

# BERLIN IN TELEVISION DRAMA SERIES: A MEDIATED SPACE

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SUSANNE EICHNER AND LOTHAR MIKOS

**Name** Susanne Eichner  
**Academic centre** Aarhus University  
**E-mail address** seichner@cc.au

**Name** Lothar Mikos  
**Academic centre** Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen  
"Konrad Wolf" in Potsdam-Babelsberg  
**E-mail address** l.mikos@filmuniversitaet.de

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## ABSTRACT

Since the early days of film Berlin and the film studios in its suburbs was an important site of production. Signature

films for film historians such as *Metropolis* and *The Blue Angel* were shot at the UFA studios in Babelsberg. Throughout its history Berlin was and is a popular place for media productions with the city functioning as a text, full of meaning that turns into branded value. The article will investigate the complex relationship of historical and societal events and Berlin as a production site and an imaginary landscape respectively cityscape. Based on the analysis of national and international drama series we will argue that the increasing importance of Berlin as production site and location goes hand in hand with an increasing mediated imagination of the city as a cinematic respectively televisual space that is able to represent past events such as the Nazi regime and the cold war and actual events such as organised crime, counter terrorist activities, and an intercultural life in a modern metropolis.

Since the early days of film, Berlin, with its film studios in the suburbs, was an important site of production. Signature films such as *Metropolis* (1927) and *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel*, 1930) were shot at the UFA studios in Babelsberg. *Berlin – Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, 1927) showed scenes from the streets of Berlin and provided the basis for future representations of the city. The depiction of iconic places such as the Reichstag or the Berlin overhead metro became increasingly important and prevalent as motifs for establishing shots. After World War II, in a divided Germany, the production site in Babelsberg (East Germany) was turned into the DEFA studios, the main production site for film- and television making of the GDR. Other production sites such as the CCC studios maintained their importance for the production of films in West Berlin. After reunification, Berlin and the film studios in Babelsberg once again became a fascinating location and production site for national and international film and television production companies.

In this article we argue that Berlin is a filmic and televisual cityscape in which the entire history of the 20th century is part of the contemporary mediated imaginary city. Historical images of the city are sedimented layer by layer, thereby establishing specific brand images of Berlin, a city that is always in flux and flow. The multi-layered images of Berlin, we further argue, have become a cultural and commemorative resource for national and international audiences, attracting even more national and international productions and thus turning the brand image into a brand value. While political decisions, economic development and direct and indirect funding also impact on this development, the increasing importance of Berlin as a production site and location goes hand in hand with an increasing mediated imagination of the city as a cinematic or televisual space. Berlin as a mediated space is able to represent 20th century history such as the Nazi regime and the Cold War as well as current themes of the new millennium.

Our argumentation is based on a historical account of Berlin as a site and setting for cinematic and televisual productions as well as Berlin itself as a resource for mediated locations and images. By considering a number of recent television series such as *Berlin Babylon* (2017-), *Berlin Station* (2016-) and *Weissensee* (2010), we will illuminate how the historical images inflect contemporary productions with meaning.

## 1. MAPPING BERLIN

Berlin has been the setting and production site for numerous narratives between the two World Wars, in the immediate post-World War II period, during the Cold War and reunification, as well as more recent periods of globalised terrorism and late capitalism. In the course of creating this multifaceted image, Berlin itself has changed its status several times. It has not only lost (and regained) its role as Germany's capital, but also its unofficial status as vibrant open and metropolitan city. From an open world capital in the 1920s, it became the center of Nazi power in the 1930s, but was destroyed and bombed out with the end of World War II. Afterwards, Berlin became a marginalized enclave with the erection of the Berlin Wall (1961–1989), but – reflecting its continual process of self-reinvention – the city has recently regained its metropolitan status. While Berlin does not have the same economic power as other world capitals such as New York, Tokyo or Paris, it has become increasingly popular and attractive for young and creative people from all over the world. Since the former mayor, Klaus Wowereit, declared Berlin as “poor but sexy” in 2004, the slogan became the subcultural brand image of Berlin, a city lacking money but offering its inhabitants low living expenses, an amazing nightlife and a sense of being “it”. Berlin, to follow Stijn Reijnders (2011), has built up a brand image. This brand image attracts again (in liaison with targeted economic promotion) a vibrant art and media scene, with film, television, gaming and publishing industries. According to Global Startup Ecosystem Growth Index, Berlin was the fastest growing Start-Up Ecosystem in 2015, ranking meanwhile at place seven as one of the world's top ten.<sup>1</sup> This will most likely influence Berlin's image of Berlin in the near future. Yet, instead of maintaining a stable image, the image of Berlin is characterised by change. Instability is characteristic because the state of instability is not an exception but rather the rule, with Berlin being a city “always to become and never to be” (Scheffler 1910 in Ingram and Sark 2012: 6).

Eichner and Waade (2015) have argued that locality in film and television is significant because it offers multiple points of audience attachment. Locality is communicated in audiovisual narratives by representing the local colour of a specific location. It includes the representation of place with landscapes, iconic buildings, or flora and fauna. It includes the

1 [http://startup-ecosystem.compass.co/ser2015/\(30.11.2016\)](http://startup-ecosystem.compass.co/ser2015/(30.11.2016))

local language with its specific vernacular(s). It includes the representation of cultural practices, the manners and traditions of everyday life and the resulting social discourses. And finally, it also includes the “spill-over” of narrative meaning into the real world, when, for example, the filmic or television location intersperses with the “real world”, and fictional film locations in a real city turn into tourist attractions and commodities.

Berlin, like Reijnders’ “guilty landscapes” of crime fiction, has been “injected” with a multitude of narrative meanings and has become a “brand value” for other media productions that draw on the images of Berlin: as a historically significant place under the Nazi regime, as a subcultural punk and drug swamp of the 1980s, as a site of reunification and Europeanisation in the post-wall era and much else besides. Based on Lefebvre’s theories on “the production of place” (Lefebvre 1974/1991), Eichner and Waade (2015) have elaborated on the complex intertwining of the physical place, the imagined place and the mediated place. The actual physical place is – via a mediation process – presented as the mediated place. Taking the example of Berlin, primary carriers of Berlin as an audiovisual space are its iconic places such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag building, and the television tower at the Alexanderplatz. Less iconic but no less significant are the streets of Berlin, with their backyards and the specificities attached to the particular areas. When Berlin becomes familiar to the non-resident audience primarily by means of the mediated place, it is mediated into an imagined place. The process by which the concept of the imagined place influences the perception and the performance of audiences in the actual physical place is labelled hyper-mediatization – for example by visiting iconic places or by following in the footsteps of your favourite character as a film and television tourist (for instance tracing the movements of Christiane F. at the former Berlin main station Zoologischer Garten in *Christiane F.*, original title: *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* by Uli Edel 1981).

The aspects of local colour described above are effective throughout the whole triangular processes by which a relationship is created between the physical place, the imagined place, and the mediated place. But the image of Berlin cannot be traced solely on the basis of its present status and image. As elaborated above, the multilayered historical images of Berlin from inter-war times until the present day constitute a rich narrative pool.

## 2. BERLIN AS A FILM CITY – A BRIEF HISTORY

Buildings, places, and memories that become attached to them are part of the grand narrative of Berlin in the 20th and 21st centuries. Film culture joins the discourse of the grand narrative of Berlin by incorporating the historical layers into the filmic story. However, as we want to argue, while one historical layer might dominate the narrative, the other layers are, through cultural memories, always also efficacious in the filmed city landscape.

Berlin has been a film city since the advent of film itself. “Filmmakers have been present in Berlin ever since the beginning of cinema”, states Saryusz-Wolska (2008: 225). In the 1920s there were at least twelve film studios in Berlin and its suburbs. Several of the most famous German films of the 1920s were shot in Berlin. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920) was made in the Lixie studio in Berlin-Weißensee. *Nosferatu – A Symphony of Terror* (*Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens*, 1922) was produced in the JOFA studios in Berlin-Johannisthal. Films with the famous Danish actress Asta Nielsen such as *Mata Hari* (1920) or *The Joyless Street* (*Die freudlose Gasse*, 1925), in which Nielsen is accompanied by Greta Garbo, were shot in the Eiko studios, film studio Staaken, Rexfilm studios in Berlin-Wedding and most prominently in the Babelsberg studios in the southwest of Berlin. Large and elaborate productions such as *Metropolis* were filmed in more than one studio, namely in Staaken and Babelsberg, and *The Blue Angel* was shot in the studios in Berlin-Tempelhof and Babelsberg. Babelsberg, built in 1912, became the most important German production site until the 1940s. The first film made in Babelsberg was *Death Dance* (*Der Totentanz*, 1912), a 34-minute film featuring Asta Nielsen. The first two studios in Babelsberg were glasshouses before studios with artificial lighting were built in the 1920s. Some famous films were made here, such as *The Last Laugh* (*Der letzte Mann*, 1926), the above-mentioned *Metropolis*, and *The Blue Angel*.

After World War II the now GDR-owned studio in Babelsberg was home to the DEFA film studios, where most of the East German films were shot. In West Berlin some studios such as the former Ufa studio Tempelhof were still used for film and television production, but new studios were also founded such as the CCC studio in Berlin-Spandau and the film studios at Havelchaussee in Berlin-Pichelsberg. After reunification, the Babelsberg studios went to the French company Compagnie Générale des Eaux (later Vivendi), which tried

to rebuild a prominent location for international productions. However, only the production *The Pianist* (2002) gained international attention. More successful than the actual films was an exterior movie set that was built in 1998 for the German film production *Sonnenallee* (1998). This film set was called “Berliner Straße” and covered 7,000 square metres, showing typical Berlin streets with old residential houses. Between 1998 and 2013, when removed, the “Berliner Straße” hosted manifold projects: in Roman Polanski’s *The Pianist* it portrays the Warsaw Ghetto, whereas for *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) Quentin Tarantino had “transformed the ‘Berliner Straße’ into a cineaste’s version of a Parisian street corner. The complete façade of a Parisian cinema was specifically erected to set the scene for the American director’s alternative end to World War II.” (Wedel 2012: 42) With the end of tenancy the movie set had to be removed. The new studio to be built on the land owned by the Studio Babelsberg AG was only fully financed and entered the construction phase with Tom Tykwer’s most recent prestige project, the television series *Babylon Berlin*, which portrays Berlin in the 1920s. The new studio set reopened as “Neue Berliner Straße” (New Berlin Street) in May 2016.

When Vivendi sold the studios in 2004 to the producers Carl Woebcken and Christoph Fisser, the new owners transformed the studios into a publicly traded company, the Studio Babelsberg AG. Since then many international films have been shot in Babelsberg such as *V for Vendetta* (2005), *The Reader* (2008), *The International* (2009), *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), *Unknown* (2011), *Monuments Men* (2014), *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), *The Hunger Games – Mockingjay 1+2* (2014/2015), *Bridge of Spies* (2015), *The First Avenger: Civil War* (*Captain America: Civil War*, 2016), and finally US television series such as *Homeland* (2011-) and “Berlin Station”.

The actual production landscape in Berlin and Babelsberg has not evolved by chance, nor is the city’s historical, multifaceted image solely responsible for the attractiveness of Berlin as a film and television production location. It is rather the outcome of political decisions in the region which made the film and television industry a key factor in economic development (Krätke 2002). International productions were enabled by changes in Germany’s film funding system, which made it easier for international productions to access funding. As a result, Studio Babelsberg is the co-producer of most of the movies shot here, causing the local funding body, the Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg (MdB), to support these international productions. For instance, the MdB contributed one million Euros to the production of *Homeland*. The

financial support can be regarded as one major driving source for the increasing attractiveness of Berlin/Babelsberg as a location. But the fact that Berlin is “a result of [...] history of Europe in a nutshell” (Saryusz-Wolska 2008: 225) is also a reason for the prolonged interest of international filmmakers in Berlin, since, “[B]ased on this place, one can portray European modernism, totalitarian ideals, the Cold War, the fall of communism and the development of a unified Europe.” (ibid: 225). Many of the film examples above focus on a narrative that is linked to the history of Berlin: *The Pianist*, *The Reader*, *Inglourious Basterds*, and *Monuments Men* are connected to the narrative of the Nazi regime and World War II; *Bridge of Spies* and *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, 2006) – a film that was shot on original locations in Berlin – tell stories that take place during the Cold War in a divided Germany. Thrillers such as *The International* and even more so *Unknown* use Berlin as plot location and setting, thereby loosely connecting to Berlin’s real history and memory of cold war agents and spies. Kraenzle accordingly summarizes that Berlin “has secured its place in history, not just as a centre of cinematic innovation, but as a site of political and cultural upheaval and a mirror of the turbulent twentieth century” (2012: 107).

### 3. BERLIN AS A TELEVISION CITY

The advent of television changed the circumstances of a divided Berlin as a site of production and as a cinematic cityscape. Whereas GDR series such as *Hochhausgeschichten* (1980-1981), *Johanna* (1987-1989), and *Zahn um Zahn* (1985-1988) portrayed East Berlin as the capital of the GDR and highlighted the ideology of socialist personalities, the West German federal Public Service Broadcaster SFB, located in West Berlin, produced drama series which portrayed the life of West Berliners in a divided city and focused on elderly main characters until the end of the 1980s.

In *Liebling Kreuzberg* (1986-1988) the famous former GDR actor Manfred Krug plays the lawyer Robert Liebling, who cares about the worries and needs of the common people. In his cases he deals with shoplifting, burglary, suicide attempts, assault, official defamation, fraud and disabilities. A cross-section of the Berlin population is featured by these cases. The first season was set in the Kreuzberg district, a quarter at the heart of Berlin, bordered towards East Germany not only by the Wall but also by the river Spree. The existence of the Berlin wall that was enclosing Kreuzberg is not explicitly negotiated or problematized, but it is often presented as part

of the background or subject to the characters' dialogues. For example, in the third episode of the first season the attorney knocks on the wall, ironically proclaiming it to be "German work of value". In the fourth season, broadcast in 1994, and so five years after the fall of the Wall, the chancellery moved from Kreuzberg to Berlin-Mitte. As a result, pictures of the new centre of Berlin with iconic buildings such as the Berlin Cathedral and the television tower at Alexanderplatz were now featured. The series narrates Berlin from the perspective of the inhabitants of the district of Kreuzberg and later the districts of Mitte and its northern neighbour district Prenzlauer Berg. The overall locality of Berlin, represented by its iconic buildings, is broken down to the level of individual districts and their inhabitants by means of the 'Berlinisch' vernacular, manners and cultural practices. The series *Praxis Bülowbogen* (1987-1996) is set in a corner of Schöneberg where the subway turns into an overhead metro – an iconic image of Berlin since the 1920s. The doctor Peter Brockmann takes care of all his patients, from toddlers to old age pensioners and from pregnant young women to homeless people. The patients' lives are presented in contrast to the life of the doctor's family. What is depicted here is not Berlin as a whole but the neighbourhood of Schöneberg with its inhabitants and village-like structures.

Other national and federal German public broadcasters picked up on stories of Berlin. Werner Fassbinder's renowned drama series *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) placed its story in Berlin. Fassbinder based the series on a novel by Alfred Döblin from 1929, a novel that had already been successfully adapted into a movie in 1931. In fourteen episodes the story of the ex-con Franz Biberkopf is told, a man who repeatedly and inescapably gets involved in criminal activities and ends up in a psychiatric clinic. Berlin life in the 1920s is told from the perspective of petty criminals in a criminal environment. The series has been described as "a fascinating, highly imaginative vision of the city and people, a dark journey through the 'dark night of the soul'" that successfully adapted Döblin's novel.<sup>2</sup> The famous iconic buildings of the city are not the only places that are featured: small streets with typical Berlin tenement houses, which often have several backyards, are also depicted. In this way, the series develops a picture of the city characterised on the one hand by the everyday life of petty criminals, and on the other by iconic buildings that embody different stages and layers of German history.

2 <http://www.zweitausendeins.de/filmlexikon/?sucheNach=titel&wert=55266>  
(21.11.16)

After reunification the role of Berlin as a location and production site for television changed. The new Berlin Republic started to regain some of its former vibrancy of the 1920s and transformed itself into an open metropolis again, becoming a popular place for young people, artists and creatives from all over the world. It is the "capital of knowledge and culture" coined by a strong cultural sector, media industries, and education, making it into a first-tier "global media city" (Krätke 2003). Concurrently, Berlin offers a vibrant nightlife always accompanied by an aura of loucheness, non-conformity and opportunity, a topic that has been picked up in Dominik Graf's *In the Face of Crime (Im Angesicht des Verbrechens)*, 2010). Here the milieu of the Berlin Russian mafia serves as dense background where the crime case unfolds. The new Berlin is depicted in lighter drama series such as "Berlin Berlin" and comedies such as *Turkish for Beginners (Türkisch für Anfänger)*, 2005-2008), which place young female characters at the heart of the stories and highlight the intercultural life of Berlin. Alongside public service broadcasters, commercial broadcasters also started to produce drama series in Berlin. Since 1992, the longest running daily soap, *Good Times, Bad Times (Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten)*, 1992-, has been shot in Berlin and the studios in Babelsberg (Moran 2000). As well, *That's Life (Verliebt in Berlin)*, 2005-2007, adaption of *Yo soy Betty, la fea* and *Verrückt nach Clara* (2006) both rely on the new Berlin as convincing setting for the diverse life encounters of their young protagonists.

Berlin serves as the location for many domestic television series, most prominent when it comes to the crime and police genre. *KDD – Berlin Crime Squad (KDD – Kriminaldauerdienst)*, 2007-2009) is a renowned and prize winning police series set in Berlin Kreuzberg. Also, *Wolff's Turf (Wolffs Revier)*, 1992-2006 & 2012), *Die Straßen von Berlin* (1995-2000), *Der Kriminalist* (2006-), and *Abschnitt 40* (2001-2006) are located in the German capital, portraying cases from a fictive Berlin underground milieu with a touch of Berlin local colour. The popular series do not draw deliberately on Berlin history but rather use contemporary images of Berlin as metropolitan location of drugs, prostitution and organized crime, and use the reunification process between East and West Berlin as a telling, meaningful setting for a primarily domestic audience.

Berlin is also the host of numerous hospital drama series and soaps. In the footsteps of *Praxis Bülowbogen*, series such as *Auf Herz und Nieren* (2012), *Für alle Fälle Stefanie* (1995-2005), or *Klinik am Alex* (2008-2009) portray in dramatic or humorous ways the everyday life of hospital work with the city of Berlin merely serving as background scenery. Genre



hybrids, such as the recently aired historical series *Charité* (2017), differ inasmuch as they invoke a more deeply historical Berlin, with “Charité” depicting the city in the year 1888. The story follows a young woman who in pursuing her passion for medicine meets some of the founding fathers of its modern practice: Rudolph Virchow, Robert Koch, and Emil von Behring. Berlin here is purely imaginative: the series offers a fictional evocation of a passed time, and at the same time the fictional evocation of an imagined place, as filming takes place not in Berlin itself but in the capital of the Czech Republic, Prague.

Most of the early representations of Berlin in film and in television series deal with an *inner* image of the city. At the same time, they initiate the mediated image of the city. They contribute to the mediation of collective memories which are connected to the (political and cultural) history of the 20th century. It was after the unification that the mediated image of Berlin became an imagined city, a city where 20th century history is present in locations, sets and iconic buildings, and a city with a brand value.

#### 4. BERLIN IMAGES

Similarly, Huyssen argues that “there is no other western city that bears the marks of twentieth century history as intensely and self-consciously as Berlin” (Huyssen 2013: 51). This history is visible in the architecture of the city, represented not only by distinctive buildings but also by the map of the city and related street life. Berlin was at the centre of the Weimar Republic and the Roaring Twenties – impressively pictured in the film *Cabaret* (1972). It was also a central location during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, and in the Berlin Wall provided the central emblem of the post-war German partition. It also played a major role in the Cold War, with totalitarian regimes of the East colliding with democratic regimes of the West, and the city witnessed the fall of the Wall and the end of communism. And finally, Berlin was reunified and Europeanised, starting with West Berlin being the European Capital of Culture in 1988, and developing into a European metropolis at the gateway between Eastern and Western Europe in the last two decades.

Berlin in the 21st century is a city where history accretes, layer by layer. “The unique nature of Berlin is its complex history and how this has played upon its current position” (Gittus 2002: 112; see also Neill 2005). The cityscape of Berlin narrates the history of the 20th century in different ways.

Whereas the Speer architecture tells a real and imagined story of the Nazi regime, the new architecture – such as Potsdamer Platz with its skyscrapers, and the transparent dome of the Reichstag building designed by Norman Foster – tell the story of a new Berlin that has overcome the past. “Thus debate over how to shape the new Berlin is concerned with superseding the past and convincing Germany as well as the rest of the world that the new Germanness is emancipated from previous versions.” (Shapiro 2010: 429) The architecture represents the fact that “the phenomenon of Berlin as Germany’s new capital and seat of government does not wish to draw crude associations suggesting that the past can directly affect the present and future of German identity.” (Gittus 2002: 93) Berlin tries to narrate the (horrible) past as memory – for instance in the Holocaust Monument or the GDR museum. But the link between past and present is always visible – even if in forms of absence or emptiness, such as empty spaces that speak to the bombing of Berlin during World War II, or the border between East and West. This relation between the visible and the absent is characteristic for the role of Berlin in the national identity of Germany:

Berlin is susceptible to an analysis of the link between past, present and place in the formation of German national identity for several reasons: first, the resonance of German history is inveterate in the existing buildings which exist; secondly, the divided city was hosting two ideologically opposing regimes, which attempted to create competing realities in one city space; thirdly, those areas – empty throughout most of the 1990s – which were occupied by properties used in the past are also sites of remembrance or forgetting; and, finally, the major physical legacy of the 20th century has bequeathed an unprecedented amount of free inner-city land to Government, developers and investors (Gittus 2002: 96).

The most prominent example of such a Berlin place is the former wasteland and ‘death strip’ at Potsdamer Platz, which was devoid of buildings between 1961 and 1995. As a testimony to the consequences of World War II and a divided Germany, Potsdamer Platz came to represent a new German national self-concept and reunification, starting with the Roger Waters concert *The Wall* in 1990 and developing into its current state with the Sony Center as an architectural symbol of global capital. Huyssen warns in this context that it

is exactly this process of filling the voids that endangers the memories of Berlin: “this whole area between Brandenburger Gate and Potsdamer Platz (...) was a void filled with history and memory, all of which will be erased by the new constructions.” (1997: 75)

In fact, it can be argued that the new Berlin, the Berlin Republic, is still in the process of filling the voids; it is a city characterised by construction as such. Berlin has gained the reputation of being the world’s biggest construction site, iconically represented by the immensely popular red Info-Box that was present between 1995 and 2001 at Potsdamer Platz. And more recently, the enormous, prestigious, and yet disastrous project to build the new Berlin Brandenburg Airport is another example of the fact that Berlin is constantly under construction.<sup>3</sup> New constructions, however, do not necessarily mean that memories are lost – they may instead become part of new layers in the city’s history. Instead of keeping the past preserved, Berlin becomes and develops in multiple layers. Berlin as an imagined city represents 20th century history, and is always a city in progress as it turns into a vivid modern metropolis of visual and popular arts.

## 5. BERLIN AS MEDIATED AND IMAGINED LOCATION AND PRODUCTION SITE

Meanwhile Berlin has become an important location and space for national and international contemporary drama series, as well as an important mediated historical space. For instance, the Roaring Twenties are central to the narrative of the television series “Babylon Berlin”, based on the bestselling novels by Volker Kutscher and built around the character of Gereon Rath, who investigates “the whole Panopticon of an exciting world metropolis amid drugs and politics, murder and art, emancipation and extremism”.<sup>4</sup> The successful mini-series *Ku’damm 56* (2016) addresses the German post-war era and the ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ (the German “economic miracle”) of the 1950s in Berlin-Charlottenburg. The story focuses on the private lives and struggles of its protagonists in a post-war Germany, who try to forget World War II and who are torn between competing, rigid attitudes to morality. The

3 The prestigious project went into the building phase in 2006 and was supposed to open in 2012, but due to severe construction failures this proved impossible. The opening of the airport is still in the unforeseeable future with estimated costs nearly three times the initial budget.

4 Production information of ARD (<http://www.daserste.de/specials/ueber-uns/serie-babylon-berlin-tom-tykwer-100.html>).

political climate and the divided city of Berlin are only in the background of the storytelling, however they still play an effective role in producing the specific climate and atmosphere of the prudish 1950s. The series *Weissensee* and *Deutschland 83* (2015-) draw much more directly on the context of the Cold War in a divided Germany, playing with notions of ‘Ostalgie’ and ‘Westalgie’, the specific variations of German post-Wall nostalgia.<sup>5</sup> Berlin’s historically coined images are thus apparent and turned into a brand value to appeal to local as well as global audiences.

Other productions such as *The Team* (2015), *Homeland* or *Sense8* (2015) use Berlin among other places as sceneries for their stories. The images of Berlin that these series draw on are less targeted and more open towards the audience’s knowledge and experience with the imagined space of the city. And while the evocation of Berlin has proven as a successful commodity that adds production value to many television series productions but that it will not guarantee success with audiences. In trying to replicate success stories such as *Borgen* (2010-2013) or *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), Berlin-based series such as *Die Stadt und die Macht* (2016) or *Blochin* (2015) have for diverse reasons failed to win the favour of audiences.

The numerous Berlin-based and Berlin-produced television series indicate that for both German and international series, Berlin has been turned into a commodity that adds production value to a television show. Yet, the existing circulating images of Berlin as an imagined place determine which images can be successfully used and communicated to a broader transnational audience. International film and television series often do not exceed stereotypical images of Berlin as a signifier of the Nazi regime or as signifier of the Cold War era. At the same time, many domestic productions use Berlin as simply an interchangeable backdrop against which the action takes place. But as we have elaborated, with the images of Berlin stacking up and with the increasing international popularity of Berlin as “the place to be”, more sophisticated images and meanings of Berlin can be transported by the depiction of the city. One example of the rich and meaningful use of Berlin is the US-produced series *Berlin Station* written by Olen Steinhauer. In the series, Richard Armitage plays the CIA officer Daniel Miller, who is sent to Berlin to look for a leak in the Berlin branch of the CIA. The head of the Berlin CIA branch, Steven Frost, is a

5 “Ostalgie” is a term used to describe a nostalgic view towards the former GDR as better society. In reaction to this, “Westalgie” refers to a view that considers West Germany, Helmut Kohl and the cold war as a better, less complex place firmly divided into two blocks (Hell and von Moltke 2005).

veteran of the Cold War. The series includes the narrative of Berlin as the centre of the Cold War and the capital of spies, and continues this into the present time. The characters of the series are closely interwoven with the city of Berlin itself. As the key second assistant director, Carlos Fidel, outlined in a personal conversation, “US writer Olen Steinhauer was very focused on the city to define the characters in the series.” The cityscape of Berlin is the essential component of the story of *Berlin Station*. That this concept proved to be successful is – among other aspects – due to the fact that Berlin has become a renowned physical place that has turned into manifold variations of an imagined space. The imagined city of Berlin as a representation (and condensation) of 20th century history and of the new millennium has become a brand value that is implicitly present in all these transnational television drama series productions. The series always depict iconic Berlin sites that serve as mediated and imagined spaces. But only when this is done in a way that allows audiences to ascribe meaning to the depicted place, does locality turn into a brand value.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The filmic and televised Berlin itself is then not a reproduction of Berlin history or of contemporary Berlin society. It is the result of the triangular intertwined nature of 1) the actual physical place, loaded with multilayered historical meanings, 2) the already mediated places that have become the cultural resource of German and international audiences, as well as of film and television professionals, and which are thus turned into 3) manifold variations of the imagined space. The variations of the imagined space of Berlin – alongside other cultural images – fill in and inspire the new portrayals of Berlin with the most recent example, *Berlin Station*.

This article has investigated the relationship between historical and societal events and Berlin as a production site and imaginary land- or cityscape (see Couldry and McCarthy 2004; Eichner and Waade 2015; Lefebvre 2006). Based on a historical account of Berlin as a film city and the consideration of contemporary national and international drama series, we have argued that the increasing importance of Berlin as a production site and location goes hand-in-hand with an increasingly mediated imagination of the city. That mediated imagination presents Berlin as a cinematic or televisual space able to represent not only past events such as the Nazi regime and the Cold War, but also current themes such as organised crime, counter-terrorist activities, and an intercul-

tural life in a modern metropolis. The imagined city of Berlin represents 20th century history and has become a brand value for transnational productions.

With Berlin’s recent self-invention the historical layers are complemented by more contemporary images that sometimes overlap with older layers and that are evoked by the very same iconic signs. This then does not necessarily involve the integration of these significant images into the narrative. Many productions make use of Berlin as mere urban background against which any story can unfold. *Homeland* or *The International* offer examples of Berlin as a site of production and economic advantage. There are, however, manifold examples of how the multilayered images of Berlin turn into a brand value and commodity. When Berlin as a historical city becomes the driving force of the narrative in *Babylon Berlin*; when the city is essential to characterise the protagonists in *Berlin Station*; or when Manfred Krug in one of the earlier examples, *Liebling Kreuzberg*, personifies Berlin by means of habit and vernacular. Here, the imaginary city of Berlin turns into a brand that comprises a specific form of production value for national and international television drama series.

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