Crisis, Normalcy, Fantasy:

Berlin and its Borders

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Pertti Ahonen, *Death at the Berlin Wall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 320 pp. (hb), £30, ISBN: 978-0-19-954630-5.

Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 168 pp. (hb), £17.95, ISBN: 978-1-935408-08-6.

Michael Lemke, *Vor der Mauer: Berlin in der Ost–West-Konkurrenz 1948 bis 1961*, Zeithistorische Studien 48 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011), 671 pp. (hb), £61.98, ISBN: 978-3-412-20672-7.

Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 336 pp. (pb), £28, ISBN: 978-0-19-960510-1.

Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 368 pp. (hb), £19.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-973704-8.

Janet Ward, *Post-Wall Berlin: Borders, Space and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 428 pp. (hb), £71, ISBN: 978-0-230-27657-4.

Manfred Wilke, *Der Weg zur Mauer: Stationen der Teilungsgeschichte*, 2nd edn, Beiträge zur Geschichte von Mauer und Flucht (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2011), 472 pp. (hb), £30.95, ISBN: 978-3-86153-623-9. [Manfred Wilke, *The Path to the Berlin Wall: Critical Stages in the History of Divided Germany*, tr. Sophie Perl (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014) 412 pp. (hb), £63, ISBN: 978-1-78238-288-1.]

In March 2013 a diverse group of Berliners protested against the demolition of parts of the 'East Side Gallery', a collection of artworks painted onto what was billed the Berlin Wall's 'longest remaining expanse'.[1] This effort to save a remnant of Berlin's cold war history captured international attention but also highlights the degree to which the Berlin Wall remains a simulacrum. The portion of the wall activists sought to save had been part of the hinterland wall, the secondary barrier on the Eastern

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[1] Chris Cottrell, 'In Berlin, a Protest to Keep What Remains of the Wall', *New York Times* (5 Mar. 2013), A12.

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side of the border exclusion zone and had been transformed into a recognisable piece of the Berlin Wall only after the Wall's demise. By marking the Eastern side of the barrier with politicised graffiti, the artists who created the East Side Gallery inverted the Wall, transforming the view from the eastern side to retroactively adhere to a Western cold war perspective. In effect this public struggle to preserve the Wall's ostensible history underscores the Wall's convoluted past, a blending of fantasy and nostalgia with a brutal violence that became, in the end, oddly normal.

The Berlin Wall's iconic status, both during its cold war existence and since its dismantling more than two decades ago, is well acknowledged. But it should do more than function as a signifier for something else. As early as June 1963, less than two years after the East Germans erected their 'antifascist protective barrier', the American President John F. Kennedy called on the world to 'come to Berlin' to understand the real stakes of the West's cold war battle against communism. Cold war tourists who heeded his call and clambered up the observation platforms at Potsdamer Platz near the city centre or paid the high prices for Rainer Hildebrandt's museum at the Checkpoint Charlie crossing point, often found it easy to look past the structure itself. After all, they already knew what the Wall meant, and it seemed more intriguing to speculate about the sand heap marking the site of Hitler's Second World War bunker or to marvel at the gadgets with which daring East Germans had escaped to freedom.

The Wall's existence as spectacle effectively concealed its normalcy within fantastic visions of ongoing crisis moments. Black and white film footage helpfully serves up a series of visual definitions: an East German border guard casts aside his rifle and leaps the barbed wire that first delineated the Wall in August 1961; desperate East Berliners leap to the street below from border-facing windows before East German masons could seal them; Soviet and American tanks face off at Checkpoint Charlie, temporarily militarising the confrontation over the border in October 1961; or, perhaps most famously, nineteen-year old Peter Fechter lies at the foot of the Wall, bleeding to death after a failed escape attempt in 1962. Even the crowds dancing on the Wall's broad top near the Brandenburg Gate or pouring through its gates on 9 November 1989 – by which time the video feed had changed to colour – reinforce the event-centric version of the Wall story. They marked transformative moments in the grand history of the twentieth century, this last at least an occasion when American news anchors felt compelled to drop everything to rush to Berlin to broadcast their evening reports as history happened. But it was the divergent versions of normalcy – produced in East and West – that ultimately sustained the Wall. The challenge for historians seeking to address more than a spectacular version of the Wall is to interrogate a retrospective gaze that tends to overlook the practices that made the Wall and the border regime it embodied.

The titles of these works under review attest how the Wall still functions as a reference point around which historians seek to organise their accounts of what comes before and after, in front of and behind. This reference point proves, as the best of these histories demonstrate, an unstable structure. It belies any easy rendering of its locational and chronological emplotment. Janet Ward remarks about the Iron

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Curtain, of which the Wall was the most visible manifestation, 'The World's fault line was in fact full of faults' (Ward, p. xv). The danger, however, is to assume that this border's fractured state operated only at a metaphorical level. Patrick Major rightly warns against getting lost 'in a maze of metaphorical walls' (Major, p. 8), but it remains tricky to navigate the convoluted terrain between the bricks and mortar of the border apparatus and the iconic status of the border regime, broadly conceived.

Not insignificantly, the most lasting interpretive device with which to decipher the Wall and its aftermath derives from a work of fiction, Peter Schneider's 1982 novel *The Wall Jumper*.[2] He imagined a 'wall in the head' that would take longer to dismantle than the concrete structure erected around West Berlin. Schneider was writing at a point in time when that barrier was still standing and when, it must be said, it was almost impossible to imagine it ever disappearing. But it has disappeared, and that seems now to allow us to firmly anchor this structure in time – Sunday, 13 August 1961 until Thursday, 9 November 1989. The Wall went through several physical iterations over the course of this history, not achieving its final form in reinforced concrete with a rounded top until after 1975. But merely articulating the technical developments in the border system conceals the ways that such efforts necessarily involved processes that would have seemed more at home in a work of fantastic fiction.

In January 1985 East German authorities demolished the ironically named Church of the Reconciliation, inaccessibly located in no man's land since the Wall went up in 1961. While the authorities that destroyed the church may have strived to rationalise border apparatus (by creating improved sightlines, for example), their act also reflected the way that the Wall necessitated a re-imagining of Berlin's urban geography. The church's demolition marked a decisive material intervention into the city's built space and an imposition of an aesthetic of control even if it was not realised in practice.

Wendy Brown's book about walls in a 'post-Westphalian' international environment only mentions the Berlin Wall in passing. For her it serves as a model of national imprisonment with which twenty-first century security barriers (especially on the US–Mexico border and between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories) share more similarities than the builders of those walls are willing to admit. Like John F. Kennedy, she presumes that the existence of a wall reflects a fundamental practical and ethical failing on the part of the system that built it. For Kennedy, this meant he could declare that despite their flaws, the practitioners of freedom and democracy never had to 'put up a wall to keep our people in'.[3] At the heart of Brown's comparison rests an assertion that walls 'do not merely protect but produce the content of the nations they barricade' (Brown, p. 41).

According to Brown declining nation state sovereignty (the post-Westphalian state) confronts fewer threats to security than to identity. She sees twenty-first century wall

[2] Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper: A Berlin Story*, tr. Leigh Hafrey (Chicago: University of Chicago University Press, 1998), 119.

[3] John F. Kennedy, 'Remarks in the Rudolph Wilde Platz, Berlin', *The American Presidency Project*, available at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9307 (last visited 26 Apr. 2014).

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construction as an attempt to bolster certainty about identity, to defend something 'inside' against something 'outside' even when those oppositional categories do not line up on either side of the boundary that ostensibly separates them. When Brown does return to Berlin, she draws on Greg Eghigian's description of the East German *homo munitus*, the 'sheltered, defended person' whose subjectivity was constrained by the social, cultural and political limitations imposed by life behind the Wall.[4] For Brown, western proponents of wall-building fantasise about irrational border-crossers – especially potential terrorists – whose subjectivity has been constrained by a theocratic (Islamist) world-view, but these advocates fail to grasp the way that walls both reflect and transform the societies that build them. The security apparatus appears smooth, coherent and functional. It formulates the 'visual scenography of a state of emergency' (Brown, p. 77). That this state of emergency is at least in part a fantasy helps to constitute this smooth veneer. Ultimately, Brown explores walls as a means to interrogate those who build them. In using the Berlin Wall as her point of departure, however, she is less attentive to the ways that that the East German *homo munitus*, in particular, emerged as a collaborative product, not only of East and West but also of East and West Berliners; and as Eghigian underscores, the *homo munitus* was a phenomenon that pre-existed the Wall's construction and was not only performed in and by its construction.

For Manfred Wilke the path to the Wall passes through a series of stations at the level of high politics, most notably conferences of diplomats and national political leaders. Writing against a historiography that seeks to highlight the agency of the East German and Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitsparti Deutschlands*, SED) in the construction of the Wall,[5] Wilke points to a single individual who proved ultimately responsible for its building: Nikita Khrushchev. In this account, the Wall operated as an instrument of power within a broader cold war conflict. It emerged out of a series of debates, agreements and clashes, and ultimately proved a stabilising force en route to détente (Wilke, p. 292). The Wall marked the end of a story, the end of the clash of superpowers in Europe, and provided a means to formulate international connections. Even after the Wall's construction, divided Berlin provided an ongoing mechanism to link East and West Germany. But that negotiation of the emerging status quo remained a subsidiary plot line. The real action was to be found in the crises that marked out the cold war's terrain (as opposed to merely navigating it). In this narrative, the Wall marked the end of Berlin's centrality for the cold war. The hot spots (*Krisenherde* in Wilke's terminology) moved elsewhere. Khrushchev's 1958 diplomatic gamble in Berlin nearly took the Soviet Union into a dead end. Ulbricht's pleas for a wall to stem the flow of East Germans to the West provided a way out of that diplomatic dilemma (Wilke, p. 284). But according to Wilke, Ulbricht was never a driving force.

[4] Greg Eghigian, '*Homo Munitus*: The East German Observed', in Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds, *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and* Politics, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor, Mich. : University of Michigan Press, 2008), 41.

[5] Wilke's particular target is Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet–East German Relations, 1953–1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

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The story Wilke narrates is one of a long-drawn-out return to normal. If the 1949 agreement on interzonal trade and the 1955 Geneva summit offered steps toward a normalisation of German relations, pre-Wall Berlin remained an ongoing hurdle for that process. The events of 1961, including the construction of the Wall, consolidated superpower dominance in Europe. They marked a shift away from four-power summit meetings and smoothed a path to superpower détente by relocating cold war conflict to a place over the heads of European actors.

If Wilke seeks to put the face of high politics on the building of the Wall, another line of recent research has endeavoured to put specific names and numbers to the killings which more than anything else contributed to the Wall's image as the most murderous instrument in the East–West divide. Beginning in 2005, a joint research project of the Centre for Contemporary History Research (Potsdam) and the Berlin Wall Foundation has worked to cultivate an awareness of the specific acts of violence that marked out the Wall and that seem to have vanished into reunified Berlin's hipster present. This effort to catalogue the Wall's violent 'facts' takes the Wall seriously as a focus of historical investigation. As a result, we know that at least 136 persons died as a direct result of East German border installations in and around Berlin.[6] But no less than efforts that reduce the Wall to the status of cold war emblem, the summing up of the Wall as a series of violent incidents, of extraordinary interruptions of some sort of historical normalcy, offers only part of the story. The Wall was much more than an accumulation of violent crisis moments.

The performative nature of the violence at the Wall serves to blur the line between statistical data and emblem. Leaving aside the images that so often sum up the violence (a dead Peter Fechter being carried in the arms of a East Berlin policeman, for example), the tendency to reduce Wall violence to a single declarative act – the order to shoot (*Schiessbefehl*) – conceals the multifaceted nature of these acts of violence. In fact Western authorities' increasingly ritualistic denunciation of the *Schiessbefehl* tended to reduce the violence to a single originary point within the GDR state apparatus and to render the mechanisms producing that violence comfortably uncomplicated.

In his particularly helpful effort to decipher violent death at the Wall as part of competing wall mythologies, Pertti Ahonen rejects simplification. He takes readers from August 1961, when Günter Litifin became the first shooting death at the Wall to Chris Gueffroy, who died after being shot in February 1989, just months before the Wall fell. Focusing on twelve case studies, he expands the definition of death at the Wall to include more than just those East Germans shot trying to escape. Among his list of Wall victims are East German border guards (shot both by their own colleagues and by Western escape helpers), a five year old Turkish boy who drowned after falling into the river portion of the fortified border, and a West Berliner who

[6] Hans-Hermann Hertle and Maria Nooke, eds, *Die Todesopfer an der Berliner Mauer 1961–1989: Ein Biographisches Handbuch*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009). See also the associated page on the website of the Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, available at http://www.berliner-mauer-gedenkstaette.de/de/todesopfer-240.html (last visited 26 Apr. 2014).

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crossed from West to East and was shot in the course of interrogation by East German border guards. This last case, of the anti-Wall activist Dieter Beilig, offers a different version of the Wall's disappearing violence. In this instance, although West Berlin police watched on 2 October 1971 as Beilig climbed over the Wall into East Berlin and was seized by East German border guards, they did not identify the activist and presumed him to be 'yet another drunken or deranged wall jumper' (Ahonen, p. 185) who would be processed by East German authorities and eventually returned to West Berlin. Apparently, nobody in the West heard the shot that killed Beilig, and East German State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS or 'Stasi') arranged to have his body cremated without even informing his family.

For Ahonen the death and disappearance of Beilig reflect a 'tragedy' (Ahonen, p. 179), he became the Wall's most forgotten victim. The response of MfS operatives to his death seemed to reiterate its extraordinary character. In anticipation of the Western outrage that would presumably result when the death came to light, they concocted a remarkable narrative of events in which East German guards had to defend themselves against a rampaging prisoner. They even pressed Beilig's hand to a submachine gun in order to produce fingerprint documentation that he had seized a guard's weapon. These elaborate fictions proved unnecessary. Nobody in the West connected Beilig's reported disappearance in West Berlin with the incident of the wall jumper, a 'normal' if occasional happening at the border.

The fact that this incident occurred just following the completion of the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin, a key step in 'normalising' Berlin's cold war divide and even the existence of the Wall, draws together multiple constructions of normalcy at the heart of the Wall's history. First, at the level of high politics the Berlin Agreements began a process in the early 1970s of accepting, taming and then normalising (from the outside) the otherwise abnormal and destructive reality of the cold war and of divided Berlin.[7] What Beilig's death demonstrates, however, is the way that the process of *making* normal proved a vital component of the scripts and rituals that both sides used to deal with the Wall. The two fabricated narratives about the incident that authorities in East and West used to make sense of the incident underscore that fact, even if one side acted out of ignorance and the other out of malevolent fear.

From the very beginning, East German authorities sought to explain the Wall as part of a normal border apparatus, the sort of system that any state would develop to defend its boundaries. Wendy Brown questions that premise. She suggests that the imagining of exceptional enemies on the other side of the border cannot operate as a permanent definition without 'eroding the norm defining it and against which it functions, without replacing that norm with itself and thereby forfeiting the status of exceptionality through which sovereignty is defined' (Brown, p. 86). For the East German state, boundary drawing (and defending) became part of a broader policy of *Abgrenzung*, of 'warding off' (Ahonen, p. 5) that reflected the state's fears

[7] On West Berlin's 'island' status, see David E. Barclay, 'A "Complicated Contrivance": West Berlin Behind the Wall, 1961–1989', in Marc D. Silberman, Karen E. Till and Janet Ward, eds, *Walls, Borders, Boundaries: Spatial and Cultural Practices in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 113–30.

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about influences posed by western politics, culture and society. The contradiction between these two claims, in which East German authorities sought to assert both the normalcy of their border with the West and the need for separation from the outside world, became most visible in the Wall, the ultimate 'abnormal barrier' (Ahonen, p. 155).

Any authoritative declaration of a Western ability to recognise the Wall's abnormality effectively conceals the ways that Westerners, too, made the Wall and its violence normal. This normalisation was not just a subset of a global politics of détente in the 1970s and 80s. It predated the Wall's construction in 1961 and offers a counter to a narrative that tells only of intensifying cold war disorder that the Wall, for all its human costs, ultimately stabilised. The story of ongoing East–West connection is also part of the Wall's history, although here operating somewhere below Wilke's focus on high politics. These connections on a human scale reflect at least in part the fact that 'all walls have gates' (Major, p. 194) and that the people who crossed the border played a vital role in articulating both what the Wall means and how. While the border-crosser (*Grenzgänger*) or holds a vital part in post-1945 Berlin history, it remains relegated to the period before 1961.[8] An account of border crossing as part of post-1961 Berlin has yet to be written. Even the fact that it was possible to ride the West Berlin subway through East Berlin still figures as little more than a historical curiosity.[9] Yet in the course of riding through the 'ghost stations' in East Berlin, passengers necessarily integrated encounters with the potential violence of the border apparatus (border guards with submachine guns manned the dimly lit platforms as the subway cars passed by slowly) into the quotidian act of their urban commutes.

Michael Lemke turns his attention to the experiences of cold war normalcy in the period before 1961 and argues that the Wall already existed, essentially ('in Nuce'), by 1948–9 (Lemke, p. 637). At the heart of his account are Berlin's *Grenzgänger*, although he expands the definition of the participants in this 'doubled Berlin everyday life' (p. 12) beyond just the workers and shoppers who crossed into sectors (East or West) other than where they lived. Opera and theatregoers, film viewers, and attendees of conferences and conventions, all collaborated to define the city's cultural and political terrain. These acts of crossing served to demarcate differences and to stake out competitive claims on the Berlin population, claims that businesses and political officials sought to harness. Thus, border cinemas in the West appealed explicitly to East Berlin viewers and West Berlin authorities campaigned aggressively against Western purchases of bread and other goods in East Berlin.

In 1951 West Berlin police responded with violence when Free German Youth (FDJ) used the occasion of their national convention to cross demonstratively into West Berlin. The year before, under Soviet pressure, East German organisers had

[8] Frank Roggenbuch, *Das Berliner Grenzgängerproblem: Verflechtung und Systemkonkurrenz vor dem Mauerbau*, Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin 107 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

[9] Christopher Links, *Berliner Geisterbahnhöfe: The Berlin Ghost Stations: Les Gares fantômes* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1994).

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backed down from a provocative march into the Western sectors. Nonetheless, more than 200,000 FDJ members visited West Berlin over the 1950 Pentecost holiday weekend, many of them drawn by free rides on West Berlin public transport, free tickets to movie theatres, and invitations to cake and coffee from young Westerners encouraged by the office of West Berlin mayor Ernst Reuter. These diverse encounters emerged as a kind of 'all-Berlin carnival' (*Gesamtberliner Gaudium*) (Lemke, p. 145). The 1951 gathering saw an increase in competitive pressures on both sides. On August 15, three columns of FDJ members faced West Berlin police who beat them back with clubs and water cannons.

In the aftermath of this clash, political leaders on both sides claimed victory. The SED believed the East German youth remained firmly on its side even if, after the fact, it encouraged local leaders to speak to those young people who made the grave mistake of succumbing to the seductions of West Berlin. Rather than recognising the FDJ members' choices as an indication of the party's ideological or political weakness, the SED deployed the FDJ's experiences as evidence of the pernicious threats emanating from the West. Western politicians proclaimed the success of the Western political model, which continued to appeal to the youth of the GDR. The fact that free political expression could not include FDJ processions reflected the limits of that vision of freedom. More importantly, though, these leaders' celebration of ideological confrontation and even violence undervalued the coffee and cake model of interpersonal appeals that succeeded so well the year before.

Politics mattered, but Berliners and Germans in both East and West crafted their own political interpretations within and out of their shared experiences, especially on consumption. Lemke emphasises the fundamental importance of these mutual encounters during the years 1945–8: Berliners on both sides of the city used these moments to carry out a series of ongoing social and cultural comparisons. Time spent in West Berlin and among West Berliners helped to provide the interpretive framework in which East Berliners (and East Germans) endowed ordinary products, like butter, with a kind of 'magical' status when they ran short. The GDR's distinct experience of scarcity, going back at least to 1948, helped to explain East Berliners' 'everyday western orientation' (Lemke, p. 558). West Berlin's significance for those in the East did not depend on direct experience. Even after 1961, when West Berlin proved inaccessible for most East Germans, East Berlin came to function as a kind of ersatz (Lemke, p. 19), a city's whose cachet depended at least in part on East Germans' ability to imagine it as part of a (Western) whole. The popular re-imagination of the East German capital, in other words, was already under way before the *Wende* in 1989 brought about the wholesale renovation and reconstruction of that part of the city's often dilapidated but now highly desirable building stock.

Since life behind the Wall was never cut off entirely from the West, the East–West divide manifested itself beyond the Wall as well. Patrick Major explores the 'invisible frontiers of power' (Major, p. 4) found behind the border fortifications and checkpoints. Following Max Weber's distinction between power (*Macht*), rule (*Herrschaft*), and discipline – and adding a dose of Foucault to interrogate these disciplinary practices – Major relocates our understanding of the Wall away from

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the concrete and barbed wire on the physical border. Methodologically, he rejects an absolute divide between proponents of 'totalitarian' explanations of GDR society and historians of everyday life, who see struggles over East German power in the lives of 'ordinary' East Germans. Instead he offers an 'everyday history of high politics' (Major, p. 10) and suggests the economic and diplomatic crises that tend to define the history of East Germany are better understood as manifestations of a pervasive and ongoing experience of popular crisis.

In contrast to its English-language counterpart, which has no equivalent shorthand, the German language historiography generally declares the period following Nikita Khrushchev's November 1958 Berlin ultimatum to have been a 'Second Berlin Crisis'. It thus brings to a close an arc of cold war conflict that runs from the Berlin Blockade and airlift (the first crisis, 1948–9) through the building of the Wall. Whereas Wilke concludes his account with the end of this second crisis (when the cold war moved elsewhere), Major puts 1961 in the middle of his story, which continues even beyond the collapse of the GDR in 1989. Major's reworking of the relation both of the East Germans and of the East German state to the Wall depends on understanding it less as a response to a crisis situation than as part of a broader ruling system, whose discourses of power and legitimacy matter as much for understanding the Wall as do an analysis of the technical specifications of the fortified border.

Republikflucht, the legal definition of East Germans' exodus as 'flight from the Republic', anchored the SED state's explanations for the Wall. It first figured as an operational focus (*Schwerpunkt*) for the East German police in 1951. By the end of the decade authorities increasingly associated this problem with Berlin as intensified control measures along the German–German border limited access to other exit routes after 1952. West Berlin, however, remained accessible. On one level the construction of the Wall aimed to stem the tide of departures from East Germany – one in six inhabitants between 1945 and 1961 or, as Major rather pointedly describes, proportionally thirty times more than fled from the Third Reich. *Republikflucht* was a political term that encoded a popular betrayal of East German's foundational principles. But even among East German leadership circles, its ambiguity was apparent. Major cites a 1956 party discussion as concluding, 'The majority of those leaving the German Democratic Republic are doing so not because they disagree with our order, but above all for economic and other reasons. They are not fleeing but emigrating' (Major, p. 75). What these party functionaries failed to grasp, however, was how intertwined these explanations had become.

Major draws connections across the 1961 moment of wall-building from the perspective both of the evolving security apparatus and a developing popular challenge to state power. He sees important links between acts of border crossing (and, after 1961, the pursuit of the freedom to travel) and the growth of a civil society which culminated in the 'gentle revolution' (Major, p. 234) that produced the fall of the GDR. By 1989, he notes, as much as one quarter of the East German population had travelled to the West. For some, this opportunity represented the passage of time and the arrival of their *Reisemündigkeit*, their 'travel coming of age' (Major, p. 175), when senior citizens gained the chance to take occasional trips of up to thirty days.

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Others translated Party or other privileged status into trips to the West. If these travel opportunities represented a relaxation of border restrictions for some East Germans, the authorities also sought to tighten and even extend their control structures, for example, by dispatching MfS agents to comb Bulgarian beaches for East German vacationers who might try to abscond to Turkey. At the very least, the belief that such control measures were necessary reflected the extent to which ordinary East Germans did not approach the border only on the state's terms. They were agents of change, whose actions forced the state to respond.

These contradictory policies, at once permissive and obsessive, reflected divergent policing strategies that sought to manage the border, to hold the line (as the title to Major's fourth chapter hints). But the broad range of these expansive control measures underscores the spatial uncontainability of the border regime. The battle of East versus West never took place only on the line through or around Berlin or even along the German–German divide. East German efforts to contain its populace could be found far from the armoured side of the Wall; and the need to confront adventurous East Germans who sought to make a holiday end-run around the Wall represented only part of the security dilemma. MfS operatives and other security personnel regularly operated beyond the boundaries of SED authority, and that elsewhere was often located within the territory of the GDR.

In an effort to confront the limits of their 'insider' perspective, Party members were encouraged to step 'outside', to remove their Party badge (and thus assume party-political anonymity) in order to access 'real' opinions and conditions in the GDR better (Major, p. 16). This outside, this normal, real-world setting remained part of the ongoing and continually evolving conditions of ordinary social and cultural life that could, if successfully recognised and understood by the SED regime, allow authorities to pre-empt future crises. Major quite rightly posits a 'direct causal link' between the SED leaders' perception of crisis situations in 1953, when massive popular uprisings across the GDR were violently suppressed by Soviet military intervention and in 1961, when they feared a parallel popular threat to the GDR's existence (Major, p. 291). He argues that it is only in the spaces between that the mechanics of these crisis moments become comprehensible.[10]

The frontiers behind which the SED sought to contain popular power ultimately walled off the regime behind claims of an alternative normalcy (that was the whole point of *Abgrenzung* after all – the assertion of an East Germany altogether separate from that in the West). East Germans, however, imagined and put into practice a version of normal life that existed within and beyond this state-sponsored fantasy of a delimited East German normal. More than just a retreat into the niches of private life, this effort both negotiated and challenged the regime's claims to power.[11] East Germans' hopes for freedom of movement operated in terms that also sought to

[10] On this interplay more generally, see Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[11] Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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define, defend and battle for their life within a private sphere. Thinking about this sort of life 'within walls' points to another way in which what Major terms the 'human dimensions of the Wall' (Major, p. 8) serves as a partial explanation both for East Germany's durability and its eventual demise.

By the 1980s, the view of the Wall from the West had come to be dominated by graffiti that both defaced the East German boundary apparatus and made it safe for Western consumption. Whether anonymous or renowned, the artists who covered the side facing West Berlin helped to transform the Wall from a 1960s version rendered in black and white photographs depicting acts of violence to full-colour coffee table images of wall graffiti that cold war tourists could buy in West Berlin gift shops. Only three years before the Wall fell, in October 1986, the American artist Keith Haring travelled to Berlin to paint a section of the Wall in the colours of the East and West German flags: he covered a gold background with interlocking black and red figures. Haring called it a 'humanistic gesture . . . a political and subversive act – an attempt to psychologically destroy the wall by painting it'. His act garnered significant international attention at the time and continues to maintain a significant virtual presence on the Internet. Haring's work around the world had blurred the lines between graffiti, art and commercial product. His decision to stage a public performance of art production in Berlin can be seen most provocatively as an unintended or at least unacknowledged accusation directed at those in the West.

One young Berliner watching Haring paint proved sceptical of its importance: 'This is Valium, there's no provocation in it. In every third toilet in Kreuzberg you can see the same graffiti.'[12] For this connoisseur of graffiti, the problem with Haring's mural seemed to be its lack of explicitly political content. But in transforming the concrete structure into something no different than the wall in a Kreuzberg toilet, Haring effectively underscored how the Wall as a border regime depended on much more than the structures built in the aftermath of 13 August 1961. For those who chose to see, Haring implicitly made visible the Wall in the head, which remained a collaborative East–West production. What was most subversive about Haring's act was, in effect, his declaration that the Wall was (from the West, at least), a palimpsestic canvas. Within days, his mural began to vanish behind new layers of paint.

Just over one week after Haring painted the Wall, five friends, all originally from the GDR, sought to make the Wall visible by painting a white stripe at eye level along its entire western side. Irritated by their feeling that the Wall had been reduced to a tourist destination – whether for its graffiti or its fetish value as cold war terror site – they painted their line over whatever artwork they encountered, including Haring's mural. On 4 November 1986, the second day of their undertaking, East German border guards opened an access door through the Wall and seized one of the five.

[12] 'Keith Haring Paints Mural on Berlin Wall', *New York Times* (24 Oct. 1986), available at http://www.nytimes.com/1986/10/24/arts/keith-haring-paints-mural-on-berlin-wall.html (last visited 26 Apr. 2014).

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Sentenced to one year eight months in prison, he was released in June 1987, when the West German government purchased his freedom.[13]

This incident, coming on the heels of Haring's highly publicised painting of the Wall, challenges the smooth veneer of the Wall as a stable element in the late cold war. It highlights the porous nature of the Wall. The five artists had all crossed the border into West Berlin, either as émigrés or as expellees from the GDR. The return of one of the five to East Germany was possible only because of a literal hole in the Wall, a door behind which border guards waited and through which they dragged the unlucky target of their control measures. Their recognition of the 'threat' posed by the five artists developed during the previous day, when they observed and photographed them. That one of the five proved later to have been an informant for the MfS further complicates the oppositional lines. Their effort to disrupt the normal operation of the Wall, to make it visible, was in effect undermined by the normal operating procedures of the security regime that were only tangentially connected to the Wall itself and instead dependent on human participation: observation, investigation and denunciation.

Much more than just a question of visual acuity, these disputes over how or whether to make the Wall 'normal' depend on choices about how to integrate moments of violence into ongoing experiences of the Wall. Most often this violence is recognised in spatial terms, for example, in the crosses placed in West Berlin to commemorate the points where East Germans died trying to cross the border. But normalisation also depended on chronology, on the elision of ordinary and crisis time. If the East German state sought desperately to declare the Wall and its accompanying security apparatus nothing more than standard operating procedure (a point that Brown's analysis of the US–Mexico border might endorse albeit with a different critical target), West Berliners made the Wall normal by disconnecting it from their ordinary lives. They reduced it to a backdrop that had little association with the spaces through which they regularly moved (the ones in which they might, for example, draw on the wall of a toilet). Major's appeal for historians to use multiple 'timescales' (Major, p. 290) to decipher the significance of 13 August 1961 opens up much more than just historical context. It offers a fundamentally new discursive framework with which to engage with the relationships between people and the Wall, to think about how they experienced it. It gets us back to the Wall in the head as more than a metaphoric device.

Berlin and the Wall as a subject that explodes chronological constraints is most explicitly the focus of Janet Ward's book on borders, space and identity. This wide-ranging, thoughtful and often messy book explores Berlin as a 'bordered realm' not just in the period of the Wall. Ward's interdisciplinary version of a trans-bordered Berlin considers chronological as well as geographical divides, seeking to locate and move between plans for Berlin during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era as part of the necessary imaginative work to sort out the 're-suturing' of Berlin after

[13] Anne Hahn and Frank Willmann, eds, *Der weiße Strich: Vorgeschichte und Folgen einer Kunstaktion an der Berliner Mauer* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2011).

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1989 (Ward, p. xiv). This uneasy movement across time and space reflects a lingering uncertainty about Berlin's place, its 'groundlessness' in sociologist Georg Simmel's term. Further deploying Simmel's analysis, Ward sees in Berliners' efforts to navigate this tumultuous terrain evidence of the 'symbiotic *frisson* between connection and division' (Ward, p. 152). Over the course of Berlin's twentieth-century history that productive tension becomes visible; but it also leaves a mark.

Ward explores ways of looking at and seeing Berlin but also ways of modelling it and imagining its future. In trying to sort out a post-Wall Berlin, she posits an '*ex*-Wall (its remnants and consequences, its lines and projections, traces and stagings, in short: its inverse, imaginary status, like a photographic negative) that is still marking the city. This continuation of former geometries can be both positive and pathological in nature' (59). This declaration (at the beginning of the fourth of fifteen chapters) provides a point of entry into the traces that Ward follows, and one key to the complex interplay between the visual and discursive strategies with which she explores them.

According to Ward, after the Second World War Berlin represented a 'negative metropolis' (Ward, p. 279), a cold war counterpart to the iconic imperial capital, London. Instead of a central hub that projected a cultural and economic vision into the world, divided Berlin became the site within which the two competing cold war systems sought to inscribe themselves. Ward does not accept this as a simple process in which international cold war stories can be read in and on Berlin. Rather, she sees Berlin as a palimpsest on which multiple versions of the city need to be read with and against each other.

Very much in this vein, the book's strongest chapter focuses on Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, which first opened as an empty structure in the city's Kreuzberg district in 1999. In the preceding chapter Ward vigorously criticised Peter Eisenmann's Holocaust memorial, constructed just south of the Brandenburg Gate. She denounces it as a 'cement graveyard' that fails in its public history aims due to its 'defectively open-ended signification' (Ward, p. 250). In contrast, Ward celebrates the concept and execution of Libeskind's design as a successful engagement with the city's multiple histories. He submitted the plan as a 1988 entry to a competition to extend the Berlin Museum, so the initial building design preceded the fall of the Wall. While his plan has been celebrated for its revolutionary use of disrupted lines and inaccessible voids to engage the shattering experience of the Judeocide, Ward also emphasises the building's groundedness in Berlin. She points to Libeskind's sketches for the museum that integrated an awareness of a historical Jewish presence in the city inscribed on a version of the city's grid that also included the Wall. Thus the museum emerged out of a divided urban terrain even as it remained attentive to the history in which that terrain was produced.

Ward's is a very smart book, but nonetheless risks succumbing to the danger against which Major warns, of reducing the Wall to a metaphoric condition. Her nuanced discussion of the contrasts between historical groundlessness (Eisenmann's Holocaust monument) and sitedness (Libeskind's museum design) never quite make it all the way down to the street level Libeskind's sketches survey. Although Ward cites Simmel with regard to the ways that human presence and actions transform spaces into places,

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one is left to wonder: Where are the people? Where are the Berliners to make their and the city's histories?

By contrast, Edith Sheffer makes clear the extent to which people on both sides of the Iron Curtain helped to craft it. Her insightful account of the emerging divide between Sonneberg and Neustadt, two sister cities on either side of the East–West German border, has yet to be written for Berlin, but her investigation of the 'living wall' (Sheffer, p. 10) that developed on the German–German border during the 1950s suggests ways that Berlin's concrete wall might also be interrogated. Even while the German–German border remained 'physically porous', people shored it up in the course of their daily lives. Sheffer does explore dramatic state interventions made in the name of increased border security – Operation Vermin (*Aktion Ungeziefer*) in 1952 marked one such decisive effort by the East German state to consolidate its hold on the border area by moving politically suspect inhabitants away from border villages. As Sheffer explains them, however, such turning points make sense only within a process of wall construction in which ordinary Germans on both sides of the border played ongoing roles.

Like the Berlin Wall, the border between Sonneberg and Neustadt experienced its share of dramatic, violent moments. More than a decade before Peter Fechter slowly died at the base of the Wall, East German border guards shot Erich Sperschneider in 1951 and left him to bleed to death in a field on the border near Sonneberg and Neustadt. His funeral, attended by 600 local people from both sides of the divide, occasioned the pastor to decry the shooting as a 'crime against humanity' (Sheffer, p. 86). This singular act of explosive violence seemed to set the stage for an evolving technology of violent control, the mines and automatic shooting devices that accompanied the border's militarisation, but the joint effort to process that violence hints at an alternative trajectory of evolving border controls, one in which the people take centre stage.

In June 1952 Operation Vermin depended on the participation of local inhabitants, a fact that reflected the weakness of the central state, even as the authorities' not easily deciphered targeting of 'unreliable elements' made that state seem strong. Popular memories of the deportations retain a faulty sense of villagers' futile resistance in the face of overwhelming state power. But the myth of that 'heroic' action – heroic because it posits small individuals acting courageously in the face of power descending relentlessly from on high – neglects the degree to which local resistance succeeded in allowing some borderland inhabitants to forego deportations – more than 90% of the targets in some localised areas. After 1961, the situation had changed. The 'coercive border was firmly in place. Its existence was non-negotiable' (Sheffer, p. 167). But it still depended in large measure on popular participation, whether in the form of denunciations of planned escapes or reports of any unusual activities in the border zone. 1961 thus represented an intensification of control measures, not a radical break from what had come before.

Although the militarisation of the German–German border during the 1960s and 1970s constrained East German exit possibilities, the border remained passable, especially for those with local, insider knowledge. Sheffer describes how even into

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the 1980s, local border crossing practices undermined parallel Eastern and Western claims of an impermeable Iron Curtain. In 1982, for example, one twenty-one year old crossed the border twenty-three times over a six-month period, his exploits detected only after he was arrested in West Germany for selling border mines as souvenirs. Sheffer sees the existence of this sort of 'impetuous' crossing as a corollary to the regime's increasingly brutal control measures, but neither the exceptional wall jumpers nor violent deaths in the course of failed crossing attempts represent the dominant narrative of life on the border, a history in which local inhabitants very successfully integrated the border and its restrictions into their daily lives.

In 1961 when the East Germans tightened the security systems along the border between Sonneberg and Neustadt, West German border guards restrained protesters throwing stones and berating GDR border soldiers. Sheffer explains their action as part of a larger effort to avoid 'incidents' (171). More than anything, this concept of incident avoidance reflects the shared attitude with which East and West Germans approached the Wall. A lack of newsworthy events served both sides, facilitating their efforts to restrict the Wall and its residual violence to a metaphorical borderland, set apart from the practices and experiences of everyday life. On the one hand, incidents on the border – violent or otherwise – never vanished from newspaper and media reports. On the other, the term incident conceals the degree to which these happenings, too, became regular, defining, pieces of the Wall's normal existence. Even before they built the Wall, East German police compiled regular 'incident reports' that underscored how these repeated and in a way ordinary encounters and transgressions of the border regime effectively constituted it.[14] In other words, a close examination of the Berlin Wall and its history serves particularly to highlight the processes by which violence can be routinised, not only by states, but by their citizens as well.

Gyanendra Pandey suggests that the routinisation of violence occurs not only in 'spectacular and brutal acts of aggression, nor yet in the mundane, banal, everyday exercise of power' but 'also in the construction and naturalisation of particular categories of thought, in history and in politics'.[15] In assessing efforts to process the history and memory of the Berlin Wall, Pertti Ahonen concludes his book with an especially fruitful discussion of the various commemorations and of memorial construction in Berlin since 1990. The city's official Wall memorial site at the Bernauer Strasse emerged only after protracted wrangling and disputes not only between former Easterners and Westerners but also among various politicians and even neighbours to the proposed site. The main portion of the memorial eventually incorporated a seventy-metre portion of the rebuilt border installations comprising the eastern hinterland barrier, the death strip between, and the western facing wall. Initially, visitors could only gaze into the exclusion zone by means of small holes in

[14] Paul Steege, 'Ordinary Violence on an Extraordinary Stage: Incidents on the Sector Border in Postwar Berlin', in Austin Sarat, Carleen R. Basler, and Thomas L. Dumm, eds, *Performances of Violence* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 140–63.

[15] Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 15.

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the hinterland barrier, a corrective, as Ahonen notes, to the standard dominance of Western views of the Wall. As the memorial expanded, however, the city added a new chapel on the former site of the Church of the Reconciliation and eventually a viewing platform on the Western side. By recreating and again privileging that Western gaze, city officials made it safe to physically and metaphorically look down on the Wall, or at least this recreated version of it.

Those who want to 'save' the East Side gallery petitioned Berlin's mayor on the basis of a claim to historical authenticity that remains a fiction. Wolfgang Kaschuba, however, makes a more compelling argument when he explains that ongoing dispute as a moral contest about who the city belongs to.[16] His perspective rightly brings people back into the story and also suggests that the Wall and its history remain part of Berlin and its dynamic and highly political 'memory-and-erasure game' (Ward, p. 240). After all, the Wall was always only one part of that larger process of assembling and reassembling the fragments of past Berlins into an imagined if never fully realised future.

[16] Wolfgang Kaschuba, 'Die East Side Gallery ist ein moralisches Projekt', *Zeit Online* (19 Mar. 2013), available at http://www.zeit.de/kultur/kunst/2013-03/east-side-gallery-moralisches-projekt-wolfgang-kaschuba (last visited 26 Apr. 2014).

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