CHAPTER 6
UNIFIED BERLIN: THE NEW CAPITAL

After the turbulent events of the famous *Wende*—the fall of the Wall on 9 November 1989, the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990, and the election of Berlin as the seat of government and the parliament on 20 June 1991—Berlin has victoriously emerged as Germany's new/old capital. But it remains a city in flux, a topography marked by a ghostly history, an unpredictable future, and a prolonged identity crisis. Still, these are the very features that make contemporary Berlin one of the most exciting cities to study and to visit. Even though we should not simply assume that Berlin is typical of German society and German history in its entirety, the capital reflects many aspects of Germany's post-reunification culture and its role in the New Europe. Berlin is also representative of metropolitan life in our age of late capitalist consumer culture, multiculturalism, and the global economy.

In this chapter, we will again explore the German capital in the spirit of the *flaneur*, the leisurely city stroller who "reads" the streets, squares, buildings, and people of the great European capitals like a text, deciphering them as symbolic signs of history, social life, politics, and culture. Certainly, Berlin has been ravaged by the bombings of World War II and was further victimized by the cold war division into the capital of the GDR and a Western part heavily subsidized by West Germany. The city therefore lacks the densely built city space of Paris, London, Moscow, or even New York, to name just a few typical haunts of the classical *flaneur*. Moreover, today many of us prefer to flip the TV channels or surf the internet in search of ever-new information, turning ourselves effectively into digital f*laneurs*, who enjoy the advantage of being seemingly connected to any parts of the world in real time but lack the actual mobile presence in material city space that is traditionally considered the prerequisite of genuine experience. Still, the figure of the *flaneur* retains its validity if we adapt it to the changes in our perception of the postmodern city in the age of electronic telecommunication and globalizing economies. In this chapter, you are invited to embark on a textual *flanerie* through post-reunification Berlin as represented by a multimedia display of architecture, film, and literature. In these genres, Berlin's topography appears as a visual spectacle mirroring many different locales and diverse time layers, a montage of often contradictory images that hopefully whet your appetite for the real thing: an actual visit to Berlin!

Nothing about Berlin can be taken for granted, and it is not surprising that the decision to move the government from Bonn to Berlin was itself highly controversial. The opponents argued that the move was too expensive and that Berlin was tainted by its legacy as the former capital of Prussian militarism, the Nazi regime, and the cold war. The proponents stressed that according to the *Grundgesetz* (West Germany's Constitution) Berlin had always remained the official capital of all of Germany, and they now celebrated the city as the only appropriate site to finalize the country's reunification. After the Bundestag voted by a small margin in favor of the move to Berlin, the formerly divided city's damaged infrastructure—telephone lines, streets, public transportation—had to the restored and expanded.

This process continues with the recent opening of the enormous steel-and-glass construction of new Hauptbahnhof (central station) north of the government district at the Spree river, and the future construction of Schönefeld Airport, in the south, which will restore Berlin's international airline connections. The older Tempelhof airport, a vast edifice reflecting the Nazi builders' craze for power but aesthetically quite stunning, has already been closed, and Tegel airport will share the same fate. In eastern Berlin, conflicts arose after the *Wende* over the return to their rightful owners of buildings and factories expropriated by the Nazi and Communist regimes. Controversies also sprung up when streets named after prominent Socialist leaders were given back their original names and when public monuments to the Socialist past were to be removed. The privatizing of defunct state-owned GDR enterprises by the *Treuhandanstalt*, leading to a

sudden rise in unemployment and the move of western personnel into vacant jobs, was but one factor in the widespread resentment among Easterners to their perceived colonization and the eradication of their history by an aggressive Western capitalist consumer society.

Still, there are signs that with the ascent of a new generation too young to have vivid memories of pre-Wall conditions, things are improving at an ever more dazzling speed. There are construction sites almost everywhere; tourism is booming; political power and a rather crass consumerism are thriving; and theatres, concert venues, and museums enjoy a world-wide reputation—despite the fact that they are often seriously underfunded in a city whose budget planning is in a permanent crisis. In a city that has always regarded itself a proudly cosmopolitan and tolerant place, anti-Semitism, anti-foreigner violence, neo-Nazis, and Skinheads have been stumbling blocks on Berlin's road towards social and cultural integration. Still, Berlin has now become a multicultural metropolis, with a large Turkish presence especially in Kreuzberg and a revived Jewish culture around the New Synagogue on Oranienburgerstraße, even though some ridicule the area as a "Jewish Disneyland" for what they consider its rather nostalgic artificiality.

Berlin's varied topography, its streets, squares, and buildings, forms a cultural map that reflects these and other aspects of the capital's development everywhere. For tourists pressed for time or tired of walking, there is no better way to encounter the city than from the top platform of the Route 100 double-decker bus. You start at Bahnhof Zoo, where you see Breitscheid Platz with the famous Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche. You also catch a glimpse of Kurfürstendamm and the Europa Center, the landmarks of what was once West Berlin's thriving culture of consumerism and entertainment.

After briefly meeting the famous stone elephants at the Zoologischer Garten you arrive in Tiergarten, where you pass by the beautiful Scandinavian Embassies and can admire the Siegessäule, commemorating the victory in the Prussian-Danish war of 1864 but better known as the rather obvious symbol of the Love Parade. You see Schloss Bellevue (the official residence of the Bundespräsident) and the former Congress Hall, now called Haus der Kulturen, lovingly known as the Pregnant Oyster for its unusual roof shape. And then you are in the government district, comprising the enormous and surprisingly airy Chancellery, the office buildings for the parliamentary representatives, and the monumental Reichstag (the Federal Parliament), a refurbished Wilhelminian edifice that once boasted an elaborate neo-Italian Renaissance façade and is now famous for its hypermodern steel and glass dome symbolizing the new capital's transparent democracy. Going up and down its double-helix of internal ramps, visitors can enjoy a fantastic panorama view of the city—yet another example of Berlin's topography staged as a self-consciously visual spectacle.

And then you pass through the famous Brandenburg Gate, once surrounded by the Wall and now the centerpiece of the refurbished Pariser Platz, where you find, among others, the French Embassy, the Akademie der Künste (Academy of the Arts) and, most recently, the American Embassy.

You ride through Unter den Linden, the stately Boulevard lined with restored historic buildings such as the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Humboldt University, and the Deutsche Staatsoper. There are also replicas of lost edifices, such as the luxury Hotel Adlon and the Kronprinzenpalais. Unter den Linden is a showcase for Berlin's widespread attempt to make up for its World War II destruction through spectacular reconstruction projects, which promote the painful memory of irretrievable loss but also perhaps a sense of collective redemption and healing. The Deutsche Historische Museum in the Baroque Zeughaus offers a representative multimedia exhibition of the country's national history. From a distance, you catch a glimpse of the Museum Island, housing a unique assembly of world-renowned classical art venues. Your

bus then passes by the Berlin Cathedral, its Neo-Renaissance and Baroque façade simplified after renovation but still a striking example of Wilhelminian historicist pomp. Across the street you could until recently see the Palast der Republic, the former GDR Parliament that was torn down to make space for the possible reconstruction of the Hohenzollern City Palace.

Named Humboldtforum, the building is to house Berlin's non-European art collections, the Central and State Library and other cultural venues. You see the Marienkirche (St. Mary's Church), the Rotes Rathaus (City Hall), so named for its red bricks, not for its political leanings, and of course the television tower, the pride of East Berlin's technological prowess. Here you are at the vast Alexanderplatz, the former economic center of East Germany, a vast area whose socialist architecture is slowly covered by by capitalist consumer culture but whose ultimate architectural fate is yet to be decided. From here you can change buses to proceed to Prenzlauer Berg, a colorful old working class district, whose picturesquely crumbling façades have mostly been restored now. During the GDR era the area was the gathering spot of political dissidents and artists; after reunification, it attracted young members of Berlin's counterculture but its rapid gentrification makes it now a trendy if somewhat nostalgic district of galleries, restaurant and cafés with a vibrant nightlife.

Often slowed down by heavy traffic, the leisurely bus tour offers something like a well-made travel documentary, a film that you can stop or rewind at any time (you can hop off at any of the frequent stops to take the return bus or wait a short while for the next one). While the bus ride and your usually impatient driver are entirely real, Route 100 tends to turn this sprawling metropolis with a size of 892 km^2 and a population of 3.4 Mill. into an enticing spectacle, an ever-changing panorama of visual signs framed by the bus windows as if by television or computer monitor screens. Thus Route 100 not only gets people from one end of town to the other (although the S-Bahn and U-Bahn systems accomplish this task much more efficiently) but also transforms the city into a series of images, a collective commodity to be enjoyed, consumed, and shared by visitors and natives alike.

This experience corresponds neatly with the official view of Berlin as the powerful new capital of post-reunification Germany. Through websites, print media, and movies, Berlin promotes itself aggressively as a thriving metropolis in the midst of the structural change from a traditional industrial city (although that legacy is small compared to other German cities) to a future-oriented center of high technology and communication media, global commerce, cutting-edge scientific research, and world-class arts. Having risen, phoenix-like, from the ashes of World War II and the conflicts of the East-West division, the new capital celebrates itself as the political, social, and symbolic focal point of the "Berlin Republic," the multicultural, liberal democracy aspiring to be a key player in the European Union and the globalizing economy. Berlin, in this scenario, represents the "normalization" of a reunited Germany that has earned new legitimacy as a country neither forgetful of its traumatic history nor unduly burdened by its specters that uncannily seem to haunt the capital everywhere.

In fact, for all its futuristic hype, Berlin's topography elicits an intense memory culture even though you may have to leave the 100 bus to see its sites. The traces of the capital's historical burdens are sometimes carefully preserved, at other times deliberately covered up or sublimated. Most painfully, the city continues to be marked by the legacy of the National Socialism. After restoring Berlin as capital, it was decided that building new accommodations for the federal ministries would be prohibitively expensive; instead, some of these institutions were moved, not always voluntarily, into quarters built by the Nazis and used by the GDR government. The Foreign Ministry occupies the former Reichsbank (Imperial Bank), which also served as seat of the Central Committee of the SED. The Finance Ministry relocated to the former Aviation Ministry of the Reich, which also hosted the GDR House of Ministries and the *Treuhandanstalt*. The Labor Ministry got Josef Goebbels's Ministry of Popular Enlightenment

and Propaganda. These moves raise the interesting question of whether architecture is politically neutral and should be judged primarily by aesthetic standards, or whether it always carries undeniably ideological implications. If the latter is the case, one must further ask whether the significance of an edifice is defined by the intentions of its original builders or whether it can be pragmatically redefined to serve entirely new purposes. In the case of these ministries the challenge is to practice democratic politics in an environment that keeps reminding people of the legacy of a horrible past that one needs to interrogate continually in order not to repeat it.

The Topography of Terror, situated southeast of Potsdamer Platz, preserves the authentic excavation site of the SS and Gestapo Headquarters, meticulously explaining these traces through documentary photos and textual commentary. Ironically, it finds itself right in front of one of the few remaining stretches of the Wall, falsely suggesting an uncanny continuity between two very different totalitarian regimes.

An addition to the Berlin Museum, Daniel Libeskind's Jüdisches Museum (2001) chronicles the history of Berlin's Jewish population in a stunningly avant-garde building. Its lightening-bolt shape and narrow windows allude to a distorted Star of David and the former addresses of Jews and Non-Jews on the Berlin city map; its inaccessible "voids" (empty spaces you can see but not enter) mark the absence of Jewish life after the Holocaust; its slanted Garden of Exile, with its disorienting effect on the visitor's perception, symbolizes the physical and emotional displacement of those driven from Germany; and the stark, empty Holocaust Tower stands for the dead end of civilized history in the face of genocide. And then there is the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe south of the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag, combining an underground documentation center with a vast area of gray cement cubes of varying height. Without enforcing one particular historical or aesthetic meaning onto the visitors, they form an undulating, strangely abstract labyrinth that invites reflection but also encourages the hide-and-seek play of innocent children and the occasional self-display of a sun-bathing teenager.

These are but three examples of Berlin's topography of remembrance, marked by fierce public debates about what aspects of the city's past are to be preserved, commemorated, or repressed by whom and for what ideological ends. Indeed, it seems that for every act of commemoration, there is a counter-memory that must be buried or displaced. Perhaps the most glaring example for this is the fact that in the vicinity of the Holocaust Memorial, remnants of underground shelters for Hitler's drivers, of propaganda minister Josef Goebbels's bunker, and even of the *Führerbunker* itself were found. The city decreed these sites to remain inaccessible, fearing that they attract neo-Nazi fanatics or be otherwise misused. Only recently has the unremarkable site where Hitler's bunker presumably was located been marked by a simple information board.

PETER SCHNEIDER, EDUARDS HEIMKEHR (1999)

Let's now see how this topography is reflected in contemporary literature and film. Peter Schneider's novel *Eduard's Heimkehr* (1999) is one of a slate of recent fictional depictions of the German capital after the fall of the Wall. Born in 1940, Schneider has lived in Berlin since 1961, participated in the left-wing Berlin student movement and was active as a campaign aid for the Social Democratic Party. He is one of the few contemporary German writers who have achieved some degree of popularity in the United States. His well-known novella *Der Mauerspringer* (1982), his novel *Paarungen* (1992), and the volume discussed here depict various stages of Berlin's history, political conflicts, and cultural life. *Eduards Heimkehr* lends itself especially well to our textual exploration of the city because its plot is literally mapped onto several important topographic sites of Berlin.

In the early 1990s, Eduard Hoffmann, an internationally renowned genetic scientist, takes on a research position at the new Institute for Molecular Biology in Eastern Berlin after having spent eight years at Stanford University. Another reason for his return is that Eduard and his brother have inherited a dilapidated apartment building in the East Berlin district of Friedrichshain. Before World War II it had been owned by Jewish shoe manufacturer Kasimir Marwitz, and, when the Nazis took over, had been sold to Eduard's grandfather, the executive director of the company. Now the building is being occupied by anarchist squatters, and Eduard, with the help of his lawyer Klott, must battle the unwelcomed guests, the rather unhelpful Berlin police, and a potential buyer with a very dubious reputation. To make things worse, Eduard's marriage to Jenny is in a permanent crisis, since he is unable to satisfy her sexually, perhaps not just for physical and emotional reasons but also because Jenny, an American with an Italian father and a German-Jewish mother (76) is distrustful of the German national character. While Jenny and the three kids are back in the United States, Eduard has an affair with Marina, a proud and elusive woman who may or may not be from the former East Germany and thus adds a note of exotic intrigue to Eduard's life while helping to rediscover classical German culture during a trip to Weimar. Towards the end of the novel, it turns out that Eduard's grandfather, far from simply collaborating with the Nazis against his Jewish employer and personal friend, had actually acquired the apartment building at a generous price to protect it from the Nazi's forced expropriation policies, and even Eduard's own sexual problems with Jenny seem solvable. Through Eduard's story, the reader learns much about typical German issues: the surveillance terror of the Stasi (the GDR secret police); the invasion of the former East Berlin Academy of Sciences by often less than qualified researchers from the West; the tendency among contemporary Germans to charge others with fascistic thinking in order to extricate themselves from guilt feelings; and the profits made by West German industry from investments in the East.

From the beginning, Schneider's novel focuses on Eduard's travels and travails through Berlin, which it depicts as a multimedia spectacle by showing the reader how the city is being represented in film, maps, television and other technologies. Still in California, Eduard watches the television images of Berliners dancing on top of the Wall during the night of 9 November 1989, when the GDR surprisingly opened its borders. These images are soon replaced by earlier, stereotypical ones from the memory trove of the American public, such as pictures of Neo-Nazi firebomb attacks on foreigners that evoke the blue-eyed Hollywood Nazi hero from American cold-war movies (17-18). In Berlin, Eduard wonders about the changing city maps: while the old GDR maps had left the West Berlin part simply blank, the new ones display no traces of the Wall whatsoever (23). Illegible graffiti on crumbling house façades and the S-Bahn appear to Eduard as signs of a city in dissolution and dereliction without a clear grammar (24). When going to the police station to get assistance in his fight against the squatters, Eduard is surprised to find photographs of Communist leaders still hanging on the Wall, while the Western and Eastern police officers display equal empathy for the repressive conventions of the former German dictatorship (34-37).

West-Berlin, meanwhile, undergoes rapid modernization, displaying an increasing number of multiethnic businesses and computer stores, while the shrapnel marks and other reminders of the ruinous past are being cosmetically removed. But paradoxically, this rejuvenation also evokes the prewar period, documented in photographs from the turn of the former century; as Eduard notes, cast-iron remakes of street lanterns and other classicist simulations of the Wilhelminian era decorate the streets (47-48). Jenny, surprisingly, views the reunification euphoria rather skeptically. Sensing a German proclivity for constraints and oppression, she watches the television images of the fall of the Wall as signs of an invasion of West Berlin's insular cosmopolitanism by the Easterners, who still seem entrenched in their anti-capitalist sentiments, authoritarianism, tacit anti-Semitism, and other legacies of 40 years of socialist

dictatorship (74-75). The house squatters, in turn, are very different from earlier West Berlin leftists. While these had harbored a deep-seated distrust of the capitalist media industry, the new anarchists have accepted video films and other media as part of their own world of consumerist icons like McDonald's and Nike athletic shoes (99).

In Berlin Mitte, the historic center of Berlin, war-torn and now being restored on a grand scale, Eduard marvels at the Deutscher Dom, which together with the Französischer Dom and the Schauspielhaus forms the neo-classicist Gendarmenmarkt. The cathedrals appear to Eduard as an image of a southern Baroque cityscape under the Prussian sky of the German capital, even though towards the East, a huge construction crane indicates the building sites of the New Berlin (107). Thus Schneider portrays Berlin after reunification as a strange and fragmented topography, where elements of the past are either eradicated from collective memory or continue to haunt the present like uncanny dreams that seem to elude adequate commemoration, mastery, and representation.

In the excerpt reprinted in *Berliner Spaziergänge*, Eduard and Jenny attend a celebratory reception on Potsdamer Platz, reputed to be the "biggest construction site in Europe." Before World War II, the area was a bustling center of Berlin public life, replete with intersecting streets, heavy traffic, coffee houses, hotels, a department store, and entertainment venues. Following its almost complete destruction during the allied bombings, Potsdamer Platz turned into an eerie wasteland, run through by the Berlin Wall and inhabited only by rabbits. Shortly after reunification, Potsdamer Platz was rebuilt by an international team of prominent architects as a premier site of international corporate power in the age of the expanding EU and the globalizing market economy. Deutsche Bahn, Daimler-Chrysler, and Sony set up offices here. Together with an American-style shopping arcade, hotels, restaurants, and a musical theatre, the area today is a visually exciting but somewhat impersonal icon of the new German capital's economic aspirations, even while attempting to preserve whatever is left of its broken past before World War II. Thus, the Breakfast Room and Emperor's Room, as well as parts of the façade, of the old luxury Hotel Esplanade have been integrated into the ultra-modern Sony Center, where they are encased behind glass like museum pieces from a remote era. Nearby, as Eduard learns, the Weinhaus Huth, a classic wine store and restaurant, has been placed under historic preservation and restored in the midst of the new buildings for a staggering 80 Mill. marks (157).

From the roof terrace of this precarious edifice, where he and Jenny have an almost successful sexual encounter, Eduard overlooks an area that is symptomatic of Berlin's ruinous history and rejuvenation attempts. He remembers postwar photographs of the burnt-out skeletons of the buildings that had once stood on Potsdamer Platz, followed by the Wall that itself has now turned into dust. In fact, the entire city appears as a disparate assembly of signs of a long tradition of urban life, whose buildings seem as if haphazardly dropped down by a helicopter. The Gendarmenmarkt churches, the botched Wilhelminian pomp of the Berlin Cathedral, the GDR television tower, the clumsy outline of the Charité hospital, the gloomy Reichstag, and other landmarks appear to Eduard as strange citations from another city (164), as architectural signs from different locations and different times that seem borrowed and incorporated into the continually changing cityscape like textual quotations from various sources in a new script. Here Schneider alludes to the terminology of cultural studies that read cities like Berlin in analogy to textual artifacts. Thus, as Andreas Huyssen has proposed, the city figures as something like a palimpsest, an ancient manuscript written over and over again by different scribes, displaying a complex and ambiguous topography where older, often half-forgotten buildings, streets, and squares have been erased, survive merely as obscure traces, or have been restored and replicated for new uses in the present.

Eduard's Berlin also resembles a photomontage, where textual quotations and visual images comingle without forming a harmonious whole. Thus, in the second excerpt reprinted in *Berliner Spaziergänge*, Eduard finds himself confronted with an uncanny connection between his personal life story and the history of Berlin. During a violent encounter between the house squatters and the prospective buyer, a small boy suffers serious injuries. This event fuels the fury of a street demonstration against the alleged expropriation of Eastern real estate by "Nazi inheritors" and other Western capitalist beneficiaries of the reunification. Recorded by television, the demonstration becomes yet another part of the visual spectacle of Berlin, especially because the demonstrators connect the real estate redistribution problem with one of the city's most spectacular architectural controversies.

Its subject is the demolition of the GDR Palast der Republik in order to clear the site for a partial rebuilding of the Hohenzollern dynasty's Stadtschloss. Dating back to 1443, the Baroque Hohenzollern palace in the center of Berlin, near the Berlin Cathedral and Museum's Island, had been heavily damaged in World War II. It could have been restored but in 1950 was torn down by the GDR authorities, who regarded the edifice as an embarrassing reminder of feudalistic times occupying a terrain that could be better used as a site for socialistic mass rallies. In 1976, the Palast der Republik was put up on the very site. This enormous building served as the seat of the GDR Volkskammer while accommodating a theatre, restaurants, a dance hall, a bowling alley, and other popular venues of socialist public life.

In Eduard's memory, the television images of the house squatters' demonstration overlap with black-and-white pictures of the revolutionary workers' demonstrations during the 1920s and oil paintings depicting the 1848 revolution. Therefore, Eduard wonders if the entire rally may be nothing but a citation, a sort of revolutionary game fusing the past and the present into an uncanny constellation. Suddenly, the TV camera shows the resurrected Baroque façade of the lost Stadtschloss. This mirage turns out to be a life-size canvas mock-up designed to promote the actual reconstruction of the building. Schneider neatly summarizes the terms of the controversy surrounding the site: while many East Berliners regard the demolition of their Palast der Republic as yet another sign of West's colonization of their history, the advocates of the Stadtschloss consider its reconstruction absolutely necessary for the restoration of the new capital's historic city center. This project is rejected by the Palast der Republic defenders as an assault on Eastern collective identity and as a revival of the evils of the Prussian past, the monarchy, and fascism. To make matters worse, the demonstration and the architectural debate are promptly coopted by a former fellow-student of Eduard, now an opportunistic city senator, for his own self-promotion as an advocate of the victims of Nazi expropriation, unemployment, and cultural alienation. As Klott neatly summarizes the convoluted situation, the entire controversy has less to do with historical truth than with Berlin's split self-identity and its antagonistic ideologies.

DURS GRÜNBEIN, BERLINER RUNDE (1999)

The graphic depiction of these and many other events in post-Wall Berlin make Schneider's novel a good introductory read, almost a popular page turner. In Durs Grünbein's poetry cycle "Berliner Runde" from his volume *Nach den Satiren* (1999), we revisit some of Schneider's sites from a different angle while getting to know some other places. The entire text is reproduced in *Berliner Spaziergänge*. Born 1962 in Dresden und living in Berlin since 1985, Grünbein has emerged as one of Germany's most successful poets. His work reflects his upbringing in the drab and oppressive culture of East Germany, focusing increasingly on life in the modern metropolis in the age of late capitalism, consumerism, and mass media. Critiquing their excesses, Grünbein upholds ideals of classical poetry and the predominance of the European

artistic tradition in an increasingly multicultural world of globalization, jet travel, and cosmopolitanism. His poetry combines philosophical reflection, snippets from contemporary slang, and cryptic allusions to the past, ranging from Greek and Roman antiquity to the irrepressible memories of Germany's national history.

Guided by Grünbein's poems, our topographic walk brings us first to the center of West Berlin, to the area around Tauenzienstraße and Kurfürstendamm. Designed in the 19th century as a counterpart to the Parisian boulevards, Kurfürstendamm used to be proverbial among natives and visitors as West-Berlin's most prominent street, lined with elegant cafés, boutiques, and entertainment venues. Tauenzienstraße is famous for its fancy shopping opportunities, most notably the luxury department store Kaufhaus des Westens (KaDeWe), which opened its doors in 1907. A bit further to the West, Savignyplatz, with its stately apartment buildings, bars, and bookstores, used to be the favorite hangout for many writers, actors, and other intellectuals associated with West Berlin's left-liberal culture, the 68' student movements, and political opposition to capitalist consumer society. Kurfürstendamm und Tauenzienstraße meet at Breitscheid Platz, which features the famous Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche. The ruin of a neo-Romanesque church with gothic elements, it was built in 1890-95 to honor the Emperor Wilhelm I. It was destroyed by the bombings of World War II but in 1961 was framed by a new sanctuary and bell tower constructed in concrete cement and blue glass windows. Thus the edifice symbolizes the continuity of Berlin's ruinous past in the midst of the area's rampant consumer culture, which seems to approach decline itself. Following the extensive rebuilding of the Berlin Mitte district, the area around Bahnhof Zoo (which has been reduced to a regional station after the opening of Berlin's new central railway station in 2006), has suffered economic loss and looks a bit sleazy and drab.

This is the setting of Grünbein's poem "Tauenzienstraße." It depicts the still vibrant but superficial scene of West Berlin's center, filled with mindlessly hurried pedestrians and shoppers, street-sweeping machines, and neon advertisements. The seasonal discount sale appears like a parodistic replay of the "bürgerliche Drama," the 19th century theatre form that had shifted the classical tragedy's focus on aristocratic heroes to the conflicts of bourgeois family life. This genre, in Grünbein's reading, seems to give way to the trivial and evanescent desires and pursuits of the West Berlin consumer society. The fast pace of this scene is uncannily disrupted by the presence of the Memorial Church. Its bell tower ruin, plugged with the same bunker-like cement also used in parking garages, seems to go unnoticed by the hectic shoppers, thus losing its significance as a memorial to the ravages of war. While Grünbein muses that in a distant future, Berlin itself may be a city in ruin, excavated by a female archaeologist, the Berliners themselves seem utterly forgetful of their own city's destructive past.

It is this painful legacy that Grünbein's poetry wants to rescue from oblivion. In "Anhalter Bahnhof," he evokes the history of the Anhalt Station near Potsdamer Platz, which was constructed in 1880 and served as the largest long-distance train station before World War II. It was here that the deportations of Berlin Jews to the concentrations camps of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz began. The station had been heavily damaged in 1943 and 1945 and was no longer used except for a few train connections to the Soviet occupation zone (the later GDR). The station was demolished in 1960, and only a fragment of its splendid façade remains. Grünbein's poem recapitulates this dramatic history in fittingly fragmentary images. He alludes to the Eastern territories that were once reached from the station; to the deceptive luxury of rich passengers; to the victor's tithe collected by the Russians from the victims of persecution and exile; and to the symbolic meaning of the site as a memorial to the senseless ransacking that has marred Berlin's history.

In "Friedrichshain" (where Schneider's Eduard battles his unruly house squatters) Grünbein evokes bits and pieces of the history of this old industrial and trade district in Eastern Berlin. In the 1930s, the area witnessed conflicts with SA troops after the Nazi's ascent to power. Stalinallee (later Karl-Marx-Allee) was the site of the infamous worker's uprising on 17 June 1953 against the GDR regime and its enforced industrial production norms and other oppressive policies. It is remarkable that Grünbein only depicts the bullet holes, volleys, and human misery resulting from World War II street fights while omitting any references to Friedrichshain's subsequent fate in the GDR. This blind spot is all the more surprising considering that elsewhere in his poetic work the writer has dealt extensively with his memories of growing up in East Germany. Thus, the text serves as reminder that even for astute a poet as Grünbein, the commemoration of the past is always highly subjective and selective, requiring the reader to fill in the gaps and thus in a sense to "complete" the poem.

In "Potsdamer Platz," perhaps the most powerful and concise section of the cycle, Grünbein, more sharply than Schneider, focuses on the rampant construction site of what was to emerge as the (then) future capital's premier center of global corporate enterprise and consumerism. Grünbein confronts these plans with the buried but irrepressible specters of Hitler's plans for Germania, the megalomaniac capital of the Third Reich. Only a few landmarks—some ministries, the Olympic Stadium, Airport Tempelhof—were actually completed; the remaining design plans serve a lurid reminder of the Nazi's spectacular vision of technological prowess, reactionary evocation of the architectural style of Greek and Roman antiquity, and radical nationalistic power politics. Referring to the underground Führerbunker nearby, Grünbein depicts Germania as an allegorical figure associated with Prussia's militaristic nationalism and the lascivious sexuality of Richard Wagner's musical drama *Die Walküre*. The image is a disturbing but poignant representation of the irresolvable legacies of Berlin's problematic history, its role as a site of irrational power politics, and the mythologizing of national identity.

The "Epilogue" succinctly summarizes the ever-changing cityscape of Berlin. It muses about the architectural demolition, the rebuilding projects, as well as the division into four sectors and, later, two part-cities. The poem also reminds us of the recovery of West Berlin as a fast-paced site for residential consumer comfort since the 1950s and other such aspects of Berlin history. The city's topography functions in Grünbein's poetry as the site for a diverse and contradictory history that seems to circumvent the formation of a stable, clearly recognizable collective identity. Thus, "Berliner Runde" creatively reinforces the classical notion of Berlin as a metropolis that is forever in flux, unpredictable, unconventional, and unruly.

TANJA DÜCKERS, SPIELZONE (1999)

Berlin's unruliness, although depicted in an entirely different light, is also the theme of Tanja Dückers's popular novel *Spielzone* (1999). Dückers was born in 1968 in Berlin. She enrolled in German and American Studies at the Free University of Berlin and spent much time in the United States, Amsterdam, and Barcelona. The writer also worked as an editorial assistant for Deutsche Welle television.

As we have seen, Schneider's protagonists are old enough to remember the political situation before the fall of the Wall; consequently, their views of the dramatic changes after reunification are strongly informed by the memories of the city's traumatic past. Grünbein's reflections on the city are likewise informed by his pre-reunification upbringing. By contrast, Dückers focuses on Berlin's transformations from the perspective of the young post-Wall generation in their teens and twenties. Not surprisingly, most of them see themselves as joyful participants in the Western consumer capitalist ambience of instant material gratification, media savvy pop

culture, and hedonistic pleasure that has by now spread to all areas of Berlin. For Dückers's characters, post-reunification Berlin is less the stage of painful or joyous historical legacies than an ever-shifting experimental space in which the city's quest for collective self-identity is superseded by individual desires for self-exploration beyond political commitment and fixed social identities.

Told in the casual style of contemporary popular fiction and switching frequently among the points-of-view of the various protagonists, Dückers's novel is a fast-paced mosaic of several intersecting stories. The book is divided into two parts of equal length, which are set in the Western district of Neukölln und the Eastern district of Prenzlauer Berg respectively. Standing for the old West, Neukölln is mired in social stagnation, shooting sprees among Arabic immigrant street gangs, high unemployment, and an aging population given to melancholia and nostalgia. Prenzlauer Berg, by contrast, the old East Berlin working class district and preferred living quarters of GDR dissidents, has now turned into a trendy magnet for party kids, pop art events, and unpredictable social change, even while being subject to rapid gentrification. Among the denizens of Neukölln we meet teenage Laura, who is bored stiff by her '68 generation parents and at night hangs out with her friends at the Thomas Cemetery. Here she meets Rosemarie Minzlin, an elderly lady, who tends to the grave of her art dealer husband and whose loneliness is briefly interrupted by an encounter with a sensitive young man at a supermarket, who stirs up long-forgotten erotic feelings in her. At the cemetery Laura also runs into a middle-aged voyeur, Herr Lämmle, a repressed and self-loathing individual spying on a young couple's ecstatic sex games in their apartment across the street. Until their untimely death in a car crash, the couple continually changes their life-styles, as if they have no stable core of self-identity and are nowhere really at home. By contrast, Lämmle, the quintessential anti-narcissist, wishes nothing more eagerly than to participate in their intriguing life; indeed, he wants to be one the couple's fleeting fantasies, even while all too painfully aware of his own inability to change (93).

Unlike Lämmle, Laura can free herself temporarily from the dreadful stagnation in Neukölln by visiting her older cousin Ada in Prenzlauer Berg. Ada used to be a properly dressed and diligent high school student but is now a virtuoso of unconventional self-invention and super-cool hipness. She is in a relationship of sorts with a young male gay couple, Nils and Moritz, while trying her best to get on the nerves of a politically hypercorrect lesbian couple, Alice and Petra. Annoyed by the couple's sentimental display of affection to their newly adopted baby, Ada on the spur of the moment cuts off one of her nipples, proudly sporting her now supposedly androgynous looks.

In the excerpt reprinted in *Berliner Spaziergänge*, another Berlin denizen, Katharina, escapes from Neukölln to Prenzlauer Berg, mainly because the Eastern district, with its picturesquely crumbling apartment buildings, illegal clubs, and cheap prices, offers an enticingly ambiguous gray zone, no longer the drab communist East but not yet the consumerist establishment of the West. The area around Sonnenburger Straße and Schönhauser Allee becomes a "play zone" in which the echoes of the GDR past or historical landmarks like the nearby New Synagogue, heavily damaged during the "Crystal Night" of 9 November 1938, are reduced to mere visual surface signifiers. They are without lasting political meaning for Katharina and her peers, who wish to discover themselves in a spontaneous, non-committal way. Katharina wants to avoid joining the *Spießertum* of the older generation, its petty-bourgeois complacency and opportunism, but she also refuses to turn into a "postpostmodern block of ice" (112). Postpostmodernity here seems to denote an attitude beyond the typical characteristics of postmodernism: the disavowal of historical "metanarratives" (notions of linear historical progress, Marxism, established religion, etc.), as well as the waning of historical memory, the embrace of trendy consumerism, and the celebration of pluralistic life-style performances. However, it is not entirely clear what Katharina and her cohorts want to do instead; their lives

seem deliberately aimless, beyond the political commitments and the established sense of morality of their parents.

Perhaps the only protagonist in Dückers's novel to display an utterly unconventional sense of deeply humane commitment is Benno, significantly from Eastern Berlin. On the eve of his eighteenth birthday, he breaks into the collection of medical specimens of the Charité, the city's famous research hospital, in order to rescue the terribly misshapen fetus of his twin brother Leo, deceased soon after birth, from his undignified imprisonment in a formaldehyde glass container. He takes the little body to the Tiergarten, where he dresses him lovingly in his own boy's clothes, lights some candles, shares a joint with him, and plays Stevie Wonder and Beatles songs for him. For Benno, his birthday celebration is not only a rebellious way of lifting the aura of silence and repression surrounding his baby brother but also of reliving the memories of his half-senile grandfather. The old man used to tell Benno gruesome stories of thousands of human body parts spilling into the streets of wartime Berlin after the Charité's bombing, and of the many children displaced and starved to death during World War II.

Thus, Benno seeks to forge for himself an unconventionally personal but strangely mature way of inquiring into the history of political disasters and suppressed collective memories that lie buried under the culture of self-absorbed life-style performances, trendy gender negotiations, and chic consumerism characteristic of Ada, Katharina, & Co. Like a slate of other recent Berlin fiction, *Spielzone* subscribes to the typical marketing ploys of contemporary pop fiction (easy readability, fast-moving plots, identifiable characters) while deconstructing its complacently apolitical ideology and obsession with trendy surface phenomena. In this sense, Dückers provides an intriguing supplement to the more conventional realism of Schneider and the highly stylized, even hermetic "high-cultural" elitism of Grünbein.

WOLFGANG BECKER, GOOD BYE, LENIN (2003)

Turning from textual representations to a cinematic one, let us watch the highly acclaimed film *Good Bye, Lenin* (2003). Although the *Wende* brought about Germany's political reunification, it had not necessarily led to the formation of a new national identity. Despite enormous financial aid from the federal government (to which Western taxpayer contributed reluctantly), the economic reconstruction of the "neue Länder" (new states) in the former GDR territory progressed much more slowly than the euphoric expectations had hoped for. Higher unemployment, lower salaries, racist sentiments (plaguing East and West alike) and a "brain drain" to the Western part of the country testified to real differences in opportunities and enforced dissatisfaction and mistrust. For a long time, Germans talked about the proverbial "Mauer in den Köpfen", the psychological barrier of mutual prejudices that had risen once the real Wall had come down. It divided the *Jammerossis* (the self-pitying, ineffectual victims in the East) and the *Besserwessis* (the smart-alecky, complacent conquerors from the West) from one another. The ironic puns did little to alleviate the seriousness of the conflicts between the supposedly backward Eastern post-Socialist malaise and the quasi-colonialist Western consumer capitalism.

However, in recent years, Eastern Germany has made considerable progress in building up its economy and stabilizing its social situation. Especially "boom towns" like Leipzig and Dresden have become tremendously popular. The recovery of Dresden, before its destruction in World War II called the "Florence of the Elbe River" by virtue of its splendid Italian-style Baroque panorama, has recently culminated in the authentic reconstruction of its fabled Frauenkirche. But although there are signs that the *Ossi-Wessi* dichotomy is fading away, the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* (the nostalgic, if somewhat ironic, idealization of the "good old GDR days") is

widespread. In this perspective, the real horrors of the East German regime (the Stasi, the shootings at the Wall, the failing economy, the repressive provinciality of the country) are sublimated by fond memories of its better childcare, its advancements in gender equality, and its cultivation of human solidarity in the face of state terror. The losses of such social benefits are sometimes evoked as alternatives to the *Ellbogengesellschaft*, the elbow-wielding society of Western economic competition.

While shortly after the *Wende*, you could buy real or fake bits of the Berlin Wall, Russian-made binoculars and other memorabilia of the Cold War, you can now enjoy specialty stores selling T-shirts, coffee-mugs and other souvenirs with images of the beloved *Ampelmännchen* (the little East German traffic light guy telling you to walk or stop in a cutely self-confident manner very different from the rather stern appearance of his Western colleague). And you can visit the lovely DDR Museum near the Berlin Cathedral, which features among its many interactive displays an authentic *Trabi* (the slow and obnoxious smelling but highly beloved GDR automobile) and the interior of a typical *Plattenbau* apartment. One may well smile at these popular evocations of the GDR aura, but they testify to the fact that history comprises not only the hard facts of world-shaking events long gone by but also the after-images of daily life that continue to intrigue the present.

In an ironic but sympathetic way, *Good Bye, Lenin!* deals with such aspects of ordinary life at the end of the GDR, told from the perspective of the post-*Wende* period. The movie was made by the West German director Wolfgang Becker, born in 1954. He studied at the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin and became well known through his film *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (Life is a Construction Site, 1997). Like Tom Tykwer, best known for his popular *Lola Rennt* (Run Lola Run, 1998), Becker has contributed significantly to the international success of recent German film.

Good Bye, Lenin! is set in the final year of the GDR. Alexander Kerner's father has left his family by fleeing to the West, ostensibly for another woman but actually because of his dissatisfaction with the GDR. Alex's mother had been afraid to join her husband and now compensates her loss and indecision by turning into a hyper-perfect socialist. She now works for the slow but steady improvement of GDR living conditions by writing petitions to the state on behalf of her rhetorically less skilled friends. During one of the demonstrations for more democracy eventually leading to the downfall of the regime, Alex is arrested by the police. Witnessing this incident, Mother suffers a heart attack and is in a coma for eight months. Alex, his Russian girl friend Lara, his sister Ariane, and his best buddy Denis learn that a second heart attack will inevitably lead to Mother's death. When she awakes from her coma, the Berlin Wall is gone and the end of the GDR near. In order to protect the bed-ridden patient from the fatal shock of recognizing that her beloved homeland is no longer, the young people elaborately stage an artificial GDR for her sake. They restore their typical GDR-style apartment, fill new Western pickled cucumbers into the old glass containers of the beloved *Spreewaldgurken*, and ask some kids to perform sentimental socialist songs for Mother's birthday.

In the meantime, the real West arrives aggressively in the willing East via Coca Cola ads, Burger K\ing, and satellite TV. Alex and his companions have an increasingly hard time to distract Mother from discovering the truth. Therefore, Alex and Denis fabricate images of the *Aktuelle Kamera* (the official GDR news broadcast) by cleverly manipulating the well-known documentary film images of the fall of the Wall and channeling them into Mother's television set. Their home-made news suggest that it is not the GDR that has become part of a Western-dominated Germany but that, on the contrary, many Westerners, disappointed by capitalism, Neo-Nazi tendencies, and consumerist ideology, have decided to immigrate to the GDR, which is now willing to reform itself by adopting an open, accepting, and humane type of Socialism.

In one crucial scene, Mother manages to leave her apartment all by herself, only to be totally confused by the new sights outside: an improved second-hand car dealer, advertisement posters for Western commodities and—most shocking—a low-flying helicopter carrying a huge statue of Lenin. The symbolic implications of this scene are dramatic. The helicopter arrives from the Eastern end of Karl-Marx-Allee. Originally named Stalinallee, this stately boulevard, which spans 90 m in width, was built as a showcase of socialist public life. Stylistically the street combines elements from the ornamental Soviet "Zuckerbäckerstil" with references to the classical architecture of Berlin. The statue in the movie probably alludes to the huge Lenin monument on Leninplatz (today Platz der Vereinten Nationen), which was demolished in 1991. It honored Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, called Lenin (1870-1924), the leader of the October 1917 revolution in Russia, which ended the rule of Tsar Nicholas II. Together with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Lenin developed the theory of Scientific Socialism, called for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and advocated the absolute leadership role of the Communist Party. In the movie, the Lenin statue hanging from the helicopter appears to Alex's mother like a supernatural apparition extending his hands over the city in a gesture of blessing and farewell. Thus, this scene ironically but poignantly suggests the melancholic sentiments many East Germans felt upon witnessing the sudden and unexpected disappearance of a system that many of them hated but also had come to accept as their homeland. This is underscored by a cut to Ariane, who discovers Mother's "escape" when she exists from a subway station carrying two Kaiser's Kaffee shopping bags. This is a reference to a popular West German chain store for coffee, tea, and candy, which after the fall of the Wall took over stores of the former GDR trade organization and thus figures in the film as yet another emblem of the "colonization" of Eastern territories.

The elaborate staging of the former GDR as an artificially maintained spectacle in the midst of the rapidly changing post-reunification reality allows us to see the film in the context of *Ostalgie*, but *Good Bye, Lenin!* should not be reduced only to illustrating this sentiment. Rather, the movie deals to a large degree with the manipulation of Germany's political reality by the mass medium of television. Through the montage of fictional scenes and authentic documentary footage the film questions the official image of the GDR and the seemingly inevitable facts of reunification politics. Alex's and Denis's fake *Aktuelle Kamera* broadcasts project a different GDR, one that Alex admits he had always wished for. Their cinematic tricks suggest that it may have been possible to bid farewell to the GDR in a more dignified way, one in which the "other German State" is not simply annexed ("colonized") by the powerful West but is allowed to reform itself along the ideals of genuine Socialism, thus overcoming fictitiously the oppressive policies of the "Real Existing Socialism." The utopian version of a democratic and cosmopolitan Socialist state was temporarily discussed among intellectuals shortly after the fall of the Wall, but was soon superseded by the actual reunification policies.

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How is post-reunification Berlin represented in various contemporary media (photography, film, magazine articles, literary texts, the internet)? Begin with the material presented in this reader and then proceed to do your own research! (Further information: Costable-Heming, Halverson, and Foell; Gerstenberger; Goebel; Huyssen; Ladd; Large; Richie)

2. What are most important historical and political events leading to Germany reunification and the creation of Berlin as the new capital? (Further reading: Large; Richie)

3. Do you believe that the history and cultural memory of the former GDR and East-Berlin are adequately accounted for in post-reunification city planning, or do you agree with

those who fear that these legacies have been marginalized or forgotten in the wake of Berlin's globalizing Western society? (Further reading: Goebel; Ladd; Large; Richie; Taberner, Finlay)

4. Where in Berlin do you find traces of National Socialism and sites commemorating its victims? Evaluate these memorials as sites of historical interrogation and collective memory. (Further reading: Ladd; Large; Richie)

5. How does architecture (built before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall) reflect historical changes, shifting political ideologies, and new cultural tastes in the German capital? (Further information: Goebel; Ladd; Large; Richie)

6. After reading the excerpts of Schneider and Grünbein in *Berliner Spaziergänge* of this textbook, check out available English translations. Do you find these translations to be adequate? (Further reading: Grünbein; Schneider)

7. Discuss each of these writer's preferences for describing particular districts of Berlin. What are their possible motivations for focusing on these districts (political ideology, generational factors, aesthetic considerations, different attitudes towards historical memory, etc.)? (Further reading: Large; Richie)

8. Do you agree with writers like Schneider and Grünbein that a continued interrogation of the German past is necessary for commemorating historical catastrophes and their victims? Or do you believe, as do younger writers like Dückers, that the German ought to move beyond an incessant preoccupation with National Socialism and World War II in order to attain some sense of "normalcy" in their quest for national identity in the New Europe and the global economy? (Further reading: Costable-Heming, Halverson, Foell; Taberner, Finlay)

9. Watch the movie *Good Bye, Lenin* in its entirety. How does the film use documentary and made-up television footage to envision an alternative GDR with a more humane socialism as an alternative to the aggressive consumer capitalism of the West? Do you believe that the movie feeds into sentiments of *Ostalgie*, or do you think the film ironically debunks this type of historical nostalgia? (Further reading: Töteberg)

10. Assemble a list of at least ten points about Berlin (architecture, history, politics, arts, music, literature, film, etc.) that you would like to know more about by actually visiting the German capital. (Further reading: Large, Richie)