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Preface

This volume provides a broad overview of German cultural studies. By German cultural studies we mean an interdisciplinary project that has developed out of “German studies” as it has been variously practiced in the United States for the last twenty-five years or so. German studies approaches have been increasingly influenced by the field generally referred to as “cultural studies,” derived in part from British theorists associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in part from Continental critical theory, and highly influenced by North American contexts and praxis. Our term German cultural studies thus means to draw attention to a transformation that has already taken place and to point out a trajectory for future change. The first part of our title, “A User’s Guide,” signals that this overview is offered as an invitation, not a prescription. Indeed, this is a guide, not an instruction manual or even a survey, because cultural studies does not constitute a new discipline. Rather, it is best described as an interdisciplinary field in which certain questions and methods converge, providing us with sometimes conflicting sets of practices beyond the scope of a single discipline. Such a definition disallows the introduction of a new orthodoxy. We also call this volume “A User’s Guide” because it aims for practical consequences; its essays and supporting material serve the goal of curricular and research development.

Through introductory and linking comments by the editors, essays by expert practitioners, and a unique section devoted to pedagogical tools, the book illustrates what kinds of questions get asked in cultural studies; demonstrates how these questions are approached by scholars in the German context; describes the relations between German cultural studies and other fields; and, finally, explores how successful teachers bring cultural studies into the classroom. The progression over the course of the book from theoretical issues to case studies to practical applications allows readers to personalize its use: to proceed either start to finish for a structured introduction to German cultural studies or to skip selectively to topics of greatest interest. Whereas a general reader might be most interested in parts 4, 5, and 6 dealing with historical and contemporary issues, students might turn first to parts 1, 2, and 3, introducing the field and its practitioners. Teachers and advanced graduate students of German or other foreign cultures might be more curious about parts 7 and 8, which
CHAPTER 13

"Seit die Juden weg sind . . .": Germany, History, and Representations of Absence

Omer Bartov

No one would question that Germans have produced myriad representations of the National Socialist period and of the Holocaust. And yet the question of coming to terms with this past continues to haunt the national psyche. In his essay historian Omer Bartov attempts to address a crucial missing element from literary, filmic, and scholarly representations: the absence of Jews. Launching his argument from a seemingly unremarkable moment in a conversation with a young German colleague, Bartov discusses the issue of Jewish presence and absence in German history. During the Weimar Republic and the early years of the National Socialist regime, Bartov reminds us, numerous commentators decried the “overrepresentation” of Jews in certain areas of contemporary life. And, in fact, for their relative proportion of the overall population German Jews did occupy a higher percentage of positions in certain professions such as medicine and law and in the media and the academy. Thus, it is particularly ironic that current literary, cinematic, and scholarly treatments of that same period tend to efface the Jewish presence. Non-Jewish Germans, as Bartov points out, have often been depicted as victims of the tragedies of the period, and hence there is no representational room for the historical victims. Bartov finds it worrisome that one answer to the question “What is ‘German’ now?” seems to be: victims.

Though trained in Israel and England as a historian in a traditional empirical style, tinged with the enlightened marxism of his Oxford mentor, Tim Mason, Bartov has always been interested in the visual and literary arts. He is himself a twice-published novelist, in addition to his three books and numerous articles on the Wehrmacht and the Holocaust; he is conversant with contem-
porary literary critical theory (e.g., the work of Edward Said and Paul de Man) and with important developments in German cultural studies (e.g., the work of Eric Santer and Anton Kaebs). Nonetheless, he has refrained from forays outside his traditional field in historical research until recently. In his latest book, Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation, as in this essay, Bartov uses various types of cultural evidence to prove his subject. As David Crew points out in his essay on the historical profession, such interdisciplinary efforts still remain rare among those trained as historians. Bartov considers himself a kind of double outsider, analyzing works by Germans from the perspective of a non-German and analyzing film and literature as a historian rather than as a film or literary critic. And, though Bartov does not reside in Germany, he, like Deidre Berger, uses an anecdote from personal contact with Germans to launch a reflection on contemporary German culture.

Contemporary Germans’ inability to empathize with Jews and minorities has roots in earlier periods as Zantop shows. Bartov questions here whether or not Germans have ever been able to recognize Jews as part of the fabric of German culture. To extend his argument to a recent development, there has been great controversy surrounding the creation of a Holocaust memorial near the Reichstag building in Berlin and the creation of a Jewish museum within the precincts of the Berlin Museum. That is to say, Germans have been challenged once again to remember that Jewish citizens have been and are a constitutive element of German culture. In the context of cultural studies it is also important to consider popular culture genres, such as television and the press. Despite substantial media attention given to the Third Reich and the Holocaust in Germany today, the representation of Jews remains limited. Bartov here explores this absence.

In 1987, during a conversation with a young German scholar, I remarked that, having spent a few months in Berlin, I had been struck by its distinctly provincial air as compared with other European capitals such as Paris and London. My friend sighed in agreement, adding that in the past Berlin, too, had of course been a much more vibrant and creative city but that, “seit die Juden weg sind” (since the Jews have been gone), it has lost its cosmopolitan atmosphere.

On the face of it this was a rather straightforward assertion, and at the time I gave it little thought, although I was slightly disturbed by my own instinctive agreement with it, which implied that I too believed that the Jews (as a distinctly different category from the Germans) had made city life more interesting. That, I conceded, was my prejudice. Subsequently, however, I realized that my friend’s comment, perceived by him as a mere statement of fact, was anything but innocent of an ambiguous, multilayered, and quite prevalent perception of Jewish presence and absence in German history. To be sure, this complex set of attitudes about the role of Jews, and the impact of their absence (as distinct from the mechanism whereby this absence was produced), is rarely acknowledged or even perceived by many Germans. Indeed, even German filmmakers and novelists, that is, those concerned with creating verbal and visual representations for public consumption, as well as German historians of precisely the period during which Jews were transformed from a presence to an absence, that is, scholars, conventionally viewed as charged with constructing more “reliable” (if less popular) representations of the past, rarely seem to be aware of the implications this German-Jewish (negative) symbiosis has on their own work—and on that past with which it is concerned (Diner). And yet, perhaps precisely because of this lack of awareness, the representation of absence is arguably one of the most crucial tropes in German literary, cinematic, and scholarly representations of recent German history.

There is a major difference between the absence of representation and the representation of absence, although at the same time there may be close links between them (Said, chap. 5; de Man, chaps. 7, 9). In the case of postwar German representations of the past, and especially of the Nazi era and the period immediately preceding it, Jews are clearly underrepresented, except as opaque objects of Nazi ferocity. Although one cannot speak of a complete absence of representation, the gap between the prominent role of Jews in German society, culture, and xenophobia, on the one hand, and the marginal place they are awarded in postwar representations of that past, on the other, is quite striking. In view of the prevalent argument in Weimar and the early years of the Third Reich of Jewish overrepresentation in the professions, the media, and the intelligentsia, their current underrepresentation in representations of that past is only one of numerous ironies characteristic of recent German history and its various literary, cinematic, and scholarly reconstructions. And, whatever we may say about the portrayal of Jews (or the lack thereof) in postwar German discussions of the past, it is obvious that little attempt has been made to grapple with the problems of representing the Holocaust. Indeed, one is hard put to think of any German film or work of fiction devoted to the Jewish experience of genocide, while the much larger body of German scholarship on the subject has similarly concentrated exclusively on the German side, and especially on either the technical and bureaucratic or the political and ideological facets of genocide. While not absent, the victims remain anonymous and faceless; the evil, whatever the causes attributed to it, is in the deed (and its effects on the
perpetrators), not in its application to individual human beings. This is a type of representation not unrelated to the Nazis’ own perception and representation of the victims as constituting targets for their actions totally lacking individual identity. Of course, the Nazis organized genocide, while postwar German representations deplore it, but in the latter the event itself assumes an abstract quality, bereft of precisely that empathy that has in the past, as well as much more recently, been seen as central to the recreation of a historical period and to the “pleasure of narration” (Broszat, qtd. in Baldwin 78).

Not representing a phenomenon may have to do either with its perceived irrelevance to current preoccupations or with a sense of unease about its implications for the present. In other words, the absence of representation may be caused by two contradictory, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, factors: indifference and anxiety. They are contradictory because we are rarely anxious about things to which we are indifferent, yet they are not necessarily mutually exclusive because our indifference may be superficial and assumed, rather than a true reflection of our consciousness. We may train ourselves to feel indifferent toward an object, a person, or an event that would otherwise cause us profound anxiety. To cite just one example, also related to the present discussion by a series of ironic links, it can be argued that attitudes toward the “Arab Problem” within the pre-state Jewish community (Yishuv) of Palestine were characterized by that same absence of representation of Palestinian Arabs that can be seen in postwar Germany vis-à-vis the Jews. Having escaped the “Jewish Question” in Europe, the Zionists confronted what they called the Arab Problem by not confronting it at all. This was partly a conscious decision, motivated by rational political arguments, according to which this “problem” ought not to be dealt with before demographic equality or, even better, superiority had been achieved. But it was also rooted in a psychological reaction, whereby fear of Arab nationalism and a violent reaction to Jewish settlement in Palestine manufactured an assumed indifference to the issue, indeed, an argument that the problem that had caused this anxious reaction did not exist in the first place (Shapira).

Conversely, representations of absence may involve direct confrontation with an acknowledged vacuum or void, perceived as either perpetual or as having been created by the disappearance of previously existing objects and entities. Yet even in this case, by their own definition, such representations are not concerned with the creation of the vacuum (even if it is not an immanent condition) but with absence as such; with the void, not with the mechanism that had emptied a formerly occupied space. Now representing an absence, an emptiness, a no-thing, is almost a contradiction in terms, akin to representing silence or the ineffable or perfection—that is, the Absolute, which is, by definition, unrepresentable. And yet we know, of course, that, such aesthetic and philosophical assertions notwithstanding, humanity has rarely accepted such judgments; has, indeed, felt itself challenged to try nevertheless to represent precisely that which had been deemed unrepresentable. The Jews, after all, have a long tradition of representing God, who both by decree and by definition is not amenable to representation.

Yet what concerns me here is not the representation of the Absolute, at least not insofar as absolute Evil is excluded from this definition. Moreover, I am not especially interested in the absence of representation of the Jews, and especially the Holocaust, in Germany. For one thing this is such an obvious phenomenon as to merit, at best, only hopes or calls for change. For another this does not mean that postwar Germany has refrained from preoccupation with the reality and direct consequences of Nazi crimes, that is, the physical murder of millions of human beings. Indeed, anyone visiting Germany even for a relatively brief period will be struck by the amount of media attention given to Nazism, not excepting the genocide of the Jews. Rather, what interests me here is the representation of the absence itself, the representation of the ultimate result of Nazism’s “success” in bringing about the “disappearance” of Jews from Germany (and Europe), and, by extension, the representation of the nature of postwar German society and culture as compared to prewar and pre-Nazi Germany, that Germany in which there had presumably been Jews who were “done away with,” even if the information available about them is neither ample nor particularly accurate. Indeed, what appears to me most fascinating in this phenomenon is the manner in which postwar German representations of Jewish absence serve an apparently crucial need in German society and culture to identify, or empathize, with its own immediate predecessors and to perceive itself as the inheritor of a tragic history of (its own) victimhood and suffering.

In reality, of course, the Jews are not absent from postwar Germany, even if their numbers are much smaller than their meager share of the population of pre-1933 Germany and their cultural and intellectual contribution is similarly diminished. But in much of the German visual and literary representational universe they are seen as absent, to the extent that one may even find the Holocaust being described as “the end of European Jewry” (Hillgruber). This, in itself, is a significant conception of reality, since it implies that, whoever the Jews currently residing in Germany may be, they have little to do with those Jews who had become absent and in that world of which they had been part.

More important, however, is the implicit and wholly pervasive subtext of representations of absence in the German context. After all, everyone knows quite well (thanks not least to the media’s preoccupation with the issue) where the Jews “went” and what happened to them once they got “there.” It is also acknowledged that Germans, or at least some Germans, had had a great deal to do with this “disappearance.” Hence, the question is not at all what brought about this absence or the fact that novels and films do not actually try to represent the process whereby this “happened” or that historians tend to concentrate
nermost feelings and passions, historicism sought to "feel oneself into" the past. Both the social and the human sciences and the arts are profoundly indebted to the conceptualization of and experimentation with these ideas by German philosophers, historians, writers, and artists. Yet it should be stressed that empathy is, by definition, exclusive. Only God (at least under certain circumstances) can empathize with all His creatures. For human beings, however, empathy begins with the self and is therefore deeply rooted in a narcissistic view of the world. This may greatly enrich our understanding of human psychology and history, but it may just as much distort one's perception of others. And if, as Ranke argued, "all nations are equal under God," they are not necessarily equal under the historian's gaze. Indeed, the very process of feeling oneself into history must establish clearly defined limits and boundaries in order not to degenerate into an impressionistic world history or a series of superficial pâtétudes, in which empathy wholly replaces knowledge and understanding. Moreover, since all nations, periods, and individuals are necessarily burdened (and motivated) by their own specific biases and prejudices, and since these biases and prejudices normally concern other nations, periods, and individuals, empathy must perforce also lead to antipathy, or at least to empathy with antipathy, without which understanding (Verstehen) would remain detached from the "reality" of the past.

Now, considering this intellectual heritage, as well as the traumatic events of the first half of this century, and especially the manner in which this period came to a catastrophic end—from which, of course, it nevertheless continued to flow, as it surely must—it is not surprising that postwar Germany has been so preoccupied with the recent past and that notions of empathy and understanding have been so central to both historical scholarship and literary and visual representation. This context helps us understand why much of this body of creative work has been concerned with the relationship between the nation and the individual, on the one hand, and with history's anonymous forces of destruction and the limitless misery, suffering, pain, and sorrow they had brought in their wake, on the other. The aura of tragedy that accompanies a great deal of postwar German fiction and film is rooted in a sense of betrayal and dashed hopes, unfulfilled aspirations and disillusionment from previously held beliefs, loyalty and falsehood, innocence and victimization (Kaes; Ryan). Politics and ideologies do not fare well in such representations; individuals and the nation (the "true" nation, the presumed conglomerate of culturally and ethnically related individuals constituting a historical, perhaps even an organic, entity, not the nation created by doctrine and coercion) are at the center of our empathy. Finally, such strong empathies and such a tragic context must necessarily engender boundaries and distance, detachment and animosity. When one's own suffering is not only great but also perceived as tragic, it is difficult to feel, or even notice, the pain of others not clearly included in this community of mis-

on the mechanics rather than the human aspects of this "event." The question is, rather, what are the implications of German representations of the past from which the Jews are either absent or, in the rare cases in which they appear (just before they disappear), are represented as outsiders, as different, strange, indeed ephemeral beings, who are obviously about to disappear at any given moment precisely because they are not an inherent part of the reality reconstructed by the filmmaker, novelist, or historian. Moreover, it is necessary to inquire into the implications of such representations of Germany’s destruction during the war and its suffering following the "capitulation," or "catastrophe," from which the Jews are once more almost wholly absent or, when they do appear, seem to have fared better than the average German during their long years of disappearance.

How does one deal with the question of absence? How does one come to terms with, or overcome, the absence of an object, an entity, a memory, that is known (if only perhaps vaguely and inaccurately) to have existed before, indeed, to have been seen by many as a far too pervasive presence? Does one lament the present condition (of absence), glorify past circumstances (of presence), and simultaneously decree that the process whereby the past was transformed into the present is a matter for a different, not unimportant, but nevertheless almost wholly unrelated discussion? My friend, of course, knew a great deal about the Holocaust. Yet he was sorry that the Jews were "gone," since Berlin had become much more boring compared to its glorious, if also tumultuous, past. Is there an implicit blame here of the absentee ones themselves, those eternal "Weggeher" who for some reason left Germany in the lurch? (Reitz 102, 145-46; qtd. in Santner 75, 80). Is there a connection here between this sense of a past glory somehow diminished by the Jews' absence and the anger and frustration within the German public just before and after the end of the war that they were being punished for the crimes committed (by whom?) against the Jews?—that is, that the Jews (directly or by proxy) were destroying Germany? (Arendt; Engelmann 331-33; Bartov, Hitler's Army 169-70).

Absence, after all, has much to do with questions of guilt and innocence, justice and punishment, death and survival, just as it is related to the problem of distinguishing between fact and image, history and memory, the represented (object, person, event) and its representation. Absence, in this specific context, compels us to think about, and yet paradoxically also enables us to repress, the crucial distinction between perpetrators and victims, however much the boundaries between them are blurred and however great the overlap may sometimes be.

One of the greatest contributions of German thought and letters in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the introduction of the notion of empathy, or Einfühlung, both to representations of the individual and to the study of the past. While Romanticism insisted on the need to "look into" one's in-
fortune. In other words, empathy necessitates absence; the deeper our empathy, the more keenly felt is the pain; the more tragic the circumstances of our empathy, the more urgent is the need for absence. Hence, empathy and absence are as closely related as pain and indifference. Now, under conditions of a clear-cut confrontation between friend and foe, empathy with the friend will "naturally" make for hostility toward his foe. But under such perceived tragic circumstances as those of postwar Germany, where the cause for which sacrifices had been made was largely discredited, the foe can no longer fulfill this need. Since this conventional dichotomy cannot be maintained, the foe is replaced by a gaping absence, which continues to function as that with which one cannot empathize, and yet is clearly separated from the enemy, who must now be acknowledged as the true destroyer of evil.

The issue under discussion, however, is even more complex. It is not simply that the absent must take upon itself the role that the enemy can no longer fulfill. Rather, the absent is known to have been the victim, the true, innocent, "ideal" victim, the victim with whom one precisely should empathize, had one not already chosen oneself as the preferred object of empathy. This is, one might argue, only natural. Furthermore this absent victim cannot be deprived of the status of victim, since that status is openly acknowledged, even if it does not evoke empathy. Indeed, this other's victimhood must be emphasized and reiterated, not least because, being so clearly and evidently immense, it becomes a kind of measuring rod for one's own victimhood, just as that other's tragedy becomes a measuring rod for one's own. And yet, in this skewed universe of competing victimhood in which the rationale for self-empathy is founded on suffering, can one concede first place to another? According to this logic, the absent must become ever more abstract, precisely because its presence is both a fundamental obstruction to self-empathy—which is perceived as crucial to individual and national existence—and its precondition.

A few examples from three different areas of representation—namely, literature, film, and scholarship—must suffice to demonstrate this process. Let me begin with three important young writers who emerged in the Federal Republic in the aftermath of World War II: Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, and Siegfried Lenz. All three had lived as children and teenagers in the Third Reich, and all had served in the military, although, while the slightly older Böll spent many years at the front, Grass and Lenz were conscripted only toward the end of the war, and the latter actually deserted from his unit, a fact never mentioned in the dust-jacket blurbs of his works. There is little doubt that these writers were strongly preoccupied with German history and, in some of their best works, especially with the Nazi past. What interests me here in their oeuvres is not their literary merit, which I find to be considerable, but, rather, the manner in which they represented that past, what concerned them most about it, and what they chose to leave out. In other words, I am interested in presence and absence in their writing on Nazism and the connections between the two.

All three writers are strongly preoccupied with the fate of the unique, remarkable, or rebellious individual in the context of a violently conformist society. In this sense they are, of course, concerned with themselves but also, by way of extension, with the options and limitations of individual action, creation, and interaction. Thus, for instance, the protagonists of Group Portrait with Lady (Gruppenbild mit Dame [1971]), The Tin Drum (Die Blechtrommel [1959]), and The German Lesson (Deutschstunde [1968]) are all extraordinary in one way or another; surrounded by a conventional, conformist environment, they are constantly threatened by another extraordinary minority of uniquely evil individuals. No less important, all these types, the individualistic, the indifferent, and the evil, are caught in the throes of something that is beyond their comprehension and capacities, an upheaval of universal proportions, against which individualistic action is all the more remarkable because it is so utterly hopeless. Ultimately, all, or rather, all Germans, become victims of this anonymous force and are either physically or mentally destroyed by it. The others, the non-Germans who arrive at the scene following the catastrophe, if represented at all, are obviously outsiders to the tragedy and wholly incapable of grasping it.

What is notable about these works is not merely the fact that all Germans end up in them as victims but that there are no other victims but Germans. This is what I would call an absence of representation. Thus, for instance, in Böll's The Train Came on Time (Der Zug war pünktlich [1949]), the victim is the German soldier, the innocent, war-hating, music-loving, frightened young man who gets blown up by the Polish resistance. His is a tragic figure, because he is in the clutches of forces he cannot control and is destroyed by those with whom he in fact learns to sympathize, embodied in the figure of a Polish woman who is like him but works (with much greater conviction) for the other side. But another aspect of these literary texts seems of greater significance, namely, their manner of representing absence. What I would like to suggest is that these exceptional protagonists could in fact be easily replaced by those most obviously absent, namely the Jews. From the point of view of the regime and its followers, as well as from that of many other Germans, whether antisemitic, philosophically, or, most commonly, indifferent, the Jews were the example par excellence of all that was exceptional, different, bizarre, in other words, unlike the rest, for better or for worse. They too were surrounded by a multitude of conformists and were hunted down by a majority of exceptionally committed, or at least extraordinarily obedient, servants of a regime sworn to their destruction and willing to further the careers of those who carried out its wishes. Yet in these novels we hardly ever encounter Jews, while we do hear a great deal about ex-
exceptional Germans. This is what I would call the representation of absence, since the absence of the Jews is represented by exceptional German protagonists, and the (fictional) existence of these protagonists makes possible the absence of the Jews. For, if we are to empathize with anyone during the Nazi period, and if we simultaneously insist that the focus of our empathies must be German (as defined by the Nazi regime, i.e., excluding former Jewish citizens), then it must be someone who has very similar qualities to those of the Jew (as perceived by German society).

This is not to say, of course, that such works are allegories of the fate of Jews in Nazi Germany, whatever else they may be allegories of (The Tin Drum, e.g., is arguably a mixed metaphor of both Hitler's and Germany's fate). I do not think that any of these writers consciously gave his protagonists perceived Jewish characteristics; rather, all of these works have a strong autobiographical element and are imbued with the writers' own sense of victimhood and singularity, which combines the Romantic notion of the artist with the specific details of their lives and times. Yet through this self-empathy, which in another way makes possible also empathy with the nation (in the sense of at least one righteous man in the city of Sodom), they need no longer empathize with their own, and their nation's, victims. Indeed, they thereby exclude those victims from the sphere of empathy altogether, since, as I have noted, empathy must by definition be exclusive rather than inclusive in order to have any meaning at all. Hence, the representation of absence acts as a crucial mechanism of empathic self-representation even under the most unlikely circumstances, such as those of persecution and genocide.

A later generation of German filmmakers was also greatly preoccupied with history (Kaes). Here I will also mention only three of the most prominent German directors of the 1970s and 1980s—Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder—although many others come to mind, such as Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Volker Schlöndorff, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Werner Herzog, and Wim Wenders. Here, too, I would like to focus only on one aspect of these filmmakers' work, that is, the interplay between presence and absence. Alexander Kluge's film The Patriot [Die Patriotin (1977–79)], about which I have written in greater detail elsewhere ("War"), is ostensibly about German history. Not surprisingly, it is a tale of tragedy and folly, hopelessness and despair, destruction and mutilation (of people, of landscapes, of history, of the film itself). As a fragmented pastiche of images and words, it is a truly postmodern work. an attempt to confront both the conventions of filmmaking and of German history. It remains, however, part of a postwar German tradition of representation in that it presents the Germans as victims of history and its anonymous, evil forces and in that it is innocent of any preoccupation with other victims. Considering the film's focus on World War II, the total absence of the Jews, whose own encounter with German history ended up in genocide, is especially blatant. Yet Kluge's insistence on digging up the past and revealing its hidden fragments is once more an exercise not merely in the absence of representation but also in the representation of absence. For the heavy emphasis on the centrality of death and destruction in German history creates a consistent subtext that must permeate the informed (and who is not informed on this?) viewer think of the Holocaust, an event never explicitly mentioned in the film. Once again we find ourselves empathizing with the victims of an inexplicable, omnipotent power and especially with the unique, eccentric schoolteacher who has taken upon herself the task of remaking history, not by telling it as "it really happened" but by changing it so as to be able to tell it as "I would like it to have been." We can think of Kluge's protagonist as a survivor of the genocide who would greatly prefer not to tell the world what she had actually experienced—which she obviously cannot tell in any case, since no one can tell this tale without distorting it (Levi 82-85)—but, rather, to be able to change the past itself and thereby to transform it into a tale that can be told. I do not believe that this is the conscious subtext of Kluge's film; he truly empathizes with his heroic schoolteacher, as he does with the victims of Stalingrad—the German victims, not the Soviet ones—with whom he is so obviously obsessed. But this is nevertheless a representation of absence in the sense I have been developing here, since both Kluge and his viewers must, somewhere, be constantly thinking about the genocide of the Jews as they wind their way through the piles of human and material wreckage that constitute Kluge's view of the (German) past, in those same lands of (Jewish) ashes and erased memories that haunted Paul Celan.5

Edgar Reitz's view of history, as presented in the film Heimat (1980-84), is far less fragmented and apocalyptic than Kluge's, despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the fact that he claims to be much more preoccupied with memory than with history. The German (rural) memory of the past, according to Reitz, is simple, modest, warm, and tightly knit; it is enclosed upon itself, and there is little room in it for outsiders. Indeed, the outside intrudes only in the shape of war, foreign countries, modernity, and Jews. The war is where the community must send its sons; foreign countries are where some other sons go and are unrecognizably transformed, not for the better; modernity is what finally destroys the harmony of village life, community, and the family; and the Jews are an ephemeral existence, appearing only to disappear rapidly as a somewhat disturbing, ambivalent presence, provoking hostility and fleetingly witnessing intimacy of which they have no part. Reitz's is a simpler work, and its symbolism is never very subtle. And, since it is about German memory rather than history, and because it represents that memory as wholly turned upon itself, it leaves no room for those whom the Germans would rather forget or repress, that is, their victims. And yet it is dependent for its own coherence not merely on an absence of representation but also on a representation of ab-
sence. Conscious of a context of prejudice and genocide, evil and complicity, it must escape to the environment of a remote, anachronistic village, finally connected to modernity only following World War II and the (obviously unfortunate) Americanization of Germany. And yet even in that distant location the film cannot completely ignore a presence that its own realistic and traditional technique (so unlike Kluge's) must somehow acknowledge. Hence, Reitz feels obliged to make room for a momentary appearance of the absent, if only in order to indicate that the absent remained absent for his protagonists even when they were actually there. He must make the point that the Jews had no role in German (rural) memory, precisely because he knows that German memory is inseparably tied with visions of genocide. Indeed, the major motivation of Heimat, as Reitz himself argued, was to give back German history to the Germans, after it was taken away from them by the American film Holocaust—that is, taken away from them by the Jews, who are the main protagonists of both Holocaust the ministries and the historical event of Nazi genocide. I suggest that the absence of the Jews is the fundamental subtext of Heimat, its motivation and the unspoken arbiter of its content. Without this absence the film would have been nothing more than a sentimental, overlong tale of rural life in a Godforsaken province. It is that absence that gives it meaning, provides it with the context it so emphatically rejects. In this sense Heimat is a film not about memory but about amnesia, that is, about the absence of memory and all that can be remembered and must nevertheless be erased.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder seems to have been more concerned with representing Jews than any of his colleagues (Koch 246). Perhaps the most accomplished director of the New German Cinema, he also gained a fair measure of notoriety. His films have enjoyed wide success in many countries, including Israel; yet his representations of Jews make the most blatant use of antisemitic stereotypes of any prominent German filmmaker. I would argue that Fassbinder, however, is not in fact concerned with Jews. His protagonists, like those of all of these filmmakers and writers, are marginal yet exceptional individuals, simultaneously survivors and victims of a catastrophe. In The Marriage of Maria Braun [Die Ehe der Maria Braun (1978)], the main character, a truly heroic figure, survives all hardship and betrayal, only to be blown up in a gas explosion in her villa, which she had gained through hard work and determination. (One cannot avoid thinking of the implicit association made here with those other victims of gas never represented by the director.) In Lili Marleen (1980) yet another survivor of anonymous destruction (with whose well-known chiefs she had had a brief but glamorous association) fares much worse than the shadowy figures of Jews, who seem to be more capable of controlling the forces of evil, not least by their great fortunes. Indeed, as has been pointed out (Koch 254), the Jews appear to extract themselves from the Holocaust with little difficulty and to thrive once more, while the heroine, abandoned by her Jewish lover, is destroyed along with Hitler's empire. We, the informed viewers, may of course be thinking of Auschwitz as we watch the stylized fighting at the front. But the absence of genocide makes room for the presence of money-grubbing Jews, and the misfortunes of the heroine are linked to the dubious accomplishments of the Jewish survivors (of an unmentioned Holocaust). Ultimately, it is the power of the Jews that is at the background of German suffering, and it is the absence of the Jewish genocide that serves as a crucial precondition for the representation of German victimhood.

Finally, I extend my argument to a few words about the historians. German scholarship has produced a remarkable volume of work on the Holocaust. In this sense there is no room to speak of an absence. Yet it is worthwhile to examine the nature of this scholarship and the main focus of its concerns and lacunae. In this context I would like to mention three historians who have written extensively on the National Socialist regime; Martin Broszat, Hans Mommsen, and Andreas Hillgruber (Bartov, "Wem gehört"). Broszat's well-known plea for a historization of National Socialism provides a good starting point for this brief discussion, since it touches directly on some of the issues with which I am concerned (in Baldwin). Broszat argued that there was a need to reintroduce the notion of empathy to the study of Nazism and to eliminate the distancing techniques and rhetoric employed in such writing, whose impact has been to diminish greatly the pleasure of writing and reading such history. That is, Broszat quite clearly called for what I claim had been present all along in German cinematic and literary representation of the period: German empathy for their own history and its protagonists. In his correspondence with Broszat, Saul Friedländer argued that it was still too early to approach Nazism in the same manner as one would, for instance, sixteenth-century France (Broszat and Friedländer 129–30). Yet, looking at this debate from the perspective of almost ten years, I am struck by the fact that Broszat's basic assumption—namely, that such empathy was lacking and, therefore, had to be reintroduced—was rather off the mark, since even among the historians empathy was never absent, even if it was wrapped in what he thought of as a kind of compulsory and unproductive detachment. To be sure, this empathy was expressed indirectly, in that German historians writing on Nazism, and even specifically on the Holocaust, had shown a complete inability to empathize with the victims, even while they did indeed distance themselves from the perpetra tors (but not from the remaining, vast majority of Germans). This is precisely what I would term a representation of absence, since the absence of empathy for the Jewish victims of Nazism left enough room for—indeed, made necessary—empathy with the German victims and survivors, who, from the perspective of the Jewish and other political and "racial" enemies of the Reich, were in fact the (often complicit) bystanders. Hence, the absence of representation (of Jewish victims as objects of empathy) is closely linked to a representation of absence, whereby
the impossible empathy for the Jews is directed at the Germans, those large multitudes who were neither direct perpetrators nor active resisters but, instead, either complicit or resistant bystanders. The need for empathy has been rightly seen by Broszat as a crucial component of the historian’s craft. But those who are the most obvious objects of empathy cannot be accorded that emotion, because, being as they are outside the frame of reference of identification and intimacy, empathy for them would block the option of empathy for oneself, creating thereby an unbearable psychological burden. This is what makes the mechanism of representing absence through enhanced empathy for one’s own fate as individual, group, and nation all the more urgent.

Broszat’s essay was important because it pointed at some of the fundamental problems of absence and representation (though I do not believe that he was aware of the implications of his argument as previously outlined). Hans Mommsen’s contribution to the debate was of a more technical nature, insisting on the “functionalist” aspects of the “Final Solution” and the “cumulative radicalization” of policies during the Third Reich that led to genocide (“National Socialism” and “Realization”). In one sense there is no empathy here at all, merely a detailed (and contested) interpretation of how a modern, bureaucratic, industrial state launches itself on the path to unprecedented mass murder. And yet here too absence and empathy constitute the fundamental subtext of the whole interpretative edifice. This could be gleaned momentarily from the expression of empathy made by Mommsen when writing on the “sober” mentality of German soldiers on the Eastern Front, which obviously also demonstrated sympathy for their fate (“Kriegserfahrungen”). Most of the time, however, the subtext of the argument can be gathered only through the intense effort to understand the psychology of the middle-ranking perpetrators, on the one hand, and from Mommsen’s complete lack of interest in their victims, who serve merely as the (somewhat opaque) object of the former’s thoughts and actions, on the other. The absence of any empathy with the victims is not a simple function of Mommsen’s focus on the perpetrators; rather, it is a precondition for his interpretation, since any treatment of the victims as potential objects of empathy would strongly undermine the main thrust of the argument, which is, after all, based on the perpetrators’ perception of reality. Having chosen that perspective, any discussion of reality from the perspective of the victims would seem a mere interference, an unnecessary complication, irrelevant to both the argument and its objects. Yet, of course, this too is a representation of absence, in that the only reason for our interest in the mentality and thought processes of such otherwise wholly uninteresting characters as Mommsen’s functionaries is what they were actually doing. In other words, it is the absentees who are the raison d’être of the whole interpretative undertaking, even if they appear only as numbers and figures distorted through the Nazi prism.

Andreas Hillgruber, my final example, expressed great interest in the objects of the historian’s empathy and identification, though his approach was much less subtle than Broszat’s relatively sophisticated (and ultimately far more influential) argument. As I have noted elsewhere (“Historians”), there is a clear link between Hillgruber’s insistence that the historian (meaning, of course, the German historian) must identify with the fate of the Wehrmacht’s soldiers in the eastern provinces of the Reich, his assertion that if there is any tragic element in World War II it is to be found in the carving up of Germany and the division of the world between the two flanking, non-European superpowers, and his cool and detached essay on the “end of European Jewry.” Hillgruber feels, just like Broszat, that the historian must empathize with his protagonists, and he is similarly quite incapable of seeing the Jews as his protagonists, let alone empathizing with them. More radically than Broszat, he chooses to identify with the soldiers, the population, and even some of the Nazi party functionaries of the areas in the East under threat of invasion by the Red Army. While it is crucial to his argument, the genocide of the Jews is explicitly and intentionally absented from his empathic portrayal of the last months of the war in the East. It is crucial not only because it is constantly present both in the mind of the historian and in the minds of his protagonists but also because it has to be removed so as to make empathy possible. It is there, but it is not there; it is relevant, but it is not relevant; it is a precondition for the events described, yet it is not discussed. And when, in the second essay of Hillgruber’s volume, the focus is on the genocide of the Jews, the tone and style of writing undergoes a radical transformation, adopting the bureaucratic language and detached rhetoric that both Hillgruber and Broszat have found so detrimental to good historical writing (Hillgruber 95–96; Bartov, “Historians” 343–44). In this second essay there is no case to be made for the absence of representation but very much of the representation of absence, since, while Hillgruber is explicitly concerned with the manner in which the physical absence of the Jews was achieved, the Jews as protagonists deserving the scholar’s empathy are wholly absent from it, until their existence is systematically and totally “ended,” in stark contradiction to the Germans, whose continued existence makes it possible for them to remain victims of a tragedy.

Tragedy is an important term in this context. It implies, we assume, an event or a circumstance in which the malicious forces of history had distorted the individual’s or the nation’s (heroic, in part even well-intentioned) actions into a self-destructive process, entrapping the individual in an inexplicable, and inescapable, web of errors and horrors, disillusionment and despair. What is absent from such German representations of the past is the tragedy of others. Being the true precondition for Germany’s own tragedy, that other tragedy must be represented as an absence, an unspoken, unexpressed, separate moment, that is both known and unknown to have constituted the essential starting point of the one tale with which Germans can wholeheartedly empathize: their own his-
tory. That other tragedy—which is, of course, radically different in that its objects were caught up not in the web of their own doings but in that of others—must serve as an unacknowledged model for comparison; one must constantly contend with the model and always avoid direct comparison. Even Ernst Nolte does not directly compare German and Jewish victimhood, preferring, much more conveniently, to use Stalin’s victims for that purpose (“Historical Legend,” “Past”). Hence, the representation of absence is a basic, and yet never to be articulated, precondition of German representations of the past and especially of the Nazi past. It is not confined to the sphere of literature, film, and scholarship. As my friend in Berlin had (quite unintentionally) shown me, it is an important element in many Germans’ self-representation: the sense that something that had previously been there is gone and that, while this disappearance has had long-term cultural, political, and psychological consequences, it can nevertheless not be processed by way of empathy and understanding. The process whereby the Jews were made into an absence is therefore detached from the tragedy that this absence has meant for Germany, and that tragedy of Jewish absence is submerged under the greater tragedy of German fate and history. In this case the Jews have played a double role in the tragic tales of modern German history—first by being there then by “going away.”

Notes

1. For a fascinating case of representation of absence by a converted Austrian Jew in the interwar period, see Bettauer; see further Noveck, “‘Kampf,’” 74–80; and Noveck, “Bettauer.”
2. Agnieszka Holland’s film Europa Europa (1991) is neither wholly German nor about the Jewish experience of the Holocaust but is concerned, rather, with a highly exceptional case.
3. Reitz notes: “With Holocaust, the Americans have taken away our history”; “the Jews, since time immemorial ‘people who go away’ [Weggehen], fit well into this American culture.”
4. This information was given me by Lenz himself in a private conversation in 1981.
5. I refer here especially to Celan’s poem “Engführung.”

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Chapter 14

Schinkel and the Politics of German Memory: The Life of the Neue Wache in Berlin

Wallis Miller

The guild of architectural historians has traditionally stood outside the academic mainstream not only because of the service role architectural historians play in practically oriented schools of architecture and design but also because of the varied association of scholars with local historic preservation groups, government sponsored building surveys, and expensive architectural tours for patrons. Wallis Miller’s essay shows why architectural historians should be brought into the mainstream of academic culture. Architectural history adds a new dimension to cultural studies in terms of its message and its own methods. It can tell us a great deal about the meaning of places and space: how and why space was designed and constructed in a particular way and who influenced the decisions and paid the bills for structures that necessarily affect far more people and for far longer than many other creative endeavors. And the already interdisciplinary nature of the architectural historian’s work—encompassing art, aesthetics, classics, history, engineering, semiotics, sociology, and economics, for example—can serve as both model and inspiration for some of the border crossings that we see as productive and necessary for the academy today.

We include Miller’s essay here because it is such a useful example of architectural history done well. She provides a comprehensive description of a structure, Berlin’s Neue Wache, and its compelling history. The kinds of questions she asks about this edifice are those that embody a cultural studies mode of thinking: concern with relationships between disparate entities, with the work of power and politics, with collective memory, and with a culture’s response to trauma and dislocation. Miller’s argument, like Omer Bartov’s,
Chapter 17

Living with Which Past?
National Identity in Post-Wall, Postwar Germany

Laurence McFalls

When the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic became one nation in 1990 all issues connected with German identity, including most particularly the history of the German nation, were subject to renegotiation. That is to say, new narratives have inevitably been created about the history of the Germanies and “Germany.” While Spaulding suggests that economics plays a defining role in such constructions, in the next two essays Laurence McFalls and Daphne Berdahl interrogate the role and relevance of memory in contemporary German political identity. McFalls, a political scientist, argues that, although a common and difficult (i.e., Nazi) past unites eastern and western Germans, their different memories of their respective postwar experiences within opposing political systems continue to divide them.

In developing his analysis, McFalls uses the vocabulary of the “political culture” approach within political science. An outgrowth of the systemic and structural-functionalist theories that dominated American political science in its formative years of the 1950s and 1960s, this approach conceives of political culture as individuals’ shared subjective (cognitive, evaluative, and affective) orientations toward political objects or structures. In the original systemic theoretical perspective political culture was functional—that is, it was the subjective grease that allowed the cogs of the political system to keep turning—and hence almost reduced to mere superstructure. Since the 1970s, however, political ethnography (and to a lesser extent poststructuralism) has inspired students of political culture to ascribe it more autonomy and to embrace subjectivism. Although positivist political scientists interested in discovering clear, unidirectional causality have questioned the explanatory value of the political
culture approach, its practitioners have generally come to adopt a dialectic concept of culture according to which political culture both reflects and creates political structures, so that, for example, democratic politics simultaneously depends on and creates democratic attitudes within the citizenry.

In his analysis McFalls implicitly adopts this intermediate, dialectical conception of political culture. He suggests that memory, or subjective orientations to the past, including an inherited repertoire of political and social values, is both the functional product of the structural exigencies of the political system and an independent influence on the system. Thus, he argues not only that contemporary eastern and western German political identities, remembered outgrowths of the old GDR and FRG political systems, have become instrumentalized (or functional) within the partisan competition of the new, unified FRG but also that the outcome of the battle for historical memory will determine the value orientation and the objective policy outcomes of German politics in the years to come.

In keeping with the arbitrary magical quality of round numbers, the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of the end of World War II have raised more public attention and debate in Germany than did the forty-ninth, forty-eighth, or even the fortieth anniversary. Arriving a convenient five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and just as Germany seems to be overcoming the greatest immediate challenges of unification, the public ceremonies surrounding events such as the liberation of Auschwitz (27 January), the bombing of Dresden (13–14 February), and the capitulation/liberation of the Third Reich (8–9 May) have offered Germans the occasion to reflect on their common past and on the fundamental cause for their forty-five-year division. Ideally, the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations should have permitted the reunited Germans to assume responsibility for their pasts and to forge a common political identity for the future. Instead, it would seem that unification, one precondition for the reconstruction of a common German national identity, has impeded a meaningful confrontation with the Nazi past, another precondition, I would contend, for restoring a common identity.

Many, or perhaps most, Germans (and especially those on the political Right) would deny my latter contention; for them the fiftieth anniversary of 1945 lends itself as the perfect occasion for Germany to put the Nazi past behind itself once and for all and to get on with the future as a “normal” nation. Such, indeed, seems to be the intention of leading politicians, who have in public ceremonies called for an end to recriminations and for a grand reconciliation of all now peace-loving nations, as, for example, President Roman Herzog did in his speech at the Dresden commemorations. While the denunciation of war and the desire for universal reconciliation may be noble goals in themselves, they conceal a political agenda—namely, the relativization of the humanity and scale of German war crimes. The fiftieth-anniversary commemorations have thus become the instrument for the realization of the political objectives of revisionist historians and German nationalists, who ever since the Historikerstreit (historians’ dispute) of the mid-1980s have openly striven to “normalize” German history in rendering it qualitatively no different from the history of any other modern nation (Maier). The restoration of German national unity in 1990 gave fresh impetus to the revisionist-nationalist cause, for, in formally ending the postwar period and closing the historical parenthesis of punitive national division, unification allowed Germany to reassume its place in the family of fully sovereign, modern nation-states, a status the commemorations of 1995 should have served to consecrate.

To be sure, without unification the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II could never have closed the chapter of postwar history, but revisionists, nationalists, and others are sadly mistaken if they believe that Germany can regain a common national identity by relegating its Nazi past to irrelevant antiquarian history. As Saul Friedländer has observed, the world historic events of 1989–91, including German unification, have resulted in “a complete historicization of the Nazi period” such that the postwar era has replaced the Nazi period as the relevant remembered past (in K. Naumann). That is, in national memory 1989 has replaced 1945 as the breaking point between past and present. The Germans can thus evacuate the Nazi past and any paralyzing war guilt from their living collective memory, just as the nationalists and revisionists had hoped they might. In the process, however, Germans, East and West, find themselves living with very different pasts and hence identities, and they will not be able to reconcile these identities unless they confront the now-more-distant common Nazi past that lies at the origin of their divergent recent pasts. Such a national reconciliation through confrontation with the Nazi past, I shall argue, however, will be difficult to attain because East and West Germans constructed postwar identities in opposition to each other and because the opposing East and West German postwar identities and experiences have become instrumentalized in post-Wall partisan politics.

Postwar German Identities: East and West

The relevant pasts for East and West Germans today may well be their respective experiences of the forty-five-year period of national division, but those postwar experiences were built on attempts to deny responsibility for the then
immediate Nazi past. The East and West German states and citizenries both formally and informally constructed their postwar identities in mirror image by projecting guilt for the Nazi past onto each other (Le Gloannec chap. 1). With the creation of the FRG and the GDR in May and October 1949, respectively, each of the German states tried to depict the other as the continuation of Nazi Germany under a new name and itself as the better, more democratic Germany. While the East German communist leadership sought to legitimize itself and its new state as the embodiment of the antifascist resistance to Hitler, it denounced the maintenance in the West of political personnel and of the social and economic structures that had allegedly given rise to fascism as proof that Nazi and revanchist forces continued to dominate the FRG. In fact, the West German state did acknowledge itself to be the legal successor of the Third Reich—but only the better to claim, through its Alleinvertretungsanspruch, to be the sole legitimate representative of the German people, on whatever territory those Germans might live. West German refusal to recognize the GDR (formally right up until the latter’s disappearance) not only sapped the eastern state of legitimacy and of citizens but allowed the equation of the communist leadership with the totalitarian usurper Hitler as it grew ever more repressive in its quest to hold onto its power and citizens.

As time, economic growth, and détente in the Cold War stabilized the division of Germany, the two states based their legitimacy increasingly on mutual demonizations about the past and increasingly on a more (East) or less (West) conscious evacuation of the national question from the political agenda. In the FRG the official goal of unification became a pious wish expressed only in so-called Sonntagsreden (Sunday speeches) that no one took seriously. European integration and the Atlantic alliance preoccupied West German statesmen (Brandt’s Ostpolitik being no exception, since it sought less to rekindle the national question than to postpone it to a distant future). At the same time, ordinary West Germans virtually ignored the existence of the GDR, except when they had to travel to West Berlin by land or when they remembered some relative at holiday time. In the GDR politicians more quickly dropped the issue of national unification (apparently even sabotaging Stalin’s overtures to that end) when they realized that unity would cost them their careers. Since East Germans were less likely than their cousins in the West to forget the existence of another and for them often more attractive German state, the communist leadership had to combat national sentiments openly and aggressively, first building the Wall in 1961 and then expunging ethnicity from public life in a movement that culminated in the disappearance of references to German ethnicity in the new constitution of 1974 (Naumann and Trümpler). Although the East German leadership reversed its anti-ethnic policy in the late 1970s when it revived references to the German and particularly the Prussian past, its attempts to define GDR identity on political rather than ethnic bases marked a significant departure from the German tradition of ethnohereditary nationalism (which continues, moreover, to pose problems in present-day multicultural Germany).

For the vast majority of citizens in East and West, of course, official policies and definitions made little difference for their sense of identity. West Germans built their immediate postwar identity much less around the Cold War posturing of their politicians than around the myth of “Stunde Null,” the idea that the end of the war and especially the monetary reform of 1948 had marked a fresh beginning for (West) Germany. Once the introduction of the deutsche mark (since then imbued with magical qualities in popular consciousness) had put an end to the speculation, hoarding, black marketeering, and hence suffering of the war’s immediate aftermath, Germans could go about the business of reconstructing their economy unencumbered by questions of guilt or responsibility for what everyone had experienced not as the liberation but as the catastrophe of 1945. Following monetary reform, the FRG’s “economic miracle” came, then, as a divine sign of redemption, and West German identity in the 1950s and 1960s grew so closely attached to economic performance that students of political culture questioned whether West Germans were anything more than fair-weather friends of the FRG’s democratic institutions (Almond and Verba). The children of West Germany’s economic miracle workers, the so-called 68er Generation, also dared to pose the same question. The resulting generational conflict, however, gave rise not only to the terrorism of the 1970s but to a whole new participatory political culture best represented by the Green Party (Baker, Dalton, and Hildebrandt). Because the FRG’s political system could not only absorb but respond to such an explosion of participation, West German political culture in the 1970s and 1980s added (to use Jürgen Habermas’s terminology) a layer of Verfassungspatriotismus (constitutional patriotism) to its earlier D-Mark-Nationalismus, that is, confidence in the FRG’s democratic institutions joined faith in the social market economy as cornerstones of popular West German identity (Habermas, “Lebensläge”).

Seen from the East, the FRG’s political and economic successes undermined the slight antifascist legitimacy the GDR leadership still enjoyed and devalued the GDR’s own economic miracle, which may have made its standard of living the envy of the Eastern Bloc but hardly consoled the East Germans who looked westward. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that East Germans overwhelmingly identified with the FRG and dreamed of joining it either individually through emigration or collectively through reunification. Just as West Germans forged a sense of identity with the FRG in response to their personal experiences with its economic and political system, so too did East Germans develop a sense of identity with the GDR, though of course not always in the way the leadership might have hoped. After the construction of the Berlin Wall had robbed them of a relatively easy emigration option, East Germans had little choice but to make the best out of life under a regime not of their
Choosing. They did so by practicing a kind of internal emigration into the pleasant corners of private life free from state intervention (or into what Günter Gaas, the FRG’s first permanent representative in the GDR, dubbed the Nischengeellschaft [society of niches]). They also did so by arranging themselves with the powers-that-be in morally more or less compromising manners. Thus, without necessarily identifying with the communist regime, nearly all East Germans learned to mouth the party line at appropriate times, and a minority went so far as to offer its informal services to the secret police, the Stasi.

Although they may have ideally preferred to live differently, East Germans nonetheless developed a set of positive values that not only facilitated life under the constraints of “real existing socialism” but also constituted a distinctive GDR cultural identity. As an adaptive response to the challenges of daily life, the common, positive values of East German culture concealed or compensated for the shortcomings, or sometimes just plain ugly reality, of life within state socialism. Thus, the virtues of modesty and frugality covered up consumer frustration in an economy of perpetual penury, while solidarity put a positive face on the dependence on the countless connections people had to cultivate, often speaking out of both sides of their mouths, in order to maintain their modest well-being. Social equality, as an ideal and by and large as a reality in the GDR, was the glue that held East German society together, not only because it permitted modesty and solidarity but also because it partially legitimated communist party rule. In addition to these values essential for survival under state socialism, East Germans shared a certain pride in the GDR’s economic accomplishments and social security, which compensated for the inferiority complex many had toward the West and for the predictability and monotony of life behind the Wall. As I have demonstrated in an analysis of the relative stability of the GDR before 1989 and of its unexpected collapse that year, the undermining of these GDR-specific values in the late 1980s—primarily through the rise of a parallel hard-currency economy that destroyed modesty, solidarity, and equality—motivated popular mobilization against the regime in the fall of 1989 (“Allemagne,” Communism’s Collapse, and “Modest Germans”).

Problems of Post-Wall National Identity

Although the erosion of East German cultural values ultimately led to unification, the demise of the GDR did not spell an end to the specific East German identity. In the year of national euphoria that followed the night of 9 November 1989 and ended the morning after Helmut Kohl’s triumphant reelection on 2 December 1990, East and West Germans rediscovered elements of a common identity. But even the momentous events and consequences of monetary and political unification in 1990 could not erase forty-five years of cultural divergence. Whereas West Germans had by and large grown up with or into a modern, liberal-democratic capitalist society, East Germans had cultivated traditional petit-bourgeois values—modesty, solidarity, and equality—that were hardly adapted to a competitive, individualistic consumer society. As East and West Germans began to recognize their differences despite their common heritage, with the easterners appearing to have retained greater “Germandness.” in the stagnant security of their niches behind the Wall (Gensticke), even critical intellectuals in East and West embraced the hypothesis that East German society was simply retarded in its modernization and would catch up to the West with time (Habermas, Revolution; Brie and Klein).

This hypothesis of East German backwardness, of course, fed into the West Germany Cold War stereotype of the GDR as the perpetuation of Nazi authoritarianism, a stereotype that gained weight from xenophobic skinhead violence erupted in the eastern cities of Hoyerswerda in 1991 and Rostock in 1992. The subsequent incendiary murders in Mölln and Solingen in the West, however, proved that racist violence did not have its origins in eastern “backwardness” alone. Indeed, the wave of xenophobic violence that peaked in Germany in early 1993 in no small measure stemmed from the backward-looking concept of ethnothereditary citizenship rights (jus sanguinis) that had allowed the FRG to claim to speak on behalf of its own and to defend the rights of ethnic Germans living in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Such an exclusive definition of citizenship and of the nation certainly cannot have discouraged a climate of tolerance for racist attitudes and acts at a time when the country faced an unprecedented influx of non-German refugees.

Postunification xenophobic violence, however, did not simply spring from a survival or revival of past pernicious values in East and West. Instead, it probably reflected the conflict between the new values that had emerged in both parts of Germany during separation. Hostility toward foreigners may have been a reflection of mutual antagonisms that grew between East and West Germans in the immediate post-Wall years as a result not only of the redistribution conflict that the costs of unification necessarily engendered but also of fundamental cultural misperceptions (McFalls, “Allemagne,” Communism’s Collapse chap. 6). To West Germans the Ossis (slang term for “easterners”), who had perfected the economic art of muddling through with scarce resources but with the help of informal networks of cooperation, appeared lazy and inefficient; to East Germans the so-called Besserwessis (1991 “neologism of the year” composed from know-it-all and westerner), who had learned that aggressive self-promotion was the key to success in the postindustrial capitalist economy, appeared arrogant and deceptive. Based on a lack of understanding of each other’s previous life experiences, the Ossi-Wessi rift widened as a result of the asymmetry of the unification experience: whereas East Germans have had to confront their pasts and to adjust to a radically different way of life, West Germans with few exceptions have come through unification with their pasts and presents un-
scathed. With such past and present experiences, and hence values, dividing East and West Germans, it has become commonplace in Germany to lament the *Mauer in den Köpfen* (wall in the heads) that replaced the physical Wall, which some even joke about rebuilding, only from both sides and higher.

Because values, cultures, and identities change with experience and time and because East Germans have no choice but to adjust to their new social order, the mental Wall must in the long run crumble from the East, particularly as the economic, social, and psychological shocks of unification begin to wear off. In fact, as I discovered from a new series of interviews conducted in 1994 with 40 of the 202 ordinary East Germans on whose experience I had based my cultural analysis of the GDR’s stability and collapse (“Transition,” “Partisan Strategy”), East Germans seem to be adjusting increasingly well to life in an individualistic, competitive consumer society. Although I had expected to find them rallying around their GDR identity and the old values of modesty, solidarity, and equality in defense against unemployment, temptations of credit and overconsumption, and Western arrogance, my interview partners expressed confidence in their individual ability to compete on the employment market, satisfaction and security about their standard of living, and good feelings toward their compatriots in the West. East Germans’ adjustment to the exigencies of life in the enlarged FRG does not, however, mean that they will become indistinguishable from West Germans in their identity and values. When I indirectly asked my well-adjusted interview partners whether they had completely abandoned their old GDR values and identity, they all claimed—regardless of their ages, which ranged from twenty-one to eighty—that they were too old to give up their GDR identity and that they regretted not being able to keep living by at least some of the positive values from the past, such as solidarity and egalitarianism, in the new order. In other words, in their hearts they cling to values that they knew in their heads to be out of step with the times.

More than merely inconsequential nostalgia, this loyalty to the GDR past continues, despite their adaptation to the FRG present, to distinguish East Germans from West Germans in a politically polarizing manner. Like no other party, the successor to the East German communist Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED; Socialist Unity Party), the Partei Demokratischer Sozialismus (PDS; Party of Democratic Socialism), has succeeded in positioning itself as the mouthpiece for East Germans who would like to defend their past without necessarily perpetuating it. PDS candidates have attracted support by affirming their biographical continuity with the pre-1989 past and thus reminding voters that they and the candidates share a worthwhile GDR past. At the same time, by being vaguely critical of past errors and ambiguous in its program for constructing democratic socialism in the FRG, the PDS does not menace East Germans’ integration into the democratic capitalist order. The PDS must, of course, walk a fine line in seeking to validate East Germans’ past without stirring up bad memories or threatening their present and future, but the other political parties have facilitated the PDS’s task by discrediting and even disenfranchising East Germans on the basis of their past. Whereas the (western) Social Democrats (SPD) have driven away potential motivated members by rejecting the applications of former SED members, the Christian Democrats (CDU) have offended eastern voters with heavy-handed anticommunist campaign themes, as with their infamous “Rote Socken” poster in the summer of 1994. Even the only other indigenous eastern political force (albeit now formally merged with the West German Greens), Bündnis 90, the successor to the heroic East German dissident citizens’ movements, has succeeded in alienating East German voters. Although Bündnis 90 includes many members and leaders with a strong GDR identity, its dissident tradition of moral condemnation of communism and its collaborators leaves the vast majority of East Germans, who made countless petty compromises to arrange themselves with the regime, too uncomfortable to feel at home in a party they nonetheless admire. To be sure, the PDS has not succeeded in winning the votes of a majority of East Germans: its electoral support hovers just under 20 percent in the East. What is more telling is the level of acceptance and legitimacy the party enjoys. For instance, although the PDS won only 17.6 percent of East German votes in the 16 October 1994 Bundestag election, a strong plurality of 48 percent of East Germans welcomed the party’s return to the Bundestag as beneficial for the East, and in early 1995 only 22 percent condemned the party as antidemocratic. West Germans, by contrast, cannot understand how their new compatriots can tolerate, let alone support, the PDS. Many complain: “Die Ossis haben immer noch nichts verstanden” (The East Germans still haven’t understood a thing). Not surprisingly, anticommunist campaign themes have played very well in the West, where some 62 percent of voters believe the PDS is a threat to democracy.

**Fighting for the Past**

East and West Germans’ diverging attitudes about the PDS signify more than a difference of opinion on the necessity of a separate party to represent East German interests in the Bundestag. Instead, they reflect a deep cleavage in German culture and identity, for the PDS is as much a threat to West Germans’ postwar self-image as it is an affirmation of East Germans’ post-Wall self-respect. Whether East Germans actually vote for the PDS or not, the party’s survival within the unified political system helps validate East Germans’ postwar life experience. East Germans must believe that a democratic socialist party could emerge from the dictatorial SED in order to preserve the comforting idea that the founding antifascist myth of the GDR, despite all the subsequent errors and abuses of single-party rule, had a salvageable kernel of democratic, humanis-
tic truth. If the PDS were truly incapable of democratic self-reform, then the entire history of the GDR would have been an abominable perpetuation of Nazi totalitarianism under a new name and any collaboration with or even passive acceptance of the regime an inexcusable personal error. With such a postwar past East Germans could have no voice in post-Wall German politics.

By contrast, the survival of the PDS is just as unacceptable for West Germans’ postwar identity as it is necessary for East Germans’ self-respect. As a socialist party, of course, the PDS calls into question West Germans’ dogmatic faith in the “social market economy” as well as the myth of West Germany’s postwar redemption through the economic miracle. More important, however, the possibility that a democratic party could emerge from the SED contradicts the equation of the SED with Hitler’s Nazi party (National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei; NSDAP), and deflates the self-exculpating West German myth that the GDR represented continuity with the Nazi past while the FRG represented rupture. The deflation of this myth would necessitate a reexamination of continuities with the Nazi period in the FRG, and the desire to avoid questioning West German denazification again explains the zeal with which the Western media (led by the central organ of West German self-satisfaction, Der Spiegel) have pursued allegations of collaboration with the Stasi, particularly if they involve PDS leaders or other powerful representatives of eastern interests and identity such as Brandenburg premier Manfred Stolpe. Similarly, the discovery of a twenty-four-year-old avowed Stalinist in the ranks of the PDS leadership, Sarah Wagenknecht, has been a godsend for the West, an absurd proof of the party’s failure to break with the totalitarian past.

The debate surrounding the PDS’s democratic potential that followed the party’s return to the Bundestag in October 1994 did not coincide with the debate surrounding the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of the end of the war by accident alone. To the contrary, the PDS debate served to occult a much more profound debate about postwar German identity. Like the efforts to use the anniversary commemorations to push the Nazi past into politically irrelevant antiquarian history, the PDS debate has sought to obscure the fact that Germans in both East and West built their postwar identities on an ultimately futile attempt to deny responsibility for Nazi crimes and to project it onto the other side of the Wall. With unification, however, the chickens have come home to roost. East and West Germans will be able neither to resolve the PDS debate nor to share a common identity until they recognize their mutual responsibility for the war, for Nazi crimes, and for the division of Germany. Closing the book on the past on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of World War II, no matter how magically round the number, will bring Germany no closer to a united, “normal” future. Germans must fight to preserve their unpleasant past, not flee it.

NOTES

1. The numerous more or less admitted and substantiated charges of collaboration with the Stasi leveled against such prominent personalities as Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, Manfred Stolpe, and Gregor Gysi should not obscure the fact that the overwhelming majority of East Germans (perhaps at least 90 percent) were neither perpetrators nor direct victims of domestic espionage.

2. Conceived in response to the formation of a minority SPD-Green coalition government with the tolerance of the PDS in Sachsen-Anhalt, the poster depicted a red sock pinned to a clothesline with a green peg and was captioned: “Into the future... but not on red socks.” CDU leaders in the East immediately requested to Bonn headquarters that the red-baiting poster not be distributed in the East, while the PDS profited from the red herring by immediately selling tiny red socks as a fund-raising activity.


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Chapter 18

Dis-Membering the Past: The Politics of Memory in the German Borderland

Daphne Berdahl

Daphne Berdahl uses the tools of the anthropologist, ethnologist, and historian to offer a unique examination of the construction of identity in contemporary Germany. Like McFalls, she draws our attention to the fate of eastern Germany and East Germans after unification. In discussing recent events, both quotidian and extraordinary, which have occurred in Kella, a small village once part of the restricted “stripes” between the GDR and the FRG, belonging to the former, she offers not “representativeness” (i.e., most former East Germans think like this) but, rather, illustrations of the process of constructing a new identity. She demonstrates that historical memory is dynamic, interactively constructed with great interplay between local and extralocal processes of remembering.

This essay is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Cultural studies' many affinities with ethnography and anthropology stem from these disciplines' focus on the fine-grained details of everyday life; all aspects of a society are worthy of consideration, as all contribute to our understanding of the particularities of that specific culture. Berdahl lived in Kella for two years, with follow-up visits. Her residency began shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of East and West, huge events whose consequences were felt in every household in this town. Both the geographical location of Kella as a border town and the chronology of Berdahl’s visit conspired to foreground certain processes of identity formation and negotiation that are particularly visible in moments of social discord. Changes in Kella included not only the economic and social ones (from state socialism to Western capitalism), which all areas of East Germany experienced, but also a radical “geographic” and hence psychic transformation, from a restricted zone at the periphery of the country at its extreme border, to the new center.

Berdahl’s training and interest in both history and anthropology have
C. HOW TO VIEW A FILM

Gerd Gemünden

The film historian Christian Metz once said: “Film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand.” Indeed, since the film image may resemble very much the image of reality as we see it every day, it is easy to mistake representation for reality. Therefore, when we turn to analyzing a film, it is important to focus on how a specific film constructs a certain reality: how does it produce meaning on the visual as well as the narrative level? And how does it engage the viewer in producing a certain meaning? Understanding film as a system of signs, here is a set of questions that helps us break down that system.

1. Questions Concerning Narrative and Dramatic Development

What does the film’s title signify or suggest? What are the film’s major narrative units? In what time sequence are they presented (chronological, jumbled, with flashbacks/projections; is there a narrative frame)? Are there substantial time gaps between scenes? Are there subplots that comment on the main plot? Is the story presented uninterrupted, or is it the story interrupted by songs, choruses, narrators, direct address to the audience (i.e., is the illusion of the film broken)? What are the main locations of the film? In what relationship do they stand to one another? What characters are associated with the different locales? Are characters rounded or flat? What motivates their actions (freedom, money, justice, love, fear)? Does the film give reasons for their acting in certain ways? How is their character revealed to us? Can certain characters be grouped together? Which characters change in the course of the film? How is change brought about? How is the final outcome of the film anticipated? Are there early signs of what is to come (e.g., foreshadowing)? Are all the strands of the plot resolved, or are there loose ends? What main oppositions are explored in the film?

2. Questions Concerning the Historical and Sociological Context

What is the relationship of the historical time depicted in the film to the time in which it was made? Does the film deal with a conflict still unresolved in our time and culture? Does it consciously present itself as a social statement? Does the film intend to take on controversial matters in a provocative way? Does it offer fictional alternatives to set patterns, or does it merely reaffirm the status quo? To what sort of audience does the film cater? How does the film deal with issues of gender? Do gender roles seem natural or constructed? Do men influence narrative action more than women? Is the female body a particular point of focus? Does the film assume a male spectator? a female spectator? How does the film deal with issues of race and ethnicity? Does the film reaffirm or challenge stereotypical representations of race?

3. Questions Concerning Form and Style

A film introduces its formal trajectory during the first ten shots; it is therefore important to focus on the opening sequence: what expectations does the title of the film arouse (e.g., regarding genre or style)? What do we know about the film beforehand (ads, posters, stars, trailers)? How does the credit sequence lead us into the film (if at all)? What are the signals given during the opening sequence regarding: location; perspective (who is looking at whom?); movement of characters; dialogue (who speaks first? to whom? what?); camera movement (outside-inside, from above or below); camera distance (close, medium, or close shot); camera stasis (long or short takes); camera angle (high or low, straight-on); lighting (high key, low key, flat); editing (do images flow? are there interruptions?); music (diegetic or nondiegetic); noise and sound? Are there certain images or sounds associated with certain characters? Do certain stylistic and technical devices recur? Do they develop in their repetition? Does the film follow certain conventions (national, generic, historical)? Does it try to play with or subvert our expectations? Does the film quote other films, books, songs, or texts? How likely is it that the audience will “get” these references? Is the film a literary adaptation? How does the film compare to other films by the same director? What is the realism of the film: does it aim to construct the impression of the real world, or does it foreground a sense of itself as a framed view of things? Is the film self-reflexive (does it turn back on itself and comment on its working as a fictional product)?

"How to View a Film," from A User’s Guide to German Cultural Studies, ed. Seu Denham, Irene Kacandes, and Jonathan Petropoulos (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), may be reproduced as needed.
NOTE

This is based on materials by Anton Kaes and Eric Rentschler that were presented and discussed during the Third German Film Institute (1991) at Clark University. Following the spirit of the institute, to encourage and facilitate the teaching of German film, I poach freely from their work, which they generously shared with all participants.

SUGGESTED INTRODUCTORY READINGS


D. HOW TO LISTEN TO WESTERN MUSIC

Jean H. Leventhal

Most of us hear music much of the time and pay little attention to it, whether it is the music accompanying the films we watch, or the background music on our CD or tape players. Many of us actively seek out musical experiences by attending concerts or making music ourselves, but even those who are active rather than passive in their interaction with music may think little about the structures or qualities that distinguish jazz from rock or the music of Wolfgang Mozart from that of Arnold Schönberg. Being aware of some of the possibilities in music will heighten your enjoyment and appreciation of this art.

Purpose. Was this music written for a specific occasion or ceremony, as incidental music for a play, to accompany a ballet, or to entertain royalty? Was it written for performance in a nightclub or in a palace? Different locales and occasions will determine various aspects of the piece: its tone, instrumentation, duration, style. Some music is written for a particular time and place, such as George Frederick Handel’s *Water Music* or Johann Sebastian Bach’s weekly cantatas for the church services in Leipzig. A piece might be composed on commission from a wealthy person, such as Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Rasoumovsky Quartets*, or with a particular performer in mind, like Kurt Weill’s songs for his wife, Lotte Lenya. Any of these circumstances puts constraints on the composer. A composer simply writing a piece with the hope that it will be performed at some point by the appropriate forces has much more freedom.

Form. Music is sound organized in time. Does the piece last a relatively long or short time? A lied by Franz Schubert or Hugo Wolf might last a few minutes; an opera by Mozart or Richard Wagner lasts several hours. Are there large sections within the piece, or does it appear to be one unit? Some pieces have subdivisions (operas have acts and scenes that contain *arias* and *recitatives*, *ensembles* and *solo*; oratorios and cantatas have *choral* and *solo* sections;...
E. **How to View a Painting**  
*Jonathan Petropoulos*

The analysis and explication of paintings is an enterprise with a long and contentious history. There has never been, and in all likelihood will never be, agreement about the most suitable methodology for ascertaining the manifold meanings contained in artworks. The following suggestions, which might be viewed as steps for pursuing a viable interpretation, will not yield an answer to the perennial methodological dilemmas. In fact, if past experience is a guide, these steps will only provoke disagreement. But successful answers to the following questions will provide specific insights and contribute to a more general understanding.

1. **Who is the artist?** One might call this homage to Vasari, the Renaissance art historian who was arguably the first of the modern professionals. Beginning with the biographical approach is not only consistent with the history of art history but a logical starting point for further inquiry. Determining the creator of an artwork is also a crucial part of connoisseurship, long the dominant mode of art historical scholarship. By identifying the artist and relating the specific work to a larger oeuvre, the scholar has a strong foundation on which to build a more substantial interpretation. Note that there are often significant limitations to the biographical approach: with certain non-Western cultures, for example, the name of the artist is often of minimal importance.

2. **When was the work created, and to what stylistic epoch, movement, or school does it belong?** Relating a work to others in a similar genre is helpful in terms of understanding the broader circumstances as well as contemporary idioms and debates. Artists often worked on similar “projects,” such as the Impressionists’ exploration of the nature of light. While one should be careful about implying the existence of group decisions, making these connections can help with the biographical and social history of the artists because of the frequency of collaboration and association, within both the academic establishment and avant-garde circles.

3. **What formal qualities can one discern?** Because artists often responded to developments within their discipline, as Clement Greenberg and other critics have argued, an examination of shape, color, materials, and other issues pertaining to the production of a piece offers important information. In discerning trends and the various deviations, one can gain a better understanding of artists’ projects. One example is the study of flatness in classical modernism, a crucial concern for many who worked during the first half of the twentieth century.

4. **What iconographic and iconological messages are present in the work?** Erwin Panofsky, among others, argued for the importance of iconographic investigation, which he defined as the study of the subject matter and meaning of artworks (as opposed to form), and, more specifically, iconological explication, which concerns symbols, myths, emblematic figures, and other encoded messages. In order to ascertain meanings that may be obscure, one might consult a reference source, such as Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism* (1989), or James Smith Pierce, *From Abacus to Zeus* (1977).

5. **What are the intentions of the artist?** To take a term made famous by Alois Riegl, *Kunstwollen,* or “inner necessity,” one should attempt to understand both the motivation and goals of the artist. Riegl, in fact, posited that Kunstwollen transcended individual artists and applied to entire cultures. In the inner sense specific cultures collectively drew out elements present in the intended tradition and, in turn, contributed to art history, which developed in a linear manner. Riegl applied this analysis to Dutch group portraits, examining modifications in certain thematic patterns and formal techniques in such a way as to situate the seventeenth-century Dutch masterpieces in the broader historical context. In short, while issues of intentionality are typically daunting, they often provide interesting points of departure.

6. **How might this artwork reflect broader historical or material, political or social, trends?** Although crude interpretations positing a correlation between an artwork and the society in which it was produced have been convincingly debunked, it is often the case that the artist meant to address issues beyond formalistic concerns. Certain painters deal with technological and industrial change by depicting trains or cityscapes, while others address contemporary political and military developments, such as Picasso in his masterful *Guernica.* Artists did not work in a vacuum: a knowledge of the historical and social context is important for understanding an artwork. Remember, an artist’s statement “This painting is apolitical” is necessarily a political statement.

7. **What can be discovered about the history of a painting’s reception?** Examining the exhibition venues, critical notices, commercial fate, and subsequent treatment by scholars, one can gain insight into an artwork.

8. **How might one’s own historic vantage point and subjective views fac-
tor into the analysis? This self-reflective question, while difficult to answer, should be asked. It is naive to think that an interpretation of a painting can be completely objective.

FOR FURTHER READING


F. HOW TO READ A PLAY

**Cristian Rogowski**

No matter how strong the impression may be that a play merely mimics real life, nothing in a drama “just happens”: everything has been put on the page (and on the stage) for us by someone. Every element in a drama serves a purpose, has a function. The main question in reading a play should therefore always be “why?” Why does this character say this? Why is this scene set here? Why is this happening now? We can answer such questions only if we share with the makers of a play not only a certain general knowledge about our own culture but also, more specifically, a certain set of assumptions concerning theoretical representation and dramatic enactment. Such assumptions differ widely from culture to culture: we can only appreciate a play if we are to some extent familiar with the particular conventions upon which it is based.

Genre conventions. A play is usually made up of two types of textual material: the main text consists of the characters’ utterances, the lines to be spoken by actors on the stage; the term subsidiary text designates texts not to be heard during a performance, including stage instructions and other peripheral material such as prefaces and author’s comments. Information on the setting of a particular scene might be subtly evoked in the main text or elaborately spelled out in the subsidiary text. In our reading we should aim to call information from text types so that we are able to hear and see the play in our minds.

The logic of expectation. At the outset of a play, in what is called the exposition, a dramatic situation is defined in which the characters are placed and out of which certain tensions and conflicts will develop. At the end of a play, in the denouement, the conflicts can be resolved in definitive closure or allowed to linger on in an open-ended, often new way. Plays invite the audience to make conjectures about the development of the plot according to a shared cultural knowledge concerning theatrical and social conventions. Deviations from this logic of expectation are usually charged with significance, re-
B. HOW TO VIEW A BUILDING

Wallis Miller and Scott Denham

Most of us have not thought much about the buildings around us, even though we spend nearly all our lives in them and they affect us far more than we would care to admit. Can I look out a window when I wake up in the morning? Do I share my work environment with another person or ten others or hundreds of others? Is my bank, my classroom, or my town hall made of wood or brick or of glass and steel and marble? How do I arrive at these buildings? Do I pass others that look similar, or do I enter the oddball on the block? Do I enter immediately from the street through an unassuming door or pass through a garden to reach a magnificent portal at the other side? Is the interior designed in a style similar to that of the exterior? How we answer these questions and others like them tells us about our relationship to the immediate world: it tells us how this world has shaped us as well as how we have shaped it. But buildings do not just happen. Many people thought long and hard about the spaces we spend our time in, and when we view a building it is our job to figure out just what they were thinking, why, and if they were right.

When you look at a building you should first ask several basic questions. Use. What purpose does the building serve? Is it for public or private use? For work, recreation, education, display, production, living, ceremony, or a combination of these things?

Location. Where does a building stand and why does it stand there? Urban or rural, suburban or neighborhood, in a new development or among many older buildings? Does it resemble the buildings around it? From where can the building be seen? Is it easy to reach?

Scale. How does the size and scale of the building determine its relationship to its users? Do you perceive an imposing monolith or a cozy cottage? How do various approaches (stairs, plazas, streets, walkways) mediate between the scale of the user and that of the building? How big is the front door relative to the other elements of the building? To the size of the entire structure?

Space. How do we move through the building in order to perform specific functions? What do we do when we first enter? When do we move horizontally? vertically? How big are the spaces in which we perform different functions? Are they light or dark, colorful or bland, filled with windows or closed off from the world? How easy is it to find different rooms? Does the arrangement of spaces change the way in which we perform specific functions? Does it make them easier or more difficult to perform? Does it increase the importance of some spaces and diminish that of others?

Style. What sort of messages does a building send out through its appearance? Does a facade resemble those of the temples of ancient Greece? the churches of medieval Germany? the office buildings of twentieth-century New York? Is there a noticeable absence of ornament, and what might this mean? Of what materials is the building made? Are the buildings using their styles as a way to express certain values? What ideas are being communicated by the Greek stoa facade of the Altes Museum on Unter den Linden in Berlin? by the steel and glass of Berlin’s New National Gallery?

History. Who designed the building? Who paid for the building? Why did they make it look as it does? For what culture was the building originally built? Has the use of the building or the site changed? Does it change your perceptions to know that your room was once inhabited by Bertolt Brecht? that the eighteenth-century armory in Berlin was used as a German Historical Museum in the twentieth century? or that your Berlin hotel was once the site of Adolf Eichmann’s organization?

Type. Finally, think of a building as a type. A building’s type is determined by its use. Examples of building types are schools, banks, houses, museums, and city halls. The concept of type allows architects to assess a building as an ideological as well as a practical solution to a functional problem. With use as the common attribute, architects can compare, for example, the nineteenth-century Reichstag to the East German Palast der Republik, in terms of their location, scale, spatial arrangement, and style. Then they can explain the similarities and differences among these buildings as the products of different histories and ideologies: of different cultures, patrons, and architects.

For Further Reading


ship between the sources, biases, selection, and both the overt thesis of the text and its subtext, that is, what it seems to be saying without telling us that it does.

Paying due attention to the style of the author and the interest the text arouses in us—whether we agree with it or not—we can finally subject it to a critical reading.

FOR FURTHER READING


J. HOW TO READ STATISTICS

Laurence McFalls

Applying statistical methods in cultural studies might sound like a contradiction in terms. While cultural studies engages in qualitative interpretation, seeking to uncover the meaning behind appearances, statistical methods practice quantitative description, inferring causality from the observable regularities of appearances. In fact, cultural studies and statistical methods are complementary, for to paraphrase Max Weber, the founder of interpretive social science, a statistically probable prediction without meaning is as useless as a meaningful interpretation without probability. All too often would-be practitioners of cultural studies evaluate their interpretations of social realities on moral or aesthetic grounds alone and fail to assess their interpretations’ correspondence to observable experience. Statistical methods are one technique for judging the empirical validity of cultural interpretations, but only if used properly and critically. Statistics, by their very air of scienticity, enjoy a certain legitimacy and power that should be suspect to any student of culture. The following pointers provide a brief introduction to the proper use of statistical methods and to some of their pitfalls.

Descriptive Statistics

As their name implies, some statistical measures describe the characteristics and distribution of variables. (The latter are observable phenomena, including expressed subjective states such as opinions, which vary between at least two values. A single event, such as Hitler’s seizure of power, cannot be constructed as a variable, but his electoral support from 1924 to 1933 can.) The most common descriptive statistics are the mean, the mode, the median, and the standard deviation.

The mean, or the average, is the sum of all observed values divided by the

number of observations. The mean can accurately describe a relatively homogeneous group but can also conceal useful information. For example, during the Weimar Republic the “average” German citizen held moderate political opinions, though we know that German political life at the time was highly polarized.

The mode is the most frequent value of a variable. More useful than the mean for describing a distribution that is not centered on the mean, the mode must not be confused with the majority. Thus, for example, while it is true that the Nazis enjoyed the greatest electoral support of any German party in 1933—that is, they were the modal choice of Germans—the majority of Germans never voted for the Nazis.

The median is the value of the middle observation in a distribution; that is, half of the observations will have a value above or below the median. Usually close in value to the mean, the median has the (dis)advantage of not shifting with changes at the extreme of a distribution. For example, the median level of wealth will not jump, as does the mean, when a rich member of a small population suddenly grows much richer.

The standard deviation describes how concentrated the values of a variable are around the mean. In a “normal,” bell-shaped distribution, in which the mean, mode, and median coincide, more than 95 percent of the observations of the variable will lie within two standard deviations of the mean. Because the standard deviation describes how homogeneous (when it is small) or diverse (when it is large) a population is, it is a particularly useful descriptive statistic for cultural studies, which is often interested in questions of conformity and deviation. For example, if a survey of college students produced a large standard deviation from the mean number of sexual partners students had had, then we might expect the student population to be divided between the promiscuous and the prudish.

While descriptive statistics may be useful when we wish to make generalizations about a homogeneous population, cultural studies often seek to explain cultural diversity and/or deviations from cultural norms. Not only are differences within populations intrinsically interesting, but without divergences we cannot explain anything. For example, we cannot understand cultural conformity unless we can compare and contrast cultural conformists and deviants. However defined, in order to see which of their characteristics vary and thus might explain their cultural differences. One technique for uncovering such explanatory differences is statistical inference.

Statistical Inference

As the name implies, statistical inference is the process by which we can infer relations of cause and effect between variables according to statistical measures of their covariation. Although the very notion of causality has been problematic in the philosophy of science for centuries, the standard criterion for establishing the relation of cause and effect between an independent variable (the cause) and a dependent variable (the effect) is concomitant variation, or what John Stuart Mill called the “Methods of Agreement and Disagreement.” According to these methods, we can say that x is the cause of y if x is contiguous with and precedes y and if y always follows whenever x is present (agreement) and y never follows when x is absent (disagreement). Since these conditions of determinism causality rarely obtain in the realm of human social existence, statistical inference adopts a probabilistic view of causality; that is, it seeks to establish the likelihood that y will occur when x is present.

Correlation: The standard measure of covariation, or correlation, is called Pearson’s “r,” a number that ranges between 1 and −1. A perfect correlation of r = 1 means that whenever x is present so is y; a perfect negative correlation of r = −1 means that y is absent whenever x is present; and the absence of correlation (r = 0) means that there is no particular tendency for y to be either present or absent when x is present. As a rule of thumb, r must be greater than 0.3 or less than −0.3 to be substantively significant since the value of r-squared suggests the percentage of variation in y that might be determined by x. For example, if levels of income and education are correlated at r = 0.5, then education might explain 25 percent (r-squared = 0.25) of the variation in income. Please note, however, that correlation is not causation, not even when the correlation is perfect, since statistical correlation between x and y does not establish whether x causes y, y causes x, or z causes both x and y.

Multiple Regression: Precisely because relations of causality between variables are multiple and interdependent, it is often necessary to use a technique that makes it possible to establish the relative weight of different causal factors, or independent variables. A multiple regression equation describes a posited causal relationship between several independent variables (x₁, x₂, x₃, etc.) and an independent variable, y, in the form y = ax₁ + bx₂ + cx₃ + ... + K + E (where K represents a constant and E an error term). Although the mathematics of multiple regression equations are relatively complicated, their results are relatively easy to understand: the standardized coefficients (a, b, c, etc.) of the independent variables (x₁, x₂, x₃, etc.) give the relative causal weight of each variable, and the r-squared statistic for the equation indicates the percentage of variation in y for which the various variables x can account.

Thus, for example, a multiple regression model for racial tolerance might include the independent variables age, education, and income (all correlated among themselves) and determine whether that richer, older, and better-educated people, in that order of independent causal importance, tend to express tolerance for racial diversity. It is important to recall that, even if the r-squared statistic for this equation were relatively high, say 0.6 (i.e., even if the regression model potentially “explained” 60 percent of the variance in tolerance), the
explanatory value of any statistical model depends on the validity of its measurements and its concepts. The statistical correlation between the numerical values of given variables does not mean that the posited relationship between variables exists if the numerical values do not actually measure the phenomena as the model's author conceived them. For example, if the author hypothesizes that intelligent people are more tolerant and measures intelligence by years of schooling, a correlation between levels of education and tolerance would not confirm the author's hypothesis, since many years of schooling might simply expose those people to more racial diversity and render them more tolerant, regardless of any acquired intelligence. Ultimately, then, the use of statistical methods requires the elaboration of clear concepts and measures and the critical interpretation of findings.

K. HOW TO USE AN ARCHIVE

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Know Your Archive

Accommodation away from home can be expensive, and you can use up a lot of precious time during your visit to an archive, simply finding out what it contains. That's even before you submit an order slip for a file, which may take hours to be fetched. So, do as much preparatory work as possible before you travel. There is a number of guides that are readily available. Erwin K. Welsch, ed., Archives and Libraries in a New Germany (1994), offers general information. There is also an excellent "guide to guides" in the German Historical Institute's publication: Ulrike Skorsetz and Janine Micunek, Guide to Archives and Finding Aids at the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C. (1999). This also has the merit of giving the address and phone number of the archive that it lists. The booklet gives the titles of all the main, published catalogs of federal, regional, city, and private archives in Germany. The German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) itself has published over fifty highly detailed guides (Findbücher) to particular collections, which may be purchased relatively cheaply and are invaluable if you are working in that area.

Know Your Archivist

In the old days of the GDR an archivist sat you down and subjected you to an ideological quiz and a little propaganda lecture before allowing you to set foot in the archive's reading room. Those days are gone—think of the archivist now as your friend. When applying to use an archive—do so well in advance, as they are seriously understaffed—you will need to explain in some detail what you are looking for. If you are a graduate student or do not have a regular academic appointment, you may also need a letter of introduction from a profes-

Notes

1. Note that substantive significance is not the same as statistical significance. The latter term refers to the probability that an observed statistical relationship might be accidental or due to chance. Thus, a relationship is said to be statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ if there is less than a 5 percent chance that the observed relationship is purely coincidental. Many statistically significant relationships might be substantively, practically, or morally insignificant, while some substantively significant findings might not stand up to the requirements of statistical significance.

Faye to Use an Archive," from A User's Guide to German Cultural Studies, ed. Scott Fine, Irene Kacandes, and Jonathan Petropoulos (Ann Arbor: University of Michi-