Urban Memory and Visual Culture in Berlin

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Epilogue

‘Genuine memory must therefore reveal an image
of the person who remembers’

One final spatial image, to reflect on the repository, the archive, display, curation, and the role of the academic as a collector, curator, and interpreter of urban remnants in a foreign city.

In 2009, after I had been working on this project for a number of years, and following my visit to the Rathaus, to see the Bädicker exhibition, and to the Kunsthalle to see Allora & Calzadilla’s film discussed in Chapter Four, I indulged in a little field work before returning to the library in the Breite Strasse. I wandered on to the grass which had been laid over the now empty site of the former Palace of the Republic, in what might be read as the unintended literalization of the metaphor of ‘letting grass grow over the past’. Fascinated by the ageing of concrete, that foundational material of post-war Berlin, I could not help strolling across the grass towards the remaining fragments of the Palace structure, its concrete foundations rooted in the ground. I could not help noticing a piece of paper that was poking out of a crevice in the concrete. Nor could I help approaching the piece of paper, removing it from its resting place, and inspecting it. I read it, and ‘completely controlled’ by my Fujipix camera, appropriated it with a snapshot:

The note, written in German, read (my translation):

The ex-‘GDR’ is a disturbance... But why?
Now the Palace of the Republic is gone. OK, and?
The ex-‘GDR’ is still always there whatever happens.
The DDR-Museum, T-Shirt, souvenir [illegible]
... Everything that makes money. I find that a shame.
The GDR is not worse than the Nazi era
And it is also German history

[MARGINAL ASIDE] I enjoyed coming here for 30 years.
There it was, the habit of spatial practice, place memory, invoked on the margin of a narrative of nations, in the margins of a vanishing building in the centre of a city.

I put the memory back where it cleaved to the crevice, and returned to my pile of books in the library.