

## Introduction

Jein, Gillian; Rorato, Laura; Saunders, Anna

## Journal of Contemporary European Studies

DOI:

[10.1080/14782804.2017.1381588](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2017.1381588)

Published: 11/12/2017

Peer reviewed version

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

*Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):*

Jein, G., Rorato, L., & Saunders, A. (2017). Introduction: City Margins, City Memories. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 25(4), 405-411.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2017.1381588>

### Hawliau Cyffredinol / General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## **Introduction**

### **City Margins, City Memories**

The mainstream imagination of the European city is commonly based around a cultural topography of the 'centre': the urban 'core' in which power, history and collective social life is performed. These identities are most readily articulated through the stereotypical itineraries of the tourist, and perpetuated in the monikers of Paris as the city of lights and love, Berlin as a city of war and walls and Milan as the city of fashion and food. While these clichés have their roots in the material histories of each city, they become potential tools in the era of neoliberal marketing for the instrumentalisation of the past. This packaging of the past potentially neglects the experience of those who do not conveniently fit the promotional image of the city. But, in its complexity and mobility urban space defies clichés, and as such has continuously been the site of tensions between governmental and planning ideals of coherence, order and continuity on the one hand, and the realities of the city as a complex assemblage of subjectivities, societies and environments in flux on the other. The three cities—Berlin, Milan and Paris—discussed in this special issue each provide different contexts for the exploration of this complex, multi-layered fabric of urban life. As the articles gathered here demonstrate, the question of what it means to live, and what life means in the contemporary European city is often most fiercely debated, contested and decided at the edges of the neoliberal hegemonic centre.

Margins, as many of the contributors to this special issue attest, are relative. No matter whether we refer to marginality as a social, spatial or temporal condition, the emergence of the margin is mutually implicated in the configuration of mainstream identities, central spaces and official histories. As Michel Foucault (1984) has recognised, the 'other' spaces that constitute a society's margins are at once anathema to and formative of the centre and, by extension, the centre-periphery nexus is always one of power relations. The links between marginality and power have been widely discussed in spatial and social terms. As the urbanist Spiro Kostoff points out, 'The phenomenon of the suburbs is almost as old as cities' (2004, 47), with the suburbs functioning variously as the site for the restfully wealthy to exist away from the city's perceived fervour and filth, or for the social and spatial displacement of those who have no place at the centre of things. Beyond the spatial, in terms of social marginalisation, engagement with those identities on the periphery of hegemonic subject positions have constituted the principal object of feminist, postcolonial and ethnicity scholarship since the development of Cultural Studies in the late 1970s. While space and identity are crucial threads in this issue's exploration of the urban margins, the articles collected here also bring to bear a temporal, and more particularly, a mnemonic perspective on marginality. Asserting the margin's temporal dimension is firstly to recognise history's quality as an unruly collection of multiple voices and perspectives. This recognition extends logically to acknowledge the alternative, forgotten, possible or repressed histories that lie on the edge of mainstream historical accounts. Secondly, by emphasising the temporality of margins we attest to their contingency. Neither spatially nor socially static, periphery-centre relations are negotiated in time with the social, political and cultural tensions informing the city's dynamics. And, if margins are relational and emergent, then they are as a consequence plural and conditional; in process, or 'becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980), margins are, therefore, *generative* of ways of being amongst others in urban space.

Memory is, furthermore, inextricably embedded in the material fabric of the city, and is expressed in the urban landscape not only through more obvious historical constructs, such as heritage sites, museums and memorials, but also through public art, architecture, recreation areas, street names and graffiti. As a social construct, however, memory is shaped by the context in which it is created (Halbwachs, 1925), and is thus influenced by the prevailing economic, political, cultural, religious or ideological beliefs of the present. As such, memory can be understood as an invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), which is used—and indeed altered—over time to support the varying purposes of different regimes. The re-naming of streets in eastern Germany following the demise of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), or the felling of statues of Stalin in more recent demonstrations in the Ukraine, for instance, are just two examples of the way in which new narratives of collective memory are imposed on the urban landscape, with the purpose of marginalising—and potentially erasing—past narratives. Given that physical space is in limited supply within the cityscape, we thus see prime urban sites being overwritten time and time again. This process of reinscription is captured by the notion of the urban palimpsest, which highlights both the chronological layering of history and the conflict between the need to conserve the past on the one hand and the desire to move forwards through erasure and new inscription on the other. As such, the city can be understood as a space of amnesia as much as of memory.

The inscription of collective memory onto the urban landscape is a highly selective process, for as Foote and Azaryahu (2007, 129) state, ‘we see only what *has been* marked, rather than what has *not been*.’ Drawing on Aleida Assmann’s (2010) discussion of the canon and the archive within cultural memory, we see in the city the way in which the active, working memory of a given society is embodied in a ‘canon’ of visible inscriptions—e.g. through museums, monuments and showcase architecture—whereas other, more dormant memories of the past are relegated to the ‘archive’. These may be stored in the living memories of marginalised groups, in geographically marginal locations, or in disparate urban fragments. As such, memory can play an important role in the margins of a city, and—as demonstrated in several articles in this special issue—can be significant in bringing marginal groups, locations or histories back from apparent amnesia. In the same way that contents of the archive may become part of the canon, marginalised elements of the city may return to the centre.

The articles collected in this special issue, then, all deal with the issue of margins and memories in persistent flux, and read against the grain of dominant urban imaginaries. Inquiry into the questions of marginality and memory is explored in these articles through a number of common thematic threads. Notably, the spatial challenge to the urban core can be seen most readily in the growth of the suburbs in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Management of this space often goes hand in hand with the reinvestment of marginal space and its gentrification in economic as well as cultural terms—where the standardisation of cultural norms becomes key even in its promotion of ‘alternative’ (neoliberal) spaces, offering the kinds of urban experience deemed ‘on trend’. The practice of marginal memory in public space also brings into sharp relief issues pertaining to the democratization of space, and questions of equality, participation and visibility form an essential part of the lines of enquiry pursued in these articles. The way in which these themes unfold is of course profoundly shaped by the urban context from which they emerge and as such each of the articles in this collection are discussed within the contextual weave of their particular urban surrounds.

From its foundation on the île de la Cité to the contemporary geographies of the *intra* and *extra muros* city, the cultural topographies of Paris can be mapped through the successive breaches of the city's walls. Pushing ever outwards, the ancient, medieval fortifications of the old city find their contemporary equivalent in the boulevard périphérique that encircles the 20 *arrondissements* [districts] of Paris *intra muros* and marks the beginning of that 'banned' space of the *banlieues* [suburbs]. As the 'Capital of Modernity' (Harvey 2003), Paris is the site of revolution, regicide and republicanism, and is a city where those marginalised whether by wealth, status or space, have consistently vied for a stake in the city's governmental and cultural cartography. This is a contest expressed most recently in the tension between the republican ideals of cultural universalism and religious secularism, and the realities of everyday life in the transnational, postcolonial city. But at the close of the last century too, revisionist histories of the German Occupation of the city brought to light the active role of the French in collaborating with the Nazi's programme for the Final Solution. The result is that a 'devoir de mémoire' ['duty to remember'] has become an important part of the institutional inscription of Jewish and postcolonial trauma into the city's public spaces.<sup>1</sup> As institutionalisation has progressed, so too have debates questioning the French State's modes and motivation in repatriating its lost citizens (see for instance Hazareesingh (2015)). While successive French governments have, for example, written into the fabric of the capital the State's role in the Occupation or the massacre of over 200 Algerians in the Seine in October 1961, it has been argued that such material acknowledgement acts as a means to historicise, so as better to forget the trauma of marginalised groups. Indeed at the extreme, the French historian Pierre Nora famously argues that the construction of 'lieux de mémoire' [sites of memory]—plaques, monuments and museums that bear witness to such trauma—'occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history' (Nora 1989, 12).

Dealing with the emergence of discourses of modernity in post-war urban planning, Jehnie Reis's article brings into view debates in the 1920s surrounding the development of the *Cité Universitaire de Paris*. In the context of this development in the Paris *zone*, Reis identifies a Republican drive for social transformation based on the architectural and territorial inscription of the cultural and material ideals of modern hygiene. In her close analysis of archival sources, Reis brings the reader into contact with contemporary debates around Parisian public space, new global outlooks in the construction of transformative, educational spaces, and the ideal of cleansing material and moral depravity from the modern landscape. Her article demonstrates the persistent tension between utopian modernist visions and the realities of life in the Paris *zone* in the early twentieth century.

Nadia Kiwan's piece also focuses on a singular building—the Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration (MHI)—this time to extrapolate the wider significance of debates surrounding collective memories of immigration in France. Kiwan's article engages closely with museological practice at the MHI to explore the ways in which the French national project to remember immigration is imbricated with local urban and suburban contexts. Employing theoretical concepts from within memory and museum studies to unpack some of the MHI's modes of display and public engagement, the article moves from historical overview to examine the museum's national media campaign before coming to question the extent to which the museological practices of the space manage to elude dominant, nationally constructed discourses of immigration in France.

Memories and margins have also been constantly shifting concepts in Berlin, a city which found itself at the heart of five different regimes in the twentieth century alone. Having served as capital of the Wilhelmine Empire, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, then in part as the capital of the GDR, it is little surprise that this city was once again chosen to be capital of united Germany, the so-called 'Berlin Republic'. In this new role, it has become the stage on which German unification is being played out and—in the words of its former mayor, Eberhard Diepgen—the 'workshop of German unity'.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is also a city 'whose buildings, ruins, and voids groan under the burden of painful memories' (Ladd 1997, 3), and the challenge of reconfiguring and re-imagining itself as the capital of a new, united Germany in the wake of four decades of division and two twentieth-century dictatorships, has provoked searching questions of identity and memory. As Europe's largest building site in the 1990s, Berlin's urban landscape has been at the very heart of this redevelopment, which brought with it difficult decisions over what to preserve, what to destroy and what to build. It is little surprise that the city has attracted almost unrivalled international attention from architects, artists and town planners in recent years, and as a result, high-profile memorial structures and showcase architecture now adorn the cityscape. Yet as Karen Till (2005, 7–8) states, these new structures 'communicate conflicting social desires—to remember and to forget violent national pasts that still linger in the present.' As the three articles dealing with Berlin in this special issue highlight, it is this fine balance between memory and amnesia which has been central to both the revitalisation of Berlin's historical and geographical margins, and the marginalisation of memories and structures that were previously at the city's core.

Carol Anne Costabile-Heming discusses the debates surrounding one of the most controversial structures in recent years in Berlin: the rebuilding of the Berlin City Palace façade. Destroyed in 1950 by the GDR regime, the reconstruction of this imperial building is intended to restore a missing architectural link to the historic city centre and to house the *Humboldt Forum*, which will bring together a number of non-European museum collections and scientific collections, as well as provide central library space. As the article highlights, however, this project has brought about the marginalisation of certain elements of the city's urban identity which do not conform to the demands of contemporary politics. Most notably, the destruction of the GDR's former Palace of the Republic, which previously stood on this site, demonstrates the widespread political desire to erase the GDR past from the historic city centre. In contrast, a more unexpected consequence of the centralisation of collections in the *Humboldt Forum* is the potential marginalisation of the former West Berlin suburb of Dahlem, in which the non-European museum collections are currently held. Costabile-Heming argues that city planners appear to value restorative nostalgia in the desire to restore the historic appearance of central Berlin, and suggests that opportunities for meaningful dialogue between and about imperial, divided and united Germany may have been missed in the immediate future.

In contrast to Costabile Heming's focus on central Berlin, Deirdre Byrnes turns to the formerly restricted area of Hohenschönhausen, situated in the north-eastern district of Lichtenberg. Now widely recognised as the location of Berlin's notorious Stasi prison, political prisoners were marginalised both physically and metaphorically here during the GDR, for the site even failed to appear on maps of East Berlin. Having been turned into a memorial site in 1994, the former prison is now becoming an important part of the post-GDR memorial landscape, and hosts a permanent exhibition since 2013. In her article, Byrnes particularly examines the use

of eyewitness testimony in the exhibition and in guided tours of the prison, arguing that the re-enactment of trauma and the performance of the past through eyewitnesses produces an experiential site. This memory work is intended to counter the increasingly nostalgic memories of the GDR in recent years, and enables once marginalised voices to find expression in unified Germany. As Byrnes highlights, however, the site remains a ‘troubling topography’, as the number of former East Germans who visit the site is relatively low, suggesting a certain reluctance to engage with this difficult chapter of history and thus a continued tendency towards marginalisation.

Hanno Hochmuth’s article also deals with the legacy of divided Germany, but from the perspective of the former West Berlin borough of Kreuzberg. Although geographically located centrally in the city, this borough suddenly shifted to the margins of West Berlin after the building of the Berlin Wall, as it became a peninsula stretching into the Eastern side of the city. As a result, it became the residence of those often on the margins of West German society: migrants, workers and old people. Since the fall of the Wall in 1989, however, it has become one of the most gentrified areas of Berlin, and the tenement houses once slated for removal have become some of the most expensive dwellings in the city. While German unification would appear to have provided the main impetus for the reintegration of Kreuzberg, Hochmuth argues that the history boom of the 1970s was just as important in revitalising this once neglected borough. As he outlines, grassroots activists in the late 1970s worked to protect the historic urban structure through exploring and promoting the local history of the area, thereby creating a sense of identification through historical awareness. Memory was thus an important tool in the revival of the area, and history became a valuable commodity. The irony is, of course, that the chic and gentrified Kreuzberg of contemporary Berlin now excludes the very minorities that were once instrumental in its revitalisation. As demonstrated in all three articles on Berlin, the city continues to be in flux—yet it is the force of memory which continues to drive it forwards.

Like Berlin, Milan is unusual within its national context, for unlike many Italian historic cities, its reputation does not rest mainly on the attractiveness of its architecture or artistic heritage but rather on its industriousness. At the time of the Unification in 1861, Milan was already the third largest city in Italy (after Naples and Rome), and thanks to a circle of waterways connecting the centre to the surrounding territory, industry and commerce thrived there (Granata 2015, 4). After World War II, following the country’s sudden industrial surge, Milan was one of the key centres of the so-called ‘economic miracle’, experiencing rapid economic growth and an influx of people from Southern Italy and other more rural Northern regions. As a result, the city became known for its working-class culture, flourishing labour market and creativity, and acquired the label of economic capital of Italy. With the collapse of Fordism as a mode of production in the late twentieth century, the city had to re-invent itself. Given the presence of a successful textile industry and ‘strong local craftsmanship knowhow’ (D’Ovidio 2016, 79), fashion and design represented two obvious sectors in which to invest. Each of the periods of economic change described above implied a redefinition of the city’s margins, challenging the traditional concepts of centre and periphery. The latest transition, however, has been extremely difficult, leading to a strong sense of fragmentation due to an increasing gap between the official image of the city promoted by planners, investors and administrators, and the reality of its inhabitants. Both articles in this section stress the importance of finding

alternative ways of mapping the city that are capable of reflecting the needs and aspirations of ordinary citizens.

Orsini's contribution looks at the re-writing of the Milanese margins from three different perspectives: first, as an expression of the economic and social changes that determined the city's evolution over time; second as the result of constant movements of inclusion and exclusion of spaces or materials within the city and its urban territory; and third, by focusing on the notions of porosity and permeability. If the logic of inclusion and exclusion, of which gentrification is an example, seemed in the past to generate a system of rather rigid and impermeable borders, the disappearance of the traditional binaries—inside/outside, public/private, empty/full, etc.—is leading to the deconstruction of space. In such a context, Orsini argues, the margin becomes an autonomous entity. It often coincides with the fragment, a single object or surface, and is characterised by mobility. When taken together, the fragments form a porous spatial network that connect and enliven the individual pieces, as a series of margins constantly intersecting and mirroring the heterogeneity of the contemporary spatial condition.

Rorato's article engages with the powerful nature of individual fragments in challenging the stereotypical images of the city, in particular those images that tie Milan almost exclusively to fashion, design, or events like Expo 2015. Using a series of diverse publications devoted to Milan during the last five years, this article argues that in order to understand Milan in the twenty-first century one needs to start at grassroots level, giving voice to its inhabitants, letting them talk about their relationship with various parts of the city, the changes undergone by certain neighbourhoods and how people adapted to them. Despite paying attention to fragments, and to the individual life, all the aforementioned publications stress the need to abandon excessively individualistic positions to rediscover a way of connecting, of transforming the 'city product' into a city of 'junctions' (Rolando 2014, 199). In this context, graffiti are particularly important. The potential of 'writers' as alternative urban geographers (Iveson 2010, 26) and of graffiti as a vital site for local identity (Chmielewska 2007, 148) are now widely acknowledged. However, due to their omnipresence graffiti have also become 'a powerful figure of mainstream visual language' and can be seen as an agent of cultural globalization (Chmielewska 2007, 148 and 162), thus raising interesting questions about identity and place-making in a globalised world. Milan is an ideal case study for this kind of reflection as in the late 1980s and 1990s graffiti were frequently associated with social centres and thus their subversive nature was inevitably emphasised. Both articles on Milan reveal that mapping through fragments can promote a process of democratization of space by giving a voice and visibility to those traditionally neglected by the city authorities and official discourses, and testify further to the fact that such a map can never be complete as margins are constantly being (re)negotiated.

## References

Assmann, Aleida. 2010. 'Canon and Archive.' In *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 97-107. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Chmielewska, Ella. 2007. 'Framing [Con]text. Graffiti and Place.' *Space and Culture* 10 (2): 145-169.

- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1980. *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- D'Ovidio, Marianna. 2016. *The Creative City Does Not Exist*. Milan: Ledizioni Publishing.
- Foote, Kenneth E., and Maoz Azaryahu. 2007. 'Toward a Geography of Memory: Geographical Dimensions of Public Memory and Commemoration.' *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 35 (1): 125–144.
- Foucault, Michel [1967] 1984. 'Des espaces autres.' *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5: 46–49.
- Granata, Mattia. 2015. *Smart Milan*. New York: Springer.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1925. *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: Alcan.
- Harvey, David. 2003. *Paris: Capital of Modernity*. London: Routledge.
- Hazareesingh, Sudir. 2015. *How the French Think: An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iveson, Kurt. 2010. 'Introduction.' *City* 14 (1-2): 25–32.
- Kostoff, Spiro. 2004. *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Ladd, Brian. 1997. *The Ghosts of Berlin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.' *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory: 7–24.
- Perrin, Jean. 1992. 'L'Affaire Touvier. Une cérémonie à l'île de la Cité. Le devoir de mémoire.' *Le Monde*, 16 April 1992. Accessed 1 July 2016.  
[http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1992/04/16/l-affaire-touvier-une-ceremonie-a-l-ile-de-la-cite-le-devoir-de-memoire\\_3909616\\_1819218.html?xtmc=une\\_ceremonie\\_a\\_l\\_ile\\_de\\_la\\_cite\\_le\\_devoir\\_de\\_memoire&xtcr=4](http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1992/04/16/l-affaire-touvier-une-ceremonie-a-l-ile-de-la-cite-le-devoir-de-memoire_3909616_1819218.html?xtmc=une_ceremonie_a_l_ile_de_la_cite_le_devoir_de_memoire&xtcr=4)
- Rolando, Stefano. 2014. *Citytelling*. Milan: Egea.
- Till, Karen E. 2005. *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.



---

<sup>1</sup> This expression enters the language after its use as a headline in an article by Jean Perrin for *Le Monde* in 1992. In his piece, the journalist cites Louis Mexandeau (then secretary of State for veterans): ‘J’ai voulu témoigner de ma solidarité totale avec ceux qui ont été victimes de l’occupant. On ne peut pas oublier. Il y a un devoir de mémoire.’ [‘I wanted to express my complete solidarity with those who had been victims of the occupier. We cannot forget. There is a duty to remember.’]

<sup>2</sup> Eberhard Diepgen, cited in ‘Bananen billiger’, *Der Spiegel*, 26 (1994), pp. 90–1 (p. 91).