the horizon just across the wall and the missed experiences that it represents.

In *Helden wie Wir* (1995, *Heroes Like Us*) the main character Klaus Uhltzscht grows up not overshadowed by the wall but across the street from the Stasi Headquarters. Its proximity results in the parental policing of the private domestic space, and Klaus's own sexual expression and fulfillment. The overflowing of this urge, the story playfully suggests, is what leads to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The novel represents the content of a record composed by the hero/narrator for Mr. Kitzelstein, a reporter, explaining how it came about that he brought down the Berlin Wall. Klaus, himself a member of the Stasi, is full of repressed sexual urges built up from his restrictive childhood. Klaus believes that he brought down the Berlin Wall when he exposed himself at an opportune moment, full of pride at the sudden growth in the size of his male member, to a guard. What Brussig's novel adds besides a more outrageous and obsessive approach to sexuality and Berlin, is an explicit connection of sexual life and public political life.[74]

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[74] Brad Prager, "The Erection of the Berlin Wall: Thomas Brussig's 'Helden Wie Wir' and the End of East Germany," *The Modern Language Review* 99, no. 4 (October 2004): 983–98.

Conclusion

> "Berlin is stumbling into an almost too precipitous future. The euphoria of beginning is overshadowed by the feeling of being late… the fear of making mistakes, fear of taking risks, fear of loss of identity…" – Axel Schultes[75]

In Berlin as the incongruent temporalities of the two halves of the city were exposed, the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* of unification tempered the euphoria of a new national beginning. The mismatched architecture of prefabricated East and *Internationale Bauausstellung* (IBA) West, like the incongruent tiles in the subway that Hell abandons, were mutually unintelligible. Reunification was not immediately followed by the construction and design of a new state: a new map, a new public, a new cultural and architectural language for "being" together, but rather by demolition: the physical tearing down of the wall and many of the "backward" buildings of East Berlin regardless of their significance to public memory.

Parei's character, Hell, represents one of the many that left the West to take up residence in the various squats, partially abandoned buildings, and run down quarters that existed for a short while during the limbo created by porous borders and indefinite regulations. The Moloch of renovation and resale eventually consumed her building, like it did many others, as Berlin regained its dashing tempo.

Walser and Hessel's approach to the fast moving streets of Berlin in the early decades of the 20th century is one of intimate understanding. Walser watches his

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[75] Qtd in H. Geisert, "Introduction," in *Berlin*, ed. Alan Balfour, World Cities (New York: Ernst & Sohn, 1995), 33.

languid giantess dress and stretch in the early morning. He knows her veins and limbs, her movements and sounds. Even Hessel, who must push through the rushing crowd, practices an art of reading that allows him to translate the city into words and the words back into pictures.[76] Doris might even be said to achieve the closest relationship to the city, as she goes beyond being "at home" in the facades, lights, and shop window worlds of the arcades. She internalizes them.

The literature of the city post-unification substitutes this intimacy with the streets of Berlin for sexual conquest, exploration, and exposure at the sites of Berlin's urban fissures.[77] In these spaces of potential, the characters address their individual traumas, which can also be interpreted as products of the city's division. Tanja Dückers' characters seek an escape form the isolated and stolid world of Neukölln by exploring sexuality, gender, and free love in the new spaces opened up by reunification. Parei's Hell resists physical intimacy but attempts to map the violation of her rape, which occurred in the wasteland space created by the severed railroad, onto the map of Berlin and the fissure of the division. While Brussig's Klaus suffers from neuroses induced by parental (and state) surveillance resulting in sexual repression and inadequacy only to overcome it at the very moment the wall appears to be breached.

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[76] "ein Bilderbuch in Worten"

[77] See also Peter Schneider, *Eduards Heimkehr*, 2nd ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verl, 2005). Peter Schneider's novel highlights the fraught politics of development in East Berlin and features an intimate encounter at the Potsdamer Platz construction site.

II. PRAGUE

> Metamorphosis expresses a labile world of flux and transformation,
> encountered through story. … Metamorphosis goes from an entity that
> is one thing to an entity that is another. It is essentially narrative. [1]

The city of Prague and its attendant narratives – national, fictional, and mythical –
weave a coherent and extended example of self-making. This chapter will focus, like
the ones on Berlin and Gdańsk, on understanding the city as a site of memory that is
both written and read. The particular focus will be the importance of the city in
navigating territory and identity, which can be recast as the relationship between
narrative and space. In Berlin, Prague, and Gdańsk I trace the narrative tropes that
cling to the practice of memory in public and literary space. In Berlin this process
took the form projects of construction. In Prague this process takes on the trope of
metamorphosis and its figurative counterpart, metaphor.

As a city that has been the center of the Czech Reformation and Counter
Reformation, the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, the object of Nazi occupation, a
part of the Eastern Block, the heart of the Prague Spring, the site of one of the largest
tank invasions since World War II, and the locus of the velvet revolution. Prague's
identity and its history have undergone a number of shifts and retellings. A city need
not have such a fragmented history in order to become the object of *fabula* and
syuzhet, but Prague's particular placement in the constellation of the struggle between
religious, secular, and national ideology has resulted in a national, urban narrative
that has evolved unique tools for surviving without resorting to demolition,

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[1] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books, 2001), 29–30.

anachronistic nostalgia, or incoherence. The magic and legend that dominate the

discourse on Prague are accidents of history as well as a mode of storytelling that turn

traumatic shifts and breaks into an organic narrative: magic and surrealism naturalize

the way the city and its citizens have navigated the shifts in power and history. This

mode of reading and writing Prague's place within history has been more than

figurative. The tropes of transformation adopted in these narratives have allowed for

continued belief in a coherent national narrative even under occupation and changing

political and religious systems.

The spell of Prague's old magic has long been a part of the city's cultural

imaginary. Whether the magic is perceived from within or without, the city continues

to inspire fantastic stories about the true or second lives of its twisting alleys. This

magical quality has been and continues to be propagated by various agents of history,

literature, popular culture, and marketing. Tourist brochures and academic

scholarship find common ground in Prague, where the city is pitched terms of its

magical and alchemical past. This is usually done with particular attention to the

eccentricities of Kafka or Rudolf II, the legend of the Prague Golem, or the

mysterious witches whose daemons litter the Havelské Tržiště and film.

Far from the void of history encountered in Berlin, Prague exists in a

confluence of history. Just as one familiar with the streets of Prague can maneuver

through the narrow avenues without relying on the ever changing street signs to find

their way to main concourses and squares – places of gathering, assemblage, and

memory – the narrative of magic and metamorphosis allows for the explanation and

navigation of historical swerves. In a city of potentially clashing historical and national symbols, languages, and architecture metamorphosis provides a medium for the joining of incongruent parts and holds together a narrative frame for what would otherwise be an indecipherable din.[2]

This chapter will focus on metaphor and metamorphosis as modes of narrating the relationship between past and present in Prague. I argue that the city's alchemic magic, or what has been described as such, should be read as a trace of these narrative tools rather than an exotic historical artifact. Unlike Berlin, which responds to change with narratives of demolition and projects of construction, Prague weaves a narrative that allows alternative temporal signifiers to exist simultaneously without the aid of concrete breaks in the physical landscape.

Metaphor and the process of metamorphosis will be discussed in multiple contexts. The chapter will begin with the poetry of Vítězslav Nezval in the interwar period. In Nezval's introduction to *Most* as well as in his poetry, Prague opens up as a poetic stage that gains inspiration from both cosmopolitan and provincial muses through the conjuring magic of names. Nezval's texts create space for a discussion of the relationship between language and reality within the literary history of Prague. Nezval's figure of the Prague Walker recalls Benjamin's flâneur as the chapter moves from versions of the Prague Walker in Nezval and Apollinaire to Alexandr Hackenschmied's "An Aimless Walk." The city walker treads the double ground of

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[2] The city is rife with competing remnants of the reformation and counter reformation, German and Czech identity, re-appropriated monuments, and the varying architectural styles from Romanesque to cubism.

past and present in these texts, occupying multiple planes of history, and highlighting the telescopic time that is experienced on Prague's streets. The flâneur, himself a figure of transition, navigates the city's multiple and concrete layers of signification.

The chapter moves from the literature of the interwar period to the literature of the post-communist era to explore the way texts maneuver within the city in order to negotiate the traumas of the past in a moment of apparent Czech freedom and independence. These authors are engaging with the symbolic weight of the capital city (both its heft as an idea and its material artifacts: monuments, subways, statues) in these moments as well as the historically significant role of the author as guardian of the national spirit.

The ways that the authors of the early 1900s navigate space and time in the city offers insight into the way Prague's younger generation deal with the simultaneous presence of modern and magical narratives. Daniela Hodrová's narrator in *Město vidím…* (*Prague, I See a City …*) encounters the city as one that is composed of both a real and a dream world and self-consciously integrates the myths of the city into her own self-understanding. She experiences the city as a stage of history. Michal Ajvaz in *The Other City* (*Druhé Město*) and Jáchym Topol in his novel *City Sister Silver* (*Sestra*) and novella "*Výlet k nádražní hale*" depict Prague as consisting of two dimensions: the historical real and an alternative underground, which doubles as a mystical underworld. Here, the underground emerges as an alternative space, where the dictates of reality (and of official culture) are morphed in an admixture of myth and exploded time.

I suggest that these narratives of transformation and magic have been embraced in Prague because they play around the edges of identity. The dual narrative function of transitional figures like the flâneur, the metamorphic content of Prague's popular legends, and the city's ability to transform under the exigencies of history explain the resilience of this trope, as the Czech people found themselves historically caught between the responsibilities of tradition and the pressures of occupation and assimilation.[3]

This chapter will finally ground its analysis with a reading of Prague's monuments, streets, and architecture – particularly the construction of the National Museum and the renovations made to the Prague Castle.

Prague in the Service of Poetry and Provincialism

> "Prague, when human hearts tremble at the word Paris why is your name pronounced, most mysterious of cities, with jeering lips or with boastful chatter! It is because every Parisian stone is marked with the kiss of adventure, which is within the power of the poets, and because under the roofs of Prague the vivacious bitch of banality and provincialism disfigures without reservation. And yet, I have always felt, despite the regrettable garrulity of Father Kondelík[4] who meddles everywhere, that just you, hundred-spired city still steeped half in old

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[3] For an examination of spatial representations of the tension between assimilation and Jewish identity and mysticism in Prague, see Erica Smeltzer, "The Metropolis and the Attic: Spatial Representations of Jewish Identity in Kafka and the Golem of Prague," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 14, no. 2 (June 2016): 343–60.

[4] A character from Ignat Herrmann's novel *Otec Kondelík a ženich Vejvara: drobné příběhy ze života spořádané pražské rodiny* (Prague: F. Topič, 1899). (*Father Kondelík and the groom Vejvara: Small stories from the life of a respectable Prague family*) and the film of the same name directed by M. J. Krňanský and released in 1937, the year this edition of *Most* was published. Kondelík snugly fits the Czech and middleclass stereotypes: his horizons are limited and his careful peace is easily disturbed. Dagmar Mocná in *Případ Kondelík* identifies Herrmann's character as an archetype of the Czech everyday.

legend and slipping on before our eyes a magic garment woven from
this spring's lights, are able to give to the services of the poetry we
love all of your old magic and youthful uncertainty. So I taught myself
to love, to call your bridges and streets by their true names, so that I
could awake in them something of the properties of an incantation. My
subjective life, yearning endlessly for enchantment, attempted to make
you into a stage for my desire and a great lexicon, which would
articulate the color of our days, the color of our delirious love, of our
passions."[5]

These lines are from the foreword to Nezval's collection of poems, *Most.* Here

Nezval is specifically reflecting upon his poem "Praha s prsty deště" (Prague with

Fingers of Rain), which he describes as: "A rumination on everything that creates in

my spirit, in my memory, in my feelings and dreams the emotional appearance of

Prague."[6] Prague is the stage upon which the Czech Nation is imagined and enacted.

Nezval, as Daniela Hodrová will do later, describes the city as a place where one can

simultaneously witness history, legend, and the drama of the current generation

unfold on the bridges and in the streets. The incantations that articulate these

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[5] "Když se při slově Paříž zachvívají lidská srdce, proč bývá vyslovováno tvé jméno, Praho, tajemnější
než všecka města, s uštěpačnými rty anebo s chvástavou žvanivostí! To proto, že každý pařížský
kámen je poznamenán polibkem dobrodružství, které je v moci básníků - a že pod pražskými střechami
je zohyzdila bez rozpaků čiperná fena banality a maloměšťáctví. A přece, vždycky jsem cítil, že přes
politováníhodnou žvanivost tchána Kondelíka, jenž se tlačí všude, právě ty, stověžaté město, potopené
dosud napolo v staré legendě a navlékající si před našima očima magický, ze světel letošního jara
upředený šat, jsi schopno dát do služeb poesie, kterou milujeme, všecku svou starou magičnost i
mladou nejistotu. Tak jsem se tě naučil milovat, nazývat tvé mosty a ulic jejich pravými jmény, abych
v nich probudil něco z vlastností zaklinadla. Můj subjectivní život, prahnoucí bez konce po uchvácení,
pokusil se tě učinit jevištěm své touhy a velikým slovníkem, který by vyjádřil barvu našich dní, barvu
našich blouznivých lásek, našich tužeb" Vítězslav Nezval, Karel Teige, and František Muzika, *Most*
(Praha: Fr. Borový, 1937), 54.
[6] "Soustředění na vše, co tvoří v mém duchu, v mé vzpomínce, v mých pocitech a snech emocionální
podobu Prahy" Ibid.

historical tableaux are the stories, literatures, and myths that are so much a part of the experience of the physical city and the imagined community.[7]

The tension between German and Czech communities in Prague, which peaked as a national struggle in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth century, was also a linguistic struggle between the Czech vernacular and the Emperor's German.[8] Nezval, who was born at the turn of the century, would have been quite familiar with the history of the floundering of the Czech language under Austrian rule. The "true names" of Prague's bridges and streets are, among other things, references to the very language in which these names are spoken--having at one time existed in tandem with their German counterparts. The two references—magic and the linguistic history of Prague--are not mutually exclusive: the name *Karlův most* certainly conjures a different narrative than *Karlsbrücke*.

In addition to being beautiful in its own right, this brief section when quoted in its entirety refers to the tangles that catch and tie Prague's seductive and marketable magic to provincialism and the folk tradition. Nezval embodies this provincial character in his reference to the corpulent corpus of Father Kondelík, a

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[7] These myths and legend become popularized through forged national artifacts such as Václav Hanka's "discovery" of the epic fragments *Rukopis královédvorský* and *Rukopis zelenohorský* and print anthologies of collected folk talesas we will see in the case of Alois Jirásek's *Staré pověsti české.* These artifacts manufactured and propagated and legitimated a Czech national history and identity even when there was no political reality.

[8] We can extend this back in popular memory as far as Jan Hus, who was burned at the stake for Heresy in 1415. The myth of Hus highlights his belief that liturgy should be given to the laity in the vernacular Czech rather than Latin. There were, of course, earlier proponents of the Czech liturgy; however, these are not part of the popular narrative of the Czech Reformation. Although every good Czech (or tourist) associates Bethlehem Chapel with Jan Hus, it was actually founded by wealthy members of the Czech branch of *Devotio Moderna.* It was Hus, though, who secured permission to use Bethlehem for holding regular Masses in addition to the sermons.

character from popular novels and film whose practical and respectable small town manners and worldview clash with the spirit of the modern day and life in the city. Nezval describes the unique beauty of Prague as its ability to be a product of the youthful spring of Czech poetry and the lively and transformative kitsch of traditional provincialism. Nezval places Prague in the midst of the process of making ugly by means of the old and donning the beautiful and new: it is old and uncertain, kitsch and mystery. The effect of mixing old and new is not all "regrettable" (*politovánihodný*); the poets are able to take up the legacy of "old magic" in service of the articulation of the present situation. Nezval conjures Prague as a muse in the service of poetry alongside Paris and juxtaposed to it–perhaps not only by means of this ugly banality but certainly not fully extricable from it.[9]

These lines highlight the rifts in time and aesthetic between rural and urban spaces in Bohemia, and they emphasize the power of names and naming in Prague.[10] In any city that has undergone drastic political change names have an especially poignant significance; the names of streets, theaters, squares, and parks reflect the new historical territory of the regime. Thus, the "true names of the streets and

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[9] There is much to say about the connection between Prague and Paris in Nezval's generation of artists. Many of the great Czech artists visited or lived in Paris including Toyen (Marie Čermínová), Alphons Mucha, and Karel Čapek. In return, Parisia artists visited Prague resulting in extensive cooperation and influencein both directions. These artists and thinkers include André Breton, Le Corbusier, and Apollinaire. For an exploration of the Prague-Paris connection with particular emphasis on the cities' influence on surrealism, see Chapter 8, "The Gold of Time," of Derek Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). For a general overview of foreign influences on Prague art and literature with an emphasis on Paris, see chapter 5, "Prague Modern, 1900-1948" of Richard Burton, *Prague: A Cultural and Literary History* (Signal Books, 2003).

[10] Addressing Prague directly using the vocative case, "Praho."

bridges" brings together the conjuring effect of the true name of god and the national historis implied in the past,[11] present and future names of Prague's streets and bridges, which in 1930 had already undergone many transformations.

The magic of a name is a familiar concept that stretches back to the realm of fairytales, Kabbalah, Socrates, and sorcery.[12] It also reaches forward to postmodern thinking and semiotics. The dimension that brings this ephemeral realm together with the concrete, or here stone, world is the poetic. Nezval claims that in Paris the poets attribute a sense of adventure to each stone, but in Prague the mixture of provincialism and cosmopolitan life constitutes the vocabulary with which the poet will enunciate the life of the national subject, or the subjective life (*subjectivní život*).

When Nezval calls upon the true names of the bridges and streets, he is metaphorically conjuring the spectres of national identity, the Czech language, and power. The power of naming for the Czech poet brings to life these multiple dimensions of the city. Like the already famous legend of Rabbi Löw who brought the clay golem to life in the service and defense of his people by placing the true name of God in the golem's mouth, the poet calls the streets and bridges by their true names bringing to life their multiple historical presences and memories. The "kiss" of Prague's poets is not the French kiss of adventure as in the romantic cityscape of Paris, but a love for and knowledge of Prague's cityscape and the true names of its objects.

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[11] According to legend the true name of god is used by Rabbi Loew of Prague to animate the golem.

[12] Plato's Cratylus is an example of this ancient obsession with names. Socrates considers whether names are "conventional" or "natural." Gematria

Nezval's Prague provides the terms by which the author constructs an understanding of his own experience. This understanding requires navigation of a process of learning (and learning to love) that leads him to the true name or identity of structures within the city. This process requires the conscious excavation of the porous historical layers of which the city is built.[13] These narratives have a dimension that is magical and legendary but at the same time are not fully separable from the city's periphery or provincialism. Despite the lack of beauty or tact, the banal instigates a dialogue between old and new, where magic and legend become the common terms. In short, these lines crystalize the dynamic that makes magic and metamorphosis apt modes for the description, not only of subjective life in the city but also of the life of the city itself. Magic and legend are mysterious and attractive holdovers of backwards thinking; they give one the ability to imagine a realm of knowledge in which a "true" object can underlie the many names attributed to it and even the multiple appearances. Magic and legend also provide a unique and seductive "offering" to art that is a counter to the temporality and metaphysics of unsullied Western modernist thought and the seductive adventure into the new that is offered by the French poets.

The power of the name does not perform a merely allegorical function. The banal, that secret ingredient to the enchantment of Prague's art, erupts in the midst of the signifying process, and disrupts the stability of meaning. As in metaphor, the

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[13] In *The Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Boym uses "porosity" as "a spatial metaphor for time in the city, for the variety of temporal dimensions embedded in physical space" Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 77..

object and its signifiers combine to create a fuller meaning. The true name does not

call upon an origin story that oscillates between nature and history (like an

Urgeschichte or notion of *Heimat*). Instead the name is "uncertain" and signals a

multiplicity of identities while navigating through the built, intentional, and already

history-laden environment.[14]

These lines from Nezval have been quoted elsewhere, but often not in their

entirety.[15] The extraction of the first portion of the commentary is possibly

coincidental, but nevertheless indicative of the general trend for the representation of

Prague in scholarship and popular culture. The problematic relationship between the

cosmopolitan city center and its periphery is overlooked in favor of magic and beauty,

which has been the highlight for many others.[16] Paris's André Breton once referred to

Prague as "*la capitale magique de l'ancienne Europe*" (the magical capital of ancient

Europe) and in *The Spirit of Prague* Ivan Klíma addresses the city as mystical,

magical or as he would prefer it, "a city of paradox." As recently as March of 2011

the multi-media theater Laterna Magika premiered a new version of "*Legendy*

magické Prahy" based on the original performance of Jiří Srnec's Black Light Theatre

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[14] Many of the centers of Prague's built environment have "objects" built into their foundation: the foundation stones of the National Theater has stones from the mountains of Blaník and Říp, both of which feature in Czech legends, and gold coins were built into the foundation the Prague City Savings Bank Headquarters (later the Klement Gottwald Museum, and now a building for another bank, Česká spořitelna).

[15] A. French, *The Poets of Prague: Czech Poetry between the Wars* (London, New York: Oxford U.P, 1969), 103. and Neubauer 2010*,* which quotes the former

[16] In *The Poets of Prague* the quote begins: "I felt you, the city of a hundred spires still half-submerged in old legends, and wearing before our eyes an enchanted robe spun from Spring's lights, you could place all your old magic and youthful uncertainty in the service of the poetry we love."

in the 90s under the name(s): "Ahasver, Timewalker, Pražský chodec." This focus on

the magical often presents the magic and legend as inherent to the city itself rather

than a combination of rural traditions and urban migration or the product of a national

impulse to manufacture a Prague folk tradition and through it a unified national

identity.

Prague navigates between various points in Nezval's foreward, between

Western culture (which Nezval locates in Paris) and the "backwards" provincialism

of the *pohraničí* and *vesnice* that meet on Prague streets. Nezval provides, in the same

foreword, an introduction to "Pražský chodec" (Prague Walker), a poem inspired by

Apollinaire's "Zone" and "The Stroller through Prague."[17] This poem again reflects

the gaze of artists from Prague to Paris and provides a grim counterpart to the more

mysterious and playful poem of a similar title.

Pražský chodec

> The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every
> street is precipitous. It leads downward—if not to the mythical
> Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because
> it is not his own, not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the time
> of a childhood. But what about the life he has lived? In the asphalt
> over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising resonance. The
> gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal
> light on this double ground. [18]

Vítěslav Nezval steeps Prague streets in legend and dresses her in magic. In his

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[17] Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest Writing, Memory, and the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 116.

[18] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002), 416.

poetry as well as his poetic commentary, he locates the reader on the thoroughfares of the city: the bridges, streets, and brothels. Like Nezval Prague's poets and authors produce the pace of passage through space and time by means of these narratives of movement. The movement through a city reflects the process of narrative: passing from beginning, middle, to end, engendering effects out of causes and symbols out of objects. The figure of the city walker highlights the way that Prague has been imagined as equivocal. The city speaks in two voices: history and myth, German and Czech, present and past.

In his poem, "Walker in Prague," Nezval narrates the processes of walking and learning the city: "Thus I walked for days and nights on end…Sitting on an embankment…Leaning over the bridge of legions…Thus I learned to love Prague…Thus I became a walker in Prague."[19] Both the history and the built space of the city demand narratives. Navigating the modern metropolis is a practice in narration and weaving through history—encounters with monuments, graffiti, social relations, museums, infrastructure, public art, and advertisements simultaneously narrate and are plotted here. Simultaneously, these spaces shape the identity of those who experience them. The embankments and bridges shape Nezval's personal narrative. His identity is molded by the gaps and twists of history that are marked in the city's streets, alleyways, and monuments. Just as nation and language shape him, the city shapes him; and he becomes a "walker of Prague."

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[19] Vítězslav Nezval, *Prague with Fingers of Rain*, trans. Ewald Osers (Tarset, Northumberland : [Chester Springs, PA: Bloodaxe Books ; U.S. distributor, Dufour Editions], 2009).

The stories written about Prague's winding streets add to this palimpsest of time and meaning and effect as well as facilitate the experience of the city's "double ground" – the mediation of present experience and past significance. Walking through the streets of Prague then is not only affected by the palimpsest of street names and resurrected monuments, but also the direct or indirect knowledge of the legends and stories that have shaped the walker/reader's expectations and experience. The texts that will provide the course for these *chodci* are Apollinaire's "The Wandering Jew," Nezval's collection *Prague with Fingers of Rain*, and the film *Bezúčelná procházka* (Aimless walk, 1930).

Guillaume Apollinaire's "The Wandering Jew" ("*le Passant de Prague*") provides an account of the flâneur that combines the modern and the ancient on Prague's streets. The legend of the wandering Jew provides the ideal scenario for a hero unhurried, constantly observing, and noting the passage of time on the equivocal double ground of the city. Laquedem, the name Apollinaire gives to the wandering legend, is unhindered by the fear of death. He is the heroic flâneur: the flâneur who is only accidentally an ideal representative and inhabitant of the modern. He is freed from capital and thus a more traditional account of the wanderer in Prague; he is an adept guide to the mythical and modern city of Prague and the apotheosis of the indulgent flâneur. Laquedem, is not a mythical and trans-historical figure. His experience is timeless and therefore also essentially "modern." At the same time, as an allusion to legend and myth, he also embodies the anti-modern. Laquedem's experience of the city is marked by a sense of impermanence and the absence of the

distress and significance brought on by man's "subjection to nature."[20]

Laquedem accompanies Apollinaire's foreign visitor through the city as a guide. The two wanderers visit the central Prague monuments, but their interaction is always affected by their individual relationship to time and history: the careful mortal navigation through time by the one and the aimless eternal wandering of the other. The narrator sees the monuments, the prostitutes, and himself in terms of their relationship to mortality. Laquedem takes his companion to Saint Vítus cathedral and shows him the amethyst whose veins are supposed to form the portrait of "Napoleon;" however, the narrator, our mortal counterpart in the narrative, is only able to see his own face where Napoleon's should be. His own "somber jealous eyes" are outlined instead of that great, but mortal, figure of history. He is neither a great historical figure, nor a martyred saint. Like Saint Wenceslas and Napoleon (and unlike Laquedem) he will be met with a mortal end, but unlike them he will not be survived by symbols and monuments.

Nezval's poem "Pražský chodec" (Prague Walker) takes up the direct Czech translation of the French title to Apollinaire's narrative ("*le Passant de Prague*"). The speaker in the poem even echoes the experience of Nezval's narrator by recalling the date of his arrival (April 1920) as an inversion of Apollinaire's (1902). Nezval also

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[20] "[The] figure of man's most extreme subjection to nature, is pronounced the enigmatic question not only of the nature of human existence as such but of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the core of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular account of history as the Passion (*Leidensgeschichte*) of the world, a world that is meaningful only in the stations of its decay. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical being and significance" Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London ; New York: Verso, 1998), 166.

includes an encounter with a version of Apollinaire's legend, who, like Laquedem,

exposes the speaker to the beauty of Prague and a certain *Joie de vivre*, which serves

as a turning point in the poem:

> Thus I walked for days and nights on end
> Unspeakably dejected
> Everything was strange I did not dare to remember
> Until one day
> I met a memory
> It was a friend
> He took me along under his umbrella
> We sat in a room the piano was playing at last I shall be able to
>   love you Prague[21]

In both Apollinaire's story and Nezval's poem, Prague is a bewitching space:

hideous, miraculous, and radiant. As Alfred Thomas points out in *Prague Palimpsest,*

these Prague walkers do not offer the only version of the encounter with the narrow,

winding streets of Prague. Camus' "Death in the Soul" offers a much more somber

encounter with the city; an encounter that is dominated by estrangement, an excess of

cumin, and a real rather than symbolic death that lurks just one door down the hall.

Camus does not learn to love Prague, and instead of finding a confluence of legend,

history, and life in the magical alleyways of Prague he escapes the urban altogether to

find happiness marked by "inner silence" on a hill near Vicenza in Italy. Camus

cannot help but see in Prague the foreign and modern metropolis; this strangeness and

estrangement is what prompts his response to Nezval and Apollinaire – a recollection

devoid of magic or even a sufficiently weighty experience of symbolic melancholy.

Nezval, who came to Prague from rural Moravia, and Apollinaire, who visited Prague

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[21] Nezval, *Prague with Fingers of Rain*.

from the cultural centers of Paris, access Prague's magic through metaphor, a memory/a friend, and legend, the wandering Jew.

Similarly, Alexandr Hackenschmied's first film, *Bezúčelná procházka* (Aimless Walk), responds visually to this trope of the city walker by representing the exploration of Prague as a modern urban space. The title invites the expectation of the leisurely strolling flâneur, blessed with the luxury of time to meander, stroll and otherwise be unhurried through the busy streets of the modern metropolis. He is a medial figure, a holdover of aristocracy and patriarchy, but also a true denizen of the metropolis and a figment of modernity. However, the promise of this heroic and privileged observer, which is hinted at in the title is not manifested on the modern and mechanized Prague street where the film's meditation begins. It becomes clear upon the film's opening that a "walk" is not the primary focus of the film. "Aimless Walk" opens with various still takes of the cornices of the buildings lining the street and of the street itself laced with tram tracks. Besides the slight shaking of the camera that alerts us to the man whose gaze we are following, these shots of the street are lonely and empty; they are only broken by human interference when a single shadow of a walking man passes through the camera's view.

When the true movement of the film begins it becomes clear that this "walk" is not, in fact, a walk at all – the camera and the man behind it board the tram. The tram itself becomes the frame for the camera's gaze and in that case also for our hero, who has been introduced to us not as a dandy but as a smartly dressed young man of the middle classes who alternately gazes out of the tram through the window or

through the open tram door at the street as it passes at dizzying speeds underneath or at the rapidly passing buildings and scenery. These images are broken by the frame and blur into obscurity, the feeling of fragmentation and anonymity is enhanced because although the film is shot in Prague (beginning in the Karlín district and heading toward the city's periphery), none of the scenery is readily recognizable as "of Prague." The rapid succession of broken and blurred images prevents any "conduct through time" and instead reflects on the new temporal experience in the modern city as potentially disjointed, without resonance, rapid, and without narrative or a "mythical dimension." While the camera remains within Prague proper, an experience of the city is made to seem impossible. Walking, of course, is possible even within the heart of the city and even today, but the rush of the tram until we reach the periphery would seem to suggest that "walking," or more specifically *flânerie,* has become impossible.

In the film the flâneur is not recognized by his gate, but by his gaze. There is no better example of the "passionate spectator" than the eye of the camera which retains individuality by insisting on being the dominant gaze on record. However, his vision ultimately fails, even the technically aided gaze is not sufficient in a now far-gone technical world (technology, speed, the global metropolis all foreclose the possibility of true *flanerie*). The gaze is fractured, he does not capture the crowd; he barely captures the street. There is not time for the aimless walk within the bounds of

the city.[22] Our would-be flâneur can only find time to be aimless outside of the city –
where another temporality reigns. In order to reach the city's periphery he must hurry,
because capital demands his timely return.[23]

The vision suggests that one may no longer be able to "walk aimlessly" within
Prague. The traffic between one point in the city and another has been efficiently
streamlined. The flâneur is beset by clean and modern streets that prefer fixed rails to
a meditation on the history-laden nature of urban space. The film begins in the Karlín
district of Prague, the district where Hackenschmied in fact spent his childhood.
However, the sense of the "time of childhood" appears to be conspicuously absent;
this is a silent world full of adults and a palpable lack of wonder.[24]

The central figure in the film, the Prague walker, is at times behind the camera
and the object of the camera's gaze. Therefore, he is always double and public: he
must continually share his gaze with the audience as well as endure their following
eyes. The lack of private space (privacy of watching and privacy from being watched)
is emphasized when the camera takes in sleeping workers or fellow tram goers, whose

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[22] "The end of the flâneur comes when he is unable to keep this 'elbow room.' The dialectics of the crowd thereby oscillate between the extremes of the flâneur as heroic and arrogant outsider and the flâneur as eager to fuse into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Flanerie is a 'crowd practice,' which requires the crowd for its own existence; but it is a practice that moves dialectically between the individual, who strives to maintain his individuality, and the crowd which strives to absorb him" Carlo Salzani, *Constellations of Reading: Walter Benjamin in Figures of Actuality* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 57.

[23] "Buck-Morss argues that 'the flâneur is not truly a person of leisure (*Musse*). Rather, loitering (*Müssigang*) is his trade,' and he fully exploits the commodification of time, that is, the equation of time and money. Gilloch points out that his studied slowness is a 'calculated scheme for pecuniary gain. He thereby transformed laziness into a paid occupation.' Baudelair—'at once socially rebellious bohemian and producer of commodities for the literary market'—'knew the true situation of the man of letters' and therefore both embodied the ambivalences of the flâneur and emblematized the objective circumstances of the intellectual producer in consumer society" Ibid., 58.
[24] Jiří Cieslar, "Bezúčelná Procházka," *Literární Noviny*, November 1997.

gazes never meet the camera. They appear to be oblivious to the film even if it is not

oblivious to them, or at the very least they do not attempt to avoid being caught by it.

They are steeled against the invasion of privacy, or perhaps in the modern age

adapted to it.

Besides the medium of the art form, the film is self-consciously modern, or

rather entranced by the modern; it emphasizes the clean sweeping and crossing curves

of the tram tracks, the rapid speed at which the tram moves once we have boarded,

and the brief and fragmentary glimpses we are afforded of city.[25] These beautifully

captured fleeting glimpses are disjunctive and fail to create a coherent image of the

city street. What the viewer receives are flickering images of passing vehicles and

building façades—none of which are dwelt on long enough to provide bearings within

the city. All symbolically loaded images of Prague, those that could allow us to orient

ourselves within the space of the city, are avoided. The camera does not catch the

Charles Bridge, the National Museum, the National Theater, the Orloj, or any of

Prague's monuments: all of which would offer us an alternative historical and national

narrative. The markers of concrete histories are foregone to allow for the apparent

purity of this sequence of the modern and under-examined Prague in the midst of

"progress." The city is reduced to a single movement. It is an individual impetus

given to us without context, an engagement with the modern landscape that is foreign

in experience. The Prague walker here engages in a different kind of 'historicizing' of

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[25] Here we encounter the same incongruence that one can experience in contemporary Prague. The slick tram tracks offer a nearly frictionless surface, accommodating speed in a fixed direction, in juxtaposition to the irregularity and aesthetically quaint cobblestones.

the city and, in fact, is not a walker in Prague at all but a commuter. The experience of this would-be flâneur is fragmentary, sporadic, without historical depth or the possibility of identification.

The walker's destination is the outskirts of Prague. The movement outward, away from the city, is coupled with a slowing of pace, the rapid and fixed movement of the tram is finally transformed into true "aimless walking." The "walking" that takes place here is not that of the city center, which was primarily depicted through long takes of winding tram tracks and cobblestone streets, or flickering images through a tram window—this is to say, it is walking "proper"—but this again is not city walking or *flânerie*. There is a class dimension to this walking as well. The flâneur of the previous works was closer to Walter Benjamin's cosmopolitan dandy, a liminal figure walking on the edge between labor and leisure, whereas the protagonist of the film escapes to the periphery of the petite bourgeois for a respite at the border between the modern and the provincial.

The "walk" takes place in the outskirts of Prague, where cleaned cobblestones are replaced with muddy paths, and the trams have transformed into load bearing horses and laborers. The movement to the periphery of the city has provided a change in tempo and class, as well as a movement to the edges of the modern. If we have not arrived in the past proper, we have at least arrived in a place where the past can still be imagined and experienced. Our would-be flâneur is still privileged in his leisure here. The periphery of Prague is only available as a place to contemplate and imagine the past (outdated technology, labor, the forest, the stream) to those who are given the

leisure to perceive the changed tempo rather than experience the manual labor that is at its foundation – the working class still experiences this as a place of work.

This is the place between two times, two ideas of Czech identity—the village and the city, the *vesnice* and *Praha*—two tempos of life, two classes of people, two uses of the land. Thus, this is also where the effect of doubling becomes most prominent: at the center of the film now are two men. However, these two men are both the single figure we have been following throughout the film. This is one man doubled; pulled apart by the gravity of two poles. He is divided into two bodies that share a single identity. This doubling is mirrored in the reflections we see upon water – the same water of the Vltava that is following an ancient path out of the city. The tension is now not between the central figure and the viewer, but between the figure who wishes to stay sitting on the grassy hilltop and the one who eventually takes his leave by means of the tram. Both "belong" to the city, we know this by his/their stiff hats and polished shoes, which starkly contrast the empty shoes of the workingman that the camera finds waiting in the grass. This duality is central to the identity of the flâneur, a figure whose existence is essentially modern, but whose "aimless walk" is in fact a self-conscious engagement with the temporality of his physical setting.

Hackenschmied's film embraces the temporality of Prague and its periphery as the two modes of life and two halves of the Czech identity. Filming in the interwar period, when the Czech people could finally imagine that they were fulfilling their national destiny, the project presents a spatial exploration of Prague and the new and old that constitute the affective fabric of the iconic Czech city. The question of

temporality and identity for Nezval and Hackenschmied, was one of the modern responsibilities of the nation and its urban and artistic fabric. In *Bezúčelná procházka* without its iconic monuments the metropolis of Prague blends into the image of other modern cities of central European nations. Nezval compares the artistic production of Prague to France, that self-determined nation par excellence, and its romantic capital Paris.

For both Nezval and Hackenschmied it is the admixture of this modern spirit of art and progress with the holdover of its provincial customs, legends, and practices that makes Prague unique. This combination of past and present is figured as magic in both instances. The protagonist of the film is able to be both sitting on a grassy hilltop and returning to work just as Nezval's poetry is a product of the magic of true names (also suggesting a dual existence that engages multiple temporalities). The alchemy that engendered the magic of Prague and the legacy of the golem live on in these iterations of incantation and dual identity.

The national (if not political) stability of the interwar period was not to be experienced again until the fall of communism and the re-establishment of a Czech and Slovak state. However, the literature of this second period of nation building perhaps has more in common with the creative response to Imperial rule in the late 19th century with its collections of Czech folktales, forged epic manuscripts, and grand symbols of piecemeal national symbolism. The literature of the late 20th century responds to the problematic concept of Czech national identity given the instability of Czech-Slovak relations, the traumas of German occupation, and the

crush of Russian normalization by re-imaging time in the city of Prague. Authors like Daniela Hodrova and Jachym Topol harness the metamorphic qualities of Prague's myths and explore a city that can drift in and out of time. They labile world of flux that they explore in their narratives are the space after communism and before capitalism and the desire to scrape together a semblance of national identity when the world they have entered has already made its shift to the global. I call this attempt to narrate this flux metamorphosis, not because it is a transformation, but because it is an attempt to occupy and navigate a spectrum of identities and temporalities.

The City as the Theater of History:

„For me the city was at first a word – Prague."[26]

Daniela Hodrová, in *Prague, I see a city...* (*Město vidím...*, 1990), collapses the history of the Earth and of Prague itself into her "theater-city." This history is played out somewhere in front of the National Museum on the stage of Wenceslas Square.[27] Daniela Hodrová opens *Město Vidím...* by echoing John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The word in Hodrová's text, unfolds in her consciousness from bands of light across the ceiling of the room in her nursery. Her understanding of what Prague *is* is bound to the narrative of her own development. Before her birth she describes the Earth on which the city would eventually stand as still erupting with volcanoes and spontaneous creation, and

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[26] Daniela Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, trans. David Short ([Folkestone, Kent]: Jantar, 2011).

[27] Ibid., 6.

as her age brings her closer and deeper into the geography of the city, embarking from the Olšany cemetery outside her bedroom window, the history of the space unfolds before her—a simultaneous and receding vision of the extension of time in space. The narrator's present moment is simultaneous with her present space as she maps time in Prague, as spatial distance.

However, as Rajendra Chitnis points out in *Literature in post-communist Russia and Eastern Europe: the Russian, Czech and Slovak fiction of the Changes* Hodrová, like her contemporary Michal Ajvaz who will be discussed later, resists "writing as mapping" in favor of writing as endless wandering.[28] Chitnis articulates this as an act of resistance to "the deadening identification of sign with referent."[29] It is also a resistance to the positionality of the cartographer, who is fixed in time and space, removed from the object of study. Hodrová, whose narrators and characters are always very intimately associated with the author herself, resists both the distance and, through her slippages in time and nonlinear narration, the spatial and temporal fixity.

The title and the novel itself foreground vision: however, vision in the text amounts to more than sensory perception. If the word is the origin of the material world and creation, then vision becomes the organ for perception of past and future. Vision, as we find through the reference to *visio* and living pictures, offers a static

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[28] Rajendra A. Chitnis, *Literature in Post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe: The Russian, Czech and Slovak Fiction of the Changes, 1988 - 1998*, BASEES/RoutledgeCurzon Series on Russian and East European Studies 16 (London: Routledge, 2005), 104.

[29] Ibid.

image in which time is compounded. Whereas we find in Hodrová's Prague that the traditional symbol of time, the clock, is only real when it is also a static image: "The impression is of a mask, though this clock could actually be real, perhaps because there is no motion behind it and it does not show any time."[30] The "clock" in question is the famous Manesův orloj, the Prague astronomical clock, which has its own mythical history. The story about the clock and its creator—his death and the sabotage of the clock—in Alois Jirásek's popular *Staré pověsti české* is a result of the fear of the city officials that the clock could be reproduced elsewhere in a competing city, particularly a German city. They blind the clock's creator to ensure that Prague's clock would never be surpassed. The artist gets his revenge, inevitably, by stopping the clock in the last moments of his life.

The Orloj in Hodrová's text is depicted as broken or static multiple times, but this is somewhat of an anachronism: Hodrová's broken clock is, here, out of time. Although there were times when the clock did not function (when there was significant damage to the clock as a result of the attempts to suppress the Prague uprising during WWII, for example) the orloj would not have been "static" at the time Hodrová is purporting to write this section of the book. However, this aspect is completely in keeping with the complex sense of time we get in Hodrová's text. It depicts time in multiple planes like the clock itself: old Czech time based on a twenty-four hour day determined by the sunset, the zodiac, the lunar phase, and

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[30] Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, 27. "Působí dojmem masky, ačkoli právě tento je pravý, snad je to tím, že se za ním neotáčí soukolí hodinového stroje, žádný čas neukazuje" Daniela Hodrová, *Město vidím--* (Praha: Euroslavica, 1992), 29.

standard Central-European time. Thus the clock measures old and new

simultaneously, and presents accurately "the time of eternity in which the city is

frozen."[31]

The Czech title, *Město Vidím...,* translates directly to "I see a/the city" while

the English translation gets perhaps a little too explicit—*Prague, I see a city...*

Whereas the first line of the book evokes the simultaneous creation of thought and

being, the title invites the reader to rehearse the founding myth of Prague: the title

repeats the first words of Libuše's prophecy, in which the young prophetess has a

vision of the future and reaching her arms toward the empty opposite shore of the

Vltava proclaims: "I see a great city whose glory will touch the stars."[32] Again,

however, Hodrová's invocation conflates the ancient prophecy of the future with the

present experience—aligning the mythical past with the imagined future and the lived

reality. Instead of adhering to Cosmas's account in which Libuše makes her

proclamation to her new husband, the progenitor of the Přemyslid people, and her

followers, in Hodrová's text Libuše finds herself "standing on the forestage of the

[National] Museum in her ritual gown and with a diadem on her head, looking for all

the world like a Byzantine priestess.[33] In her hand she has a sprig of linden. Her

passionate eyes gaze out over and beyond the tunnel next to the Main Station."[34]

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[31] Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, 24.

[32] "Město vidím veliké, jeho sláva hvězd se dotýka."

[33] Here Hodrová mentions Cosmas, but this line is repeated (in Czech rather than Latin) in the more popular version of the myth from Alois Jirásek's *Staré pověsti české* (1894). Jirásek is also the prolific author of historical novels of the Czech Nation and the National Revival.

[34] Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, 7.

What was in the legend a vision without an object, or at the very least an object that

only existed in the future, is now for Hodrová a bejeweled spectacle and ironic

anachronism,[35] overacted and overstated. The image that Hodrová brings to mind is in

fact the familiar depiction of the Czech prophetess painted by Karel Vitězslav Mašek

in all of its art nouveau splendor.[36] The image she provides is only a reflection of a

kitsch sense of deeply rooted national pride: the conscious symbolism and the

passionate gaze over the terrain of the "great" but hardly stellar city, which for

Hodrová still stands at the threshold.

　　　Hodrová consciously plays with the idea of "Threshold," which is one of the

classic explanations for the name given to Prague (Prague in Czech is *Praha*, which is

rumored in popular lore to be derived from the Czech word *práh* or threshold).

Prague later will be the threshold between life and death as the gate to the underworld

trespassed in the *Divine Comedy*, "A text about the theatre of the city which will be

another variant on the *città dolente*."[37] This is a connection that is also seen in her

Prague based trilogy *Trýznivé město* (Suffering City). And so it is this city threshold

that declares: "Through me the way into the suffering city, / through me the way to

the eternal pain, / through me the way that runs among the lost." [38] In Hodrová's

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[35] Benjamin – the allegorical method, the image as 'amorphous fragment' rather than 'organic totality'

[36] Karel Vítězslav Mašek, *The Prophetess Libuse*, oil on canvas, 1893, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

[37] Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, 16. "Text o divadle města, který bude další variantou trýznivého města, *città dolente*" (Hodrová, *Město vidím--*, 19). Hodrová's reference to "*città dolente*,"

[38] Dante Alighieri, *Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy*, trans. Mark Musa, vol. 1, 6 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996)."Per me si va ne la città dolente, / per me si va ne l'etterno dolore, / per me si va tra la perduta gente" from Canto III of *Inferno* Alighieri Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, 3rd ed., vol. 1, 3 vols. (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1985).

wandering text it is no longer clear who is lost, or where, or when.

When the author imagines Cosmas' description of Libuše at the moment of Prague's founding through the filter of her own perception of the Karel Vítězslav Mašek's painting of "Libuše the Prophetess." Three iterations of the prophetess and prophecy emerge simultaneously out of different mediums. Each iteration is a synthesis of their situatedness in time and the influence of past and future. The allegory that arises here—out of the disjunction of the literally concrete metro hub and the symbolic or transcendent Libuše is not a new gesture.[39] It is instead a repetition of various attempts to ground Czech Nationalism by means of "artifacts," primarily "discovered" manuscripts—whose tendentious and tenuous legitimacy is balanced by their symbolic significance and tangible "reality."

In "Romantic Documents and Political Monuments: The Meaning-Fulfillment of History in 19th Century Czech Nationalism" Andrew Lass refers to this movement from object to historical presence, as "concretization"—the process through which a relic embodies "the past in the present," and therefore, in our recognition of its validity its "meaning, is *presented*."[40] Hodrová presents objects and history simultaneously by presenting the stories that surround Prague's objects and the stories that the objects themselves create:

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[39] Paul de Man states in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" that allegory and irony are both engaged in the "demystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality could coincide" Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight*, 2.ed., rev, Theory and History of Literature 7 (Minneapolis, Minn: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1995), 222. Hodrová imagines Prague as surrounded by an ether containing all works of the city's past and present, melding fiction and reality, and thus nothing is written or created without this influence.

[40] emphasis my own

On the basis of their memory, places make up their own stories, surrounding themselves with events that have never occurred there, but could have. The same applies to things (this text will be full of all manner of relics) – things not only have their actual stories, but also invent other stories for fun. All that's needed is to give in to their urge to weave plots"[41]

What is translated here as "relics" can also be translated as "remains," which invokes both the process by which Saints are made into objects and recalls the various processes of death and rebirth that we find in the text. For what David Short translates as the "weaving of plots" and the "making up of stories" Hodrová uses the same word in Czech *fabulovat*, which is not part of the standard Czech lexicon, but a loan word from the Latin fabula (in this case the verb, fabulate), or perhaps in context it would be more interesting to consider the choice with regard to the vocabulary of Russian formalism "fabula and syuzhet."

The translator's choice to use weaving rather than fabulovat was likely driven by the centrality of weaving or spinning as a metaphor for writing and history throughout Hodrová's work. This weaving recalls Ovid's tale of the metamorphosis of the weaver Arachne into a spider by the proud goddess Athena. Hodrová makes this connection directly in "*Text-proud a text tkaný--'hérakleitos' a 'arachné'*" ("Text as stream and text as weaving: 'Heraclitus' and 'Arachne'") from *Citlivé město: eseje z mytopoetiky* (Sensing city: essays from mythopoetics)—a book concerned with the writing of the city, city walking, and the urban underworld, with special attention to Prague. The texts that flow are texts of Prague that consist of a long unbroken

[41] Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, 13. "Místa na základě své paměti sama fabulují, obklopují se příběhy, které se na nich nikdy nestaly, ale mohly stát. A stejně je tomu i s věcmi (tento text bude plný ostatků všeho druhu) – věci tu mají nejen své skutečné příběhy, nýbrž další příběhy si vymýšlejí. Stačí se poddat jejich vůli fabulovat" Hodrová, *Město vidím--*, 16.

sentence or sentences marked by the absence of brokenness. On the other hand texts that are woven or "seem as if they have woven themselves" (*text jako by se tkal sám*)[42] permeate consciousness by "vanishing boundaries between me and it, while this vanishing often accompanies the penetration of various temporal and spatial plains."[43] Weaving would seem to be the equivalent for narration of what wandering is to the experience of the city.

Hodrová provides the reader with the description of a procession of *tableaux vivants*—the equivalent of fabula without syuzhet. These are enacted in this "playhouse-city" (*Divadlo město*) whose "curtain is found somewhere near the National Museum." In the Czech text these are "*živé obrazy*," or living pictures, rather than the French *tableaux vivants,* which was adopted for the English translation; however, the Latin "*visio*" is used earlier in the original Czech with reference to "*posvátný výjev*" or a sacred/hallowed scene. These "live pictures" have a precedent in the presentation of the Libuše legend especially within Smetana's opera "Libuše" [44] which is accompanied by "'Live painting' stage performance depicting 'Libuše's Judgment' to the accompaniment of music by Smetana.'"[45] This opera is also the inaugural performance for the nationally significant opening of the

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[42] Daniela Hodrová, *Citlivé město: eseje z mytopoetiky* (Praha: Akropolis, 2006), 102.

[43] "Netoliko v textu jako celku, ale i v jednotlivých větách se prostupují různá vědomí (tvořící součást vědomí jediného, rozpínajícího se), mizí hranice mezi já a on, přičemž toto mizení nezřídka provází prostupování různých časových a prostorových rovin" Ibid., 100.

[44] Andrew Lass, "Romantic Documents and Political Monuments: The Meaning-Fulfillment of History in 19th-Century Czech Nationalism," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 3 (August 1, 1988): 456–71.

[45] Ibid.

Narodní Divadlo. Smetana's "Libuše," depicts the founding moment of Prague and the Czech Nation; and because of the provisions around when it should be played (to celebrate occasions of national importance), the opera has also become a mark of significance for historical moments.

The narrator, who addresses us as Hodrová, is presented with a procession of living pictures of the founding characters of the city and moments significant to Czech history—Libuše, Saint Wenceslas,[46] Charles IV, a brief peek of Hitler and Reinhard Heydrich, and the Czech Middle Ages (defined by a boundedness of space: walls and ramparts)—as she facilitates the reader with a description of their passing. This double removal from representation, the living pictures which are the three dimensional substitution for the static image, one that is living and therefore full of the potential for movement and change and the description of them, which renders them again static and two dimensional, offers an odd and disjointed combination of life and representation.

Claiming for her personal experience the origins of the universe in the origins of the city and the Czech Nation, Daniela Hodrová in *I See a City . . .* presents the reader a story of identity: "If I am seeking to evoke that first ever perception of the city, it may be that I am doing so from a belief that the city rose from nothing in parallel to how I arrived in the world and came to an awareness of my own self."[47]

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[46] Saint Wenceslas (Svatý Václav) is the patron Saint of the Czech Nation.

[47] Hodrová, *Prague, I See a City...*, 4. "Snažím-li se vyvolat onen prvopočáteční vjem města, činím tak snad v domnění, že město vyvstávalo z nicoty souběžně s tím, jak jsem já přišla na svět a probírala se ke svému vědomí."

The city is the material out of which the concept of self—self as a part of a nation, a member of a class, and a participant in a culture—develops and the space in which the historical and spatial narratives of nation and membership unfold.[48]

In Hodrová's novel *Kukly,* part of the *Suffering City* trilogy, this convergence of self and place is embodied in the main character, Sofie Syslová, when she begins to see her consciousness as a place of compound time, "the place in which past and future come together like the radii of a circle."[49] The title of the novel is the Czech plural for pupa (*kukla* in Czech, the final stage before adulthood in the biological process of metamorphosis) as well as the plural for a protective mask or helmet.[50] *Kukly* also recalls the author, Karel Ladislav Kukla, who is best known for writing on the theme of Prague's dark corners: at night and underground. Karel Kukla wrote *Podzemní Praha* (Underground Prague) and *Praha neznámá* (Unknown Prague) among many other texts. In *Kukly,* he is also the great grandfather of the main character Sofie.

The City and the Underworld

> Few Praguers know, that under the bustle and street life of the metropolis of the Czechoslovak Republic, the venerable mother Prague (*matka Praha*), which now begins with hurried power in the modern city of millions, deep

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[48] "Prostor, na kterém vyrostlo procházel před mým zrozením teprve vrásněním." This is sentiment is also expressed in Stanislava Přádná, "Sestupování Do Nitra Města," *Prostor* 6, no. 22 (1993): 111., where Hodrová equates a descent into the self in search of identity to a decent into the identity of the city. Prague. The story/history of Prague is interchangeable with her story of self.

[49] "Její vědomí je místem, v němž se sbíhají jako paprsky kruhu události minulé i budoucí." (Hodrová 1999, p. 341)

[50] These are both "kukla" in the singular.

below the flagstones and pavement of Prague streets, avenues, and squares… under electric tram lines… under stations, beneath the proud cathedrals and historic buildings… even under the majestic … once imperial castle… now seat of our president and republican ministries [. . .] in the bowels of the city, clarity and light… extends yet another Prague."[51]

         – Kukla, the opening lines of *Prague Underground*

The underground in its classic setting returned to one of its oldest focal points and became the underworld.[52]

         – Jáchym Topol, *Sestra*.

Karel Ladislav Kukla (1863-1930), reporter, dramatists, author, and mapper of the

sewers of Prague, brings together Paris and Prague like Apolinaire and Nezval by

comparing, in his story of the war deserter Jan Pexy and his lover Anna Macková, the

underground sewers of Prague to the underground Paris of Victor Hugo's *Les*

Misérables.

  Victor Hugo saw the sewer of Paris as the "conscience of the city."[53] The

underground network of tunnels and refuse offered an alternative urban fabric that

provided a refuge for all manner of rejected ideas and people: "Crime, intelligence,

social protest, liberty of conscience, thought, theft, all that human laws pursue or have

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[51] "Málokterý Pražan ví, že pod nejrušnějším pouličním shonem a životem metropole československé republiky, staroslavné matky Prahy, která teď počíná kvapem mohutněti v milionové moderní velkoměsto, hluboko pode dlažbou a chodníky pražských ulic, tříd i náměstí… pod tratěmi elektrických drah… pod nádražími, pod hrdými chrámy i historickými budovami… ba i pod majestátním… kdysi královským hradem… teď sídlem našeho presidenta a republikánských ministerstev… pod horami kolem i pod hladinou stříbropěnné Vltavy… v útrobách města, jasu a světla… se rozprostírá ještě jiná Praha…" Karel Ladislav Kukla, *Podzemní Praha*, V MKP 1. vyd (Městská knihovna v Praze, 2013), 82–86.
[52] Jáchym Topol, *Sestra* (Brno: Atlantis, 1994), 61.

[53] Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables Volume Two*, vol. 2, Wadswroth Collection 2 (Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 852.

pursued, have hidden in this hole."[54] The sewers of a city, modern and primordial, are

honest and polyvocal: "the digestive apparatus of Babylon," this underground is

echoed in the underworlds of the texts of Jachym Topol and Michal Ajvaz. Both

authors explore the underside of the city, either in its unseen corners (Ajvaz) or in its

criminal underground, subway, and sewers (Topol). In these spaces left in the folds of

the urban fabric, they engage the "cavern, grave, gulf pierced with streets, titanic

molehill, in which the mind seems to see prowling through the shadow, in the ordure

which has been splendor, that enormous blind mole, the past."[55] In the work of Kukla,

Topol, and Ajvaz the underground offers an avenue for accessing the buried past of

the city and alternative histories: allowing the authors to move through the strata and

sediment of time. Instead of steeping their texts in myth and dramatizing the

performance of Czech identity and history as Hodrová does in her novels, the novels

of her contemporaries explore the city and its past by offering a psychedelic

exploration of fractal Czech identity in post-communist Prague. Their protagonists

lead the reader through the figurative and literal underworld of the city.

     In *The Other City* (*Druhé Město,* 1993) by Michal Ajvaz this journey takes

place in two Pragues: the first, the Prague of the everyday; and the second, a surreal

Prague that exists within the negative space of our concrete and predictable Prague.

Ajvaz's style has been compared to magical realism, which is not surprising when

one considers that the author has written scholarly works on both Borges and Derrida.

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[54] Ibid., 2:857.

[55] Ibid., 2:862.

Neither the magical elements nor the linguistic mysticism of his novels come simply

or singularly from the city itself; however, *The Other City* is most certainly a novel of

Prague, asserting familiar street names and landmarks alongside unexpected stories of

chiding black fish and banned verbal tenses. The protagonist discovers access to this

second Prague in a bookstore on Karlova street; he discusses the mysterious language

of the text and the frontier between the Pragues with a researcher at the Clementinum;

and he discovers a secret ski lift that carries him under Charles Bridge, up Petřín Hill,

through Malá Strana, and through the corners of bedrooms "through the interspace

between apartments whose existence is denied."[56] The novel does not present a

coherent allegory and it would be misguided and exhausting to try to sketch out a

coherent metaphorical meaning in all of Ajvaz's careful nonsense; however, the novel

inevitably echoes the stories of Prague and the national narrative that it represents.

Amongst other fantastic intersections of the world of concrete and the surreal,

the main character meets a reciter bird—a duckbilled parrot responsible for reciting

the national epic *The Broken Spoon* by heart—on the roof of St Vitus's Cathedral.

The bird's keeper claims that in his opinion "the entire epic is a fairly unsuccessful

forgery from the last century" and complains of the ridiculous folklore and rituals

"that hold the life of our city together."[57] In this context it is hard not to think of

Hanka's epic forgeries, Erben's folksongs, and Frantisek Palacky's multiple projects

of Czech cultural and political curation that were a major part of the Czech national

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[56] Michal Ajvaz, *The Other City*, First English Translation edition (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), 51.

[57] Ibid., 91.

revival in the 19th century. The arrogance of the nationalist impulse is presented in

Ajvaz's other Prague, a world that both is and is not Prague. The keeper reflects:

"Our people maintain they were here thousands of years before you, but their arrogant

assertions are based solely on biased and tasteless legends of dubious provenance. …

Our myths are created out of the detritus of your thinking." The second city, the

Prague whose spiritual and physical existence relies on the rejected spaces of the

Prague of the everyday, offers the reader an alternative dimension – one that resists

realism and, like Hodrová's novels, the complete equation of the signifier and the

signified. The swirling purple cloud of Ajvaz's novel sometimes clears to provide an

uncannily accurate reflection on the cultivation of a Czech nation from the schemata

provided by the nations that preceded them. The city of Prague, as the fulcrum of

Czech nationalism, reasserts this narrative of Czech identity at every landmark, and it

is no surprise that this exchange occurs on the roof of St. Vitus's in the center of

Prague Castle.

Ajvaz's story both is and is not a metaphorical account of Prague's rich history

of an active underground or the dense history and tradition that underlie the city's

modern functions. The borders between these dual Pragues are constantly observed,

lost, and crossed. The novel avoids metaphorical reading to the point that the book

itself becomes difficult to read—interpretation and representation lose their footing

and fall into pictures or assemblages of familiar words. This dissolution, is the one

experience that can be taken away from the novel with some surety: the novel begins

with the main character taking up a faintly glowing book full of indecipherable text,

and the language and culture of the other world to which he gains access revolves around the discourse of a common origin.

Jáchym Topol's linguistically dense novel, *Sestra* (1994, *City, Sister, Silver*), explores the underground of post-communist Prague in the liminal space between the local and the global, in the flux between trade as business and the *byznys* of the black market. Both novels feature protagonists who are attempting to solve a mystery hidden in Prague's boundaries and spaces of belonging while representing them as temporally and spatially fluid.

Like Hodrovs's novel, *Sestra* begins in a prehistory; however, this particular chronology is not a personal ur-history, but the experience of time before the fall of communism, which Topol refers to as the "Stone age." Potok takes us to the German Embassy in Prague where Germans are streaming through the square attempting to escape to the West. This, Potok says, is where time began to change, where it took on movement and color.

At the midpoint of the novel *Sestra*'s protagonist, Potok, inspired by Jícha, a young poet who had "drowned his debut works in Samizdat,"[58] imagines writing a book, one that is written "On the body of a changed world, in the ruins of the former time."[59] The book would be composed in "raw post-Babylonian" (*surovou postbabylónštinou*). This postbabylonian language is the language of the Kingdom of Kanak. The Kanak is a civilization that Potok has chosen to represent the social

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[58] Jáchym Topol, *City, Sister, Silver*, trans. Alex Zucker (North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 2000), 161.

[59] Ibid., 243. "Na těle měněnýho písemnictví! Dalšího postbabylónskýho. A když už: tak už. Napíšu tu knihu surovou postbabylónštinou, přítomnosti, i budoucnosti" Topol, *Sestra*, 235.

structures and bonds of his tribe in the Czech underground. This tribal identity replaces law and social order in the exploded time after the fall of communism. Potok observes:

> as I stood around, picking up all sorts of words and expressions as the tribes mixed together in byznys to survive … stealin cash an words from each other … experiences an words … it struck me maybe somethin was happening here, maybe the mixing was givin rise to a new tongue … a Kanak one."[60]

The novel Potok imagines is the product of his crash course in the global world of byznys and mild infractions (the experiences he lists in his "Kanak studies" is a litany of infractions against the law in Paris, Berlin, Milan, Gibraltar, Munich, Dormut). The warning label that would protect the stacks of crates of his literary success would state, in English, "Fragile! Very fragile! Only for Kanaks!"[61] Topol's novel of fractured time and language explores these most basic elements of society after the fall of communism, which he equates to the fall of the tower of Babylon.

When communism ends in Prague, time explodes. The exploration of identity and community in this period of exploded time and language is the theme of Jáchym Topol's novel as Potok struggles between narratives of past and present – hardly the unidirectional stream suggested by his name –[62] in order to interpret and come up with labels for the rapidly changing environment around after the Velvet Revolution. The search for Sister, his various entrepreneurial undertakings, the dense rapid language and inscrutable plot all reflect the changing trajectory of history, the

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[60] Topol, *City, Sister, Silver*, 234.

[61] Topol, *Sestra*, 235.

[62] Potok is the Czech for stream.

introduction of capitalism and the struggle for new definitions of social belonging that

accompanied the thrust into the world of liberal democracy and global capitalism.

However, more significantly, Topol does not only explode time, but also, in what in

form is similar to the "navigation" of Prague offered by Ajvaz in *The Other City,*

Topol produces the city in two worlds: the underground and the world of the

everyday.

Constructing a National Discourse

> The street Tamina was born on was called Schwerin. That was during
> the war, and Prague was occupied by the Germans. Her father was
> born on Černokostelecká Avenue—the Avenue of the Black Church.
> That was during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. When her mother
> married her father and moved there, it bore the name of Marshal Foch.
> That was after World War I. Tamina spent her childhood on Stalin
> Avenue, and when her husband came to take her away, he went to
> Vinohrady—that is, Vineyards—Avenue. And all the time it was the
> same street; they just kept changing its name, trying to lobotomize it.[63]

The transfer of state and political power is accompanied by many re-imaginings. If

Nezval had to learn the "true names" of the street on which Tamina was born in

Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* he would have a bit more

work ahead of him than he did in 1927. The now commonplace transformation of

street names that accompanied the transfer of state power necessarily also rewrote the

personal histories of the lives that live alongside them. However, the significance of

place names goes beyond mere "re-naming." Prague residents have so closely

assigned identity to place that they have, when necessary, gone beyond the superficial

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[63] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1980).

substitution of names and have relied on their own understanding of their city's idiosyncratic topography—the privileged knowledge of the resident—and gone so far as to tear down street name markers in order to hinder the movement of foreigners through the city. The names are significant, but a personal relationship to the composition of the space is more so.

The architecture and topography of Prague has always reflected its historical associations: the architectural styles reflect various moments in national revival, occupation, and upheaval. One of the most self-conscious of these and most significant for the sense of Czech national pride and identity was the construction of the National Theater,[64] which self-consciously declares itself as the nation made manifest to itself, "*Národ sobě*" (the nation for itself).[65] The Theater's construction was both a true Czech populous undertaking and a reaction against the German cultural and linguistic presence in Prague. Its construction literally laid the foundation for the concretization of National myths and symbols during a time of "national revival."

The national mythology was reflected not only in the appearance of the building and its artworks, but also in its physical construction. Its foundation stones were cut from such great quarries of the Czech cultural imaginary as Říp and Blaník

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[64] Construction of the theater began in 1868, but the theater did not open until 1881. The theater opened, showed Smetana's opera and was soon after destroyed by a fire. Funds were collected from the Czech public for reconstruction after the fire, and the theater was rebuilt and opened again in 1883.

[65] This is written above the proscenium. Palacký appears again here as a leading figure in The Committee to Build the National Theater whose manifesto states: "We are still lacking something without which Europe will hardly regard us as an educated and cultured nation. We mean an independent *national theater* which will testify to the world of our national culture." qtd. in Burton, *Prague*, 103.

Mountain. Říp is a mountain in the North of Prague where, according to legend, the father of the Czech nation, *Praotec Čech*, brought his people to settle in the Czech lands, the promised land of honey and good hunting. The popular version of this origin myth comes from Alois Jirásek's *Old Czech Legends*, but the roots of the legend dates back to the 1300s with the Dalimil Chronicles of the Cosmas of Prague. Říp mountain still resonates with the Czech national consciousness: even today, at the top of the mountain you can find a restaurant and tourist kiosk hanging a sign left over from the national fervor of the early 20th century that brazenly states: "*Co Mohamedu Mekka, to Čechu Říp*!" ("What Mecca is to Islam, Říp is to Czechs").[66] Inside Blaník mountain, on the other hand, supposedly sleep 1470 knight who wait to be led by St. Wenceslas to fight for the Czech nation at its greatest moment of need. The mountain also appear's in Jirásek's collected legends and as the crowing piece in Bedřich Smetana's patriotic symphonic poem, "*Má vlast*" (My Homeland). František Palacký, one of the "*Otci národa*" (fathers of the nation) laid "The foundation stone proper" of the Theater.[67] It has been argued that the location of the National Theater, across the Vltava from Prague Castle, was strategic, and that the national pomp that went into its construction was in part to place it in direct opposition to the castle in which the emperor would stay while in Prague and which therefore could be

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[66] "Co Mohamedu Mekka, to Čechu Říp!," *iDNES.cz*, January 1, 2008, http://cestovani.idnes.cz/co-mohamedu-mekka-to-cechu-rip-d2e-/po-cesku.aspx?c=A071230_175522_igcechy_tom.

[67] along with Tomáš Masaryk as opposed to Charles the IV, "Otec vlasti" or father of the homeland. Richard Burton, *Prague: A Cultural and Literary History* (Signal Books, 2003), 103.

interpreted as the "císařský hrad" and thus a symbol of Habsburg authority.[68]

The Prague Castle underwent significant renovation after the Czech's successfully reclaimed this symbol as their own. When Masaryk ascended to the presidency in 1918 he appointed Josip Plečnik as castle architect, and under him achieved what is "considered to be an excellent example of a democratic re-interpretation of monarchic architecture."[69] They did not erase the monarchic past, because in deed there was much to hold on to: however, the space was renegotiated in order to symbolize a shift to an independent and modern Czech nation-state that negotiated between the Gothic and Romanesque past, the vernacular Czech and the modern "cubist" understanding of dynamic space.

When Václav Havel took up the castle in 1989 after the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, he made a symbolic effort to renovate and reemploy the space in order to represent the democratic shift. Havel employed Bořek Šípek to fulfill the role of castle architect. Many areas were opened to the public that had previously been off limits, and among other things Šípek remodeled areas designed by Plečnik. This was not an erasure, but a return. Šípek maintained an "artistic and conceptual affinity" to

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[68] Marek Nekula, "The Divided City: Prague's Public Space and Franz Kafka's Readings of Prague," in *Franz Kafka Im Sprachnationalen Kontext Seiner Zeit: Sprache Und Nationale Identität in Öffentlichen Institutionen Der Böhmischen Länder* (Böhlau Verlag Köln Weimar, 2007), 87–108.The argument put forth by Nekula is not entirely convincing. The emperor very rarely stayed in Prague, and the castle was also a symbol of the golden age of Charles IV, who is fondly referred to as the "otec vlasti" (father of the homeland).Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 142. The only reason for this assertion in Nekula's seems to be that he wishes to argue that the "properly" Czech castle is the castle associated with Libuše, Vyšhrad.

[69] Arnold Bartetzky, "Changes in the Political Iconography of East Central European Capitals after 1989 (Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava)," *International Review of Sociology* 16, no. 2 (July 1, 2006): 451–69.

the work performed under Plečnik for Masaryk—reinforcing this connection had its obvious ideological benefits.[70]

Prague has undergone many upheavals and political transformations; however, for the most part, this has been accomplished without significant damage to the concrete existence of the city itself or its cultural and national sense of self. The destruction of significant centers of culture and historical memory, although tragic and an undeniably destructive, provided opportunities for a drastic "rethinking" or "rebranding" of the perception and projection of an urban environment's temporal ethos. Thus Prague has had to modify the symbolic significance of structures, without grand scale reconstruction in order to create a sense of spatial and temporal coherence.

The Libuše myth and others reemerge within the broader context of artifacts, nationalism and forgery—artificially woven plots—with Václav Hanka's contested and celebrated discovery of the *Rukopis královédvorský* and *Rukopis zelenohorský* in 1817, 1818 and continuing until 1848.[71] These documents and the controversy around their legitimacy became a locus of the navigation of the legacy of the Czech Nation. It brought the past into the present in order to rewrite and validate it. As Andrew Lass argues in "Romantic Documents and Political Monuments," the manuscript provided evidence for a nation with a rich epic and folk tradition that could compare to those of

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[70] Ibid.

[71] The "Libuše Oracle" *Libušino proroctví* was discovered in 1848 Lass, "Romantic Documents and Political Monuments."

the Germanic and Russian peoples.[72]

František Palacký, the central figures of the Czech national revival, mobilized these documents in order to make a claim for the Czechs in Bohemia by means of the history of the Přemyslid dynasty and swore by their validity.[73] He saw in the text evidence that the Czechs within Libuše's time demonstrated equality and democratic values that he wished to attribute to the historical identity of the nation. It was of course the other "father of the Czech Nation," Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who was central in conclusively debunking the manuscripts and calling for the Czech people to shift their approach to the constitution and justification of the Czech nation.

Masaryk later became the first president of the Czechoslovakia. As someone so deeply concerned with the viability of a Czech (mostly) nation-state the choice to methodically enquire into the documents' validity and to eventually denounce them as forgeries was quite a risk. However, in later discussions with the author Karel Čapek, Masaryk suggested that his motivation was to revise the mode in which the Czech people engaged with and attempted to defend their national identity and rights.[74] Of course Masaryk would, during his presidency, partake in his own romantic (if not artificial, then at the very least opportunistic) definition of what laid the basis for their claim to Czechoslovakian borders and unity after WWI. Thus, with

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[72] Ibid.

[73] Claiming, "I am as sure of the genuineness of Hanka's faithful copy as I am of my own life" S. E. Mann, "Václav Hanka's Forgeries," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 36, no. 87 (June 1, 1958): 493.

[74] Lass "and the manuscript battle turned into a matter of journalism and politics, the revision of an alleged ancient Slavonic culture became a revision of the whole cultural life of the present" (from Hovory s TGM as quoted in Ivanov 1969:365)

respect to both Fathers of the Czech Nation, we can apply Renan's apt words: "Forgetting, and I will even say historical error, are an essential factor in the formation of a nation … the essence of a nation is that all individuals have a lot of things in common, and also that all have forgotten a lot of things."[75]

Even after being dismissed on empirical grounds the texts remained significant as artifacts of the Czech imaginary and as pieces of literature. They were also masterpieces of forgery. The manuscripts were composed of pieced together authentic manuscripts that were doctored to present (presumably Hanka's) epic representation of Czech history. If indeed, as František Svejovský has stated, "the nation's revival was to a large extent a revival of interest in manuscript sources,"[76] then this can also be understood as identification with the category of the manuscripts as allegorical and their temporality as such. Alois Jirásek's *Staré pověsti české* are based, in part, on the stories surrounding the manuscripts, and his popular, household collection of Bohemian legends is central to the propagation of the popular myth of the nation.

Conclusion

Prague has and can be used as a symbol, but its success, the reason that one would like to use it as a symbol of the Czech Nation, is a result of its successful navigation

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[75] Qtd. in Faith Evelyn Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 315.

[76] Lass, "Romantic Documents and Political Monuments."

through the waves of the past and its escape from ruin. Prague does not engage in palingenesis or rebirth, but rather metamorphosis, and therefore requires a continuous narrative, not of renewal, but of continuity through change over time. It thus resists a break or radical change.[77] It is easy to understand why the possibility of radical change or break with the past could be considered potentially threatening to a nation that existed in potentiality for almost three centuries, only to be allowed a brief independence before again being forced into dormancy. During this time the "Czech Nation" was not allowed an independent sovereign existence and the Czech culture and language were constantly in a state of defense.[78] The idea of a national identity relied primarily on claims to historical continuity, language and national spirit; therefore, any narrative that allowed for radical break or change endangered the possibility of its own tenuous grasp on historical justification and continuing existence. The space of Prague therefore always carries within it the memory of all that has past: it is not a city in conflict with itself, but a city that has negotiated away this conflict by integrating not the conflict but duality into the fabric of its concept.

For Prague this flexibility is not only Švejkian capitulation and subtle circumnavigation but also the ability to reinterpret and re-script its history to accommodate continuity in the face of radical change. This is true down to the city's street names, which have changed over the course of multiple forfeitures of power, but were also manipulated and repurposed: the street signs were torn down by Prague

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[77] Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*.

[78] All Czech books published in Bohemia between 1414 and 1635, according to Rule 21 of the Index Bohemicorum librorum prohibitorum, contained heresies. Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 49.

residents in 1968 to confuse the Russians entering their city by taking advantage of

the city's notoriously narrow and winding avenues. Nameless streets did not provide

much difficulty to Prague citizens, since the street names themselves had been

changed just in 1948 after the communists take power, before that in 1945 when they

changed the street names to reflect the now absent German influence that had

changed the streets only in 1939 from the patriotic Czech street names applied in

1918 when the nation gained its independence. What is in an official name, therefore,

in Prague, is variable and far less important than the narrative that you ascribe to it.

We can see this even now when, as in the street formerly known as "7 Listopadu" in

memory of the Russian Revolution and is now, for convenience, Listopadova "in

honor" of the November 1989 Revolution.[79]

The corpus of Prague, its literature and its physicality, in the interwar period

as well as the post communist era has attempted to provide a narrative for the past of

the city. This narrative has resisted a linear sequence that could result as Rajendra

Chitnis observes result in "fixedness," an identity that can be defined, denied, or

destroyed. Instead the texts create a woven text of transformation and interweaving. It

is fitting that Rajendra Chitnis locates the greatest striving of literature for openness

in literary reflections on the period of normalization—when Czech identity was yet

again being controlled, limited, and occupied.[80]

By tying together the present and the past through prophecy, magic, and

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[79] Maura Griffin, "Street Names II," *The Prague Post*, October 20, 1992,
http://www.praguepost.cz/archivescontent/11234-street-names-ii.html.

[80] Chitnis, *Literature in Post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe*, 81.

metamorphosis all changes are prefigured and all pasts manufactured to fit the

exigencies of the present.[81]

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[81] In this way it would be claimed that Libuše prophesied the coming of the Jewish population that settled in Prague. And Ripellino in *Magic Prague* would see everywhere in Prague an iteration of the golem legend returning to haunt the present

III. GDAŃSK

"everyone here is suffering from the loss of a sense of time

we were left with only the place of attachment to place
still we keep ruins of temples ghosts of gardens and houses
if we lose the ruins we will be left with nothing"

--Zbigniew Herbert[1]

In the poem quoted above, "Report from the Besieged City," the Polish poet, essayist,

and dramatist Zbigniew Herbert reflects on identity and memory during a time of

destruction and resistance. The poem references an unnamed city, but the events it

details could suggest any number of sieges in Herbert's lifetime, most notably

Gdańsk,[2] where the German invasion of Poland began; Lwów, where Herbert was

born; and Warsaw, the German siege of Warsaw and the famous Warsaw uprising.

The use of the capitalized "City" (*Miasto*) throughout the poem implies that which

city any particular detail can be attributed to is less important than the idea of the

Polish city under siege in general. Herbert dates the "report" "1982," just after the

public announcement of the imposition of martial law was made to the Polish people

in December of 1981. The date suggests that although the imagery of the poem is

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[1] "wszyscy chorują tutaj na zanik poczucia czasu // pozostało nam tylko miejsce przywiązania do miejsca / jeszcze dzierżymy ruiny świątyń widma ogrodów i domów / jeśli stracimy ruiny nie pozostanie nic" in *Raport Z Oblężonego Miasta I Inne Wiersze*, Biblioteka "Kultury" ; T. 380 (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1983), 81. It is important to note that Polish does not have articles, so the choice to interpret the title as "Report from a Besieged City" or "Report from the Besieged City" is at the discretion of the translator. Alissa Valles and Bogusław Rostworowski chose to translate the title as "Report from a Besieged City" and "Report from a Town Under Siege" respectively. I have chosen to follow John and Bogdana Carpenter's translation "Report from a Besieged City," because Herbert's capitalization of City throughout the poem seems to suggest that there is not a single city to which he is referring; however, as I state above, it could be referring to one of a number of cities that were being stormed in literal or figural ways throughout his lifetime.

[2] Herbert and his family also lived in the *Trojmiasto* area (Gdańsk, Sopot, and Gdynia) shortly after the end of the war.

undoubtedly the imagery of war, what is meant by a city under siege may be interpreted with more latitude.

The geographic location of the poem is less interesting than its assertion of place, ruin, and memory over and above time. In some ways this is in line with the ways the previous chapters have examined Berlin and Prague's manipulation of time through navigating and reimagining space. However, it certainly isn't the insistence on the surface of the present that is described in Berlin. The lost sense of time that the speaker of the poem describes in the height of socialism's martial law may very well be something akin to the "exploded" time that Potok experiences after the end of that same socialist regime, but the alternative and mystical spaces of Prague are exchanged for a very specific "here" (*tutaj*) and an attachment to the concrete of "ruins." The themes of ruins and exile that run through this poem resonate with the themes that arise in the literature of and about Gdańsk. The relocation of the city's German population after WWII and the destruction the city center underwent during the German invasion guaranteed that ghosts and ruins were in overabundance and that there were many who held a disappeared city in their hearts.

This chapter is concerned with place and memory – their figuration and their loss – in the city of Gdańsk/Danzig.[3] It will address representations of the city in different dimensions: the literary, in books by Günter Grass, Stefan Chwin, and Mieczysław Abramowicz's, and the spatial, through the process and reception of

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[3] I will use Gdańsk to refer to the city post WWII, and Danzig to refer to the city before this point. I do this to compliment the distinction between the different places, but I do not want to undermine the geographical/spatial continuity.

architectural reproduction and monuments. Throughout these works objects, photographs, and architectural citation are used as metonymic and synecdochic figurations of lost affective relationships to space and memory. These modes will provide the groundwork for an analysis of the mobilization of the categories of kitsch and authenticity in response to the city's traumatic and elided pasts.

Ruins and Exile

> "and if the City falls and one survives
> he will cary the City within himself on the road of exile
> he will be the City"[4]

The city's most famous literary son, Günter Grass, has used Danzig as the setting for some of his most important works. His *Danziger Trilogy* consists of *Katz und Maus* (*Cat and Mouse*), *Hundejahre* (*Dog Years*)*,* and probably his most famous work, *Die Blechtrummel* (The Tin Drum). These novels are all set in city of Danzig with an intimate sense of space and history. Grass's *Unkenrufe* (The Call of the Toad) would theoretically also be considered to fit this General rubric; however, it is set in contemporary Gdańsk and although it engages the city's history, it foregrounds the nostalgia of the German exile and the global world with which this nostalgia contends rather than a connection between space and history. The city haunts these texts despite, or perhaps because of, Grass's long stated belief that Danzig, the city of his birth, ceased to exist long ago.

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[4] "i jeśli Miasto padnie a ocaleje jeden / on będzie niósł Miasto w sobie po drogach wygnania / on będzie Miasto" from "Raport z oblężonego miasta" Herbert, *Raport Z Oblężonego Miasta I Inne Wiersze*, 81.

This loss of homeland that is foregrounded by Grass can be read in part as a strategic political stance that by extension positions Grass against those Germans interested in regaining the territory East of the Oder-Neisse line, a desire that in West Germany lasted well into '70s. This absolute loss also reflects the loss of homeland not only in the straightforward sense of territory and place of birth but also the loss of *Heimat*:[5] the romantic image of society's relationship to the natural environment that was lost or disavowed in response to German guilt and the concept's implication in the crimes of the twentieth century. However, these explanations, that would read Grass's insistence on the loss of Danzig as figurative or functional, are incomplete: they distill the sentiment into a banal observation and a political gesture. The loss of Danzig that he claims must also be read as an actual loss of place rather than a purely metaphorical loss.

This literal loss is multifaceted: the destruction of Danzig's city center at the end of the second World War, the loss of the city's name, the loss of language, and the physical as well as emotional separation necessitated by the loss of territory.[6] Of course, this loss is also mixed with the feeling of moral obligation, guilt, and exile.[7]

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[5] "Homeland," he says, "is something one only becomes aware of through its loss," Maya Jaggi, "A Life in Writing: Günter Grass," *The Guardian*, accessed December 3, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/nov/01/gunter-grass-interview-maya-jaggi.; Guntram H. Herb, "Double Vision: Territorial Strategies in the Construction of National Identities in Germany, 1949-1979," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 140–64.

[6] "Nobody speaks Silesian any more; East Prussian is gone. That monstrous loss can never be recouped" Jaggi, "A Life in Writing."

[7] "Left to my own devices, I would have followed the laws of aesthetics and been perfectly happy to seek my place in texts droll and harmless. But … There were extenuating circumstances: mountains of rubble and cadavers, fruit of the womb of German history. … Besides, I come from a family of refugees, which means that in addition to everything … I had the irreparable loss of my birthplace."

These dimensions of loss—linguistic, affective, cultural, structural, territorial—all

result in the rewriting of essential categories that make a "place": a compelling

combination of space, culture, and memory.

Of course, despite the various ways in which it can be claimed that Danzig has

ceased to be, it must be acknowledged that the city still exists. Gdańsk is a city that

Grass still regularly visits, and he still finds commonality with the people he finds

there, especially with refugees and displaced peoples transported to Gdańsk from

Poland's former eastern territories.[8] What then is the relationship between these cities

(Danzig/ Gdańsk)? And how do we address them in terms of memory?

In his 1999 Nobel Prize acceptance speech Günter Grass argued, in line with

Adorno's statement that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz, that "the only way

writing after Auschwitz, poetry or prose, could proceed was by becoming memory

and preventing the past from coming to an end."[9] This revival of the past is for Grass

intimately tied to place and space as we see in his comments during an interview with

Ōe Kenzaburō in 1978 eleven years earlier. In the interview he binds this memory

with the space of his childhood, saying: "In order to face the problem of the Third

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Günter Grass, "Nobel Lecture: To Be Continued ...," *Nobelprize.org*, accessed December 3, 2014, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1999/lecture-e.html.

[8] "I met refugees who understood how I felt. We could speak about lost things." Jaggi, "A Life in Writing."; many of these displaced peoples from the eastern territories are from cities like Herbert's Lwów, which were integrated into the borders of the Ukraine after the agreements at Yalta and Potsdam.

[9] Grass, "Nobel Lecture: To Be Continued ..."; Grass is responding to Adorno's famous formulation in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (1951) "Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben."

Reich, I need to re-create the memory of my childhood in my hometown."[10] This recreation of home, even as an attempt to keep alive past sins as a balsam against absolution, is not free of the nostalgic impulse to fend away the future in his literature—the homeless future in which he lived his present.

Re-creating memory in space became an extra-literary pursuit directly tied to Gdańsk in 2005 when the second translation of *The Tin Drum* made clear the significance of the present day space of Gdańsk to the communication of the Grass's narrative. Günter Grass sought a new English translation to supplement the first translation by Ralph Manheim, which though very successful included some omissions and abbreviations.

The new translation, requested by Grass, was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the book's first German publication. In the "translator's Afterword" to the new English translation that came out of this request, Breon Mitchell describes Günter Grass's approach to work-shopping the translations.

For the Nobel Prize winner, the 50th anniversary resulted in new translations in ten languages. Grass requested a new process for author/translator collaboration, one that added depth to the understanding of the novel's setting in addition to clarifying the nuance of the text's prose. This method consisted of combining a personally guided tour of the locations of the novel with page-by-page discussion of the novel's content. Breon Mitchell writes:

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[10] Günter Grass, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Reiko Tachibana Nemoto, "On Two Interviews between Günter Grass and Ōe Kenzaburō," *World Literature Today* 67, no. 2 (1993): 301.

the Nobel Prize-winning author had been conferring for hours each day with his translators, going over *Die Blechtrommel* page by page, then emerging from the workshop atmosphere to show them the heart and soul of the novel's geography and history—the potato fields of the Kashubian countryside, the beach and jetty at Neufahrwasser, the city and suburbs of Danzig, Oskar's home, the grocery store, the old city hall: in short, the still living features of his past.[11]

The idyllic picture of translation that Mitchell creates here is admirable. A careful and cooperative page by page exploration of the text is as much as any translated volume could ask for. However, in her own somewhat nostalgic musings ("heart and soul" of the Kashubian countryside and the intimacies of Danzig daily life), Mitchell seems to somewhat miss the mark here. If the places that were visited on these outings were "still living" parts of Grass's past, then his presence would be unnecessary and he would not have insisted on it so adamantly. Grass's insistence on being present suggests that these locations are not the heart and soul of the novel's "geography and history" but rather parts of his past that he is attempting to resurrect or bring alive from fragments that may not identify with, but can still refer to, the Danzig that no longer lives.

These "*Übersetzentreffen*" are, of course, unique in that they display the dedication of Günter Grass to the process and product of the new foreign language translations, but they are also unique in the significance of the place in which this labor of rewriting occurs. The specific insistence on the space in which the communication of memory and narrative take place signals not only the importance

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[11] Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 566.

of Gdańsk/Danzig as a setting but also the nostalgia that insists on recreating the narrative of the city's past.

Grass's participation in the process of translation is also noteworthy in its novelty. That is, the implication goes beyond the importance of the opportunity to ask the author "what he meant" and to get a sense of the setting. One could imagine that it was a combination of the city and the author that gave the experience its true insights: to experience the city discussed in the story, to have the author describe the memories he has there, and to walk with the author as he attempts to recreate his story on the streets of a city that is no longer Danzig.

Grass found it necessary to personally guide his translators through Gdańsk, a city that as he states should not be mistakenly elided with the Danzig of his childhood. How then do we give appropriate weight to the loss Grass insists upon and the referential quality that he obviously values and uses as a basis for the reconstruction of his novel? This insistence on the absolute loss of Danzig as a place and the navigation of the space of Gdańsk as necessary to bring alive certain memories or pieces of the lost city relies on the relationships of "place" and "space" to time and memory.

As a space, Gdańsk has a history that can be glossed from the oldest record of the city's existence in the 10th century to the present. It was largely autonomous until the War of Polish Succession, when it was sieged by the Russians, in the Second Partition of Poland it was annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia, then it briefly existed as a free city under Napoleon, before being tossed between Germanic hands until

1918 when it regained the status of a Free City per the Versailles Treaty only to be taken by Nazi Germany in September of 1939. Many of the city's Polish citizens were interned under Nazi occupation, and the city only became Polish again in 1945. By this time allied bombing had destroyed much of the city center.

The demographics of the city again shifted in 1945, when the German citizens of Gdańsk either fled or were forcibly expelled. The city was then repopulated with Poles from other areas of the nation, many were Polish peoples expelled from what would become the new borders of the USSR, which meant from what is now Ukraine and Lithuania. After the Second World War, Poland was under Soviet control and Gdańsk was an essential port for the Eastern Bloc. This is partially what gave the Lenin Shipyard workers the influence they needed to leverage the Solidarność trade union. After that: martial law, the resurrection of solidarity, the fall of the iron curtain and European reintegration. The space of Gdańsk/Danzig saw the passing these phases of history in intimate and very physical ways: bombs, strikes, and the politics of reconstruction.

This complicated history is often represented as different emblematic historical positions: the city's cosmopolitan past as a wealthy port city, its existence as the embodiment of the German/Polish conflict, and the city's function as the heart of Solidarność. These dominate the popular representations of the city and populate it with monuments. Often, photographic representations of the city highlight these phases: the crane that stands in for the Hanseatic past of the city, the destroyed city

center that embodies both the German/Polish conflict and the absolute loss of Danzig,

and the prolific religious and nationalist symbolism of the Solidarność movement.

These symbolic moments lend themselves easily to representation but fail to

capture the traumatic loss and defensive shoring up of identities that took place

through seismic shifts in memory, topography and demography. As a temporally and

culturally determined *place*, the city on the Baltic coast has a fragmented narrative

that is less easily attached to a coherent identity or emblematic image. The city has

been re-written and re-created in multiple iterations; therefore, "the past" imagined as

a concept of temporal and affective totality, the sediment of the years gone by, is

often traumatic in both its absence and embattled presence. These less emblematic

pasts haunt the city's literary and physical topography as histories "out of place."

Günter Grass gestures to this fragmented history of renaming and recreation through

his recounting of the city's past in *The Tin Drum*:

> First came the Rugii, then the Goths and Gepidae, then the Kashubes,
> from whom Oskar descends in a direct line. Soon thereafter the Poles
> sent in Adalbert of Prague. He came with the Cross and was slain with
> the Ax by either Kashubes or Borussians. This happened in a fishing
> village, and the name of that village was Gyddanyzc. Gyddanyzc
> became Danczik, Danczik became Dantzig, later spelled Danzig, and
> now called Danzig-Gdańsk.[12]

It is not, as the translator suggests, possible for the space of the city to produce the

"still living features of the past." Grass must narrate, or reproduce, the process of

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[12] Ibid., 377. "Zuerst kamen die Rugier, dann kamen die Goten und Gepiden, sodann die Kaschuben, von denen Oskar in direkter Linie abstammt. Bald darauf schickten die Polen den Adalbert von Prag. Der kam mit dem Kreuz und wurde von Kaschuben oder Pruzzen mit der Axt erschlagen.Das geschah in einem Fischerdorf und das Dorf hieß Gyddanyzc. Aus Gydannyzc machte man Danczik, aus Danczik wurde Dantzig, das sich später Danzig schrieb, und heute heißt Danzig Gdańsk." Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel; Roman*, 11. Aufl. (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1964), 379.

memory by thickening the space of Gdańsk with the replication of the practice of memory.

This fragmented historical narrative is only partially tangible in its objects. Lost totalities of identity and memory grounded in place result in a literature of historical and semantic layers and fragments that appeal to misplaced histories. Gdańsk has gathered depth through mnemonics of memory: motifs, themes, and narrative devices that have evolved to respond to the exigencies of the city's history. Often these narrative devices work through the objects that populate the city's literature and museums. These objects exist as fragments of a lost totality of identity: the city that has been lost and a cosmopolitan Polish identity that can no longer be claimed.

Porous Time and Synecdoche: Mediating Time through Objects

Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* explores the function of memory and memorial in European cities that she describes as "in transition" in terms of their memory politics. In order to explore the relationship between time and space, especially intentional and unintentional monuments, Boym uses "porosity" as a metaphor for the referential operation of space. She describes porosity as "a spatial metaphor for time in the city, for the variety of temporal dimensions embedded in physical space."[13] Borrowing a description of divided Berlin from a novel by Peter Schneider, Boym describes the porous city as "a city where there [are] 'always new

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[13] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 77.

cracks in the asphalt and out of them the past [grows] luxuriantly."[14] The effect of this porosity, she states, is "a sense of urban theatricality and intimacy." This definition of porosity describes a certain affect related to time and space in Gdańsk; however, it is unclear whether the past can be said to grow luxuriently from the cracks in this city's façades. This chapter argues that it is rather kitsch, the aesthetic expression of a desire for a lost totality, that blossoms here.

This chapter proposes to accept Svetlana Boym's emphasis on topography through the material and spatial presence of the city but to shift the tropology of her examination. In this coastal city metonymy and synecdoche, rather than metaphor, are the operative modes of representation. These allow for slippage between objects and the categories of history and memory. I will first discuss the way I am mobilizing metonymy and synecdoche as related figures of speech and then connect the terms to key texts in the literature of Gdańsk as mnemonics of memory. The chapter will then discuss kitsch as an aesthetic model of relating affectively to history and community that is based in physical objects (or an environment) and introduce into this model, the potential of a post-traumatic kitsch that responds not to the rapidly changing conceptions of time but to the disruptive gaps in community and memory.

In his essay, "Four Master Tropes," Kenneth Burke addresses metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony not as rhetorical elements but in terms of "their role in the discovery and description of 'the truth.'"[15] This truth, which I read as

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[14] Ibid., 176.

[15] Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1941): 421.

meaning making or making sense, can be translated into the realm of representing the past. An aspect of this can be seen in Pierre Nora's proposition that memory and history are in many ways oppositional terms: one deeply engrained in life and therefore constantly evolving and the other concerned with reconstruction and always subject to the accusation of being incomplete.

For Burke, the basic "strategy" of metonymy in the production of meaning is "to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible" . This relationship is often referred to as one of contiguity or, for Burke, reduction: the substitution of the actual for the potential or the bodily equivalent for a state of mind (as in "heart" for "emotions"). We can also refer back to Quintilian's example of metonymy "Mars for war; Virgil for Virgil's works" to highlight the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical.[16]

Burke offers "representation" as the "literal" description of the substitution that takes place in synecdoche. He claims the function of substituting the part for the whole or genus for the species is one of representation. While the relationship between synecdoche and metonymy has a long history of debate, especially whether synecdoche should be considered as a subsumed under metonymy (Jakobson), this chapter adopts the position that they do indeed compose two separate but related categories that can be categorized differently and that this difference lies in the characteristics drawn out by Burke: that metonymy can be considered in terms of

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[16] "As tropes Quintilian names and describes metaphor, synecdoche (*mucronem pro gladio; puppim pro navi* ("blade for sword; prow for ship"), metonymy (Mars for war; Virgil for Virgil's works)" Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 26.

substitution of a figure or embodied state, while synecdoche operates in the realm of material, relationship and practice.

The Tin Drum

> I slept in a basket full of letters headed for Łódz, Lublin, Lwów,
> Torun, Kraków, Częstochowa, coming from Lodz, Lublin, Lemberg,
> Thorn, Krakau, and Tschenstochau. But I dreamed neither of the
> Matka Boska Częstochowska nor of the Black Madonna, nibbled in
> dreams neither on Marszałek Piłsudski's heart preserved in Cracow
> nor on the gingerbread that has made the city of Thorn so famous.[17]

Oscar, whose initial narrative offers a tentative example of an inverted

Bildungsroman when, with the help of his toy drum, he refused to grow, is left lying

in a basket of letters while his "father" unwillingly joins the defense of the Polish

Post Office at the outbreak of the second World War. These letters signal destinations

that are utterly different and very much the same. The use of the cities' Polish and

German names (Lwów, Lemberg; Kraków, Krakau; Częstochowa, Tschenstochau)

emphasizes the dual identity of these cities and of Gdańsk-Danzig: as a Polish *and*

German home. As Oscar sleeps awaiting the standoff at the Polish Post Office, the

last outpost of the Polish state in the free city, Oscar does not dream of "the Matka

Boska Częstochowska" or the "the Black Madonna," or snack on "Marszałek

Piłsudski's heart preserved in Cracow" or the famous Thorn gingerbread. Oscar

seamlessly moves from the complex relationship between language, identity, place,

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[17] Grass, *The Tin Drum*, 205. "Ich schlief in einem Wäschekorb voller Briefe, die nach Lodz, Lublin, Lwów, Toruń, Krakow und Częstochowa hinwollten, die von Lodz, Lublin, Lemberg, Thorn, Krakau und Tschenstochau herkamen. Ich trämte aber weder von der Matka Boska Częstochowska noch von der schwarzen Madonna, knabberte weder träumend an Marszałek pilsudskis in Krakau aufbewahrtem Herzen noch an jenen Lebkuchen, die die Stadt Thorn so berühmt gemacht haben."

and name to the reduction of place to a single image, particularly one that is iconic (in the most literal sense) and/or consumable.

These images appear drastically opposed but their effect is very much the same. Whether it is the roman catholic icon of the Black Madonna, often reproduced and most famously worn as a lapel pin by Lech Walesa during Solidarity's negotiations (this was, of course, after the publication of *Die Blechtrommel*), the heart of a Polish national hero interned in the cultural center of the polish nation, or a piece of Thorn gingerbread which now is of course today called by its Polish name *pierniki toruńskie*. These objects quickly and without mediation conjure not only the cities with which they are associated but also national faith, national spirit, and national tradition. The complexity introduced by the conflicting names is contrasted with these consumable synechdoches. These objects neatly stand in for forms of national identification and offer access to concepts that are otherwise too complex or ineffable to engage with directly.

However, sleeping on the bed of mutually unintelligible letters, Oscar notably doesn't dream of these: at the center of a conflict where "nation" is at stake, he does not dream of national religion, spirit or tradition. His position remains as ambiguous as his parentage. There is one city, of course, that has been left out of this equation: Danzig/Gdańsk. The city from and to which these letters are presumably posted has not been offered an appropriate object. However, the next sentence, which tells us that Oscar's tin drum lies in the pile of latters, suggests the drum as the appropriate synecdochic object. The mass produced tin toy that helps Oskar escape time and

remain a child until he is ready to grow up, which is also the vehicle through which, as an adult, he is able to return to the memories of his childhood, offers itself up as an appropriate emblem for the city. This object is not defined by its unmediated significance, but rather by its significance as a medium through which memories are accessed and the effects of time delayed.

For the author it is certainly true that the city of Danzig operates as a medium for memory and coming to terms with trauma. For Grass, his hometown and its Polish iteration brought to life the memories that would produce, in his estimation, the best possible translation of his work and memories. The setting provided by the city in his most famous novels was part of a project to "become memory" and "preventing the past from coming to an end." Like the drum for Oscar, the city's German name became the rhythm of a time the author wished to make stick.

In the Danzig novels of Gunter Grass, objects emerge as vehicles for accessing the past. However, like Oskar's drum and the national icons, these fall into two categories: objects that we might consider porous, that allow us to access time and mediate memory and objects that are products of closed systems and offer "a victory over time itself." This emphasis on objects is maintained in the novels of the polish authors of the Gdańsk School.

Everyone Brought What Was Best

> "The histories that I tell are true. It does not matter whether they happened or not."[18]
>
>   – Mieczysław Abramowicz

This short line opens my Mieczysław Abramowicz's, *Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego* (Everyone Brought What Was Best) and offers an interpretive key to a text that plays with the ideas of reproduction and replication, often blurring the boundaries between the document and fiction. In these short sentences the author makes a clear statement about the nature of truth in the face of the lacunae that punctuate knowledge of the past. However, the lines are easily missed, nestled at the bottom of the backside of the title page: not the usual place for an epigraph, and the 400 pages that follow are concerned with undermining the significance attributed to the distinction between object, objective fact, and fiction. This approach to truth, which is mirrored in the book's presentation of authenticity through the framing of objects and the manipulation of genre, reveals a trend in the function of memory and history in Gdańsk's literary and physical topography, where practice and narrative take precedence in the production and reproduction of the authentic.

       This project begins with the first word of the text. Abramowicz takes advantage of the dual meaning of *historia* in Polish, which like the German *Geschichte* is used to categorize both a "proper" history and a fictional story. The

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[18] "Historie, które opowiadam, są prawdziwe. Niezależnie od tego, czy się zdarzyły, czy nie." From the epigraph to *Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego* (Gdańsk: Wydawn. słowo/obraz terytoria, 2005).

book traces or invents the histories of the Jewish population of the *Trójmiasto*—the area of the cities Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot—through a series of objects, which unfold into histories that "fill the empty space between fact and fiction."[19]

Each chapter of Abramowicz's text opens with an object that is presented to the reader in the form of a black and white photograph. Among the objects collected here are a patch of the star of David, a tombstone visited by Günter Grass, an iron cross from the battle of Tannenberg, and letters from Gdańsk. These photographs serve to reproduce the object in the context of the book as well as document their existence in reality. This documentation of an originary "truth"—posited through the tenuous truth claim of photography—is followed by a collection of connected stories, bits of text, elaborations, transcribed letters, and variously constructed narrative threads that bind the objects to visions and versions of time and history.

The variety of reproduced images is matched by the spectrum of genres that compose the content of the chapters: epistolary exchanges, a fragment of a theater piece, song lyrics, the text of an operation manual for a "disinfection chamber" and an eerie chapter dedicated to "*Bestandsaufnahme*." Through its play with the practice of documentation and the affective register of genre, the book leaves the reader unclear as to which of its materials are posed reproductions and which are representations of authentic documents. For instance, the chapter "*Bestandsaufnahme*" consists of meticulous inventories of the items collected from their Jewish owners upon entering

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[19] "która wypełnia puste miejsce pomiędzy literaturą faktu a beletrystyką." Roman Pawłowski, "Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego, Abramowicz, Mieczysław," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 14, 2005, sec. Kultura, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,3014578.html

a cencentration camp. Given the chapter's affective register one is tempted to believe

that the entries are genuine: the lists are cold and thorough and they perfectly fit the

form of their genre. However, neither the appendix material nor any reference notes

support their factual existence. The only support for its claim to truth lies in the

emotional impact of the photographic epigraph to the chapter: an image of a pile of

worn suitcases which the appendix tells you was taken from an exposition at the State

Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the same time, ironically, the emotional impact

of the chapter's closing highlights the text's narrative quality:

> XIV. Canvas travel bag, green, trimmed with brown leather, very
> heavily damaged, writing in white paint – blurred.
> Content:
> -   empty.[20]

Like the nostalgic kitsch of Andrzej Wajda's films, the Abramowicz's book

seamlessly slips between documentary footage – black and white pictures of solid

objects – and what *could* be documentary footage but is, instead, dramatized material

produced to fill in the interstices between what is true and what we feel is true. In

this way Abramowicz gives both truth and fiction a touch of the mythic and of the

real.

In his review of *Każdy przyniósł* in Gazeta Wyborcza, Roman Pawłowski

highlights the quasi-documentary style of the book and compares it to the content of

the novels of Günter Grass, Stefan Chwin and Paweł Huelle:[21]

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[20] "Torba podróżna brezentowa, zielona, wykończenia z brązowej skóry, bardzo mocno
zniszczona, napis białą farbą – zamazany.
Zawartość: - pusta." Abramowicz, *Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego*, 186 translation my own.

Just as in the books of Günter Grass and his Polish imitators, Stefan Chwin and Paweł Huelle, literary fiction is always permeated with the authentic, tumultuous history of the Free City. With the difference that Abramowicz presents his by means of historically authentic frames. He combines these two realms in the manner of magical, half real, half fictional stories submerged in real detail and vice versa – he appends to authentic objects stories of their hypothetical owners."[22]

The reception of Abramowicz's historical documentary exposes a more general desire to erase the distinction between real stories supplemented with fictional detail and fictional stories based on real objects. His work, likened to documentary and even archeology, is repeatedly described in terms of authenticity and redemption (in the metaphysical and transactional sense).

This should not be surprising. At its core, of course, *Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego* is a response to the trauma of the empty spaces left behind by Gdańsk's missing Jewish population and a nostalgic attempt to create an idealized version of Gdańsk's cosmopolitan past. However, the book's broad appeal suggests a further resonance with the experience of the historicity of the *Trójmiasto* in general. Trauma, especially the trauma of full or partial erasure (expulsion, censure, extermination), occupies the affective register of Gdańsk's landscape: the German houses repopulated by Polish families, the city center that was all but leveled and then rebuilt, and the monuments scattered across the city and landscape reminding citizens of loss and

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[21] *Paradokumentalny*, a term also used to describe Wajda's *Człowiek z żelaza* (1981) and equally appropriate to *Człowiek z nadziei* (2013).

[22] "Podobnie jak książkach Güntera Grassa i jego polskich naśladowców, Stefana Chwina i Pawła Huelle, literacka fikcja przenika się tu nieustannie z autentyczną, burzliwą historią Wolnego Miasta. Z tą różnicą, że Abramowicz nadaje swoim historiom autentyczne ramy. Miesza te dwa obszary w sposób magiczny, na pół realne, na pół fikcyjne opowieści zanurza w prawdziwych szczegółach i na odwrót - dopisuje do autentycznych przedmiotów historie ich hipotetycznych właścicieli" Pawłowski, "Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego, Abramowicz, Mieczysław."

identity: Westerplatte, the Polish Post Office, the fallen shipyard workers. The texture Gdańsk's history relies on identifying what is real and to whom: street names that have been changed and histories that have been written over. This is true even to the extent that it was considered necessary to create a monument to commemorate the city's missing cemeteries.

We can therefore read *Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego* as a text that engages with the past by adopting the cloak of authenticity. It does this in order to more safely fill the traumatic gaps of absolute loss with nostalgia and "authentic" memory. The readiness with which this approach is accepted by the text's readership reflects a deeper question about authenticity and narrative in Gdańsk.

By way of illustration, in his review of the book by Abramowicz and the recent theater adaptation by Marek Brand, Piotr Wyszomirski thanks Abramowicz for providing an "authentic image and medium"[23] with which to access the Jewish experience. That is, an authentic experience that Wyszomirski sets up in opposition to the celluloid image produced, for instance, by Steven Spielberg in *Schindler's List*. However, at the same time, Wyszomirski lists the "constituent elements" of *Każdy przyniósł* as those of "protest, nostalgia, and sadness, a feeling of lack, impoverishment, the loss of someone mysterious and hard to understand, but disturbingly important." He goes on to describe *Każdy przyniósł* as "a prayer and a

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[23] "autentyczny obraz i przekaz" Piotr Wyszomirski, "Wiosną Jest Bardzo Pięknie W Stutthofie. Czyli Cicha Epopeja, 'Każdy Przyniósł, Co Miał Najlepszego' W Teatrze Miniatura," *Gazeta Świętojańska*, March 18, 2014, http://www.gazetaswietojanska.org/index.php?id=2&t=1&page=49262.

remembrance, a little *Yizkor*, that only lacks the decedents … ."[24] Meanwhile, Roman Pawłowski who, in his review in Gazeta Wyborcza, compared the text to a work of archaeology and wrote of Abramowicz's "authentic frames," has no problem concluding with the statement: "It is important to restore the memory of a little-known area of common Polish-German-Jewish history. This book undoes the Holocaust. It is salvation."[25]

This movement from the performance of authenticity to the experience of nostalgia and reconciliation suggests that the text constructs a practice of reading that replicates memory in order to engage with an affectively real experience of mourning and nostalgia. In this way, the "authentic" is framed by practice, this is here a practice of reading that is replicated and taught within Abramowicz's text. As we can see in the previous examples, this movement to establish the authenticity of a narrative of the past is combined with a gesture towards its erasure or negation (*przekreślać*). In this way it falls prey to many of the criticisms of memorialization in the name of forgetting as the construction of monuments.

I would like to argue that the response to the trauma of erasure and identity in Gdańsk is a particularly stylized relationship to the production and reproduction of the real, and I would like to tentatively label this engagement "post-traumatic kitsch." This kitsch deviates slightly from the kitsch and the temporal trauma of the modern

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[24] "Jego elementami składowymi są m.in: protest, nostalgia i smutek, poczucie braku, zubożenia, straty po kimś tajemniczym i trudnym do zrozumienia, ale niepokojąco ważnym. 'Każdy przyniósł…' to także modlitwa i wspomnienie, trochę *jizkor*, tylko potomków brak…" Ibid.

[25] Ważne jest przywrócenie pamięci mało znanego obszaru wspólnej polsko-niemiecko-żydowskiej historii. Ta książka przekreśla Holocaust. Jest ocaleniem" Pawłowski, "Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego, Abramowicz, Mieczysław."

experience that is described by Calinescu in *Five Faces of Modernity.* In this version of kitsch, "kitsch may be viewed as a reaction against the 'terror' of change and the meaninglessness of chronological time flowing from an unreal past into an equally unreal future. Under such conditions, spare time—whose quantity is socially increasing—is felt as a strange burden, the burden of emptiness. Kitsch appears as an easy way of 'killing time.'"[26]

It can be argued that kitsch has always been a reaction to trauma, or rather a flexible and vacuous aesthetic response to the collapsing of time and space. This version of kitsch kills time through a particularly hermetic and clean relationship to a "past" that is adrift from the moors of concrete historical identifiers. Kitsch engenders an affective relationship to an object or image that provides imagined communion in feeling. An engagement with kitsch signals a desired status or relationship to a class or time, but simultaneously the "kitschiness" of the object necessarily restates the distance between the individual and the desired relationship. In this way history is bracketed in the chronology of kitsch, passing quietly over traumas of the past and selecting and intentionally manipulating the history of a particular moment in order to offer a more stable image of a future.

However, the burden of the emptiness and boredom of spare time that kitsch promises to remedy is translated in the context of post-traumatic kitsch into not the emptiness of hours but the erasures and lacunae of an uneasy history such as that

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[26] Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 248.

embodied in Abramowicz's green travel bag, whose indecipherable inscription

promises a history to be known but offers no contents. Instead of offering an

"aesthetic lie," a post-traumatic kitsch offers a new mode of engaging with truth that

emphasizes practice over past or, to return to the inscription, it emphasizes the

practice and enactment of memory (story-telling, reading, experience) over what has

"happened."[27]

To engage this topic from the context of another text from Gdańsk, we can

find two particularly poignant and contending examples of kitsch offered through the

perspective of Stefan Chwin's novel *Hanemann*. Herr Hanemann, the focus of much

of the story's narration, has suffered personal as well as national trauma and stays

behind as one of the last remaining Germans in Gdańsk after the war. One evening, as

he tries to avoid thinking of the many ghosts that haunt him, he sits contemplating a

collection of the most banal kitsch, a kitsch that perfectly embodies that described by

Călinescu: a dolphin centerpiece, a statuette of a shepherdess holding a lamb and an

alabaster fisherman. He attempts to escape the trap of the aesthetic: "It wasn't that

these pretentious bibelots glistening on the shelves of the display cabinet and the

mahogany étagère were vestiges of a past he was yearning to return to, the city that

no longer existed. He had always found the whole rococo business a little

ridiculous."

Hanemann is fully aware of the purpose of their design and their more sinister

associations with his own nation's recent past (the baubles are dated 1909). And

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[27] Ibid., 249.

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eventhough he can articulate that he does not desire the return that he knows they signal – a return to an idealized national past prior to the trauma he is contending with – he is unintentionally seduced instead by their approach to time: their distance from the true object of desire, their closed system of signification, and their immunity to change. He is jealous of what he perceives as the objects' naïve defiance of the world and its changing days: "at twilight, as the sky over the hills cooled off after a scorching day, with the sun a distant fiery glow, he saw in those petit delicate forms a childlike courage, a naïve willingness to ignore the world …. A benign, insolent defiance of power and authority."[28] This scene reveals the utopic tendency of generic kitsch insofar as it is of no particular time or place. This quality is part of what allows kitsch to have the universal quality that Kundera identifies in his 1984 novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

> Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says:
> How nice to see the children running in the grass! The second tear
> says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children
> running in the grass! It is the second tear which makes kitsch kitsch.[29]

Kundera's convenient and famous "second tear" definition of kitsch calls attention to the automaticity of the emotional reaction as well as the dimension of kitsch that relies on the assumption of a shared or universal understanding. It is this coherence, which is attained through the gesture towards universality, that I wish to foreground when addressing a post-traumatic kitsch that, rather than creating the illusion of

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[28] Stefan Chwin, *Death in Danzig*, trans. Philip Boehm (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004), 97–98.

[29] Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 250–251.

common feeling and utopic time, addresses objects as relics that ground and produce coherent narratives and practices that pretend to be memory.

This brings us back to the second example from Chwin's novel, *Hanemann*. In the chapter "Objects," everyday items emerge as conscious bearers of history: the lid of a coffee pot considers the possibility of its transformation into as an instrument of death, elaborate serving dishes are jealous of the flatness of a metal baking sheet that can be easily hidden, and "linens" are "laid out on shelves like carefree strata from the Miocene." These objects are later found and used by the displaced Poles from East Poland who come to inhabit the quiet houses that the Germans left behind. These items—towels monographed with German names, shakers marked *Salz* und *Pfeffer*, a banister worn smooth by another family's hands—emerge in the private space of the Polish home or on the city's periphery in the hills and forests.

While not ostensibly kitsch, the objects have been inscribed in a narrative of practice and use that makes them the witnesses of a traumatic historical past. Like the Abramowicz text, *Hanemann* appends objects with the stories of their hypothetical owners. The objects become synechdoches of the world that has been lost. Except in Chwin's novel, the objects do not only gain significance through their figuration of their owners' stories, but through their personified experience – not only a lost history, but the emotional experience, the drama and trauma of that history. The practice of their use, in the German home and then the Polish, enacts a repetition of practice that conjures "memory" and adds figurative depth to the act.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter returns to Günter Grass with his novel *Unkenrufe* (The Call of the Toad). In *Unkenrufe* Grass brings together the nostalgic and kitschifying impulses of Polish and German inhabitants (and ex-inhabitants) of the German/Polish city in a contemporary context. The love story between the German Alexander and Polish Alexandra unfolds as the two become romantic and entrepreneurial partners in a project that establishes a homeland to those Germans who have a nostalgic wish to return.

The aesthetic of kitsch that is apparent in *Hanemann* and *Każdy przyniósł, co miał najlepszego* appears again in *Unkenrufe* as Alexander is drawn to the string bags carried by his lover Alexandra. Grass describes this fascination as an academic act of decoding and imagination as Alexander invokes a panoply of historical references:

> And just as in his doctoral thesis the three thistles and five roses in the coat-of-arms of the theologian Aegidius Strauch from the bas-relief of a tombstone in the Church of the Holy Trinity, where Strauch had been a priest until the end of the seventeenth century, were interpreted and set in relation to the vicissitudes of an embattled life—Strauch spent years in prison--, so he wrought the inherited string shopping bags of the widow with meaning. Because she always carried two of the six string bags with her in her calfskin shoulder bag, he deduced that this precaution was a result of the prevailing economy of scarcity in all of the Eastern Block: "Suddenly somewhere there is fresh cauliflower, cucumbers, or a hawker comes along offering bananas from the trunk of his Polski Fiat, and the practical string bags are at the ready, since plastic bags are still rare in the East."[30]

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[30] "Und wie er in seiner Doktorarbeit die drei Disteln und fünf Rosen im Wappen des Theologen Aegidius Strauch aus dem Flachrelief eines Grabsteins in Sankt Trinitatis, wo Strauch gegen Ende des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts Pfarrer gewesen ist, deutet und mit den Wechselfällen eines streitbaren Lebens in Beziehung setzt—Strauch verbrachte Jahre in Festungshaft--, so deutelte er an den geerbten Einkaufsnetzen der Witwe. Weil sie in ihrer Umhängetasche aus Kalbsleder jederzeit zwei von den sechs mit sich führte, leitete er diese Vorsorge von der in allen Ostblockstaaten herrschenden Mangelwirtschaft ab: 'Plötzlich gibt es irgendwo frischen Blumenkohl, Salatgurken, oder ein

The moss green netted bag becomes, for Alexander, a figure not of the prevailing situation in Poland, in the "east," but of the invented narrative of experience, necessity, and practical resourcefulness emerging out of a background of authentic knowledge and experience. The six string bags function in the text as synecdoches of the lost moment in historical time, the homeland in Wilno (the city from which Alexandra's family was forced as Alexander's was from Danzig), and a metonym not only for the affective state attached to that loss, the widow's mother, and a relationship to that homeland but also the flexibility of this inheritance to mobilize itself in the present.

Besides Alexander's obsession with interpretation, the passage highlights that what he sees in the bags is an authentic interaction with the contemporary world mediated and improved by relics of the past. The reader feels the overburdening of these insubstantial string bags with layers of history as the sentences compound. The lines are made almost unnavigable by the insertion of the layers that go into the contextualization of Alexander's nostalgic reaction: Alexander's doctoral thesis, his practice of interpretation, the 17th century context of the interpretation, and the economic and geographic setting of his present interpretive act. All are strung together from their non sequitur sources and handed to the reader as a model of the historical identity that is being attributed or miss-attributed to the string bags by this aggressive act of interpretation. Alexander's essentially nostalgic interpretation of the

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fliegender Händler bietet neuerdings aus dem Kofferraum seines Polski Fiat Bananen an, und sogleich sind die praktischen Netze greifbar, denn Plastiktüten sind im Osten immer noch rar.'" Günter Grass, *Unkenrufe: Eine Erzählung*, 1. Aufl (Göttingen: Steidl, 1992), 17–18.

kitschy symbols of "authentic" Polishness focuses on their contemporary utility, on the bags' "practical" use and ability to be "at the ready." The utility and contemporary relevance of kitsh and nostalgia are reasserted in the multi-national business endeavor that, besides the love story, is the driving narrative logic of the plot.

CONCLUSION: The Future Place of Memory and Nation

The risk for cities that have undergone traumatic historical events is that they become objects of mourning and commemoration. This is especially true for cities with rich and complicated social and cultural histories because they risk stagnating under the burden of a desire to showcase a specific moment in national memory. These cities can easily become frozen museums or concrete monuments that can no longer adapt to their complex and evolving histories and national contexts.

The preceding chapters have outlined three cities' attempts to accommodate the specters of traumatic pasts in their modern urban contexts. Myth, history, revolution, and progress: these are all technologies that justify and reconcile change, continuity, and passing time. In the current global moment, passing people, morphing environments, changing borders, and displacing significance are constants even in their transience, but they leave traces behind. I have suggested three modes of narrating these traces: three methods that have been employed to read these particular cities and provide context for understanding the relationship between the individual, the workings of the political/physical environment, and the past to which they adhere.

The cities examined in this dissertation have experienced traumatic historical events that have threatened to trap them in frozen histories. However, even under external pressure to represent a coherent national identity or fetishized past, each city has found the resources to create a unique orientation to the future. Ironically, it is in part because of the historical significance of these cities for narratives of national importance (which is easily deduced from the density of museums, monuments, and

reconstructed buildings housed within them) that these cities have managed to distance themselves from a national framework for the construction of identity. Instead, through the resources of their unique historical and representational modes, they have created identities and contexts for experience that are post-nationalist. Berlin, Prague, and Gdańsk use their specific urban memories to articulate a non-national account of history and a post-national European identity. The cities have found themselves filled with national capital to the point of bursting from the restraints of these narrow and outdated modes of identification.

Berlin has adopted a future oriented approach to the city's projects of construction that, in order to escape association with its troubled past, adopts an assemblage of architectural citations not only from its own moments of progressive history but also from multiple European examples. Alongside this mode of flexible futurity, Berlin has also taken on the burden of memorialization, which simultaneously distances itself from the immediacy of historical trauma and makes itself the site of pilgrimage for the shared European experience of these events. Forced by the ghost of its past, Berlin has taken steps to establish itself not as a German capital but a European capital.

Prague has a rich historical cosmopolitanism that recent Czech nationalism has been diluting over time. While nationalist elements are certainly present in the city's image, the international appeals that the city makes are toward this cosmopolitan past: a past shared by Germans, Czechs, and Jews, and one that is troubled but not explicitly Czech. The Czechs may struggle in their belated rise to the

status of nation-state to articulate their own national identity and what their relationship to an increasingly non-nationalized Europe is; however, Prague is more comfortable within the narrative of its cosmopolitan and European heritage. The Czech lands have always looked to Prague as the center of its national ideology, but Prague has always been more than the limits of its Czechness.

Gdańsk is a more difficult case. The city must ask to what extent it is a prisoner of the tragic and nationalistic narrative of Poland and whether its narrative is unique in its relationship to Germany as well as a larger maritime history that exists outside of the national model. Gdańsk and its unique architectural, industrial, and literary traditions force the question of whether to foreground the Polish narrative or reinvent itself along the lines of a Hanseatic city along the Baltic. Gdańsk and its historically dislocated inhabitants must grapple with the sediment of time that is present in the city, while the aesthetics of kitsch present in its architectural reconstruction and literature allows for a reinterpretation of what it means for the present to have an authentic relationship to the past.

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