Chapter 14

Schinkel and the Politics of German Memory: The Life of the Neue Wache in Berlin

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The guild of architectural historians has traditionally stood outside the academic mainstream not only because of the service role architectural historians play in practically oriented schools of architecture and design but also because of the varied association of scholars with local historic preservation groups, government sponsored building surveys, and expensive architectural tours for patrons. Wallis Miller’s essay shows why architectural historians should be brought into the mainstream of academic culture. Architectural history adds a new dimension to cultural studies in terms of its message and its own methods. It can tell us a great deal about the meaning of places and space: how and why space was designed and constructed in a particular way and who influenced the decisions and paid the bills for structures that necessarily affect far more people and for far longer than many other creative endeavors. And the already interdisciplinary nature of the architectural historian’s work—encompassing art, aesthetics, classics, history, engineering, semiotics, sociology, and economics, for example—can serve as both model and inspiration for some of the border crossings that we see as productive and necessary for the academy today.

We include Miller’s essay here because it is such a useful example of architectural history done well. She provides a comprehensive description of a structure, Berlin’s Neue Wache, and its compelling history. The kinds of questions she asks about this edifice are those that embody a cultural studies mode of thinking: concern with relationships between disparate entities, with the work of power and politics, with collective memory, and with a culture’s response to trauma and dislocation. Miller’s argument, like Omer Bartov’s,
demonstrates the persistent problems that Germans have encountered with objects of empathy. As in Bartov’s piece, here too, the question “Which victims?” finds perturbing answers.

Miller’s entry into the Neue Wache comes via its architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Her thesis is that Schinkel’s original construction (1818) constitutes an act of “renovation.” Miller constructs notions of renovation to mean renewal and reinvigoration, but with an intact past, with a constant foundation present. Schinkel’s “renovation,” necessarily, has to negotiate the past and incorporate it and the memory of it into a newly invigorated, forward-looking structure. His work set the terms of the Neue Wache’s subsequent renovations (in a more traditional sense): during the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, under Walter Ulbricht’s East German regime, and, finally, in 1993 following reunification. Miller’s essay can teach us much about the nature of both renovation and memory. Her analysis of this key symbolic space shows the power—analytical and pedagogical—of looking at such sites of public tension and commemoration.

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century the instability of the Prussian/German state has affected the shape of Berlin. Constant shifts in the boundaries of the empire as well as in its ideology have forced countless architectural redefinitions of the center of its capital. The decisions to preserve, renovate, or replace Berlin’s monuments have thus always been caught between considerations of their ideological impact and their effect on the body of historic documentation. Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Neue Wache grew out of this tension (fig. 1). It was originally designed and subsequently renovated at significant points of change in German history: it was designed after the defeat of Napoléon and renovated after World War I, modified during the Nazi period, and substantially changed at three points after World War II: in the early years of the German Democratic Republic, at the height of the Cold War, and after reunification in 1993. Consequently, its architecture has always borne traces of history consciously transformed by the ideologies of the present.¹

Given that the building has always been renovated as a memorial, it is no surprise that it is the locus of a confrontation of history and ideology, or, more precisely, a confrontation of history and memory and of the past and the present. The mutual dependency within each of these pairs is revealed by the fact that each member is often defined in terms of the other. In his study of history and memory the historian Jacques LeGoff describes memory as “the raw
material of history,” while “history nourishes memory in turn, and enters into
the great dialectical process of memory and forgetting experienced by individu-
als and societies” (xi). The two terms fluctuate between identical and inde-
pendent states, in which history remains closest to the event itself, to the ob-
jective, and to a notion of truth, and memory is colored by experience, ideology,
by the search for power (54), and by imagination. According to Vico:

The Latins call memory memoria when it retains sense perceptions, and
reminiscendia when it gives them back to us. But they designated in
the same way the faculty by which we form images, which the Greeks called
phantasia, and which we call imaginativa; for where we vulgarly say
imaginare, the Latins said memorare. . . . Thus the Greeks say in their
mythology that the Muses, the powers of imagination, are the daughters of
Memory. (Qtd. in LeGoff 86)

The intimacy of memory and imagination implies a similar intimacy of past and
present. These reciprocities are played out throughout the life of the Neue
Wache, in its original design as well as in its renovations.

The Neue Wache was one of the first architectural signs of German pride after
the defeat of Napoléon; King Friedrich Wilhelm III commissioned the project,
which was built between 1816 and 1818, in order to express the public impor-
tance of the Prussian victory over the French as well as to provide himself with
a guardhouse for his new residence across the street. Thus, the building formed
a major part of the king’s plan to transform the center of Berlin from a closed
royal enclave, protected by the military, into an area open to the public. The na-
ture of the Neue Wache project placed the military in the pivotal role of the
agent who would unite the general public with the monarchy in the center of
the city.

In 1816 King Friedrich Wilhelm III ordered the architect, painter, and set
designer Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) to replan the center of Berlin
(see fig. 5). Schinkel had been appointed to the head of the royal building de-
partment (Geheimer Oberbaurat), one year earlier. This commission was an
expression of the king’s desire to build the recent Prussian victory into the design
of its capital, Berlin. It was not merely a victory for the monarchy, however, but
was perceived by all to be a victory won by the people as well. Until the
Napoleonic Wars the military had been seen as a vehicle of the ruling aristoc-
raty. It had been an adversary of the civilian population and had exploited their
families and their possessions at will. The wars against the French fundamen-
tally changed this relationship, and thus the relationship between the ruling
class, the military, and its subjects, by providing the occasion for fundamental
military reforms.

According to General Gerhard von Scharnhorst, an important military
leader, strategist, and theoretician at the time, “When free citizens become sol-
diers and soldiers are free citizens, the state that they should defend, should be
governed, [or] in other words, shaped by them.” 2 As this new perception of the
soldier radically changed the military’s recruitment strategy, it affected the na-
ture of the military’s alliances to the public and the monarchy. Not surpris-
ingly, however, it only had a moderate effect on the king. While he commissi-
oned Schinkel to redesign the center of Berlin as a civic realm, the king was unwil-
ing to release it completely to the public. Many of Schinkel’s public com-
missions in Berlin, for the redesign of the city center (1816–41), the 1818–21
Schauspielhaus (National Theater), the 1822–27 Altes Museum (National Mu-
seum), the Friedrich-Werdersche Church of 1824–30, the 1829–32 Packhof
(customs buildings), the 1831–36 Bauakademie (Architecture Academy), as well as the Neue Wache, were manifestations of the king's attempt to exercise his sovereignty while recognizing the new significance of the public, represented by Schinkel himself.\(^3\)

The king's correction to Schinkel's 1816 site plan (fig. 2), which ultimately determined the building's location, made it clear that there was a difference between his interpretation of the situation and that of Schinkel. Schinkel had placed the building to respond to the public space on the other side of Unter den Linden; the king slid the building to a position that clearly related it to his residence. Schinkel further expressed this tension in his design for the building. Rather than simply reinforce the military's allegiance to the monarchy, acted out in their function as the royal guard, Schinkel juxtaposed this function to the new relationship between the military and the general public by making his building out of two very different parts: he surrounded a guardhouse, designed as a Roman castrum, or fortress, with Greek porticoes at the front and the back.\(^4\)

In his description of the building he clearly separated the two elements. He began by talking about the "building itself": "The plan of this entirely freestanding building is more or less modeled on a Roman castrum. Whence the four massive corner towers and the interior court." Only after finishing his description of the castrum does he describe the portico as "attatched or brought on to the front [der vorme angebrachte Porticus], resting on ten free columns and the connecting pilasters."\(^5\)

The portico signified the public realm in Schinkel's urban works and allowed the Neue Wache to enter into a dialog with the two most recent civic structures: Knobelsdorff's 1741 Staatsoper, across the street, and Langhans's Brandenburg gate to the west, where Unter den Linden entered the city, built between 1788 and 1791.\(^6\) Soon after, the Schauspielhaus (1817) and the Altes Museum (1823–24) joined the group. Schinkel's decision to place the Greek portico entry in front of the Roman castrum allowed him to exploit a simple architectural difference between exterior and interior, between Greek and Roman languages, and, in Alberti's terms, between ornament and structure.

Sometimes with subtlety, sometimes directly, Schinkel let the hybrid nature of the Neue Wache emerge in his descriptions and renderings of the building. In his description in the Sammlung Architektonischer Entwürfe (The Collection of Architectural Drawings) he makes no mention of the fact that the portico and the castrum towers are of the same material; he only mentions that the portico is made of sandstone from Saxony. This distinction becomes clear in his representation of the building (fig. 1), in which only the entire surface of the castrum is rendered as cut stone blocks and the portico is left blank.

The actual building was treated in a slightly more complicated way. While the front and the rear facades, including the castrum towers, were of the same stone, the castrum side walls were of brick. The distinction between the Royal
Conquering the Guardhouse: The Temporal Nature of the Juxtaposition

The location of the building made sense as it was diagonally opposite the new royal residence across the street (see fig. 5). While the portico, framed with trees, was as much a backdrop for the king’s view of his guard as it was for the public’s, its relationship to the new palace was not so strong as to privilege the king’s position, as did, say, his royal box in the theater. The king was simply a member of the public viewing the urban spectacle in the center of the city.

Schinkel’s Neue Wache was the catalyst for a new urban scheme that was to transform the existing Berlin. But the resonance of the new scheme lay in making clear its conquest of the old city and thus the old order. The construction of an entirely new guardhouse would not have expressed this notion of conquest as well as the transformation of an old one. The old guardhouse—the Alte Wache—was located slightly to the east of the Neue Wache site, in the shadows of the Zeughaus, the arsenal (fig. 4). Since 1800 there were plans to replace the old “unsightly” military guardhouse (die unansehnliche Kanonierwache) with a new Royal Guard House (Forsmann 92). On the far side of the Alte Wache—which would become the site of the Neue Wache—lay the Grüner Graben (Green Moat), a part of the old fortifications from the mid-seventeenth century. The fortifications had not defended the Prussian monarchy merely against a military enemy; they prevented the expansion of the suburbs and, thus, of civilian territory. They were dismantled around 1700 by King Friedrich I and replaced by new fortifications, completed by 1736, that embraced a wider area. While the new walls allowed the suburbs and the civilian population to grow, the official justification for their new location was that they were to contain potential military deserters. Thus, they once again defended the monarchy against the civilian enemy, as they transformed a growing population into agents of the king. In his site plan for the new guardhouse Schinkel defied the historic predominance of the royal defense line as he covered over the moat (fig. 5). His Neue Wache stood as the slightly, but significantly, displaced Alte Wache, the castrum representing the undorned form of the old guardhouse, renovated with the new public garb (figs. 3, 4). The renovation represented what Schinkel hoped would be the transformation from Hohenzollern to civic Berlin and the birth of a new Prussian identity. The concept of renovation became the means to shape German memory—a construct founded on the tension between the present and the past—and thus it became an appropriate template for the subsequent projects on the site.

Renovation as a Representative Tool

How could the same building be used to serve the memory of the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the early German Democratic Republic, the German...
Fig. 5. Schinkel’s plan of the center of the city, 1816–41. Schinkel’s buildings are black; other important buildings are gray. One can see the vestiges of the moat above and to the right of the Neue Wache (the small rectangle at the center) and below, across Unter den Linden. (Drawn by James K. M. Cheng; Punzi, pl. 73.)
Democratic Republic steeped in the Cold War, and a reunified Germany? Was an eternal respect for Schinkel and a wish to use his traces to preserve his presence in Berlin the sole basis for repeatedly using the shell of his guard building for a major memorial? As each new period of German history made the existing Neue Wache ideologically obsolete and demanded its renovation, there were many proposals for using the building as something other than a memorial as well as for other locations for a major war memorial. Each time, however, the Neue Wache and plans for a new memorial converged. Its location, its architectural value, and the fact that the building was one of the few that focused on the historic relationship between the military, the people, and the government contributed to the Neue Wache's desirability as a war memorial of national scope. That the renovation process, which focused on the interior, was not cumulative, but one in which a new project replaced its predecessor, explains how these very different states made use of a similar container to express their different attitudes toward the past.

Rather than simply weave the past and present into a new whole, each of these projects exploited Schinkel's architectural confrontation of the interior with the exterior. In many countries, however, national memorials and monuments provide a sense of continuity with the past, such as the Arc de Triomphe in France, and, in the United States, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials. Jefferson and Lincoln stand as individual representations of universally accepted values in the United States. The military memorials, both the Arc de Triomphe and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, represent a military generally perceived always to have been fighting on the "right" side.

In the case of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier any doubt concerning military allegiance, as has been caused by the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, is deflected by the presence of the individual soldier, whose sacrifice for his country at the expense of his identity is the focus of remembrance at the site. In turn, the potentially negative connotation of the Vietnam War has been isolated in a memorial specifically dedicated to that event. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the site where Americans could cast doubt on the correctness of their military involvement in the Vietnam War, thus assigning responsibility for the mistake to the U.S. government and, in turn, to themselves. But, again, the emphasis is on the memory of the individual soldiers who perished in battle. In reading each name, the viewer first identifies with the dead soldier and not with those who may have wrongly led him or her, and many others, to their deaths.

Germany certainly has its share of military memorials and monuments, but most, like the Vietnam Memorial, commemorate specific individuals, groups, or events. In Berlin Schinkel's monument on the Kreuzberg (1817-21), placed on the highest point on the military parade grounds near the Tempelhof Feld (the field at Tempelhof), is one such example. With the construction of the Kreuzberg monument, the renaming of the rondel at the nearby Hallesches Tor, one of the city gates, to Belle-Alliance Platz (Square of Good Alliance), and the largest victory celebration ever in Berlin (some sixty thousand people attended), the Germans fully commemorated their victory over Napoleon (Mieck 476-77 and n. 103). The Siegessäule (Victory Column) could be seen as another example of the same kind. It was built in 1873 as a monument to the victory over Denmark, Austria, and France in the wars from 1864 to 1871 that provoked the founding of the Second Empire. Placed opposite the future site of the Reichstag, it seemed to transfer the sense of victory from the military to the people and their new country. The frieze covering the shaft was decorated with French canons, thus transforming the column into a figurative display of the trophies of victory. One of these canons had, in fact, been dragged from the battlefield to the side of the Neue Wache (Tietz 20), where it assumed iconographic significance. This was reinforced by its position alongside similar canons confiscated earlier from the French, after the Napoleonic Wars. In front of all of them stood statues of the four generals who helped to win both those wars and an improved status for the civilian conscripts. But cast over all of the canons was the shadow of the Neue Wache, which remained in the service of the king. The ambiguous role of the military was more subtly present around the Siegessäule, not only because this ambiguity was transferred, via the trophies of victory, from the Neue Wache back to the column but because the Siegessäule was based, so to speak, in the monarchy: it stood on nothing other than the Königsplatz (Square of the King).

In the twentieth century the association of civic identity with the military became even more problematic. Given the German defeat in both world wars, the Holocaust, and, for some, the short life of the German Democratic Republic, any plans to create a central memorial on this recent history would be difficult to realize. "After all," as James Young says in The Texture of Memory:

while the victors of history have long erected monuments to their triumphs and victims have built memorials to their martyrdom, only rarely does a nation call upon itself to remember the victims of crimes it has perpetrated. Where are the national monuments to the genocide of American Indians, to the millions of Africans enslaved and murdered, to the Russian kulaks and peasants starved to death by the millions? They barely exist. (21)

Nonetheless, each German government in place after World War I, with the exception of the National Socialist government, seemed willing to shape national identity anew within a building that could not fail to evoke negative associations. Each decided to create a major memorial when it acceded to power and to locate the project in a renovated Neue Wache. Rather than designing a com-
pletely new structure, which would be a separate addition to those built in the past, or restoring an old one to its original state, which would seamlessly carry past associations into the present, each government made an architectural decision that forced it to juxtapose the present to the past and thus preclude any ideological continuity.

The Weimar Renovation

Schinkel's building was first renovated during the Weimar Republic, when it had become functionally as well as ideologically obsolete. The fall of the monarchy eliminated the need for a Royal Guard; the loss of the war made the celebration of victory on the building’s exterior inappropriate. Heinrich Tessenow’s winning entry in the 1930 competition to renovate the building as a “Memorial Site for those killed in the Great War” (Gedächtnissäle für die Gefallenen des Weltkrieges) replaced the workspaces of the living guard with a space for the dead, carefully echoing what had existed there previously (fig. 6). Tessenow was an ambiguous, if important, figure in the German architectural community at the time, who situated himself between the avant-garde and the conservative factions of the profession. His buildings, many of which were residential, reflected his faith in mass production, while they assumed the simplified forms of a traditional German architecture (a Heimatstil). Although his new interior was a single cubic space, Tessenow metaphorically retained the essential feature of the guard’s quarters: the separation of the guard from the urban life outside. The interior was completely sealed off from all sources of natural light except for a skylight, which echoed the presence of the old service courtyard. The side windows were filled with brick, laid in the same manner as the rest of the original wall, literally making a seamless connection between new and old construction. Access to the building was reduced to three doorways sealed by iron gates, displaced artifacts of the fence that had previously surrounded the building outside to protect the guardhouse during the 1848 revolution. Tessenow’s original intention further separated the guard from the public: he wanted to allow only visual access to the building except on special, that is, state-sanctioned, occasions.

The memorial objects consisted of a granite cube, two candelabra, a bronze tablet inscribed with the dates of World War I, and a series of wreaths: natural wreaths hung on the side walls and a silver wreath gilded in gold and platinum lay atop the granite cube, which Tessenow described as a sarcophagus. It was as if Tessenow had reached to the Winged Victories on the entablature of Schinkel's building and taken a wreath to place inside. But the wreath was not the laurel wreath of victory; it was the oak wreath of death (figs. 6, 7).

The significance of Tessenow’s project can be best understood by looking at a project that was not selected but often publicized. Among the other five en-
tries in the competition Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's project most directly challenged Tessenow's scheme (fig. 8); among the nine jury members five supported Tessenow, three supported Mies, and one supported Hans Poelzig. Mies was one of Germany's best-known architects and a leader of the modern avant-garde movement in architecture, although he was less politically committed than most of his other members. A few years earlier he had completed Germany's pavilion at the world exhibition in Barcelona (1929), one of the most studied projects in the history of modern architecture, and, in 1930, replaced the marxist Hannes Meyer as director of the Bauhaus, the German avant-garde's school of design, then located in the city of Dessau. Mies boldly confronted the connection between the military and the German state after the horrible losses of World War I. His project opposed the Schinkel building in detail: it slid into, rather than engaged, the existing building. The interior was sealed off but not concealed from the exterior; the window apertures were to be filled with gray glass, not brick. This uneasy juxtaposition was also revealed to the public on the interior. Seated at a bench located at the periphery of the space, a visitor looked through the transparent marble veneer used to clad the walls and saw Schinkel's guardhouse exterior as a shell, a ghost, hovering around the new site for meaning. At the center lay not a wreath but the state, represented by the Reichsadler (imperial eagle) engraved in a slab of stone. The inscription surrounding it dedicated the memorial "to the dead" [den Toten].

Given the link between memorial and identity, one can see how death referred as much to the nineteenth-century German Empire as it did to the victims of the war. Mies's scheme made clear the tragic genesis of the new German republic, which, in turn, tainted the republic's nineteenth-century origins in Prussian victory and military strength. By comparison, Tessenow intended to leave the victorious nineteenth-century origins intact for the Weimar identity, by isolating death as a separate affair. Only Schinkel's laurel wreath of victory on the exterior entablature would be a part of the public landscape; Tessenow's oak wreath of death inside would remain in the precinct of state-controlled ritual.

Tessenow's proposal seemed to reiterate the tensions between the public and the state present in Schinkel's construction of Prussian identity. The monarchy had died, but a state removed from the public still occupied the interior space, as it had done for the past century. Both inside and out, however, every trace of the military had disappeared but one: Tessenow had placed an iron cross—the symbol of heroism—in the central portal, between the zone of the public and that of the state. The military's absence, except as it was represented by the iron cross, suggested its diminished importance and, thus, the death of the nineteenth-century configuration of Prussian society, which had, in the eyes of some, continued to shape German identity since 1871. This loss was the subject of Tessenow's memorial project.
The public, however, did not allow the Neue Wache to remain a memorial to an obsolete identity. Consequently, the scheme was changed: the public metaphorically broke through the iron gates, cast the iron cross to the side, and claimed the interior of the building and, thus, the memory of the war as their own. They no longer needed to be represented by the military in national consciousness; they were present in their own right. As the barrier between the public and the state dropped away in Tessenow’s final scheme, the stone floor turned to paving, reminiscent of Berlin’s streets. The interior of the Neue Wache became a part of the public landscape and part of a living German memory.

The emphasis now was on the specific origin of the Weimar Republic, which confronted, rather than absorbed, the nineteenth-century origins of the modern German state. As in Mies’s project, “remembering” in this version of Tessenow’s project enabled Weimar Germans to determine who they were and out of what they came. It did not simply inform them about who they had been but were no longer. Mies’s project, however, allowed the past to confront the present directly; for him it was the brutal irony of military victory and mass death that was a key part of the Weimar consciousness. By physically separating these two terms, Tessenow placed tragic death at the heart of the original victory, without tainting it.

Both, however, left the connection between death and identity open to interpretation. The abstract nature of the Denkzeichen (sign of contemplation), as it was called by the competition’s organizers, refused to fix the meaning that death had for the German citizen. Inside the victorious symbols of a distant national past the choice to assume the role of mourner, victim, passive witness to an uncontrollable horror, or its agent was the result of the individual interpretation of each German who visited the project. This choice is essential to the definition of memory given by the historian Charles Maier in his book The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity:

Memory, as in Saul Friedländer’s affecting memoir, mingles private and public spheres. Like some Verdiian aria of renunciation set against a backdrop of war or rebellion, it conflates vast historical occurrences with the most interior consciousness. (149)

It is this particular conflation of public and private, this mechanism of memory formation, that worked with the architectural template provided by the renovation to negotiate a varied German history and connect memorial building to the construction of national identity in these two Weimar projects. In both cases the abstract Denkzeichen was the nucleus of a dual confrontation; at this site of contemplation the viewer situated him- or herself relative to both the recent and the
distant national past. It was from deep within the interior, not on the exterior, that German memory and, thus, identity emerged.

The Neue Wache between Weimar and Reunification

The National Socialist regime only altered the building superficially, uniting the exterior and interior with funerary ornament and a military guard that turned the whole building into a heroic monument. The Allies' bombings of Berlin in World War II severely damaged the building. The portico partially collapsed, and fire gutted the interior, melting Tessenow's granite cube. The wreath went missing, allegedly removed for safekeeping. Although rumored to be in the West, it was never found (fig. 9). Until renovation plans for the building existed, the building's ruins served as a backdrop for banners that called for peace in the name of the Soviet government.

After a long debate over the building's future, the East German government stabilized and restored it in 1957, leaving the wartorn Tessenow sarcophagus in place for public view. In 1968, at the height of the Cold War and in preparation for its twentieth anniversary the next year, the government completely renovated the building, removing the objects of Tessenow's renovation but maintaining its structure. Inside a newly finished space, one found an eternal flame and tombs of the unknown soldier and the unknown resistance fighter, dedicated, as in 1957, "to the victims of fascism and militarism." Thus, the history of the use of the building during the existence of the German Democratic Republic is one of a shift from reminding viewers of the extensive destruction caused by a war produced by the West to being a memorial whose representational technique created a continuity with the victors of World War I. These changes, those produced by the National Socialist government and the war as well as the total erasure of the final East German project by the reunified German government, despite protest from many quarters, reveal a series of religious, political, and cultural associations that are beyond the scope of this essay but the subject of my other research concerning this building. Here my examples are confined to the moments in the history of the Neue Wache admitted into the memory of those who specifically transformed it into a national memorial after German reunification.

The Neue Wache in a Reunited Germany

Given the sharp ideological turn that followed reunification, the Neue Wache was again obsolete after 1990. Its most recent renovation was completed in 1993, when it was dedicated "to the victims of war and oppression" (fig. 10). The project entailed an interesting combination of ideology and history created by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the director of the German Historical Museum.
Christoph Stölzl. They erased all of the traces of the East German projects and almost completely restored Tessenow’s design, except for the granite cube and the wreath. This they replaced with a copy of Käthe Kollwitz’s Pietà of 1937–38 (fig. 11).

Although it was actually created during the Nazi period, the Pietà was substantially a product of the post–World War I era. Kollwitz made the Expressionist sculpture to represent her mourning for her son, who was killed in the war. While contemporary to Tessenow’s original design, the sculpture clearly had no place there. The power of Tessenow’s design, according to Siegfried Kracauer in 1931, lay in the absence of representational figures. He said: “[The viewer] notices, thanks to the nature [of the details] that essential human qualities are represented in the space. They fill it more than figures would.” Memory in Tessenow’s scheme was generated by the interaction of individual members of the public with the architecture. Now, the personal memory that was once liberated by Tessenow’s architecture is absent, having been cast by the state into a bronze mold.

The individual is only present in the documents of history. The announcement by the German government and the German Historical Museum of completed plans for the building produced a flurry of responses in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the streets. While some defended the project, most protested both the selection process for the design, which was not made public, and the design of the memorial itself. The discussion has continued to the present, its focus shifting from the building to the surroundings after the memorial’s dedication on Volkstraumertag (People’s Day of Mourning) in November 1993.

The most recent debate concentrates on a plan to reinstall the statues of nineteenth-century generals that stood around the building from Schinkel’s time to the early days of the German Democratic Republic. Many of the pre-dedication responses to the new project were compiled in two books: one published by the German Academy of Arts (Streit um die Neue Wache) and the other by the German Historical Museum (Stölzl). Both books debate the validity of erasing all traces of the East German memorials. The former, published when the project was nearly complete, consists of opinion pieces, in scholarly and journalistic form, written by cultural experts and a discussion held by the academy the previous March, when demolition was already under way. The latter is similar, but it replaces the academy discussion with a debate held in the German Bundestag on the subject, which occurred on 14 May 1993, when the project was well under construction.

Both are records of the possibility of individual response to the building, so cherished by Kracauer but replaced by the bronze figure in the new memorial. This possibility remains concealed in books that were published after the
renovation was largely complete and whose covers are opened only by those with a specific interest in the building. The exclusion of individual response from the site of contemporary national memory and its relegation to the historical record are made all the more poignant by two facts. The academy book devotes most of its pages to essays and a discussion concerning the appropriate-ness of the use of the Kollwitz figure, a use that is not supported by the academy in its wish to have seen a full restoration of the Tessenow design. The other book was published by the very institution that, along with the chancellor, sanctioned the design of the current memorial.

The 1993 Neue Wache project poses as the integration of history and memory; it claims to have restored history in order to demonstrate the continuity of German memory. Because of the installation of the Pietà, however, it has in fact reconfigured Weimar history for use by a new German memory. That the Pietà in the Neue Wache is five times the size of Kollwitz’s original is a sign of this reconfiguration; it shows that continuity between the memory of the Weimar period and the present can only be created by forcing a history transformed by imagination—by memory—into place.

Historical fact has not been completely transformed by the new design, however, and in its own right presents the unavoidable challenge to memory that completes the memorial project. The site of the struggle of history and memory against their forced identity is at the juncture of interior and exterior: the locus of the military and of ambiguity for both Schinkel and Tessenow. Here hang two bronze plates, German descriptions of the complete history of the building and of the victims of Nazi terror (fig. 12). They hang outside the “contemporary” site of memory, outside the Weimar reconfiguration. The 1993 project attempts to restore German memory to its pre-Nazi era state. But the facts of history, both those that record the oppression of the Nazi period and those that record all of the changes to the Neue Wache, frame the recreated Weimar juxtaposition of the recent and distant past. At the threshold it is historical fact that challenges the contemporary use of the Weimar memory: each German-speaking visitor must read and interpret these facts alone, before entering the building and confronting the fixed symbolism inherent in Kollwitz’s figure of the Pietà. Engraved on bronze tablets, these records strangely echo Tessenow’s original plan to list the dates of World War I in the bronze frame of the skylight. In the form of a historical document the site for individual contemplation has resurfaced at the threshold, and thus the possibility for memory has returned. Despite the official attempt to create national memory in this project by resisting the facts of history, this memory is dependent on the very documentation of these facts for its existence.17

It is the juxtaposition of interior and exterior established by Schinkel that prophetically anticipated the needs of German memory. This juxtaposition has allowed the German memory builders—willingly or not—to escape a search
for unity and integrate the tensions between past and present, public and private, and history and memory, into the architectural landscape. The fact that the German national memorial has always taken the form of a renovation, or change, is itself an appropriate metaphor for the history of German national memory, a metaphor of which the name Neue Wache (New Guardhouse) has always been a trace.

NOTES

A shorter version of this essay was presented at the conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, April 1995, in Seattle. An abstracted version of this essay was presented at the European Conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (U.S.), May 1995, in Lisbon and will be published in the transcripts of that conference. Support for this research has been given by the University of Kentucky and its College of Architecture. I would like to thank the editors and John Czaplicka for their helpful comments.

1. In contrast to other literature concerning the Neue Wache, this essay looks at the entire history of the building: from the time of its first design to the present. Other texts, many of which are listed in the following pages, concentrate on individual stages of the building’s existence.

Only the most recent works on the building look at several of its designs at once. But they either offer a description, rather than an analysis, of its history (e.g., Tietz) or analyze specific changes to the building over time, often to evaluate the most recent renovation. Dolf-Bonekämper focuses on the history of the building during the German Democratic Republic in order to call into question the viability of erasing the East German memorial if the country is truly a reunification of two states. Koselleck looks at the same history in order to question the use of the Kollwitz sculpture. Specifically, he traces the history of the inscriptions and symbols in the interior of the building. Other articles in newspapers and magazines, some gathered by Stölzl, refer generally to the history of the building likewise to defend their opinions about the building’s most recent changes.

2. “Wenn freie Bürger Soldaten werden und Soldaten freie Bürger sind, muss der Staat, den sie verteidigen sollen, auch von ihnen mitgetragen, also auch mitgestaltet werden” (qtd. in Dolf-Bonekämper 41). Scharnhorst’s statue was one of four statues of important generals in the Napoleonic Wars that flanked the original building.

3. There are numerous sources that describe and analyze Schinkel’s work because of his importance both to Germany and German architecture as well as to the history of modern architecture. Some are cited in this essay. The recent English edition of Schinkel’s *Sammlung Architektonischer Entwürfe*, translated as *Collection of Architectural Drawings*, includes an extensive bibliography as well as essays by Schinkel scholars Rand Carter and Hermann Pundt. Other important English-language sources include: Bergdolt; Forster; and Pundt.

4. See Forssman’s description of the building, which reinforces the theory that it is a hybrid: “Dem römischen Vorbild widerspricht allerdings die Öffnung durch einen
griechisch-dorischen Portikus” (The opening through a Greek-Doric portico contradicts, however, the Roman precedent [94]).

5. “Der Plan dieses, ringsum ganz freiliegenden Gebäudes ist einen römischen Castrum ungefähr nachgeformt, deshalb die vier festeren Eckthürrme und der innere Hof.”

“Der vorme angebrachte Porticus, auf 10 freien Säulen und den damit in Verbindung stehenden Wandpfeilern ruhend” (Schinkel, 1).

Barry Bergdoll claims that the castrum was a synthesis of both the fortification architecture and the portico. “Known only from texts, he [Schinkel] imagined the castrum as a synthesis of the forms of fortification architecture—the pylons and parapets of city walls—and the honorific portico of civic architecture, in this case a baseless Doric order, traditionally the order whose ‘masculine character was deemed appropriate for military functions.’” In addition, Bergdoll goes on to talk about Schinkel reinterpreting the “classical Greek architecture in relation to the building’s dual military and commemorative purpose.” Here he is referring to the portico (this is clear from the discussion that follows) as Greek, without telling the reader of its transition from a Roman element—as one can assume from his theory, that the portico was a part of the Roman Castrum—to a Greek element. His reference to the portico as Greek is more convincing if one accepts that the Roman castrum did not include the portico and that the building was a hybrid of two very different elements (51).

6. Forssman talks about the relationships between the porticoes—and thus the buildings—in more specific terms. After pointing out the Doric connection between the Neue Wache and the Brandenburg gate, he discusses the Neue Wache’s relationship to the opera diagonally opposite: to the opera’s Corinthian, the Neue Wache Doric sets “a more serious counterpart, very different in character” (94).

7. A description of this scheme can be found in Bergdoll (3).

8. It is unclear when the old fortifications were dismantled. They had certainly disappeared by 1713, the year of Friedrich’s death (Pundt 10–11). The newer fortifications had a commercial as well as a military function: they were also used as customs walls. Thus, they “protected” the monopoly of the civilian public in two ways. On the one hand, they tempered the influx of commercial goods, restricting the amount of commercial activity in the city. On the other, they allowed the state to profit from any additional trade that did occur. Both prevented the relative increase in the power of the commercial class in Berlin that would have been a consequence of an increase of independent trade with the areas outside the city. According to Hermann Pundt, “The customs wall had been completed by 1736 and produced drastic planning limitations for Berlin until its demolition more than one hundred years later” (18). Thereby, the city’s civilian territory, not just its civilian activity, was naturally ripe for expansion.

9. Although both men and women have been American soldiers, I use the masculine his, given the fact that those guarding the tomb are almost exclusively, if not exclusively, men. Here the continuity between the living soldier and the dead one play an important role in creating memory at the site.

10. The metal frieze is rumored to have been fabricated from melted cannons, confiscated from the French. This would have transformed the column into a literal, if abstract, display of the trophies of victory.

11. The history of the statues of the generals is important to an understanding of the ambiguous relationship between the military, the civilian populace, and the monarchy in the context of victory and defeat. An analysis of their selection, placement, and removal, however, is beyond the scope of this essay and has been undertaken elsewhere; see Dolf-Bonekämper, and Tiez.

12. One jury member (Hiecke, from the historic preservation commission) supported Poezieg’s entry, and five supported Tessenow (Gaetzold, director of the Berlin museums; Wilhelm Kreis, architect; Karl Scheffler, art critic; Walter Curt Behrendt, from the finance ministry; and advisor Rudelius, an advisor from the defense ministry). Edwin Redslab, an advisor; Martin Wagner, the city planning commissioner; and Martin Klessing, the chairman of the commission and the director of the building department in the Prussian Ministry of Finance supported Mies. See Tiez (61).

13. While the renovation of the Neue Wache into a war memorial and the creation of a national memorial were topics of broad-based discussions during most of the Weimar period, it was the Prussian government that made the actual decision to implement the plans to renovate the Neue Wache. Immediately thereafter, the national government joined the Prussians in directing the renovation, as it was afraid that the public could accuse the Prussians of taking over the national war memorial project. While no one intended that the Neue Wache would be the national memorial, there were no other buildings at the time that served this purpose. See Tiez (21–25).

The continuity of Prussian and German history was particularly problematic here and was mentioned as such by several of the project’s critics; see Tiez (61). Both Mies and Tessenow dealt with the issue of historical continuity: Mies, in a clearly critical fashion; Tessenow, mourning its loss in its original scheme.

14. In the published research on the subject there is no explanation for the literal cause of this change, only a footnote citing material in the Federal Archive in Koblenz. See Tiez (58 n. 94).

15. A description of the change in design from stone to a mosaic, similar to Berlin’s streets is found in Tiez (52).

16. The future of the urban planning around the Neue Wache and the issues raised concerning militaristic representation is the subject of my further research.

17. Both James Young and Charles Maier see documentation as a possible memorial site. Young sees a record of the debates concerning the creation of a memorial as the possible site: “Though some, like the Greens, might see such absorption in the process of memorial building as an evasion of memory, it may also be true that the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution. In fact, the best German memorial to the Fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all—but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end” (21).

For Maier one possible memorial site is the museum. In The Unmasterable Past he links the West German project for a German Historical Museum with national identity and argues for a—perhaps impossible—fragmentary presentation of German history, which would communicate the complexities of both historical events and historians’ interpretations while not sacrificing coherence (121–59).

In both cases, however, the authors do not refer to the documentation of “raw facts,” as I do in my discussion of the recent renovation to the Neue Wache, but, rather, to the
documentation of many different interpretations of those facts, much like those in the two books, by the German Academy of Arts and the German Historical Museum, mentioned earlier.

WORKS CITED


