

Media, Memory and the City

Introduction

JENS MARTIN GURR / ROLF PARR

This collection results from a workshop on *Media, Memory and the City* held at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities/Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut (KWI) in Essen on November 26, 2019. The workshop took place in the context of a week-long stay of L.A.-based urban historian, media scholar and novelist Norman M. Klein, Professor of Critical Studies at the California Institute of the Arts. Hosted by Jens Martin Gurr, Norman Klein visited the Department of Anglophone Studies of the University of Duisburg-Essen for the KWI workshop, several guest lectures and a meeting with the CityScripts research group¹, for whom Klein's notion of »scripted spaces« as outlined in his 2004 monograph *Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* was especially relevant.

Organized on the occasion of Klein's visit, the workshop revolved around what are arguably the three concepts central to his work over at least three decades: Both in his scholarly work, for instance his monograph *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (1997/2008), as well as in his two multimedia novels *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920-1986* (2003) and *The Imaginary 20th Century* (2016), Klein explores the interplay between the city, its medial representation, and questions of individual as well as collective memory (and its obverse, erasure and forgetting). A recurring interest here is with various forms of layering, both in the sense of a palimpsestic layering of different historical strata in the city as well as with various techniques of representing such layers in the form of multimedia documentaries. *Bleeding Through*, for instance, combines a print novella of some 40 pages recounting key phases of one woman's life in L.A. with a multimedia DVD containing thousands of photographs, newspaper clippings, film scenes and various levels of narration. These are presented by means of a then unprecedented user-navigated interface based on a database archive accessed in non-linear randomized ways. An iconic feature of the multimedia documentary are overlays of historical and more recent photographs of identical sites represent-

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ing these different layers – Klein refers to them as »bleeds«. His understanding of layered urban memory and its physical and mental representation owes much to Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and its notion of »superposition«: implicitly invoked in *Bleeding Through*, Benjamin is a key presence in Klein's *History of Forgetting*, on which *Bleeding Through* is partly based (for a discussion of *Bleeding Through* and its representation of urban memory, see Gurr 2021, 62–83; for a discussion of key aspects of Klein's urban historiography, cf. Parr in this issue).

Without being confined exclusively to Klein's work, the workshop thus took its cue from some of his key concerns and explored the interrelation of media, memory and the city in a curated sequence of papers. Moreover, both of Klein's interactive multimedia novels, *Bleeding Through* and *The Imaginary 20th Century*, where on display in an exhibition set up in the KWI's library during and after the conference. Also during the workshop, a group of students from the University of Duisburg-Essen and the University of Cincinnati presented their transatlantic project *The Future of Our Two Cities (Cincinnati and Essen)*, which took the form of two photo/film essays.

In addition to selected essays based on papers presented during the workshop, this special issue also contains a number of specifically commissioned essays. The collection begins with two essays on literary representations of urban memory, JULIA SATTLER's »City of Conscience«: *Fragments, Empty Spaces, and the Psychogeography of Detroit* in Kristin Palm's »The Straits«, a discussion of Palm's highly allusive and reflexive exploration of urban memory and identity in Detroit, as well as LENA MATTHEIS and JENS MARTIN GURR's »Routine« versus »Event«: *Media, Memory and the City* in B. S. Johnson's »The Unfortunates«, arguably one of the most ambitious explorations of the interplay of memory and the city in a highly media-conscious and self-reflexive novel of the British experimental tradition. Two essays on Norman Klein's work then frame artist MISCHA KUBAL's photo collage on *res-o-nant*, his celebrated installation in the Jewish Museum in Berlin (2017–2019), which functions as an artistic centrepiece: First, NORMAN KLEIN's essay *Memory, Media and the City in Multimedia Docufiction: Notes and Layers from 2001 to 2021*«, a contextualization of his own practice in his media novels; second, ROLF PARR's »Seinszustände« und ihre »Dokufabeln«: *Norman M. Klein und das Medial-Imaginäre der Städte*, a wide-ranging discussion of the interplay of media, memory and the city – or, as Parr argues it should more precisely be – »Cities, Memory, and the Media« in both Klein's media novels and his scholarly work on urban memory. The final two essays tie in with Klein's interest in U.S. popular culture, theme parks and scripted spaces, as well as in architecture and urban development (e.g., in the »docufable« *Freud in Coney Island, and Other Tales* and in his scholarly work): FLORIAN FREITAG's »Share a Luna Park Memory ... and Make a New One!«: *Memorializing Coney Island* traces Coney Island's rich and layered history as evidenced by its theme parks and rides and their frequently self-reflexive harking back to earlier installations, while ALEXANDER GUTZMER's essay *Workspacization of the City: The New Capitalist Reappropriation of the Urban Realm* engages

with the pervasive »googlefication« both of contemporary workspace architecture and, by implication, of urban development as a whole through the trend of urban co-working spaces in cities worldwide.

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