



Jennifer Jordan. *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 304 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5276-3; \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-5277-0.

Reviewed by Eric Anderson (Department of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University)

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How Memorials Happen

The location of Berlin's new Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, chosen by the Berlin Senate in June 1992, was, according to Jennifer Jordan, in some ways an unlikely choice. Although adjacent to the former site of Hitler's Reichskanzlei, the five-acre memorial plot "has no direct, perceptible connection to the Nazi past," she writes (p. 123), and thus lacks the "authenticity" of place that is frequently a central component of memorials. Moreover, the memorial is situated in immediate proximity to the Potsdamer Platz, one of the city's most desirable commercial real estate districts, prompting the question: "Why is it that this lot was not also a sea of cranes and of slowly rising office buildings, shopping arcades, movie theaters, casinos, and high-end apartments?" (pp. 120-121). This particular site would seem to be neither the most resonant nor the most affordable. Yet while much about the project has been hotly debated, its location has remained largely uncontroversial.

Jordan's explanation hinges on the straightforward facts that the land was vacant, owned by the federal government, and zoned for low-density diplomatic construction, making it unavailable for commercial uses. Such practical issues of development are central to the stories of a number of Berlin memorials that she tells in this book. Certainly hers is not a typical way of examining Germany's relationship to the Nazi past and the role played by historical memory in the remaking of Berlin as the capital. The literature on these subjects, which is extensive, has tended to focus on how politics shape public remembering, the artistic strategies used to memorialize,

and the ways that memorials can serve as means for a group to come to terms with, put to rest, or remain in conflict with its history.[1]

It is Jordan's aim, however, to find new ways of examining Berlin's much-discussed memorial landscape and to formulate "a new theory of the production of urban memorial space" (p. 17). Thus she deliberately leaves aside more ephemeral considerations of the German national consciousness and the psychology of remembrance. Instead, she focuses on what makes a memorial happen, considering factors such as the availability of land, the promotional actions of a "memorial entrepreneur," and the state of public opinion. Jordan is concerned more with the how than the why of Berlin's memorials.

The book is made up of a series of case studies. All address memorials to events of the Nazi era. Some of these are highly visible projects begun since reunification, such as the Topographie des Terrors outdoor museum and the Bebelplatz book-burning memorial. Others are much smaller, relatively unknown memorials, most of them initiated in the 1980s by the East German government. These include a cemetery in the outlying district of Marzahn in which monuments to Nazi victims and resisters are scattered among their graves; a small figural sculpture and plaque on the Grosse Hamburger Strasse in the center of the city, which commemorates a Nazi deportation facility; another centrally located sculptural group on the Rosenstrasse marking a site on which

wives of imprisoned Jewish men staged a protest in 1943; and the Herbert Baum Gedenkstein in the Lustgarten, a bronze cube dedicated to a Communist group executed for disrupting a Nazi demonstration there. Through these and other case studies, the reader learns of the real estate dynamics of the areas in which the memorials are situated; of development projects that threatened their realization, and negotiations among government officials over land-use questions that ultimately made them possible; of efforts on the part of student groups, artists, writers, and politicians to raise awareness about unmemorialized sites that resulted in public embrace of new projects; and of debates over the effectiveness of particular memorial forms, often surrounding GDR-era memorials deemed politically or artistically outmoded.

In addition to her inquiry into the practical matters of memorial building, another distinguishing feature of Jordan's approach is her interest in the absence of memorials. "To understand the social origins of memorial space," she writes, "it is necessary to compare that which is forgotten (at least officially) with that which is remembered" (p. 8). To this end, she devotes a chapter to categories of places she sees as undermemorialized: former synagogues, Nazi torture and detention sites, and forced-labor camps. Despite ongoing efforts to identify such sites, only a small fraction have been marked, and often only discreetly. Her analysis of why this is so again emphasizes practical issues. She cites the lack of archival evidence pinpointing locations, the creeping tide of development that continues to erase remaining traces, and the existence of many sites on inaccessible private land.

The book is commendable in several regards: for its attempt to find new ways of engaging with the popular subject of German memory and for its treatment of lesser-known Berlin memorials, of which even readers who have spent considerable time in the city may not have been aware. Ultimately, however, the book is somewhat disappointing due in part to uneven writing and

the shallow depth of the material it treats. While larger arguments are stated forcefully and clearly, analysis of individual monuments often does not push far enough beyond general descriptions of the objects and their inception. The author tends to rely heavily on long quotations from secondary literature, allowing others' observations to suffice in places where the reader is looking for original assessments and new documents. The flow of the book's narrative is frequently interrupted by unnecessary reiterations of its general theses, which distract from more specific and nuanced arguments that might otherwise have been developed.

The book's limitations are also inherent in its approach. The strict emphasis that the author places on the practical issues of memorial building produces an incomplete picture of her subject. For example, to suggest that hundreds of Nazi torture sites remain unmemorialized due primarily to obstacles of identification and access ignores the psychological impulses behind acts of forgetting. Choosing what to remember and what not to remember involves many other considerations. Is there an imperative to mark all sites of atrocity? Or is there an appropriate balance to be struck between remembering and forgetting? Can too many memorials result in a fatigue that lessens their impact? Jordan's attention to previously deemphasized questions of land use, development, and bureaucratic processes is a valid line of inquiry, yet can explain only so much about the place of memorials in society. Readers will have to turn elsewhere for discussion of many pressing questions not raised here.

Note

[1]. See, for example, Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

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