

visiting a memorial, especially if that memorial stands next to Berlin's extensively refurbished Potsdamer Platz. Such a memorial, built on a site where not long before a wasteland and a wall divided two cities, would be witness not so much to the past as to a German memorial politics in the service of the global village. Kohl surely chose this site with care. Forced to make amends for his sweeping equalization of victims in the Neue Wache memorial, he wanted to make sure that whatever shape the new memorial took, and however specific its designation of victims, it would at least be drafted into the *Heile Welt* narrative being underwritten by a newly re-capitalized Potsdamer Platz. "Not only is Germany's task of working through the past receiving unmistakably earnest attention," the planned memorial could thus proclaim from its valuable vantage point, "but the economy is booming too."<sup>6</sup>

The most important provocation of "Bus Stop," and the reason it could never have won during Kohl's tenure lies in the fact that it would have botched his plan. The visitor to "Bus Stop" would have to confront the contrast between Germany's present and future, as reflected in those gleaming Sony and Daimler-Benz displays, and Germany's past, in the form of crumbling installations just outside the gates of the capital, all but neglected in the government's memory-financing zeal. "Bus Stop" thus echoes Broder's proposal for the establishment of a foundation for those still persecuted today. The new senator for Culture Michael Nauman had already announced before elections that he would prefer to support the memorial sites already in existence, in particular Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück. A new era of German commemoration thus seems to be upon us.

### Sachsenhausen

Sih and Schnock's "memorial buses" would take about an hour from the center of Berlin to reach the site of the former concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. But even without the proposed bus service, the camp would be readily accessible by S-Bahn, with trains departing every twenty minutes from Berlin for Oranienburg, the small, formerly East German town adjacent to the camp site. From the Oranienburg train station signs point to the entry gates of the "Sachsenhausen Memorial Site" (*Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen*), a twenty-minute walk away. It's just as well perhaps that there is no public transportation to the site, because aside from the erection of a few gaudy billboards advertising pizza and cheap flights to Paris and New York, nothing much seems to have changed here since the Wall came down, or indeed since the end of the war. Hence the walk itself offers a history lesson.

Oranienburg is a small town where coal dust seems still to hover in the air, where bullet-pocked façades are crumbling and the main street is made of cobblestones. The visitor is struck first by the "eastness" of the place, by the fact, that is, that time seems to have stood still for forty years, and then by the realization that the physical structures have remained virtually unaltered throughout war and changes of regime. But despite the almost palpable sense of history they convey, the buildings reveal very little about their past. Nothing indicates that even before the camp was built in Sachsenhausen, Oranienburg itself was home to one of the first German concentration camps, installed by the Nazi stormtroopers (the *Sturmabteilung*, or SA) in an old brewery in March 1933 just after Hitler came to power; that the town's castle housed Oranienburg's SS regiment after 1933 until the entire central administration of the SS was moved from Berlin to Oranienburg in 1937; or that Oranienburg was marked on the maps of the Third Reich as the "City of the SS," just as Munich was given the epithet "City of Movements," and Nuremberg was known as the "City of the Party Conference." By the time visitors have walked down Bernauer Strasse (under the Nazis, Adolf-Hitler-Strasse, later in the GDR, Strasse der Freiheit), and turned left onto the Strasse der Einheit, then right onto the Strasse der Nationen to reach the camp gates, they will have traversed the same route along which many thousands of internees were herded by camp guards toward imprisonment in Sachsenhausen, past the apartments and houses of members of the SS. Visitors will thus have passed through a town filled with concealed relics, only to find the site itself submerged under layer after layer of ideological, aesthetic, and political constructions of the past.

Representation and authenticity stand in uneasy relation to one another. In common memorial parlance, the term authenticity refers to original objects or to actual physical sites where events have occurred, often in the sense that these objects or sites are somehow superior to those whose meaning must first be constructed, and that a type of unalterable truth is to be found in them that cannot be found elsewhere. In his celebrated essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin, although writing in an age as yet untouched by the Holocaust, suggests the fateful name "aura" for that which supposedly bestows upon the authentic relic a superiority to its reproductions. In the case of a reproduction, he writes, the artifact's ability to give historical witness is at risk of collapse; its very authority is shaken, and its aura, that which enables it to conquer its audience, falls away.<sup>71</sup> Authority, testimony, and reputation form a powerful triad in Holocaust studies where issues of representability, believability, and transmission of history plague those who ponder the conditions of representing the Holocaust. It is all too seductive to believe in such a thing as aura, to believe that there are places where

a sort of direct, privileged access to the Holocaust is possible via the very stones and mortar that housed it. But of course there is no such thing as a pure site affording access to a knowledge of the Holocaust untouched by interpretation or construction. And a historically significant site can not necessarily speak for itself. Hence the theoretical bind: without representation there can be only limited memory; and with too overbearing a framework of interpretation, with too much narrative, there is the danger that memory may be distorted, fragmented, or destroyed altogether. The former camp of Sachsenhausen, located on the outskirts of Oranienburg, is a good illustration of the tug-of-war between authenticity and representation. The "authentic site" of Sachsenhausen, almost hidden under the layers of meaning imposed upon it by the East German government, actually employed the Nazi past as a political instrument, while the town of Oranienburg proper, itself too an "authentic site" of SS activity, went largely unnoticed as such. Oranienburg and Sachsenhausen teach us that there is a fine line between, on the one hand, representing and re-contextualizing a site or an object while smothering the object itself under biased or simply incorrect historical interpretations, and, on the other hand, denying the authenticity of a site, and thus its past, by simply not mentioning it. In order to appreciate the aura of an object or a site, one must, after all, first be aware that it's there.

The significance of such authentic sites for contemporary audiences has, moreover, changed considerably over the fifty years since the camp was liberated. For one thing, there are fewer and fewer people around for whom the stones direct or bring back a direct memory of National Socialism; for younger generations the site itself becomes the memory, not the medium for recalling the events that took place there. This can have various consequences. One tendency is to understand the memorial site simply as one of the countless Holocaust narratives encountered in today's media-saturated world. "Schindler's List was better," I overheard one teenager remark just after his tour of the site, as he sat with his friends in the café outside the camp gates. His sense of having just experienced a narrative comparable to, and indeed inferior to, that of a Hollywood film, underscores the basic change of perception in those brought up in the world of visual media. It may be that this youngster had simply failed to distinguish between reality and fictionality; that for him, the remnants of a concentration camp are to be interpreted in the same register as a fictional account of the Holocaust, an effect Steven Spielberg was no doubt aiming to achieve with the documentary quality of his film's cinematography. Or he might also have understood, however vaguely, that the camp itself was a narrative, a construction of reality that could legitimately be compared to the constructedness of the "real" story of Oskar Schindler. In either case, the authenticity of the site did not inspire awe, at least in

this instance, as one has come to expect, because the Holocaust has become a narrative so worn as to have elicited specific consumer expectations in which the idea of originality, the representation of "the authentic," is executed better by Hollywood than in "real" life.

Of course, such a blurring of genre boundaries is extreme, and as they left the café, the teenagers were engaged in vociferous argument, unfortunately soon beyond my hearing. Their debate, as I imagine it, might well have confirmed Andreas Huyssen's recent appraisal of the effects of postmodernity, his contention that it is in fact precisely the saturation of today's media with Holocaust images that can lead to a privileging, rather than a flattening, of the permanent site. "One reason for the new-found strength of the museum and the monument in the public sphere," he writes, "may have to do with the fact that both offer something that television denies: the material quality of the object."<sup>17</sup> Permanence therefore becomes an antidote to the fleeting images of television, although as Huyssen is quick to point out, the permanence of Holocaust sites nonetheless needs to negotiate the "multiple discourses of memory provided by the very electronic media to which the monument as solid matter provides an alternative."<sup>18</sup> No matter how authentic a site, then, the extent of its success in transmitting an understanding of the past that has produced it must take into account habits of perception in the present. The idea that aura is inherent in the object, or in the site, that it "conquers" its audience, as Benjamin writes, must be rethought. Today's audience seems quite ready to be conquered, even by "auras" that are themselves patently, and paradoxically, reproduced. Aura is in the eye of the beholder, after all.

Günter Morsch, head of the Foundation for Brandenburg Memorials (*Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten*) is well aware of the exigencies of contemporary viewing habits: "We have about two hours during which to impart some knowledge of the past," he says, speaking of his duties to visitors to the camp site. The best way to use this time, he believes, is by what he terms the "decentralized concept," which combines the two principal aims of his curatorship: preservation of the still extant original buildings, and teaching exhibits in the buildings that illustrate aspects of the camp's history as they relate to their respective locations.<sup>19</sup> In addition to referring to various aspects of history, each of the exhibits is to be framed by the history of the entire camp, so that the individual narratives can be integrated into the larger picture of the camp. Thus, even if visitors have not had a chance to view the individual exhibits, they will still come away with more than only a fragmented sense of the place. Moreover, the information given about the camp doesn't simply end with its liberation in 1945. In what is to become one of the permanent exhibits of the camp, aptly entitled "From Memory to Monument" (*Von der Erinnerung zum*

Monument), Morsch also documents the subsequent history of Sachsenhausen as a memorial site during the time of the GDR, reflecting on authenticity, memorial narrativity, and historical revisionism. Thus the aim is not to restore to the site a spurious authenticity, to pretend that it is once again an unadulterated site. As Morsch himself says, "the historical site *sel generis* does not exist but is to be approached as an amalgamate of historical processes," a fusion of representational elements in need of interpretation.<sup>159</sup>

With the help of the current exhibit, visitors come to understand that the layers of interpretations imposed on the memorial site under the GDR almost entirely effaced the original narratives of the concentration camp. While the preserved buildings and relics impart a vague idea of how the camp actually looked, the superimposition of the Sachsenhausen National Memorial during the late 1950s and early 1960s on the actual camp site and the political and aesthetic decisions informing its construction speak clearly and eloquently about the forms of social and political memory possible under the East German regime, and about their uses. Interpretation of Sachsenhausen's history in the GDR and of its current re-conceptualization in unified Germany offers insights into two radically different attitudes toward the history of National Socialism. Under the GDR the memory of the camp as a historical site was used to shape the state identity of the emerging socialist republic, for which the concept of anti-fascism was a crucial legitimizing strategy. The resulting narrative, of the anti-fascist state and the anti-fascist resistance fighter (a sort of Wilhelm Tell of the Eastern Bloc), was one that offered absolute redemption to the new citizens by turning the defeat of the German nation into a victory over National Socialism, for at least as long as these new citizens could identify themselves with their new state.

*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, in the sense of trying to understand the mechanism of National Socialism and one's own role within it, was necessarily a private business in the GDR, because officially it was unneeded. In that sense, reading as Santner does, the official GDR narrative about the past presented its citizens with a history in which the traumatic site of Hitler's Germany was located firmly in the *other* Germany, thereby allowing for a re-constitution of citizens' identities under non-traumatic conditions.<sup>160</sup> In exchange for identification with the new system, and a belief in its founding myth, the East German could put aside feelings of loss and shame without the painful work of mourning.

I want to stress that this scenario is, of course, highly stylized, and that, as Claudia Koonz observes, it makes sense to maintain the difference between popular memory and official memory.<sup>161</sup> After an initial outpouring of memoirs written by camp survivors had received little attention in the struggle and turmoil of the immediate postwar years, accounts

published in the East during the 1950s and 1960s, after the founding of the GDR in 1949, already began to bear the stamp of censorship. It was only in the later years of the GDR that highly publicized personal recollections, such as Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, published in the 1970s, or plans to restore the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue in Berlin, helped to create a framework in the public mind for confronting the past.

The narrative strategies used in fashioning the concentration camp memorial sites that had fallen to the GDR, most prominent among them Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück, can be read today as blueprints of GDR official memory of the National Socialist past, produced by the government to forge a collective social identity commensurate with the needs of GDR ideology. These narratives also underscore the difference between a working through of the past and its instrumentalization. In order to make intelligible the extent to which the narrative of the Memorial Site of Sachsenhausen is a construct, I will, in the following, present its history and significance as a camp, first under Nazi and then under Soviet rule. I will then discuss its subsequent development into the Memorial Site of Sachsenhausen in the GDR, and the efforts currently in progress to turn it into a memorial site of post-unification Germany. I conclude with an account of contemporary debates and conflicts about the preservation of the area surrounding the prisoner's camp: the vast, crumbling terrain of former SS barracks, SS residences, and satellite camps, which together form a unique site of perpetration, the only one preserved to this extent in Germany, or for that matter, anywhere in the world.

Even before Sachsenhausen was built in 1936, Oranienburg was home to a make-shift concentration camp, which had been installed in an old brewery in March of 1933 soon after Hitler's accession to power. One of the first of its kind, the camp's function under the SA was to imprison those who opposed the new National Socialist regime. The camp's life was relatively brief, since it was already closed in the summer of 1934. Shortly thereafter, Heinrich Himmler and the commandant of Dachau, Theodor Eicke, came up with a new system of concentration camps placed exclusively under the direction of the SS. Sachsenhausen was to be the star, a "completely modern concentration camp," in Heinrich Himmler's words, a model outfit where the SS could be trained in their duties.<sup>162</sup> What made it so modern was above all its capacity to house and control large numbers of prisoners, a requirement commensurate with the Reich's implementation of its new racial politics in the aftermath of the Nuremberg laws in 1935, and with its pursuit of the ever-harder political and social control of its population. As Morsch points out, symptomatic of this change was that, under the new system, the SS guards could no longer come from the





by Stalin to silence enemies of his regime. The arbitrary mixture of prisoners in the Soviet camps reflected a double motive for arrests. On the one hand, the Soviets were "anti-fascists," and sought therefore to intern and punish Nazi criminals; on the other hand, they were also totalitarians, and therefore all opponents of their regime, including non-Stalinist Communists and members of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), were imprisoned. While most of the prisoners had been low and middle level functionaries of the Nazi party, there was still a fair number of inmates who had been arrested arbitrarily. Thus, Nazis, former Sachsenhausen inmates again interned as spies, youngsters denounced as "wolves" by ambitious Communists, and people arbitrarily arrested by roving Soviet soldiers were interned alongside guards from the former concentration camp at Ravensbrück. What all of them, except for the most egregious Nazi criminals, had in common was that they were being held in the camp without trial and with no communication with the outside world. Families were not even informed of the deaths of inmates. For this reason, the special camps came to be known as *Schwartzlager*, or "camps of silence."<sup>118</sup>

In 1948, approximately half of these prisoners were set free and seven of the ten special camps in the Soviet sector were closed down. The three remaining in operation were Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Bautzen; Sachsenhausen, the largest of the three, was re-named "Special Camp 1." In the spring of 1950, all remaining prisoners were either set free or released to the government of what by then had become the GDR. Released prisoners were threatened with the gravest of repercussions if they ever spoke about their experiences in the camp; to speak of the camps' existence at all was taboo in the GDR. This silence continued until after the Wall came down, when three mass graves from the period just after the war were discovered at various locations in Oranienburg, one of them just outside the camp wall.

Within weeks of the liberation of Sachsenhausen and other camps on German soil, former prisoners all over Germany had banded together in an organization called *Opfer des Faschismus* (ODF) or Victims of Fascism, when the Allied forces forbade the ODF to engage in political activity, the group metamorphosed in 1946 into the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Nazi-Regimes* (VVN) or Association of Those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime, a group independent of the Allies. The self-defined goals of the ODF, and later of the VVN, were to act as a self-help group to ease the difficult transition from prison camp into a society that was itself bruised by the war and therefore less than hospitable toward living examples of its previous government's oppression and terror. On a more ideological level, the group hoped to "participate in the construction of a new society,

in part by initiating a meaningful confrontation between the present society and the National Socialist past."<sup>119</sup>

It quickly became clear, however, that the "National Socialist past" was to be understood only in a rigid, politically self-serving sense. This was evident above all in discussions about who would have the right to call themselves victims of persecution, or *Verfolgter*, and thus be eligible for membership in the organization. The figure of the ideal resistance fighter had already been drawn in 1945 in the inaugural speech of the ODF by its leader, Karl Radatz: "We want to show examples of uplifting camaraderie that made it possible for us to bear so much cruelty;" further, "We want to praise the main figure of the fighter against fascism, those workers, preachers, intellectuals, and officers who . . . were interned as political opponents of the Nazi regime."<sup>120</sup> This ideal fighter was in no way related to the masses who had been persecuted for racial reasons, i.e., the Jews and the Sinti and Roma, nor indeed did it include women. As Susanne zur Nieden points out, the mystification and instrumentalization of camp history is already clearly visible in this reductive understanding of the victim.<sup>121</sup>

Victims of National Socialist racial policies were marginalized in the historical discourse of the GDR for another reason as well, already apparent in Radatz's formulation of the anti-fascist resistance fighter. As Dan Diner observes, National Socialism was interpreted through the lens of a Marxist theory of fascism which held that the ruling classes, motivated by militarism, imperialism, and monocapitalism, had made possible Hitler's rise to power and the ensuing war. Defining itself in this way as an anti-fascist state made possible not only the GDR's opposition to Hitler's Germany, but also its distinction from "the other Germany" that was allegedly predisposed to fascism anyway because of its capitalist structure. The ramifications of this economic interpretation of fascism were that those aspects of mass killing that could not be perceived as having been economically motivated—in other words, the genocide of the Jews and the Sinti and Roma—were naturally threatening to the self-understanding and legitimization of the new state. In this context Diner writes: "The memory of the victim groups stigmatized neither because of political resistance, nor for economical exploitation, but only because of their ethnic origin, coincided with the official self-understanding of the GDR based on the concept of anti-fascism."<sup>122</sup> Genocide, in Raphael Lemkin's sense, was thus to be ignored. This fact would profoundly influence the way the historical narrative of the camp was constructed.

Despite the fact that one of the primary tasks of the VVN in the years immediately following the war was the memorialization of this imagined fighter, public memory, especially after the currency reform of 1946, were insufficient, and in any case most people's attention was focused else-

where, Berlin lay in rubble, there were food and fuel shortages everywhere, thousands of refugees from the areas now under Polish rule were flooding the cities, and German soldiers due home from the eastern front were actually being held in Soviet prison camps. Moreover, the site of atrocity itself was unavailable for purposes of memorialization, as it was in use by the Soviets as they created another category of victim in their "Special Camps." Thus, except for a couple of memorial stones erected in Oranienburg proper, and a competition to design a memorial for the park in front of the castle which failed for financial reasons, nothing much was done until 1949, when a large international demonstration in Oranienburg was planned for the fifth anniversary of Sachsenhausen's liberation.

Anticipation of the anniversary coincided with the founding of the German Democratic Republic on October 7, 1949, and the memorial work previously reserved to the VVN suddenly became a national issue. Commemoration was no longer merely a matter of remembering dead comrades, or of reminding the world of the atrocities committed by the Nazis. History, under the new regime, was to take on the dual task of legitimizing the new state, and of proving to the world, and to the newly-minted citizens of the GDR, that the "new" Germany was also the "better" Germany.<sup>157</sup> To satisfy this call order, the town of Oranienburg announced a competition in preparation for the fifth anniversary of the liberation of the camp in April of 1950, to create a memorial, to which fifty designs were ultimately submitted. Among these widely varied designs, there seems to have been a consensus on two points: first, that the entire camp complex, including the area of the command headquarters or *Kommandantur* and the SS buildings, should be incorporated into the memorial site (implying that the dissolution of the *Speziallager* was planned as well); and second, that a sort of garden or wooded area should be planted on the site: "to integrate it into the city planning of Oranienburg." The submissions were ranked, a prize was awarded for a design that proposed to adorn the camp site with "a lovely green meadow with flowers, surrounded by trees," and then there was silence.<sup>158</sup>

What had happened? Since no documents are left to explain the sudden paralysis, it can only be speculated that money and time had run short, and, more importantly, that the site was simply not yet ready for use. The last eight *Speziallager* prisoners were to be released on March 10, 1950. The ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of the camp's liberation from the Nazis was planned for April 15, a scant 36 days later. Clearly, growing a field of flowers, not to mention erasing five destructive years of intervening history so as to prevent their interfering with the new state image, was impossible. Other measures would have to be taken to obliterate this unwanted history. After the *Speziallager* was closed, the camp was turned over to the so-called *Kasernierte Volkspolizei* (KVP) or Stationary People's

Police, who took up residence in the former SS buildings. Then the great destruction of the camp began. In less than five years, barracks and buildings had been torn down, most of the crematoria blown up, and part of the original walls of the camp removed (creating the impression that the area where the crematoria had stood, and where executions had taken place, had been visible to the prisoners). The police even planned to install a shooting range just behind the site where prisoners had been shot and gassed. Morsch suspects that this neglect and destruction were deliberate, and that the second history of the site as a Soviet camp had to be suppressed and that its remnants had literally to be removed before it could be taken over "cleansed of its history."<sup>159</sup> The VVN underwent a cleansing of its own during these years. It was dissolved by the government in the spring of 1953, and replaced by the Committee of the Anti-Fascist Resistance fighter under the direct leadership of the *Sozialistische Einheits-Partei Deutschlands* (SED) or Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the party of the regime. While some of the original members of the VVN remained on the committee, others whose party loyalty was in question were banned. What had begun as an organization for all victims of National Socialism had now become one in which the victim had turned into a victor over fascism, the very image upon which the GDR had been founded.

Given the centrality taken by this figure of the resistance fighter in the founding mythology of the state, the sites of the former concentration camps took on central importance as well. What better place to corroborate the notion that thousands of resistance fighters had fought against Hitler's regime, and thereby saved Germany's honor, than on the site of the fighters' suffering and ultimate transcendent triumph? What better way to prove to the world the legitimacy of the new anti-fascist state? How better to demonstrate the collaboration between a new citizenry and a new state in confronting the past than through highly visible, on-site memorial commemorations? The political deployment of the camps at Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Ravensbrück was considered so important, in fact, that then-President Otto Grotewohl himself founded a committee, on May 1, 1955, for the construction of national memorials on their sites.<sup>160</sup>

After years of neglect and destruction, during which civilians as well as police helped themselves to the bricks, windows, and doors of the few barracks still standing, the former site of Sachsenhausen was much more receptive to a new interpretation of history. The *Speziallager*, the memory of which might have compromised the GDR just five years earlier, had been all but forgotten, and the physical site had been largely altered by the extensive demolition. Funds, too, were more readily available, although now it had been decided that money for the planned construction of memorial sites was to come mainly from citizens directly, instead

of from the state's coffers. In calls for donations the people of the GDR were reminded that it wasn't they alone who had freed themselves from National Socialism, but that they had been assisted by "thousands of progressive men and women whose resistance had shone like a light in the night of National Socialist barbarity" and that these heroes had "saved German honor." The site was, moreover, to be an expression of friendship with "the great Soviet Union . . . which had freed the German people from Fascism."<sup>259</sup> People were encouraged to make donations by the organizers' suggestion that the speed and generosity with which a donation was made would signal the donor's relative commitment to the state. Thus the citizen was efficiently and rewardingly brought in line with the privileged narrative of the resistance fighter. By 1961 the population of the GDR had donated over 30 million marks for GDR memorial sites, 6 million of which was used to fashion Sachsenhausen into an appropriate site for anti-fascist commemoration.

In 1956 the Committee for Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters offered the job of designing the Sachsenhausen memorial site to Kurt Tausendschön, Ludwig Deiters, Hans Grotewohl, and Horst Katzat, a group of architects who had made a name for themselves with their design for the Buchenwald commemorative site. In Buchenwald their task had been to create a memorial on the site of mass graves located on the Eittersberg some distance from the actual site of the camp. Upon completion of the memorial site many former prisoners, regretting that the memorial made no reference to their daily suffering, demanded a historical reconstruction of the camp. As they realized on their first tour of Sachsenhausen with former prisoners, their task at this site would be entirely different. Here the former prisoners asked that the wall around the camp be rebuilt, and the remaining buildings and barracks reconstructed. These buildings could then be used to house exhibits depicting the prisoners' daily life, their suffering, their resistance, their torture, and their death. All nations, as well as the Jewish prisoners, were to have their respective rooms; the area where prominent prisoners had been interned would become an international research center for the history of the concentration camp, and memorials could be erected to mourn the dead comrades. After all, the committee argued, Sachsenhausen was the site of the SS Inspection for Concentration Camps and should therefore be a place where scientific inquiry, historical remains, and art could coexist as a demonstration of the Nazi machinery of terror.<sup>260</sup>

At that time the idea of preserving an authentic site was revolutionary. Contemporary memorial practices, as the example of Buchenwald shows, consisted rather in tearing down historical remnants and erecting in their stead something upliftingly monumental, something that would at once recall suffering and triumph in a symbolic fashion while at the same time

removing from view the unsightly debris of history. At Sachsenhausen an insistence on reconstruction came simultaneously with the equally pressing matter of creating a memorial space to impress the visitor and offer a focal point amid the stringency of documentation, while also providing the space required by the politicians who planned to use commemorations there as media events.

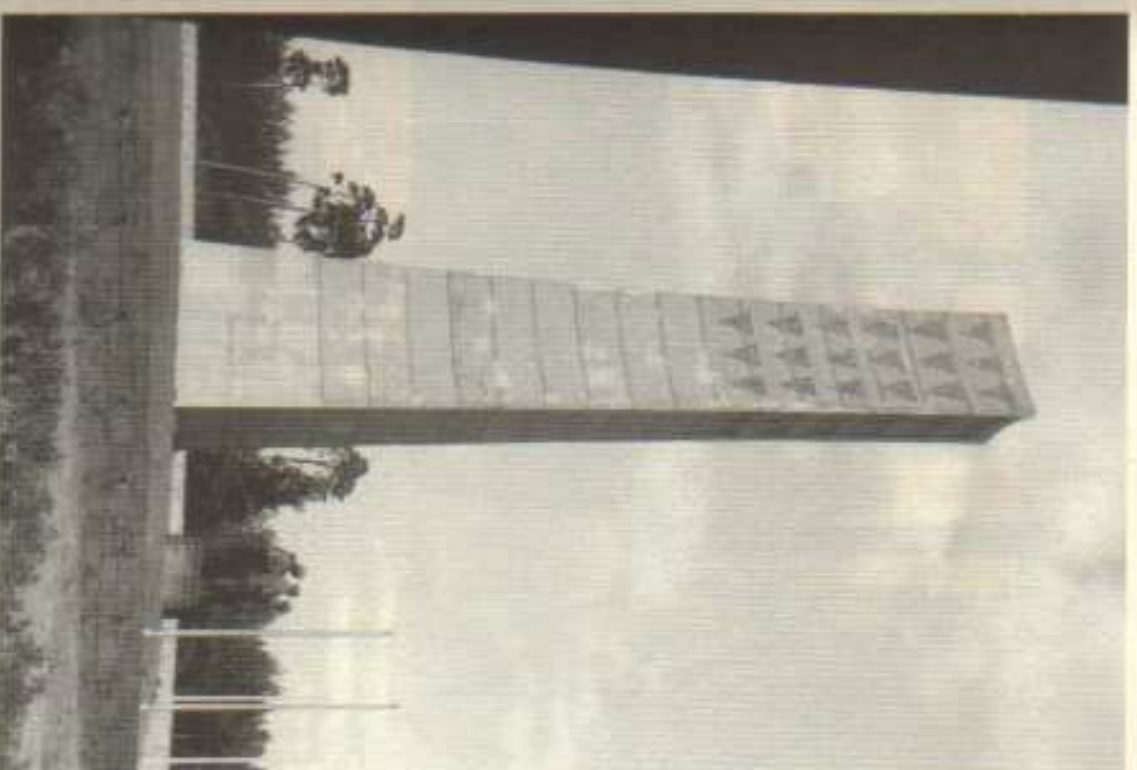
But the architects were not happy with this two-pronged agenda as their task. To their mind, as architects of memorial sites in Germany, they would do well "to express the overcoming of Nazi rule by tearing down and cleaning up the remnants," and then proceed to construct in a "dignified manner."<sup>261</sup> In their distress they decided to visit other concentration camps to see what had happened to them in the 11 years since the end of the war. At Bergen-Belsen, they found, memorialization had proceeded to their taste. The rubble of the former camp had been cleared away, and in its place heather had been planted. Surrounded by its haunting beauty, they felt, visitors would surely be moved. Once on Polish soil, however, they discovered an entirely different approach. The original buildings of Auschwitz and Majdanek had been preserved as a means of bearing witness to what had taken place there. This other aesthetics of memorialization, while new to the architects, made intuitive sense to them, since the original buildings, they reported, ugly though they were, did indeed have a certain effect on the visitor, an effect increased by the collection of personal belongings left behind by the murdered—the glasses, the shoes, and the eating utensils—not to mention the mounds of hair and the gold teeth. Still, the empty buildings were somehow inadequate for simulating the sounds and smells of the place, or the smoking chimneys. The empty shell did not "give the imagination nearly as much nourishment" as would an artistic interpretation of the prisoners' suffering and struggle. In the conclusion to their study of other memorial sites, they summed up their findings thus: "In comparing the expressiveness of preserved buildings with that of artistic representation, the latter always proves to be superior."<sup>262</sup>

Back in Germany, the group set to work on several proposals in accord with their newly-gained wisdom. Their final design, approved on June 25, 1957—two years of discussion and hundreds of drawings later—was a compromise among the wishes of the former prisoners, the aesthetic sensibilities of the architects, and the political and ideological needs of the state.<sup>263</sup> While the committee of former prisoners desired the far-reaching reconstruction of original buildings, especially of the barracks, in order to illustrate how the original camp had looked, the architects considered this costly and naive. They believed that such a reconstruction would make "too nice" an impression, and would never be able to communicate the horrors that had taken place in the camp. Instead, a wall with cross-shaped



Fence around Apdellplatz, a GDR-era memorial. Detail. Photograph by the author (1997).

openings was built in a half-circle around the roll-call area (*Apdellplatz*), and the outlines of the barracks that had stood on that spot were depicted on the wall. The exhibits that the former prisoners had hoped to mount in the reconstructed barracks would now be lodged in a museum outside the prison camp proper, in the area of the former *Kommandantur*. In return for relinquishing the barracks, the committee of former prisoners was granted its second-most urgent wish, namely, the erection of an imposing obelisk representing not so much their suffering as their heroic resistance. The obelisk, called Monument of the Nations, stands at the far end of the camp, facing the watch tower, and rising 20 meters above it. In its architectural relationship with the watch tower, it thus responded not only to the wishes of the prisoner committee, but also to the architects' desire to create an antithesis to the Nazi architecture of the camp, a design in which the triumph of anti-fascism could be made visible.<sup>204</sup> As a concession to the former prisoners' request for a representation of the camp's conditions, the following elements were reconstructed: the shoe-leasing



Monument of the Nations. Obelisk. A GDR-era memorial. Detail. Photograph by the author (1997).

area, an extended section of different sorts of pavement on which prisoners had been forced to walk back and forth, sometimes until they died of exhaustion, wearing prototype footwear; a simulation of the high-voltage "neutral zone," complete with death's head and barbed wire; and



Waldemar Grzimek. Statue group at Station Z. A GDR-era memorial. Photograph by the author (1997).

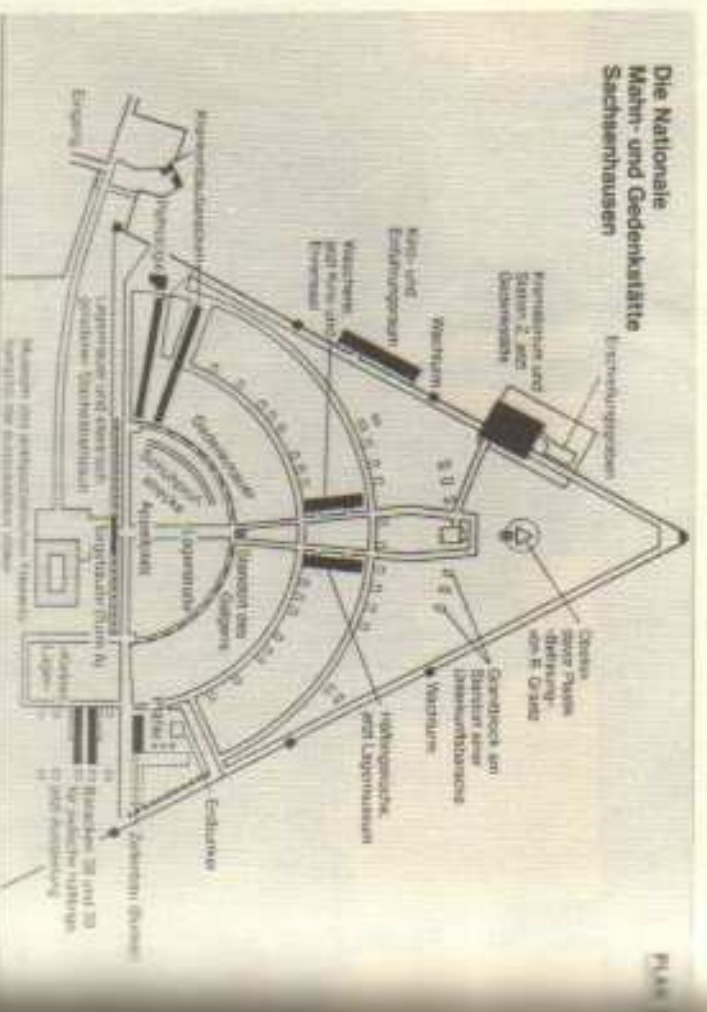
the gallows. There was a consensus about leaving the simple cement arch over the Z-Station, the site of executions, gasings, and the crematoria (the latter all but demolished at this point), and about the project of landscaping the rest of the camp. In addition to the obelisk, two further monuments were to mark individual sites. In front of the crematoria, a statue group by Waldemar Grzimek depicted the prisoners' suffering; in addition, René Graetz installed his "Liberation" in front of the obelisk.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Sachsenhausen, in contrast to Buchenwald, had been liberated by the "correct side," that is, by units of the Soviet Army, made this association of triumph and liberation possible.<sup>21</sup> The neat spatial division between the site of the obelisk and the site where the crematoria had once stood further allowed for a memorial division between sorrow and triumph.

These three structures, the obelisk, Graetz's and Grzimek's memorials, demonstrate the political and ideological functions that the camp was to have. Graetz's experience shows that only a very specific figure of the pris-



René Graetz. Statue group at Obelisk. A GDR-era Memorial. Photograph by the author (1997).

oner was wanted in the GDR's interpretation of the past. His first design elicited only disappointment from the former inmates and others. The prisoner, he was told, was too miserable and too weak, and his apparent relationship to the Soviet soldier was wrong, too. The soldier should appear



Plan, GDR-era memorial site. Courtesy: Oranienburg, Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen, Fotothek.

more like a brother-in-arms, since that, after all, was the contemporary situation. President Grotewohl, himself something of an artist, would accept the memorial design only after Grotetz had made the legs of the Soviet soldier appear stronger. The final product, then is, a group of three sturdy men, two prisoners with their liberator starting proudly ahead, ready to shoulder this interpretation of history. Nothing of the miserable conditions of the prisoners encountered during liberation were implied by the memorial, nor, for that matter, was the misery of the Soviet soldiers who had fought for so many months under harsh conditions. And if there was any lingering doubt that anyone other than Communists had been held in the camp, it was dispelled by the forty red triangles, used to identify political prisoners by the Nazis, near the top of the obelisk. Unrepresented were thus, to name just the largest groups of victims, the Jews, the Sinti and Roma, the homosexuals, and the Jehovah's Witnesses (unless some of these were also Communists). Women, irrespective of their status, were not represented at all, even though many had been interned in Sach-

senhausen, for the official history held that women had been interned exclusively at nearby Ravensbrück. Grizmek's memorial, meanwhile, is a more realistic depiction of the prisoners' suffering, although here too the figures are exclusively male. Their mutual assistance, furthermore, conjures up an image of events that could have taken place only after the prisoners had been liberated.

The symbolic language of the monuments was complemented by three museum installations rehearsing the political and ideological importance Sachsenhausen was to assume within the GDR. The largest of the three, erected outside the triangle of the camp proper on the terrain formerly occupied by the SS, was the Museum of the Struggle for Freedom of the European People (*Museum des Freiheitskampfes der europäischen Völker*) and was dedicated to the various resistance fighters whose citizens had been interned at Sachsenhausen were each allotted fifty square meters in which to represent their struggle against the Nazis.<sup>20</sup> The representation of the GDR, of course, was minutely scrutinized, by Ulbricht himself among others, and the finished exhibit was brought into line with the political agenda of the state, clearly articulating Hitler's fascism as the struggle between capitalism and the "other Germany." In the aftermath of National Socialism "the best tradition" of anti-fascist struggle had been realized in the GDR, while "the politics of the Adenauer government represented a continuation of the reactionary, militaristic, and anti-humanist traditions."<sup>21</sup>

A smaller exhibit mounted in three parts in a restored barracks within the prison camp represents the history of the concentration camp, daily life in Sachsenhausen, complete with resistance and liberation, and finally the respective histories of the two Germanies after the war. The master narrative, as in the rest of the memorial site, emphasizes National Socialism as a monstrous deformation of capitalism and Nazi persecution as motivated solely by economic considerations. According to the exhibit, persecution on the basis of race did not exist, nor was there a difference between Auschwitz, built primarily as a camp for the mass extermination of the allegedly racially inferior, and Sachsenhausen, originally, at least, a political prison. The final two rooms, dedicated to the two Germanies, emphasized once again the continuation of the National Socialist regime in West Germany versus the national rebirth of the "new, humanist" Germany in the GDR which based its political legitimacy on anti-fascism and the elimination of capitalism.<sup>22</sup>

Since anti-Semitism and racism, according to the GDR paradigm, were at most lesser symptoms of class struggle, the destruction of the Jews was hardly mentioned in the exhibit. If Jews had been incarcerated, it must have been because they were Communists; the faces of inmates on one



GDR-era museum at Sachsenhausen. Detail, poster. Photograph by the author (1997).

exhibit poster of the time are said to represent that of the “anti-fascist.” Accordingly, the persecution of Jews, or of Sinti and Roma, on the basis of alleged racial considerations was seldom discussed in the GDR in the 1950s. This indifference and silence would probably have continued had it not suddenly become politically opportune for the SED to shine a spotlight on the war-time activities of Adenauer’s secretary of state, Hans Globke, in order to emphasize West Germany’s continuation of the Nazi legacy under a different guise, an emphasis which was to be at the heart of the GDR’s controversy with the FRG. The trouble was that this spotlight on the West’s secretary of state also illuminated the Nuremberg race laws, since Globke had been instrumental in their formulation. Added to this was the fact that the SED’s accusations came in the wake of the Eichmann trial, which had opened in Jerusalem in May of 1960, and which itself had focused the world’s attention on Israel and the fate of the Jews. Against this background it seemed scandalous that Israel and the suffering of the Jewish people were not represented among the 19 nations

in the large international museum on the Sachsenhausen site and figured only very cursorily in the smaller exhibit about life in the camp.<sup>20</sup> In fact, in January of 1961, a group of Israelis, the Union of Anti-Fascist Resistance fighters of Israel, former inmates at Sachsenhausen, wrote a letter to the heads of the museum protesting their exclusion. The heads were thrown into a quandary, because German anti-Semitism was not a topic that readily fit into the narrow paradigm the museum designers had been presented with by the SED, and the state of Israel could hardly be given a place among the other nations, since this would be tantamount to recognition. At the same time, however, the charge of anti-Semitism leveled at the FRG would ring hollow should Israel accuse the GDR of the same vice. The only acceptable solution was finally to create the Museum of Resistance and Suffering of the Jewish People in restored Barracks 38 and 39 where Jews had been incarcerated during the Holocaust and which were located at the edge of the memorial site. As Morsch notes, the Jews were thus once again marginalized.<sup>21</sup>

The finished Memorial Site of Sachsenhausen was a sort of theater, ideally fitted for the function it had been assigned, a site for mass gatherings at which representatives of the government could with an arsenal of rituals repeatedly demonstrate the quality of the GDR’s anti-fascism as attested by the triumph of its resistance fighters. The opening ceremony of the memorial site at Sachsenhausen was set for April 22, 1961, 16 years and a day after the liberation of the camp. Preparations had begun months earlier. Citizens of Oranienburg had been asked to spruce up their houses and gardens, if need be with the financial help of the state. The train station was renovated, and members of the official youth organization Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) formed an honor guard reaching from the train station to the entrance of the camp. This was a chance to demonstrate to the world that all was well in the “better Germany” in order to reinforce the desired image of overall contentment, but Ulbricht had to prevent international visitors from seeing too much. A trip to the state-run factories, for instance, was canceled for fear that the disgruntled workers would disrupt the smooth exterior countless SED offices had spent months creating. (The fact that for some time thousands of people had been fleeing to the West was not improving the image the president wished the world to take home, either.) In April the SED’s hope for a stop to the division of Germany was still alive. Indeed, while every detail of the festivities was worked out and controlled by the SED, the impression Ulbricht wanted to give to the rest of the world was that his country was in fact capable of a non-partisan consensus and democracy, that a unification of Germany under the banner of the SED would bring peace and contentment to all.



Dedication of the Sachsenhausen Memorial Site (1961). Photograph by E. Schäfer. Courtesy: Oranienburg, Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen, Kowitzke.

After the impressive ceremony of 1961, GDR interpretation of the Nazi past remained essentially paralyzed. Anti-fascism had been dehistoricized, turned into an amalgamate of myth and governmental interest, and all was well contained until history changed course in 1989 and the GDR dissolved under a flood of suspicions, accusations, and revelations. Despite the centrality of the national memorial site of Sachsenhausen, not much had been done to preserve the original buildings during the near 30 years the Wall had stood. "Sometimes they threw some paint at the barracks," a woman who has been working at the camp's information stand since 1968 told me in the summer of 1997, "but that was just to cover up the rot." Indeed, almost a decade after the fall of the Wall, this rot is visible everywhere, accentuated by the lush foliage that has grown up around the site. Where people were once shot, gassed, or burned, nothing remains except the caved-in foundations of the ground floor. "Do not enter—

Danger," a large sign warns today's visitors. The semi-circular wall around the roll-call area, too, is cordoned off because of its possible collapse, and the paint is peeling from the buildings in which much of the camp's museum exhibit is still displayed in its original state. A newer plaque just outside the gates of the camp points to one of the three mass graves of the *Speziallager* victims, discovered only after the Wall came down.

It is fortunate that so much of the memorial site as constructed under GDR rule is extant. Because of the museum exhibits and the superimposition of the memorial onto the original topography of the camp site, Sachsenhausen today not only tells the story of National Socialist persecution but also documents the manner in which the GDR constructed that history by adding, reducing, and erasing facts to serve its ideological and political ends.<sup>20</sup> However, for the team of historians and researchers faced with bringing this disintegrating palimpsest of history in line with contemporary thinking about representations of the past, difficult questions arise. Should as much as possible of the original, "authentic" camp, as constructed in 1936, be restored, the bare bones of the original architecture reconstructed at the cost of the park-like memorial installations put in place by the GDR in the late 1950s? Or should the national memorial site of the GDR be preserved in its own identity as witness to the history of the GDR? And what about the Soviet *Speziallager*, which used the very same buildings as the Nazi camp, but which had, ostensibly at least, interned the perpetrators, and not their victims?

The post-unification history of Barracks 38 and 39 helps to highlight some of the issues confronting would-be renovators. In September of 1992, following a widely publicized visit by Prime Minister Rabin of Israel, alleged neo-Nazis torched what had become known as the "Jewish barracks,"<sup>21</sup> destroying half of Barrack 38 and leaving the other half, as well as Barrack 39, badly damaged and in need of reconstruction.<sup>22</sup> The arson occurred when Germany as a whole was still reeling from the attacks on foreigners in Hoyerswerda in the fall of 1991, and Rostock in the summer of 1992; together with the attacks on Mölln and Solingen, in the winter of 1992, and the early summer of 1993, respectively, it would come to seem a link in the internationally noted chain of anti-Semitic and racist acts of aggression that had marked the resurgence of Germany's radical right movement. Public reaction was immediate and conflicted. While many demanded that the barracks be rebuilt in their "original" shape, as an act of resistance to racist crimes, others suggested that the charred remains be left as a symbolic protest against anti-Semitism and violence. The question, in other words, presented itself as follows: would the "undoing" of the physical damage be a more effective way to counteract anti-Semitism than the preserving of its traces? Clearly, rebuilding the barracks to remove all traces would not undo the fact that they had been set

on fire. It would, however, obscure multiple histories, those of the Soviet camps, and the history of the barracks under National Socialism, of the torching, from obscuring the one history which those in favor of rebuilding felt to be the most important. In one sense, then, the considerations came down to how the various stages of the site's histories should be weighted. Should the commemoration be of only the Nazi period of the camp's history, or should it also encompass the present-day repercussions of the recent past?

The question of how to depict the past, not only in these specific barracks but in the camp in general, led to heated debate during discussions following the arson. Controversy arose on two fronts, between the victims' organizations and the historians, and between representatives of victims of the Nazi regime and those of the Stalinist regime. Moreover at the center of both confrontations were the same issues of memory and history that had been occupying Germanians since the Historians' debate, if not since the end of the war.<sup>214</sup>

The issue of authenticity was raised on this occasion as well. The history of Barracks 38 and 39 in this regard was already somewhat checkered, for at the insistence of some former Sachsenhausen prisoners wishing to retain at least a few "original" buildings in which to portray daily life in the camps, the architects of the memorial site had in 1958 reluctantly rebuilt the two barracks with materials remaining from the demolition of other barracks. Although the architects in this reconstruction had purposely used materials and techniques to render obvious the barracks' status, there was no explicit sign to mark them as inauthentic and very few visitors noticed or could interpret the difference in materials or building styles.<sup>215</sup> In taking this history into account, the discussions in December of 1995 defined two basic attitudes, that of the historians, who spoke in theoretical terms about representation, "inauthenticity," and the difficulty of re-enacting historical events, and that of the former prisoners and the Jewish community, who argued simply for immediate reconstruction of the barracks. The latter asserted that it was more important to preserve the memory of Jewish suffering than to worry about the relative authenticity of the buildings. Besides, they argued, wouldn't a memorial on the site, as proposed by some of the speakers, not simply reward the arsonists? Wouldn't an artistic solution further promote forgetting of the Jewish victims who were already sufficiently neglected since the war? This last point was based on the barracks' assumed role of proving to the world the persecution of the Jews and of helping to teach younger generations "how it was," and was re-inforced by the fact that the last living witnesses to camp life are about to disappear and that with their disappearance historical representation itself would become even more fragile and susceptible to misinterpretation. The entire concept of authenticity, finally, is one

of degree, at least in the mind of Adolf Burger, a Czech survivor of three years' imprisonment in one of the impreserved barracks. "You know," he said to the people assembled at the colloquia, "I really liked your lectures, your scientific lectures, but nonetheless I would like to say . . . [the reconstruction] is the right thing to do, despite all these theories. . . . Generations will be able to see it. A concentration camp should not become a site of great monuments, they didn't exist, they are not true."<sup>216</sup>

Those opposed to a complete reconstruction who favor instead a thematization of the barracks' complex history, owed their view to doubts about whether "inauthentic" buildings could perform the task of bearing witness and teaching. Wouldn't the very fact of their reconstruction mean that the buildings would lose the authority Benjamin assigns to an original object, and thus open the way for revisionists to claim that the events depicted were as inauthentic as the buildings in which the images and artifacts were displayed? And finally, wouldn't the relatively tame re-enactment of "how it was" in a museum exhibit mock the actual horrors of life in the camps? As Diner points out, the concentration camps on German soil present a less dramatic vision of Hitler's industrial mass murder, and yet they are understood by many, *pars pro toto*, as the Holocaust.<sup>217</sup> A re-enactment in Sachsenhausen would therefore skew the historical view considerably in the direction of rendering the camp experience more harmless than it really had been. After long deliberation, and following a competition in which three architectural firms, including that of Daniel Libeskind, were invited to participate, it was decided that the barracks could be rebuilt in such a way as to show their occupants' experience. The winning design encases the section beyond repair in rusting steel, divided internally into two floors of exhibits about Sachsenhausen's Jewish prisoners.

In judging competing designs for the entire site, the participating historians had stressed that the National Socialist past will remain central. There will be no mixing of victims, nor will they be equated with one another; nonetheless, the history of the Soviet *Speziallager* has to be told. For this purpose an exhibit will be mounted near the mass graves in the so-called Zone II, situated some distance from the original camp. But the misunderstandings and controversies occasioned by these debates, and in no way resolved by the decisions made so far, underscore an important dimension in today's memorial work. While it often "remembers the victims," the needs of the victims themselves, expressed in their sense of the past and their involvement in present-day politics, are radically different from the needs and attitudes of those engaged in recording their history. In this context it is also important to consider how Sachsenhausen and other camps relate to their immediate surroundings, the communities in whose midst they have been erected. In Sachsenhausen (as in Ravensbrück), these questions are particularly pertinent since, with the fall of the

Wall and the dissolution of the GDR, the areas of the camp, formerly in control of the army have once again been relinquished for other uses.

The most difficult and pressing questions of all, then, do not concern the area where the prisoners had been interned, but rather the remainder of the sprawling camp, the 95% that had been taken up by SS barracks, satellite camps, and SS residences, in short, the site of the perpetrators. Because the People's Army had taken over large parts of the SS barracks, and because the inhabitants of Oranienburg had settled into the former SS residences, enough of the camp's original infrastructure had been preserved to render intelligible, even today, the structure of the SS machinery, or, as historian Volkhard Knigge puts it, "the school of murder."<sup>210</sup> Sachsenhausen in this regard is unique, for nowhere else, including Poland, are the remnants of the perpetrators preserved to this extent, and nowhere else could such a preservation be as important as in the Nazis' model camp. As Moersch explains, the SS installations around the core of the prisoner camp are part of an entirely new concentrationary philosophy, and as such are a crucial piece of the puzzle in research on the Third Reich.<sup>211</sup>

This central significance is at once a blessing and a curse, depending on whether one's interest lies in writing history, or living unmolested in what have suddenly become the historically freighted houses of Oranienburg. For the idea that the places of the perpetrators might be of academic and symbolic importance equal to those of the victims has only gained currency very recently. For long years, the only sites considered worth preserving were those of the victims, which thus took on the dual role of cemetery, where victims could be mourned, and of *corpus delicti*, witness to the atrocities committed. The sites of perpetrators, in the meantime, were destroyed rapidly; for no one wanted their memory preserved. It was too painful for the *Mitläufer* and their descendants to be reminded of the perpetrators, who, after all, had come straight from the midst of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. To the minds of the victims, only the morally worthy were thought to deserve commemoration. The final punishment for the perpetrators, then, was to be their utter banishment from memory. Accordingly, the perception many people have of "the perpetrator" has been reduced to images taken first from the Nuremberg trials, and later from the press and cinema. *Schindler's List*, for example, has the camp commandant Goeth typify the alleged utter evil of the SS-man. The efforts to preserve what little was left of the Gestapo Headquarters for the Topography of Terror exhibit were groundbreaking, and provided a new focus on the perpetrators and their lives. And the fact that only a few remnants were left was emblematic of the dearth of perpetrator relics in Germany. The widespread controversies in Germany in the wake of the traveling exhibit, War

of Destruction—The Crimes of the German Army, which details the crimes of the *Wehrmacht*, and Daniel Goldhagen's narration of atrocities in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, are fueled not least by the replacement of this well-worn image of the perpetrator with that of "the ordinary man."

When the GDR *Volksprezler* vacated the huge lots next to the Sachsenhausen commemorative sites not long after unification, the first thoughts locally were not of perpetrators and their history, however, but of housing, a reflex entirely in keeping with the tradition in the West and the East to convert the buildings formerly inhabited by representatives of the Reich into practical use. To members of the Oranienburg city council, who felt pressed, after the Wall came down, to provide accommodation for an ever-expanding population, the lots were a godsend. The area, according to a brochure distributed by the development agency of the State of Brandenburg on the occasion of an exhibit of proposals for the site, could be turned into a "lively city neighborhood," with apartments, shops, and businesses; "in order to give the city center a chance for a proper reorientation." Aware that such a project would sooner or later have to deal with the issue of the terrain's previous use by the SS, the brochure made the following claim: "Since these barracks played an important role in the Third Reich for the SS guards of the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, this is also a way for us, together with the citizens of Oranienburg, to come to terms with a part of our past (*ten Stöck Vergangenes ist zu bewältigen*).... The process shows the readiness of the city to confront this difficult topic openly, and thus not to wait for decades, as was mostly the case in the old federal states, or even to avoid confrontation with the problem altogether."<sup>212</sup>

The subject of this exemplary stance, the area for whose renovation the city of Oranienburg and the state of Brandenburg announced a competition in 1993, was summed up by Libeskind as follows: "The area was repugnant, the camp horrible, the proposed project monstrous."<sup>221</sup> Libeskind nevertheless submitted a proposal entitled "Dawn of a New Mourning," with the "u" of "Mourning" struck through both to emphasize the play on words and to position his ideas within a vaguely post-structuralist discourse. In his brief, the architect announces his refusal to "revitalize the area through domestication." The SS terrain, to his mind, is paradigmatic for the catastrophe of Germany and for the country's responsibility for the future, and as part of the camp's infrastructure and context cannot be separated from it. To build apartments on such a location, to Libeskind's mind, would be unthinkable.

He proposes instead to dislocate the former triangle of the camp, thereby symbolically breaking the axes of power that had radiated out from the crematoria, the villa of the commandant, and the *T-Gebäude*, or



Daniel Libeskind, *Dawn of a New Morning* (1997). Model view. Photograph by Steven Gerrard. Courtesy Studio Libeskind.

"T-Building," seat of the Inspection of the Concentration Camps. In what he calls a *Konfrontativer Ansatz*, an approach that confronts history, the new triangle thus created would point toward Lübeck, the direction Libeskind believes the prisoners were forced to take on their death marches.<sup>22</sup> Two areas would be defined by this re-orientation. In one the buildings, including the T-Building, would be torn down, leaving visible only their foundations, which would then be flooded. Libeskind explains that this water, deployed here as a symbol of slave labor, would cover the grounds like a lake, and then be allowed gradually to alter the area's underground topography, a process visitors could witness from walkways traversing the artificial lake. Meanwhile, the foundations of the buildings in the other area would in turn be buried under mounds of earth. Into this realm of water and earth would be placed a long slab of concrete—Libeskind calls it the "Hope-Incision"—on which the tokens of a new socio-cultural infrastructure would be erected, educational facilities for the under- or unemployed, buildings for computer schools and industry,

libraries, archives, a museum and an ecumenical chapel. What had once been a center of destruction would thus become one of reconstruction, a place, in Libeskind's words, "that secures for those participating in Germany's reconstruction a job, and a safe future, and makes accessible to them a renewed [piece of] nature."<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly, there was much debate among jury members over Libeskind's proposal, debate that would ultimately lead the city and its investors to abandon the idea of constructing housing on the terrain. In the meantime, Dawn of a New Morning, it was concluded, was too intense for Oranienburg, for Brandenburg, and probably even for Germany, since it could be seen to represent a "re-traumatization" of the area.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Libeskind was awarded *Sonderpreis* or special mention. "[A] perfect way to pass over my proposal with a good conscience," Libeskind commented.<sup>25</sup> The first prize, in the meantime, went to the Viennese architect, Hermann Czech, whose design included housing for fully 20 percent of Oranienburg's population, projected to swell from 150,000 to 200,000 by the beginning of the next century. Czech's design makes no mention of the area's history.<sup>26</sup> The issue of the ethics of constructing housing on the former SS terrain, however, continued to haunt the committee, especially after the torching of Barracks 38 and 39 had drawn international attention to Sachsenhausen. When Ignatz Bubis expressed his reservations about this "domestication," the developers themselves withdrew their money. Close proximity to a former concentration camp might not, after all, be a big selling point, even if, as the competition brief had instructed, "the SS-character" of the place were to be completely eradicated.<sup>27</sup>

While the competition had solved none of the problems of how to preserve the site, Libeskind's intervention had at least temporarily saved the area from obliteration. Unused and unprotected, however, the landscape of perpetration is beginning to show signs of its neglect. The buildings are slowly rotting away and the area itself has become a wilderness. To prevent total disintegration, the *Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten* has requested that the remaining buildings of the perpetrators be given *Externelle Denkmalschutz*, or collective landmark status, decreeing that the buildings must be kept up and their exteriors not changed.

For many of the citizens of Oranienburg, however, this constant discussion of their environs can begin to feel like harassment. Those living in one of the houses that would be affected by the *Ensemble Denkmalschutz* were particularly incensed. With signs like "Former SS houses—today a monument?" and "A monument for the perpetrators? We say NO," people living on Diana Strasse, a street two blocks away from the camp entrance, protest what they consider to be the law's incursion into their everyday lives and property. The residents' fears are mul-



Sign outside an "SS-house" on Diana Strasse (1997). Photograph by the author.

tuple. If they go against the ordinance they risk being evicted. Visitors might ask how they could live in the former houses of murderers, and the houses, once known to have been former Nazi dwellings, might attract neo-Nazis. This protest is connected, on the one hand, with traditional interpretations of memorialization, and, on the other, with the sense that living in a former SS house has suddenly, after decades of peaceful cohabitation with the ghosts of the past, become a stigma, one that would in the future bring visitors not only to the concentration camp but also to one's own front door.

Of course these are legitimate concerns, and the sudden change in attitude with regard to what it means to be living in these houses points to an important difference in the way people have dealt with the Nazi legacy in the GDR and the FRG. In the West, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* was raised to fever pitch, beginning with the painful interrogations of the 1968 generation, fueled further by the uproar created by the television series *Holocaust* in 1979, and maintained throughout the 1980s by the various history workshops, which attempted to re-create the common citizen's

experience during National Socialism, and whose fruits include the Topography of Terror exhibit and the investigations in the Bayerisches Viertel. With the evolving importance and sophistication of ideas about an "authentic site," the idea of living in a house formerly occupied by an SS officer is indeed a horrifying idea to a "Westerner".

In the GDR the question was never framed in this manner. Since the regime understood itself as the anti-fascist victor government, anything left over by the defeated fascists was war booty, a legitimate inheritance, even a token of exorcism. Since most of the people living in these houses were officers of the People's Army, who had been given the chance to buy their houses in 1982 and the grounds after 1990, the sense that the act was legitimized was, if anything, heightened. The "real" Nazis of Oranienburg had, according to GDR official legend, been punished, or had moved on to the "other Germany." Of course this meant that the question of citizens' knowledge of the camps, of their own possible implication in the crimes, was a private matter. Certainly investigation into these matters wasn't rewarded, as was quite literally the case with Anja Rosmus, nor metaphorically in the sense that *Aufarbeitung* in the West seemed to imply that one had found one's way to a morally superior identity. To open up the clearly defined area encircling the Sachsenhausen Memorial Site to include the 110 acres of land on which the SS had lived and their prisoners had worked, would belie the still unthreatened assumption that only a small, invisible piece of Oranienburg had been used by the Nazis, and prove instead that the wall between city and camp had been porous.

The first version of Libeskind's Dawn of a New Morning, his solution to this tectonic problem, makes a grand symbolic gesture, full of contemporary relevance but bound to render the SS terrain innocuous within a few decades. The subterranean remnants of the buildings to be demolished would gradually disintegrate under the steady erosion of his proposed flooding. His design's proposed "Morning," his working through of the past, would be relegated to the nature or "Morning" into whose midst its marker intrudes, while a new society, formed in part from the infrastructure built on his Hope-Incision, would be free to flourish. His design, in the end, is a narrative of forgetfulness, a vision of a *Heile Welt* built literally on the erosion of the past. The morning in his title suggests further that the night can be circumvented, that the necessary confrontation with the past can be skipped. But this is hardly the hopeful gesture he intends. While his ideal visitor is envisioned periodically glimpsing the gradual elimination of the past's traces, and thereby participating in its overcoming, it is difficult to imagine actual people being moved in this manner to perform any work of mourning as they baste off to the Hope-Incision. Radical as his design may be, it is not new. One recalls that some

four decades earlier the Buchenwald collective had proposed that the original site of Sachsenhausen be treated in much the same way—a dialectical artistic rendering of the horrors, in which the Nazi architecture was answered and overcome by the architecture of anti-fascism. They believed this would be the most effective way to come to terms with the camp's history. They accordingly suggested that traces of the SS be erased in order to allow for a new society's representation and proposed growing a garden over much of the terrain so that visitors' attention would be focused on a few landmark memorials.

Morsch himself reflects on this continuity, "Artists always turn to the symbolic to bridge the tension between the profanity of the original site and the unspeakable horror it represents," he observes, "and the symbolic is dependent on the slice of time in which it is created."<sup>220</sup> And if that symbolism is based, as in Libeskind's first design, on the actual destruction of authentic buildings, then the danger is great that in a relatively short time nothing at all will be left. Not surprisingly, the citizens of Oranienburg support Libeskind's design. By erasing the traces of the SS, after all, and re-orienting the camp's axes, Dawn of a New Morning points away from the uncomfortably seamless transition between concentration camp, SS world, and town. Visitors to the redesigned area would thus no longer confront the historical relic as such, but rather an artistic interpretation of that relic. As Libeskind notes, he wants to offer citizens a chance to confront their history from a safe vantage point, one that even thematizes their distance from the events. This idea, at first glance reasonable, presupposes something that is not the case, namely, that the citizens already know the history of National Socialism, that they are already familiar with the axes of power that Libeskind's design attempts symbolically to break. Because of the specific way the past was constructed by the GDR government, however, Libeskind's design, rather than providing a vantage point from which the past can be reconsidered, seems to offer the viewer a way to avoid considering it in the first place. The public is invited, in other words, to skip a step in its *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*.

In the course of long discussions, Morsch, who wants to preserve as much of the original sites as possible, and Libeskind, who has agreed to leave the buildings untouched if he gets his Hope-fascism, have found compromises in a brand new, expensive design that involves a long slab of concrete to break the area's symmetry of terror, while leaving intact the buildings that housed that terror's purveyors. Meanwhile, untouched by all but sun, rain, and snow, those actual buildings are crumbling away, and unless the city of Oranienburg moves quickly, no compromise in the world will save them, given that it is estimated that most of the buildings will not survive another winter. One interpretation of the situation in Sach-

schausen might be that the City Council is actually using Libeskind to further its unacknowledged aim, which is to let the buildings go to rack and ruin, and is simply taking advantage of the length of time needed to reach a compromise, in the full knowledge that if preservation is postponed long enough, the buildings will fall down by themselves, or will have to be removed for security reasons.

It is a travesty that the fate of an issue so pressing and so significant as this has been left up to one small city with one small budget, for the history of the perpetrators as conveyed in the ensemble of buildings in and around Sachsenhausen is crucial to an understanding of the history of the victims. If the SS-area could indeed be saved, its use as an important resource in the scholarship of the Holocaust would project the town's name beyond the city limits of Oranienburg, and indeed beyond the boundaries of Germany.

den were deported in 1942 from the children's home located on Wilhelm Wolf Strasse in Berlin-Pankow; in 1938, the deportation of 1200 Sinti and Roma began from a camp installed at the former Marzahn cemetery; at Kanarstrasse 152 in 1933 Carl von Ossietzky, Nobel prize winner and editor of the anti-militaristic journal "Die Weltbühne," was arrested; at Fasanenstrasse 79, near the Zoo train station, a synagogue was destroyed during the *Reichskristallnacht*. See Seib and Schmock in collaboration with Bernd Nicolai and Dada Puhovski, *Buchhaltestelle*, a brochure on the occasion of the competition (Berlin, 1995).

<sup>174</sup> Seib and Schmock, *Buchhaltestelle*.

<sup>175</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 221.

<sup>176</sup> Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p. 255.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Personal interview, August 1997.

<sup>179</sup> Günter Morsch, "Von der Erinnerung zum Monument—Eine Einführung," in Günter Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument: Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen* (Berlin: Edition Heinrich, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>180</sup> Eric Santner, "History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," p. 144.

<sup>181</sup> Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory," in John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 261.

<sup>182</sup> Morsch, "Von der Erinnerung zum Monument—Eine Einführung," p. 12.

<sup>183</sup> Personal interview with Günter Morsch, August 1997.

<sup>184</sup> Stefanie Endlich, ed., *Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten für die Verfolgten des NS-Regimes: Perspektiven, Kontroversen und internationale Vergleiche* (Berlin: Edition Heinrich, 1992), p. 234.

<sup>185</sup> Personal interview, August 1997.

<sup>186</sup> Ulrich Hartung, "Zur Baugeschichte des Konzentrationslagers Sachsenhausen," in G. Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument* (Berlin: E. Heinrich, 1996), pp. 26–29. Of these the most important installation was the tile factory, built primarily by Jewish and homosexual prisoners, whose main function was to furnish Albert Speer, the Reich's premier architect, with tiles to build *Gormania*, Hitler's planned expansion of Berlin.

<sup>187</sup> Susanne zur Nieden, "Kriegsende und Befreiung in Sachsenhausen," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, p. 61.

<sup>188</sup> It is clear today that people of the town could hardly ignore the prisoners' arrival and subsequent treatment. Many of the prisoner groups for instance arrived at the Oranienburg train station, whence they would have to march through town, along the Adolf-Hitler-Strasse and past the first rows of SS apartments, and then traverse the SS exercise grounds to arrive at the gate with the inscription *Arbeit macht frei*. The enforced labor the prisoners had to perform, moreover, took place in buildings partly visible to the townspeople.

<sup>189</sup> Annette Kaminsky et al., "Soviet Special Camp No. 7: 1945–50," trans. Miriamne Fields, leaflet distributed by the *Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten*, 1996.

<sup>190</sup> Andreas Graf, "Speziallager—Fragen und Überlegungen. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag," in Stefanie Endlich, ed., *Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten für die Verfolgten des NS-Regimes*, pp. 46–51.

<sup>191</sup> Susanne zur Nieden, "Antifaschismus und Kalter Krieg: Vom Hauptausbruch für die Opfer des Faschismus zur Vereinnahmung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, pp. 77–86. Also in the same volume see Annette Leo, "Das kurze Leben der VVN," pp. 93–100.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in zur Nieden, "Antifaschismus und Kalter Krieg," p. 76.

<sup>193</sup> Zur Nieden, "Antifaschismus und Kalter Krieg," p. 81.

<sup>194</sup> Diner, *Kristallnacht*, p. 90.

<sup>195</sup> See Volkhard Knigge, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, pp. 101–113, and Young, *The Texture of Memory*, pp. 72–79, for a consideration of Buchenwald, whose development was often parallel to that of Sachsenhausen.

<sup>196</sup> Zur Nieden, "Erste Initiative für Mahnmale in Oranienburg und Sachsenhausen," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, p. 126.

<sup>197</sup> Morsch, "Von der Erinnerung zum Monument—eine Einführung," p. 15.

<sup>198</sup> See Ulrike Köpp, "Das Gedenken wird zur nationalen Aufgabe erklärt: Das Kuratorium für den Aufbau nationaler Gedenkstätten und die Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, pp. 133–147. For a thorough discussion of the GDR's representation of National Socialism, see Jürgen Danyel, "Die geteilte Vergangenheit: Gesellschaftspolitische Ausgangslagen und politische Dispositionen für den Umgang mit dem Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten nach 1949," in Jürgen Kocke, ed., *Historische DDR-Forschung. Aufsätze und Studien* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), p. 129.

<sup>199</sup> Cited in Köpp, "Das Gedenken wird zur nationalen Aufgabe erklärt," p. 134.

<sup>200</sup> See Köpp, "Eine Dunkelzelle ist nicht dunkel, wenn sie gezeigt wird...": Die Studien des Buchenwald-Kollektivs für die Gestaltung der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen 1956," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, pp. 158–163.

<sup>201</sup> Köpp, "Eine Dunkelzelle ist nicht dunkel, wenn sie gezeigt wird...," p. 162.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>203</sup> As Morsch points out, the group of prisoners at this point had been reduced to the Communist core of the Committee of Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters. A collaboration with international committees of former prisoners, or for that matter with any other victim groups, was seemingly not desired. Morsch, "Von der Erinnerung zum Monument—eine Einführung," p. 15.

<sup>204</sup> Morsch, p. 15.

<sup>205</sup> Köpp, pp. 210–222.

<sup>206</sup> See Morsch, p. 18.

<sup>207</sup> See zur Nieden, "Das Museum des antifaschistischen Freiheitskampfes der europäischen Völker," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, pp. 255–265.

<sup>208</sup> Notes of the Committee of the Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters, 20 January 1961, cited in zur Nieden, "Das Museum des antifaschistischen Freiheitskampfes der europäischen Völker," p. 238.

<sup>209</sup> Zur Nieden, p. 269.

<sup>210</sup> Zur Nieden, "Das Museum des Widerstandskampfes und der Leiden des jüdischen Volkes," in Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, p. 278.

<sup>211</sup> Morsch, "Von der Erinnerung zum Monument—eine Einführung," p. 23.

<sup>212</sup> This impression is deepened by the excellent exhibit "From Memory to Monument" put on by Morsch and his team in the International Museum, April 13–October 13, 1997.

<sup>213</sup> Fortunately the exhibit pieces were being stored elsewhere at the time, ready to be shipped off on loan to another museum.

<sup>214</sup> Not surprisingly, the victims felt that the historians' discussions only relativized their suffering. The inevitable comparison between the two totalitarian systems was felt by victims of both groups to be inappropriate. A number of participants did however point out that in this instance comparison was warranted as a tool to define the similarities and disparities between the systems, in order better to illuminate and comprehend them. For a complete account of the discussion see "Diskussion," in Morsch, ed., *Die Baracken 38 und 39: Geschichte und Zukunft eines geschichteten Denkmals* (Berlin: Edition Herrlich, 1995), pp. 52–60.

<sup>215</sup> Wolfgang Tietz, "Zur Geschichte der Baracken 38 und 39: Aufbau, Belegung und museale Nutzung," in Morsch, ed., *Die Baracken 38 und 39*, pp. 15–24.

<sup>216</sup> "Diskussion," in Morsch, ed., *Die Baracken 38 und 39*, pp. 52–60, citation p. 152.

<sup>217</sup> Dimer, "Nach-Denken über Gedenkstättenpolitik," in S. Endlich, ed., *Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten für die Verfolgten des NS-Regimes*, pp. 151–153, citation p. 152.

<sup>218</sup> Unpublished lecture given at the conference *Ein Denkmal für die Täter?* organized by the *Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten*, September 10–11, 1997. A commission assembled in the summer of 1991 to take stock of the current situation of the former concentration camps in the state of Brandenburg, which include Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Brandenburg prison, made the following interim proposals for Sachsenhausen's renovation: whatever was left of the camp as originally built by the Nazis should be preserved, and the memorial site should be extended to mark and preserve additional remnants and traces of the camp as it was employed first by the Nazis and then by the Soviets. The memorial ensemble—the obelisk and the two statue groups—as well as the memorial architecture, are to remain for the time being, with the addition of plaques explaining the historical and political contexts in which they were created. The exhibits, on the other hand, are to be re-conceptualized, since the information given in the original exhibits was thought to be too undifferentiated in its treatment of the people who had suffered in the camps, and too profoundly marked by SED party politics. Indeed, the representation of the past under the GDR itself has since become the subject of an exhibit, in the summer of 1997, about the history and creation of the Sachsenhausen memorial site.

<sup>219</sup> Personal interview, August 1997.

<sup>220</sup> "Blick zurück und Schritt nach vorne: Urbanisierung des Geländes der ehemaligen SS-Kaserne Oranienburg," brochure to an exhibit of experts' proposals, February 25–March 14, 1995.

<sup>221</sup> Libeskind, *Kein Ort an seiner Stelle: Schriften zu Architektur—Visionen für Berlin* (Dresden and Basel: Verlag der Kunst, 1995), p. 135.

<sup>222</sup> In fact the idea that the death marches proceeded in the direction of Lüneburg, where the prisoners were to be herded onto ships and drowned off shore, is only a piece of war-time mythology.

<sup>223</sup> Libeskind, *Kein Ort an seiner Stelle*, p. 140.

<sup>224</sup> "Blick zurück und Schritt nach vorne."

<sup>225</sup> Libeskind, *Kein Ort an seiner Stelle*, p. 135.

<sup>226</sup> "Blick zurück und Schritt nach vorne."

<sup>227</sup> "Blick zurück und Schritt nach vorne."

<sup>228</sup> Personal interview, August 1997.

## Epilogue

<sup>1</sup> Brigitte Grunert, "Von der Chance des Raukes im hektischen Stillstand," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 4 October 1997, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Tincq, "A Drancy, l'Église catholique et la communauté juive ont resserré leurs liens," *Le Monde*, 2 October 1997, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> "Mémorial de la Shoah," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 2 October 1997, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Tincq, "Le silence persistant du Vatican sur la Shoah," *Le Monde*, 2 October 1997, pp. 1, 15. As this article further recalls, the Vatican itself had yet to issue an apology like the one made in October of 1997 by the French Church.

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Biffrud, "Une circulaire du premier ministre vise à faciliter l'accès aux archives de Vichy," *Le Monde*, 4 October 1997, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Conan and Rouso, *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1994), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Christian van Lessen, "Der 5. Oktober ist der falsche Feiertag," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 4 October 1997, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Lackmann, "Die Saule der Nation," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 2–3 October 1997, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> That this American framing of Holocaust representation has achieved the status of a commonplace in Germany is proven by its almost casual invocation in the successful 1995 novel of Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, in which a young man seeks to understand the concentration camps by visiting Struthof-Natzweiler. "Today there are so many books and films," he reasons, justifying his need for first-hand experience, "that the world of the camps is part of our collective imagination and completes our everyday one. Our imagination knows its way around in it, and since the television series *Holocaust* and movies like *Sophie's Choice* and especially *Schindler's List*, actually moves in it, not just registering, but supplementing and embellishing it." Schlink, *The Reader*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), p. 148. Schlink's novel bears consideration as well because it takes up in a compelling and fresh fashion the complex and uncomfortable issue of the immediate postwar generation's moral dilemma, caught as it is between its desire to judge the crimes of the Nazi period and its continuing emotional involvement with members of the wartime generation. As such it represents a turn away from the rage filled *Vaterliteratur* of decades past and presages a more nuanced, less Manichean engagement with the German legacy. At the same time, its implicit suggestion that a course in the classics of European humanism is the way to the perpetrator's redemption may be worth a careful, skeptical analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Identifying with the United States in terms of its victor status is not so difficult for France, since it too could legitimately count itself among the victorious allies after the Second World War. While Germany's identification with America as the victor in that war was clearly more problematic, identification with America's position of victor in the Cold War (the crowning achievement of which victory, of course, was the unification of Germany) offers Germany a new chance at enlistment in the first great bourgeois cause of the twentieth century, the struggle against Bolshevism. The co-opting of the victim's subject-position can be risky, however, especially in Germany, and especially when the particular subject in question is Jewish. This has been amply documented by the agonies attending the appointment and subsequent firing (since