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# ‘Stones do not Speak for Themselves’: Disentangling Berlin’s Palimpsest

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## Abstract

At the time of German unification, politicians, historians and academics expressed concerns that the material legacies of National Socialism had become too integrated into Berlin’s urban fabric. Unification disrupted the status quo of several such buildings and campaigners sought to use this as an opportunity to facilitate increased engagement with their National Socialist layers. Through exploring the contests that surrounded three high-profile examples, the Aviation Ministry, Olympic Stadium and Tempelhof Airport, this article will reveal the contingent nature of post-unification responses to Berlin’s National Socialist layer. Firstly, it will analyse the debates that surrounded the buildings and demonstrate that the problematisation of heritage is a process, one shaped and mediated by myriad factors not necessarily relating to the trace itself. Secondly, it will show that the attempts to bring about increased engagement with each of the sites’ histories have been informed by a common rationale, namely, the development of a ‘palimpsestic’ approach to each building’s layers.

## Keywords

Berlin – National Socialism – architecture – palimpsest – Aviation Ministry – Olympic Stadium – Tempelhof Airport – memory politics

Perhaps one of Berlin’s strangest legacies of National Socialism can be found in the district of Tempelhof where, set back from General Pape Strasse, a concrete cylinder twenty-one metres in diameter and fourteen metres high looms

above a low, scruffy hedge. Its function is not easy to discern, and its name, the *Schwerbelastungskörper* or 'heavy load-bearing body', does little to enlighten the curious passer-by. Yet this inauspicious-looking structure (figure 1) was granted protected status in 1995 due to its historical significance; it is the only remnant of the North-South axis which was a key part of Hitler and Speer's unrealised plans to transform Berlin into the monumental 'World Capital', Germania. The *Schwerbelastungskörper* was created in 1941 with the sole purpose of testing the load-bearing capacity of Berlin's marshy soil in order to assess the feasibility of Speer's planned Great Arch, envisaged as one of the focal points of Germania. After the war, the structure, which also extends eighteen metres below the ground, was deemed too close to residential apartments to be safely demolished and it was used for geological study until 1977.<sup>1</sup> Today, no alternative function has been found for it except for the housing of an exhibition about its history. Without a purpose, the structure's status as a relic of National Socialist excess has not been mitigated through its incorporation into



FIGURE 1  
The *Schwerbelastungskörper* (1941).  
PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.

1 'Schwerbelastungskörper,' *Landesdenkmalamt Berlin*, Object / document number 09055087, accessed October 19, 2018, [http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/liste\\_karte\\_datenbank/de/denkmaldatenbank/daobj.php?obj\\_dok\\_nr=09055087](http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/liste_karte_datenbank/de/denkmaldatenbank/daobj.php?obj_dok_nr=09055087).

other narratives, through physical transformation or through integration into the surrounding city. In a stark shift from its purely functional origins, the *Schwerbelastungskörper* now serves primarily as an unintended yet enduring monument to National Socialist megalomania, dislocated from the city it was designed to reshape.

It would not, of course, be feasible or, indeed, desirable to limit all built legacies of National Socialism to housing exhibitions about their former uses; unlike the *Schwerbelastungskörper*, many are highly functional buildings which have been in use since their construction. As a result they have continued to accumulate both physical layers and popular memory narratives since 1945, leading to fears from historians and campaigners that they had become too integrated into the fabric of the city. Vocal on this matter was art historian Hans-Ernst Mittig, who shortly after unification expressed his concerns about several such sites including the Olympic Complex which was, he felt, now 'hardly recognised as a Nazi propaganda piece' and was instead 'blithely used both as a sports facility and as a symbol to promote the State of Berlin and its businesses'.<sup>2</sup> However, nearly twenty-five years later, Professor Andreas Nachama, director of the Topography of Terror Foundation, articulated what had by then become a generally accepted view in his speech at the unveiling of a set of information boards at Tempelhofer Feld where he stated that 'stones don't speak for themselves';<sup>3</sup> rather, they require mediation if the people who encounter them are to understand their origins and use under National Socialism.

This article will trace the emergence of this consensus and highlight the contingent nature of the mediations that have resulted from it. It will do this by analysing post-unification engagement with three National Socialist prestige buildings: Ernst Sagebiel's Aviation Ministry building, built 1935 – 1936 (figure 2); Werner March's monumental stadium for the 1936 Olympic Games (figure 3); and finally, another Sagebiel project, Tempelhof Airport which was begun in 1936, the exterior completed in 1938 but the interior never fully finished (figure 4). The high profiles of these buildings both during and after the

2 Hans-Ernst Mittig, 'Kunst und Propaganda im NS-System,' in *Moderne Kunst 2: Das Funkkolleg zum Verständnis der Gegenwartskunst*, ed. Monika Wagner (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991), 450.

3 Prof. Andreas Nachama, speech at the unveiling of ten information boards at Tempelhofer Feld 10 July 2013, cited in Christine Kühnl-Sager, "'Steine reden nicht von selbst': Enthüllung weiterer historischer Informationsstelen auf dem Tempelhofer Feld,' *Aktivesmuseum Mitgliederundbrief* no. 69 (August 2013): 20.



FIGURE 2  
Ernst Sagebiel's *Reichsluftfahrtministerium* (1935–1936).  
PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.



FIGURE 3  
Werner March's *Olympiastadion* (1934–1936) with roof by Gerkan, Marg and Partner (2000–2004).  
PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.



FIGURE 4 Ernst Sagebiel's *Flughafen Berlin-Tempelhof* (begun 1936).  
PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.

Third Reich meant that they did, in due course, demand a particularly conscious, definitive response, and they thus provide an ideal platform from which we can explore the development of these responses. The article will begin by exploring the post-unification debates around each of these buildings. In particular, it will highlight how each one came to be under the spotlight, which aspects of their physical fabric or their history were problematized, and the suggestions mooted for countering these elements. In doing so, it will demonstrate that the contests around the material legacies of Nazism are not solely, or even necessarily primarily, informed by the trace itself, but by myriad other factors: the postwar use of the building and its relationship to Cold War memory politics; the level and nature of media attention; and the function of the building and the different expectations engendered by those functions. Through interrogating this unevenness in conceptions of the traces of National Socialism, it will reveal the extent to which the problematisation of heritage is a process, rather than an already-existing, inevitable status for buildings with connections to past dictatorship or atrocity. The second part of the article will focus on the strategies ultimately implemented at each of the buildings. It will show that, despite the differences between the popular conceptions of the buildings highlighted in part one, the attempts to deal with each site were

founded upon what will be conceptualised as a 'palimpsestic' approach; the disentangling of the sites' layers in order to highlight and 'other' their National Socialist traces. However, it will also show that, although a dominant paradigm was emerging which posited confrontation with the legacies of dictatorship through their preservation and differentiation as the optimal response to the past, there was no single, coherent top-down force which pushed this through or informed how it should be realised. Rather, the interventions into each of the sites explored in this article is the product of a long and complex process of negotiation between multiple politicians, academics and citizens' groups which also needed to account for factors including the materiality of the sites, the complexities of their histories and practical hurdles such as planning permission and funding.

A range of sources has been deployed in order to provide an insight into these different angles. Architectural reports, minutes of meetings and correspondence between key actors are used to identify the rationale behind key decisions around the development of the sites. The sites themselves are used to examine the outcomes of these discussions.<sup>4</sup> Outlets such as books, websites and tours provide an insight into the officially-sanctioned narratives that have been constructed around this process while press coverage, campaign materials and the blogs and newsletters of citizens' initiatives are used to explore the dissemination of, and reactions to, those official narratives. The main temporal focus of this analysis is the early years of the Berlin Republic; 1990 to 2012. This covers the period from unification until the first significant attempts to respond to the National Socialist past at Tempelhofer Feld. In order to keep this study as up-to-date as possible, later developments such as the more recent exhibition at Tempelhof will be highlighted. These elements will be connected to the main analysis but are not its focus.

The historical and architectural complexities of National Socialist architecture have been the subject of a vast literature. The use of architecture as a form of propaganda and its function of representing aspects of Nazi ideology in built form has been elucidated by Robert Taylor while Barbara Miller-Lane has effectively demonstrated that although prestige buildings were expected to be monumental, stone-clad constructions with strong axial alignments and allusions to antiquity, any notion of a single, coherent National Socialist aesthetic is a gross over-simplification.<sup>5</sup> Jaskot has moved beyond focusing on aesthetics

4 Unless otherwise mentioned, all discussion of the sites is based on their status in summer 2012.

5 Barbara Miller-Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Robert Taylor, *The Word in Stone: The Role of Architecture in the National Socialist Ideology* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1974).

and ideology and shown that later monumental buildings are also problematised through the use of forced labour to procure the stones with which they were built.<sup>6</sup> The origins and earlier uses of the three buildings that feature in this article have been explored in detail by cultural, architectural and art historians, many of whom have also been heavily involved in the efforts to make these histories more visible at the sites themselves.<sup>7</sup> In this capacity, as well as playing a prominent role in producing empirical historical knowledge about the sites, these scholars are also key participants in shaping the processes explored in this article.

The fate of the built legacies of National Socialism has also been the subject of detailed study. On Berlin, Brian Ladd's work on the city's layers and responses to them up until the mid-nineties is particularly notable.<sup>8</sup> This and analyses of postwar engagement with such traces outside of Berlin, in particular Rosenfeld's work on Munich, Gregor's study of Nuremberg and Macdonald's work on the Nuremberg Rally Grounds, have done much to inform the approach taken in this study.<sup>9</sup> In returning to Berlin, this article certainly risks entering an already-congested research terrain. However, as this article will interrogate both the development of the consensus that the built legacies *should* be dealt with and the contingent nature of the processes through which they have been responded to, it makes sense for it to focus on the city where these processes are their most intense and highly self-conscious. Following unification and the associated developments which are explored below, this city is Berlin. In a city as continually and rapidly in flux as Berlin, extending the temporal focus of the analysis by nearly two decades beyond Ladd's end point means that there is

6 Paul B. Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labour and the Nazi Building Economy* (London: Routledge, 2000).

7 Among many examples see: Harald Bodenschatz, Friedhelm Fischer, and Engelbert Luetke-Daldrup, 'Berlin: Hauptstadt mit Vergangenheit: Zur Geschichte der Standorte für Regierungsfunktionen,' in *Architektur in Berlin – Jahrbuch*, ed. Lothar Juckel for the Architektenkammer Berlin (Hamburg: Junius Verlag GmbH, 1992); Elke Dittrich, *Ernst Sagebiel: Leben und Werk 1892–1970* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2005); Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, 'Berlin-Tempelhof,' in *Berlin Tempelhof, Liverpool Speke, Paris Le Bourget: Airport Architecture of the Thirties*, ed. Paul Smith and Bernard Toulhier (Paris: Editions du Patrimoine, 2000), 30–62; Wolfgang Schäche, *Architektur und Städtebau in Berlin zwischen 1933 und 1945: Planen und Bauen unter der Ägide der Stadtverwaltung* (Berlin: Gerbr. Mann Verlag, 1992).

8 Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

9 Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past* (London: Yale University Press, 2008); Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2008); Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: University of California Press, 2000).



still much to say. The processes of engagement that Ladd explores have taken several turns since then and, as this article will demonstrate, these are as revealing about the development of Germany's relationship with its National Socialist past as those that preceded them.

## 1 The Palimpsest of Berlin

The continued use of the former Aviation Ministry, Olympic Stadium and Tempelhof Airport across the upheaval which Berlin has endured since the 1930s has led to each accumulating multiple physical layers and collective memory narratives. The layers of Berlin's urban fabric have captured significant scholarly attention. Germanist and literary theorist Andreas Huyssen conceptualises Berlin as a palimpsest, a 'disparate city-text that is being rewritten while previous text is preserved, traces are restored, erasures documented'.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is not sufficient merely to establish that something is layered; what is primarily at stake is the interaction between the layers. In his analysis of the process of layering at the former Aviation Ministry at the time of its original construction and in the early Cold War, Matthew Philpotts supplements his use of Huyssen with the theorisation of the palimpsest developed by literary theorist Sarah Dillon.<sup>11</sup> Dillon suggests that we can explore the interaction between layers by differentiating between the 'palimpsestic' and the 'palimpsestuous'. The first of these refers to the process of layering which constitutes a palimpsest, to the possibility of identifying and separating individual layers. A structure that is 'palimpsestuous' is, however, encountered as an already-formed palimpsest, comprised by multiple, entangled layers of which even those that have been written over or suppressed continue to 'infect and affect the supposedly dominant and authoritative narratives'.<sup>12</sup> Using Dillon's language, at unification each of the three sites under consideration in this article would be considered a palimpsestuous structure; a messy, jumbled mass of layers which both preceded and succeeded the buildings' National Socialist use. The corollary of this was that non-experts would not necessarily be able to discern which elements

10 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 81.

11 Matthew Philpotts, 'Cultural-Political Palimpsests: The Reich Aviation Ministry and the Multiple Temporalities of Dictatorship,' *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (117) (2012), 209.

12 Sarah Dillon, 'Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literature in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies,' *Textual Practice*, 19 (2005), 243–263, (especially 254–255).

of the sites were 'Nazi' and which were not. As the calls for increased critical engagement with the sites' connections with the Third Reich grew in strength in the years following unification, this was one of the key elements that was problematised.

These layers had accumulated as each successive occupant of the former Aviation Ministry, Olympic Stadium and Tempelhof Airport used each respective site to express the new political direction of that regime and to provide a commentary on the regime(s) that had gone before. However, at each apparent historical rupture, continuities persisted which challenged each successive regime's attempts to appropriate and rewrite the sites. Even the original construction of the buildings which were portrayed in the Nazi press as evidence of the 'decisiveness' of the new regime was heavily shaped by the way the land had been used before their erection:<sup>13</sup> Philpotts demonstrates that the footprint and height of the Aviation Ministry were largely in-keeping with those of the buildings it replaced;<sup>14</sup> at the Olympic Stadium, continuity is most evident in the stadium's sunken form which echoes the design of the stadium which had been built on the site by Werner March's father for the aborted 1916 Olympics. This was, in turn, a response to the need to avoid obstructing the view of the horse racing track which had pre-dated the first stadium;<sup>15</sup> and as the second airport to be built on Tempelhofer Feld, Sagebiel's construction was shaped by the need for a smooth transition from the use of one to the other.<sup>16</sup>

After the war, the three sites were heavily incorporated into the political and administrative apparatus of the Cold War city. This is where their paths diverged. Immediately after the surrender, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany moved into the former Aviation Ministry building. After the GDR was formally proclaimed in the building's Great Hall in 1949, it went on to house several different government ministries, thus earning the name 'House

13 Hans Pfundtner, 'Die Gesamtleitung der Errichtung des Reichssportfeldes,' in *Das Reichssportfeld: Eine Schöpfung des Dritten Reiches für die Olympischen Spiele und die deutschen Leibesübungen*, ed. Reichsministerium des Innern (Berlin: Reichspartei Verlag, 1936), 11–26; Ernst Sagebiel, 'Vom Bau des Reichsluftfahrtministeriums,' *Monatshefte für Baukunst und Staedtebau* 20 (1936): 81–92; Anon., 'Zur Neugestaltung der Reichshauptstadt,' *Bauen-Siedeln-Wohnen* 18 (1938): 246.

14 Philpotts, 'Cultural-Political Palimpsests,' 212–213.

15 Bernd Hettlage and Wolfgang Reiher, *Olympiastadion Berlin: Die Neuen Architekturführer* (Berlin: Stadtwechsel, 2006), 9.

16 Manfred Hecker, 'Berlin-Tempelhof: A City Airport of the 1930s,' in *Historic Airports: Proceedings of the International L'Europe de L'Air Conferences on Aviation Architecture Liverpool (1999), Berlin (2000), Paris (2001)*, ed. B. Hawkins, G. Lechner, and P. Smith (London: English Heritage, 2005), 92–99.

of Ministries'.<sup>17</sup> The British made the Sports Forum in the north-eastern corner of the Olympic Complex their headquarters until the departure of the Allies in 1994. Keen to establish ordinary life in their section of Berlin, they oversaw the re-opening of much of the Complex for athletic events shortly afterwards.<sup>18</sup> Tempelhof Airport was established as the headquarters of the American Air Force in Berlin and served as the central hub for the importation of supplies through the Berlin Airlift.<sup>19</sup> To varying extents, the postwar inhabitants removed the most overt symbols of National Socialism and added their own layers to the sites. Some additions, such as the remodelling of the Great Hall at the Aviation Ministry and the installation of basketball courts at Tempelhof, would clearly mark differentiation from what had gone before and reflect the new inhabitants' own aesthetic sensibilities or functional requirements. Others would involve the reconstruction of previously-existing features which had been damaged during the war. The starkest example of this was the renovation of the Olympic Stadium in the 1960s whereby, in a move that would subsequently be criticised, Werner March was commissioned to oversee what was tantamount to the reconstruction of many elements of the original stadium.<sup>20</sup>

While the buildings' origins and previous functions were common knowledge, there was no significant impetus to develop a critical response to their histories at the sites themselves until after unification. For a range of reasons, unification brought the future role of all of these sites into question, thus opening up new possibilities for their respective futures. The Aviation Ministry was brought under the spotlight following the 1991 decision that the German government would move back from Bonn to Berlin and the ensuing debate over whether government ministries would inhabit existing government buildings. The Olympic Stadium came to public attention as a result of the idea that, now that Berlin was a 'normal' city again, it should jostle for its place on the world stage and part of this would involve applying to host major international sports events. Debates arose around Tempelhof once the Berlin Senate agreed to the construction of a new, much larger airport and Tempelhof was, very controversially, earmarked for closure. Each of these changes of use required some

17 Laurenz Demps, Eberhard Schultz, and Klaus Wettig, *Das Bundesfinanzministerium: Ein belasteter Ort?* (Berlin: Parthas, 2001), 77.

18 Matthias Donath, *Garden Guide: The Olympic Grounds – Former Reichssportfeld* (Berlin: Landesdenkmalamt (Berlin) and Museumspädagogischer Dienst (Berlin), 2001), 9.

19 Frank Schmitz, *Flughafen Tempelhof – Berlins Tor zur Welt* (Berlin: be.bra, 1997), 105.

20 Report by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Reinald Eckert and Wolfgang Schäche, 'Das Ehemalige Reichssportfeld, Geschichte und Bestand,' in *Kooperatives Gutachterverfahren Olympisches Dorf und Olympiagelände*, ed. Thies Schröder, Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz (Berlin: Kulturbuchverlag, 1993), 33.

intervention into the physical fabric of the site in question, and also brought the sites into the public eye, leading to open debates about how to engage with their respective National Socialist pasts. By this point, the layers at each respective site had become interwoven and tangled, creating truly palimpsestuous structures. A significant part of the subsequent engagement with each of the sites would go on to involve what Dillon would refer to as a palimpsestic approach, one that unpicks the layers, identifying, labelling and classifying them in order to determine the appropriate response to each of them.

## 2 Problematising the Palimpsest

Of the three buildings, the former Aviation Ministry would come the closest to demolition. The proposed continuity of this building's function as a government ministry building proved to be especially controversial, particularly to those who opposed the move from Bonn to the 'historically burdened' city of Berlin in the first place.<sup>21</sup> Concerns about both domestic and international reactions to the housing of democratic government institutions in former National Socialist and GDR ministry buildings were exacerbated by the building's aesthetics. Government architecture in the Bonn Republic such as Schwipfert's Bundeshaus (1949) had been designed in direct opposition to that of the Third Reich, with relatively modest, glass structures considered not only to symbolise democratic values such as self-effacement and transparency but, through functioning as 'reverse panopticons', to inculcate them.<sup>22</sup> Even in the GDR, where the policies of the SED government and the brutal suppression of expressions of dissent undermined any claims to political openness, the visual transparency of the parliament building, the *Palast der Republik* (1976), was designed to function as a metaphor for 'openness and contact among people'.<sup>23</sup> In stark contrast to this, the Aviation Ministry building had effectively been 'hermetically sealed to the public' while functioning as Göring's Aviation Ministry.<sup>24</sup> The deliberate exclusion of the citizen is strongly conveyed through the

21 Eberhard Schultz, 'Abriss oder Sanierung? Umgang mit einem Historischen Ort = Demolition or Renovation: Handling an Historic Site,' in *Das Bundesfinanzministerium: Ein Belasteter Ort?*, ed. Laurenz Demps, Eberhard Schultz, and Klaus Wettig (Berlin: Parthas, 2001), 53.

22 Deborah Ascher Barnstone, *The Transparent State: Architecture and Politics in Postwar Germany* (London: Routledge, 2005), 228.

23 Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 172.

24 Bodenschatz et al., 'Berlin: Hauptstadt mit Vergangenheit,' 25.

building itself; from the wrought iron fence and the stone cladding that completely 'encases' the exterior walls, seen as emphasising the 'closedness' (*Geschlossenheit*) of the building,<sup>25</sup> to the disorientating sequence of rooms, considered a manifestation of 'the principle of architectural uncertainty', designed to disorient and thus intimidate any visitor who was granted access.<sup>26</sup> For Building Minister Irmgard Schwaetzer (FDP), a building so tainted by its previous occupants and by its aesthetics had no place in a democratic Germany.<sup>27</sup> Keen to emphasise Germany's break with the past, Schwaetzer and other Bonn politicians called for the demolition of buildings 'contaminated' by National Socialism or the GDR and their replacement with new constructions on the same sites.<sup>28</sup> The Berlin State government strongly opposed this with Berlin Building Senator Nagel condemning what he referred to as a policy of 'coming to terms with the past with a wrecking ball',<sup>29</sup> while Thierse, deputy leader of the SPD, scoffed that, following such logic, 'we might as well bomb Unter den Linden'.<sup>30</sup>

However, as would be the case for all three sites, it was not only the building's history that was an issue. There were also concerns about the financial cost of moving the capital back to Berlin, and whether renovation or demolition and replacement would be the most economical solution. Both the Federal and Berlin State governments commissioned architectural consultants to carry out separate assessments of the economic viability of renovating the building. The report produced for the Federal Cabinet by leading West German architectural firm, Hentrich-Petsching and Partners (HPP) found that 'with certain limitations', renovation of the former Aviation Ministry would be possible.<sup>31</sup> This was not enough to convince the Federal Cabinet who provisionally approved the building's demolition on 17 December 1992. The findings of Bodenschatz, Geisenhof and Tscheschner, the architectural consultants commissioned by the Berlin State government, however, made a far stronger case for the building's preservation. As well as highlighting the experience of those who had used the buildings since unification and its historical and

25 Joachim Petsch, *Baukunst und Stadtplanung im Dritten Reich: Herleitung, Bestandsaufnahme, Entwicklung, Nachfolge* (Munich: Hanser, 1976), 100.

26 Matthias Donath, *Architektur in Berlin 1933–1945: Ein Stadtführer* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag for the Landesdenkmalamt Berlin, 2004), 54.

27 Demps et al., *Das Bundesfinanzministerium*, 46.

28 Eva Schweitzer, *Großbaustelle Berlin: Wie Die Hauptstadt Verplant Wird* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1996), 19.

29 'Mit der Abrissbirne,' *Der Spiegel*, 21 February 1992, 30.

30 'Rexrodt Mag den Treuhand-Sitz,' *Berliner Zeitung*, 30 January 1993, 17.

31 'Ein Bau so dunkel wie das Nazi-Reich,' *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 May 1997.

architectural significance, they expanded on the cost and feasibility of demolition and rebuilding.<sup>32</sup> The debate was ultimately resolved through a political and economic decision when Kohl replaced Schwaetzer with Klaus Töpfer (CDU). Capping the cost of the capital's move to Berlin at twenty billion deutschmarks, Töpfer decreed that most ministries would be relocated to existing, rather than new, buildings and that the Federal Finance Ministry would be housed in the former Aviation Ministry.<sup>33</sup>

In the wake of the debates which had inextricably bound the fate of this particular building with the wider question of how the unified Germany would respond to its past, simply reusing the building for practical reasons alone would have been untenable. Instead, the move was couched in the language of re-appropriation and juxtaposition. This is encapsulated in the introduction to one of several publications later produced by the Government about the building; 'after two dictatorships, freedom and democracy have moved in. This does not mean that the past has been erased, but rather that the story continues.'<sup>34</sup> Exactly how this would be achieved had yet to be determined. The closure of debates around demolition thus opened up a raft of new questions about how this building could be reconfigured into an appropriate government building in the new capital of the united, democratic Germany.

Much like at the Aviation Ministry, the debates around the future of the Olympic Stadium were informed by a combination of practical concerns and memory politics. Not being a government building, however, the discussions about the building's aesthetics and features were not couched in terms of its architecture being 'democratic' or otherwise, and there was no widespread appetite for the stadium to be torn down. The relatively muted calls for demolition which were made by some representatives of Berlin sports clubs were certainly not done so on the basis of memory politics but because of their desire

32 Harald Bodenschatz, Johannes Geisenhof, and Dorothea Tscheschner, *Gutachten zur Bau-, Stadtbau- und Nutzungsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung des 'Hauses der Parlamentarier' (ehem. Reichsbankgebäude bzw. Zk-Gebäude der SED), des Treuhandgebäudes (Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus, ehem. Gebäude des Reichsluftfahrtministerium bzw. Haus Der Ministerien) und des ehemaligen Staatsratsgebäudes* (Berlin: Planungsbüro Gruppe DASS, 1993), 95-96. Many thanks to Herr Prof. Dr. Bodenschatz for providing me with a copy of this report from his personal papers.

33 Frank Pieter Hesse, 'Die Standorte von Parlament und Regierung: Wege der Denkmalpflege,' in *Hauptstadt Berlin: Denkmalpflege für Parlament, Regierung und Diplomatie 1900-2000: Beiträge zur Denkmalpflege in Berlin*, ed. Frank Pieter Hesse and Jürgen Tietz (Berlin: Verlag Bauwesen for the Landesdenkmalamt Berlin, 2000), 15.

34 D. Hansen and M. Jachmann, *The Detlev Rohwedder Building: German History Reflected* (Berlin: Bundesministerium der Finanzen, 2008), 3.



FIGURE 5

Arno Breker's *Zehnkämpfer* (1936).

PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.

for Berlin to prioritise the need for a modern sports facility that could compete on the world stage.<sup>35</sup> Another distinction is that the discussions about how the traces of dictatorship at the Olympic Stadium should be dealt with were much more nuanced. Rather than addressing the site as whole, particular features were identified as more problematic than others and, as a result, a more differentiated rhetoric developed around the individual elements of the site's National Socialist layer.

Particularly significant were the debates around the site's sculpture collection (figure 5) which was largely comprised of depictions of naked, muscular athletes, many produced by sculptors with strong associations with the Nazi regime such as Arno Breker and Josef Thorak. As well as providing decoration, the statues accentuate and frame particular features of the Olympic Complex,

35 "Reichstagslösung" für das Berliner Olympiastadion? Senat bringt neue Umbauvariante ins Gespräch, *BauNetz.de*, 24 November 1997, accessed 13 November 2013, [http://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen\\_Senat\\_bringt\\_neue\\_Umbauvariante\\_ins\\_Gespraech\\_2757.html](http://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen_Senat_bringt_neue_Umbauvariante_ins_Gespraech_2757.html).

contributing to its designation as *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>36</sup> In a 1992 report into the history and condition of the site which was commissioned by the Berlin Senate in preparation for Berlin's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, the report's authors Wolfgang Schäche and Reinald Eckert identify the sculptures as key to the expression of the site as a symbol of National Socialism through their representation of Nazi ideas such as racial ideology, the conception of sport as a training school for the military, the connection they make between sport and the military, and their depiction of the ancient, idealised form of the athlete.<sup>37</sup> They lament that until this point, the sculptures had simply been left in a 'kind of permanent outdoor exhibition' at the site, and call for a 'serious discussion' over how to deal with the statues.<sup>38</sup>

This call was heeded by Hilmar Hoffmann, who as Cultural Advisor in the Olympic bid development team, expressed his determination that Olympia 2000 would facilitate 'appropriate engagement with the legacy of the 1936 Olympic Games' and that one of his primary concerns was the statues.<sup>39</sup> To kick-start the debate, Hoffmann put forward three suggestions and invited a range of public figures to critically discuss the issue, either by engaging with his suggestions or by giving their own ideas.<sup>40</sup> The first of Hoffmann's suggestions involved rearranging the statues and juxtaposing them with a 'counter aesthetic', achieved either through the display of work by artists whose art depicts the form of those marginalised and oppressed by the veneration of a particular physical form, or by displaying replicas of pieces included in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition; the second suggestion was to turn the statues into exhibits in a museum by installing glass cases around them with a museum-like plaque giving key information about each piece; the third suggestion was to commission Christo to wrap the sculptures, as he had done with the *Reichstag*.<sup>41</sup> Hoffmann's ideas all comprise different ways of appropriating the physicality of the statues to alter their function, and thus how people experience

36 Magdalena Bushart, 'Dem Bildwerke auf dem Reichssportfeld in Berlin,' in *Das Kunstwerk als Geschichtsdokument: Festschrift für Hans-Ernst Mittag*, ed. Annette Tietenberg (Munich: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1999), 138–139.

37 Arbeitsgemeinschaft Eckert und Schäche, 'Das ehemalige Reichssportfeld, Geschichte und Bestand,' 42–44.

38 *Ibid.*, 43–44.

39 'In Stein gehauener Rassenwahn,' *Die Zeit*, 17 September 1993.

40 Hilmar Hoffmann, *Mythos Olympia: Autonomie und Unterwerfung von Sport und Kultur: Hitlers Olympiade, Olympische Kultur, Riefenstahls Olympia-Film*, 1st edition (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1993), 188.

41 Hoffmann, *Mythos Olympia*, 188.



and respond to them. Rather than imposing a monolithic narrative, however, they all leave considerable scope for interpretation. The re-encoding of the statues would be achieved through adjusting their spatial configuration and their surroundings rather than through explicitly situating them within a particular narrative.

Reactions to his suggestions varied. Several high profile figures such as Jean-Christophe Amman, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt am Main, and Eberhard Diepgen, then mayor of Berlin, wished to see the sculptures left as they were, for reasons that include respect for the building's listed status; avoiding giving the impression that the Germans were only seeking a temporary solution for the duration of the period for which the eyes of the world were upon them; and allowing the people to see the relics of the ideology that led to the Holocaust. Others, such as Ignatz Bubis, leader of the *Zentralrat der Juden*, and Willi Daume, President of the German Olympic Committee, with various caveats preferred the idea of challenging the statues with a counter-aesthetic. Others still, such as Björn Engholm, leader of the SPD, were adamant that there should be 'no Olympic Games against the backdrop of dictatorship'.<sup>42</sup> Hoffmann's suggestions generated significant media coverage and, as well as reporting that discussions over the fate of the sculptures were occurring, the popular press actually became a site where the debates on the issue took place. Lengthy articles written by academics, politicians and other experts were given considerable column inches, and readers' opinions on the issue featured in the letters pages.<sup>43</sup> In *Tagesspiegel* articles a few months apart, art historians such as Tilmann Buddensieg and Ursel Berger were given space to situate the Olympic site as a whole, and the statues in particular, within their wider historical and architectural context and interrogate the extent to which they should actually be considered 'National Socialist' constructions.<sup>44</sup> Publisher and writer Wolf Jobst Siedler tackles a similar issue in

42 Ibid., 188–207.

43 Kotte and Monath, 'Künstlerische Entnazifizierungsversuche zur Rettung der Jahrtausendspiele,' *Die Tageszeitung*, 27 January 1993; Readers' letters: Hans Borgelt 'Olympia 2000: Eine Ideenfabrik,' *Der Tagesspiegel*, 25 October 1992; Dieter Prelinger, 'Olympiadenkmale von 1936,' *Der Tagesspiegel*, 8 November 1992.

44 Ursel Berger, 'Die Athleten Von Olympia-Berlin,' *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 February 1993; Tilmann Buddensieg, 'Olympia 1936-Olympia 2000: Anmerkungen zum Reichssportfeld/ auf dem Wege zum Metropole (12) Berlin-Krisen, Kräfte und Konzepte,' *Der Tagesspiegel*, 13 December 1992.

the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and Buddensieg then uses the letters page of that newspaper to publicly challenge Siedler's interpretation.<sup>45</sup>

When the Olympic bid failed, public interest in the site as a whole, and in the fate of the sculptures, subsided. Again, this highlights the contingent nature of engagement with problematic heritage, and demonstrates that there is not a straightforward, one-way trajectory between the public problematisation of heritage and the impetus to develop a solution. Academics and initiatives such as *Verein Aktives Museum* and the *Deutscher Werkbund* continued campaigning for increased engagement with the site's National Socialist past, but it was not until the stadium came back into the public spotlight, in the run-up to the 2006 World Cup, that they were awarded the permission and the means to develop a response to the site.<sup>46</sup>

Tempelhof Airport is a rather different story as its connection with the Berlin Airlift came to dominate the historical narratives around it, occluding much of its National Socialist history. This became apparent in the wake of the 1996 decision to close the airport. This move was heavily contested; while the pro-closure SPD was supported by Die Linke, Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen and various citizens' initiatives and environmental groups who rejoiced at the prospect of the closure of the city centre airport, they were vehemently opposed by the CDU and FDP, who were supported by other citizens' groups and a campaign in the Springer Press. An analysis of campaign materials and press coverage shows how those opposed to the closure of the airport drew heavily on the site's Cold War past to generate support. In particular, the legacy of the 'raisin bombers' was frequently deployed as a means of suggesting that those seeking the cessation of flight operations at Tempelhof were disregarding a normative imperative to continue to honour that history.<sup>47</sup> This was particularly apparent in the CDU campaign material: 'thousands of pilots put their lives at stake to save Berlin as they built the air bridge. Dear Berliners, it is not far for you to go

45 Wolf Jobst Siedler, 'Anstössige Athleten: Überflüssige Diskussion: Die Skulpturen des Olympiageländes,' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 January 1993; Tilmann Buddensieg, 'Hierzulande ein Stildiktat,' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 January 1993.

46 See for example calls for a critical engagement with the site's history in Bushart, 'Dem Bildwerke auf dem Reichssportfeld in Berlin'; Matthias Donath, 'Konservieren und Kommentieren: Denkmalvermittlung für das Berliner Olympiagelände,' in *Sport Stätten Kultur/ Sport Sites Culture*, ed. Fiona Laudamus, Michael Petzet, and John Zieseimer (Munich: ICOMOS, Nationalkomitee der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2002), 85.

47 Peter Hahne, 'Über Rosinenbomber und den Kampf David gegen Goliath,' *Bild*, 26 April 2008.

and give your signature at the nearest *Bürgeramt!*<sup>48</sup> In their own campaign material, the SPD countered this by arguing that commemoration of the past at the site should focus on valuing the people involved rather than ‘tarmac and cement’, and that the stories of these people should be told through an exhibition on the site itself.<sup>49</sup> A newspaper-style flyer produced by the initiative ‘Tempelhof Aufmachen. Für Alle’ [Make Tempelhof open. For all] constituted by members of Bündis 90/ Die Grünen and various other citizens’ groups is more blunt in its rejection of the pro-airport campaigners’ tendency to draw on what they call the ‘romantic memory of Tempelhof as a lifeline for West Berlin’; ‘today the Wall is gone and the freedom of Berlin, and of the western world, must no longer be saved by the raisin bombers’. In common with the SPD flyer, it recommends that the history of Tempelhof be commemorated in a museum.<sup>50</sup>

It is noteworthy, particularly in the context of the debates surrounding the Aviation Ministry and the Olympic Stadium, that while the site’s National Socialist origins did feature in these discussions, they did not provide a significant impetus to either demolish or preserve any elements of the site. The press coverage of the debates over Tempelhof was replete with references to its creators and resulting ‘bombastic’, ‘severe, overpowering and excessive’ architecture that ‘overwhelms and intimidates’.<sup>51</sup> Yet at the same time, the site’s modernity and city-centre location were both also widely commented upon and contribute strongly to the narrative that presented Tempelhof as a unique, progressive building which should be valued; the *Hamburger Abendblatt* considered it to be architecturally revolutionary;<sup>52</sup> architect Norman Foster publicly praised its ‘modern boldness’;<sup>53</sup> and the *Frankfurter Rundschau* featured praise of this ‘astoundingly modern airport’.<sup>54</sup> This positivity does not demonstrate

48 CDU-Fraktion des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin, *Pro-Tempelhof*, information flyer, ed. F. Henkel (Berlin: CDU-Fraktion des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin, undated).

49 SPD Berlin, *Für ein flugfreies Tempelhof*, information flyer (Berlin: SPD Berlin, undated).

50 Tempelhof Aufmachen. Für Alle, *Als Flughafen viel zu Schade!*, information flyer (Berlin: Tempelhof Aufmachen. Für Alle, undated).

51 Some of many examples of this kind of language can be found in K. Westphal and D. Schölkopf, ‘Goodbye Tempelhof,’ *Welt Am Sonntag*, 26 October 2008; C. van Lessen, ‘Im Sinkflug,’ *Tagesspiegel*, 28 April 2008; N. Bernau, ‘So viel Flughafen wird nie wieder sein in Berlin,’ *Berliner Zeitung*, 16 November 2006.

52 B. Möller, ‘Bewundert und erledigt: Die “Mutter aller Flughäfen”,’ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 11 January 2007.

53 Torsten Krauel, ‘Tempelhof: Der schönste Flughafen der Welt,’ *Welt am Sonntag*, 23 August 2009.

54 Schindler, ‘Schwingen im Körper der Stadt,’ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2 November 2004.

an erasure or forgetting of the site's origins, but rather an acceptance that both can be highlighted simultaneously. *Die Welt*, for example, sees the airport building as a 'testament to the mixture between monumentality and modernity', and a 'symbol of progress, megalomania and freedom'.<sup>55</sup> In *Berliner Zeitung*, the building is conceptualised as a 'symbol of the greatness of Berlin, of the hubris and modernity of the Nazis and of West Berlin's resistance to the communist claim to power'.<sup>56</sup> However, there is a clear dissonance here between the treasuring of Tempelhof as an architectural gem which should be celebrated, and the begrudging preservation of Sagebiel's other major project, the former Aviation Ministry. This is particularly apparent in the materials produced to market the former airport as an events location, where the very forms and features that were condemned at the Aviation Ministry and used to make the case for its demolition are celebrated and capitalised upon. Prospective hirers are told, for example, that the 'imposing monumental architecture [. . . provides . . .] the perfect entrance gateway for your event'.<sup>57</sup> In comparison with the Aviation Ministry, we can see much more willingness to separate this building from the context within which it was constructed, and judge it on its architectural merits and limitations.

Against the backdrop of these debates, and in the aftermath of the final decision to close the airport and open a public park on the air field, memory activists sought to make the National Socialist use of the site more visible. Groups of campaigners, including the Berlin History Workshop, have heavily criticised the 'selective memory' around Tempelhof, something they feel is both exemplified and exacerbated by the naming of the park that now stands on the former air field as 'Tempelhofer Freiheit'.<sup>58</sup> As I have explored elsewhere, these groups have sought to challenge the conception of Tempelhof purely as a 'symbol of freedom' by campaigning to highlight the site's former functions as a concentration camp and space for housing forced labourers.<sup>59</sup> In a publication about their work, campaigners identify the absence of visible traces of either

55 T. Schmid, 'Klätliches Ende eines großen Traums,' *Die Welt*, 30 October 2008.

56 N. Bernau, 'So viel Flughafen wird nie wieder sein in Berlin,' *Berliner Zeitung*, 16 November 2006.

57 Tempelhof Projekt GmbH, 'Available Space: Airport Building,' accessed 20 November 2013, <http://www.tempelhoferfreiheit.de/en/organize-events-rent-invest/event-location/available-space-airport-building>.

58 S. Endlich and B. Rossié, 'Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes, Zweiter Teil: Ein weiterer Rundgang, diesmal zu Resten und Spuren des Alten Flughafens,' *Verein Aktives Museum: Mitgliederrundbrief* no. 67 (August 2012), 13.

59 Clare Copley, 'Curating Tempelhof: Negotiating the Multiple Histories of Berlin's 'Symbol of Freedom,' *Urban History* 44, no. 4 (2017): 698–717.

the camp or the forced labourer barracks as a hurdle to inscribing them into collective memory of the site.<sup>60</sup> It was not until the 1980s that details about the history of the Columbia-Haus Concentration Camp started to emerge, as historians Kurt Schilde and Johannes Tuchel began research into the camp and its inmates, calling for an already 'long overdue' memorial to be installed at the site.<sup>61</sup> Their work led to the installation of a permanent exhibition in the local museum which in turn increased public interest in the concentration camp,<sup>62</sup> but it was not until after unification that either the camp or the barracks were marked on the site itself or began to enter the public narratives about its history. To a much larger extent than the other two cases, the post-war functions of Tempelhof had overwhelmed and almost obliterated the most harrowing aspects of its National Socialist use. Before they could devise a way to foster critical engagement with the site's National Socialist layer, the campaigners would need to actually uncover it and find a way to re-write it onto the site.

### 3 Disentangling the Palimpsest

As the first part of this article has demonstrated, by unification, these National Socialist buildings had been largely integrated into the urban fabric of Berlin until questions over their continued use arose. Underpinning the subsequent public discussions, however, were the contributions of the academics, architectural historians, urban planners and historians who had long argued that the National Socialist legacies of such sites had been obfuscated by the plethora of alternative physical traces and memory narratives that had settled upon them. These memory activists sought to challenge this by identifying the National Socialist layers within the now-palimpsestuous structures in order to facilitate critical engagement with them. This perspective would go on to inform the strategies developed to deal with each of the sites under discussion here. Although the contests around each site had been manifested in different ways and thus called for bespoke solutions, all of the subsequent interventions into the sites ultimately involved a palimpsestic approach; one that sought to

60 M. Heisig, 'Die "Weser" Flugzeugbau GmbH auf dem Flughafen Tempelhof: Rüstungsproduktion und Zwangsarbeit für den Krieg,' in *Kein Ort der Freiheit: Das Tempelhofer Feld 1933–1945*, ed. Frieder Böhne and Beate Winzer (Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 2012), 44.

61 K. Schilde, *Vom Columbia-Haus zum Schulenburgring* (Berlin, 1987), 322.

62 Jennifer Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 158–159.

identify and separate out each layer of the palimpsest and respond to each of them individually. At the former Aviation Ministry, this involved the physical disentangling of the layers; at the Olympic Stadium, we see the addition of a new layer which provided a commentary on the existing ones; and at Tempelhof we see attempts to add to the layers before labelling them.

Before the Finance Ministry could move in, the Aviation Ministry building needed a thorough renovation, which would not only bring it up to the functional and legal standards required of a modern office, but which would also address the physical traces of the building's past. Particularly important was the need to reconcile the building with popular expectations for democratic government architecture. In the 1993 report which made the case for the building's preservation, the team of consultants had made several suggestions about how this could be achieved: the opening up of the ground floor for municipal use; the removal of the external fence; the reconfiguration of the courtyard and the introduction of architectural accents to break up its long façades.<sup>63</sup> Minutes from meetings between the restoration team and their contractors showed an awareness of the need to challenge the 'totalitarian spirit' of the original building and convey its contemporary 'liberal ethos'.<sup>64</sup> However, the building was listed in 1996, so any signification of accessibility now needed to be reconciled with the requirements of its new protected status. Amongst the recommendations made in their own report into the protected elements of the building, Pitz and Hoh included the preservation of the existing configuration of the courtyard and restoration of the fence to its original colour, as well as the restoration of the façade to as close as its original appearance as possible. The evocative room sequence was deemed integral to the building's character and was therefore also to be preserved throughout the renovations.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the form of the building was neither significantly altered nor overtly challenged with a counter-aesthetic techniques that have been used at other former National Socialist prestige buildings, such as the former Reichsbank (figure 6) and the Congress Hall at the former Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg.<sup>66</sup>

63 Bodenschatz et al., *Gutachten zur Bau-, Stadtbau- und Nutzungsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung*, 64.

64 Meeting Minutes. HPP International Planungsgesellschaft GmbH. 12. Sept. 1996. Landesdenkmalamtarchiv (LDA): LDA D-R-H 003533.31.

65 Schultz, 'Abriss oder Sanierung?' 56.

66 On this see, for example, Sharon Macdonald, 'Undesirable Heritage: Fascist Material Culture and Historical Consciousness in Nuremberg,' *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12 (2006): 20.



FIGURE 6 Right: Heinrich Wolff's *Reichsbank* (1934–1940). Left: Thomas Müller und Ivan Reimann's extension (1997–1999).

PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.

Instead, the Senate decided that, through the renovation, the multi-layered history of the site should be made legible to the public and thus provide a 'visual aid' for critical and self-critical reflection.<sup>67</sup> The decision to preserve traces of the site's multiple histories led to the emergence of a palimpsestic approach to the building's renovation. This painstaking process of identifying each of the layers and determining which should be preserved, restored or removed produced reams of correspondence and meeting minutes now housed in the *Landesdenkmalamtarchiv*.<sup>68</sup> It is also relayed in detail in multiple officially-produced books, pamphlets and web pages about the building's history and reuse,<sup>69</sup> and is also a prominent theme on guided tours of the building where

67 Jörg Haspel, 'Vorwort: Architekturzeugnisse der NS-Zeit Erhalten, um zu Erinnern,' in *Architektur in Berlin 1933–1945: Ein Stadtführer*, ed. by Matthias Donath (Berlin: Lukas Verlag for the Landesdenkmalamt Berlin, 2004), 9.

68 See for example LDA D-R-H Betreuung Baudenkmal – Schriftverkehr 003533.2/I.

69 Hansen and Jachmann, *The Detlev Rohwedder Building*; Hans-Joachim Henzgen, and Andrea Ulrich, ed., *Das Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus: Architektur und Nutzung für Bundesministerium der Finanzen Referat Presse und Information* (Berlin: Bundesbauamt III, 1999).



FIGURE 7 Nazi-era banisters inside the Federal Finance Ministry.  
PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.

features from different periods such as the banisters (figure 7), the paternosters, door handles and bookcases are highlighted by the guide and used as jumping off points from which to talk about the building's previous uses. These very conscious efforts to provide such detailed accounts of the renovation to the general public are indicative of the significance of this palimpsestic approach in forming part of the present's response to the past. Through this response, the traces of dictatorship have been neatly ordered and regulated and are used as a platform upon which the present and past uses are juxtaposed. The physical traces of dictatorship are thus appropriated by the present; they are differentiated from their surroundings, marked out as other, and used as a counterfoil for the democratic Federal Republic.

Reactions to the renovation have been mixed. *Landeskonservator* Haspel wonders if it might be a feature and a virtue of German democracy that it can actually preserve and withstand such legacies of political architecture and totalitarian history.<sup>70</sup> In a similar vein, art historian Matthias Donath sees the refusal to erase National Socialist heritage in favour of using it as a critical

<sup>70</sup> Haspel, 'Vorwort,' 9–11.



standpoint part of the fostering of a democratic community.<sup>71</sup> However, the renovation has been criticised on two grounds. Firstly, renovation is not a strictly objective, scientific process. There is considerable scope for subjectivity in the decisions about which features should be removed and which preserved and, despite the highly-publicised intention to make all of the layers of building visible, many of the traces left by the GDR were considered by the renovating team to have been ‘generally low quality and poorly thought through [and therefore] undeserving of preservation.’<sup>72</sup> Situated within a wider context of fears that the GDR was being erased from multiple areas of political, social and cultural life, the removal of these traces led commentators to ask ‘did the GDR really leave no meaningful marks on the building? Or is it simply that the present refuses to recognise them?’<sup>73</sup> Secondly, the decision to preserve and restore, rather than challenge, the building’s layers has been subject to criticism. Amongst others, town planner and architecture critic Hoffmann-Axthelm was vocally critical of this particular strategy for dealing with National Socialist government buildings on the grounds that it leads to these buildings, ‘which are as authoritarian as they are banal’, being restored ‘with a degree of care which is totally inappropriate to the building’, while also avoiding the ‘real task’ of ‘responding aesthetically to their aggressiveness.’<sup>74</sup> Others concurred that the painstaking reconstruction had made the building as repellent as it was originally intended to look.<sup>75</sup> Bound up with this were concerns that the continued use of the building in its original form might be seen as indicating an ‘unbroken continuum’ since the 1930s.<sup>76</sup>

The renovation strategy did seek to counter elements of the building’s forbidding, intimidating ambiance through techniques such as flooding the building with light,<sup>77</sup> adorning the walls with abstract art, and breaking up the rigid austerity of the exterior through the asymmetric planting of trees and

71 Donath, *Architektur in Berlin*, 45.

72 Hansen and Jachmann, *The Detlev Rohwedder Building*, 40–41.

73 ‘Ein Bau so dunkel wie das Nazi-Reich’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 May 1997.

74 Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, ‘Former Government Buildings in Berlin and their Future,’ in *Bau und Raum Jahrbuch / Building and Regions Annual*, ed. Annegret Burg (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag GmbH & co, 2001/2002), 91.

75 Günter Schlusche, ‘Die Parlaments- und Regierungsbauten des Bundes im Kontext der Berliner Stadtentwicklung,’ *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 34–35 (2001): 20.

76 Schlusche, ‘Die Parlaments- und Regierungsbauten des Bundes,’ 20.

77 Atelier für Lichtplanung Kress und Adams, ‘Das Lichtkonzept,’ in *Das Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus: Architektur und Nutzung for Bundesministerium der Finanzen Referat Presse und Information*, ed. Hans-Joachim Henzgen and Andrea Ulrich (Berlin: Bundesbauamt III, 1999), 22–23.

the creation of paths in the courtyards.<sup>78</sup> These challenges are subtle, however, and, like the layering, predominantly only visible within the building. While the nuances of the approach to the renovation have been heavily written into the discourse around the site, they are only really apparent to people who take a tour of the building or who read about them in one of the numerous printed accounts of the process. An information board has been installed on Wilhelmstraße which provides an overview of the site's history, from its use by the Prussians to the Federal Finance Ministry moving into the building in 1999. Yet this account does not connect its uses with its physical layers. Although these layers are now visible, this does not necessarily mean they are legible without a medium that facilitates their interpretation. In the absence of such a device, passers-by could thus be forgiven for seeing the renovation simply as reconstruction, and reconstruction does not necessarily mean engagement.

Whereas the Aviation Ministry saw physical intervention into its existing layers, the Olympic Stadium was responded to through the addition of a new layer which explicitly commented on the rest. As part of the preparations for Germany's hosting of the World Cup, the final of which would be held at the Berlin Olympic Stadium, the Berlin Senate agreed to fund the provision of a permanent outdoor scholarly commentary on the site. An interdisciplinary expert committee, led by Monica Geyley-von-Bernus, Beate Rossié and Stefanie Endlich of the *Berliner Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart* [BvGG; Berlin Forum for History and Present] was formed and charged with its development.<sup>79</sup> Minutes of the meetings of this committee give an insight into some of the challenges they faced. Some of these were caused by the sheer complexity of the site's history and the need to avoid particular areas of the stadium becoming 'swamped'.<sup>80</sup> Others involved more practical issues such as the lack of a clear source of funding for the continuation of the trail beyond the immediate

78 Regina Poly, 'Die Außenanlagen,' in *Das Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus: Architektur und Nutzung für Bundesministerium der Finanzen Referat Presse und Information*, ed. Hans-Joachim Henzgen and Andrea Ulrich (Berlin: Bundesbauamt III, 1999), 38–39.

79 Stefanie Endlich, 'Vom Reichssportfeld zum Olympiapark: Ein Baudenkmal aus der NS-Zeit wird kommentiert,' in *Gedächtnis, Kultur und Politik*, ed. Ingeborg Siggelkow (Berlin: Frank und Timme Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2006), 12.

80 Meeting papers *Olympiastadion Berlin Konzeption für die Historische Kommentierung und einen Ort der Information: Ergänzung* (November 2003), 9; see also meeting minutes, *Projekt Historische Kommentierung des Olympiastadions: 1. Sitzung der Expertenkommission. Protokoll*, minutes of meeting on 18 September 2003 (29 September 2003), 6. My thanks to Herr Prof. Dr Hans-Ernst Mittig for giving me access to these documents from his personal papers (subsequent references: HEM personal papers).

vicinity of the stadium.<sup>81</sup> Committee members were unsure whether or not a future expansion of the trail would enable them to incorporate the outlying features such as the Langemarck Hall, the *Maifeld*, the Sport Forum and the swimming stadium and, as such, they were unsure how they should address these elements, particularly those visible from the main stadium, in the first stage of the trail.<sup>82</sup> These deliberations reveal the contingent nature of the ordering of the site, and the extent to which the historical narrative constructed there was informed by multiple factors, not necessarily connected with original events or even with the creators' understanding of them, but which would nonetheless go on to shape future understandings of those events.

The sculptures were incorporated into the history trail. This solution to the statues makes the features that renders each statue problematic explicit by outlining them on an information board erected nearby. It is explained that the reliefs outside the *Waldbühne*, for example, are designed to establish a link with ancient culture, whereas the naked bodies of Breker's Decathlete and Female Victor were supposed to represent ideals which youth should strive to emulate. The overriding theme here is the attempt to neutralise these 'problematic' sculptures through making what was implicit explicit. The efforts to undermine the impact of the statues can also be seen in the photographs which accompany the texts: a photograph showing the Relay Runners surrounded by scaffolding when under construction, for example, serves to denaturalise it and sever any connections with 'timelessness' or 'antiquity'; the photographs from the 1936 Olympics showing picnicking crowds around the Relay Runners, paying it no attention whatsoever, and the girls in swimming costumes posing playfully in front of the Resting Athlete and The Boxer diminish their monumental austerity, and suggest that even in 1936 the sculptures were not necessarily treated reverentially. In contrast to previous suggestions, the history trail signifies an attempt to encourage people to engage with the statues on a cognitive level, rather than purely through reshaping their spatial encounters with them. While the sculptures themselves were not physically

81 The question mark over funding would overshadow much of the project; at one point the bankruptcy of Walterbau-AG, the company to which the management of the trail had been outsourced, threatened to derail the project altogether. For a frank discussion of this see Stefanie Endlich, "Historische Kommentierung" Am Berliner Olympiastadion, in *Ver-ein Aktives Museum: Mitgliederrundbrief* (Berlin, June 2005), 12–16.

82 Meeting minutes, *Projekt Historische Kommentierung des Olympiastadions: 1. Sitzung der Expertenkommission. Protokoll*, 5; Meeting minutes, *Projekt Historische Kommentierung des Olympiastadions: 2. Sitzung des Wissenschaftliches Beirats. Protokoll*, minutes of meeting on 25 November 2003 (2 December 2003), 4–5. (all HEM personal papers).



FIGURE 8 Karl Albiker's *Diskuswerfer* (1936) and information board.  
PHOTO: CLARE COPLEY.

altered during this process, their materiality is affected by the signposts, which are generally situated within close proximity to the corresponding sculpture. As well as instantly identifying the related piece as 'problematic', the signposts have an impact upon the spatial configuration around the sculptures, often mitigating their monumentality or diminishing their function by highlighting the axiality of the overall composition of the Olympic Complex.

As at the Olympic Stadium, it was the work of historians, citizens' initiatives and other campaigners with the support of some politicians which went on to bring about increased engagement with Tempelhof's National Socialist past.<sup>83</sup> In 1993, the Berlin History Workshop, began sharing their research on forced labour under the Nazis, including at Tempelhofer Feld, with the wider public through exhibitions and books.<sup>84</sup> In 1994, following years of campaigning from citizens' groups, historians and the SPD-faction in the local assembly, a

83 For more detail on this see Copley, 'Curating Tempelhof.'

84 Projekt-gruppe NS-Zwangsarbeit, accessed 8 July 2016, <http://www.berliner-geschichts-werkstatt.de/zwangsarbeit.html>.

memorial to the former concentration camp was finally inaugurated.<sup>85</sup> However, as the airport was still in use at this time it was installed on Columbiadamm, the road running alongside the airfield, rather than where the camp had actually been situated. Following the 2008 closure of the airport and the opening up of the airfield, these campaigners called for more effective commemoration than what was labelled by one Left Party representative as ‘the memorial on the wrong side of the road’.<sup>86</sup> The SPD faction echoed this in their own motion to the Tempelhof-Schöneberg District Assembly, where they called for commemoration and public information about both the concentration camp and the forced labourers on the sites where these structures had actually stood.<sup>87</sup>

In summer 2010 the Senate Department for Urban Development, in conjunction with the Senate Department for Culture and the State Conservation Office formed a working group to develop a ‘commemorative strategy’ for Tempelhofer Feld. Much as we have seen at the Olympic Stadium, this was centred around the establishment of a ‘panel of experts’ charged with making Tempelhof’s multiple histories more visible. Co-ordinated by the Topography of Terror Foundation, the panel comprises historians, memorial activists, archaeologists, curators and other experts, and considers the negotiation and mediation of the site’s National Socialist past to be a ‘central discussion point’.<sup>88</sup> To a much greater extent than at the other two sites, a key element of this process was to actually uncover a significant dimension of the National Socialist layer. This was to be achieved through an archaeological excavation of the old airport, forced labourer barracks and concentration camp. Framed as ‘actively

85 K. Schilde, ‘Columbia-Haus: Historische Abriss der Geschichte eines Gefängnisses und Konzentrationslagers,’ in *Kein Ort der Freiheit: Das Tempelhofer Feld 1933–1945*, ed. Frieder Böhne and Beate Winzer (Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 2012), 30.

86 Uwe Doering, ‘Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Colombia-Haus an historischer Stelle errichten,’ *Aktuelles aus dem Abgeordnetenhaus*, 24 January 2010. Available at *DieLinke*, accessed 9 July 2016, [http://www.dielinke-treptow-koepenick.de/fileadmin/tk/thematisch/doering/info\\_agh\\_januar\\_2010.pdf](http://www.dielinke-treptow-koepenick.de/fileadmin/tk/thematisch/doering/info_agh_januar_2010.pdf)

87 Bezirksverordnetenversammlung Tempelhof-Schöneberg von Berlin, *Antrag Drucks. Nr: 1494/XVIII Fraktion der SPD Informations- und Gedenkort am Columbiadamm* (16 June 2010), accessed 9 July 2016, [http://www.berlin.de/ba-tempelhof-schoeneberg/politik-und-verwaltung/bezirksverordnetenversammlung/online/\\_\\_\\_tmp/tmp/45081036152744194/152744194/00032508/08-Anlagen/01/1\\_Version\\_vom\\_08\\_06\\_2010.pdf](http://www.berlin.de/ba-tempelhof-schoeneberg/politik-und-verwaltung/bezirksverordnetenversammlung/online/___tmp/tmp/45081036152744194/152744194/00032508/08-Anlagen/01/1_Version_vom_08_06_2010.pdf)

88 S. Endlich and B. Rossié, ‘Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes, Zweiter Teil: Ein weiterer Rundgang, diesmal zu Resten und Spuren des Alten Flughafens,’ *Verein Aktives Museum: Mitgliederrundbrief* 67 (August 2012), 13.

working against forgetting',<sup>89</sup> the excavations were carried out through 2012 and 2013 in order to make any traces of these structures visible and provide an insight into an area of National Socialist history in which there are still many gaps in research.<sup>90</sup> In addition to the excavation, the panel has also overseen the development of a history trail, very similar to that at the Olympic Stadium. Stefanie Endlich, along with Beate Rossié and Monica Geyler-von Bernus of the BFGG, who were also heavily involved in the historicisation of the Olympic Stadium, have been key actors in the development of the history trail at Tempelhof which comprises twenty-seven panels, to be installed at twenty locations across the site.<sup>91</sup> The first three of these were unveiled in July 2012, two at the site of the former concentration camp, and one at the site of the barracks that housed the forced labourers. In correspondence with the demands of the campaigners unhappy at the location of the memorial, the report of a meeting of the round table indicates that a key priority for the expert committee was that the panels would be installed on the exact sites where the structures they mark had once stood.<sup>92</sup> The other panels would be installed in stages over the next three years.

Also in common with the Olympic Stadium, the developers of the trail encountered a range of challenges. To a large extent these were due to a lack of certainty over the future development of the former airfield,<sup>93</sup> but they were also a product of the complexity of its past. Meeting reports indicate that one issue which was particularly challenging was that while some of the themes the committee wished to explore through the trail, such as aviation history, the

89 In German: 'Dem Vergessen soll durch das Projekt aktiv entgegengewirkt werden.'

90 Reinhard Bernbeck, 'Archäologische Ausgrabungen auf dem Tempelhofer Flugfeld,' accessed 15 February 2013, <http://www.ausgrabungen-tempelhof.de/Ausgrabungen%20Tempelhofer%20Flugfeld.pdf>.

91 Meeting report *Runder Tisch 'Historische Markierung Tempelhofer Feld': Sachstandsbericht zur bisherigen Arbeit Appendix: Berliner Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart: Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes und des Flughafens Tempelhof*, June 2014, Section 2. 'Die Zeitschichten und Themen im Überblick', 5. Available at *Berlin.de*, accessed November 28, 2019, [https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/umwelt/stadtgruen/tempelhofer\\_feld/download/Sachstandsbericht\\_RunderTisch2014.pdf](https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/umwelt/stadtgruen/tempelhofer_feld/download/Sachstandsbericht_RunderTisch2014.pdf).

92 Meeting report *Runder Tisch 'Historische Markierung Tempelhofer Feld': Sachstandsbericht zur bisherigen Arbeit Appendix: Berliner Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart: Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes und des Flughafens Tempelhof*, June 2014, Section 4.1 'Erster Schritt: Infopfad zur Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes.' Available at *Berlin.de*, accessed November 28, 2019, [https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/umwelt/stadtgruen/tempelhofer\\_feld/download/Sachstandsbericht\\_RunderTisch2014.pdf](https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/umwelt/stadtgruen/tempelhofer_feld/download/Sachstandsbericht_RunderTisch2014.pdf).

93 Endlich and Rossié, 'Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes, Zweiter Teil,' 12–13.

building itself and the air lift, could be approached through elements that were still visible, this was not the case for others, such as the concentration camp and the forced labourer barracks, and that before this layer could be engaged with, more research would be required in order to fill in some of the gaps.<sup>94</sup> The research into Tempelhof's National Socialist past and the attempts to make this element of its history more visible are ongoing but have already had some impact; in June 2014 the Senate agreed to stop using the name 'Tempelhofer Freiheit', which had been consistently opposed by campaigners,<sup>95</sup> and in September 2018 an exhibition opened in the airport building which would, according to the inauguration speech from Parliamentary Minister Moniker Grütters (CDU), highlight the 'Vielschichtigkeit' [multi-layeredness] of the site<sup>96</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

By the time Nachama made his speech at the unveiling of the information boards at Tempelhof, he was encapsulating what was, by then, a fairly established consensus that the material legacies of National Socialism alone could not provide adequate testimony of their former uses. Even structures such as the *Schwerbelastungskörper*, which stand apart from the city and now function primarily as monuments to Nazi megalomania, are deemed to require commentary to ensure that the nature and extent of their otherness is clearly understood. With more palimpsestuous sites, such as those discussed here, this is considered even more pressing and even more complex. As this article has demonstrated, this consensus has taken time to build. Through interrogating the means by which sites, or elements of them, become problematised, and by

94 Meeting report *Runder Tisch 'Historische Markierung Tempelhofer Feld': Sachstandsbericht zur bisherigen Arbeit Appendix: Berliner Forum für Geschichte und Gegenwart: Geschichte des Tempelhofer Feldes und des Flughafens Tempelhof*, June 2014, Section 3, 5. Available at *Berlin.de*, accessed at November 28, 2019, [https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/umwelt/stadtgruen/tempelhofer\\_feld/download/Sachstandsbericht\\_RunderTisch2014.pdf](https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/umwelt/stadtgruen/tempelhofer_feld/download/Sachstandsbericht_RunderTisch2014.pdf).

95 Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin. *Drucksache 17.2345 Vorlage-zur Kenntnisnahme – Sachstandsbericht des Runden Tisches Historische Markierung Tempelhofer Feld*, 17. Wahlperiode 18 Jun 2015, 20.

96 Speech by Staatsministerin Prof. Monika Grütters *Anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ausstellung 'Ein weites Feld. Der Flughafen Tempelhof und seine Geschichte' im Rahmen des Europäischen Kulturerbejahres* am 4. September 2018 in Berlin, 2. Accessed 20 October 2018, [https://www.topographie.de/fileadmin/topographie/public/Presse/Reden\\_und\\_Vortraege/Gruetters-180904\\_Rede\\_Tempelhof\\_Ausstellung\\_ECHY.pdf](https://www.topographie.de/fileadmin/topographie/public/Presse/Reden_und_Vortraege/Gruetters-180904_Rede_Tempelhof_Ausstellung_ECHY.pdf).

highlighting the significant degree of contingency within that process, this article unsettles any notion that the designation of a particular item of heritage as 'problematic' is immanent to the site itself. Regardless of a site's connection with dictatorship, its problematisation is a process, one shaped and mediated by myriad factors.

Underpinning this process of problematising National Socialist built heritage in Berlin has been an emerging sense that facilitating critical engagement with that period is closely bound up with increasing public awareness of the ways that regime used the built environment, whether by highlighting how particular architectural forms were designed to convey elements of Nazi ideology, or by pinpointing the exact location at which a particular event took place. The idea of countering the propagandistic potential of National Socialist structures and documenting the crimes and abuses which took place within them through outdoor information boards containing scholarly, rational commentary has gained traction in recent years. Today, history trails cover much of Berlin's city centre, and stand-alone boards elucidate the histories of more dispersed sites. That as a result, access to research-based, clearly-presented information about the Third Reich has been moved beyond textbooks, educational institutions and museums, and into public space must surely be celebrated. As James Young aptly states, however, the most effective memorial to the Nazi past is not a 'fixed figure' but 'the debate itself – perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions'.<sup>97</sup> It must therefore be hoped that these measures do not mark the end of this discussion but ensure that its continuation is well-informed.

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97 James E. Young, 'The Counter-Monument: Memory against itself in Germany Today,' *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 270.