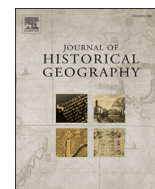




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Identities in transit: the (re)connections and (re)brandings of Berlin's municipal railway infrastructure after 1989

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses urban railway infrastructures as landscapes in order to reveal their role as constructions and constructors of collective and individual identities. It does this by introducing the notion of 'identities in transit', a rhetorical category that problematises the tendency to consider the nexus of urban infrastructure and identity formation only during discrete moments and in relation to abstract subjectivities. Specifically, it explores the (re)connections and (re)brandings that Berlin's municipal railway infrastructure, the Stadtschnellbahn (S-Bahn) and Untergrundbahn (U-Bahn), experienced in the years surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall, and considers their contribution to the formation of post-unification municipal identities. These discussions are historicised and contextualised by an account of the consequences of Berlin's Cold War division on its transport infrastructure. The article then considers the subsequent impact of the city's reunification and how the S- and U-Bahn became a means of constructing more unified municipal identities. It considers the process by which Berlin's municipal railway networks were reconnected after November 1989 and frames this process as a metaphor for both the different durations and protracted process of the city's reunification and the identities these gave rise to. Thereafter, the article argues that the rebranding strategy pursued by one of the city's municipal transport authorities provides one of the earliest examples of an attempt to manufacture a unified identity for the New Berlin. The article highlights that while processes at the municipal level emphasised the unification of collective identities, experiences of the infrastructures themselves often involved persisting divides and forms of subversion and social conflict that highlighted the meeting of more diverse individual identities.

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Urban landscapes are not only expressions of collective identities, they also shape the individual identities of those who inhabit them.¹ However, geographers who have investigated this duality have mostly focused their attention on the production of national identities, and landscapes created with, or retrospectively assigned, the task of social remembrance: memorials, monuments, museums, public architecture and heritage sites.² Only recently have

geographers begun to consider the role that more taken-for-granted urban environments, such as transport infrastructures, play in the construction of identities. These efforts remain piecemeal and often over-stress how infrastructural projects produce identities at the point of their construction or initial encounter. They can also fail to respect the inextricably connected nature of social and personal identities, conceiving these as static, and sometimes ignoring intermediate levels of analysis by emphasising macro and national or micro and individual frames of identity over the meso frames provided by, for example, specific urban contexts.

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¹ M. Hall, Identity, memory and counter-memory: the archaeology of an urban landscape, *Journal of Material Culture* 11 (2006) 189–209.

² See F. Driver and D. Gilbert (Eds), *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, Manchester, 1999; C. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, Cambridge, MA, 1999.

surrounding German unification.³ It does this by recounting the production of various 'identities in transit' – a rhetorical category that pertains to a particular urban context, namely public transport networks, and specifically acknowledges the changes to Berlin's identities that were caused by the broader geopolitical shifts of the second half of the twentieth century, but are arguably still playing out today. Thus, this article aligns itself with a non-essentialist approach to identity formation by respecting Tilley's evocative conception of identities as 'transient, a reflection on where you are now, a fleeting moment in a biography of the self or the group, only partially connected to where you might have come from, and where you might be going.'⁴ It carries out its task by approaching 'infrastructure as landscape' – a medium of collective identity formation composed of physical, representational and experiential elements, across and between which the construction of individual identities can be traced. It begins with a review of the literature that addresses the relationship of infrastructure and landscape, volumetric geographies and urbanisms, as well as identity construction in Germany, and in Berlin more particularly. Thereafter, an account of the Cold War division of Berlin's transport infrastructure is provided. Then the process by which Berlin's municipal railway networks were (re)connected after November 1989 is considered and framed as a metaphor for both the different durations of the city's reunification and the identities these gave rise to. The article then explores how the (re)branding strategies pursued by the city's transport authorities in the same period were an early attempt to manufacture a unified identity for the New Berlin, but one which masked the negative aspects of the networks that indexed other competing identities.

Landscape, infrastructure, and identity

In 1984 Jackson described landscape as the 'infrastructure or background for our collective existence', but only following the growth of an interdisciplinary academic interest in the networked society have the productive compatibilities of landscape and infrastructure gained significant scholarly recognition.⁵ At least two distinct clusters of academic research reflect this. One emphasises how infrastructural sites relating to environmentally damaging industries can become sustainable landscapes.⁶ This cluster frames 'landscape as infrastructure' and as 'a sophisticated, instrumental system of essential resources, services, and agents that generate and support urban economies.'⁷ The other, which is partly built on the criticism of the first cluster's failure to account for the social production of nature, instead considers 'infrastructure as landscape', with landscape regularly conceived, either implicitly

or explicitly, in terms of Lefebvre's tripartite model for the social production of space.⁸ This reflects how Lefebvre's categories of representational space, representations of space and spatial practices can be operationally mapped onto the predominant modes of landscape studies in order to consider landscapes as simultaneously physical, representational and experiential.⁹ The second cluster, in often pertaining to urban landscapes that force aesthetic reformulations through corporeal engagement as facilitated by the notion of the cyborg, also helps to overcome the visual bias of much landscape research and allows more balanced and nuanced interpretations of the 'material interface between the body and the city.'¹⁰ More generally, this approach reveals the productive roles of metropolitan cultures and the social and political composition of the city in ways that are 'sensitive to the social and historical contexts that produce the built environment and imbue places with cultural meaning.'¹¹

Several types of transport infrastructure have been approached as landscape, including surface-level and elevated roads, railways and walkways, in ways that – if at times only implicitly – have considered questions of identity formation.¹² In Germany, for example, the *Autobahn* [motorway] has been considered within a landscape framework in order to ascertain its impact on collective identities.¹³ But the focus of these studies is usually the national level, reflecting broader patterns outlined below. A corpus of literature loosely in this vein also exists for various subterranean urban infrastructural spaces (including sewers and communication networks), and of relevance here is Moss' account of the impact of Berlin's Cold War division and subsequent reunification on the city's water and energy infrastructures.¹⁴ However, few have addressed how these geopolitical processes affected the city's municipal railways, and, more generally, urban underground railways – the buried infrastructure that is, arguably, directly experienced by the greatest number of people on a regular basis – remains curiously understudied from a landscape perspective. Addressing these gaps helps satisfy recent calls for innovative accounts of subterranean cultural and historical geographies.¹⁵

At the same time, reconceiving landscape 'to encompass the interconnectedness of space' and 'infrastructure to encompass the experience of space' highlights that urban underground railways are rarely hermetically closed subterranean systems.¹⁶ Instead, they emerge onto and above the surface to connect with other transport networks, either physically or through the pathways and experiences of those who use them. In other words, they are multi-

³ S. Merrill, *Excavating Buried Memories: Mnemonic Production in the Railways Beneath London and Berlin*, PhD Thesis, University of London, 2014.

¹⁰ M. Gandy, Cyborg urbanization: complexity and monstrosity in the contemporary city, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (2005) 28; see also A. Picon, *Anxious landscapes: from the ruin to rust*, *Grey Room* 1 (2000) 65–83.

¹¹ Gandy, *Concrete and Clay*, 17.

¹² Robertson, *Visions of urban mobility*; A. Harris, *Vertical urbanism: flyovers and skywalks in Mumbai*, in: M. Gandy (Ed), *Urban Constellations*, Berlin, 2011, 118–123; P. Merriman, *Driving Spaces: A Cultural-Historical Geography of England's M1 Motorway*, Oxford, 2007; B. Rosa, *Beneath the Arches: Re-appropriating the Spaces of Infrastructure in Manchester*, PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2013.

¹³ See D. Zeller, *Driving Germany: The Landscape Of The German Autobahn, 1930–1970*, New York and Oxford, 2007.

¹⁴ M. Gandy, The Paris sewers and the rationalization of urban space, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24 (1999) 23–44; Graham and Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism*; T. Moss, Divided city, divided infrastructures: securing energy and water services in postwar Berlin, *The Journal of Urban History* 35 (2009) 923–942.

¹⁵ P. Merriman, *Mobilities I: departures*, *Progress in Human Geography* 39 (2014) 87–95.

¹⁶ M. Gandy, Landscape and infrastructure in the late-modern metropolis, in: G. Bridge and S. Watson (Eds), *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, Oxford, 2011, 57.

³ 'Unification' best describes the creation of a new German national political and geographical entity after 1989 while 'reunification' resonates more strongly with the processes that reconstituted the city of Berlin. See M. Blacksell, *Partition, die Wende, and German unification*, *Applied Geography* 17 (1997) 257–265.

⁴ C. Tilley, Introduction: identity, place, landscape and heritage, *Journal of Material Culture* 11 (2006) 9.

⁵ J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, New Haven, 1984, 8; See M. Kaika and E. Swynedouw, Fetishizing the modern city: the phantasmagoria of urban technological networks, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24 (2000) 120–138; S. Graham and S. Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*, London, 2001.

⁶ See C. Waldheim (Ed), *The Landscape Urbanism Reader*, New York, 2006; M. Mostafavi and G. Doherty (Eds), *Ecological Urbanism*, Baden, 2010.

⁷ P. Bélanger, Landscape as infrastructure, *Landscape Journal* 28 (2009) 79.

⁸ M. Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2003, 10; H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, 1991; see also S. Robertson, *Visions of urban mobility: the Westway*, London, England, *Cultural Geographies* 14 (2007) 74–91. For further critiques of the 'landscape as infrastructure' approach, see P. Rawes (Ed), *Relational Architectural Ecologies: Architecture, Nature and Subjectivity*, New York, 2013.

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