Chapter 5
The Nazi Phantom:
A Journey Following the Relics of the Third Reich

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to examine the ways in which German cities have confronted their past through the study of heritage of Nazi architecture and design since 1945. The author has chosen to use the camera as her study tool through which she is studying Nazi architecture and design today and see them as a reflection of the German Erinnerungskultur (Memory-Culture). In the last decade, the author has travelled all over Germany following the relics of the Nazi era. These photographed journeys have resulted in more than 10,000 frames so far and is still ongoing. The radical changes in German cities after the Allied bombing left fragile urban spaces, and given the circumstances, city authorities, architects, and urban planners wanted to delay the discussion of the Nazi phantoms left behind as long as possible. After reunification, some German cities adopted the solutions discussed in this chapter, which can often be described as a complicated situation. German cities are trying to do the impossible: combining ancient legacies, buildings designed during the Third Reich and left untouched for decades, and modern and postmodern construction. The resulting mixture has a complexity not found anywhere else.

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INTRODUCTION

After the Holocaust and World War II, Nazi architecture, though very hard to conceal, stood untouched like a phantom in the midst of urban spaces. The term Nazi architecture refers to public and private buildings designed and built in German cities and elsewhere in Europe between 1933 and 1945. For many decades these structures were neglected and ignored. One can assume that the decision not to decide what to do with these remnants of Nazism probably resulted from great embarrassment.

Over the years various solutions have been adopted for the Nazi phantoms left untouched in the center of urban spaces. Certain solutions, such as the destruction or neglect of the buildings, were adopted immediately after the War, but after many decades of negligence, and particularly after reunification, German cities began to look their history straight in the eye. At this point, awareness and careful consideration of how to deal with these Nazi remnants influenced the solutions suggested, such as reusing them or turning them into historical monuments. These solutions were heterogeneous in nature and adopted after careful consideration, but they could not minimize the historical irony. Almost every attempt to make these buildings part of the urban space resulted in severe criticism. From the beginning this may have been an impossible mission, but it does reflect an attempt to rewrite history and overcome trauma.

Destruction, deletion, negligence, and ignoring, were common solutions adopted between 1945 and the 1980s. Since the reunification in 1989 reuse, absorption into urban space, and transparent commemoration have been preferred. These new solutions have led to a commemoration industry with the Third Reich at its center. This industry, consumed mainly by tourists, is paradoxically characterized by a blurring of the lines between oppressors and victims. The tension between transparent commemoration and the commemoration industry is discussed in detail at the end of this paper.

In order to establish the major thesis of this essay, I rely greatly on my work during the recent few years. I have devoted most of my academic and creative career to the study of Nazi art, architecture and design, and I have travelled all over Germany, following the relics of the Nazi Era. These photographed Journeys have resulted with more than ten thousand frames so far and is still ongoing (Arieli, 2014).

NAZI ARCHITECTURE AFTER 1945: SOME THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

After the War, Nazi architecture, became the topic of comprehensive research. This research increased the amount of information available about public and official
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