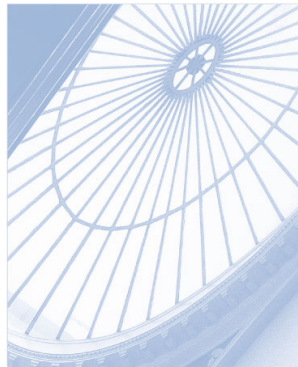


Zitierhinweis

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JANET WARD, *Post-Wall Berlin: Borders, Space and Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xix + 405 pp. ISBN 978 0 230 27657 4. £65.00

The Berlin Wall came down in 1989, but the wall in people's heads is still standing. Janet Ward's new book, *Post-Wall Berlin: Borders, Space and Identity*, can be reduced to this well-worn commonplace, but the American historian is less interested in writing a sentimental lament for a German normality that has still not been found, than in showing that borders are constitutive in the modern and post-modern world. 'Border-making will continue in a post-Wall era because it is, quite simply, a psychological necessity' (p. 18). Inspired by the spatial turn, Ward emphasizes the permanent construction and deconstruction of borders in general, and illustrates this by reference to the specific significance of border-making and border-breaking taking the example of Berlin. The main title, *Post-Wall Berlin*, refers not only to the book's temporal focus, but also has a methodological aspect, in the sense of post-modern theory-building, that aims to make the spatial dimensions of our thinking visible. Finally, in writing this determinedly inter-disciplinary book, Ward's aim is also to overcome the borders between the academic disciplines that deal with the city.

As the author explains in the first part of the book, Berlin has always been a frontier city, a place where borders possess a highly mobilizing and socially shaping force. In transferring Jackson Turner's classic concept of the frontier from the American West to the German East, Ward emphasizes the nature of borders as process. Expansion and migration are therefore an important key to understanding Berlin. Despite her theoretical loans from the post-modern spatial turn, Ward does not close the door to geo-political arguments and problematizes Berlin's role as a turntable between East and West. Since 1989–90, to be sure, the city has exercised this function less in economic terms than in respect of the newly acquired mobility and distinct presence of migrants from Eastern Europe. The fact that this mobility is not unlimited and ends at ever more strongly guarded borders on the new outer limits of Fortress Europe is among Ward's most noteworthy political arguments.

Borders thus continue to exist today, especially after the events of 9/11 which, in many respects, resulted in a strengthening of border regimes and practices of exclusion. Conversely, Ward emphasizes in

the second part of the book, which deals specifically with the Berlin Wall and its afterlives, that all borders are permeable and are shaped, used, and appropriated by the agency of the actors. This applies even to a structure as strongly secured as the Berlin Wall, which she characterizes as a permeable membrane. The Wall also served as an identity resource and a symbolic zipper, separating the two parts while holding them together. The rapid dismantling of the Berlin Wall, however, deprived the Germans of an important anchor for the communicative memory of Germany's division. Ward thus suggests that the 'resurrection' of the Berlin Wall in recent years not only fulfils the expectations of tourists, but is also a reaction to the unsatisfied need for identity felt by Berliners on both sides of the city.¹ Ward does not restrain her criticism of Berlin politics which, she claims, have proved incapable of adequately preserving the Wall as a site of memory as well as the many alternative 'interim uses' of the former death strip.

Ward is also largely critical of Berlin city planning in the 1990s. In the third part of the book, entitled 'German Geomancy: Power and Planning in Berlin', she emphasizes continuities with Albert Speer's megalomaniac planning for 'Germania', but also the contrast between Berlin municipal building surveyor Martin Wagner's (1926–33) forward-looking planning for a world city, and the backward-looking reconstruction undertaken under the aegis of Berlin's building director Hans Stimmann (1991–6 and 1999–2006). The latter was oriented strictly by the historical city plan and traditional local building styles, while the GDR's architectural heritage was pulled down to make way for it. While this commonly heard criticism is understandable, Ward here shows herself to be susceptible to the widespread idealization of Berlin in the 1920s, during the Weimar Republic. On the other hand there is no mention of the basis of Berlin's city development laid down in the 1862 Hobrecht Plan, whose effects are visible to the present day, or of internal and external segregation in the nineteenth-century tenement town. Yet a reflection on the drawing of social boundaries and reactions to it seen in attempts to direct town planning and politics in the twentieth century would have provided a worthwhile longitudinal perspective in a historical and spatial

¹ A similar argument can be found in Hope M. Harrison, 'The Demise and Resurrection of the Berlin Wall: German Debates about the Wall as a Site of Memory', in Birgit Hofmann (ed.), *Diktaturüberwindung in Europa: Neue nationale und transnationale Perspektiven* (Heidelberg, 2010), 195–209.

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study of Berlin, especially as some of the old socio-spatial patterns have been revived in reunified Berlin.²

Ward also argues critically in the fourth part of her study, which looks at the modern memorial architecture in Berlin. In her view, Peter Eisenman's memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe is too large, oversized, and simply old fashioned by comparison with other counter monuments which represent non-traditional, non-state-centred memory. The Berlin Holocaust Memorial, built on contaminated bunker ground and concealed Wall land, is as Ward suggests a wound on the wound and, all in all, a 'tragic comedy of errors' (p. 253). That the memorial does not permit visitors to reflect, and that it is used merely as a 'playground of memory' remain mere assertions, like much in Ward's polarizing arguments. Not Eisenman's field of concrete blocks, she suggests, but Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum is the true Holocaust Memorial in Berlin because it relates to its own location more critically, and also points to Jewish life before and after the Holocaust.

In the last section of the book, Ward discusses the reunited capital's dreams of world city status. She tells the story of a grandiose failure, which resulted in acres of office space standing empty, and 62 billion euros of debt. She describes Berlin's city development in the 1990s as a case of 'worst practice urban governance' (p. 287). The historian from Las Vegas, Colorado, labels the New Berlin 'Las Vegas on the Spree', where image is all. The new real estates on Potsdamer Platz, in particular, she sees as standing for the Americanization of the city. Ward describes the re-capitalization of Berlin in a double sense: on the one hand, as a sell-out in the name of democratic, American freedom; on the other, as a failed attempt on the part of Berlin as a new old capital to keep up with other world cities in the global competition. For this reason she demonstrates all the 'castles in the air' dating from the post-*Wende* period that have burst like balloons. And, finally, she predicts a similar fate for Berlin's royal palace, soon to be re-built as the Humboldt Forum.

On the whole, the breadth of publications concerning 'post-Wall Berlin' on which Ward's book draws is impressive. She quotes numerous architects, film makers, and writers as commentators on

² See Hartmut Häußermann and Andreas Kapphahn, *Berlin: Von der geteilten zur gespaltenen Stadt? Sozialräumlicher Wandel seit 1990* (Opladen, 2000).

the most recent developments in Berlin. But the fact that she repeatedly draws on general reflections of pioneers of the spatial turn, such as Henri Lefebvre and Edward W. Soja, as prophetic forecasts for developments in Berlin, and then uses examples from Berlin to exemplify their theories, gives rise to a circular argument. In general, Ward is interested mainly in the great names of intellectual history from Aristotle to Ernst Bloch, and draws almost exclusively on the work of intellectual critics of the New Berlin. By contrast, we hear little about the actual urban actors, although their agency is repeatedly invoked. The same also applies, ultimately, to the city's spatial structures, which receive uneven treatment in the different chapters. This may be because the individual parts of the book, on the whole, seem quite disparate, sometimes resembling a loose collection of essays. Ward's enjoyment in expressing her opinions is both the strength and the weakness of the book. Thus *Post-Wall Berlin* is ultimately less a sober historiographical analysis written from a distanced perspective than a polemic on the numerous actual or assumed failures of Berlin's development since the *Wende*. The author shows herself to be well informed and always up to date with the most recent, even daily, developments in the debate. The book could thus well be read as a critical travel guide to the New Berlin.

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