3. **The Remembered City On Display, 1984-1993**

The ‘place memory work’ discussed in the previous chapter becomes codified in forms of display which establish the paradigm of the city as a museal space in itself between 1984 and the early 1990s, spanning the caesura of the fall of the Wall. This is evident in the outcomes of the IBA-Neu and -Alt projects, and then a series of projects related to the 750th anniversary of the city’s founding in 1987, which establishes a new technique of place memory production: the installation as ‘collective’ event. The 1986 Mythos Berlin exhibition on the site of the Anhalter Bahnhof illustrates site-specific urban memory production (‘the city as museum’) as a specific technology in the evocation of past time and experience, but also as a development of an embryonic event culture. An extended analysis of Wim Wenders’s *Wings of Desire* (1986) focuses on how the film shapes the viewer’s encounter with the ‘empty spaces’ of the southern Friedrichstadt, the Anhalter Bahnhof and the Hotel Esplanade. Wenders curates the city in such a way as to (re) formulate the viewer’s experience of the cityscape through the undoing of the sensory-motor habits of the urban environment. The Nikolaiviertel reconstruction in East Berlin allows for a broader consideration of the display of the urban and its role in monument preservation and reconstruction in the period, especially in comparison with the aims of the West Berlin IBA-Neu. It is read alongside the late GDR film, *The Architects* (1991) which revisits the themes of critical visual culture, the built environment and the urban gaze that were also visible in Chapter Two. *The Architects* points to a continuity in the museal urban gaze that is to be found in a number of works from the immediate post-wall era. Jürgen Bottcher’s documentary film about the fall of the Wall and its aftermath, *Die Mauer* (1991), works with the visual language of obsolescence we are familiar with from the GDR – not however now as a tacit form of state dissidence, but as a form of resistance to the synchronic time regime and the new post-unification order with its associated historical narratives. A similar continuity is evident in Christian Boltanski’s *Missing House*, and Shimon Attie’s *Writing on the Wall*, both of which are explicit interventions in the urban fabric that foreground the palimpsestic city as simultaneously repository, archive and museum.
The IBA on display

In the previous chapter, we discussed the IBA primarily in terms of the theories of the museal urban gaze that its leading curators formulated. How did the application of those theories relate to the exhibition and display of the city that followed at the end of its process? In 1984, the year of the interim report of the Berlin IBA, the urban renewal section on the ground floor of the ‘Martin Gropius Bauhaus’, as the project manager and designer Bernhard Strecker named the venerable building in an invocation of architectural tradition, displayed a project which sought to do justice to the concerns of careful urban repair. Jürg Steiner was commissioned to develop a typical Kreuzberg scene, using streetscapes aligned with old buildings and the ‘new Kreuzberg centre.’ The street corners of Kreuzberg were shown as large-format photographs and the incremental reduction in scale created an impression of perspective for the exhibition visitor. This was an attempt to construct an encounter with place, or perhaps more correctly, the memory of place memory in an exhibition setting.

The display side of the IBA-Neu is, however, best read through the new constructions themselves, which were, however, limited in 1984 to largely unobtrusive signs that described the either fulfilled or yet to be fulfilled intentions of the IBA (for example, James Stirling’s intervention at Meinekestrasse, discussed earlier, has no indication of the architect’s input). The philosophical coherence of this ‘urban repair’ was conceptualized in the 1984 exhibition, ‘Architecture and Philosophy since the Industrial Revolution’, curated by Vittorio Magnagno Lampugnani at the New National Gallery. This exhibition continued the theoretical line of discussion and sought to present architectural history as intellectual history, largely through sketches and designs, rather than representations of actual buildings. The critical architectural journals, ARCH+, took a sceptical view of the exhibition’s limited social contextualization of architectural theory, contrasting it unfavourably with the exhibition, ‘Berlin around 1900’, in the Akademie der Künste (curated by, amongst others, Janos Frecot) which it considered a much more historically informed and informative reflection on questions of urban planning and architecture.¹

For the specific display of spatial images, however, one must turn to the work done by IBA-Alt in Kreuzberg, which created a series of ‘site-specific’ (vor Ort) exhibitions. It is here that the practice of the museal urban gaze becomes highly visible, with the use of existing structures (such as the hall of the Schlesisches Tor underground station) and a pedestrian ‘guided tour’ of the work being done by IBA-Alt in a series of blocks, starting from...
Admiralstrasse 17, via Admiralstrasse 23, Liegnitzer Strasse 18, Cuvrystrasse 20, Oppelner Strasse 41, Wrangelstrasse 69, Silbersteinstrasse 97, Ohlauer Strasse 37, to the Paul-Lincke-Ufer 20-22. Significantly, the encounter with these acts of urban curation culminated in an exhibition in the former multi-storey car park at the Kottbusser Tor. The exhibition, Baller und Kennedy’s ‘Brave New World – Ecological Projections from a dilapidated garage’, allowed, according to Peterek in ARCH+, ‘the desired radical break with the past to be experienced with all one’s senses.’ The same reviewer also considered that there remained, in the whole IBA exhibition process, a problem of address: ‘the site-specific exhibitions are not always addressed to those who live in the area.’ The IBA-Neu offered the visual and philosophical encounter with the cityscape in an exhibition space, the IBA-Alt demanded an encounter on foot that recreated forms of place memory. The display aspect demonstrates the fundamental distinctions in the conceptions and address of the museal urban gaze of the two sides of the IBA.

The IBA’s museal urban gaze culminated not in 1984’s exhibitions, but in its incorporation into the 750th anniversary of the founding of the city of Berlin in 1987. This anniversary, celebrated on both sides of the Wall, brought together the developing paradigms of urban memory, such as the encounter with the anamnestic dimensions of the material site and its implication in the generation of cultural memory narratives and asynchronicity. Rather than looking at the ‘official’ commemorations organized by the regimes on either side of the divide, I want to look at how the museal urban gaze was formulated in three projects of this period. First, the ‘Mythos Berlin’ exhibition, which described itself as a ‘history of the perception of an industrial metropolis’, enacted through a ‘scenic representation’ of a variety of installations at the Anhalter Bahnhof. Second, the major East Berlin ‘urban renewal’ project for the 750th anniversary, the reconstruction of the Nikolai Quarter, which had been all but razed to the ground at the end of the Second World War. And third, Wim Wenders’s 1986 film, Wings of Desire (Der Himmel über Berlin), which is a profound meditation on the encounter with the presence of the past in (the western half of) the city.

Mythos Berlin

‘Mythos Berlin’ was an institutionally supported project, but as befits the generational change of the period, the institutions themselves were now populated by those for whom the radical shifts in urban politics and aesthetics in the late 1960s were part of their own education. It is, unsurprisingly,
a project that also saw the incorporation of critical visual culture into the institutional making of urban memory.

Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, the director of the project, indicated that a major impulse for the ‘Mythos Berlin’ project had been the discussions around the fate of the southern Friedrichstadt (see previous chapter). ‘Mythos Berlin’ recapitulates the narrative of the ‘second destruction’ of the post-war era and restates the importance of the ‘search for a method for dealing with urban spaces that do not lend themselves to being displayed as representative’ (i.e. that are not overlaid with narrativizations). The rhetoric of place memory is evident throughout the conception of the project, in its production of a spatial image. As Knödler-Bunte stated:

Perception and myth always relate to a place of social interaction. [...] Place here [in Berlin] is not only what is on one side of the Wall, but on the other side as well, present as a remnant of remembrance even there where its visibility has faded. [...] The Anhalter Railway Station with its remaining portico and the few remnants of its function, is a necessary prerequisite, a reference-point which shapes (entlangangelt) our perception; the materiality of the remains are an irreplaceable clue (Anhaltspunkt) to make history visible.
The key difference, perhaps, to the Topography of the Terror discussed earlier, is the distinction between the demand there for ‘legibility’ and the rhetoric here of ‘visibility.’ The original German is strikingly tortured, in its almost tautological ‘prerequisite’ and ‘reference point’ in attempting to describe the object and its function in shaping perception.

The exhibition as a whole experiments with the technologies of the museal gaze’s work of transmission, in that it ‘formulates clues’ that are triggers rather than solutions for its addressees. Different modes of encounter are embedded in the exhibition beyond the initial prerequisite of the material remnants. There is a collective dimension to the experience of the exhibition space, but the varying objects and stagings imply a differentiated response, which, for Knödler-Bunte, is a sign of the metropolitan. The framings involve montage, gestural signs and spatial sequences which seek to create a fluid encounter with space. The experience of place and scale is reinforced not in order to revivify old narratives of the location, but to understand the present moment in contact with history.

As Knödler-Bunte described the Anhalter Bahnhof at this point, it is interstitial, poised not only between ruin and renewal, but also between the pulsing commercialism of the Kudamm and the stability of the local neighbourhood. For Knödler-Bunte, this interstitial quality describes ‘the cultural’, which is related to specific forms of perception that are at odds with the perceptions shaped by commerce. He also draws a contrast with theatre: the Anhalter Bahnhof is not an artificial stage, but a space of experience (Erlebnisraum). The fundamental structure is hidden behind the ‘aura’ of the exhibited objects and for Knödler-Bunte, this enchanting form of presentation is crucial for the production of aura, since, if the objects were removed from this form of museal context, they would disappear into the continuum of everyday perception. Only the particular framing here, removed from their original context, and combined in an ‘elevated’ space, allows their particular and unique meanings to be evoked (hervortreten).

While this seems to privilege sensation, and a certain kind of sensationalism, a consideration of one of the art projects on display in the terrain of the former station helps to get a more tangible sense of the kind of spatial image that was produced under these conditions. Wolf Vostell, a central conceptual artist of the previous two decades through his involvement in the FLUXUS movement, designed an installation, ‘La Tortuga’ (The Tortoise) which, in Vostell’s words, sought to manifest the ‘ongoing death throes of the socio-aesthetic environment in the recent history of Berlin.’

The installation, which consisted of an upturned steam locomotive, situated in the terrain without explanatory signs, certainly addressed the
polemical combination of social and aesthetic work that was underpinned by Vostell’s concern with perception in the urban environment and the specific exhibition space. Enhanced by its partial casing in concrete, the building material of the synchronic post-war city, the implication that an obsolescent ‘modernity’ has come to a standstill was, for Vostell, counteracted by the dynamism inherent in the still potentially mobile wheels (which were driven by an installed electric motor). The presence of ‘the past’ was suggested not just by the obsolescent locomotive, but also through the dynamics of communicative memory, voices which evoke ‘the victims of German history, which precisely in this part of Berlin still float around reproachfully in the atmosphere.’ The mode of encounter was central to the work: the public was able to come right up to the sculpture and, ‘by PLACING THEIR EARS [capitals in original] on the engine’ hear the sounds of screams, conversations, heartbeats and fragments of music.7

Here Vostell created a spatial image for the encounter with obsolescence that evokes the attentional dynamics of place memory. Another work by Vostell created for the 1987 anniversary that reinforced and enhanced these concerns in the context of another collective large-scale art project, the ‘sculpture boulevard’, which ran along the Kurfürstendamm in 1987.8 The seven artists involved were a mixture of international and local artists, brought together for a project that, like the Mythos Berlin event, would only be present in the cityscape for a short time. The tension between ‘art work’ and ‘temporary urban environment’ proved creative and disruptive, as in the work of Olaf Metzel, whose ‘sculpture’, ‘13.04.81’, consisted of a tower of shopping trolleys constructed over night at the Joachimsthaler Platz right in front of the Kranzler Café. As Duchamp had called into question the nature of the gallery museum with his everyday readymades in the 1920s, so Metzel called into question the sensory-motor perceptions of the Kudamm as ‘shopping boulevard.’ The undoing of mobility, and the ‘stumbling’ of the Berlin citizens on the morning after its erection, was echoed in the response to Vostell’s ‘Beton-Cadillacs’ (Concrete-Cadillacs) (Fig. 13), which was positioned in the centre of the roundabout at Rathenau-Platz, at the far western end of the Kudamm, where it meets up with the ‘Stadtautobahn’ at Halensee.

The site-specificity of both works is on the one hand, a self-conscious dissection of the sensory-motor regime which had been dominant in West Berlin in the past decades and on the other hand, a commentary on forms of urban memory, founded in an enigmatic refusal to explain. The response to Metzel’s ‘parody’ of the nearby Kaiser William Memorial Church recalls
the response of the Berlin public to Egon Eiermann’s design for a ‘new’ memorial church in the 1950s. Yet site-specificity has more to do with the modes of encounter embedded in a site, rather than any history of the location. Vostell’s sculpture, two golden cadillacs, up-ended and encased in cement, spoke to De Certeau’s contemporaneously crumbling ‘concept-city’, while at the same time, like Metzel, creating an unintended monument, in the sense that the artist’s intentionality is not explained or denoted. Its effect on the perception of the automobile drivers circulating around the roundabout at Rathenauplatz cannot of course be measured, though the public response to these two pieces was very clear, compared to the setting of the Anhalter Bahnhof, where the framing of the locomotive-monument within an exhibition setting created an expectation of non-conventional perception. Vostell’s immobile donation to the socio-aesthetic experience of West Berlin’s built environment was certainly incendiary, but not nostalgic. It made a small, but lasting contribution to the ‘history of destroyed urban history’ and disrupted the synchronic perception of space. It does not operate with an already existing museal space in the manner of Mythos Berlin, nor does it offer the compensations of a memory of urban place as was promised by the IBA-Neu, or indeed by the East Berlin reconstruction of the Nikolaiviertel, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
Curating Berlin in *Wings of Desire*

It is not insignificant that it is Berlin in which this museal gaze and its concomitant memory culture emerges, a culture that is more sophisticated than what might be decried as a conservationist, heritage nostalgia. If, following the implications of De Certeau’s argument, non-museified ruins themselves create an implicit form of seeing, then the urban museal gaze that emerges in Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s is perhaps also shaped by the city itself. Wim Wenders spoke to this in an interview around the time of the release of *Wings of Desire*. This is a quotation that we have already cited, but it bears repetition, as it is a rich and suggestive assertion:

> Berlin has a lot of empty spaces… I like the city for its wounds. They show its history better than any history book or document. [...] [The] empty spaces allow the visitor and the people of Berlin to see through the cityscape [...], through these gaps in a sense they can see through time.\(^9\)

Wenders’s claim for Berlin has many resonances with De Certeau’s version of the museal object within the synchronic post-war urban environment. The wounds of the city possess an anamnestic dimension, give immediate access to the past and counteract the synchronic cityscape that has been imposed on the urban space. Wenders presents the city(scape) as a repository of the past that is activated into a space of museal encounter through an interactive gaze. In line with Huyssen’s formulation of the museal gaze, there is a symbiotic relationship between spectator and material object in the production of an anamnestic gaze that can perceive a sense of the past and of non-synchronicity. As with Riegl, the immediate experience of temporality is privileged over the transmission of historical knowledge and understanding – history is shown, not told – but there is also a sense of the recovery of a different relationship to time, which is also implicit in formulations of place memory. Wenders’s quotation implies an immediate experience of the cityscape by the visitor or citizen. Given our earlier discussion about the construction of place memory, this elision is significant; the visitor does not have the immediate relationship that binds the citizen to place, as Halbwachs argues in his essays on ‘Space and the Collective Memory’, but is in the city, thus subject to the practices of ‘civic seeing.’ Wenders proposes an observer that can be extended to the situation of the cinematic spectator (one which the quotation’s context – *Wings of Desire*’s interest in Berlin’s cityscape – heavily implies). As suggested in the introduction to this book, film can position the spectator in the
'museal encounter' with the opaque, material object, a spectator who has surrendered synchronic visual mastery.

Before discussing *Wings of Desire* in detail, a point of correlation between Wenders and Andreas Huyssen needs to be elucidated in their conception of the technologies of the synchronic and museal gazes. The oppositions that underlie Huyssen’s argument, in particular of the museal object versus television, are very much of their time, though they do not necessarily diminish the relevance of his insistence on the compensatory power of the material object. They are crucial to an understanding of the historical moment out of which the museal gaze emerges and whence it has evolved. Like Huyssen, Wenders is sceptical about television, which brings ‘the new idea of being able to view distant events ‘live’, as they happen [...]’: television is a facilitator of synchronicity beyond the city walls. For Wenders, television is ‘colder, less emotional’ than the movies, and it takes us further away from the idea that an image has a direct link with ‘reality’ (i.e. a ‘register of reality’, in Huyssen’s terms). Televisual hyperreality could ‘only be opposed by our European images, our common art and language, our European cinema.’

Cinema emerges as a medium for Wenders that can counteract the ‘televisual gaze’, through its direct link with reality, an idea which has its roots in Bazin’s essay on the ‘ontology of the photographic image’, which founded the value of the photographic image (and by extension the cinematic image) on its automatic, indexical link with reality.

Wenders’s faith in the photographic image as an indexical record of reality is borne out by his observations on the buildings in Berlin that were being sacrificed to urban planning throughout the 1970s and 1980s. When asked in an interview whether he saw film-making as an archival activity, Wenders replied that the fact that a building is about to disappear is always a good reason to include it in a scene, thereby reinforcing the idea that urban memory emerges at a moment of threat. *Wings of Desire* does not, however, only include ruins and threatened buildings as acts of celluloid preservation. As spatial images, those acts of preservation are simultaneously active encounters with the material, opaque remnants that litter the Berlin cityscape.

*Wings of Desire* presents the cityscape as a repository of the past that is activated into a space of museal encounter through the live gaze of the camera/viewer. This is foregrounded in an early sequence in the film. The angel Damiel, atop the ruin of the war-damaged Kaiser William Memorial Church, looks down on citizens moving across a pedestrian crossing. While almost all the citizens are walking according to the traffic regulations, a child stops in the middle of the pedestrian crossing to look up at Damiel.
The film here contrasts the instrumentalized mode of seeing (in) the city – a ‘civic seeing’ which is blind to everything except the regulation of circulation – with that of the curious child’s mode of perception. The child stops moving and can perceive the angel, but the child also sees the wound, the Kaiser William Memorial Church, which is much more dominant in the long shot of the angel.

Aligned with the child, the cinematic viewer sees the ‘wound’, and is invited to see, via the ‘age value’ of the ruin, through the synchronic time of the city. It is of course debatable that the Kaiser William Memorial Church ‘shows the history of the city better than any history book or document’, as Wenders claimed, but the historical understanding of the object is secondary to the encounter with the anamnestic dimension of the object’s ‘age value.’ Importantly, right from the start, the film establishes a precondition of its museal gaze, one that can be aligned with de Certeau’s reflections: to see through the cityscape is to see beyond the reduction of the cityscape to a phenomenon of a utilitarian present, the means by which ever-present circulation can be regulated.

The film sets up a contrast between two ways of encountering the cityscape: on the one hand, a form of civic seeing which may itself not be one of ‘visual mastery’, but that is shaped by the logic of the synchronic organization of time and, on the other, a gaze that performs a different form of perception and a different form of encounter with the material of the city. The dominant regime of seeing the city sees only the cityscape; the alternative regime of seeing the city, which Wings of Desire proposes to its viewer, is one that sees through the cityscape, by not framing the cityscape as a static image. Indeed, this strategy is manifest right from the start of the film, when the mobile camera (imitating the film’s angelic perspective) swoops down from above and passes through the walls of a tenement block to reveal the alienated lives of the citizens otherwise inaudible and invisible behind the façades of the cityscape.

Throughout, the film shows how the gaze of the vast majority of citizens is locked into the logic of the concept-city, most explicitly exemplified in the sequences showing them in their cars on the urban motorway (whose construction we have discussed earlier). This ‘synchronic urban gaze’ from the car is complicated in sections which reflect on film’s archiving function and also its potential for constructing a museal encounter. Through the use of archival footage that is montaged into a drive down the Potsdamer Strasse, a taxi journey becomes also a drive through the streets of Berlin towards the end of the Second World War. Wenders aligns the spectator’s gaze with that of one of the film’s figures, the angel Cassiel, who has a more
complex relationship to time than the taxi driver whose thoughts, which we hear, simply follow the logic of the synchronic city (he is, after all, a taxi driver). The gaze of the cinematic spectator thus encounters the material object of film as an indexical record of a past that is conventionally invisible in a cityscape that has expunged past time. This form of museal gaze is illustrated again in a sequence where Homer wanders across the empty space of Potsdamer Platz. As he wanders in a state of disorientation, the film montages colour images of the Platz presumably from the end of the Second World War. Homer's ability to see through time is used as a way of showing film's capacity to store past images of the city and represent them at a later point.

The aforementioned drive down Potsdamer Strasse brings Cassiel to the former air-raid bunker which is being used as a location for Wings of Desire's film-within-a-film, which is a melodramatic appropriation of 'Third Reich' history for a mass market. Wenders's film follows the American actor, Peter Falk, who has come to play a role in this American production. Falk, as the visitor to Berlin's walks through the city, 'seeing through time.' In one sequence the camera tracks Falk as he wanders across the vast empty space behind the ruin of the façade of the former Anhalter Bahnhof. The soundtrack allows us to hear Falk's inner monologue, 'spazieren, walking, looking and seeing', at which point he, and the camera, stop to look upon the ruin of the station 'where the station stopped.' The cinematic museal gaze is produced by a live gaze upon an opaque material object in which the spectator's gaze is aligned with that of a character. The special quality of Falk's 'flanerie' ('walking, looking and seeing') is established through a contrast with the Berliners who walk past him in the opposite direction. As Falk disappears from shot, the Berliners wonder whether this figure is Columbo, illustrating their trained fascination with images from American television, as well as their obliviousness to the ruin. Yet the camera has stopped its tracking of Falk, the final shot is of the men aligned with the new building behind the ruin, which is still visible in the margins on the left-hand side of the frame (Fig. 14).

Wenders here makes use of depth of field to maintain the presence of the ruin even when the ostensible curator of the museal gaze, Falk, has disappeared from shot. This focus on the object recalls the Shell House sequence from Wenders's first feature-length film, Summer in the City (1970), discussed in the previous chapter. While there are formal parallels to this Falk/Anhalter sequence, perhaps the most striking aspect is that Wenders actually reshot the 1970 sequence during the making of Wings of Desire. As Wenders remarks in his audio commentary to the DVD extras, the building
in the back of the shot is Emil Fahrenkamp's Shell House that, at the time of filming (in both 1970 and 1986), was threatened with demolition. On the surface, the purpose of reshooting the sequence was to ‘preserve’ the building one more time on celluloid. Yet Wenders also reshoots the mode of encountering the building, the cinematic museal gaze which makes use of depth of field and tracking shot to induce in the spectator the same temporal duration of the encounter with the material object. Employing a Bazinian long-take, Wenders uses film to construct a museal gaze which both records an indexical reality and reveals that reality to the cinematic viewer.

Wenders’s use of the tracking shot in the construction of the spatial image in these sequences shows how cinema can evade the ossification of the material object through a haptic encounter with that object. The film shows that the present cityscape is inhabited by the past, even if that past is not always visible, and also demonstrates that through the encounter with those objects that bear a ‘register of reality’, an alternative way of seeing the city, a museal gaze, can be redeemed.

Wenders’s film is also a display museum for former ways of visualizing the city that construct a counter-narrative of cultural memory in some of the film’s more allusive and elusive moments of intertextuality. In one sequence, the camera tracks Damiel as, subject to the synchronic regimes of the city, he is conveyed up an elevator, walks through a shopping arcade and then stops in front of a display window for electrical goods (television, cameras and video recorders). Damiel, munching an apple, is captivated by a television screen, which at that moment is displaying the image of the actor Peter Falk. The image freezes and is then replaced by a clock. Damiel checks his own watch, reminding us of the regulation of ‘human’ time, before he moves on.

This sequence revisits the famous scene from Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), where M, played by Peter Lorre, munching an apple, stops in front of a metalware shop, attracted by the sheer number of knives displayed in the window (though Wenders, otherwise so keen to point out references to the past in the film, omits to mention this in his commentary to his museum film). Once more, though, it is not simply the display of an object, but also an awareness that the object in its urban environment is subject to a certain regime of seeing. In Lang’s film, as M stands before the window, devouring both the apple and the knives in a literal and visual sense, we are reminded, as Janet Ward writes, ‘how fundamentally the command of advertising on our psyches is based on the promise of gratification’ and the deadly way in which the display window fosters scopophilia and voyeurism in the denizen of the city. Lang’s film, then, is a critical commentary on the ‘commercial
forms of popular visual entertainment, which are said to lure the eye into
civically unproductive forms of visual pleasure.\textsuperscript{12}

In \textit{Wings of Desire}, however, it is the moving image that has itself become
commodified in the display window, and it is moving image technology, and
American images and American TV (Columbo) that are on sale. Wenders's
observation that ‘images once had as a primary purpose to show something,
that primary purpose is becoming more and more the tendency to sell
something’ implies that he displays past images (in his revisiting of Lang's
\textit{M}) not just to preserve a threatened object (in this case Lang's legacy), but
to preserve and display a different regime of seeing: the images of Lang's
films show us how images are being used to sell a mode of seeing.\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Wings of Desire} invites us to see through time back to a different regime of seeing.
The cinematic display of the past is thus, for Wenders, an act of show-
ing, rather than telling or selling, the past to the spectator. The contrast,
implicitly, is with the film being made in the bunker in which the image
of the National-Socialist past is being framed to not reveal anything, but
to be displayed for profit.

Such intertextuality can be read as a way of preserving a tradition –
European traditions – of ways of seeing versus a televisual way of seeing,
but precisely not ‘pacifying’ the fragment's potential. The intertextuality is
not signposted or framed in any way. Its very surreptitiousness means that it
does not rely on the recognition that this is an opaque object from the past.

The final melodramatic dialogue, framed in close-up, between the
angel, Damiel, and the trapeze artist, Marion, is set in the ruins of another
threatened object of the Cold War era, the Hotel Esplanade. The Hotel
Esplanade is a paradigmatic location for \textit{Wings of Desire}, an interstitial space
and time on the ultimate margin of West Berlin, the ruins of Potsdamer
Platz where the concept-city has not yet imposed the post-war regime of
synchronic time. The scene in the Hotel Esplanade is the culmination of
the film's construction of a museal gaze, a way of encountering the city
as the repository of past time. The material structure of the Esplanade is
crucial in this regard.

Wenders's camera makes use of a tracking shot as the camera follows
Marion from the ballroom where Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds are about to
perform ‘From Her to Eternity’ and moves through the bar that is located
to one side of it. As it does so, Wenders makes use of depth of field in order
to record the material traces of the historic bar, but also mise-en-scène
to track past a figure who reproduces, rather indirectly, Otto Dix's 1926
portrait of Sylvia von Harden. This is obliquely suggested in the position
of the woman's arm and the cigarette and in the use of colours (red and
white reversed from the painting; it is, of course, Marion who is wearing von Harden’s red).

Although he does not notice the Dix reference, Friedemann Kreuder, in his study of the Hotel Esplanade as a cultural-historical object, argues that the scene provides the ‘experience of one’s own historicity’ in the Esplanade’s atmosphere. In a formulation of the hapticality of the museal gaze, Kreuder argues that Wenders provides ‘an aesthetic experience of historical material, not in the sense of a critical-pessimistic judgment, but as a value-free perception, sensation, appreciation of shapes and colors.’

This mise-en-scene invites a museal gaze, the Esplanade is a spatial image combining past and present in which the city’s repository can be reactivated and put on display for the ‘live gaze’ of the cinematic spectator. In the almost invisible presence of the past in the indirect citation of Dix, the film engages with the problem of musealization and the potential of the monument whose meaning and intention is not foregrounded.

Throughout the film Wenders cinematically frames the conditions under which the museal gaze can operate in the city. That gaze is, however, founded not on a singular and fixed spectatorial vantage point, but utilizes the medium of film to produce a ‘museal gaze’ which dislocates the eye and from the ‘pace and speed of modernization’ and the synchronic organization of time that dominates in the city. Under Wenders’s curation, film produces a hapticality that troubles the reification of the object and maintains its enigmatic opacity. It does not deem the obsolescent object, in the manner
of a subject appropriating an object, but proposes an aesthetic mode of engaging the non-musealized object, a moment of discovery which is at the same time a moment of preservation in a moment of encounter.

The Nikolaiviertel and The Architects

Despite the omnipresence of the Wall, Wenders’s film fundamentally ignores the existence of the GDR beyond that border. Indeed divided Berlin is metaphorical fodder for the site of a generic reflection on modernist alienation in the musings of a taxi driver at one point.16 It is not just alienation, but historical stagnation that characterizes the urban present in both halves of Berlin as they carried out their celebrations of the 750th anniversary of the city’s grounding.

The Nikolaiviertel, just south-west of Alexanderplatz in the east of the city, had lain, disregarded, since the end of the Second World War. The only building still standing after the removal of rubble had been the Nikolai Church and sacred buildings were not of much interest to the GDR state. The decision to restore the church, and indeed the whole quarter, as part of the 1987 celebrations in the East of the city indicated how far the GDR state was prepared to go in the appropriation of cultural memory for its own legitimation, as well as being a statement to the Western half of the city, implying that the roots of the city lay in the East.

A brief comparison between the ways in which East and West commemorated the city’s founding at their underground stations is instructive in the forms of urban memory were being constructed. Close to the Nikolaiviertel was the underground station, Märkisches Museum, and as part of the 1987 commemorations, it was renovated with a new set of panels along the wall where, conventionally, posters would be placed. These panels form a fascinating series, for they represent, through coloured stones and without textual adornment, the ground structure of the centre of Berlin (i.e. the area around the Fischerkiez that was the ‘original site’ of the founding villages of Berlin and Cölln) from the city’s foundation through to the present.

The long historical narrative is explained in a panel on the station platform, but the emphasis on an abstract visual encounter with a largely dehistoricized urban structure is particularly striking when set against the renovations, for example, at Fehrbelliner Platz, a station where the U7 and (now) the U3 cross. While the U7 platform retains its rather tired-looking 1970s futuristic stylings (common to a whole series of stations built along the line at that time), the U3 platform received a refurbishment for the 1987
commemorations that reinforced its ‘origins’ as one of the first stations on that line, having been opened in 1913.

It is not just a case of period restoration here, but the adornment of the platform panels with photographs from the Wilhelmine period. Where the Märkisches Museum engages with the ‘deep’ structure of the city, the Fehrbelliner Platz constructs the look of a place from the past and as such has much in common, ironically, with the restoration of the Nikolaiviertel in East Berlin.

This reconstruction was not simply a political exercise, but also belonged in the trajectory of the recovery of place memory in the East of the city since the mid-1970s. This had seen the restoration of further quarters in the hitherto-neglected inner city area (around the Kollwitzplatz). The Nikolaiviertel was constructed as a kind of sophisticated pedestrian zone, an island amidst the high-speed, high-frequency traffic routes that surrounded it on three sides (the fourth was the River Spree). It sought to create a form of ‘mixed urban living:’ around 800 apartments were built (in the style of the original quarter), along with 30 shops and 22 restaurants. It was a memory of urban living that was accompanied by the façade of the past: the house fronts were constructed out of prefabricated concrete, but with levels of decoration that are visible in other parts of the inner city reconstructed at this time, particularly in the Spandauer Vorstadt. The encounter was mediated through the retro-details of the façades, as well as through the signboards dotted throughout the area which told the story of the location, primarily through ‘old’ photographs, as was the method at Fehrbelliner Platz.

Both the Fehrbelliner Platz and Nikolaiviertel restorations can be read as a summation of the developments of the ‘monumental memory value’ dimension of the museal urban gaze, a memory value that seeks to communicate by constructing a stable, spatial image that evokes urban continuity and overrides any sense of rupture in space or time. This is the urban memorial gaze as ‘Erlebnis’, too, however, the organization of the consumer body in a museal urban space.

The Spandauer Vorstadt appears as a location in Die Architekten, Peter Kahane’s film about the interlocking professional and personal problems of a young (well, 38-year-old) architect in East Berlin. While developments such as the Nikolaiviertel are not mentioned specifically, the film does engage with questions of cultural memory through the figure of Brenner’s friend from earlier days, who is engaged in the restoration of an (unnamed) palace. This restoration is clearly part of official cultural memory, as we see the celebration of its completion on television at one point in the film.
The film has its limitations, in that its discussion of architectural questions is frequently more ‘tell’ than ‘show’, especially regarding the problems of urban planning in the GDR. Some of the film’s difficulties were due to its complex production conditions: it took a long time to get production permitted, and the historical events of late autumn 1989 turned the as yet unfinished film into an unintentional monument to the production conditions for both film and architecture in the GDR.

The perspective of the urban landscape is where the film succeeds in showing rather than telling, in a subtext about memory that resists the melodrama of its main plot. Here, the film is an unintended monument to ways of seeing in East Berlin, something which it subtly thematizes in visual form throughout. The opening, establishing sequence juxtaposes the conventionally cut office-bound doling-out of shopping-centre contracts with a long take of an ‘empty’ wasteland hemmed in between prefabricated tower blocks. This sequence emphasizes not only duration, but also ‘natural time’ as it draws back from the close-up of two plants thriving tenuously in the wasteland. This focus on the passage of natural time is reinforced by the following shots, which show a series of fossils in close-up, the camera aligning our gaze with that of the film’s central protagonist, Daniel Brenner. Brenner’s interest in fossils is not returned to in the film. Instead it is one of the architect collective, Martin, who demonstrates a fascination for the presence of ‘age value’ in the cityscape, collecting images of the decaying façades of East Berlin. One of the film’s rather disjointed closing sequences takes place at ‘Weisser Elefant’, a gallery in the aforementioned Spandauer Vorstadt, at which Martin’s photographs are being displayed. These are, as the credits inform us, actually photographs by Ulrich Wüst (see previous chapter for a discussion of Wüst’s work). The establishing shot mimics one of Martin’s photographs in its interplay of old/new, demolition and construction that was going on at this time in this part of the city.

As with the earlier cityscape films from both East and West, discussed in the previous chapter, the dilapidated courtyards of the old tenement blocks provide the locus of community, again combining ‘age value’ with community life, in contrast to the static images of deserted spaces and desultory conversations between Brenner and his wife.

The film, then, on a subtextual level, is interested in the act of seeing. This is more blatantly evident in the ultimately ambivalent figure of the accountant Endler, who is presented as having a reputation for economic rigour, and yet is persuaded by Brenner’s economic arguments for aspects of his project. Given that Endler is an accountant, rather than an architect/planner, it is important that the question of ‘seeing’ is most dramatically
presented through the fate of the calculator of the synchronic urban gaze (the problem is not the architect planner, but the economic rationality that circumscribes his planning). We see him for the last time when visited by Brenner in hospital; his eyes have packed in and are bandaged over. Reminding us of Wolfgang Kil’s remarks about Ulrich Wüst, Endler declares that he has learnt that perception is more than ‘merely’ seeing and that the dangerous ones are the ‘one-eyed who only see what they want to see.’

Like the earlier cityscape films, The Architects makes use of the view from the car as the ground-level embodiment of the synchronic urban gaze, particularly in the final drive through the uniform, industrial city ironically accompanied by the soundtrack of the Pionier song Unsere Heimat (Our Homeland) – perhaps now best known for its comic rendition in Good Bye, Lenin. This automobility is contrasted then with the image of Daniel and Johanna haphazardly cycling through the city into the ‘wasteland’ space, replete with children kicking a ball, which is to house the future development.

By the end of the 1980s, place memory work has been established as a paradigmatic activity in Berlin as a form of urban memory, understood as remembrance that is explicitly concerned with and shapes an encounter with the urban environment through the dynamics of place memory. As Wenders suggested, Berlin’s specific topography (ruin spaces, spaces of neglect, Wall-defined marginal space) plays a significant role in the creation of this paradigm. Berlin in that sense can be read as a test case for forms of urban memory that emerged over the 1970s and 1980s in response to the impact of the ‘automobilization’ of the city on the urban environment, and which developed at a slower pace, and with less overt political implications for memory work (though the economic effects of gentrification are certainly political, as we noted above in Hoffmann-Axthelm’s critique of the IBA-Neu).

Berlin’s specific history helps us identify the tensions in Huyssen’s model of the anamnestic dimensions of the material object, in particular, its capacity to generate the experience of asynchronicity. That specific history is, by the late 1980s, expanding to encompass narratives of cultural memory that extend back beyond the Second World War. The figure of the curator, a kind of archaeologist breaking through the ostensibly intact surface of the cityscape, has emerged as central in this period, with the IBA demonstrating the tensions between institutional and non-institutional curation of urban space. Artist-curators in both East and West working in the media of critical visual culture (site-specific installations, photography and film)
also operated on the margins of the institutions, and have been central to the investigation of the attentional dynamics and narrative elaborations of urban memory. The figure of the curator, as both citizen of and visitor to the city, brings to the fore tensions in the production of spatial images of place memory, where the connection to the local is no longer a given, and thus the connection between the spatial image and the collective is no longer that of a faithful mirror, but requires the allegorical activity of a ‘reading observer.’

**Film and the remnants of the wall: *Die Mauer* (1991)**

The forms of museal urban gaze do not disappear with the fall of the wall. The forms of visual engagement with the East Berlin cityscape continue to be marked by the typical mode of critical GDR cultural production in the visual field. As Barton Byg observed:

> any critique or opposition had to come from the seemingly ‘objective’ depiction of life in the GDR as it really was. The results were at times simply stunning: aesthetically sophisticated films that investigate the irreducible gap between personal experience and public history, and the contradictions of the film medium itself in speaking for and to the ‘subjects’ of history in a socialist state.²¹

We saw how the GDR films generated (without explicit commentary) the distinction between the state’s synchronic urban gaze and a museal urban gaze, as well as the gap between the ostensible self-evidence of the image (its ‘immediate’ communicative potential) and the ongoing requirement for interpretation. This eschewal of direct statement remains the model in Jürgen Böttcher’s 1991 film, *The Wall* (*Die Mauer*). On one level, Böttcher’s film, which documents the rendering obsolete of the Wall, translates this former part of the city infrastructure into the realm of cultural memory. On the other, in its eschewal of verbal commentary, it seeks to preserve the immediate communicative potential of the built environment.

The film does not open in an urban environment, but with the camera slowly panning across a landscape in which we see random piles of concrete slabs, identifiable through their form and graffiti as fragments of the Wall. This section before the film’s title already indicates the eschewal of ‘linear time’, film’s ability both to archive time and reorder it, as the sky above the rubble site, filled with birds, progressively shifts to become the sky over a Berlin in which the Wall is still standing.
This initial sequence at the Wall shows ‘amateur’ wall-peckers (not only, but also, Asian tourists with shopping bags and Burberry scarves and, later, Turkish youths) trying to break off fragments. The camera watches passers-by watching them, a ground-level engagement with and appropriation of the Wall, both with hammers and cameras. The film reflects on its own work of recording and reprojecting the passing of time, and the work of others to attempt to capture history/historical time (and space) through the multitude of recording apparatuses that Böttcher’s camera itself documents. Böttcher uses film to interrogate the ‘ghost’ (i.e. disused) Potsdamer Platz underground station, showing a shift from ground-level erosion to systematic removal of remains.

Although the film eschews verbal commentary, it explicitly demonstrates the problem with such narration. At one point, during the opening of the Brandenburg Gate, it records a radio journalist constructing a cityscape for his listeners close to the Brandenburg Gate, revealing to the film viewers that he is making it up, for, as he speaks, he is still on the ‘Western’ side of the pillars. He knows what he is going to see, conjuring up the memory value of the street sign, embedding it within a pre-Second World War narrative that establishes continuity above and beyond the history of the GDR, invoking the familiarity of the landmarks cited (Unter den Linden, Red Rathaus, Palace of the Republic) that are not visible to the film viewers, ironically complementing his assertion that this cityscape was previously one that was not visible from the west.

We then see an American television journalist talking to camera. His speech runs as follows:

No parades will be coming through these arches for a long time and the Wall over there will remain a blot on West Berlin's landscape. But the gate going nowhere now goes somewhere, and all of East Germany knows where it goes. Richard Blystone, CNN, at the Brandenburg Gate.

Blystone repeats this text four times in all. Although Böttcher’s film refrains from explicit commentary, this is blatant. The more Richard Blystone repeats his summation for the global CNN audience of the moment when the Brandenburg Gate is opened, the less convincing it sounds, revealed as a performance whose image must be perfect and uninterrupted, much like the ‘West Berlin’ cityscape. Unsurprisingly, in Blystone’s narrative, the ‘landscape’ is now in the ownership of West Berlin, and the East German remnant, defined as a ‘blot’ on that landscape, is condemned to vanish.
This particular section from Böttcher’s film is concerned with how the material GDR cityscape is translated into a projection screen for triumphalist narratives at the moment when it is recorded as ‘becoming obsolete.’ The film also illustrates that this form of memory value is not the only way in which the material cityscape can be used as a projection screen. For example, there are sections when archive film from the history of Germany and Berlin is run through a projector and beamed on to a fragment of the dismantled Berlin Wall. These sequences of the film are not straightforward to interpret, given the many layers of visuality being interrogated. To begin with, we see an audience behind crash barriers watching a projection on to a section of Wall so covered with graffiti as to render it almost indecipherable (Fig. 15). The next sequence presents within a tighter frame sequences of film fragments relating to the building of the Wall. Although the graffiti is now absent, there is a doubling of ‘age value’ here: as Andrew Webber has noted, the ‘pocked and striated surface’ of the Wall fragment ‘has the effect of appearing before the images projected on to it here, as a veil or partial screen.”22 There is also a back and forth, as at times the archive footage fills the frame, and at times it is only a small section within an otherwise black screen. These latter sequences comprise mostly footage of escapes, including the repetition of one sequence, implying that aspects of the ‘bigger picture’ remain ‘blacked out’ by such an instrumentalized selection.

In addition, this second section replays, in the smaller frame, propaganda from an earlier period (the outbreak of the First World War, soldiers marching through the Brandenburg Gate, then a Nazi parade – but in full screen – the end of the second world war); to the accompanying soundtrack of both the bulldozers and the whirring projector). The material Wall here is not a straightforward projection surface. There is material interference within the image that draws attention both to the image as image (by rendering it less immediately legible) and to the medium through which the image is transmitted. Böttcher’s emphasis on surface is interesting: these are not the traces of graffiti on the fragment of wall that would render the image illegible, but rather material traces of the passage of time that intervene in the ostensibly transparent presentation of history. The implication is that the Wall is a material repository of the city’s history, but its translation into cultural memory is complex, neither the wall nor the archive footage give immediate access to the past, despite the illusion.

This film is a history of a dismantling, quite possibly its own. The film itself is ‘becoming obsolete’ as it illustrates when the projector shows footage from 9 November 1989. Here it not only documents the obsolescence of the GDR cityscape, but this activity is always in the process of ‘becoming
obsolete.' Nevertheless, through the reactivation of the past within the present, it cancels out the state of ‘being out-of-date.’ There is a distinction to be made between the stasis of ‘being obsolete’ and the process of ‘becoming obsolete.’ Böttcher’s film documents the structures by which a state of ‘obsolescence’ is imposed.

The film’s final images are of a pair of eyes on a slab of Wall; the camera moves up this final slab of Wall and halts at the top, with the creation of the visual illusion that a winter tree is growing out of the slab. This can be read as the memory of an image – Caspar David Friedrich’s *Abbey in an Oak Forest* (1809). Friedrich’s image is ambiguous: on one level, it symbolized the decline of the old Church, leaving behind only impressive monuments of the faith that once sustained it. On another level, it stands for nature reclaiming its place, as oak trees now rather impiously grow where cultivated gardens and chapels once stood. Beyond this, it also symbolizes obsolescence. The trees and shrubs of the film are as lifeless now as the chapel and abbey. If we consider these final images in conjunction with the opening ‘Wall graveyard’, we see that the film also contains an argument; what was ‘simply’ rubble at the beginning has now been transformed into a site/sight of cultural memory. The old nation-state religion has declined, leaving behind its monuments.

The commentary remains visual, but the focus on the eyes in the conclusion reminds us that the memorial gaze is an act of seeing that involves
supplementing the image through interpretation. The film invites that interpretation through a form of haptic encounter that revitalizes the dynamics of place memory.

Site-specific interventions after 1990

One of the most striking features of Böttcher’s film is that it translates material remnants into the ambiguous medium of cultural memory so soon after the event that rendered the remnants redundant. This is one key feature of memorialization of the remnants of the GDR regime after 1989, and is a function of the return of the synchronic urban gaze in this period of urban transformation. Having been subject to a critique, which led to a paradigmatic shift by the end of the 1980s, the change in the perceived value of certain spaces in the city led to a whole rash of engagements with these unintended monuments. One example would be Sophie Calle’s The Detachment (1996), an art project that, through reported conversations with Berlin citizens, demonstrated the unreliability of communicative memory, albeit through a non-site specificity in its gallery setting. Other projects demonstrate the continuities of the periods before and after 1989. An example of this is the Finitude of Freedom (Endlichkeit der Freiheit) project, originally designed to cross the divided city. This was planned from 1986 onwards, but was radically altered by the intervention of the Wende that took place before its implementation. The project was originated by the playwright, Heiner Müller, and the artists Rebecca Hor and Jannis Kounellis, and was finally accomplished in the autumn of 1990, overlapping with the unification of the two German states in October of that year. There were ultimately 17 projects, dotted around the now unifying city, in a manner akin to the structure of ‘Mythos Berlin’ and, particularly, the urban interventions of the Sculpture Boulevard. The artworks frequently involved the curation of obsolescent material, something which Kounellis described as ‘more a moral happening than an exhibition.’ Kounellis’s own work engaged with the temporal rhythms of the city: he uncovered an old rail line running between two factory buildings in the industrial ruins of a former transformer station in the Otto-Grotewohl-Strasse and ran a coal carriage at snail’s pace between the halls. A similar project was planned by Raffael Rheinsberg, who, in his ‘joint venture’, wanted to situate large cable rolls in the once-divided Otto-Grotewohl and Wilhelmstrasse. This was ironically deemed not possible, since it would have disrupted the circulation of traffic, and so
it was ultimately located beside a remaining piece of wall close to the Martin-Gropius-Bau.\textsuperscript{23}

Another of the pieces conceived as part of this overall project was Christian Boltanski’s \textit{Missing House} (1990), which ‘framed’ a gap within the housing stock of the Grosse Hamburger Strasse in Berlin-Mitte, in the former Scheunenviertel.

The initial impetus for Boltanski’s work came from a concern with the fate of the Jews of Berlin. His work is formally concerned with the moment of translation of the material fragment from the storehouse repository of the city to the functional realm of cultural memory and \textit{Missing House} enacted (and continues to enact) this in a number of ways.

The absence of conventional communicative memory is reflected both in the absence of both those who lived there and of the house itself, and leads to the production of two memorial sites that are \textit{lieux de mémoire}, \textit{in lieu of a} (Jewish) ‘milieu de mémoire.’ One of these was the missing house on the Grosse Hamburger Strasse, the other was the ‘Museum’, the exhibition of the historical documentation, gathered by Boltanski and his team of researchers, which was displayed about four kilometres away on a piece of open ground near the Hamburger Bahnhof in what had become the former West Berlin over the course of the piece’s development.

Like Rheinsberg in the late 1970s, Boltanski figured here as both collector and curator.\textsuperscript{24} He collected a series of marginalized objects (the site of the house, the archival documentation) and curates them principally through the use of signage. The ‘walls’ of the ‘missing house’ site are marked by forms of framing that mimic newspaper death notices. Boltanski thus stages an encounter with Victor Burgin’s ‘mnemic trace’ of the past, without providing a straightforward narrative. The concern that this encounter might not be sufficiently mediated is addressed by John Czaplicka in his article on commemoration in post-unification Berlin: ‘The aesthetic and empathetic evocation of [such a] situation is best combined with the controlling instance of historical documentation, lest the aesthetic means merely call forth from the beholder a response that plays on the emotions and delves into sentimental-ity or worse.’\textsuperscript{25} In Czaplicka’s account, history can ‘control’ memory. Yet, since in Boltanski’s case the historical documentation was located somewhere else in the city, his work explicitly addressed the mechanisms by which the ‘memory trace’ becomes translated into a memory narrative. Czaplicka gives one explanation of how this mechanism works: ‘In the terseness of artistic language, in the significance of insignificant siting, and in a dignified reserve in subjective artistic expression, the viewer will recognize a receptive framework for the contemplative mind.’\textsuperscript{26} In reflecting on Boltanski’s work,
Czaplicka also identifies a central factor in the dynamics of urban memory: ‘Separated and secluded from the systemic workings of its modern urban context, this space has been rightly termed a “contemplative place”’.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in an environment that is not dominated by the frameworks of communicative memory, a key constitutive factor for the production of urban memory is a technology which establishes the conditions for a kind of receptive attention that is at odds with the ‘systemic workings’ of the city. It can thus be seen how Boltanski’s work seeks to shape one of the key dynamics of urban memory: an appropriate form of attentiveness.
Boltanski identified the site, but also curated it in such a way as to delay narrative closure within the framework of cultural memory. The notices record the names of former residents, not just the Jews who were deported by the Nazi regime, but also those who were resident in the house at the time of its bombing. This is of course not made explicit by the abbreviated information at the site, so the viewer is not immediately aware what exactly is being contemplated. To what extent is this a productive lacuna, produced by the aesthetics of framing perception? The question is highlighted by the allegorical reading of the installation proposed by Abigail Solomon-Godeau. She argues that ‘Boltanski’s Missing House is an appropriate work for contemporary Berlin because it is fundamentally structured around an absence, a vacancy, a loss.’ For Solomon-Godeau, this absence presents ‘obvious [my emphasis - SW] analogies to what is now absent in German national life, namely, the presence of its once flourishing Jewish community.’ Solomon-Godeau reduces the ambiguity of Boltanski’s framing of the traces to a specific meaning. However, more troubling than the specificity is the ostensibly self-evident over-determination of Solomon-Godeau’s interpretation, especially since the accompanying museum and the brief explanatory panel at the Missing House have since been removed, meaning that the uninformed visitor at that time would have struggled to contemplate anything other than the anomaly of empty urban space in a milieu dominated by the practices of consumption.

Solomon-Godeau translates Missing House from its ambiguous status by functionalizing it as a narrative of cultural memory of the absence of Jewish ‘communicative memory’. Nevertheless, Missing House has also been translated into the framework of cultural memory: the work passed into the ownership of the district office of Berlin-Mitte and the archival findings are now on display at the district’s local museum. The site itself remains in place but, given the exchange value of the surroundings as part of a regenerating city centre, the nature of its visibility has changed. Brian Ladd, returning to the site in the late 1990s, observed that, ‘some passers-by see only the new restaurant garden in front of the installation.’ Perhaps the growing monumental invisibility of the object illustrates the dynamics of urban memory, as it is gradually translated back into the city’s storehouse repository (Fig. 16). For example, it is included in Stefanie Endlich’s encyclopedic volume of NS monuments, but it was not mentioned in the official ‘City as Exhibition’ guide, which is discussed in Chapter Four.

Missing House invokes two anamnestic dimensions of the opaque object in different ways: it evokes asynchronicity by generating a form of attention in the city that is not determined by the systemic workings of the city; and it produces counter-memory through a ‘delayed’ meaning that
undermines the swift consumption of its narrative significance. It is also not located in the ‘city centre’, and thus, at least when first executed, was marginal to the tourist itineraries as well as being related to a marginalized set of spatial practices. It illustrates the centrifugal nature of both pre- and post-unification Berlin, with its reconfigured centres and margins. When moved to the city centre, the kind of artistic practice in which Boltanski engages becomes transformed into a tourist spectacle, as I shall discuss in Chapter Four.

Boltanski’s work can be read profitably alongside Shimon Attie’s 1992-3 project, *Writing on the Wall*, also produced in Berlin’s former Jewish quarter, the Scheunenviertel, a centre for Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the end of the nineteenth century located close to the Alexanderplatz. Attie’s work is a textbook example of the translation of documents from the repository into the functional archive of cultural memory, reactivating historical photographs of the Scheunenviertel that reflected the world of the Jewish working class rather than that of the more affluent, assimilated German Jews who lived mostly in the western part of the city.

Yet this work of cultural memory also relied on the dynamics of place memory, the spatial image of the unintended monument. Attie slide-projected portions of pre-war photographs of Jewish street life in Berlin onto the same or nearby addresses today. By using slide projection on location, fragments of the past were introduced into the visual field of the present, in a method similar to that used at the Brandenburg Gate installation by Hans Hoheisel discussed in the introduction. Parts of long-destroyed Jewish community life were visually simulated and momentarily reactivated, becoming visible to street traffic, neighbourhood residents, and passers-by. This momentary intersection of past and present as an aesthetic strategy does not present an ‘old face’ alongside the ‘new’, but rather defaces the contemporary face with the ‘old’ face, creating a much more complex object that fractures and places in question the contemporary experience of time in the city, producing ‘critical memory value’ through temporal discontinuity.

Attie also noted that, in the early 1990s, the Scheunenviertel was a neighbourhood undergoing rapid gentrification. His own commentary runs as follows:

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has become the new chic quarter and frontier for many West Berliners. As a result, the neighborhood has seen a huge influx of new residents and capital from the West. Within the course of only a few years, block after block of houses and buildings in the Scheunenviertel had become completely transformed. Most have been
entirely renovated, from the inside out. Others have been transformed into fashionable and trendy bars and restaurants.

As a result, Attie observed in 1996, the Scheunenviertel had become almost unrecognizable even in the few years since the Writing on the Wall project was realized. The ‘remaking’ of the Scheunenviertel affects both Jewish as well as post-war East German collective memory and identity, as the last physical evidence of these pasts disappeared as well.31

It is clear from the photographs taken by Attie of his project that it involves the layering of the everyday visual field of the urban environment, turning the city into a spatial image. Like Boltanski’s work, Attie’s commentary also makes clear that he has perceived that what begins as a comment on post-war German amnesia becomes through time a more general comment on the effacing of time in the urban environment through the workings of capital.

The ‘preservation’ of obsolescence in these refinements of the museal gaze results from the construction of a ‘spatial image’ that resists the disappearance of the past in the East. The projects of Boltanski and Attie curate ‘empty spaces’ abandoned during the GDR and by the disappearance of the GDR state to create an encounter with urban space that is still ‘momentary’, and concerned with the disruption of temporal rhythms in the city, working with modulations of attention.32

These projects also alert us to a shift in the coordinates of urban memory culture. The museal gaze is less addressed to resisting the impact of the synchronic gaze and more with confronting the shifts in the value of ‘real estate’ and their impact on these spaces of uncertainty.

The reconstruction of the German nation after 1989, both literally and metaphorically, was largely focused on Berlin as the new capital, and indeed the massive and radical transformations in the built environment are a productive example for how the dynamics of urban memory function in a rapidly transforming city on a global scale. At the same time, this model of urban memory is one that builds upon a certain set of practices that had become largely institutionalized by the time of the fall of the Wall. This has implications for the response in the East of the city, which was obviously going to be more affected by the economic shifts (changes in ownership and in the exchange value of space, both public and private) and was thus more likely to resist change through the production of ‘spatial images’. The two different halves of the city represented two different forms of collective experience, the analysis of which sheds lights on how urban memory practices responded to the challenge of framing urban memory in post-wall Berlin.