Anna Horakova

Pinkert, Anke. *Remembering 1989: Future Archives of Public Protest*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024. 360 pp. $35.

What kind of violence is concealed when the revolutions that swept across East Germany and Eastern Europe in 1989/1990 are (mis)labeled as "peaceful"? Anke Pinkert's terrific new book joins the ranks of recent scholarship on the subject of the *Wende* years, notably Stephen Brockmann's *The Freest Country in the World* (2023; see the review in this *Jahrbuch*). Pinkert's intervention in the field lies primarily in showing that the term "peaceful" suppresses the radically democratic potentialities of events that proved disruptive to the narrative of German reunification and hindered the spread of neoliberalism. The notion of "peaceful revolutions" disregards the real violence that accompanied them in, for instance, Romania, Georgia, and later, the Yugoslav republics. While in Germany, the uprising did resolve without a large loss of life, "peaceful revolutions" – rather than the more accurate terms "rebellion," "revolt," "uprising," or "unrest" that Pinkert suggests – also serves as a taming mechanism.

The term disregards the immense force of the hundreds of thousands of East Germans who "participated in a process of self-determination" that toppled an unpopular SED leadership but also attacked "the legitimacy of Western capitalism itself" (24, 22). The irruptive, anarchic force that underpinned the collective unruliness of 1989/1990 envisioned the future as open-ended, often not inimical to reformed socialism, and shaped by genuine forms of anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle. These agendas are all too often obscured by post-*Wende* commemorations of East Germany as a totalitarian state against which the "gently courageous" (*sanftmutigen*) citizens rose only to affirm the superiority of Western liberal democracy. Three decades later, a similarly simplistic narrative declares this alleged affirmation to have failed, positing causal links between the end of socialism in the former East and the staggering rise of the *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* in the new federal states because the protests had supposedly "harbored right-wing, anti-statist elements from the start" (22).

Remembering 1989 effectively walks a tightrope on a number of topics. It espouses a defense of the promise of democracy in light of Russia's imperial attack on Ukraine and the ongoing descent of several Western democracies into rightwing

Anna Horakova, *University of Connecticut*, anna.horakova@uconn.edu

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populism, while not shying away from exposing the limits of existing forms of democracy. Joining Wendy Brown and Ann Stoler in their critiques of neoliberalism and its attendant evacuation of liberal democracy's content, Pinkert's book proposes to revisit the late GDR as a moment of rupture between the two antagonist systems of the Cold War; as a historic moment when the meaning of democracy was being radically reinterpreted and propagated across numerous public fora, institutions, and movements that her book helps to bring back into the spotlight.

Much of the volume thus focuses on critiquing the ongoing impulse to "pacify" the revolutions of 1989/1990 by erasing their traces from public memory, documenting instead more productive spaces for commemoration, public memorials, and artworks. Building on Jacques Derrida and Hal Foster, Pinkert coins the key term "future archives" to designate alternative, underground, and often intermedial spaces that refuse to consolidate the neoliberal status quo in Germany's memorial culture.

The first chapter, "Erasing '89–90 from the Capital" critiques several Berlin-based memorials, including the permanent exhibition "Topography of Terror" (2010) and the Berlin Wall Memorial at Bernauer Straße (1998). While the former simply conflates the ideological projects of Nazism and Communism, the Berlin Wall Memorial, by focusing on those killed at the Wall, marks a shift in the official public memory of the GDR towards "narratives of authoritarian oppression and victimization" as opposed to the more recalcitrant memories of hope, activist struggle, or political projects rooted in collective solidarities. The chapter also discusses an inconspicuous stela at the Schlossplatz, designed to commemorate a site of the Peaceful Revolution. Although this memorial features photographs that may contradict hegemonic narratives, it does not afford enough visibility to the events that it sets out to commemorate. The chapter concludes with a critique of the planned grandiose Monument to Freedom and Unity at the Berlin Stadtschloss, a walk-in, dish-shaped memorial designed to honor the peaceful revolution of 1989 and German reunification. Pinkert notes that the initial design of the monument as proposed by the choreographer Sasha Waltz who later withdrew from the project, had more aptly captured the civic movements' fearless occupation of public space and might have been more conducive to rethinking the movement's legacy.

The volume's second chapter, titled "Pacifying Memory," uses both historiography and oral history to document the complex circumstances of the Leipzig demonstrations, in which Pinkert, a Leipzig native, had participated. The chapter likewise reexamines the globalized notion of the revolutions' "peacefulness" in the Leipzig-based memorials to the civic movement. It argues that even though the demonstrations were guided by pacifist principles and originated in the peace prayers that various grassroots movements held at the *Nikolaikirche* throughout

the 1980s, the demonstrations ought to be fundamentally remembered for their disruptive power. Pinkert describes the tense atmosphere of the peace prayers, which were often met with police brutality and shows that the peaceful nature of the Leipzig demonstrations did not necessarily reflect personal moral beliefs of ordinary GDR citizens but resulted from what was in fact a conflict between local pastors, the Saxon Church administration, and various oppositional groups who aimed to transform the *Nikolaikirche* into a radical political space. Thirty-five years later, the protesters leave behind "unfinished business" in that their aspirations have not been honored in the post-reunification, neoliberal order.

The subsequent two chapters are dedicated to several filmic and intermedial responses to commemorating 1989/1990 and the GDR. Titled "Possible Archives," Chapter Three analyzes the documentary *Karl Marx City* (2016), co-directed by Petra Epperlein and Michael Tucker. Straddling the personal and the public, the film tackles the role that the *Bundesbehörde für die Stasi-Unterlagen* (*BStU*) played in post-reunification memory. The documentary is based on the story of Epperlein's late father whose potential collaboration with the Stasi and suicide in 1998 is being probed when the director pays a visit to the Stasi archives during the shooting of the documentary. Pinkert argues that in its use of self-reflexive filmic techniques, including "pensive" and "indeterminate" photographic stills, Epperlein's documentary unsettles the authoritative role that the Stasi archives played in Germany's official memory politics, which imposed a shroud of "collective guilt" on East Germans (Heiner Müller). Chapter Four uses the term "prospective archaeology" as a way of theorizing the experimental films of the recently departed documentary filmmaker Thomas Heise (1955–2024). On the basis of a detailed analysis of Heise's films, especially *Material* (2009) that was compiled entirely from leftover footage shot for Heise's other films, Pinkert demonstrates the late filmmaker's remarkable ability to generate future-oriented, non-melancholic narratives through the past.

The final Chapter Five, "Futures of Hope," takes on the topic of the *AfD*'s gains on the territory of the former GDR and the parallel success of rightwing nationalist parties in Eastern Europe by critically examining – as opposed to accepting – their link to the socialist past. What factors determine whether a crowd of protesters becomes the anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and racist *Volk* or coalesces into "*the people* claiming sovereign self-rule, performing the community as negotiated and differentiated *Gemeinschaft*?" (206), the chapter asks. Pinkert argues that the combined phenomena of the demise of state socialism, the sidelining of the former GDR, leftwing melancholia, and the "perpetual now" of neoliberal Germany altogether ceded alternative, counter-public spaces to the far right. The

chapter reviews the ambivalent legacies of the GDR's international solidarity schemes as well as various migrant archives (such as the exhibition *BİZİM BERLİN 89/90* that brought into relief the perspectives of Turkish Berliners on the fall of the Berlin Wall) and offers as an alternative the notion of "post-migrant allyship." The latter especially has the potential to inspire a renewed public commons as we persist in addressing issues related to race, gender, and the planet's survivability.