

Research Proposal – 2019-2020 Zvi Yavetz & Thomas Arnold Fellowship

Imagining Germany: Spatial Politics of Community in the Twentieth Century

I. Project Description

Throughout the twentieth century, Germans took to the streets. In the prelude to war's outbreak in late July and early August 1914, anxious Berliners crowded along the city's wide boulevards to await the latest news. It was during these intense days that Kaiser Wilhelm II delivered his famous address saying he no longer recognized political parties but only "German brothers." Indeed, some historians pin this moment as the birth of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) in Germany. From its inception, Germany's national community has always had a spatial component shaped by visible displays of belonging. This national community underwent many transformations as Germany evolved from an imperial state to a democracy, a fascist state, a divided nation, and once again, to a united democratic republic. While this collective body was certainly largely "racially" defined from 1933–45, its boundaries prior to and following this era remain more obscure, and waves of immigrants and guest workers in the postwar era prompted new iterations of the national community. While studies of German nationalism in the past have centered on questions of ethnicity, language, and culture, my project examines the unexplored spatial dimensions of the German national community as it evolved in the twentieth century.

There are several main questions I pose in this study: How did German governments, democratic and authoritarian, utilize space to assert power and remake the German national community? How did German citizens abet or hinder political appropriations of space? And how did "ordinary Germans" themselves utilize space to refashion political and social norms? I maintain that Germany and its national community were fashioned in space and through spatial practices in the twentieth century. I demonstrate how, through their interactions with their everyday surroundings, Germans perpetually transformed the "imagined community" of each era into a dynamic entity, defined by who had a right to make claims to German spaces and who did not.¹

I examine these transformations through five main lenses of spatial politics in this project. First, I examine street politics and collective action in twentieth-century Germany as citizens utilized public spaces for explicitly political purposes to make demands of the state. Second, I investigate "architectures of power" and urban planning in Germany through which state authorities sought to mold urban spaces to fit their political views. Third, I examine visual culture

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

and the ways in which propaganda and advertising reshaped the nation. Fourth, I analyze how practices of memorialization in stone evolved in Germany's democratic and totalitarian states. Finally, I illuminate the continuities of "deviant spaces" throughout the twentieth century as individuals who fell outside the national community carved out and maintained access to urban spaces.

II. Methodology and Historiography

This project bridges the divides between intellectual, cultural, and social history and actively engages urban theory, human geography, architecture, visual and material culture, and memory studies. Crucially, such an endeavor requires a serious consideration of the ductile and political nature of space, for Germans did not view space as static but rather as imbued with meanings that were representative of specific people and ideas. In his 1974 opus, *The Production of Space*, French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre first articulated the idea of space as a "social construct." Lefebvre explored both the material and social aspects of space: each mode of production creates a physical space (to move capital quickly) and fosters social space (to differentiate and consolidate class identities) most conducive to perpetuating that mode of production.² Subsequent scholarship utilizing Lefebvre focused almost exclusively on the material dimensions of the built environment within a Marxist framework, defining capitalism as the driving force of spatial changes while leaving the social dimension underexplored.³ Urban studies of Germany too have stressed capitalism, consumerism, and advertising.⁴ These narratives effectively minimized the role of politics in space, relegating its importance secondary to capital.⁵

Recent studies pioneered by human geographers emphasize the multivalent nature of space, underscoring that spaces and our interactions with them are political. They argue that places are both "material and mental and cannot be reduced to either."⁶ Through our interactions with *places* (physical sites or structures, such as buildings, streets, squares, parks, and fields), we transform them into *spaces* (those same structures, but with their accompanying symbolic, social, and

² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 30-46.

³ See, e.g., Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Molly Loberg, *The Struggle for the Streets of Berlin: Politics, Consumption, and Urban Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵ Doreen Massey first made this important critique of Harvey's and Soja's work, emphasizing the need to incorporate race and gender in our spatial analyses. See Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁶ Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 13.

political capital).⁷ Our surroundings are neither static nor neutral but are rather imbued with mutable meanings and possess great symbolic capital which can motivate action, appropriation, and resistance. Political powers seek to shape spaces to suit their own needs, while individuals can abet or subvert political appropriations of space.⁸ In my examination of space in twentieth-century Germany, I seek to reinsert the political and ideological dimensions back into space to explore how acts of “everyday urbanism”—individuals’ interactions with their everyday surroundings—made and remade the German national community throughout the twentieth century.⁹

This interdisciplinary approach allows me to problematize standard accounts of the public sphere in the modern era. In the nineteenth century, bourgeois Germans successfully forged a critical public sphere that helped them mediate between society and state.¹⁰ Yet traditional narratives of the public sphere tend to downplay just how radically minority groups transformed the public sphere in the early twentieth century, as women, the organized working class, Jews, and homosexuals began to make claims on the state. These groups garnered political power by projecting their physical and symbolic presence into public spaces. Much like the middle class had utilized salons and coffee houses, minority and oppressed groups met in cafes and pubs. These spaces allowed them to build and strengthen social ties amongst themselves and to make collective political demands from the state. Political organizations held mass demonstrations, often in provocative places, to challenge the bourgeois status quo and physically occupy the streets.¹¹ These groups even began making their mark through architecture, erecting or moving into grand institutes, clubhouses, trade union buildings, party headquarters, and synagogues.¹² Between 1933–

⁷ Human geographers invert these definitions. They define space as abstract and place as something familiar and imbued with meaning and value. Space to them is movement, whereas place is “a pause in movement.” See Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 5.

⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Michel de Certeau’s theories on the power dynamics integral to space and spatial practices are instructive here. The intended uses of space as promoted by authorities such as government officials, city planners, architects (*strategies*), often bear little resemblance to how these representations are received by ordinary users. These users often challenge official representations via their interactions with and appropriation of these spaces (*tactics*).

⁹ Camilo D. Trumper, *Ephemeral Histories: Public Art, Politics, and the Struggle for the Streets in Chile* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 7. My work here is informed by Camilo D. Trumper’s excellent study of everyday urbanism in Chile in which he convincingly shows how both “[e]xperts’ infrastructures and plans and laypeople’s mundane actions, the formal and the informal, were part of the same fluid process by which cities and social relations were made and remade together.”

¹⁰ The standard account remains: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

¹¹ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 167. See also Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹² See, e.g. Despina Stratigakos, *A Women's Berlin: Building the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Saskia Coenen Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

45, the German public sphere reverted to its acclamatory function of pre-modern times and largely served as a sounding board for Nazi ideology.¹³ Following World War II, West Germans had to relearn the power of collective action in service of democracy in seminal moments like the 1960s student protests and during anti-nuclear demonstrations in the 1970s and 1980s, while East Germans had to navigate vastly different spatial politics under the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) regime. The public sphere in Germany became less autocratic and more democratic as it accommodated dissident and minority groups in public spaces throughout the twentieth century.

My examination of embodied meaning and memory also allows me to contribute to a larger body of work that examines the politics of memory and the built environment in Germany.¹⁴ These studies have primarily concentrated on the post-1945 period, and I build on them by showing how memory served important political functions throughout the entire twentieth century. Many of these studies largely depict a unidirectional appropriation of space, wherein elites attempt to dictate the official meanings imbued within architecture and monumental buildings. I argue that memories and meanings are not merely manipulated by officials but that previously-imbued meanings themselves shaped the policy decisions of German officials regarding the built environment in the twentieth century. Thus, in analyzing official and popular contestations of space, my study explores memory's agency in driving individual actions and in shaping social relations.¹⁵

Taking a long-view of the twentieth century, I also seek to challenge 1945 as a historical rupture and instead emphasize continuities in spatial practices across this divide.¹⁶ Political regimes fell in rapid succession throughout the century, but in each era, political elites employed practiced means of shoring up power—via memorialization and rituals, the deployment of violence to quell dissident movements, and the policing of “deviant spaces.” Several excellent cultural histories have utilized Walter Benjamin's theory of the aestheticization of politics to illuminate how fascist regimes won supporters by reinfusing spectacle, myths, rituals, and ceremonies into modern political life.¹⁷ Yet few scholars have explicitly examined the role urban spaces themselves played

¹³ Peter Longerich conceives of the Nazi public sphere in such a manner. See Peter Longerich, *Davon haben wir nichts gewusst! Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006), 24.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche have challenged historians to move beyond studying how memory merely reflects society and instead to explore how memory also can drive action and serve as an impetus of change. See Alon Confino, and Peter Fritzsche, eds., *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 2, 4.

¹⁶ For one account that asserts a sharp break in 1945, see Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

¹⁷ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Wenke Nitz, *Führer und Duce: Politische Machtinszenierungen im*

in this process nor the role of spectacle in non-fascist states. Another important continuity to investigate regards the willingness of German governments, authoritarian and democratic alike, to employ violence to quell dissident spatial practices in the public sphere.¹⁸ Finally, despite several excellent period studies of homosexual and other nonconformist spaces in German cities, no one has examined continuities in such deviant uses of spaces in the twentieth century.¹⁹ This long-view historical investigation will render patterns and breaks across the twentieth century discernible.²⁰

III. Research Plans

For my research aims, Tel Aviv University would be an ideal academic home. I have conducted preliminary research for this project in the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde and in the Landesarchiv Berlin. The Sourasky Central Library and Wiener Library at Tel Aviv University, in addition to the National Library of Israel, hold much of the literature that I need to consult in order to complete the research for this project. By the end of my year as a postdoctoral fellow, I will submit an article for publication and will begin work on the larger book manuscript. Throughout my tenure as a postdoctoral fellow, I will also seek out colloquia and conferences where I can present and receive feedback on my work. I organized and submitted a panel proposal of international scholars entitled “Racialized Spaces: Imagining the Home during and after the Holocaust” for the November 2019 “Lesson & Legacies” Conference in Munich, and I am eager to continue developing similar spatially-informed historical investigations with my colleagues. I believe that my diverse research interests will allow me to contribute unique perspectives and new avenues for interdisciplinary research at the Zvi Yavetz School of History. I would warmly welcome the opportunity to work with other postdoctoral fellows and scholars on collaborative research projects and in organizing conferences and events. I believe that I am perfectly situated for this fellowship, and I would be honored to receive support from the Zvi Yavetz School of Historical Studies in the form of a Zvi Yavetz or Thomas Arnold postdoctoral fellowship.

nationalsozialistischen Deutschland und im faschistischen Italien, ed. Christof Dipper, Oliver Janz, Sven Reichardt, Wolfgang Schieder, Petra Terhoeven, *Italien in der Moderne* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2013).

¹⁸ For one study of state violence in Weimar, see Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁹ See, e.g., David James Prickett, “Defining Identity via Homosexual Spaces: Locating the Male Homosexual in Weimar Berlin,” *Women in German Yearbook* 21 (2005); Jennifer V. Evans, *Life among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁰ Guildi and Armitage underscore the importance of revisiting *longue durée* approaches to history to help us better understand the links that connect the past and future. See Jo Guldi, and David Armitage, ed. *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.