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Divided History, Unified Present: The Politics of Memory in Germany and the Memorialization of the Former East

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

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PROJECT TITLE: DIVIDED HISTORY, UNIFIED PRESENT:

THE POLITCS OF MEMORY IN GERMANY

AND THE MEMORIALIZATION OF THE FORMER EAST

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

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**Divided History, Unified Present:
The Politics of Memory in Germany
And the Memorialization of the Former East**

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Honors Thesis

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Note

I have adopted A. James McAdams's system of terminology for East Germany, West Germany, and their citizens from his book *Judging the Past in Unified Germany*: "I refer to the two German states before unification, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, as West Germany and East Germany. I refer to the people who lived in those states as West Germans and East Germans, respectively. However, after unification, I speak of eastern Germany and western Germany, and when contrasting the citizens of the two parts of the nation, I speak of western Germans (or westerners) and eastern Germans (or easterners)."

The Perspectives of a Memorial: Gathering Meaning

The Federal Republic of Germany has endured through some of the most varied and difficult regimes in Europe in the last hundred years, and has emerged intact with a deep consciousness of its own history of which few other countries can boast. But such a consciousness requires constant effort, what Holocaust historian James Young calls “memory-work,” the process of constructing, tearing down, and reconstructing official memory and never actually arriving at a finished product. The lack of a concrete end makes memory-work more true to the nature of history, an endlessly curving, varying, and contradictory path rather than a straight line. Young’s theories of memorialization revolve around memory-work; he encourages us to accept uncertainty and face the dilemmas of representation of the past and the self without desiring resolution. Instead of seeing memorials as spaces for the deposit of collective memory, he sees them as repositories of *collected* memory, the many individual and sometimes competing histories and recollections that are lumped together and assigned a common meaning by governments and conventional memorials.

A memorial gathers meaning from three different perspectives: the internal, the external, and the displaced. First, a memorial is fundamentally interactive and purely referential in meaning. A memorial is meant to interact with a viewer, to encourage memory by referring to certain things or events. Its own internal meaning lies in what memories it evokes in the viewer and how it shapes them. “[M]emorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce” (Young, *Texture*, preface).

Second, a memorial is a text that is most fruitfully read in the external context of its historical, political, and economic frames.

“All of this is meant to expand the texts of these memorials to include not only their conception and execution among historical realities, but also their current and changing lives, even their eventual destruction. This is to draw back into view the very process, the many complicated historical, political, and aesthetic axes, on which memory is being constructed. For neither memory nor intention is ever monolithic: each depends on the vast array of forces—material, aesthetic, spatial, ideological—converging in one memorial site. By reinvesting these memorials with the memory of their origins, I hope to highlight the process of public art over its often static result, the ever-changing life of the monument over its seemingly frozen face in the landscape” (Young, *Texture*, preface).

The memorial takes meaning from the external forces surrounding its full life cycle of conception, birth, life, and death.

Last, memorials take on a significance of their own beyond that envisioned for them by the state or by the artist. Memorials are invested with significance from the intended meaning they displace. While these intended meanings are important, unintended meanings can often be more enlightening as to the function of a specific memorial. “Once created, memorials take on lives of their own, often stubbornly resistant to the state’s original intentions. In some cases, memorials created in the image of a state’s ideals actually turn around to recast those ideals in the memorial’s own image. New generations visit memorials under new circumstances and invest them with new

meanings. The result is an evolution in the memorial's significance, generated in the new times and company in which it finds itself' (Young, *Texture*, 2-3).

The Functions of a Memorial: Processing Meaning

A memorial can process the meaning it has gathered through its various perspectives in different ways. Recent scholarship has focused on problems and inconsistencies between the ways that memorials profess to function, and their true functions. Perhaps the three most relevant models for an analysis of German memory of its divided past are the fossil-memorial that petrifies, the distraction-memorial that effaces, and the substitute-memorial that absolves.

In his 1938 work *The Culture of Cities* Lewis Mumford posits that modern urban civilization is defined by constant renewal and rejuvenation, the very opposite of the memorial's intentions: to mummify old and forgotten ideals and celebrate the static. It would seem that Mumford ignores the internal perspective of the memorial, its ability to change with the intentions and memories brought to it by the viewer. But James Young draws from Robert Musil's *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* to round out the fossil model of the memorial: "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen—indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention" (Musil 61). Young argues that "this 'something' is the essential stiffness monuments share with all other images: as a likeness necessarily vitrifies its otherwise dynamic referent, a monument turns pliant memory to stone. And it is this 'finish' that repels our attention, that makes a monument invisible....For monuments at rest like this—in stasis—seem to present themselves as

eternal parts of the landscape, as naturally arranged as nearby trees or rock formations. As an inert piece of stone, the monument keeps its own past a tightly held secret, gesturing away from its own history to the events and meanings we bring to it in our visits” (Young, *Texture*, 13-4). For Young, the memorial as a fossil retains the intended meaning invested in it by the artist or the state that created it, but petrifies it beyond recognition or validity.

Aside from making its original referent obsolete, a memorial can also make it invisible. “...Martin Broszat has suggested that...monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether beneath layers of national myths and explanations” (Young, *Texture*, 5). The highly self-conscious nature of memorialization squeezes historical events into the strict forms of political agendas—and risks, according to Broszat, effacing the event entirely. Using this model for the processing of meaning, a memorial to the Holocaust might really be a memorial to the state’s remembrance of the Holocaust and the myths the state uses to explain the Holocaust to itself.

In a radical acceleration of the two processes outlined above, a memorial can not only efface the event it professes to remember, but also relieve the viewers of the burden of the memory-work it is supposed to inspire. By offering an overly simplified national explanation of the referent event, a memorial can give viewers the impression that the memory-work is complete: the state has arrived at a “finished” view of its history, a view evidenced by the memorial itself. “[Some] have argued that...the monument displaces [memory] altogether, supplanting a community’s memory-work with its own material form. ‘The less memory is experienced from the inside,’ Pierre Nora warns, ‘the more it exists through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs.’ Nora concludes, ‘Memory has

been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstruction. Its new vocation is to record: delegating to the *lieu de memoire* the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin.’ As a result, the memorial operation remains self-contained and detached from our daily lives....In effect, the initial impulse to memorialize events...may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them” (Nora in Young, *Texture*, 5). The memorial as substitute absolves its viewers from the guilt and/or responsibility inherent in Young’s active and endless process of memory-work.

The Federal Republic of Germany’s Engagement with its Divided Past

At the fall of East German Communism in 1989, newly unified Germany was in a unique position among transitional countries: the destruction of the Communist state had been sudden and total, leaving no anti-Western factions with enough power or popular support to challenge what had been the West German government and was now simply the German government. German policymakers had a lot of latitude in how they chose to deal with the ramifications of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei* (SED) administration, and they chose to engage the past in multiple spheres: legal, social, and economic. Their confrontation of the past shows very convincingly what is at stake in the question of memorialization of the GDR.

I. The FRG’s Legal Engagement of the GDR

During the years immediately following the GDR’s demise, the FRG conducted a number of high-profile trials to ascertain the guilt of some SED officials and border

guards in shooting deaths at the walled border between East and West Germany. For many western Germans and eastern victims of SED policy, justice for the crimes of the East German government “was part and parcel of their nation’s continuing historical responsibility to act upon the legacy of German authoritarianism” (McAdams 26). But many were more cautious in drawing parallels between the East German state and the Nazi regime, conceding the lesser scope and severity of the SED’s crimes in comparison to those of the NSDAP. A common thread between the vast majority of proponents of punishing the crimes of the fallen state was the characterization of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*, or unjust state. But officials of unified Germany were not blind to the implications of this widely held assumption: the FRG would risk losing its own credibility as a *Rechtsstaat* if it allowed legal action against former East Germans to become politicized. Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the post-unification German government announced, “We do not hold political trials” (Kohl, “Interview...”, *Statements and Speeches*). The need to avoid politicization and focus on a more strict concept of justice led the framers of the Unification Treaty of 1990 to include a stipulation that the FRG’s criminal code could only be applied to accused East Germans if they had also been in violation of the GDR’s criminal code.

The most famous of the post-unification trials of accused East Germans was that of Erich Honecker, initiated in 1992 when the former SED General Secretary was charged with “indirect complicity in manslaughter” (McAdams 35). His indictment was an 800-page painstakingly detailed document tying him personally to the construction of the Berlin Wall and the GDR’s border policy. “In one particularly notable meeting of the National Defense Council (NVR), on May 3, 1974—a time when the GDR was

supposedly welcoming greater contacts between its citizenry and the capitalist West— Honecker had specifically endorsed the ‘unhampered use’ of firearms to prevent escapes, and he had called upon his coleaders to ‘praise those comrades who used their weapons successfully’” (Richter in McAdams 36). In his only statement before the court, Honecker said the trial was a political act of domination of the victors over the defeated. “[I]t amounts to a politically motivated misrepresentation of history” (Honecker in McAdams 37). Early on in the legal process, it became clear that Honecker’s failing health would soon render him unfit for trial under the FRG’s constitution, but preliminary discussion of dismissing the charges met with substantial public outcry. The German government was now faced with the same dilemma that dogged all of its efforts to confront its divided past: defining the fallen GDR regime was a process intimately connected to the self-definition of the FRG; self-righteousness or exaggeration in characterizing the negative aspects of the GDR would only lead to a loss of legitimacy of the FRG. Germany could not try Honecker for his abuses of human rights without abusing his rights under their own constitution, and as a result, the constitutional court in Berlin curtailed the proceedings on January 12, 1993. The less media-rife but similar trials of three other members of the NVR resulted in convictions, and the presiding judge Hans Boß pointed out in his oral statement the problematic nature of West Germany’s position as judge of East Germany’s past: “It would have been better if East Germany had tried its own leaders” (Boß in McAdams 40).

A weaker form of legal engagement with East German past was the call to exclude collaborators of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (State Security Service), or the Stasi, from public office, which was being heard even before official reunification on

both sides of the Berlin Wall, as well as the call to make the voluminous and covertly gathered Stasi files public. Some wanted to use the files to ascertain which former collaborators should be expelled from positions of current power. But critics pointed out that to base judgments of the injustices of a dictatorship on the very information unjustly collected by that dictatorship was absurd. Again, the argument came down to maintaining the legitimacy of the FRG in comparison to the GDR. The decision was eventually made to make the files public under the auspices of the Federal Authority for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former GDR (BStU), and to dismiss from public office any individual responsible for human rights violations under the SED regime. This determination did not, of course, fully address possibilities that the Stasi's files might not be factually accurate, or that such a large percentage of the East German population might be implicated as to make the process pointless and destructive.

However, careful attention was devoted by the BStU to cross-referencing and contextualizing Stasi reports, and collaboration levels were not nearly so high as some had feared. The process of sifting through Stasi files and gleaning useful information was also beset by concrete problems: evidently, different standards of guilt and innocence were applied in different cases, and many of the some 50,000 dismissals that had resulted as of 1997 were much contested. The inconsistent and highly public interpretation and use of information from Stasi files precipitated much discussion of national and legal legitimacy of both East and West Germany, and also much confusion about the role of the Stasi in East German society, but the process also had, according to many, the cathartic effect desired by the German government.

II. The FRG's Social and Moral Engagement of the GDR

In the years following reunification, cost of living and unemployment rose dramatically, leading many former East Germans to disillusionment with the new Germany and nostalgia for their lives under the SED, expressed through support of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Alarmed, many of the original dissidents against the SED saw the need for a more complete public representation of the SED regime than arose from trials and public inquiries into Stasi files. The result of this recognized need was a special parliamentary Enquete commission on the "history and consequences of the SED dictatorship" (McAdams 90), formed in 1992. The commission considered many of the most disputed topics concerning the formation, maintenance, and implosion of the GDR, such as the role of churches in East Germany, human rights abuses, and the East German state's particular relationship to Moscow. The commission conducted public hearings and closed meetings with a veritable army of experts, witnesses, and representatives, and yielded 15,000 pages of gathered information on the GDR. However, the commission was not immune to the political agendas of its participants, and its representation of the East German state was not always proactive in terms of reunifying the two populations of unified Germany. As with Germany's attempts to reconcile itself legally with its divided past, the real issue is self-definition.

When the commission considered the question of why East Germans had been so relatively passive during the forty years of the GDR, the politicized nature of its proceedings came to the fore in a lack of discussion of the lives of everyday, complicit but disgruntled East Germans in favor of numerous stories of heroism and sacrifice for one's beliefs under the SED. The final commission report contains a section dedicated

solely to the stories of those directly victimized by the SED, but very little analysis of the mundane trials of life under the Communist regime. “If average East Germans had moderately intelligible or even partly understandable reasons for going along with the governing regime’s policies (from simple loyalty to the place of their birth to rational calculations about maximizing their social and economic well-being), this would not be apparent to anyone reading the final report” (McAdams 113). The commission eschewed contradiction and uncertainty in its final product, describing the GDR in oppositional terms like domination and subjugation, support and rebellion. Perhaps this development can be traced back to the rise in support for the PDS that originally motivated the formation of the commission, and yet the deficiencies in the final report helped reinforce many former East Germans’ reasons for Communist nostalgia: they felt that their identities were not being represented or acknowledged by the German government or people. Dietmar Keller, in his PDS reply to the report, writes that the GDR was “a daily history of millions of people, whose personal happiness and sorrow, sense of security and well-being, conflicts and protests, public presence and withdrawal into private ‘niches’ could not be verified through any archival source” (Keller 251). Keller maintained he was insulted by the idea that life in East Germany was nothing more than a prison term. While his reply exemplifies the opposite romanticized extreme from the overly black-and-white commission report, the political consequences of the larger social debate verbalized by the commission became clear in the 1994 elections, in which the PDS received 19.8% of the eastern electorate’s vote, up from 11.1% in 1990.

Wolfgang Thierse, the eastern German Social Democrat, “worried openly [in 1995] that his party had seriously underestimated the psychological and emotional

connections many easterners still felt to their former lives in the GDR” (McAdams 116). Thierse was not alone in calling for a more balanced official history of divided Germany, but the second round of hearings of the Enquete commission paid only brief lip service to the uncertainty inherent in its project in favor of continuing its stark view of German history.

III. The FRG’s Economic Engagement of the GDR

In 1990, the Volkskammer (Parliament) of East Germany passed a law to allow for the post-reunification settlement of the issue of property restitution. By 1992, over a million claims for restitution had been filed, illustrating to the FRG’s government exactly how widespread and personal was the issue of property, and how necessary the historically appropriate and justifiable actions. Of course, even historically appropriate and justifiable ways of restoring property could not but alienate some claimants. The process was further complicated by the impossibility of constraining the ownership changes to property transfers made under the SED: a substantial number of claims involved property taken during the National Socialist regime, or during the four years of Soviet occupation preceding the formation of the GDR, or even in the confusion surrounding the 1989 collapse of Communism. The final restitution policy that resulted generally favored restitution of property over compensation for lost property, with three general exceptions: first, because of the massive social and economic upheaval that would have resulted, no property seized during the Soviet Union’s land reform and nationalization of the 1940’s was to be restored to its pre-1940 owners. Second, property acquired in “an honest manner” (McAdams 131) under East German law would not be

restored to its pre-GDR owner. This second exception illustrates unified Germany's struggle with the legitimacy of the GDR, and, by extension, its own legitimacy. Third, the decisive factor in disputed cases would be in whose hands the property in question most benefited the public good. Although the property restitution scheme was carried out in a manner consistent with the letter of the law and the policy outlined above, there was no shortage of disgruntled western and eastern Germans who felt cheated.

The Federal Republic of Germany's New Relationship with its Divided Past

A. James McAdams locates much of the impetus for the recent decrease in engagement of Germany's divided past in the high probability that the legal, social, and economic measures designed to reconcile reunified Germany with divided Germany have made significant progress toward doing so. He points out that the Berlin office of the *Staatsanwaltschaft*, which investigated instances of East German state criminality, closed in 1999. The use of Stasi records for background checks on employees had decreased significantly by 1999. As of that same year, the German government was estimated to have resolved 92 percent of all registered property disputes under its restitution and compensation policy, and the special Enquete commission had long since finished its final meetings. However, there are still problems and gaps in the official understanding of Germany's history between 1949 and 1989, just as there will certainly be with any historical narrative that attempts to eschew memory-work and reach an "end of the story" that is accurate and concrete.

The memory-work is not over, and nowhere in Germany is the process of memorialization of divided Germany more vivid, controversial, and changeable than on

the *Schloßplatz*, or the palace plaza in the heart of the city of Berlin. In the year 1443, the first foundation stone was laid for the royal palace on the *Schloßplatz*, and the Hohenzollern Kaiser Frederick II moved into the palace in 1451. Over the following centuries, new wings and architectural features were added, and obsolete portions of the palace removed. In the first fifteen years of the eighteenth century, architect Andreas Schlüter converted the palace to the Baroque style, which it retained until 1945. The palace was a symbol of Prussian might and pride. On March 18, 1848, Kaiser Frederick William IV stood on the balcony of the palace and attempted to quell growing popular desire for parliamentary democracy by promising a number of political reforms, but the crowd dissolved into riots when military officers began a bayonet charge into the protesters, killing 230 in the ensuing battle (the March Revolution). On August 1, 1914, Kaiser William II read the declaration of World War I from the same balcony. The palace was tragically mostly destroyed by British and American bombers in February of 1945.

Then, in April of 1961, the East German government began planning to build on the site of the Prussian palace, whose ruins had by then been cleared away with no thought of rebuilding. Construction on the Palace of the Republic began in 1973. The Palace of the Republic was to be the Socialist answer to the Prussian palace: a palace of the people, it would house the Volkskammer in one large chamber and a larger performance arena in another, bringing the people and the government into the same space. The two large halls are connected by a foyer divided into five floors with restaurants, a milk bar, a bowling alley, a terrace overlooking the Spree, and that can also be divided into separate rooms. The ceiling of the main entryway was covered in over

one thousand spherical light fixtures (earning the Palace the nickname, Erich's lamp shop). The entryway leads into a gallery (*Galerie des Palastes*) that used to house sixteen paintings by contemporary artists in the 1980's. The basement floor of the foyer is divided into two rooms in which discos and other events for youth were held. The Palace of the Republic officially opened in April of 1976. When Honecker began allowing Western artists to perform in the GDR, they performed in the Palace of the Republic, such as Udo Lindenberg and others in the 1983 Rock für den Frieden concert.

In September of 1990, just after reunification, the German government closed the Palace of the Republic down due to asbestos contamination. In 1993, the government decided to tear the building down, although did not agree on a date until 2004, when it was decided that the Palace of the Republic will be demolished in 2005. In 1997, the Association for the Preservation of the Palace of the Republic was founded. The building was briefly reopened in 2003 for tours after complete asbestos removal (required by law, even in buildings that will not be used). Every tour was sold out, and the gutted palace has been a venue for several exhibitions since then, most recently a set of life-size copies of the Terra Cotta Army from China.

The German government is discussing several different plans to at least partially rebuild the Hohenzollern Palace on the *Schloßplatz*. The debate about the *Schloßplatz* and what should be built there centers on the position of the plaza in the heart of Berlin and the resulting high profile of whatever building should stand on it: the location will ensure the building's status as a monument, and so the only question left is, which is a more fitting monument—the old Prussian palace, or the Palace of the Republic? James Young's work on memorialization, while relating directly to memorialization of the

Holocaust, is also applicable in this instance because of his focus on the relationship between defining history and defining the societal self.

The Palaces as Memorials and Monuments

Both the Palace of the Republic and the Prussian palace gather their meaning from internal, external, and displaced perspectives, and process it in problematic ways that often correspond with the fossil-, distraction-, and substitute-memorial models. Before analyzing the Palaces' functions of remembrance, it is useful to consult Arthur Danto's work on the American Vietnam Veterans' Memorial as to the distinction between monuments and memorials. He writes, "We erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build memorials so that we shall never forget. Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends....Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments, we honor ourselves.' Insofar as the same object can perform both functions, there may be nothing intrinsic to historical markers that makes them either a monument or a memorial" (Danto in Young, *Texture*, 3). The Hohenzollern palace was built as a monument, and were it to be rebuilt (even if only partially) in the place of the Palace of the Republic, it would, in the eyes of many, remain such. The Palace of the Republic was built as a monument to commemorate Socialist East Germany and has become, in the eyes of many Germans, a sort of inauspicious memorial to the same since reunification. Proponents of the demolition of the Palace of the Republic have justified their position

aesthetically, politically/ideologically, and practically. The aesthetic argument posits that the Palace is “ugly,” and does not fit the architectural style of the city center. The political argument casts the Palace as an emblem of a repressive regime, a blemish on the face of Berlin that must be blotted out along with the memory of East Germany. The practical argument revolves around the dilapidated state of the building and the funding that would be required to render it usable again.

All of these arguments touch upon the same sensitive subject of shaping the heart of Berlin. The Palace of the Republic as well as the old Hohenzollern palace function as symbols of unity and emblems of Germany’s deepest values. In this way, both buildings are monuments that shape Berlin’s sense of self and history. Peter Strieder, a senator (SPD) who helps shape city planning policy in Berlin, in his reply to a 2002 *Tagesspiegel* editorial that was supportive of keeping the Palace of the Republic, said that defining the presence of the Palace in modern Berlin is “*schwierig*” (difficult). In the course of his letter, he refers to the Palace of the Republic using the language of human corpses: “ruins,” “remains,” and “a lifeless hull.” He cites the ruins of the Palace as an obstacle to Berlin’s good impression on tourists.

Even the issue of asbestos contamination is politicized on the Initiative Propalast website, a group of Berliners who support keeping the Palace of the Republic where it is, whose writers divide the issue into “Asb-ost” and “Ast-west,” drawing attention to the fact that numerous contaminated former West German buildings have been cleaned and then utilized. They argue that the Palace of the Republic is being targeted for demolition because of its Eastern associations. Indeed, many supporters of demolition of the Palace openly admit that these Eastern associations are their reason for wanting the Palace gone.

The German Democratic Republic was a repressive government that abbreviated the rights of its citizens while claiming to represent them; this is evident. But James Young argues that we must face “the dilemmas of representation.” In our monuments and our official histories, we must “resist closure, sustain uncertainty, and allow ourselves to live without full understanding.”

And of course, the symbolism of the Palace of the Republic is very different for citizens of the former East and the former West. The German Democratic Republic’s official architecture magazine, *Architektur der DDR*, insists that the Palace of the Republic embodies the two main goals of a socialist society: *wohnen* and *arbeiten*, living and working. The Palace was a hub of social activity, a venue for graduations and weddings but also party rallies and other public ceremonies to cement the work ethic. In the introduction to their film *Ein Palast und seine Republik*, Julia Novak and Thomas Beutelschmidt point out that even the architecture of the Palace blends *wohnen* and *arbeiten* in its image of the “domesticated modern.” They argue that it is a monument to the Socialist self image that is still a part of German culture. This is the internal meaning that many eastern Germans still bring to the monument, along with the external meaning that stems from the current debate over the Socialist Palace’s demolition. Yet the Palace of the Republic also displaces the meaning the East German state intended to convey with the building: many eastern Germans and most western Germans now attach the negative stigma of the repressive regime to the meaning of the building.

Many scholars have placed this stigma of repression and illegitimacy on the Palace of the Republic in opposition to positive meaning placed on the Prussian Palace that could very well replace the People’s Palace. Dr. Klaus Wever, an author and

professor of architecture in Berlin, has called the Socialist Palace “a veritable cuckoo’s egg of another German state in the nest of the Federal Republic of Germany.” Wolf Jobst Siedler, a well-known Berlin publisher and writer, has insisted that “the Hohenzollern Palace was not merely *in* Berlin; Berlin *was* the Palace.” According to Dr. Bruno Flierl, a Berlin scholar and critic of architecture, Siedler means that Berlin lost its identity when it lost the Prussian Palace in 1945, and that the city needs it back in order to regain this lost self. This characterization of the Hohenzollern palace as a monument honoring the heart and identity of Berlin is reductive, and hints at the Prussian palace’s seemingly contradictory function as a monument of both distraction and substitution of Germany’s divided past *and* its pre-Nazi past. By removing from Berlin’s landscape the traces of its divided history, Germany runs the risk of constructing that entire forty-year history as merely “a rehabilitative sentence served before Germany could be reborn again, whole” (Young, *Texture*, 25), and thereby invalidating East German lives by distracting attention from them. The Prussian Palace as a monument also hearkens back to a time of national glory before the National Socialists, and comes dangerously close to idealizing that time to the point of calling Germany’s memory-work finished by substituting a concrete palace for continued self-scrutiny.

Conclusion

The internal meaning brought to the Palace of the Republic by individuals, the external meaning projected upon it by the *Schloßplatz* debate, and the GDR’s old optimistic intended meanings that the Palace displaces could all be scrutinized further, rather than just relegating the building to “a cuckoo’s egg“ and leaving off the work of

integrating memory into the present. However, even though public memory-work on East German history appears to be lacking, individuals in Berlin are still very conscious of their history. On a recent trip to Berlin, I was fortunate enough to be inside the Palace of the Republic on its first day open to the public for an exhibit (the Terra Cotta Army) since the announcement of its definite demolition date (in 2005). The exhibit was divided into corridors using tall metal frames hung with canvas to block the viewer off from the ugly reality of the scraped-clean skeleton of the Palace and concentrate attention on the terra cotta figures. But for me, as apparently for many others there that day, the Palace was the attraction and not the exhibit: numerous people pulled back the canvas curtains to snap pictures or just to see the desolate, rusted interior of the Palace, as it has been since the asbestos removal. The rapt faces staring at distant steel and concrete half-obscured by darkness seemed to be carefully tasting the meaning of the huge, empty Socialist monument and trying to decide what life would be like without it.

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