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# Urban Memory in Germany: The City as a Trace of History in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* and Wim Wenders' *Der Himmel Über Berlin*

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This paper is concerned with the representation of urban space. If the sources for this paper are an East German novel by Christa Wolf and a West German film by Wim Wenders, I am not considering them from the perspective of a Germanist but through my concern with the city as a locus of memory. By focusing on the Postmodern city or on the understanding of the nature of cities that emerged after the Seventies, my main interest is in how previously deleted or marginalized historical references and connections are reintroduced as central concerns. I will begin by presenting Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* in the light of the trip that her main protagonist takes into a previously familiar urban space. A specific town becomes an emblem for lasting impressions, as revisiting a place bends mind and body back to past aspects. The novel focuses on memory, and more specifically on German memories of the Second World War. These are also central to Wim Wenders' film *Der Himmel Über Berlin* although they are developed in a different direction. I will discuss this film as an example of the New German Cinema as well as present its concern with loss and remembrance as they appear to be inscribed within the Berlin of the late Eighties. Wenders makes Berlin the centre of his narrative and this city is a key location in relation to my interest in urban memory and cities as repositories of history. After considering this question in relation to its manifestation in *Der Himmel Über Berlin*, I will focus on recent changes in the architectural

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configuration of Berlin, as the latter is being shaped into the capital of Unified Germany.

Postmodern architecture, fiction and film present an understanding of cities that differs from a Modernist perspective where a sense of chaos, confusion and fragmentation prevailed. Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) is an example of this equation of urban space with disjunction and psychological confusion in the face of an unprecedented size and pace which made the modern metropolis a new experience. Döblin's Berlin is hostile, like the cities that find their visual representation in the paintings of Dix, Groczsz, Meidner and Kirschner. The Second World War marked changes in the representation of the later twentieth-century city - as urban space was filled with hostile occupation prior to the physical damage that altered many cities' shapes and patterns; Dresden being the most obvious example. The post-Second World War city is the one that is still central to representational concerns today, a space scarred by bombing as well as by post-war reconstruction. Two options presented themselves in relation to the rehabilitation of urban space after the war. The first involved remembrance through the replication of what had been destroyed; remembrance by leaving meaningful ruins and gaps within a city. The other produced an urban environment that seemingly deleted memory from its appearance by creating an architecture of tower blocks that sought to be independent from historical associations.

In the Sixties and Seventies, the ideology that underlaid this second policy leading to an architecture of slabs of concrete, steel and glass came under scrutiny. Criticism of the post-war International Style of architecture was fuelled by figures such as Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs who saw it as a source for urban decay. They claimed that what had been lost was architecture's connection with its context, as well as with an anchorage in history. The ideology behind most High Modernist constructions was indeed focused on a break with the past; developing a tradition of the new, of pure form, in a post-traumatic desire for a fresh start that found its formal roots in the pre-war Bauhaus. As problems and dangers underlying this trend emerged, a new view on architecture reached maturity with a revised perception of situations which sought to ensure a healthier and lasting presence

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of a city. A Postmodern city is thus a place where a new concern with the past will be given shape. History has become a point of reference for constructions that are either playful stylistic acrobatics or reveal a concern with the expression of historical continuum. This latter perspective informs my interest in Postmodern cities and how architects rework historical references into their fabric.

The buildings and writings of both Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi, among many other architects, reveal a return to historicism as well as a desire to explore archetypal or persistent forms from the past, even though they work in contrasting styles. They use these as a spine for new architectural developments. Their work claims not to be nostalgic or regressive but seeks to create new forms from a reconfiguration of the past by using references to earlier styles and expressing an awareness of architectural heritage. They are critical of Modernism's seeming deletion of history. For a building to hold and for the city around it to be functional rather than dysfunctional, a mooring in history needs to be established. The city is thus no longer read as a locus for a break with the past and its various juxtaposed periods, but rather as a space where a layering of traces from various ages and historical moments can be read and made readable. In *L'Architettura della Città*, Aldo Rossi writes that a historical process which layers traces from the past and from successive modifications of a city underlies an urban dynamic.<sup>1</sup> The city, therefore, becomes a repository of memory. If most cities contain juxtaposed traces of different times, Rome being a key example and the one used by Rossi in his *L'Architettura della Città*, Berlin stands out as a central example of how a city is sculpted by time - to use Victor Hugo's image.<sup>2</sup> It is a place where history has inscribed a rapid succession of traces and where a notion of 'presence of the past' is particularly strong, especially from a late twentieth-century perspective.

Postmodern narratives often represent cities, entering the patterns of this common literary motif. If memory of the past and its integration into new forms has become a concern for architects, this aspect finds an echo in narrative representations of cities. These dwell on urban space as a locus for a layered presence of the past where historical traces offer themselves to be read in urban patterns. Christa Wolf's

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novel *Kindheitsmuster*,<sup>3</sup> published in 1976, expresses these concerns and provides a starting point for considering questions of memory linked to German identity after the Second World War.

*Kindheitsmuster* is a novel that focuses on a journey taken by the central female protagonist and narrator. With her family, she returns to the town of her childhood, referring to this place as 'L, now called G'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the town has changed name since the end of the war and is no longer German but Polish.<sup>5</sup> She is therefore entering a foreign space, holding on to her East German perspective in the process, and using this process to explore the Germany she belongs to at the time of the trip and then of writing. This time is the early Seventies, more specifically the 10th and 11th of July 1971. By recounting this trip, the narrator attempts to describe the working process of memory. The history of the town, of her country and of herself are intertwined to form a portrait of the Second World War through the third-person perspective of 'Nelly', a young girl from an ordinary family in a small town. This portrait is overtly linked to the Seventies and a wider political problematic is thus developed through juxtapositions of views of the present with recreated scenes from childhood and their chronological development; for instance, references are made to current crises and issues such as Cuba and Vietnam.

The town contains recognisable traces of the past, not any past but particularly the war years; it is this layer that is revisited. The narrator returns to her old school and weighs the evocative power of the presence of unaltered elements within its fabric. She establishes that 'the school, the street, the playground offer up bodies and faces which you could paint to this day'.<sup>6</sup> L, now G, offers many instances of triggers to an immersion into the past. These prove more effective than traces of a more conventional kind, such as photographs and newspapers. As the narrator recalls what took place in given locations, her immersion into the past is fluid. It is the continuing presence of place in a tangible form despite alterations to the town's identity that acts as a means of rediscovering lost memories. These are experienced with a time distance; one which separates L from its earlier identity as G. By returning to this earlier layer, preserved in details of the town, the narrator rediscovers or discloses patterns of behaviour from the war years; the ones Nazism inscribed in members of the German

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population such as herself and her family. *Kindheitsmuster* explores this painful past which is subject to suppressions and repression after the war but is under scrutiny again in the Seventies. It is a past that may not be accessible through rational means or through documented traces. History is entered as a flow, where the capacity to remember is as present as forgetfulness or a deletion of memories and linked to a retrospective awareness of this erasure.

If Christa Wolf's novel focuses on memory and history, it does so to explore why it is important to look back. This polemic perspective diagnoses 'history's accursed tendency to repeat itself'.<sup>7</sup> The juxtapositions of the story from the past with current events from the Seventies reveals an underlying connection between them. *Kindheitsmuster* is therefore about the present, but seen from the perspective of how today can be understood in relation to history. The novel is political in the sense that it seeks to reveal patterns in history, and by recognising them, to give them an active function in enhancing an understanding of the present. Behind a need to remember and to - literally - go back to the time and the place of a given trauma, *Kindheitsmuster* emphasises the painful recurrence of situations that should never have been allowed to repeat themselves. Memory is considered as a tool to counter this repetition.

Wolf's narrator also gives a voice to a post-war generation that is removed from a direct experience of the Nazi years. Her daughter Lenka for instance reveals this gap and is part of the 'children [who] no longer suffer from a guilt feeling'<sup>8</sup> in an age of 'universal loss of memory'.<sup>9</sup> The horror has faded and thus threatens to resurge, even though the new generation's views are intensely politicised. Memory and an attempt to give it a voice thus takes on an ethical function or a form of social responsibility. Wolf tells a story to keep an awareness of history as a living part of German identity. She reveals its presence by considering traces of its passage in a city, the location of her involvement in this layer of the past. *Kindheitsmuster* dwells on the process of memory as well as on its telling, on how to narrate such a past and the difficulty in reaching fluency on the matter and accepting the weight of this involvement. Wolf's novel explores, in the third person, the notion that it is 'unbearable to think the tiny word "I" in connection with the word "Auschwitz"',<sup>10</sup> and that 'all we can do is

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point out our difficulties to those who come after us'.<sup>11</sup> These difficulties include being able to confront the past in the first person. Her trip to G. is a journey into her self; one which she seeks to read out of the tangible presence of the town.

Another city that is readable in relation to its history and indeed also in relation to the problems of how to refind history and represent memory is Berlin, as portrayed by Wim Wenders. *Der Himmel Über Berlin* is a film about Berlin as much as it is the story of an angel and a trapeze artist or a postmodernist meditation on romance.<sup>12</sup> Berlin is portrayed here as a German city and a place of change that is deeply connected to a sense of historical process. The city is explored by Wenders' camera and he offers a portrait of its gaps and cracks and of the areas where yesterday - or the past - are readable. Within these he locates a story of characters in quest of their own life histories and of experience that would give them a sense of being inscribed in history. Even if the characters interact with each other, what is mainly told in this film is their encounter with the city and how personal and urban histories echo each other. If Wenders represents the continuing presence of historical traces in a city differently from Wolf, both *Kindheitsmuster* and *Der Himmel Über Berlin* make memory a central problematic.

Wenders' film was released in 1987 and shows a West German perspective on this matter. In an interview with the German architect Hans Kollhoff,<sup>13</sup> Wenders discusses his choice of Berlin as the only possible setting for this film. In his view, Berlin, as an urban space, reveals questions of memory and identity at the heart of the late twentieth century and has become an emblem of the tensions of our time. For Wenders, it is essentially a place of tension, 'a city which constantly throws you back into the past, not just in brief glimpses but as a total sensation'.<sup>14</sup> Berlin in this respect is neither a museum-city nor a form of historical theme park where the past is laid out for all to inspect from a comfortable distance, or at least was not so when Wenders filmed *Der Himmel Über Berlin*. He perceives it as a place where history, not only German but international as well, is present everyday; exists in the cracks and details rather than in monuments. It is a city made of an accretion of superimposed or juxtaposed stories and, in this respect, it is a palimpsest. The

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palimpsest is an image that fits the Postmodern city. As Rossi and other architects have established, a city is a space where layers of time are juxtaposed and vitality is maintained when a historical continuum between them is visually present. Thus urban fabric is a layering of many stories, and as a palimpsest, the whole pattern relies on persistent traces of past narratives.

Wenders views Berlin as a repository of the memory of past events, reinforcing his own statement that, for him, cinema is a medium of expression that involves memory by preserving its traces on a reel. However, even if these traces are recorded in a successive rather than a cumulative or layered manner, there is still a similarity between city and film in the respect that they both preserve or record traces of time on a given place. Wenders writes that a camera watches something and preserves it and that cinema can save the existence of things. It is a tool that helps to protect against the disappearance or erasure of these things, against the loss of their trace. In this way Berlin becomes a city of many traces. In Wenders' films, Berlin is also a place where the particular and the general, the timely and the historical meet, and in this respect it is representative of the tensions and contradictions of the post-war era. Wenders' attempt to come to terms with the past shows his acceptance of a past that is problematic and disturbing.

*Der Himmel Über Berlin* was made when Wenders returned to Germany after seven years of working in America. If the influence of American film prevails throughout his career, it is because, as a post-war director, he cannot escape it. After the war, Hollywood productions took over where other film industries left off. His relationship with American movies is contradictory and reveals both a rejection and a dependence on them. His own understanding of the medium of film was shaped through his cinephile attachment to other films, including products from the United States; an attachment that is expressed in the allusive density of his own movies.

Wenders participated in the New German Cinema from the Sixties onwards and his work contributes to a quest for a visual vocabulary that would convey an image of post-war Germany. Amongst the aims of the New German Cinema was a need to recreate a German cinema perceived as non-existent since the war and to do so by presenting

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views of the present. The directors of the New German Cinema - Herzog, Fassbinder and Wenders being the main three, with others such as Syberberg, Kluge and Schlöndorff - have no shared aesthetic but rather share a concern with finding a representational vocabulary which offers an alternative to American cinema. A major difference between the two national cinemas resides in the fact that American movies are products of a show business industry subjected to the pressure of the market, whereas the New German Cinema is the result of a 'cultural mode of production'<sup>15</sup> that was fed by State subsidies.

Like Wolf, Wenders seeks to travel back to the past to confront it, to make it present. Confronting issues of identity, history and the nature of cinema itself became a priority. *Der Himmel Über Berlin* is a mature work and its setting in Berlin brings forth all these issues of German identity and history. In a late manifestation of a cinema of authors, a well established author in the case of Wenders, the film is both subjective and personal as well as seeking to capture impersonal traces of history's mythical dimension in the city. As Berlin is loaded with so many associations and connotations, Wenders chose it as the European city that would be a tool for their representation, even though this representation remains inherently idiosyncratic. For him this city is a 'symbol of the whole world',<sup>16</sup> 'so exemplary of our century'.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Logic of Images*, a collection of essays Wenders published about his own work, he writes that:

The thing I wished for and saw flashing was a film *in and about* Berlin. A film that might convey something of the history of the city since 1945. A film that might succeed in capturing what I miss in so many films that are set here, something that seems to be so palpably there when you arrive in Berlin: a feeling in the air and under your feet and in people's faces, that makes life in this city so different from life in other cities. To explain and clarify my wish, I should add: it's the desire of someone who's been away from Germany for a long time, and who could only ever experience 'Germanness' in this one city. I should say I'm no Berliner. Who is nowadays? But for over twenty years now, visits to this city have given me my only genuine experiences of Germany, because the



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(hi)story that elsewhere in the country is suppressed or denied is physically and emotionally present here.<sup>18</sup>

Berlin carries within its structure and substance scars of war and political division. After a history of rapid expansion beginning in the eighteenth century, and of devastation, fragmentation and reconstruction in recent times, the city is a space of unprecedented and unrivalled tensions. In 1987, these were rooted in the division of its space. Wenders wrote that 'the idea that it was one single city never ceases to overwhelm me'<sup>19</sup> and the fact that in 1995 it is again one city gives the movie its awaited sequel. *Der Himmel Über Berlin* is a study of history's traces within a changing space and is now dated. Filmed and set in 1987, the film offers a portrait of Berlin's shape at a given time. Even if the Berlin in this film does not exist any more, it is still very much part of how this city's identity had been registered for a quarter of a century.

Berlin is a city that 'offers strange views of the past or of what still remains from the past, witnesses of everything that has happened'.<sup>20</sup> Wenders writes that the city is 'an open history book',<sup>21</sup> where all documents tell a story of loss since gaps bear witness to deleted presence and can be read in this perspective. These documents are mostly ruins preserved so as to ensure remembrance of Berlin's ordeal during the war and its ensuing division. The fragmentation that had become associated with post-war Berlin; its different sectors, its rubble and the Wall erected in August 1961 as a material sign of separation, are all emblems of aspects of our century that exist elsewhere and everywhere but which were made most visible here through their spatialisation and concentration.

In *Der Himmel Über Berlin*, the city is multiple in its spatial levels as well as in terms of time levels. The present form of the city stores the memory of past ones - as Hans Scharoun's library, which appears at length in the film, stores culture and identity. Also, as David Harvey notes, 'we encounter two groups of actors living on different time scales. Angels live in enduring and eternal time, and humans live in their own time'.<sup>22</sup> The angels who oversee the life of the city are attentive to its details as they read within them the weight of the past. They remember the city from its earliest days as they belong to

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a space beyond human time. They tell the story of the city that starts with the formation of the soil on which it grew and they act as a form of vocalised memory. Through their presence, Wenders plays with connections between stories and history, as well as links between the past and the present, as both are recorded by the angels (in a similar way to Wenders' camera recording a city). Wenders writes that:

in the film of course it's not HISTORY  
but A story, though of course  
A STORY may contain HISTORY,  
images and traces of past history,  
and intimations of what is to come.<sup>23</sup>

In this respect, Berlin in 1987 is represented as a moment in time that has a given shape as well as being one moment within a larger history; for instance, the film portrays Berlin's division by the wall as one of its main characteristics. But Wenders does not only film the Western side. His camera glimpses across the wall into the no-man's-land, the Prenzlauer Berg and the area around the Museumsinsel. These places are part of Berlin's identity and the fact that they were on the 'other side' does not erase this fact. If the angels can move freely in space and across the border at will, they are unable to influence their environment in any way or leave a trace of their presence. This presence itself, and their mobility, offer a comment on the latent union and oneness of Berlin that underlies its division. The title of the film underlines the fact that there is one sky over the two cities, as if on a wider scale than immediate history lies the notion that there exists a memory of the whole history of the city.

Wenders expresses his perception of Berlin as a history book by revealing the past beneath and within the present city. He writes that 'behind the city of today, in its interstices or above it, as though frozen in time, are the ruins, the mounds of rubble, the burned chimney stacks and facades of the devastated city, only dimly visible sometimes, but always there in the background ... [This] yesterday is still present everywhere, as a "parallel world"'.<sup>24</sup> If memory is contained within the fabric of the city, it can be brought to light by being confronted with the knowledge of that city's past which lies in an individual. The character of Homer who appears regularly

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throughout the film represents 'the story-teller, the muse, the potential guardian of collective memory and history'.<sup>25</sup> His name harks back to another storyteller, whose tales have been regenerative sources for other stories and cultural landmarks. By referring to Homer, Wenders emphasises the role of memory in shaping stories and a link between stories and the telling of history.

Homer first appears in a scene set in Hans Scharoun's library and is conscious of being this storehouse for memory, conscious of his advanced age and his disconnection from his audience. There is a closeness between him and the angels, as both are in touch with 'the latent past'.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the scenes where Homer appears, he is alone and silent, closed in on his mental storehouse that only the angels can share in their capacity as listeners or eavesdroppers. Homer expresses the sense of loss that Wenders associates with Berlin. He represents the spirit of a tired and burnt out city and mourns the loss of another Berlin, Weimar Berlin. A significant scene in this respect is when Homer is walking alone along the wall, searching for the Potsdamer Platz that once was the heart of the city and all that remains on that very spot is an empty and weed-filled no-man's-land in 1987.<sup>27</sup> He compares his memories with what he sees and is unable to accept the contrast. During this scene, fragments from archives appear which show ruins of bombed buildings and rubble-filled streets and bring to mind post-war Trümmer films.<sup>28</sup> The script - written in association with Peter Handke - tells us that these images have appeared on Homer's inner eye.<sup>29</sup> Past and present are in total opposition to each other and only connected by memory, a memory that is undergoing confusion and disorientation in relation to the brutality of the contrast between then and now. Homer appears to be rattling around in Berlin of the late eighties, lost and confused and looking inwards to his memories. Homer's presence and his preoccupation show the importance for some of telling stories 'even though [they] may in parts be ugly'.<sup>30</sup> Homer is inscribed within time and can connect its different parts, or at least diagnose their disconnection, through references to his own experience. Included in the relics of the past city, he is a voice which is problematic in the sense that his cohesive words remain silent to the population and only accessible to the silent and non-interfering angel, Cassiel. A connection between past and

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present through memory exists but remains in the form of a monologue.

The aspect of Berlin that the Homer scenes bring to light is that the city's past is most powerfully present where it is absent. Homer has lost the monuments in the city that were reference points in his mental cityscape and cannot replace them. Indeed, Berlin is attractive to Wenders precisely for its wilderness and for such cracks in its surface. He states that the mind can grasp broken things better than it can things whole upon which memory slips away. It is unusual for a city to have such deserted lots and broken or scarred elements in its fabric. This waste space in the city - which is being built out now and which was possibly attractive to Wenders because it was anachronistic and ephemeral - was however once full, as Homer's memories of the Potsdamer reveal. By filming cracks and gaps, Wenders shows the traces of a destructive history in a way that avoids an aestheticisation of the past or its reduction to familiar clichés. In this respect, *Der Himmel Über Berlin* contrasts two ways of representing history: firstly, by showing an old Berliner in a no-man's-land and by sharing his memories, and secondly, by the portrayal of the making of an American television film in Berlin.

The making of an American film shows actors at work and extras waiting on a set which is an old bunker on Goeben Strasse. Using a complex interaction between different levels of fiction as well as between different levels of time, these scenes are constructed out of a pastiche of the past where forties clothes, cars and props are being used to stage this making of a film within a film. This stands as a comment on the fact that these aspects of the war are accessible to post-war generations through filmed evidence, such as documentary footage. However, Wenders is also contrasting the recycling of these images and a mass-mediatised recreation of the past through period nostalgia to Homer's memory and the city's telling of its own history through what is missing or absent. In my view, this is an attempt to find a German vocabulary which could represent its own past in the medium of film, acknowledging the weight and influence of American cinema at the same time. Elements from previous representations are reconfigured into a new whole which is constructed on an allusive or meta-level. Whether this attempt is successful is open to question.

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*Der Himmel Über Berlin* is a film that portrays a desire to find history and seeks its traces in urban space. The city is where Wenders is tempted to locate these traces but I believe that if the city is where the layering of time can be read, it is also a tenuous trace since it is itself subject to change and flux. As with Wolf's encounter with the city, what is central to Wenders' movie is the way he captures this desire to find history and the moment in which this momentum takes place. Whether he has successfully shot 'HISTORY' in its natural habitat is doubtful. Within reach, however, lies that attempt to do so which reveals a shift in focus away from the monuments in which history is officially ensconced.

Wenders writes that Berlin appears to him as 'more a SITE than a CITY',<sup>31</sup> as a space where identity can be thought about in relation to reconstruction and the incorporation of the past into the present. This identity will involve accepting the challenge of the past, as the intertextual references on which Wenders draws reveal. He is indeed shaping his own picture on a premise of precedence, many frames being quotes or allusions to other films such as *Der Blaue Engel* and American detective fiction, as well as intratextual references to his own earlier work. The city appears optimistically as a construction site rather than a ruin; an opportunity rather than a space of destruction; a space in flux rather than set in a definite form. There is thus an echo between the city and the fluidity or changeability of memory.

In 1995, unified Berlin is still a site but is not as open as it was in 1987. If it is now a space of intense building activity, urgent choices also have to be made prior to initiating projects within the city. The division of Berlin, still deeply rooted in its identity and in the minds of visitors, has supposedly been swept away by the latest wave of political developments. Architectural projects are now carried out with an awareness of what constitutes Berlin; a city deeply marked by history and which cannot be dissociated from its past. Unification involves looking back to a pre-war Berlin and builders of the new city seek to recall traces of multiple layers of history. Berlin's cityscape in 1989 was filled with significant landmarks: those which had survived the Allied bombers and the Red Army's canons and stood whole or in ruins, as well as those built after Berlin had been

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reclaimed from the rubble of 1945. Plans to build a new capital have taken this into account in a seemingly history-conscious and critical reworking of these landmarks into a new whole. I emphasise 'seemingly' because even if the memory of Berlin's past is being preserved, it is also done in conjunction with its normalisation. How successful these new accretions to the city will be in combining this double purpose of storing memory as well as functioning in the present and the future remains to be seen. One can only underline an integrative and historically conscious intent within the plans. Clearly, the term 'normalisation' also contains a connotation of neutralisation that might pin history into a gilt frame and hang it up for all to peruse rather than let it maintain its disturbing presence in an unprocessed form, a form which Wolf and Wenders explore in German urban fabric.

*Der Himmel Über Berlin* captures the eloquence of absence (absence of the city as one city) and most of all in the scenes on the fallow land of the Potsdamer. Now, Berlin is becoming a space where presence is being inscribed in a new urban symphony. When most historical landmarks within the city are being integrated into a redefined whole, what might be lost is the emotional presence of the past within Berlin's gaps and cracks, the one which first attracted Wenders to this city. Berlin today is, so to speak, a post-post war city. Fifty years after the end of the war, memories of this period are confronted in a way which reveals a desire to look back, to render the fluidity of memory in a more concrete form, literally. This involves reading a variety of traces of the past and confronting the question of their reliability. Cities are tangible traces of the past's continuing presence, as well as witnesses to the brutality of an attempt to erase the past, both in the destruction encountered through bombing and in tampering with historical urban fabric through post-war reconstruction. However, within the fabric of places like Berlin and Wolf's L. now G., the past is readable and encased, even though it is also slippery. In this respect, cities are crucial for confronting history, however problematic its representation and its processing may be.

Within a Postmodern problematising of the representation of the past and of the interaction between fiction and fact lies the acknowledgement that history cannot be erased or denied, and that it

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is dangerous and destructive to attempt to do so.<sup>32</sup> Memory is central in contemporary culture. Through fiction, memory's emotive presence is emphasised. Narratives, such as Wenders' *Der Himmel Über Berlin* do not involve a denial of history, however problematic any notion of veracity has become. This problem is negotiated in a quest for appropriate means of representation that make the past present and explore the process of memory, countering any notion that history is out of reach and maybe even never have happened. The problem however for post-war generations is how to bear witness now that a process of mourning has become more open, manifest.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Aldo Rossi, *L'Architettura della Città* (Milano: Cupl, 1978)

<sup>2</sup>Victor Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris* (Paris: Gallinard, 1988) originally 1832, Livre Troisième: Chapter 1, 'Notre-Dame'. His idea that time is a main force in determining the changing and yet specific shape of a building or a city recurs in his poem 'A L'Arc de Triomphe' (in *Les Voix Intérieures*), at the end of Part 1: 'Et laissez travailler à toutes les statues/ Le temps, ce grand sculpteur!'

<sup>3</sup>Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlog, 1976)

<sup>4</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood* (London: Virago Press, 1992), pp. 4, 97.

<sup>5</sup>James Knowlton establishes that 'Wolf's hometown Landsberg an der Warthe is now called Gorzow Wielkopolski', in his article 'How have we become what we are today? History and Utopia in the Novels of Christa Wolf', in *History and Post-War Writing*, Theo d'Haen and Hans Bertens eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi; Antwerpen: Restant, 1990), pp. 61-88, p.72.

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<sup>6</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, p.229.

<sup>7</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, pp.170, 180, 284.

<sup>8</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, p.236.

<sup>9</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, p.153.

<sup>10</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, p.230.

<sup>11</sup>Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, p.231.

<sup>12</sup>See Robert Philip Kolker and Peter Beiken, *The Films of Wim Wenders* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), intro. viii.

<sup>13</sup>Published in the Review of the Catalan Association of Architects *Nova Narració*, number 177 (April, May, June 1988), pp. 48-77.

<sup>14</sup>Interview published in *Nova Narració*, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989). He develops this contrast by establishing that in relation to the American film industry, 'other countries try to maintain themselves on a terrain staked out by the competition. West Germany is one example, but the implications affect all developed countries whose sense of cultural identity is based on a need to maintain makers - and markets - of difference vis-à-vis the products of the international entertainment business', pp. 3, 6-7 and 42.

<sup>16</sup>Interview, *Nova Narració*, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup>Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images* translated Michael Hofmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 74.

<sup>18</sup>Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images*, pp. 73-74. Wenders' italics.

<sup>19</sup>Interview, *Nova Narració*, p. 72.

<sup>20</sup>Interview, p. 66.



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<sup>21</sup>Interview, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup>David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 314.

<sup>23</sup>Wim Wenders, *Logic of Images*, p. 74. The use of uppercase is Wenders'. 'History' thus frames 'a story'.

<sup>24</sup>Wim Wenders, *Logic of Images*, p. 80. I would like to point out that Wenders was born on August 14, 1945 and therefore did not witness the war first-hand, although his *Weltanschauung* was no doubt shaped in its aftermath. His delving into Germany's past and history of the war therefore depends on second-hand information about the period and his work can therefore be contrasted to Wolf's. For instance, the character of Homer - the storyteller, an old man played by the actor Curt Bois - is construed as a contrast to Wenders' generation. A comparison that comes to mind is between Wenders and the French novelist Patrick Modiano who is in a similar position vis-a-vis the war years and who seeks to rediscover its traces through his writing.

<sup>25</sup>David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 317.

<sup>26</sup>Wim Wenders, *Logic of Images*, p. 80.

<sup>27</sup>Wenders and Handke, *Les Ailes du désir* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), pp. 60-64.

<sup>28</sup>Post-War German films set in devastated cities that were still a sea of rubble, or *Trümmer*.

<sup>29</sup>Wenders and Handke, *Les Ailes du désir*, p. 62. Handke's writing belongs to a form of detached narration characteristic of postmodernism. This tone prevails in Wenders' film. Their collaboration precedes *Der Himmel Über Berlin*, starting with Wenders' filming of *The Anxiety of the Goalie before the Penalty Shot* (1971-72).

<sup>30</sup>David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 317.

<sup>31</sup>Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images*, p. 74. The uppercase is Wenders'.

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<sup>32</sup>Walter Abish explores the dangers of repressing the past in his novel *How German Is It* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982). In this fiction, the new town of Brumholdstein which epitomises the economic miracle of the post-war years experiences a resurgence of history when its main street caves in to reveal the underlying presence of a mass grave. The city is built on the site of Durst, a concentration camp, and tried to veil its existence. The presence of its underground traces defy this attempt and break through the surface - literally - of this strategy of denial.