H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Clarke, Renate Rechtien, eds. *The Politics of Place in Post-War Germany: Essays in Literary Criticism.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009. v + 291 pp. $119.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7734-4736-3.

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Published on H-German (November, 2010)
Commissioned by Benita Blessing

Space and Place in Postwar Germany

On the cover of *The Politics of Place*, a photograph of a prefabricated building in Leipzig in 2007 serves as a reminder of the aesthetic uniformity that characterized the intersection between politics and place in the construction of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Happily, the volume of essays that follows, based on a 2005 symposium at the University of Cambridge, is remarkable for its diversity and eclecticism. The conference was originally conceived as an investigation into the work of author Angela Krauß, but expanded into a wide-ranging consideration of the function of place in postwar German writing. Thoroughly embedded in literary texts, the volume explores responses to location in Kraus, Hanns-Josef Ortheil, W. G. Sebald, Birgit Vanderbeke, Wolfgang Koeppen, Günter Grass, Ingeborg Bachmann, Franz Fühmann, Günter de Bruyn, Gert Neumann, Helga Schütz, and Christa Wolf.

In his introduction, David Clarke provides a useful summary of the emergence of a new emphasis on space in the humanities and social sciences, which he allies with postcolonial investigations of the relations between culture, geography, and ideology. A subtle analysis of how spatial theorists define place and space precedes a consideration of place in literature and reference to key events in the postwar German political context. A complementary genealogy of German literature of place is supplied in a later chapter by Thomas Möbius. The latter's survey of the tradition of landscape imagery in GDR literature ranges far beyond the volume's postwar parameters to provide a welcome study of the evolution of landscape representation in German poetry. Two essays with a Berlin focus by Simon Ward and Andrew Webber anchor the volume's deliberations on place, while Berlin is also integral to Dennis Tate's reflections on Günter de Bruyn's ambivalent attitude to the city. Configurations of German places in the contemporary era extend beyond the national terrain in a number of instances. These include the East End of London and representations of Theresienstadt in Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001); Vanderbeke's presentation of German migrant experience in the south of France; and Fühmann's textual embodiment of Budapest. Considering the heterogeneous nature of the volume, the recurrence of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia as a touchstone for many of these essays is intriguing, as Karen Seago acknowledges in her foreword. As Foucault's spatial theories have inspired a range of interpretations in this volume, it may be useful to foreground this review with the following definition of heterotopia from his 1967 essay "Of Other Spaces," in which the idea of a real location as a combination of incongruous spaces appears particularly resonant with a focus on the literary representation of place: "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."[1]

Helmut Schmitz explores the traumatic effects of the Second World War on his own family in his autobiographical novels *Hedge* (*Hecke*, 1983) and *Farewell to the Combatants* (*Abschied von den Kriegsteilnehmern*, 1992). The impact of war on the landscape is evident: society is diminished both by the trauma of war and the haste of reconstruction. In *Farewell to the Combatants,* Germany is a collection of bombed and reassembled villages, a manic patriarchal reconstruction of a devastated world. Loss of home is experienced as expulsion from a regional Rhineland terrain, reflecting a postwar desire for peace and security. Here Schmitz finds similarities between *Farewell to the Combatants* and the opening episode of Edgar Reitz's 1984 TV series *Heimat* in which the modernity of war invades an ordered agricultural world.

Dora Osborne interprets Sebald's *Austerlitz* through Foucault's focus on space as a form of relation and Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995), in which the desire to know about the past threatens to consume its

traces. Applying Foucault's heterotopia to depict spaces at once within and outside reality, she analyzes a network of spaces in *Austerlitz* such as the incompatibility of the depiction of Theresienstadt as ghetto, spa resort, and film. Austerlitz's walk through the East End of London connects the Bedlam asylum in London with Theresienstadt by spatial associations linking asylum, cinema, and railway. Later the protagonist's quest for his mother leads to a viewing of a video of the Theresienstadt ghetto in the Imperial War Museum. Austerlitz wants to believe he sees her in the film but she is what Osborne terms "a lost object of narrative desire": accessing the space of the Holocaust is seen as continually subject to deviation and redirection (p. 63).

Emily Jeremiah explores gender and migration from Germany in the fictional work of Birgit Vanderbeke. Born in the GDR, Vanderbeke moved to West Germany when she was five and now lives in the south of France, a migratory trajectory which is reflected in her novella *I Spy with My Little Eye* (*Ich sehe was, was du nicht siest,* 1997). Germans living in the south of France find that migration does not erase the old self and place of origin; that is, Germany is subject to recurrent critique and comparison, urban isolation contrasting with French rural community. Although the host culture is never fully accessible to the outsider, the narrative depicts a slow growth towards community. The south of France is again the location for Vanderbeke's more recent novella *The Strange Career of Mrs. Choi* (*Der sonderbare Karriere der Frau Choi*, 2007). A Korean woman, Mrs. Choi, arrives in a village and opens a restaurant which serves to regenerate a place defined by corruption and ignorance. The narrator's occasional address to a German male constructs the reader as a skeptic towards Mrs. Choi but reinforces a critique of male authority. Jeremiah sees the novella as confirming the importance of the local within a globalized world and as promoting a transnational feminist community through surprising encounters with the unfamiliar.

Simon Ward highlights how recent attention to sites of memory in Berlin has not been matched by study of how Berlin memory is mediated. His focus is on an exceptional and little-known figure: Wolfgang Koeppen, a writer whose postwar texts are informed by memories of the Weimar Berlin of the 1920s and 1930s. "A Coffeehouse" ("Ein Kaffeehaus," 1965) is a short memoir that reconstructs the history of the site of the Romanisches Café close to the Gedächtniskirche in West Berlin. "Tiergarten" (1965) depicts the city's formation over the centuries. Ward skillfully teases out the political references and literary allusions in a 1979 text, "Bless Our Exit, Our Entrance Also Bless" ("Unsern Ausgang segne, unsern Eingang gleichermaßen"), in which a journey by the overhead S-Bahn into the East Berlin of the GDR shifts in and out of the past.

Andrew Webber explores the haunted terrain of Berlin through a range of textual connections and associations to which a Freudian emphasis on displacement and the unconscious is central. Relating postwar and post-unification perspectives to nineteenth-century Berlin, Webber reads Fontane as a point of entry into the case history of the modern city. Playing with the saying that truth comes out on the pitch or "Platz," an Elfriede Jelinek poem becomes a meditation on the repression of truth underneath. Webber follows the logic of this insistence on the subterranean to Micha Ullman's underground memorial on Bebelplatz at the site of the Nazi book-burning. The trope of Berlin as an open field in Grass's *Ein weites Feld* (*Too Far Afield*, 1995) refers to Fontane and also implicates the no-man's-land of the Berlin Wall and the wartime ruin which is the 1963 home of poet Ingeborg Bachmann. In the Bachmann text *A Place for Coincidences* (*Ein Ort für Zufälle,* 1964), the Berlin of the 1960s is a combination of coincidence and collapse, a combination of tropes Webber also locates in Cees Nooteboom's *All Souls' Day* (*Allerseelen*, 1999) when a man falls on the post-wall construction site at Potsdamer Platz.

In an extended tracing of literary inheritance, Thomas Möbius considers landscape not as a given, but rather as a mode of perception and explores the representation of the Harz mountains in the German literary tradition and, specifically, in GDR literature. An overlap between the experience of nature for itself and mythological associations with witches and spirits is depicted in the ascent of the Brocken in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1808). Heine continues the tradition but also subjects it to irony in *The Harz Journey* (*Die Harzreise*, 1824) and undermines the association of the mountains with national unity in his *Deutschtland. Ein Wintermärchen* (*Germany. A Winter's Tale,* 1844). Möbius then proceeds to analyze how Heine's linkage of the landscape to political discourse is continued in the work of post-1945 GDR writers, Irmtraud Morgner and Thomas Rosenlöcher. Morgner uses the folklore of the mountains in *Amanda. A Witch Novel (Ein Hexenroman,* 1983) in stories which critique patriarchal power, appropriation of nature, and military occupation of the Harz as a strategic border location. Thomas Rosenlöcher in *The Harz Journey* (*Die Harzreise*, 1990) gives a contemporary spin to the tradition of poetic Harz journeys and to the Harz as a political symbol. Aware of Goethe's and Heine's land-

scape experiences, Rosenlöcher's wanderer protagonist finds that he is unresponsive when he attempts to contemplate nature himself. Möbius concludes by showing how Rosenlöcher exposes the Western hegemony within the unification process by using enlightened irony. The ridiculous and the heroic combine in an incident in which the wanderer walks stubbornly in front of an impatient Mercedes: the spirit of Heine is not far away.

In an essay on the relationship of self to environment in the fiction of Angela Krauß, Ute Wölfel explores how societal changes since unification in East Germany are registered in her work. In her 1986 text *The Celebration* (*Das Vergnügen*), the individual is rooted in the nurturing industrial milieu of a briquette factory in Bitterfeld. After unification, this milieu disappears and the displaced individual must seek out new forms of identity. In *Summer on the Ice* (*Sommer auf den Eis*, 1998), Kraus returns to the industrial landscape of *The Celebration* but now the perspective is of a woman for whom unemployment has become a threat to identity. Wölfel then traces a process whereby recovery of a sense of self is constructed through memories of childhood but growth into self-awareness also entails new forms of alienation. Skating on a pond, the woman, in despair, realizes her own dispensability. A vision of a ship offers what Wölfel calls a "scene of fulfillment" ("eine Erfüllungsszenerie"), a heterotopia of a real "other place" countering the industrial decline. Passengers on the ship bring the prospect of a new community in an ironic vision in which the polluted wasteland of Bitterfeld is figured as an Eden and industrial space as utopia: "the miracle of the chemical triangle" ("das Wunder im Chemiedreieck"). Wölfel warns that the irony implicit in this fulfillment is an indication of its fragility.

David Clarke highlights the work of a neglected East German author, Gert Neumann, who, despite being championed by Martin Walser, remains relatively unknown. In particular, Clarke explores *Eleven O'Clock* (*Elf Uhr*, 1981), a novel which is in fact a hybrid form, incorporating a diary, a poetic treatise, and a commentary on social and working conditions. In his depiction of Leipzig, Neumann's concerns with the transformation of the ordinary into a poetic space can be associated with Romanticism. Clarke presents a close analysis of Neumann's writing technique and relates its effects to the incommensurability of the Romantic sublime.

Stephan Krause reads GDR author Franz Fühmann's *Twenty-two Days* (*Zweiundzwanzig Tage*, 1973) as a liberation from earlier stylistic conformity: a planned travel book based on a visit to Budapest is transformed into a fluid text recreating the steam baths in the city. Krause locates Foucault's heterotopia in the inaccessibility of the baths-as-labyrinth and traces the allusions to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as a key intertext for Fühmann. The latter's expedition from Berlin to Budapest and back embodies the landscape of modernism, the longer term significance of the project revealed in Krause's comment that the project was far from exhausted on the author's return.

In an informed chapter on the life and work of Günter de Bruyn, Dennis Tate profiles an author often construed as the Theodor Fontane of contemporary German literature. Tate discusses how in his 2005 autobiographical memoir *Off the Beaten Track: A Declaration of Love to a Landscape* (*Abseits: Liebeserklärung an eine Landschaft*), de Bruyn portrays the discovery of a cottage in Brandenburg in 1968 as the turning-point in his life. Tate relates this declaration to a perception of East Berlin as dominated by the corrupt GDR hierarchy in the novel *Researches in the Brandenburg Marches (Märkische Forschungen*, 1979). However, the picture is complicated by the tensions and GDR politics of relations between city and country in de Bruyn's 1960s novels, *The Ravine* (*Der Hohlweg*, 1963) and *Burdidan's Ass* (*Buridans Esel*, 1968). (Incidentally, and usefully, he recommends the latter novel as one of the few successful Berlin novels written in the GDR era.) Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Tate is surprised by de Bruyn's detachment on revisiting the place of his birth and childhood in Britz in West Berlin. However, de Bruyn's consistent preference for an outsider stance continues to define his location in Brandenburg and a critical perspective on Berlin.

Juliane Parthier considers the treatment of the former border zone which divided Germany and Berlin in her analysis of Helga Schütz's novel *Border to Yesterday* (*Grenze zum gestrigen tag*, 2000). Based on the author's own experience, this fictional account depicts how a family manages to live in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. There they discover a degree of normality and happiness despite being surrounded by militarized terrain. The novel challenges official discourses about the GDR by describing the everyday realities of life in a dictatorship but also uses personal history to expose places such as war memorials which have been repressed in public memory. A marginal figure on the GDR literary scene, the author herself lived in the village of Grossglienicke near Potsdam where the wall bordered her own garden. The wall's effect is experienced locally in its detrimental impact on the health of a child and on the depredation of the natural environment through the construction of supplementary fortifications. Schütz presents a nonjudgmental

and nonideological account of life in the GDR, unlike the allegories of the brutality of the regime, a form which dominated in the 1990s. This lucid and patient reading by Parthier is a sympathetic interpretation of an unusual personal perspective on the politics of place.

Finally, an analysis of three works by Christa Wolf is particularly rewarding in the attention it pays to her early stories. Renate Rechtien draws out the implications of the private garden setting of "June Afternoon" ("Juninachmittag," 1965). Wolf constructs an idyllic scene but a garden is still a bounded site: the narrator is irritated by the planes that fly overhead on the air corridor connecting West Germany to West Berlin. It could be paradise or a prison: a synecdoche for the GDR. In reality, the setting was based on the garden of Wolf's own house in the East Berlin suburb of Kleinmachnow. This private location contrasts with the very public and central situation of "Unter den Linden" (1974). Rechtien describes how this story combines reality, fantasy, memory, and dream, as the city's most ideologically contested boulevard is made the platform for a journey into interior depths. The confident claims of the narrator as *flâneuse* give way to uneasiness and self-questioning about her capacity for moral evasion and complicit behavior. However, the process of exposure extends beyond the self to the social context and the pressures of conforming to the arbitrary regulations and duplicitous procedures of a dictatorship. In *What Remains* (*Was Bleibt*, 1989), written initially in 1979 but not published till ten years later, the narrator is the subject of secret police surveillance and incursions into her privacy. Here Wolf reflects the reprisals she suffered for opposing the exclusion of Wolf Biermann from the GDR in 1976. The city is condemned as an infernal "non-place" ("nicht Ort") and a crisis of alienation is only averted by the consoling thought of a future reader and the emergence of independent vision in a new generation of writers.

This volume is a storehouse of scholarly knowledge. The editors, Clarke and Rechtien, who are both lecturers at the University of Bath, deserve congratulation for assembling a substantial, ambitious and well-organized collection. A considerable contribution to postwar German literary studies, it creates a context for renewed engagement with place, politics, and contemporary German texts.

Note

[1]. Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres" (Conference paper for the Cercle d'études architecturales, March 14, 1967), *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (October 1984): 46-49; reprinted as "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 25.

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Citation: Paul O'Hanrahan. Review of Clarke, David; Rechtien, Renate, eds., *The Politics of Place in Post-War Germany: Essays in Literary Criticism.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. November, 2010.
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