Die Himmel über Berlin: Constructing and Resisting Citizenship through Occupations of the Divided City’s Aerial Space

Ned Carter Miles
*School of European Languages, Culture and Society, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK, Email: info@ncmiles.co.uk*

Abstract

Guy Debord, among others, has shown that the physical and psychological landscapes of a city are interconnected. How we see and see from urban locations influences our overall sense of the city and, as Dennis Cosgrove has acknowledged, also our sense of civic identity. Combining history, theory, and criticism, this article considers the importance of Berlin’s aerial space leading up to and during the division period of 1945-1989, exploring how ways of seeing and seeing from it aided and resisted identity formation among newly defined East and West German citizens. Adapting the vertical-geopolitical concept of aerial space, and using the power theory of John Allen and the work of scholars such as Michel de Certeau and Yi Fu Tuan, the article argues that spatial perspective informs political identity, and that aerial space not only tells a city’s story, but also writes it.

Keywords

Berlin, aerial space, architecture, urban planning, cognitive map, psychogeography, citizenship, Wim Wenders

Introduction

A citizen locates himself or herself in urban space—not just geographically, but politically, ideologically, and emotionally—through the surrounding landscape. Both impositions on the skyline and the obstruction of such impositions not only tell stories of the city and its citizens, but also write them.

A number of scholars have considered how these ideas apply to post-war Berlin, not least Emily Pugh, who suggests that the political, geographical, economic, and cultural divisions of Germany did not occur simultaneously with the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, but were partly distinct processes (2008: 84). This article similarly seeks to understand how the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the east and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the west sought to realign their Berliner citizens’ identities with the reconfigured urban space they inhabited. It goes further to argue that the mediation of power through aerial space played a significant role.

Miles (2016): 1
Scholars concerned with vertical geopolitics have theorised the term 'aerial space'. In his paper Secure the Volume, Stuart Elden writes that we all-too-often think of the spaces of geography as 'areas, not volumes'; 'territories are bordered, divided and demarcated, but not understood in terms of height and depth' (2013: 1). He goes on to suggest (of modern Israel in particular) that height plays an important role in the power relations of fractured and contested spaces (Ibid: 4). In a similar vein, Peter Adey in his work on aerial space has explored how 'both the ground and the air reside together in vertical reciprocity' (2010: 2). Though Adey's work mostly concerns the geopolitical implications of aviation, this idea of reciprocity is useful in explaining how aerial space informs a sense of identity and place on the ground. Although aviation was undoubtedly relevant given the constant threat of nuclear warfare overshadowing the Cold War period of 1947 to 1991, here I will be using a broader definition of 'aerial space' in order to explore a range of ordinary citizens' experiences in the divided city of Berlin.

Building a four metre wall cutting through the centre of the city ensured that 'East and West Berliners could only experience the other side visually' (Pugh 2008: 90), and in the presence of such a wall this visual experience necessarily included an element of verticality. When looking across it one either looked upwards from the ground at what was visible above, or downwards from some vantage point onto the other side. 'Vertical' may then seem the appropriate term to describe the spatial experience; we would do well, however, to employ it with caution. Whereas 'vertical space' implies (somewhat misleadingly) movement along an up-down linear axis, this article focuses on fixed visible and visual 'occupations' of aerial space, where an occupation often constitutes something sustained and significant, not simply a 'passing through'. Putting 'aerial' forward as a more fitting descriptor of Berliners' spatial experience, I aim to show that occupying positions that were visible from the ground, and those permitting vision from above, shaped political identities in the GDR and the FRG. Proceeding with these ideas of the 'visible' and the 'visual' in mind, this article explores the visible occupations of aerial space as observed from below (bottom-up), before turning to the visual positions occupied from above (top-down).

A landscape constructed in three dimensions and visible from only one point at any given time will naturally create hierarchies, compositions, and meanings. The layering of buildings and architectural forms seen from different viewpoints establishes a dialectic with the perceiver—be they flâneur or functionary—that comes to define perceptions of space. When this spatial understanding becomes, as it did in Cold War Europe, inextricably linked with 'two regimes focused more than ever on negotiating the non-material borders of culture and identity in an effort to establish legitimacy' (Pugh, 90), a discussion on the uses and effects of power is inevitable.

Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau have each considered that looking down from above has a totalising effect, transforming the city below into an observable text if not obliterating the lived world of experience and perception it contains (Adey 2010, 86). Furthermore, de Certeau believed citizens could resist the strategic deployment of power in the city through everyday practices, suggesting a range of power dynamics that are generated across aerial space where such practices are visible. Although these observations are useful to the present discussion of aerial space's influence on political identity, both de Certeau's and Lefebvre's understandings of power relations focus on a binary of domination and resistance (Allen 2003: 174). If we are to better understand how aerial

Miles (2016): 2
space mediates power, and how this mediation impacted identity formation, we will need a more nuanced approach. John Allen has more recently argued that 'power is not a uniform or continuous substance transmitted across tracts of space and time; it is always constituted in space and time' (Ibid: 2). He distinguishes between styles of power: authority, manipulation, coercion, seduction, and others (Ibid: 2). This is not to say, however, that these styles of power, while distinct from each other, do not themselves form intersecting relations of power and resistance that should be recognised.

Occupations of Berlin’s aerial space involving such power styles as authority or domination facilitated the informing of political identities alongside more covert styles, such as manipulation or seduction. Using a framework that acknowledges these more covert styles of power allows us to explore more fully the effect of occupations of aerial space in relation to cognitive mapping. A cognitive map is essentially our inner sense of spatial environment. In this instance, it gestures to an imaginary visual position from which the mind assumes a bird’s eye view, akin to how one might physically occupy an observation deck. Roger M Downs and David Stea have argued that 'cognitive maps are not universal but subjective, coloured according to things like “social group, region, and nation”’ (Downs and Stea 1977: 24). They have also stated that ‘in some very fundamental but inexpressible way, our own self-identity is inextricably bound up with knowledge of the spatial environment.’ (Ibid: 27). Manipulating citizens’ cognitive maps is then key to aligning their political identities with the space they inhabit. Occupations visible from the ground (such as buildings or street signs) may achieve this, but so too do influencers of top-down visual perspectives, such as planning sketches, maps, and the toponyms that accompany them. John Allen’s understanding of power, like that of Anthony Giddens, invites us to consider maps as ‘authoritative resources’ (Cosgrove 1989: 279) controlled by the state. They commonly express and inform our functional understanding of space and, as such, they constitute another visual occupation of aerial space that exists in the imagination. There are a variety of ways, then, in which different styles of power contribute to a sense of space, and in turn to a sense of political identity.

The processes explored in this paper are not of the kind openly discussed by people in their everyday lives, but are rather lived without acknowledgement. We are unable to see into the minds of past Berliners for guidance, and so the final part of this article turns to examples of visual art, in particular Wim Wender’s Der Himmel über Berlin (Wings of Desire), which explores the concepts of absence and memory and thus provides further useful insights.

**Bottom-Up: Political Identity and Visible Occupations of Aerial Space**

**Arial space, architecture, and political identity in pre-division Berlin**

The architect has often affirmed existing political power, and architectural occupations of aerial space have betrayed ideological oppositions within Berlin since at least the nineteenth century (Richter 1996: 75). The Berliner Stadtschloss (City Palace), for example, was a visual centrepiece of the city for many years. Dubbed 'the beginning of Berliner architecture' by Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, it became an important symbol for the historical legitimacy of the Hohenzollern dynasty under successive reincarnations in Italian Renaissance and Baroque style (Kramer 1999: 12). Additionally, at the behest of Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm VI in 1885 Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Friedrich August Stüler added a dome to the Stadtschloss, enhancing its visible occupation of the cityscape.

Miles (2016): 3
As an architectural symbol traditionally associated with power a dome would not have been out of place on the roof of a royal palace; however, the addition of one to the roof of Paul Wollet's Reichstag building, constructed half a century later, would prove controversial (Rizzoni 2009: 187). By this time the Reichstag, which housed the German Parliament, afforded votes to all males over twenty-five and had become a focal point for 'those (national minorities, Catholics, socialists) who were treated as pariahs in the early years of the empire' (Blackbourn 1997: 267). Buildings representing the enfranchisement of the non-aristocratic classes, such as Schinkel's Altes Museum (Old Museum), had previously been obligated to keep a low profile if they were to share the central space of the 'Museuminsel' (Museum Island)—a key location in Berlin—with the Stadtschloss. The Reichstag building, however, stood seven metres taller than the latter and, quoting Giovanni Rizzoni, its inclusion 'of a dome, always an architectural feature of buildings associated with temporal or religious power, clearly symbolized the fact that popular representation had become autonomous' (2009: 187). Moreover, the building included an easily visible and controversial sign, crafted in bronze by the respected Jewish firm S.A. Loevy, with the democratic message: 'Dem deutschen Volk (To the German People)' (Carter-Hett 2014: 4). As might be expected, Wilhelm II openly opposed the Reichstag's construction; nonetheless, following a decade-long debate over its location, he begrudgingly presided over the opening. Finally (and with no small significance) the building was constructed at the opposite end of Unter den Linden—a central boulevard of Berlin—facing westwards away from the Stadtschloss, and so away from the symbolic centre of the German Empire (Large 2002: 59).

The Reichstag's dome 'highlight[ed] the competition which existed between two powers with different sources of legitimization' (Rizzoni 2009: 187). The provocation did not go unmet and, in the year the Reichstag was completed, work began on the Berliner Dom (Berlin Cathedral). This renewed symbol of traditional authority, completed in 1905 and standing at 116 metres, towered over its competitor. In an ironic reversal, however, the visibility of both buildings in aerial space created unintended meanings when filtered through the opinions and experience of contemporary Berliners: critics dismissed the garish cathedral as a 'monument to showy piety' (Large 2002: 59), while lambasting the Reichstag because its 'showiness symbolized all too well the lack of substance prevailing inside' (ibid: 60).

This complex interplay of power and meaning cannot be described purely in the binary language of Lefebvre and de Certeau or by using Allen's more nuanced categories alone; it is a case of appropriating and re-appropriating symbols of authority in order to subvert or affirm that authority's dominant status. In the later divided Berlin it was rather a question of two authorities, eastern and western, each exercising styles of power. In their own respective geopolitical space these power styles may have constituted domination, authority, or coercion; however, to the other side they may have translated to manipulation or seduction, or been subverted through context. Both the nuanced language of power styles and that of power and resistance are therefore relevant to this discussion.

The importance of housing
In the early twentieth century Berlin suffered a severe housing shortage as a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation. Working to meet it, the left-leaning architects of the interwar Weimar Republic inserted a markedly socialist political identity into the city's
landscape. Between 1925 and 1931 the trade-union housing associations and the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany funded social housing projects, a notable example of which can be found in Bruno Taut’s 1926 Onkel Toms Hütte (Uncle Tom’s Cabin) estate in Zehlendorf (Boyd Whyte and Frisby 2012: 465). Such projects were characteristically modern in style, in particular due to their flat roofs, which announced 'the levelling of social and national differences' (Hake 2008: 106). As in the previous century, people with more traditionalist sympathies reacted to this provocative occupation of visible space. They soon constructed counter-buildings in the same district with traditional, sloped roofs, initiating an ideological and architectural struggle for aerial supremacy that came to be known as the Dächerkrieg (War of the Roofs) (Rosenberg; Schumacker 2003).

Although proponents of more traditionalist ideologies occupied aerial space directly, they also asserted influence to keep it empty. Since the nineteenth century Berlin city planning laws have precluded the construction of buildings whose eaves exceed twenty-two metres in height, partly in order to protect the visibility of the Brandenburg Gate, a triumph arch and symbol of traditional German and Prussian militarist identity. Even today, any exceptions to this rule (though numerous) are considered on a case-by-case basis (BauOBin: 5; Lehnerer 2009: 106). With debates over the place of high-rise buildings emerging in early twentieth-century Berlin, the conservative bourgeoisie struggled with the rapid changes brought on by urbanisation and modernisation, and yearned rather for 'the more traditional look of the village small-town' (Planungsgruppe 4 2014). Consequently, although some high-rises were constructed during the 1920s, conservatives such as Ludwig Hoffman, then building officer of the city, relegated them to isolated or marginal areas. The socialist Martin Wagner eventually replaced Hoffman in 1926 and oversaw the building of the majority of high-rise and social housing projects in the city, making their ideological significance visible where it had not been before (Pugh 2014: 23). Authority need not then be mediated in space by the presence of something, but can also be practised by forced omission. Relegating undesirable architectural styles to the margins of urban space was intended to marginalise their associated ideologies in psychological space, with architecture reflecting and influencing both political and physical landscapes.

Socialism and Fascism: aerial space from Dächerkrieg to Weltkrieg
Socialist-inspired housing projects came into question with the rise of the Third Reich. The National Socialist regime vehemently enforced the idea, inherited from the Weimar Republic, that architectural styles could be neatly aligned with political ideologies (Miller Lane 1968: 2-3), and to this end planned to "'cleanse" the city by building monumental, historicised structures’ (Pugh 2014: 26). To understand the importance of aerial space here, one need only consider Albert Speer’s plan for Berlin, or rather 'Germania's' Halles des Volkes, an enormous dome slated to stand at 290 metres—so large that it was reportedly abandoned for fear it would sink into Berlin’s soft ground (BTK). Another dome meant to dominate the cleansed city’s skyline, this structure was intended to symbolise Nazi Germany’s authority. Its claim to being 'des Volkes’ (of the people) was to further conflate the building and its ideological significance with the citizenry that would see it, and to which it ostensibly belonged.

Many of Speer’s building projects, like the Halles des Volkes, were never realised, and many that were have since been levelled. National Socialism did nonetheless
architecturally influence post-war Berlin after the occupying powers had divided up the city in 1945. Pugh has suggested that the Nazis 'helped solidify the perception in the German public’s imagination that architectural styles could be parsed neatly into political categories' (2014: 25). When, in 1945, it was time to rebuild in the image of new and divergent Eastern and Western political identities, the established architectural-political tradition of occupying Berlin’s aerial space remained prominent, and would only become more so in the years to come.

The significance of the Wall
In the aftermath of the Second World War the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Agreement redefined the geopolitics of Berlin and Germany. The emergence of the West German Hallstein Doctrine in 1955 further stipulated that the FRG would cut off relations with any country that recognised the GDR, thus implying that there was only one Germany (Pugh 2008: 81). Consequently, a previously united people became two separate citizenries, neither of whose leaders willingly or openly acknowledged the legitimacy of the other. A decade later, they were separated by the best-known symbol of the Cold War: the Berlin Wall, and it became necessary to align the identities of two new sets of citizens with this new configuration of space (Palmowski 2009: 19, 105).

Though the Wall functioned in part to prevent emigration, it was also intended to decrease intervisibility. Prior to its construction western powers invested heavily in West Berlin in order to showcase capitalism in close proximity to the GDR, causing it to become known as the Schauenster des Westens (the display window to the West) (Pugh 2014: 82). This is an instance of seduction, 'where curiosity rather than any so-called disciplinary logic is the subject of stimulation', and is particularly significant in the context of the East-West ideological divide, where one side would interfere with the other’s identity building project through alluring displays of cultural and economic success (Allen: 175). In 1961 the East sought to direct attention back to its own development by obscuring the West's display window with four metres of concrete.

The Wall played a further role in influencing the two new citizenries' sense of space. The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan asserted that 'visible limits to a nation's sovereignty, such as a row of hills or a stretch of river [or a wall], support the sense of a nation as a place' (1977: 176). Pugh used this concept to argue that the construction of the Wall 'made West and East Berlin definitive places in a way that they had not been before, completing Berlin's transformation from a group of zones, to two separate cities' (Pugh: 86). But if Tuan, and by extension Pugh, have lain the groundwork for thinking of 'the nation' as 'place', they have yet to glance upward. While demarcating geopolitical space, the wall itself played a limited role in directly informing senses of political identity. It acted as a catalyst, rather, charging aerial space with significance and allowing the operations here discussed. When we come to a wall, after all, if we are to see anything but the wall itself we must either turn away or look up. With the Wall in place, the task remained to align the identities of the two Germanys with the places and ideologies that now defined them, and aerial space would play an important role. The project was in many ways successful, as illustrated by the Berlin Wall's continuing influence long after it fell, epitomised in the expression 'die Mauer im Kopf' (the Wall in the head).

An unforeseen consequence of the Wall was that any structure or object that remained visible above it, on either side, was infused with importance and became

Miles (2016): 6
representative of the other side. The most quotidian occurrences in the skies over Berlin became charged with significance, as evidence in telling examples from popular culture. Although the heavily synthesised pop melodies of the West Berlin-based band Nena’s 1983 hit song 99 Luftballons (99 Red Balloons) may seem frivolous, the song’s lyrics are revealing. They tell of two West Berliner children who release ninety-nine balloons close to the Wall. People on the other side misidentify them as they float upwards and inadvertently trigger a war that reduces both sections of the divided city to rubble (Nena 1983). Carlo Karges, the song’s author, explained in a 1986 interview with Rolling Stone magazine that its impetus stemmed from the release of balloons at a Rolling Stones concert in West Berlin. Although the release had been part of the show, Karges found himself anxiously weighing the consequences if the balloons were to float too far to the East (Nena Interview 1984). Evidently, the Wall’s presence as a line of demarcation and obstruction had the power to charge seemingly innocuous objects in aerial space with significance, if not the potential for provocation and danger. This anecdote represents one of numerous cultural examples granting us hitherto fettered access to the psychological effects of Berlin’s partition and that of Germany more broadly.

Provocation, recreation, seduction
In the late 1950s high-rise buildings were increasingly constructed close to the Wall on both sides, asserting antagonistic identities through newly charged aerial space. From 1959 to 1966, for example, Axel Springer erected his company’s headquarters in the West Berlin district of Kreuzberg, next to the Wall. The East responded to this deliberately ‘provocative east-facing structure’ with markedly socialist styled high-rises on the other side (Plannungsgruppe4: 2014). Here, as in the nineteenth century, architecture was knowingly used to assert antagonistic identities, with the visible space above Berlin being divided, occupied, and marked in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Two other buildings significant in this regard are West Berlin’s Europazentrum (Europa Centre), constructed by Helmut Hentrich and Hubert Petschniggäht in 1963, and the East’s Fernsehturm (Television Tower), completed by Fritz Dieter, Günter Franke, and Werner Ahrendt in 1969. While at 365 metres the Fernsehturm was taller than the 103-metre Europazentrum, and despite the former’s ostensible primary function as a broadcast tower, both buildings occupied the divided city’s aerial space as deliberate symbols of their states’ respective values (Structurae 2014: 1, 2).

The Europazentrum boasted shops, cinemas, cabaret venues, hotels, bars, and an ice rink. It became an iconic occupation of the sky above capitalist West Berlin thanks to an enormous rotating Mercedez-Benz emblem on its roof, visible not only to its own citizens, but also to their estranged counterparts. Alternatively, the Fernsehturm was modelled on Sputnik 1, the first artificial Earth satellite and a recognised Soviet triumph. It housed a rotating restaurant in its dome and represented a commitment to recreation in the GDR (Fernsehturm 2014). In the terms of Guy Debord and the Situationist International, both buildings created visible points by which one’s experience and exploration of the urban space might be influenced from the ground (Debord 1955). Each edifice provided its own half of the city with a constantly visible symbol affirming the state’s cultural strength and a sense of citizenship, while, to the other half, providing potentially seductive manifestations of culture and ideology. In both instances power styles played an important role in consolidating political identities, with the two buildings mediating power in different ways.
depending on the vantage point from which they were perceived. The uses and effects of these buildings reinforce Allen's notion that power is not something substantive that flows through space, but is more complexly generated in it.

Recreation was central to the consolidation of communal identity in the GDR (Palmowski 2009: 19). However, it can also be argued that the recreational function of both buildings (and of the domestic high-rises discussed earlier in this section) resisted essentialist notions of identity. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau defines 'tactics' as those everyday acts that make use of opportune moments and spaces to enact resistance in an environment that is subject to official, 'strategic' power structures (1984: XX). Representing supposedly apolitical everyday practises (eating, recreation, living) in highly visible spaces is tactical; it reminds the other citizenry that those among whom one once lived—even in a divided city, country, and continent—still do so in similar ways, and are therefore not so alien.

Serving their purpose as transmitters the Fernsehturm and equivalent structures in the West also performed similar functions. In spite of official yet largely unsuccessful GDR suppression before 1979 radio waves from western structures freely traversed borders and aerial space (Fulbrook 2005: 60, 235). Mutually available television and radio broadcasts therefore provided yet more perspectives of everyday life which, whether deliberate propaganda or not, constituted further resistance (Major 2010: 192; Palmowski 2009: 130). Moreover, in a case of 'accidental' resistance known as the 'Rache des Papstes (The Pope's Revenge)', when the sun shone at a certain angle on the Fernsehturm's reflective panels a cross would appear on its surface. This phenomenon embarrassed the GDR and particularly its then president, Walter Ulbricht, an atheist who had for years attempted to separate Christianity from his citizens' identities (Fernsehturm 2014; Schäfer 2010: 11).

In 1976 Erich Honecker deposed Ulbricht and built the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) on the site where the old Stadtschloss had stood. A 'people's palace', Honecker intended it as a visible symbol of socialism that would perform a similar if non-capitalist recreational function as the Europazentrum. It was also equipped with 'advanced broadcasting capabilities' and transmitted images from a variety of social and political events, causing it to become a well-known symbol in the West (Pugh 2014: 176-7).

**Top-Down: Political Identity and Visual Occupations of Aerial Space**

*Observation decks, cognitive maps, and the city as text*

The previous examples have explored visible occupations of aerial space, where the visibility of an object (or its absence) mediated styles of power and informed political identity. However, occupations can also be visual, with a viewer as opposed to a viewed object occupying an aerial position.

De Certeau has used the example of the former World Trade Centre’s observation deck to describe the act of occupying a city’s visual aerial space, and how this act 'transfigures [the viewer] into a voyeur, [...] puts him at a distance, [and] transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one’s eyes' (1984: 92).

Both the Europazentrum and the Fernsehturm also housed observation decks from which citizens might assume visual aerial positions with potentially contradictory effects. In occupying such a position and transforming the city into a text, a viewer distances him-
or herself from those living below—they become simply Wandermänner (wandering men) who unwittingly write the urban text without being able to read it (Ibid: 93). This objectification of the city's inhabitants reinforces the sense of alienation created under division.

Such a totalising visual perspective might arguably provide a comprehensive view of the city that resists a citizen's sense that he or she is uniquely a member of one or the other Berlin, thus undermining the sense of division. Challenging such an argument, however, de Certeau has distinguished between maps and tours: a 'tour' involves an itinerary (a series of discursive operations); a map, on the other hand, is a 'plane projection totalising observations, that is, between two symbolic anthropological languages of space' (Ibid: 119). The observer looking down and imagining his or her own journey through the divided Berlin could not help but to quite literally hit a wall, or to read the Wall into the text written by the Wandermänner. The Wall dominated space by making certain movements impossible, and mediated coercion in that attempts to cross it were often deadly. It therefore limited the discursive operations that constitute the language of a tour and reduced the urban space's possibilities to that of a map. Despite the perspectives observation decks and other such positions allowed, they ultimately aligned an East or West Berliner's cognitive map (his or her inner sense of the environment and its possibilities) with the geopolitical limits to which he or she was subjected.

The cognitive map of the city is a visual position in imaginary aerial space, occupied through the mind's eye and informed in myriad ways: 'from static viewpoints, from top-down maps, and in travelling through the scenery' (Brettel 2006). It is not only informed but also informs an understanding of space and one's position therein. Mapping the city, according to Dennis Cosgrove, has always been 'about more than mapping urban space, [but] about mapping urban life and [...] citizenship' (2006: 151). The shaping of cognitive maps is therefore integral in reinforcing and counteracting the alignment of a Berliner's political identity with the space in which he or she lives.

**Real maps, imaginary positions**

It was common—especially in the East—to try and manipulate citizens' cognitive maps in order to erase undesirable histories and align psychological and political space, with manipulating maps themselves as an especially straightforward approach. To look at a map is to occupy an imaginary position in aerial space that directly informs one's cognitive map. As the dominating presence of the Wall influenced perspective from observation decks, so the manipulative practice of the map-writer influenced the perspectives of map-readers. To this end, following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 'West Berlin disappeared from official East German geography', and in 1962 the GDR's map of Berlin included 'no trace of West Berlin' (Azaryahu 1986: 598). Moreover, official attempts to reconfigure Eastern citizens' sense of the space they inhabited went so far as to designate any Western maps or newspapers as contraband that might undermine official strategies (Gay 1992: 512).

**The significance of names**

Street names are an element of both printed maps and real urban space that inform and are informed by cognitive maps. In what Maoz Azaryahu has called a 'Street Sign Revolution', East Berlin made a concerted effort following the immediate de-nazification of street
names in 1945 to systematically reconfigure citizens’ consciousness of the space where they lived. The renaming extended from Nazi-inspired signs to any that represented Prussian Military or German Nationalist tradition; National Socialism, the GDR claimed, was after all the responsibility of Western economic imperialism (SED 1952: 581). Erasing these connotations from printed maps was to reinforce a sense of citizenship in the Eastern ‘antifascist state’ and emphasise the moral inferiority of the West. To this end, the GDR changed a total of 239 street names between 1945 and 1951 (Azaryahu 1986: 582, 587, 591).

Aligning citizenship and space is not always so simple; old understandings of space often persist through memory, leaving traces on cognitive maps. In 1949, for instance, the East Berlin Frankfurter Allee was renamed, amid much fanfare, to Stalinallee (Stalin Street), and became one of the best-known examples of a Stalinist style housing project in Europe (Ibid: 594). Following various revelations and the ‘de-Stalinisation’ of Eastern Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, the government renamed the street once more, in the night and with no fanfare at all, to the more innocuous Karl-Marx-Allee (Karl Marx Street) (Ibid: 597). Despite this conscious attempt to realign a cognitive mapping of the city towards a more progressive sense of GDR citizenship, the street's imposing Stalinist architecture constituted a visible trace of what had been before. For an insight into how these changes affected popular understandings of space, it is particularly interesting to note that traces also remain in cartographic and virtual space today. Type Stalinallee into Google Maps, compiled forty-three years after this second renaming, and an automatic drop-down box will suggest you try Karl-Marx-Allee, instead.

Ultimately, while the GDR used street names strategically in East Berlin to emphasise the difference between itself and the West, it did not implement these renaming practices categorically. Streets such as Charlottenburger Straße, Spandauer Straße and Rudower Straße, bearing the names of areas in the FRG, remained in East Berlin as trace referents to the other city and other state whose absence the GDR was nonetheless formalising in cognitive and cartographic terms (Azaryahu 1986: 599).

Infrastructure and urban planning

Although East and West employed strategies to negate their counterparts’ political legitimacy and affirm their own, creating long-term functional and cognitive independence was notably more complex. Soon after Berlin’s division the need arose for each side to establish independent infrastructure, reconfiguring the functional space of the city in terms of everything from public transport to waste disposal (Merritt 1973: 65). This infrastructural re-centring would reinforce a sense of completeness in each half of the city while diminishing the impact of the other half’s absence, thus aligning functional and geopolitical experiences of space. In becoming functionally independent of each other, the two halves of Berlin might become two wholes.

Still hopeful for reconciliation, in the early 1950s city planners on both sides of the Wall officially continued to exchange information in order that a reunified Berlin might retain the infrastructure necessary to operate coherently. However, the GDR suppressed all such exchanges following Western authorities’ announcement of a competition to rebuild the old Hansa Quarter, a move viewed in the East as ‘planning imperialism’ (Merritt 1973: 70). This suppression, together with state-funded planning projects in the East, might have facilitated the move towards infrastructural independence; however, maps and plans were

Miles (2016): 10
used to covertly manipulate and subvert the state's authority. City planners from the West continued to exchange sketches with their counterparts in the East under the guise of personal visits, providing otherwise unavailable aerial-spatial perspectives. This exchange facilitated holistic city planning at the expense of the unwitting East German state, and thus resisted the re-centring of both urban space and cognitive maps (Ibid, 70).

Die Mauer im Kopf: Aerial Space & Absence as in Visual Art

Absence and forgetting

The erasing of maps, changing of street names, and re-centring of urban space in the East sought to absent the West and thus consolidate a distinct civic identity. To speak of something as absent still affirms its existence, whereas forgetting negates it entirely; remembering absences is therefore important to how a 'city in two halves' may or may not become 'two cities'. How, then, did the West experience this absence? Experiences of absence and forgetting do not leave physical traces like buildings and maps; they can, however, do so through memorialisation or, as we shall see here, art.

At the time of the Berlin wall’s construction there arose a revealing body of documentary photographic work, treading the line between artistic and historical accounts of Berliners’ experience of division. The most notable of these efforts can be found in Léon Herschtritt’s series ‘Le Mur de Berlin’, and Paul Schutzer’s photographic work for Life Magazine, both of which were originally published in 1961 and are available online (Herschtritt’s series is also on permanent display at the Berlin Wall Memorial Centre on Bernauer Straße). These artists’ work provides many insights into the visual semiotics of power implied by the wall’s construction, the reactions and tactics of newly defined citizens, and the processes of absence and forgetting. Herschtritt’s photographs are particularly interesting for the attention he pays to viewing platforms in the West; these platforms allowed for visual occupations of aerial space that were unavailable to citizens in the East, and therefore made for different experiences of division between the two citizenries (Davey 1987: 16). Looking at such work brings us closer to understanding how the Mauer (Wall) became the Mauer im Kopf (Wall in the head).

Aerial Space and absence in Wim Wenders’ Der Himmel über Berlin

Wim Wender’s 1987 film Der Himmel über Berlin (Wings of Desire)—often called his ‘ode to Berlin’—uses aerial space in several sequences to signify a progression from absence to forgetting. The first of these begins with a medium shot of the angel Damiel (Bruno Ganz) sitting on the shoulder of the Victoria statue atop the Victory Column (Figure 1.1). In the ensuing shots the film sutures us into his West-looking gaze (Figure 1.2), then cuts to a mid-shot of him looking over his own shoulder (Figure 1.3), before showing us the Eastern skyline through his eyes. In this last shot the Fernsehturm appears weakly through the background fog as it does in several of the film’s other sequences, such as when the elderly storyteller Homer ventures out to the wasteland where Potzdammer Platz once stood, its dome hovering spectrally above the Wall (Figure 1.4). This pensive sequence, whose perspective the film’s angels alone can provide, suggests a sense of loss that remains present but unspoken throughout the film. Although these angels permit us suggestive glances to the East, at no point in the film do they, or we, go there. As in the GDR’s revised maps of the city our map of this filmic Berlin omits its other half, adding weight to such longing glances.

Miles (2016): 11
In the second sequence the angel Cassiel (Otto Sandler) tries unsuccessfully to prevent a suicidal young man jumping from the roof of the Europazentrum. The recognisable Mercedes-Benz logo rotating in the background of the opening shot situates us instantly (Figure 2.1). The subsequent panning shot then follows the young man 270° around the roof of the building while various visual clues indicate our position in time and space; the silhouette of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in (Figure 2.2) and the low sun in (Figure 2.3) reveal that the shot in (Figures 2.4 and 2.5) is East facing and that it is evening. In the harrowing moment that he finally jumps to his death, the camera sharply focuses on the Eastern part of the city below (Figure 2.6). Significantly, although our attention is now directed towards the other city, a thicker fog than before obfuscates it. Thus, in the film as a whole, the absence of the East becomes more acute over time. The young man's death, the falling of night, and the thickening fog suggest the loss of youth and hope, the passing of time, and the onset of forgetting.
As long as we continue to share in the aerial perspectives of angels (marked by black and white film as opposed to colour for mortal perspectives) we see at least glimpses of the East as outlined above; however, a further sequence preceding Daniel’s becoming human, joining the ‘stream of time’, and thus subjecting himself to the possibility for forgetting, clearly removes the East and its citizens from diegetic space.

We begin the sequence at eye-level with Cassiel as he approaches the Western outer wall (Figure 3.1). If we were truly seeing from his perspective, however, our gaze would simply pass through the wall as he does (filmically this is possible as shooting this scene on
location was forbidden and the wall used was in fact a replica (IMDB 2014)). Instead, our
gaze as viewers passes over the wall in a smooth vertical tracking shot and into the 'death
strip' (Figures 3.2-5).

Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3

Figure 3.4

Figure 3.5

Figure 3.6

Figure 3: A sequence from Wim Wender's Der Himmel über Berlin (Wenders 1987).

The composition of the final shot furthers a sense of forgetting the East (Figure 3.6).
Although we have passed over one wall another remains, and the use of contrast here
matches the latter to the now even fogger sky; a grey blanket thus consumes any trace of
both the East and its absence.
The film permits no further glimpses across the Wall. From this point on our perspective—
mostly in colour—is constrained to that of the filmic West Berliners and the limitations that
confine them. A synecdoche between isolated citizen and state reinforces this division and its psychological impact when Cassiel, riding in the back of a prop-car through the Western city, listens in to the chauffeur's thoughts: 'the German people are divided into as many states as there are individuals' (Wenders 1987).

Such examples provide insight into the anxiety that absences might be forgotten over time, and that the two half-cities and citizenries of Berlin might become two permanently realigned wholes. Ultimately, though, the memorialising function of these pieces of art in itself constitutes resistance to this process. The chauffeur in Der Himmel über Berlin, after all, reveals something of his own cognitive map when he thinks not of the 'West German' people, but of a 'German' people. In speaking of division, he acknowledges the possibility of a whole.

Conclusion
Above all else, Wenders’ film is a collection of Berlin experiences to which we, through the perspective of angels who inhabit the city's aerial space, are given privileged access; it constitutes one of many ways aerial space and its occupations allow for the telling of stories. This article has explored the story of how the space above Berlin and the perspectives of its citizens mediated ideology and power, functioning to consolidate political identity. As with any good story, though, here too there is conflict. Whether through buildings, mapping, city planning, or the arts, the processes of alignment and resistance that form this narrative depend on memory, absence, and forgetting. Berlin, Karen Till has said, is a place ‘haunted with landscapes that simultaneously embody presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering.' (2005: 8).

The experience of Berlin and Germany’s divided citizens is undoubtedly complex, but aerial space—the way people view it and view from it—has played an important role in their growing apart and coming back together. Division may have ended, but the story of Berlin’s aerial space and its significance has not. As we see written on the sky above Berlin at the end of Wender’s film, where the Sony Tower will mark the eventual triumph of western capitalism and the Reichstag’s dome will be replaced in glass, this story is 'to be continued...'

Competing Interests
The author declares that he has no competing interests.

Acknowledgements
I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance I received from Gaelle Fisher in writing this article, and from Sandy Carter, in this and all things.

References
Adey, Peter 2010 Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects. London: Wiley & Sons Ltd.
Allen, John 2003 Lost Geographies of Power. London: Wiley & Sons Ltd.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002200948602100405

BauOBin 2005 Bauordnungen für Berlin. 3(2): pp.5. Accessible at

BTK (Berlin Tourismus & Kongress) n.d. Accessible at


Brettel, Alexandra 2006 The Effects of “Order” and “Disorder” on Human Cognitive Perception in Navigating through Urban Environments; Built Environment Report [Esgz1]. University College London.


Elden, Stuart 2013 Secure the Volume: Vertical Geopolitics and the Depth of Power. Political Geography, (34) 35-51. DOI:
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2012.12.009

Fernsehturm 2011 Accessible at

Fullbrook, Mary 2005 The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker. New Haven: Yale University Press.


Herrschtritt, Léon (Selections from) Le mur de Berlin. Accessible at

Miles (2016): 16
http://leonherschtritt.com/le-mur-de-berlin/ and on permanent display at the Berlin Memorial Centre, Bernauer Straße, Berlin. [Last Accessed 4 February 2014].


