

Searching for Sustainable Utopia:  
Art, Political Culture, and Historical Practice in Germany, 1980-2000

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## Abstract

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At the end of the twentieth century, the gradual triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism over “really existing socialism” brought to many West Germans not relief but melancholy. Facing what they interpreted as the dissipation of radical social and political alternatives, academics and public intellectuals pronounced the death of ideology, of history, and of utopian ambitions. This dissertation asks how West Germans nevertheless found ways to challenge this resignation by giving voice to new, radical hopes for Germany’s future.

For their broad popularity and sustained impact, this study traces the grassroots efforts of three groups. First, it follows the Berlin History Workshop, a collection of amateur and professional historians, as they attempted to liberate the process of researching and writing history from the rigid confines German universities. This group sought, instead, to bring the historian’s craft into Berlin’s local neighborhoods in order to enable ordinary Germans to narrate their own histories. Second, this dissertation analyzes the Green Party, which practiced localized plebiscitary policy making in an effort to endow German citizens with greater political agency. The Greens brought this political practice to numerous cultural projects in an effort to democratize German society by democratizing the cultural encounters of its citizens. Third, this project investigates a loosely-connected group of artists who echoed the investments of the historians and politicians by creating art installations with ordinary objects in ordinary spaces that prompted passersby to reevaluate their relationships to the topography of their daily lives.

This dissertation argues that, through these groups, everyday Germans adopted a set of cultural practices in the 1980s and ‘90s that not only critiqued established institutions but also crafted new institutions in their place. Their critical practices followed three conventions. First, they championed radical grassroots democracy by giving citizens opportunities to create socially-significant cultural products like museums and monuments. Second, they decentralized the creative process, locating it in the spaces of everyday life in order to make it widely accessible. Finally, they borrowed from the environmental movement the concept of sustainability, which demanded that any alternative to existing society be both enduring and adaptable. These practices put culture to work in realizing a more democratic, more socially-integrated Germany. In doing so, they permitted their practitioners to reclaim utopian hope from the dustbin of historical ideas.

These three case studies span Germany's academic, political, and aesthetic terrain. As such, together they offer evidence that efforts to battle twentieth-century apathy signaled a broad shift in German cultural sensibilities, not an isolated phenomenon. The first three chapters of the dissertation treat each of these groups individually as they began to advocate for new, more democratic geographies of cultural engagement, or "alternative public spheres," in the early 1980s. Their focus on Germany's cultural environment made them particularly receptive to the idea of sustainability popularized after the convening of the World Commission on Environment and Development in the middle of the decade. The next three chapters trace their pursuit of sustainability in culture. A sustainable culture, they came to realize, had to regard its projects as part of an ongoing process rather than as static goals: theirs was a renewable, future-oriented cultural movement in the present, or a "sustainable utopia." Faced with radical changes to the international political landscape and the rapid expansion of their constituencies to include sixteen million East Germans alongside more pedestrian concerns like funding difficulties and interpersonal conflicts, these groups weathered the last decade of the twentieth century with varying success. The study concludes by underscoring the irony that the most durable component of their cultural programs in the wake of German political reunification was their push for cultural decentralization.

To my mother, who would have had a lot to say about this project.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Melancholy of Anti-Utopianism

In 1988, a group of West German historians—some professional, some amateur—organized an exhibit for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. Their exhibit attempted to answer the ambitious question of how wars are made. Surprisingly, the historians dismissed conventional interpretations like imperialistic tendencies, the economics of domination, or heightening militarization as inadequate explanations of how a nation mobilizes at the level of the individual. Instead, they located the answer in the social and cultural structures of everyday society, in the constellation of mentalities that guide the actions of ordinary people. They zeroed in on popular attitudes toward the future and their power in shaping behavior in the present. In a section of the exhibit that dealt with the relationship between National Socialism and World War II, the historians cited a German school children’s songbook from 1934. “We are soldiers of the future,” one song’s refrain read, “we are doers of future deeds.” From their archival research, they learned that this line had become a mantra among students in Hitler’s Germany, “an unconditional promise recited to death.” Though ostensibly only a promise, it had been drilled so thoroughly into Nazi youth that they could mobilize it instinctively. Not merely an oath, the refrain became “a preparation, an educational goal, and thereby a reality.”<sup>1</sup> It fashioned an ideal Nazi state in advance, the exhibit’s organizers highlighted, by shaping the practices of its ordinary citizens in the present around a hope for the future.

These West German historians—members of the Berlin branch of Germany’s History Workshop movement—possessed an abiding, arguably paralyzing interest in the Nazi period. It should surprise few that they would incline toward a discussion of the rise of National Socialism even in an exhibit ostensibly about World War I. It was no accident, however, that out of thousands of examples of Nazi pedagogy, the historians chose to highlight this particular one. They gravitated toward this example, despite their unflinching criticism of the Nazi state, because it tantalizingly promised to reveal to them a small lesson about a theme that had guided their work, namely the methods society might employ in attempt to build for itself its ideal future. National Socialism’s massive social engineering project—though violent, racist, and thus clearly no model to reproduce—nevertheless illustrated one path toward utopia, however distasteful its object might have been.

With an interest in utopian hope, these historians would seem out of place in the 1980s. They operated in a milieu defined by the gradual triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy over “really existing socialism.” A wealth of broadly Western scholarship would lead us to believe that this triumph brought to many West Germans not only relief but also melancholy as it discredited utopian ambitions. By most accounts—certainly those written after the collapse of the twentieth century’s massive social engineering projects—utopia had become a hazardous idea with two equally bad faces. Its reception has vacillated between naïve idealism and dangerous engineering, between the golden chamber pots of Thomas More’s fictional society, for example, or the lemonade oceans and anti-lions of Charles Fourier’s Harmony on one side and the deadly social experiments of Hitler and Stalin on the other. Drawing their momentum from a homophonic pun that links the Greek word for “no place” [*οὐτόπος*] with another meaning “good place” [*eutopos*, where the Greek prefix εὖ means good], utopian projects have typically prioritized this idealized place as a destination or an object of pursuit which subordinates the pursuit itself. Thus the legitimation of horrific means like the concentration camps or gulags. In light of utopia’s recent past, intellectuals of the late twentieth century generally (and with good cause) discounted the Janus-faced concept. Arguments for the end

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<sup>1</sup> BGWA, Rundbrief 1988/3, “Projekt 1914 - Lehrer und Krieg,” 5.

of utopia in the wake of the Second World War<sup>2</sup> tended to accompany arguments for the collapse of modernism,<sup>3</sup> of socialism,<sup>4</sup> of ideology,<sup>5</sup> and of history itself.<sup>6</sup> With the notable exception of historian Samuel Moyn, who has identified a “last” utopia in the program of the human rights movement, the late twentieth century’s climate of disillusionment resoundingly condemned utopia to death.

Political theorist Susan Buck-Morss has described efforts to realize utopian projects on a mass scale as the “dream of the twentieth century.”<sup>7</sup> Though the content of this dream varied considerably between the century’s most disastrous utopian experiments—Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia—twentieth-century Europe nevertheless shared a commitment to pursuing sweeping revisions to the structure and function of society. Europeans grounded this commitment, on one hand, in optimism that the future could thoroughly improve the quality of human existence.<sup>8</sup> On the other, they rooted their investment in utopian projects in the will to pursue that future. They reinforced their agenda with an active and “heartfelt desire to make the world a better place,” as Samuel Moyn has claimed in his recent work on human rights as the last frontier of the twentieth century utopian project.<sup>9</sup> Europeans aspired to “social arrangements that [transcended] existing forms,” Buck-Morss noted.<sup>10</sup> These aspirations assumed as their object the totality of modern life—political, cultural, social, and economic—and operated not solely on the level of the conceptual but on the material level as well; they possessed great power to transform both the natural and the built world.

The twentieth century, however, has proven as effective at destroying these dreamworlds as it did at initially conjuring them.<sup>11</sup> Twentieth century dreams became dangerous when the passions behind them were mobilized instrumentally, turning the dreams against precisely those masses they originally intended to benefit. Even the twentieth century’s most promising utopian projects—the elimination of political oppression through mass sovereignty, the elimination of material poverty

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<sup>2</sup> The end of Eric Hobsbawm’s so-called “age of extremes” sounded its death knell. Eric J. Hobsbawm. *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994. See Mary Nolan. “Gender and Utopian Visions in a Post-Utopian Era: Americanism, Human Rights, Market Fundamentalism.” *Central European History* 44:1 (2011): 13–36; Joachim C. Fest. *Der zerstörte Traum: vom Ende des utopischen Zeitalters*. Berlin: Siedler, 1991; Russell Jacoby. *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*. New York: Basic Books, 1999; Russell Jacoby. “Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and the Anti-Utopian Refugees.” Jost Hermand and Klaus L. Berghahn, eds. *The Temptation of Hope: Utopian Thinking and Imagination from Thomas More to Ernst Bloch - and Beyond*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2011, 49-64.

<sup>3</sup> William W. Hagen. “Master Narratives Beyond Postmodernity: Germany’s ‘Separate Path’ in Historiographical-Philosophical Light.” *German Studies Review* 30:1 (1 February 2007): 1–32.

<sup>4</sup> C. M. Hann. *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*. New York: Routledge, 2002; “The Political Economy of Postsocialism.” *Slavic Review* 58:4 (1 December 1999): 756–793; Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999; Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn. “Post-Post Transition Theories: Walking on Multiple Paths.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (October 2008): 235–250.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Bell. *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. Glencoe: Free Press, 1960

<sup>6</sup> Lutz Niethammer and Dirk van Laak. *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* London: Verso, 1992; “Afterthoughts on Posthistoire.” *History and Memory* 1:1 (1 April 1989): 27–53; Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Buck-Morss. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000, ix

<sup>8</sup> Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, xi-xii

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Moyn. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010, 225

<sup>10</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, xi

<sup>11</sup> Buck-Morss takes the notion of a “dreamworld” from Benjamin, who placed it at the heart of his theory of modernity. Benjamin interprets this modernity as transient and always changing. Its fluidity threatens traditional culture “in a positive sense, because constant change allows hope that the future can be better.” Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, ix-xi.



through mass production, the cultivation of the creative capacities of society through mass culture—have often had darker consequences: the pursuit of mass sovereignty led to bellicose nationalism, mass production to human and ecological exploitation, and mass culture to the anaesthetization of its consumers.<sup>12</sup>

Already in the 1950s, the American political theorist Judith Shklar had augured the turn to fatalism in her doctoral dissertation. She identified the beginning of the downward spiral of Western political philosophy in Romanticism’s challenge to the optimism of the Enlightenment in the early nineteenth century. Of the promises of Western liberal democracy, Shklar wrote cynically that “we know too little to feel justified in social despair,” but “we know too much to fall into even the slightest utopianism.”<sup>13</sup> Just three years later, in 1960, the American sociologist Daniel Bell pronounced the end of ideology. The revolutionary impulses of Western radical intellectuals, which for a century and a half had transformed Western societies by propelling them to seek radical social and political alternatives had reached, in Bell’s words, “a dead end.”<sup>14</sup>

The New Left and the revolutionary moment of the 1960s tried to reverse the pessimism of the 1950s.<sup>15</sup> They deemed this discourse of the end of ideology insufficiently critical and thus premature, temporarily reviving hope in utopian programs.<sup>16</sup> Embracing Herbert Marcuse’s “Great Refusal,” the Student Movement came to understand its brand of antiauthoritarianism as both a challenge to autocracy and oppression as well as the emancipation of the individual.<sup>17</sup> The Alternative milieu pursued systems of critical self-management that appeared, as one radical suggested, as a “working utopia.”<sup>18</sup> Over the following decade, however, the programs of the New Left began to lose steam as they diverged along two troublesome paths. In some cases, the lodestars of 1960s led not to radical reform but to the far left militancy of the 1970s. Academics and public intellectuals of the Left watched in frustration as the Red Army Faction replaced Rudi Dutschke, as teach-ins gave way to terror. In other cases, proposals from the 1960s merely revealed themselves as dissatisfyingly piecemeal reform, to use the language of Karl Popper, rather than as utopian

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<sup>12</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, xi

<sup>13</sup> Judith Shklar. *After Utopia: the Decline of Political Faith*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, 271. See also George H. Sabine. “Review: Judith Shklar. After Utopia.” *The Philosophical Review* 67:4 (1 October 1958): 573–575.

<sup>14</sup> Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 393.

<sup>15</sup> Russell Jacoby recounts how the rise of the New Left in the early 1960s “buried talk of ‘the end of ideology’,” or so many believed. Donald Clark Hodges, for example, in his article “The End of ‘The End of Ideology,’” aimed to put to rest Daniel Bell’s 1960 argument that radical progressive ideology had become a thing of the past. Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, 6. See Donald Clark Hodges. “The End of ‘The End of Ideology.’” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 26:2 (1967): 135–146. Others like Samuel Moyn have highlighted the revival of utopian projects in the 1960s. They lobbied, Moyn writes, “for community at home, redeeming the United States from hollow consumerism, or ‘socialism with a human face’ in the Soviet empire, or further liberation from a so-called neocolonialism in the third world.” Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 3. As perhaps a first piece of evidence of this trend, however, see American sociologist C. Wright Mills’ “Letter to the New Left,” in which he gave weight to the identification of a nascent “New Left” as well as took to task those who mobilized the rhetoric of “the end of ideology.” C. Wright Mills. “Letter to the New Left.” *New Left Review* 1:5 (October 1960): 18–23.

<sup>16</sup> Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” 18–23; Herbert Marcuse. “The End of Utopia.” *Marxism, Revolution and Utopia Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume Six*. Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce, eds. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014, 249–263; Hodges, “The End of ‘The End of Ideology,’” 135–146.

<sup>17</sup> Sabine Von Dirke. *All Power to the Imagination!: The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, 33. On subjectivity and the 1960s, see also Richard W. McCormick. *Politics of the Self: Feminism and the Postmodern in West German Literature and Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn. *The Spirit of ’68 Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 206. On the Generation of 1968’s tendency to think in Manichaeic terms, with utopia as one of its poles, see Hans Kundnani. *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany’s 1968 Generation and the Holocaust*. London: Hurst & Co., 2009.

blueprints for large-scale social transformation.<sup>19</sup> Radicalism after the ‘60s came, at best, in quotation marks, or as what Pierre Bourdieu called “a cult of transgression without risk.”<sup>20</sup>

As the social and political promises of the 1960s fizzled, West Germans began to revisit an older postwar line of reasoning, one that regarded the politics of radical transformation as having proved reliable only in running roughshod over Europe in the previous three quarters of a century.<sup>21</sup> These Germans retreated into a conceptual paradigm that understood ideology to have revealed itself as a farce. Ideology thus yielded, once again, to fatalism, and West Germans fell into what one Hungarian Marxist nearly seventy years earlier presciently called the romanticism of disillusionment.<sup>22</sup>

For many, the politically cataclysmic year of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union confirmed that “radicalism and the utopian spirit that sustains it...[had] ceased to be major political or even intellectual forces.”<sup>23</sup> The “mass democratic myth of modernity,” as Buck-Morss has labeled it—that expansive social project that pursued political, personal, and material happiness for the whole of society—deflated when history reneged on the promises of socialism, and the oligarchies of advanced capitalism tightened their grip on both society and nature. Though consumer culture continued to operate for some as a kind of personal utopia—it fulfilled the consumer’s material if not intellectual, social, or emotional needs—it led to political cynicism, to disillusionment that it was “no longer thought necessary to guarantee to the collective that which [was] pursued by the individual.”<sup>24</sup>

Western liberalism and advanced capitalism had prevailed, driving what seemed like the last nail into the coffin of ideological alternatives and concluding the debate over “the end of ideology” that Daniel Bell had opened nearly thirty years earlier.<sup>25</sup> With the collapse of state socialism in the

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<sup>19</sup> Karl R. Popper. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966. The economic crisis and recession of the early 1970s prompted a tempering of the utopian energies of the 1960s. This hope faded into mere projections of the anxieties about the present onto the near future. On the anti-utopianism of the 1970s, see David Pinder. “In Defence of Utopian Urbanism: Imagining Cities after the ‘End of Utopia.’” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 84:3/4 (1 January 2002): 229–241, esp. 232; Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann. *Utopias and the Millennium*. London: Reaktion Books, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis Soron. “Back to the Future: The Contemporary Left and the Politics of Utopia.” *Labour/Le Travail* 47 (1 April 2001): 207. See also Pierre Bourdieu. *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Fest, *Der zerstörte Traum*. See also Jacoby’s book written ten years after Fest: Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*.

<sup>22</sup> György Lukács. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1971, 112ff.

<sup>23</sup> Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, ix-x.

<sup>25</sup> This period marked, for Jacoby, “the end of the end of the end of ideology,” a comical phrase he uses to make a case in support of Daniel Bell. Jacoby offers a succinct overview of the considerable literature written on the genealogy of “the end of ideology” (2-5). He suggests that the phrase “end of ideology” may first have appeared in a 1946 issue of *Combat*, a resistance newspaper edited by Albert Camus. Just a few years later, H. Stuart Hughes published on the mood of leftist European intellectuals, who realized to their shock that they preferred capitalism to communism. Judith Shklar, in a book chapter titled “The End of Radicalism,” argued that radicalism required “a ‘minimum of utopian faith’ that people can transform their social environment” but that socialism no longer has anything to say to reinforce that faith. In 1960 Seymour Martin Lipset declared that “Politics is now boring” and that the “very triumph of the democratic social revolution in the West ends domestic politics for those intellectuals who must have ideologies of utopias to motivate them to political action.” In the same year, Daniel Bell’s *The End of Ideology* described nineteenth century ideologies as “exhausted” and identified the consensus among western intellectuals to accept the welfare state, desire decentralized power, a system of mixed economy and political pluralism. Jacoby also invokes Raymond Aron’s *The Opium of the Intellectuals* in which Aron referenced the “end of the age of ideology” in order to suggest that the days in which ideology meant revolution and utopianism had passed: “These were finished,” Aron argued. “No one could pretend that an alternative to advanced capitalism existed.” See H. Stuart Hughes. “The End of Political Ideology.” *Measure* 2 (Spring

East, the “bright hopes” invested in the century’s major social and political projects—from national self-determination to internationalist socialism—disclosed themselves, in practice, as “dark tragedies.”<sup>26</sup> The world had fallen into a full-fledged crisis of utopianism, if not *tout court* then at least utopianism of the political variety, the conservative German historian Joachim Fest declared.<sup>27</sup> Writing as the dust settled from the fall of the Berlin Wall, the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama echoed Fest, proposing that the global victory of liberal democracy had finally punctuated the long sentence of humanity’s political development.<sup>28</sup> Conservative British prime minister Margaret Thatcher bundled up these ideas neatly in her pronouncement that “there is no alternative.” The moral utopia of human rights that arose in place of political utopias, Samuel Moyn has suggested, faced the difficult challenge of defining “the good life” in a manner that transcended politics and putting forth a program for its realization despite being “ill-equipped by the fact of [its] suprapolitical birth to do so.”<sup>29</sup>

By the penultimate decade of the century, then, utopian thinking was decidedly on the defensive, indeed, almost inconceivable. The failure of totalizing utopian projects, those dogmatic mediators of a vision for a better future, indicated to many that hope—the very spirit that had motivated these projects—had died too. Anyone who still holds on to that spirit today, the intellectual historian Russell Jacoby has emphasized, “is widely considered out to lunch or out to kill.”<sup>30</sup> A coalition of Western scholars and public intellectuals observed, disgruntled, as the revolutionary potential of Marxism dissipated and Western society, once more, succumbed to the allure of an “ending myth.” They had become distracted from real and present possibilities of liberal democracy for building a better world.<sup>31</sup> A malaise resting on an apathetic politics exposed the uninspiring choice “between the status quo or something worse. Other alternatives,” Jacoby has argued flatly, “do not seem to exist.”<sup>32</sup> The only new growth in this “long winter of neoconservative reaction and capitalist triumphalism” of the late twentieth century was a “pervasive sense of impotence and despair.”<sup>33</sup> Radicalism had shown itself to be a political illusion, and as the century drew to a close, what remained of political creativity gave way to weariness, resignation, and withdrawal.

Writing at the same time as Fest and Fukuyama and at the tail end of Thatcher’s reign, German historian Lutz Niethammer chronicled the Western obsession with the end of history in his book *Posthistoire*. Niethammer ended the book, however, on a more sanguine note than his contemporaries, suggesting that the discourse of the end of history stood simply as a “disenchanted postscript to the nineteenth-century philosophy of history.” A more resilient “quest for a critical alternative,” Niethammer explained, would “dispense with its ideal of greatness and power” and place “the traditional hierarchy of historical tasks ‘the right side up’” in a practice Niethammer and others called “history from below.” The proponents of this grassroots approach to writing history, among whom the historians of the Berlin History Workshop counted themselves, claimed it could

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1951); Shklar, *After Utopia*; Seymour Martin Lipset. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1960; Raymond Aron. *The Opium of the Intellectuals*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1957.

<sup>26</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Fest, *Der zerstörte Traum*.

<sup>28</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History*. This book draws on Fukuyama’s essay, “The End of History?” published in 1989. See Francis Fukuyama. “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18; “Reply to My Critics” *The National Interest* 18 (Winter 1989-90): 21–28.

<sup>29</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 9, 213–214.

<sup>30</sup> Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, xi.

<sup>31</sup> Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.

<sup>32</sup> Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, xi–xii.

<sup>33</sup> Soron, “Back to the Future,” 203.

resist the allure and melodrama of the ending myth and instead, according to Niethammer, “arrive at a realistic assessment of the space for action within and against existing social structures.”<sup>34</sup>

Niethammer was not alone in making this assessment. At first muffled behind the din of an elegizing chorus announcing the end of ideology, of history, and of utopian ambitions, a few discordant West German voices began to speak out in support of radical new visions for society. These West German optimists, who form the subject of this study, resisted the temptation of the ending myth and gave voice to new visions for Germany’s future. Three West German groups stand out for their broad popularity and sustained impact:

- The Berlin History Workshop [*Geschichtswerkstatt*]<sup>34</sup>—a collection of amateur and professional historians who formed an official association in 1981—sought to liberate the process of researching and writing history from the rigid, hierarchical confines of German universities. They attempted, instead, to bring the historian’s craft into Berlin’s local neighborhoods in order to enable ordinary Germans to narrate their own histories.
- The German Green Party, in an effort to endow German citizens with greater political agency, practiced localized plebiscitary policy making. Formally established in 1980, the party won its first federal representation just three years later. With a great deal of momentum at both the local and the national level, the Greens immediately brought their grassroots political practices to numerous cultural projects—museums, monuments, community centers, for example—that all sought to democratize German society by turning the cultural encounters of its citizens into a catechism of radical democracy.
- A loose collection of German artists of public space created art installations with ordinary objects in ordinary spaces—residential sidewalks, empty lots, streetlights—that prompted passersby to reevaluate their relationships to the people and topography of their daily lives. These artists challenged what was commonly understood as art’s “territory.” For the ways they made central to their work the project of exploring, overturning, and rewriting the boundaries of where art belonged and what it sought to do there—that is, for the way their art intervened in public space—I call them “spatial interventionists.” Ironically, these artists used the spatiality of their artworks to shift attention away from its fixed physical location toward its fluid, virtual, discursive existence.<sup>35</sup>

These three groups—historians, politicians, and artists—are, admittedly, curious bedfellows. While each has garnered scholarly attention, they tend to be treated independently. The Berlin History Workshop has taken its place in the evolution of German historiography, for example. It contributed to the 1980s critique of the people-less structuralism of Bielefeld-era social history and illustrated the popularization of the subjects and methods of the history of everyday life.<sup>36</sup> The German Greens have offered a study in the transition from protest group to political establishment, a test case for Robert Michels’s iron law of oligarchy, in which the exigencies of parliamentary power

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<sup>34</sup> Niethammer and van Laak. *Posthistoire*, 149-151.

<sup>35</sup> Miwon Kwon. “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity.” *October* 80 (1 April 1997): 95. See also Kwon’s longer engagement with this theme: Miwon Kwon. *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> For an overview, see Roger Fletcher. “Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and Its Critics.” *German Studies Review* 7: 3 (1 October 1984): 451–480; Hans Medick. “Missionaries in the Rowboat? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History.” *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Alf Lüdtke, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 41-71.

dismantle democratic ambition into political alienation.<sup>37</sup> The Greens have shaped the history of the postwar German Left, in which a set of unsatisfying reformist programs replaced revolutionary platforms in the late 1950s and left protesters and activists to seek a parliamentary voice in new arenas.<sup>38</sup> And they have served as a capstone in the history of an experimental politics of countercultural imagination, one that stretches from the radical hopes of the 1960s through the success, institutionalization, and mellowing of many of the New Social Movements of the 1970s—the peace movement, anti-nuclear movement, women’s movement, and environmental movement.<sup>39</sup> The artists of public space have played a role in the story of the democratization of museum access in the 1970s and ‘80s<sup>40</sup> and in a generational narrative about the overturning of centuries-old conventions of monument-making, challenged in the late 1980s by renewed debates about the status Holocaust memory.<sup>41</sup>

Curious bedfellows as these three groups may be, together they offer a window onto the development of a new German milieu at the end of the twentieth century: a milieu that championed radical grassroots democracy by giving ordinary citizens opportunities to create socially-significant cultural products like museums and monuments; a milieu that decentralized the creative process, locating it in the spaces of everyday life in order to make it widely accessible; and a milieu that absorbed from the environmental movement the concept of sustainability, which demanded that any alternative to existing society be both enduring and adaptable. Through their efforts to resist an increasing sense of political disenfranchisement, social alienation, and cultural impotence in the late twentieth century, these groups reveal that German interest in radical alternatives to existing society had not, in fact, evaporated. Against the claim that the second half of the twentieth century spiraled into political and cultural apathy, that ending myths won, the history of these three groups demonstrates that West Germans rallied behind a collection of utopian cultural practices that pursued the radical and sustainable democratization of politics and culture in the topographies and temporalities of everyday life. These West Germans occasioned the popular uptake in Germany of a new conception of utopia that attempted to reconcile West German ideals with West German realities in what French theorist Michel de Certeau called the practices of everyday life. They not

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<sup>37</sup> E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, and Benoît Rihoux, eds. *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-Roots Democracy?* Burlington: Ashgate, 2008; Margit Mayer and John Ely. *The German Greens: Paradox between Movement and Party*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998; E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker. *Between Protest and Power: The Green Party in Germany*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992. Michels—or, more precisely, the fear of the unstoppable trend toward increasing elitism, bureaucracy, and corruption that Michels registered in democratic institutions over time—is ever-present both in historical work on the Greens and in the Greens’ own thinking. On the iron law of oligarchy, see Robert Michels. *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: Dover Publications, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski. *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; E. Gene Frankland. “The Greening of the German Left.” *The Review of Politics* 56: 4 (1 October 1994): 813–815; John Ely. “Green Politics and the Transformation of the Left in Germany.” *New German Critique*, 72 (1 October 1997): 177–192.

<sup>39</sup> Von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination!*

<sup>40</sup> Petra Hornig. *Kunst im Museum und Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2011; Florian Matzner, ed. *Public Art: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001; Volker Plagemann and Babette Peters, eds. *Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Anstöße der 80er Jahre*. Köln: DuMont, 1989; Henriette Steube. *Kunst in der Stadt 1945 bis 1995: eine Dokumentation zur Kunst im öffentlichen Raum in Hildesheim*. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1996; Walter Grasskamp. *Unerwünschte Monumente: moderne Kunst im Stadtraum*. München: Schreiber, 1989; Walter Grasskamp. *Die unbewältigte Moderne: Kunst und Öffentlichkeit*. München: C.H. Beck, 1989.

<sup>41</sup> Corinna Tomberger. *Das Gegendenkmal: Avantgardekunst, Geschichtspolitik und Geschlecht in der bundesdeutschen Erinnerungskultur*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007; Christoph Heinrich. *Strategien des Erinnerns: der veränderte Denkmalbegriff in der Kunst der achtziger Jahre*. München: S. Schreiber, 1993; Detlef Hoffmann. “Erinnerungsarbeit der ‘Zweiten und Dritten’ Generation und ‘Spurensuche’ in der zeitgenössischen Kunst.” *Kritische Berichte* 2 (1988): 31–46.

only envisioned a new German society but attempted to enact their vision. In doing so, they reclaimed utopian hope from the dustbin of historical ideas.

For its pronounced difference from utopian projects earlier in the twentieth century, this peculiar utopian form of the 1980s and 90s deserves its own descriptor: I call it a “sustainable utopia.” It was utopian in that it proposed a normative agenda for a different version Germany society, and it understood this iteration as a radical improvement upon Germany’s status quo. Importantly, however, in opposition to the totalizing social engineering projects whose bloody impossibility the twentieth century had so thoroughly revealed, the utopian projects of the 1980s and ‘90s did not take as their object society as a whole. Rather, they sought to enact modest but concrete steps toward realizing equality, peace, and justice in a determinate part of it.<sup>42</sup>

The notion of a modest utopia would seem a paradox. A variety of researchers (not all, or even primarily, historians) writing in the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, have argued to the contrary. Among the foremost proponents of such an interpretive move is historian Jay Winter who separates from the “major utopias” of Hitler and Stalin, which left a mountain of victims in their wake, what he calls “minor utopias.” Winter writes against the “very fashionable tendency among students and scholars” to treat any “notion of a different kind of international order, or an alternative vision of society...as the stuff of children or madmen, or the irrelevant recollection of totalitarian blueprints discredited long ago.” As a counterbalance to this trend, he advocates the investigation of the “visionary temperament” of those who engage in the modest work of imagining new possibilities for the world and whose works are illuminating, even should they fail.<sup>43</sup> Characteristic of minor utopias is their simultaneous use of a language of universalism in their efforts to transform society while also embracing “a particular ideology, the interests and outlook of discrete social and political formations.”<sup>44</sup> Minor utopian projects, Winter suggests, are those which “aim not at the total eradication of social conflict or the construction of an ideal city, but at partial transformations, steps on the way to a less violent and unjust society.” He counts among these minor utopian projects the 1937 Paris Exposition [*Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*], the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and the vision of “globalization-from-below” after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These projects differ from the standard utopian exemplars of the twentieth century in that they are neither totalitarian nor merely reformist; that is, they cannot be implemented through either “political thuggery or political compromise.” Minor utopias are not guaranteed to succeed by virtue of their modesty, Winter cautions, though he also highlights that they have yet to “[offer] blueprints to murderers.”<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, sociologist Erik Olin Wright has examined what he terms “real utopias.”<sup>46</sup> Acknowledging the ostensible contradiction in terms, he notes that utopian projects “are fantasies, morally inspired designs for a humane world of peace and harmony unconstrained by realistic considerations of human psychology and social feasibility.”<sup>47</sup> He nevertheless intends to walk the line between dream and practice, suggesting that

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<sup>42</sup> J. M. Winter. *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 208-209.

<sup>43</sup> Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, 205.

<sup>44</sup> Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, 206.

<sup>45</sup> Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, 208-209.

<sup>46</sup> German socialist and political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth has suggested that the term “real utopia” originated with Ernst Bloch. See Wolfgang Abendroth “Aufgaben einer deutschen Linken,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 580, originally published in Horst Krüger, ed. *Was ist heute links? Thesen und Theorien zu einer politischen Position*. Munich: P. List, 1963, 130-157. Ernst Bloch. *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Erik Olin Wright. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso, 2010, 5.

what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions....Nurturing clear-sighted understandings of what it would take to create social institutions free of oppression is part of creating a political will for radical social change to reduce oppression. A vital belief in a utopian ideal may be necessary to motivate people to set off on the journey from the status quo in the first place, even though the likely destination may fall short of the utopian ideal.<sup>48</sup>

While utopian abstractions risk leading an optimistic humanity into the lion's den of resignation, Wright suggests that society should instead set off in pursuit of "utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible way stations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change."<sup>49</sup> This is what he means by the "realness" of real utopias. As (quite disparate) examples, he volunteers the project of implementing a universal basic income, bottom-up or participatory municipal budgeting efforts, the worker-owned cooperatives of the Mondragon conglomerate in Spain, and the popularly-sourced internet encyclopedia Wikipedia.

Others have recently taken up this concept of a real, modest, or minor utopia as well, with only small differences in vocabulary.<sup>50</sup> Journalist Daniel Singer rejected the "reactionary common sense of the 'post-socialist' era, whose gore-drenched images of misfired communist utopianism serve 'obvious political purposes - to frighten people, to warn them that any radical resistance, any serious search for change, is bound to end in a bloodbath'."<sup>51</sup> Against this trend, he argued that intentional radical change remained a possibility. He called this possibility a "realistic utopia:" realistic in that

it must manifest itself in present struggles, and must be tempered by an awareness of the necessarily slow and complicated nature of social transformation. At one level, this means that the utopian aspirations of the left must not ride on the impossible prospect of a total and instantaneous revolutionary transformation of existing society. At another level, it means that would-be revolutionaries cannot endlessly defer their own utopian goals, but must strive to realize them in their

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<sup>48</sup> Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 6

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 6

<sup>50</sup> It bears noting that the notion of a concrete utopia is hardly new. Ernst Bloch, for example, differentiated between the abstract utopias of idealistic reformers and what he understood as the concrete utopias of Marxism. Though they differed in their relationship to social reality, what linked these two concepts was their "utopian intention," or what Bloch termed the "principle of hope." Bloch was fairly hazy about the long-term objectives of his "concrete utopia." He did, however, claim that it should have three features: unity, permanence, and a final goal [*Endzweck*]. The "unity" of a concrete utopia meant the reconciliation of its internal social contradictions, which would result in social harmony. By permanence, he meant the endurance of this moment of reconciliation and harmony. The *Endzweck* consisted of the realization of these two conditions. Concrete utopia, for Bloch, lacked positive content; he understood it, rather, as a "processive model." It mandated passage from one mode of existence to another. It served as a set of guidelines for an existence whose essence was first temporal rather than phenomenological. Art, in the pursuit of a concrete utopia, became particularly valuable to Bloch for its ability to visualize the possibilities dormant in reality. Bloch called art that fulfilled this function *l'art pour l'espoire*, or art for the sake of hope. See Klaus L Berghahn. "'Concrete Utopia' and 'Exact Fantasy.' Utopian Thinking and Imagination in Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*." Jost Hermand and Klaus L. Berghahn, eds. *The Temptation of Hope: Utopian Thinking and Imagination from Thomas More to Ernst Bloch - and Beyond*. Aisthesis: Bielefeld, 2011, 67-76. See also the introduction to *The Principle of Hope*: Ernst Bloch. *The Principle of Hope*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986, 1-20.

<sup>51</sup> Soron, "Back to the Future," 212. See Daniel Singer. *Whose Millennium?: Theirs or Ours?* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999, 236.

ongoing practices and social relationships, such that ‘the instrument of the present should somehow prefigure, foreshadow the future’.<sup>52</sup>

Another scholar, in a similar vein, advocated a “critical utopia” that would combat political and social apathy by offering an alternative vision for society while also cultivating a critical culture of contestation around that alternative vision.<sup>53</sup> A group of anthropologists has labeled as “grounded utopias” those projects that both aim for an ideal destination and designate a path toward it that traverses “real places, embodied by living people” who are informed by an actual past and whose interrelationship is maintained by quotidian interactions.<sup>54</sup>

These attempts to reconceptualize a more modest utopia have aligned well with a wave of recent scholarship that warns against premature historiographical melodrama. Some have highlighted how flagging faith that the future might differ in positive ways from the present derived from the myopia of post-socialism. The collapse of “real existing socialism” has been mobilized to defend, even champion, Margaret Thatcher’s argument that no alternative exists to Western capitalism and liberal democracy.<sup>55</sup> But French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has staked the fate of the Left precisely on its ability to resist these fatalistic politics and the melancholy of anti-utopianism. The task of the Left, after all, is to nurture “the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions.”<sup>56</sup> Literary critic Andreas Huyssen has taken a different tack by highlighting that “the discourse of the end of utopia is as endemic to the utopian imagination as its visions of other worlds, other times or other states of mind.”<sup>57</sup> Huyssen understands hope for a better life as a stubborn and resilient reflex that will continue to sustain the promises of utopia through adverse conditions. In his book *Utopistics*, sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein dismisses the hope-slandering of the late twentieth century entirely and lobbies for the rehabilitation of utopian promises. He does not, admittedly, aspire to “paradise on earth,” and, as a fellow sociologist notes, Wallerstein’s book’s neologistic title—*Utopistics*—intends to confine and redirect attention away from the negative, dangerous connotations of the traditional utopianism of the twentieth century. Instead, he aims for “the sober, rational and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human creativity.”<sup>58</sup> Wallerstein, Huyssen, Bourdieu and the other scholars who have participated in this redefinition of utopia do not stand alone either in their hope for hope or in their investment in what Wallerstein has called alternative “zones of creativity.”

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<sup>52</sup> Soron, “Back to the Future,” 215; Daniel Singer. *Whose Millennium?*, 252. Singer, here, may have draw inspiration from the philosopher John Rawls who used the same language of “realistic utopia” in his *Law of Peoples*. See John Rawls. *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, especially 7, 11-12.

<sup>53</sup> Ashlie Lancaster. “Instantiating Critical Utopia.” *Utopian Studies* 11:1 (1 January 2000): 109–19. Here, Lancaster draws on Seyla Benhabib’s understanding of the transfigurative function of utopia. Benhabib describes this transfigurative quality as one that prompts “a radical rupture with the present, and that in such a rupture a new and imaginative constellation of values and meanings of the present takes place.” See Seyla Benhabib. “The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics.” *New German Critique* 35 (1 April 1985): 84; also Seyla Benhabib. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Lancaster mobilizes Benhabib to criticize Richard Rorty’s concept of a liberal utopia. This utopian form changes continually and thus lacks a point of rupture or fundamental transfiguration as in Benhabib. See Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Price, Donald Nonini, and Erich Fox Tree. “Grounded Utopian Movements: Subjects of Neglect.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81: 1 (1 December 2008): 128

<sup>55</sup> Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, xi-xii; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*; Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. *Utopistics: Or Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: New Press, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> Andreas Huyssen. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge, 1995, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Wallerstein, *Utopistics*, 1-2. See also Soron, “Back to the Future,” 209-210.



A robust popular instantiation of this concept of a modest utopia can be identified in the cultural political agenda of these grassroots groups of the late twentieth century. Their peculiar agenda for German society offered not only a modestly utopian *vision* for a future deferred; at its core lay an immanent *practical* component that attempted to realize this modest utopia in the present. Theirs was not a utopia of ends but of means. It operated as what Canadian regional planner Leonie Sandercock described as “an *approach toward*,” or as a “Utopia in the becoming.” These grassroots actors prescribed their modest utopian agendas “not as a state to be realized but as a movement toward, with utopia here conceived as a social project concerned with ‘living together in difference’ that is open to dialogue, change and contestation. This is in contrast to utopia’s traditional inability to deal with questions of difference without collapsing them into the same,” geographer David Pinder has explained.<sup>59</sup>

Curious though an immanent utopia might sound, the logic that undergirded it had, by the 1980s, already begun to find expression in the concept of environmental sustainability. The idea of sustainability—which, as a twentieth-century idea, had come into vogue only in the 1980s<sup>60</sup>—set as its project for the world not a “fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs.”<sup>61</sup> The three grassroots groups at the heart of this story shared a similar commitment to programs that were rooted simultaneously in both present and future practices, which they understood together—much like the imperative of environmental sustainability—to be both enduring and adaptable. Though these groups themselves never explicitly mobilized the terminology of sustainable utopia and used the language of both utopia and sustainability only occasionally, we can make sense of their cultural political agendas as well as the large German cultural milieu to which they contributed by viewing them through this lens.

This dissertation charts the crystallization of this concept of a “sustainable utopia” on the ground in West Germany from its first moment of conceptual possibility in the early 1980s through various—variously fitful—attempts to realize it over the subsequent two decades. The histories of

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<sup>59</sup> See Leonie Sandercock. *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*. Chichester: J. Wiley, 1998, 8. Quoted in Pinder, “In Defence of Utopian Urbanism,” 238. See also Angelika Bammer. *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s*. New York: Routledge, 1991, 7; Lucy Sargisson. *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*. London: Routledge, 2000. Joachim Fest, too, concerns himself with the temporality of utopia, distinguishing it from what he calls *Raum-Utopien*, that is utopias of space, which he understood as an outmoded concept that seeks a perfect place, a “Nowhere.” In the eighteenth century, however, utopian time, which advanced an ideal world historical progression, replaced utopian space as the primary understanding of utopia. Its conceptual epitome was to be found in Marx’s historical materialism. Fest argued, however, that by the end of the twentieth century, utopian time no longer offered a viable political alternative. On the negotiation between utopian space and utopian time, see Fest, *Der zerstörte Traum*, esp. 16-18.

<sup>60</sup> The twentieth-century notion of sustainability burst into political and popular consciousness with the 1987 meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development. This notion had an older sibling, however, which dated to the nineteenth century and whose agenda was much more insidious. Sustainability as a nineteenth-century concept, particularly in Germany, emerged out of foresting practices that aimed to extract the maximum amount of renewable resources from the environment without completely destroying the forest. Sustainability meant the greatest degree to which the environment could be depleted but yet also sustained. See, for example, Paul Warde. “The Invention of Sustainability.” *Modern Intellectual History* 8:1 (April 2011): 153–170; Joachim Radkau. *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*. Thomas Dunlap, tr. Washington, D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2008, chapters 3 and 5; S. Ravi Rajan. *Modernizing Nature Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development 1800-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, chapter 2. On the rise of the twentieth-century concept of sustainability, see also World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

<sup>61</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>, 17

the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, the German Green Party, and the spatial interventionists serve as a set of variations on this theme. Together, these histories tell a story about renewed flirtation with radical hope in an era thought to have buried it.

This narrative unfolds over two parts. It begins in the early 1980s when trumpeting utopian agendas still invited snickers or scowls. The concept of a sustainable utopia, thus, plays little role in the first half of the project. Instead, part one traces how each of these three groups came to embrace a set of foundational values that enabled them to think, once again, in utopian terms. Newly-constituted or only weakly associated in the first years of the 1980s, the three young groups cared deeply about the local communities in which they operated. They opposed the tendency of their respective societal spheres—academic life, political life, and aesthetic life—to operate in deeply hierarchical ways. To combat this predisposition, they each championed the pursuit of new, decentralized, more democratic geographies of cultural engagement, or “alternative public spheres.” Each group, independently, came to understand radically new uses of local space in the execution of their cultural projects as the primary medium through which they could have the greatest impact on German society. The first three chapters trace the development of each of these groups individually as they coalesced around this shared goal in the early 1980s.

Chapter one introduces this focus on localized, democratic engagement with public space through the work of two artists: Joseph Beuys and Gunter Demnig. Together Beuys and Demnig represent both the diverse demographics and the common investments of the spatial interventionists as they began in the early 1980s to take issue with what they saw as the passivity of art in public space. For them, traditional public artists had hitherto only *occupied* public space, in various ways; the point, however, was to *intervene* in it. Art that intervened in public space meant many different things to these postwar German artists, but for all of them the act of intervention became their most urgent social, cultural, and political task. They understood their art installations as reconfiguring the range of possible experiences of public space in order to generate a more democratic sense of investment in and agency over that space. This form of spatial engagement took a fundamentally discursive form. Beuys, Demnig, and the other spatial interventionists understood popular civic engagement as predicated on opportunities for dialogue about how ordinary people used space in their everyday lives. West Germany, they believed, desperately needed more of these opportunities. By creating a new kind of public art that aimed to render the mundane experience of public space self-conscious, participatory, discursive, and even emancipatory, these artists created a foundation for more radical—indeed—utopian demands for the aesthetics of public space.

Chapter two follows the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* in its earliest years. It charts the birth of a German grassroots historical movement, which had its origins not only locally in Berlin, but also nationally and internationally. The group became the beneficiary—though not always consciously—of efforts already undertaken by historians, both professional and amateur, in England and Sweden to destabilize an exclusive, hierarchical historical profession. In opposition to traditional scholarship, which they understood to focus too much on the history of social and political structures, of famous men, of policy, and of large-scale diplomatic conflicts—that is, top-down history—they instead advocated “history from below.” The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* took a particular interest in filling in gaps in West Germany’s understanding of how National Socialism operated at the level of the mundane. The group drew inspiration from recent historiographical arguments for researching *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life, as well as theoretical scholarship that called for new attitudes toward the social power of space and the production of authority. Through a series of local historical research projects that employed professional and amateur historians as well as community residents, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* attempted to tell the history of Berlin through its local spaces. In doing so, it aimed to use history to advance a radically democratic intellectual project.

Chapter three traces the development of the German Green Party, which positioned itself as an alternative to West Germany's political status quo. The chapter explains how the Greens put creative new uses of local space at the heart of their program to implement radical grassroots democratic and environmentally-conscious practices in West Germany. The chapter focuses on their cultural programs, which in many ways remained sheltered from the immediate exigencies of electoral politics and so offered a more flexible medium for working through some of their knottier agendas. By exploring the rambling and disorganized but passionately-articulated theoretical framework the Greens placed at the heart of their first attempts to define a cultural program, it reveals that culture and aesthetics mattered a great deal to the Greens, even in their earliest days. This argument runs contrary to conventional historiography as well as to charges, leveled both by the Greens' contemporaries and from within the party ranks itself, that claim the Greens had little concern for cultural issues. Indeed, the early Greens' conception of a rigorous, effective environmental policy in fact hinged on their idea of and support for culture. And central to the Green cultural program was the placement of art, aesthetics, and culture writ large into new—both newly-built and never-before-used—local spaces. These components of “Green” culture, together, would prove pivotal in the party's efforts to create a Germany that was not only “Green,” but also sustainably so.

The second part of the dissertation takes up the years that bookended the world-historical events of 1989 and '90. For different reasons, the late-1980s brought to the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, the German Green Party, and the spatial interventionists a crisis of purpose that prompted them to reevaluate their priorities and redefine their cultural agendas. Despite the diverse content of their cultural platforms, each group independently reformulated for itself similar conceptual foundations. Their attentiveness to Germany's localized cultural environments made them particularly receptive to the idea of sustainability, which had been popularized after the convening of the World Commission on Environment and Development in the middle of the decade. Though they did not always marshal the language of sustainability explicitly, they nevertheless transposed its initially environmental logic—with its utopian imperative—into the key of culture. Their pursuit of a sustainable culture changed the way these groups understood the timeline of their work. They could not effect meaningful change through finite, short-term goals; rather, they needed to approach their efforts as an ongoing project, structured to be self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and adaptable. Theirs became a renewable, future-oriented cultural movement in the present. This realization marked not only the continued vitality of optimistic radicalism during this period but also a reconceptualization of the idea of a utopia itself: sustainable utopia had become imaginable. By charting the shift from an interest in the democratization of local space to an interest in cultural programs that would use this space to ensure the continuous realization of these groups' agendas in the future, the second part of the dissertation demonstrates that both utopian hopes and utopian projects were far from dead as the century approached its last decade.

Chapter four traces how the German Greens developed a sustainable utopian program as they worked through a series of controversies that confronted the party in the late 1980s and early '90s. The party faced substantial internal disagreement over the constitution and objectives of the party that had pitted environmental fundamentalists against political realists. While they argued on the national political stage over more conspicuous environmental policies, away from the spotlight they engaged the question of what it meant to foster a “Green” culture in Germany. Though the Greens undertook a wide range of cultural efforts at the end of the twentieth century, two projects represent their attempts to realize both the content and methods of this Green culture in practice: first, their involvement in the creation of Berlin's Active Museum, an attempt to build a museum to the city's Nazi past that would involve its visitors intimately in the ongoing construction of its form and intellectual content rather than offering a passive, didactic museum-going experience; and,

second, their vigorous opposition to the establishment of Berlin’s German Historical Museum, Helmut Kohl’s museological “gift” to the city of Berlin, which aimed to bring the artifacts and narratives of Germany’s long history under one roof. The Greens’ contributions to these two projects reveal the party’s reimagination of the topography, temporality, and agency of traditional cultural practices in Germany. The party argued that privileging the spaces, timeframes, and actors of everyday life served as the means for creating a self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and adaptable radical grassroots democratic culture.

Chapter five follows the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* [BGW] as it, too, engaged in sustainable utopian cultural work while also struggling to manage the effects that its early success had generated. Its creation of the Mobile Museum—a transportable museum housed in a double-decker bus that would display the group’s research projects—represented the culmination of the BGW’s historical project. The museum took historical exploration out of the confines of the university and put it in the hands of ordinary people, in the spaces and timeframes of their everyday lives. Through the museum, the BGW attempted to implement a historical practice that would radically alter the demographics of those writing Germany’s history. And by giving ordinary people opportunities to trace clear causal connections between the past and the present, the BGW hoped also to give them the skills to chart a causal path from the ideals of the present to the realities of the future. The Mobile Museum, however, met an untimely demise as vandals destroyed it beyond repair in chaos following West Germany’s 1990 World Cup victory. Before its complete destruction, however, the Mobile Museum also helped the (West) Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* form a bridge to East Germany through a series of exhibits it brought to the other side of the Berlin Wall. This partnership with the east would prove short-lived, though, as the BGW favored its autonomy over collaboration with eastern grassroots historical groups, especially after the fall of the Wall. This intransigence, amplified by interpersonal discontent, would spell the end of the group’s heyday. The BGW slowly unraveled in the years surrounding German reunification, and with it went its sustainable utopian historical program.

The artists and their utopian aesthetic proved perhaps the most resilient of all three groups, maintaining their grasp on the emancipatory potential of space. Chapter six charts the explosion of spatial interventionist artwork in Germany in the late 1980s and early ‘90s. These artists made use of a milieu that had everyone talking about Holocaust commemoration. In an effort to rethink the limits and potential of Holocaust monuments, the spatial interventionists began to create novel memorial forms that resisted traditional monument styles. Instead of large, singular, centrally-located, government sponsored monuments, they began to craft networks of small, inconspicuous mini-monuments scattered across a large territory. These monuments could only be comprehended by moving in and around them. Their message took a dialogic form; their commemorative efficacy stemmed from the conversations they generated among visitors and the way those conversations guided visitors’ relationships to the surrounding topography. In initiating dynamic memorial projects that offered ongoing opportunities for ordinary people to contribute to their expansion—rather than relying on governmental inertia or the work of a single artist—the spatial interventionists put into place a series of internationally popular memorials whose peculiar commemorative agenda has managed to survive for nearly three decades despite fundamental changes to German political, social, and cultural contexts around them.

The novel cultural practices of these three grassroots organizations, however, were never promised success simply on account of their modesty. The outcomes of their flirtations with utopia rarely measured up to the hopes invested in them. Indeed, faced with sea changes to the international political landscape and the rapid expansion of their constituencies to include sixteen million East Germans alongside more pedestrian concerns like funding difficulties and interpersonal conflicts, these groups and their cultural programs weathered the last decade of the twentieth

century with limited success. After the Green Party's dismal results in reunified Germany's first Bundestag election and their subsequent reform and rebranding efforts, they realized that the path to success led through collaboration with the Social Democratic Party. Their realist faction had won, and with the institutionalization of the party and the practical limits of political power came a tempering of their radical cultural program. They largely abandoned utopia in order to retain parliamentary seats. The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, which had focused most of its energy on offering novel narrations of Germany's Nazi past, fell largely into irrelevance as engagement with Holocaust history became increasingly mainstream. And it struggled to integrate the historians of everyday life [*Alltagshistoriker*] from former East Germany. Its utopian program for historical engagement faded with it. The artists, however, held strong, and in reunified Germany their artworks continue to generate considerable public interest. The unique grassroots spatial decentralization of their artworks proved the most stable element of all of the undertakings of these three groups. This narrative, in conclusion, underscores the irony that the most durable component of their cultural programs in the wake of German political reunification was the push for cultural decentralization.

## **PART ONE**

### **New Geographies of Cultural Engagement: Emancipation Through Space**

## CHAPTER 1

### New Spaces for Art: The Rise of the Spatial Interventionists

A gulf separated Joseph Beuys and Gunter Demnig in the early 1980s. The few hundred miles that lay between the two artists' studios accounted for perhaps the least of this expanse. By the 1980s, Beuys represented the artistic establishment, the “Old Guard” of the avant-garde in the West German art world, and was nearing the end of his life. Born in the early years of the Weimar Republic, Beuys had grown up under National Socialism and had both participated in the Hitler Youth and served in the Luftwaffe during World War II—most argue apathetically. After the war, he returned to a long-time passion and opted to pursue a career in art, enrolling in the program for the design of monumental sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Art. Beuys selected as his mentor Joseph Enseling, a sculptor committed to using art to represent the labor of industrial workers, though Beuys would later complete a master class taught by the artist Ewald Mataré, another sculptor whose stylized work the Nazis had dubbed “degenerate.” After his schooling, Beuys' attempts to make a name for himself in traditional art media were met with only limited professional success. After working ten years as an instructor of monumental sculpture in Düsseldorf, he was removed from his post in 1972 on account of substantial disagreements with the school's administration and faculty. This institutional rejection, however, encouraged Beuys to push harder against what he saw as the limitations of traditional art. His willingness to experiment with art's boundaries through sculptures, performance art, installations, and videos eventually won him international fame.<sup>1</sup> Remarkably protean, though, Beuys worked not only as an artist but also as a teacher, a sort of spiritual leader, and a politician. Over the four decades he spent active in West German cultural and political arenas, Beuys had articulated a fairly clear set of investments. A former student radical in the 1960s, he had professed his support for the New Left (an about-face following his earlier affiliations with the Nazis<sup>2</sup>), and he continued his involvement in alternative political movements as a founding member of the German Green Party. Unsurprisingly, then, the theme of democracy and democratic practices assumed a prominent role in Beuys' work.<sup>3</sup> By his death in 1986, Beuys had received more invitations than any other artist to contribute to documenta, the world-renowned international art exposition held every five years in Kassel, Germany.<sup>4</sup>

Gunter Demnig, in the early 1980s, stood as quite the contrast. Nearly thirty years Joseph Beuys' junior, Demnig had just emerged onto the art scene as Beuys was capping his career. A year before Beuys was removed from his post in Düsseldorf, a young Demnig enrolled 150 miles to the east in the University of Kassel, studying under the artist Harry Kramer, a proponent of kinetic art. Choosing at first to study art education and industrial design, Demnig later switched to monument construction and management. His location—Kassel, home to documenta—gave him the

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<sup>1</sup> Already by the mid-1960s Beuys had become a celebrity for his radical art. See, for example, Hal Foster, et al. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Beuys' contributions to the project of sustainable utopia, however, would only come with his last works. For more on Beuys' biography, see Götz Adriani, et al. *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*. Patricia Lech, tr. Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> As a darling of the avant-garde art world, Beuys' early National Socialist inclinations tend to fade into the background of both scholarly and popular representations of his life. Such a move is facilitated by Beuys' extended engagement with the themes of democracy and democratic practices in postwar West Germany. One controversial recent biography, however, has attempted to restore balance to these representations by foregrounding Beuys' continued flirtations with less progressive agendas after the war. See Hans Peter Riegel. *Beuys: die Biographie*. Berlin: Aufbau, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Omnibus für Direkte Demokratie in Deutschland. *Projekte Erweiterte Kunst: von Beuys aus*. Wangen: FIU, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> He received six invitations for documenta exhibitions: 1964, 1968, 1972, 1977, 1982, and 1987, though Beuys died before he could attend the final one. Joseph Beuys and Harald Kimpel, eds. *1982 - 2002: 20 Jahre Joseph Beuys: "7000 Eichen - Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung."* Kassel: Kulturamt, 2003, 16.

opportunity to learn his craft in the presence of some of the world's most recognized and innovative artists, including Beuys. Perhaps it was this environment, conducive to bold creativity, that encouraged Demnig to push boundaries from the very start. In his early thirties, he held a newly-minted degree from art school and had gotten right to work attempting to make a place for himself in a crowded art scene. One of his earliest artworks included a representation of the American flag with skulls in place of its stars. The painting, which protested the Vietnam War, resulted in a visit from the West German police; this would hardly be the last of such encounters for Demnig. Though he prioritized pushing the buttons of law enforcement, his style had yet to come into focus, and his broader agenda, however ostentatiously expressed, remained muddled.

Though separated by a generation, Beuys and Demnig together exemplify a coherent aesthetic opposition movement that developed in West Germany in the early 1980s. This movement responded to a long-term outcome of the aesthetic functionalism that reigned after the Second World War. Pragmatic rebuilding efforts, fueled by the so-called “economic miracle” of the 1950s, dominated the aesthetic paradigms of the first two postwar decades. In a ruined German landscape engagements with space needed to focus, it seemed, on reclaiming space for everyday use. The need for rapid reconstruction rendered the pure purposelessness of *l'art pour l'art*, which had characterized nineteenth-century aesthetics, an unaffordable luxury in the postwar *Trümmerzeit* and relegated aesthetic creativity to the realm of the functional. The kinds of art that appeared in public space after the war—often the products of *Kunst am Bau* initiatives, that is, efforts to install artistic adornments on public building—were criticized by many as aesthetically impotent and politically myopic.<sup>5</sup> Little improved in the first three decades after the war, and functionalism's exclusivity hit artists, particularly artists of public space, hard in light of the already limited opportunities for paid creative work. The aesthetic attitude that Beuys and Demnig represent took aim, in its work, both at this stagnancy and at Germany's tacit permission of art that passively occupied public space. Importantly, however, proponents of this art opposition movement refused to unleash a passive aesthetic critique against this passive aesthetic practice. Instead, they engaged in a practical critique of art that merely occupied public space by creating an infrastructure by which art could *intervene* actively in public space. I refer to this aesthetic temperament as spatial interventionism.<sup>6</sup>

### I. Joseph Beuys, Social Sculpture, and the Aesthetics of the 7000 Oaks Project

Joseph Beuys' greatest impact on the European art world was as a pioneer of what he called “social sculpture,” art essential to which was the participation of many people in a manner that

<sup>5</sup> Martin Warnke. “Kunst unter Verweigerungspflicht.” *Skulpturenboulevard Kurfürstendamm Tauentzien, Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Berlin: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 1987, 25. See also Beate Mielsch. “Die historischen Hintergründe der ‘Kunst-am-Bau’-Regelungen.” *Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Anstöße der 80er Jahre*. Volker Plagemann, et al., eds. Köln: DuMont, 1989, 39-43. For more on the complicated relationship between art and architecture in Germany in the twentieth century, see Claudia Büttner et al., eds. *Geschichte der Kunst am Bau in Deutschland*. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011; Sunke Herlyn et al., eds. *Kunst im Stadtbild: von Kunst am Bau zu Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Katalog zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung in der Universität Bremen vom 8.-30. Juni 1976*. Bremen: Hauschild, 1976; Elisabeth Dühr. *Kunst am Bau/Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Geschichte und Entwicklung öffentlicher Kunst im Spannungsfeld von Architektur, Städtebau und Kulturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991; Klaus Honnef. “Kunstwerke im öffentlichen Raum repräsentativer Demokratien: ‘Umwelt-Akzente’ in Monschau, 1970.” *Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Anstöße der 80er Jahre*. Volker Plagemann and Babette Peters, eds. Köln: DuMont, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> It bears noting that space served as an important conceptual category in Germany long before the “spatial turn” brought it into international vogue. Gerd Schwerhoff. “Spaces, Places, and the Historians: A Comment from a German Perspective,” *History and Theory* 52:3 (2013): 420–432. See also Karl Schlögel. *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*. Munich: Hanser, 2003, 19-24. On the popularity of *Kulturraumforschung* in a wide variety of disciplines see, among others, Stephan Güntzel, ed. *Topologie: Zur Raumbeschreibung in den Kultur- und Mediennwissenschaften*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007; Doris Bachmann-Medick. “Der Spatial Turn als Cultural Turn.” “*Cultural Turns*”: *Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2011, 284-328.



would alter the shape of society. Beuys subscribed to the Romantic philosopher Novalis' prescription that every individual should lead an artistic existence.<sup>7</sup> By extension, Beuys also endorsed the imperative that society too should constitute itself as an artwork, a composite of the creative potentialities of those who constitute it, pasted together as an existential collage. Social and political "intentions need to be artistic," Beuys suggested, "that is, they need to originate out of human creativity, out of individual human freedom."<sup>8</sup> Freedom, creative agency, and democratic practice went hand-in-hand for Beuys. The ability to live artistically as Novalis prescribed, however, did not inhere in modern society, Beuys recognized; its artists slumbered and had to be called to engage in such a collective creative project. Social sculpture, as Beuys conceived it, served this function: a participatory artwork, a social sculpture would activate the creative power within society by mobilizing citizens to collaborate on an aesthetic enterprise with impressive ramifications. Beuys aimed for nothing less in his social sculptures than to reweave the very fabric of society. Sculpture, after all, is only valuable to society, Beuys argued, "when it contributes to the advancement of human consciousness."<sup>9</sup>

Certainly in 1972 the democratic fabric of West German society appeared to have worn thin. Over the summer, the Palestinian terror organization Black September had used the occasion of the first Olympic Games hosted in Germany since the Nazi era as an opportunity to murder a group of Israeli athletes. Terrorism further gripped the West German population as the domestic terror organization, the Red Army Faction, bombed several high-profile sites, including the Axel Springer publishing house in Hamburg. It made sense, then, that Beuys would use his invitation to documenta 5 in the summer of 1972 to create a social sculpture that attempted to bolster German faith in democracy. And particularly because Beuys, much like his contemporary Jürgen Habermas, acknowledged that the foundations for social and political change lay in rational dialogue, it would also make sense that he would initiate a social sculpture that forged opportunities for social discourse. Beuys set up a small office at the art exhibition where he sat without pause for one hundred days. During that period, he invited visitors to the installation to join him in conversation about the promises and challenges of direct democracy. Though the security of West Germany democratic culture might have seemed threatened, there were no shortage of ideas among the exhibit's visitors for how to fortify it. Participants in Beuys' installation raised environmental issues, women's issues, educational and economic policy issues, and made suggestions for improving parliamentary democracy through deliberate use of instruments like popular referenda.<sup>10</sup> Many of these issues, it bears noting, would not enter mainstream public discourse for another decade.

The *100 Days* project also highlighted Beuys' investment in creating social sculptures that occupied a liminal site between the museum or gallery and extra-museological space. Here, Beuys' interest in testing the limits of the gallery aligned with a contemporary impulse, both top-down and

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<sup>7</sup> In his collection of literary fragments titled *Glauben und Liebe, oder der König und die Königin*, Novalis wrote that "[e]ach person should have been an artist. Everything can become beautiful art." Quoted in Herbert Uerlings, ed. *Novalis: Poesie und Poetik*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004, 35.

<sup>8</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, "Jeder Mensch ein Künstler," 7.1990. Certainly the notion of an aestheticized politics has a dark past in Germany. On the meaning of the aestheticization of politics, see Martin Jay. "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology; Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?" *Cultural Critique* 21 (1 April 1992): 41–61. Beuys, however, seemed not to fear the potential violence his artistic imperative might permit. Particularly in the context of his involvement in grassroots democratic politics since the 1960s, his optimism seems more reasoned.

<sup>9</sup> Tautologically, however, Beuys also claimed that the process of developing social consciousness was "in fact already a sculptural [*plastischer*] event." BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, "Jeder Mensch ein Künstler," 7.1990.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Beuys and Clara Bodenmann-Ritter. *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler: Gespräche auf der Documenta 5/1972*. Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1975.

bottom-up, to challenge the function of the museum by challenging its form. It had taken nearly twenty-five years for Germany to liberate public art fully from the weight of National Socialism and its legacy of instrumental aesthetics; even, as we have seen, after the dismantling of the Nazi regime, the destruction it wrought on the German landscape continued to dictate how and where art could be produced, by whom and for what purposes. By the 1970s, however, Germany began to witness a reorientation of its cultural politics that permitted a reevaluation of the placement of cultural products within West German society.<sup>11</sup> The rise of Willy Brandt's social democrat-liberal coalition at the federal level brought with it a gradual dismantling of the Adenauer regime's cultural conservatism. Mobilizing the succinct motto "Culture for Everyone [*Kultur für alle*]" popularized by the social democrat and Frankfurt city councilman for cultural affairs Hilmar Hoffmann, the coalition partners sought a radical expansion of access [*Zugänglichkeit*] to cultural products and experiences.<sup>12</sup> Like Beuys, they recognized the potential of these cultural products and experiences to operate in service of progressive social, communicative, and aesthetic programs. They evaluated art and culture based on their capacity to make German society more humane [*menschlicher*] by challenging entrenched power structures and promoting the political and social emancipation of the individual.<sup>13</sup> (Presumably, however, they hoped to exempt their own claim on the entrenched power structures of the Federal Republic.)

This new demand for emancipatory democratic cultural access called attention to the spaces that permitted such access, namely public space. The 1970s helped to crystallize as an autonomous aesthetic category the concept of "public art"—or, more literally from the German, "art in public space" [*Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*].<sup>14</sup> By heeding the imperative of equal access, art in public space could respond to contemporary cultural demands in ways the traditional museum—understood as exclusive and elitist—could not.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to the modernist desire in the first half of the twentieth

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<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the best recent work on this shift is the art historian Petra Hornig's published dissertation *Kunst im Museum und Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2011. Treatment of this theme can also be found in Albrecht Göschel. "Identitäts- und Imagepolitik: Revision kulturpolitischer Reformen." *Jahrbuch für Kulturpolitik* 6 (2006): 235-243; Dieter Sauberzweig. *Urbanität und Kultur: Erfahrungen beim Deutschen Städtetag und in Berlin*. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2005, 20ff.; and Hilmar Hoffmann. "Kultur für alle. Als Prognose." *Kultur Politik Diskurs* 3 (2000): 15-22.

<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, idea of *Kultur* in Germany carried with it a notion of privilege: *Kultur* meant high culture. Among the contributions of the 1970s to the German cultural world was political leaders' and cultural critics' redefinition of this conception of *Kultur* to incorporate not only high culture but other forms of mass cultural engagement, including—to the chagrin of many intellectuals and aesthetes—the consumer products of what the Frankfurt School called the culture industry.

<sup>13</sup> Petra Hornig has highlighted the 1973 publication by the Deutschen Städtetages. *Wege zur menschlichen Stadt*. Köln 1973 as the pivotal moment in this process. *Kultur*, she argues, was given the project of making the German city more humane [*die Stadt menschlicher zu machen*]. Hornig, *Kunst im Museum*, 16-18.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the development of public art, see Claudia Büttner. *Art goes public: von der Gruppenausstellung im Freien zum Projekt im nicht-institutionellen Raum*. München: S. Schreiber, 1997. For a broader, more conceptual approach, see W. J. T. Mitchell. *Art and the Public Sphere*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. A concise account of the shift in the discursive function of public art can be found in Grant Kester. "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art," *Afterimage* 22:6 (January 1995): 5-11. On the "public" role of art and artists, see Rosalyn Deutsche. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996; Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen. "On the 'Publicness' of Public Art and the Limits of the Possible." *Public Art: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Florian Matzner, ed. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001, 649.

<sup>15</sup> In an effort to increase numbers of visitors, some museums began to expand the sorts of locations where they would place installations, further developing experiments with place and setting for art that dated from the immediate postwar period. The opening exhibit for the famous art show in Kassel, documenta, in 1955, for example, featured a collection of sculptures by some of Germany's most famous artists, which had been taken out of the gallery and placed outdoors in somewhat random locations. The project's organizers wanted to use the art objects' weak relationship to the natural environments they now inhabited to demonstrate their fundamental link to the people and society that created and

century to create works of art that were “more autonomous and self-referential, and thus transportable, placeless, and nomadic,”<sup>16</sup> a concern for the indivisible relationship between the artwork and the space it occupied—that is, for site specificity—took hold of the postwar German art world.<sup>17</sup> Artists began to recognize the site of an artwork as an actual, particular location, “a tangible reality...composed of a unique combination of constitutive physical elements” that included both natural and man-made topographical influences and limitations; these components—lighting and ventilation, for example—constituted an integral part of the artwork’s meaning such that to remove the work of art from its context was to destroy it.<sup>18</sup> The Irish sculptor and art critic Brian O’Doherty summarized this attitude in a series of influential and artfully written essays that critiqued the development of the art gallery since the early nineteenth century. The gallery, he argued, had gradually become a “white cube.”<sup>19</sup> This “white cube” operated according to a set of

laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. The art is free, as the saying used to go, ‘to take on its own life.’ ... In this context, a standing ashtray becomes almost a sacred object, just as the firehose in a modern museum looks not like a firehose but an esthetic conundrum.<sup>20</sup>

Over the first half of the twentieth century, the gallery space had become megalomaniacal in its relationship toward the art spectator: the gallery, and in particular the wall on which pictorial art hung, dictated a stringent set of behavioral norms that shaped both engagement with the artwork and the interpretation of its meaning. The gallery, according to O’Doherty, does violence to art. Mobilizing a language reminiscent of the genocidal telos toward which the Nazis’ social aesthetic

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placed them. The meanings of these artworks were socially constructed and repeatedly reconstructed. Schmidt-Wulffen. “On the ‘Publicness’ of Public Art,” 649.

<sup>16</sup> Miwon Kwon. “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity.” *October* 80 (1 April 1997): 85. The American art historian Douglas Crimp has explained that the “idealism of modernist art, in which the art object in and of itself was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning, determined the object’s placelessness, its belonging in no particular place...Site specificity opposed that idealism—and unveiled the material system it obscured—by its refusal of circulatory mobility, its belongingness to a specific site.” *On the Museum’s Ruins*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993, 17. See also Rosalind Krauss. “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Hal Foster, ed. Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983, 31-42; Mary Miss. “From Autocracy to Integration: Redefining the Objectives of Public Art.” *Insights/On Sites: Perspectives on Art in Public Places*. Stacy Paleologos Harris, ed. Washington: Partners for Livable Places, 1984.

<sup>17</sup> Inspired by, but ultimately dissatisfied with, the call to arms voiced by Bauhaus artists, Russian constructivist and suprematist artists, and members of De Stijl—all of whom gestured at the supremacy of the aesthetic idea over “mere” artistic representation in the years before the Second World War—a new group of artists working under the broad rubric of “minimalism” took aim at the site of art in the postwar period. A great deal of literature, both historiographical and theoretical, has been written on the origins and nature of site specificity in art. Perhaps the best account is Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 85–110, which she developed into a full book several years later: *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. Other engagements with this theme can be found in Erika Suderburg, ed. *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000; James Meyer. “The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site-Specificity.” *Space, Site, Intervention*. Erika Suderburg, ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 23-37; Martin Hogue. “The Site as Project: Lessons from Land Art and Conceptual Art.” *Journal of Architectural Education* 57:3 (February 2004): 54-61; and Jane McFadden. “Toward Site.” *Grey Room* 27 (April 2007): 36-57.

<sup>18</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 85-86. As an example of this relationship, Kwon cites the conflict between Robert Barry and Richard Serra. The controversy surrounding Serra’s *Tilted Arc* in the late 1980s represented a moment of crisis for a mode of site specificity tied to physical space. Serra lost his battle to preserve the site specificity of his piece. For more on the Serra case see W. J. T. Mitchell. *Art and the Public Sphere*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976.

<sup>20</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 15.

propelled Germany, O’Doherty criticized the gallery for trying so hard to be “[u]nshadowed, white, clean”<sup>21</sup> and the artworks within it for the manner in which they “demand . . . *Lebensraum*.”<sup>22</sup> Artworks hang fully independent of one another and seemingly lifted outside of “time and its vicissitudes.” Gallery art, per O’Doherty, “exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of ‘period’ (late modern), there is no time.” And as the conventional photograph of the gallery entirely emptied of spectators makes clear, “the presence of that odd piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion. The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not.”<sup>23</sup> Adherents to the phenomenological paradigm of experiencing art kinesthetically rejected this “Cartesian paradox” of the modern gallery, that is, how the privileging of the mind and the eye as the only means of beholding and appreciating the idea of the artwork in fact demands the elimination of the vehicle of that idea, the spectator. Instead they demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work’s completion.<sup>24</sup> This hostility toward the traditional art gallery as an institution dominated interpretation drove artists to seek out new spaces in their effort to produce more accessible and democratic art.

Beuys’ next major project participated in this trend by drawing the artist decidedly out of the traditional museum space. Nineteen eighty-two—a decade after *100 Days*—saw the inception of Beuys’ final and perhaps most spectacular work: a five-year-long collaborative installation with the clever, alliterative, and neological subtitle *Stadtverwaldung statt Stadtverwaltung*, which translates less gracefully as “foresting the city instead of administering the city.”<sup>25</sup> In conjunction with documenta 7 held that year, Beuys challenged the citizens of and visitors to Kassel to partake in a massive tree-planting enterprise. Seven thousand trees, in all, were to be planted throughout the city in a decentralized initiative. By spotlighting the many barren locations in the city that could accommodate a sapling, the project aimed to draw attention to urban development undertaken at the expense of the environment. Through it, Beuys also aimed to begin a city-wide grassroots conversation about humanity’s embeddedness in its natural environment. Beuys viewed the environmental degradation caused by modern industrial society as a significant and imminent threat to both humans and nature. Reinforcing this sense of urgency was a set of 7,000 large basalt stones installed in the shape of a giant triangle on Friedrichsplatz in front of the Fridericianum, one of the oldest public museums in Europe and the central hub of documenta. Each time a tree was planted, Beuys removed one of the stones from the triangle and placed it beside the sapling, creating a sort of stone clock, Götz Adriani and Ulrich Weisner have argued, that marked “the transposition of Joseph Beuys’ idea into reality.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to serving as a measure of the project’s progress, the basalt stones also lent the arboreal installation a certain permanence.<sup>27</sup> In this way, *7000 Oaks* challenged the boundaries, temporality, and nature of authorship of traditional artworks and installations. The Berlin-based art curator Heiner Bastian, in a multi-artist homage to Beuys’ work, pointed to the

<sup>21</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Kwon. “One Place after Another,” 86.

<sup>25</sup> Administering here connotes not only governance but direct control and a correlate lack of freedom, whereas the neologism *Vervaldung*—roughly “enforesting” or “sylvanizing,” with its root *Wald*, meaning a woodland wilderness—suggests something wild, free, earthy, and uninhibited by the practices and expectations of civilized management. Beuys tapped into a long German tradition of escaping the confines of urban administration that perhaps first arose with the Romantics but later found expression in the Wandervogel youth movement and the Naturfreunde at the end of the nineteenth century. See Walter Laqueur. *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*. New York: Basic Books, 1962; Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995; John A. Williams. *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Heiner Bastian, ed. *7000 Eichen*. Bern: Benteli, 1985, preface, n. pag.

<sup>27</sup> Beuys and Kimpel. *1982 - 2002: 20 Jahre Joseph Beuys*, 5.

project's spatial and temporal expansiveness. While the work, in its initial phases, was inextricably bound to a specific place and time, namely to Friedrichsplatz in the years between documenta 7 and 8, the totality of its existence transcends these bounds: it represents continuous temporal and spatial development. Beginning in 1982, the artwork slowly crept over the city of Kassel, unfurling as a leafy canopy with a basalt base. As the Friedrichsplatz triangle dwindled, the project gradually lost its most distinct landmark. But its imprint and impact remain today.<sup>28</sup> With each successive year Beuys' trees cast a longer shadow over the city and root themselves deeper into its topography.

Although there were, in reality, forty-one different kinds of trees involved,<sup>29</sup> Beuys titled the piece *7000 Oaks*, the oak a quintessential icon of Germanness and a long-standing symbol of strength and vitality; the oak, after all, can live for more than eight hundred years under the right conditions.<sup>30</sup> By pairing the tree with a lasting geological marker, the project represented endurance and fixity. It also suggested evolution and change, insofar as trees change seasonally and eventually die. Death, however, fuels rather than frustrates the project's dynamic imperative: a publicly financed foundation committed to the project's preservation ensures that dead trees will be replaced. Though at any moment, there may be fewer than 7,000 trees as aging, diseased, or dead trees are removed to make way for their successors, the project's concept provides a renewable goal whose repeated fulfillment demands both popular awareness and investment. Beuys provided the initial impulse, but *7000 Oaks* is an artwork made and continually remade by the thousands of people who care for it.

Upon completion of the project in 1987, the cultural spokesperson of the Green Party Antje Vollmer described *7000 Oaks* as offering a positive response to the most difficult questions facing contemporary Germany. Reflecting critically on the alternative movement in West Germany, Vollmer noted that every previous emancipatory movement had articulated a positive culture of resistance. She lamented how the environmental movement, and by extension the larger alternative movement of the 1970s and '80s, had contented itself with merely sketching out the most depressing picture of the status quo and engaging in the collective act of bemoaning it. Beuys alone, she argued, offered a positive alternative: his installation showed art actively engaged in the work of survival [*Kunst als Arbeit des Überlebens*].<sup>31</sup> In the eyes of many, his project had successfully accomplished the goals of social sculpture by using art to intervene in public space and demand democratic engagement with the aim of effecting social change. *7000 Oaks* offered a culturally mediated alternative method of interacting with both the natural and the social environment. In turn, it challenged conventional modes of thinking [*Denkstrukturen*], above all, prompting a reconceptualization of the relationship between the human and natural environments.<sup>32</sup> Its imperative was a process, not a finished product.

## II. The Spatial Interventionism of Gunter Demnig: *Duftmarken, Blutspur, Ariadne-Faden*

<sup>28</sup> Bastian, *7000 Eichen*, preface, n. pag.

<sup>29</sup> There were five different kinds of oaks as well as other species, including ginkgo, ash-leaf maple, tulip poplar, and honey locust. Wolfgang Schmidt. "Das Baumkataster '7000 Eichen' der Stadt Kassel." Joseph Beuys and Harald Kimpel, eds. *1982 - 2002: 20 Jahre Joseph Beuys: "7000 Eichen - Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung"*. Kassel: Kulturamt, 2003, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Valentin Rothmaler et al. *Kunst wächst manchen über den Kopf: zwei Spaziergänge zu 7000 Eichen von Joseph Beuys*. Kassel: Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft, 1997, 6-7. Kai Uwe Schierz. "Von Bonifatius bis Beuys, oder: Vom Umgang mit heiligen Eichen" *Bonifatius: Heidenopfer, Christuskreuz, Eichenkult*. Hardy Eidam et al., eds. Erfurt: Stadtverwaltung Erfurt, 2004, 139-145.

<sup>31</sup> "Mit grünen Augen betrachtet. Eine Diskussion über Kunst und ihre Verantwortung in der Gesellschaft anlässlich der Documenta 8 in Kassel." *Öko-Kunst?: zur Ästhetik der Grünen*. Jost Hermand and Hubert Müller, eds. Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1989, 89.

<sup>32</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, #30-34, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kunst und Kultur, Die Grünen "Vom 'Öko-Kult' zur Öko-Kultur," 19.5.1988.

Beneath the canopy of the *7000 Oaks*, a young Gunter Demnig had just begun his first forays into the German art world after receiving his degree in the construction and management of monuments from the University of Kassel. While there, Demnig developed quite the reputation among his peers. Wolfgang Hahn, a sculptor and one of Demnig's former classmates, described him as a jack-of-all-trades who embraced the mentality that nothing is impossible. "The greater the challenge, the better" Hahn wrote of Demnig, who assumed that working harder, longer, and more creatively would solve all his problems.<sup>33</sup> His committed attitude gave him the inertia to complete one of his adviser's most radical assignments: on the grounds that "every artist should be the world champion of something," Kramer challenged his students to try to log a record in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.<sup>34</sup>

By the early 1980s, Demnig like many of his artist contemporaries had already developed an interest in art that went beyond the traditional museum and canvas. He had decided that making good art should always involve working in and on public space.<sup>35</sup> Acting on these investments, Demnig accepted Kramer's challenge and undertook a record-breaking artwork that would "operate centrifugally," bursting outward into the spaces of ordinary people's everyday lives.<sup>36</sup> Here, Demnig's objectives reminisced of an art movement of the 1960s and '70s in which an international collection of participants began to dismantle the centuries-long tradition of displaying art in exclusive spaces that reinforced a strict power hierarchy in the experience of it.<sup>37</sup> The West German art community had proven particularly receptive to the influence of the so-called "land art" movement, which originated in the United States and sought to use the existing natural landscape, with its in-built palimpsests of meaning, as its canvas and natural materials—stones, wood, leaves, water, etc.—as its media. Land art teased out the boundaries between nature and artifice, artifice and artwork. The German artist of public space Frieder Schnock, for example, who would later gain international renown for his contribution to the Berlin Holocaust memorial installation *Places of Remembrance*, began his career with a dissertation on Richard Long, a British sculptor and pioneer of land art.<sup>38</sup> The appeal of land art to artists like Schnock or Demnig lay in the way it tested the interrelation of experiences of space, experiences of time, and the appreciation of aesthetic meaning. "Transformation," one assessment of Long's legacy suggests, was his overriding focus; his works explored the way the passage of time permits changes to space and how movement links discrete, otherwise unrelated spaces via a temporal bridge. Long's first major artwork, *A Line Made By Walking* (1967), for example, featured the young artist pacing back and forth over a single line in an English country meadow until he had trampled a path, which he then photographed. The photograph itself, however, was not the artwork. As Marie-Luise Geiseler notes in her dissertation,

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<sup>33</sup> Wolfgang Hahn. "Gunter Demnig, Tausendsassa" *Vor meiner Haustür - "Stolpersteine" von Gunter Demnig: ein Begleitbuch*. Joachim Rönneper, ed. Gelsenkirchen: Arachne-Verlag, 2010, 114.

<sup>34</sup> Gunter Demnig and Jürgen Rapp. "Gunter Demnig: Dezentrales Mahnmahl. Ein Gespräch mit Jürgen Rapp," *Kunstforum International* 170 (2004): 232.

<sup>35</sup> From an interview with Gunter Demnig on 27 July 2006, conducted by Brinda Sommer and published in her Magisterarbeit: Brinda Sommer. "Stolpersteine wider das Vergessen. Gesellschaftliches Erinnern an den Nationalsozialismus im lokalen Kontext." Magisterarbeit. Freie Universität Berlin, Fachbereich Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften. 2006, 127.

<sup>36</sup> Uta Franke and Gunter Demnig. "Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben, Uta Franke im Interview mit Gunter Demnig" *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichsbain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Bettina Eisbrenner, ed. Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2002, 9.

<sup>37</sup> See McFadden, "Toward Site," 37; Craig Owens. "Earthwords." *October* 18 (Fall 1979): 120-30; Crimp. *On the Museums Ruins*; Meyer, "The Functional Site," 23-37.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Martin Schnock. "Richard Long und der veränderte Skulpturbegriff." Dissertation. Hochschule für Bildende Künste, 1999.

Long's sculpture was constituted essentially by time: the artwork, which combined art object with art performance, existed in the tension between the photograph, which documented that Long had in fact created the line, and the knowledge that the subsequent passage of time and the continued growth of the grass he had flattened would have eliminated this line.<sup>39</sup> But land art's appeal to these German artists might also have stemmed from the manner in which this art protested the mechanisms and strictures of the art gallery and the commercial art market. Land art was too large for the gallery space; it could not be sold; it often could not be moved; and sometimes its very existence was ephemeral. Alternative art practices that took artworks outside of the gallery destabilized the art community from within by placing, as curator and art critic Miwon Kwon observes, "an unprecedented strain on established patterns of (re)producing, exhibiting, borrowing/lending, purchasing/selling, and commissioning/executing art works in general."<sup>40</sup>

In the manner of land art, Demnig's earliest projects wrenched art out of the frame and the gallery space and inserted it into the earth's natural landscapes. In his own kind of "conquest of nature," Demnig concentrated on fashioning temporary, large-scale aesthetic interventions in the natural environment.<sup>41</sup> With his advisor and another classmate, for example, Demnig traveled in 1977 to Quebec to carve a men's restroom, complete with three standing urinals, out of a large snow bank. They titled the piece *Sculpture out of Snow: An Homage to Duchamp*, a nod to Marcel Duchamp's famous 1917 readymade artwork, *Fountain*, which had unsettled the global art world when it debuted at the New York Society of Independent Artists. Landscape in Demnig's view was not an object to be represented in art as a mere likeness, as in classical painting. It served, rather, as a "field for direct artistic action," a space to be worked in and upon, an essential medium between artist and spectator.<sup>42</sup> Demnig's pursuit of new fields for aesthetic action won him the reputation of a wanderer: for his work, one classmate said simply, "he walked everywhere."<sup>43</sup> But as the publisher and lead editor of the art journal *Kunstzeitung* Karlheinz Schmid carefully added, Demnig was less an aimless itinerant than an artist without a place—or more accurately, an aesthetic medium—to call "home." More tellingly, he was seen as a rebel who tirelessly sought out new boundaries just so he could overstep them.<sup>44</sup> Demnig's search for new forms and frontiers for art became a work of art in itself as he attempted to capture in dynamic material form his quest for an emancipatory artistic

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<sup>39</sup> Marie-Louise Geiseler. "Zeit/Raum/Natur-Erfahrung im Werk von Richard Long." Dr.Phil. Dissertation. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2003, 17, 164-68.

<sup>40</sup> Kwon, "One Place after Another," 100.

<sup>41</sup> Elaborating on Norbert Elias' argument that the project of modern civility emerged out of the manipulation of the environment, the historian David Blackbourn has explored the modern "conquest of nature," which involved the disciplining of bodies between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries through a catechism of norms about the scope of interactions possible within the German citizen-subject's lived environment. See David Blackbourn. *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*. New York: Norton, 2006; Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. The first half of the twentieth century revealed, however, that the human domination of nature tells us much about the nature of human domination, not least with regard to the delicate balance between the careful manipulation of space and total catastrophe. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer recognized the Enlightenment's perilous attempt to dissolve the mythic quality of nature, subjugating space to the hand of instrumental reason. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Edmund Jephcott, tr. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. On the theme of colonial space, see Gwendolyn Wright. *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. And on the relevance of space to the formation of the modern self, see Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Demnig and Rapp, "Gunter Demnig," 229-31.

<sup>43</sup> Hahn, "Gunter Demnig, Tausendsassa," 114.

<sup>44</sup> Karlheinz Schmid. "Kunst-Tip des Monats: Gunter Demnig." *Pan* 10 (1988): 9.

space. As one of his colleagues once described his method, “the creative process, the production, is also the result, the work itself.”<sup>45</sup>

It was only a short leap from Demnig’s earlier, loosely defined intention of leaving his mark on and through the landscape to his more specific interest in creating artworks that would leave behind “traces” [*Spuren*].<sup>46</sup> Among his peers, this style would earn Demnig the moniker *Spurenleger*, or “Leaver of Traces.” The practice of leaving traces formed a bridge to Demnig’s earlier training in the maintenance of traditional monuments. The German photographer and author Rolf Sachsse, who on several occasions profiled the young Demnig and his works, described traces as “legacies” [*Hinterlassenschaften*] or remnants of the past in the present. Though this description fits the purpose of monuments as well, Sachsse differentiated between monuments and traces in order to make clear how Demnig placed his traditional education in tension with his boundary-transgressing impulses. Inherent in the monument, Sachsse highlighted, was the assumption of its continued impact on society; it was constructed intentionally with fixity in mind. Traces, by contrast, exist as residue or debris [*Überbleibsel, Abfälle*] whose incidental remainders lack the predetermined intentionality of monuments. Traces string a thread between past and present, almost accidentally. The strength of Demnig’s work, according to Sachsse, lay in the way that it allowed intentionality and accident, fixity and movement, to coexist.<sup>47</sup>

After completing his dissertation in 1979, a thirty-three-year-old Demnig initiated his first major independent artwork: *Duftmarken Kassel-Paris Demnig 80*. Over the next three years, he would complete another two projects—*Blutspur Kassel-London* (1981) and *Ariadne-Faden Kassel-Venedig* (1982)—which, together with *Duftmarken*, became a public stage for Demnig to work through his ideas on the nature and importance of the aesthetic trace.

Motivating Demnig’s first project was his frustration with the relative lack of attention paid to the placement and purpose of individual artworks within major centers of European aesthetic appreciation.<sup>48</sup> He chose two of these—the Academy of Fine Arts in Kassel and the Centre Pompidou in Paris—and, using a handmade bicycle-like printing wheel, he inked a short text in gesso onto the roads between them. Though the literal connection he drew between them would last only temporarily until the paint wore away, the work also signified a more permanent figurative connection. Titled “Scent Marks” [*Duftmarken*], even though the artwork involved no odors, the project referred metaphorically to the way that animals mark their territory. Demnig’s “territory” was potential spaces for art in the public sphere. Like a scent, however, his artwork began to dissipate as soon as it was deposited; well before he reached his destination in Paris, the first traces of the project had already started to disappear. Though temporary, the project nevertheless amounted to a massive undertaking: a total of 508 miles, which Demnig walked with his ink wheel over twenty-one days. Presumably to the great pleasure of his mentor, *Duftmarken* (1980) won Demnig an entry in the 1982 Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s longest work of art.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rolf Sachsse. “Spur und Monument. Zwei plastische Grundbegriffe in Gunter Demnigs Arbeit,” NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz: 1988, 131-38: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, “Spuren. Demnig 88. Projekt Einreise”, 13.8.1988; Sonderdruck des *Tagespiegel*, [www.hbksaar.de/personen/lehrende0/professoren/prof-dr-rolf-sachsse/als-wissenschaftler-und-publizist/](http://www.hbksaar.de/personen/lehrende0/professoren/prof-dr-rolf-sachsse/als-wissenschaftler-und-publizist/)

<sup>46</sup> In this respect, Demnig was part of a growing national trend. The historian Rudy Koshar has discussed the increased interest in traces in Germany in the late twentieth century. *From Monuments to Traces Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Rolf Sachsse. “Spur und Monument.”

<sup>48</sup> From an interview with Gunter Demnig on 27 July 2006, conducted by Brinda Sommer. “Stolpersteine wider das Vergessen,” 127.

<sup>49</sup> Hahn, “Gunter Demnig, Tausendsassa,” 114.



Fueled by the positive reception *Duftmarken* received, Demnig undertook a similar project the following year. He would print another short text on the roads between Kassel and the Tate Modern in London. Instead of a trail of gesso, however, he chose to use a more provocative medium: blood. At the project's outset, Demnig had worked closely with a friend to develop a chemical solution that could initially be printed colorlessly; only later, after Demnig had moved on with his printing wheel, would a blood-red color appear. He had readied the project, titled *Blutspur* or "Trail of Blood," for installation when the chemist upended all their preparatory work by suggesting that they use actual blood. So, they did. Sticky, stinky, and foamy, the pig's blood immediately disgusted viewers, especially the members of the press tasked with reporting on it.<sup>50</sup> Gradually, though, Demnig's foul print wore away. His artwork, in one sense, existed only briefly as a snapshot of one moment in time.<sup>51</sup> "As an artist, one works with symbols," Demnig claimed; in this case, he opted for blood for its symbolic reference to life.<sup>52</sup> *Blutspur* marked a moment of vitality: the vitality of the many spectators he attracted, puzzled, and disgusted; the vitality of the art communities in each town through which he walked, roused to reaction by his installation; and the vitality of the artist himself, whose youthful persistence (and impertinence) made the project possible. But the artwork also symbolized death: not only of the countless pigs who enabled its creation but also of the artwork itself, whose life cycle began to draw to a close the moment it was first printed on the ground. The project observed the process by which artworks die: Demnig explored the fading away of a work's imprint on society, literal and figurative. And he examined art's afterlife by testing the limits of its resurrection through only dim and scattered memories.

The last in Demnig's trilogy of artistic treks materialized in 1982. The year was a significant one in the art world as two of the most important international exhibitions of contemporary art—Kassel's documenta and Venice's Biennale—would take place simultaneously for the first time. To mark this occasion, Demnig walked for thirty-six days in a straight line from Kassel to Venice, leaving behind him 1,000 kilometers of red thread connecting these two beacons in the global art world.<sup>53</sup> Rolf Sachsse called the piece the most concise expression of Demnig's trace-laying: "downright unspectacular, made out of a material whose remnant can still be found years down the road."<sup>54</sup> Demnig named the installation *Ariadne's Thread* after the Greek myth of Ariadne, who gave her beloved Theseus a thread to help him escape the Labyrinth after slaying the Minotaur. Just as Ariadne's thread led Theseus from one end of the maze to the other, Demnig's thread allowed the spectator to connect the alpha and omega of the international art community. Here, as with the other two projects, however, "only conceptually do beginning and end ever meet." In this respect, Demnig stressed that "this kind of art does not give any answers. It only spells out the questions."<sup>55</sup> Demnig saw it as his task to leave marks or signs [*Zeichen*] that raised questions. But their answers could only be worked out by the beholder.<sup>56</sup> In 1988, Sachsse noted presciently that *Ariadne's Thread* marked a stylistic transformation for Demnig. Thereafter Demnig would place at the heart of his projects a conscious working-through of the tense relationship between the artist's process of crafting and the artwork's own process of becoming permanent in the world.<sup>57</sup> Demnig's greatest

<sup>50</sup> Rolf Sachsse, "Spur und Monument."

<sup>51</sup> Hahn, "Gunter Demnig, Tausendsassa," 114.

<sup>52</sup> From an interview with Gunter Demnig on 27 July 2006, conducted by Brinda Sommer, "Stolpersteine wider das Vergessen," 127.

<sup>53</sup> From an interview with Gunter Demnig on 27 July 2006, conducted by Brinda Sommer, "Stolpersteine wider das Vergessen," 127.

<sup>54</sup> Rolf Sachsse. "Spur und Monument."

<sup>55</sup> Hahn, "Gunter Demnig, Tausendsassa," 114.

<sup>56</sup> Demnig and Rapp, "Gunter Demnig," 235.

<sup>57</sup> Rolf Sachsse, "Spur und Monument."

work, the *Stumbling Stones* (1992-present), would embody this tension and, through the collaboration of thousands of people, take on a life of its own.

### III. The Spatial Interventionists Declare War

Joseph Beuys' magnum opus *7000 Oaks* met with general acclaim while Demnig's three exploratory works drew a mixed response. Popular and professional assessments of all four works agreed, however, on the novelty of their effects. Critics spoke of the way these projects set in motion more than just dynamic artworks. They unleashed a new way of thinking about art in public space. This new aesthetic mentality unsettled the usual parameters of art production, the temporality of the artwork, the rules of the canvas and the frame, and the very nature of the creative process. According to one account, it prioritized individual creativity, inventiveness, innovation, and absolute freedom of thought.<sup>58</sup> It might even be understood, as another pamphlet argued, to vindicate Novalis' mantra that every person should be an artist.<sup>59</sup> What set works like *7000 Oaks* and Demnig's trace trilogy apart from more traditional public art was the manner in which they challenged conventional modes of understanding and engaging with public space. Beuys and Demnig were spatial interventionists who understood space as an ongoing contest of meaning that demanded active participation by artists and their audience. They understood the collision of space and human capacity to engage with it as the moment in which one's reason renders meaningful or concrete the "empty and innocent spatial spread" of one's physical environment.<sup>60</sup> As a determinant of the physical conditions of possibility of human experience—one could not escape one's spatial situatedness in the world, Heidegger argued<sup>61</sup>—space, for the spatial interventionists, had the power

<sup>58</sup> Rothmaler, *Kunst wächst manchen über den Kopf*, 9.

<sup>59</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, "Jeder Mensch ein Künstler," 7.1990. Siede and Koinegg were careful to distinguish these remarks from Hilmar Hoffmann's phrase "Culture for Everyone" [*Kultur für alle*]. This expression slipped too easily, they thought, into "culture for everything [*alles*]," which stripped culture of its power by dissolving its boundaries completely rather than reasserting new ones.

<sup>60</sup> Here, they would have sided with Kant, who understood established space as an essential form of intuition. Absolute space, which Kant understood as infinite, empty, and a priori, served as the conceptual precondition for relative or empirical space. This distinction enabled the shift from mere appearance [*Erscheinung*] to real experience [*Erfahrung*]. See Michael Friedman. "Kant on Space, the Understanding, and the Law of Gravitation: 'Prolegomena' §38," *The Monist* 72:2 (1 April 1989): 236–284. Friedman draws on Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* in order to make sense of the relation between the transcendental principles of understanding outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and Newtonian natural science. For a very concise account of the importance of space in Kant, see Edward S. Casey. "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena." *Senses of Place*. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Explorations of Martin Heidegger's work have typically highlighted the centrality of temporality in Heidegger's phenomenology. In scholarship on Heidegger, Gerd Schwerhoff has recognized a "critical reserve" toward the spatial turn and notes that recent decades of German historiography have generally had possessed a greater interest in time than in space. Schwerhoff. "Spaces, Places, and the Historians." Reinhart Koselleck made this argument in 2000. Reinhart Koselleck. "Raum und Geschichte." *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000, 81. Recent scholarship, however, has attempted to tip the balance toward Heidegger's engagements with space. With particular emphasis on Heidegger's later work after *Being and Time* (1927), Jeff Malpas considers Heidegger's whole philosophy inconceivable without taking into account its topographical dimensions. Examining the themes of topography, space, and place throughout Heidegger's oeuvre, Malpas argues that Heidegger's central idea of "being-in-the-world" [*In-der-Welt-sein*] always already meant being "in place." In his 1951 essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," for example, Heidegger argued that the notion of "dwelling," which he characterized as "the basic character of Being" and which captured the uniqueness of *Dasein's* mode of being-in-the-world, consisted of "[m]an's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces." To dwell in the world was to relate to space. Martin Heidegger. "Building Dwelling Thinking." *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Albert Hofstadter, tr. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, 155, 158. On Heidegger and space, see Jeff Malpas. *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006 or his more recent, more capacious book, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012. See also Theodore Schatzki.

to shape the theater of political, cultural, and social action.<sup>62</sup> Instead of offering a critique of art in public space that would do little to change the meaning people actually give to public space, these artists constructed their critique such that it would simultaneously initiate a new kind of aesthetic practice: it would generate art in public space that in fact reconfigured that public space by guiding the set of possible interactions with it.

Like many of their avant-garde forbears, spatial interventionist artists wanted to overturn the practices and priorities of the traditional gallery and canvas. But they considered the interventions of their predecessors insufficient. They could not content themselves with creating mere “public art,” which limited itself to escaping the confines of the gallery. Nor could they be satisfied with land art, whose remove from the vicissitudes of everyday life and deep embeddedness in the individual creative experience of the artist, non-transferrable to the spectator, made it an inadequate vehicle for addressing broad social concerns. Even site-specific art, which “gave itself up to its environmental context,” rejecting a Cartesian mode of appreciating the world in favor of a phenomenological one that emphasized lived, bodily experience<sup>63</sup>—or, in the deeply critical language of the art historian and critic Michael Fried, “theatricality”<sup>64</sup>—lacked something, namely a radically democratic form of power. For Demnig and Beuys, spatial intervention involved challenging the norms that governed the construction of, interaction with, and behavior within the sites where they installed their works. Art that intervened in public space was art that enabled a new normative power over the aesthetics of public space. The spatial interventionists rejected bureaucratized forms of power, including aesthetic power, that they saw at work in the sites they selected as well as this power’s routinization. Society, they argued, had accepted as a mundane reality a lack of control over the creation of meaning in the spaces of daily lives. Against this current, the spatial interventionists wanted to generate an opportunity for everyday people to engage regularly and consciously in the act of contesting the meaning embedded within their quotidian environments: the people should, thus, reappropriate every street, sidewalk, and façade.

As their art gradually occupied a more prominent space outside of the gallery, the spatial interventionists began to think more critically about what it meant to lobby for the liberation of artworks from what O’Doherty had called the “white cube.” O’Doherty had celebrated the clear vision with which artists had finally begun to view artistic display: “We have now reached a point,” he argued, “where we see not the art but the *space* first,”<sup>65</sup> or more accurately, the totality of spatial

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*Martin Heidegger: Theorist of Space.* Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007; Yoko Arisaka. “On Heidegger’s Theory of Space: A Critique of Dreyfus,” *Inquiry* 38: 4 (December 1995): 455-467; and Edward Casey. “Heidegger in and out of Place.” *Heidegger: A Centenary Appraisal.* Pittsburgh: Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, 1990.

<sup>62</sup> In this manner, the spatial interventionists might have agreed with the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl that things are never simply given; they appear, rather, as the possibility of the experience of space. In his 1907 lectures at the University of Göttingen, Husserl dealt, for example, with the difference between objective space, that is, space constituted conceptually through transcendental logic, and visual space, or the materiality of the world filtered through our perception of it. He predicated the human capacity to relate discrete perceptions of individual things on the kinesthetic experience of space or, more precisely, on the possibility of such experience. See, for example, Edmund Husserl. *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907.* Richard Rojcewicz, tr. Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997. Together with *The Idea of Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), these lectures represent Husserl’s complete course on the “Main Parts of the Phenomenology and Critique of Reason” in which he took up the nature and problems of the phenomenology of perception and of the thing. In his course, he explored the conditions of the possibility of visual perception as well as the relation of discrete images to experience in time. On the primacy of the visual in Husserl’s phenomenology as well as attempts to strip Husserl of this “ocularcentrism,” see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 265-268.

<sup>63</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 85-86.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Fried. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

<sup>65</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 14.

experience. Artists in West Germany began to interpret site not only in physical and spatial terms but “as a *cultural* framework” that acknowledged the social influences on the viewing subject. Whereas minimalism had challenged “the idealist hermeticism of the autonomous art object by deflecting its meaning to the space of its presentation,” this new groups of artists criticized “the idealist hermeticism of the space of presentation itself.” The asceticism of the modern gallery and museum spaces increasingly appeared, in Miwon Kwon’s words,

as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition convention serving an ideological function. The seemingly benign architectural features of a gallery/museum, in other words, were deemed to be coded mechanisms that actively disassociate the space of art from the outer world, furthering the institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchization of values “objective,” “disinterested,” and “true.”<sup>66</sup>

To intervene in public spaces beyond the traditional gallery or museum did not imply an attempt to escape norms entirely. These artists did not seek a tabula rasa upon which they could rewrite, *de novo*, a set of self-consciously postmodern values to govern interaction with their art. Instead, they sought the possibility of creating a new cultural constellation that would lend their art new life. They paid attention to the “socioeconomic relations within which art and its institutional programming find their possibilities of being.” And they rejected spaces tied to “the ideologically suspect if not morally corrupt power elite” in order to prioritize sites with less restrictive rules for use that would give more power to the viewer.<sup>67</sup> In an attempt to escape an elitist or exclusive appreciation of the production and reception of both traditional art and art in public space, the spatial interventionists increasingly favored public spaces that pushed them beyond “the traditional confines of art in physical and intellectual terms.”<sup>68</sup> Simply moving art beyond the gallery’s walls was only half the solution; that move alone would not tackle the passivity of conventional (and in the eyes of the spatial interventionist, inefficacious) art. Art that occupied public space passively risked becoming mere artistic ornament intended only to beautify the spaces of everyday life, or in the blunter words of one art historian, serving as “a form of decorative atonement for the sins of certain town planners, architects and landscape gardeners.”<sup>69</sup> If contentedness with the hermeticism of the gallery and acceptance of the static nature of the gallery space counted among the defining features of art inside the white cube, then art beyond the cube had to exhibit a perpetual discontentedness with the nature, the bounds, and the visitors to its site. “It is a fact,” one curator of alternative art installations argued, “that the majority of works in public space are mediocre, if not actually bad.” They served as a kind of aesthetic Band-Aid, patching up through “artful camouflage” the aesthetic wounds that the self-abnegating functionalist art culture of the postwar era had inflicted upon itself. “These kinds of intervention,” the curator suggested, “lead nowhere.”<sup>70</sup>

The object of these artists’ discontent began to crystallize in their demand that embodied engagement with art replace the traditional primacy of visual perception. Active public art, as O’Doherty explained, ensured that the body “becomes [the] data-gatherer.”<sup>71</sup> The philosopher Michel de Certeau would make this corporeal activity central to his definition of the site itself. Site, or “space” for Certeau, was place “practiced,” that is, “composed of intersections of mobile elements” and “actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it.” Space or site emerged

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<sup>66</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 87-88.

<sup>67</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 89.

<sup>68</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 91.

<sup>69</sup> Florian Matzner, ed. *Public Art: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Buren. “Art - Architecture - City - Politics. An Interview with Jérôme Sans” *Public Art: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Florian Matzner, ed. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001, 162.

<sup>71</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 50-52.

a product of action, not a precondition for it; it remained “situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts.”<sup>72</sup> In this respect, site, according to Certeau, lacks any stability or fixity; its very existence depends precariously on the promise of practice or, in other words, on the act of intervention.

The stakes both of such promises and of such active aesthetic interventions in public space were high. We might understand the anxieties of the spatial interventionists through the gravity philosopher Hannah Arendt gave to this spatial action. In an attempt to make sense of the political catastrophes wrought upon the world by Germany in the first half of the twentieth century, Arendt oriented her understanding of political action toward an idea of freedom predicated on the space in which that freedom is exercised, “the living space of freedom.”<sup>73</sup> By rooting political freedom in humans’ creative capacity to act and speak freely in concert with one another—what she dubbed the “web of human relationships”<sup>74</sup>—Arendt offered a concrete definition of freedom constituted intersubjectively and in the world. Totalitarianism, she famously argued in 1951, originates from the conscious or unconscious limitation of the space of political action, from a withering away of the “public.” “The fundamental deprivation of human rights,” she claimed, appears “above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.”<sup>75</sup> By eliminating spaces for free action, or as Arendt suggested, by

pressing men against each other, total terror destroys the space between them; compared to the condition within its iron band, even the desert of tyranny, insofar as it is still some kind of space, appears like a guarantee of freedom. Totalitarian government does not just curtail liberties or abolish essential freedoms; nor does it, at least to our limited knowledge, succeed in eradicating the love for freedom from the hearts of man. It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.<sup>76</sup>

To limit public spaces for political action was to curtail one of the most essential elements of human life: the situatedness of freedom as the physical and discursive space between men. The spatial interventionists, fueled by a nagging uncertainty about West Germany’s political program, sought to use their art to radically expand the existence of such pivotal spaces for action.

Available locations for such practice, as one American installation artist noticed, were often in short supply. Other enterprises had already laid claim to more conventional spaces:

the vertical is allotted to architecture, the horizontal to landscape architecture, and the network of lines between and through them to engineering. The city has all the design it needs.... Public art has to squeeze in and fit under and fall over what already exists in the city. Its mode of behavior is to perform operations—what appear to be unnecessary operations—upon the built environment: it adds to the vertical, subtracts from the horizontal, multiplies and divides the network on in-between lines.<sup>77</sup>

This secondhand topographical canvas beyond the gallery posed a challenge that would continue to preoccupy artists of public space well into the late twentieth century. But the spatial interventionists began to see these limits on public space as an opportunity. To seek new places for art did not mean the mere relocation of existing art concepts; rather, it demanded the creation of new art concepts

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<sup>72</sup> Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 117. Long before Certeau, Georg Simmel had identified five essential qualities of space, including the possibility of movement. See Schwerhoff. “Spaces, Places, and the Historians,” 430.

<sup>73</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1968, 466.

<sup>74</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 184

<sup>75</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296-297

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 466.

<sup>77</sup> Vito Acconci. “Leaving Home - Notes on Insertions into the Public.” *Public Art: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*. Florian Matzner, ed. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001, 45

that, in themselves, created new sites within existing places. O’Doherty claimed that art’s real value lay in its ability to define and shape space and time, to dictate the “flow of energy between concepts of space articulated through the artwork and the space we occupy.” This space determines the observer’s understanding of himself and his relationship to the space he shares with an artwork. In other (pithier) words, O’Doherty suggested that “[s]pace now is not just where things happen; things make space happen.”<sup>78</sup> The American artist Vito Acconci made the same point when he argued that the “function of public art is to de-design,” meaning that public art had to deconstruct established norms of aesthetic engagement with public space, make those norms visible, and create art that gave its viewers the opportunity to overturn established norms by relating differently to space.<sup>79</sup> Or, as Miwon Kwon explained a few years before Acconci, the task was to

decode and/or recode the institutional conventions so as to expose their hidden yet motivated operations—to reveal the ways in which institutions mold art’s meaning to modulate its cultural and economic value, and to undercut the fallacy of art and its institutions’ ‘autonomy’ by making apparent their imbricated relationship to the broader socioeconomic and political processes of the day.<sup>80</sup>

In this context, the site of art, per Kwon, “evolves away from its coincidence with the literal space of art, and the physical condition of a specific location recedes as the primary element in the conception of a site.” Instead, it is the “*techniques and effects* of the art institution as they circumscribe the definition, production, presentation, and dissemination of art that become the sites of critical intervention.” For the spatial interventionists, the nature of the work of art shifted from a static existence to an active enterprise. As Kwon has theorized, “[t]he ‘work’ no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process, provoking the viewers’ *critical* (not just physical) acuity regarding the ideological conditions of that viewing.”<sup>81</sup> Here the original object of critique, the disembodied Cartesian thinker-viewer, is reintegrated dialectically into an active process of art production and reception. The spatial interventionists placed this act of uniting production and reception at the heart of their efforts.

Practically, the spatial interventionists’ renegotiation of the politics of power in public space most often revolved around the official or legal permission required to alter their sites of choice. Among the first questions that confronted them as they drafted their projects was whether one was actually allowed to do anything new with that space, that is, to interpret its potential uses differently than those already sanctioned by the city or state.<sup>82</sup> Because the administration of cultural matters in West Germany and elsewhere often rested in the hands of provincial and local authorities rather than the central government, regional idiosyncrasies in cultural policy tended to put these artists at the mercy of municipal administrators. While creating *Duftmarken*, for example, Demnig had not officially registered his project and was consequently arrested in France because, as he discovered, “you are not allowed just to go about printing things on the streets.”<sup>83</sup> Such an observation may seem banal, but it indicated that the spatial interventionists had encroached upon territory that had hitherto been closed to artistic manipulation.

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<sup>78</sup> O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 38-39.

<sup>79</sup> Acconci, “Leaving Home,” 45.

<sup>80</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 88. For more on this perspective, see Daniel Buren. “Function of the Museum.” *Artforum* 12:1 (September 1973): 68.

<sup>81</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” 91. Emphasis in original.

<sup>82</sup> Franke and Demnig, “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben,” 9.

<sup>83</sup> He was, incidentally, never prosecuted. From an interview with Gunter Demnig on 27 July 2006, conducted by Brinda Sommer, “Stolpersteine wider das Vergessen,” 127.

These new artworks challenged what was commonly understood as art’s “territory,” and thus the issue of exploring, overriding, and rewriting boundaries became central to them.<sup>84</sup> But the boundaries that most concerned Demnig and Beuys were not obvious physical boundaries—the threshold of the gallery, the edge of the frame, or the perimeter of public space. Rather they were conceptual or normative boundaries imagined and perpetuated through social consensus and dialogue. Demnig wanted to expand art’s “communicative contexts” in order to link it to a much more expansive community of interlocutors: academics, scientists, community leaders, and, most importantly, the broad category of “the public.”<sup>85</sup> This relatively simple objective of spatial interventionist art is what made it both so powerful and so confusing: these artists used the spatiality of the artwork ironically to shift attention away from the actual physical location of the work, which was “grounded, fixed, actual,” toward the fundamentally discursive nature of art, which by contrast was “ungrounded, fluid, virtual.”<sup>86</sup> Here, the spatial interventionists absorbed a facet of philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ thought. For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere had constituted itself not in a particular physical space but in the diffuse, anonymous “space” of public conversation.<sup>87</sup> Drawing from Arendt’s understanding of human action as linguistically conditioned, or as understandable “for what it is only through a narrative account,” Habermas identified the rise of a form of publicity during the Enlightenment in which a predominantly visual public became an auditory one. The “space” of the public sphere in Habermas shifts away from Arendt’s topographical and spatial understanding of the space of action toward one in which spoken words and printed media play a leading role.<sup>88</sup> Similar to what Benedict Anderson would later call an “imagined community” constituted by the “homogeneous, empty time” of a collective, simultaneous readership of mass media,<sup>89</sup> Habermas identified as *Öffentlichkeit* a publicness or “public sphere” formed through the depersonalized communicative medium of print capitalism: citizen-readers engaged with a marketed text rather than immediately face-to-face with its author.<sup>90</sup> Though their medium took the form of art rather than print capitalism, the spatial interventionists nevertheless assimilated their own version of Habermas’ claims: citizens would engage one another in a dialogue provoked by the spatial medium of spatial interventionist artworks. The site or space of the artwork, Miwon Kwon has observed, became more capacious: “different cultural debates, a theoretical concept, a social issue, a political problem, an institutional framework (not necessarily an art institution), a community or seasonal event, a historical condition, even particular formations of desire” increasingly functioned as sites.<sup>91</sup>

The transgression of the spatial interventionists, although mediated by physical space, was actually, then, to intervene in public dialogue. In place of the phenomenological aesthetic paradigm the spatial interventionists substituted a discursive paradigm, the distinguishing feature of which was the way it foregrounded the site as a discursive “field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate.” That is, the site did not exist *a priori* but was produced by the artwork itself. Kwon has

<sup>84</sup> Franke and Demnig, “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben,” 9.

<sup>85</sup> Demnig and Rapp, “Gunter Demnig,” 235.

<sup>86</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 95.

<sup>87</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger, tr. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989. The political scientist and philosopher Seyla Benhabib has highlighted how Habermas’ understanding of public space was guided by his appropriation of some of Arendt’s understanding of public space. See Seyla Benhabib. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996, 199.

<sup>88</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 199-200. On the rise of an auditory public, see also James H. Johnson. *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

<sup>89</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

<sup>90</sup> This distance between reader and author did not prevent the former from imagining a real personal connection with the latter, as was the case with devotees of Rousseau who referred to him only by his familiar first name, “Jean-Jacques.”

<sup>91</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 92-93. Emphasis in original.

argued that “unlike previous models, this site is not defined as a *precondition*. Rather, it is *generated* by the work (often as ‘content’), and then *verified* by its convergence with an existing discursive formation.”<sup>92</sup> The art historian James Meyer has echoed Kwon’s argument by referring to these artworks as occupying a “functional site” rather than the “literal site” of more traditional art. The literal site means “an actual location, a singular place,” a work “*in situ*,” the capacity of art embedded in this literal site to generate discourse or meaning is determined by that individual, physical location.<sup>93</sup> The functional site, by contrast, operates dynamically within and upon the work: this site lets go of its physical space and becomes, instead, “a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and discursive filiations and the bodies that move between them’.”<sup>94</sup> The effect of the functional site is to orient the artwork discursively rather than phenomenologically: it “textualizes spaces . . . and spatializes discourses,” Kwon argues, similar to the way one can “surf” the Internet.<sup>95</sup> The ability to conceive of the site of an artwork as something more than a particular place requires a major conceptual leap as well as a redefinition of the “public” role of art and artists.<sup>96</sup>

The discursive paradigm of the functional space, as explained by Kwon and Meyer, helps makes sense of the power of Beuys and Demnig’s work. The permanence of their artworks as intentional and recognizable works—that is, the significance of their literal site—fades with time: Demnig’s physical traces dissipate; Beuys’ trees gradually become routinized as trees rather than as art installations. But the cognitive and discursive trace remains, repeatedly reconstituted in public memory and dialogue.<sup>97</sup> Johannes Stüttgen, an artist as well as student and friend of Joseph Beuys, noted the way that the gradual replacement of place by dialogue, the literal site by the functional, the phenomenological by the discursive, marked a vital and essential dialectical moment in these spatial interventionist artworks. It denoted both an end and a beginning: an end to the obsession with the physicality of the artwork but the beginning of the work’s afterlife, like a grain of sand in an oyster, an irritant that provoked society to smooth out its edges and incorporate the pearl into its conceptual framework. This process of social reckoning with art was collective and dialogic, undertaken repeatedly and voluntarily by independent artists and citizen-viewers. For that reason, Stüttgen understood these artworks to “stand for a kind of internal democracy.” Both the individual and the collective willingness to engage with the artwork’s concept “cannot be delegated, abdicated, [or] relinquished because it is rooted in the individual and in that individual’s personal creative capacity as an artist” to remake art continually as a fixture on the gallery wall of society.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 92-93. Emphasis in original.

<sup>93</sup> Meyer, “The Functional Site,” 24.

<sup>94</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 95. Here Kwon cites two earlier iterations of Meyer’s discussion of the functional site: James Meyer, “The Functional Site,” in *Platzwechsel*, exhibition catalogue. Zurich: Kunsthalle Zurich, 1995, 27. She notes that a revised version of this essay appears in *Documents 7* (Fall 1996), 20-29.

<sup>95</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 95.

<sup>96</sup> Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 96. Kwon cites Rosalyn Deutsche. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

<sup>97</sup> Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichshain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Berlin: NGBK, 2002, 10. See also Sachsse, “Spur und Monument.”

<sup>98</sup> Johannes Stüttgen. “Das soll ein Zeichen sein für die Notwendigkeit eines gewaltigen Tuns. Vortrag zum Festakt in der Neuen Galerie der Staatlichen Museum Kassel am 28 September 2002.” *1982 - 2002: 20 Jahre Joseph Beuys: “7000 Eichen - Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung*.” Joseph Beuys and Harald Kimpel, eds. Kassel: Kulturamt, 2003, 16, 20.



## CHAPTER 2

### New Spaces for History: The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* and “History from Below”

“*Their point of departure is not a historical theory like Marxism but a historical place, everyday life.*”  
- Michael Wildt, 1991

In an obituary published in 1997, German historian Peter Schöttler drew a particularly poignant picture of the deceased, a British academic, whom he described at once as a heretic, a pathbreaker, and an ideas-man. With the tenderness of a student charged with representing a cherished mentor’s legacy, Schöttler mused about the scholar’s lecture style. The appearance of a large shopping bag overflowing with sheets of paper would announce his arrival. Having emptied the bag of its contents, he would spread them out before him on the lectern. Out of this jumbled mess of citations, images, embryonic ideas, and unanswered questions, he “assembled his lecture right before his audience’s very eyes.” Though many of his colleagues saw in this ad hoc pedagogical style a sign of deficient professionalism—conspicuous smirks often betrayed their skepticism—he understood every lecture as a workshop, a collaborative effort in which, by showing his cards, so to speak, by inviting from the audience interruption, questioning, corrections, and elaborations, they together could create its content.<sup>1</sup>

The obituary honored Raphael Samuel, British Marxist historian and, more importantly for Schöttler’s purposes, father of Britain’s hub for alternative social history, the History Workshop. Schöttler’s vignette appeared just four months after Samuel’s death in *WerkstattGeschichte*, a German-language journal that emerged out of Germany’s own History Workshop movement.<sup>2</sup> Schöttler, a young leftist historian in the 1960s and ‘70s and a student of Hans Mommsen, admired Samuel’s methods. An exponent of “history from below,” Samuel championed historical inquiry that not only featured the working class, the content of whose daily lives capitalism’s bourgeois ideology had written out of the historical record, but were also narrated from their perspective. “Social history and the history of everyday life, as far as [Samuel] understood and practiced them,” Schöttler explained, should not present a closed or finite worldview. Samuel thought, instead, that “they should operate as an ‘open text’.”<sup>3</sup> In Samuel’s lecture style, Schöttler saw the epitome of this kind of open, interactive historical inquiry. It also represented the objectives of a popular trend in West Germany that the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, in 1983, dubbed Germany’s “new history movement.”<sup>4</sup>

Nearly four decades after the collapse of National Socialism, four decades of politics and society full steam ahead, West Germany had finally stopped to catch its breath, Ulrich Herbert, a young student of historian Lutz Niethammer, argued. After almost forty years “hectically in pursuit of ‘getting on with things’ [*Vorwärtskommen*], a whole generation was struck with a retrospective impulse.” As they reflected on West Germany’s past, however, a generation of students began “to grasp that their history [was] being taken away from them.” Accompanying them in this realization was a hodge-podge collection of German academics with and without university positions, social

<sup>1</sup> Peter Schöttler. “Häretiker, Pfadfinder und Ideenbanker. Zum Tod von Raphael Samuel.” *WerkstattGeschichte* 16 (1997):

<sup>2</sup> *WerkstattGeschichte*, issued by the Association for Critical Historiography [*Verein für kritische Geschichtsschreibung*], first appeared in 1992 as the successor to *Geschichtswerkstatt*, a journal published by Germany’s national History Workshop organization between 1983 and 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Schöttler, “Häretiker, Pfadfinder und Ideenbanker,” 67-68. For Samuel’s own words on the project of writing social history and the history of everyday life, see Raphael Samuel. *Theatres of Memory*. London: Verso, 1994, particularly Samuel’s introduction.

<sup>4</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit.’ Spiegel-Report über die neue Geschichtsbewegung in der Bundesrepublik.” *Der Spiegel*, 6 June 1983, 36.

workers, teachers, librarians, and interested local citizens.<sup>5</sup> For some, the disappearance of history resulted only from calendar pages turning, a gulf growing ever larger between their past—with its still-living witnesses—and their present. Others, however, positioned themselves against what they labeled, pejoratively, the “Historians’ Guild” [*Historikergewerkschaft*], that collection of professionally-trained historians in coveted, secure, increasingly hard-to-come-by university chairs.<sup>6</sup> Academic claims of the neutrality of the historical profession proved, for many, a hard pill to swallow. What passed as neutrality, they argued, ultimately reinforced a historiographical power dynamic that excluded from historical inquiry the voices of the oppressed and dependent, that is, the ordinary people [*kleine Leute*].

With a rhetoric that mirrored the language used by Raphael Samuel’s British history collective, partisans of the new interest in history that swept West Germany in the 1980s aimed to “work through history from the bottom up, from the perspective of and, when possible, with the participation of those who lived through it.”<sup>7</sup> This movement ramified quickly; it generated new museums, tour groups, student research competitions, and a manner of historical forensics teams or *Spurensicherer* [literally, trace-savers] who wanted to preserve remaining physical or topographical traces of the Germany’s past.<sup>8</sup> The most concise crystallization of its agenda, however, was the formation of German History Workshops. Founded as a national organization in Göttingen in 1982, the German History Workshop or *Geschichtswerkstatt* (henceforth in the German to distinguish it from the English example; in the plural, *Geschichtswerkstätten*) comprised a collection of both informal institutions of varying sizes and independent historians collectively committed to building a “Left-pluralistic forum for alternative historical research.”<sup>9</sup> From Oldenburg to Konstanz, Berlin to Solingen, Schöttler explained in 1984, this mass of grassroots historians [*Basishistoriker*] ramped up their public engagement with historical themes. They had taken it upon themselves, one executive board member of the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* explained, to explore new modes of non-hierarchical historical inquiry, to use this historical knowledge to involve themselves more thoroughly in their own “lifeworld” [*Lebenswelt*], to engage more rigorously in current social and political debates, and, ultimately, to advance radically democratic mutual- and self-understanding.<sup>10</sup> As a case study of this

<sup>5</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> On the Historian’s Guild as a bone of contention within the German academic community, see Heinz Dieter Kittsteiner. “Die Krisis der Historiker-Zunft.” *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Wahrheit: zum Grundlagenstreit in der Geschichtswissenschaft*. Rainer Maria Kiesow and Dieter Simon, eds. Frankfurt: Campus, 2000, 71-86. On the relationship between traditional historians and the “new history movement,” see Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich. “Die ‘neue Geschichtsbewegung’ in der Bundesrepublik. Antriebeskräfte, Selbstverständnis, Perspektiven.” *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*. Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich, eds. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985, 20. For more, particularly on the response of professional historians, especially those sympathetic with this movement and their limited engagement with its questions, see Lutz Niethammer. “Anmerkungen zur Alltagsgeschichte.” *Geschichtsdidaktik*, 5:3 (1980): 231-242; Detlev Peukert. “Arbeiteralltag - Mode oder Methode?” *Arbeiteralltag in Stadt und Land. Neue Wege der Geschichtsschreibung, Argument Sonderband 94*. Heiko Haumann and Stefan Bajohr, eds. Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1982, 8-39.

<sup>7</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 36.

<sup>8</sup> Consider, for example, the efforts to preserve the Berlin house at Große Hamburger Straße 29 adjacent to the Sophienkirche, which features prominent bullet damage from the Second World War. Information about the house was published the same year as the *Spiegel* article on the New History Movement. See Heinrich Trost, Horst Vysěk, Horst Büttner, Institut für Denkmalpflege der DDR. *Die Bau- und Kunstdenkmale in der DDR, I*. München: C.H. Beck, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Schöttler. “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. zu einem Versuch, basisdemokratische Geschichtsinitiativen und -Forschungen zu ‘Vernetzen.’” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10:3 (1 January 1984): 422.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Georg Frei. “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten. Ein Plädoyer für aufklärerische Geschichtsarbeit.” *Die andere Geschichte: Geschichte von unten, Spurensicherung, ökologische Geschichte, Geschichtswerkstätten*. Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig, eds. Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1986, 269. Other goals of the national chapter of the

phenomenon—an example chosen for the degree and density of its historical practices—this chapter will examine the trajectory of the Berlin branch of the *Geschichtswerkstatt*, founded in Berlin’s alternative cultural center, the Mehringhof, in May 1981.

As Schöttler had suggested thirteen years earlier than his obituary for Raphael Samuel, the *Geschichtswerkstatt* was not assured the same success as its British counterpart. While the British History Workshop formed during a moment Schöttler described as a “political awakening” of the Left in England, the *Geschichtswerkstatt* emerged during a conservative resurgence in the Federal Republic, whose politics—electoral as well as social and cultural—raised a unique set of challenges for “history from below” in Germany.<sup>11</sup> Sympathetic with the agenda of the *Geschichtswerkstatt*, Schöttler expressed his hopes early in the group’s existence that it might engage with and overcome some of the conceptual impediments facing German historians on the Left.<sup>12</sup> Such was not to be the case, however, and the *Geschichtswerkstatt* failed definitively to surmount many of these obstacles. Though the History Workshop played an important role in challenging the demographics and sites of intellectual work in Germany, and though the group remains active today, its real heyday—which began in the middle of the 1980s—ended when the Berlin Wall fell.<sup>13</sup> Facing the most significant historical event to unfold during the group’s existence, this vocal collection of lay-historians responded to the end of the Cold War with surprising silence: their first sustained engagement with the world historical events of 1989 came a full decade later.<sup>14</sup>

Remarkable, given the group’s short lifespan and decidedly unspectacular decline, is the quiet but powerful legacy the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* left for German cultural projects. While the group itself slowly collapsed beneath budgetary problems and irreconcilable in-fighting, it nevertheless managed to organize a series of historical exhibits, installations, tours, and events whose three governing principles remained widely attractive even after the group’s overall popularity declined. First, these projects facilitated grassroots democracy, both in form and in content: history should be narrated by everyday people as well as told from their perspective. As such, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s projects became a community effort. Second, they stressed decentralization. Rather than hosting their exhibits, installations, and events at popular tourist destinations, at other convenient high-traffic sites in the heart of the city, or even at the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s own headquarters, they chose to locate their projects “*vor Ort*,” or at the place where historical events actually happened: often unglamorous residential streets, quiet alleyways, or undeveloped open spaces. Finally, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* attempted to create projects with an in-built dynamism. Instead of presenting their projects as final historical expressions that closed off further debate, they

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*Geschichtswerkstatt* were printed in *Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* “Selbstverständnispapier der Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.” *Geschichtsdidaktik* 9:2 (1984): 193f.

<sup>11</sup> Schöttler, “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.,” 423.

<sup>12</sup> Schöttler was socialized into the professional historical world through his studies of Left intellectuals like Louis Althusser and Siegfried Kracauer and under historians of the Left like Hans Mommsen. As a scholar of discourse analysis, Schöttler was particularly attentive to the language used to criticize the History Workshop. He expressed frustration that critics of the History Workshop movement often too readily drew “false oppositions” between concepts like ‘structure’ and ‘subject,’ ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld,’ ‘science’ and ‘experience,’ reproducing these dichotomies just as undialectically as those they criticized. Conjuring Raphael Samuel—who understood the British History Workshop to reject the simple opposition of categories like ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic,’ ‘Marxist’ and ‘non-Marxist,’ ‘scholarship’ and ‘radical political engagement’—Schöttler ended this article with the hope that the German History Workshop might be able, in its own way, to “take up, break through, and overcome such false dichotomies.” Schöttler, “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.,” 424.

<sup>13</sup> Jenny Wüstenberg. “Vom Alternativen Laden zum Diestleistungsbetrieb: The Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. A Case Study in Activist Memory Politics.” *German Studies Review* 32:3 (2009): 590–618.

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Karwelat. *Wahnsinn: Erinnerung an den Berliner Mauerfall vom 9. November 1989*. Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1999.

hoped that their work would evolve as participants gathered more information and would, thus, invite ongoing dialogue. Like Raphael Samuel's lectures, the *Geschichtswerkstatt* created a forum that facilitated interactive, participatory, discursive engagement with the past.

This chapter takes up the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* [BGW] in its earliest years. It traces the group's formation, its conceptual influences, and its first major projects in order to demonstrate how this grassroots organization used history to advance a radically democratic spatial project.

## I. The Birth of Berlin's *Geschichtswerkstatt*

### A. Origins: Local, National, International

For many of the BGW's founding members, remnants of the group's humble beginnings exist today only as vague memories of an "atmosphere" rather than as concrete dates and names. Twenty-five people came to an initial, informal brainstorming meeting on 19 November 1980. On the occasion of the BGW's twentieth birthday, group member Ursula Schröter reflected on this incendiary moment. They prepared a simple poster, which they hung in student centers of Berlin's universities and elsewhere around the city. "COME BUILD A BERLIN GESCHICHTSWERKSTATT," it read, summoning guests to a gathering two months later. "It was obvious," Schröter wrote, "that the meeting's initiators considered the various movements and battles of the Left to have waned, and they worried that their stories might perish in the great underworld of historical scholarship." These first members of the *Geschichtswerkstatt* appealed to those who wanted to oppose "the state-sponsored historical narrative...with alternative histories 'from below'." Their call-to-arms extended to "all who [wished] to prevent (this) history from going to the dogs [*unter die Räder kommen*] and being forgotten," though it would later become obvious to Schröter and others that the message was much clearer than the means to advance it.<sup>15</sup>

For its aura as an epicenter of grassroots organization and alternative culture in Berlin, the youthful neighborhood of Kreuzberg served as the galvanizing point. The group's founding members gathered in Kreuzberg's Mehringhof, the first of Berlin's apartment buildings to be occupied in the 1970s in protest of the city's demolition of viable living quarters during its housing scarcity crisis.<sup>16</sup> This first official meeting of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* on 23 January 1981 brought out a much more impressive roster of eighty participants, who assembled in the Mehringhof's "Blue Salon." Disagreement reigned over the group's as-yet-undetermined objectives, though one faculty member from Berlin's Technical University, Manfred Liebel, gained traction in suggesting that their collective effort should not simply create a new organization, a safe repository for disgruntled citizens with an interest in history, or "a kind of claim to leadership in the effort to work through the history of the Left." Instead, he charged the group with finding ways to pursue three pillars: promoting the exchange and communication of historical experiences, developing an archive, and mediating contact between organizations with similar investments.<sup>17</sup> These pillars unfortunately offered little help in narrowing down the group's concrete interests. During the meeting participants debated project suggestions on themes as diverse as the worker's movement during the Weimar Republic and the House Occupation Movement in the 1970s, though they did

<sup>15</sup> Ursula Schröter. "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt." *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 9.

<sup>16</sup> The House Occupation Movement [*Hausbesetzung*] was both a product and a reinforcement of the values of the New Social Movements in Germany in the 1970s. Since the mid-1960s, the Berlin Senate had, through their *Flächensanierungspolitik*, endorsed the removal of old buildings, whose destruction would permit further modernization efforts in a city that had not still not recovered from the destruction of the Second World War.

<sup>17</sup> Schröter, "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 10-11.

manage to agree that, whichever projects they chose, the group's archive should assemble materials in short supply in established archival institutions.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the breadth of their intellectual curiosity, however, they shared a set of social circumstances that aligned their most basic commitments. Many of them were academic transplants to Berlin, drawn like moths to the flame of alternative thinking the city was reputed to stoke and the allure of the Student Movement, even well after its own light had been snuffed out. Because of the city's novelty, BGW member and later curator of Berlin's Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum Martin Düspohl suggested, these newcomers found themselves engrossed in finding their way around their new, unfamiliar environment. To make sense of this foreignness, not only in its immediacy but also historically, these participants took an interest in the everyday life of the city. Many of them also wanted to engage politically in their new home, but found opportunities within the university lacking and beyond the university carried out over their heads. The sense that whole neighborhoods might be razed, for example, to permit the city's rebuilding and modernization contributed to a sense of disenfranchisement from their newly-adopted home. They began to regard stories of historic resistance efforts as an inspiration. In conversations with older neighbors, many nurtured a fascination with the legends of the so-called "Red Wedding," a militant Communist district in the central part of the city whose violent struggles against the Nazis in the 1920s made it an enduring icon of the struggle against fascism. Wedding would play host in mid-1981 to one of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt's* first activities, which focused on the contemporary history of the neighborhood's housing opportunities amid the renter protest movement that had begun the previous decade.<sup>19</sup>

That at least a third of those present for the initial meeting were female would later prove constitutive of the group's agenda.<sup>20</sup> At the time, however, it caused the greatest friction in efforts to determine what they should call their organization. Theo Pinkus, a Swiss publisher and bookseller whose work often brought him to Berlin and whose interests leaned toward alternative educational practices, was present at the group's first meetings. He would become a key mentor for the organization, though he tended to stay largely in the background of the group's actual undertakings. In honor of one of the leaders of Weimar's radical leftist Spartacus League and the namesake of their meeting site, Pinkus suggested they call the group the Franz Mehring Society. Though his suggestion met overwhelming approval from the group, Ursula Schröter noted that many women regarded it with silence. In addition to highlighting the number of archives already in service of the worker's movement and pointing out that naming it after Clara Zetkin could accomplish the same goal, Schröter settled the gendered disagreement by stressing that the group should communicate openness, rather than a narrow political agenda. In place of the Franz Mehring Society, Schröter suggested simply that they called it the History Workshop or *Geschichtswerkstatt*, as in their original advertisement. Her suggestion stuck, and four months later, on 25 May 1981 in the Mehringhof, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* was officially founded.<sup>21</sup>

The BGW saw itself as participating in a wide social and political movement invested in engaging critically with Germany's dominant institutions in a spirit they likened to that of the generation of 1968.<sup>22</sup> Its members advanced what they understood as a "novel kind of historical analysis" which, by bringing the practice of historical research out of the confines of the university and by using everyday life [*Alltag*] as the primary point of access, would enable a more democratic

<sup>18</sup> Schröter, "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 10-11

<sup>19</sup> Martin Düspohl. "20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt: Ein persönlicher Rückblick." *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 46-47

<sup>20</sup> Schröter, "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 10

<sup>21</sup> Schröter, "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 9-11

<sup>22</sup> BGWA. Gisela Wenzel. "Grabe, wo du stehst." *Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.* Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

engagement with history. Combining archival work and oral interviews with historical witnesses, lectures and neighborhood walks, they described their methods as stretching from “traditional and academic” to “unconventional and experimental.”<sup>23</sup> They wanted to approach history as a collective, non-elitist, public activity and distinguished their products both from a top-down understanding of history oriented around the nation-state as well as from narrower folk histories.

The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* was not alone in its concern for the university’s proprietary relationship to the practice of history or in its interest in using history to engage the German public politically. In 1983, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* published an article in which it described a “new history movement” [*neue Geschichtsbewegung*] that had begun to sweep West Germany.<sup>24</sup> A motley and interdisciplinary crew of professional historians, other social scientists, and educational administrators had begun to join ranks with a large body of laypeople in forming regional working groups dedicated to using history to intervene in the politics of their communities.<sup>25</sup> They drew participation from members of the newly-formed German Green Party, from adherents of the New Social Movements of the 1970s and 80s, as well as from students whose initial interest in history had been piqued by West German president Gustav Heinemann’s national Student Research Contest in History, held annually since 1973.<sup>26</sup> The professional academic half of the New History Movement included ethnographers like Hans Medick and Alf Lüdtke in Göttingen; members of Dieter Groh’s Marxist group in Constance; oral historians like Lutz Niethammer, Franz Josef Brüggemeier, and Ulrich Herbert; German feminists like Regine Schulte, Dorothee Wierling, Annette Kuhn, Ursula Nienhaus, and Karin Hausen; and quantitative historians. On occasion, they also received support from older established historians like Martin Broszat.<sup>27</sup>

A year and a half after the founding of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* and eight months before the publication of the *Spiegel* article, this cluster of individuals gathered in Göttingen in November 1982 to bring to life a national *Geschichtswerkstatt*. They intended that this organization would serve as a loose umbrella association for the host of regional historical groups that had begun to sprout up throughout Germany, facilitating networking between them. One hundred interested parties gathered again in May 1983 in Bochum. In addition to registering the organization formally, they

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<sup>23</sup> BGWA, Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 9.-12.1983

<sup>24</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 40

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt. “Radical Plurality: History Workshops as a Practical Critique of Knowledge.” *History Workshop Journal* 33:1 (20 March 1992): 75-76. See also “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 37

<sup>26</sup> Alfred Georg Frei. “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 318. See also Gerhard Schneider. “Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte.” *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*. Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich, eds. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985. It is hard to underestimate the impact of the *Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte*, organized since 1973 by the Kurt A. Körber-Stiftung in Hamburg. When *Der Spiegel* published its 1983 article on the New History Movement, they cited the impressive statistics from the most recent competition. It had yielded 150,000 sheets of paper describing everyday life between the end of the Weimar republic and beginning of the war. There were nearly 13,000 participants and 2172 projects. The competition would also become a strong motor in the new attitude toward the Holocaust. These more than 2000 project averaged at least ten interviews with historical witnesses, which, the article noted, created a “massive dialogue between grandparents and grandchildren.” “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 37.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Fletcher. “History from Below Comes to Germany: The New History Movement in the Federal Republic of Germany.” *The Journal of Modern History* 60:3 (1 September 1988): 562. See also Alf Lüdtke, ed. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995; Peter Borscheid. “Alltagsgeschichte – Modetorheit oder neues Tor zur Vergangenheit?” *Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland. Entwicklungen und Perspektiven im internationalen Zusammenhang, Band III: Soziales Verhalten und soziale Aktionsformen in der Geschichte*. Wolfgang Schieder and Volker Sellin, eds. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987, 87-100. On Broszat’s support, see, for example, Martin Broszat. *Nach Hitler: Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 1987.

produced a declaration of the group’s “self-conception” [*Selbstverständnis*]. At the top of their list of research interests stood the histories of gender, power and repression, resistance, everyday realities, and local history. While they would use traditional archival sources—they understood these largely as government administrative documents and press publications—they stressed the need to expand their reach to include oral history testimonies alongside the objects and documents of everyday life. They saw themselves as highlighting the relevance of the challenges of the past to those of the present in an effort to prompt political and social engagement. By promoting what they hoped would be “cooperative, solidarity-generating forms of work,” they aimed, somewhat vaguely, to foster understanding [*Verständlichkeit*] within their membership and audience.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the decade, the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* would claim more than three hundred individual members and at least forty local affiliates.<sup>29</sup>

Writing over a decade after the formation of Berlin’s *Geschichtswerkstatt*, Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt—professional historians and members of Berlin’s and Hamburg’s *Geschichtswerkstätten*, respectively—stressed that, within Germany, the phenomenon of the history workshop was unique: “History, which used...to be such a solemn social science” in Germany, they argued, “is now the only discipline in the humanities that can boast a grass-roots movement.”<sup>30</sup> Wildt, however, cautioned against inferring too much about the internal coherence of this phenomenon solely from its having been identified as a movement. The media hype surrounding the *Geschichtswerkstätten*, which began with the *Spiegel* article, gave them “a kind of false unity,” Wildt suggested, “before [they] could catch their breath to discuss who they were and what they were all about.”<sup>31</sup> Press attention often smoothed over ideological differences within the organization. Professional historians pushed to use the *Geschichtswerkstatt* to advance the academic discipline of history.<sup>32</sup> Political activists hoped to use history as a medium for popular political education; in particular, critics of the increasingly-reformist and middle-class Social Democratic Party saw the *Geschichtswerkstatt* as an opportunity to engage the public with the history of the Left in Germany.<sup>33</sup> Participants from among the New Social Movements and former contributors to the Student Movement held onto their disappointments with the failed revolutionary hopes of the past two decades. They sought to put the *Geschichtswerkstatt* to work identifying the deeper causes of the conflicts out of which these movements grew and the reasons for their decline or failure.<sup>34</sup> Women’s groups wanted to write history’s female agents back into the historical record.<sup>35</sup> Teachers called for an exploration of new historical pedagogy. Locals wanted to cultivate a “sense of belonging,” or

<sup>28</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 317.

<sup>29</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 318.

<sup>30</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 73, quoted from Gustav Seibt. “Grabe wo du stehst. Die Kontroverse um die Alltagsgeschichte.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 September 1987, 36

<sup>31</sup> Michael Wildt. “History Workshops in Germany: A Survey at the End of the German Post-War Era.” Lyndal Roper, tr. *History Workshop: A Collectanea, 1967-1991: Documents, Memoirs, Critique and Cumulative Index to History Workshop Journal*. Raphael Samuel and History Workshop Centre for Social History, eds. Oxford: History Workshop, 1991, 56

<sup>32</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 56.

<sup>33</sup> On the agendas of politicians of the left, see Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 318; Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 258; Manfred Scharrer. *Macht Geschichte von unten. Handbuch für gewerkschaftliche Geschichte vor Ort*. Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1988.

<sup>34</sup> Fletcher, “History from Below Comes to Germany,” 560. On the “new social movements,” see Sabine Von Dirke. *All Power to the Imagination!: The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997; Peter H. Merkl. “How New the Brave New World? New Social Movements in West Germany.” *German Studies Review* 10:1 (1987): 127-47; Roland Roth, Dieter Rucht, and Sabine Berthold, eds. *Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Frankfurt: Campus, 1987; Karl-Werner Brand. *Neue soziale Bewegungen: Entstehung, Funktion und Perspektive neuer Protestpotentiale: eine Zwischenbilanz*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982.

<sup>35</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 318. See also Alfred G. Frei. “Geschichte aus den ‘Graswurzeln’? Geschichtswerkstätten in der historischen Kulturarbeit.” *Aus Parlament und Zeitgeschichte*. B 2 (1988): 35-46, here 40f.

*Heimat*, by learning the history of their own community.<sup>36</sup> But public representations of these groups, both self-generated and external, often swept these differences under the rug. In fact, Wildt highlighted, only first in 1991, a decade after the history workshop trend gained steam, did the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* publish a special issue of its self-titled journal on the subject of its internal fragmentation.<sup>37</sup>

While acknowledging the range of personal interests within its membership, several features nevertheless defined the *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s approach to historical work. Contrasting themselves to the so-called “guild” of traditional university historians, the *Spiegel* article explained, they saw themselves as “memory workers” tasked with recording eyewitness testimonies and collecting the material evidence of social memory to integrate into the historical record. They set out to catalogue in the annals of history what few others had: the lives of ordinary people [*kleine Leute*],<sup>38</sup> or those “who generally leave few traces,” as the historian of everyday life Alf Lüdtke described them.<sup>39</sup> They wanted to narrate history from the bottom up, reconstructing the everyday lives of everyday people in the past. This objective meant, first, that *Geschichtswerkstatt* members focused on mediating the perspectives of society's subordinate voices and, second, that they invited remaining living witnesses to participate in that narrative process.<sup>40</sup>

While Lindenberger and Wildt highlighted the peculiarity of the new history movement within Germany, precedent for this kind of a grassroots historical organization existed beyond German borders, namely in Britain. Two decades prior during a moment of crisis in the British Left after the Second World War,<sup>41</sup> a peculiar “unorthodox and critical Marxism” birthed an intellectual moment in England that historian Dennis Dworkin labels “cultural Marxism.”<sup>42</sup> Cultural Marxism abandoned the economism of orthodox Marxism and Stalinism as well as Leninist vanguardism and

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<sup>36</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 56.

<sup>37</sup> See *Geschichtswerkstatt* 24, Special Feature, “Rifts: History from below in the West and the East,” 1991.

<sup>38</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 36-37

<sup>39</sup> Alf Lüdtke. “Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are its Practitioners.” *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Alf Lüdtke, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 13

<sup>40</sup> Fletcher, “History from Below Comes to Germany,” 563. See also Gert Zang. *Die unaufhaltsame Annäherung an das Einzelne: Reflexionen über den theoretischen und praktischen Nutzen der Regional- und Alltagsgeschichte*. Konstanz: Eigenverlag des Arbeitskreises für Regionalgeschichte, 1985.

<sup>41</sup> For the intellectual Left in England, the 1950s were a decade of defeat: the working class movement stalled, the electorate proved indifferent to radical agendas, and intellectuals withdrew from politics. The relative affluence of the British working class, the rise of consumer capitalism, and the flourishing of mass media in the postwar period seemed to have exploded traditional assumptions that orthodox Marxist theory held of the working class. The revolutionary preconditions necessary to turn the wheel of history toward socialism revealed themselves as absent from advanced capitalist society. Disillusionment with their leadership in the wake of the Soviet Union's quashing of Hungary's 1956 revolution coupled with anger over Britain's involvement in the Suez Crisis that same year created a “heterogeneous group of ex-Communists, disaffected Labour supporters, and socialist students” who shared a commitment to revitalizing democratic socialist theory and practice. See Dennis L. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, 44-45. On the link between Suez and the formation of the British New Left, see Michael Kenny. *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> Dworkin's *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*, which traces development of an “unorthodox and critical Marxism” in England between the rise of the Welfare State in the 1940s and Margaret Thatcher's solid dismantling of it in the 1970s, remains perhaps the best account both of the rise of cultural Marxism in England and of the extended history of British historians of the Left, which includes the History Workshop. On the origins of Dworkin's attention to the particular cultural inflection of British Marxism in the postwar years, see Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson. “The Territory of Marxism” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, eds. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Grossberg and Nelson's book summarizes the proceedings of a 1983 conference which highlighted the centrality of an academic trend by which Marxism radically challenged the social sciences and humanities by placing culture and cultural practices at the heart of its inquiries.



instead took as its subject the autonomy of culture in social life.<sup>43</sup> Less of a “political movement in the traditional sense” than the catalyst in the creation of a “space for cultural politics and theory in Britain,”<sup>44</sup> the British New Left distinguished itself from the tradition Left by rejecting the historical inevitability of socialist transformation. But it also attempted to reclaim an “appreciation of historical traditions of popular resistance.”<sup>45</sup> The British History Workshop emerged from within this climate and assumed as its task the two-part project of writing “history from below,” a project that consisted both of telling the history of ordinary people as well as of democratizing the penning of that history.<sup>46</sup> In the manner of Marxist historian and intellectual luminary E. P. Thompson, they sought to “rescue” the everyday citizens of the past “from the enormous condescension of posterity.”<sup>47</sup> Under the leadership of Raphael Samuel, the History Workshop interpreted the individuals they studied not as “passive victims of historical circumstances but active makers and creators of their own history.”<sup>48</sup> The History Workshop also drew inspiration from Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy*, in which Hoggart pioneered new literary-critical methods aimed at understanding the meaning of cultural experience, “reading lived experience as if it were a text.”<sup>49</sup> Hoggart’s influence complemented the impact of Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society*, which aimed to understand culture expansively, as an entire way of life. On account of its broadness, culture could not be mastered by a small group and was, thus, an “intrinsically democratic” subject matter.<sup>50</sup> Accessing this “culture from below” required that members of the History Workshop tap into new kinds of often scarce primary sources, read those sources against the grain, and assemble them into a creative narrative that used plain, simple language in order to make it accessible to the

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<sup>43</sup> Dworkin distinguishes between the Marxism of his subjects and that of the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School saw modern culture as the debased mass culture of the culture industry. British Marxists, by contrast, saw popular culture as potentially subversive and tried to understand it from the point of view of the consumers rather than the producers. Both, nevertheless, understood culture as playing an important role in ensure the acquiescence of the masses to dominant ideology and the status quo. While the Frankfurt School privileged the importance of intellectuals apart from workers, British Marxists struggled with the relationship between theory and practice (Dworkin, 4-5). Martin Jay has also emphasized the distance British Marxism maintained to the issue of totality in comparison to continental Marxism. Not until after Althusser in the 1970s did totality became part of the British discourse. Jay also notes the general distaste among British Marxists for generalizing concepts (Jay, 4). Many Frankfurt Schoolers were also philosophers, “nurtured in Hegelianism,” while British Marxists were historians and theories of a literary or cultural bent (Dworkin, 6). See Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*; Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 78

<sup>45</sup> It developed an investment in reading the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, for example, or the English Revolution in the seventeenth century or the radical movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the everyday experiences of ordinary people. The British Marxists remained largely silent about the delicate history of the twentieth century. With a nod to less flattering explanations, Dworkin suggests simply that Marxist historians in England knew their boundaries and self-censored when it came to touchier subjects. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 24, 77. See also Richard J. Evans. “Die ‘History Workshop’-Bewegung in England.” *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*. Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich, eds.. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985, 37-38.

<sup>46</sup> They drew inspiration from the socialist humanist historiography in E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Though Thompson lit the fire beneath the History Workshop, it bears noting that the affinity was not entirely reciprocal. While Thompson admired the Workshop for its manifestation of libertarian traditions, he also suggested that their methods involved “abandoning ‘whole territories’ of economic and political history.” Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 189. See also E. P. Thompson. “E. P. Thompson: Recovering the Libertarian Tradition,” *Leveller* 22 (1978) 22; Schöttler, “Häretiker, Pfadfinder und Ideenbanker,” 64.

<sup>47</sup> E. P. Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964, 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> In the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson explained that he wrote against efforts to “obscure the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed, by conscious efforts, to the making of history.” Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 12-13. See also Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 183.

<sup>49</sup> Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 85.

<sup>50</sup> Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 89.

broadest possible audience. The stakes in their fight for accessibility were high as they also understood history to carry great political importance, enabling meaningful engagement with contemporary issues.<sup>51</sup>

Basic affinities between the British and German History Workshops were obvious. The German *Geschichtswerkstatt* is, for one, a literal translation of the English “History Workshop” and both groups formed as a challenge to dominant historiographical cultures. The *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s indebtedness to its British predecessor, already some fifteen years its elder, however, remained at best a specter in the 1980s. Certainly German speakers attentive to historical issues appearing in the popular press would have had at least a perfunctory awareness that a group of socialist historians and lay-people with an interest in history had gathered in the mid-1970s at Ruskin College in Oxford, England. They would have known that this historically-minded collective had collaborated on collecting oral testimonies about the beginning of the workers’ and women’s movements and had placed special emphasis on assembling records “from those who generally leave no autobiography.” The 1983 article in *Der Spiegel* devoted three paragraphs to the international models that inspired this fresh German interest in the past, including the British example.<sup>52</sup> Those with more specialized historical investments might have picked up the 1985 collection of essays on this “new history movement” edited by historians Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich in which they would have encountered the German language essay by British historian and student of British Marxism’s greats Richard Evans, who tried to introduce his German audience to a more nuanced story about the origins and content of the History Workshop.<sup>53</sup> But receptivity to Britain’s influence on the shape of either the *Geschichtswerkstatt* or the new history movement in Germany was ultimately slight and superficial. Among publications released by the national *Geschichtswerkstatt*, the special issue of its (short-lived) journal *Modern Times* [*Moderne Zeiten* (MOZ)], released just before the largest gathering of *Geschichtswerkstatt* members and supporters—the 1984 “HistoryFest” [*Geschichtsfest*] in Berlin—gave Raphael Samuel, the father of the British History Workshop, just three pages to explain “the British model” and its goals.<sup>54</sup> Otherwise, this significant issue of MOZ reserved a scant thirty words for the History Workshop, which appeared in the four-page leading article by Alfred Georg Frei, one of the executive committee members of the national *Geschichtswerkstatt*.<sup>55</sup> Berliners proved slightly more generous in their citations. The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s extended engagement with the theories and methods of the history of everyday life in their self-published *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte* (1994) devoted two pages to “post-68,” in which “people’s history” and oral history were discussed together with the background of England’s History Workshop movement (which they, somewhat curiously, translated as *Geschichtsseminare*, that

<sup>51</sup> Evans, “Die ‘History Workshop’-Bewegung in England,” 40-42. Of the dangers of using new sources creatively, Dworkin quotes Raphael Samuel as explaining that “[u]nless he is careful this historian may end up as their mouthpiece.” Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 188. See also Raphael Samuel. “General Editor’s Introduction: People’s History.” *Village Life and Labour*. Raphael Samuel, ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, xv.

<sup>52</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 40

<sup>53</sup> Evans, “Die ‘History Workshop’-Bewegung in England,” 37-45.

<sup>54</sup> Ralph Samuel. “Das britische Modell. Die englische History-Workshop-Bewegung und ihre Ziele.” *Moderne Zeiten—Extra. Geschichtswerkstatt. Sondernummer 4* (April 1984): 7-9. This article was a shortened version of the original, “History Workshop 1: Truth is Partisan,” which appeared in *New Statesman* on February 15, 1980. The longer article was a segment of a six-part series—“History Workshop 1-6”—that appeared in *New Statesman* between February 15 and March 21, 1980. It was first translated to German for the *Journal für Geschichte* 1 (1981).

<sup>55</sup> Alfred Georg Frei. “Die Zukunft liegt in der Vergangenheit. Geschichtswerkstätten, Tendenzwende und demokratische Alternativen.” *Moderne Zeiten—Extra. Geschichtswerkstatt. Sondernummer 4* (April 1984): 5. Frei did, however, devote slightly more attention to the *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s international influences in a 1988 article that appeared in the journal for historical pedagogy, *Geschichtsdidaktik*: Alfred G. Frei. “Alltag - Region - Politik. Anmerkungen zur ‘neuen Geschichtsbewegung’.” *Geschichtsdidaktik* 2 (1984): 107-120.

is, “history seminars” rather than the more literal translation that the *Geschichtswerkstatt* used as their very organization name).<sup>56</sup> A subsequent chapter in the book also gave a vague hat tip to the “scholarly developments” abroad from which the *Geschichtswerkstatt* “profits,” pointing specifically to the influential work of British Marxist historian E. P. Thompson.<sup>57</sup> The *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s founding newsletter—both less formal and likely more widely read—however, made no references to England; nor did its first stab in 1984 at a programmatic leaflet printed for broad distribution or its twenty-year retrospective published in 2001.<sup>58</sup> Even in an English language write-up on “History Workshops in Germany” destined for a compendium of articles and primary source documents published by the British History Workshop itself, Michael Wildt led by noting, in a word, the nominal similarities between the two groups, but thereafter used the substantive differences distinguishing the *Geschichtswerkstatt* from its British counterpart as a springboard for discussing the nature of the German example alone, surprisingly absent any comparative analysis.<sup>59</sup>

The *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s stunted appreciation of the History Workshop may have been a simple product of limited materials available in translation. As of 1997, only two essays of Raphael Samuel’s had been translated into German,<sup>60</sup> though works from the British Marxist historians who operated to varying degrees in tandem with the History Workshop were more numerous: German translations for select texts by E. P. Thomson, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rudé, and R. H. Hilton were available as early as 1977.<sup>61</sup> And if Schöttler’s flattering obituary for Samuel, published in the *WerkstattGeschichte*—successor to the journal *Geschichtswerkstatt*, which Germany’s national *Geschichtswerkstatt* issued between 1983 and 1992—is any indication, the impact of the British History Workshop on the German iteration may have become clearer in hindsight. Despite the German tendency to eclipse the influence of the British History Workshop or at least to distance themselves from it, however, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s roots stretched undeniably—if not exclusively—to England.

## B. Historical Interest, Historical Inertia

With the exception of a few individuals who received compensation for their historical work as part of the West German government’s job creation efforts [*ABM-Stellen*], the majority of Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* members undertook their historical research for the group without pay. The laborious process of cobbling together small amounts of funding to support the organization’s

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<sup>56</sup> It bears noting, however, that the author of this chapter, which focused, in particular, on women and their role in the development of the history of everyday life, was not in fact a member of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* or even, for that matter, a German. Anna Davin was, rather, an English historian, active in the British History Workshop Movement. She served, at the time, as the co-editor of the *History Workshop Journal*. This involvement perhaps explains her well-informed footnotes, which nevertheless relegate many more substantial citations about the content of the History Workshop’s work to backmatter. See Anna Davin. “Frauen und Alltagsgeschichte.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 41-43. See also Davin’s footnotes 10-13 on page 57.

<sup>57</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 318. In particular, Frei highlights *The Making of the English Working Class*, which was translated to German in 1987 (*Die Entstehung der englischen Arbeiterklasse*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987) as well as Thompson’s *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), translated to German in 1980 (*Das Elend der Theorie. Zur Produktion geschichtlicher Erfahrung*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> See BGWA, Rundbrief 7.3.1983; Programm, 9-12.1983; and *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 56.

<sup>60</sup> The two articles were Samuel’s “Oral History in Großbritannien.” *Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis: Die Praxis der Oral History*. Lutz Niethammer and Werner Trapp, eds. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1980; and “Die englische History-Workshop-Bewegung und ihre Ziele.” *Journal für Geschichte* 1 (1981), reproduced in *Moderne Zeiten extra, Sonderheft “Geschichtsfest 84,”* (1984): 7-9, cited in Schöttler, “Häretiker, Pfadfinder und Ideenbanker.”

<sup>61</sup> See Evans, “Die ‘History Workshop’-Bewegung in England,” 45.

projects tended to consume the energies of project leaders.<sup>62</sup> Germany's troublesome unemployment levels, particularly for young academics, further complicated the group's efforts: understandably, "job searches often took precedence," long-time Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* member Andreas Ludwig recalled, "since most contributors were unemployed."<sup>63</sup> Given this constellation of circumstances, the group could not sustain its momentum alone and relied for its inertia on broad popular involvement.

Though the reasons people chose to participate in the *Geschichtswerkstatt's* efforts were as individual as the histories they sought to narrate, two motivating factors surfaced frequently. The late 1970s and '80s brought, first, new engagement with the history of the Holocaust. With the release of the four-part American television series *Holocaust*, which first aired in West Germany in 1979 a year after it aired in the United States, and the multi-season German series *Heimat*, which began in 1984, Germans engaged in a new and sustained confrontation with their past and their post-Holocaust national identity from the comfort of their living rooms. And that history included the violent deeds and legacy of National Socialism.<sup>64</sup> An interest in the everyday mechanisms of National Socialism became the red thread running through the groups clustered under the umbrella of the national *Geschichtswerkstatt*. The power of round numbers certainly helped in this regard. Nineteen eighty-three marked the fifty-year anniversary of—or, sometimes referred to more coolly as the fifty-year "distance" [*Distanz*] from—Hitler's ascension to power on 30 January 1933. While it occasioned the creation of many *Geschichtswerkstätten*,<sup>65</sup> the anniversary year also rendered interest in *kleine Leute* contagious. A new fascination with the everyday operations of life under National Socialism emerged as German society began to take to heart historian Raul Hilberg's 1961 argument that those "who supposedly were only cogs in the machine, carrying out orders, became [its] active accomplices."<sup>66</sup>

The second factor that bolstered interest in the *Geschichtswerkstatt's* undertakings manifested as a broadly conceived "crisis of identity." Historians Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig argued that society's mobility had destroyed social connections in Germany and the social spaces in which

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<sup>62</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. "'Grabe, wo du stehst.' Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt." Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

<sup>63</sup> Andreas Ludwig. "Historische Neugier and Projektpraxis." *Projekt: Spurensicherung. Alltag und Widerstand im Berlin der 30er Jahre*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1983, 5-8.

<sup>64</sup> With viewerships of both shows regularly in the tens of millions, this milestone of Germany's collective process of working through its past was no small phenomenon. Historians Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig argued in 1986 that the reception of these two films confirmed the appearance of an intensified interest in "our own" history. Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig. "Geschichte und Heimat." *Die Andere Geschichte: Geschichte von unten, Spurensicherung, ökologische Geschichte, Geschichtswerkstätten*. Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig, eds. Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1986, 15. These films carried the torch of the academic debates of the 1960s over Germany's "inability to mourn" and of the generation of the 1960s who rebelled against their parents and refused to deny the Nazi past simply to make an argument about Germany's modernization. They highlighted a generational shift and their reception signaled among the German public a cautious openness to new ways of engaging with the past, including more sustained conversations with elderly witnesses to National Socialism, whose days were numbered. Lindenberger and Wildt, "Radical Plurality," 82-83. On the "inability to mourn" argument, see Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich. *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*. New York: Grove Press, 1975. Among the most engaging recent research on generational changes and historical interest is Harald Welzer's trans-generational study conducted at Center for Interdisciplinary Memory Research at the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen. See Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall. *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> As the title of countless exhibitions and brochures, Michael Wildt complained, "'Persecution and Resistance in...'" became something of a cliché" in the run-up to the anniversary year. Wildt, "History Workshops in Germany," 59. In West Berlin alone, *Der Spiegel* noted, there were more than fifty scheduled events, exhibits, and lectures on the subject of Hitler's ascension to power. "Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit," 37

<sup>66</sup> Lüdtkke, "Introduction," 4

those connections were made.<sup>67</sup> In suggesting that German society stood before a turning point—not political but rather in the history of thought—historian Klaus Tenfelde gestured toward Daniel Bell’s claim that modernity approached its conclusion: “The exhaustion of modernism, the aridity of the communist *Dasein*, the tedium of the unchained individual, the substance-less nature [*Wesenlosigkeit*] of monolithic political slogans—all of this signals that a long era is gradually coming to an end.”<sup>68</sup> Even the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Horst Waffenschmidt, suggested that the West German population had begun to understand that a sense of social alienation and disorientation was the high price German society might have to pay for economic “progress.”<sup>69</sup> West Germans had lost their ability, Frei argued, to locate themselves as part of a social community and as part of a historical narrative.<sup>70</sup> The task, he argued, was to side with Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who understood the “root of history” as “the working, creating person, the person who revises and refashions reality. Once he has grasped himself,” Bloch argued in his book *The Principle of Hope*, “and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all in which no one has yet been: Home.”<sup>71</sup> The *Geschichtswerkstatt*, Frei claimed, gave people a means for searching for ‘home’ in a country that seemed to lack it.<sup>72</sup> This renewed interest in locating oneself socially and spatially—the search for a cultural, political, and topographical *Heimat*—generated an interest in the physical places in which people live. This interest most often came packaged in the language of “historical work ‘*vor Ort*,’” or “at the site,” that is, in the mundane spaces where everyday life progresses even within the most radical of historical moments. The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s 1983 organizational program described the group as uninterested in telling *the* history; rather, their concern for the many local sites where the history of everyday life took place oriented them toward history in the plural.<sup>73</sup>

They also likened their mode of historical inquiry to a kind of localized excavation. When they described the process of undertaking historical work *vor Ort* as “digging where you stand,” they gestured to an important inspiration that originated in Sweden around non-fiction writer Sven Lindqvist. Frustrated with his inability to find information on the history of Sweden’s everyday citizens, particularly its members of the industrial working class, Lindqvist embarked on a project in the late 1970s that would rewrite these workers into the foreground of Sweden’s historical

<sup>67</sup> Paul and Schossig, “Geschichte und Heimat,” 18

<sup>68</sup> Klaus Tenfelde. “Schwierigkeiten mit dem Alltag.” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 1984), 381. Here, Tenfelde quotes from *Der Monat* 1983, which quotes from A. Baring. “Zeitschriftenbericht.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 176, 2 August 1983, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 266. See Horst Waffenschmidt. “Schaufenster des Staates”. Aus der Ansprache zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung ‘Der Bundespräsident.’” *Das Parlament* 44 (3 November 1984): 10

<sup>70</sup> “[A]nxiety about the technocratic modernization of daily life and the alienation and anonymity of modern society,” Frei argued—in short, the sense that some essential aspect of human existence had been lost in modern life, “gave rise to a longing for a place you can survey, for a ‘homeland’ (*Heimat*) and a ‘local history.’” Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 57; Dieter Emig and Alfred G. Frei. “...die Fremdheit der Dinge und Personen aufheben.’ Über Versuche, Heimat neu zu entdecken.” *Heimat: Analysen, Themen, Perspektiven*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, ed. Bonn 1990, 307-328

<sup>71</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 266. See Ernst Bloch. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968, 1628. In the original German, Bloch wrote: “Die Wurzel der Geschichte... ist der arbeitende, schaffende, die Gegebenheiten umbildende und überholende Mensch. Hat er sich erfaßt und das Seine ohne Entäußerung und Entfremdung in realer Demokratie begründet, so entsteht in der Welt etwas, das allen in die Kindheit scheint und worin noch niemand war: Heimat.” On the idea of *Heimat* in Germany, see Celia Applegate. *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>72</sup> Importantly, these groups abandoned a notion of *Heimat* that retained its associations with Nazi blood and soil ideology. They interpreted *Heimat* not as proof of heritage [*Herkunftsnachweis*] or as a means of exclusion [*Eingrenzung*], but as that place which made life possible [*Heimat als Lebensmöglichkeit*]. Paul and Schossig, “Geschichte und Heimat,” 23

<sup>73</sup> BGWA Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 9.-12.1983

narratives.<sup>74</sup> The aim, he described, was that workers should be shown the ways in which they participate in the long history of the workers' community.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Lindqvist argued that the workers themselves should be the ones to write this bottom-up history; they lacked only competence in the basic methodologies and techniques expected of sound historical research.<sup>76</sup> To catalyze their efforts, Lindqvist thus undertook to write a practical handbook for lay-people interested in researching their respective trades. In 1978, he completed *Dig Where You Stand* [*Gräv där du står*].<sup>77</sup> The attraction of what became known as the Dig-Where-You-Stand-Movement, Lindqvist explained, lay in its ability to investigate the many ways in which history "lives on in the bodies of living people," still paying its dividends by conferring power on some people while not on others.<sup>78</sup>

Although it took several years for Lindqvist's works to appear in German translation, he managed to maneuver his way into the German conversation earlier. The 1983 *Spiegel* article fingered

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<sup>74</sup> Lindqvist wanted to tell the history of Swedish industrialization not from a corporate perspective but from the perspective of the workers. He took cues from a host of foreign examples. He was inspired, for one, by a trip through Latin America in the 1960s while researching for a book that explored the political corruption in developing south and central American countries and the violence and retribution directed at political resisters that decade. While investigating several of the multinational corporation with hubs in Latin America, Lindqvist lamented the relative absence from the historical record of those most affected by their enterprises, namely the workers and local populations. This experience brought into sharper relief the situation of his own country. Sven Lindqvist. "Dig Where You Stand." *Oral History* 7:2 (1 October 1979): 24. Lindqvist was conducting research for his book *The Shadow: Latin America Faces the Seventies*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972 (published in 1969 in the original Swedish as *Slagskuggan: Latinamerika inför 70-talet*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1969). From Lindqvist's work in Beijing as cultural attaché at the Swedish embassy in China from 1960-61, he also drew inspiration from the Chinese cultural campaign *yiku sitian*, which translates as "recalling past bitterness in order to savor the sweetness of the present," though Lindqvist simplified its title to "Dig the Bitter Roots." An old phrase newly mobilized in the 1950s and '60s and associated with Mao's Great Leap Forward, *yiku sitian* called citizens to reflect on the bitterness and suffering of life before Communism in order both to appreciate newly-won proletarian power as well as to caution against a return of exploitation by class enemies. By Lindqvist's understanding (more innocuous, and likely also more deliberately managed by those Chinese diplomats with whom he had contact), however, this phenomenon tasked proletarian workers not only with practicing their trade, but also with writing poems and painting pictures as well as to researching their own histories. Wing-chung Ho. "The (Un-)Making of the Shanghai Socialist 'Model Community': From the Monolithic to Heterogeneous Appropriation(s) of the Past." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 39:5 (1 October 2004): 380; Wing-chung Ho. "From Resistance to Collective Action in a Shanghai Socialist 'Model Community': From the Late 1940s to Early 1970s." *Journal of Social History* 40:1 (1 October 2006): 86. It is also possible Lindqvist confused or elided the *yiku sitian* campaign with another Maoist program in the 1950s called "Million Poems and Million Songs," which drew on Mao's belief that everyone, not only the educated, had creative capacities. With a nod to the violence of many Maoist programs and a dash of dark humor, historian of twentieth century China Wen-Hsin Yeh has noted that this "campaign...ran for a little while (without killing anybody)." Personal correspondence, 21 July 2014. See also Sven Lindqvist. "Grabe, wo du stehst. Das schwedische Beispiel." *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*. Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich, eds. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985.

<sup>75</sup> He compared this project favorably with that of Socialist realist author and political reformist Maxim Gorky, whose campaign in the early years of the Russian Revolution encouraged research on the history of factories and workshops. Lindqvist, "Grabe, wo du stehst," *Geschichte entdecken*, 72-73. See for example Maxim Gorky. "The People Must Know Their History!" *Culture and the People*. New York: International Publishers, 1939, 94-100. Gorky's effort lasted through the 1930s but was interrupted by the start of World War II. His slogan was remobilized in the 1950s, some twenty years after Gorky's death, though in its second iteration its products were, unfortunately, used to write propaganda materials that could be marshaled in the dismissal of workers.

<sup>76</sup> Lindqvist, "Dig Where You Stand," 25-26

<sup>77</sup> Sven Lindqvist. *Gräv där du står: hur man utforskar ett jobb*. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1978. Only one version of Lindqvist's text is available in English. Translated by Ann Henning as *Dig Where You Stand: How to Research a Job*, the book was released in 1978, the same year as Lindqvist's original. Lindqvist's publisher expected the author would fail to find much of a readership. To his surprise, however, the guide quickly won favor among both workers and academics alike. In 1985 a compendium was published that documented the wide variety of uses to which his book had been put by the thousands of groups that had already used it in the short seven years since its initial release.

<sup>78</sup> Lindqvist, "Grabe, wo du stehst," *Geschichte entdecken*, 74; Lindqvist, "Dig Where You Stand," 28

Lindqvist and the hundreds of local research circles in the Swedish Dig-Where-You-Stand Movement as a conscious template for the German case.<sup>79</sup> Not all press on Lindqvist's influence was uncritical, however. In 1989 professional historian of everyday life Alf Lüdtke argued that the imperative to dig where one stood was “necessary but...not sufficient” for the German context. Germany, he claimed, needed both “to delve deeper while [also] extending one’s own diggings horizontally.”<sup>80</sup> In general, however, German practitioners of “history from below,” particularly the *Geschichtswerkstatt*, welcomed Lindqvist's insights. Although the discussion of Lindqvist's lessons consisted more of hype than substance—terms like “history from below” and “history of everyday life” remained largely “euphoric key words, without much theoretical or methodological consideration,” noted Ursula Schröter of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*—the group nevertheless took strides to clarify its commitments to the democratization of the project of writing history, to enable citizens to research their own histories, and to connect these histories to current political dialogue.<sup>81</sup>

### C. The Call for Progressive Historical Work

Germany's receptivity to the Dig-Where-You-Stand Movement, to the influence of the British History Workshop, and in general to a novel kind of historical analysis [*anderartige Geschichtsanalyse*],<sup>82</sup> which took local history and the history of everyday life as its points of departure, was conditioned by the rise of that bastion of bottom-up historical consciousness in the service of the present and future, the New Left, over the past two decades. If intellectual luminary Herbert Marcuse was the “*Stichwortgeber*”—literally, the one who provides key terms—for the New Left, among his contributions was certainly his notion of “practice.” Practice—or *praxis*, in German—and its relationship to theory had been fraught for decades within the German Left<sup>83</sup> as had the question of whether the exigencies of Germany's contemporary political situation called for a new form of political practice. But the New Left, especially as it jettisoned rigid theoretical allegiances, sided quickly with those who privileged action over theoretical rigor. As American sociologist C. Wright

<sup>79</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 40. Lindqvist's reflections, in an abridged form, were made available to a German-speaking audience in the early 1980s. His article “Dig Where You Stand,” first appeared in English in 1979 in *Oral History*, a journal published by Britain's Oral History Society, chaired initially by John Saville, a member of the Communist Party Historian's Group and notable forerunner of the History Workshop. The article was translated to German five years later and appeared in a volume on the questions, methods, and projects of “history from below” undertaken in a German-speaking context. Hubert Ch. Ehalt, ed. *Geschichte von unten: Fragestellungen, Methoden und Projekte einer Geschichte des Alltags*. Wien: H. Böhlau, 1984. A year later, a summary of this article appeared again in German in a compilation of essays on Germany's “new history movement” edited by German historian and, now, prominent journalist Volker Ullrich along with historian Hannes Heer, who, in the mid-1990s would win himself a reputation as the coordinator of the controversial Wehrmacht Exhibit. The complete handbook was published in German translation in 1989, eleven years after it first appeared in Swedish: Sven Lindqvist. *Grabe wo du stehst: Handbuch zur Erforschung der eigenen Geschichte*. Manfred Dammeyer, tr. Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 1989.

<sup>80</sup> Alf Lüdtke, ed. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 16. Lüdtke's text was originally published in German in 1989. See Alf Lüdtke, ed. *Alltagsgeschichte: zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*. Frankfurt: Campus, 1989.

<sup>81</sup> Shortly after its founding, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, looking for guidance in streamlining its efforts, met with Lindqvist in person at Berlin's Technical University for a workshop organized by social historian Karin Hausen. Emerging from this workshop was a call by one of the working groups within the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* for the production of a similar text for German “history from below.” And in June 1984, the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* organized a seven-day seminar-retreat in Switzerland that featured an all-day session, in which Lindqvist participated, on the methods and research of the Dig-Where-You-Stand Movement. Schröter, “Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 11. See also “Salecina-Seminar. 10.-16. Juni 1984. Geschichte von unten. Faschismus und Widerstand.” *Moderne Zeiten—Extra. Geschichtswerkstatt. Sondernummer 4* (April 1984): 59.

<sup>82</sup> Schöttler, “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.”

<sup>83</sup> On the relationship between theory and practice in Marxism, see Jürgen Habermas. *Theory and Practice*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973; Nicholas Lobkowicz. *Theory and Practice*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

Mills explained, being a Leftist meant consciously linking cultural and political criticism with concrete programs.<sup>84</sup> This combination of disillusionment with existing politics and a demand for action lent the New Left a cause not only for envisioning but also for attempting to realize an alternative political practice. They embraced informal popular politics, the expressions of which “grew out of imagination, necessity, and a desire to be heard.”<sup>85</sup> They celebrated the anti-hierarchical, anti-institutional, and anti-bureaucratic; they fought for self-determination and self-management.<sup>86</sup>

Two important programmatic points retained their valence well after the original fire of the New Left, the Student Movement, and the promises of 1968 had begun to dim. The first was the politicization—more specifically, the democratization—of everyday life.<sup>87</sup> This politicization of everyday life prompted, second, the creation of a new political habitat, that is, the reevaluation—and sometimes discovery—of new spaces for political engagement, particularly public engagement, or what Belinda Davis has called “alternative public spheres.” Alternative politics took place “behind the scenes,” Davis has suggested, “creating new spaces for communication, affording alternative modes of living, working, and interacting, and sometimes offering protection from repression.”<sup>88</sup> As the Student Movement dissipated at the turn of the decade, the university—the original site that galvanized early protesters—lost its centrality as the location for organizing political efforts. Oppositional work moved definitively beyond the walls of the Ivory Tower into those alternative public spheres the New Left had nurtured.<sup>89</sup> The *Geschichtswerkstatt* developed as one of these extracurricular, extraparliamentary attempts to defend that radical democratic politicization of everyday life that the Student Movement and New Left had championed. One of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s founding members Martin Düspohl described the group, in retrospect, as the

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<sup>84</sup> C. Wright Mills. “Letter to the New Left.” *New Left Review* 1:5 (October 1960): 21

<sup>85</sup> Belinda Davis. “What’s Left? Popular Political Participation in Postwar Europe.” *The American Historical Review* 113:2 (1 April 2008): 369

<sup>86</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn. *The Spirit of ’68 Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 154

<sup>87</sup> Particularly the young Leftist participants in the excitement of ’68 had objected not only to capitalism’s increasing and conspicuous domination over both economics and politics, specifically opportunities for popular agency in these arenas, but also to its subtler manipulation of opinion, consumption and leisure habits, and systems of dependency like schools and administrative bureaucracies. In a move that startled the post-Godesberg Social Democratic Party, the party’s youth organization, the Young Socialists or Jusos—typically less radical than the breakaway SDS—began to advocate not for moderate, modernized socialist policy but for radically transformative systemic reforms [*systemüberwindende Reformen*] in the manner of existentialist Marxist and political ecologist André Gorz and Italian socialist Lelio Basso. Not vanguardists, the Jusos declined to lead this process, tapping instead the whole of society for this task. They emphasized a grassroots politics of everyday life [*Alltagspolitik*] and encouraged self-organization with the intent of “democratizing all realms of life.” Horst Mewes. “The German New Left.” *New German Critique*, 1 (1 December 1973): 36-37. See also Johano Strasser. “Weiterentwicklung der Doppelstrategie.” *Juso, Zeitschrift der Jungsozialisten in der SPD* 3/4 (1973): 9; See Norbert Gansel. “Die Strategie in der Diskussion der Jungsozialisten.” *Überwindet den Kapitalismus, oder Was Wollen die Jungsozialisten?* Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971, 55.

<sup>88</sup> Davis, “What’s Left?,” 369-370; Mewes, “The German New Left,” 23. On the alternative public spheres of popular protest in the late Cold War years, see Belinda Davis. “The City as Theater of Protest: West Berlin and West Germany, 1962–1983.” *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*. Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 247–274; Sven Reichardt. “‘Wärme’ als Modus sozialen Verhaltens—Vorüberlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte des linksalternativen Milieus vom Ende der sechziger bis Anfang der achtziger Jahre.” *vorgänge* 44: 171/172 (2005): 175–187.

<sup>89</sup> Wolfgang Kraushaar. “Denkmodelle der 68er-Bewegung.” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 22–23 (2001): 26



child of a generation of students “still wooed to West Berlin by the myth of the Student Movement but who found no more connection to ‘the movement’ there.”<sup>90</sup>

Seeing themselves as the torchbearers of the spirit of the Student Movement and the New Left, the *Geschichtswerkstatt* pushed progressive historical work as a means of social and political emancipation.<sup>91</sup> Looking for guidance from the leftist sociologist and former member of the Socialist German Student League [*Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*, or SDS] Helmut Dahmer, *Geschichtswerkstatt* members argued that society’s ability to make sense of and “master” its present hinged on the individual’s ability to “orient oneself around one’s past,” to grasp one’s own situation as historically-determined.<sup>92</sup> When its members spoke of the liberating potential of the practice of history, they evoked the language of the Enlightenment. Citing a 1981 article by historical theorist Jörn Rüsen, one national *Geschichtswerkstatt* leader emphasized that progressive [*aufklärerisch*] historical work must be used as a weapon against immaturity or *Unmündigkeit*, which calls to mind Immanuel Kant’s 1784 essay in which he answered the question “What is Enlightenment?” For Kant, Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*] demanded “mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity” and the ability “to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another.”<sup>93</sup> For Rüsen, “history as Enlightenment” meant giving individuals the capacity to write their own histories. The *Geschichtswerkstatt* understood this lesson as a call for the detachment of the practices of history from an exclusionary university setting and the abandonment of the university’s rituals.<sup>94</sup> They embraced three points of departure for such historical work. First, they rejected a Rankean pursuit of history “as it actually was.” Even the best researcher, they argued, cannot construct history; history is always a reconstruction, a reflection of how the researcher imagines it once was. In that regard, they understood these reconstructions of the past and the researchers that offer them, second, as influenced by the problems of the present. Third, they tasked these researchers with approaching their work as goal-oriented [*ziel-gelenkte Geschichtsarbeit*]. History, they demanded, should call into question dominant socioeconomic structures as well as challenge the purposive or instrumental [*zweckrationaler*] form of reason that structured contemporary life. Instead, *Geschichtswerkstatt* members thought that their work should override [*aufheben*; here, they channeled Hegel] contemporary modes of rationality in favor of an ethical rationality organized around the pursuit of a “democratic, peaceful and human global society.”<sup>95</sup>

## II. “History from Below” as a Radical Spatial Project

The *Geschichtswerkstatt* understood history as a means to pursue a more democratic, more peaceful, less socially-disaggregated society. What made history a particularly fruitful avenue hinged on their appreciation of the practices of history as practices in the democratization of space. By interpreting the project of history as a radically democratic spatial project, they saw themselves as

<sup>90</sup> Martin Düspohl. “20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. Ein persönlicher Rückblick.” *Immer Noch Lust Auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., ed. Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 46.

<sup>91</sup> Fletcher, “History from Below Comes to Germany,” 563

<sup>92</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 267-268. See Helmut Dahmer. “Die Sinnggebung des Sinnlosen.” *Die Zeit* 44, 26 October 1984, 57f.; Axel Schildt. “Zur Einleitung.” *Geschichtswerkstätten gestern, heute, morgen: Bewegung, Stillstand, Aufbruch*. Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg, ed. München: Dölling und Galitz, 2004, 18

<sup>93</sup> Immanuel Kant. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” James Schmidt, tr. *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. James Schmidt, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 58

<sup>94</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 260-261. See Jörn Rüsen. “Geschichte als Aufklärung? Oder: Das Dilemma des historischen Denkens zwischen Herrschaft und Emanzipation.” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7:2 (1 January 1981): 189–218.

<sup>95</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 261-262.

actively changing their physical environment to enable new kinds of social interactions. New developments in the history of everyday life, or *Alltagsgeschichte*, played an increasingly important role in their work, and the *Geschichtswerkstätten*, historians Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt argued, became the clearest expression of *Alltagsgeschichte*'s innovations.<sup>96</sup>

### A. *Alltagsgeschichte*: A New Interest in Everyday Life

Arguably the most important change in West German historiography in the 1980s, *Alltagsgeschichte* had, from its inception, developed as an extracurricular phenomenon. First gaining traction a decade before, when history students of the 1960s and '70s graduated only to find themselves jobless, this shift in historical interests swept not only universities but also museums, local cultural institutions, the media, and film, among others groups that operated outside the Ivory Tower. A movement as much lay as professional, historian Geoff Eley has highlighted, *Alltagsgeschichte* attracted amateurs—"barefoot historians" [*Barfußhistoriker*] as they were often called—who brought with them a combination of "zeal, anti-academism, and populist politics."<sup>97</sup>

The contours of *Alltagsgeschichte*'s agenda become clearer when traced first against its negative investments. Though the historiographical shift brought about by *Alltagsgeschichte* drew support from professional academics—historians Lutz Niethammer and Alexander von Plato among others at the University of Hagen proved particularly supportive, the paterfamilias of *Alltagsgeschichte* Alf Lüdtke has noted—it powered its motor with the engagement of individuals operating outside of the university system.<sup>98</sup> It defined itself against what its practitioners often referred to pejoratively as the "guild" [*Zunft*] of professional historians whose historiographical traditions these "barefoot historians" understood to have excised the world of ordinary life from its purview.<sup>99</sup> This "discovery" of the alternative world [*Gegenwelt*] of everydayness, historian and scholar of social movements Klaus Tenfelde remarked in 1984, coincided with the rise of the German Green Party, whose radical grassroots democratic ambitions proved highly contagious in German society.<sup>100</sup> Some have, thus, regarded the popularity of *Alltagsgeschichte*, gently, as a "greening" of the social history pioneered in the 1960s by the Bielefeld School,<sup>101</sup> who aimed to "accommodate the complexity and connection of diverse dimensions of reality" by using the methods of a "historical social science" to reveal the structures that guided society's operations.<sup>102</sup> Others revealed the historiographical battleground more explicitly: Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* member Gisela Wenzel described the practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* as "[declaring] war on modern social history with its valorization of objective categories and its suppression of the significance of categories of human subjectivity."<sup>103</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, "Radical Plurality," 74

<sup>97</sup> Geoff Eley. "Labor History, Social History, 'Alltagsgeschichte': Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday—a New Direction for German Social History?" *The Journal of Modern History* 61:2 (1 June 1989): 297-298. Here, I take up the history of everyday life in the context of West Germany only, which, as Roger Fletcher has argued "has proven thus far the more original, autonomous, fruitful and stimulating foray into modern social history" as opposed to that in East Germany. See Fletcher, "History from Below Comes to Germany," 558. On the East German approach, see Gunther Heydemann, "Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsverständnis in der DDR seit 1945," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 13 (28 March 1987): 15-26.

<sup>98</sup> Lüdtke, "Introduction," 25-27

<sup>99</sup> Geoff Eley. "Foreword." *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Alf Lüdtke, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, vii

<sup>100</sup> Tenfelde, "Schwierigkeiten mit dem Alltag," 379

<sup>101</sup> Eley, "Labor History, Social History, 'Alltagsgeschichte'," 298.

<sup>102</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler. "Historiography in Germany Today." *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age."* Jürgen Habermas, ed. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984, 243-244, quoted in Roger Fletcher. "Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and Its Critics." *German Studies Review* 7:3 (1 October 1984): 459.

<sup>103</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. "'Grabe, wo du stehst.' Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt." Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

Lüdtke concurred, arguing that “the history of everyday life demands the *systematic decentering* of analysis and interpretation....The classification of individual phenomena and their systematization no longer occupy center stages. At issue now,” he claimed, “is a reorientation in which theory deals with more than just the level of ‘conception’ [*Begriff*]: it encompasses the very act of ‘conceptualizing, idea formation [*Vorstellen*]’ as well.”<sup>104</sup> Proponents of *Alltagsgeschichte* opposed what they saw as Bielefeld’s tendency to hold individual actors as the “mere bearers of the potential for modernization” and to regard long trade cycles, population mobility, development of a rational state, bureaucracy, businesses, and political parties as the heroes of their histories.<sup>105</sup>

Practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte*, by contrast, wanted to treat the farmer, the artisan, the factory worker as the carriers of history and as those ultimately impacted by it. Through these ordinary historical actors, they aimed to explore social history “in its experiential or subjective dimensions,” to transcend the distinctions between public and private as well as to bridge the political and the cultural.<sup>106</sup> The history of everyday life, Alfred Georg Frei argued, required attention to the social and cultural practices of humanity. Everyday life, to Frei’s mind, consisted of the totality of values, orientation, models of behavior, and interpretive frameworks.<sup>107</sup> Its history was to be narrated through “the everyday experiences of real people in their concrete life situations and the needs those experience occasioned.” *Alltagsgeschichte* demanded to see “the ‘insides’ of the society’s structures, processes, and models analyzed” by the historical social science of the Bielefeld School, and to measure historical change not in terms of the “alienated world of formal political engagement” but rather by its “internal costs” to the “informal domain of the everyday.”<sup>108</sup> Historians of everyday life looked to Friedrich Engels, for whom “the dynamism and contradictory character of radical historical change are linked with the ‘production and reproduction of real life’.” Here *kleine Leute* became “simultaneously both the objects of history and its subjects.”<sup>109</sup> *Alltagsgeschichte* championed folk culture, for example, as an object of study for the way it offered access to the personal social interactions, what cultural theorist and scholar of folklore Wolfgang Kaschuba described as “the register of the everyday spaces of experience” and as “the sites of equilibrium”<sup>110</sup>—or what German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies a century prior distinguished as “community” [*Gemeinschaft*] and opposed to impersonal “society” [*Gesellschaft*].<sup>111</sup> These historians pursued history “from below” but wished to shed the mythical, often racist connotations given to the earthly and the *völkisch* by National Socialism.<sup>112</sup> It was, rather, the doubly-suggestive

<sup>104</sup> Lüdtke, “Introduction,” 15-16

<sup>105</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 83

<sup>106</sup> Eley, “Foreword,” viii

<sup>107</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 323, Alf Lüdtke, “Einleitung: Was ist und wer treibt Alltagsgeschichte” *Alltagsgeschichte: zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*. Alf Lüdtke, ed. Frankfurt; New York: Campus, 1989, 12. See also Carola Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung im Grenzbereich von Volkskunde, Soziologie, und Geschichte. Aufstieg und Niedergang eines interdisziplinären Forschungskonzepts.” *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 1 (1993): 24f.

<sup>108</sup> Geoff Eley, “Wie denken wir über Politik? Alltagsgeschichte und die Kategorie des Politischen.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 27-29. Eley, “Foreword,” ix. See also Alf Lüdtke, “Zur Einleitung.” *Sozialwissenschaftliche Informationen für Unterricht und Studium (SOWI)* 6 (1997): 147.

<sup>109</sup> Lüdtke, “Introduction,” 6. See Friedrich Engels to Joseph Bloch. 21-22 September 1890. *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vol. 37, Berlin/GDR, 1978, 463

<sup>110</sup> Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung,” 84. See also Wolfgang Kaschuba, “Mythos oder Eigensinn, Volkskultur zwischen Volkskunde und Sozialgeschichte.” *Volkskultur in der Moderne. Probleme und Perspektiven empirischer Kulturforschung*. Utz Jeggle and Hermann Bausinger, eds. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986, 484.

<sup>111</sup> See Ferdinand Tönnies. *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (1887), Darmstadt, 1963. For how the *Geschichtswerkstatt* put Tönnies to use endorsing their own methods, see Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung,” 84.

<sup>112</sup> Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung,” 78.

association of “from below” that made it particularly suitable for describing the phenomenon of *Alltagsgeschichte*: the phrase, first, suggests that it concerns “the history of those who were and are ‘below.’ Its goal is the dialectical consideration of the ‘other side,’ that is, the contradictory relationship between power and accommodation [*Anpassung*], between oppression and resistance,” German historian Peter Schöttler noted. “Second, however, it also expresses sympathy for the difficulties of the lower classes [*Unterschichten*], who become the subjects of its research.”<sup>113</sup>

While *Alltagsgeschichte* practitioners made room for Engels, and while they oriented themselves toward the experiences of the lower classes, they conceived of class at best broadly. Though in the process of rethinking history [*Umdenkungsprozess*] as one *Geschichtswerkstatt* member explained, they learned from French Marxist Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* to remain wary of the strong arm of consumer culture, the fetish character of money, and the experience of psychological and moral alienation,<sup>114</sup> the working class was never their emancipatory subject. *Alltagsgeschichte* challenged practitioners of history of the left, Alf Lüdtke emphasized, by showing patterns of self-organization based on different modes of life *within classes* as well as the limits of organization from without.<sup>115</sup> For those engaged in the history of everyday life, Michael Wildt stressed, “[t]heir point of departure is not a historical theory like Marxism,” unlike the History Workshop in England, “but a historical place, everyday life.”<sup>116</sup>

The history of everyday life was hardly without its detractors. What Alf Lüdtke described as its goal of “[decentering] entrenched ways of seeing historiography,” Bielefelder Jürgen Kocka called “new irrationalism.” Shortly after the Historians’ Quarrel of 1986-87, Kocka reinforced his point by lumping *Alltagsgeschichte*, whose practices he qualified as “fundamentally unscientific” and thus “hostile to Enlightenment values,” together with Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber, whose arguments in favor of comparing the totalitarianism of Nazi Germany to that of Soviet Russia won them the wrath of many of Germany’s leftist intellectuals. Kocka chastised the lot for failing to apply the “rigorous method” and “argumentative...presentation” of history, which dated, he noted pointedly, from the eighteenth century and prevented the discipline from blindly embracing myth.<sup>117</sup> Bielefeld behemoth Hans-Ulrich Wehler agreed, suggesting that the practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte*, by dismissing the norms of critical scholarship, engaged not simply in “bland” intellectual pursuits, but ones that were “dangerously sentimental.”<sup>118</sup> In what *Der Spiegel* reported as a “wholesale scolding” of these barefoot historians, Wehler chastised them for embracing “romantic, glorifying pseudo-realism” that dwelled “lovingly-blinkered, in the antiquarian details of proletarian existence” and that, in so doing, it “fritters away unsharply, unsystematically, on the hunt for excerpts.”<sup>119</sup> Even

<sup>113</sup> Schöttler, “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.,” 421.

<sup>114</sup> Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung,” 79. See Henri Lefebvre. *Critique of Everyday Life*. London: Verso, 1991. The Frankfurt School’s arguments bore on these conversations as well. For example, Theodor Adorno’s “Résumé über die Kulturindustrie.” *Ohne Leitbild: Parva Aesthetica*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967, 60-70.

<sup>115</sup> Lüdtke, “Introduction,” 11. The caution about restricting the bearers of social emancipation to the working class received at this time support from outside historical circles. Expelled East German Dissident and one of the founders of the East German Greens Rudolf Bahro, for example, echoed these arguments in an article published in the British History Workshop’s journal in 1983. Bahro suggests that society will abandon lingering class allegiances when faced with the “bomb” of ecological crisis. See Rudolf Bahro. “Socialism, Ecology and Utopia.” *History Workshop Journal* 16, no. 1 (September 21, 1983), 94-95.

<sup>116</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 56.

<sup>117</sup> Lüdtke, “Introduction,” 9-10. See Kocka, “Geschichte als Aufklärung?” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4 January 1988.

<sup>118</sup> Lüdtke, “Introduction,” 10. See also Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Königsweg zu neuen Ufern oder Irrgarten der Illusionen? Die westdeutsche Alltagsgeschichte: Geschichte ‘von innen’ und ‘von unten’.” *Geschichte von unten - Geschichte von innen: Kontroversen um die Alltagsgeschichte*. Franz-Josef Brüggemeier and Jürgen Kocka, eds. Hagen: Fernuniversität-Gesamthochschule Hagen, 1985, 47

<sup>119</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 41.

the sympathetic historian from Hagen, Lutz Niethammer, warned the historians of everyday life against “romanticized simple solutions” which slip easily into the sloppy equation of the “unexplored everydayness of the present” and the “unreconstructable everydayness of yesterday.”<sup>120</sup> *Alltagsgeschichte* often faced the charge of romanticizing the past, of blurring the lines between taking its historical subjects seriously and treating them with boundless sympathy, which had earned it, from some, the unfavorable sobriquet of “affect history” [*Betroffenheitsgeschichte*].<sup>121</sup> Even the professional historians who participated actively in the *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s projects recognized that the group sometimes exploited emotion in order to render *Alltagsgeschichte* “a kind of sugar-coating for the pill of political education.”<sup>122</sup> Wildt, for example, argued that the organization’s project “[ran] the risk of using the search for identity to project one’s own values onto people in the past. Instead of being conscious of the gap which separates us from the past, and developing ways to do justice to the foreignness of history, this kind of teaching method places the emphasis on removing this distance, making people feel their way into history.”<sup>123</sup> But history, Lindenberger argued with Wildt, “is not the place for the production of identities. History cannot make good the loss of identities,” serving itself as a substitute for one’s family, career, or sexuality. And it cannot “function as a kind of compensation for a loss of meaning.”<sup>124</sup> What some condemned as the dangerous “uncritical obsession with details” that resulted from *Alltagsgeschichte*’s “relentless pursuit of the individual,”<sup>125</sup> Lüdtkke tried to vindicate by describing as an “attempt to bring subjectivity and engagement into the process of research as a creative force, without falling into the trap of blurring what Gadamer called the ‘different levels of meaning’, as they are understood in classical historical hermeneutics,” but also avoiding “narrow-minded ‘empirical social research’.”<sup>126</sup>

The attraction of everydayness broke down, by and large, along generational lines. From without, practitioners of everyday life were chastised as a “generation without history,” ignorant of both the methodologies and content of two generations of postwar history.<sup>127</sup> From within, they awarded themselves a more sympathetic epithet: they were the “generation of alienation,” a nod to the effects of the extreme political, economic, and social transitions West Germany had undergone since its defeat in 1945.<sup>128</sup> The disagreement over whether they deserved censure or commiseration aside, however, this generation of young, historically-inclined West Germans shared one very important feature: it consisted largely of unemployed academics.<sup>129</sup> One participant in the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* recalled the dearth of opportunities for academic work when he finished his own

<sup>120</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 38

<sup>121</sup> Lüdtkke, “Introduction,” 12. Here, Lüdtkke drew, in particular, from Wehler, “Königsweg zu neuen Ufern oder Irrgarten der Illusionen?” Peter Borscheid criticized what he described as Wehler’s “posturing” in “Alltagsgeschichte – Modetorheit oder neues Tor zur Vergangenheit?” *Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland. Entwicklungen und Perspektiven im internationalen Zusammenhang, Band III: Soziales Verhalten und soziale Aktionsformen in der Geschichte*. Wolfgang Schieder and Volker Sellin, eds. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987, 85. Jürgen Kocka and Klaus Tenfelde have tried to provide clarification from the position of the historical social sciences. See Kocka’s *Sozialgeschichte, vol 2*, Göttingen, 1986, esp. 152-60, 162-174; Tenfelde, “Schwierigkeiten mit dem Alltag,” 376–94.

<sup>122</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 59.

<sup>123</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 59.

<sup>124</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 89.

<sup>125</sup> Alfred Georg Frei. “Geschichtswerkstätten.” *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*. Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich, eds. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985, 402-403. See Zang, *Die unaufhaltsame Annäherung an das Einzelne*, 1985.

<sup>126</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 90; Lüdtkke, “Introduction,” 30-32.

<sup>127</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 36

<sup>128</sup> Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung,” 79. On the primary intellectual movements of the postwar period, see Agnes Heller. “Existentialismus, Entfremdung, Postmodernismus, Kulturelle Bewegungen als Ausdrucksmittel des Wandels der Verhaltensmuster im alltäglichen Leben.” *Der Alltag* 4, 1987, 16-27.

<sup>129</sup> Fletcher, “History from Below Comes to Germany,” 560.

studies at the Free University in the early 1980s. One's best bet was to leave the university entirely; one stood a greater chance for employment in a museum, for example, or a government office. That over six hundred eager participants would show up in 1984 for a Berlin gathering of lay historians demonstrated just what a substantial accumulation of intellectual drifters had developed out of West Germany's unfavorable academic job market of the 1980s.<sup>130</sup> "Individual certainty about the future," particularly certainty about future career prospects, "has shattered," one *Geschichtswerkstatt* member reflected dramatically.<sup>131</sup> For many of these individuals, scholarly work was "in fact synonymous with the rat race for jobs and limited funding, coupled with the personal battle to establish and maintain a reputation—and this whole struggle for academic survival," Alf Lüdtke argued, "played out behind a constructed impression of busyness and untiring diligence."<sup>132</sup> In their war against historical myth, professional historians had allowed a new kind of myth—the myth of professionalism—to blinker their practices, the barefoot historians claimed. By employing the diligent gatekeepers of suffocating jargon and hierarchy,<sup>133</sup> the Ivory Tower had convinced itself that it held a "monopoly on historical truth finding."<sup>134</sup> It was no coincidence, noted one historian tenuously employed at the time as an affiliate researcher at the University of Bremen, that support for the *Geschichtswerkstätten* originated not within the body of established historians but from "free-floating," professionally-trained, either unemployed or precariously-employed historians. This group wanted to create a new kind of discussion forum that would free them from the highly competitive environment of university engagement and generate an ersatz source of intellectual solidarity independent of the traditional scholarly apparatus.<sup>135</sup> The *Geschichtswerkstätten*—intended from the outset to provide an opportunity for historical researchers to exchange and discuss their work—offered ideal shelters to jobless historians: an opportunity to undertake their craft and to network with others in a similar situation, occasionally (though infrequently) with pay.<sup>136</sup> Using the language of the New Social Movements of the 1970s and '80s, and specifically the language of the German Green Party, which began to gain its footing nationally as the *Geschichtswerkstätten* cut their teeth, Berlin's *Geschichtswerkstatt* "wanted to practice grassroots democratic principles," Ursula Schröter reminisced. She had in mind the group's commitment to the idea that everyone should have a chance to speak at membership meetings, even at the gatherings of its quasi-executive board, the "Monday Group." She was also thinking of the organization's efforts to implement a rotation principle for leadership roles, which divided both the burdens of labor as well as the privileges of administrative authority. Here, she added boldly that, in attempting to disaggregate power, "we frequently succeeded."<sup>137</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Düspohl, "20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 49. After receiving his degree, Düspohl, for example, took work at the art administration office of Berlin's neighborhood of Kreuzberg [*Kunstamt Kreuzberg*] and would later become the leader of the Kreuzberg Museum, now the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

<sup>131</sup> Frei, "Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten," 271

<sup>132</sup> Lüdtke, "Introduction," 28

<sup>133</sup> Frei, "Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise," 320. Here, the practitioners of Alltagsgeschichte were reading Michel de Certeau. "Die Geschichte, Wissenschaft, und Fiktion." *Die Zeichen der Historie*. Georg Schmidt, ed. Wien, Köln, 1986, 29-50. See also Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig. "Vorwort." *Die Andere Geschichte: Geschichte von unten, Spurensicherung, ökologische Geschichte, Geschichtswerkstätten*. Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig, eds. Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1986, 11-12

<sup>134</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, "Radical Plurality," 87.

<sup>135</sup> Schöttler, "Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.," 421–24.

<sup>136</sup> BGWA Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 9.-12.1983. See also Frei, "Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise," 319.

<sup>137</sup> Schröter, "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 12. To make the Monday Group more appealing and accessible to the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt's* regular members, in the group's organizational brochure notes that, after their meetings "we always go to the bar." BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 1984. The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt's* early investments in egalitarian leadership appeared concretely in the group's first newsletters, in which it lamented to the group's membership as a whole that Monday Group participation in the last few months had

In an attempt to challenge the “false dichotomies” between academic and grassroots historical practices and to give weight to the *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s investment in creating opportunities in which all historical researchers could realize their intellectual capacities,<sup>138</sup> some of these barefoot historians turned to the ideas of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Mobilizing Gramsci's concept of the “organic intellectual” from his *Prison Notebooks*, the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* emphasized that the organization sought to recognize that “[e]very person is a potential intellectual,” though it also recognized that, limited by time and finances, “the work of the *Geschichtswerkstätten* [was], admittedly, only an attempt to implement such lofty goals.”<sup>139</sup>

## B. Theories of the Theory-Less: Space and the Performance of New Power Relationships

For their opposition to established traditions like the social science methods of the Bielefeld School as well as for their resistance to the labels, rhetoric, institutional affiliations, and most importantly unified theoretical frameworks that they understood to characterize their opponents in the so-called historians' guild,<sup>140</sup> practitioners of history from below like the *Geschichtswerkstatt* often received an indictment of “theorylessness” [*Theorielosigkeit*].<sup>141</sup> Though they hardly adhered to a coherent conceptual system, however, these barefoot historians, who tended to possess at least a minimum of university training, can be seen as intellectual *bricoleurs*, bringing together piecemeal the theoretical odds-and-ends they had at their disposal.<sup>142</sup>

These odds-and-ends were shaped, in particular, by their own precarious situation and occasioned what historians Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich referred to as an “exploratory journey into one's own people” [*Entdeckungsreise ins eigene Volk*].<sup>143</sup> While some took a phenomenological approach to everyday life, which offered access to the inner structures of experience, particularly the creation of truth in everyday life,<sup>144</sup> the most robust product of their *bricolage* oriented their intellectual investments outwardly. Their interest in working through their own experiences of powerlessness occasioned an interest in the history of powerlessness generally, a concern for the historical performance of power relationships, and for the voices those relationships had historically silenced. This investment in the experiences of those whose voices had been omitted from the historical record led them toward the experiences of workers, artisans, women, children, and outsiders, among others.<sup>145</sup> Michel Foucault's claim that power in modern society had become

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dropped by half. Active Monday Group members worried that this declining participation had put a great burden on the individuals who participated regularly and threatened the communicative structure and capacity of the group. See BGWA Rundbrief, 7.3.1983.

<sup>138</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 75

<sup>139</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 268-269. On Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual mobilized here, see Antonio Gramsci. “The Modern Prince.” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed. and tr. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

<sup>140</sup> Schöttler, “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.,” 421-24.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Jürgen Kocka, who suggested that the historians of everyday life had traded rigorous engagement with theory for “nostalgia idealization of the pre-industrial life world.” “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 41

<sup>142</sup> Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>143</sup> Heer and Ullrich, “Die ‘neue Geschichtsbewegung,’” 9. See also Franz-Josef Brüggemeier. *Leben vor Ort: Ruhrbergleute und Ruhrbergbau 1889-1919*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1983, 13.

<sup>144</sup> Husserl proved particularly appealing, with practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* drawing on pieces like “Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Philosophie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie” (1934-1937). *Husserliana Bd. VI*. Walter Biemel, ed. den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1976, 125f. Alfred Schütz's *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's 1969 volume *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* also played an important role in the intellectual orientation of adherents of *Alltagsgeschichte*. See Lipp, “Alltagskulturforschung,” 80.

<sup>145</sup> Of all these groups, women as marginalized historical subjects came to have the greatest importance to—even if they did not always appear most prominently in the work of—the *Geschichtswerkstätten*. Women's history, Lindenberger and

radically diffused provided for them a foundation for understanding its dynamics. They took an interest in what Foucault understood as the “micro-physics” of the state, in which “power no longer belongs to the ‘repression apparatus,’ to coercive measures, or to public institutions in general; it is much more a component of the smallest and most intimate human relationships.”<sup>146</sup> But, argued American historian Geoff Eley, here writing for the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, “when we say that power does not have a single center, that does not mean we can ignore the state or neglect other central sites of power.” To make sense of Foucault, they again used Gramsci and his understanding of hegemony. “Gramsci’s concept of hegemony,” Eley continued, “allows us to see how various sources and places of power can be organized to function in tandem.”<sup>147</sup> This decentralized reinforcement of power relationships appeared to these historians of everyday life not only as the problem but also as the promise of its solution. They capitalized, specifically, on the idea that those power relationships had been constructed socially and the “most powerful bastions” of hegemony reinforced these relationships in the spaces and temporalities of daily life. Thus, Wildt argued, “that is where the struggle against [power] needs to take place.”<sup>148</sup> Gramsci offered them further hope by giving them a method for engaging that struggle. It was not to be a wholesale revolution in power politics. Indeed, with the frustrated revolutionary hopes of the Student Movement and the subsequent reform- as opposed to revolution-oriented political planning of the social-liberal coalition, which governed from 1969-1981, anyone hoping that the political Left would be the emissaries of a radically different Germany had reason to begin looking elsewhere. They replaced aspirations for radical revolutionary change with another of Gramsci’s ideas: that of the “molecular transition” [*molekularer Übergang*] of society, or incremental radical change.<sup>149</sup> While Gramsci criticized the idea of small victories by associating it with the passive revolutionary practices of bourgeois politics, practitioners of history from below praised the idea of incremental radical change by emphasizing the importance of localized, individual contributions to that process, or what Gramsci called the practice of “civil hegemony.”<sup>150</sup>

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Wildt noted, arose as a “reaction to the patriarchal structure of academic research,” and gender became an important component of the *Geschichtswerkstätten*’s rejection of the notion of a single dominant masculine reality. That female historians had recently begun to a very intentional dialogue about their place in the academic field as well as the place of women in the historical register played no small role in this process. Uniting these women, who gathered for the first time in March 1977 outside of Nuremberg, was their professed inability to “find their history in the official sources,” which, a young Ute Frevert, who would later become a prominent professional historian, argued, “have always been collected and interpreted by men to whom women as historical subjects have been of no interest at all.” History, Frevert claimed on behalf of the historians at this gathering, “has to be written anew from a standpoint which discloses the mechanisms responsible for women’s suppression in history.” She cautioned, however, against falling into the trap of writing only of great women in history, which Lindenberger and Wildt described as merely “[reserving] a little women’s corner.” Instead their task lay in regarding women’s work as autonomous and making gender a fundamental question in historical work. Ute Frevert. “German Women Historians’ Meeting, 26–27 March 1977.” *History Workshop Journal* 4:1 (21 September 1977): 235-236; Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 81; Dorothee Wierling. “The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations. On Historical and Historiographical Relationships.” *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Alf Lüdtke, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

<sup>146</sup> Eley, “Wie denken wir über Politik?,” 20. See Michel Foucault. “Body/Power.” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Colin Gordon, ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, 60.

<sup>147</sup> Eley, “Wie denken wir über Politik?,” 22. On the importance of Gramsci, see Geoff Eley. “Reading Gramsci in English: Observations on the Reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English-Speaking World, 1957-1982” *European History Quarterly* 14 (1984): 441-477.

<sup>148</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 57

<sup>149</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 318. See also Alfred Georg Frei. *Antonio Gramsci, Theoretiker des demokratischen Übergangs zum Sozialismus*. Berlin (West): DVK-Verlag, 1978.

<sup>150</sup> On small victories and civil hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci. “State and Civil Society.” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed. and tr. New York: International Publishers,



These historians understood their craft as a part both of the everyday construction of social power relationships and, so too, of their reconstruction. Historiography generates authority, Lindenberger and Wildt suggested, citing Michel de Certeau who argued that, insofar as history

presents itself as a representation of a past reality, every narrative that deals with a what-is-happening (or what-has-happened) institutes the real. It derives its authority from the fact that it passes itself off as witness of what is, or what has been. It seduces and imposes itself in the name of events which it supposedly interprets [. . .]. Indeed, every authority is based on the real that it is supposed to signify. It is always in the name of the real that believers are produced and ‘made to function.’ The discipline of history gains this power by presenting and interpreting ‘facts’.<sup>151</sup>

That act of historiographical presentation and interpretation, as an act of constituting “the real,” operated as a performance: “It makes what it says ‘believable,’” Certeau continued, “and as a consequence, it leads to action. Producing believers, it ultimately produces actors. The solemn voice of narration transforms, displaces and regulates social space. It exercises an immense power which evades control, since it presents itself as the true representation of what happens or what happened.”<sup>152</sup> History narrated from above, Lindenberger and Wildt claimed, makes “credible a vision of the social as centralized, and of society as hierarchically and functionally structured.”<sup>153</sup> If narrated from below, that is, from the multivalent perspective of the *kleine Leute*, however, these histories could present what German philosopher Wolfgang Iser termed the “radical plurality” of the past.<sup>154</sup> The historian would lose his places as the sole narrator, the creator of a single monologue, and the hierarchy of knowledge that he substantiated would dissipate, making way, Certeau argued, for an “interdependent differentiation of subjects.”<sup>155</sup> This radical plurality, in the eyes of the historians of everyday life, had the power to delegitimize unrepresentative master narratives. These historians saw this process as an essential “precondition for political and cultural self-determination” and, thus, understood themselves to possess a powerful tool in the refashioning of social power relationships.<sup>156</sup> Their work offered a “critique of knowledge [*Wissenschaftskritik*]... carried out on the political and cultural terrain of the practice of history itself.”<sup>157</sup> Rejecting the university as the traditional site of historiographical authority, they turned their attention to the physical spaces of everyday life and their associated histories—“the hidden history of the

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1971, esp. 234-243. See also James Martin. *Antonio Gramsci: Intellectuals, Culture and the Party*. Taylor & Francis, 2002, 525-526; Peter Gibbon. “Gramsci, Eurocommunism and the Comintern.” *Economy and Society* 12:3 (1 August 1983): 328–66.

<sup>151</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Die Geschichte, Wissen und Fiktion.” *Die Zeichen der Historie: Beiträge zu einer semiologischen Geschichtswissenschaft*. Georg Schmid, ed. Wien: H. Böhlau, 1986, 32. Quoted in Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 82

<sup>152</sup> Certeau, “Die Geschichte, Wissen und Fiktion,” 35f. Quoted in Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 83

<sup>153</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 84-85. On socialization from above, especially Louis Althusser’s analysis of bourgeois society in his theory of state apparatuses, see Zang, *Die unaufhaltsame Annäherung an das Einzelne*, 41-51

<sup>154</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 85-86. On German philosopher Wolfgang Iser’s concept of the “post-modern-modern,” see Wolfgang Iser. *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. Weinheim: VCH, 1987.

<sup>155</sup> Certeau, “Die Geschichte, Wissen und Fiktion,” 77-78

<sup>156</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 85-86. They point to Lyotard’s work on the delegitimization of Western discourse of emancipation, which led to the collapse of grand narratives based on speculative philosophy. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition*. trans. G. Benington, Manchester 1986. Lindenberger and Wildt emphasize that the ideas of plurality and discontinuity, which first took root in the natural sciences, had made their way into the social sciences. Here they contrast Lyotard to Habermas: whereas Habermas saw the development of a “discourse without dominance” [*herrschaftsfreier Diskurs*], which implies the possibility of consensus, Lyotard granted autonomy to the variety of arguments. See Jean-Francois Lyotard in conversation with Jean-Pierre Dubost, printed in the appendix to the first German edition of *Das postmoderne Wissen*, Bremen 1982, cited in Iser, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, 33

<sup>157</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 74

everyday”—as the stage on which to articulate new power dynamics.<sup>158</sup> They understood local- or microhistory to give access to the “terrain, where the actual content of the abstractions of power and exploitation can be found and worked through” and where a “healthier” organization of individual and social life could be brokered.<sup>159</sup> Importantly, however, they claimed not to view themselves as standing beyond criticism, emphasizing that their “critique of knowledge” did not endorse irrationality or blind hostility toward academic knowledge. Inspired, here, by Marx and the third of his “Theses on Feuerbach,” which demanded that “the educator must become educated himself,” they aimed, rather, that their work would implicate them in a process of self-criticism, self-transformation, and “radical-democratic self-understanding.”<sup>160</sup> They pursued an alternative model of social development by engaging in and with their own life-world [*als Sich-Einlassen auf die eigene Lebenswelt*].<sup>161</sup> In this manner, the *Geschichtswerkstätten*—history workshops—earned from some the label of *Zukunftswerkstätten*, or “future workshops.” They refused to understand the work of the historian, despite its orientation toward the past, as impotent. Rather, historiography in pursuit of radical plurality, they claimed, would contribute to the construction of the present and the future.<sup>162</sup>

The historians of everyday life, thus, saw their work not only as retrospective but also as prescriptive and normative. “‘History from below’ is not just a method for us,” wrote founding member of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* Andreas Ludwig. “It is a political practice,”<sup>163</sup> governed by what Eley described as a radically-expanded conception of the Political. This more capacious interpretation of the realm of politics in social life, Eley highlighted, rejected the subordination of the environments of everyday life as “unpolitical.” It recognized them, instead, as spaces of political contestation, of power, and of resistance.<sup>164</sup> While they understood hegemonic politics to unfold “on the border of public and personal life,” they also recognized the imperative that this same “terrain”

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<sup>158</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 84-85. Lindenberger and Wildt noted that Critical Theory had long since established a critique of the institutionalized, privileged position of authoritative narratives, but this critique became more powerful when put into practice, as grassroots efforts questioned authority in daily life. See also Thomas Lindenberger. “Werkstattgeflüster. Überlegungen zu Selbstverständnis und Praxis radikaldemokratischer Geschichtsforschung aus der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” *Demokratie- und Arbeitergeschichte. Jahrbuch 3*. Franz Mehring Gesellschaft, Stuttgart, ed. Weingarten: Drumlin-Verlag, 1983, 23-27

<sup>159</sup> Eley, “Wie denken wir über Politik?,” 27.

<sup>160</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 75. In his third thesis, Marx writes: “The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice.” “Theses on Feuerbach.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 144. See also Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 269

<sup>161</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 269; Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten,” 403-404

<sup>162</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten,” 274

<sup>163</sup> Ludwig, “Historische Neugier und Projektpraxis,” 5-8.

<sup>164</sup> Eley, “Wie denken wir über Politik?,” 18-19. Others also noted the challenges of dealing with politics in the postwar period, with many scholars emphasizing that all historical questions tended to be posed as political questions in the wake of Germany’s dismemberment between 1945 and 1949. Fletcher, “History from Below Comes to Germany,” 60. And against the backdrop of a host of new anthropologically-oriented cultural theories—feminism and the category of gender, psychoanalytic theory, new arguments about popular culture, poststructuralist language theory, and Foucault on power and hegemony, etc.—“politics,” in their battle for social integration, had come to encompass everything. See also Geoff Eley. “Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later.” *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, Terrence McDonald, ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996; Hans Medick, “Missionare im Ruderboot? Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte” *Alltagsgeschichte*. Alf Lüdtke, ed. 1989; Lynn Hunt, ed. *The New Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989,

also harbors the “democratic politics of opposition and of emancipation.”<sup>165</sup> The politicization of the project of presenting history from below rendered it, in essence, a spatial project. Writing specifically of historical exhibits, Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* member Udo Gößwald argued that every historical exhibit depends on [*lebt von*] spatial experience, in which the visitor composes himself mentally into its space [*gedanklich in den Raum hineinzukomponieren*].<sup>166</sup> The space of historical experience, for Gößwald, existed as a site of a construction [*Ort einer Konstruktion*], “an in-between space [*Zwischenraum*] in which the set pieces of the past and present meet.” This moment of encounter, he explained, “generates movement directed at establishing the truth [*Wahrheitsfindung*],” (by which Gößwald meant historical understanding). It is this tension in the space of the historical exhibit that enables what the *Geschichtswerkstatt*’s members understood as a particular “kind of thinking oriented around historical understanding.”<sup>167</sup> Gößwald understood historical experiences to negotiate between personal historical meaning and sensual experience. Not “contemplative sensuality [*betrachtende Sinnlichkeit*],” he explained, in which one’s mind takes one “where one’s feet no longer can and where the ground itself remains inaccessible.” He rejected this kind of historical sensuality because it required no movement, only reflection and “comfortable enjoyment” of the past. Gößwald understood historical sensuality, instead, through Ernst Bloch for whom sensuality meant awareness [*Kenntnis*], that is, “the actual basis of understanding.”<sup>168</sup> An engineered relationship between proximity and distance, historical exhibition spaces attempt to make history “experienceable” [*erlebbar*].<sup>169</sup> As “sites of reconstructed sensuality [*rekonstruierter Sinnlichkeit*],” Gößwald argued, these spaces of historical experience generate “a critical encounter with one’s own history.” But, quoting Walter Benjamin’s “News of a Death” from his *Berlin Childhood since 1900*, Gößwald emphasized the instrumental function of the historical site by arguing that they “point us toward the invisible stranger—the future—which left them behind with us.”<sup>170</sup> Here, Gößwald, by way of Benjamin, nodded toward the work the past performs on the future. But for history to undertake the task of working on the future—or, for the *Geschichtswerkstätten*, of remaking the power politics of German society—the *Geschichtswerkstatt* had to make accessible the mundane objects and topographies that populate everyday life and that inform and enable an undesirable, undemocratic system of political, social, and cultural agency.<sup>171</sup> The historians of the *Geschichtswerkstatt* prioritized the presentation of their research “in places where they would reach their intended audience...in the most direct way.” Locally-relevant exhibitions and walking tours offered to their public a “rare

<sup>165</sup> Eley, “Wie denken wir über Politik?,” 33.

<sup>166</sup> Udo Gößwald. “Historische Ausstellungen—Orte rekonstruierte Sinnlichkeit.” *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*. Hannes Heer and Volker Ullrich, eds. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985, 305. Important for Gößwald, however, was the incompleteness of this spatial inhabitance. He drew on Georg Simmel to argue that even the most active participant in the historical exhibit inhabits a historical space as “foreign wanderer [*fremder Wanderer*], ‘who never quite overcame the detachedness of comings and goings [*Gelöstheit des Kommens und Gebens*].” See Georg Simmel. “Der Fremde.” *Philosophische Kultur*. Leipzig, 1911, 63.

<sup>167</sup> Gößwald, “Historische Ausstellungen,” 306.

<sup>168</sup> Gößwald, “Historische Ausstellungen,” 304. See Ernst Bloch. *Karl Marx und die Menschlichkeit*. Reinbeck, 1972, 83

<sup>169</sup> Gößwald, “Historische Ausstellungen,” 304. See Bloch. *Karl Marx und die Menschlichkeit*, 83

<sup>170</sup> Gößwald, “Historische Ausstellungen,” 309. Gößwald wrote: “Historische Ausstellungen sind eine kritische Begegnung mit der eigenen Geschichte - Orte rekonstruierter Sinnlichkeit, ‘die uns auf jene unsichtbare Fremde schließen lassen: die Zukunft, welche sie bei uns vergaß.’” He takes this last quote from Benjamin from “Eine Todesnachricht” in Benjamin’s *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*.

<sup>171</sup> Detlef Stender. “Vom Leben der toten Dinge: Schränke zum Kühlen als historische Quelle.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 157. On the lives of everyday objects and how they are not as private as one might think, even if no one sees them, see Gert Selle and Jutta Boeche, *Leben mit schönen Dingen - Anpassung und Eigensinn im Alltags des Wohnens*, Reinbek, 1986

opportunity to experience history where it happened, as something almost tangible.”<sup>172</sup> By understanding the histories of these spaces and objects—by making their histories comprehensible [*nachvollziehbar*], inhabitable [*als für sich besetzbar*], and available to be experienced [*erlebbar*]<sup>173</sup>—the historians of everyday life thought they stood a better chance of altering the systems those objects and spaces empowered.

### III. The Early Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* at Work

The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*—its membership, its headquarters, its financial situation, and the content of its projects—changed considerably in the first decade of its existence. In a retrospective lecture given about the BGW’s first twenty years of historical work, one of its founding members, Gisela Wenzel, bracketed the group’s first three years—from 1981 to 1984—as a unique phase in its formation: a period of “productive chaos,” of tone-setting, and of putting down roots.<sup>174</sup> During this short stretch, the BGW outlined for itself three central tasks, based on the three pillars Manfred Liebel had suggested at the organization’s initial meeting. First, they aimed to generate a forum for research projects on Berlin’s local histories. Second, they wanted to create an archive that would serve as a repository for the results of this research and to begin a dialogue with existing archives so that the BGW might complement rather than duplicate their holdings. Third, they refused to undertake these projects in isolation and regarded their work as a project in public outreach [*Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*]. They aimed to mediate between other small, disaggregated local history groups operating simultaneously in Berlin and to facilitate the communication of their efforts to Berlin’s public in the form of meetings, exhibits and installations, and publications.<sup>175</sup>

Though their ambitions to give new archival life to the forgotten relics of Berlin’s everyday past and to operate as a capacious grassroots umbrella organization gave the group lofty administrative aims, the real “soul” of the organization, Wenzel argued, was housed in its research projects.<sup>176</sup> In these projects, the members of the BGW attempted to realize their radical spatial objectives through the concrete practices of history from below. In the group’s first three years, its members proposed scores of projects. Rather than censoring them—a practice they associated with the guild-mentality of the university-sanctioned historiography—the organization often gave these projects the green light to see where they would lead. By attempting to facilitate what they understood as “democratic, self-directed activities,” they hoped to let the interest of the BGW’s membership dictate a project’s success or failure.<sup>177</sup>

As the organization’s first event, held in early February 1981 even before the BGW had completed the paperwork with the city to constitute itself officially, the BGW screened a film by Barbara Kaspar and Lothar Schuster on the history of Berlin’s massive steam engine manufacturer, Borsig. The event, one participant claimed, brought out over one hundred participants and boosted early interest in the BGW considerably.<sup>178</sup> Participants drawn from this gathering divided into several subgroups based on their diverse interests. The Peace Group hoped to engage with the history of war and the rise of the peace movement in Berlin. They were driven by the intensifying debate over the stationing of American nuclear missiles in Germany and wanted to insert themselves into this

<sup>172</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 79

<sup>173</sup> Paul and Schossig, “Vorwort,” 12

<sup>174</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “Grabe, wo du stehst.’ Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

<sup>175</sup> Schröter, “Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 9

<sup>176</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “Grabe, wo du stehst.’ Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

<sup>177</sup> Frei, “Geschichtswerkstätten,” 401

<sup>178</sup> Schröter, “Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 11-12

contemporary controversy.<sup>179</sup> The Theater Group took an interest in Berlin's cultural history and hoped to use the arts as a point of access to the histories of violence, resistance, and assimilation in Germany. In attempt to present history kinesthetically in their first project, they created a multimedia theater piece, *The Way through a Herd of Cows*, that offered historical documentation of the life of Berlin's political cabaret group The Catacombs from 1933-35.<sup>180</sup> The Postwar Group took an interest in chronicling the survival mechanisms of those living in the ruins of Berlin after the Second World War. Their first exhibit took place in 1982 at Berlin's alternative educational consortium, the VolksUni, on the theme "Myths of Postwar History."<sup>181</sup> But the real excitement within the BGW surrounded the history of National Socialism in Berlin. "I remember a sort of gold rush atmosphere [*Goldgräberstimmung*]," Gisela Wenzel wrote, describing the enthusiasm around the first of the major anniversaries with which the group had to reckon. The fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's ascension to power on 30 January 1933 became the primary historical signpost guiding the group's earliest work.<sup>182</sup>

### A. In the Beginning was National Socialism: "Saving Traces" and the "33-Project"

"In the beginning... was National Socialism,"<sup>183</sup> quipped BGW member Jürgen Karwelat on the occasion of the group's twentieth birthday. Though the organization's work in its early years included projects on a range of subjects, his apothegm captures the degree to which the Nazi era anchored the work of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*. Two projects undertaken in 1983, both inspired by the approaching anniversary of that pregnant beginning of National Socialism,<sup>184</sup> carried the torch in the group's formative years: "Saving Traces: Everyday Life and Resistance in Berlin in the 1930s" and the "33-Project."

Though prompted by the tidy calendric reminder of a round-number anniversary, "Saving Traces" emerged out of a constellation of two additional factors. First, this new generation of historians in Berlin had come to terms with their own curiosity about the mechanisms that fueled National Socialism on the level of the everyday. Too young to have participated in the regime themselves, they benefitted from a decoupling of *interest* in totalitarianism at work from *implication* in it. Their distance offered a chance, Andreas Ludwig argued, to reevaluate the "platitudes" with which they had been socialized: "Hitler as the incarnation of evil," "we did not know about it," the unforeseeable and thus unstoppable catastrophe of the Holocaust; and comparative totalitarianisms, where the Third Reich had become equated with the Soviet Union. These conceptual frameworks had begun to lose their veneer, opening them up to new criticism. With this increased conceptual breathing room, BGW members began to ask questions of the everyman [*Masse Mensch*]. They wanted to know what roles these individuals played in mediating and bolstering the Nazis' power, and how, in the practices of everyday life—the spaces for action [*Handlungsspielräume*] and reaction—the Nazis managed to arrive at mass political consensus.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>179</sup> BGWA Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 9.-12.1983

<sup>180</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>181</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 1984; Schröter, "Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 11-12

<sup>182</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. "Grabe, wo du stehst." Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt." Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

<sup>183</sup> Jürgen Karwelat. "Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge." *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 58

<sup>184</sup> Rendered inconsistently as either *Machtergreifung*—seizure of power, a conceptualization of Hitler's rise now generally discredited by historians—or *Machtübergabe*—a more tempered "transfer of power." For more on Hitler's rise, see Henry Ashby Turner. *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1996.

<sup>185</sup> Ludwig, "Historische Neugier," 5-8.

Berliners had, second, begun to take note of how the Second World War had thoroughly destroyed the visible traces of the city's pre-war lives.<sup>186</sup> Inspired by a meeting with Sven Lindqvist in the summer of 1981, the BGW began to call its own members to “dig where they stood” in order to uncover and then preserve the traces of their own families', professions', and living communities' pasts.<sup>187</sup> The group chose to focus on two particular areas of the city, the neighborhoods of Charlottenburg—a bourgeois area in the western part of the city which, during the Nazi era, fell along what Hitler planned as the primary artery of his World Capital Germania—and Schöneberg—an area just southeast of the city's center, that housed both the relatively affluent Jewish district of the “Bavarian Quarter” as well as one of Berlin's sources of Left activism during the Weimar and Nazi years. Participants in the “Saving Traces” project took a particular interest in recording and representing the experiences of witness, those remaining human “traces” of the past who experienced the transformations of National Socialism directly.<sup>188</sup> Some participants criticized the BGW's interest in the witness, highlighting the conventional problems associated with oral history. Interviews might, for example, feature leading questions that would render the witness a mere puppet. One critic dismissed the BGW's work in “Saving Traces” as a “Puppet Show from Below,” that would bring Berliners no closer to the history they aimed to understand.<sup>189</sup> Another, however—one who had participated in the activities of the BGW as a witness—stressed the unavoidable subjectivity of individual testimonies. Their role, he emphasized, was to contribute to a total picture; alone, they bear no objective fact. In any case, he argued, that was not their primary purpose: “I do not want to be a nostalgic relic. Rather simply,” he noted, offering a window into why witnesses chose to engage the BGW researchers in their efforts, “I want to try to contribute a path into our future.”<sup>190</sup>

With “Saving Traces,” the BGW had to confront concretely the question of how they should mediate their “history from below” to the broader public. Andreas Ludwig made clear that he opposed static representations: “No monuments,” he demanded. “Instead, a center that works actively to save the traces of the past.”<sup>191</sup> Communicating history's dynamism became a central concern of the BGW's efforts: they sought new forms of historical mediation sensitive to the spaces that enabled it to take place and to its mundane contingencies. While they presented the findings of the “Saving Traces” project in a more traditional, centralized exhibit in the former shopping center-turned-cultural center Kaufhaus Kato adjacent to Berlin's Schlesisches Tor subway station, they also sought alternative ways to present their findings, particularly ways that might appeal more to young Berliners. With financial support from the Berlin Senate and the findings from their research for the “Saving Traces” project, they began to organize walking city tours of Charlottenburg and Schöneberg that focused on alternative culture and resistance during the Nazi era.<sup>192</sup> So much interest, both from BGW members and from locals, developed around the enterprise of crafting these tours that a separate BGW discussion group formed to manage their creation.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Paul and Schossig, “Geschichte und Heimat,” 21-23

<sup>187</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “Grabe, wo du stehst.” Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten; Schröter, “Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 11.

<sup>188</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “Grabe, wo du stehst.” Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten. The BGW, as would become apparent in later projects, took a capacious view of the witness: survivors, bystanders, and others who could offer a testimony of the time. For an excellent analysis of types of witnessing, see Robin Wagner-Pacifici. “Witness to Surrender.” *Visual Worlds*. John R. Hall, Blake Stimson, and Lisa Tamiris Becker, eds. London; New York: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>189</sup> BGWA Siegfried Heimann, “Leserbrief,” Rundbrief, 18.4.1983.

<sup>190</sup> BGWA Joachim Stein, “Leserbrief,” Rundbrief, 6.6.1983.

<sup>191</sup> Ludwig, “Historische Neugier,” 5-8.

<sup>192</sup> BGWA Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 9.-12.1983.

<sup>193</sup> Schröter, “Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 12.

The explorations of Charlottenburg and Schöneberg in the 1930s through the “Saving Traces” project generated a more substantial interest in these two areas that carried the BGW forward into a new effort, the “33-Project.” At a membership meeting in June 1982, Ursula Schröter announced with some surprise that the Berlin Senate had granted the BGW 90,000 DM, or somewhere around \$35,000, for her project proposal seeking to document the Nazis’ rise to power in everyday Berlin. Schröter’s project had two components. First, she hoped to document the mundane ways that everyday life changed for Berliners after Hitler’s assumed leadership. Did ordinary spaces without political associations—like garden plots—change? What about representation of the family in photography or oral narrations of family histories? Second, she hoped to examine how Berliners encountered propaganda and were acculturated into the National Socialist state through films, theater, and other visual media. Drawn in by a lively, open atmosphere that he contrasted to that of “musty university historians,” a young Andreas Ludwig volunteered along with Gisela Wenzel and Kurt Schilde to lead the project. Given relative independence by the Monday Group, Ludwig and his fellow program leaders found themselves with the freedom to realize their vision for an alternative historical project. Ludwig did note, however, that this freedom, facilitated by the grant from the state which paid them a modest stipend, occasionally brought criticism from the BGW’s far more numerous unpaid volunteer researchers.<sup>194</sup>

As the “33-Project” gained steam, a tandem responsibility emerged. When it became clear that the BGW’s first meeting site in the Mehringhof could no longer accommodate the group’s growing numbers, they relocated in June 1982 to what would become a permanent home in the heart of Schöneberg. In addition to serving as a meeting space, their new headquarters on Goltzstraße operated as an archive and information center in service of the “33-Project.”<sup>195</sup> The archive and information center would attempt to manage the mass of materials assembled by “33-Project” researchers: oral history interviews, family photographs, letters, diaries, and other memorabilia left in the hands of the group when it assumed responsibility for several personal archival collections. Those tasked with coordinating the center’s creation—the Tuesday Group, like the Monday Group, named uncreatively after the day they met in the Goltzstraße site—envisioned an archive that would offer the tools for researchers to reconstruct the processes and experiences of everyday life, particularly private encounters. They understood the objects the archive was to hold as constituting the “world of experience” [*Erlebnisswelt*] of the historical narrator, whose narration could not be understood apart from them.<sup>196</sup> Beyond its archival role, the BGW intended the Goltzstraße headquarters to bring together the city’s grassroots historical “experts” undertaking similar projects. With assistance from Berlin’s State Center for Political Education, the info center also began to assemble a small library that placed emphasis on the theories and practices of history research “from

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<sup>194</sup> Andreas Ludwig. “Das ‘33-Projekt.’” *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 21-22.

<sup>195</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 6.6.1983. The “33-Project” members were not, incidentally, let off the hook for the exciting new burden they created for the BGW. They were tasked with staffing the group’s new headquarters. BGWA Rundbrief, 7.3.1983.

<sup>196</sup> Frauke Bollow and Elke Mocker. “Archivierung biographischer Quellen im Dokumentationszentrum für Alltags- und Regionalgeschichte der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 224. See also “Biographische Selbstzeugnisse als Programm.” *Das Archiv für biographische Interviews und Selbstzeugnisse in der Berlin Geschichtswerkstatt*, unpublished. Theo Pinkus, a founding father of the BGW, played an important role in negotiating the archive. See Rudolf Lüscher, Werner Schweizer, Amalie und Theo Pinkus-De Sassi, *Leben im Widerspruch*. Zürich: Limmat-Verlag, 1987. Pinkus had helped to popularize Lindqvist’s Dig Where You Stand program in the BRD and in Austria through his educational center in Salecina, Switzerland. BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “‘Grabe, wo du stehst.’ Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

below.”<sup>197</sup> The info center would serve as a hub of information exchange, consultation, start-up assistance, and research possibilities. Its coordinators hoped that not only historians would find their materials useful. As part of their ambition to have an impact on the city’s contemporary political dialogues, they envisioned the info center as a networking hub that would link the many, decentralized projects organized by local initiatives, the city’s renters’ associations, Antifa (short for “anti-fascist”) groups, participants in the women’s movement, foreigners, and youth organization.<sup>198</sup> As an ambitious undertaking and one whose administrative responsibilities endowed it with far less allure than the research projects it aimed to document, the Tuesday Group soon found itself struggling to keep up with its work and in need of volunteers.<sup>199</sup> These strains aside, though, the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler’s rise of power provided the BGW with a canvas on which sketch out its objectives. The group’s interest in local, decentralized historical work that attended to the people, objects, and spaces of everyday life during the Nazi era had already crystallized in the BGW’s first years.

### B. “Lindenhof,” “Red Island,” and “City Tours by Boat”

Out of the early investments that manifested in the “33-Project” grew three additional projects through which the BGW’s practical engagement with the spatial project of history from below became much clearer. The Lindenhof Working Group formed in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of 1933 to research the history of the group’s namesake, the Lindenhof: a cooperatively-organized living community in the south of Schöneberg.<sup>200</sup> Built during the Weimar Republic by the ambitious modernist architects Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner, the Lindenhof housing development targeted the lower classes and aimed to create the infrastructure for a collaborative living arrangement that would fulfill not only the structural but also the social needs of its inhabitants. Relatively isolated, in the middle of an industrial area, from the heart of Berlin as well as from the main center of the neighborhood of Schöneberg, the Lindenhof interested the BGW for the way it provided (of necessity) its own services to its residents: schools, businesses, social organizations, etc. Because the community’s leadership consisted of members of the Social Democratic Party, the Lindenhof leaned left. Moreover, as a relatively closed architectural unit—“a little fortified town”—its inhabitants came to see the community as “theirs,” endowing it with its own unique identity independent of Schöneberg or Berlin as a whole.<sup>201</sup> This sense of belonging and community among its residents, invested solidly with leftist values, made the Lindenhof an ideal site for studying how National Socialist ideology worked its way into the spaces and relationships of everyday life. By examining when and how the Nazis penetrated the social fabric of the Lindenhof, the BGW hope to come to a better understanding of the limits of resistance and the slippery path into acquiescence, collaboration, and finally organized support.

United by a collective dissatisfaction that the city, by the summer of 1982, had yet to announce any official plans to acknowledge the approaching anniversary, a motley group of three BGW members proposed to research the evolution of the Lindenhof from its construction in 1918 through the mid-1930s. A school teacher, a professor city planning at Berlin’s Technical University, and a fourth-semester history student at the Free University together outlined four thematic research

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<sup>197</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, 7.3.1983

<sup>198</sup> BGWA Programm, Berliner GeschichtsWerkstatt e.V., 9.-12.1983; BGWA Informationen: Berliner GeschichtsWerkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>199</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, 6.6.1983

<sup>200</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>201</sup> Eva Brücker and the Arbeitsgruppe Lindenhof. “Gemmeinnützige ‘Siedlung Lindehof’ E.G.m.b.H. Berlin-Schöneberg.” *Projekt: Spurensicherung. Alltag und Widerstand im Berlin der 30er Jahre*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Berlin (West): Elefant Press, 1983, 9-10



areas. They wanted to trace changes in Lindenhofers' experiences of childhood. They would examine the development of neighborly relationships through the formation of associations, festivals, gardening culture, and other expressions of community solidarity. They planned to chronicle the social changes that took place immediately after the political changes of 30 January 1933. And, finally, they intended to chart the shifting opportunities for reaction in the wake of 1933, marking out demonstrations of opposition as well as when those opportunities subsided into acts of assimilation. The project's organizers wanted to understand the objects and places that contributed to the Lindenhof's sense of community and how these places broke down under the Nazis. When their proposal received funding from the Berliner *Kulturrat*, the project's three organizers—Regina Wincke, Rüdiger Schwenke, and Eva Brücker—began to collect oral history interviews with present and former residents of the community as well as material paraphernalia from the Lindenhof's history: photos, posters, advertisements, announcements, receipts, minutes from the meetings of the community's leadership, etc.<sup>202</sup>

As with many of the BGW's ambitious early projects, the "Lindenhof" project began to overwhelm its organizers. They responded by pulling in more volunteers to balance out the workload. This practice, however, generated tension within the group between those receiving a modest stipend from the state for their work (as well as the increased accountability that accompanied the use of those funds) and the working group's volunteers. The group remained uneasy about the quality of the work its unpaid volunteers would provide; the unspoken assumption was that volunteer work would be of a less rigorous quality than that of the group's paid members. The Lindenhof group's internal discord demonstrated how the BGW never ultimately reevaluated established standards of historical "professionalism," however much the organization professed its distance from the practices and values of professional historians.<sup>203</sup> Their move, then, to bring on three trained biographers as the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the city of Berlin approached in 1987, was unsurprising. Roswitha Breckner, Claudia Gather, and Monika Rummler brought a great deal of energy as well as dedicated work to the project in its last years, conducting intensive life-historical narrative interviews with residents of the Lindenhof and reinforcing the BGW's witness-oriented, oral history research approach.<sup>204</sup>

Presentations of the Lindenhof research began to appear very soon after the project's initiation. Starting in 1984, just a year and a half after research began, the Lindenhof Working Group began to compile materials for an exhibit and a small brochure.<sup>205</sup> As the project evolved and their collection of materials grew, the group assembled a much larger and more inspiring exhibit, installed in the Lindenhof itself as well as in other places in the city. Working with the Schöneberg branch of *Die Falken*, the youth organization of the SPD, the BGW displayed twenty-four biographies over eleven decentralized open air exhibits that narrated the evolution of the Lindenhof community over four generations, from its founding to its physical and social reconstruction after the Second World War.<sup>206</sup> After the exhibit's conclusion, the BGW compiled their materials in the Goltzstraße archive and would later use them to offer courses on conducting oral history interviews.<sup>207</sup>

Also emerging out of research for the "33-Project" was another Schöneberg-oriented research project that would focus on a small "island" within the district created by three intersecting

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<sup>202</sup> Brücker, "Gemmeinnützige 'Siedlung Lindehof,'" 10; Eva Brücker. "Das Lindenhof-Projekt: Alltagsgeschichte ist machbar." *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 28

<sup>203</sup> Brücker, "Das Lindenhof-Projekt," 29

<sup>204</sup> Brücker, "Das Lindenhof-Projekt," 28-29

<sup>205</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>206</sup> Brücker, "Das Lindenhof-Projekt," 29

<sup>207</sup> Brücker, "Das Lindenhof-Projekt," 30

train lines. Dubbed the “Red Island” [*Rote Insel*] after one of its precocious SPD residents hung a red flag out his window to protest implementation of Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Laws in the late nineteenth century, this small sub-district of Schöneberg won for itself a reputation.<sup>208</sup> A storied group of residents had called the Red Island home throughout the past one hundred years: legendary German entertainer Marlene Dietrich was born there at the turn of the century, as was Alfred Lion, a Jewish exile who would later co-found Blue Note Records, the American jazz label that recorded greats like John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, and Herbie Hancock. The “island” also boasted its share of political heavyweights: the first president of West Germany after the Second World War, Theodor Heuss, lived there for some years as did the second president of the West German Bundestag, Hermann Ehlers. The man who would serve twenty-two years in the East German Socialist Unity Party as Prime Minister of the GDR, Willi Stoph, spent his childhood on the island as well, which overwhelmingly voted socialist until the rise of the Green party in the 1980s. The “red” in “Red Island” contributed significantly, even disproportionately, to its aura: one of the leaders of the social democratic movement under the Anti-Socialist Laws, August Bebel, lived on the island from the late nineteenth century until his death just before the First World War, while social democrat and Nazi resister Julius Leber (for whom the central street running through the “Red Island” district is named) worked along the district’s southern-most perimeter.<sup>209</sup> In comparison to other of Berlin’s resistance districts—Wedding, for example, served as a hotbed of violent resistance efforts in the early years of National Socialism—the Red Island offer a mix and fairly tempered example of resistance to the Nazis. But insofar as its small, finite area and fairly strong self-conception made it easy to study, the BGW took an interest in exploring the history of the “Red Island” through the construction of its “resistance myths.”<sup>210</sup> Andreas Sander, one of the project’s early coordinators was careful to add, however, that the BGW never intended the project to focus solely on Nazi dictatorship. Instead, they aimed to depict the totality of the island’s history, in all its diversity,<sup>211</sup> tracing its evolution from a late nineteenth century epicenter of railway construction, through the destruction of workers’ culture of solidarity during fascism, to its process of rebuilding and redefinition in the postwar period.<sup>212</sup>

The Red Island Group’s methods mirrored those of the “Lindenhof” project. In the spirit of the Dig-Where-You-Stand Movement, Sander noted, the members of the Red Island Working Group wanted to uncover the area’s history in a common effort with its residents.<sup>213</sup> As a complement to more conventional archival research, BGW members stressed the importance of conducting oral history interviews with older residents and the decentralized display of their findings in an interactive audio-visual installation throughout the island. For such an installation, the group received funding from the city of Berlin.<sup>214</sup> The group ran into snags along the way, however. As transplants to the city and to the neighborhood, Sander pointed out, they appeared to many of the Red Island’s residents as outsiders, excluded from its sense of community. They often had trouble winning the trust of longtime residents. Compounding the problem was an initial lack of interest

<sup>208</sup> Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. *Spurensicherung in Schöneberg 1933: “Rote Insel”, Lindenhof, “jüdische Schweiz.”* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1983.

<sup>209</sup> Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. *Spurensicherung in Schöneberg 1933.* See also Herbert Böpple and Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. *Die Rote Insel: Berlin-Schöneberg: Bruchstücke zu einer Stadtgeschichte.* Berlin: Nishen, 1987.

<sup>210</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “Grabe, wo du stehst.” *Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.* Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten.

<sup>211</sup> Andreas Sander. “Die ‘Rote Insel.’” *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 26-27

<sup>212</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>213</sup> Sander, “Die ‘Rote Insel,’” 26-27

<sup>214</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984; Sander, “Die ‘Rote Insel,’” 26-27

from younger and newer residents. As the project progressed, however, of the BGW found that it had piqued the interest of many previously skeptical locals and saw willingness to participate in their work—and more importantly, a heightened interest in the spaces their histories narrated—grow over the project’s four-year existence.<sup>215</sup>

The BGW really made the connection between space and history, however, in a third project that gained steam (rather literally, in fact) during the group’s earliest years. In June 1982, the Berlin shipping company Riedel hosted its annual board meeting during one of the company’s historic boat tours on Berlin’s waterways. During this meeting a member of Riedel’s leadership drew the group’s attention to a copy of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt’s* annual report. This exchange began a fruitful relationship between the two organizations, as the BGW began to take a heightened interest not only in walking tours of the city but in opportunity made possible by Berlin’s network of canals: historical city tours by boat.<sup>216</sup> BGW member Jürgen Karwelat originally proposed the idea of using the vantage points available from Berlin’s River Spree and Landwehr Canal as a new way to transmit historical narratives. But, he noted, his suggestion met “friendly disinterest.” As with many early BGW projects, however, he was given the go-ahead to pursue the project and to see if interest developed around it. And indeed it did.<sup>217</sup> Since April 1984, the BGW’s Steamship Group [*Dampfergruppe*] began hosting regular tours of Berlin’s historic architecture, residential neighborhoods, and industrial districts from the small passenger ships that populated the city’s waterways.<sup>218</sup> From their inception, the tours proved popular, drawing in guests of all sorts. Indeed, they began on a strong note with a representative from the evening news broadcast by Radio Free Berlin in attendance at the very first of their tours.<sup>219</sup>

The BGW highlighted that part of the success of the City Tours by Boat, which have run continuously for thirty years, derived from their curious vantage point. “The urban waterways of Berlin,” one of the BGW’s early brochures suggested, “mediate the unexpected.” They give access to “unique vantage points, places that one would otherwise never visit. Everywhere you look, you encounter hard evidence of the past.”<sup>220</sup> Along Berlin’s Westhafen, Germany’s second largest inland harbor, for example, a collection of imposing storage facilities offer evidence for the importance of inland ship traffic to the history of Berlin as an industrial metropolis, one BGW tour highlighted. And along the Landwehr Canal, they could narrate a longer history of German revolutionary efforts by noting the coincidental contiguity of several key landmarks in this narrative. The embankment of the Landwehr Canal named after Max Reichpietsch, one of the socialist leaders of a sailors’ mutiny in Kiel in 1918, offered the BGW an opportunity to explain how the mutiny played a key role in toppling the German monarchy, making way for the Weimar Republic but, in the interim, also fanning hopes of a socialist revolution. Guests on the tour, however, get a topographical metaphor for the brevity of the more radical phases of the German Revolution when they learn that nearby the Reichpietsch Embankment, Freikorps soldiers in 1919 had disposed of the body of murdered communist political activist Rosa Luxemburg, a symbol of radical revolutionary hopes. But as much as ambitions for a revolutionary recovery of German politics survived the assassination of the leaders of the communist radicals of the Spartacus League, so too did hopes for an alternative survive National Socialism. Here, the BGW highlighted that this same area along the Landwehr Canal served as the headquarters for the planning of Stauffenberg’s failed attempt on Hitler’s life in

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<sup>215</sup> Sander, “Die ‘Rote Insel,’” 26

<sup>216</sup> Schröter, “Gründungsphase der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 12

<sup>217</sup> Karwelat, “Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge,” 56

<sup>218</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>219</sup> Karwelat, “Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge,” 56

<sup>220</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984

1944.<sup>221</sup> These tours, the BGW argued, did something more than merely present history. Instead, they suggested that tours by boat “make history vivid [*anschaulich*]. We want to see where history happened,” they argued, “and, in doing so, we want to make it more accessible.”<sup>222</sup>

### C. Berlin as a History Workshop: The Active Museum

With “City Tours by Boat,” the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* understood itself to engage with city as historical classroom [*Lernort*]. It was more effective, they argued, to teach history “at the site” [*vor Ort*] and to use real, physical spaces of historical value to explain complex historical connections than even the best lecture could hope to be.<sup>223</sup> The first phase in the BGW’s existence culminated as the group’s name—and purpose—was taken up by a broader public as a language to describe Berlin itself. By the middle of the 1980s, the idea that the topography of Berlin operated as the real “history workshop,” and all citizens, by engaging with that topography, could become historians, had been appropriated by other alternative groups within the city.

The appropriation of this language appeared most clearly in the dialogues surrounding the work of another historical group that had formed in Berlin contemporaneously: the Active Museum [AM]. The AM coalesced around a collective frustration with the treatment of one of Berlin’s most infamous sites. While, by the 1980s, it had stood for decade as an empty lot, Wilhelmstraße 102-106 once served as the headquarters of the Third Reich’s security apparatus under Reinhard Heydrich. Built by the prolific Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the structure originally housed the Rococo-style Prince Albrecht Palace, constructed on the orders of King Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia. In need of space to station the growing administrative operations of the SD, SS, and Gestapo, however, Heydrich moved them to the Prince Albrecht Palace just a year after Hitler’s ascension to power. Destroyed in the Battle of Berlin, the site had remained empty and unattended since its rubble was cleared in the mid-1950s. With the rise of the New History Movement, however, murmurings of popular interest [*Bürger-Begehren*] in turning the site into a large open air monument for West German postwar history began to echo through the city. Such attention to this historic site was “long overdue,” the more vocal of these activists claimed.<sup>224</sup>

The Active Museum developed as a group of concerned citizens undertook to create an institution that would reckon with the role the Prince Albrecht grounds played in the atrocities of National Socialism. The museum’s name derived from the group’s express wish that the site serve not as a static presentation of a monologic history of National Socialism. Instead, it was to offer a site of historical “encounters” [*Begegnungsstätte*], where visitors could engage with the site’s history, with other visitors, and with their own personal relationship to Germany’s complex past. The museum was to serve as a place for debating the history of fascism: its preconditions, its execution, and its results. The museum’s supporters called for the creation of a forum that facilitated controversial discussions within the general population. A democratic history, they claimed, had to be written with the active participation of the German citizenry. These supporters also demanded the museum explore fascism in practice at the level of the everyday.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>221</sup> BGWA Brochure “Warum historische Stadtrundfahrten mit dem Schiff?“, 1984

<sup>222</sup> BGWA Brochure “Warum historische Stadtrundfahrten mit dem Schiff?“, 1984; BGWA exchange of letters between Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. and the Wasserstraßenhauptamt of the Ministerium für Verkehr in East Berlin, from the Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt on 13.12.1985 and 25.4.1986. The BGW emphasized its interest in the everyday life of Berliners on both sides of the Wall and wanted to take their tour into the East as well.

<sup>223</sup> Düsphohl, “20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 47

<sup>224</sup> “Ein kräftiger Schub für die Vergangenheit,” 36

<sup>225</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig, Vorüberlegungen zu einer Konzeption für das “Aktive Museum - Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin,” 8/9.1983.

Understandably, the project appealed to the young BGW, and in 1984, the BGW gathered a working group that would participate actively in the efforts to provide a conceptual foundation for the museum. Led by Udo Gößwald and Andreas Ludwig, the BGW's AM Working Group saw the potential for the *Geschichtswerkstatt* to provide essential guidance in this project, which aimed precisely at promoting grassroots historical "at the site." The AM agreed put Gößwald and Ludwig in charge of overseeing the museum's entire conceptualization process. The Active Museum Conception Group met for the first time on 24 August 1983.<sup>226</sup> While the AM drew participation from a diversity of groups and individuals from throughout the city (including representatives from the Berlin's Green party, the Alternative Liste, about which more in chapters 3 and 4), members of the BGW held a special seat in the AM's earliest years,<sup>227</sup> their role perhaps enhanced by their willingness to play host at their Goltzstraße headquarters to initial AM meetings.<sup>228</sup> The first chairs of the Active Museum, Gerhard Schoenberner and Heinz-Dieter Schilling, maintained a lively dialogue with the BGW's most active members, planning, for example, historical exhibits together.<sup>229</sup>

The good will between the BGW and AM would eventually dissipate as the museum transitioned from the realm of the conceptual to the space of the real. On the level of the mundane, the multitude of BGW working group meetings meant that AM meetings often conflicted with some event or another on the BGW's full calendar.<sup>230</sup> More importantly, however, the BGW soon discovered that the museum would not offer an opportunity to realize the radical spatial approach to history on a grander scale than their limited budget would allow them in their other work. The BGW criticized the consensus-winning version of the AM's conceptualization as "thin" and only "weakly articulated" as well as insufficiently distinct from existing historical institutions and museums.<sup>231</sup> The museum's "affirmation of radical intent" [*Bekennnis zur Radikalität*], which Andreas Ludwig noted had appeared in the first drafts of plans for the museum in September 1983, had been watered down over the next seven months to a more tepid historical form that substituted a desire to generate affect in the visitor for what Ludwig had hoped would be a more meaningful kind of historical provocation.<sup>232</sup> The BGW wanted to make a dynamic [*veränderbar*] museum whose visitors were given sufficient power to constitute its character such that they would view the museum "their

<sup>226</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Udo Gößwald, Protokoll der Mitgleiderversammlung vom 5.8.1983; BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984

<sup>227</sup> The Concept Group of the Aktives Museum included BGW members Eva Brücker, Udo Gößwald, Andreas Ludwig, Gisela Wenzel, Rita Klages, Andreas Ludwig, Claus Kittsteiner. See, for example, LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Konzeptionsgruppe Aktives Museum, undated; LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-33, 1, Aktives Museum, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Rundbrief 3/1984, Andreas Ludwig, "Wie sollte ein Aktives Museum einmal werden?"; LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Attendance List, Aktives Museum, 25.5.1984. In 1984, BGW member Andreas Ludwig spoke to the Aktives Museum's executive committee to explain the relationship between the AM and the BGW. LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Heinz-Dieter Schilling to the Vorstandskollegen, invitation to next Vorstandssitzung on 5.4.1984, sent 29.3.1984.

<sup>228</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Udo Gößwald, BGW/AM, to Konzeptgruppe, 29.9.1983.

<sup>229</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Schoenberner and Schilling to Mitglieder and Freunde [of the Aktives Museum], 10.11.1983. Schoenberner and Schilling informed AM members about an exhibit in November 1983 in the Akademie der Künste on the use of the Martin Gropius Bau. The exhibit "Was geschah/geschieht hier" on the use of the Gropius Building and plans for the former Prinz-Albrecht area was created by three members of AM: Heinz-Dieter Schilling, as well as Udo Gößwald and Regina Cohn (both dual members of the AM and the BGW). In May 1984, Andreas Ludwig sent an (admittedly critical) article he had written for the journal *Geschichtsdidaktik*, titled "Wie kann ein 'Aktives Museum' aufgebaut werden?" to Aktives Museum's co-chair Heinz-Dieter Schilling. Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig to Heinz-Dieter Schilling, 14.5.1984.

<sup>230</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, Andreas Ludwig, Bernhard Müller für den Vorstand der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 14.2.1987.

<sup>231</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Udo Gößwald, undated.

<sup>232</sup> LArch, B Rep. 232-33, 1, Aktives Museum, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Rundbrief 3/1984, Andreas Ludwig, "Wie sollte ein Aktives Museum einmal werden?"

own.”<sup>233</sup> The BGW would get no such product, however. Summarizing the group’s frustrations with the later direction of the AM, Andreas Ludwig argued that “we wanted an active museum, not activities for a new museum.”<sup>234</sup>

Nevertheless, the BGW’s involvement in the museum marked the uptake of their historical objectives into the activities, language, and mindset of the broader Berlin alternative community. On 5 May 1985, members of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* joined members of the Active Museum for a symbolic excavation at the site of the former Prince Albrecht Palace. This time literally digging where they stood, the Active Museum made a public statement that stressed Berlin’s topography as mandating the attention of anyone concerned with Berlin’s—and Germany’s—efforts to understand the origins and legacy of National Socialism as well as to advance Germany’s process of coming to terms with carrying that burdensome history. (Jürgen Karwelat noted that, had they dug deeper, they would have uncovered the cellar of the Gestapo headquarters, which had remained buried beneath the rubble of Wilhelmstraße 102-106 for forty years.<sup>235</sup>) The success of the BGW lay not in the trajectory of the plans for the Active Museum itself, but rather for the way Berliners increasingly understood them. The goal for the grounds of the former Prince Albrecht Palace should be “the immediate creation of [a] living history workshop,” Kreuzberg’s local Green Party, the Alternative Liste argued in 1984.<sup>236</sup> And, several years later, when confronted with their opposition to Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s proposal to create a national German historical museum in Berlin, the Alternative Liste would again argue that

Berlin is, itself, already a great historical museum of recent German history. If this project is really about making history visible and tangible, then the millions of Marks from Bonn should go first to already-existing sites where history actually happened, like the Wannsee Villa, the site of the former synagogue on Levetzow Street in Tiergarten, or that of the former headquarters of the security apparatus of the Third Reich on Koch Street. These sites should be made visible, tangible, and available to the public to be experienced once again. *Let’s make West Berlin into a history workshop.*<sup>237</sup>

This rhetoric, German historian Axel Schildt has emphasized, drew attention to the “artisanal [*handwerklichen*] character” of the New History Movement and stressed its grassroots nature.<sup>238</sup> Here, with the popular uptake of the logic and language of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, they took the first real step in realizing their radical spatial project for history.

#### D. *Geschichtsfest* ’84: A Pilgrimage

In 1984, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*, under the auspices of the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* organized a gathering of independent historians in June 1984. Though they expected a few hundred participants at the multi-day HistoryFest, or *Geschichtsfest* ’84, they were hardly prepared for the wellspring of interest the event received. Over six hundred “barefoot historians” traveled to Berlin to talk about history of everyday life, history from below, oral history, the *Geschichtswerkstätten*, among innumerable other themes.<sup>239</sup> The festival was designed both as a networking event for unaffiliated grassroots historians, but also, Alf Lüdtkke argued, to generate an emotional investment

<sup>233</sup> LArch, B Rep. 232-33, 1, Aktives Museum, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Rundbrief 3/1984, Andreas Ludwig, “Wie sollte ein Aktives Museum einmal werden?”

<sup>234</sup> LArch, B Rep. 232-33, 1, Aktives Museum, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Rundbrief 3/1984, Andreas Ludwig, “Wie sollte ein Aktives Museum einmal werden?”

<sup>235</sup> Karwelat, “Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge,” 58

<sup>236</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, correspondence between Aktives Museum and Berlin’s Alternative List, “Stellungnahme der AL Kreuzberg zum Ergebnis des Wettbewerbs Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände,” 7.6.1984.

<sup>237</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N1569/740, #51, “Zum geplanten ‘Deutschen Historischen Museum,’” [undated], emphasis mine

<sup>238</sup> Schildt, “Zur Einleitung,” 18

<sup>239</sup> Düsphohl, “20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 49

in the narration of local history.<sup>240</sup> An advertisement for the event raised the question of its name, HistoryFest. “History,” they wrote. “What is there to celebrate?” Clarifying the festival’s objectives, the event’s organizers explained that “we will not just argue and criticize history in small groups,” here a subtle nod to their distaste for academic conference culture. “Rather, we’ll present the work of the *Geschichtswerkstätten* in open, public events: Exhibits, films, theater, and music — history,” they argued, “can be mediated through the most diverse media and cultural activities.” The festival program was, indeed, diverse. It began with an event on how to make history visible, particularly through photography and documentary cinematography, professional and lay. They discussed the promises and problems of historical walking tours. They ran workshops on conducting oral history. And they hosted an event specifically for female historians to share their thoughts on the history of women and the challenges facing women writing history. For a group of young, often entirely amateur historians, they had organized a remarkably sophisticated conference. So, the answer to their question of what about Germany’s complicated history could be worth celebrating became a sort of pat-on-the-back. After sketching out the festival’s program they noted “if we can manage to do all that in three days...that is surely a reason to celebrate.”<sup>241</sup>

Berlin had fallen into a bright new spotlight as both a space of history and a space for historians. It offered the *Geschichtswerkstätten* clay for molding a form of their idealized historical practice. It allowed them to show how the present was infused with history and to argue that grasping history would facilitate contemporary political and social engagement. It helped them to stress the dynamism of history as a social construct and to ground that constructive process in grassroots democratic participation. And it gave physical substance to their arguments that the historiographical project should be undertaken in spaces where history happened, where possible with the participation of those around whom it happened.<sup>242</sup> The city of Berlin itself became a history workshop and, as such, something of a pilgrimage site for Germany’s hundreds of free-floating grassroots historians.

The BGW’s success, however, would soon generate for them a considerable challenge as they faced several looming “round numbers.” On the eve of the HistoryFest, the most important of these stood three years in the future. Berlin’s (largely fabricated) 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration was slated for celebration in 1987. While the city may have dragged its feet its preparing for the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler’s rise to power, there would be no similar delay with the this major birthday year. Already, in 1984, chatter had begun about how to do justice to the city’s long and rich past. With the “warm shower of [state] money” that would fall on Berlin’s cultural scene as the city prepared for its jubilee, the BGW would fill its coffers, along with everyone else. But in doing so, it would also have to face questions of how to negotiate large amounts of state funding, strong popular demands, and historiographically unsatisfying national narratives while maintaining its autonomy and grassroots democratic values. The second half of the decade would decide the fate of the BGW and its ambitions for a radical spatial historical practice.

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<sup>240</sup> Lüdtkte was hardly uncritical of this objective, qualifying it, as did many others, as potential dangerous “affect history” or history with “*Betroffenheit*.” Lüdtkte, “Introduction,” 23; see also the program of Berlin’s Geschichtsfest ’84 in *Moderne Zeiten* 4:4 (1984), and reports in the Geschichtswerkstatt Rundbrief 4 (August 1984); Alfred Georg Frei.

“Spannungsfelder. Geschichtsfest Berlin.” *Journal für Geschichte* 4 (1984) 4-7; Anthony McElligott, “The German History Workshop Festival in Berlin May-June 1984” *German History* 2 (1985): 21-29.

<sup>241</sup> BGWA Programm, Geschichtsfest ’84 in Berlin.

<sup>242</sup> BGWA Programm, Geschichtsfest ’84 in Berlin.

## CHAPTER 3

### New Spaces for Politics: Toward a Green Cultural Program

The most significant changes to Germany's political map have emerged out of moments of upheaval. Catholics formed the Center Party in 1870 as a unified front opposite Bismarck's cultural offensive waged over their allegiance to the Vatican over the nation. And in demonstration of resilience against the monarchist Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation, which outlawed both the forums and mouthpieces of socialist organization, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) reconstituted itself in 1890 out of a coalition of workers' parties that had crystalized over the preceding three decades. The Communist Party of Germany assembled in the wake of the First World War out of disagreements within the SPD over the war, the Bolshevik model, and the trajectory of socialism. The National Socialists likewise emerged out of the traumas of World War I, militantly opposing the armistice and advocating nationalist, racist, violently expansionist domestic and foreign policies. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU)—an inter-confessional party with a platform of social and fiscal conservatism—and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which advocates classical economic liberalism, materialized from the ashes of the Second World War. No such fanfare, however, preceded the Greens' entrance onto the German political stage.

More than thirty-five years after the end of the Second World War, well into the Cold War, more than a decade after the events of 1968, and two after the political commotion of the mid-1950s, the founding of the German Green Party occurred during a moment that can, at best, be called a "soft turning point" or "silent revolution," that is, a turning point not imposed by war, revolution, or a breakdown of an empire.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the 1970s precipitated change: 1971 brought the collapse of Bretton Woods, which destabilized the international monetary system; OPEC's oil embargo of 1973-74 sent the West into a period of great inflation and inflamed international political relations; 1975 halted the nineteen-year-long Vietnam War. During this decade, Germany experienced the end of the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*—the wave of unprecedented prosperity that crested over the postwar years—and the beginning of a period of increased unemployment and economic stagnation. These years also saw the decline of manufacturing, the beginning of deindustrialization efforts, and the reorganization of labor markets, which together effectively replaced industrial society with its new, post-industrial offspring. Finally, the 1970s arguably also brought the first sustained challenges to the patriarchy and paternalism of Western Europe both at home and abroad: the activism surrounding feminism and decolonization and the developing discourse of human rights began to dismantle centuries-old practices of injustice.<sup>2</sup> But at least in comparison to the global destruction of the first half of the twentieth century, these were decidedly non-cataclysmic transitions. If they were to be lights at the end of the twentieth century's tunnel of political, diplomatic, and economic trauma, they were dim, at best.

Domestically, a period of relative political rigidity compounded these uninspiring international circumstances. Definitive of the political and, by extension, cultural topography that the Greens would unsettle was the growing—to some, it seemed, irreversible—inflexibility of

<sup>1</sup> Hartmut Kaelble. "The 1970s: What Turning Point?" Andreas Wirsching, et al. "The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History?" *Journal of Modern European History* 9:1 (15 April 2011): 20

<sup>2</sup> Göran Therborn. "The Tide and Turn of the Marxian Dialectic of European Capitalism." Andreas Wirsching, et al. "The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History?" *Journal of Modern European History* 9:1 (15 April 2011): 9-10. For more on the 1970s as a point of transformation in Europe, see Philippe Chassaing. *Les années 1970: Fin d'un monde et origine de notre modernité*. Paris: A. Colin, 2008; Konrad Hugo Jarausch, ed. *Das Ende der Zuversicht?: die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008; Thomas Raithel, Andreas Rödder, and Andreas Wirsching, eds. *Auf dem Weg in eine neue Moderne?: die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren*. München: Oldenbourg, 2009.



Germany's three-party political system. In 1957, when federal election returns for the All-German Bloc/League of Expellees and Deprived of Rights (GB/BHE) fell to 4.6%, German politics entered an election pattern in which only the SPD, the CDU/CSU, and the FDP attracted a constituency sufficiently large to cross the five-percent voting threshold required to win representation in the Bundestag. Though after half a century of political chaos this stability had its appeal, the increasing entrenchment of this new party trifecta was hard to ignore: between 1949-1980, Germany shifted from a system in which these three main parties won 72% of the vote to one in which they won 98%.<sup>3</sup> Their security served as an apparent endorsement of the status quo; this was not a situation conducive to political innovation. It was nothing short of ground-breaking, then, when an ostensibly single-issue party barely three years old managed to clear the 5% hurdle with an extra .6% to spare in the federal elections of March 1983. With their robust environmentalist platform, the German Green Party became the first fourth party to enter the Bundestag in over a quarter of a century.

### A. Importance of the Greens as a Case Study

It is easy to interpret the significance of the Green party in terms of its most obvious legacy: it put ecology on the political agenda as well as at the heart of the New Left. Some have even claimed that one “simply cannot be a leftist in Europe today and disregard...ecology,” suggesting that, in fact, “everybody has become a Green on this issue.”<sup>4</sup> Arguably, however, the more important of the Greens' legacies was also a subtler one. Their enduring success broke a long-standing German political malaise and, in doing so, inspired a new optimism about the potential not only for political change in Germany, but also for environmental, social, and cultural change. The Greens' debut on the political stage was, admittedly, far from flawless. Shortly after the Greens' first victory in the federal elections, critics jumped to highlight several of the Greens' most embarrassing failures. Their innovative two-year rotation system for elected officials, for example, and their adherence to an ‘imperative mandate,’ which curtailed representatives' individual discretion, had done little to prompt changes in the behaviors of West German parties or parliaments. The Greens in fact failed, one political scientist argued, to call into question any of West Germany's less desirable parliamentary practices in any significant or sustained way.<sup>5</sup> The very fact of the Greens' entry into parliament, both in Bonn and regionally, however, overshadowed their underachievements. In their first seven years, the Greens crossed the five-percent threshold in eight of Germany's eleven states: Bremen in 1979; Baden-Württemberg in 1980, Berlin in 1981; Niedersachsen, Hamburg, Hessen in 1982; Bayern in 1986; and Rheinland-Pfalz 1987.<sup>6</sup> These local victories quickly earned the Greens a widespread and diverse constituency and gave them strong local roots that would allow the party to weather early factionalism at the national level. The Greens' great accomplishment disproved the longstanding assumption that it was not possible for new parties to overcome the hurdles of West Germany's electoral system. Public and party confidence remained tenuous: with each new election, the five-percent hurdle still loomed, and narrow margins meant that the vicissitudes of voting preferences always threatened the Greens' privilege of parliamentary presence. But optimism

<sup>3</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt. “Wahlberechtigte, Wähler, Stimmabgabe und Sitzverteilung bei den Bundestagswahlen seit 1949 – Zweitstimmen.” Wiesbaden: 23.11.2009, [http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/downloads/bundestagswahlergebnisse/btw\\_ab49\\_ergebnisse.pdf](http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/downloads/bundestagswahlergebnisse/btw_ab49_ergebnisse.pdf). See also E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker. *Between Protest and Power: The Green Party in Germany*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, 25-30.

<sup>4</sup> Andrei S. Markovits and Stephen J. Silvia. “The Identity Crisis of Alliance '90/The Greens: The New Left at a Crossroad.” *New German Critique* 72:1 (October 1997): 127-128

<sup>5</sup> Arno Klönne. “Überlegungen zur sozialen Basis und politische Philosophie der grünen Partei.” *Von der Machbarkeit der Unmöglichkeiten: politische Gespräche über grüne Praxis und grüne Perspektiven*. Sabine Stamer, ed. Hamburg: Junius, 1985, 172.

<sup>6</sup> Missing were Saarland, Nordrhein-Westfalen, and Schleswig-Holstein. See [http://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/Gruene-Wahlergebnisse-2013.pdf](http://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Gruene-Wahlergebnisse-2013.pdf).

persisted. To West Germans in an uninspiring economic, political, and social context, the Greens offered evidence that the doldrums of stagnant traditions were no match for the power of active voters. They signaled that something important in West Germany had begun to change.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter examines how the German Green Party understood itself as offering an alternative to West Germany's political status quo. Though the party's ecological agenda won it attention, the significance of its political alternative extended well beyond environmental policy. Contrary to conventional depictions of the party—both historical and contemporary—which narrate its impact using the language of ecology, the Greens' success should be measured against an even more sweeping legacy, namely that it occasioned a paradigm shift in cultural politics. In fact, the early Greens' conception of a rigorous, effective environmental policy hinged on their concept and support of culture. The Green alternative took the form of an "aesthetic state,"<sup>8</sup> a notion whose origins date to the emergence of Hellenism in ancient Greece, but which possesses a German heritage of considerable substance. From Schiller to Wagner to Marcuse, the idea that aesthetics could be used to create and sustain a democratic polis has resonated among German intellectuals at key points in the development of the modern German state. The Greens, however, initiated the first sustained effort by a political party committed to participatory democracy to render Germany what one might call an "aesthetic state in practice:" they put at the heart of their political program a commitment to cultivating the creative, artistic impulses of the German people. It bears noting that theirs was not the "aestheticization of politics" embraced by fascism and National Socialism in the 1930s and 40s, whose neo-Renaissance treatment of the state as a work of art that could be beautified catalyzed the development of violently racist nationalisms.<sup>9</sup> The Greens' aesthetics lacked the element of aesthetic disinterest that yoked the pursuit of the aesthetic purity of the Nazis' Aryan empire to genocide; to the contrary, the Greens understood indifference as destructive of life, both human and environmental. The Green aesthetic state, rather, combined radical participatory democracy and an intellectual agenda inherited from the German Alternative Movement that stressed practices of individual creativity on a daily basis. At the core of the Greens' program lay a commitment to radically new uses of local space in the execution of their cultural projects, which they believed would facilitate this capacity of everyday Germans for aesthetic artifice. These components of "Green" culture would later become central to the Greens' efforts to create a Germany that was not only "Green," but also sustainably so.

## I. Good Politicians as Good Environmentalists: The early Green platform

### A. The Greens' Earliest Years

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<sup>7</sup> Klönne, "Überlegungen zur sozialen Basis und politische Philosophie der grünen Partei," 172-173

<sup>8</sup> On the use of aesthetics as a mechanism for organizing both politics and society, a practice that dates back to the emergence of Hellenism in ancient Greece, see Josef Chytry. *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> On the link between "aestheticization of politics" and fascism, the analysis of which originated in Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Art of Mechanical Reproduction," and its waning analytical force see Martin Jay. "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology; Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?" *Cultural Critique* 21 (1 April 1992): 41–61. Others, like sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, denote the same phenomenon with the language of the "gardening state," in which the state exists not only as a political actor but also as a work of craftsmanship that should be beautiful to behold: for the Nazis, it consisted both of "'cultured plants' to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated." The Nazis overstepped with great ease the boundary between the pursuit of beauty and the pursuit of purity, which they of course understood in racial terms. See Zygmunt Bauman. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, here 18. On an interpretation of the state as artifice that pre-dated the rise of National Socialism, see nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt's 1860 book *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. New York: Harper, 1958.

Using the momentum that propelled the movement against the use of nuclear weapons and energy in the early 1970s, a group of citizens' initiatives with a shared commitment to an anti-nuclear program banded together in 1972 to form the Federal Association of Citizens' Initiatives for the Protection of the Environment (BBU). Though BBU served first as an umbrella organization for groups mobilizing against the construction of nuclear installations in Germany, it later became a mouthpiece for ecological concerns. Partially as a result, the last two years of the decade saw the appearance of a rash of groups that blurred the lines between oppositional movement and political party; uniting them was their investment in the environment. 1978 initiated an extended period of electoral victories for what, just two years later, would officially become Germany's Green Party. Beginning with the Green List<sup>10</sup> for Environmental Protection (GLU) in Lower Saxony, the Multicolored List or *Bunte Liste* (BuLi)<sup>11</sup> in Hamburg, and the Green Campaign for the Future (GAZ) in Bonn, political groups with an environmental bent took root in most of Germany's major regions. In 1979, Bremen's Green List was the first of these groups to gain seats in a state parliament in 1979.

The early platforms of these groups were frequently broad and impressionistic. The GLU, for example, put "the maintenance and improvement of the basis of life" at the heart of its agenda. The GAZ advocated for a "simple, less materialistic lifestyle." Often they disagreed with other Green-Alternative groups on fundamental questions of governance. Hamburg incubated what would later become the "eco-socialist" branch of the Greens. They understood environmental problems as an epiphenomenon of the crisis of capitalism, though unlike Marxist-Leninist groups, the GLU never went so far as to advocate overturning the established political order entirely. The GAZ, by contrast, rejected any attempt to substitute radical democratic or socialist institutions for the status quo and instead advocated reform in the direction of traditional values. Fissures like those between the GLU and GAZ motivated these political newcomers to run separate tickets. This move cost the Green-Alternative critical votes, which effectively assured its failure to win at least 5% of the vote and thus seats in parliament.<sup>12</sup> Even after the Greens gained momentum on a national level, however, this principled reluctance to compromise would continue to haunt them.

Elections to the European Parliament in 1979 provided a key opportunity for these groups to overlook their antagonisms. Under the name *Die Grünen*—the Greens—the GLU and GAZ together with the Green List of Schleswig-Holstein and the Action Group for Independent Germans formed an official, alternative political alliance for which they drafted a common program. Though their election returns of 3.21% were insufficient to win them seats in the parliament, it was more than enough to put them in the international spotlight and to prompt them to consolidate in time to contend for the German federal election of 1980. In the southwestern city of Karlsruhe on the thirteenth of January 1980, the Green Party was formally established on the basis of four "pillars"—grassroots democracy, social responsibility, ecological consciousness, and non-violence. They intended that these principles, if pursued in tandem, would shake up Germany's stagnant political system. In their federal program of 1980, the newly constituted Green party presented itself as the alternative to traditional parties. They marketed this alternative not only with blueprints for a

<sup>10</sup> These groups often chose to call themselves a "list" rather than a "party," in order to distance themselves even further from the political status quo.

<sup>11</sup> "*Bunt*"—that is, "multicolored"—referred to the German practice of identifying political parties by colors: at that time, black for the CDU and light blue for their Bavarian partner party, the CSU; red for the SPD; and yellow for the FDP. The *Bunte Liste* saw itself as open to members of any political coloration. It was this openness that allowed them to amass a constituency of sufficient size to overcome the five-percent voting hurdle required to win seats in the Bundestag.

<sup>12</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 126–130. See also Thomas Scharf. *The German Greens: Challenging the Consensus*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994.

different kind of policy but also, more capaciously, with pledges of a new way of living. They called for the replacement of impenetrable centralized bureaucracy with decentralized grassroots-democratic political and social institutions. The quantity, direct election, and short tenure of the delegates tasked with managing these institutions as well as their strict commitment to following to the letter the mandate of their constituents promised to combat the sense of political impotence and social alienation they argued had come to characterize West Germany.<sup>13</sup>

The young party's soaring ambitions did not, however, yield similarly elevated voter returns. The federal elections of 1980 brought dismal results of only 1.5%: far from enough to win them parliamentary seats. Their pie-in-the-sky program provoked the ridicule of critics far and wide. Some barbs were more measured. An editor for the newspaper *Die Zeit* suggested that perhaps the Greens had bitten off more than they could actually chew: "[T]o warn of the decline of the industrial West is one matter; to offer an alternative is another; and to carry it through, still another." The Greens, he argued, were most successful as harbingers of doom because they could highlight tangible, recognizable, exigent problems. As the voices of an alternative, they stood in the unenviable position of battling the din of economic, political, and social opposition in order to be heard. As real agents of radical social transformation, however, he suggested simply that they were condemned to failure.<sup>14</sup> Other critics resorted to *ad hominem* attacks and name-calling: romantic utopians, Nietzschean nihilists, flipped-out anarcho-Communists, flighty *Wandervogel*-types, and court jesters appeared among the many popular epithets.<sup>15</sup> It bears noting, however, that court jesters possessed the uncommon power to speak the truth to authorities in medieval courts.

Within a few years, popular reception to the Greens would change considerably. Broadening their focus beyond environmental concerns, the Greens put Germany's high level of unemployment and generally uninspiring economic situation at the heart of their national campaign platform: organizing their long-term plan around quality-of-life issues, they advocated, for example, for the development of small technology to create jobs locally. Their foreign and defense policies set them far apart from the center-right by rejecting fully the use of Pershing II and cruise missiles, which also stood in the spotlight during the early 1980s. The 1983 federal election marked a watershed moment not just for the Greens but for the German political system at large: the nascent party had engaged issues of national importance to the satisfaction of an ambivalent constituency and, with a return of 5.6%, they became the first new party to cross the five-percent parliamentary threshold in twenty-six years. "It was the first time anywhere in the Western world," one historian stressed, "that a party of this kind (i.e. embodying the legacy of the 1960s and representing a coalition of various alternative movements)...entered the most important locus of legislative power on a federal level."<sup>16</sup> Though

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<sup>13</sup> Die Grünen. *Das Bundesprogramm*. Bonn: Die Grünen, 1980. The Greens inherited the concept of grassroots democracy [*Basisdemokratie*] from the New Social Movements of the 1970s, which criticized the centralized bureaucratic oligarchical nature of traditional political parties. See E. Gene Frankland. "The Evolution of the Greens in Germany: From Amateurism to Professionalism." E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, and Benoît Rihoux, eds. *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-roots Democracy?* Surrey: Ashgate, 2008, 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> Horst Bieber. "Sie eint nur der Protest. Aber die Parteigründung ist beschlossene Sache." *Die Zeit* 44, 26 October 1979.

<sup>15</sup> See Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 16. Frankland and Schoonmaker are also critical of the Greens' slogan "Einheit in der Vielfalt," or "Unity in Diversity," which, they have claimed, the Greens "bandied about to convince themselves that their pluralism is not as unstructured as it really is." (74-75). Some, however, have argued that the Greens "made a virtue of pluralism from the plight of factionalism." See Detlef Murphy and Roland Roth. "In viele Richtungen zugleich. Die Grünen – eine Artefakt der Fünf-Prozent-Klausel?" *Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Roth, Roland, Dieter Rucht, and Sabine Berthold, eds. Frankfurt; New York: Campus, 1987, 303-324.

<sup>16</sup> Andrei S. Markovits. "Reflections and Observations on the 1983 Bundestag Elections and Their Consequences for West German Politics." *New German Critique* 28 (1 January 1983): here 11-12. Markovits has also written on the Greens'

that same scholar, writing only two years after the Greens' national victory, warned that the Greens owed this success to their oppositional stance rather than the substance of their proposed alternatives and that their balloon would deflate quickly when their hot air ran out, the German electorate increasingly viewed the Greens as a serious political player. By the end of 1983, as environmental concerns rose to the top of political agendas across party lines, members both of the general population and the political arena could no longer criticize the Greens as “merely a band of ‘sunshine soldiers’ pushing a sometime thing.”<sup>17</sup>

Nineteen eighty-three thus began a crucial transitional period for the Greens during which they attempted to put their ideas—many of which had, until then, remained either abstract or untested—into practice at the national level. The task of adapting to conventional parliamentary politics posed a significant challenge to the party. Yielding control of the party to federal parliamentary representatives stood fundamentally at odds with the principles of their grassroots-democratic agenda. Seats in parliament represented an opportunity to effect meaningful change in Germany. The realities of parliamentary politics also meant, however, that pushing real reform would require political coalitioning and compromise that might, by necessity, take place without the opportunity for plebiscites. And so the Greens remained divided: their commitment, on one hand, to *Basisanbildung*—the grassroots communicative network in which the party's direction takes shape from the bottom up—and, on the other, to the imperative mandate, which bound them to that locally-determined agenda, collided with the need for flexibility and pragmatism in the Bundestag.<sup>18</sup> The battle between principle and reform drove a deep, long-lasting wedge into the heart of the party.

Factionalism fractured the Greens quickly.<sup>19</sup> Their cleavages crystalized in the division between the realists on one hand, who stressed cooperation with the SPD with an eye toward real parliamentary victory, and the fundamentalists, who clung to principled extraparliamentary politics over compromise, or with a slightly Swiftian ring, the Realos and the Fundis. The fundamentalists or radical ecologists emerged in the early 1980s around Jutta Ditfurth, a sociologist, founding member, and committed proponent of radical naturalist policies. She heavily criticized the capitalist system and called instead for the establishment of a deindustrialized, grassroots democratic society. Alongside Ditfurth worked Rudolf Bahro, an East German dissident deported to West Germany in 1979 over the publication of his dissertation, which lambasted ‘real existing socialism.’ Like Ditfurth, Bahro argued that industrial-urban civilization was unsustainable. As the alternative, he advocated social reform through the formation of small, close-knit communities, though, in opposition to the established political parties as well as to several other factions within the Greens, Bahro called for a bio-centric worldview instead of an anthropocentric one. He espoused a kind of environmentalism fueled by a vision of looming ecological catastrophe and his preference for privileging nature over humanity made many uncomfortable.

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impact on the SPD, which was then facing fronts not only on the right but on the left as well. See Andrei S. Markovits “The Vicissitudes of West German Social Democracy in the Crisis of the 1980's.” *Studies in Political Economy* 19 (1986): 83–112, esp. 98-99. On the Greens' early opposition of NATO, which had decided to deploy missiles in West Germany in 1983 as part of the Double-Track Decision, see Hans-Georg Betz, “Strange Love? How the Greens Began to Love NATO.” *German Studies Review* 12:3 (October 1989): 487-505.

<sup>17</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Frankland, “The Evolution of the Greens in Germany,” 26-35.

<sup>19</sup> The best recent text on the factions within the young party is Silke Mende. *Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn: eine Geschichte der Gründungsgrünen*. München: Oldenbourg, 2011. For briefer syntheses of the party's internal divisions, see Jürgen Hoffmann. *Die doppelte Vereinigung: Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Auswirkungen des Zusammenschlusses von Grünen und Bündnis 90*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998, 76-94; Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski. *Grün schlägt rot. Die deutsche Linke nach 1945*. Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1997, 181ff.; Dick Richardson. “The Green Challenge. Philosophical, Programmatic, and Electoral Considerations.” *The Green Challenge: The Development of Green Parties in Europe*. Dick Richardson and Chris Rootes, eds. London: Routledge, 1995, 4-22.

Despite the best laid plans of the Fundis, the Green ideal of radical grassroots democracy began to fall victim to what German sociologist described in the 1920s as the “iron law” party politics: the practical responsibilities of governing bodies eventually render oligarchical even those parties with the most democratic of intentions.<sup>20</sup> As electorally successful local and regional branches of the Greens found themselves increasingly confronted with the mundane and often overwhelming exigencies of political power, they began to privilege parliamentary efficacy over principled plebiscitary democratic practices.<sup>21</sup> These realists—radical-outsiders-cum-reformist-insiders—rallied around the former student movement activist Joschka Fischer. At the heart of the realist agenda lay political feasibility. Its proponents abandoned a politics of protest for parliamentary pragmatism. They stressed a reform-based project for the ecological and social restructuring of industrial society at the expense of constructing a rigorous ideological profile.

Dissatisfied with the agendas of either the Realos or the Fundis, two additional camps formed. Drawing on the party’s early and considerable support from the Left—the Greens were sometimes called “watermelons,” that is, green on the outside but red or socialist on the inside—a group of “eco-socialists” banded together to emphasize the historic importance of the workers’ movement and its desire to create a socialist society. They understood the crisis of ecology as a side effect of the battle between workers and capitalists. Many of these members would leave the party after the fall of the Berlin Wall when it became apparent that the project of using Green means toward communist ends had failed definitively.

That the Greens, under the eco-socialists, risked veering away from a Green agenda toward an expressly Social Democratic one was lost on few. In particular, Wolf-Dieter Hasenclever—a politician with inconsistent allegiances who first left the SPD to found the Greens but later left the Greens for the FDP at the turn of the millennium—opposed what he saw among other Green factions as a cavalier instrumentalization of parliamentary democracy. His fellow party members, he railed, aimed to implement a fully Green agenda—whether green-green or red-green—only to dismantle the representative parliamentary scaffolding that had enabled it in favor of an ingenuous experiment in direct democracy on a massive scale. He argued, rather, that responsible representation makes democracy possible in the first place. The “eco-libertarians” around Hasenclever, however, never gained a large percentage of the party’s delegates.

Unsettled by the distracting extremism they saw taking root in their party, several influential centrist groups cropped up in the late 1980s, including one called *Grüner Aufbruch '88* that formed around the leadership of Antje Vollmer and Ralf Fücks, two figures who would play pivotal roles in the development of the Greens after reunification.

Despite these cleavages, an important commonality united most of the early Greens. Beginning with their first federal party program, the Greens explicitly rejected what they saw as the traditional parties’ dependence on passive citizenship.<sup>22</sup> They committed themselves to instituting, in its place, a new politics of the self through whose lens they understood the practice of democracy “in collective terms as a participatory versus a mere representative model of politics.”<sup>23</sup> While the Greens shared classical liberalism’s commitment to the freedom of the individual, unlike the self-

<sup>20</sup> Robert Michels. *Political Parties; a Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: Dover Publications, 1959.

<sup>21</sup> Markovits and Silvia, “The Identity Crisis of Alliance '90/The Greens,” 130. See also Joachim Raschke. *Die Grünen. Wie sie wurden, was sie sind*. Cologne: Bund, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Die Grünen. *Das Bundesprogramm*. Bonn: Die Grünen, 1980, 5, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Sabine Von Dirke. *All Power to the Imagination!: The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, 185. See Die Grünen. *Das Bundesprogramm*. Bonn: Die Grünen, 1980, 5; Thomas Poguntke. “The Organization of a Participatory Party: The German Greens.” *European Journal of Political Research* 15:6 (1987): 609-633

interested individualism of Smithian liberalism, in which the fulfillment of the self drives the actualization of a free market economy, the Greens' valuation of the self was neither market-oriented nor egocentric. As an antidote to the problems previous generations of leftist German intellectuals had identified in modern society—deep social alienation disguised by the superficial distractions of mass culture—the Greens advocated for a conception of the self whose essential mode of being in the world was its empathic engagement in community.<sup>24</sup> Against recriminations that the Greens lacked a coherent master plan,<sup>25</sup> Manon Maren-Grisebach—a founding member, early party spokesperson, and one of the engines driving efforts to develop a party philosophy—argued that the party's objective was nothing short of a fundamentally different way of life: “Green,” she argued, “is the color of living differently [*die Farbe des sich ändernden Lebens*].”<sup>26</sup> Their *bête noire* was the social milieu of advanced capitalism in which the individual lived disaggregated from an empathic community, his social needs sustained only by his vague knowledge that he participated anonymously in a network of mass consumption; his individuality had gotten lost in the abstraction of the mass ornament.<sup>27</sup> Drawing on the energy of countless alternative groups, the Greens, she argued, provided collectivity to support the pursuit of a more robust expression of selfhood.<sup>28</sup>

The emphasis Maren-Grisebach placed on empathic community, belonging, self-expression, and quality of life over economic and physical security planted the Greens squarely on one side of a paradigm shift in values, representative of what political scientist Ronald Inglehart refers to as postmaterialist politics: absent the economic crises of the first half of the twentieth century, German values were freed to drift away from material concerns.<sup>29</sup> If values are dictated in part by scarcity, the generation of 1968 and their countercultural successors—including the Greens—highlighted that interpretations of scarcity alongside socially-acceptable standards of subsistence had transformed with time.<sup>30</sup> The scarcity that defined this new generation was one of opportunities for self-expression in politics and society. Socialized into the conditions of peace and relative prosperity, Germany's ascendant educated middle class by the late 1970s expressed greater concern for the rights of political and cultural participation and agency than had their parents, the war generation. In

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<sup>24</sup> On the self's complicated relationship to the world—its “relationality” or essentially social dimension—in the German intellectual tradition, see Jerrold E. Seigel. *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 295-426, 537-602. Seigel criticizes conceptions of the self that oversimplify what he argues is its essential multidimensionality. Among his interlocutors one finds philosopher Charles Taylor. See Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> For example, “Grüne: Sehr interessante Kehrtwendung.” *Der Spiegel* 26 (28 June 1982) <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-14345177.html>

<sup>26</sup> Manon Maren-Grisebach. *Philosophie der Grünen*. München: Olzog, 1982, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, writing of mass culture in the early twentieth century, described the problem of individuals reduced to “parts of a mass, not...individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within;” their being is defined by their anonymity and fragmentation. Siegfried Kracauer. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Thomas Y. Levin, ed. and tr. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 76, 83.

<sup>28</sup> “Western society,” she suggested, “lives mostly disaggregated [*ungesammelt*] and in confusion. Its members seek yet to find themselves.” Grisebach claimed that the Greens offered a platform for self-discovery; they provided stillness—an opportunity to collect oneself—within the commotion of modern life [*Stille als Sehnsucht gegen den Lärm des Getriebes, als Möglichkeit für Sammlung im Innern*]. Maren-Grisebach. *Philosophie der Grünen*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Inglehart. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990; Ronald Inglehart. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 131-159; Ronald Inglehart. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; Robyn Eckersley. *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> On the rising expectations of the working class and absence of a historically consistent understanding of “subsistence,” see Eduard Bernstein. *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961.

this regard, the early Greens agenda can also be read as the product of a generational conflict, part of a cyclical rebellion of young against old, a crisis of identity and authority.<sup>31</sup>

Their origins aside, the Greens' politics leaned decidedly toward a transformational individualism. Their task, as a party, was to nurture hope first directed inwardly: hope for self-actualization, hope for a sense of belonging in and to nature, hope for equality [*Gleichrangigkeit*] but not sameness [*Gleichheit*]. Maren-Grisebach understood individualized hope as a precondition of political engagement; without it, constituents with little time or money to spare would be hard-pressed to engage in the political process. With sufficient hope, however, they could pursue a new life-sensibility [*Lebens-Sinn*]. In short, she argued, “the Greens are building a party based upon the hope for life [*Hoffnung auf Leben*].”<sup>32</sup> The party represented this drive toward political and cultural transformation with the imperative “Concretize utopia. This phrase combines the romantic and idealistic inclination to take utopian designs seriously with the exhortation of the Enlightenment tradition that humans' reason and obligation to civic action encourage them to implement ideals. This new tradition moves beyond both the Kantian admonition to think critically but obey superiors and the German romantic inclination to seek private development over civic action.”<sup>33</sup> The self-centered focus of postmaterialism might appear at odds with an environmental or ecological program, which would seem, de facto, to possess an outward, external orientation. The Greens, however, consciously understood postmaterialist individualism and the collectivism of environmental politics as coterminous and mutually dependent.

## II. Good Environmentalists as Good Artists: Theorizing a “Green” culture

The Greens' collective, collaborative large-scale environmental agenda seems at first incompatible with the party's inward, individualistic postmaterialist values. The unexpected link that coupled them was the understanding of environment that the Greens gradually adopted. They conceived of environment expansively: it consisted not only of the natural world but also of the built and social worlds. The Greens expressed this totality through the language of “culture. Though prevailing accounts of the Greens' agenda have regarded culture as irrelevant to the party, given its ostensible absence from the party's four governing pillars—grassroots democracy, social responsibility, ecology, and non-violence—the Greens, on the contrary, not only cared about cultural issues but also regarded them as an essential framework within which they could reconcile their two otherwise conflicting values. Indeed, in order to be a good environmentalist, one had to engage in cultural projects.

Here it is worth distinguishing between investment in an issue and the publication of a fixed, formal statement about it. It would be shortsighted to claim that culture played a subordinate role in

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<sup>31</sup> In this case, the Greens participated in a larger protest movement whose antiestablishment politics arose out of their criticism of imbalances in the academic world: an overabundance of educated graduates met few employment opportunities. Some argued that the German youth would eventually find their way back to the Social Democrats as they increasingly confronted the exigencies of adult life. See Peter Flora and Jens Alber. “Modernization, Democratization and the Development of Welfare States in Western Europe.” *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*. Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer, eds. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981; Wilhelm P. Bürklin. “Governing Left Parties Frustrating the Radical Non-Established Left: The Rise and Inevitable Decline of the Greens.” *European Sociological Review* 3:2 (1 September 1987): 109–26. Political scientist Hans-Joachim Veen interpreted the Greens as a “milieu party,” which, despite its claims of serving as an umbrella party for a broad set of interest groups, in fact represented a narrow constituency, or “milieu,” concerned with personal development and freedom. They were not, Veen argued, invested in altering society, only in perpetuating their milieu. See Hans-Joachim Veen. “The Greens as a Milieu Party.” *The Greens in West Germany: Organisation and Policy Making*. Eva Kolinsky, ed. Eva Kolinsky and Lindsay Batson, tr. New York: Berg, 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Maren-Grisebach, *Philosophie der Grünen*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 17.



the society the Greens envisioned for Germany simply because their cultural philosophy was disorganized and more diffuse than the traditional understanding of German *Kultur* or because their accompanying programmatic demands were abstract and sometimes contradictory. In fact, the Greens engaged early and vigorously with cultural questions, though many of their contemporaries failed to take note.

### A. The Greens and their Culture Problem

Anyone plugged into established conduits of cultural communication in West Germany in the 1980s would have encountered the argument that the Greens had a culture problem. Sometimes critics spoke in broad terms, charging the Greens with anti-intellectualism and theorylessness. Despite their socialization into the era of student rebellion and educational expansion, whose engagement with theory while messy was nevertheless conceptually rigorous, the Greens' command and mobilization of conceptual systems was often described as insufficient, incomplete, and unsatisfactory. Some softened the blow of their unfavorable analyses by suggesting that the Greens and their critics simply talked past one another.<sup>34</sup> Others qualified their criticisms by suggesting that the Greens were in fact intellectuals insofar as intellectuals are “specialists in general concerns,” that they produce *Zeitdiagnosen*, or evaluations of their times, by engaging discursively with participants from diverse fields, and that these *Zeitdiagnosen* are always destined to be disappointing.<sup>35</sup> Most, however, remained unconvinced. Public intellectuals in Germany, who wielded some of the larger swords in this battle, tended to keep the Greens at arm's length. They chided them for lacking conceptual rigor for which the party provided only eagerness as a substitute. Social systems theorist Niklas Luhmann, for example, dismissed the Greens on the grounds that they “[camouflaged] their lack of theoretical clarity by moralistic fervor.”<sup>36</sup> A patient reader could identify in the rhetoric of some radical ecologists vague recitations of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's touchstone critique of humanity's dangerous domination of nature, though these echoed only faintly. Early pamphlets hinted that the Greens had an affinity for other thinkers, too: Kant, Schiller, Nietzsche, and Freud all appeared sporadically, though their ideas were cherry-picked, decontextualized, and instrumentalized. More their contemporary, Hans Jonas offered them an appealing eco-ethical conceptual framework in his 1979 advocacy of “the imperative of responsibility” in a technologically-sophisticated society.<sup>37</sup> Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch was a particular favorite for

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<sup>34</sup> Roland Schmidt recast the common criticism that the Greens had nothing to say about theoretical matters—that is, that they were speechless [*sprachlos*] on these issues—by suggesting that the party, instead, engaged these issues on different terms. Rather than speechless, their conversation had become like the Biblical city of Babel, in which the diversity of tongues rendered the Greens incomprehensible. The party's trouble, Schmidt claimed, was that it suffered not from speechlessness [*Sprachlosigkeit*] but from a great diversity of language [*Sprachverschiedenheit*]. Roland Schmidt. “Zur Alternative Kultur. Erscheinungsbild und Strukturen.” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 11 (19 March 1983): 50–51. On *Sprachlosigkeit* vs. *Sprachverschiedenheit*, see Jörg Bopp. “Trauer-Power. Zur Jugendrevolte 1981.” *Kursbuch* 65 (1981): 155f. Also Benny Härlin. “Von Haus zu Haus - Berliner Bewegungsstudien.” *Kursbuch* 65 (1981): 15. On the rejection of conventional communication strategies, see Adolf Muschg. “Die Macht der Phantasie. Über die Ästhetik des Jugendprotests — am Beispiel der Züricher ‘Bewegung’.” *Aussteigen oder rebellieren. Jugendliche gegen Staat und Gesellschaft*. Michael Haller, ed. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981, 183f.

<sup>35</sup> Norbert Kostede. “The Greens and Intellectuals.” *The Greens in West Germany: Organisation and Policy Making*. Eva Kolinsky, ed. and tr. Oxford: Berg, 1989, 127-128. On anti-intellectualism and the Greens' connection to the Student Movement, see also Mende, *Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn*; von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination!*

<sup>36</sup> Kostede, “The Greens and Intellectuals,” 123, 137-138. See also Niklas Luhmann. *Ökologische Kommunikation. Kann die moderne Gesellschaft sich auf ökologische Gefährdungen einstellen?* Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Jonas. *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1979. On the Greens affinity for Jonas, see Jost Hermand. *Im Wettlauf mit der Zeit: Anstöße zu einer ökologiebewussten Ästhetik*. Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1991, 157; Norbert Walz. “Die Erlösung der Natur.” *Widerspruch* 38 (2002): 53. See also Jonas' article in *Die Welt*, 26 September 1987.

his emphasis on hope and the liberation of humanity from the oppression of modern civilization. The Greens remained wary of rigid philosophical systems, however, wishing to avoid becoming the handmaidens of what they understood as a backward-looking intellectualism. Not, admittedly, without some irony, they mobilized the ideas of their favorite intellectual to make this point. Citing *The Principle of Hope*, the Greens argued that the “dream”—that is, their political and social goal—“is only directed forward when it anticipates the future;” the dream must take the form of the active anticipation of the arrival of the new. They refused to recapitulate old ideas and called instead for the pursuit of the “not-yet-known [*Noch-nicht-Bewußte*], the novel, the creative, and as Bloch instructed, the utopian.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the generation of 1968, whose genuine investment in revising Marxism often won them the respect of the intellectual community, the Green-Alternative movement had no interest in establishing intellectual continuities. They championed instinct over contemplation, demanding a “new politics that came from the gut [*die aus dem Bauch herauskommt*].”<sup>39</sup> They were no longer moved by the strength of a line of reasoning, by the brilliance of its formulation, or by its critical force. They judged arguments as captivating based on their ability to mediate “life-historical authenticity [*lebensgeschichtlicher Authentizität*].”<sup>40</sup>

On other occasions, critics presented the Greens’ problem with culture in specifically aesthetic terms. One musician called the Greens philistines [*Kunstbanausen*] and admonished them for their negligible public discussion of art and described their attention to aesthetics as “deficient.”<sup>41</sup> Historian Sabine von Dirke has found this reticence curious for two reasons. First, the Greens’ constituency was largely middle class, and the middle class had traditionally been supportive of the arts in Germany. Second, the Greens received a great deal of support from artists, the most famous of whom was Joseph Beuys. Von Dirke suggests that nature may have been the greatest obstacle to Green aesthetics, insofar as nature, by definition, opposes artifice. By privileging nature as the ultimate point of reference, the Greens seemed to relegate art to mimesis.<sup>42</sup>

Anyone looking to chide the Greens for a weak cultural platform needed to look no further than their first federal program. It devoted little attention to cultural initiatives, calling only for their decentralization in the form of traveling exhibitions and the creation of community-oriented cultural centers. The Greens themselves agreed that they had directed their attention elsewhere. In a retrospective written two years after Berlin’s Alternative List for Democracy and the Protection of the Environment (AL) entered the state parliament in 1981, the AL’s assistant for cultural affairs, Hajo Cornel, confirmed that culture and cultural policy played almost no role in the AL’s election program. AL representatives often required the party’s Cultural Committee to justify its existence. And upon winning seats in the Berlin senate, this branch of the Greens unexpectedly received a position on the Senate Cultural Committee, but only because more coveted seats had already been claimed.<sup>43</sup> Speaking on behalf of the Greens’ Federal Working Group for Culture (BAG-Kultur<sup>44</sup>),

<sup>38</sup> Schmidt, “Zur Alternative Kultur,” 54. Schmidt cites Bloch from *Das Prinzip Hoffnung, 1. Band*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, 163. Important for Bloch, though, was that one’s orientation toward the future, “the dream,” and hope itself begins “to bloom” only when a voice is also given to reason.

<sup>39</sup> Tilman Spengler. “Der Bauch als Avantgarde - Über den aufrechten Niedergang der Theorie.” *Kursbuch* 65 (1981): 183.

<sup>40</sup> Bopp, “Trauer-Power,” 37. On the place of the concept of authenticity in the alternative culture of the 1970s and 80s, see Sven Reichardt. *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Altendorfer. “Die Kunstbanausen: Über das (Nicht)Verhältnis der Grünen zur Kunst und Kultur. Versuch einer Herausforderung.” *Kunstforum International* 93 (1988): 123-125.

<sup>42</sup> Von Dirke. *All Power to the Imagination!*, 186-188, 193. See also Jost Hermand and Hubert Müller, eds. *Öko-Kunst? Zur Ästhetik der Grünen*. Hamburg: Argument, 1989, especially Bernd Wagner, “Kulturpolitik und Politik des Kulturellen,” 37-54; Stephen Brockmann, “Der Streit um die grüne Kulturpolitik,” 24-36; and Eckhard Holler, “Grüne Kulturpolitik und kulturelle Bewegung ‘von unten,’” 55-70.

<sup>43</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 127-133, Hajo Cornel, “Zwei Jahre AL - Kulturpolitik - Eine Bilanz,” 7.1983.

Klaus Becker dismissed criticism of the Greens' engagement with cultural issues by deflecting responsibility onto the general German political system. In a 1985 position paper to the party titled "A Vote for Culture," he explained that Green cultural politics had not yet fully gelled. It was "no disgrace" to the Greens that they needed further tweaking; after all, he argued, none of the other political parties took *Kultur* seriously either. Nevertheless, he urged the party to get to work; the development of a radically new cultural program, he argued, offered a novel opportunity for the Greens to be "truly alternative."<sup>45</sup> Other party members valued culture as a point of access to the electorate. Annemarie Borgmann, a Green member of the Bundestag, stressed that, while the dense rhetoric of policy could alienate them, the average person found culture approachable. But the Greens, she lamented, wanted "damned little" [*verdammmt wenig*] to do with culture. Reflecting on her first two years in the Bundestag, she claimed, tellingly, that there were "always more important things to do!" Even a cultural consultant appointed by the party threw up his hands after several months of work, suggesting that if the Greens had any hopes of amplifying their investment in cultural issues, they had best make *Kultur* another pillar of the party.<sup>46</sup>

Part of the Greens' trouble with *Kultur* came down to its definition. What they meant by culture was hardly obvious. To many, *Kultur* implied exclusivity, elitism, *high* culture. To appreciate the accomplishments of high culture, Norbert Elias stressed in his 1939 analysis of European social attitudes, *The Civilizing Process*, indicated a level of personal cultivation that distinguished one from the uneducated masses. Cultural appreciation offered a source of pride and a sense of legitimacy, a holdover from the bourgeois mores of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its absence could invite shame. It encapsulated the long history of creative expression—artistic and intellectual—that has since become a stereotype of Germanness: literature, philosophy, opera, art, classical music. Their understanding required deep, thorough education [*Bildung*]; their appreciation was a spiritual affair.<sup>47</sup> But German culture had other faces as well, including a thriving alternative side that occupied perhaps an equally storied post. The Weimar era's legendary art world, for example, pushed the boundaries not only of the aesthetically pleasing but, even more dramatically, of what constituted art itself. It cultivated the Dadaism of Cabaret Voltaire and the epic theater of Bertolt Brecht. It welcomed the fresh jazz styles of black America and the expressionist film of Fritz Lang. It became an incubator for the radical aesthetic innovation.<sup>48</sup> The 1960s and 70s took the aesthetic

<sup>44</sup> The BAG-Kultur was founded in January 1984 at the Green Cultural Congress in Hamburg. See Josef Boyer, Helge Heidemeyer, and Tim B. Peters. *Die Grünen im Bundestag: Sitzungsprotokolle und Anlagen 1983-1987*. Düsseldorf: Droste, 2008, 620, 631. See also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, "Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor." *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985.

<sup>45</sup> Cornel located the connection between culture, aesthetics and alternative politics in the potential to create a fundamentally different way of living: "Dabei könnten wir hier wirklich 'alternative' sein. Zumal die Grünen hier eine ihrer Wurzeln haben: die Sehnsucht, ganz anders zu leben ist vielleicht die umfassendste Kategorie grüner Bewegung. Frieden und Ökologie, die beiden Hauptthemen, waren auch von der Art, mit der an ihnen gearbeitet wurde, stets mit einem anderen Lebensgefühl verbunden." BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 192-193, Klaus W. Becker, BAG Kultur, "Antrag an die Fraktion: Ein Votum für die Kultur," 28.9.1985.

<sup>46</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 333-338, Annemarie Borgmann, "Von Adorno bis Zadek: Keine Problem! Aber: Kultur fängt vorher an... Ein Stück Brachland grüner Politik," 1985.

<sup>47</sup> Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994, 6, 23-24. On the trajectory of the concept of *Kultur* in Germany from the late nineteenth century through reunification, see also Wolf Lepenies. *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Gay. *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968; Helmut Lethen. *Cool Conduct the Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* remains the best collection of primary source excerpts on Weimar culture available in translation. See Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, 507-640.

torch from Weimar and engaged broadly with questions of oppositional aesthetics.<sup>49</sup> Painter Gerhard Richter's inconsistent oeuvre joined photo-realism and abstract neo-expressionism as a rejection of the need for coherent artistic styles. Sculptor Joseph Beuys pioneered the social sculpture, whose participatory nature evolved the old Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* because artistic creation, Beuys believed, should not be solely the purview of the artist. These same years, however, also saw the tidal wave of that “irresistible” empire of American consumer culture sweet through Europe: Coca Cola and Elvis Presley represented the success of a global cultural conformism.<sup>50</sup> It remained unclear to the Greens what, precisely, they should include under the rubric of culture.

In a presentation to the Greens of Marburg in 1984, party member from Baden-Württemberg and expert in cultural politics Eckard Holler advised, first, that Green alternative cultural policy must offer a self-critical program for engaging with bourgeois cultural products and for supporting and developing traditional popular culture [*Volkskultur*] and oppositional culture. Second, Holler advocated understanding culture not simply as art [*Kunst*] but as the aggregate expression of human creativity.<sup>51</sup> Though Holler's talk was likely heard by few members of the party, by the time it was printed eight months later in the journal for philosophy and the social sciences, *Das Argument*, the question of the boundaries of the Greens' concept of culture—their *Kulturbegriff*—had become a topic of considerable contestation.

Many party members embraced a capacious notion of culture. Sabine Weißler, a member of Berlin's Alternative List and curator of the city's New Society for the Visual Arts (NGBK), for example, argued in 1984 that essentially everything had the potential to become the subject of cultural politics.<sup>52</sup> At that time, to follow Holler and Weißler's line of reasoning meant aligning with a cultural politician of another persuasion: Frankfurt's well-known Social Democrat, Hilmar Hoffmann. Within cultural and political circles in West Germany, Hoffmann's name usually accompanied the motto he popularized in 1979: *Kultur für alle*, that is, “Culture for everyone.”<sup>53</sup> Praised for the way it put art and cultural institutions more broadly in the service of urban renewal and development in Frankfurt,<sup>54</sup> Hoffmann's motto also won him his fair share of enemies. In 1985 Christoph Schröder, a member of the cultural group of Hamburg's Green-Alternative List, published a polemic against fellow party members who had allied—he argued imprudently—with Hoffmann and other Social Democratic cultural advisors.<sup>55</sup> Instead of Hoffmann's motto, Schröder preferred the formulation drawn up at the international congress of Green and alternative movements in Liverpool in November 1984: *Kultur von und mit Allen und gegen Wenige*, “Culture from and with everyone and against the few.” This phrasing allowed him to allude directly to the

<sup>49</sup> Uta G. Poiger. *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; David Robb. *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*. Rochester: Camden House, 2007. For a discussion of flagging faith in oppositional aesthetics from the 1960s onward and the mobilization of humor in art to work through this changing relationship to politics see Gregory H. Williams. *Permission to Laugh: Humor and Politics in Contemporary German Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels Cold War Politics*; Victoria de Grazia. *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Eckard Holler. “Soziokultur als Gegenkonzept zur etablierten Elitekultur?” *Das Argument* 151 (May/June 1985): 399.

<sup>52</sup> Sabine Weißler. “Grüne Selbstverständlichkeiten: Zum Problem grün-alternativer Kulturprogramme.” *Alternative Kommunalpolitik* 3 (1984): 23-24.

<sup>53</sup> Hilmar Hoffmann. *Kultur für alle. Perspektiven und Modelle*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1979; Hilmar Hoffmann. *Kultur für Morgen*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985.

<sup>54</sup> Hermann Glaser. *Kleine Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1989*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991, 366.

<sup>55</sup> Alongside Hoffmann were often included Freimut Duve and Peter Glotz, both SPD members very vocal in their support for “Kultur für alle.”

Hamburg GAL's socialist inclinations: the “few,” here, meant “the ruling class,” which rendered culture a key battleground in the trajectory of class conflict. It also allowed him to dissociate the Green cultural conception from that of the traditional parties which, he claimed, all shared some version of Hoffmann's: that *Kultur* is constituted by the totality of expressions of life [*Lebensäußerungen*]. What displeased Schröder were not Hoffmann's Social Democratic inclinations; Schröder's own alternative motto clearly mobilized the socialist rhetoric of class conflict. Rather, Schröder disliked Hoffmann being in the pockets of conservatives: Hoffmann's cultural policies aimed not at generating social consciousness but at stimulating the economy. Within this framework, Schröder argued, aesthetic production would be rendered uncritical, instrumentalized, mechanical, “depraved” [*verkommen*]. Instead, he called the Greens to conceive of culture as that which rebels against the status quo. Out of this art and culture of opposition, society could begin to realize a new value system and world orientation.<sup>56</sup>

Out of the problem of culture in practice thus grew the problem of the idea, or *Begriff*, of culture. The Berlin AL, for example, hosted a long and controversial debate about their *Kulturbegriff* in the summer of 1983. Though they managed to agree that Berlin cultural politics should always leave space for both alternative and established cultural institutions, they could come to no further consensus about the content of their concept of culture. In the run-up to the 1985 elections, they justified their slow progress on the clichéd grounds that “good things come to those who wait” and resigned themselves to a cultural program that addressed only short-term issues, offering little direction on the long-term trajectory of Berlin's cultural landscape.<sup>57</sup>

The desire to articulate a well-defined *Kulturbegriff* remained a concern through the mid-1980s. In October 1985, the Greens organized a cultural political debate at the federal level. First on the agenda was to determine the status of the Greens' *Kulturbegriff*. The BAG-Kultur had already spent their past two meetings debating this theme. But the result—a blurry catch-all definition—disappointed many: when it came to culture, “green,” Annemarie Borgmann reported, was to remain a “multicolored color,” that is, the Greens were willing to engage with the full spectrum of political perspectives. The Greens, she claimed, had had enough of boundaries and exclusivity.<sup>58</sup>

Not all representatives took so kindly, however, to this curious obsession with definitions. Christoph Schröder denounced it as nothing more than a distraction. Taking a swipe at intellectuals and academics, he argued that no hearty declarations or sophisticated philosophical guiding principles could ever matter as much as political practice. He challenged the BAG-Kultur to serve as an instigator of action, both among representatives as well as regular party members, rather than as armchair intellectuals.<sup>59</sup> Noting that their constituents were disappointed with the party's flagging engagement with culture, other representatives joined Schröder in his calls to revive it.<sup>60</sup>

## B. Cultural Assumptions: Implicit and Explicit

Despite what the great *Begriff*-distraction and the unmet expectations of crisp programmatic statements might suggest, the Greens engaged a great deal with practical of cultural matters. Between January and October 1984, the Greens organized three cultural congresses.<sup>61</sup> Anticipating accusations like Schröder's, the first of these congresses, held in Hamburg, focused exclusively

<sup>56</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/770, pag. 173-175, Christoph Schröder, “Zu einem “grünen” Kulturbegriff,” 16.9.1985.

<sup>57</sup> Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985, 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 190, Annemarie Borgmann, Kulturpolitische Debatte der Fraktion am 1.10.1985, 24.9.1985.

<sup>59</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/770, pag. 173-175, Christoph Schröder, “Zu einem “grünen” Kulturbegriff,” 16.9.1985.

<sup>60</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 52-53, Heidemarie Dann, “Thesen zur Kulturpolitik. 14.1.1985

<sup>61</sup> In Hamburg in January 1984, in Frankfurt in June 1984, and in Marburg in October 1984.

cultural practice and postponed categorical, definitional debates to future meetings.<sup>62</sup> After the dust had settled from the first congress, the journal *Alternative Kommunalpolitik* released an issue devoted entirely to alternative cultural politics. This mouthpiece for local Green and alternative political issues consolidated the resolutions made in Hamburg in January in preparation for the second congress, to be held in Frankfurt that June. Two points of accord stood out. First, the Greens had little patience with established cultural institutions that they believed had become outmoded and whose innovative inclinations had stagnated. High theater and opera, for example, had grown too comfortable with their substantial state subsidies, and their elitism and exclusivity undermined their ability to carry out their project of the cultural enrichment of the German people. Second, the Greens were particularly sympathetic with new cultural initiatives forced to fight for recognition and support.<sup>63</sup>

In a landmark move, just shortly after the Greens concluded the third cultural congress, the Bundestag opted to host West Germany's first federal debate on cultural policy in November of 1984.<sup>64</sup> On behalf of the Greens, Hubert Kleinert, a Bundestag representative from Marburg, rose to speak in opposition to the *Wirtschaftswunder*-generated blinders that he understood many politicians to wear when adjudicating the value of cultural products and institutions. He wanted to make clear that the Greens advocated a cultural orientation that established cultural value on grounds other than economics: "It's inconvenient to many of you," he quipped, "that many of us have realized that there are things besides earning and producing, besides growth and increasing standards of living, that make life meaningful." He argued that the Greens rejected an economically-grounded cultural framework because of its capacity to stifle, even suffocate, artistic creativity.<sup>65</sup>

Though Kleinert's brief speech largely failed to animate his party, the young scholar of the New Social Movements, Roland Schmidt, marshaled Kleinert's sentiments when he called for party members to remember that Green aesthetics were also Green politics. Channeling political sociologist and second generation Frankfurt School member Claus Offe, Schmidt criticized the separation of politics from aesthetics, practice from perception, as objectionably bourgeois. To Schmidt, these "false dichotomies," which he saw represented in the work of Wolfgang Kraushaar, a prominent political scientist at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, merely reinforced the disjuncture between action [*Handeln*] and desire [*Wollen*], which Offe identified as the structuring principle of bourgeois democracy.<sup>66</sup> By Schmidt's understanding, the nature of alternative moments meant that their politics could never be separated from the culture they inhabited. Alternative culture grew both in reaction to and as a solution for societal crisis. It aspired to generate a collective

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<sup>62</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 171, Fachgruppe Kultur der GAL Hamburg, Invitation to the first Green-Alternative Bundeskongress on Kulturpolitik, 1.1984. For an extensive compilation of preparatory and discussion materials for the first congress, see AGG, Kul 105-12, Grüne und Alternative in den Räten Nordrhein-Westfalens. *Arbeitsmappe. Grün-alternativer Bundeskongress zur Kulturpolitik, 27.-29.1.1984*. Hamburg, 1984.

<sup>63</sup> "Alternativen in der Kulturpolitik. Bestandsaufnahme und Neuansätze eines unterbelichteten Politikfeldes." *Alternative Kommunalpolitik* 3, 1984, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Drs. 10/99, Stenographische Berichte, 99. Sitzung, Bonn, 9. November 1984. See also Drucksachen 10/382, 10/785, 10/2236, 10/2237, 10/2262, 10/2279, and 10/2280. Together, these inquiries and statements formed the impetus for the Bundestag debate.

<sup>65</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Drs. 10/99, Stenographische Berichte, 99. Sitzung, Bonn, 9. November 1984, 7186.

<sup>66</sup> Schmidt, "Zur Alternative Kultur," 51. For the arguments of Schmidt's interlocutors, see Wolfgang Kraushaar. "Thesen zum Verhältnis von Alternativ- und Fluchtbewegung." *Autonomie oder Getto? Kontroversen über die Alternativbewegung*. Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1978, 8-67; Claus Offe.

"Konkurrenzpartei und kollektive politische Identität." *Parlamentarisches Ritual und politische Alternativen*. Roland Roth, ed. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1980, 26-42.

oppositional identity out of an otherwise undifferentiated political culture and to combat the tendency of an overzealous economic life to “colonize the life-world.”<sup>67</sup>

Hajo Cornel argued one step further than Schmidt that the objective of any cultural political program should be to enable more democratic access to cultural education, to the means of cultural production, and to cultural products themselves. Insofar as support for all stages of cultural production involves a process of adjudicating cultural value, Cornel also demanded radical transparency of aesthetic judgment: German citizens should not only know who determines the cultural offerings to which they are given access and by what standards access is granted, but should also play a central role in both the negotiation of those standards and the process of adjudication itself. Only by retaining grassroots democratic control over the arts could the German people preserve art’s power to register dissent [*Widerspruch*]. Culture, Cornel argued, should stand as a permanent moment of opposition.<sup>68</sup>

Berlin’s Sabine Weißler saw the same argument from the opposite vantage point. She predicated the politics of opposition—the facilitation of difference—on a politics of creativity and potentiality. Drawing on the Bremen Greens’ more capacious *Kulturbegriff*, Weißler suggested that alternative culture, which emerges out of the friction between competing visions [*Entwürfe*] for society, is simply the preservation of the possibility of something different. It makes no distinction between its producers. Contrary to bourgeois cultural understanding, Weißler argued, every individual—not just artists or scholars—possesses the capacity to contribute new visions for society. In other words, culture is essentially democratic. That democratic inclination extended to its object, as well: through culture, the boundaries between everyday life [*Alltag*], work, and creativity become irrelevant. Although Weißler recognized the idealistic quality of her demands, she nevertheless urged the Greens to advance cultural policies that would cultivate this radically democratic potential for creativity.<sup>69</sup>

Like Weißler, Manon Maren-Grisebach understood that bourgeois cultural and social expectations had become outdated and that the Greens stood at the edge of a great opportunity to revise them. Just two years after the Greens’ founding, Maren-Grisebach published a book that attempted to give voice to the new party’s philosophy. Though far shorter than other chapters and appearing at the end of the book, her pithy statement on Green aesthetic philosophy was hardly an afterthought. At the heart of the party’s ethical demands for the environment, society, and the Life-World, Maren-Grisebach placed aesthetics, or more specifically, what she called ‘play’ [*Spiel*]. Not the kind of play accompanying games with rules, *Regelspiel*, rather play without purpose [*Spiel der Zwecklosigkeit*]. This kind of play, she argued, nurtures the pursuit of fantasies and dreams. The Green advantage, she claimed, was that they appreciated the non-utility [*Un-Nutzen*] of play. If general social, political, and environmental renewal [*Rundumerneuerung*] required first upsetting capitalism’s means-end rationality [*Zweckrationalität*], the Greens possessed a powerful weapon in the

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<sup>67</sup> Schmidt, “Zur Alternative Kultur,” 41-42. Schmidt mobilizes Habermas’ understanding of protest as “resistance against the tendency to colonize the life-world [*Widerstand gegen Tendenzen einer Kolonialisierung der Lebenswelt*],” in which the life-world refers to the arena of both the private living sphere and the sphere of publicity, that is *Öffentlichkeit*, which is structured by consensual communicative exchange; shares systems of meaning, culture, and community enable a mode of understanding through communication that forms the foundation of interaction within that social orbit. Habermas criticizes, however, the manner in which the members of modern society have relinquished agency to an externalized system that is constituted by the market, bureaucracy, and the media and that eliminates the necessity of this kind of communication. That is, the system colonizes the life-world. The objective is to reclaim the agency of the life-world. See Jürgen Habermas. *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon, 1987.

<sup>68</sup> Hajo Cornel. “Rahmenbedingungen für eine Kultur im Widerspruch.’ Finanzielle, bürokratische und ideologische Fesseln der kommunalen Kulturpolitik.” *Alternative Kommunalpolitik* 3 (1984): 21.

<sup>69</sup> Weißler, “Grüne Selbstverständlichkeiten,” 23-24.

form of their playful orientation to the world.<sup>70</sup> Aesthetics and creativity, as a medium of play without purpose, formed a bridge between the practices of every life and the ethical imperative of the Greens' ecological fantasy.

### C. What Green Culture Meant and Why It Mattered in a Postmaterialist Political Context

The emphasis that Weißler and Maren-Grisebach placed on creativity took on more explicit meaning when understood against the Greens' early embrace of postmaterialist politics. Creativity and cultural production affirmed the self. Weißler drew inspiration from Elsbeth Mordo, a member of Baden-Württemberg's state parliament, who stressed that *Selbermachen*, that is, the experience of one's own aesthetic creativity, was central to the Greens' understanding of culture: *Selbermachen* fosters self-affirmation.<sup>71</sup> The Greens had endorsed this assertion since the party's earliest days, when founding member of the party, president of the Foundation of Political Ecology, and 1976 chair of the German Writers Association Carl Amery published an article in 1980 on the philosophical foundations and consequences of the alternative movement. His point of departure lay in what he saw as the essential problem of modern society. Responding to the pessimism of Sigmund Freud who, fifty years prior, famously lamented that "the greatest impediment to civilization" rest in civilized society's own internal enmity and human antagonisms—the death drive, or *Thanatos*, in action<sup>72</sup>—Amery argued that society could foster a life-affirming world opposed to this drive toward self-destruction if it could first create a new culture to support it.<sup>73</sup> Amery conceived of culture not as an epiphenomenal component of historical materialism, but rather, broadly, as an essential means of Being in relationship to the physical world and, thus, as an embodied or corporeal phenomenon. By radically revising West Germany's technical and political establishment so that it celebrated humanity's creative capacity, which also emanates from body and the senses, Amery argued, West Germany could put itself on a path toward eliminating its culture of domination, possession, and global annihilation. These ideas would stay with Amery. Seven years later he would revise them into a talk presented at Oldenburg University, in which he argued that the task of solving the ecological problems facing the modern world in fact amounted to a massive cultural project.<sup>74</sup>

Through different rhetorical means but with the same objective as Amery, another founding party member, Wolf-Dieter Hasenclever, critiqued the destructive tendencies in modern society. Hasenclever, who had been driven into the arms of the Greens by his opposition to the SPD's tacit acceptance of nuclear weapons under NATO's Double-Track decision, used as his springboard the party program of the Baden-Württemberg Greens, which endorsed ecological humanism as the guiding principle of the Green movement. Hasenclever understood ecology as the science of life's interconnections [*Lebenszusammenhängen*]. He argued that a political system guided by a humanistic

<sup>70</sup> Maren-Grisebach, *Philosophie der Grünen*, 126-131.

<sup>71</sup> Weißler, "Grüne Selbstverständlichkeiten," 23-24.

<sup>72</sup> Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. James Strachey, tr. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989, 69-70, 78, 81-82

<sup>73</sup> Carl Amery. "Die philosophischen Grundlagen und Konsequenzen der Alternativbewegung." *Die Grünen: Personen, Projekte, Programme*. Hans-Werner Lüdke and Olaf Dinné, eds. Stuttgart-Degerloch: Seewald, 1980. On the importance of positive, life-affirming positive utopia over negative utopia, see Herbert Marcuse. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, here 83-84. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse read Freud against the grain in order to combat the pessimism about civilization and its social repression that drove Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and to find a way to halt *Thanatos'* forward march toward social annihilation. Marcuse lamented Freud's inability to see emancipatory opportunities within society and aimed, in his own work, to revise Freud so as to identify the possibilities for liberation from repression.

<sup>74</sup> Amery, "Die philosophischen Grundlagen und Konsequenzen der Alternativbewegung," 20-21. Amery would go on to publish his Oldenburg University lecture as "Das ökologische Problem als Kulturauftrag." Oldenburger Universitätsreden. Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg (BIS) Verlag, 1988.



ethic will permit both humanity's social freedom as well as its harmonious coexistence in and with nature. Here, Hasenclever noted Ernst Bloch's influence on his thinking.<sup>75</sup> To Hasenclever, ecological humanism meant recognizing that the sacrosanct dignity [*unantastbare Würde*] of humanity derives from its capacity to live creatively in responsive co-existence with the natural world, social world, and the future world of its posterity. Slightly modifying theologian, philosopher, and physician, Albert Schweitzer's concept of "reverence for life" [*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*], Hasenclever challenged the Greens to embrace reverence for living creatively and to make it the foundation of all human activity. Such veneration of humanity's capacity to transform its world creatively, Hasenclever argued, had the potential to forestall the otherwise catastrophic trajectory of contemporary society.<sup>76</sup>

Such emphasis on the creative enterprises of individuals could be risky, though. The boundaries beyond which the celebration of individual creativity gave way to the abyss of social and cultural isolation were by no means obvious. It drifted dangerously close to social and cultural alienation. As the Green party's membership grew, some increasingly lost the sense that they belonged to a community. By 1985, Bundestag member Annemarie Borgmann could argue that the party's annual federal conventions lacked a sense of cohesiveness and that members were reluctant to speak of fellow party members using "we." In the absence of opportunities to foster a sense of belonging and collective identity, she lamented, the Greens "have become strangers to themselves."<sup>77</sup>

Others countered that immersion in the kind of self-directed aesthetic activities that Amery, Hasenclever, Weißler, and Mordo advocated need not imply an experience of social alienation. Mordo suggested that individual acts of aesthetic creation were in fact inherently communal and communicative experiences in which individuals enter a relationship with their community through the act of re-envisioning their shared way of life [*Lebensgestaltung*].<sup>78</sup> Manon Maren-Grisebach drew on Ernst Bloch to make the same point. Bloch, she noted, spoke of a solidarity constituted by a polyphonic multitude [*personenreichen, höchst vielstimmigen*], which resembled the Green saying "Unity in Diversity." Strong egos [*Ichē*], Bloch suggested, make for strong voices that, together, build strong solidarity. Maren-Grisebach referred to that which emerges from this solidarity as the "products of the 'we'." Through their interactions, significant and mundane, people leave traces on one another, such that no idea, no encounter is ever radically one's own.<sup>79</sup> Roland Schmidt concurred, suggesting that alternative movements build for themselves a collective identity by acting on their shared set of concerns [*Betroffenheit*] about contemporary society. He used the research of Thomas Ziehe, a scholar of education who specialized in processes of cultural modernization, to argue that the centralizing structures, means-end rationality, and technocracy of social activity in modern society dominated—in his words, "colonized"—even the most personal of social spaces. As an antidote, Ziehe and Schmidt called for the localization of cultural activities, whose close proximity and opportunities for

<sup>75</sup> Wolf-Dieter Hasenclever. "Ökologischer Humanismus." *Die Grünen: Personen, Projekte, Programme*. Hans-Werner Lüdke and Olaf Dinné, eds. Stuttgart-Degerloch: Seewald, 1980, 46. Here, Hasenclever cites Bloch from *The Principle of Hope*, in which Bloch writes that "Existence in social freedom and existence in harmony with recognized natural laws go together." Hasenclever understands from Bloch's statement that "the freedom of mankind and his embeddedness in nature are two sides of the same coin" and charges society with crafting a new political practice, guided by a "humanistic ethic," that ensures their connectedness. See Ernst Bloch. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 5*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, 816.

<sup>76</sup> Hasenclever, "Ökologischer Humanismus," 42, 50-51. On Schweitzer's philosophy of "reverence for life," see Albert Schweitzer. "The Ethics of Reverence for Life." *The Philosophy of Civilization*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987, 307-29.

<sup>77</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 333-338: Annemarie Borgmann, "Von Adorno bis Zadek: Keine Problem! Aber: Kultur fängt vorher an... Ein Stück Brachland grüner Politik," 1985.

<sup>78</sup> Weißler, "Grüne Selbstverständlichkeiten," 23-24.

<sup>79</sup> Maren-Grisebach, *Philosophie der Grünen*, 76-77.

collaborative work would facilitate expressions of belonging and shared *Betroffenheit* rather than experiences of social fragmentation.<sup>80</sup>

One historian has argued that the facilitation of individual creative capacity, in fact, lay at the very core of the Greens pillar of social responsibility. Beyond social responsibility conceived in terms of welfare programs and aid to developing countries, the Greens also understood *sozial* to mean

a vague notion of a better, nonalienated life, in which the human being will be restored to his or her full creative powers. Green politics strove for a society in which the subject is not reduced to a passive recipient either of food stamps and unemployment checks or of the commodities that the market economic provides. In contrast, the Greens advocated a model of a society in which everybody has a chance for self-actualization and political, social, and cultural participation.<sup>81</sup>

Broad political participation of this sort, historian of German countercultural movements Sabine von Dirke has noted, conflicted with a political system based on representation. Political representation, that is, political centralization and consolidation, stood at odds with the “braid of relationships” that defined the Green-Alternative movement’s vision for a better society. This braid had nodes and knots of varying sizes, but its real strength, Roland Schmidt argued, was that it lacked a center.<sup>82</sup> Schmidt understood the Green-Alternative movement as employing a new collective “politics of the first person”<sup>83</sup> which played out not in parliament but locally, on the ground, or, using the popular catchphrase of the alternative movement, *vor Ort*, in places it saw as dissociated from the existing political process. And the Greens believed themselves to possess an aptitude for rooting out or, if necessary, creating these new spaces of free expression that slipped the colonizing impulses of modern society. Christiane Zieseke, both a member of the Greens and of Berlin’s Cultural Council [*Kulturrat*] as well as a founding member of Berlin’s so-called Active Museum, argued that citizens deserved locally-accessible opportunities to develop their cultural sensibilities and to realize their individual creativity instead of being towed along by the state.<sup>84</sup> Sabine Weißler and Elsbeth Mordo, for example, tasked their party with creating and supporting sites where ideas about art and culture could be discussed together, where laypeople would be encouraged to exercise their aesthetic creativity, and where artists of all sorts could interact directly with their publics. In other words, the party should nurture, Weißler suggested, the “completely quotidian character that engagement with art, history and all the manifestations of culture should have.”<sup>85</sup>

### III. Toward an Ideal of Decentralization: The practice of eco-politics through eco-art

<sup>80</sup> Schmidt, “Zur Alternative Kultur,” 41. On Ziehe, see Thomas Ziehe und Herbert Stubenrauch. *Plädoyer für ungewöhnliches Lernen. Ideen zur Jugendsituation*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1982, 25ff.

<sup>81</sup> Von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination!*, 185

<sup>82</sup> Schmidt, “Zur Alternative Kultur,” 52. Schmidt draws the braid metaphor from Peter Brückner. “Thesen zur Diskussion der ‘Alternativen.’” *Autonomie oder Getto? Kontroversen über die Alternativbewegung*. Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1978, 68. On the common agenda of the Alternative Movement, see Bundesministerium für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit. “Zur alternativen Kultur in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. B 39 (1981): 3-15.

<sup>83</sup> As a result, access to the politics and content of alternative culture would always remain fragmentary, heterogeneous, and dynamic. To grasp alternative culture, Schmidt counseled, was to grasp its intangibility [*Ungreifbarkeit*]. To make this point, Schmidt drew on Urs Jaeggi. “Drinne und draußen.” *Stichworte zur Geistigen Situation der Zeit*, Bd. 2. *Politik und Kultur*. Jürgen Habermas, ed. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979, 443-473, 469f.

<sup>84</sup> Christiane Zieseke. “Dezentrale Kultur - Stiefkind etablierter Kulturpolitik.” *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Sabine Weißler. “Vom Umgang mit Geschichte.” *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985, 15-16. Weißler, “Grüne Selbstverständlichkeiten,” 23-24.

The Greens' failure to articulate an official party-wide understanding of culture hardly stood in the way of their local efforts to add Green dimensions to cultural ventures still in planning phases. Throughout West Germany, local Green constituencies pushed to inject everyday life with more culture, to create and sustain conditions in which art and culture could serve as a medium of resistance to the less desirable qualities of modern life, and to use these cultural projects to advocate for a transformation of the way everyday Germans interacted with and experienced their world.<sup>86</sup> In the wake of their first major electoral successes, for example, the Green-Alternative movement began to make a name for itself in Berlin's cultural scene. Only a month after their 7.2% election return in 1981 won them nine seats in the Berlin Senate (two more than the FDP), Berlin's Alternative List released a major interpellation [*große Anfrage*] on the status of plans for an art exhibit featuring the work of artist Arno Breker, whose sculptures had won acclaim during the National Socialist era. Fueled by considerable popular protest,<sup>87</sup> the AL's inquiry unleashed a heated parliamentary debate about whether the celebration of art with such a shadowy past should be tolerated in Berlin.<sup>88</sup> Fueled by the reception of their early efforts to engage critically with cultural questions in Berlin,<sup>89</sup> the party undertook to consolidate, organize, and intensify its cultural policy work by naming to the party an official cultural assistant [*Bereichsassistent für Medien und Kulturpolitik*, later *Fraktionsassistenten*]. They tasked this assistant with ensuring the party's continuous engagement in Berlin's cultural community, establishing contacts, mediating between those contacts and party leadership, and filling in the gaps in the party's cultural program. Chosen as AL's first cultural assistant, Hajo Cornel would later criticize the structure of the party itself as the primary obstacle to the advancement of its cultural program. The Greens' small number of parliamentary seats<sup>90</sup> as well as its policy mandating a two-year rotation period for its representatives meant a quick turnover of leadership. Unfortunately, the first three representatives tasked with managing the party's cultural issues split their investments with other more pressing political concerns, which meant that they often gave cultural issues short shrift. Cornel lobbied the Greens to choose instead a designated cultural politician with knowledge of Berlin's diverse cultural topography, reminding them pointedly that grassroots democratic political participation need not imply that "anyone can do anything."<sup>91</sup>

The Greens' participation in cultural policy debates and their involvement in putting cultural policies into practice increased quickly in the first few years they occupied offices at the federal, state, and local levels. Though the pursuit of a Green cultural agenda took place on several fronts, the most important of these was space. The Green cultural program, in practice, took the form of the deliberate attempt to find the best spaces for culture in contemporary German society.

### A. Green Allies for Green Spaces

<sup>86</sup> Uwe Fricke. "Kultur - Ästhetik - Kunst." *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985, 32-33.

<sup>87</sup> William Saroyan. "Zeitmosaik." *Die Zeit*, 22.5.1981.

<sup>88</sup> Drucksache 9/35, Große Anfrage im Abgeordnetenhaus zur Breker-Ausstellung. The parliamentary debate in response to this inquiry was held on 25.6.1981.

<sup>89</sup> Beyond the Greens' engagement with the Breker exhibit, the first few years of their tenure in the Berlin Senate saw the party's involvement in debates about the film scene in Berlin with the support of the Berlin Working Group for Film (see Abgeordnetenhaus debate on 8.10.1981); about the status of a fiftieth anniversary project with the Berliner *Kulturrat* (see Drucksachen 9/188, debated on 12.11.1981, and 9/330, debated on 24.3.1982); about funding and support for independent theater groups (debated in the cultural subcommittee in May 1982); about support for artists (debated on 20.1.1983); about funding for the annual Independent Berlin Art Exhibit (debated 10.2.1983); and about reading culture (Drucksachen 9/2231, debated on 25.10.1984) and literary production (Drucksachen 9/1415) in Berlin.

<sup>90</sup> The Greens initially held only nine seats, a small number compared to the SPD's 51 and the CDU's 65.

<sup>91</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 127-133, Hajo Cornel, "Zwei Jahre AL - Kulturpolitik - Eine Bilanz," 7.1983. Also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, "Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor."

The Greens' concerns about the site of culture had its roots in what Geoff Eley calls the "new radicalisms of sixty-eight," which changed the landscape where politics could occur. Greater disposable incomes in the 1960s brought new opportunities to engage in capitalist consumerism, altering both how and where one participated in the economy. The Student Movement brought not only economic, but also political, social, and cultural battles onto the terrain of Germany's younger generation.<sup>92</sup> Both in the streets and in the classroom, the Student Movement called young Germans to challenge traditional authorities of space. New negotiations of power through space shaped the 1970s, too, as the Alternative Movement embraced cooperative living, squatted apartment buildings to protest their demolition in times of housing shortage, advocated the inviolability of the space of the body through liberated sexual and gender politics as well as drug use.

Anxieties about agency over space filtered into the 1980s as well and, unsurprisingly, became a particular concern of the Greens. In 1985 Berlin, for example, the Alternative List insisted that the Greens needed to devote more energy to saving public spaces in which they could nurture a culture that opposed repression and celebrated grassroots democratic practices. And where the Greens could not repurpose existing spaces for this task, they needed to create new ones. Indeed, the AL understood the provision of sufficient space as essential to fostering self-expression and self-administration within German society. Not everyone who founds an alternative group, the AL's cultural assistant suggested, should automatically receive funding. But "there should be space to conceptualize a product and to determine whether there is an audience for it."<sup>93</sup>

For a party still gaining its political footing, administering space in practice meant first winning allies among those with louder voices and greater influence. In Berlin, the party's first victory on this front involved earning the trust of the Berlin Cultural Council. Influenced by unflattering media portrayals of the Greens, the Council initially regarded with skepticism the Alternative List's investment in cultural issues, which the Council assumed were narrow and instrumentalized. They expected few returns from collaborative work with the young party.<sup>94</sup> In spite of their bad reputation, however, the Greens insisted on meeting with the Cultural Council in early 1982. The AL expressed their support for the Cultural Council's old, repeatedly dismissed plan to repurpose an underutilized building designed in the late nineteenth century by Martin Gropius, the great uncle of Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius. Restorations of the Martin Gropius Building, partially destroyed by the Second World War, had begun only in the 1970s, but the Cultural Council already recognized the building's potential. They had lobbied for the site to house a center for the visual arts, though until the Greens got involved, their petitions fell largely on deaf ears. The AL also stood behind the Cultural Council in its bid to manage the major art exhibition and event series to be hosted in observance of the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's ascension to power. The anniversary project, called "Destroying Democracy - The Seizure of Power and Resistance, 1933" appealed to the Greens' commitment to the sanctity of democracy, and the Cultural Council's investment in the accessibility of art and history in everyday life by everyday Germans aligned with the early

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<sup>92</sup> Geoff Eley. "End of the Post-war? The 1970s as a Key Watershed in European History." "The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History?" Andreas Wirsching, et al. *Journal of Modern European History* 9:1 (15 April 2011): 13. Eley argues that 1967-1974 marked the moment when the stabilities of the post-war settlement first began to unravel. This period formed the "hinge," so to speak, separating two eras, the first of which emphasized the 'political logic of reconstruction', mobilized mass membership in political parties, and emphasized democracy, social justice and national independence; the latter called these points of consensus in the postwar period into question. The traditional mass party fell into disarray, the "popular culture of collective improvement and appreciation, cemented around the welfare states" and correlate government practices dissolved, and the nation-state's sovereignties succumbed before "powerful supra-national logics" epitomized in the EU (12-15).

<sup>93</sup> Hajo Cornel. "Kultur." *Handbuch für alternative Kommunalpolitik*. Wolfgang Pohl, et al., eds. Bielefeld: AJZ, 1985, 292–299.

<sup>94</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 153, Christiane Zieseke, Berliner Kulturrat, 22.9.1982

formulations of the Berlin Greens’ cultural concept.<sup>95</sup> The AL’s enthusiastic expressions of support for the “Destroying Democracy” project, both within the Berlin Senate<sup>96</sup> and via public media outlets, became a breakthrough moment for the party. It elevated the party to the status of a serious player in Berlin cultural politics. In September of 1982, the Berlin Cultural Council wrote to thank the AL expressly for its parliamentary backing. Acknowledging its initial pessimism, the Cultural Council was pleased to find the AL “unconditionally supportive” and willing to collaborate with other parties to win the city’s approval for the project. The party’s performance went a long way, the Council suggested, toward changing popular and parliamentary attitudes toward the AL and its investment in cultural affairs.<sup>97</sup> In fact, the Cultural Council’s signatory on these correspondences, Christiane Zieseke, would become so persuaded by the Greens’ agenda that she later not only joined the party but also rose to office, serving as an AL representative in the Berlin Senate. The AL would continue to maintain its alliance with the Berlin Cultural Council, supporting them next in their bid against the conservative Senate majority to reformulate the city’s plan for its 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.<sup>98</sup>

Such momentum was hard to maintain and the party faltered at the end of 1982. The AL had gotten caught up with the SPD in a sluggish battle against the CDU and FDP over the laws governing the number of state representatives who served on the board of Berlin’s public radio and television service. Introducing no new initiatives for several months, the party entered what one member called a “cultural political wasteland” [*kulturpolitische Bruchzeit*].<sup>99</sup> But Berlin’s AL nevertheless managed over the next year to win another major ally in the newly-constituted but vocal, visible, and tenacious Active Museum. Active Museum formed in 1983 out of a citizens’ initiative committed to reclaiming the site of the former Gestapo headquarters—then, only an empty lot—in preparation for the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler’s rise to power. Its founders wanted to design a museum for the history of National Socialism whose governing principle was collective, collaborative, communal memory work: they intended that all permanent installations, rotating exhibits, visiting speakers, and research would be conducted by its visitors rather than by an isolated set of experts.<sup>100</sup> The organization boasted an impressive membership roster from among the city’s most prominent alternative social, cultural, and political groups. In response to the group’s first press release, the Greens issued a press release of their own, which expressed their approval of the organization, its goals for events and exhibitions in recognition of the anniversary of 1933, and its grassroots democratic methods. AL celebrated Active Museum as further evidence that it was “possible to make cultural-political initiatives from below an important part of Berlin culture, even if the force behind them must be great in order to maintain the attention of a disinterested senate.”<sup>101</sup> The AL committed to providing Active Museum with support—personal, parliamentary, and

<sup>95</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 127-133, Hajo Cornel, “Zwei Jahre AL - Kulturpolitik - Eine Bilanz,” 7.1983. See also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, “Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor;” Antrag im Abgeordnetenhaus on the transfer of an exhibition “50 Jahre Machtergreifung durch die NSDAP” (Drucksachen 9/188, debated on 12.11.1981; 9/330, debated on 24.3.1982)

<sup>96</sup> See Drucksache 9/619, the debate of which was held in the Abgeordnetenhaus on 24.6.1982.

<sup>97</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 153, Christiane Zieseke, Berliner Kulturrat, 22.9.1982

<sup>98</sup> Berlin’s parliament saw many debates on this question, the last of which took place on 25.10.1984. See also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, “Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor.”

<sup>99</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 127-133, Hajo Cornel, “Zwei Jahre AL - Kulturpolitik - Eine Bilanz,” 7.1983. Also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, “Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor.”

<sup>100</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1 Actives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand e.V., Gründung des Vereins

<sup>101</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 143, Roland Stelter, 19.1.1983. See also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, “Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor.”

financial—and not much later, succeeded in placing several active AL participants among the group’s membership.<sup>102</sup>

## B. Old Spaces: The Power of Nostalgia, the Perversion of Authority

In 1981 Jost Hermand reflected on the question of cultural heritage in cultural-political initiatives. A German émigré, literary critic, and cultural historian working in the United States who would later produce an extensive body of scholarly work on the German Green party, Hermand argued that a true democracy should extend into all arenas of life; it would demand radically democratic access to all expressions of culture, including those of the past. In cultural politics, Hermand called for the use of the past—that is, of cultural heritage—in the present in the name of building a better future.<sup>103</sup> This question of how to regard cultural heritage, however, proved a sticky point for the Greens. Abstractly, the appropriation of cultural heritage could harmonize with Green ideology. Maren-Grisebach argued that cultural renewal need not necessitate washing away heritage. By cushioning the experience of “sentimental nostalgia” prompted by the objects and sites of cultural heritage in a sufficiently critical grassroots democratic framework—that is, in local rather than top-down state initiatives—she suggested that citizens could reconcile open creative self-discovery with the closed cultural inheritances of the past.<sup>104</sup>

In practice, however, traditional spaces of cultural heritage, particularly those in public consciousness at the time, carried for the Greens troublesome baggage. They threatened to eliminate individual experiences of culture, substituting for them hegemonic narratives. Green perspectives occupied a prominent position in the barrage of criticism leveled against Chancellor Helmut Kohl, for example, after he commissioned the construction of two new national historical museums, one each in Berlin and Bonn in 1982. He intended these museums to serve as assembly points for fascinating objects and stories from Germany’s history. Together, they would create a new image for a new Germany, freed from the shadow of its Nazi past.<sup>105</sup> From the Greens’ point of view, the space of the traditional museum already commanded authority. They interpreted Kohl as unfairly mobilizing that authority to push a streamlined, state-sponsored national historical narrative that would patch over Germany’s history of conflict and diversity. They feared that the version of “culture” articulated in such a national museum would turn citizens into passive cultural consumers rather than active agents of cultural critique. The concurrent plan to build a large central national monument in Bonn “to the victims of war and violence” met with equal disapproval from the Greens.<sup>106</sup> They criticized the use of traditional, imposing memorial forms in uncreative locations (here, the heart of Bonn’s government area) as the instrumentalization of memory for questionable

<sup>102</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1 Actives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand e.V., Gründung des Vereins, 25.5.1984.

<sup>103</sup> Jost Hermand. *Orte, irgendwo: Formen utopischen Denkens*. Königstein im Taunus: Athenäum, 1981, 134-135. This book is in some ways a prelude to his 1991 text, which more explicitly takes up the question of Green utopias. See Jost Hermand. *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland: zur Geschichte des ökologischen Bewußtseins*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991.

<sup>104</sup> Maren-Grisebach, *Philosophie der Grünen*, 132-134.

<sup>105</sup> Excellent archival material on the alternative movement’s response to the long process of creating the German Historical Museum in Berlin is available at the Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (B.II.1-2744), the Landesarchiv (including LArch Berlin, B. Rep. 232-233, 1-3, and 6), and the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz (see BArch [Koblenz] N 1569/740-741). For a detailed account of the creation of and controversies surrounding the German Historical Museum in Berlin, see Christoph Stözl and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan. *Deutsches Historisches Museum: Ideen, Kontroversen, Perspektiven*. Berlin: Propyläen, 1988. The Greens disagreed with many of Stözl’s interpretations of the value of the museum as well as his suggestions for its organization.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, AGG B.II.1 - Die Grünen im Bundestag 1983-1990, 5683: Gedenkstätte für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus auf dem Synagogenplatz Bonn.

international diplomatic aims. German architect and Green Bundestag representative Walter Sauermilch argued that Germany did “not need a mammoth monument the size of four football fields merely as a receptacle for wreaths.” Such a monument, he argued, would enable the pomp of commemoration without doing the diligent work of prompting critical reflection on history in order to promote a politics of peace.<sup>107</sup> Against what one Green member referred to derisively as the plans for a “Walhalla in Bonn,”<sup>108</sup> federal Greens chastised the Bundestag for attempting to build a new national consciousness by constructing monumental forms grounded in forgetfulness. West Germany, they argued, had no need for a national monument, in Bonn or elsewhere. Any visiting foreign dignitary who wished to lay a wreath in honor of the dead, they noted, had an unfortunate wealth of pre-existing sites from which to choose. In any case, in the absence of a national monument, visitors would surely understand that erecting a national monument in Germany was no simple matter; some in the party argue, more extremely, that such a project was necessarily doomed to failure on account of the danger of commemorating in a single space victims and perpetrators alike.<sup>109</sup> The Greens tasked the Bundestag, instead, with supporting regional and local initiatives to erect memorials “where history actually happened” in order to make evidence of that history apparent and available for quotidian experience.

The Greens also had mixed feelings about repurposing existing spaces. Although they had supported the Berlin Cultural Council’s plans for the Martin Gropius Building and requested to rent the space for a rotating exhibit of the visual arts,<sup>110</sup> they nevertheless remained critical of its use. They rejected, for example, the Berlin Senate’s plans to transform the Gropius Building into a site for a massive exhibition with art and historical installations in honor of the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Berlin’s founding. The Greens saw in the Senate’s plans to assemble an exhibition in which one could simply “stroll through history” [*Geschichte vorbeiflanieren*] the extraction of engagement from the everyday environments of everyday people’s lives.<sup>111</sup>

### C. The New Local: Politics, Culture, Space

The Greens preferred to make use of new, often local spaces whose novelty as sites of cultural production and experience meant that visitors were not locked into established norms of engagement and local citizens, rather than the state, shared the primary responsibility for their development. In this respect, the Greens were symptomatic of a general shift in local political agendas in Germany during the 1980s.

In addition to opposing centralized, bureaucratized political oligarchies at the state level, the Greens at the local level offered an alternative to the tradition of local political engagement dating from the years immediately following the Second World War. These “old local politics” were characterized by non-confrontational decision-making processes acceptable to occupying forces.

<sup>107</sup> AGG A-Düllmann, Gina, 64: Gedenkstätte, Bd. II, Pressemitteilung Nr. 579/85, “Nationale Gedenkstätte ist überflüssig,” 2.11.1984; Deutscher Bundestag, Drs. 10/99, Stenographische Berichte, 99. Sitzung, Bonn, Freitag, 9. November 1984, 7195D.

<sup>108</sup> Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, “Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor,” 11. Commissioned in the mid-nineteenth century by Ludwig I, Walhalla stood for the Greens as a paragon of disagreeable nationalist monumentality. The massive memorial in eastern Bavaria consolidated the history of famous personalities into a deliberately-constructed narrative of national heroism and strength.

<sup>109</sup> AGG A-Düllmann, Gina, 64: Gedenkstätte, Bd. II; Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 10/4521, Antrag der Fraktion Die Grünen, Geplante zentrale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte im Regierungsviertel in Bonn, 11.12.1985

<sup>110</sup> Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, “Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor.”

<sup>111</sup> Weißler, “Vom Umgang mit Geschichte,” 14-16. See also the following parliamentary documents, which present a number of other cultural political projects in old or traditional spaces about which the Greens had something to say: at the federal level Drucksachen 10/382, 10/785, 10/2236, 10/2237, 10/2262, 10/2279, and 10/2280; at the regional level in Berlin see 9/1674, and 9/1675.

The combination, first, of highly-educated local officials invested more in the juridical components of governance than in political and, second, their jurisdiction over issues that were largely unpolitical at best (the administration of kindergartens, for example) or downright boring at worst (drainage management) made for underinvested leadership. Restrictions on confrontational engagement with politics imposed by the occupying powers further dampened public interest in local issues.<sup>112</sup> The rise of New Social Movements in the 1970s and '80s, however, generated heightened expectations of local authorities and the affairs they governed. With the concurrent implementation of administrative reforms that made local organization easier, a new local political style gradually emerged.

To the Greens, these new local politics meant that local political actors should dictate local political structures. In the 1984 Bundestag debate on cultural politics, Green representative Walter Sauermilch criticized the exclusivity of contemporary conservative cultural politics because, he argued, they had lost sight of where real cultural meaning was generated, namely regionally and locally: “The government limits its cultural engagement,” he claimed, “to...the advancement of particularly important institutions, events or other activities through which the dignity of the German nation and state find expression,” that is, state-commissioned, state-administered institutes, events, and activities. This kind of a cultural understanding, he argued, threatened to destroy culture from below by eliminating any opportunity it had to exercise agency.<sup>113</sup> As a corrective to this problem, the Greens demanded the establishment of locally- and democratically-administered regional cultural centers whose physical proximity to the homes and workplaces of average citizens would bring conversations about cultural issues into their everyday lives, thereby reintegrating politics, including cultural politics, into social practice.<sup>114</sup>

Empowering local cultural agents meant, first, giving them space in which they could exercise that agency. Insofar as the success of cultural initiatives from below was predicated on self-organization and decentralization, argued Peter Finger, a member of the Berlin AL's cultural committee, in 1982, the availability of inexpensive spaces in which to assemble was an essential precondition for fostering their development as well as cultivating democratic culture and cultural democracy. In a budgetary meeting for cultural political issues, Finger demanded that the state create conditions—fiscal and physical—in which it was possible to allocate sufficient free space to these groups.<sup>115</sup> Using the language of postmaterialism, Sabine Weißler put the same objective in differently terms: the Greens recognized the importance of cultural self-determination [*Selbstbestimmung*] as the foundation of all *Kultur*. But they also recognized that they could not simply campaign on behalf of cultural self-determination; they had to carve out, fight for, and secure physical spaces where it could occur.<sup>116</sup> As an example, she highlighted socio-cultural centers—centers that offered opportunities to engage with local social and cultural affairs, for example youth outreach to the elderly or community theater productions—the creation and support of which the Greens have repeatedly pursued, though with mixed success.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Scharf. *The German Greens: Challenging the Consensus*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994, 28-38. On local political apathy during the postwar years, see Jutta Beyer and Everhard Holtmann. “‘Sachpolitik,’ Partizipation und Apathie in der Nachkriegsgesellschaft.” *Politische Kultur in Deutschland: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung*. Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Jakob Schissler, eds. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1987, 144-154.

<sup>113</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Drs. 10/99, Stenographische Berichte, 99. Sitzung, Bonn, Freitag, 9. November 1984; see also BArch (Koblenz) N1569/770, 241-278.

<sup>114</sup> Volker Gransow. “A Greening of German-German Relations?” *The Greens in West Germany: Organisation and Policy Making*. Eva Kolinsky, ed. Oxford: Berg, 1989, 149.

<sup>115</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag 161, 21. Sitzung, Haushaltsrede on Kulturpolitik, Peter Finger, 26.3.1982

<sup>116</sup> Weißler, “Grüne Selbstverständlichkeiten,” 23-24.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, the Greens' major interpellation [*große Anfrage*] in the Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus about cultural houses and socio-cultural centers in Berlin: Drucksachen 9/1343, which was debated on 20.10.1983. Or the Greens



The Greens also lobbied against attempts to consolidate small grassroots groups under umbrella organizations, which would threaten to curtail opportunities for the groups to shape their own cultural products autonomously by coordinating their activities or relocating them physically. In 1984, for example, Jürgen Kunze of the Berlin AL opposed the creation of the Cultural Foundation of the German States. What was intended as a source of funding and preservation efforts for the art and cultural artifacts that constituted Germany's cultural history Kunze understood as a potential instrument for the mass reproduction and celebration of state-sanctioned forms of cultural expression. He feared the foundation would overshadow and slowly stamp out the cultural creativity and agency of individual artists and their supporters.<sup>118</sup>

Yet, the Greens also recognized the potential pitfalls of programs that emphasized decentralization but that did not have the funding or personnel to ensure its full realization. On one hand, careless or inattentive advocacy of decentralized forms and sites of culture could result in their trivialization. Axel Stozenwaldt, a Green representative from the town of Hofheim, located on the far outskirts of Frankfurt, reported to the BAG-Kultur that uncritical advocacy of grassroots culture had inadvertently eclipsed interesting and innovative cultural projects in his administrative region by privileging only the simplest expressions of local culture: popular and folkloric culture.<sup>119</sup> Stozenwaldt also lamented the centripetal force of metropolitan culture, which drew cultural agents away from smaller cities and towns. From the opposite side of the country, in Lower Saxony, Heidemarie Dann, also spoke on behalf of those inconvenienced by an inconsistent politics of cultural decentralization. In her 1985 "Theses on Cultural Politics," Dann noted that residents outside of Germany's major metropolitan areas had been culturally disadvantaged. She called upon cultural institutions to attend to the cultural needs of all citizens, not just the urban ones.<sup>120</sup> The Greens, however, made no attempt to disguise their uneven application of cultural programs. The Berlin AL acknowledged explicitly in their 1985 campaign brochure the problem of "cultural deserts" and pledged, in the next governance cycle, to invest greater energy in spreading cultural opportunities more uniformly beyond the heart of the city.<sup>121</sup> Some, like Stozenwaldt, openly displayed their distaste for metropolitan culture. They called their fellow party members to set aside their investments in urban areas and to work, instead, for the benefit of cultural projects in rural and suburban locations. A true grassroots cultural program, Stozenwaldt suggested, would focus on celebrating the individual cultures and histories of all Germany's regions and, in doing so, would eliminate the dangers of cultural alienation that accompany the cultural offerings of a cosmopolitan urban space.<sup>122</sup> Maren-Grisebach was more tempered in her treatment of urban culture. Decentralization, she argued, need not mean ignoring art and culture in urban areas. Instead, she rejected the concentration of cultural centers and projects in cities and called instead for a broad dispersal of culture throughout both city and countryside. While early Green programs took steps in the right direction, she noted vaguely that the material preconditions for such an undertaking were still lacking.<sup>123</sup> Dann's solution was to kill two birds with one stone by servicing both urban and non-urban cultural needs: she advocated for greater investment in mobile cultural sites.<sup>124</sup>

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unsuccessful attempt in 1983-1984 to save the Kunst- und Kulturzentrum in Kreuzberg e.V. Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, "Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor."

<sup>118</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 134, Jürgen Kunze, AL für Demokratie und Umweltschutz Berlin, 30.5.1984.

<sup>119</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 177-179, Axel Stozenwaldt, Protokoll der BAG-Kultur von 8.9-9.9.85, 27.9.1985.

<sup>120</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 52-53, Heidemarie Dann, "Thesen zur Kulturpolitik. 14.1.1985.

<sup>121</sup> "Wahlprogramm - Kultur." *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985, 38-39; alternately, 236-237 in the 1985 Wahlprogramm itself.

<sup>122</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 177-179, Axel Stozenwaldt, Protokoll der BAG-Kultur von 8.9-9.9.85, 27.9.1985

<sup>123</sup> Maren-Grisebach, *Philosophie der Grünen*, 134

<sup>124</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 52-53, Heidemarie Dann, "Thesen zur Kulturpolitik. 14.1.1985

Some have argued, more cynically, that the Greens' focus on decentralized cultural space and action "on the ground" was pragmatic. Beneath the slogan "think globally, act locally," which had become a rallying point for Green politicians and their constituents alike,<sup>125</sup> beneath the attempt to show that the national and even the international were deeply connected to the regional and local,<sup>126</sup> decentralization, some claimed, was really just a practical measure to lessen the imposing amount of bureaucratic paperwork confronting a small, inexperienced political party.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, decentralized cultural work was hardly the path of least resistance, and despite their efforts, the Greens frequently met failure. In late-1982, their attempts to ramp up community cultural projects stagnated, as did subsequent efforts to encourage local, alternative cultural leaders to work together with the leaders of established cultural institutions.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps postmaterialism had gotten the best of them. German political scientist Hans-Joachim Veen, who argued for understanding the Greens as a milieu party,<sup>129</sup> criticized the early Green milieu for the way it had "become increasingly inward-looking." Demands "for a radical change of the system," he argued, had been displaced by a growing "apathy towards anything that [occurred] outside of their own personal environment."<sup>130</sup> Political scientists and specialists on the Greens, E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker agreed, suggesting that Green programs should have helped to "integrate the demands and identities of heterogeneous activists," but because of the Greens' navel-gazing self-interest, they only led more to efforts that reflected "the evolving balance of power among ideological subgroups more than the outcome of creative efforts to grapple with real world problems."<sup>131</sup>

Despite these failures as well as the party's internal antagonism, grounded in fundamentally different cultural political agendas, the party nevertheless understood culture as precisely the way forward. They recognized that capitalism and its associated culture industry alienated and stifled human creativity. As a solution, BAG-Kultur member Klaus Becker pointed to party's common desire to occupy the world in a new and completely different way through reimagined, revitalized social and political institutions.<sup>132</sup> A free culture—which none of the Green cultural factions

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, Volker Hauff. *Global denken, lokal handeln: ein politisches Fazit*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992. Also Lutz Mez. "Von den Bürgerinitiativen zu den Grünen: zur Entstehungsgeschichte der 'Wahlalternativen' in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland." *Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Roland Roth, Dieter Rucht, and Sabine Berthold, ed. Frankfurt: Campus, 1987, 263–76; Karl-Werner Brand. *Neue soziale Bewegungen: Entstehung, Funktion und Perspektive neuer Protestpotentiale: eine Zwischenbilanz*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982; Dieter Rucht. *Von Wyl nach Gorbelen: Bürger gegen Atomprogramm und nukleare Entsorgung*. München: Beck, 1980.

<sup>126</sup> Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak. *Green Politics: The Global Promise*. New York: Dutton, 1984.

<sup>127</sup> Scharf, *The German Greens*; see also Hauff, *Global denken-lokal handeln*, 108-113.

<sup>128</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 127-133, Hajo Cornel, "Zwei Jahre AL - Kulturpolitik - Eine Bilanz," 7.1983. Also Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste, "Der Kulturbereich der Alternativen Liste stellt vor."

<sup>129</sup> On the concept of 'social milieu' as politically integrative, Veen looked to German sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius who was, in turn, inspired by the work of sociologists Heinz Marr and Sigmund Neumann from the 1920s. Marr and Neumann understood an integrated "social milieu" as the community consisting of large groups across social, economic and ideological divides brought together by political parties. M. Rainer Lepsius later defined these social milieu through four categories: conservative, liberal, Catholic, and socialist or social. Veen described the political party as the 'political action committee' of the social milieu. See Veen, "The Greens as a Milieu Party," 31. See also M. Rainer Lepsius. "Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur. Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft." *Deutsche Parteien vor 1918*. Gerhard A. Ritter, ed. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1973.

<sup>130</sup> Veen, "The Greens as a Milieu Party," 50-51, 53.

<sup>131</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 126. See also Rudolf van Hüllen. *Ideologie und Machtkampf bei den Grünen. Untersuchung zur programmatischen und innerorganisatorischen Entwicklung einer deutschen "Bewegungspartei."* Bonn: Bouvier, 1990.

<sup>132</sup> Though the party remained divided over the particulars of its cultural program, they agreed in their at least moderate opposition to the cultural politics of advanced capitalist society. For a concise statement of the two major camps, see, on one hand, the summary by eco-liberal Hajo Cornel. "Rahmenbedingungen für eine Kultur im Widerspruch," 18-22. On the other, see the statement from eco-socialist C. J. Schröder. "Kunst als Klassenkampf oder Kultur für Alle? Der

opposed—would expose society to the diversity of human creativity and initiate the creation of these institutions. They understood a commitment to nurturing that creativity, whatever disagreements might accompany it, as preserving for the party a common rallying point. Cultural politics, however fraught, offered one of the few good chances to work against the fracturing and collapse of the party and to reinvigorate the optimism of the Green constituency.<sup>133</sup>

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Richtungsstreit in der grün-alternativen Kulturpolitik.” *grüner basisdienst* 3 (1985): 23-27; C. J. Schröder. “Drei Fallen einer grün-alternativen Kulturpolitik” *Kultur und Gesellschaft* 4 (1984).

<sup>133</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 192-193, Klaus W. Becker, BAG Kultur, “Antrag an die Fraktion: Ein Votum für die Kultur,” 28.9.1985.

## **PART TWO**

### **Crises of Purpose and the Pursuit of a Sustainable Culture**

## CHAPTER 4

### The Cultural Politics of Sustainability: The German Green Party, 1985-1990

*“You don’t save a dying forest by building a botanical garden in it.”*

-Bruno Schindler, Architect, 1985

The mid-1980s presented to the Greens a series of obstacles that eliminated straightforward ecological activism as a sufficiently robust platform for retaining the attention of their constituency. After other political parties added environmentalist components to their programs, the Greens lost their *raison d’être*, and excitement over the Greens’ meteoric rise to power began to wane. In order to retain their still precarious position in parliament, some Green party members began to focus on carving a new space for themselves in Germany’s existing political landscape. They turned to culture as a lens through which to reenvision what it meant to be “Green.” Without conspicuously marshaling the language of utopia, they nevertheless accepted its paradox—both perfection and non-existence—and mobilized this tension to articulate a new definition for their political objective. A “Green” Germany, they determined, was not a static product that simply did or did not exist. Being “Green” involved, rather, the commitment to engaging in a continual process of becoming “Green.” They were driven by a commitment to occupying the environment—conceived capaciously as the composite of natural, built, and social environments—in a way that facilitated the practice of radical local grassroots democracy. Encouraging others to join in this commitment involved cultivating a new cultural sensibility. The party consciously regarded their idealized objectives not as blind or naïve, but as calculated and measured. Theirs was not a totalizing utopian project, but a set of modest utopian goals oriented broadly around the idea of sustainability, an idea concerned with means more than ends.

The explanation of why and how the Greens pursued this utopian project of creating a sustainable culture weaves together two narratives. The first recounts how the Greens plunged into a crisis of purpose right as their first major wave of success crested and became prominent players on the German political stage. By the mid-1980s, the Greens had solidly crossed the five-percent voting threshold required to win representation in federal parliament. This victory, however, sent the group into a tailspin as their mode of existence shifted from protest to power politics. As an extraparliamentary protest organization, the Greens had understood their project as a dogged and obstinate crusade for robust environmental policies grounded in radical grassroots activism. Even after ascension into parliament, some party members held on to this approach. The fundamentalists, referred to colloquially as the “Fundis,” favored an all-or-nothing environmental dogmatism, arguing that any compromise ultimately meant failure. But these tactics generally proved incompatible with the flexibility, coalitioning, and collaboration required for success in parliament. The realists or “Realos,” in contrast to their rigidly principled counterparts, argued that the desire to make real headway on Germany’s ecological program required cooperation with, and likely some degree of concession to, other larger parties. Disagreement within the party over which of these practices to prioritize fueled distracting factionalism. Already weakened from within, the party sustained a major blow as the normalization of the environmental agenda threatened to turn the Greens into a “stinking normal party.”<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the mid-1980s environmentalism became a buzzword in the platforms of every major political party. Seen from one angle as the unequivocal success of the Green Party, from another, this broad embrace of ecological consciousness seemed to indicate the

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<sup>1</sup> On the Greens’ fears of becoming “*stinknormal*,” see Wolf-Dieter Hansenclever. “Die Grünen sind eine stinknormale Partei geworden.” *Die Grünen: 10 bewegte Jahre*. Michael Schroeren, ed. Wien: Ueberreuter, 1990. Green Bundestag representative and later vice president of the Bundestag Antje Vollmer also discussed the fear of normalization. See

party's obsolescence. Its original motivation—namely, the absence of robust environmental policies in Germany—had dissipated. What else was left for a party seen colloquially as a single-issue lobby group? Indeed, the Greens foundered with great spectacle in 1990 as their unwillingness to endorse the reunification of East and West Germany resulted in a significant electoral loss and their first exclusion from the Bundestag since their 1983 victory in the federal election shocked the German political system.

While this very publically-negotiated crisis ripped through the party, however, the Greens simultaneously cultivated a subtler contribution to German society. Away from the spotlight of stricter, more conspicuous environmental policies, they formulated what it meant to marshal a “Green” culture. In the wake of both party-wide and Bundestag debates on the status of culture and cultural politics in Germany and building on the ad hoc, disorganized, but passionate engagement with culture of their earliest years, the Greens reimagined grassroots democracy by reimagining the methods and media of grassroots cultural expression. At its heart lay a collective optimism, creativity, and mobilization of hope. By discussing two key projects in which the Greens invested considerable time and public engagement, this chapter takes on its second task, namely to identify the content and methodology of this newly-defined Green cultural idea in practice. Though the Greens left an imprint on cultural projects large and small during the last half of the 1980s, two stand out for the sustained critical engagement they saw from the party. The Greens supported the founding and development of the Active Museum in Berlin and, by contrast, vehemently rejected the establishment of the German Historical Museum in the same city. Observed together, these two projects highlight the central features of this new Green culture, which called into question the topography, temporality, and agency of traditional cultural practices in Germany. The Greens, first, pulled cultural projects away from the city center and placed them *in situ*, amid the pulse of everyday German life. They brought these cultural practices into the timeframe of daily life by making them mundane and ongoing rather than bracketing them from everydayness as finite and exceptional moments. Finally, the Greens aimed to alter Germany's primary cultural agency. In place of state and municipal authorities, the party wanted to make average citizens culture's principle mediators. The Greens saw these three innovations as essential preconditions for creating a radical grassroots democratic culture that would be self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and adaptable.

## I. The Green Commitment to Hope

### A. The Utopian Politics of Sustainability

Historian Samuel Moyn has argued that the global project of human rights, which gained real traction beginning in the 1970s, has offered “the most inspiring mass utopianism Westerners have had before them in recent decades.”<sup>2</sup> It straddles catastrophe prevention and utopian construction, aiming both to advance a minimalist ethics that would end the large-scale human tragedies that have been an unfortunately reliable feature of human history and to implement a maximalist political program that would “[give] people the freedom and capacity to develop their lives and the world.”<sup>3</sup> When he dubs this program of human rights the “last utopia” of the twentieth century, however, Moyn overlooks another major utopian enterprise that also won global favor over the last decades of the twentieth century: the project of sustainability. Despite some disagreement over the precise meaning of sustainable development, Israeli architectural scholar Yosef Jabareen stresses that the concept of sustainability privileges a vision for a new society in which “people live and flourish in

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Moyn. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 225-227.

harmony with nature.”<sup>4</sup> Using the definition established in the 1987 report produced by the World Commission on Environment and Development, the so-called Brundtland Commission of the United Nations, sustainability clearly shared foundational similarities with previous utopian projects. The Brundtland Commission called for the implementation of a set of social, political, economic, and environmental practices that would sustain “human progress not just in a few places for a few years, but for the entire planet into the distant future.” They capitalized on what they understood as humanity’s ability “to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The commission rejected the inevitability of widespread poverty and called for more effective management of and improvements to “technology and social organization...to make way for a new era of economic growth.” They set ambitious goals for this growth, which they argued must meet the basic needs of all humanity and “[extend] to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life.” As such, they stressed the importance of equitable resource distribution, down to the poorest in developing nations. The commission called for the implementation of “political systems that secure effective citizen participation in decision-making,” both domestically and internationally and demanded the synchronization of population size and growth “with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem.”<sup>5</sup> Above all, however, the commission grounded its ambitions in hope, a word that appears no fewer than twenty-six times in its report. Lamenting society’s departure from the optimism and progress they saw in the 1960s—a time, commission members argued, defined by its “hope for a braver new world, and for progressive international ideas”<sup>6</sup>—the commission understood itself as standing at the edge of the grave the world had prepared for hope over the preceding fifty years. They quoted Cacilda Lanuza of the Brazilian Ecological Movement, who, in 1985, claimed that the world’s “greatest crime” would be to permit the death of hope, the death of a generation’s faith in the future, and the chance to live it to the fullest of their abilities.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, the commission suggested, hope had not yet been extinguished;<sup>8</sup> its flame only need be rekindled. They called for a “new era of international cooperation based on the premise that every human being,” present and future, “has the right to life, and to a decent life,” and they expressed their confidence in the capacity of the international community to “rise...to the challenge of securing sustainable human progress.”<sup>9</sup>

An international body of scholarship has recognized the utopian resonance of this global project of sustainable development. British political scientist and Green Party candidate Andrew Dobson, for example, has written at length about the reliance of the environmental movement upon utopian visions of possibilities for a radically different world, while Dutch political scientist Marius

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<sup>4</sup> Yosef Jabareen. “A New Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Development.” *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 10:2 (1 April 2008): 179, 186.

<sup>5</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development. *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*, 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>, 13, 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, 6

<sup>7</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, 246.

<sup>8</sup> As evidence of the success and endurance of hope, the commission pointed to a host of signs they interpreted as heartening: “infant mortality is falling; human life expectancy is increasing; the proportion of the world’s adults who can read and write is climbing; the proportion of children starting school is rising; and global food production increases faster than the population grows.” Further, it noted that “[t]hroughout much of the world, children born today can expect to live longer and be better educated than their parents. In many parts, the new-born can also expect to attain a higher standard of living in a wider sense. Such progress provides hope as we contemplate the improvements still needed, and also as we face our failures to make this Earth a safer and sounder home for us and for those who are to come.” World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, 11-12, 28

<sup>9</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, 29, 39

de Geus has stressed that a “utopian ecological imagination” fuels the pursuit of an ecologically responsible society.<sup>10</sup> Israeli Jabareen highlights that the ecological utopia of sustainability does not limit its focus to environmental concerns. It readily incorporates “political and social concepts such as solidarity, spirituality, and the equal allocation of resources.”<sup>11</sup> Though Belgian geographer Marc Antrop recognizes in sustainability a new framework for increasing quality of life on a global scale, he rejects qualifying it as utopian largely on account of utopia’s conventional associations with the foolish, the naive, and the unrealizable: he argues that the project of global sustainability is, by contrast, quite viable.<sup>12</sup> To correct for utopia’s bad associations, Patrik Baard, a Swedish doctoral student in environmental philosophy, has offered up in his dissertation a new terminology to describe the goals of sustainable development. They are, he suggests, “cautiously utopian:” utopian in that they have long-term desirable environmental, economic, and social consequences; cautious in that they “are believed, but not certain, to be achievable and to remain desirable, but are open to future adjustments due to changing desires” or other circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

This utopia of sustainability became the fulcrum of the German Green Party’s political program as they pursued a revitalized, world-altering political radicalism in practice. Soon, however, the established parties began to espouse their own programs of sustainable politics, which forced the Greens to redefine their relationship to sustainability in order to maintain their distinctive appeal.

### **B. Proprietary Sustainability: The Rise and Fall of a Uniquely Green Political Ideal**

In 1983, German political scientist Joachim Raschke published an article describing the prevalent sentiment that Germany’s established political parties—at that time, the conservative Christian Democratic Union (allied with the Christian Socialist Union of southern Germany, abbreviated together as the CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the classical liberals, the Free Democratic Party (FDP)—had lost touch with the times.<sup>14</sup> The young Green Party capitalized on these weaknesses. Their first few years on the political stage won them the reputation of the “unruly newcomers,” set on destabilizing the indispensable postwar order that had pulled Germany out of the shadows of National Socialism, economic insolvency, and physical ruin onto the well-lit elite international diplomatic stage of the Western power bloc. The Green political experiment challenged both the structure and content of the conventional German party apparatus. They implemented, for example, a two-year rotation principle for all office-holders that pulled Green representatives out of office and substituted new ones in their place just when they had begun to figure out how to function in parliament. And besides the imperative mandate, which confined elected officials to following the express will of their constituents rather than giving them interpretive license, the Greens imposed a host of additional strictures on their representatives, among the most public of which were a series of stringent gender quotas and rules aimed at evening out a longstanding parliamentary gender imbalance.<sup>15</sup> If the party’s confident demands for more

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Dobson. *Green Political Thought*. London: Routledge, 2000, 206-207; Marius de Geus. *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society*. Utrecht: International Books, 1999, 260.

<sup>11</sup> Jabareen, “A New Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Development,” 189

<sup>12</sup> Marc Antrop. “Sustainable Landscapes: Contradiction, Fiction or Utopia?” *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 75:3–4 (15 March 2006): 187–197

<sup>13</sup> Patrik Baard and Karin Edvardsson Björnberg. “Cautious Utopias: Environmental Goal-Setting with Long Time Frames.” *Sustainable Goals: Feasible Paths to Desirable Long-Term Futures*. Stockholm: KTH Royal Institute of Technology, 2014. See also the forthcoming article, the abstract of which was also quoted in Patrik Baard and Karin Edvardsson Björnberg. “Cautious Utopias: Environmental Goal-Setting with Long Time Frames.” *Ethics, Policy and Environment*, forthcoming 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Joachim Raschke, “Jenseits der Volkspartei.” *Das Argument*, 25:137 (1983): 54–64.

<sup>15</sup> In this measure, the Greens proved quite successful. In the first four years of the party’s existence, their Bundestag delegation averaged approximately one third female. In the last three years of the decade, that number jumped, on



women in politics did not ruffle their opponents, their calls for a shortened thirty-five-hour work week amid uncomfortably high unemployment rates or their eagerness to disregard parliamentary codes of dress and behavior likely did.<sup>16</sup> Above all, the Greens resolved to wrest political agency from the centralized bureaucratic oligarchy of the German Federal Parliament, where it had been carefully rehabilitated since the fall of Hitler, and place it instead back into the hands of the German masses in the form of functional grassroots democratic practices [*Basisdemokratie*].

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Greens had found their strength in exploiting the traditional parties' inability to convince their electorate that they could "radically...tackle new problems without undermining the gains of the past."<sup>17</sup> This political experiment between protest movement and political party quickly attracted sympathizers,<sup>18</sup> contributing to one of the worst defeats that their primary competitors—the SPD—had seen in the postwar period.<sup>19</sup> A mere half-decade since their official formation, the Greens rode atop an imposing wave of success. By the mid-1980s, however, the sun had quickly begun to set on the party's easy glory days. The factionalism that had developed in the first half of the decade certainly took its toll, restricting the party's ability to present a united and convincing front in parliament. The more formidable predicament, however, came in the form of the party's increasing irrelevance with the broad normalization of the Greens' political agenda. The Green environmentalist platform, by identifying an exigent but widely ignored national problem, had originally given the party gravitas on the political stage and distinguished them from the established parties, so the party understood the loss of the uniqueness of its ecological agenda to be a devastating one.

Environmental responsiveness had, admittedly, been creeping into the programs of the traditional parties since the late 1970s.<sup>20</sup> The Social Democrats, for example, adopted the Greens'

average, to 50%. Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 75-79. The ramifications of the Green lobby for gender equality can be seen across the German federal parliament. In 1980, at the time of the party's founding, the participation of women in the Bundestag had reached an unimpressive 8.5%: not the highest since the end of the Second World War (9.2% in 1957), though not also the lowest (5.8% in 1972). By 1990, that number had risen to 20.5% and would climb by an additional 12.8% over the next twelve years. See Beate Hoecker and Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung. "Frauen in Der Politik - Dossier Frauen," November 5, 2009. [http://www.bpb.de/themen/TAHKRA,0,Frauen\\_in\\_der\\_Politik.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/TAHKRA,0,Frauen_in_der_Politik.html).

<sup>16</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 2. For a snapshot of this ongoing debate, see the relatively recent article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: "Ärger um die Kleiderordnung im Bundestag: Nur ohne meine Krawatte." <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/aerger-um-die-kleiderordnung-im-bundestag-nur-ohne-meine-krawatte-1.1061031>.

<sup>17</sup> Elim Papadakis. "Green issues and other parties: Themenklau or new flexibility?" *The Greens in West Germany: Organisation and Policy Making*. Eva Kolinsky, ed. New York: Berg, 1989, 65-67. See also Karl Mannheim. "Conservative Thought." *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953, 74-164.

<sup>18</sup> In 1983, the Greens cleared the 5% threshold required to gain representation in parliament with a margin of .6%, which gave them 27 seats in the Bundestag. A year later, they also performed well in the elections for the European Parliament, winning 8.2%. In the next elections to the European Parliament in 1989, they increased their winnings by a small margin to 8.4%. Both elections won them seven seats in the European Parliament. Between 1983 and 1989, the Greens crossed the 5% threshold and won seats in many of the state parliaments: in 1983, 5.9% in Hessen (7 seats) and 5.4% in Bremen (5 seats); in 1984, 8% in Baden-Württemberg (9 seats); in 1985, 10.6% in Berlin (15 seats); in 1986, 7.1 in Lower Saxony (11 seats), 7.5% in Bavaria (15 seats), and 10.4 in Hamburg (13 seats); in 1987, 9.4% in Hessen (10 seats), 7% in Hamburg (8 seats), 5.9% in Rheinland-Pfalz (5 seats), 10.2% in Bremen (10 seats); in 1988 7.9% in Baden-Württemberg (10 seats); and in 1989, 11.8% in Berlin (17 seats). Political scientists E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker have argued that the 5% rule—and the Greens' need to overcome it in order to establish their parliamentary presence—became the "glue" that held the party together despite its internal divisions. See Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 5

<sup>19</sup> Since the beginning of the 1980s, the SPD had lost 32 seats in the Bundestag, which marked a total loss of 44 seats since 1972, the height of their federal elections returns, when they won 230 Bundestag seats. They also lost their coalitioning partner, the Free Democrats, who paired with the CDU.

<sup>20</sup> Papadakis, "Green issues and other parties," 72-77.

anti-nuclear stance by joining them in rejecting NATO's Double-Track Decision, which threatened to introduce more nuclear weapons into Western Europe,<sup>21</sup> and by the latter half of the 1980s, organized labor largely embraced the compatibility of economic development and ecology.<sup>22</sup> And historians Andrei Markovits and Philip Gorski have noted that “German industry joined the country’s very costly recycling system not because it was compelled to do so by legislation, but because it [was] operating in a social environment with a fundamentally changed public consciousness which demands ecological vigilance.”<sup>23</sup> By the middle of the decade, crucial components of Green environmentalism had been absorbed by all major political parties.<sup>24</sup> This process of institutionalizing the Green ecological program—the “greening” of the German political system—was symbolized in the meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development between 1983 to 1987, whose only delegate from the Federal Republic was Volker Hauff, a Social Democrat, not a Green.<sup>25</sup> Despite the great irony that the Greens would take umbrage when the rest of Germany joined them in recognizing the exigency of environmentalism, they nevertheless criticized the uptake of their program by the established parties, referring to this practice derisively as “issue theft” or *Themenklau*.<sup>26</sup> Their closest competitors, the SPD, for example, embraced a program for strengthening business and lowering unemployment that emphasized a small, manageable, decentralized and thus ecologically-sensitive economy.<sup>27</sup> In 1986, the SPD party program moved even nearer the Greens in their lobby for increases to “quality of life” through increased attention to environmental damage, over-centralization, monopolies, social problems, destruction of employment, opposition to nuclear energy, critical use of technology, and equal representation of women in the Bundestag – all prominent issues in the Green party program. Though some have interpreted the Right’s correlate engagement with the these “new politics” as “image engineering,” rhetorical, and merely symbolic, the CDU/CSU’s position as the political underdog during the thirteen year social-liberal coalition government between 1969 and 1982 prompted it to recast its openness to many of these programs.<sup>28</sup> Critiques, largely from within the Greens, alleged that, in this context, they had become “stinking normal.”

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<sup>21</sup> Matthias Kaelberer. “The Emergence of Green Parties in Western Europe.” *Comparative Politics* 25:2 (1 January 1993): 240. See also Werner Hülsberg. *The German Greens: A Social and Political Profile*. New York: Verso, 1988; Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski. *The German Left: Red, Green and beyond*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, chs. 1-4.

<sup>22</sup> Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 270.

<sup>23</sup> Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 272. On the broad political recognition of the urgency of environmental issues, including ecological responsibility and the relationship between sustainability and democracy, see Volker Hauff. *Global denken-lokal handeln: ein politisches Fazit*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992, especially 139-162

<sup>24</sup> Kaelberer, “The Emergence of Green Parties in Western Europe,” 238. See also Papadakis, “Green issues and other parties.” For a good timeline of the Greens’ descent into crisis, see Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 191-192.

<sup>25</sup> On Hauff’s environmental political agendas, see Hauff’s forward to the German-language publication of the report from the meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Volker Hauff and World Commission on Environment and Development. *Unsere gemeinsame Zukunft: der Brundtland-Bericht der Weltkommission für Umwelt und Entwicklung*. Greven: Eggenkamp, 1987, xi-xvii.

<sup>26</sup> On *Themenklau*, see Papadakis, “Green issues and other parties,” 61-85.

<sup>27</sup> Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 205-208; Papadakis, “Green issues and other parties,” 63. See also SPD. *Frieden mit der Natur, Für eine umweltverträgliche Industriegesellschaft, beschlossen auf dem Bundesparteitag, Essen*. Bonn: SPD, 1984, 2; SPD. *Irsee Draft of New SPD Manifesto*. Bonn: SPD, 1986, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Papadakis, “Green issues and other parties,” 67-69. See also Thomas Poguntke. “New Politics and Party Systems: The Emergency of a New Type of Party?” *West European Politics* 10:1, 1986, 82; Claus Offe. “New Social Movements: Changing the Boundaries of Institutional Politics,” *Social Research* 52:4 (1985): 860.

From one vantage point, then, the Greens met great success over the course of the 1980s. Indeed, they came to serve as a model for Green Parties internationally.<sup>29</sup> But these Green victories were also bittersweet: “In a sense, they had rendered all other parties ‘green’... Virtually all issues...had been appropriated by all West German parties in the course of the 1980s. The most convincing evidence for the Greens’ success was furnished by the party’s loss of its uniqueness.”<sup>30</sup>

### C. A Culture of Hope: The Alternative Alternative

For a group that occupied the liminal space between protest organization and political party, this loss of both uniqueness and much of the political upper hand it had worked so hard to win threatened to cripple the party and to snuff out its opportunity to implement radical change in West Germany. As their utopia of sustainability lost its singularity on the political stage, the Greens began to reinvest their energies in the arena of culture as an alternative platform for realizing their vision for sustainable Green living in Germany. Culture proved a promising medium for radicalism; after all, Susan Buck-Morss explains, the products of cultural expression “provide a sensual, cognitive experience that is capable of resisting abusive power’s self-justification.”<sup>31</sup> The Greens began to realize that culture could serve just as well as politics as a mediator for the Green catechism of a sustainable society against the internalized hegemony of post-industrial capitalist society.<sup>32</sup> Culture proved also a convenient choice: cultural politics, both conceptually and in practice, occupied something of a political safe zone in West Germany in the 1980s. Cultural projects tended not to receive the same scrutiny as policymaking in other fields. With the CDU/CSU occupying nearly half the seats in the Bundestag in 1984, when party chair Alfred Dregger called for artists and other cultural producers to “respect the boundaries between art and politics” and promised that politicians would do likewise,<sup>33</sup> he spoke volumes about the Bundestag’s general posture toward cultural politics: parliament was a place to deal with weighty political issues; cultural concerns, by and large, did not count among these. When they did, they were handled on an ad hoc basis rather than a sustainable one, as the Greens would argue. One sociologist sympathetic to the Green agenda described German cultural politics of the 1980s as susceptible to the kinds of euphemisms that disguised and thus promoted the impulses of capitalism: the commercialization of culture promoted its consumption among a wider audience but failed to actually democratize it.<sup>34</sup>

Precisely because it took a backseat to more exigent political issues like the elimination of nuclear energy, participation in NATO, and the relationship of West to East Germany, cultural politics became a crucial experimental space in which the Greens could work out the ideal content and long-term methodology of the “Green” way of being in the world. Unlike many of the other items on the Green agenda, the Greens pushed for seemingly modest changes in the arena of

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<sup>29</sup> E. Gene Frankland. “The Evolution of the Greens in Germany: From Amateurism to Professionalism.” *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-roots Democracy?* E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, and Benoit Rihoux, eds. Surrey: Ashgate, 2008, 19

<sup>30</sup> Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 236

<sup>31</sup> Susan Buck-Morss. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000, 101

<sup>32</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 3-7, Claudia Siede, Redeentwurf zur kulturpolitischen Debatte im Deutschen Bundestag am 31.10.90, 27.10.1990.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Fischer. “Schlechtgemachte Bilder, schlechtgemachtes Fernsehen, schlechtgeführte Ehen, ...’ Auf den Spuren grüner Kulturpolitik am Beispiel der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.” *Nur kein Rhabarber! Auseinandersetzungen mit grüner Politik in Österreich*. Karl Lind, ed. Wien: Grün-Alternativ Verlags, 1988, 127

<sup>34</sup> Matthias Greffrath. “Die misbrauchte Kraft des Schönen. Auf dem Weg in die ‘Kulturgesellschaft.’” *Die Zeit* 48, 25 November 1988, Feuilleton, 65.

culture.<sup>35</sup> They wanted to move cultural projects into different physical spaces within German society. They wanted to shift the timetables on which Germans engaged with these projects. And they wanted to alter the kinds of opportunities Germans were given to participate in these projects. Though these modifications were relatively subtle, their implications were far reaching. They helped the Greens to visualize for the rest of Germany “a democratic future beyond ‘the capitalist horizon’” that would “make hope practical,”—that is, something ones practices—“rather than despair convincing.”<sup>36</sup>

#### *The Method of Green Cultural Sustainability*

Unlike the remainder of their political agenda, which revolved around the party’s four content-based conceptual pillars of ecological responsibility, social justice, grassroots democracy, and nonviolence, Green culture found its direction in three different and unspoken methodological pillars: spatial decentralization, quotidian temporalities, and radical democratic agency.

For a party first rooted in an ecological agenda, which privileged the space of the natural world, it is no wonder that their cultural program would place great emphasis on physical space. Space, as the “concrete visual field” of society’s imagination, has often been seen as central to radical social renewal.<sup>37</sup> As cultural geographer David Pinder has noted, space provides the foundation for “ordered, harmonious societies.... In the will to transformation, issues of space are privileged in the assumption that if these are sorted out then social matters will follow.”<sup>38</sup> The Greens chose as the spatial foundation of their cultural program a decentralized topography whose localization eliminated the pressures and powerlessness of submitting to centralized administrative oversight and thus made room for the kind of playful creativity [*Spielraum*] these postmaterialist politicians celebrated.<sup>39</sup> Insofar as the Greens conceived of culture as touching on humanity’s entire mode of being, serving as a kind of protective barrier that mediates between individuals and their pure environment, realizing this decentralized cultural topography, however, was no small task.<sup>40</sup> It required that they embed cultural practices in even the most mundane operations of society; engagement in a Green cultural project should not, they believed, constitute an exceptional part of everyday life. As such, Greens stressed spaces of democratic access—those whose topographies did not limit participation by, say, charging an access fee, for example—as well as spaces of “authenticity”—that is, spaces that possessed actual, active or historical meaning for real communities, past or present, rather than spaces whose meaning derived from the forced reassembly or reproduction of historical importance.<sup>41</sup> The Greens generally, though not dogmatically,

<sup>35</sup> While the changes they pursued were modest, they pursued them with relative consistency. The Berlin Greens [*Alternative Liste für Demokratie und Umweltschutz*], for example, issued sixty-five minor inquiries (interpellations or *Anfragen*) on the theme of cultural politics during the election period running from 1985-1989. That amounts to one inquiry every other time the Berlin Senate met for a plenary session. BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 120-123, *Alternative Liste, Zum Thema: Kultur*, 1989

<sup>36</sup> Dennis Soron. “Back to the Future: The Contemporary Left and the Politics of Utopia.” *Labour/Le Travail* 47 (1 April 2001): 216

<sup>37</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 12

<sup>38</sup> David Pinder. “In Defence of Utopian Urbanism: Imagining Cities after the ‘End of Utopia.’” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 84, no. 3/4 (1 January 2002): 233.

<sup>39</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 24-26, of Kulturbüro Claudia Siede on behalf of Antje Voller, *Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Kultur und Ökologie - Plädoyer für eine Neubewertung,”* 22.1.1990.

<sup>40</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 310-324, “Kommunale Kulturpolitik,” LAG Kommunalpolitik, LAG Kultur, 15.9.1987.

<sup>41</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 67-69, Udo Knapp, Sabine Weißler, Christiane Zieseke, “Warum wollen die Herren Kohl, Hassemer, Momper, Momsen, Fichter und Hoffmann-Axthelm Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum einsperren?” 1.9.1985. See also BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417.

preferred to keep their cultural projects away from the city center and to bring them, instead, to the heart of everyday local neighborhoods, into boring or “normal” spaces rather than famous ones. Such “authenticity of space”, they argued, permitted a kind of “emotional access” that the Greens understood as crucial to the internalization of the cultural messages those spaces mediated.<sup>42</sup>

Locating cultural projects in an ideal physical space was, however, insufficient, to constitute a robust Green program. As Buck-Morss has noted, social life operates within a plurality of temporal layers.<sup>43</sup> The Greens recognized that the timeframe over which their program unfolded mattered as much as the space it occupied and put temporality, in addition to topography, in the service of their radical cultural agenda. The Greens privileged the mundane process of cultural production in the mundane moments of everyday life, rather than in a temporality of exceptionalism.<sup>44</sup>

Of course a Green democracy could not exist without its demos. Antje Vollmer, Green party cultural speaker and leader of the party’s moderate wing, was fond of arguing that democracy without popular participation is like ecology without nature.<sup>45</sup> Green culture needed to counteract the paradoxical reality that political regimes that aim to rule in the name of the masses tend to implement power structures that operate outside of the people’s control. The mechanisms for popular cultural participation that Vollmer envisioned included, among others, extensive decision-making opportunities for German citizens, which she argued would cultivate the civic courage necessary to stand up to the hegemony of parliamentary oligarchy, and the radically democratic delegation of the administration of power.<sup>46</sup> Public intellectual and Green cultural scholar Micha Brumlik echoed Vollmer, arguing that

the task of a democratic art and cultural-political program must be to weave together general political debate and the discourse of artistic experts. Ideally, all citizens of a community should be in a position to decide, according to aesthetic criteria, how to advance the production, reception, and communication of public art. The best way to generate thoughtful and aesthetically-cultivated citizens is for those citizens to participate directly in political and aesthetic debates that deal with the development of their communities and environments.<sup>47</sup>

Cultural engagement, thus, became a three-part catechism for “Green” living that aimed to balance structure and openness sufficient to sustain its promise across time and space. It was, in short, utopian.

### *A Modest Utopia*

The Greens, over the second half of the 1980s, became increasingly conscious of the utopian quality of their relationship to and goals for culture. Sometimes they used the language of “utopia” explicitly. In Kassel, for example—home to documenta, one of the most important international art exhibitions in the world—the city’s Green representatives saw the exhibition as an opportunity to

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<sup>42</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Protokoll der 1. Sitzung der Konzeptgruppe Verein Aktives Museums, 27.8.1983.

<sup>43</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 66-67

<sup>44</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 55-62, Karlheinz Koinegg, Claudia Seide, Kulturbüro Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Ein Leben für die Kartoffel. Grüne, Kunst, und Grünenkunst,” 8.1989.

<sup>45</sup> Antje Vollmer. “Die Grünen brauchen eine Kulturrevolution. Die Grünen-Bundestagsabgeordnete Antje Vollmer über die Schwierigkeiten ihrer Partei.” *Der Spiegel*, March 14, 1988.

<sup>46</sup> Vollmer, “Die Grünen brauchen eine Kulturrevolution.

<sup>47</sup> Micha Brumlik. “Kulturpolitik als Ermöglichung von Bildung.” *Kommune 7* (1989): 46. Brumlik is a German professor of education and a public intellectual. He participated (albeit modestly) in the famous Historians’ Debate of the late 1980s, in which professional historians and public intellectuals debated the singularity of the Holocaust and the state of the process of working through its memory in Germany. For our purposes here, however, Brumlik was a member of the Green party in Frankfurt and was, when his article was published, the Frankfurt Greens’ spokesperson for cultural matters.

engage its creative, idealistic visitors on the question of how the party could use art and culture to bridge utopian agendas and daily life [*Utopien und die alltägliche Wirklichkeit*].<sup>48</sup> Claudia Siede of the Green's Federal Cultural Bureau used similar language when she described the goal of the party's contemporary aesthetic relations as the project of connecting the realities of everyday life with "concrete utopias" in practice [*konkrete Utopien in einer 'grenzüberschreitenden Praxis' mit der Realität zu verbinden*].<sup>49</sup> Specialists in Green politics E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker argue that the imperative to "concretize utopia" in order to transform both political and cultural traditions ranked among the Greens' favorite expressions: "This phrase," they write

combines the romantic and idealistic inclination to take utopian designs seriously with the exhortation of the Enlightenment tradition that human reason and obligation to civic action encourage society to implement these ideals. This new tradition moves beyond both the Kantian admonition to think critically but obey superiors and the German romantic inclination to seek private development over civic action.<sup>50</sup>

The utopian quality of the Green cultural program derived from the party's attempt to locate and perpetuate opportunities for radical grassroots democratic practices across mundane space, in mundane time, and among mundane practitioners. That these projects prioritized practice, however imperfect, over conceptualization rendered these utopian objectives, from the Greens perspective, viable objectives, not merely flights-of-fancy. They understood their cultural work, moreover, not as a totalizing utopian social experiment but as a more modest variety of utopia, committed to a method rather than a particular content, to means they understood as essentially ethical—socially and environmentally—rather than to ends whose contours might require compromising means. The Greens' utopian agenda was not by its modesty relegated to timidity or depoliticization, however; their cultural program aimed for nothing less than the transformation of political, social, cultural, and spatial spheres.

For the Greens their modest utopian program of a sustainable culture offered not the static final condition that critics of utopian projects tend to find both so unrealistic and so dangerous.<sup>51</sup> Rather, aligning with the Brundtland Commission, they saw their project as a fluid practice, not object- or place- but process-oriented.<sup>52</sup> The Greens' cultural utopia aimed for self-propulsion: envisioning, instantiating, and continually revising its destination in an ongoing dialectic of creation.<sup>53</sup> As such, the Greens modest utopia of cultural sustainability demanded one trait above all from its constituency: imagination. Imagination served as the primary point of access to utopia and its renewable motor.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kassel Greens Uli Trostowitsch and Hubert Müller wrote that "Documenta offers us an ideal artistic framework: it continues to pursue connections between history, society and art. The Greens should miss this opportunity and should instead join them in this pursuit and take advantage of the opportunity to discuss the connection art and Green cultural politics bear to utopias and daily life." BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/783, pag. 9-10, Uli Trostowitsch, Hubert Müller, Die Grünen in Kassel. Einladung zum Grünen Kunst- und Kultur-Gespräch: Grünes Kunst- Kulturgespräch zur documenta acht: "Keiner Griff darf sitzen," 3.7.1987.

<sup>49</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 49-64, Claudia Siede, "Plädoyer für eine grüne Chorprobe. Bausteine zu einer grünen Kultur," 6.3.1988.

<sup>50</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 17

<sup>51</sup> Lurton Blassingame. "Sustainable Cities: Oxymoron, Utopia, or Inevitability?" *The Social Science Journal* 35:1 (1998): 2

<sup>52</sup> Pinder, "In Defence of Utopian Urbanism," 238

<sup>53</sup> Blassingame, "Sustainable Cities," 3

<sup>54</sup> Much ink has been spilled on the reliance of utopia on imagination. André Breton, in his first manifesto on surrealism, argued that "[t]o reduce the imagination to a state of slavery is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself. Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*." Russell Jacoby. *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*. New York: Basic Books, 1999, 180. See also André Breton. "Manifesto of Surrealism [1924]." *Manifestos of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972, 4-5. Imagination also provided a rallying cry to the Student

## II. Grassroots Democracy via Grassroots Culture: The Sustainable Utopia of “Green” Culture

Though the Greens engaged in a wide range of cultural projects,<sup>55</sup> from the establishment of local operas to the creation of centers in which the elderly could interact with young people, the tensions between one pair of related but opposing projects bring their contributions to this field into relief: the founding of a German Historical Museum in Berlin, in particular the years between 1985 and 1990, and the efforts to establish Berlin’s “Active Museum,” roughly from 1983 to 1990.

The German Historical Museum, billed by Chancellor Helmut Kohl as a “gift” to the city of Berlin in honor of its (largely fabricated) 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary, was designed as a “place of reflection and awareness driven by historical memory,” a museum that would “generate” for its visitors “historical questions and official answers.” It was to prompt critical engagement as well as enable understanding [*Verstehen*]. And in the midst of Germany’s “Conservative Turn” [*Wende*] led by Christian Democrat Kohl, the museum was intended above all to help Germans understand who they were, both as Germans and as Europeans, and where they, as a nation and people, were going.<sup>56</sup> Kohl, together with the conservative Berlin Senate, articulated the museum’s conceptual foundation. The Active Museum, by contrast, developed independently as an initiative propelled by a diverse collection of grassroots and leftist organizations.<sup>57</sup> Greens party members counted among Active Museum’s founders, administrative board, and active membership,<sup>58</sup> and other members of the party not directly involved in the planning of the museum went out of their way to express their support and to promise assistance from the party as a whole should the Active Museum desire it.<sup>59</sup>

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Movement in 1968: “*Phantasie an die Macht!*” that is, “All power to the imagination!” See Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey. *Die Phantasie an die Macht: Mai 68 in Frankreich*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995; Karl Heinz Bohrer. “1968: Die Phantasie an Die Macht? Studentenbewegung - Walter Benjamin - Surrealismus.” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft 17* (1 January 1998): 288–300. During the sixties, Herbert Marcuse, whose scholarship proved influential to the German Student Movement, highlighted the liberating power of imagination. See Herbert Marcuse. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, esp. 172-185. Samuel Moyn, likewise, stressed the importance of imagination to the project of human rights: “human rights would have to win or lose on the terrain of the imagination, first and foremost,” Moyn writes. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 5. Cultural geographer David Pinder chastises those who assert the collapse of imagination. This position, he suggests, “smacks of nostalgia for a unitary voice or a single, grand vision whose demise should, on the contrary, be welcomed for allowing space for the articulation of different needs and desires.” Pinder, “In Defense of Utopian Urbanism,” 236.

<sup>55</sup> For an overview of the variety of projects that interested the Greens in the middle of the decade, see Hajo Cornel, et al., eds. *Zum Thema: Kulturpolitik*. Berlin: Die Alternative Liste Berlin, January 1985.

<sup>56</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 178-183, Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau, Bonn, Pressemitteilung 54/88, 10.6.1988.

<sup>57</sup> For brief chronology of the Active Museum, see LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 6, Mitgliederrundbrief Nr. 4, 6.1988 the newsletter created on the occasion of the five-year anniversary of the museum’s founding.

<sup>58</sup> Some Greens participated directly as representatives of their party and listed themselves as such in documents circulated by Active Museum. Others explicitly represented other organizations, but implicitly brought their Green agenda to bear on their contributions to the organization’s development. Among the most substantial Green participants were Sabine Weißler, Annette Ahme, Christiane Zieseke, and Roland Stelter. LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, 25.5.1984.

<sup>59</sup> In 1983, Hajo Cornel, on behalf of the Berlin Greens, congratulated Active Museum on its founding and on the undertaking itself. He stressed that the Greens not only welcomed the organization’s proposal but that they were also prepared to participate and support it actively. The party, he promised, was ready to use its leverage—parliamentary and extraparliamentary—to the benefit of the project. LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Hajo Cornel, Alternative Liste - Für Demokratie und Umweltschutz, Fraktion des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin, to Gerhard Schoenberner, Heinz-Dieter Schilling, Aktives Museum, 21.7.1983. After a lull in the organization’s activities two years later, Active Museum’s chair Heinz-Dieter Schilling suggested that a good way of bringing the organization back into conversation and public consciousness was to seek out the Berlin Greens, along with the SPD, for some kind of a collaborative effort. Pending this kind of collaboration, conditions, Schilling said, were “*günstig*,” favorable for renewed interest in the museum project. LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, from Heinz-Dieter Schilling to Aktives Museum’s membership, 13.11.1985.

The crystallization of the Greens' understanding of how Germans should live in their world, what their responsibilities were to others, to their communities, and to their environment, in short, what it meant to be "Green" appears in the interstices between these projects, as the Greens worked out what aspects they supported, what they opposed, and why.

### A. Cultural Topography

Green living, as ecologically-conscious living, necessarily addressed the environment. Outside of the confines of stricter environmental policy, however, the Greens regarded what constituted their environment in a much more capacious way.<sup>60</sup> In a major parliamentary inquiry from Walter Sauermilch, a Green Bundestag representative from the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, Sauermilch registered this capacious definition by lamenting not only how current German policy threatened the natural environment but also how it endangered Germany's constructed environment [*gebauten Umwelt*]. The built environment, for Sauermilch, stood as a remnant of the past that peeked through the layers of time into the present. It also offered, he claimed, a glimpse of cultural meaning in a society of anomie and alienation. The hazards of environmental destruction operated differently for the built than for the natural environment. Society, he argued, could regrow forests to promote better air quality, for example; the built environment, however, was precious since it could not be regenerated: "Houses," he noted, "don't grow back again." His solution was for the party to endorse a social "obligation to preserve" [*Erbhaltungspflicht*] not only the natural environment but the environment the German nation had built for itself.<sup>61</sup>

In parliament, the Greens were not alone in their search for meaning in space. The former president of West Germany, a Free Democrat named Walter Scheel, and the conservative German historian who would gain notoriety for his participation in the Historian's Debate of the late 1980s, Michael Stürmer, both stressed the connection between space, history, and meaning in the charge that Germany was in danger of becoming a land without a history, a situation which threatened the well-being of the entire German people.<sup>62</sup> The manifestations of their search for meaning in space, however, differed greatly from that of the Greens.<sup>63</sup>

#### *The Problems of Space*

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For more on Active Museum's willingness to work with leftist political parties, especially the Greens, see LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, Vorlage zur Mitgleiderversammlung 28.4.1988, Diskussionspapier: Ergebnisse der Arbeitsgruppe "Konzeption."

<sup>60</sup> In other political arenas, Green factionalism divided the party on the politics of space, which included land use issues such as the expansion of harbors or airports; urban renewal; topics related to public and private transportation; an nuclear power including the placement of power sites. These and other issues often laid competing claims for urban space, and where these irreconcilable relationships developed, factionalism took its toll. Eco-socialists and radical ecologists (particularly in Hamburg, Bremen, and West Berlin) privileged the natural environment above all. Realists, pragmatists and eco-libertarians (especially in larger, more rural states like Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony) prioritized a more pliable politics of space. Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 74-75

<sup>61</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/730, pag. 26-34, Große Anfrage des Abgeordneten Sauermilch und der Fraktion Die Grünen, "Zivilisationsbedingte Schäden an Gebäuden, Kulturdenkmälern, und Ingenieurbauwerken," undated.

<sup>62</sup> Aleida Assmann. *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung*. München: C.H. Beck, 2007, 189; Michael Stürmer. "Geschichte in geschichtlosem Land." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 April 1986. Also Charles S. Maier. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 184 fn. 23. On the Greens and the suggestion that Germany was becoming a land without a history, see BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 164-191, *Wider die Entsorgung der deutschen Geschichte. Streitschrift gegen die geplanten historischen Museen in Berlin (W) und Bonn*. Die Grünen in Bundestag, Arbeitskreis Recht und Gesellschaft, ed., 12.1986.

<sup>63</sup> The Greens demanded the West German government think critically about topography, though their supporters lamented that few representatives in either the federal or regional parliaments shared this investment. LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, Planungssitzung zum Gestapogelände, 7.9.1987.



The German Historical Museum (abbreviated here, using its German name—*Deutsches Historisches Museum*—to DHM), proposed by the Bundestag’s conservative coalition of the CDU/CSU and the FDP, offered one solution to the challenge of locating meaning in space. Originally presented as a structural testament to the richness and diversity of the German past and the strength of the German people, the DHM was an impressive undertaking. On a grounds totaling 55,000 square meters (over 13.5 acres), the museum itself would occupy 36,300 square meters (nearly nine acres) on a tract of land in the eastern part of Berlin’s Tiergarten, not far from the Reichstag. By contrast, the Greens liked to point out that the most important building in the land, the Reichstag itself, occupied a modest space of only 11,200 square meters.<sup>64</sup> As a repository for artifacts and narratives from the *longue durée* of Germany’s history, the museum would serve as beacon and ballast for national identity. For this reason, the space of the DHM troubled the Greens: they wanted to live “with history” but without what they interpreted as the DHM’s authoritarian presentation of this historical meaning.<sup>65</sup>

The site, they argued, promoted a dangerous kind of nationalism: first, a nationalism that located its identity-forging museological gem in precisely that space chosen by Hitler and his architect Albert Speer as the heart of the “Capital City of the Eternal Empire of the German People.” The DHM also endorsed the fiction of a Germany that no longer existed. Rhetoric that spoke of the museum’s site as the “heart” of Berlin hit a nerve with Germans still all-too-conscious of the Berlin Wall, which ran only a few meters to the east. The museum’s planners had positioned it, rather, in the *former* heart of an undivided Berlin. The museum reinforced “the dangerous dream,” the Greens argued, “of the imminent reunification of Berlin.”<sup>66</sup> On this front, the Greens joined ranks with the Social Democrats, who interrogated the cultural work the museum required Berlin’s landscape to perform for the nation: must Berlin, a castrated former capital, be responsible for the past and Bonn for the present and the future? Does Berlin, as a divided city, bear an obligation to Europe to present only national histories or should it make a contribution to the common history of Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the world?<sup>67</sup> The site of the DHM—centralized, prestigious, removed from everyday life—required the museum to perform work it had neither the right nor the capacity to do in order to generate a fictitious meaning. It conflicted with the Greens’ understanding of their *Erhaltungspflicht*, the obligation to preserve the historical palimpsest of their existing environment. If the party wished to combat forces like those propelling the DHM, they realized they would need to mobilize preservation of a space not in literal terms, but rather symbolically or dialectically.

### *The Promises of Space*

<sup>64</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 201-202, 27.10.1987. See also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, Hilde Schramm, Annette Ahme. Entwurf des Aufrufs: Wir wollen mit geschichte leben. Aber ohne Deutsches Historisches Museum, 28.10.1987.

<sup>65</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 201-202, 27.10.1987. See also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, Hilde Schramm, Annette Ahme. Entwurf des Aufrufs: Wir wollen mit geschichte leben. Aber ohne Deutsches Historisches Museum, 28.10.1987.

<sup>66</sup> The Greens remained both skeptical and unsupportive of plans for reunification. On their opposition to the site of the proposed German Historical Museum, see BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 51, undated.

<sup>67</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 47, Der Sozialdemokratischer Bundestagsfraktion, 15.1.1986. The SPD criticized the planning process behind Berlin’s German Historical Museum and Bonn’s House of History [*Haus der Geschichte*], which they suggested put the cart before the horse by erecting a structure without first clarifying that content it would house. They called for a reversal of this process, beginning with the creation of an independent commission that would solicit public feedback. See BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 48-49, 4.12.1985. See also Drucksache 10/47 (24.5.1985). Response to Kleine Anfrage Nr. 890 des Abgeordneten Dietrich Pawlowski (FDP) vom 17.10.1985 über ein Deutsches Historisches Museum.

Lutz Niethammer, a Leftist historian and an intellectual inspiration for the grassroots movement, described the space that required preservation in Germany as spaces of potential energy; their gravitas lay in the way they implied possibility. Cultural projects did not belong in spaces and sites that cauterized possibility; rather, he argued, they should find their homes in sites of affect [*Orten der Betroffenheit*], that is, sites in which the aesthetic presentation of the object of interpretation leaves those objects—their identification, rehabilitation, reflection, opposition—hermeneutically open rather than positioning them in consolidated interpretative frameworks.<sup>68</sup> The spaces and sites of cultural projects should promote a pluralism of active engagement.

The Greens criticized the German Historical Museum for the way it failed to provide such opportunities “to engage with and question the possibilities and boundaries of the museum” and offered little space—literal or figurative—“for democratic public discussion” of the themes it took up.<sup>69</sup> The museum, as a spatial representation of power, they argued, represented hegemony, not grassroots democracy.<sup>70</sup> The Green antidote was to endorse projects whose spaces enabled a broader, richer range of activities and engagement by participants. The Frankfurt Greens, for example, called for the creation of free spaces in which people can exercise “all imaginable forms of expression and perception.” German citizens, they suggested, needed room to explore their world playfully, enjoyably, free from oppression, and motivated by fantasy. They presented this objective as a goal both “for individuals and for groups, both for society at present and society as utopia.”<sup>71</sup> In practice, it took the form of supporting History Workshops, for example, and generating information centers, and building memorials throughout the Federal Republic in places, they highlighted, “where history actually happened.”<sup>72</sup>

Among the Greens’ most vehement critiques of the DHM was that Berlin did not need to fabricate new sites for engaging history. The city was already a history workshop, they argued; they saw it as a giant living historical museum. A worthier project, they suggested, would instead focus on making visible, accessible, and tangible the ample history already present in the city. The millions of Marks earmarked for the DHM should instead flow into already-existing sites of historical significance so that the general public could engage with them freely. Plans should also exist, they demanded, to preserve the (generally neglected) monuments to German history already present in the DHM’s proposed site in Tiergarten and to highlight the historical meaning they embodied. Rather than sealing off nearly fourteen acres of public green space, the Greens called the government to commit those grounds to promoting recreation of various kinds in acknowledgement of West Berliners’ preferred manner of using the space and as boon to the kind of play the Greens aimed to cultivate in society.<sup>73</sup>

The Active Museum became the Greens’ preferred alternative to the German Historical Museum, for the ways it proposed an architectural plan that amplified rather than muted the

<sup>68</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 113-117, Lutz Niethammer (Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin). “Fünf Bemerkungen zur Gründung des DHM in Berlin.” Kurzfassung zum Gespräch in Bonn am 21.10.1987

<sup>69</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 164-191, *Wider die Entsorgung der deutschen Geschichte. Streitschrift gegen die geplanten historischen Museen in Berlin (W) und Bonn*. Die Grünen in Bundestag, Arbeitskreis Recht und Gesellschaft, ed., 12.1986.

<sup>70</sup> In one publication released by the Greens, Bruno Schindler altered Marx’s famous aphorism to suggest that “there is a specter hanging over Europe. It is the specter of ‘museumism’ [*Museismus*].” BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417. Christiane Zieseke, *Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin*. “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden? Einladung zum Weiterdenken.” Protokoll einer öffentlichen Diskussion im Reichstag am 20.9.1985.

<sup>71</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 38-63, *Die Grünen im Römer, Für Kulturelle Selbstbestimmung, Haushalt 1987, Etat Antrag*, 17.11.1986.

<sup>72</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 232-236, Han-Christian Ströbele, MdB, to die Grünen im Landtag Stuttgart, 14.5.1986; a response to BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 229-231.

<sup>73</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 51, undated.

historical and political significance of its site.<sup>74</sup> With plans to locate the museum at the site of the former headquarters of the Gestapo, the Nazi police apparatus, and to provide practical opportunities for visitors to engage critically with the history and legacy of National Socialism, the site promised both to participate in and to promote further attempts to work through Germany's past.<sup>75</sup> As the chair of the museum Gerhard Schoenberner explained, the museum aimed “not to hide behind the partial history of the concentration camps.” Instead it intended to give its visitors access to “the heart of all the Treblinkas, Lidices, and Dachaus,” the heart of the Nazi state: the history of the Gestapo at the site where that history unfolded.<sup>76</sup>

The Active Museum offers a good example, though, of the ways Green culture attended to more than environment and topography. Beyond site, supporters of the Active Museum privileged activity or temporal dynamism.<sup>77</sup>

## B. Cultural Temporality

When they opposed the German Historical Museum on the grounds that Berlin already served as a massive decentralized history workshop and had no need for a redundant centralized historical museum, the Greens drew on the blurry boundaries between cultural topography and cultural temporality. The task of consciously re-embedding culture—in this case, history—into everyday life had not only a topographical component but also a temporal one. Culture, for the Greens, could be generated and mediated more effectively within more capacious temporal parameters, namely within the prolonged timeframe of mundane, quotidian life activity.

### *The Problems of Time*

In 1985, Christiane Zieseke, a Green representative in the Berlin Senate and a member of Berlin's Cultural Council, participated in a public panel discussion hosted in the Reichstag building titled “Why do Kohl, Hassemer, Momper, Momsen, Fichter, and Hoffman-Axthelm want to lock history inside a German Historical Museum?” In Zieseke's write-up of the discussion, she put herself on record as arguing that, for everyday people who live in West Berlin, the “Central Zone” that was to house the DHM was, in fact, hardly “central.” It was sufficiently out-of-the-way such that a visit to the museum would have to be intentional and planned.<sup>78</sup> The museum's pursuit of topographical centrality landed it in a temporal prison,<sup>79</sup> guilty of robbing the mundane non-exceptional moments of everyday life of their opportunities for historical encounters. Claudia Siede, a staff member in the Green party Cultural Bureau run by Antje Vollmer, reinforced Zieseke's

<sup>74</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Gerhard Schoenberner to the Vorstand Aktives Museum, Heinz-Dieter Schilling, 21.3.1984.

<sup>75</sup> Site-specificity informed the shape of the museum since its inception. Inspiration for the museum's conceptual foundation came, in part, from a paper written by Thomas Vogel, titled “The Meaning of Site.” Vogel, at the time, was working as an intern at Aktion Sühnezeichen, a German service organization committed to creating dialogue about the international consequences of National Socialism. LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Thomas Vogel, Aktion Sühnezeichen to Heinz-Dieter Schilling, Verein Aktives Museum. Betr. Broschüre des Vereins für sein Projekt einer Gedenkstätte, 26.1.1984.

<sup>76</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Gerhard Schoenberner to the Vorstand Aktives Museum, Heinz-Dieter Schilling, 21.3.1984.

<sup>77</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Aktives Museum, Protokoll der Mitgliederversammlung vom 19.10.1983; LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig. “Vorüberlegungen zu einer Konzeption für das Aktive Museum - Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin,” 8/9.1983

<sup>78</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden?” 1985.

<sup>79</sup> “Wie ein riesiges Gefängnis. Die Entwürfe zum Historischen Museum sind jetzt ausgestellt.” *Tagespiegel*, June 1988, Feuilleton, 26. Stölzl and the Jury extolled the proposals as “European” [*europäisch*], though it was unclear quite what they meant by such a designation.

argument by highlighting that the DHM effected not only the spatial but also the “temporal...exclusion of historical experience” from everyday life by generating artificial boundaries that limited and controlled when people could engage with the past.<sup>80</sup>

The Active Museum, however, offered the promise of a different temporality. When the Active Museum’s founders announce the winner of the competition to design the museum’s grounds, the Greens wrote to the museum board to offer their congratulations. Though the competition had ended, they noted, a very important conversation about and engagement with the medium and content of the museum had only just begun. The Greens communicated their support for the immediate creation of “this living history workshop.” But the party’s praise for the museum project and its new design stopped there; the remainder of their letter criticized the temporal dimensions of the existing museum plans. They opposed the materials proposed to construct the site: originally, a dark grove of chestnut trees growing out of an iron floor whose obscure connection to the history it commemorated threatened to turn it into a purely ornamental or mythic site once the very public discussions about the museum’s trajectory faded in popular memory. They objected to the way the structure offered no insight into the complex forty-year history of Germany’s subsequent engagement with the legacy of National Socialism. What the Greens described as the museum’s “perfected form” disguised that the process of reckoning with history had not ended; indeed, they argued, many other important sites of fascism, embarrassingly, remained hidden from popular awareness. They criticized the way the proposal realized the concept of this “active” museum, which aspired to be a self-conscious, self-critical, open site of historical engagement, as a static sightseeing destination. It threatened to bury history and the dynamism of its interpretation. Clearly, they argued, the essential nature of the project as imagined by the Active Museum’s founders had gotten lost in translation at some point during the design competition. The only solution, the Greens claimed, was to scrap all existing submissions and reframe the project to emphasize the essence of the museum as a discovery-oriented, open-framework in which the its visitors could gradually, cumulatively, and collaboratively work through the physical space of Berlin and the memories that resided within it.<sup>81</sup>

### *The Promises of Time*

In response to the criticism they received, the Active Museum quietly abandoned the museum’s initial design. Over the course of the next five years, the Greens periodically revisited the question of how to achieve the temporal goals of the Active Museum. In advance of the Senate elections of 1989, Berlin’s Greens invited the board of the Active Museum to discuss with the party the objectives of its cultural political agenda. Figuring out how to preserve and display Berlin as a living city, a site of dynamic self-determination and cultural experience—a project the Greens linked with preventing the misuse of cultural politics as instruments of order and control by the parties of the right—occupied a central place on their agenda.<sup>82</sup> Otto Kallscheuer, a political scientist in dialogue with the Greens, had called on the party, “to make clear” through their cultural projects “that it is possible to live in a *Bruchbennuſtsein*,” a ruptured consciousness of German history,

<sup>80</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 24-25, Thesenpapier, 21.10.1987.

<sup>81</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, correspondence from Alternative Liste to Aktives Museum, Stellungnahme der AL Kreuzberg zum Ergebnis des Wettbewerbs Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände, 7.6.1984.

<sup>82</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, Sabine Weißler, Alternative Liste für Demokratie und Umweltschutz, Kulturbereich to Aktives Museum. Gespräch um die zukünftigen kulturpolitischen Leitlinien der Alternativen Liste am 10.6.88, 26.5.1988.

constituted by a history of wounds and bandages but also one of dreams for the future and for reason.<sup>83</sup>

The temporality of Green culture came to mean three things for Green cultural projects. They promoted, first, the exploration of the subjects and events of everyday life in the timeframe of everyday life, as a routine activity rather than an exceptional privilege.<sup>84</sup> Speaking on behalf of the citizens of Berlin but also in sympathy with the Green cause in an article titled “The Whole City is History Museum,” German art historian Diethard Kerbs argued that Berliners lived in and with history and generally possessed a consciousness of and a respect for its palimpsestic nature. As such, Kerbs contended that they were owed the right to encounter these “traces of history in [their] field of vision,” that is, in the course of their everyday lives. Remnants of the past trapped in museum display cases could hardly meet this need.<sup>85</sup> Instead, the Greens argued, these traces needed to be left out in the open, decentralized but no less carefully preserved: vacant historical buildings, for example, could be used to house exhibits and cultural meetings.<sup>86</sup> They directed their attentions to the city’s more uninspiring districts. Decentralized cultural work, they insisted, should foster opportunities for people of all neighborhoods to develop their cultural talents, sharpen their critical capacities, and explore their world. Together these would improve the general living conditions of the entire community.<sup>87</sup>

Second, the Greens embraced a kinesthetic understanding of grassroots cultural learning, the idea that cultural lessons could only be taken up via active participation in the form of critical and democratic cultural engagement.<sup>88</sup> At the heart of the Active Museum’s earliest conceptual program, for example, lay the idea that such a proposal could not be made *for* its visitors. An Active Museum could only emerge *with* or *through* its visitors. Its workshop character rendered it reliant on their desires and initiatives and permitted only the fuzziest of boundaries between the museum’s management and its guests.<sup>89</sup> The museum’s installations, events, research work, and resources should be determined by honest controversial discussion initiated by all who passed through its doors as well as by their open self-directed research.<sup>90</sup> The museum’s supporters understood this kind of a relationship to the diversity of perspectives of its visitors as ensuring that the museum would perpetually participate in discussions rather than react passively to trends;<sup>91</sup> it would seek to acquire knowledge continuously rather than simply present or re-present it. In short, sociologist Matthias Greffrath argued that Germany needed a historical cultural laboratory, in which German citizens could observe, measure, test, and evaluate their country’s history—social, cultural, economic, political—in order to determine what humanity could keep, what required repair, and

<sup>83</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin. “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden?” 1985.

<sup>84</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig. “Vorüberlegungen zu einer Konzeption für das Aktive Museum - Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin,” 8/9.1983.

<sup>85</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin. “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden?” 1985.

<sup>86</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 201-202, 27.10.1987; see also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, 3.10.1987.

<sup>87</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 120-123, Alternative Liste. *Zum Thema: Kultur*, 1989.

<sup>88</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig. “Vorüberlegungen zu einer Konzeption für das Aktive Museum - Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin,” 8/9.1983.

<sup>89</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Konzept für das Aktive Museum - Diskussionsstand 16.9.1983.

<sup>90</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin. “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden?” 1985; LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig and Andreas Heinemann-Grudder. “‘Aktives Museum’ - ein Ort selbstätiger Aneignung der Geschichte,” [undated].

<sup>91</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Berliner *Geschichtswerkstatt* Rundbrief 3.1984, Andreas Ludwig “Wie sollte ein Aktives Museum einmal werden?” Überlegung aus der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Ludwig’s article was circulated to the members of the Aktives Museum.

what they must discard. Germany needed a forum in which the accomplishments and the hopes, the disappointments and the perversions of modernity could be not only displayed but also discussed and worked through in the course of time.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, the Greens accepted that exploration and participation was not a destination but a pathway [*Weg dorthin*]: cultural sites retained their value to the German people only insofar as they remained in a constant state of becoming.<sup>93</sup> Green party cultural speaker Antje Vollmer, in a speech to the Bundestag just before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, argued that an effective cultural institution needed to be dynamic across time, eternally revisable [*wiederum korrigierbar*] and re-interpretable [*umdeutbar*].<sup>94</sup> Vollmer here echoed a much older prescription for the Active Museum that it must be a “Museum in Flux” [*Museum im Wandel*], in which content, management, and methodology remain permanently on the table for revision and whose revision sustains the original essence of the project.

### C. Cultural Agency

The final and, perhaps, most pivotal Green revision to the German cultural sensibility can be found in their reevaluation of cultural agency. Efforts to challenge the distribution of power in West German politics and culture were hardly new in the postwar period.<sup>95</sup> The revolutionaries of the student movement in 1968 rejected and offered revisions to the perceived autocracy of German political leadership.<sup>96</sup> In the 1970s, the terrorist tactics of the Red Army Faction targeted what the group claimed was the fascism of the West German government.<sup>97</sup> Over the course of the 1970s and early 80s, Germany’s New Social Movements, despite their diversity of interests, grew together out of a shared commitment to grassroots social and political organization.<sup>98</sup> When the Greens tackled West Germany’s broad problem of agency, they recycled many of the attitudes and methods of their predecessors. They nevertheless understood themselves as doing something different, fuller, and more sustainable than those before them. They claimed not only to advocate for grassroots democratic agency, that is, power “from below,” but also to practice it, to enable its practice by the

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<sup>92</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin. “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden?” 1985.

<sup>93</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig. “Vorüberlegungen zu einer Konzeption für das Aktive Museum - Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin,” 8/9.1983.

<sup>94</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 44, Rede der Abg. Antje Vollmer zu DHM am 27.10.89 im Deutschen Bundestag. See also Drucksachen 11/5487, Deutscher Bundestag, 11. Wahlperiode Antrag der Fraktion die Grünen. Überarbeitung es Konzeptes zum “Europäischen Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart,” 26.10.89, fn. 48-51, Vorschlag der AL-Fraktion im Abgeordnetenhaus zum weiteren Umgang mit dem DHM; BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 46, 26.10.1989

<sup>95</sup> On the problems of cultural agency, see, for example, Eberhard Lämmert. “Wem gehört die Geschichte? Über den vernünftigen Umgang mit der Vergangenheit.” *Die Zeit* 4, 22 January 1988.

<sup>96</sup> Norbert Frei. *1968: Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008. The twentieth anniversary of the Student Movement in 1988 meant that the legacy of this historic moment was particularly present in the minds of the Greens during this period. On the Green’s interest in the Student Movement and its legacy, see the collection of articles compiled by Antje on this theme, BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/773-2, Veröffentlichungen und Dokumentationen zur Kulturpolitik, 1986-1990.

<sup>97</sup> Karin Hanshew. *Terror and Democracy in West Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>98</sup> The investments of the New Social Movements in Germany were quite diverse, ranging from environmental concerns to women’s rights, communal living to opposition to nuclear weapons and power, gay rights to global peace. Roland Roth, Dieter Rucht, and Sabine Berthold, eds. *Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Frankfurt: Campus, 1987; Ruud Koopmans. *Democracy from below: New Social Movements and the Political System in West Germany*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

entirety of the West German population, and to set in place a system that would ensure its practice in the future.<sup>99</sup>

### *The Problems of Agency*

Like many on the Left, some among the Greens pinned the constriction of democratic agency, abstractly, on the bourgeois character of modern society. The Frankfurt Greens, for example, understood the cultural and social alienation in Frankfurt communities as a product of the dominant bourgeois-industrial consumer culture: a social environment in which individuals live side-by-side, satisfying superficial material needs by replicating each other's consumer patterns and lifestyles without any real neighborly relations deadens the will to live differently.<sup>100</sup> Many among the Greens, however, were quicker to find fault explicitly in the agendas of their immediate political opponents. Those in power, the Greens noted, eagerly awarded agency to those individuals and institutions that articulated ideologies that reinforced existing power structures.<sup>101</sup> Though examples of this dynamic in practice were plentiful, the Greens' responses to the German Historical Museum offers a clear example of the party's critiques of the status quo of democratic agency in German society.

Just by listening to Chancellor Helmut Kohl discuss the merits of the German Historical Museum, the source of Greens' angst over radically-restricted cultural agency might not have been readily apparent. Indeed, Kohl presented the museum as a well-reasoned solution to a problem of considerable national significance, namely the problem of meaningful national engagement with a rich but complicated national past. Germany's efforts to engage with history in order to develop an understanding of the past, he argued, would condition its ability to formulate a meaningful plan for the future. Meaningful, responsible, reflective historical inquiry, according to Kohl, became possible only when the display of historical knowledge employed scholarly seriousness and objectivity. The DHM—gifted by Kohl to the city of Berlin, to the German people and, one might argue, to the

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<sup>99</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 117. It bears noting that the Greens' pursuit of a more democratic form of agency also had ramifications beyond the realm of culture. Among their most noteworthy and enduring contributions, for example, was their demand that women participate equally in the political process. Their success was born out by their party demographics. For an early glimpse into how the Green battle for gender equality effected their cultural politics, see Christiane Zieseke's diatribe against the German Historical Museum Committee for its failure to include women among its ranks: Kleine Anfrage Nr. 871 der Abg. Christiane Zieseke (AL) vom 14.10.1985 über "Sachverständigenkommission für das DHM." Zieseke asked what the Senate thought about the fact that no woman served on the DHM committee; how the Senate participated in the creation of the DHM committee; whether it was impossible to recommend a woman because men make history so women cannot participate or because they did not know any qualified women; and if the Senate would be interested in the Greens' recommendations for qualified candidates. See BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 54, 14.10.1985

<sup>100</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/774, pag. 38-63, Die Grünen im Römer, Für Kulturelle Selbstbestimmung, Haushalt 1987, Etat Antrag, 17.11.1986.

<sup>101</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/730, pag. 6, Resolution zum Erhalt der sozialistischen Denkmale in der DDR, Summer 1990. An important vignette, though one too far afield to treat in full, involved the federal Green's cultural bureau under Antje Vollmer and Claudia Siede in battle over the preservation of DDR monuments. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Vollmer reiterated the spirit of the Greens' 1988 *Große Anfrage*, by which they intended to generate productive, democratic debate about the legacy of the DDR—a process of working through [*Aufarbeitung*—instead endorse its repression. The removal of symbols of this "old regime," Vollmer argued, risked rendering the new post-Wall Germany historyless [*geschichtslos*]. Calling for an engagement not only with the DDR's political legacy but also with its aesthetics, Vollmer highlighted the often quiet removal of socialist monuments and advocated instead initiating open, public conversations about how to process the physical and conceptual remnants of the DDR's forty years. On Vollmer's understanding of how aesthetics contributed to the totality of the DDR, support her demands received from academics and university students, as well as the German government's response to her request, see BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/730, pag. 2-3, 3.9.1990; BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/730, pag. 6, Resolution zum Erhalt der sozialistischen Denkmale in der DDR, Summer 1990. See also Matthias Flügge. "Bildersturm." *Kunst Intern* 1987.

country's international visitors as well—was to serve as Germany's primary hub for this kind of public engagement. Few places, Kohl suggested, offered a more appropriate home for the museum as the old capital of a unified Germany, intimately intertwined as it was in Germany's national narrative. He claimed the DHM would emphasize a historical trajectory that underlined the common cultural heritage of both sides of the Berlin Wall, though he admittedly also (in contradiction) viewed the museum as an opportunity to demonstrate Germany's longstanding commitment to the politics and ethics of the West. He bolstered his plans by emphasizing that consciousness of German unity had grown stronger and clearer in the months leading up to his dedication of the museum in 1987.<sup>102</sup>

A finer comb through Kohl's remarks, however, reveal the nits in his conceptualization of the museum that irritated the Greens. Foremost, they objected to his patronizing description of the museum's effect, namely its promotion of historical, cultural, and intellectual "maturity" within the German population. Here, Kohl uses the words *mündig* and *Mündigkeit*, concepts that denote not only the capacity for intellectual discrimination that comes with age and exposure but also the transition to an age of legal majority, that is, from childhood to adulthood. *Mündigkeit*, of course, occupied a central role in Immanuel Kant's 1784 essay defining the concept of "Enlightenment." Kohl, in the eyes of the Greens, however, was no Kant calling on his country to have the courage to use its own reason. Instead, the Greens read in his comments that Germany was a country of personally, socially, and political immature children in need of administration.<sup>103</sup> The Greens also came down quite critically on the content of the chancellor's version of German national history. The museum, he argued, against the backdrop of the "division of the German Fatherland," appeared as a national project with European significance. It accepted as its task the communication of the long, varied, enduring, and above all *singular* [emphasis theirs] common history of the Germans. Without this history—that is, in the absence of a German Historical Museum—Kohl suggested, Germany would flounder, lacking both home and roots [*heimatlos und wurzellos*].<sup>104</sup> The Greens, unsurprisingly, found this argument preposterous, given their interpretation that German topography already stood as a massive national historical museum.

Beyond the content of Kohl's express remarks, the Greens also found much to criticize in the content of the museum. The ostensibly generous gesture of gifting a national museum to the city, when seen through the eyes of the tax payers who would ultimately fund this rather expensive "gift," lost its aura of benevolence.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the site of the museum itself not only embodied (and, some argued, silenced) a very undemocratic history. Berlin Green representative Christian Ströbele underscored that this was the site of "Speer's Walhalla of German imperialism and fascism, of the burning Reichstag, and of Göring's crimes," to name just a few. Its selection alone, Ströbele

<sup>102</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 186, *Das Parlament* Nr. 46-47 (14./21.11.1987): 12. Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, reflections on Kohl's speech from 28 October 1987,

<sup>103</sup> The Greens often spoke critically of an understanding of humanity central to which was the question of its "maturity." They interpreted this language as enabling a subtly insidious kind of authoritarianism. BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/772, pag. 55-62, Karlheinz Koinegg, Claudia Seide, Kulturbüro, Die Grünen im Bundestag "Ein Leben für die Kartoffel. Grüne, Kunst, und Grünenkunst," 8.1989.

<sup>104</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 186, *Das Parlament* Nr. 46-47 (14./21.11.1987): 12. Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, reflections on Kohl's speech from 28 October 1987. The Greens interrogated the majority leadership on some of these issues, receiving only oblique, uncontroversial answers.

<sup>105</sup> The Greens make multiple references to the concern that Berlin would be forced to pay for Kohl's "gift" of a German Historical Museum. See also BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 207-208, Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin, 10. Wahlperiode, Plenar- und Ausschußdienst, Inhalts-Protokoll, Ausschuß für Bundesangelegenheiten und Gesamtberliner Fragen -gemeinsame Sitzung mit dem Ausschuß für innerdeutsche Beziehungen des Deutschen Bundestages, 33. Sitzung, Vorsitz: Hoppe, MdB FDP, 14.10.1987, nichtöffentlich; also BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 73-75, Hans-Christian Ströbele, MdB, to AL - Geschäftsführender Ausschuß, Betr. Errichtung eines "Historischen Museums" in Berlin zur 750 Jahr Feier, 26.7.1985.



argued, proscribed democratic agency. Green delegate Christiane Zieseke pointed out that the conservative bloc behind the museum’s planning disguised its autocratic governing mechanisms—the fact that they had handed to the German people a unilateral decision from above—behind a rhetoric of showcasing the rise of republican traditions.<sup>106</sup> “It’s as if we are still living in an Absolutist regime,” one green member complained of this Bonn decision-making monopoly [*Entscheidungsmonopol*].<sup>107</sup> Were that insufficient to mobilize some members of the party, others found their cause in the monopoly on interpretation the museum’s creators claimed over its content. The Greens interpreted the museum as an instrument of exclusion, comparable to the Berlin Wall, that mobilized a one-side historical account told entirely from the perspective of the right-wing political leadership of West Germany.<sup>108</sup> This was a fight, as contemporary historian Michael Wildt described it, against cultural hegemony.<sup>109</sup> And the stakes were nothing less significant than the very constitution of the Federal Republic whose clauses protected the autonomy of individual states in the execution of cultural projects. German federalism operated to the suppression of unified cultural hermeneutics; pluralism and diversity were built into its founding principles. The German Historical Museum, however, by dismissing the rights of Berlin’s leadership and citizenry to shape its own cultural landscape, threatened this license.<sup>110</sup>

Historian Lutz Niethammer summarized these concerns by posing a rhetorical question: how would the German Historical Museum, with its “totalizing history,” make space for opposition?<sup>111</sup> His unspoken answer was that it would not. Though this criticism appeared variously in different language, its message remained the same: Germany was facing an increasingly dire situation in the relationship between democratic politics and disagreeable power.

### *The Promises of Agency*

Artist and education scholar Rainer Zech raised the question of the politics of creating a new kind of politics. How, he asked, can individuals forge a new but also broadly viable of political practice—one that preserves the openness, the lability, and the radical democratic intent of the grassroots movement—without merely copying traditional party politics? His answer lay in conceptualizing politics as a cultural project that crystalizes at the intersection of ethics, subjectivity and aesthetics. Aesthetics in particular, he argued, foster a kind of curiosity and confusion that prompt intellectual engagement, a re-thinking. Aesthetics achieves its goal, he claimed, when it creates of moment of irritation or doubt about expectations, when it does not merely reproduce what is already known but attempts to generate in the beholder a recognition of new possibilities of

<sup>106</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, Die Grünen im Bundestag, Fraktion der Alternativen Liste Berlin. “Warum soll die deutsche Geschichte in ein Deutsches Historisches Museum eingesperrt werden?” 1985. See, in particular, Christian Ströbele’s commentary in the same document, in which he highlights the troublesome nature of the site proposed from the German Historical Museum. Having played host to Albert Speer’s plans for a “Walhalla” of German imperialism and fascism as well as the epicenter of Hermann Göring’s crimes, the site, Ströbele suggested, could not have any other goal but to legitimate, if not also to resuscitate, these histories.

<sup>107</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 201-202, 27.10.1987; see also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, 3.10.1987

<sup>108</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 32, Siegfried Reetz, for Rückfragen, Pressemitteilung: Arbeitsgruppe Alternative Deutschlandpolitik in der AL, forwarded to Claudia Siede, Offene deutsche Frage läßt Bau des DHM nicht zu, 21.10.1989.

<sup>109</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 164-191, *Wider die Entsorgung der deutschen Geschichte. Streitschrift gegen die geplanten historischen Museen in Berlin (W) und Bonn*. Die Grünen in Bundestag, Arbeitskreis Recht und Gesellschaft, ed., 12.1986.

<sup>110</sup> See BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 32, Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Christiane Zieseke (AL) über Einrichtung eines DHM in Berlin, 6.10.1986. For the response from Berlin’s Senator for Cultural Affairs, CDU member Dr. Volker Hassemer, see BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 33-35, 11.11.1986.

<sup>111</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 113-117, Lutz Niethammer (Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin). “Fünf Bemerkungen zur Gründung des DHM in Berlin.” Kurzfassung zum Gespräch in Bonn am 21.10.1987.

knowledge. This moment of recognized potentiality, Zech suggested, is a powerful and politically creative one.<sup>112</sup> But it hinges on the presence of a participatory audience.

The Green solution to the problem of cultural agency consisted, at core, of implementing projects that necessarily implicated such a participatory audience. Through debate, discussion, and plebiscitary decision-making, the party argued, citizens should have the opportunity to shape their cultural landscapes. In this respect, Antje Vollmer found hope not in the DHM itself but in the contentious debates surrounding it. These debates represented a certain—albeit limited—kind of democratic cultural engagement. In the manner of Jürgen Habermas, Vollmer viewed mutual and responsive communicative engagement as emancipatory. By responding to Kohl’s plans to create the German Historical Museum, Germany’s citizens demanded their participation in determining how they understood their history, how they wanted to document it, and what they hoped to gain through its documentation. In fact, Vollmer suggested that the ultimate bone of contention was not between ‘museum’ and ‘no museum.’ It concerned, rather, the methods mobilized both for and by the museum to promote (or incapacitate) a fundamentally democratic engagement with the past.<sup>113</sup>

The Active Museum took strides to communicate its stance on this issue. In response to an inquiry, the Museum’s board noted that the pedagogical function of the museum did not derive from a monotonous array of curio cabinets with accompanying informational plaques. It intended, rather, to offer a space in which the visitor would “[participate] actively in the work of the museum.” It sought to bridge museology’s traditional boundaries between public access areas and private administrative spaces, between visitor and associate. It aimed for transparency so that its guests would feel invited to identify its weakness as well as to work together to strengthen them. An Active Museum, they claimed, did not work *with* its guests; it worked *through* them. Without those guests—all of whom they understood as equally qualified to engage museum work—it could not function.<sup>114</sup>

These impulses found resonance among the Greens. Instead of sponsoring “cultural spectacles” like the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the city of Berlin, events planned *for* the citizens of Berlin, Christiane Zieseke called for the creation of “workshops,” whose success depended on broad, direct participation. Traditionally, she argued, Germans themselves, have been neither the subject nor the objects of the national cultural political agenda. An instrumentalized politics capitalized instead on the purchasing power of tourists or on other economic factors. This tendency subordinated the content and method of cultural politics to its bottom line, which resulted in what Zieseke described as the “draining” of substance [*Entleerung*] from practical cultural political projects.<sup>115</sup> A more substantive cultural program, rich both in content and in method, could be produced by German citizens themselves.

Abandoning consensus in favor of “provocative food-for-thought,” debate, and even open conflict, the Active Museum aimed to bring together a diversity of visitors whose contradictory ideas on the depiction of history they could negotiate collaboratively. As grassroots historian and Green interlocutor Andreas Ludwig suggested, a republican form of government does not guarantee

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<sup>112</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 39-48, Rainer Zech, Vortragsmanuskript für Hamburg, “Aus der Sackgasse der Selbstfesselung zu veränderten Politikformen. Beispiele aus der Basispolitik einer stadtteilbezogenen Friedensinitiative,” 16.6.1988.

<sup>113</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 44, Rede der Abg. Antje Vollmer zu DHM am 27.10.89 im Deutschen Bundestag. See also 26.10.89, Drucksachen 11/5487, Deutscher Bundestag, 11. Wahlperiode Antrag der Fraktion die Grünen, Überarbeitung des Konzeptes zum “Europäischen Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart”, Footnote: #48-51, Vorschlag der AL-Fraktion im Abgeordnetenhaus zum weiteren Umgang mit dem DHM. BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/741, pag. 46, 26.10.1989

<sup>114</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, response from Aktives Museum to inquiry from 17.5.1984, undated.

<sup>115</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 3, Christiane Zieseke, “B 750, E 88... - Thesen zur Situation der Kulturpolitik und Chancen für Initiativen (1989),” 14.4.1988.

democracy. Democracy only functions through the active participation of its population in decision-making and sovereignty. The Active Museum placed this kind of radical democratic sovereignty at the heart of the museum's conceptual foundation.<sup>116</sup> It bears mentioning that the Greens, as much as they disapproved of many of their political opponents, remained—at least in word—receptive to dialogue that included them. A democratic cultural politics, as inherently inclusive of cross-party debate, would necessarily involve disagreement. The Greens claimed to embrace this kind of controversy and often extended invitations to the other parties to engage them in discussion.<sup>117</sup>

### III. Green Culture as Sustainable Utopia

The penultimate decade of the twentieth century ended, for the Greens, in a moment of considerable tension. From the vantage point of policy and political power, the Greens' mid-decade crisis of purpose and identity sent them into a tailspin. Factionalism weakened not only the party's internal coherence but also its outward viability as a political alternative. The party's oppositional quality tended to amplify these divisions: while one could determine quite easily what the Greens opposed, it was not always clear what agendas they supported.

Ironically, one of the few points about which the Greens generally agreed would become their Achilles' Heel in the first election after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As the Wall came down to chants that the Germans were “one people”<sup>118</sup> and reunification began to seem inevitable, the Greens stood their ground and rejected the idea of a unified Germany. Instead, in part to curtail perceived imperialism of the West, in part to focus on other issues they considered more pressing (environmental destruction, for example), the party advocated more open, diplomatic relationships between East and West Germany as two distinct states, whose relationship was now rooted in forty years of distinct history. In the company of citizens' movements like New Forum, they lobbied West Germany to help foster a more humane, less bureaucratic, generally more democratized socialism in the German Democratic Republic. But the GDR was to remain a separate state.

With a notable shift in public sentiment in favor of rapid reunification, the Greens' slow and unfavorable response to reunification brought the “surprise eviction” of the West German Greens from the Bundestag in the elections of December 1990.<sup>119</sup> These losses in 1990 served as a pivotal wake-up call for the party as it bled both constituents and representatives to their political opponents.<sup>120</sup> Defeat in 1990 ultimately brought reform and later victories in 1991, but not before first occasioning a renewed sense of crisis, the results of which would register a victory for the party's Realist faction and lead to a very successful coalition with the Social Democrats. The

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<sup>116</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig. “Wie sollte ein Aktives Museum einmal werden? Überlegung aus der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt” Berliner *Geschichtswerkstatt* Rundbrief, 3.1984; LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 1, Andreas Ludwig. “Vorüberlegungen zu einer Konzeption für das “Aktive Museum - Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin,” 8/9.1983. The imperative of active, collaborative democratic work [*Mitmachen*] found resonance in other areas of the Greens' cultural policy as well. See, for example, “Ehemaliges Konzentrationslager Neuengamme wird Mahnmahl. Hamburger Senat will Teile unter Denkmalschutz stellen / Grün-Alternative Liste hält Pläne für nicht ausreichend.” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16.2.1984.

<sup>117</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 59, Heidi Bischoff-Pflanz, Alternative List für Demokratie und Umweltschutz, Fraktion des Abgeordnetenhauses, Berlin to Walter Momper, SPD-Fraktion, 11.1985; BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag 67-69. Compare with BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 390-417, 1.9.1985.

<sup>118</sup> “*Wir sind ein Volk.*” This chant marked a subtle but important change from earlier East German peace protest chants that declared instead “*Wir sind das Volk*” or “We are the people,” a conscious oppositional statement to the authoritarianism of the East German government. Mary Fulbrook. *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany, 1918-1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 334.

<sup>119</sup> Frankland and Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power*, 8-10, 75-79; Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 191-192.

<sup>120</sup> It bears noting that the Greens' demise was not total. In the 1990 elections they still held seats in 9 of the 11 original West German state parliaments and the Eastern Greens held seats in 4 of the 5 newly assimilated state parliaments.

exigencies of political power won through this coalition would curtail the party's radical and innovative impulses.

### *The Utopian Project of a Sustainable Green Cultural Program*

The Greens' trajectory following the fall of the Wall might suggest a party in decline. The substance of the Green promise, however, operated on registers less susceptible to the vicissitudes of electioneering, policy debates, and political defeat. Over the course of the postwar period, the SPD had gradually lost its monopoly on utopia.<sup>121</sup> It was in the void they left behind them that the Greens left their mark in the form of a durable but also dynamic framework for moving forward with cultural projects in West and later reunified Germany.

Kassel's Greens summarized the idea of their party's sustainable cultural utopia succinctly when they explained that the Greens supported both an ecologically-oriented politics of personal development alongside the active participation of the party in the construction of Germany's cultural landscape. The tasks of encouraging Germans to connect with and make changes to both their natural and their built environments and generating opportunities for them to make those changes required a revision of traditional patterns of thought [*Denkstrukturen*]. It was through cultural means—particularly, the innovative, the transgressive, and the avant-garde—the Greens argued, that this “process of rethinking will be brought into motion and accelerated.” Who, they asked “will realize the Green utopian blueprint if not art and culture?”<sup>122</sup>

In a critique of the German Historical Museum, one Green representative wielded the words of Walter Benjamin on hope and cultural creation. From Benjamin's “On the Concept of History,” he quoted that “Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”<sup>123</sup> Hope, in other words, stood on perilous ground, as the trophy for the victorious party in the battle between status quo and radicalism. And as so many scholars have argued, the endurance of the anti-utopian status quo had left many uncertain that hope might ever again fall into the hands of one who could put it to use. Hope had begun to wither; its rescue was urgent. Both the necessity of the fight against the status quo and the reward of victory—the reclamation of hope—shaped the Greens' cultural agenda in the second half of the 1980s. The party understood itself as the torchbearer of a new democratic cultural society. The utopia of the alternative movement, one Green wrote, rested on its hopes, aspirations, and intentions; this utopia accepted the challenge of changing the entirety of society, its forms of cultural expression and engagement and, as such all the materials and structures of governance.<sup>124</sup> But, perhaps melodramatically, the Greens also understood themselves as standing on a monumental precipice. If they traversed it successfully they could bring world-historical change to German society, a cultural practice that embodied the most promising, precious aspects of democratic culture, human

<sup>121</sup> John Ely. “Green Politics and the Transformation of the Left in Germany.” *New German Critique* 72 (1 October 1997): 180. Joachim Hirsch. *Der Sicherheitsstaat: das “Modell Deutschland”, seine Krise und die neuen sozialen Bewegungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1980.

<sup>122</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 30-34, AG Kunst und Kultur, Kassel. “Vom ‘Öko-Kult’ zur Öko-Kultur,” 19.5.1988. Unsurprisingly, this document makes prominent reference to Joseph Beuys' 7000 *Eichen*.

<sup>123</sup> BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/740, pag. 137, Die Grünen im Bundestag. Pressemitteilung Nr. 283/86. Historiker erklären sich zu Kohls Staatsgeschichtsschreibern, 28.4.1986. See also Walter Benjamin. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. Hannah Arendt, ed. Harry Zohn, tr. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, 255.

<sup>124</sup> Manfred Kunk. “Zwischen Kulturutopie und Kulturinstitution. Zum Stellenwert Soziokultureller Zentren.” *Alternative Kommunale Kulturpolitik* 1 (1988): 37-39. See also BArch (Koblenz) N 1569/771, pag. 35, “Entwurf für Perspektiven: Kultur: Die Grünen wollen künftig stärker mitmischen.” *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, 5.1988.

creativity, and hope. If they failed, they would fail not only the present German electorate but their country's past and its future.

## CHAPTER 5

### Success, Schism, and the Fate of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s Historical Practice

While the Greens heeded the lessons of Benjamin only metaphorically, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* would have interpreted them more literally: as historians, they had at their disposal the tools to fan the spark of hope in the past, and the BGW shared with the Greens a similar sense the urgency that they use these tools swiftly and effectively. If the Greens saw themselves as emissaries of the utopian vision of a democratic cultural society, the BGW understood itself as the mediators of a utopian relationship to an entire national history.

The BGW rode the wave of momentum from the success of their earliest years. They began to move into the spotlight in some of the heated historical debates that captured German popular, scholarly, and political imagination during the 1980s. In 1985, for example, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Germany's capitulation, the BGW organized an extended series of events that included three historical exhibits with accompanying lectures in different neighborhoods of West Berlin; a symbolic excavation at the site of the former Gestapo headquarters on Prinz-Albrecht-Straße, a collaborative action with the Active Museum; and an installation directly in front of the Reichstag, organized together with the Union of Educators and Scholars [*Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft*].<sup>1</sup> The BGW would continue its engagement with the historical legacy of "Zero Hour" in the years to come. As the fiftieth anniversary of capitulation approached, the group attempted to serve as a conduit between the various Berlin neighborhoods undertaking independent commemorative projects and took strides to include a new generation of German youth in the exploration of this historical moment.<sup>2</sup> And the BGW joined the Greens, the spatial interventionists, and others in their efforts to chip away at Kohl's plans to construct the German Historical Museum. In 1987, they issued a polemical pamphlet that underscored the reasons for their opposition and planned a counter-action that would coincide with the ceremonial laying of the DHM's cornerstone.<sup>3</sup>

As they positioned themselves more prominently in the public sphere, the BGW also began to win a larger audience. What had started as small, local projects conducted "*vor Ort*" gradually became part of a more substantial dialogue, whose interlocutors also increased in prominence: at the end of the 1980s the BGW's project coordinators for the "Red Island" and "Lindenhof" projects received an invitation, for example, to speak at a Free University colloquium on comparative fascisms alongside the famed historian of National Socialism Hans Mommsen.<sup>4</sup> They also found themselves serving as a communicative nexus for other smaller regional *Geschichtswerkstätten*. After a proposal at the 1985 HistoryFest in Hamburg failed to generate enthusiasm about archiving the publications of all Germany's *Geschichtswerkstätten* in the small town of Nienburg/Weser in Lower Saxony, Berlin's *Geschichtswerkstatt* stepped up to the plate. From their 1983 effort to document local West German history projects related to the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's seizure of power—the first major project for the group's nascent "info center"—the BGW had cached experience operating as a repository for *Geschichtswerkstätten* materials.<sup>5</sup> At the 1989 HistoryFest in Bonn,

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<sup>1</sup> BGWA 1985/86, Informationen und Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.

<sup>2</sup> See for example their 1993 project "50 Jahre Kriegsende." Karin Winklhofer, Protokoll des Werkstattgesprächs vom

<sup>2</sup> See for example their 1993 project "50 Jahre Kriegsende." Karin Winklhofer, Protokoll des Werkstattgesprächs vom 5.7.1993, Betr. Einleitung eines neuen Projektes zum Thema "50 Jahre Kriegsende." BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1993.1.10

<sup>3</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6, 12

<sup>4</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/2

<sup>5</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, 6.6.1983, "Ein neues Projekt der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt." This project had also received considerable support from Berlin's *Landeszentrale für politische Bildung*.

conference participants approved the BGW's info center as an alternative to the floundering Nienburg/Weser archive plan.<sup>6</sup>

With increasing standing came increasing confidence in their conceptual and methodological framing. The *Geschichtswerkstätten*, both in Berlin and around the country, spoke out louder about the origins of their approach to history, identifying it as a product of the 1970s failure to achieve a radical alteration of society, a failure that called into question both the theories and the political practices of the revolutionaries of the Student Movement.<sup>7</sup> Writing during the thick of the *Historikerstreit*, BGW members argued that they had successfully aligned their research agenda with contemporary social and political issues and that their work on National Socialism *vor Ort* had been so controversial precisely because it “[hit] home [*machen betroffen*].”<sup>8</sup> They asked, rhetorically, whether the history of a nation whose last phase of national unity ended in mass murder could ever again generate a positive national identity. In response, they stressed that the most meaningful foil to the conservative attempt to create a new postwar national identity was the work of local and regional *Geschichtswerkstätten*, with their focus on the “underdogs.” Decentralized, democratic historical work, they claimed, offered a new point of entry into the creation of a new national identity and demanded a more comprehensive solution to “the problems of the present.”<sup>9</sup> The BGW recognized the critique leveled against them by the historical social scientists of the Bielefeld School (without whose original historiographical interventions the *Geschichtswerkstätten* would have been unthinkable). But *Geschichtswerkstätten* members rejected the claims from Bielefeld critics like Hans-Ulrich Wehler that they had backtracked on the Enlightenment ideas of the West by bringing historical practice and historical method, adulterated, to the masses.<sup>10</sup> In fact, BGW member Thomas Lindenberger argued that the *Geschichtswerkstätten* represented the broad popular uptake of Bielefeld methodologies outside the Ivory Tower and, as such, represented their culmination and success: the *Geschichtswerkstätten* understood themselves as facilitating the project of Enlightenment, which called as many people as possible “to use their minds and rational capacity freely and to apply those things to the exploration of their own history.”<sup>11</sup> The work of the *Geschichtswerkstätten* involved rendering the knowledge and methodology of historical scholarship accessible to those who wished to use it. And they pilloried anyone engaged in grassroots historical work who failed to meet these expectations.<sup>12</sup>

Having established itself as a significant player in the field by the middle of the 1980s, the BGW had earned a strategic position from which it could advance its historical and historiographical agenda. From this position, much like the newly empowered Greens, the BGW could flirt with

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<sup>6</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Grau und Regional - Geschichtswerkstätten-Literatur auf einen Blick in unserem Infozentrum,” 4

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Georg Frei. “Geschichte aus den ‘Graswurzeln’? Geschichtswerkstätten in der historischen Kulturarbeit.” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung *Das Parlament*, B 2 (1988): 39. See also BArch (Koblenz), N1569/740, #218-241, 8.1.1988

<sup>8</sup> Frei. “Geschichte aus den ‘Graswurzeln’?” 43. See also BArch (Koblenz), N1569/740, #218-241, 8.1.1988

<sup>9</sup> Frei. “Geschichte aus den ‘Graswurzeln’?” 45-46. See also BArch (Koblenz), N1569/740, #218-241, 8.1.1988. Here, Frei drew on Ingrid Laurien. “Flucht aus der Geschichte in die Geschichte?” *L’80. Zeitschrift für Literatur und Politik*. 39 (1986): 75-84. Related, see Joachim Raschke. *Soziale Bewegungen. Ein historisch-systematischer Grundriß*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 1987, 446.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Hans-Ulrich Wehler. “Geschichte – von Unten Gesehen.” *Die Zeit*, Mai 1985; Hans-Ulrich Wehler. “Im Gespräch. Geschichte ganz unten.” *Bayerischen Rundfunk*, 3. Fernsehprogramm, 16 July 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Lindenberger. “Wer hat Angst vor den Barfußhistorikern? Plaedoyer für einen rationalen Dialog.” *Geschichtsdidaktik. Probleme, Projekte, Perspektiven* 11:1 (1986): 17-20; Frei. “Geschichte aus den ‘Graswurzeln’?” 44. See also BArch (Koblenz), N1569/740, #218-241, 8.1.1988.

<sup>12</sup> One Berlin tour guide deemed insufficiently rigorous in his bottom-up historical work, for example, received an earful from the BGW. They described his book, *Walks in Kreuzberg*, which he based upon his walking tours of the trendy Berlin neighborhood, as chaotic and wholly boring, in addition to being unreliable, indeed often entirely false. BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 6.1987, 15

implementing a sustainable utopian historical project. Ironically, however, the group's dogged adherence to some of the central tenets of this project would eventually spell the BGW's collapse.

## I. The Life and Death of the Mobile Museum

The first half of the decade had provided a testing ground for the BGW's ideas. Projects like "Red Island" and "Lindenhof" brought historical inquiry out of the university and the city center and into the topographies of mundane life; the BGW narrated the histories of the Red Island and the Lindenhof living community into the spaces of these communities themselves. Even with several traveling installations, however, these projects remained limited and localized. "City Tours by Boat" overcame some of these obstacles, offering to ordinary people mobile history lessons that penetrated the city's non-traditional spaces. The boat tours encountered a different set of constraints, though, namely weather and the availability of boats as well as their unavoidable ticket fee which, while minimal, nevertheless deterred some visitors. Together, these features prevented the boat tours, too, from reaching the wide audience the BGW had envisioned. So, when the BGW stumbled upon an opportunity to purchase a retired double-decker bus from the Berlin Transport Company [BVG], they jumped at the chance. The project, which they dubbed the "Mobile Museum," would evolve into the clearest expression of the BGW's sustainable utopian historical agenda.

### A. The Concept

The first murmurings about the Mobile Museum emerged out of collective opposition to Berlin administrators' plans to celebrate the city's alleged 750<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1987 with a massive series of events. The BGW joined a coalition of groups including the Active Museum, Alternative List, Humanistische Union, the Internationale Lige für Menschenrechte, Aktion Sühnezeichen, and the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (VVN), among others, that feared the polished official spectacle would smooth over the city's difficult past.<sup>13</sup> Together they sought an alternative to the city's plans that would more appropriately represent the complexities of Berlin's past, particularly its role in National Socialism.

The problem, one member of the Active Museum explained, was that the "war and postwar period had totally changed the face of the city." The 750<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations risked skirting over the city's more difficult history because extensive rebuilding and renewal efforts since 1945 had stripped the city of many of the visible reminders of its past. The lingering aesthetics of trauma tended to be subtle. "Anti-fascist historical work must, at least in part," he argued, "work to make visible" the often no-longer-visible sites where Nazi crimes had been planned, organized, and executed.<sup>14</sup> "[I]ruly worthy historical work must lay bare the sites of Berlin's forgotten or repressed past," one BGW member demanded.<sup>15</sup> The prevailing proposal in response to this problem came from a member of the VVN who suggested that the groups, together, purchase one of the city's retired buses and outfit it as a traveling exhibit and event space. Drawing attention to what they saw as its most prominent strength, they called it the Mobile Museum.

BGW member Bernhard Müller suggested that the Mobile Museum "understands itself less as an extension of" the hundreds of museums that already dotted Berlin's museum landscape "than as an alternative to them."<sup>16</sup> Rather than taking root in a single location within the city, another

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<sup>13</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 6.1987, "Forum '87," 11. See also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, % BGW, Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum

<sup>14</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, undated

<sup>15</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, BGW, "Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum."

<sup>16</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, BGW, "Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum."



coordinator of the Mobile Museums argued, the bus “should be able to show up anywhere in the city where it is necessary to oppose historical forgetfulness with small-scale historical exhibits.”<sup>17</sup> With a modest but flexible interior space, the museum could house traditional exhibits, films, slideshows, audio displays, and lectures. But in place of what they described as traditional “ostentatious exhibits housed in buildings that are bracketed” from everyday life, the Mobile Museum was to “include the sites of history in its presentations and, in doing so, make a specific part of Berlin’s history accessible” in the everyday arteries of the public sphere. They claimed that the manner in which the Mobile Museum would link space and time would be “better suited than all previous presentation forms” to “laying bare the traces of Berlin’s history.”<sup>18</sup>

The project became even more attractive to the groups involved in its conceptualization after the BGW—which had taken up much of the coordination work<sup>19</sup>—presented a detailed budget of the cost projections and funding sources. The bus, complete with exhibits and guest lecturers, would run them 19,580DM. Berlin’s *Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung* had contributed 5,000DM; the *Bildungswerk für Demokratie und Umweltschutz* promised to cover honoraria travel expenses for visiting speakers from throughout Germany, an amount the BGW estimated at 5,000DM. With nearly 1,500DM more provided by members of the interorganizational bus initiative group, that left only about 8,000DM left to finance—a much less imposing figure, one that would become easier to meet, too, once their first completed exhibit gave them good inertia from which to request donations from the fairly extensive collective membership of all participating groups.<sup>20</sup>

## B. The First Exhibit

Over time, the museum would house exhibits on a wide range of subjects, many of which would depart from the founding association’s initial emphasis on the forgotten sites of Nazi trauma. The first, and perhaps most successful of these exhibits, however, dealt with what one prominent historian has called the “opening act of Nazi genocide,” namely euthanasia in Nazi Germany.<sup>21</sup> For this first exhibit, they stationed the Mobile Museum at what was once the address Tiergartenstraße 4 in the heart of the city. Though Tiergartenstraße 4, by 1987, lay somewhere in the middle of the parking lot outside Berlin’s Philharmonie, this site had served during the Nazi era as the headquarters of the Nazis’ experiments with euthanasia. The address had also given to the experimental medical program its code name: Action “T-4.” Writing on behalf of the Mobile Museum association, the BGW’s Bernhard Müller complained that at the contemporary address, “one finds only a pavement desert, a final stop on a bus route with no sign of the past.”<sup>22</sup> In attempt to return significance to this site, the Mobile Museum’s organizers proposed to position the bus at the former site of Tiergartenstraße 4, holding discussions with scholars and doctors and undertaking a campaign that would commemorate Action T-4’s 200,000 victims.<sup>23</sup> Journalist and Holocaust

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<sup>17</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, undated

<sup>18</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, BGW, “Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum.”

<sup>19</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 6.1987, “Forum ’87,” 11. While the BGW managed much of the administrative work, other groups like the Aktives Museum supplied paid ABM workers, an essential component, the BGW had long since discovered, of successful alternative historical work. See LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, Protokoll des Mitgliederversammlung Aktives Museum, 19.11.1987.

<sup>20</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, 20.7.1987, from Wolfgang Endler for the Initiativekreis, Das mobile Museum, BGW, Kostenaufstellung für Ausstellung, Veranstaltungen, Katalog, provisorische Gedenktafel - Stand: 20.7.87. See also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, 7.8.1987, from Mumin Petzold-Pock, Das Mobile Museum, c/o BGW, Spendenaufwurf an die Mitglieder des Initiativekreises für das Mobile Museum und an alle anderen.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Friedlander. *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, BGW, “Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum.”

<sup>23</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, BGW, “Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum.”

historian working, at that time, at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, Götz Aly, served as the scholarly director of the project.<sup>24</sup> Joining the list of patrons in this effort were two key representatives from Berlin's medical community: the Berlin Medical Association [*Ärztekammer Berlin*] and the history working group of the Karl Bonhoeffer Mental Hospital.<sup>25</sup>

The plans for the exhibit began small: the bus would feature twelve posters that would document the organization of the Nazi's euthanasia program, its research, its murderous techniques, evidence of both acceptance and resistance, and the careers of those who participated in it.<sup>26</sup> But as planning progressed, the T-4 exhibit program grew more sophisticated, running the entire month of September under the title "Forgotten History? Tiergartenstraße 4 - Euthanasia Campaigns, 1939-1945." It began with a press conference directly in front of Berlin's legendary Philharmonie concert hall, followed by commentary from Ellis Huber, president of the Berlin Medical Association, Udo Sierck of the Initiative for the Physically Handicapped [*Krippelinitiative*] in Hamburg, and Leipzig medical historian Achim Thom. Later that week at the prestigious nearby independent film institute Arsenal, they screened the 1941 euthanasia propaganda film *Ich klage an* [*I Accuse*]. In the nearby Matthäus Church, the group also sponsored a lecture on euthanasia in the Nazi era and its impact on the field of psychiatry in Germany, delivered by prominent psychiatrist Klaus Dörner, and a subsequent lecture by several scholars on the question of whether Berlin's Karl Bonhoeffer Mental Hospital pursued a similar euthanasia program between 1933 and 1945. The exhibit program ended with a series of events that included a lecture by an immunologist and medical historian from East Berlin.<sup>27</sup> Other group members developed auxiliary events hosted on the occasion of—but independent from—the official program schedule. Active Museum member Sabine Weißler, for example, planned in conjunction with the Mobile Museum exhibit a lecture series in the nearby Gropius Building on the social politics of the Weimar Republic. Her series focused, in particular, on fascism's suppression of autonomy in the management of an individual's health and health insurance.<sup>28</sup>

The positive response to the Mobile Museum was considerable. In a letter to the "Friends of the Mobile Museum," Bernhard Müller called his colleagues to congratulate themselves both on the work that went into the T-4 exhibit and on the engagement they generated among the public.<sup>29</sup> He emphasized that visitors had come from far and wide to see the Mobile Museum exhibit. They "reacted with great concern" toward the historical content of the exhibit and expressed their "considerable approval" at the Mobile Museum's undertaking.<sup>30</sup> The museum also benefitted from its location in front of the Philharmonie, which often drew in accidental visitors from among curious concert goers.<sup>31</sup> In conjunction with the Mobile Museum exhibit and program series, the coordinators proposed to create a plaque commemorating the victims of the T-4 enterprise. The

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<sup>24</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, undated

<sup>25</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Bernhard Müller, BGW, "Neu in Berlin: Das Mobile Museum."

<sup>26</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, undated

<sup>27</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Terminkalender für die Ausstellung und die Rahmenveranstaltungen, "Vergessene Geschichte? -Tiergartenstraße 4- "Euthanasie-Aktionen 1939-1945, Veranstalter: Ärztekammer Berlin, Initiativkreis Mobiles Museum/Tiergartenstr 4, BGW.

<sup>28</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, Protokoll des Vorstandssitzung Aktives Museum, 10.2.1987. It remains unclear whether this series in fact materialized.

<sup>29</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Bernhard Müller, BGW, to Freunde des Trägerkreises "Mobiles Museum," 28.9.1987.

<sup>30</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, undated, Presseerklärung, Das mobile Museum, c/o BGW, Bernhard Müller, "Mord an 200.000 Kranken Erinnerung und Mahnung." Related: LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Christine Fischer-Defoy, stellv. Vorsitzende, to Herr Dr. Hassemer, Senator für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten, 31.8.1988.

<sup>31</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 6, Aktives Museum Mitglieder Rundbrief Nr. 1, Anne von Törne, "'T-4'-Ausstellung," 12.1987.

memorial plaque was to be placed at the former location of Tiergartenstraße 4 and its text would read: “Honor to the forgotten victims / Remember the politics of killing.”<sup>32</sup> An additional explanatory text would highlight the history of the T-4 campaign, in which “more than 200,000 defenseless humans were killed by gas, sleeping medication and hunger. Their lives,” the plaque continued, “were deemed unworthy, and their murders, euthanasia. The perpetrators were scholars, doctors, caretakers, civil servants,” among others. The victims themselves, the plaque’s initiators wished to emphasize, were poor and hopeless, pulled from hospitals and other institutions of public welfare. The text would close with a statement about the dangerous power of an overzealous state, registering the unevenness of T-4’s massive collection of victims murdered at the hands of relatively few perpetrators.<sup>33</sup> In their initiative, they received support from Berlin’s senator for cultural affairs, Volker Hassemer, and successfully petitioned to install the plaque before an abstract sculpture titled “Berlin Junction” and designed by the American artist Richard Serra that the city had recently installed in front of the Philharmonie.<sup>34</sup> One year after the Mobile Museum first undertook its T-4 work and exactly one year before the monument to the euthanasia victims was supposed to be installed, the Mobile Museum’s organizers wrote to Hassemer to inquire about the state of the monument. Serra had not shown up to a group meeting on the subject in May 1988, and the Mobile Museum group never heard anything further from him. They appealed to Hassemer once again to help them in their collective effort to create a “worthy commemoration” of the victims. “To those who were murdered or tortured, to those and their relatives, who were never offered redress, we are all responsible,” they explained to Hassemer.<sup>35</sup> After a period of debate and the selection of a new designer for the plaque, Mobile Museum’s organizers agreed in conjunction with Senator Hassemer that the plaque would be installed in front of Serra’s sculpture on the first of September 1989, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the invasion of Poland.

While the novice museum-makers generally encountered enthusiasm, they also experienced some negative exchanges, though less from the patrons of the Mobile Museum and more from within the ranks of the organizers themselves. Among the more disagreeable exchanges originated, in fact, with the museum’s academic director, Götz Aly. The Active Museum, a member of the Mobile Museum organizational group, had expressed its frustration in a letter to Aly about not having been listed as a supporter of the Mobile Museum in Aly’s book on the history of the euthanasia headquarters, *Aktion T4 1939-1945: Die “Euthanasie”-Zentrale in der Tiergartenstraße 4*, which had been made available for purchase at the T-4 exhibit as the key summary of the exhibit’s content. Thomas Lutz, a long-time member of the Active Museum (who represented Aktion Sühnezeichen on the Active Museum board), criticized Aly for failing to acknowledge that the Active Museum donated 500DM to the T-4 exhibit in addition to having been a member of the Mobile Museum’s executive board and participating actively in the formation of the exhibit. Keeping in mind that the Mobile Museum emerged as a grassroots project, the collaborative effort of many small local groups,

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<sup>32</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Das Mobile Museum, c/o BGW, Text-Vorschlag für den Gedenkstein, Tiergartenstrasse 4, undated. In a draft version of the text, the group had debate the precise language the memorial should use, with some calling for a stronger statement. One member had crossed out “Remember” and in its place argued that “it should read PILLORY [anprangern]!”

<sup>33</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, from Das Mobile Museum, c/o BGW, Text-Vorschlag für den Gedenkstein, Tiergartenstrasse 4, undated.

<sup>34</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Presseerklärung, Das Mobile Museum, c/o BGW, Bernhard Müller, “Mord an 200.000 Kranken Erinnerung und Mahnung,” undated. Related, see also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Christine Fischer-Defoy, stellv. Vorsitzende, to Herr Dr Hassemer, Senator für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten, 31.8.1988. See also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, “Richard Serra entwirft Gedenktafel für Euthanasie-Opfer,” *Tagesspiegel*, 2 September 1988, 14.

<sup>35</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Bernhard Müller, BGW, to Volker Hassemer, Senator für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten, 1.9.1988.

Lutz took Aly to task for ignoring the contributions of these groups. He charged Aly with dismissing the “solidarity” of smaller initiatives and failing to regard their donations of both time and labor with the same gravitas as those from the better endowed and more prestigious Berlin Medical Association, for example.<sup>36</sup> Relations with Aly quickly deteriorated as it became clear to the grassroots organizers of the Mobile Museum that they had misjudged their relationship to the scholar. While Aly applauded the coordinators of the T-4 exhibit, in a letter to the Mobile Museum’s board he called into question the nature of the entire enterprise. As he understood it, the Mobile Museum’s coordinating organizations had “never viewed themselves as a collective, but rather as a goal-oriented coalition of private individuals.” Aly claimed that they had agreed—and that this had been clear from the start—that they would dissolve the group at the end of the exhibit and that the project’s initiators would donate the bus to those who wished to continue its subsequent use throughout the city. But Aly dictated under no uncertain terms that the T-4 exhibit itself, for which he had provided the bulk of the content, would never leave the lot of the Philharmonie. As the primary author of the exhibit’s posted texts, Aly clarified that he was not prepared simply to hand them over to the Mobile Museum. He forbade anyone from using them again after the conclusion of the exhibit and prohibited the Mobile Museum’s organizers from giving away or selling any of the exhibit’s brochures after the conclusion of the event series. “They neither belong to you,” Aly wrote tersely, “nor are they available for your use.” Failure to comply, he argued, would amount to theft, an open threat to his intellectual property rights.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps in light of Aly’s wish to resolve his conflict with the Mobile Museum amicably (that is, without a lawsuit), the group agreed that Aly would end his work with the project upon the conclusion of the T-4 exhibit and that all texts from the exhibit would be destroyed in order to prevent their distribution. The organizational groups of the Mobile Museum would assume the cost of the posters and the printed texts, and they would abstain from pursuing legal action.<sup>38</sup> An awkward and rather unpleasant end to a promising undertaking.

### C. Subsequent Exhibits

Fortunately, the T-4 exhibit was hardly the Mobile Museum’s last. The Mobile Museum organizational group had conceived of the bus as a testament to its name: a museum that could move about the city, traveling to destinations where its exhibits would have the greatest impact. They presented the Mobile Museum as an alternative to the behemoth German Historical Museum, opposed by so many of the country’s alternative groups.<sup>39</sup>

One exhibit series that would keep the bus on the move took the form of the BGW’s street-renaming initiative. With its longstanding interest in exposing the historical traces of National Socialism present in the everyday spaces of West Germany, the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* took a special interest in the names given to streets and other landmarks within the city. Beginning in May 1988, the BGW organized an exhibit cycle on the history of Berlin’s street names. In an article to BGW members, Bernhard Müller—a participant both in the BGW’s street names working group as well as member of the Mobile Museum initiative—explained that the street renaming exhibit had nothing to do with “nostalgic representations.” The BGW’s work was not destined for “anecdote-

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<sup>36</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Thomas Lutz, Aktion Sühnezeichen, to Götz Aly, copied to AM, BGW, and VVN, 2.9.1987. See also Götz Aly, *Aktion T4, 1939-1945: die “Euthanasie”-Zentrale in der Tiergartenstrasse 4*. Berlin: Hentrich, 1987.

<sup>37</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Götz Aly, to Anne von Törne, Mumin Petzold-Pock, Bernhard Müller, Wolfgang Endler.

<sup>38</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Das Mobile Museum, c/o BGW, to Götz Aly, Vertragsentwurf als Ergebnis des Gespräches am Montag 7.9.87, 11.9.1987.

<sup>39</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 6, Aktives Museum Mitglieder Rundbrief Nr. 1, 12.1987, Anne von Törne, “T-4’-Ausstellung.” See also BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 6.1987, “Forum ’87,” 11

rich biographies about [the streets'] namesakes or harmless, idyllic neighborhood descriptions.” Müller stressed that publications like these already existed in relative abundance (often with sanction, whether tacit or explicit) from the state.<sup>40</sup> Rather than researching street names as an act of sentimentality, the BGW took up the issue of street naming as a political problem. The “historic roll and function of the city has changed radically,” Müller noted of the transformation Berlin had undergone in the four decades since the end of the Second World War. “But the problem of street names,” he elaborated, “has not followed suit.”<sup>41</sup> Urban topography, Müller explained, served as a canvas for political agendas. Governments—both generally and West Germany’s specifically—had attempted to create out of their physical surroundings what Müller dubbed an “*Ewigkeitstempel*,” a shrine to its aspirations of enduring power. Architecture, urban layouts, even the enamel of street signs in Berlin bore evidence of a palimpsest of bygone political systems: “to this very day, we see manifest Hohenzollern domination, imperial and colonial behaviors, but also racist, antisemitic, misogynistic elements.”<sup>42</sup> The so-called “African Quarter” in Berlin’s Wedding neighborhood, for example, with its African Street, Cameroon Street, Togo Street, and Swakopmund Street (named after the Namibian coastal city and former German colonial holding) absentmindedly recalled nineteenth-century German imperialism, the BGW argued. The BGW also criticized the city’s unwillingness to mark the site along the Landwehr Canal where Rosa Luxemburg’s body was later found after she was murdered by the Freikorps in 1919. The BGW lobbied to rename the Lichtenstein Bridge in Berlin’s Tiergarten the Rosa-Luxemburg Bridge in her memory.<sup>43</sup>

The BGW regarded the social-political issue of street names as having significant ramifications for West German society. Though in subtle ways, street names “impact everyone directly in their everyday lives and living spaces.” For this reason, Müller described the problem of inappropriate street names as a “problem like hardly any other,” one that forces a kind of “insurmountable conservatism.” At the heart this conservative impulse, Müller suggested, lay knee-jerk local patriotism, the simple fear of change, or a mistaken resignation to impotence in the face of bureaucracy.<sup>44</sup> On account of these obstacles, many who had undertaken the project of renaming in the previous four decades—the BGW recognized that they were hardly the first to take up this theme—had met with failure. In conjunction with the Mobile Museum, the BGW took on two projects: first, to document previous attempts—stalled or failed—to rename Berlin’s streets and second, to renew lobbying efforts to effect these changes.

Their 1988 street naming exhibit in the Mobile Museum acted, for one, as a source of public enlightenment [*Aufklärung*], Müller argued. It served as a first step in the process of informing an uninformed public about the problem of outdated street names. It also prevented residents—in fact, quite literally—from sidestepping the problem: by positioning the bus “quasi in-the-way” of their living quarters, the BGW prompted residents to look and—they hoped—think about the meaning of something so routinized and mundane as the name of the streets they walked daily.<sup>45</sup> Although the BGW planned to undertake further research on the history of Berlin’s street names—and, indeed, would publish in the same year a full book chronicling this history<sup>46</sup>—they intended that the Mobile Museum exhibit with its accompanying lectures, news articles, and publications would foremost, catalyze popular action by moving its visitors to support its cause. Ultimately, the BGW

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<sup>40</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 9

<sup>41</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 9

<sup>42</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 9

<sup>43</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 11. The BGW would succeed in changing the name of the Tiergarten bridge only a quarter of a century later.

<sup>44</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 10

<sup>45</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 10

<sup>46</sup> Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. *Sackgassen: keine Wendemöglichkeit für Berliner Strassennamen*. Berlin: Nishen, 1988.

proved just as vulnerable as its predecessors, however, and many of its initiatives made little headway.<sup>47</sup> But the group remained dogged in its efforts, circulating the Mobile Museum throughout the city and soliciting participation from a range of regional groups, including the SPD, the AL, the Young Socialists, the Peace Initiative, and a number of school groups.<sup>48</sup>

Other exhibits also kept the Mobile Museum on the move. In late 1987, the bus stood in front of Berlin's Japanese-German Center in Berlin's Dahlem neighborhood. It featured an exhibit on antimilitarism organized together with the German-Japanese Peace Forum and contributed to an effort to establish a sister city relationship between Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Berlin-Tiergarten.<sup>49</sup> In 1988, the Mobile Museum hosted an exhibit on how the heavily socialist, often communist, district of Wedding—sometimes called Red Wedding, for its political inclinations—experienced the November Pogrom, the so-called *Kristallnacht* on November 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in 1938. The exhibit detailed the integration of Jewish lives and businesses into the traditionally working-class neighborhood. Through this exhibit, the BGW hoped to provoke Wedding residents into engaging both with the history of their neighborhood and with this dark chapter in Germany's history.<sup>50</sup> Following the fiftieth anniversary of the November Pogrom, the Mobile Museum shifted gears entirely and ran an exhibit on a more contemporary subject: the AIDS epidemic and the history of discrimination against those infected. To Berlin's Schöneberg and Charlottenburg neighborhoods, the Mobile Museum brought an informational program that stressed the broad relevance of offering AIDS education to groups beyond prostitutes, the gay community, and drug addicts. The exhibit—titled “Contagious Measures” and organized in conjunction with a related program at Berlin's New Society for the Visual Arts—sought to combat “the stifling taboo” surrounding conversation about AIDS, which risked permitting the virus to spread unchecked.<sup>51</sup> “[B]old headlines and strong political language stand opposed to real education about AIDS, changes in sexual behavior, and a change in the interactions with those infected with AIDS,” members of the BGW's AIDS Project Group argued. Through the exhibit, the group aimed to stress the ways in which existing attitudes toward AIDS—both official and popular—only served to isolate victims, to enable their persecution, to catalogue them, and to punish them. They hoped the display would challenge the public to think through how exclusion and discrimination permitted uninfected individuals to relinquish any sense of responsibility, “a self-deception,” they suggested, “that only facilitates the spread of the virus.”<sup>52</sup> Embracing widespread AIDS education, the exhibit advertisement claimed boldly, “will make history.”<sup>53</sup> The BGW's desire to “make history,” not only through the AIDS exhibit but through the Mobile Museum project generally, meant fostering among Berlin's ordinary residents not only a

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<sup>47</sup> Only in 2012, for example—twenty-five years after the BGW first directed its attention to the Lichtenstein Bridge—did the group finally succeed in convincing the city to rename it the Rosa Luxemburg Bridge. And although the BGW began a campaign in 1987 to rename Manfred von Richtenhofen Street in the Tempelhof area after the Jewish interwar anarchist Erich Mühsam instead of after an imperial fighter pilot from the First World War, the street name remains unchanged even today; their campaign stalled beneath much parliamentary bickering. BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 6.1987, 12

<sup>48</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 12. See also LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, Ausstellung im Bus des “Mobilen Museums,” Steglitz - Schloßstraße, am Winterpavillon gegenüber dem Haupteingang des Bezirksamtes im Kreisel, Anwohner für Umbenennung, 6.-16.9.1988; Jürgen Karwelat, “Der Druck der öffentlichen Straße,” *Tageszeitung* 18.3.1994; BGWA Rundbrief 1994/1.

<sup>49</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 6, Aktives Museum Mitglieder Rundbrief Nr. 1, 12.1987, Anne von Törne, “T-4'-Ausstellung.” For the BGW's ongoing engagement with Japan, see BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, 20-28.

<sup>50</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 5, BGW, Das Mobile Museum, Einladung zur Ausstellungsöffnung on 3.11.88 in the Mobiles Museum, Dauer der Ausstellung: 3.-10.11.88.

<sup>51</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Projektgruppe AIDS: Kock-Rezepte gegen Pimmelpanik,” 16-17

<sup>52</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Projektgruppe AIDS: Kock-Rezepte gegen Pimmelpanik,” 18-19

<sup>53</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Projektgruppe AIDS: Kock-Rezepte gegen Pimmelpanik,” 17

more thoughtful historical dialogue about these issues but also one that would have enduring—that is, sustainable—implications for the residents themselves. The group intended that this kind of open dialogue would operate, in turn, toward the better of German society at large.

The Mobile Museum, as a collective cultural enterprise, attempted to correct for several of the key failures of its member groups in their other undertakings. It promised, above all, mobility. The Active Museum, for example, had demanded that its own museum, designed as an alternative to the static and traditionalist German Historical Museum, be “variable and mobile, so much so that its concept could be realized both within the grounds of the former Gestapo headquarters and outside of them.”<sup>54</sup> While the final form of the Active Museum would ultimately (and disappointingly) prove not terribly different from the conventional form that the German Historical Museum took, Active Museum members had a second shot at creating this kind of a museum space through their participation in the Mobile Museum. The museum promised to use its mobility to call into question Berlin residents’ relationships to their city, their neighborhoods, and the spaces of their daily lives. Organized in conjunction with the museum’s Wedding exhibit on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the November Pogrom, for example, was another exhibit planned for Berlin’s famous commercial artery, Kurfürstendamm. Here, foreshadowing a more permanent exhibit that the neighborhood of Schöneberg would install five years later just a short distance to the south, the BGW affixed texts and images to light posts that detailed the lives of Jewish community members and organizations that had once operated nearby.<sup>55</sup> Advocates for the spatial interventionists would later recognize the value of the museum’s decentralization. These proponents of spatial interventionism would highlight the manner in which the museum stood in conscious opposition to the mindset that had governed so much of Berlin’s postwar development, namely the idea of a “new centrality” in West Germany’s relationship to its past. Centrality, however, was not always best suited to historical pedagogy, they argued. Euthanasia, for example, unfolded throughout the country. The museum’s ability to move about a decentralized historical topography allowed it to address this history in a dynamic way.<sup>56</sup>

#### **D. The Death of the Mobile Museum and the End of Its Sustainable Utopia**

The Mobile Museum thus crystalized into an attempt at a sustainable utopian historical program: a decentralized historical educational enterprise, a joint product of several grassroots organizations, that carried with it the promise of endurance. It became a sort of “trademark” of the BGW and managed to attract the attention of Berlin residents and visitors from diverse backgrounds.<sup>57</sup> Greater public recognition also meant more attention from less thoughtful museum visitors. Just as soon as the museum began to gain speed, vandals stopped its sustainable utopian agenda in its tracks with a series of attacks on the bus. The Mobile Museum organizational group committed to a complete remodeling of the bus in June 1990, despite funding problems. Unfortunately that progress did not last long. As part of a post-Wall collaborative project with the former East German Museum of Workers’ Life around 1900, the BGW organized an exhibit called “Summer House, Garden Plot, Colony,” for which they housed the museum in an annex of one of Berlin’s many garden allotment communities in Treptow. The exhibit coincided with the 1990 FIFA World Cup, in which West Germany beat Argentina to become world soccer champions for the

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<sup>54</sup> LArch Berlin, B Rep. 232-233, 2, Protokoll der Mitgliederversammlung Aktives Museum, 19.5.1988.

<sup>55</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, 7-8.

<sup>56</sup> Stephanie Endlich. “Ein “dezentrales Monument”? Anmerkungen zu einem ungewöhnlichen Denkmalskonzept.” *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichshain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. Berlin: NGBK, 2002, 29-30.

<sup>57</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, 14

third time (their last victory had been in 1974). Perhaps in a fit of celebration, vandals destroyed the bus beyond repair.<sup>58</sup> The Mobile Museum group decided on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1990 to scrap the bus entirely, bringing to a close the promising attempt at creating a sustainable utopian historical project. The conversation shifted from one of remodeling to one of rebuilding from scratch. And while the BGW established a new bus group just three weeks later in an attempt to initiate Mobile Museum II, the project never gained the traction of the first museum initiative. Bugged down in bureaucratic details—long-term parking, financing for advertisements, sponsorships, insurance, and arrangements for necessary repairs—the group stalled before it could get the new museum up and running. Less than five years after the T-4 exhibition first opened, the Mobile Museum, and the hopes invested in it, remained little more than a memory.<sup>59</sup>

## II. West and East: The Impact of the Fall of the Berlin Wall

One of the Mobile Museum's greatest gifts to the BGW during its short life was that it allowed the BGW to bring its historical project across the East-West divide. The West Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* had, for some time, shown an interest in the East in tangential ways. The group's general interest in Wedding—a neighborhood on the edge of the British and Soviet occupational sectors of the city—for example, fostered a curiosity about neighborhoods along borders. Wedding offered a lens through which to examine how living on the margins shaped the everyday lives of the residents of these neighborhoods.<sup>60</sup> The BGW even went so far as to rent a separate storefront in Wedding to facilitate their exploration of *Alltagsgeschichte* in liminal spaces.<sup>61</sup> Their interest in the everyday lives of the working class and the history of resistance in Berlin during the Nazi era attracted them to the history of the left. They understood that the biographies they presented in their “Red Island” project shared similarities with biographies of those on the other side of the Berlin Wall. They had also made contacts with historians from the East. And at their archival meeting at the Salecina retreat center in Switzerland in 1988, they were eager to meet with a representative from the DDR's Contemporary Video Archive, a timely encounter as the BGW attempted to systematize its own info center's multimedia holdings.<sup>62</sup> After the BGW settled into the niche they had carved for themselves in West Berlin, they found themselves draw eastward as a natural progression of their interests.

### A. Existing Projects Go East

In summer 1988, the BGW had successfully run an exhibit in the Mobile Museum called “Pictures of Russians: Berlin 1945.” The exhibit had featured photographs of Russian soldiers after German capitulation and ran for four weeks in West Berlin. That the photos portrayed the soldiers as young and confused rather than confident and victorious made it that much more curious when the BGW successfully negotiated a six-week-long stay for the exhibit at the Soviet Museum in the Karlshorst neighborhood of East Berlin in November and December of 1988.<sup>63</sup> From the 11<sup>th</sup> of November through the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, the exhibit would run adjacent to the site of Germany's

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<sup>58</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, 14-15. See also “Chronik der Projekte des Vereins.” *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 7

<sup>59</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, 15

<sup>60</sup> BGWA 1985/86, Informationen und Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., “Berlin Postwar History, Wedding - An exhibit project of the Berliner and Weddinger GW for the 750th anniversary celebration.”

<sup>61</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6. For the final product of the BGW's research in Wedding see Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. *Der Wedding - Hart an der Grenze: Weiterleben in Berlin nach dem Krieg.* Berlin: Dirk Nishen Verlag, 1987.

<sup>62</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Second Archival Meeting in Salecina, Switzerland: ‘On Engagement with Images’”

<sup>63</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Russen in Karlshorst!!!,” 15. The museum, occupied by the Red Army and referred to as the Capitulation Museum until 1994, is now called the German-Russian Museum of Karlshorst.



capitulation. In a later reflection on the *Geschichtswerkstatt* movement, two intellectual powerhouses of the West German *Geschichtswerkstätten*, Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt, praised the “Pictures of Russians” exhibit in Karlshorst as “perestroika in action.”<sup>64</sup> The BGW altered several small aspects of the exhibit to make it more appropriate for an East German audience. They provided, for example, introductions to the exhibit in both Russian and German, an explanation of the project’s origins and intentions, an overview of the West German discussion about German capitulation in 1945, and an overview of the BGW itself. They elaborated or reformulated some of the images’ captions and in some cases replaced a particularly provocative photo with a text explanation, as with one image dealing with the subject of rape.<sup>65</sup> The BGW was given permission, however, to present effectively the same exhibit they had shown in West Berlin earlier that summer, and they could both distribute BGW pamphlets and sell BGW publications. The group thus began its engagement with East Berlin rather confidently.

Having broken the ice with “Pictures of Russians”—for many reasons, a less intuitive choice for an East-West cultural exchange—the BGW shifted its attention to bringing to East Berlin a project well-suited to a DDR audience: their “Red Island” project, which had met considerable success in the West but whose focus on a left-leaning, working-class, political vanguard neighborhood would appeal to Eastern visitors (and officials) as well. “Red Island” came to East Berlin, in fact, at the invitation of DDR officials, one result of a much longer conversation that began with the 1986 Cultural Convention between East and West Germany.<sup>66</sup> Beginning the first of May 1989, the “Red Island” exhibit went on display at the East German Museum of Workers’ Life in East Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood.<sup>67</sup> Much as with “Pictures of Russians,” the BGW was given relatively free license to determine the content of the exhibit. Their alterations focused only on making the exhibit more comprehensible to East German citizens.<sup>68</sup>

Though the BGW had originally agreed to run the exhibit until the end of the summer, it received such warm welcome that the Prenzlauer Berg museum extended its stay for four additional weeks. The exhibit averaged one hundred visitors per day, such an enthusiastic reception that one BGW member projected that, by the end of its run in East Berlin, the exhibit would have seen more visitors than the original 1987 installation in the Red Island itself. Impressive visitor statistics from the exhibit replicated themselves in other areas too. The BGW recorded more than five hundred exhibition catalogue sales. And the twice-monthly lecture series they had organized jointly with the Museum of Worker’s Life, called “Museum on Wednesday,” regularly brought in a full house. Guest speakers—representatives of both East and West—included, for example, scholar of cultural studies Horst Groschopp in conversation with publisher and leading patron of the *Geschichtswerkstatt* movement in West Germany Theo Pinkus. Discussion subjects ranged from media relations in the workers’ movement to the biography of communist political activist Willi Münzenberg to more contemporary issues.<sup>69</sup> These conversations proved enlightening not only to Eastern visitors but also to those visiting from the West. Of the participants in the “Museum on Wednesday” events, the “Red Island” coordinators wrote that West German visitors “were sometimes taken aback by the openness with which current issues and grievances were thematized and pilloried in the discussion.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt. “Radical Plurality: History Workshops as a Practical Critique of Knowledge.” *History Workshop Journal* 33:1 (20 March 1992), 80.

<sup>65</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/2, “Mitgliederversammlung der Geschichtswerkstatt - das Protokoll.”

<sup>66</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauerberg,” 14-15

<sup>67</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, Gisela Wenzel, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauer Berg,” 13-14

<sup>68</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauerberg,” 14

<sup>69</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, Gisela Wenzel, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauer Berg,” 13-14

<sup>70</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauer Berg,” 14

The BGW augmented its exhibit in the Museum of Workers' Life by installing the Mobile Museum in front of the brick-and-mortar museum. They used the Mobile Museum to inform East German visitors about the *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s work, its other exhibits, and its boat tours around Berlin's waterways, as well as to distribute printed materials.<sup>71</sup> Nishen Verlag, the press with which the BGW had collaborated on several other projects, expressed particular interest in reaching a new audience. Just two years before, Nishen had published the findings of the BGW's research on the Red Island as *Die Rote Insel: Berlin-Schöneberg: Bruchstücke zu einer Stadtgeschichte* [*Rote Insel. Berlin-Schöneberg. Fragments of a City History*]. The publisher sought for the book a broader audience beyond the residents of the Red Island themselves. They found that audience among the East Berliners.<sup>72</sup>

At least once per week, BGW members would open the bus up for a public discussion forum, which consistently attracted attention.<sup>73</sup> While exchanges with East German visitors to the exhibit were not always positive—one “Red Island” coordinator noted that younger visitors often seemed uninspired by the exhibit—BGW members remarked that many of the most rewarding experiences involved encounters with old DDR residents who had, at one point, lived in the Red Island neighborhood and could augment the content of the exhibit.<sup>74</sup> These productive exchanges cut both ways, and the BGW's East German hosts treated them to a local history tour around East Berlin that featured local monuments like the monument to the WWII battle at Seelow Heights near the German-Polish border and regional museums like the Oderbruch Museum about forty miles to the north east of Berlin, as well as the agrarian history museums in Wandlitz and Alt-Schwerin.<sup>75</sup> The BGW also benefited from exchanges with East German academics. At the end of June, many BGW members joined a professional conference on working-class cultural history sponsored by the Neukölln Heimat Museum and Berlin's Academy of Art. In addition to generating an opportunity for BGW members to explore the research methods and research groups around Humboldt University professor Dietrich Mühlberg, the conference also helped West German BGW members network with academics from the East.<sup>76</sup> Interest from official outlets in both East and West Berlin also proved relatively enthusiastic. The DDR's cultural critics found the exhibit intriguing. East German journalist and architectural critic Wolfgang Kil published in the weekly newspaper *Sonntag* released by the *Kulturbund* of the DDR a full page report on the BGW's work in West Berlin.<sup>77</sup> The East Berlin radio station Berliner Rundfunk featured a forty-five minute segment in its cultural program. Shorter multimedia reports appeared in *Abendschau*, *Zitty*, *Neues Deutschland*, and *BZ*.<sup>78</sup> While a visit from the West Berlin Cultural Committee to the exhibit in the Museum of Workers' Life rattled the East Germans and cast a shadow over an otherwise positive cultural exchange, BGW members took it in stride as evidence of the large gulf that remained between East and West at the diplomatic level, a gulf they hoped their modest historical work could nonetheless begin to bridge.<sup>79</sup>

## B. History from Below in Reunified Berlin

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<sup>71</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauerberg,” 14

<sup>72</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6, “Rote Insel. Berlin-Schöneberg. Fragments of a City History,” 8-9. See also Herbert Böpple and Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. *Die Rote Insel: Berlin-Schöneberg: Bruchstücke zu einer Stadtgeschichte*. Berlin: Nishen, 1987.

<sup>73</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Rote Insel auf dem Prenzlauer Berg,” 14

<sup>74</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauer Berg,” 14

<sup>75</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauer Berg,” 15

<sup>76</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauer Berg,” 14-15

<sup>77</sup> Wolfgang Kil. “Geschichte von Unten.” *Sonntag*, 2 July 1989.

<sup>78</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauerberg,” 14

<sup>79</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, “Rote Insel in Prenzlauerberg,” 15

The fall of the Berlin Wall galvanized the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* to a surprisingly modest degree. In the absence of the wall, the BGW was freed to explore aspects of East Germany that had previously remained off limits. They began, first, by cultivating further contacts with the East. For the 1989 HistoryFest, for example, the Heinrich Böll Foundation funded exchanges between the *Geschichtswerkstatt* and the anti-Stalinist history and civil rights group Memorial.<sup>80</sup> And at the encouragement of some members of the SPD, the BGW began to prepare two projects collaboratively with the Museum for Workers' Life, both of which related to reunification: a political-historical project titled "From Krenz to Kohl" and a project called "No Man's Land" that chronicled the last year of the DDR. Unfortunately the anticipated collaboration did not materialize as hoped. Both East and West wanted to retain their intellectual autonomy and thus limited their engagements to targeted assistance with specific projects and on a limited basis.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly after the Wall fell, the BGW took up contact with a more sympathetic group, namely the newly formed East Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* (OBGW) under the direction of Felix Mühlberg (son of the East German professor and ethnographer of working-class life Dietrich Mühlberg, with whom the BGW also found itself in dialogue). With just over a dozen members, all of whom were academically trained and most of whom held academic positions, the OBGW did not cut a particularly impressive figure in the eyes of those who saw the *Geschichtswerkstatt* framework as a means for destabilizing academic cliques rather than reinforcing them. That only several of the OBGW's members were former East Berliners was another strike against the group. But their research interests certainly passed muster with their Western counterpart. In the few years following reunification the OBGW explored the history of forced ethnic immigration from the nineteenth century diamond mining area in Germany's Namibian colonial holding; the history of women's contributions to the economy in the former Soviet Zone; everyday life on the German-German border; the history of German women internees in the Soviet Union; street food in the Second Reich; East Berlin social democrats and the social democratic milieu of the 1950s; and trace preserving efforts [*Spurensicherung*], particularly in Prenzlauer Berg.<sup>82</sup> They also held larger meetings two or three times per year on contemporary questions of relevance to newly reunified Germany, such as how to handle the Stasi's massive collection of files.<sup>83</sup> Despite their shared investments, however, neither contact nor collaboration between the BGW and OBGW proved particularly strong.<sup>84</sup>

While the BGW's hopes for its East German contacts tended to deflate, its members nevertheless maintained an interest in the history of East Germany. The City Tour by Boat working group was one of the more enthusiastic. Having requested special permission to use East Berlin's waterways for their boat tours already in 1985,<sup>85</sup> they jumped at the chance to incorporate East Berlin sites freely. Beginning in 1990, the group was able to offer a three-hour round trip tour

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt. "Radical Plurality: History Workshops as a Practical Critique of Knowledge." *History Workshop Journal* 33:1 (20 March 1992).

<sup>81</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, "Ost-West-Kontakte," 18-19.

<sup>82</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Felix Mühlberg, "Ostberliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. Ein Beitrag zur Arbeit der OBGW," 14-15, 19. The OBGW had registered itself as an official association in the association register of Charlottenburg. But, in a move Mühlberg claimed was not a typo, the organization was listed as the East Berlin *Gerichtswerkstatt*, or court workshop, rather than as the *Geschichtswerkstatt*.

<sup>83</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Felix Mühlberg, "Ostberliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. Ein Beitrag zur Arbeit der OBGW," 14. This conversation took place as part of the events of the Archive Day sponsored by the Unabhängiger Historikerverband. See also *WerkstattGeschichte* 5.

<sup>84</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, "Ost-West-Kontakte," 19

<sup>85</sup> BGWA exchange of letters between Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. and the Wasserstraßenhauptamt of the Ministerium für Verkehr in East Berlin, from the Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt on 13.12.1985 and 25.4.1986, with a reply from the Wasserstraßenhauptamt of East Berlin on 10.6.1986

through much of the Spree River and Landwehr Canal.<sup>86</sup> Two years later for the two-year anniversary of the official reunification of the two Germanys on 3 October 1990, the BGW hosted a special thematic tour for East Berliners and West Berliners together, titled “Hurray, We’re Reunified.”<sup>87</sup> The “humorous, ironic tour” aimed to reveal the development of reunified Berlin since the end of the DDR-era.<sup>88</sup> The same year, they also instituted a tour titled “40 Years DDR - Over with and forgotten?” Traces of the DDR, they explained, “are slowly getting blurry. Many things have been repressed or blown out of proportion.” They presented their tour, which ran through the heart of the East—Berlin’s Mitte neighborhood—as “turning the high beams on this history,” which, they noted, “does not consist just of Trabis and the Stasi. Sixteen million people lived in this country.” And they made it their mission to tell their stories.<sup>89</sup> In 1998 they added another tour, “Rebellious Berlin,” that sought to highlight Germany’s major revolutionary moments.<sup>90</sup> By putting 1989 in a chronology with 1848, 1918, and 1968, the BGW worked to find a way to narrate reunification as part of a longer shared German history of revolution.

Reunification enabled the BGW to expand its street naming project eastward as well. While the forty posters of Bernhard Müller’s 1988 Mobile Museum street naming exhibit, *Sackgassen* or “Impasses,” focused primarily on the history of West Berlin, he had also taken up fairly substantial contact with the East in preparing the project. The BGW had begun by researching names in the East Berlin neighborhood of Mitte and planned to use their connections in East Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood to tackle that area next. Perhaps a bit arrogantly, they described their plans for researching the long history of street renamings in East Berlin since 1945 as “a huge effort with inestimable value for the DDR itself,” though they may have based their assessments on interest expressed by the DDR’s *Kulturbund* to feature their findings in a future exhibit.<sup>91</sup> After the Wall fell and following the elections of May 1990, a lively discussion kindled in Berlin over the nature of street names. Though in the former East, many instances of successful street renamings efforts simply resulted in reversions to more traditional names, one BGW member underscored the heightened interest in bringing women’s names more prominently into the urban landscape. The BGW would ultimately meet similar resistance in its attempts to rename streets after women, but it did succeed in lobbying the city to append quotes from women to relevant street signs in some neighborhoods in both west and east.<sup>92</sup>

Smaller projects that dealt with history from below in reunified Berlin cropped up too. In the fall of 1991, the BGW took up research on the Oberbaum Bridge, a border crossing point that connected West Berlin’s neighborhood of Kreuzberg with East Berlin’s Friedrichshain. With the fall of the wall, the bridge had awakened, they explained, “from a Sleeping-Beauty-like slumber, transforming from a hardly used border crossing into one of the most important hinges between the two halves of the city.” They described the bridge as occupying a mythic position for residents on both sides of the wall. It stood as “the end of the world.”<sup>93</sup> Their research and the subsequent

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<sup>86</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1999/1, Karin Winklhöfer and Jürgen Karwelat, “15 Jahre Dampfergruppe. Seit 1984 - und noch nicht untergegangen. 15 Jahre Historische Stadtrundfahrten mit der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 21

<sup>87</sup> BGWA Historische Stadtrundfahrten mit dem Schiff, 1992.4-9

<sup>88</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1999/1, Karin Winklhöfer and Jürgen Karwelat, “15 Jahre Dampfergruppe,” 21

<sup>89</sup> BGWA Historische Stadtrundfahrten mit dem Schiff, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1992.4-9.

<sup>90</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1999/1, Karin Winklhöfer and Jürgen Karwelat, “15 Jahre Dampfergruppe,” 21

<sup>91</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, Bernhard Müller, “Sackgassen? Projektverlauf,” 12

<sup>92</sup> Jürgen Karwelat, “Schon wieder ‘ne Luise? Berliner Straßenumbenennungen - Die Zwischenbilanz ergibt: viele Chancen vertan.” *die tageszeitung*, 13.3.1992. See also BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, 11; Jürgen Karwelat. “Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge.” *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 59

<sup>93</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, Cord Pagenstecher and Jürgen Karwelat, “Sommerspaß auf der Oberbaumbrücke: Open-Air-Ausstellung.”

exhibit they planned for it focused on three objects: the bridge as a border both between two cities and within a single city, the river as a divided site of industry, and the banks as the backdrop for two sets of everyday life. They wanted to explore the site as one of tension: both a border and a bridge (both literal and metaphorical), both a site of division and a site of unity.<sup>94</sup> In 1998, another BGW research group took up a project with an eye toward the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1848 democratic revolutions, which it noted had received little attention from Berlin's Senate. Only fifty years ago, however, things looked entirely different. Against the backdrop of the nascent Cold War, the celebration of the hundredth anniversary loomed much larger in divided Berlin. It became a political laboratory in which to test the agendas of the occupying forces. In researching speeches and press reports, the BGW explored how politicians and journalists polemicized the relationship between the Western allies and the Soviet Union. From the vantage point of the Western sectors, the 18<sup>th</sup> of March represented “an overwhelming commitment to freedom,” as the Western newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* argued in its extensive coverage of the rallies organized in the western parts of the city without the contribution of the SED. The seventy or eighty thousand people who gathered in front of the Reichstag ruins despite pouring rain “to demonstrate for freedom,” the BGW highlighted, could be viewed as an expression of anticommunist sentiments.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile the SED had put its preparations for the anniversary in the service of the People's Congress Movement [*Volkskongreßbewegung*], which sought to fight the division of Germany and to install social-political programs more favorable to the SED in the Western zones. The future president of the DDR Wilhelm Pieck presented the failures of 1848 as the product of an act of betrayal by the bourgeoisie. Pieck argued that, in the new postwar Germany, the time was ripe “to conclude the battle for Germany's national unity and the wellbeing of the German people.”<sup>96</sup> Although unity was on the lips of German leaders representing both Western and Eastern occupation zones, the BGW highlighted the opposition that had already kindled between east and west, a foreshadowing of what was to come in the next forty years. The BGW would use this research to explain the largely lackluster response to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The BGW thus engaged in meaningful ways with East Berlin and East Germany more generally. Its members explored the manifestations of division as well as the sometimes unexpected connections shared between East and West. One major omission, however, spoke volumes about the fate of the group in a reunified Germany: the Berlin Wall itself.

### C. The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* in Post-Wall Germany

Writing in retrospect, twelve years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the BGW member Martin Düspohl described 1989-90 as a “moment of awakening” in Germany, a turning point beyond which “everyone and everything suddenly began to look forward.” Instead of attending to the past, the country reoriented toward the future. Instead of engaging the local, they turned toward the newly-constituted national.<sup>97</sup> The so-called “rush to German unity,” which touched all areas of life—not only political, but also economic, social, and cultural—eclipsed popular interest in more mundane aspects of life.<sup>98</sup> BGW members—historians, not prognosticators—found themselves just as

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<sup>94</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, Cord Pagenstecher and Jürgen Karwelat, “Sommerspaß auf der Oberbaumbrücke,” 6

<sup>95</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1998/2, Angela Martin, “Märzfeiern in Zeiten des Kalten Krieges. Der 100. Jahrestag der 1848er-Revolution in Ost- und West-Berlin,” 35.

<sup>96</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1998/2, Angela Martin, “Märzfeiern in Zeiten des Kalten Krieges,” 36.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Düspohl. “20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt: Ein persönlicher Rückblick.” *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 50

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Konrad Hugo Jarausch. *The Rush to German Unity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

surprised and unsettled by the fall of the Wall as most other Germans. But these historians would meet this world historical event unfolding right before their eyes with surprising silence.

The fall of the Wall ultimately proved the BGW's "greatest challenge," as one longstanding BGW member described it: "the most important political event in the history of the organization passed by without leaving deep traces" or generating much activity.<sup>99</sup> Of course, he elaborated, "[w]orld history and everyday history were intimately intertwined with each other [*ganz dicht aufeinander und ineinander*]." <sup>100</sup> But BGW members seemed to have great difficulty engaging with the process of German reunification as a paradigm shift that demanded the attention of historians. In the immediate wake of the global, European, and German sea change of 1989-91, the BGW hosted no major conference, published no substantive materials, ran no major exhibits that took up the pivotal historical question of the nature of German reunification.<sup>101</sup> The photodocumentation exhibit "From Krenz to Kohl," which aimed to document the process of political reunification and which had been organized in collaboration with the Museum for Workers' Life in former East Berlin drew few participants.<sup>102</sup> Instead, the BGW fell back on the same set of historical question that first motivated it, namely life during National Socialism, and in 1991 they initiated a major project to research Jews in Kreuzberg that would consume their attention.<sup>103</sup>

Not until a decade after the fall of the Wall did the BGW finally publish reflections at length on the historical importance of 1989. In 1997 several members of the group issued a call in the *Berliner Zeitung* inviting both Berliners and non-Berliners to share their experiences of the days surrounding November 9<sup>th</sup>. The group aimed to document the things everyday people saw and felt; the BGW's members wanted "once again to remember together how [November 9<sup>th</sup>] unfolded and how we felt then." They sought to document the range of emotions during the most decisive event in many people's lives: "feelings of chaos, fraternization, fear for the future, above all limitless nearly-impossible-to-describe happiness and amazement at the sudden world historical event." They republished the advertisement in *Tagesspiegel* and the weekly newspaper of the evangelical church two years later, in 1999, after receiving only a weak response to the first call for submissions. Perhaps driven by the approaching round number anniversary, the second ad generated much more enthusiasm. They gathered seventy submissions, many with personal photographs, as well as a number of contributions from professional writers like Heinz Knobloch, Freya Klier, and Peter Schneider. After struggling to find a press willing to publish the book, they ultimately chose to publish it themselves.<sup>104</sup>

The BGW's surprisingly delayed engagement with this pivotal historical moment augured their later failure to reinforce their relevance in post-wall Germany. Their questionable status became readily evident. Their funding situation became more precarious almost immediately. On account of the upheaval, they chose not to submit their annual application for government funding, and in August 1990, members of the SPD and AL reinforced their hesitations by suggesting that any appeal for funding while the government sped toward official reunification would be unrealistic. Instead, they encouraged the BGW to apply for one-time emergency funding and to grease the proverbial wheels by incorporating into their application plans to coordinate their efforts with the Museum of Workers' Life in former East Berlin. A cooperative effort between the two organizations, which the Berlin Senate saw as similar and thus in competition for funding from the

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<sup>99</sup> Karwelat, "Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge," 59-60

<sup>100</sup> Karwelat, "Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge," 59

<sup>101</sup> Düsphohl, "20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 50

<sup>102</sup> Karwelat, "Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge," 59

<sup>103</sup> Düsphohl, "20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 50-51

<sup>104</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1999/1, Jürgen Karwelat and Marcel Munte, "Projekte 9 November 1989 - Hoffentlich wird es ein Buch," 23-24.

same pot, would increase both groups' chances of receiving the grants they wanted. A common meeting between the two groups in September of 1990 generated, at least within the BGW, a weighty discussion about its self-conception. Ultimately both groups declined to band together for a shared funding application, preferring instead to remain financially, methodologically, and substantively independent.<sup>105</sup>

The reluctance of the Museum of Workers' Life to adopt the practices and research projects of the BGW represented a larger trend in East Germany, one that in part explains the BGW's difficulties justifying its continued existence after 1989. Put simply, the *Geschichtswerkstatt* movement won little favor among citizens of the former DDR. One East German historian sympathetic to the *Geschichtswerkstätten* described the situation as "sobering" and "disappointing."<sup>106</sup> In the words of one of his colleagues from the West on the situation in the former DDR: "people's eyes are on the future, no-one wants to look backwards. People in the East want consumer goods, not history."<sup>107</sup> Certainly, Germans from both East and West brought some initial optimism to the pursuit of history from below in reunified Germany. From the perspective of the West, Germany had just absorbed forty years of East German history as part of its own national narrative. And in the East, the state played such a prominent role in the fabric of everyday life that working through the history of the former involved working through the history of the latter.<sup>108</sup> Already in December 1989, just a few weeks after the Wall fell, the East Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* formed. And conferences like those organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on local and regional historical research helped East Germans make connections with western researchers—both professional and amateur—undertaking similar projects *vor Ort*. The emphasis, many in the East were quick to highlight, was on building intellectual networks, not "copying West German *Geschichtswerkstätten*."<sup>109</sup> Particularly in former East Berlin and Leipzig—former DDR cities with lively academic institutions—students and young scholars found themselves drawn to the *Geschichtswerkstätten* as an opportunity to push for the democratization of historical research in the east.<sup>110</sup> The *Geschichtswerkstatt* framework offered them a springboard from which to issue in new critiques of orthodox Marxist theory, critiques with which they could only have engaged hesitantly in the DDR. It allowed them to gauge the public reception of their research directly. And it permitted them to respond to Western scholars who dominated research on the East by claiming expertise [*"Sachkompetenz"*]<sup>111</sup>—many Easterners thought unfairly; they sought, instead, to even out the caricatures Westerner researchers sometimes drew of the East.<sup>112</sup> But these enterprises would, in the end, meet only limited success, and many participants quickly grew disillusioned.<sup>112</sup> Cooperation between groups—the lifeblood of the early West Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*—tended to be short-lived. Differing opinions on terminology—the definitions of Stalinism or dictatorship, for example—as well as polarizing stances on major historiographical debates—the totalitarianism thesis, that is, the question of whether and how to compare totalitarian

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<sup>105</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, "Institutionalisierung," 17-18.

<sup>106</sup> Axel Doßmann. "Geschichtswerkstatt-Initiativen im Osten - ein ernüchterndes Fazit." *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 333.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Wildt. "History Workshops in Germany: A Survey at the End of the German Post-War Era." Lyndal Roper, tr. *History Workshop: A Collectanea, 1967-1991: Documents, Memoirs, Critique and Cumulative Index to History Workshop Journal*. Raphael Samuel and History Workshop Centre for Social History, eds. Oxford: History Workshop, 1991, 61.

<sup>108</sup> Wildt, "History Workshops in Germany," 61.

<sup>109</sup> Harald Dehne. "W(a)ende für/gegen eine Geschichtswerkstatt in der DDR?" *Geschichtswerkstatt* 20, 1990; *Geschichtswerkstatt* 22, 1990; *Geschichtswerkstatt* 1, 1992. See also Doßmann. "Geschichtswerkstatt-Initiativen im Osten," 328-329.

<sup>110</sup> Doßmann. "Geschichtswerkstatt-Initiativen im Osten," 328-329.

<sup>111</sup> Doßmann. "Geschichtswerkstatt-Initiativen im Osten," 329-331.

<sup>112</sup> Doßmann. "Geschichtswerkstatt-Initiativen im Osten," 332.

or fascist regimes—tended to drive a wedge between nascent and somewhat precariously-situated East German historical groups, preventing more robust and sustained collaborative work between East and West.<sup>113</sup>

In an article published in the Britain-based *History Workshop Journal*, Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt—two German *Geschichtswerkstatt* members, both of whom went on to fairly prominent careers in the academic establishment—turned to Michel de Certeau for theoretical guidance about the promises of historical practice in reunified Germany. Quoting Certeau's last major work, *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction* (1987), Lindenberger and Wildt stressed that “[t]he narration of history is performative. It makes what it says ‘believable’ and as a consequence, it leads to action. Producing believers, it ultimately produces actors. The solemn voice of narration transforms, displaces and regulates social space. It exercises an immense power which evades control, since it presents itself as the true representation of what happens or what happened.”<sup>114</sup> Though Lindenberger and Wildt, here, used Certeau to explain the popular affection for the BGW and its agenda, we might also repurpose this excerpt to understand the BGW's insignificance in the East and in a post-Wall Germany. Over the course of the early- and mid-1980s, the BGW had indeed engaged in a believable performance of history. Working in a context that had uncovered a vacuum in official historical research on National Socialism, namely a failure to engage with the uptake and impact of National Socialism in everyday life, the BGW staked a claim to its territory by providing an opportunity for historians, both amateur and professional, to explore the rise of Nazism in their own neighborhoods. That this academic moment would culminate in the lively Historian's Debate of the late 1980s makes clear that the BGW had hit a nerve. But the BGW proved surprisingly inflexible in its historical interests. To carry the metaphor of theatrical performance a bit further, we might suggest that when society swapped out the old playbill for a new one at the end of the decade, the BGW failed to take notice. The script had changed, and interest in the history of national socialism was suddenly replaced by the German-German question. Unable to engage with the major moment of historical rupture that happened before their eye, the BGW found itself—metaphorically—performing Brahms, while everyone else had moved on to Schönberg. While the group's convincing historical performance led to action in the 1980s, in the '90s their myopic interests prevented them from doing the same.

### III. Schism in the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* and the Fate of their Utopian Vision

The BGW's rocky attempts to find its intellectual place in a post-Wall Germany were complicated by an untenable social dynamic that developed within the organization and in its relationships to other alternative groups. Irreconcilable opinions about funding, professionalization, and group leadership; intransigence toward peer grassroots organizations; and the decline of some of its stronger projects led to the deterioration of the BGW's agenda and a subsequent loss of hope. While the BGW's sustainable utopian historical program might have foundered simply on account of the group's dogged adherence to outdated research interests after the Wall, the constellation of conditions that developed in the next decade ensured its demise.

#### A. The Pressures of Success: Funding and Professionalization

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<sup>113</sup> Doßmann. “Geschichtswerkstatt-Initiativen im Osten,” 332. See also Alexander von Plato, “Notizen zu einer ‘Geschichte von unten’ in Ost und West.” *Geschichtswerkstatt* 24, 1990.

<sup>114</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, “Radical Plurality,” 83. See also Michel de Certeau. “Die Geschichte: Wissenschaft und Fiktion.” *Theoretische Fiktionen: Geschichte und Psychoanalyse*. Wien: Turia + Kant, 1997, 33-60; Michel de Certeau. *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.



The BGW's success in the mid-1980s generated a series of administrative issues the group proved unprepared to handle as the Wall came down and it began to fight for a place in newly reunified Germany. The first of these problems was financial.

The BGW had registered with the state as an official organization in 1981 and later received the designation of a non-profit. Together, these statuses allowed them to secure substantial financial support. Though the group regularly applied for state funding, it understood its intellectual independence to hinge on its ability to obtain funding from non-governmental sources as well.<sup>115</sup> While the BGW never enjoyed complete financial stability, in its heyday it provided for its researchers and participants admirably, receiving grants as high as a million DM and funding for a number of paid positions for research associates and assistants [*ABM-Stellen*].<sup>116</sup> The fall of the Wall tested the BGW's financial situation, however, and not only by forcing the group to weigh the option of funding that hinged on uncomfortable collaborative relationships. After a botched state funding application in late 1989 and the delay of the subsequent 1990 application on account of the tumult of reunification, when the BGW finally got around to submitting its 1991 funding proposal, it had recalibrated its investments. Although unwilling to join forces with the Museum of Workers' Life, the group nevertheless shifted its self-presentation in its application to the Berlin Senate away from the its long-term archival project toward support for a range of projects whose progress had slowed with the BGW's stanch income flow.<sup>117</sup> The group's uneven financial situation sent it into a tailspin and in early 1992 group members were warned of an impending acute financial crisis later that fall. To forestall the group's downward spiral, the BGW's executive committee began to exercise strict control over its finances.<sup>118</sup> The decision only exacerbated financial problems that had grown slowly over the previous few years. The organization had not been able to offer its paid workers a wage increase, for example, and instead could offer only compensatory time off. It also had to intensify its fundraising efforts as annual member contributions amounted to enough only to cover the BGW's fixed operational costs. Any expenses for project development had to be funded by external sources. Eager to use its publications to bring in whatever revenue it could, but also in the wake of the dispute with Götz Aly over authorship in the T-4 exhibit, the BGW was forced to confront explicitly the question of copyright. For all subsequent projects, the organization took strides to identify very clearly who could claim ownership over, and thus profit from, each of its projects.<sup>119</sup>

The BGW's financial problems came to a head toward the end of the 1990s as Berlin's tax office [*Finanzamt*], looking for ways to consolidate its expenses, reassessed registered non-profit organizations and their tax obligations. The BGW fell under the gaze of the *Finanzamt* in 1998. After two separate audits, it became clear that the BGW was in danger of losing its tax-exempt status. Fortunately, the BGW cleared up the confusion by changing the language of its constitution, clarifying its purpose and the tasks the organization performed in order to identify how it served the common good. The newly reformulated constitution highlighted, for example, that its boat tours were educational events delivered in a scholarly manner and that its research activities would result

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<sup>115</sup> BGWA 1985/86, Informationen und Programm, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.

<sup>116</sup> It bears noting that, after a fair amount of success securing ABM positions for its various projects in divided Germany, the BGW struggled after the fall of the Wall to obtain funding for a position for research on East Berlin. See BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Michael Pfléghar, "Arbeitsbericht zur ABM-Stelle in der BGW vom 1.3.1991 bis 28.2.1993," 8. See also BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6, Thomas Lindenberger, "Von der Sowjetunion lernen... Anmerkungen zur letzten MV der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 24.

<sup>117</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, Andreas Ludwig, "Institutionalisierung," 3; BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, "Institutionelle Förderung," 3.

<sup>118</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, Jürgen Karwelat, "Finanzen der BGW," 4.

<sup>119</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/2, "Mitgliederversammlung der Geschichtswerkstatt - das Protokoll."

in publications. While the audits and the revised constitution never threatened the BGW's self-understanding, its executive committee claimed, they nevertheless offered incontrovertible evidence that the group's existence was far from guaranteed.<sup>120</sup>

This nagging sense of insecurity helped to nurture an already nascent concern among group members about the group's professionalization. The BGW had always positioned itself as a nexus between professional and amateur historians, between the methods and fields of academic research—in particular oral history, image research, and the history of mentalities—and informal local historical “forensics” or *Spurensuche vor Ort*, that is, those discussions the *Geschichtswerkstatt* movement understood to have been excluded from the traditional university setting.<sup>121</sup> As the BGW staked a place for itself in Berlin's academic discourse, however, it grew more tolerant—often welcoming, even—of those academic attitudes and practices it had once resisted. The creation of a respected, professional publication topped the list. Where *Geschichtswerkstatt* participants had once criticized the tenacious pursuit of peer-reviewed publications as an emblem of “ossified academic life [*erstarrten Wissenschaftsbetrieb*],” an initiation ritual of the Ivory Tower that threatened the alternative discursive environment the *Geschichtswerkstätten* sought to create, they would later fight to make their organizational publication more professional. Out of the original journal *Geschichtswerkstatt*, the more formal *WerkstattGeschichte* was born.<sup>122</sup> Some members would come down hard against the concern with professionalism, calling it instrumental. One member cited critical theorist Oskar Negt who recognized “among critical intellectuals an ‘erosion of their self-understanding.’ From ‘the reservoir of disappointed, leftist intellectuals, influenced by an employment crisis [*Berufsnof*],” he highlighted, emerged a new collection of intellectuals who measured their success in terms of “ice-cold realism” and “ever intensifying expediency.” The drive to publish in outlets with broad audiences participated in this instrumentalization. The *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s journal no longer served the earlier movement's goal of “the self-liberation of humanity [*Selbstbefreiung des Menschens*];” instead, it provided line-items on curricula vitae.<sup>123</sup> Concerns about professionalization came to eclipse some of the group's other, more substantive interests, which in turn generated insuperable interpersonal conflict both within the group and between the BGW and other organizations.

## **B. The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* Unravels: Crises of Management and Interpersonal Dynamics**

Where commitment to the principles of grassroots democracy conflicted with the exigencies of administering a complex organization with many moving parts (and because of their having

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<sup>120</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1998/2, “Das Finanzamt prüft und befindet: die Gemeinnützigkeit des Vereins ist in Gefahr,” 2-4. This existential uncertainty was born out not only at the regional level but also at the national level. Although accounts conflict on the specifics, it is safe to say that over three hundred historians attended the 1984 Geschichtsfest in Berlin. Ten years later, the Geschichtsfest held in Mainz drew a mere fifty participants. See Alfred Georg Frei. “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 316.

<sup>121</sup> BGWA Gisela Wenzel. “Grabe, wo du stehst.” Zwei Jahrzehnte Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt.” Hamburg, October 2003. Tagung der Geschichtswerkstätten. See also Alfred Georg Frei. “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise.” *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994, 317; and Alf Lüdtkke, “Rekonstruktion von Alltagswirklichkeit - Entpolitisierung der Sozialgeschichte?” *Klassen und Kultur. Sozialanthropologische Perspektiven in der Geschichtsschreibung*. Robert M. Berdahl, et al., eds. Frankfurt am Main, 1982, 332.

<sup>122</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 316-317, 320-321; see also Alfred Georg Frei and Michael Wildt. “Hirsebrei und Seifenblasen. Die Geschichtswerkstätten und ihre Kritiker.” *L'80. Zeitschrift für Literatur und Politik*. 39, 1986, 64-72, here 71.

<sup>123</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise;” 321.

received substantial grants, higher economic stakes), disagreements ignited among BGW group members. The first feathers ruffled over the so-called Monday Group [*Montagsgruppe*], which operated as a “sort of an expanded executive committee.” Importantly, anyone was welcome to participate in the Monday Group, so the group’s leadership—which, they liked to note, ended every meeting with a trip to the bar—was limited, but self-selecting and open.<sup>124</sup> The payout from this openness—they hoped radical democracy in the group’s administration—however, never came. Already in its first few years, the group saw a fifty-percent decline in Monday Group participation, a decline that threatened the group’s core values and communicative structure.<sup>125</sup> Hierarchy and operational opacity began to grow where none had been intended. Conflict often arose between the Monday Group leadership and the BGW’s regular membership over the initiation of new projects, a process over which many felt insufficient agency.<sup>126</sup> Calling for a renewed level of “*glasnost* in the Berliner *Geschichtswerkstatt*,” BGW member Thomas Lindenberger criticized the Monday Group in 1987 for driving participants away, a product both of climate and the workload demanded of them.<sup>127</sup>

Entropy began to dominate in 1987 when the group initiated a project titled “The August Experience 1914.” The undertaking, which they aimed to complete over the next two years in time for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the start of the First World War, would engage the question of how contemporary Germany understood the euphoria at the outbreak of the war. Of course, what interested the BGW was less the war itself or the process of mobilization from the top down than the “mental mobilization” of everyday Germans.<sup>128</sup> The BGW hoped to present its research in a three-month-long exhibit for the Kreuzberg art center, the *Künstlerhaus Bethanien*, and for this undertaking it sought funding from the *Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie*. The stakes of the project elevated tremendously when, in February 1988, the BGW received the full amount of its funding application, an impressive 1.05 million DM—the highest of any BGW effort—which won for the undertaking the nickname “the million Mark project.”<sup>129</sup>

The BGW earmarked these funds for a rather bulky group of administrative positions: a general project coordinator, an aesthetic coordinator, a content coordinator, an accountant, and five assistants who would oversee research on intellectual historical, art historical, religious, film, and pedagogical themes. They had assembled this network of administrators in order to ensure the highest level of organization, diversity of represented disciplines, and quality of research. But the unwieldy group ended up catalyzing the opposite: an impenetrable tangle of different, often irreconcilable opinions about the trajectory of the project.<sup>130</sup> Part of the problem, one BGW member uninvolved in the project highlighted, was the lack of discussion about the enterprise’s overall conceptual framework. The project began without consensus, without clarifying personal qualifications and individual interests and, in doing so, without establishing priorities and responsibilities.<sup>131</sup> No common thread ran through the project’s components. Little cooperation

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<sup>124</sup> BGWA Informationen: Berliner Geschichts Werkstatt e.V., 1984.

<sup>125</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, 7.3.1983. On the continued stagnancy of the Montagsgruppe, see also BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1987.6, Thomas Lindenberger, “Von der Sowjetunion lernen... Anmerkungen zur letzten MV der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 22.

<sup>126</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, “Montagsgruppe/Vorstand,” 13.

<sup>127</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6, Thomas Lindenberger, “Von der Sowjetunion lernen... Anmerkungen zur letzten MV der Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 20.

<sup>128</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1988/3, “Projekt 1914 - Lehrer und Krieg,” 5.

<sup>129</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse: 1914 und 1989: Das Projekt, Die Krise, Die Lösung, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 2-3, 5.

<sup>130</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, 2-3, 5.

<sup>131</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, Andreas Ludwig, “Projektkrise - Kommunikationskrise?,” 56, 58.

existed between the different specialties. They had trouble even narrowing in on a methodological approach, vacillating between the history of mentalities or an art historical approach.<sup>132</sup> Guided by their commitment to grassroots democracy, the Monday Group left the leadership of the “August Experience” project to its own devices. This autonomy backfired, however, and in the absence of a clear and coherent mission for the project, its participants had, at best, a hazy idea about their responsibilities. Where the BGW thought it had planted the seeds of intellectual freedom, trust, and solidarity, it had instead sowed what one project assistant described as “a general ‘couldn’t-care-less attitude.” Resignation, laziness, and fear, he explained, “mixed with frightful arrogance and a tendency to scheme,”<sup>133</sup> which another member lamented “turned social relations into a kind of war.”<sup>134</sup> “It would take a Balzac,” he complained, “to represent the complicated braid of motives and actions” among the project’s participants.<sup>135</sup>

In conjunction with its leadership problems, the “August Experience” project group also faced problems with its participants, most of whom were volunteers. When the BGW moved to hire a sixth paid assistant midway through 1988, despite already having a wealth of unpaid volunteers, they offended some of those offering their labor without remuneration. Believing that the organization undervalued their contributions, many of the project’s unpaid volunteers chose to leave the research group. Confusion both about the project’s financial standing and about the demographics of its researchers amplified existing frustrations.<sup>136</sup> In May 1988, the BGW elected two members—Ray Rosdale and Thomas Lindenberger—to serve as mediators between the “August Experience” project and the organization as a whole. Just a few weeks later, however, both Rosdale and Lindenberger declared themselves powerless against the disaster that the “August Experience” project had become and abdicated their positions. Immediately following in their footsteps were two other members of the project as well as two additional members who, so thoroughly disappointed in the BGW’s recent trajectory, exited not only the project but the *Geschichtswerkstatt* entirely. In a last-ditch attempt to save the project—an effort made more urgent by the fact that the group had already appropriated some of the funding allocated to them by the *Klassenlotterie*—the BGW divided the “August Experience” group into two, based on its most vocal factions, a mutual understanding between whom seemed impossible to foster. They created a group focused on the publication of a book and a group focused on the preparation of an exhibit. Viewing this move as kowtowing to intransigence (though, at the same time, as administration at the expense of grassroots democratic practices, however much those practices might have failed the first time around), several of the BGW’s longest standing members also chose to abandon the organization, although not without much commotion.<sup>137</sup>

The hobbled “August Experience” project somehow managed to crawl to the finish line, resulting in both an exhibit and a publication in 1989.<sup>138</sup> But the BGW would continue to reel from the turmoil the “August Experience” group had created as well as from a series of similar, if more muted, issues within the BGW’s leadership. In 1992, a seasoned BGW member, Jürgen Karwelat, criticized the Archive Group—charged with maintaining the info center and BGW archive—for a

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<sup>132</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, 6.

<sup>133</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Michael Pfléghar, “Arbeitsbericht zur ABM-Stelle in der BGW vom 1.3.1991 bis 28.2.1993,” 8.

<sup>134</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, Heinrich Kutzner, “Buß- und Betttag, Position on the Progress of the ‘Augusterlebnis 1914’ in its relations to the BGW,” 8.

<sup>135</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, Heinrich Kutzner, “Buß- und Betttag,” 8.

<sup>136</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, 3. See also BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Michael Pfléghar, “Arbeitsbericht zur ABM-Stelle,” 8-9

<sup>137</sup> BGWA Rundbrief, Sonderausgabe 1988, Augusterlebnisse, 3, 5

<sup>138</sup> Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. *August 1914: ein Volk zieht in den Krieg*. Berlin: Nischen, 1989.

major personnel mishap. When Ray Rosdale retired from his work in the Archive Group, the working group chose to replace him—a member who, despite his failure in mending the beyond-repair “August Experience” group, had still committed an impressive ten years of service to the BGW and had possessed solid qualifications—with someone far less experienced. For this choice, Karwelat charged the Archive Group and, more importantly, the BGW as a whole, with employing “disinterested and narrow-minded specialists [*Fachidioten*]” and called them, instead, to return to employing people much more invested in the general mission and particular work of the organization.<sup>139</sup> Even more disconcerting than the disapproval of this disgruntled member was that the BGW’s awkward group dynamics played out in a very public forum. In the BGW’s newsletter, which circulated to group members as well as to affiliated organizations and donors, the organization’s archivist, Sonja Miltenberger, responded to the attack. She made the point, above all, that the Archive Group hardly came to their decision recklessly or in isolation. But she presented her argument in the form of a not-so-subtle *ad hominem* attack. Though she claimed not to offer her response as a counterpoint to Karwelat’s original letter, she used her two pages in the group’s newsletter to pen nothing short of a diatribe. To the charge of being a *Fachidiot*, she returned the insult that those who undervalue the painstaking work of coordinating the archive deserved to be called “ignoramuses, blockheads, or know-it-all” fueled by “a capricious hodgepodge of stagnant prejudices, misunderstanding, resentment, impatience or a very special disinterest.” She excoriated those who viewed the Archive Group—whose membership was largely female—as a “haven for effusive broads...who lack an eye for bigger connections, who get hung up on details,” who “create rules that they themselves do not follow, and that the clueless executive board simply accepts as fact.”<sup>140</sup> Evident in the Karwelat-Miltenberger exchange was the way the benevolent grassroots democratic ambitions of the early 1980s had resolved, by the early 1990s, into bitter and petty bickering that nearly eclipsed substantive historical engagement.

Any doubt that this was the case would have been dispelled a year later when the BGW undertook to publish a book for its tenth anniversary, a project led incidentally by the same beleaguered archivist. After several participants left the project early—one because the project had become too much work, another because her ideas about the trajectory of the project clashed fundamentally with the rest of the group—those who remained gradually found it more and more difficult to work together collaboratively. Against the backdrop of this interpersonal conflict, the group’s paid assistant added fuel to the fire by circumventing the group and abandoning the outline for the book it had drafted collectively. In an unauthorized one-on-one meeting with the group’s publisher, the assistant presented instead her own plan for the book. She also took charge of the content, rejecting a series of authors whose contributions had already been approved but whose intellectual agendas did not fit with her own. She only informed the BGW’s executive committee of her work at the eleventh hour, after the damage had largely been done.<sup>141</sup> After an uncomfortable and highly emotional debate in an enlarged Monday Group meeting, the assistant resigned her post and left the BGW. The *Geschichtswerkstatt* offered to all those whose articles had been cut from the unapproved revision of the book an opportunity to appear in a supplementary brochure and designated an editing group that would operate independently of the group compiling the book.<sup>142</sup> But the wound had grown too large to bandage so easily. The disaster further alienated quite a few

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<sup>139</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, Jürgen Karwelat, “‘Alarmglocken sollten klingeln.’ Kritik an der Archivgruppe,” 5.

<sup>140</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, Sonja Miltenberger, “Frust der gemeinen Archivarin,” 6.

<sup>141</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Sonja Miltenberger, “Buchprojekt der BGW zur Alltagsgeschichte - ein Vorstandsbericht,” 9-10.

<sup>142</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Sonja Miltenberger, “Protokoll der MVV vom 3.7.1993,” 16.

among the core membership who had, in the previous decade, served as the backbone of the group's more rigorously sustainable utopian projects.

Though not as a result of internal squabbling, the "City Tours by Boat" group—one of the BGW's most consistently successful sustainable utopian efforts—also deteriorated in the last years of the 1980s and in the early period after the fall of the Wall. While the 1986 tour season had booked the BGW's ships completely, the 1987 season began with lackluster turnout for two new tours the group had organized through the Neukölln and Teltow canals. Representatives from the boat tour group were uncertain whether they should attribute the uninspiring attendance to weak advertisement or disinterest among local residents.<sup>143</sup> Attendance yo-yoed over the next few years, but in 1993 the group would take another considerable hit as bad summer weather decimated participation and amplified the impact of the decline in tourism Berlin had already begun to witness after the excitement over the fall of the wall subsided.<sup>144</sup> Only half of their boat tours were occupied, and one member described the "sad high point" of the season as a dry but very cold night when they hosted five guests. In an attempt to replenish their coffers, the BGW began to offer bus tours as well, but those saw equally poor attendance. And compounding this disappointing public interest was a decline in boat group volunteers. With many of its members employed full-time elsewhere or taking classes as students, the boat group saw active participation in its efforts cut by half.<sup>145</sup> While "City Tours by Boat" would remain perhaps the most consistent of the BGW's working groups as the organization struggled to carve a new niche in reunified Germany, its "process of contracting," as one BGW member put it euphemistically, nevertheless continued fitfully over the remainder of the decade.<sup>146</sup>

Complicating the BGW's internal interpersonal conflicts and the effects of declining participation in its programs were an increasingly tense set of relationships with other would-be ally organizations. The 1989 HistoryFest held in Bonn brought this tension to light. First, the BGW found itself in conflict with the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* organization when the national executive committee, in advance of the HistoryFest, called members to a workshop to plan for the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. What ruffled the BGW's feathers was that the workshop had been planned as a collaborative enterprise with the German Historical Museum, resistance to whose "disturbing massivity" had long been verbalized in the BGW. The BGW's Monday Group penned a statement in opposition to this plan that they would present at the Bonn conference. Their disapproval, however, proved a non-starter. The commotion they created generated little debate at the meeting, which angered the BGW not the least because the attendees had failed to carve out any kind of alternative that would limit engagement with the DHM.<sup>147</sup> The BGW also found itself in a row with another major sponsor of alternative historical tours around Germany, *StattReisen*.<sup>148</sup> The Bonn HistoryFest had offered an opportunity to members of *Geschichtswerkstätten* and *StattReisen* branches from around the country to share with each other both

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<sup>143</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6, "Saisonstart der Dampfergruppe," 3.

<sup>144</sup> Claire Colomb. *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012, 123.

<sup>145</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Manuela Dörnenburg, "Dampfergruppe, Saisonbericht & Buchprojekt," 12; Sonja Miltenberger, "Protokoll der MVV vom 3.7.1993," 17.

<sup>146</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1999/1, Karin Winklhofer and Jürgen Karwelat, "15 Jahre Dampfergruppe," 22

<sup>147</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/2, "Geschichtsfest Bonn 1989"

<sup>148</sup> Though by the fall of the Wall it already operated as a national organization, *StattReisen* (originally the Association for Urban Exploration [*Verein für Stadterkundungen*]) evolved in 1983 out of the *Geschichtswerkstatt* branch in the Berlin neighborhood of Wedding. Düspohl, "20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt," 47. See also Katja Schmid. "Das Gästeführungswesen im Wandel: Analyse von Angebotsformen und Organisationsstrukturen in deutschen Städten und Gemeinden." Diplomarbeit. Universität Trier, 1998, 80f.

challenges and wisdom concerning alternative historical tours. With their shared investment in using urban topography as a “site of learning [*Lernort*],” it made sense for the two groups to collaborate.<sup>149</sup> The BGW, however, perceived the HistoryFest meeting not as a collaborative enterprise but as an exaltation of *StattReisen*'s successes. Perhaps particularly sensitive to this unevenness in the context of the BGW's own recent decline, the BGW jumped to criticize *StattReisen* following the HistoryFest, accusing them of giving in to commercial pressures, of abandoning creative research in favor of a relentless tour schedule that turned a good profit, and of forgetting to engage with other alternative organizations. At the same time, the BGW lamented in a letter to its membership that its boat tours could never keep up with those of what they assumed was a better endowed *StattReisen*.<sup>150</sup> Martin Düspohl, a member of both *StattReisen* Berlin and the BGW, wrote to the BGW's membership in response to the criticisms that had been raised. He highlighted that the HistoryFest meeting in May was poorly chosen as an opportunity for exchange between the two groups because May weekends tended to be some of the most popular for their tours, so *StattReisen*'s Berlin members were not able to participate in the conference in the first place. As a result, it remained unclear to him how the meeting had deteriorated as the BGW members claimed. He even suggested that the BGW might have pulled this construed opposition out of thin air. He further chastised the BGW for publishing its critical remarks in its member newsletter, which Düspohl claimed threatened *StattReisen*'s reputation. Though his rationalization for *StattReisen*'s absence at the conference might have suggested otherwise, Düspohl argued that profit had never been a primary concern of the organization and that, in fact, they were registered as a non-profit and worked hard to distinguish themselves from the slew of other more traditional tour groups in the city. He also claimed that the BGW's charges that the quality of their historical research had faltered were unfounded. As evidence to the contrary he offered the previous seven years of interaction between the BGW and *StattReisen* Berlin, a long local relationship that had been fruitful for both organizations, Düspohl made clear. His frustrated letter ended on a tense note, as he asked the BGW what would happen if *StattReisen* should want to incorporate BGW research—the findings of the “Red Island” or “Lindenhof” projects, for example—into its tours. The implication of Düspohl's rhetorical question was that, on account of the uneasy relationships between the two groups, *StattReisen* would forgo these histories in favor of using historical resources with fewer strings attached to them.<sup>151</sup>

The BGW faced the challenge of making a place for itself in a newly reunified Berlin. But rather than positioning their projects in existing niches as they had done in the 1980s, the group chose something of an aggressive slash-and-burn campaign, burning bridges both inside and outside the group. Though diplomacy tended to win out in the end, and the BGW mended relationships with many of those it had initially alienated, the group clearly no longer occupied the position it did in the early 1980s. What began as a hope for sustainable utopia unraveled into something far less inspiring.

### C. The Loss of Hope, the Collapse of the BGW's Program, and the Death of its Sustainable Utopia

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<sup>149</sup> Düspohl, “20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt,” 47-48.

<sup>150</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/2, Gisela Hahn, “Geschichtsfest Bonn: Alternative Stadtrundfahrten Bestätigungsfeld für Geschichtswerkstätten.”

<sup>151</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1989/3, Martin Düspohl für Stattreisen Berlin eV, “Stattreisen und Geschichtswerkstätten. Entgegnung zum Artikel von Gisela Hahn im GW-Rundbrief 2/89 über einen Workshop beim Geschichtsfest '89 in Bonn,” 20-21.

As ambitious as the BGW may have been at its founding in 1981, a decade and a half had provided enough time for disillusionment, calculated realism, and myopia to replace ambition. The group began to lose its grasp on its objectives, and its mission started to blur. With the collapse of authoritarian socialism in 1989—interpreted widely as a positive development for Europe—the *Geschichtswerkstatt* movement lost a key motivator. When the historical promise of socialism revealed itself as a lie, so did the hopes of historians of alternative culture who could not remove their blinders. The biggest experiment in utopian social alternatives crumbled along with the Wall. One executive committee member of the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* wrote in 1994 of “the loss of hope and the deterioration of the goal [*Zielverfall*].” Cynicism and mistrust of political action, a sense of embarrassment at having been duped by the utopian hopes of 1980s, resignation that “enormous public poverty”—social, cultural, and material—would reign as the hopes of grassroots democratic culture evaporated: these concerns characterized the frustration that crept over the late BGW.<sup>152</sup> With the victory of Western liberal capitalism and—for the BGW—the top-down historical narratives it advanced, Germany’s social movements, the BGW feared, would no longer lobby hard for critical analysis. Not only did the BGW worry they had lost an audience for their methods, they also watched their subject matter sink into the background as well. “If in the minds of social democratic and alternative intellectuals, the concept of the nation state had given way to a vision of a ‘Europe of regions,’” Michael Wildt wrote of the previous decades, “the events of October 3, 1990 put the idea of the nation state firmly back on the agenda.”<sup>153</sup> No longer, many *Geschichtswerkstatt* members believed, could local history from below compete with new desires to work through national history in the form of the German-German question.

In this context, the BGW understandably saw flagging interest, or at least limited sustained interest, in new projects. Often members would commit to involvement in project proposals and disappear as the group tried to get these projects off the ground. In a letter to the BGW membership in 1994, one member demanded that, if the organization claimed to maintain an investment in undertaking innovative research, it was “high time to lift our tired bones and start up the debate again.”<sup>154</sup> But this drive toward innovation flagged right along with participation. The BGW’s initial projects in the early 1980s responded to a historiographical gap, namely the limited knowledge about National Socialism on the ground. This forceful push to engage with the Holocaust in new ways—one in which the BGW was a vocal player, but by no means the only one—would culminate in the Historians’ Debate of the late 1980s. As one *Geschichtswerkstatt* member wrote, though the *Geschichtswerkstatt* movement played only a limited role in the Historians’ Debate itself, they certainly helped to open the door for it. In the extended historiographical denouement after this debate, research in universities and research centers expanded their methodological approaches to the subject of National Socialism, adopting many of those championed by the BGW. As engagement with National Socialism through *Alltagsgeschichte* won greater popularity, the BGW never quite let go of its interest in the subject. Despite forays into other major historical questions, the BGW always found itself drawn back to the themes of Nazi Germany, even after historiography had moved on.<sup>155</sup> Unable to think in sustained ways beyond National Socialism, the BGW lost not only its sharp innovative edge but also the fuel for its sustainable utopian project of grassroots historical engagement as locals began to look elsewhere for new subjects.

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<sup>152</sup> Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 128.

<sup>153</sup> Wildt, “History Workshops in Germany,” 61.

<sup>154</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1994/1, Bernhard Müller, “Einladung zu einem Werkstattgespräch zum Thema 50 Jahre Kriegsende 1995,” 11.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example, Frei, “Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise,” 319.



Plagued by interpersonal drama, an inability to update its research agenda, and difficulty rendering itself relevant to reunified Germany, the BGW's future looked bleak. Ironically, however, the final nail in its coffin came not in the form of any of these weaknesses, but rather from its success, somewhat like the Greens. The BGW no longer operated as a "pure alternative movement." In order to maintain a "peaceful coexistence" with established institutions that also engaged historical themes and methods, the *Geschichtswerkstätten* allowed themselves to be more or less absorbed by them.<sup>156</sup> The history of everyday life and ordinary people, the idea that the politics of power unfold on the register of the everyday, and the impulse to sift through the details of this everydayness was taken up in many of the social science disciplines in universities throughout Germany,<sup>157</sup> as had attention to the role of women historians and to women in history.<sup>158</sup> In an article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* just two years after the Wall had fallen, one journalist quipped that the national *Geschichtswerkstatt* had grown too weak even to dissolve itself; to do so, it would need a two-thirds majority of its membership, and the journalist reckoned that the organization could never muster such a turnout.<sup>159</sup> The BGW had lost both the human and intellectual resources required to implement a framework for a sustainable utopian grassroots historical agenda that would function in the new intellectual, political, social, and cultural context of a reunified German state as its earlier sustainable utopia had in divided West Germany.

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<sup>156</sup> Lindenberger and Wildt, "Radical Plurality," 93.

<sup>157</sup> See Frei, "Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise," 319. See also Carola Lipp, "Alltagskulturforschung im Grenzbereich von Volkskunde, Soziologie, und Geschichte. Aufstieg und Niedergang eines interdisziplinären Forschungskonzepts." *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 1 (1993): 1-33. It bears noting that the BGW saw this phenomenon not only indirectly but directly as well. In 1987, in order to expand the radius in which they could conduct history from below, they opened a second headquarter in the Berlin district of Wedding on Malplaquetstraße. Seven years later, after the space's declining utility for a contracting BGW and only limited interest from other groups who might want to lease it, the BGW gave up their satellite facility. Their inability to make use of it may well have been a result of the fact that what was once alternative cultural work had now found a home in more established institutions. See BGWA Rundbrief 1987/1, 1987.6; Rundbrief 1994/1, "Mitteilung aus dem Vorstand -Laden in der Malplaquetstraße," 2

<sup>158</sup> See Frei, "Die Geschichtswerkstätten in der Krise," 1994.

<sup>159</sup> Harald Gesterkamp, "'Barfußhistoriker' ohne Boden." *Frankfurter Rundschau*. 23.4.1992. See also BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, 13.

## CHAPTER 6

### The Utopian Project of the Spatial Interventionists: A Sustainable Aesthetics of Commemoration

Although not always so consciously apocalyptic as the Greens, West Germany's artists, by the second half of the 1980s, also understood themselves to stand at the edge of a precipice. Against the backdrop of a series of political and cultural controversies that thrust the legacies of National Socialism and the Holocaust once again to the foreground of public consciousness, Holocaust commemoration became a key platform upon which spatial interventionist artists could sculpt a new kind of commemorative aesthetics for Germany. This chapter details the trajectory that led from the new spatial investments of artists like Joseph Beuys and Gunter Demnig in the first half of the decade to a full-blown utopian aesthetic agenda in the second. This trajectory began with a seismic shift in commemorative attitudes that altered discourses about both the object and the form of commemoration. These shifts cleared a path by which the spatial interventionists could expand their demands for radically decentralized and democratized grassroots engagements with art in public space and to facilitate, through that art, a new kind of Holocaust commemorative practice whose method would promise its endurance. As the dust from the fall of the Berlin Wall began to settle, the spatial interventionists pushed this sustainable utopian commemorative aesthetics into the spotlight in reunified Germany.

#### I. The Problem of Late Twentieth Century Commemorative Aesthetics

##### A. The Vicarious Witness or, How Holocaust Memory Became Paradigmatic

By the 1980s, those Germans either born too late to have participated actively in National Socialism or born entirely after its downfall had reached adulthood. Their date of birth, in one sense, implied a benediction, as Chancellor Helmut Kohl explained before the Israeli Knesset in 1984: by the “grace of a late birth [*Gnade der späten Geburt*],” these younger Germans had escaped involvement in Nazi atrocities.<sup>1</sup> Their national heritage, however, yoked them to these crimes, placing them in a liminal position between innocence and an enduring and inescapable legacy of guilt. This interstitial implication in the horrors of the Holocaust complicated the logic of individualized guilt that dated to the Nuremberg Trials, one which West Germany had reinforced each time it brought to the parliamentary table the question of extending the statute of limitations on the prosecution of Nazi war criminals.<sup>2</sup> It also complicated Nuremberg's logic of innocence, which had generated a rhetoric

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<sup>1</sup> On the origins of this expression with politician and journalist Günter Gaus years earlier, see Christian Wicke. *Helmut Kohl's Quest for Normality: His Representation of the German Nation and Himself*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, 203 fn. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Highly-publicized, the Nuremberg trials oriented Germans toward the pursuit of an individualized guilt, searing into German minds a select set of names as *the* perpetrators. Relentless in this effort, the four-year period between 1945 and 1949, which historian Jeffrey Herf has labeled the Nuremberg interregnum, followed Germans even into their relaxation time with its emphasis on individualized guilt. Before the feature film at the cinema, for example, British and American occupying forces screened their compulsory *Welt im Film* series, a weekly newsreel designed to encourage the democratic “reeducation” and “reorientation” of the German population. Many of these short pieces detailed the Nuremberg trials and, with great consistency, offered a short list of perpetrators. In the opening scene of the first film, screened in December 1945, the camera panned the courtroom as the voiceover identified, by seat assignment and by name, each of the twenty accused. Following a clip of the court president, Briton Geoffrey Lawrence, the film cut to a new scene in which the viewer heard, slowly and clearly, the full names of the accused once more, charged each with “waging a war of aggression and, in so doing, with having enacted barbarous crimes against the whole of humanity.” Subsequent films—a new one was released weekly—repeated this style of identification. In one, a chart shown in accompaniment to the usual litany of names, offered a visual representation of the Nazi chain of command, suggestive of a finite communicative

not of individual victimhood that corresponded to its rhetoric of guilt, but rather a rhetoric of collective victimhood. Such was the nature of juridical language in charging crimes against humanity, for example, whose offenses the military tribunal defined as “committed against any *civilian population*.”<sup>3</sup> Emerging out of the pursuit of moral rectification, the rhetoric of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal instrumentalized a language of scale—of mass victimization—in order to convey the gravity of Nazi moral failure; these were, after all, crimes against *humanity*.<sup>4</sup> Here, the individual victim as such remained largely absent. An anonymous mass of victims appeared both when charging guilt and when exacting justice. The Tribunal closed its case against Karl Brandt, the leading Nazi proponent of experimental euthanasia, for example, by “solemnly [reaffirming]...that the value of even one human life is infinite, which means...that one times infinity is just as infinite as 500 times infinity.”<sup>5</sup> The prosecution, however, failed to realize how this equation replicated the manner in which the Nazis denied individuality to their victims. This stress on fingering the perpetrator against a backdrop of millions of identity-less victims would dominate the German memory discourse for four decades following the first of the postwar trials.<sup>6</sup>

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network. See, for example, USHMMSA, Story RG-60.2603, Tape 1001, *Welt im Film*, no. 29; Story RG-60.2612, Tape 1002, *Welt im Film*, no. 30. For similar visual documentation of a finite list of the guilty at other trials, see HLS-NTP, NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 10363 (28 June 1947) Closing argument for the United States of America. On four occasions—1960, 1965, 1969 and 1979—the West German parliament debated whether to extend the statute of limitations on the prosecution of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and, thus, this logic of individualized guilt. In 1979 the *Bundestag* voted 253 to 228 to eliminate the statute of limitations entirely, with members like Herta Däubler-Gmelin of the SPD arguing that it would be intolerable “if due to the statute of limitations a murderer can no longer be held accountable even if his deed is obvious and even if verification of his participation in the crime posed no problem.” *Verhandlungen des deutschen Bundestages, Stenographische Berichte: 8. Wahlperiode, Sitzung 166*.

<sup>3</sup> HLS-NTP, NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 10718 (14 July 1947), Closing argument for the United States of America, No. 2, p. 9

<sup>4</sup> In the case against Karl Brandt, who was responsible for over 60,000 deaths, the prosecution emphasized Brandt’s efforts to strip the humanity not from individuals but from masses. Of his tens of thousands of victims, the prosecution stressed that for “the most part they are nameless dead. To their murderers, those wretched people were not individuals at all. They came in wholesale lots and were treated worse than animals....The victims of these crimes are numbered among the anonymous millions who met death at the hands of the Nazis.” Namelessness, anonymity, and absent individuality were key motifs in the trial. HLS-NTP, NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 10718 (14 July 1947), Closing argument for the United States of America, No. 2, p. 12 (9 December 1946); Opening Statement for the United States of America, No. 565, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> The tribunal set this “entirely different type of mathematics” against what they saw as Brandt’s “untenable” system of Nazi arithmetic. HLS-NTP, NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 10718 (14 July 1947), Closing argument for the United States of America, No. 2, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Political, social, and economic structures implemented for the promotion of the individualization of victims remained stunted in the postwar world. If its aim was to recognize individual suffering, the restitution effort, for example, arguably failed by way of the unintended consequences of bureaucratic expediency. Restitution applications required thorough documentation of one’s experiences of persecution, and the pursuit of such documentation was often as dehumanizing as the experiences it intended to redress. The International Tracing Service (ITS), established in 1943 under the auspices of the Red Cross to track down those missing as a result of Nazi persecution during the Second World War, served as a major clearinghouse for the sorts of documentation on internment, forced labor, and other Nazi efforts needed for restitution applications. As an inundated bureaucracy, ITS unsurprisingly asked applicants to complete formal paperwork. These forms, however, reinforced tendencies to strip victims of their unique identities by siphoning them into categories which permitted easy clerical organization by effacing individuality: one was simply “polnisch,” or “jüdisch,” or residing in Koblenz. ITS lacked the clerical structure for processing the content, for example, of the personalized correspondence submitted by some applicants. Simple individual letters including only basic identifying information were processed without difficulty. It was narrative style that complicated processing efforts and prompted ITS officials to request forms. One applicant, in 1964, after already having written a two-and-a-half-page letter describing his situation, received instructions to fill out the standard Red Cross form—despite the fact that it asked nothing he had not already indicated in his narrative—before ITS would take further action on his request. Perhaps with an air of defiance, he made this clear in his responses. To “How do you write your name?” he responded “As was written” in his

By the mid-1980s, however, a new generation of West Germans had formed. Two generations removed from the era of National Socialism and its perpetrations, they occupied a foggy memorial *habitus* that the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has described as the “infamous zone of irresponsibility...from which no confession of responsibility will remove us and in which what is spelled out, minute by minute is the lesson of the ‘terrifying unsayable and unimaginable banality of evil.’”<sup>7</sup> They carried with them the history of their parents and grandparents, which compelled them, however unwillingly, to participate in the continual evolution of the Holocaust narrative as “vicarious witnesses,” as one scholar of Jewish studies, Froma Zeitlin, has labeled them. Technically non-witnesses to the Holocaust but saddled with Germany’s “obsessive quest to assume the burden” of Germany’s genocidal past, this generation plunged head-first into the project of “reconstructing and recovering memory, which can only be acquired second or third hand.”<sup>8</sup> Like Kohl, they possessed an “inevitable awareness of their own belatedness. Far from foreclosing any identification with these events,” Zeitlin has argued, “this very belatedness [led] them urgently to seek ways of linking the present to the past.”<sup>9</sup> Their work took the form of reckoning—quite publically—with the imbalance in the binary of victimhood and guilt.<sup>10</sup>

The issue of breaking apart the mass of victims came to a head in the 1985 international political debacle in the town of Bitburg. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Germany’s unconditional surrender and in a nod toward reconciliation and reintegration with the West, Kohl invited President Ronald Reagan to a ceremony to honor the fallen soldiers of World War II. The ceremony became incendiary. Its site—the Kolmeshöhe cemetery—was selected for its proximity to a large American military base, symbolic, the Kohl administration had intended, of the positive relations between Germany and the United States. Innocuous enough until the revelation that Kolmeshöhe held the graves of Waffen-SS members, the visit further incensed an international

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letter. And to a request for his birthday, “Indeed, the date given in my documents.” ITS T/D 830366(-367). Not only were applicants boxed into formulae; they frequently demonstrated an internalization of and submission to this system, which returned them, even in their salvation, to the mass of faceless Nazi victims. Restitution letters tended to follow a distinct pattern, simply running through a recitation of personal statistics. Applicants would reduce themselves to their prisoner number, work group number, patient number, sequence of transfers to different camps, and the work they did. See, for example, ITS T/D 124421, 130410, and 01122415.

<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Agamben. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Daniel Heller-Roazen, tr. New York: Zone Books, 2002, 21. Here Agamben quote Hannah Arendt on the notion of the banality of evil from her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. See Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*. London: Penguin Press 1992, 252. In his explanation of this “zone of irresponsibility,” Agamben drew on the Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi who famously proposed the concept of the “gray zone” to identify the way responsibility for the atrocities of the Holocaust failed to fit a tidy Manichaean model of guilt and innocence. Though Levi wrote explicitly of witnesses to the Holocaust, the same kind of confusion could be understood to apply to subsequent generations of decedents who lacked direct experiences of its atrocities. Writing of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, chosen by the Nazis as the Jewish administrative head of the Łódź ghetto in Poland, Levi highlights how Rumkowski occupied a liminal moral space, and argued, perhaps more importantly that “we are all mirrored in Rumkowski, his ambiguity is ours...Like Rumkowski, we too are so dazzled by power and prestige as to forget our essential fragility. Willingly or not we come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting.” Everyone, for Levi—even the generation of vicarious witnesses—existed on the boundary between victim and perpetrator. Primo Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved*. tr. Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Vintage Books, 1988, 69

<sup>8</sup> Froma Zeitlin. “The Vicarious Witness: Belated Memory and Authorial Presence in Recent Holocaust Literature.” *History and Memory*. 10:2 (1998): 15.

<sup>9</sup> Zeitlin, “The Vicarious Witness,” 6

<sup>10</sup> This description caricatures contemporary Holocaust memorial culture which, today, includes categories of involvement beyond the black-and-white binary of guilt and innocence, namely that of the witness or bystander. This categorical extension of possible implication in the Holocaust, however, has only recently begun to receive increasing scholarly and popular attention.

public after a trip to nearby Bergen-Belsen appeared belatedly—and, seemingly, as damage control—on Reagan’s agenda. The Bitburg incident became an emblem of the stunted memorial politics of the Kohl government and the obtuseness, in this context, of Reagan’s. Having adopted an attitude that seemed to lump together victims of National Socialism with victims of military violence, it effectively collapsed the distinction between Germans and those who suffered at their hands.<sup>11</sup> Bitburg enacted on a political stage an attitude that the Kohl administration, just three years earlier, had embraced on a politicized aesthetic stage. Tasked by Kohl with reenvisioning Germany’s still small makeshift national monument to “the victims of war and tyranny,” the *Volksbund deutscher Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, an organization charged with the maintenance of graves for German war dead buried abroad, presented to the chancellor a ranked list—which he accepted—of victims to be honored by the monument. It listed, first, “the fallen soldiers and those who died of their wounds,” followed by “those who died as POWs.” Coming in third were “those who died fleeing or being expelled.” Fourth and fifth place were reserved for “the victims of violence” and “the victims at home [*in der Heimat*],” respectively.<sup>12</sup> Absent from the *Volksbund* ranking was a clear distinction between Nazis killers and Nazi victims. The Bitburg incident, however, drew international attention to this ordering, which amounted to an affront to those who advocated for a “self-critical awareness of the Nazi past [in] West German self-understanding” and sought to distance themselves “from the vague, self-pitying and inculpatory tone of the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>13</sup>

Protests by Germans and Americans alike indicated the hollowness of Kohl’s list.<sup>14</sup> Capitalizing on the opportunity for dialogue that Bitburg created, the Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker responded with a speech that delimited victimhood differently. “We commemorate today in sadness all the dead of the war and of the rule of tyranny,” he began.

We commemorate in particular the six million Jews who were murdered in German concentration camps.

We commemorate all peoples who suffered in the war, most especially the unthinkable number of citizens of the Soviet Union and Poland who lost their lives.

As Germans we commemorate in sorrow our own countrymen, who lost their lives as soldiers, in air attacks in their homeland, during imprisonment and in their flight elsewhere.

We commemorate the murdered Sinti and Roma, the homosexuals who were killed, the mentally ill who were murdered, the people who had to die for the sake of their religious or political convictions.

We commemorate the hostages who were shot.

We think of the sacrifices of the Resistance in all countries occupied by us.

As Germans we honour the memory of the sacrifices made by the German Resistance, whether civilian, military, or motivated by certain beliefs, by the resistance among workers and in unions, by the resistance of the Communists.

We commemorate those who did not actively resist, but accepted death rather than humble their consciences.<sup>15</sup>

Weizsäcker pushed against Kohl’s tendency to blur and merge categories of victims. For some, however, Weizsäcker’s efforts stopped short of sufficiently redressing not only Kohl’s Bitburg debacle but also Germany’s long-standing imbalanced discussion of victims and perpetrators more

<sup>11</sup> Bill Niven. *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*. London: Routledge, 2002, 105.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Marcuse. “The National Memorial to the Victims of War and Tyranny: From Conflict to Consensus.” German Studies Association Conference. 25 September 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2 May 1985, 6 May 1985, and 8 May 1985; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 May 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Richard von Weizsäcker. *A Voice from Germany: Speeches by Richard von Weizsäcker*. Karin von Abrams, tr. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985, 45.

generally. Writing in the red-green German daily *die Tageszeitung* a year after Bitburg, nearly forty years after Nuremberg, and in the heat of the war of words between Germany's leading intellectuals over the status of Holocaust narration—the so-called Historians' Debate [*Historikerstreit*]<sup>16</sup>—the scholar of education and Green party cultural leader Micha Brumlik demanded a more rigorous and thoughtful attention to the Holocaust's victims. He called Germans to avoid what he termed the “fascism of memory,” that is, a commemorative stance which did to the memory of Holocaust victims what National Socialism did to their person, namely reduce them to a number, void of identity, history, and uniqueness.<sup>16</sup> “Annihilation,” Brumlik wrote,

becomes an end; the murdered Jews become the Jewry. The abstraction into tragedy...only has the function of letting the horror of the actual events disappear under the veil of words...It was possible to let millions of people be murdered by redefining them as abstract numbers. Attempting to understand their horrible fate by means of equally abstract concepts represents something in the same vein: treating the memory of the victims just as the murdered ones themselves were treated.<sup>17</sup>

Brumlik's words found kindred spirits among many of his contemporaries. French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann's 1985 Holocaust documentary *Shoah* attempted to combat the fascism of memory. Lanzmann's film aimed to tackle the seemingly insurmountable act of undoing what Hannah Arendt referred to as “organized oblivion,” or, as historian Rudy Koshar has described it, the process “in which individual life histories and even whole families were extinguished and made unrecoverable to future generations.”<sup>18</sup> *Shoah* presented a host of testimonies that revealed the Holocaust as a complex network of individual histories. Lanzmann himself wanted little to do with choosing between these narratives and evaluating their relative significance. “I am not a decision-maker,” Lanzmann argued pointedly. “More than anything I hate decision-makers with all my heart. I call them ‘decision-killers’ because to decide is to kill.” Though, of course, no narration of Holocaust history is possible without some degree of selection, Lanzmann proposed the length of his enterprise as something of an antidote: “after nine and one-half hours” of film, he suggested, “nobody has a desire” to talk.<sup>19</sup> The viewer finishes the film exhausted and with some sense of the extent of personal devastation National Socialism effected. In 1986, the president of the German Federation of Historians Christian Meier put the same imperative in different words. Calling on Germans to see history “with the eyes of identity,” Meier tasked them with creating entirely “new categories” for discussing the question of guilt and innocence. “[N]ot only for reason,” he suggested, “but also for the heart. Perhaps the events of that time should be told in more and finer detail and in direct reference to this or that event...But if we do not take these events upon ourselves, if we think we can simply draw a line under them, then they will come back to haunt us in a worse way. And then we also will fail to gain the steadfastness that we might need to face exacting demands that may some day be placed upon us.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Micha Brumlik. “New Myth of State: The Eastern Front. The Most Recent Development in the Discipline of History in the Federal Republic of Germany.” *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*. James Knowlton and Truett Cates, eds. and trs. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1993, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Brumlik, “New Myth of State,” 48.

<sup>18</sup> See Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, 1968, 452. Also Rudy Koshar. *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 200.

<sup>19</sup> Claude Lanzmann, Ruth Larson, and David Rodowick. “Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, 11 April 1990.” *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 82.

<sup>20</sup> Christian Meier. “Condemning and Comprehending.” *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*. James Knowlton and Truett Cates, eds. and trs. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1993, 33.

## B. Countermonuments and the Relocation of the Nazi *Tatort*

Understanding how the late 1980s fostered a modest utopian commemorative politics requires sorting through the boundaries of these new commemorative categories, categories that delineated not only whom was to be remembered but also where that memorial process should take place. This generation of vicarious witnesses engaged with Holocaust memory in profoundly spatial ways. This spatial investment makes sense given that, beyond its genealogy, this generation's strongest connection to its history was topographical. That is, it occupied the spaces of both the perpetrators and the victims. This reevaluation of Holocaust commemorative space faced a considerable uphill effort that involved overturning a long-standing postwar memorial paradigm that located the Nazi *Tatort*—the crime scene, literally “the place of the act”—at a remove from daily life in Germany.<sup>21</sup> The camps had served as perhaps the clearest evidence of Nazi destruction, with photographic representations of them initially playing the most important role in shaping quotidian German perspectives on guilt and the consequences of National Socialism.<sup>22</sup> But with all the death camps and many of the major concentration camps located in the East, they never became a central motif in West German cultural politics.

Instead, accompanying the reassessment of victimhood in the 1980s was a foreshortening of the memorial gaze. Rather than projecting the site of Nazi terror abroad, West Germans shifted their efforts to locate the Nazi *Tatort* locally, recognizing its embeddedness in their immediate, personal environments. Literary scholar and Holocaust monument specialist James Young has recognized the importance of this commemorative shift, dubbing its material project the “countermonument.” As the name suggests, countermonuments work against both formal and functional qualities of traditional German monuments.<sup>23</sup> Instead of constructing imposing, centralized, positive forms,<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Faced with mountains of ruins, Germans confronted daily and unavoidably the question of rebuilding. Estimates place average destruction of German cities at about 40%, though some were as much as 80% destroyed, with cities like Cologne bombed at least 150 times. Steven Brakman, Harry Garretsen, and Marc Schramm. “The Strategic Bombing of German Cities During World War II and Its Impact on City Growth.” *Journal of Economic Geography* 4 (2004): 205. Driven by the practical need to reestablish the arterial flow throughout their cities, as well as drawing from an aesthetic tradition in which the ruin was at most a peripheral trope in urban design, Germans expressed what Rudy Koshar calls their collective “allergy to ruins.” They opted to clear ruins, though not in “flight from memory of the war,” Koshar claims, “but rather [in] an attempt to resurrect a certain version of history,” namely a version that emphasized a march toward modernization, liberalization and global reintegration. While clearing their cities of rubble, Germans also effaced from the landscape all visual remnants of the Nazi regime. Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 154.

<sup>22</sup> A steady stream of photographs inundated the world with evidence of Nazi atrocities. With Allied forces maintaining nearly complete proprietary control over the documentation of camp liberations, photos began to flow first into Western media outlets after the liberation of Ohrdruf by U.S. troops on 4 April 1945, followed shortly thereafter by the liberations of Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and Dachau. In her detailed account of the impact of Holocaust photography after the war, Barbie Zelizer notes that “over an approximately three-week period...the U.S. and British publics were exposed to an explicit and ongoing photographic display that visually documented the atrocities.” Barbie Zelizer. *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 92. Shortly after their release in the West, the same images began to appear in Germany's Western zones as part of the denazification campaign by American and British occupying forces. Describing Germany's visual media landscape, Hannah Arendt noted that in “the early days of occupation, posters appeared everywhere showing the photographed horrors of Buchenwald.” Curiously, though, in contrast to Herf's interpretation of the “Nuremberg interregnum,” Arendt sees these images as “a finger pointing at the spectator, and the text: ‘You are guilty.’” Arendt argued that this identification of guilt bewildered a majority of the population, for whom “these pictures were the first authentic knowledge of what had been done in their name. How could they feel guilty if they had not even known? All they saw was the pointed finger clearly indicating the wrong person. From this error they concluded that the whole poster was a propaganda lie.” Hannah Arendt. “The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany.” *Commentary* 10:4 (1950): 349.

<sup>23</sup> Young has published fairly extensively, if occasionally redundantly, about what he calls the Countermonument Movement. The most concise statements of its parameters and examples of countermonuments in action can be found in James E. Young. “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today.” *Critical Inquiry* 18:2 (1 January 1992): 267–296. For more extensive, though not significantly more robust, discussions of countermonuments see James

countermonumentalists employed negative forms or “voids.” Moreover, the countermonument movement, which gained steam at the end of the 1980s, destabilized Germany’s unrelenting efforts to come to terms with its past by arguing for the ultimate impossibility of such a project; nothing could ever occasion the mastery of Germany’s difficult past.

In 1986, for example, the Association for the Preservation of Historical Monuments in Kassel selected from scores of applicants the artist Horst Hoheisel’s proposal for a reconstruction of the city’s historic Aschrott Fountain. Located in the courtyard of Kassel’s City Hall, the twelve-meter-tall sandstone obelisk fountain—a product of a substantial turn-of-the-century investment by the Jewish financier Sigmund Aschrott—became a symbol to Kassel’s Nazis of Jewish presence at the heart of German society. In 1939 they destroyed the fountain. Just shy of fifty years later, Hoheisel would provide the design for its re-inauguration. “The destruction of the sandstone form” of the fountain itself, Hoheisel explained,

was followed by the destruction of the human form. The only way I know to make this loss visible is through a perceptibly empty space, representing the space once occupied. Instead of continuously searching for yet another explanation or interpretation of that which has been lost, I prefer facing the loss as a vanished form. A reflective listening into the void, in the negative of an irretrievable form, where the memory of that which has been lost resounds, is preferable to a mere numb endurance of the facts.<sup>25</sup>

Hoheisel’s design inverted the original structure of the fountain such that its waters poured into the ground, rather than shooting upward. By directed the war downward into a dark abyss, his design suggested that “the tragedy of the Jews” in Kassel “reaches down into the depths of the city,” Kassel’s former mayor explained. Hoheisel represented the horrors of Nazi persecution not in the language of concentration camps, death marches, and mass graves, but through an aesthetic vernacular that revealed the Nazi era as a deep transgression against the most intimate fabric of German society.<sup>26</sup>

Just two years after the city of Kassel approved Hoheisel’s plan for the Aschrott Fountain, the West Berlin Senate, in its competition to design the city’s Jewish Museum, selected a proposal that emphasized the same need to represent the gaps National Socialism left in Germany’s social topography. Even the museum’s floor plan, designed by world renowned Jewish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, mapped quite literally onto the geography of an eradicated population. Shaped like an uneven lightning bolt, the building’s footprint drew its form from actual markers in Berlin’s

Young. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; and James Young. *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. Others have mobilized Young’s argument. See, for example, Noam Lupu. “Memory Vanished, Absent, and Confined: The Counter Memorial Project in 1980s and 1990s Germany.” *History & Memory* 15:2 (2003): 130–164.

<sup>24</sup> One thinks of the Hermannsdenkmal or the Kyffhäuser Monument: towering structures whose message of German dominance was clear. See Koshar’s *From Monuments to Traces*. See also Alon Confino, who has published on both monuments and German memory generally. For example, Alon Confino. *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997; Alon Confino. *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. Others have written briefer explorations of memorial culture in Germany, for example, Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann. “Sakraler Monumentalismus um 1900. Das Leipziger Völkerschlachtdenkmal.” *Der politische Totenkult: Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*. Reinhart Koselleck and Michael Jeismann, eds. München: Fink, 1994, 249-280; Andreas Huyssen. “Monumental Seduction.” *New German Critique* 69 (1 October 1996): 181–200. This discourse of monuments has longer scholastic roots that extend to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Thomas Nipperdey. “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert.” *Historische Zeitschrift* 206:3 (1 June 1968): 529–585, or even earlier Richard Muther. “Die Denkmalseuche.” *Studien und Kritiken, Bd. 2*. Wien: Wiener Verlag, 1901, 100–109.

<sup>25</sup> Horst Hoheisel. *Aschrottbrunnen*. Frankfurt: Fritz Bauer Institut, 1998, 31

<sup>26</sup> Hoheisel, *Aschrottbrunnen*, 7



landscape: Libeskind plotted on a map the addresses of six of prominent Berlin Jews whose lives had represented the complex relationship between German society and Jewish society. He connected them with an uneven Star of David and then deconstructed the shape, using the star's sides to determine the length of each of the museum's zigzag stretches. Libeskind also incorporated five architectural empty spaces—or “voids,” as Andreas Huyssen has called them<sup>27</sup>—into the museum's blueprint. Libeskind argued that out of “the terminus of history, which is nothing other than the Holocaust with its concentrated space of annihilation ... – out of this event which shatters this place comes that which cannot really be given by architecture.” The museum performs, in Libeskind's words, the annihilation of German-Jewish culture “in the realm of the invisible. It is this remoteness which I have tried to bring to consciousness,” he has claimed. He argued that his design revealed an urban “architecture in which the unnamed remains because the names keep still. The project seeks to reconnect the trace of history to Berlin and Berlin to its own eradicated memory which should not be camouflaged, disowned or forgotten.”<sup>28</sup>

This tension between presence and absence lay at the heart of a memorial installation undertaken by German artist Jochen Gerz for the courtyard of the old town hall in Saarbrücken. Titled *2146 Stones: Monument Against Racism*, Gerz's 1993 project undertook to document all Jewish cemeteries in existence prior to the beginning of the Third Reich—2146 of them. Gerz understood each cemetery as a sign that someone had once called home the town in which it was located. To document the cemeteries, then, many of which had been destroyed by the Nazis, was to reassert both the physical absence and the abiding cultural and social presence of Jews in Germany. Gerz aimed to create a monument that would generate controversy and conversation about these themes. Working piecemeal over a period of weeks and under the cover of night because he lacked official permission to execute his project, Gerz gradually removed 2146 cobblestones from the town hall square. He engraved them with the location of an individual Jewish cemetery and then replaced the stone engraved side down such that the completed installation would appear no different than the courtyard prior to Gerz's effort. What kind of monument was it, though, if no one could see it? This ambiguity fueled a dialogue that Gerz argued was integral to the advancement of contemporary Holocaust memorial efforts. Those who engage the monument's ambiguity, he asserted, “are the memory and the remembrance.” Responding to criticism that the efficacy of *2146 Stones* as a monument suffered because it lacked form, Gerz argued that the monument's impact derived from the fact that people discussed it. “It exists because we are here. Memory and remembrance can have no other place outside of us,” he claimed. The strength of Gerz's memorial originated in its capacity to incite a locally-specific and relevant conversation about memory.<sup>29</sup>

In another project initiated several years before Gerz's, Horst Hoheisel captured this same concern for localized discussions with his *Denk-Stein Sammlung* or *Thought Stones Collection*. Armed with a copy of a 1986 memory book that featured the names and fates of Kassel's Jews, Hoheisel visited local schools to discuss with students how members of Kassel's thriving Jewish community once populated the spaces the students now occupied. Since most students knew no Jews, Hoheisel invited each of them to select a name from the book and to research that person's life. Students read about their chosen individual, visited the neighborhood in which he or she had lived, spoke with elderly neighbors who might have known the person, and upon concluding their research, they wrote short biographies of their subjects. Hoheisel then wrapped these paper life stories around cobblestones taken from around the city. The final collection of locally-grounded, locally-narrated

<sup>27</sup> Andreas Huyssen. “The Voids of Berlin.” *Critical Inquiry* 24:1 (1 October 1997): 57–81.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Libeskind. *Erweiterung des Berlin Museums mit Abteilung Jüdisches Museum*. Kristin Feireiss, ed. Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1992, 59-61.

<sup>29</sup> Jochen Gerz. *2146 Steine: Mahnmahl gegen Rassismus Saarbrücken*. Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1993, 11-13.

fates was eventually transferred to Kassel's main train station, the site of Jewish deportations and the place that marked the beginning of the end of these life narratives.<sup>30</sup>

Hoheisel, Libeskind, and Gerz each used the form of their countermonuments to mark out ordinary spaces shaped by National Socialism. The power of these monuments derived from precisely this feature: the echoes of Nazi crimes rang not simply, or even primarily, through the silent corridors of former concentration camps, sites of execution, or mass burial. Rather they reverberated in the communities whose fundamental composition the Holocaust had altered.

Alongside the rise of this “countermonument movement,” an academic field of memory studies had begun to expand internationally in something of a “memory boom,” as historian Jay Winter has called it<sup>31</sup> Pierre Nora, for example, began to publish his pioneering multi-volume project on *lieux de mémoire* in 1984,<sup>32</sup> and five years later the journal *History and Memory* was founded at Tel Aviv University. Just as the academic community began to shake up the discourse of memory, so too did the function and strictures of memory, commemorative practices, and monuments—including countermonuments—come under increasing scrutiny in the artistic community. In Germany, just as quickly as it had won favor, the countermonumentalist impulse began to dissipate. Experimenting with the same methods that Beuys and Demnig had tested earlier in the decade, the loosely-connected network of spatial interventionists began to forge a new memorial practice that built off of the commemorative demands of the generation of vicarious witness as well as the spatial interventionists' previous explorations with radical decentralized grassroots art in public space. They offered their installations not as negative critiques of a nineteenth-century nationalist monument-making tradition—that is, they did not simply position themselves “against” the traditional German monument, as had the countermonumentalists. Indeed, the idea of a countermonument, while originally an important intervention in the young field of memory studies, now proved far too capacious to remain analytically useful.<sup>33</sup> The spatial interventionists, by contrast, called into question the traditional spatial and temporal boundaries of Holocaust commemoration by lobbying for the embrace of a new memorial topography and temporality. This group asserted the value of monuments without a bounded site, integrated into everyday life, and most importantly, without a clear beginning or end. An effective Holocaust monument became a modest utopian project for the spatial interventionists. It not only envisioned but also attempted to realize a future in which German citizens would engage actively with the past both as individuals and as a collective communicative network. They designed monuments that, similar to Beuys' *7000 Oaks* would be made and remade daily by ordinary people, and as such rendered sustainable.

## II. The Utopian Imperative of Communication through Movement: *Places of Remembrance and Bus Stop*

<sup>30</sup> Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 102-3.

<sup>31</sup> Jay Winter. “The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies.” *Raritan* 21:1 (Summer 2001): 52-66. For a harsher indictment of this scholarly fixation—what historian Kerwin Klein, more cynically than Winter, has called the academic “memory industry”—see Kerwin Klein. “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse.” *Representations* 69 (1 January 2000): 127-150.

<sup>32</sup> See Pierre Nora. *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984, or for a more concise statement of his thesis, Pierre Nora. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* 26 (1 April 1989): 7-24.

<sup>33</sup> I also want to distinguish the phenomenon of spatial interventionist monuments from Rudy Koshar's fuzzy idea of “traces,” or remnants of the past that peek through the palimpsest of history into the present. While the notion of a “trace” did occupy a central place in the imagination of many of the spatial interventionists, as a category for delimiting this new commemorative moment, the concept of a “trace” places too much emphasis on the appearance of these new memorial practices and not enough on their social character. See Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 226-285.

The Berlin-based artist pair, Croatian-born Renata Stih and German Frieder Schnock, offered through two monument designs a first articulation of what would become the utopian objectives—and stakes—of the mature spatial interventionist project. The first of these, a permanent installation called *Places of Remembrance* (1993) housed in the West Berlin's Schöneberg neighborhood, emerged out of a project by the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*. The group had discovered the rich history of the flourishing Jewish community in Berlin's so-called Bavarian Quarter—which for its prosperity won for itself the nickname of Berlin's "Jewish Switzerland." Intrigued by this history, the BGW undertook a local Holocaust history research project there, but soon found that the extensive archival resources far exceeded the group's means to work through them.<sup>34</sup> Schöneberg's cultural affairs office [*Kunstamt Schöneberg*] assumed responsibility for the project and, after a multi-year research enterprise, they sketched out a mosaic history of the exclusion, persecution, and elimination of Schöneberg's Jews, with emphasis on local collections of biographies.<sup>35</sup> When the 1983 exhibit concluded, it prompted a discussion about how to continue dialogue about this local history and how to immortalize this work, particularly in the form of a monument.<sup>36</sup> Out of this discussion grew a four-year initiative to collect the names of six thousand Jews deported from the Bavarian Quarter. The project culminated with a temporary installation, initiated by the neighborhood's Social Democratic Party, that displayed the names of the deported on cardboard signs in front of seventy-six houses in the district. Motivated both by the initial exhibit and the deportation documentation project, the Schöneberg district council voted in 1988 to erect a permanent monument on the plaza at the heart of the Bavarian Quarter and issued a call for design proposals. "The objective of the design competition," one Jewish journalist later explained, "was not to create a monument in the usual sense. Rather, it called for stumbling stones [*Stolpersteine*] that would galvanize people as well as provoke conversations among eyewitnesses" to the Nazi years.<sup>37</sup>

The competition's first prize went to Stih and Schnock who had proposed to install eighty small signs—roughly 20x30 inches—on lampposts around the neighborhood.<sup>38</sup> They drew inspiration from a 1981 publication, *Das Sonderrecht für Juden im NS-Staat* [The Rights of Jews in the Nazi State], by the director of Jerusalem's Leo Baeck Institute, Joseph Walk; Stih and Schnock had encountered the book for the first time during a previous trip to the Wannsee Conference Museum. Thinking about the rights of which Jews had been deprived by the Nazi regime, Stih and Schnock decided to depict, in both word and image, the various acts of anti-Jewish legislation that had gradually curtailed these rights for Schöneberg locals.<sup>39</sup> "At Bayerischer Platz, Jews may sit only on

<sup>34</sup> See Birgit Menzel and Werner Süß. "Das Bayrische Viertel - 'Die Jüdische Schweiz.' Etappen eines Vernichtungsprozesses." *Leben in Schöneberg/Friedenau 1933-45*. Gisela Wenzel, ed. Berlin: Kunstamt Schöneberg, 1983, 39-44.

<sup>35</sup> Kunstamt Schöneberg and Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz. *Orte des Erinnerns, Bd. 2. Jüdisches Alltagsleben im Bayerischen Viertel, Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1995.

<sup>36</sup> Kunstamt Schöneberg and Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz. *Orte des Erinnerns, Bd. 1. Das Denkmal im Bayerischen Viertel, Beitrag zur Debatte um Denkmale und Erinnerung*. Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994.

<sup>37</sup> "Stolpersteine im Bayerischen Viertel. Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin - ungewöhnlich dokumentiert." *Unabhängige Jüdische Stimme*, 2:3 (September 1993): 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> "Stolpersteine im Bayerischen Viertel," *Unabhängige Jüdische Stimme*, 8-9. See also Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin. *Offener Kunstwettbewerb. "Kunst im Stadtraum." Mahnen und Gedenken im Bayerischen Viertel. Ausschreibung 1. Phase*. Berlin: June 1991; Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin. *Offener Kunstwettbewerb. "Kunst im Stadtraum." Mahnen und Gedenken im Bayerischen Viertel. Protokoll der Preisgerichtssitzung und Bericht der Vorprüfung*. Berlin: November 1991; Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin. *Offener Kunstwettbewerb. "Kunst im Stadtraum." Mahnen und Gedenken im Bayerischen Viertel. Protokoll der Preisgerichtssitzung und Bericht der Vorprüfung, 2. Phase*. Berlin: April 1992.

<sup>39</sup> 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin. See Joseph Walk. *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS-Staat: eine Sammlung der gesetzlichen Massnahmen und Richtlinien, Inhalt und Bedeutung*. Heidelberg; Karlsruhe: Müller Juristischer Verlag, 1981.

yellow marked park benches,” reads one sign, with a pictogram of a red bench on the reverse side. Another displays a white letter “U” against a blue background, the icon marking an entrance to Berlin’s subway system: “Jews are permitted to use public transportation only to go to work. September 13, 1941,” reads the reverse. “Jews are expelled from all choral groups,” reads another, showing a musical staff on the sign’s opposite side.<sup>40</sup> The signs not only draw attention to urban topography but also shape the way passersby engage with that space. One might think not only about the prohibition of sitting on a bench, for example, but also about what one’s own contemporary freedom to use the bench means. The *Places of Memory* installation acts as a kind of “*Kreuzweg*,” or stations of the cross, Stih has explained of the decentralized monument. To walk the stations, to read the signs together with other passersby, and to think through their meaning in a ritualized way permits a form of meditative reparation performed collectively. “That’s why we call it a social sculpture,” Stih explains, consciously mobilizing Joseph Beuys’ concept.<sup>41</sup> Joseph Walk, whose approval they solicited prior to the project’s installation, suggested that he could not think of a better end for his research.<sup>42</sup>

Stih and Schnock’s piece brought anti-Jewish policy out of the distant realm of legal history and into the daily lives of their fellow Berlin residents. The artists sought to provoke contemporary Berliners to reflect on the everyday social and spatial implications of National Socialism within the concrete contexts of their own communities. “We wanted...people [to] have it in their face every day,” Stih explained of the historic set of Nazi laws regulating Jewish life. Stih and Schnock aimed for their installation to become “the unavoidable memorial.”<sup>43</sup> Such unavoidability could only be achieved through decentralization. And decentralization combined with irritation would render the monument meaningful. The artists wanted to disrupt passersby, to administer their message “intravenously.” The power of the project, Stih clarified, was that it “[gets] under your skin.”<sup>44</sup> And indeed, a snafu in the scheduling of the memorial’s installation proved that it did.

The artists began to install the first few signs a week before the memorial’s official inauguration in June 1993. While they did, the police received several phone calls reporting antisemitic activity in the Schöneberg neighborhood. The police responded swiftly. “Signs reading ‘Jews need a certificate of discharge in order to leave the neighborhood’ have been removed from several streets in the Bavarian Quarter,” the *Berliner Zeitung* reported on June 6. The installation, the paper clarified, “is part of an art campaign in the neighborhood, one of which local authorities were aware.” Nevertheless, district administrators “based their decision to take down the signs on the grounds that they had overstepped the boundaries of tastefulness.”<sup>45</sup> Even the head of Schöneberg’s Jewish community, who had sat on the jury that selected the memorial, failed to come to its aid, having forgotten that he in fact voted for Stih and Schnock’s proposal. In a comical twist, the police stored the signs with their other confiscated goods, namely illegal drugs and firearms. The incident began a battle over how to redeem the disgraced monument that ended only after the artists agreed

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<sup>40</sup> Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. *Orte des Erinnerns. Places of Remembrance in Berlin*. Berlin: Verlag Stih und Schnock, 2009, 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin. The monument now falls under the auspices of the Berlin Cultural Office [*Kulturverwaltung*].

<sup>42</sup> See Stih and Schnock personal archive, letter from Joseph Walk, undated; see also 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin.

<sup>43</sup> 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin.

<sup>44</sup> 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin.

<sup>45</sup> “Kurz und Knapp. Plakate abgenommen.” *Berliner Zeitung*, 5/6 June 1993, 17. See also Ulrich Clewing. “Anwohner hielten das Mahnmal für antisemitische Propaganda. Berlin: Misverständnisse um Denkmal für Juden.” *art. Das Kunstmagazin* 8 (1993), 193.

to show their hand, so to speak, to passersby by appending to each sign a smaller plaque that identifies the memorial by name and explains its purpose.<sup>46</sup>

Twenty years after its botched unveiling, the monument has seen better days. “Images are faded. Some placards have fallen victim to wind. The associated guidebook has long been out-of-print.” Brigitte Werneburg of Berlin’s *Tageszeitung* has suggested that the memorial’s deterioration resulted not from lack of funding but from lack of interest. “[T]he Bavarian Quarter,” she notes, “often goes unmentioned in city guides and the monument itself remains absent from the list of Berlin memorials maintained by the documentation center” of the national Holocaust monument.<sup>47</sup> Stih, however, disagrees. The monument’s maintenance has flagged, she believes, because the city has yet to master the management of decentralized monuments. Though the monument is owned officially by the city of Berlin and designated a public state memorial [*Landesdenkmal*], it is managed by Schöneberg’s *Kunstamt*, while Stih and Schnock possess the copyright. Confusion reigns over who is obligated to mend broken signs, for example, and to whose standard.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the memorial has continued to engage passersby and local residents alike. The simple imperative of upkeep prevents neighborhood residents from forgetting about the monument entirely. And, for that reason, it manages to cling to its utopian ambition of keeping the abomination of racial legislation present in the minds of Schöneberg residents and visitors through decentralized art.

The second of Stih and Schnock’s influential projects, called *Bus Stop* (1995), generated equal controversy, though no such administrative confusion, in part because it was never realized. Despite the *Bus Stop*’s purely conceptual existence, it lives on—quite actively—in public consciousness, a testament to its aesthetic power.

Stih and Schnock submitted *Bus Stop* to Germany’s 1995 competition to design the national Holocaust monument in Berlin.<sup>49</sup> The competition called for submissions for a monument that would occupy the nearly-five-acre plot of land that constituted the former “Ministry Garden” on the edge of Berlin’s government district. Only meters from the Reichstag building, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Tiergarten—Berlin’s main public park—the future monument was to occupy the effective heart of both contemporary and historic Berlin.<sup>50</sup> Many of the 528 submissions for the competition translated the plot’s prestige into structural grandiosity. Only a truly monumental memorial befitted such a monumental site, many seemed to assume.<sup>51</sup> “We know well the depth of Germany’s guilt,” Stih and Schnock wrote in a short piece for *Der Tagesspiegel* the year of the competition. “For the ‘Memorial for Murdered European Jews’ [sic] great international art is called for, and the whole giant monument for the new capital does not come cheaply.”<sup>52</sup> Their contemporary assessment proved accurate in light of the monument’s estimated 16-Million-Mark (roughly 11-million-dollar) price tag.<sup>53</sup> “[O]ne can’t avoid the impression,” Stih and Schnock elaborated,

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<sup>46</sup> 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin.

<sup>47</sup> Brigitte Werneburg. “Armes Berlin.” *ta3*, 9 June 2008.

<sup>48</sup> 8 May 2013, Interview with Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin.

<sup>49</sup> Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin. *Künstlerischer Wettbewerb*, 9. Participation in the competition was open to German nationals and all artists who had lived in Germany for more than six years.

<sup>50</sup> Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin. *Künstlerischer Wettbewerb*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> For renderings and brief descriptions of each submission, see Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin. *Künstlerischer Wettbewerb*, 54ff.

<sup>52</sup> Stih and Schnock personal archive, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. “Under Goethe’s Cool Gaze. Controversial Holocaust Memorial: Size at what price?” *Der Tagesspiegel*. Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, trs. 19 January 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Marlies Emmerich. “Ausstellung zum Holocaust-Denkmal eröffnet. 200 000 Mark gespendet: Eine Pflicht zur Erinnerung.” *Berliner Zeitung*. 11.4.1995.

that a certain type of memorial was envisioned, one that reconciles the vast sorrow for the past with the size of the nation. ... [T]he only possible form for a memorial is ‘It must be big.’ Perhaps the historically significant area between the Brandenburg Gate, the new American embassy building, the academy of art, and Goethe’s cool gaze down from his memorial all suggest the belief that physical size equals impact.<sup>54</sup>

The final monument, designed by American architect Peter Eisenman, certainly fits this bill: it features 2711 large concrete blocks, some nearly sixteen feet tall, on an undulating terrain that occupies the entire plot of land provided by the city.

Stih and Schnock’s proposal, by contrast, adopted different priorities in line with those once expressed by jury member and American scholar of Holocaust memorials James Young. Young, Stih and Schnock claim, suggested that “the ideal situation would be the memorial as ‘work in process,’ in which every succeeding generation took part.”<sup>55</sup> Describing their proposal as a “non-monument” and “ephemeral memorial,” Stih and Schnock took to heart the call for a work-in-progress. The transitory nature of their proposal derived from its minimal use of the expansive plot, which stood only as an empty lot at the time they submitted their design. At the center of the site they placed “a single bus terminal... from which the buses depart for the former concentration camps. Visitors to the Bus Stop can take hourly buses to authentic memorials and institutions in Berlin and regularly buses offer services between the capital and Sachsenhausen,” their proposal explained. “Furthermore, bus trips to more distant memorial sites and the death camps in Poland will be provided at frequent intervals.” As a “reminder of the decades of urban destruction created by National Socialist rule,” Stih and Schnock planned to leave unaltered the “desolate landscape” of the monument’s otherwise empty allotment of land.<sup>56</sup> Much like the German Greens, who in the debates surrounding the formation of the German Historical Museum in Berlin declared the German landscape a “history workshop,” one already filled with authentic resources for historical learning, Stih and Schnock too called on the German people to make use of the unassuming commemorative possibilities already present within their national borders rather than to create new ones: “One wishes,” the artists wrote in 1995, “that instead of monumental stars of David, polished marble and deep trenches, there could be a discussion which excludes gigantomania. This is important for citizens’ consciousness, so that they can and will confront the past in many places.”<sup>57</sup> Particularly noteworthy is the way this wish resonated not only with the two artists, but with the broader public, both in Germany and internationally. At an exhibit in April and May 1995, visitors to the state council building could view renderings for all 528 design submissions. Entries in the exhibit’s guestbook praised Stih and Schnock with considerable frequency. A selection of these entries is worth quoting at some length:

“The only decent one is the Bus Stop! The rest are trite symbolism.”

“Why no Bus Stop? All the others are the same and toot their own horns with flowery, pompous, holier-than-thou language.”

“Against gigantomania and notions of redemption — so, THE BUS STOP!”

“If you need a monument for the Holocaust as an indication (above all with a view to the future) that we want to remember, then, in my opinion, the Bus Stop is the only plausible one. Brisk business at a station like this would be, for me, a reassuring indication that noteworthy engagement with this history was taking place. And what if the busses were empty? A fascinating question! A decision in favor of realizing this proposal would be a courageous choice. But who is that brave?”

“Hollywood designers on coke!!! Only the Bus Stop is legit.”

<sup>54</sup> Stih and Schnock personal archive, Stih and Schnock “Under Goethe’s Cool Gaze.”

<sup>55</sup> Stih and Schnock personal archive, Stih and Schnock “Under Goethe’s Cool Gaze.”

<sup>56</sup> Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. *Bus Stop*. Steve Sokol, tr. Berlin, 1995, n.pag.

<sup>57</sup> Stih and Schnock personal archive, Stih and Schnock “Under Goethe’s Cool Gaze.”

“The banality and normality of the bus stop as an active memorial would best motivate a remembering that could engage present and future generations!”

“I vote for the Bus Stop as a daily, perpetual reminder.”

“I’m for the Bus Stop and for an active commemoration [*lebendiges Erinnern*].”

“The Bus Stop is the only proposal that actually engaged meaningfully with the concept of a monument.”<sup>58</sup>

Several guests also argued that the funds allotted for the monument would be better spent on the upkeep of existing historical sites, while one in explicit support of the *Bus Stop* suggested that, as the busses got older, they too would become mobile monuments whose significance would be cemented into popular consciousness (perhaps a nod to the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*'s Mobile Museum, which also took the form of a decommissioned bus). Another pointed to the absurdity of the whole competition: “We should collect money for an even bigger plot of land. Then we could solicit even more megalomaniacal proposals. Then we would finally be sure that we have the biggest Holocaust monument in the universe. And what then? Delusions of grandeur [*Größenwahn*].”<sup>59</sup> Stih and Schnock acknowledged this criticism, noting that “the idea of erecting a central monument for the millions of Jews murdered in Europe is not lacking in absurdity. After all, here in Germany — and particularly in Berlin — we find ourselves on a terrain which offers numerous authentic sites for remembrance.”<sup>60</sup> They proposed the *Bus Stop* as a solution to this problem:

Bus Stop is a reaction to this inherent conflict in forms of remembrance. Bus Stop is a transitory monument. Its primary function is based on the dissolution of the conventional concept of a memorial. No site for ritualized remembrance is created. Instead, the idea is that one can go to the actual places of remembrance. In this manner, the otherwise passive visitor is forced to play an active role: In place of consumption, the acquisition of knowledge and the coming to terms with historical facts.<sup>61</sup>

The *Bus Stop* presented itself as a monument for a new generation with new commemorative needs. In a set of remarks delivered as part of the colloquium series tied to the creation of the Holocaust monument, scholar of cultural memory Aleida Assmann argued that “in the present, which we might characterize as undergoing a generational shift, the cultural function of a monument is its trans-generational preservation of memory. The monument must elevate an event from the level of history and render it a collectively obligatory memory [*Erinnerung*].” She called for the redefinition of national identity through political monuments. National identity, she claimed, must become a “relational identity that is no longer ideologically but rather communicatively grounded.”<sup>62</sup> The *Bus Stop*, by proposing to bring together strangers on long bus rides and to transport them to locations that offer provocative conversation pieces, presented a decentralized, communicatively-grounded, self-sustaining monument for a new commemorative era in Germany. Though not selected as the national monument, *Bus Stop*'s themes and lessons nonetheless resonated with many Germans. The themes of communication and cooperation mediated by social experiences enabled by spatial interventionist monuments would anchor themselves solidly over the next few years, both in Germany's popular consciousness and in its physical topography.

<sup>58</sup> Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. *Bus Stop Fahrplan, 1. Auflage*. Leonie Baumann, ed. Berlin: NGBK, 12.1995, 106-110. See also Stih and Schnock personal archive, Visitors' Book. The last of these rendered “monument” in the German as *Denkmal*, a word that can be translated literally as the imperative “think for a moment.”

<sup>59</sup> Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. *Bus Stop Fahrplan, 1. Auflage*. Leonie Baumann, ed. Berlin: NGBK, December 1995, 107-109. See also Stih and Schnock personal archive, Visitors' Book.

<sup>60</sup> Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. *Bus Stop*. Steve Sokol, tr. Berlin, 1995, n.pag.

<sup>61</sup> Stih and Schnock, *Bus Stop*, n.pag.

<sup>62</sup> Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur. *Colloquium. Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas. Dokumentation*. Berlin, 1997, 8.

### III. The *Stolpersteine* as a Model for a Sustainable Utopia

In an book published in 2008 by the small north German town of Elmshorn to document its efforts to install a peculiar grassroots decentralized monument in its community, a leader of the memorial initiative Rudi Arendt lauded the project for having enabled a kind of mutual understanding or rapprochement [*Verständigung*]. “If one here follows the philosopher Jürgen Habermas,” he noted, one sees that this Elmshorn monument-series promotes “understanding-oriented communicative action.” It “builds connections. Connections to those who wish to take in the perspective of the victims.” Performance art [*Aktionskunst*, or what I have termed spatial interventionist art] “provokes...dialogue, encourages the public to participate, sets a chain of conversations in action, in which the process of critical reason is given voice [*kritische Vernunft zu Wort kommt*].”<sup>63</sup> The particular monument of which Arendt wrote was the *Stumbling Stones* project, or *Stolpersteine*, the magnum opus of Gunter Demnig. The *Stolpersteine* consist not of a single large commemorative site, but rather of tens of thousands of small sites scattered throughout Europe’s landscape. Each mini-monument consists of a brass-covered cobblestone roughly three-inches-cubed and engraved with the name, date of birth, date of death, and place of death of one single victim of Nazi persecution. The text on each stone always begins the same: “Here lived...” Demnig places the stones flush with the sidewalk in front of the victim’s last freely chosen residence. He called them *Stumbling Stones* not because one actually stumbles over them, but because one stumbles over a memory whose unanticipated discovery invites a moment of reflection and participation.<sup>64</sup> Identifying victims by name, the stones cement the occurrence of each individual existence into the topography of everyday life. Remarkably, in the two decades since the project’s initiation, over 50,000 of these stones have been installed throughout Europe.<sup>65</sup> Writing in 2011, one historian estimated that, an average of 7.5 Stumbling Stones are laid per day.<sup>66</sup> And those numbers continue to climb. Demnig, unsurprisingly, does not work alone.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the most significant feature of the *Stolpersteine* is the massive network of participants they have created. Each stone requires a sponsor; a financier; a researcher; someone to make the stone, to advertise its installation, and to lay it; and

<sup>63</sup> Rudi Arendt. “Aktionskunst schafft Verbindungen: ‘Stolpersteine in Elmshorn - Gegen das Vergessen.’” *Stolpersteine in Elmshorn - gegen das Vergessen: eine Kunstaktion*. Gunter Demnig and Bert C Biehl, eds. Elmshorn, 2008, 10ff.

<sup>64</sup> One could also interpret Demnig’s project through the biblical metaphor of the stumbling stone (though it remains unclear how consciously Demnig channeled this biblical meaning). Acts 9:11-18: “The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’ ‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’ But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.”

<sup>65</sup> As a grassroots project with a massive, decentralized, largely ad hoc management system, the Stumbling Stones have proven remarkably hard to keep track of, with much disagreement about the precise number of stones that have been laid at any particular moment. Demnig’s own website lists the number as of December 2013 at 43,500: [www.stolpersteine.eu/de/technik](http://www.stolpersteine.eu/de/technik). An article from February 2014 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* lists the total at 44,000: Andreas Nefzger. “Stolpersteine Der Spurenleger.” *faz.net*, 7 February 2014, sec. Gesellschaft. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/menschen/stolpersteine-der-spurenleger-12788525.html>. The rather active Stolpersteine Twitter account (@\_Stolpersteine\_) posted on 4 February 2015 that the project had topped 50,000 stones in eighteen countries.

<sup>66</sup> Harald Schmid. “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur – Eine Zwischenbilanz.” Tagung: Stolpersteine – Irritationen der Erinnerung. Evangelische Akademie der Nordkirche, Hamburg, 9-10 September 2011.

<sup>67</sup> On Demnig’s decision to begin outsourcing the responsibility for crafting the stones, see Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 7.



finally guests to attend the installation event. The number of people behind those 50,000 Stumbling Stones is, therefore, far more numerous. The *Stumbling Stones* have arguably become the largest grassroots memorial project in the world. Moreover, the project offers the clearest crystallization of a sustainable utopian agenda.

### A. “Delusions of Grandeur:” The Birth of the *Stolpersteine* Project

The first faint silhouette of what would later become the *Stolpersteine* appeared in a temporary installation Demnig undertook in 1990 in cooperation with Kölner Rom, a Cologne-based association to promote understanding between Roma and Sinti people and non-Romani. The project, titled *May 1940 – 1,000 Roma and Sinti*, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1940 experimental deportation of thousands of Cologne’s Sinti and Roma population, a technique the Nazis would later use to deport not only Sinti and Roma, but millions of antifascist resisters, homosexuals, handicapped, Jehovah’s Witnesses, alternative thinkers and, of course, Jews from the heart of European cities to the camps.<sup>68</sup> The project would also ignite Demnig’s commitment to using his art to work through the traumatic legacies of National Socialism.<sup>69</sup> Using the same ink wheel he had used in his 1980 *Duftmarken* installation between Kassel and Paris, Demnig printed onto Cologne’s streets the text “May 1940 – 1,000 Roma and Sinti.” The text wound its way from the heart of the city to the Cologne exhibition grounds, tracing the trail along which the deportees were marched to the local Buchenwald satellite camp. Demnig laid his trace in 1990 in twenty-three places throughout the city.<sup>70</sup> With a permit to use chalk as his medium, Demnig intended to foreground the transitory nature of memory in his installation. In an expression of the rebellious side for which Demnig had a reputation, however, he opted to replace the chalk with a more durable dispersion paint. Though the police detained Demnig during the laying of his text trail—as often happened during his installations—the fortuitous decision of the police not to check the trunk of his car where he had stored the clearly-labeled medium meant his act of intransigence escaped notice.<sup>71</sup>

Understandably, then, “the trace proved more persistent than the municipal permit authorities had expected,” explained Rolf Sachsse, a photographer and writer with an interest in Demnig’s work. “The dry weather had done its part; everything stuck around a while, preserved. Then came the people and the dogs and the weather and only that remained which nothing else could wash away. And then came the authorities.” But, Sachsse clarified, their response was unexpected. In nothing short of a complete reversal of their previous permit decision—which had allowed Demnig to use a medium that would disappear in the shortest time possible—they chose to give the trace the privileged status of a protected monument [*Denkmalschutz*].<sup>72</sup> On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1993, the municipal director of the city of Cologne, Lothar Ruschmeier, approved the permanent

<sup>68</sup> That Demnig began with the Romani should not escape notice. Throughout his work on the atrocities of National Socialism, he has insisted on maintaining a “most comprehensive conception” of the victims of Nazi persecution. Though, as historian Beate Meyer has noted, approximately 90% of Demnig’s work in fact commemorates Jewish victims, neither a spotlighting of particular groups nor their heirarchization has played a role in the development of his projects. NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz:, 78, Gunter Demnig, 5.1994; 53 Gunter Demnig [undated]. See also Beate Meyer. “Stolpersteine in Hamburg - Individualisiertes Erinnern in alltäglichen Lebensräumen.” *Mein Täubchen aus dem Felsenspalt, im Hohlort des Berganges, lass Dein Antlitz mich schauen, Deine Stimme mir ertönen ...*: (gemäß Das Hobelied 2,14): *Becoming Visible: Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1990*. Miryam Gilis-Karlebakh and Barbara Vogel, eds. München: Döllner und Galitz, 2011, 70.

<sup>69</sup> NS-Dokumentationszentrum (Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln) and Karola Fings. *Stolpersteine: Gunter Demnig und sein Projekt = Gunter Demnig and his project*. Köln: Emons, 2007, 14. See also Joachim Rönneper. *Vor meiner Haustür - “Stolpersteine” von Gunter Demnig: ein Begleitbuch*. Gelsenkirchen: Arachne-Verlag, 2010, 116f.

<sup>70</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz:, 78, Gunter Demnig, 5.1994; 53 Gunter Demnig [undated].

<sup>71</sup> Kurt Holl and Corinna Kawaters. *Ein Strich durchs Vergessen: 1000 Roma und Sinti-mai 1940*. Köln: Rom e.V., 1997, 7, 23.

<sup>72</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz:, 66, Rolf Sachsse, 1991.

installation of Demnig's *1000 Roma and Sinti*. Many informally called it the "*Leidensweg*," or Way of Sorrows, a solemn nod to the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, the path Jesus allegedly walked both toward his crucifixion and after his resurrection.<sup>73</sup> Demnig, however, referred presciently to the installation made of brass-embedded concrete, which he laid in 1994, as "stumbling stones."<sup>74</sup> During the three-year-long wait for municipal approval to lay the permanent installation of the *Leidensweg*, Demnig illegally installed another monument in the cobblestone plaza in front of the Cologne City Hall. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1992, Demnig marked the fiftieth anniversary of Heinrich Himmler's order that all "gypsies" be deported from the Reich to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He created a small brass-capped cobblestone, which bore on its face the text of Himmler's order and included in a hollowed-out cavity in the stone a paper copy of the text. Demnig dubbed this monument, too, a *Stolperstein*.<sup>75</sup>

The inspiration for Demnig's later *Stolpersteine* project came from the confluence of the permanent installation of the *Leidensweg* and this small brass cobblestone laid without permission in the heart of the city. While installing in the southern part of Cologne the large metal-embedded concrete strips that bore the text of the *1000 Roman and Sinti* project, Demnig recounted how an onlooker remarked to him that his project looked "very nice, but in our neighborhood," she said, "there weren't any gypsies." Demnig often relates his conviction that the woman genuinely did not know about the ethnic constitution of her community. The experience revealed to Demnig the extent to which many of Cologne's Romani were integrated into their social and cultural community and lived together normally with their neighbors. "And nevertheless," he adds pensively, "these people were later deported without any resistance worth mentioning from their neighbors. Auschwitz was the destination, the end point. But the horror, the inconceivable began in apartments and houses."<sup>76</sup>

Shortly before this encounter, Demnig had been invited to contribute an entry to an edited volume of conceptual art titled *Delusions of Grandeur [Größenwahn]: Art Projects for Europe*. The editors of the 1993 publication explained the project as an attempt to bridge the divide between politics and art through dialogue about their shared investment in realizing a united Europe.<sup>77</sup> They solicited contributions from two hundred artists in a score of different countries, giving them the opportunity to express an artistic conceptualization that would guide the development of a common Europe through what they described as "an era of political reconfiguration."<sup>78</sup> Although the book included many proposals whose artists freely admitted would never be realized, the collection's editors intended that the volume would nevertheless serve as "a treasure chest of inspiration" for those "active in the construction of Europe." They were careful not to preclude the success of any of the

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<sup>73</sup> Importantly, however, the city accepted the monument only as a gift from Demnig. The city did not represent the installation as a municipal initiative. This decision would later give Demnig a precedent for pushing for the approval of early *Stolpersteine*. NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz.; 67-70, 18.3.1993, Stadt Köln, Oberstadtdirektor, Rat betr: Leidenweg der Roma und Sinti durch Köln; Dauerhafte Sicherung des Weges durch den Künstler Herr Gunter Demnig

<sup>74</sup> Kurt-Werner Pick. "Stolpersteine. Spuren gegen das Vergessen. Ein Kunstprojekt an der Antoniterkirche." *Antoniter Nachrichten*, March 1994, 5. See also NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz.; 78, Gunter Demnig, 5.1994; 53, Gunter Demnig, [undated].

<sup>75</sup> Holl and Kawaters, *Ein Strich durchs Vergessen*, 8-9, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Uta Franke. "Stolpersteine: Idee, Vorgeschichte und Entwicklung eines Projektes. Interviews von Uta Franke mit Gunter Demnig." Köln, 2003, 4-5. See also Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichshain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Berlin: NGBK, 2002, 11-12.

<sup>77</sup> Gabriele Lindinger and Karlheinz Schmid, eds. *Größenwahn: Kunstprojekte für Europa*. Regensburg: Lindinger + Schmid, 1993, 11

<sup>78</sup> Lindinger and Schmid, eds, *Größenwahn*, 15.

projects; over the next millennium, they suggested dramatically, perhaps some would come to fruition, when conflict between European cities and states would no longer play a constitutive role in political, social, and cultural life in Europe. At that moment, they prophesied, “the concrete European utopia will finally have enabled new structures of social reality. In the meantime,” however, they preferred to concentrate on a “politics of small steps and great visions.”<sup>79</sup> Demnig submitted an abridged description of a large project that would duplicate mini-monuments similar to the stone with Himmler’s deportation order; these stones, however, would honor individual Holocaust victims. Demnig also titled this piece of conceptual art *Stolpersteine*.

With the publication of *Delusions of Grandeur*, the *Stolpersteine* remained “a purely conceptual work.”<sup>80</sup> The proposal to install six million stones, Demnig later quipped, was “surely delusional enough.”<sup>81</sup> The project nevertheless quickly began to win attention, starting with a small evangelical church community. While researching for *1000 Sinti and Roma*, Demnig made contact with Cologne’s Antoniter Church. Over the previous two years, Antoniter had offered religious asylum to two Roma families threatened with deportation. As a result, the church community had begun to raise the profile of the precarious living situation of Cologne’s Romani population.<sup>82</sup> Noting that there were far more than one thousand Sinti and Roma killed in the Holocaust, Antoniter’s head pastor Kurt Pick invited Demnig to expand upon the *Leidensweg*, this time using the form of the *Stolpersteine*. Demnig balked, deterred by the absurdity of embarking on a project that would involve millions of component parts. Here, however, Pick imparted to Demnig a line of wisdom he has since reproduced countless times to those wondering what carries him over the hurdle of the irrational: “Of course you can’t make six million stones,” Pick reflected, “but if you want to set an example, you can still begin small.”<sup>83</sup> This encouragement proved sufficient. Using archival materials made available to him through his connections with Kölner Rom, Demnig created for the church 250 stones, each bearing the personal details of one Holocaust victim.<sup>84</sup> He intended that his monuments would generate a dialogue about both the proximity and the individuality of victims of the Holocaust, combatting the tendency of large centralized memorials to permit their visitors “to forget that these horrors played out in neighborhoods, in streets, in apartments in which we live today.” Demnig also sought to restore individual names to the previously anonymous mass of the deported associated with these spaces.<sup>85</sup> From September to November 1994, Demnig displayed the stones in the Antoniter Church.<sup>86</sup>

Reflecting on all of the submissions to *Delusions of Grandeur*, art historian Manfred Schneckenburger asked whether Europeans have “not all been waiting for a long time for a new paradigm, and hasn’t continual fluctuation long appeared as nothing less than the ontological

<sup>79</sup> Lindinger and Schmid, eds, *Größenwahn*, 15

<sup>80</sup> Gunter Demnig and Jürgen Rapp. “Gunter Demnig: Dezentrales Mahnmahl. Ein Gespräch mit Jürgen Rapp.” *Kunstforum International* 170 (2004), 232

<sup>81</sup> Demnig and Rapp, “Gunter Demnig,” 232. The figure of six million was more a convenient one for the sake of easy reference. Demnig’s project has never centered on Jews alone.

<sup>82</sup> Pick, “Stolpersteine,” 6-7.

<sup>83</sup> Demnig and Rapp, “Gunter Demnig,” 232; Franke, “Stolpersteine,” 7.

<sup>84</sup> Uta Franke and Gunter Demnig. “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben, Uta Franke im Interview mit Gunter Demnig.” *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichsbain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. Berlin: NGBK, 2002, 12.

<sup>85</sup> Gunter Demnig. “Projekt Stolpersteine.” *Größenwahn: Kunstprojekte für Europa*. Gabriele Lindinger and Karlheinz Schmid, eds. Regensburg: Lindinger + Schmid, 1993, 61. See also Pick, “Stolpersteine,” 6. On the importance of naming and the dead, see Thomas Laqueur’s forthcoming book *The Work of the Dead* (2015).

<sup>86</sup> Franke and Demnig, “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben,” 12.

essence of art?”<sup>87</sup> As the first examples of Demnig’s *Stumbling Stones* began to jump off the pages of the edited volume and into the lived spaces of Cologne, it began to seem that his project might offer a response to Schneckenburger’s rhetorical call. Sculpture, Schneckenburger wrote, “possesses the capacity to tackle themes pointedly, both at their site and in their contemporary moment.” Sculptures, he argued,

seize at once upon structure, topography, sociology, public attitudes, memories as concrete spaces, as concrete pasts....Public art directs itself not at the psychology of the masses, but rather at the individual and his individual sensibility. ... Art forms that seemed to have been discredited or abandoned entirely—monuments, memorials—have suddenly regained a form and a meaning. The old task of art in public space as “Mnemonic of the Polity,” per Gerhard Schröder, has generated a new paradigm.<sup>88</sup>

Although Schneckenburger wrote here of contemporary art in general, he may have had his eye on Demnig’s work in particular. Writing elsewhere, the same year he published the previous remarks, Schneckenburger pegged Demnig as having “mastered the greatest expanse of space, more than any other artist I know.” Whoever looks, Schneckenburger added, finds in Demnig’s work “an (ironic?) aesthetic dialectic between word and act.”<sup>89</sup> Demnig’s work, he elaborated, “does not dispense with the past through a kind of memorial pathos, but instead brings it into everyday life in the present.”<sup>90</sup> And so it would seem that Demnig, with the earliest iterations of the *Stolpersteine*, had firmly established himself as a pioneer among radical artists of public space.

### B. “They might be monuments:” The Battle Against Bureaucracy

A key turning point in the project’s development came in 1995 as Demnig, for the first time, took his decentralized memorial project beyond Cologne. A young, part-time employee in the media and public outreach at Berlin’s New Society for the Visual Arts (*Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst*, or NGBK) Matthias Reichelt invited Demnig to participate in an exhibition organized with together with the Schöneberg community arts gallery, the Haus am Kleistpark. As the exhibit’s general theme, the NGBK had selected “the Holocaust in art.” The other participants included the American cartoonist Art Spiegelman, famous for his graphic novel *Maus*, which depicts interviews with the author’s Polish-Jewish father about his experience in the concentration camps; the German photographer Reinhard Matz, who at the time was focused on representing monuments; German installation artist Beate Passow; and British artist Pam Skelton, whose work emphasized the problems of postwar geographies and temporalities. Titled “*Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz*,” the exhibit’s name, through a bit of word play, suggested both artists conducting researching in the wake of Auschwitz as well as artists searching for Auschwitz. Of the exhibition, then head of the Schöneberg’s *Kunstamt* Katharina Kaiser explained that, in conjunction with the anniversary year of 1995, the galleries wanted to play a role in prolonging the work of memory and the process of reckoning with the Nazi system of violence; in this regard, they would prove far more successful than they could have anticipated.<sup>91</sup> Reichelt, in correspondence with one journalist, explained that “for us, it was not about finding artists interested in engaging the subject in monumental ways (as is the case, for example, with the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe). Rather, we sought

<sup>87</sup> Manfred Schneckenburger. “Delta im Einheitsstrom. Zur Kunst der neunziger Jahre.” *Grüßenwahn: Kunstprojekte für Europa*. Gabriele Lindinger and Karlheinz Schmid, eds. Regensburg: Lindinger + Schmid, 1993, 18-19.

<sup>88</sup> Schneckenburger, “Delta im Einheitsstrom,” 20-21.

<sup>89</sup> Manfred Schneckenburger. “Gunter Demnig - Vergangenheit, Trittfest Gemacht.” *Kölner Skizzen* 15:4 (1993): 7

<sup>90</sup> Schneckenburger, “Gunter Demnig,” 7.

<sup>91</sup> NGBK Ordner: *Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz*, 114, Katharina Kaiser, Kunstamt Schöneberg to Mitglieder des Kulturarbeitskreises und die Arbeitsgruppe Bayerischer Platz, 18.4.1996.

artists who attempt, processually, to bring these difficult themes into closer proximity [*sich...näher*]” to everyday life.<sup>92</sup>

Reichelt invited Demnig, first, to contribute to the exhibition a reproduction of an older project, *Lemniskate BR53*, which featured a scale electric model of a German Reichsbahn BR 53 train, the kind of train that had transported deportees to the camps. Demnig had set the model to run perpetually along a lemniscate—or, figure-eight—pattern, from which the installation drew its name. The sculpture invited viewers to press a green button to bring the train to life. As the train began to chug along its path, however, Demnig treated viewers to an announcement delivered over a loudspeaker that explained the gruesome history of the BR53.<sup>93</sup> (It bears noting that *Lemniskate BR53*, which Demnig first created in 1994 amid the excitement of the *1000 Roma and Sinti* project and the Antoniter Church installation, had also originally been called a “*Stolperstein*.”<sup>94</sup> Demnig was becoming a bit predictable.) Reichelt planted the seed that would grow into the first Berlin *Stolpersteine* installation by suggesting that Demnig should “give some thought to some kind of ‘action’” that would complement his *Lemniskate* gallery installation.<sup>95</sup> Demnig replied, saying that he had, in fact, lots of thoughts about a Berlin initiative but that he also “could hardly imagine, time-wise, how it would be possible to pull off.” Nevertheless, Demnig ultimately agreed that a symbolic action might be possible if Reichelt could coordinate the logistics. They settled upon laying a small collection of *Stolpersteine* in Berlin’s Kreuzberg neighborhood, on Oranienstraße near the NGBK exhibit itself.<sup>96</sup>

Reichelt undertook the archival research necessary to identify the Jewish families that had lived on Oranienstraße. According to the deportation records he pulled from the finance ministry, fifteen apartments on the street had housed Jewish residents. Upon delivering his research to Demnig, Reichelt lamented, however, that the NGBK’s finances would limit the number of stones Demnig could install; stones for all fifteen sets of addresses would certainly exceed their budget. But, Reichelt noted, what first appeared a modest fiscal dilemma catapulted them into a grievous moral dilemma: “The problem with that, at least to me,” Reichelt explained, “is that we would be forced to undertake a second ‘selection’ of victims, which Reichelt understood as inappropriately reminiscent of the Final Solution itself. “Perhaps I’m crazy, and the rest of the group will have no trouble with this situation” he wrote to Demnig in December 1995, “but it would nevertheless be much nicer if we could mark out all addresses.” He proposed that they seek financial support from the Berlin Greens in order to complete the project in full.<sup>97</sup>

While the pair did receive additional funding to lay fifty-one stones along Oranienstraße, they did not, however, receive additional time. Between their initial decision to place the stones and the start of the exhibit stood a short three months. “To get a permit approved” for a project of this

<sup>92</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz, 13, Matthias Reichelt to Heiner Hepper, *ARD Morgenmagazin*, 29.4.1996

<sup>93</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz, 56, Matthias Reichelt to Gunter Demnig, 31.10.1995. On the Lemniskate BR53, see also NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz., 78, Gunter Demnig 5.1994; 39-41, Gunter Demnig to Matthias Reichelt, 27.2.1996.

<sup>94</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz., 39-41, Gunter Demnig to Matthias Reichelt 27.2.1996.

<sup>95</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz., 56, Matthias Reichelt to Gunter Demnig, 31.10.1995.

<sup>96</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz., 46-49, Gunter Demnig to Matthias Reichelt, 5.11.1995.

<sup>97</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz., 45, Matthias Reichelt to Gunter Demnig, 5.12.1995. Demnig has never actively addressed the problem of inadvertently reproducing the act of selection by placing *Stolpersteine*. This dilemma continues to trouble those who engage with the project. In Kassel, for example, one person complained that “the selection of individual houses [for the receipt of *Stumbling Stones*] can be compared with the selection ramp at Auschwitz.” See, for example, Harald Stingele and Die AnStifter. *Stuttgarter Stolpersteine: Spuren vergessener Nachbarn. Ein Kunstprojekt füllt Gedächtnislücken*. Filderstadt: Markstein, 2007, 18; Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds., *Stolpersteine*, 20.

sort, Demnig later explained, “one needs at least three years.”<sup>98</sup> In typical Demnig fashion, however, he opted to forge ahead with the project anyway and to lay the stones illegally.

The problem of permission would, in general, prove a sticky point for Demnig throughout the early years of the project. The stones’ location was largely to blame. Originally intended to be placed squarely before the front door to an apartment building or house, the stones’ sites made them unavoidable. One could step over them or to one side, but they remained impossible to ignore. Demnig had, of course, placed them there quite intentionally. With “frequent foot traffic,” he suggested, “the stones will always be polished, remaining legible and conspicuous.” But this conspicuity—the reality that an individual victim of Nazi oppression had been forcibly removed from the building, maybe even from one’s own apartment—was hard for some to residents face. Perhaps, Demnig suggested hopefully, “many individual memorials will have a greater effect than monuments largely kept at a distance. When set before your house door, repression [*Verdrängung*] becomes much harder.”<sup>99</sup> This unavoidability inclined some residents to oppose the placement of the stones entirely, though their opposition only forced Demnig to grow a thicker skin. He became adept at dismissing stray detractors when the community at large otherwise demanded the stones’ installation. “[I]f I had to get the personal approval of every resident before moving forward,” he explained a decade after placing the first stone before Cologne’s City Hall, “the project would have long ago been held up and hardly realizable.”<sup>100</sup> For this reason, however, he chose to place the stones at the very border between private and public space. Officially on public property, though directly adjacent to a private house door, the stones “challenge our thoughts about the boundaries of private space, the threshold between house and street, . . . protection and exposure, individuality and anonymity, . . . privacy and . . . neighborliness.”<sup>101</sup> Demnig occasionally recalls a pivotal moment in Cologne in which one house owner took him to court on the grounds that the two *Stolpersteine* in front of his home lowered his property valued by 100,000 Marks. The judge, however, ruled in Demnig’s favor, arguing that “the sidewalk belongs to the city, and as such *Stolpersteine* are a gift of the building’s residents to the city.” The decision set a precedent for managing future conflicts.<sup>102</sup>

When municipal administrators were the ones to impede installation efforts, especially when the residents themselves lobbied adamantly for the stones, Demnig often mustered his long-polished attitude of indifference and moved forward without permission.<sup>103</sup> Socialized in the protest

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<sup>98</sup> Here, Demnig based his calculations on his first attempt at obtaining a permit in Cologne. First filed in 1995, he only received permission five years later, in 2000. Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds., *Stolpersteine*, 14-15.

<sup>99</sup> Demnig, “Projekt Stolpersteine,” 61. Elsewhere, Demnig notes the attentiveness in Jewish philosophy to the relationship between traversing [*Begehen*] and reading. In particular, he points to Derrida’s essay on Edmund Jabès in *Writing and Difference*: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, in particular, 80, 87. See Franke. “Stolpersteine,” 8.

<sup>100</sup> Franke. “Stolpersteine,” 9.

<sup>101</sup> Stephanie Endlich. “Ein “dezentrales Monument”?: Anmerkungen zu einem ungewöhnlichen Denkmalskonzept.” *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichshain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. Berlin: NGBK, 2002, 31

<sup>102</sup> Rönneper, *Vor meiner Haustür*, 90-91.

<sup>103</sup> Demnig, one should note, was no stranger to crossing bureaucratic t’s and dotting clerical i’s. He had a long record of experience soliciting approval through the appropriate channels. For the NGBK installation, in particular, Demnig would have had a good working knowledge of how to obtain permission to install the stones. From his well-coordinated *Einreise ’88* [Entry ’88] project in 1988, Demnig clearly knew Berlin’s approval system by the time he undertook the laying of NGBK *Stolpersteine*. *Einreise* had involved the placement of a massive lead plank at several of the Western checkpoints along the Berlin Wall over which drivers would pass leaving dark tracks of their paths back into the Western island. It required considerable, though not insurmountable, paperwork. His decision to forge ahead with the Oraniensraße action illegally, then, seems clearly intentional. On *Einreise*, see Barbara Straka. “Grenzüberschreitender Verkehr. Gunter Demnigs Projekt ‘Einreise’ und die Kunst des Spurenlesens.” NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz: 1988, 131-138: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Spuren, Demnig 88; Sonderdruck des *Tagespiegel*. <http://www.hbksaar.de/>

generation of 1968, he possessed more than a mild irreverence for authority<sup>104</sup>—a convenient attitude given the long and murky channels of bureaucracy through which he often had to wade: in Cologne, for example, his tortuous path began with the city’s art advisory board, then shuffled to the city’s cultural committee, then to the offices of the representatives of each district in which he hoped to lay stones, then to the municipal department of civil engineering, then to the department of transportation, then to the office of city planning, then the budget office, and then at long last on to the Cologne city council for a final approval.<sup>105</sup> Five years from start to finish—and not without dissenters along the way—was enough to wear one thin. This impatience often translated to disregard for the rules entirely. “Whether or not his actions have received the approval of the appropriate agencies,” one researcher wrote, “matters little to Demnig. He prefers to let things lead to confrontation, a remnant of 1968.”<sup>106</sup> Only with confrontation, Demnig explained to one Cologne journalist, “will the subject remain lively.”<sup>107</sup> In general, however, Demnig and his growing collection of administrative collaborators in Germany and beyond have developed a good working relationships with the municipal offices that process approvals for the stones.

In the case of the NGBK installation, Demnig’s decision to move ahead with the project without the appropriate permits proved quite revealing. For three months, the fifty-one Oranienstraße stones escaped noticed from Berlin authorities. But a summer construction project adjacent to Moritzplatz in the middle of Oranienstraße ran up against the stones, which lay in a stretch of sidewalk that city engineers had planned to remove. Confronted with fifty-one shiny stones bearing the names of concentration camp victims, however, the construction workers tasked with the project of actually removing them refused on the premise, they said, that “these stones might be monuments.” This civil engineering hiccup finally brought the stones to the attention of the Kreuzberg district council. Fortunately, Reichelt has noted, “since we were engaged in memory work in the constituency of a relatively progressive district administration headed by Green Party member Frank Schulz, all the stones were retroactively legalized and recognized as an official commemorative site [*Denkort*].”<sup>108</sup>

### C. The Mainstreaming of the *Stolpersteine*

With increasing press came increasing public interest in the *Stolpersteine*.<sup>109</sup> When a South African descendant of Holocaust survivors stumbled upon the stones during a visit to Berlin, he lobbied to place his own set of stones in honor of those in his family who did not escape the camps. Anthropologist and guest faculty member at Berlin’s Humboldt University in the late 1990s Steven Robins found himself moved by the confluence of commemorative challenges not only in Germany

personen/lehrende0/professoren/prof-dr-rolf-sachsse/als-wissenschaftler-und-publizist/ from the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein: “Spuren. Demnig 88. Projekt Einreise,” 13.8.1988.

<sup>104</sup> Brinda Sommer. *Gesellschaftliches Erinnern an den Nationalsozialismus: Stolpersteine wider das Vergessen*. Berlin: Institut für Museumsforschung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2007, 38.

<sup>105</sup> Demnig and Rapp, “Gunter Demnig,” 233-234.

<sup>106</sup> Kirsten Serup-Bilfeldt and Elke Heidenreich. *Stolpersteine: vergessene Namen, verwehte Spuren: Wegweiser zu Kölner Schicksalen in der NS-Zeit*. Köln: KIWI, 2003, 156.

<sup>107</sup> “Stolpersteine eines Künstlers.” *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*. 5 January 1995.

<sup>108</sup> Personal correspondence with Matthias Reichelt, 3.26.2013; NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz, 1-2, Finanzplan, AG Exkurse: “Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz.,” 21 November 1996. See also Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds., *Stolpersteine*, 14-15. Reichelt has been careful to note that the workers’ decision cannot necessarily be read as an expression of particular empathy or reverence. More likely, their refusal originated out of a fear of inadvertently desecrating a Holocaust monument.

<sup>109</sup> Demnig credits, in particular, the 2002 publication of an article in the Deutsche Bahn magazine *Mobil*, with a large wave of attention. See Sigrid Rahlfs. “Die Spur der Steine.” *mobil*, November 2002. See also Demnig and Rapp, “Gunter Demnig,” 234.

but in his home country, which wrestled with the abolition of apartheid.<sup>110</sup> Robins' request to lay two stones for his father's family—and the corresponding clerical work required to install them legally—raised the profile of the stones for the Kreuzberg city council. Inspired by this international interest, the district of Kreuzberg elected to offer its full support, financial and administrative, to facilitate the installation of as many such stones as possible. Neighboring district Friedrichshain soon joined Kreuzberg, initiating a chain-reaction in which several other Berlin districts committed themselves to supporting the decentralized memorial *en masse*.<sup>111</sup>

The rapid growth of the project both in Berlin in the wake of the NGBK campaign and elsewhere in Germany prompted a critical reevaluation of the project's administrative framework. A grassroots gift economy became central to the project's ability to expand; it grew only because German citizens committed themselves to ensuring that it did.<sup>112</sup> As Kurt Pick reminded Demnig in 1994, he could not fashion millions of stones on his own. He could, however, outsource the labor. And so he did. As the project grew, so did the grassroots network of participants. All projects began with express interest from the community, a statement, Demnig explained, that says "Yes, we want to realize this project in our community."<sup>113</sup> Then, each stone required an individual or group to finance the cost of labor and supplies; though these costs have always been modest, they have crept up over the years and currently come in at €120.<sup>114</sup> In addition to funding the stone, the community then needs to research the individual it commemorates. This process requires not only tracing the fate of the individual named on the stone but also the fates of immediate family members, such that the installation of the stone can, as far as possible, be undertaken in conjunction with relatives of the individual commemorated. Research of this sort can prove quite laborious and often demands more than one researcher as well as an auxiliary network of archivists who facilitate the historical investigation. At present, installations generally require permission in advance. In addition to financiers and researchers, the project requires someone to process its paperwork. Once the community receives an installation permit, the project requires a sculptor. Initially, Demnig made all the stones himself. Gradually, however, he began to divide the labor, first in 2005 inviting a longtime colleague in Berlin, Michael Friedrichs-Friedländer, to craft stones in his own workshop.<sup>115</sup> Finally, the project requires someone to lay the stone. Though Demnig completes many installations himself in a grueling schedule that lands him in a different city often several times each week, the considerable interest necessitates the involvement of others. The initiative operates entirely at the grassroots level, fueled completely through popular contributions of both time and money. Municipal intervention are, in most instances, *pro forma*.

Certainly, some element of the project's initial fantastic vision remains. "In Cologne," Demnig has mused, "one would have to pave whole streets with Stolpersteine. The project can at best set an example [*Zeichen setzen*]."<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, its massive network of participants tempers what would otherwise seem to be its absurd objective. Youth in particular have demonstrated their willingness to shoulder the burden of the project's original "delusion." Demnig has often, and with

<sup>110</sup> See Archiv FHXB Ordner: Steven Robins.

<sup>111</sup> Franke and Demnig, "Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben," 20.

<sup>112</sup> On Demnig's increasing reliance on the cooperation of a large network of both institutions and individuals, see NS-Dokumentationszentrum and Fings, *Stolpersteine*, 15; Rönneper, *Vor meiner Haustür*, 117; Wolfgang Jorzig. "Stolpern heißt auch, darauf stoßen. Erinnerungsmale - Kunst im öffentlichen Raum." *Schriftenreihe des Vereins "Gegen Vergessen - Für Demokratie"*. Verein "Gegen Vergessen - Für Demokratie," ed. 36 (März 2003): 6–8.

<sup>113</sup> Demnig and Rapp, "Gunter Demnig," 234

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/technical-aspects/>. These stones prove quite affordable by comparison to some other copycat projects, one of whose stones comes with a price tag of €670. <http://www.steinedererinnerung.net/>

<sup>115</sup> Schmid, "Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur," 7.

<sup>116</sup> Franke, "Stolpersteine," 7.



particular affection, stressed the importance of school groups to the fate of the project. They have carried its torch. The Werner-Heisenberg-Schule in Leverkusen, for example, took over the project from the city and has engaged in its archival research as well as the process of obtaining approval from the municipal administration. And in Cologne, the Humboldt-Gymnasium alone organized sponsorship for thirty-three stones. “Young people,” Demnig has reflected, “consistently engage the project with great interest and take a personal investment in the fates of the victims. Through the project which mediates history concretely, they can imagine the past quite clearly. This, in turn, brings into great focus the present, with the ever-increasing tendencies in all of Europe once again toward nationalism and intolerance toward foreigners.”<sup>117</sup>

Not all, however, approach the project with such boundless enthusiasm. German historian Harald Schmid has criticized the project for two flaws. First, he charges, it fixates on the commemoration of the victim to the exclusion of other memories. The project would resonate quite differently, he has noted, were it to lay stones with the names of Nazi oppressors instead. Such a project would have provoked opposition more like that leveled against Daniel Goldhagen’s 1996 monograph, which charged ordinary Germans with being “Hitler’s willing executioners” or like that raised against the Hamburg Institute for Social Research’s 1995-99 Wehrmacht Exhibition, whose portrayal of the Wehrmacht’s collaboration in the Holocaust fueled what Schmid dubbed a “battle of the generations.”<sup>118</sup> Second, Schmid explained, the memorial offers a one-dimensional engagement with Nazi atrocity. It teaches next to nothing about how the National Socialist power and extermination apparatus functioned in practice. More meaningful, he suggests, would be to create perpetrator biographies instead of victim portraits. Germany, he argued, can only hold to its imperative of “Never again!” if its citizens understand both the how and the who, the execution and the responsibility, of Nazi genocide.<sup>119</sup> Others have charged the project with commemorative bullying: “The question,” one historian has written, “is whether most communities permit the installation of *Stolpersteine* in their cities less out of enthusiasm than out of fear of negative effects should they elect otherwise; indeed, public image may be at stake for many cities.”<sup>120</sup> Still others have pointed to the problem of creating an aesthetics of superficiality, a commemorative cult that might be compared to the gilt stars along Hollywood’s “Walk of Fame.”<sup>121</sup>

Outside the Ivory Tower, some opposition proved less measured. In Bergedorf, a suburb of Hamburg, the Christian Democratic Union together with the short-lived, right-wing populist Schill-Partei used their majority in the city council to reject a *Stolperstein* proposal on the (largely inaccurate) grounds that Demnig would turn a profit from the project. Only after public protests did they concede.<sup>122</sup> One resident in Cologne opposed the placement of a stone in front of his house on the premise that it would detract attention from his front garden.<sup>123</sup> One group of residents balked at endorsing a *Stolperstein* near their apartment out of fear that it might draw attention to their homes from the wrong sorts.<sup>124</sup> And indeed these fears were not unfounded. In Berlin, one radical right-wing resident got so angry about the placement of a collection of stones near his apartment building

<sup>117</sup> Franke, “Stolpersteine,” 14-15.

<sup>118</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 13-14.

<sup>119</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 14-15.

<sup>120</sup> Ulrike Schrader. “Die ‘Stolpersteine’ oder Von der Leichtigkeit des Gedenkens: Einige kritische Anmerkungen.” *Geschichte im Westen: Zeitschrift für Landes- und Zeitgeschichte* 21 (2006): 175-176.

<sup>121</sup> Franke and Demnig, “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben,” 20.

<sup>122</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 8. See also “Nur in Bergedorf darf es keine Stolpersteine geben.” *Die Welt*, 30 January 2003, 38; “Bergedorf: Streit um Stolpersteine.” *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 4 July 2003, 15.

<sup>123</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 8.

<sup>124</sup> Franke and Demnig, “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben,” 20.

that he gouged a deep gash across several in a group installation—no easy feat through the thick, brass-topped concrete.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, however, some of the most virulent opposition has come from German-Jewish communities. Göttingen and Kassel, for example, both delayed installations after Jewish groups voiced their disapproval.<sup>126</sup> Much of the Jewish dissent focused on the placement of the stones underfoot. Of course, to walk on a stone—which some, despite Demnig’s protests to the contrary, regarded as an ersatz gravestone—could be construed as an act of desecration against the memory of the individual it commemorates.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, an offensive Nazi-era Austrian folk saying, for example, attributed the act of stumbling to having inadvertently encountered a Jewish burial site: “When one trips on a stone,” read one 1930 encyclopedia of folk culture in the Sudetenland, “one exclaims, ‘A Jew must be buried there.’”<sup>128</sup> Demnig, however, checked with Yad Vashem and others before initiating the project to ensure he would not violate Jewish law by placing names in the ground; he was given the green light.

The most unrelenting opposition came from Munich’s Jewish community, led by Charlotte Knobloch. It would be unbearable, she argued, to see the names of murdered Jews on *Stolpersteine*, which would be trampled. In a reframing of Micha Brumlik’s concept of the fascism of memory, Knobloch interpreted the commemorative opportunity facilitated by the *Stumbling Stones* as one that merely continued the mistreatment of victims at the hands of the Nazis. She was not afraid, she argued, of standing up against such “*Gedenktäter*,” or memory-perpetrators. Despite considerable opposition from Munich’s general population, the city’s mayor and SPD member Christian Ude, who held office for the twenty-one years following Demnig’s initiation of the *Stolpersteine* project, has backed Knobloch on the grounds that Munich was the “capital of the National Socialist movement” and thus bears a special responsibility for the memory of its atrocities.<sup>129</sup> In May 2014, fellow SPD member Dieter Reiter—eleven years Ude’s junior—succeeded Ude as mayor. It remains to be seen whether local *Stolpersteine* advocates will make more headway under Reiter’s administration than they have in the past two decades.

#### D. The Sustainable Utopian Objectives of the *Stolpersteine*

The *Stolpersteine* project, in the view of historian Harald Schmid, operates as a *perpetuum mobile*. It propels and sustains itself, he argues, like a snowball effect, growing ever bigger through the organizational and communicative networks whose evolution it facilitates. International civic

<sup>125</sup> Personal meeting with Matthias Reichelt, 29 April 2013, Berlin.

<sup>126</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 8. Schmid highlights, for example, Reimar Paul. “Kultusgemeinde kritisiert Stolpersteine.” *Tageszeitung*, 22 July 2006; Christina Hein. “Stolperstein schlägt Wellen. Die Stadt Kassel unterstützt künftig die Gedenkstein- Aktion von Gunter Demnig.” *Hessisch-Niedersächsisch Allgemeine*, 27 May 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Franke, “Stolpersteine,” 8. Stinglele and Die AnStifter, *Stuttgarter Stolpersteine*, 16.

<sup>128</sup> G. Jungbauer. *Sudetendeutsche Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, Bd. 3-4. Prague: Dr. G. Jungbauer, 1930, 257. See also Verein für Volkskunde. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, Bd. 31-33. Wien: Verein für Volkskunde, 1926, 46; Christian Berger. *Zwölf Wiener Geschichten über bedeutende Tote und ihre Gräber*. Bielefeld: Neues Literaturkontor, 1997, 87; Ingke Brodersen, Klaus Humann, and Susanne von Paczensky. *1933, Wie die Deutschen Hitler zur Macht verhalfen: Ein Lesebuch für Demokraten*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983, 300.

<sup>129</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 9. See also Kathrin Maas. “Erinnerung auf Schritt und Tritt. Das Denkmalprojekt Stolpersteine in Hamburg.” Magisterarbeit. Universität Hamburg, 2007; Beate Meyer. “Stolpersteine in Hamburg - Individualisiertes Erinnern in alltäglichen Lebensräumen.” *“Mein Täubchen aus dem Felsenspalt, im Hohlort des Berghanges, lass Dein Antlitz mich schauen, Deine Stimme mir ertönen ...”: (gemäß Das Hobelied 2,14): Becoming Visible: Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1990*. Miryam Gilis-Karlebakh and Barbara Vogel, eds. München: Dölling und Galitz, 2011; Igal Avidan. “In München stolpert man nicht gerne.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 6 November 2008. Also Joachim Rönneper, who refers to Munich as the *Stolpersteine Sonderweg*: Rönneper, *Vor meiner Haustür*. Minutes from the meetings of the Munich Stadtradt, in which the *Stumbling Stones* are discussed, reveal the virulence of the opposition but also the breadth of support the stones nevertheless have.

participations stand both as a condition and a consequence of the laying of *Stolpersteine*. The project, he highlights, enables an “activation of civic engagement ‘at the site’” of historical meaning [*vor Ort*]. Its massive human resources—a participatory network that reaches far beyond Demnig’s personal orbit—render this mobilization not isolated but rather normative, world-historical, and radically democratic.<sup>130</sup> Others have also made note of the possibilities the project opens for radical grassroots civic engagement: While humanity’s relationship to the past is passive, the *Stolpersteine* “open up a sphere of action: no longer must one stand on the sidelines of time and bear the weight of the past; one can actually do something.”<sup>131</sup> Demnig, however, emphasizes the importance of decentralization and democratization but on different grounds. “This project...has become a social sculpture,” he argues, and here again we see the language of Beuys. “It has fashioned a communicative network that exists by and large independently of me.”<sup>132</sup> As a result, the project stands a good chance of sustaining itself even after Demnig and his current collaborators die. This element, specialist on art in public space Stefanie Endlich proclaims, sets a decentralized grassroots project like Demnig’s apart from prior attempts to remake Germany’s commemorative paradigm. The project occupies a liminal space between resilience and attrition, between the visible and the invisible, between perception and repression, and above all between reality and utopia.<sup>133</sup> The utopia is one that not only envisions but also attempts to enact a future in which German citizens engage more actively with the past both as individuals and as a collective communicative network.<sup>134</sup> Demnig has, in fact, lamented this utopian nature of his project in light of the continued aggression of extremist groups in Germany: “I wish my project were a little less contemporarily germane. But we should be laying many more *Stolpersteine* precisely because of this relevance.”<sup>135</sup> The immediate power of the project, however, rests in its ability to fragment mass atrocity, rendering it immediately tangible. “You can open a book and read six million murdered Jews,” Demnig suggested after one stone-laying ceremony, “but to me, that’s so abstract a number...it’s beyond conception.” The *Stolpersteine* project aims to overcome this conceptual defeatism.<sup>136</sup> “Abstraction,” journalist Judith Miller has explained, “is memory’s most ardent enemy.” It “kills because it encourages distance, and often indifference. We must remind ourselves that the Holocaust was not six million.” Instead, Demnig, like Miller, approaches it differently: genocide takes place “one, plus one, plus one.... Only in understanding that civilized people must defend the one, by one, by one... can the Holocaust, the incomprehensible, be given meaning.”<sup>137</sup> The *Stolpersteine* attempt to tackle in a sustainable way the utopian objective of honoring all of these “ones.”

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<sup>130</sup> Schmid, “Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur,” 12.

<sup>131</sup> Jürgen-Wolfgang Goette. *Stolpersteine Erich-Mühsam-Preis 2009 an Gunter Demnig*. Lübeck: EMG, 2009, 32.

<sup>132</sup> Barbara Günther and Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung. *Stolpersteine in Hamburg-Harburg und Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg biographische Spurensuche*. Hamburg: Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2012, 16.

<sup>133</sup> Endlich, “Ein ‘dezentrales Monument?’,” 33.

<sup>134</sup> Leonie Baumann. “Ein kleiner Stein zwischen Kunst, Geschichte und Zukunft.” *Stolpersteine für die von den Nazis ermordeten ehemaligen Nachbarn aus Friedrichsbain und Kreuzberg: Dokumentation, Texte, Materialien*. Bettina Eisbrenner and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. Berlin: NGBK, 2002, 8.

<sup>135</sup> Franke and Demnig. “Am treffendsten läßt sich meine Berufsbezeichnung mit Bildhauer umschreiben,” 20.

<sup>136</sup> “Stolpersteine: Gedenken im Alltag,” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=176043140738822987#>

<sup>137</sup> Judith Miller. *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990, 287.

## CONCLUSION

A sea change it was for West Germans to embrace utopia openly in the 1980s and '90s, when popular attitudes suggested that such a move had become a fool's errand. Let us not confuse the renewed ability to think in utopian terms or the hopes invested in sustainable utopian programs, however, with the promise of their success. Modest though these utopias may have been, their modesty did not spare them the embarrassment of failure.

### The Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt*

Once the dust had settled from the *Historikerstreit*, the 1990s rendered confrontations with Germany's Nazi past decidedly mainstream. The BGW watched as not only its subjects and its methods but eventually its members as well were taken up by established academic institutions. "To that extent," longtime BGW member Jürgen Karwelat argued, "the history of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* is a history of success."<sup>1</sup> But its national triumph also spelled the group's local collapse. That the heart of the BGW's alternative, oppositional *raison d'être* had given out became obvious as the group lost nearly forty percent of its membership between its heyday and the first years of the new millennium.<sup>2</sup>

Buoyed somewhat by the life vest of the Goltzstraße archive and informational center—just enough of a repository of unique archival materials to prevent the group's descent into complete irrelevance—the BGW managed to remain afloat in newly reunified Germany. The Goltzstraße site offers a few public open hours every weekday, and the BGW has continued to add to its collective curriculum vitae with more than twenty publications since the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>3</sup> The group never managed to escape its obsession with the history of National Socialism fully, and nearly half of those publications take up the same themes it had wrestled with for the past two decades: the everyday life of Jewish residents in Berlin, forced labor and the labor camps, Polish women prisoners, etc. But the group did manage to keep its finger at least lightly on the pulse of some contemporary issues in Germany, publishing on the significance of the fall of the Wall, for example, and on freedom of travel in a post-Cold War Europe after the establishment of the passport-free intra-European travel zone, the Schengen Area, in 1995.

Perhaps the most representative example of the BGW's attempt to keep its sustainable utopia alive through attention to its current social and political context, however, took the form of a project on immigrants in Berlin that ran through 1994. Deeply unsettled by the xenophobic riots in September 1991 in the Saxon town of Hoyerswerda just a few hours to the southeast of Berlin, the BGW's newly-formed "Immi-Group," as its members called themselves, feared the resurgence of nationalism and racism in reunified Germany. The Hoyerswerda riots and the wave of racist nationalist expressions of solidarity that followed them recalled National Socialism much too clearly.<sup>4</sup> Who better to explore the history of local immigrant populations in Germany while drawing parallels to the lessons of National Socialism than the BGW?

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Karwelat. "Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge." *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner*

<sup>2</sup> Karwelat, "Mittlerweile bin ich mein eigener Zeitzeuge," 56. See also Jenny Wüstenberg. "Vom Alternativen Laden Zum Dienstleistungsbetrieb: The Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. A Case Study in Activist Memory Politics." *German Studies Review* 32:3 (2009): 608ff.

<sup>3</sup> Nearly half of these were self-published, another piece of evidence of the BGW's struggles in the new Germany.

<sup>4</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1992/1, Michael Pflegar, Arbeitsimmigration: "Projektbericht: 'Alltagsgeschichte der Arbeitsimmigranten und Arbeitsimmigrantinnen und ihrer Familien in Berlin seit 1961,'" 9; BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, "Project report: 'Alltagsgeschichte der foreign workers in Berlin from 1961 to the present,'" 1991.5.18. See also Elke Allinger and Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt. ... *da sind wir keine Ausländer mehr: eingewanderte ArbeiterInnen in Berlin 1961-1993*. Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1993.

The immigration project, which explored foreign worker communities in Berlin from the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 through the years after its fall and from which the BGW intended to produce a traveling exhibit and a book, oriented the organization's attentions solidly toward the present.<sup>5</sup> The Immi-Group planned to research themes of housing, familial dynamics, work opportunities, and encounters with racism in order to demonstrate the conflicting manner in which Berlin had served, on one hand, as deeply personal home [*Heimatstadt*] to these workers while failing, on the other, to provide them with legal and social equality.<sup>6</sup> Immi-Group members understood their work as a mouthpiece for immigrants in the city and as part of the BGW's continuing effort to fight racism in Germany from below.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly limited by language barriers, the BGW nevertheless began to conduct intergenerational family interviews with non-ethnic German Berliners who were long-time residents of the city.<sup>8</sup> With nearly half a million Marks from the *Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie*, interest in hosting the exhibit from a number of the city's districts, and cooperation from the Turkish Community of Berlin [*Türkische Gemeinde Berlin*], the BGW received solid support from the new Berlin administration and community.<sup>9</sup> Interest, however, did not automatically translate to willingness to participate in the project. The exhibits ran, and the project generated a small set of publications, but with uninspiring book sales and flagging participation, the Immi-Group slowly dissolved itself after it concluded its scheduled exhibition cycle.<sup>10</sup> BGW members tried to revive the group on several occasions but could never get it off the ground again.<sup>11</sup>

This project's fate offered a microcosm of the final foundering of the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt's* sustainable utopian agenda. Where the group had once worked to offer radically democratic, decentralized, sustainable programs that put the task of narrating history into the hands of ordinary people in the spaces and timeframes of their everyday lives, its mission evaporated as the century drew to a close. The destruction of the Mobile Museum and the inability to get Mobile Museum II up and running severely limited the decentralized topography of BGW exhibits. The group was forced to rely for exhibition space on collaborative efforts with sympathetic organizations. But its increasing desire for intellectual autonomy made it wary of such teamwork. Alongside its constricted topography came a similar constriction of its grassroots demographics. It watched the shearing of its participants from both ends. As established academic institutions absorbed the subjects and methods of history from below, they also absorbed many of its practitioners. Over the last decade, the BGW saw its leadership depart for more permanent, more lucrative employment. One member suggested that the responsibility for the group's decline in fact lay with its founding members who had failed to groom their replacements sufficiently. On the occasion of the group's twentieth birthday, he noted that the BGW "had the same problem as *die taz*

<sup>5</sup> Cord Pagenstecher. "'...da sind wir keine Ausländer mehr.' Eingewanderte ArbeiterInnen in Berlin 1961-1993." *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 41-45

<sup>6</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. - Projekt "Geschichte der ausländischen ArbeitsimmigrantInnen in West-Berlin seit 1961," 5. The BGW mistakenly published two reports of the immigration project in this newsletter. These notes derive from the earlier draft.

<sup>7</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18, Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. - Projekt "Geschichte der ausländischen ArbeitsimmigrantInnen in West-Berlin seit 1961," 5.

<sup>8</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18.

<sup>9</sup> BGWA Rundbrief 1991/3, 1991.5.18; BGWA Rundbrief 1993/3, 1993.1.10, Sonja Miltenberger, "Protokoll der MVV vom 3.7.1993," 17-18; Pagenstecher. "'...da sind wir keine Ausländer mehr,'" 41.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Kathrin Roller. *Frauenmigration und Ausländerpolitik im Deutschen Kaiserreich. Polnische Arbeitsmigrantinnen in Preußen*. Berlin: D. Bertz, 1994; Cord Pagenstecher. "Die 'Illusion' der Rückkehr. Zur Mentalitätsgeschichte von 'Gastarbeit' und Einwanderung." *Soziale Welt* 47:2 (1996): 149-179.

<sup>11</sup> Pagenstecher. "'...da sind wir keine Ausländer mehr,'" 41-45; BGWA Rundbrief 1994/1, Ursula Trüper, "Protokoll der MVV," 17; BGWA Rundbrief 1994/1, K. Roller, "Eine Idee und ein Aufruf," 14.

and the Greens, namely that the old West Berlin 68er alpha members,” those who had led the charge in the BGW’s creation and lobbied hard to foster the conditions for implementing their sustainable utopian programs “had left no successors” who could carry the organization and its mission into a changing political and cultural milieu.<sup>12</sup> The group saw its broad volunteer base disappear as well as it failed to adapt to these changing circumstances and popular expectations. It lost its allure, as one member pointed out: “An association with an executive committee and weekly meetings is just not hip any more. What is one to do?” he asked forlornly.<sup>13</sup> Most importantly, however, the group had lost its grasp on the element of sustainability that would have ensured the group’s continued progress. With limited funding, it ran in an ad hoc way and, beyond the Goltzstraße information center, it never devised a permanent structure to ensure its continued existence after the project’s original members moved on. And its desire for autonomy fueled its inability to create long-term collaborative relationships as it had done in the 1980s with groups like the Active Museum, Aktion Sühnezeichen, and the Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime (VVN). Perhaps, though, the main reason for the failure of the BGW’s sustainable utopia stemmed from its inability to understand fully and consciously the true novelty of its program in the first place. The originality of a group that comprised “barefoot historians” doing “history from below” was lost on no one. But it did not occur to them, longtime BGW member Martin Düspohl explained in 2001, that Germany lacked social and political utopias.<sup>14</sup> They never recognized their sustainable utopia for what it was. And this failure to understand clearly the gap their work actually filled meant that they would also fail to realize when it no longer continued to serve this purpose.

### The German Green Party

The Greens placed great hope in the transformational power of culture. They understood the late twentieth century’s imminent “crisis of humanity”—namely Europe’s impending self-destruction at the hands of environmental degradation, nuclear power, and short-sighted oligarchical politics—as a crisis of art inasmuch as art served as a primary facilitator of new ways of thinking: art, they claimed, allows people to hear, see, and feel differently; it could help them recognize imminent catastrophe in new, tangible, visceral ways.<sup>15</sup> The realm of the creative, the Greens argued, was capable of “[generating] in humanity the sense that ecology is more than environment” and, thereby, of making explicit the broad importance of the Green environmental program.<sup>16</sup> The party’s sustainable utopia hinged on its efforts to fashion Germany’s “living conditions according to the inner principles and rules of art”<sup>17</sup> (though party members emphasized that they intended that their program would differ essentially from the violent aestheticization of politics made all too familiar by National Socialism: cultural politics, they argued, must not instrumentalize art and culture for government purposes<sup>18</sup>). Importantly, following Joseph Beuys’ adage, the Greens understood each

<sup>12</sup> Pagenstecher. “...da sind wir keine Ausländer mehr,” 44.

<sup>13</sup> Pagenstecher. “...da sind wir keine Ausländer mehr,” 44.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Düspohl. “20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt: Ein persönlicher Rückblick.” *Immer noch Lust auf Geschichte. 20 Jahre Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.* Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt e.V., 2001, 49

<sup>15</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,” 7.1990.

<sup>16</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,” 7.1990.

<sup>17</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,” 7.1990.

<sup>18</sup> Helga Trüpel. “Plädoyer für eine ‘kleine Kulturpolitik.’” *Zwischen Leuchtturmprogramm und Warnblinkanlage. Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik auf Bundesebene. Dokumentations des Kulturpolitischen Ratschlags am 8. Juli 1995 in Bonn.* Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Bundestagsfraktion and Bernd Wagner, eds. Bonn: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 1995, 9, 11.

individual citizen to be in possession of artistic faculties. Given sufficient freedom to exercise these faculties, a liberated population carried with it the capacity to realize modest utopias and so, like Beuys, the Greens also understood each person to bear a responsibility for the construction of those utopian futures.<sup>19</sup>

But as one artist and Green parliamentary representative, quoting Weimar era cabaret artist Karl Valentin, remarked in 1995, “[a]rt is nice, but it is a lot of work.”<sup>20</sup> The sustainable utopia of the Green’s cultural program proved, in fact, too much work. And under the pressures of both their success and Germany’s rapidly changing political and cultural climate, the Greens, much like the BGW, struggled to sustain their sustainable utopian program in the last years of the century. Although the party would attempt to obscure its failures—a 2005 document outlining the status of the party’s cultural political program described itself as “not about presenting a track record but rather about understanding a method”<sup>21</sup>—it could not forestall the erosion of its utopian ambitions.

As in the case of the BGW, the Greens’ gradual abandonment of their radically democratized, radically decentralized sustainable cultural program resulted from both internal dynamics within the party and external factors. First, the Greens’ growing comfort as a more conventional political party active in precisely that behemoth parliamentary apparatus they original abhorred never quite kept pace with their increasing success. What had begun in the early 1980s as a “system of solidarity” led by amateur activists united by a shared set of environmental values and grassroots political methods had by the mid-90s become a “system of interests” oriented primarily toward achieving parliamentary success.<sup>22</sup> They retained their rhetoric about fighting for a modern grassroots democratic state and criticized the large SPD and CDU parties as “over-adapted, over-generalized, over institutionalized, and overloaded.” But their 2002 party program omitted the language of grassroots democracy [*Basisdemokratie*] itself, and listed instead toward the more moderate language of *Demokratie* as the foundation of the party. It had gradually become clear that, in exchange for success, the Greens were willing to trade fiery but inexperienced political hopefuls on an unstable rotation cycle for a permanent salaried leadership with technical expertise, management skills, and a track record for turning pipe dreams into political policy.<sup>23</sup> Radical grassroots democratic practices, which lay at the heart of the Greens’ sustainable utopia, fell by the wayside as the party came to recognize time as a precious political resource and decision by social consensus as profligate of that time. The party chose expediency over ethic and method. In any case, as German social scientist Alex Demirovic has highlighted, despite the party’s best intentions, the mission of the direct referendum—“[initiating] democratic learning by mobilizing the citizenry” into

<sup>19</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,” 7.1990.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Schmidt. “Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik zwischen Skepsis und Erwartung.” *Zwischen Leuchtturmprogramm und Warnblinkanlage. Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik auf Bundesebene. Dokumentations des Kulturpolitischen Ratschlags am 8. Juli 1995 in Bonn.* Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Bundestagsfraktion and Bernd Wagner, eds. Bonn: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 1995, 8

<sup>21</sup> Bündnis 90/Die Grünen - Bundestagsfraktion. Antje Vollmer, ed. *Politik mit Kultur.* Berlin: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen - Bundestagsfraktion, 2005, 2.

<sup>22</sup> E. Gene Frankland. “The Evolution of the Greens in Germany: From Amateurism to Professionalism.” *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-roots Democracy?* E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, and Benoît Rihoux, eds. Surrey: Ashgate, 2008, 35. See also Angelo Panebianco. *Political Parties: Organization and Power.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 17ff.

<sup>23</sup> Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. *Die Zukunft ist grün. Grundsatzprogramm von Bündnis 90/Die Grünen.* Berlin: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2002. See also Frankland, “The Evolution of the Greens,” 36; Joachim Raschke and Gudrun Heinrich. *Die Grünen: wie sie wurden, was sie sind.* Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1993; Andrei S. Markovits and Stephen J. Silvia. “The Identity Crisis of Alliance 90/The Greens: The New Left at a Crossroad.” *New German Critique* 72:1 (October 1997): 130. For this same issue in the context of their cultural program specifically, see Schmidt, “Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik zwischen Skepsis und Erwartung,” 8.

active political participation—dissipates when it is reduced to the black-and-white logic of the ballot.<sup>24</sup>

This tempering of grassroots democratic values also contributed to the weakening of the sustainable element of the Greens program. By bringing political practices into the everyday spaces of ordinary people's everyday lives, the Greens had intended to place real political power directly and permanently into the hands of its constituents. With the party's success and the transfer of power to an increasingly technocratic collection of parliamentary representatives, however, the Greens lost sight of the boundary between their responsibility as a party of activists and requisite grassroots action. Where they had originally claimed that every person is an artist, they increasingly stressed the need for aesthetic education if social and cultural discourse were to be more open and more sophisticated. And aesthetic education required administration; that is, the Greens would lobby for the democratic provision of such educational opportunities to their constituents, but they no longer emphasized first campaigning for the conditions under which those constituents could create such educational opportunities for themselves. Their sustainable utopia hinged on the establishment of a system in which German citizens served as its motor; they gave up this feature when they yielded to Robert Michels' "iron law of oligarchy."<sup>25</sup>

The party and its sustainable utopian cultural program were also hampered by a more mundane factor, namely that party members soon discovered that the demands of sustained parliamentary power proved much more boring than political activism. The Greens were quick, for example, to insist that the public infrastructure of culture—library, music schools, theaters, etc.—should not be left to the free market.<sup>26</sup> Yet, when it came time to implement their program, they found themselves confronted with "a complex, overwhelmingly dry, increasingly juridified [*verrechtlichten*] subject matter." Somewhere along the path "from the Utopia of 'social sculpture' to the creation of capital tax on art and cultural goods" party members had wandered off.<sup>27</sup> And despite all their pleas, still by the middle of the 1990s, the party had failed to establish a cultural bureau with any kind of staying power.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the party was waylaid by the international political circumstances of 1989/90. The former East Germany would prove a major roadblock for the Greens, as their misreading of their constituency on the question of unification led to dismal results in the first federal elections for reunified Germany in December of 1990. This sharp downsizing of their constituency would plague the party over the next decade as they attempted to regain their footing in the Bundestag. After the public resoundingly rejected their initial opposition to German unification—it would be, they argued, a marker of West German imperialism—they tried to backtrack, toeing a more palatable line. They celebrated the public rallies held in the DDR in the days before the fall of the Wall as models

<sup>24</sup> Alex Demirovic. "Grassroots Democracy: Contradictions and Implications." *The German Greens: Paradox Between Movement and Party*. Margit Mayer and John Ely, eds. Michael Schatzschneider, tr. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998, 152, 157.

<sup>25</sup> In a cultural political pamphlet from 1995, for example, the party describes its goal as "für möglichst viele Menschen möglichst vielfältige und ansprechende und kulturell und ästhetische aktivierende Angebote zu machen." Claudia Roth. "Kreativitätspolitik im Übergang zur Wissensgesellschaft. Verschiedene Politik- und Aufgabenfelder miteinander in Beziehung setzen." *Kulturpolitik der Parteien: Visionen, Programmatic, Geschichte und Differenzen*. Olaf Zimmermann and Theo Geißler, eds. Berlin: Deutscher Kulturrat, 2008, 94. See also Trüpel, "Plädoyer für eine 'kleine Kulturpolitik,'" 11.

<sup>26</sup> Katrin Göring-Eckardt. "'Die K-Frage' – Kultur diesseits und jenseits der Ökonomie. Kulturpolitik als bevorzugter Bereich kreativen und politischen Denkens." *Kulturpolitik der Parteien: Visionen, Programmatic, Geschichte und Differenzen*. Olaf Zimmermann and Theo Geißler, eds. Berlin: Deutscher Kulturrat, 2008, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Eva Krings. "Politikfeld Kultur. Anforderungen an Bündnis 90/Die Grünen." *Zwischen Leuchtturmprogramm und Warnblinkanlage. Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik auf Bundesebene. Dokumentations des Kulturpolitischen Ratschlags am 8. Juli 1995 in Bonn*. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Bundestagsfraktion and Bernd Wagner, eds. Bonn: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 1995, 18

<sup>28</sup> Schmidt, "Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik zwischen Skepsis und Erwartung," 5



of grassroots political decentralization. The Greens sought to realize in their updated program a “politics of liberation” that mirrored Alexanderplatz on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1989: in that instance, they highlighted, the motivation to resist a “dead political system” grew out of “all the small and concrete life circumstances that accumulated” in the experiences of an entire population.<sup>29</sup> They tried to anchor their post-Wall work in the goal of placing the pursuit of a shared German culture at the heart of the new German constitution.<sup>30</sup> They offered their support for German-German grassroots efforts to preserve DDR monuments, for example, arguing that the failure to allow the German people to decide openly and freely which symbols of their complicated shared heritage to retain would lead to repression, even barbarity.<sup>31</sup>

But while they celebrated the fostering of cultural unity between East and West as a way to forge political unity,<sup>32</sup> their 1990 election debacle—in which the West German Greens lost all of their parliamentary seats and Alliance 90, which would become the Greens’ sister party in the east, held on only by a thread—left the party with only one real life vest: coalitioning. A longtime cautious ally, the SPD was the Greens’ natural choice for a political partnership. A red-green coalition, however, meant that the party would be carried on the shoulders of giants, as political scientists Andrei Markovits and Stephen Silvia have noted.<sup>33</sup> A difficult move that meant a great deal of compromise for the already hobbled Greens, the party opted for realism over dogmatism and for continued parliamentary power over allegiance to the idealistic principles of the Greens-as-protest-movement.<sup>34</sup> Coalitioning also sliced through the sustainability of their utopian program; it rested, after all, in the hands of the SPD, which had abandoned its own last vestiges of utopian thinking in the final year of the 1950s.

The Greens sustainable utopian cultural program did not fall completely into oblivion. They would support a project uncannily similar to the BGW’s Mobile Museum called the *Omnibus for Direct Democracy*, for example. The project drew inspiration from Joseph Beuys’ 1972 documenta installation in which Beuys sat for one hundred days in an office to talk with his visitors about direct democracy. More than a decade and a half later, when the last tree was laid in Beuys’ *7000 Oaks*, one of Beuys’ students, Johannes Stüttgen, sought to continue his mentor’s legacy by initiating a project that would carry the lessons of *7000 Oaks* and Beuys’ *100 Days* exhibit beyond Kassel. Having learned from his teacher that political intentions “must derive from human creativity and from the individual freedom of humanity” and that one could sketch a direct line of connection between the

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<sup>29</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,” 7.1990.

<sup>30</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/772, #3-7, 27.10.90, Redeentwurf zur kulturpolitischen Debatte im Dt. BT am 31.10.90, Claudia Siede.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/730, #2-3, 3.9.90, from Kulturbüro/Claudia Siede, Antje Vollmer on behalf of Die Grünen im Bundestag, to Arbeitsgruppe Soz. Denkmale in der DDR, Kunsthistor. Institut Bonn, Siede writing on behalf of Antje Vollmer; BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/730, #6, Summer 1990, Arbeitsgruppe, “Sozialistische Denkmale in der DDR”, Kunsthistorisches Institut Bonn, Resolution zum Erhalt der sozialistischen Denkmale in der DDR; BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/730, #7-9, 7.8.1990, Einladung, Diskussionsveranstaltung & Pressekonferenz for the Ausstellung “Erhalten, Zerstören, Verändern? Denkmäler der DDR in Ost-Berlin. Zum Beispiel Ernst Thälmann. Meinung Vor Ort,” 11.8-7.9.1990, Eine Ausstellung des AM... und der Neuen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Konzeption und Realisation; Göring-Eckardt, “Die K-Frage’.”

<sup>32</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,” 7.1990.

<sup>33</sup> Markovits and Silvia. “The Identity Crisis of Alliance ’90/The Greens,” 119-120.

<sup>34</sup> On the Greens’ difficulty swallowing this compromise, see, for example, Carl Amery. “Rat eines Ratlosen.” *Zwischen Leuchtturmprogramm und Warnblinkanlage. Bündnisgrüne Kulturpolitik auf Bundesebene. Dokumentationen des Kulturpolitischen Ratschlags am 8. Juli 1995 in Bonn.* Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Bundestagsfraktion and Bernd Wagner, eds. Bonn: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 1995, 13. Also Frankland, “The Evolution of the Greens in Germany,” 35.

condition of society's aesthetic practices and the flourishing of its democratic practices, Stüttgen created what he described as a mobile social sculpture for the discussion of democratic practices that could be experienced by Germans around the country. Just in its first three years, it had already booked nearly 1500 stops throughout Germany. Although *Omnibus* later gave up its political affiliations in favor of supporting any initiatives that advanced the project of direct democracy, this “social sculpture”—which continues to pursue its mission in Germany through the present—was set into motion with support and interest from the Greens.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this limited success, the Greens after their abysmal election results found themselves on the defensive, guarded only by a carefully cultivated set of political alliances on whose endurance the party's continued existence hinged. From this position—of course, already having had a taste of success and power—they got caught in a cycle of thinking and rethinking without any real forward motion. They replaced their sustainable utopian program with empty phrases whose hollowness offered an uninspiring alternative.

### The Spatial Interventionists

While the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* and the German Greens floundered in reunified Germany, the spatial interventionists—Demnig, in particular—cultivated for themselves a more promising set of circumstances. Despite popular aversion to utopian agendas, Demnig managed to popularize, first in central Europe and increasingly globally, the sustainable utopian goal of bringing a commemorative project of unbelievable magnitude into the topographies and temporalities of everyday life. The kind of commemorative act that the *Stumbling Stones* demand does not take place as an exceptional, state-sponsored production, but as a popular act that we might understand, somewhat in the manner of Ernest Renan, as a postnationalist “daily plebiscite.” A plebiscite that constitutes not a nation but a virtual democratic commemorative network. In the two decades since the project's initiation, the *Stolpersteine* have spread to sixteen other countries and now number more than 50,000, making it the largest grassroots memorial in the world.<sup>36</sup>

His project has not grown without encountering obstacles. As of April 2015, the city of Munich remains opposed to the installation of stones on the premise that the project defiles the memory of Nazi victims. This fear of the “fascism of memory” has proven incredibly durable, despite much popular protest to the contrary.<sup>37</sup> Demnig has also encountered backlash from other artists. One of the so-called “countermonumentalists,” Horst Hoheisel, complained that Demnig plagiarized an older idea of Hoheisel's that he had submitted to the competition to design the

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<sup>35</sup> BArch (Koblenz), N 1569/773-2, #263-265, Claudia Siede and Karlheinz Koinegg, *Die Grünen im Bundestag, “Jeder Mensch ein Künstler,”* 7.1990. See also *Omnibus für Direkte Demokratie in Deutschland. Projekte Erweiterte Kunst: von Benys aus.* Wangen: FIU, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> As of January 2015, *Stolpersteine* could be found in Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Russia, Croatia, France, Poland, Slovenia, Italy, Norway, the Ukraine, Slovakia, Switzerland and Luxemburg. For a breakdown of the spread of the project and evidence for its superlative label, see Harald Schmid. “*Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur – Eine Zwischenbilanz.*” Tagung: *Stolpersteine – Irritationen der Erinnerung.* Evangelische Akademie der Nordkirche, Hamburg, 9-10 September 2011.

<sup>37</sup> A popular petition on change.org, for example, has collected over 70,000 signatures from around the world as it lobbies for Munich's government to lift the ban on the *Stolpersteine*, and a Facebook group posts actively about progress and obstacles in their ongoing debates. News articles, portraying both sides of the controversy, are beyond count, a testimony at least to continued German interest in the mini-monuments. See, for example, this piece on the installation of stones as an act of protest: Igal Avidan. “Im Kino: ‘Stolperstein’: In München stolpert man nicht gerne.” *sueddeutsche.de*. 17 Mai 2010, sec. kultur. <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/im-kino-stolperstein-in-muenchen-stolpert-man-nicht-gerne-1.536809>.

monument to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime in Berlin's Bavarian Quarter.<sup>38</sup> Copycat tendencies, however, cut both ways. Demnig lashed out against one imitation project in Vienna, which was founded in 2005. He accused the group of plagiarism, forbade them to lay stones anywhere but directly before house entryways, and threatened legal action should they fail to comply. Demnig eventually backed down, however, recognizing that he would likely lose a lawsuit and that his project had grown much larger than himself.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, a fair degree of protectiveness has grown up around the mini-monuments, their collective name in particular. One representative in the administration of Wuppertal received swift correction when he accidentally referred to a ground plaque for nineteenth-century working-class barricade fighters as a "*Stolperstein*."<sup>40</sup> The project's popularity and size, together, shattered any real proprietary hopes Demnig might have had. Facing an overwhelming demand for more stones, for example, Demnig had already abandoned his post as the sole producer of the *Stolpersteine* in 2005 when he brought on a friend to contribute to their construction.<sup>41</sup>

Though the popularity of his project within Europe stands out, Demnig's real impact has been the uptake of his aesthetic form globally. The international attractiveness of this grassroots memorial model is evident in communities mourning mass death around the world. Buenos Aires was among the first to offer its own take on Demnig's decentralized, democratized commemorative practice. In 2005, a group of citizens in Argentina began to prepare for the thirtieth anniversary of the 1976 Argentine coup, which initiated a period of state terrorism during which left-wing activists, trade unionists, students, journalists, and others were "disappeared." Under the military junta that ruled from 1976 to 1983, between 13,000 and 30,000 alleged dissidents were kidnapped and killed, often tossed alive from airplanes over the Atlantic to drown without leaving a trace of their fate.<sup>42</sup> An informal association of mothers, young human rights workers, and some who refer to themselves simply as *vecinos*, or neighbors, however, has begun to weave the lives of these "disappeared" back into the social and cultural fabric of Buenos Aires. They have embedded local

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<sup>38</sup> NGBK Ordner: Künstler forschen nach Auschwitz:, 108, Horst Hoheisel to Katharina Kaiser, Haus am Kleistpark, 5.6.1996. Hoheisel wrote: "Dein Eingespanntsein in den Ablauf der Tagung und meine zum Schluß knapp werdende Zeit haben unser Gespräch gekippt. Das ist aber nicht weiter schlimm, da ich für das Projekt inzwischen eine Form gewählt habe, die von Institutionen und Ausstellungsmachern unabhängig ist. Das entspricht auch mehr dem Stil meiner Arbeit. Eins muß ich aber noch loswerden "Die Stolpersteine" von Gunter Demnig waren ja in nicht so plumper Form das Projekt von Mattias Weis und mir zu Eurem Wettbewerb im Bayrischen Viertel. Ich bin sauer, daß Gunter dieses Projekt auf Eure Einladung hin nun in der Oranienstraße realisiert und wohl im nächsten Jahr zu Documenta, denn darum geht es ihm, wie ich ihn kenne in Kassel vor meiner Haustür, wo ich die Denksteinsammlung und mit Silke Menzel das Projekt "Geschichte in die Häuser tragen" mit SchülerInnen und auch älteren BürgerInnen der Stadt gerade außerhalb des Kunstbetriebes in jahrelanger Kleinarbeit realisiert habe. ... Da Du meine Arbeit kanntest, hätte ich zumindest einen Hinweis von Dir, besser aber einen Einspruch bei der Ausstellungsvorbereitung erwartet." Of course Hoheisel suggests that it's laughable to get possessive over commemorative representations of the Holocaust: "Vor dem "Steinbruch" des Holocaust ist es lächerlich solche Künstlerkonkurrenzen auszutragen." Nevertheless, he wanted to make his frustration known. Hoheisel would later, however, prove cagier about this connection. Personal correspondence with Horst Hoheisel, 9 May 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabeth Ben David-Hindler und Joachim Rönneper. "Verein 'Steine der Erinnerung,' Wien - Briefwechsel." *Vor meiner Haustür - "Stolpersteine" von Gunter Demnig: ein Begleitbuch*. Joachim Rönneper, ed. Gelsenkirchen: Arachne-Verlag, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Ulrike Schrader. "Die 'Stolpersteine' oder Von der Leichtigkeit des Gedenkens : Einige kritische Anmerkungen." *Geschichte im Westen: Zeitschrift für Landes und Zeitgeschichte* 21 (2006): 178.

<sup>41</sup> Schmid, "Stolpersteine und Erinnerungskultur."

<sup>42</sup> Though much more substantial work on forced disappearance is available in Spanish language historical literature, for discussions in English, see Alison Brysk. *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina: Protest, Change, and Democratization*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994; Antonius C. G. M. Robben. *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

walkways with colorful tiles featuring the names of those killed and the dates of their disappearance. They called them *Baldosas por la memoria*, or *Tiles of Remembrance*.<sup>43</sup> Though their superficial appearance differs from the Stumbling Stones—each is painted with a durable ferrous ceramic compound that gives them a green tint and then decorated with colorful glass shards—the tiles follow the same form as Demnig’s memorial. Many read “Here lived,” though some stones are placed at sites of former employment or education and the text is altered accordingly: “Here worked...,” “Here studied...” And like the Stumbling Stones, they originate out of grassroots community organization, intervene in quotidian spaces, and invite passersby to reckon with the history of mass death.

A second example, a project in Russia led by the international human rights organization Memorial, dates from the winter of 2014. On December 10<sup>th</sup>—International Human Rights Day—Memorial installed in Moscow the first mini-monument of its *Last Address* project, which is modeled directly on the *Stolpersteine*. The project commemorates victims murdered by Stalin’s administration during the Great Terror in the late 1930s. Following Stalin’s death, the state rehabilitated many of those murdered by the NKVD—a mass of victims numbering somewhere between 680,000 and 1.2 million. To date, however, no national memorial exists for Stalin’s purge victims, and if Memorial itself is any indication, opportunities for grassroots dialogue about government repression do not exactly receive a warm welcome in Russia, where in recent years, the Putin administration has turned to intimidation tactics to muzzle Memorial. This climate makes it all the more surprising, then, that Memorial has already received nearly four hundred applications requesting that plaques naming a single victim of Soviet repression be installed on the façade of a building where the victim once lived. This popularity is also surprising given that, unlike more conventional memorial plaques that can be found throughout Russia, interested citizens must fund the plaque’s creation themselves—the sum equals roughly \$80—and first obtain approval from the building’s residents, a process that initiates a dialogue within the community about government repression. The project’s organizer Sergey Parkhomenko channeled the imperative of the Stumbling Stones when he argued of the long commemorative road ahead that “the most important thing is not to despair, not to lose heart but to act.”<sup>44</sup>

The *Stolpersteine*, the *Tiles of Remembrance*, and the *Last Address* rely on a modest use of text to bracket a life’s absence from society. (Particularly with the first two, the work of the spectator begins with a short bow in order to read that text. An inadvertent act of reverence, but one that certainly was not lost on the creators of either monument.<sup>45</sup>) Textuality, however, is not the pioneering feature of these grassroots monuments. More important is their networked decentralization. Two final examples demonstrate how sustainable utopian art projects of forms less explicitly reminiscent of the *Stolpersteine* have also been able to take root in the fertile ground readied by the spatial interventionists. First, another Holocaust monument whose roots date to January 1943 on the

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<sup>43</sup> As a young project, scholarship on the Baldosas is minimal. In print, the best resource is Barrios X Memoria y Justicia, and Instituto Espacio para la Memoria (Argentina). *Baldosas X la memoria*. Buenos Aires: Instituto Espacio para la Memoria, 2008. A discussion of the project can also be found in Manuel Tufro and Luis Sanjurjo. “Descentralizar la memoria. Dos lógicas de intervención sobre el espacio urbano en la ciudad de Buenos Aires.” *Universitas Humanística (Bogotá)* 70 (2010): 119–132. By far the best resources are available online, for example, the interview with member of the group Barrios por Memoria y Justicia, Gustavo Sales: [www.culturaymedios.com.ar/nota56.html](http://www.culturaymedios.com.ar/nota56.html); or the rudimentary website of the group “Neighbors from Almagro and Balvanera for a Memorial in the Service of the Present and the Future”: [memorialmagro.blogspot.com/p/baldosas-colocadas\\_14.html](http://memorialmagro.blogspot.com/p/baldosas-colocadas_14.html). Much of the mobilization work seems to happen on Facebook, with scores of group accounts dedicated to the creation of individual tiles for specific neighborhoods.

<sup>44</sup> Masha Lipman. “Humble Memorials for Stalin’s Victims in Moscow.” *The New Yorker*, 13 December 2014. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/humble-memorials-stalins-victims-moscow>.

<sup>45</sup> Schrader, “Die ‘Stolpersteine,’” 173–181.

Jewish holiday of Tu Bishvat, the New Year of the Trees. Irma Lauscher, a prisoner of the Theresienstadt concentration camp in what is, today, the Czech Republic, persuaded a guard to smuggle into the camp a tiny sapling. The camp's Jewish children celebrated the holiday by planting it. The red maple was kept alive by the continued commitment of camp children who shared with it their meager water rations. Unlike the tree, most of these children, sadly, did not live to see the war's end. Among the camp's survivors, however, was Lauscher herself, who, after liberation, informed Czech authorities about the tree, which was, by then, five feet tall. It was uprooted and replanted near the camp's former crematorium as a memorial to those who perished there.<sup>46</sup> Before her death in 1985, Lauscher requested of one of her friends, Mark Talisman—then vice-chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council—that seeds from the tree be planted in memory of the children lost to Nazi inhumanity. Talisman agreed and annually sends seeds to people around the world to plant in their communities. As the story of the tree spread, far-flung communities took an interest in planting their own Tree of Life, as it was called. They began, often without sanction, to collect seeds and take cuttings from the original tree and to transplant them globally. Today, estimates put the progeny of the Theresienstadt tree at around 600,<sup>47</sup> with roots in Jerusalem, central and southern England, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, San Francisco, northern Illinois, and Cincinnati, to name just a few. Unfortunately, catastrophic flooding in 2002 damaged the original tree's root system, and it died not long afterward.<sup>48</sup> The sad fate of the Tree of Life, however, vitalized the memorial, a metaphor for the way the work of commemorating genocide passes from one generation to the next. The tree's work is connective and dialogic, a trans-generational, trans-national, living monument.

A brief final example of the spread of the commemorative style of the spatial interventionists looks to Washington D.C. in the summer of 2013, when volunteers laid 1,018,260 handmade bone-shaped sculptures down the length of the National Mall.<sup>49</sup> The three-day installation, appropriately titled One Million Bones, commemorated the lives lost to mass atrocities in places like Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma, Syria, and Somalia. The monument to atrocity, though temporary, involved a massive international collaborative effort. Each of the artificial bones was handcrafted. Contributions came from all fifty states, thirty-one countries, and over 150,000 participants. Moreover, each bone was placed individually by an army of volunteers.<sup>50</sup> The organizers described the action as a collaborative site of conscience honoring both victims and survivors, a visual representation of the extensive global network of dialogue and investment in fighting genocide.

What was once utopian commemorative project of a small set of artists has become a global initiative beyond their control. Why did the spatial interventionists succeed where the Berlin *Geschichtswerkstatt* and the Greens failed? Perhaps the most compelling argument looks to the

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<sup>46</sup> Much myth and disagreement surrounds the history of the tree, and no academic research has, to date, been published on the tree's story. The best sources remain news articles in the local press in areas where descendants of the tree have been planted. Among the more accurate articles are Marc Settle, "Tree of Life' Planted for Peace." *BBC*, September 21, 2009, sec. UK. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8263288.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8263288.stm); Debbie Cohen, "Children's tree from Theresienstadt may sprout in S.F." *jweekly.com*, 22 March 1996. [www.jweekly.com/includes/print/2794/article/children-s-tree-from-theresienstadt-may-sprout-in-s-f/](http://www.jweekly.com/includes/print/2794/article/children-s-tree-from-theresienstadt-may-sprout-in-s-f/)

<sup>47</sup> Marc Settle. "Tree of life' planted for peace." *BBC*, 21 September 2009. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8263288.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8263288.stm)

<sup>48</sup> Památník Terezín. *Terezín Memorial: Annual Report for 2008*. Terezín, 2008, 6. The annual report is available online via the Theresienstadt/Terezín Memorial website: [www.pamatnik-terezin.cz/?dl\\_id=38](http://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz/?dl_id=38).

<sup>49</sup> "One Million Bones on the National Mall, All Countable in This Gigapixel Image | TED Blog." [blog.ted.com/2013/06/27/one-million-bones-on-the-national-mall-all-countable-in-this-gigapixel-image](http://blog.ted.com/2013/06/27/one-million-bones-on-the-national-mall-all-countable-in-this-gigapixel-image).

<sup>50</sup> Sharon Rose Goldtzvik, "One Million Bones - Press Releases." May 29, 2013. <http://www.onemillionbones.org/press-releases>. See also MK MacNaughton. "One Million Bones Project – Final Report | Initiative for Community Engagement." [alaskaice.org/one-million-bones-project-final-report](http://alaskaice.org/one-million-bones-project-final-report).

function of art. In a 1989 interview, Frankfurt School member Leo Löwenthal reflected on the manner in which art serves optimism. Art, he argued, “often has utopian elements in the sense that it depicts a semblance of a world...cured of its ailments.” Of course, Löwenthal continued, art “knows fully that it is only a semblance.” But this realization need not throw the beholder into despair.<sup>51</sup> It “does not mean that the semblance will not be realized someday, somewhere; such is utopian hope.”<sup>52</sup> Looking in the same direction as Löwenthal, one might understand the aesthetic medium of the spatial interventionists simply to have been more functionally aligned with the sustainable utopian project than the media of historical or political practice. Perhaps, however, one might still hold out hope for hope. Perhaps the strewn bits that remain of the sustainable utopian projects of the other grassroots democratic organizations might not spell their demise entirely. Writing of the melodramatic posthistorians in 1989, Lutz Niethammer asked how one battles despair. Perhaps, he wrote, “all he or she can do is try to gather together some little stones, without knowing whether they form part of a mosaic, or whether they will eventually appear as a mere scree devoid of form and plan.”<sup>53</sup> Perhaps in his desire to admonish these premature historians, however, Niethammer missed a key point: that leaving behind what he describes as a “strewn legacy” has a beneficial side. This legacy does not eliminate hope but rather disperses it to be carried in the pockets of ordinary people who possess both the freedom and the responsibility to put it to use.

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<sup>51</sup> On the theme of despair, see Robyn Marasco. *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory after Hegel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Leo Löwenthal and Frithjof Hager. *Geschichte denken: ein Notizbuch für Leo Löwenthal*. Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1992, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Lutz Niethammer and Dirk van Laak. *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?*. London; New York: Verso, 1992, 1.

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