Unification Effects: Imaginary Landscapes of the Berlin Republic

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Between February 12 and April 4, 1989, Haus Esters in Krefeld exhibited Gerhard Richter's so-called *RAF Zyklus*. The title of this cycle, *October 18, 1977*, refers to the night when Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, leading members of the Red Army Fraction (RAF), died at Stammheim prison. Touching on one of the Federal Republic's most sensitive taboos, the exhibit promised to become the political scandal of the year. But then, it did not; instead, the Berlin Wall came down.

Although unification temporarily pushed Richter's work to the margins and interrupted a renewed confrontation with the RAF that had begun in the late 1980s, the fall of the wall hardly erased the topic from public consciousness. On the contrary, the history of the RAF continues to haunt the Berlin Republic in debates about the foreign minister's student days, on anniversaries of the German Autumn, and through recent films such as Volker Schlöndorff's *Die Stille nach dem Schuß* (2000), Christian Petzold's *Die innere Sicherheit* (2000), and Andres Veiel's *Black Box BRD* (2001). Richter's cycle represented a seminal intervention in an ongoing confrontation; as the tagline for Veiel's film said, the battles may be over, but "the wounds are still open." Overshadowed by the political events of 1989, *October 18, 1977* presaged their cultural fallout in complex ways. In particular, the aesthetics of Richter's cycle illuminate the shifting articulations of space and time that characterize the historical imaginary of the unified Germany at the turn of the millennium. The larger significance of Richter's cycle lies in the way it exemplifies a new spatial dimension in the representation of German history after 1989. Starting with a close look at *October 18, 1977*, we sketch what we see as the *imaginary spaces* of the Berlin Republic. Produced most tangibly through the visual media of film, painting, or architecture, these spaces also can be located in texts such as W. G. Sebald's *Air War and Literature* (1999) and Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand* (*The Fire*, 2001).

At a press conference in February 1989, Richter discussed his photo-inspired black-and-white paintings as traces of a catastrophic history, a history marred by radical ideologies that, he argued, inexorably turn into terror.[1] Characterized by the dark, melancholic tone that has been so prevalent among Germany's intellectuals since the late 1980s, Richter's thoughts on the failures of the Left, from Robes-pierre to the RAF, were quickly picked up by his critics, who discussed the exhibit with its particular spatial arrangement as a memorial, even a mausoleum, to the RAF. But Richter's cycle is less a mausoleum and more an Orphic space. Working from police photographs, Richter created fifteen canvases that take the viewer from an early portrait of Ulrike Meinhof to a large painting of the Ensslin and Baader funeral that is so blurred that it almost is unrecognizable. Although all of his exhibits to date have started with *Youth Portrait* and ended with *Funeral*, the sequencing of the remaining thirteen paintings has varied. However, all displays have preserved the quadripartite structure of the cycle: *Man Shot Down 1* and *2* (Baader); *Dead 1*, *2*, and *3* (Meinhof); *Confrontation 1*, *2*, and *3* (Ensslin); and *Arrest 1* and *2*. The paintings generally are hung along the walls of a single room, sometimes with Meinhof's portrait set slightly apart from the rest of the exhibit. It is this structure of an enclosed space—along with the theme of the exhibit—that prompted the static reading of the work in terms of a mausoleum. In contrast, if we use the Orphic journey as a subtext, we see a clearer articulation of space and time in the cycle.

Together, the two canvases of Meinhof and the Ensslin/Baader funeral create the artist's Orphic descent into the realm of the dead in search of his beloved. Many critics have noted the dominance of women in the cycle.[2] Seen through the lens of the Orphic myth, this female "dominance" signifies Richter's effort to paint the artist's "emotional participation" in his images.[3] Richter achieves this effect—the emotional affinity of Orpheus/the artist to his subject—through the use of specific techniques: the contrast between Meinhof and Ensslin first alive and then dead, the emphatically repetitive structure of the Meinhof and Ensslin series, the varying degrees of closeness to and distance from the subjects represented, and the different degrees of blurriness.

The series opens with a painting of the young Ulrike Meinhof that recalls a soft-focus photographic studio portrait in which Meinhof looks straight at the artist/viewer. Subsequently, the viewer's eye is drawn to the repetitive series of Meinhof and Ensslin. The three paintings of Ensslin at a press conference, titled *Confrontation 1*, *2*, and *3*, have been called "disconcertingly intimate" (Storr 107). Like the por-

trait of Meinhof, these paintings are only mildly blurred, showing Ensslin from a middle-distance. The overall effect is indeed one of "bodily presence" (Ziegler 378). The viewer's eye is attracted to the three canvases of Meinhof's dead body. They are in sharper focus than the Ensslin canvases and pull the viewer closer to the body, close to its lethal wound: the dark line left by the cord with which Meinhof hanged herself and which Richter renders as a cut, perhaps even evoking the blade of a guillotine. Thus, the series generates an Orphic gaze drawn to the cycle's women. Depending on the order in which the paintings are displayed, Richter produces an erratic, yet dynamic, scopic movement through the exhibition space that makes the intervening paintings of the men recede into the background.

Although the cycle directs the gaze of the visitor toward Meinhof and Ensslin, it is really Meinhof who dominates this Orphic space. The quality of the gaze attached to the two women is similar at the beginning but radically differs once we approach the paintings of their dead bodies: Meinhof becomes the object of a more dramatic, more confrontational gaze. Creating this scopic arc from Meinhof's idealized portrait to the representation of her corpse, Richter condenses the cycle's emotional intensity in the three paintings of Meinhof's dead body. The order in which the canvases were painted underscores this emotional investment, because Richter started with these latter paintings. Given this emotional trajectory, Richter invites the viewer to follow Orpheus in his search for his beloved, to follow him to the crucial moment of confrontation with the final image of her dead body. In these paintings, Meinhof's dead body becomes increasingly invisible, thus concluding the scopic arc with a disturbance of vision: the Orphic gaze fails at the sight of the beloved woman's dead body. The cycle's Orphic space stages an artist's reflection on the very act of artistic production in the face of catastrophic events.[4]

Richter's signature style of blurred photo-paintings helps structure the cycle and thematizes artistic production in its encounter with violent death. But this technique also serves another function. By "de-painting" photographs, Richter also thematizes the artist's Orphic gaze in the age of mechanical reproduction. In *October 18, 1977*, Orpheus's gaze encounters iconic photographs as history's *afterimages*. Combining blurriness and photography's "paradoxical ecstasy of precision" (Jeannot Simmen, qtd. in Koch 15), Richter presents an afterimage of history as one that resonates with the viewer's own visual memories.[5] To describe this effect, we draw on James E.

Young's work, which presents after-images in a static sense as the representation of "the impression retained in the mind's eye of a vivid sensation long after the original, external cause has been removed" (*Memory's Edge* 7). But we also conceive of these afterimages in Roland Barthes's productive sense as the sudden collision of two images, "public" and "private," that generates the *punctum*; that is, that moment when an insignificant detail from the photograph touches an image from the viewer's own mnemonic archive (53–55). Barthes thus translates the temporal logic that forms Young's notion of the after-image into the simultaneity of an aesthetic experience. A similar process exists in Richter's work, which stages the encounter with history's afterimages in its (Orphic) space, provoking the confrontation between the psychic and the social, the political and the aesthetic. Richter's paintings visually implicate the viewer in the production of historical memory and address the viewer as a subject whose visual activity operates on the very border of the subjective and the social. This emphasis on the viewer's visual engagement with the remnants of the past and the intermittently "invisible" history of the RAF precedes the current discussions about Germany's visual archive, with its increasing awareness that all memory is text and image based, to which we return below.[6]

As afterimages, Richter's paintings evoke more than mnemonic images relating to the RAF. *October 18, 1977* also mobilizes visual memories of the Nazi past—most notably the execution chamber at Plötzensee prison: "'Plötzensee' was of course always present in the images of the dead, however inappropriately" (Theweleit 78).[7] This particular visual collision arguably circulates National Socialism's afterimages as forcefully as Richter's photo-paintings from the 1960s, of which *Uncle Rudi* (1967) is the most famous example. Likewise, the evocation of the Nazi past in *October 18, 1977* recalls the provocative juxtaposition of camp photographs with stills from pornographic movies in Richter's *Atlas*, which raised the question of "seeing" the past as the always present danger of voyeurism.[8]

Generating a tension between photographic realism and its negation, *October 18, 1977* raises the question of what can be seen and represented and what cannot, while implicating the viewer in the visual production of historical memory. A seemingly peripheral event in 1989, Richter's work on German history acquires in hindsight a larger significance for the discussion of the cultural imaginary of the Berlin Republic and its cultural logic of return.

This logic of return is not simply a question of temporality, where different histories (East and West; Nazi past and postunification present) become entangled, if not superimposed, in an expanded present (Huyssen, *Present Pasts*). The particular *spatial* logic of recent cultural production also is at stake, for the reconfiguration of histories in the wake of 1989 also takes shape in emblematic imaginary spaces. Ranging from Richter's Orphic space to the *mise-en-scène* of unification in the cinema, and from the mnemonic landscapes of wartime Germany to the architecturally constructed environment of the Berlin Republic, these spaces are imaginary both in the Lacanian sense of offering compensatory vistas of illusory plenitude and in their characteristic optical dimensions. In keeping with the global expansion of visual culture, the Berlin Republic has staked its histories, its present, and its millennial futures on the power of architectonic images to construct its guiding chronotopes.

This special issue, including our reflections here, aims to survey some of the key imaginary spaces as a way of plotting the cultural configuration of the Berlin Republic. That configuration, we argue, came into sharp focus around the tenth anniversary of unification in 1999. We first examine the particular historical punctuation produced ten years after Richter's cycle and the fall of the wall (section 2). The following sections then trace the spaces in which postunification nostalgias, East and West, have materialized over the past decade—especially as *cinematic* spaces (section 3). The historical deposits that constitute these spaces extend as far back as World War II and the Holocaust; indeed, as we argue in our reading of Jörg Friedrich's recent publications, the imaginary reach of that history now also extends to an era before the destruction of German cities in the 1940s (section 4). We situate these publications in relation to W. G. Sebald's important intervention, *Air War and Literature* (1999), to explore how literature (and literary debates) participates in the visual realm by tapping into, describing, and redirecting a postwar visual archive. With these two case studies—of cinematic spaces of nostalgia and a postwar/postunification literary imagination—we seek to take stock of the volatile cultural terrain of the Berlin Republic. This terrain is profoundly uneven in both inviting and resisting various leveling tendencies and remains haunted by the unpredictable but recurrent eruption of the RAF. Seemingly peripheral, the obstinate presence of terrorism on the level of representation, however, appears to us as a central irritant in the cultural landscape of the Berlin Republic.

HISTORICAL PUNCTUATION: 1989/1999

It is difficult to determine with any precision when the notion of a "Berlin Republic" entered public discourse.[9] But in the gradual consolidation of the idea that the unification ultimately would give birth to a paradigmatically new "Berlin Republic," the year 1999 stands out as the crucial turning point. For one thing, there were the numbers. In the shadow of global *fin-de-siècle* unrest and Y2K panic, 1999 bore a nationally specific historical charge in Germany. Here, in a country rich in symbolically fraught anniversaries, 1999 marked not only the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of both German states in 1949 but also the sixtieth anniversary of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, not to mention Goethe's 250th birthday. The political stability of the Berlin Republic is measured by the way it negotiated these anniversaries during the last year of the twentieth century. As Jürgen Habermas repeatedly pointed out throughout the decade following unification, 1989 had to be considered "in the shadow of 1945" (163). Taking the symbolic import of the various anniversaries seriously, Habermas advocated careful historical book-keeping through the transition toward a unified German state. In his seminal contributions, which gave an intellectual shape to the idea of a Berlin Republic, Habermas has therefore persisted in raising the question of "historical punctuation," noting its relevance not only in the articulation of historical narratives but also to the self-understanding of German citizens, for whom "historical markers sometimes acquire the action-oriented quality of pivot points" (165). Unlike Barthes, for whom the *punctum* is an aesthetic experience, an epiphany that fleetingly superimposes the private and the public, Habermas gives this moment of identity a precise political and historical valence. In different ways, each of the anniversaries in 1999 had the potential to take on this quality, thereby also serving as pivot points in the creation of a Berlin Republic.

Beyond these portentous dates, it arguably was an institutional-cum-architectural event that provided the most tangible symbol of the consolidation of the Berlin Republic. On April 19, 1999, after a much publicized and drawn-out moving process, the *Bundestag* (German Parliament) convened for the first time in the reconstructed *Reichstagsgebäude* beneath Sir Norman Foster's now famous glass cupola, itself a highly symbolic signifier of the Berlin Republic and its new pol-

itics of transparency.[10] The meeting provided the occasion for numerous political speeches highlighting the tensions that accompanied this symbolic act. In his government declaration at the opening ceremonies, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder described the accomplished move from Bonn to Berlin as nothing short of a "return to German history" (Deutscher Bundestag 2669). Was this a moment when the common German past—in the initial euphoria of unification—suddenly seemed as transparent as Foster's dome and, therefore, "manageable"? Normalizing impulses have always simmered close to the surface of German political rhetoric, but Foster's spectacular cupola may have introduced not simply the much touted transparency but a new level of *visibility*, if not the dimension of *visuality* itself, to the desire for normalization. Part of a larger shift yet to be traced, the central importance of architecture in the landscapes of the Berlin Republic arguably signals the transition from predominantly textual to more visual representations of the past.

Wolfgang Thierse, the parliament's president, endorsed this shift when he offered similar, weighty rhetoric in his opening speech, defining the *Reichstagsgebäude* as a site that literally built German history into the architectural and political landscape of the Berlin Republic. His emphasis on history was deliberate and further emphasized the underlying theme of the day's importance in parliament. The founding moment of the Berlin Republic, it appears, was as much a forward-looking celebration as it was an occasion for historical reflection, for a new way of looking at the past from both an inside and outside perspective. "As we take possession of a new plenary hall today," Thierse argued, "we are all but forced to take a critical look inward at our own history, to hold ourselves accountable for the historical legacy that we take on in this contentious site" (Deutscher Bundestag 2664). Careful to exhibit their historical sensitivity, members of parliament lined up to downplay and contextualize the symbolic act that gave birth to the Berlin Republic. In this vein, each speech exhibited a mix of newfound confidence with self-consciousness and an air of defensiveness—a mix that has arguably characterized much political rhetoric (not to mention the politics of architecture) since 1989. Wishing to move German politics, both domestic and foreign, not only into a new building but also onto new ground, policymakers were confronted with old and new fears about German power, the resurgence of right-wing radicalism, and drawing a *Schlußstrich* under postwar German history. Under these circumstances, the birth of the Berlin Republic as a new para-

digm was a sensitive issue, one that required members of parliament to "be careful in our choice of words" (Deutscher Bundestag 2663).

Such circumspection was indeed warranted. Marked by the continuing aftereffects of unification, 1999 marked a volatile moment culturally as much as politically. What we call the "Unification Effect" refers to the shifting ground on which cultural and political interventions have taken place during the past fifteen years and to the changing stakes that these interventions have had to confront.[11] Among these shifts, we single out the continuing debates about "normalization" and historical memory; the related question of how to integrate the German-Jewish relationship into the fabric of the Berlin Republic; the proliferation of *Ostalgie* and other forms of nostalgia in both former halves of the country; the fundamental question of how to (re)write the relationship between East and West Germany and their respective histories for the present; and the continuing obsession with the RAF and its attendant afterimages, with which we began.

NO PLACE TO GO: THE IMAGINARY SPACES OF NOSTALGIA

In recent years, German cinema has contributed decisively to the rewriting of East and West German (hi)stories under the sign of nostalgia. As we suggested, this re-vision is perhaps best grasped as a spatial, and thus visual, reconfiguration of the past—a project that takes literal shape in *Good Bye Lenin* (2003). The promotional tagline for the film read "The GDR lives on—on 79 square meters." The film, in other words, literally preserves the past as an imaginary space in the apartment that Alex furnishes for his mother—an interior in which he desperately hopes to prolong the existence of the GDR after its demise. The film derives both its comedy and its melancholic tone from this *mise-en-scène* of the past, which spilled over into the space of the cinema when audience members began donning pioneer paraphernalia and singing along to the old GDR tunes.

Good Bye Lenin capped the success of an earlier film from 1999, titled *Sonnenallee*, which prefigured Becker's film in a number of ways—most notably by its similar emphasis on a self-contained space in which to stage an imaginary return to the East. Leander Haußmann's adaptation of Thomas Brussig's novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (1999) offered an image of the former GDR preserved in a stage of perpetual adolescence. The "short end of *Sonnenallee*" functioned as the most condensed space of this nostalgic fantasy pro-

duction, but the fusion of nostalgia and adolescence was not limited to Haußmann's film or Brussig's novel; rather, it was part of a larger turn to lost pasts, often cast in terms of a lost childhood and lost ground (both historical and geographical) to be made up by citizens of the former GDR.[12] In a recent article, Birgit Dahlke traces the characteristically melancholic construction of these texts in the works of young East German writers as different as Uwe Kolbe, Christoph Brumme, Kerstin Hensel, Bert Papenfuß, and Annett Gröschner.[13] Their various returns to (the memory of) childhood, Dahlke argues, should not be equated simply with *Ostalgie* as a fashionable trend; rather, she investigates these authors' claims to the "right to melancholy" for what such a gesture tells us about the histories of radical transformations and wounded narcissism.

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent, however, that this form of nostalgia is not limited to an Eastern perspective. This is not simply a matter of pointing out that both the author and the director of *Good Bye Lenin* come from the *alte Bundesländer* [old states].[14] Rather, it is a matter of looking at the way Western projections involve similarly nostalgic, melancholic, or utopian re-visions as those analyzed by Dahlke.[15] Here again, the cinema offers useful leads for further inquiry. The signature film for this purpose, we suggest, is another crucial document of the Berlin Republic's emergent cultural imaginary at the turn of the millennium: Oskar Roehler's *Die Unberührbare* (2000), aptly mistranslated for American distribution as *No Place to Go*.

Die Unberührbare features a peripatetic Western protagonist who experiences unification as a life-shattering event. The film follows novelist Hanna Flanders as she crisscrosses the newly configured Republic, from her deferred decision to commit suicide on November 9, 1989, in the opening scenes to the moment, a few days later, when she acts on this decision by quietly letting herself fall out of a window in the final shot. Through the manic depression and the fitful travels of this West German, card-carrying communist writer, we experience these "Novemberdays" (*Ophuls*) as a moment of disillusionment; more precisely, through Hanna's quasi-somnambulistic gaze, we witness a gradual process of realization in which the protagonist is forced to confront her own (and the West German Left's) imaginary GDR with the fallout of existing socialism and its incipient capitalist transformation. In terms of the mapping in which we are engaged here, the places Hanna visits in the former East—her old publishing house in

East Berlin, two apartments, a bar, and an "exurban" wasteland on the outskirts of the soon-to-be defunct capital of the GDR—might be described as failed imaginary spaces: They are locales that no longer support the projections of the woman who encounters them. As a consequence, Roehler's film presents us with a German nation as a space out of joint, providing neither the protagonist nor the viewer with a clear sense of orientation: Hanna has "no place to go."

Even as it undercuts Hanna's projections, *Die Unberührbare* does offer us an emblematic spatial image of unification (or of the Left's experience of unification, at any rate) as a cultural moment built around an empty center. Midway through the film, during the waning hours of the night, Hanna steps into a deserted street on the outskirts of East Berlin. Unable to sleep, she dons her enormous black wig, wraps herself in her signature Dior coat, and begins walking against the flow of people on their way to work. As she gingerly picks her way on stiletto heels over uneven grass, the camera tracks her across a barren strip of land framed by distant high-rises. In the middle of this ex-urban wasteland, she finds an incongruous food stand, where she orders coffee and turns up the volume on the radio with a fleeting smile of recognition as the *Can* sings "She Brings the Rain."

The haunting sense of spatial incongruence that Roehler captures with these images is similarly visible in the close-ups of Hanna's high heels negotiating cobblestones; in long shots through windows of Hanna pacing her empty fish-bowl bungalow in Munich or making a desperate call in a phone booth in the crowded center of Berlin; or in sequences showing Hanna trying to find sleep in one wrong place after another. The same motif of displacement structures Hannelore Elsner's critically acclaimed performance of Hanna Flanders as a restless figure who hardly is at one with her surroundings. Last, by following Hanna from Munich to the Excelsior Hotel in West Berlin to the city's Eastern fringes to her parents' home in Nürnberg to her ex-husband's place in Darmstadt and back to Munich, the narrative itself is structured around the topos of displacement. The urban void that she traverses in the early morning provides that structure.

The power of this urban image derives not only from its logic within the film's internal spatial system of inclusion and exclusion but also from its relation to other images of voids that have dominated unification discourse. One is reminded particularly of the Potsdamer Platz before its rebuilding, unforgettably rendered as the "vacated space" that Homer scours for history in Wim Wenders's film *Der Himmel über*

Berlin (1987). Writing a few years after unification, Huyssen emphasized that this former city center was now a "void saturated with invisible history" and that there remained "ample reasons to emphasize the void rather than to celebrate Berlin's current state of becoming" ("Voids of Berlin" 58, 54). Huyssen is joined in this analysis by other readers of the urban *terrain vague*, these voided, abandoned spaces that resonate with "our strangeness in front of the world; they empathize with our feelings of placelessness and dislocation within our cities" (Perez and Daskalakis 80). The emblematic image of Hanna crossing a less centered void on the outskirts of East Berlin tangentially invokes this (architectural) trope and personalizes it in the melodramatic terms of this particular narrative.

If we take a closer look at this gesture of personalization, the imaginary logic of the film's investment in the *terrain vague* comes to the fore. In a striking parallel to Richter's return to the RAF, Roehler's film may be read as an artist's Orphic descent, a longing gaze at a lost object that it cannot recuperate. Every bit as allegorical as Richter's cycle, this film adds an autobiographical dimension to the Orphic story, which now doubles as an Oedipal one. Drawing on the biography of Roehler's mother, Gisela Elsner, *Die Unberührbare* is a son's portrait of the leftist writer he hardly knew, suspended between her decision to commit suicide at the beginning of the film and the silent fall to her death that concludes it. In the interim, the son's/camera's gaze tries to retrieve the female protagonist from the "underworld" in which she wanders, a somnambulation on sleeping pills. But again, for all of the film's autobiographical overtones, Hanna Flanders functions as an allegory, and Roehler's psychogram of his mother's last days also registers the aftershocks of unification from a uniquely Western perspective. With the fictionalized figure of his mother, Roehler brings to the screen an admittedly idiosyncratic representative of the West German Left to remind us that many of its members experienced unification not as cause for celebration but as a traumatic event that shattered long-held imaginary projections. In this respect, one might read the protagonist as holding a Western mirror to Wolfgang Engler's penetrating analyses of the "civilizational gap" that opened up between the East and the West with the events of 1989. In Engler's reading, 1989 amounted to an abrupt invalidation or "defunctionalization" of former East German dispositions, leaving them "naked, laid bare to the gaze of the observer" (10). Films such as *Die Unberührbare* serve to represent this defunctionalization. As Paul Cooke remarks in his interpre-

tation of the film, Hanna is "an anachronism, a hangover from an earlier age" (37). Through this figure, Roehler puts not just his mother but also her generation and its left-wing utopias under the spotlight. Under his cinematic gaze—one that combines the Orphic and the Oedipal—1989 registers not as a beginning but as the end of an era. The depression-ridden Hanna is another doomed female figure who, in this case, allegorizes a broader disillusionment of left-wing intellectuals around 1989. Already in 1990, Helmut Dubiel diagnosed a "melancholic fixation on loss" among the Left (484). Peter Schneider, coauthor of *Das Versprechen*, was criticized as opportunistic and thoughtless in the sudden reversal among leftist loyalists in the West, "who until recently pounced on anyone who dared to call the GDR a Stalinist dictatorship" (Schneider 5). In a familiar turn, narcissistic melancholia replaced mourning, "purely tactical reactions replaced analysis" (9).[16] In Schneider's suggestive image, unification found the West German Left "standing among ruins, spatula in hand, wanting to patch over cracks long after the walls had already fallen down" (10). Roehler depicts Hanna Flanders as precisely this forlorn figure, but he confronts her and the viewer with the ruins of unification as well.

These include the ruins of the German Left that once again must come to terms with the RAF as a lost object of emotional cathexis: When Hanna comes across her ex-husband in another one of the transient spaces that she traverses (the Nürnberg train station), this sets the stage for a reunion of two lovers who once orbited around the center of the West German Left in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As the director's parents' alter egos, Hanna and Bruno (who represents the writer and publisher Klaus Roehler) travel to the latter's apartment in Darmstadt. They drink, dance, and try to make love but fail in their effort to rekindle an old moment. Instead, as Hanna prepares to leave, Bruno recounts his real loves—the "girls" of the RAF: "Gudrun, Ingeborg, Rita, Ulrike—I understand them so well, these girls. They just knew what was happening. You have no idea, how much I loved Gudrun." Once again, another one of Hanna's encounters has revealed an empty center—although now this imaginary space is defined emotionally as a lost past rather than spatially as a *terrain vague*. Unable to reconnect with his ex-wife, Bruno reconstructs an imaginary plenitude by recalling the female leaders of the RAF as bygone lovers. If Roehler's Euridyce is his own mother, Bruno's (like Richter's) is the iconic female figure of the RAF. The failed reunion of an emblematic couple from the New Left of the 1960s and the invocation of the RAF's

female icons once again presents the Left's paralysis in the wake of unification as a critical subtext of Roehler's film.

The complex construction of Western Leftist nostalgia in *Die Unberührbare* predates two slightly more recent interventions that feed into a more simplistic discourse on *Westalgie* through their construction of strictly delimited, utopian spaces in West Berlin. Both Frank Goosen's *Liegen lernen* (2002) and Sven Regener's *Herr Lehmann* (2001) return to the Berlin of the 1980s and to the tribal rituals of its Kreuzberg subculture in particular. Both authors write about protagonists who at some point move from the western provinces into the *Randgebiete* of the *Zonenstadt*, where they discover a world that first attracts and then repels, representing first a universe of alternative social relations and then a claustrophobic, stagnant culture. The recent adaptation of both of these texts for the cinema by Hendrik Handloegten (2003) and, again, Leander Haußmann (2003), respectively, suggests that this brand of *Westalgie* has reached critical mass in recent years. Haußmann's contribution in particular further suggests a surprising aesthetic continuity between cinematic versions of *Ostalgie* (in *Sonnenallee*) and *Westalgie* (in *Herr Lehmann*). Conversely, while different aesthetic strategies set Goosen's and Regener's books apart from texts such as Hensel's *Zonenkinder* (2002) or Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003), they overlap with their Eastern counterparts in a concerted look back at the 1980s.

This new strain of nostalgia, from both East and West, causes us to further reflect on this ever-recurring phenomenon and what it might be articulating at this particular moment. Several cultural commentators have tried to grasp this problem, among them Michael Rutschky, who was one of the first to analyze *Ostalgie* as the inevitable side effect of the collapse of East Germany. As early as 1995, Rutschky pointed out that a "new" GDR was emerging, an imaginary country put together from the remnants of a country in ruins and from the hopes and anxieties of a new world. Imagined under the conditions of a public sphere that allowed the free exchange of experience, this imaginary GDR takes very different forms, according to Rutschky: There is the deep province of those who decided not to move and who base their identity on an *Ostgefühl* often articulated against the West, a phenomenon not unlike Hanna's refusal "to move"; and there also is an odd subculture of young Westerners who, "going native," moved from Kreuzberg to Berlin Mitte to live a more authentic life ("Wie erst jetzt" 851–64).

With these observations, Rutschky already detected traces of the current postmodern celebration of a GDR lifestyle, including the strange, affectionate celebration of East German commodities—products of an economy that Russell Berman, in a personal communication with Hell, once referred to somewhat uncharitably as the "primitive accumulation of weird things." By drawing our attention to a subcultural milieu migrating East, Rutschky foresaw the way *Ostalgie* would eventually fade into *Westalgie*. Other critics have analyzed this nostalgic convergence as a longing for a golden age before the fall—of the wall in the East and of the prosperous welfare state in the West. Marcus Jauer's take on *Westalgie* as the desire to "watch the East fail once again" is probably the most cynical one. The attraction, Jauer writes, is to "see this institutionalized failure laboring hard and yet to know already that it is in vain," because the West "produced the better version of everything" (1). Indeed, "[w]inning was simpler" before the wall came down. In a similar vein, Michael Schindhelm argues that the obsessive concern with the "pathological nostalgians" of the former East is largely a projection. No doubt, the former East has undergone massive changes; yet Germany's new postfordist arrangements, with their ever-mounting pressures to take risks, are transforming lives in East and West. In these circumstances, nostalgias of all kinds serve as a "refusal of the present"; mobilized in different ways by Western protagonists such as Hanna Flanders and Herr Lehmann and by Eastern antiheroes such as Alex Kerner in *Good Bye Lenin* or Micha in *Sonnenallee*, such nostalgias appear as so many reactions to what Michael Schindhelm fittingly calls "Verschwindigkeit."[17]

To add one final vista to the broadening frameworks from which we consider current German nostalgias, we reformulate Schindhelm's diagnosis of a refusal of the present by drawing on Andreas Huyssen's recent analyses of our expanding present, by which he means an ever-faster integration of a mediated past into a present that also seems to absorb the future (*Present Pasts* 2). Huyssen's discussion adds the consciousness of a break, the new awareness that with the fall of the wall, we have entered a postutopian age. The new spatial and temporal imaginary of this postutopian age also involves, as we argue, the axis of East and West, divided versus unified Germany. Thus, this new stage in the remapping of a country that was once divided is at this moment entangled in a new wave of nostalgia that forces both past and present, East and West, into close proximity.[18]

RUINS IN REVERSE: MAPPING A UNIFIED PAST

The publication of W. G. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* [Air War and Literature] in 1999 added a further dimension to our cognitive mapping of the "new" Germany. The significance of this intervention, however, is only now becoming fully readable as a rearticulation of space in time through the mobilization of visual memory and its after-images. The process set in motion by Sebald's lectures in 1999—namely, the redirection of public memory toward the ruined cityscapes of Nazi Germany—has now gained imaginary density with the publication of Jörg Friedrich's book *Der Brand* (2002). Friedrich's writing strategies vividly re-create the experience of living through the air raids, "taking the reader directly to the place of destruction, making Germans voyeurs of unimaginable horrors visited on the very sites they now inhabit" (Huyssen, "Air War Legacies" forthcoming). These sites are, of course, the major cities of a country once divided and now unified. The very structure of Friedrich's book contributes to the remapping of "Germany." Organized into sections dealing with the bombings in North, West, South, and East Germany, the core part of *Der Brand* restructures the narrative of division. The book superimposes an older map onto the younger memory of division, thus producing another form of imaginary space: "Germany" becomes a palimpsest where past suffering unifies what has proved so resistant to unification, imaginary and otherwise. In the section entitled "I," or "Self," Friedrich constructs a collective German *Kriegs-Ich*, further strengthening this story of unification (*Der Brand* 505). Sebald's 1999 text already evoked a common geography anchored in Hamburg and Dresden. This historically charged geography implicitly thematizes what has become the scholarly consensus since 1989, expressed in the title of Jeffrey Herf's book *Divided Memory* (1997). Herf's title refers to the different ways in which the two Germanys related to their common fascist past, in particular the Holocaust. Sebald's lectures and Friedrich's *Der Brand*, by contrast, have begun to produce a unified past.

The far-reaching implications of this development are best measured by taking into account Friedrich's follow-up volume, *Brandstätten* (2003), a book that adds the incendiary power of the photographic image to this new story about Germany in the 1940s. In the introduction, Friedrich makes the point that was implicit in his earlier book: German postwar history is characterized by *fehlende Tiefenschärfe*.

The purpose of *Brandstätten* consequently is to provide this missing focal plane of history by adding to the visual archive of his German audience images of German cities before the destruction (*Brandstätten* 7).[19] For those born after 1945, the visual archive of German cities includes pictures of their ruined state and the guise they took after reconstruction, the bare minimalist modernism of the 1950s. What these generations do not remember is the look of cities such as Hamburg before their ruin. Against the backdrop of this collective visual archive, Friedrich's books are remarkable not only for their much debated, graphic images of the dead but also for Friedrich's stress on the architectural loss. *Der Brand* contains long lists of destroyed historic houses, churches, castles, museums, and their collections. Evoking publications of *Heimat* photography from the pre-Nazi, Nazi, and postwar eras, *Brandstätten* opens with photographs of Hamburg and other northern cities as old towns with narrow, winding streets so different from today. These books are veritable laments, bemoaning the loss of the prewar built environment. However, Friedrich's books also visualize an imaginary wholeness. Friedrich's latest book is, in a sense, another form of *Wiederaufbau*, repairing Germany's ruins; it provides us with the afterimages of what existed before the destruction. The attraction of ruins consists in fuelling the desire to see what is no longer there, to make whole what is now fragmented. In doing so, Friedrich's photographs insert a new layer into the palimpsestic visual memory of Germany, a layer designed to heal the wound of the German nation on the imaginary level.

And yet, both Sebald's *Air War and Literature* and Friedrich's *Brandstätten* also prove how fragile all fantasies of imaginary "healing" and nostalgic "reconciliation" must remain, for they, too, are haunted by afterimages. When Sebald wrote *Air War and Literature*, images of those who died in the bombing raids were still invisible because they had not entered the German public sphere (although they had certainly circulated privately long before). With *Brandstätten* and with countless television features on the immediate postwar years, these images have flooded that public sphere.

This development illuminates a problem implicit in Sebald's text: As many critics have pointed out, Friedrich's pictures represent victims of the air raids by recalling images of those killed in the concentration camps. Whether the photographs are strategically or randomly selected, Friedrich's book relies once again on historical afterimages from the Nazi camps for its effect. As afterimages of the Holocaust, these pho-

tographs once again conflate German and Jewish victimization—if not deliberately, then at least by neglecting to avoid it. Friedrich's book demonstrates that the histories of German and European Jews and of German perpetrators and victims will remain as complex and politically charged as they were before unification, resisting all facile attempts at reconciliation. The book also demonstrates and (re)produces a space, an imaginary archive where the different, irreconcilable images produced by the catastrophe of National Socialism exist in inevitable proximity.

This is not the place to rehearse in greater depth the differences between Sebald's and Friedrich's projects, between their respective roles in reshaping public memory and their different styles of doing so.[20] Our sole goal is to draw attention to this symbolic remapping and its implications for East–West relations, for this unification of and in the past occurs in conjunction with the conciliatory fantasies that we take as characteristic of contemporary (n)ostalgias and their imaginary spaces. The coincidence of the air war debates with these nostalgias forces past and present into close proximity, producing overlapping discourses and visual regimes.

In 1989, Richter made the superimposition of German pasts and presents visible through the seemingly peripheral phenomenon of the RAF. Richter's exhibit quickly disappeared into the shadows of a crumbling wall, yet it nevertheless articulated rather precisely the cultural logic of return that we have traced above. As Roehler's film suggests, this logic concerns the postfascist politics and (displaced) utopias of the West German Left after unification. Richter, in turn, reminds us that it is impossible to separate the latter from the iconic presence of the RAF. As we suggested, Roehler's film gingerly touched on this question, while some more recent films have begun to explore its East–West dimensions; Gerd Koenen, meanwhile, has begun to elaborate an extensive cultural history of the RAF that explores its relation to the postfascist *Bildermaschine* of the Federal Republic. In a brief reflection on the aura of the RAF, Koenen's most recent book offers a synoptic glance at the organization's place in the German imaginary:

> The mythic aura in which the RAF cloaked itself from the beginning was perhaps the decisive part of its effect. Even its name reached deep into the arsenal of German images of horror, evoking the apocalyptic "lightning" of the British bombers as much as of the tellurian "Urrah" of the red army. With this name, the RAF set in motion an "image machine" loaded

> with historical associations, which has not stopped working to this day and has left a deep imprint on our collective memory. (Koenen, *Vesper, Ensslin, Baader* 317)

Historical imaginaries are indeed battlefields—of words and images, facts and desires. What we have been arguing is that Germany's historical imaginary has undergone a decisive transformation: It is characterized by a logic of return in which spatial aspects now figure more prominently. In its wake, unification has produced visual memories of imaginary spaces, a specific form of historical chronotopes that lets us read the political conflicts accompanying unification as a long-term process; those conflicts continue to revolve around Germany's controversial pasts but also define its East–West present. Richter's untimely staging of the RAF is symptomatic for this new cultural logic, as is the left-wing melancholia of films such as *Die Unberührbare*—itself a multiply overdetermined afterimage. Even the ongoing debates that were sparked by Sebald's lectures and fanned by Friedrich's books evince the investment in visualizing imaginary spaces for a postwall present. Given the centrality of spatial allegories and local metaphors for national identity in the cultural logic of the Berlin Republic, would it be wrong to suggest that what is at stake is the reinvention of *Heimat* for a "new" Germany?

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NOTES

[1]Compare Hans-Ulrich Obrist, ed., *Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting, 1960–1993* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998) 174.

[2]Compare Obrist 190.

[3]Compare Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 74.

[4]Compare Birgit Pelzer, "Das tragische Begehren," *Gerhard Richter, Band II:*

Texte, ed. Benjamin Buchloh, Peter Gidal, and Birgit Pelzer (Stuttgart: Cantz, 1993) 105–11.

[5]Gertrud Koch reads Richter's style as a sign of the very structure of memory. See Koch, "Le secret de Polichinelle: Gerhard Richter et les surfaces de la modernité," *Gerhard Richter: Jean Philippe Antoine, Gertrud Koch, Luc Lang* (Paris: Edition Dis Voir, 1995) 25.

[6]Compare Hartmut Boehme, "Das Wettstreiten der Medien im Andenken der Toten," *Der zweite Blick: Bildgeschichte und Bildreflexion*, ed. Hans Belting and Dietmar Kamper (Munich: Piper, 2000) 23–43.

[7]This visual proximity is due, first, to the immense pressure of Germany's postfascist visual archive (compare Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild: FotogRAFien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* [Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001]); second, to the RAF's self-presentation as an anti-imperialist and antifascist movement (compare Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt: unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967–1977* [Köln: Kiepenheuer, 2001] and *Vesper, Ensslin, Baader. Urszenen des deutschen Terrorismus* [Köln: Kiepenheuer, 2003]); and third, to the ongoing political and cinematic discourse about the RAF, on which we touched above. One intertext for Richter is Peter Weiss's Plötzensee segment in the *Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1976–81). As Plötzensee is readable in Richter's *Stammheim*, *Stammheim* is readable in Weiss's Plötzensee segment. Like Richter, Weiss wrote in the wake of the RAF using an Orphic plot.

[8]Compare James E. Young, "Foreword: Looking into the Mirrors of Evil," *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (New York: The Jewish Museum, New York and Rutgers UP, 2002) xvii; Benjamin Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: Das Archiv der Anomie," *Gerhard Richter, Band II: Texte*, ed. Benjamin Buchloh, Peter Gidal, and Birgit Pelzer (Stuttgart: Cantz, 1993) 7–17.

[9]The term began cropping up in the newspapers as early as 1991, although critics still took issue with the notion, arguing that unification had led to an expanded Bonn Republic, as opposed to a qualitatively new "Berliner Republik" (compare Evelyn Roll, "Jetzt ist Bewährungsprobe: Der Hambacher Disput über den Stand der Politik," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 28 Sept. 1992).

[10]Compare Lutz Koepnick, "Redeeming History? Foster's Dome and the Political Aesthetic of the Berlin Republic," *German Studies Review* 24.2 (May 2001): 303–24.

[11]Compare also Julia Hell and Johannes von Moltke, "Ten Years After: The Unification Effect," *Journal of the International Institute* 8.1 (Fall 2000): 4–5, 25.

[12]For example, see Uwe Kolbe, "Was habe ich noch nachzuholen?" *Vineta. Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998) 18.

[13]See Dahlke, "The Right to Melancholy: Narratives from the GDR by Younger East German Authors of the Nineties," unpublished manuscript, Humboldt U, 1999.

[14]Compare Nora Fitzgerald, "Berlin's Wall Is Down, but Try to Keep Mom From Finding Out," *New York Times* 2 Apr. 2003: E1.

[15]Compare Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003).

[16]Compare Alison Lewis, "Unity Begins Together: Analyzing the Trauma of German Unification," *New German Critique* 64 (Winter 1995): 135–59.

[17]This neologism combines the German words for disappearance (*Verschwinden*) and speed (*Geschwindigkeit*) to suggest the overwhelming speed of the transformations taking place in Germany's expanded postunification present. Compare Michael Schindhelm, "Der Terror der Zeit: Warum die Nostalgie um sichgreift—in Ost wie in West," *Die Zeit* 31 Oct. 2001. See also Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986); and George Steinmetz, "Die (un)moralische Ökonomie rechtsextremer Gewalt im Übergang zum Postfordismus," *Das Argument* 23, no. 203 (January/February 1994): 23–40.

[18]As the postwall East German identity constitutes itself against the West, German—and, more broadly, European—identity emerges in opposition to the United States. On the tradition of European anti-Americanism, compare Russell A. Berman, *Anti-Americanism in Europe: A Cultural Problem* (Stanford, CA: Hoover, 2004); Andrei Markovits, *Amerika, dich haßt sich's besser Antiamerikanismus und Antisemitismus in Europa* (Hamburg: KVV Konkret, 2004), and "The Minister and the Terrorist," *Foreign Affairs* 80.6 (November/December 2001): 132–46.

[19]Again, this project is similar to Sebald's, who writes in *Air War and Literature* about the task of German literature to bring the "images from horrifying history" into the nation's consciousness. However, where Sebald wants to create awareness of catastrophic defeat, Friedrich is driven by a nostalgic, if not melancholic, longing for lost treasures.

[20]For a judicious assessment, compare Huyssen, "Air War Legacies," and Atina Grossman, "German Civilians as Victims? The Evolution of a Perception," discussion, Goethe House, 2003.

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