

Stephanie Herold

Contested Sites

Soviet Monuments and Memorials of Liberation in Germany since 1990

As in many European countries that were historically under the influence of the Soviet Union, after the start of the War in Ukraine there were various interventions in – and discussions about – monuments in Germany that still bear witness to this historical role of the Soviet Union or are associated with it. In particular, this concerns monuments commemorating the Red Army, which were either erected by the Soviet military administration directly after the war or later to commemorate the liberation of Germany from the rule of National Socialism, which was celebrated annually in the GDR. Despite various statements that Ukrainian soldiers also fought in the Red Army, Russia in these recent discussions seems to be seen as the legitimate political successor to the Soviet Union, which has been reflected in symbolic acts of criticism at the monuments since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, whether spontaneously erupting or curated.

For all their similarities, the discussions on the individual sites have different emphases, which are connected to the different layers of meaning attributed to these monuments today. Firstly, these sites serve to commemorate the dead, as they are often also grave-sites for the many fallen Soviet soldiers. In this function, they become memorials that not only remind us of the powerful devastation of World War II, but also of the special collective guilt and responsibility associated with it for Germany to this day. This can be seen, for example, in the words of political greeting in the publication on foreign cemeteries of honour and memorials of honour in Berlin, in which the sites are described as memorials to make it clear “that the last thing is not the struggle of the systems, but the mourning for the dead”¹, or as “places of remembrance, of commemoration, of reflection”, from which a “state-wide responsibility” arises for their preservation².

Secondly, another layer of meaning emphasises the victory of the Soviet armed forces and the associ-

ated liberation of Germany from the Nazi regime, especially in the eastern German states, thus making stronger reference to heroic narratives. A third layer of meaning is evident in terms of the lived culture of remembrance, in the context of which the places were charged with new, life-worldly meanings over the course of time and thus fulfilled, and in some cases still fulfil, their own social function, especially in smaller communities³. The different ways in which the various sites are dealt with are related not only to their form, design and prominence in public space but also to different layers of meaning, which will be illustrated in the following three examples.

The Soviet War Memorial in Berlin's Tiergarten

In 2020, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, the volume *Denkmale der Befreiung. Spuren der Roten Armee in Deutschland* (Memorials of liberation: Traces of the Red Army in Germany) was released. The volume contains a compilation of all known Soviet war grave-sites and memorials in Germany. It is part of a project that was carried out under the auspices of the German-Russian Museum in Berlin-Karlshorst in cooperation with the Embassy of the Russian Federation, among others. The project was funded by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media in 2015–2022⁴. It is important to make clear that the German-Russian Museum explicitly distances itself from the Russian war of aggression on its website and expresses solidarity with Ukrainian institutions and individuals, as well as with people who have fled Russia⁵.

While the volume documents a few representative examples photographically and with some information on construction and development (with a focus on Berlin and Brandenburg), the online database related to the project currently includes 4,185 sites where



Fig. 1: Soviet War Memorial in Berlin's Tiergarten, aerial view. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, 2006.

graves of Soviet war victims (soldiers, prisoners of war and forced labourers) and associated monuments are listed. These are located on the territory of both the former Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The design and treatment of these sites differed in the two parts of Germany, which in some cases still has an impact today. For example, in contrast to the socialist-influenced eastern German federal states, there are hardly any independent cemeteries of honour or memorial sites in western Germany; instead, the graveyards are often integrated into existing cemeteries in separate areas⁶.

A prominent exception is the Soviet War Memorial in Tiergarten, Berlin (fig. 1). As early as May 1945, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the war council of the Soviet occupation troops in Germany passed a resolution to erect a memorial in the centre of Berlin. Based on a design by Lew E. Kerbel, Wladimir E. Zigal and Nikolai W. Sergijewski, the Soviet War Memorial was created under the construction management of Grigori L. Krawzow by German workers and completed in November 1945 already⁷. The 60,400-

square-meter memorial complex includes a monumental arch-shaped colonnade crowned by a bronze statue of a Red Army soldier and flanked by two T-34 tanks and two guns, as well as a landscaped green area behind the memorial. It is estimated that there are around 2,500 graves of Soviet war dead on the grounds of the memorial⁸.

The choice of the site at the intersection of the former Siegesallee and Charlottenburger Chaussee (today Straße des 17. Juni) was symbolic and referred to Hitler's plans for a monumental north-south axis at this location. However, this choice of location also led to a historical curiosity. Following the Yalta decisions on the division of Germany and Berlin, the Tiergarten belonged to the British sector of the city. After the Red Army withdrew from the western sectors in summer 1945, the memorial thus formed an enclave under Soviet administration within this sector. At the same time, the Soviet War Memorial in Tiergarten is the only representative and monumental memorial to the Red Army on former West German territory.

In addition to its special political status as a Soviet enclave, the memorial's simultaneous function as a burial site meant that from the beginning it was

covered by the special protection guaranteed by law for war graves. Since 1965, the “Law on the Preservation of the Graves of Victims of War and Tyranny” has been in force and is still valid today, guaranteeing the permanent preservation and maintenance of all corresponding grave-sites⁹. In addition, the “Geneva Convention”, with its requirement for the appropriate maintenance of grave-sites of fallen soldiers¹⁰, is regarded as a legally binding basis for the obligation of permanent preservation and care¹¹. In 1990, this protection of the site and all corresponding sites was once again confirmed by law in the course of reunification, when the German Federal Government once again assured the permanent protection and maintenance of war graves within the framework of the “Two-Plus-Four Treaty” between the two German parts and the former victorious powers. A joint letter from the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Acting Foreign Minister of the GDR stated as follows in 1990 in connection with the signing of the “Treaty on the Final Settlement in Respect of Germany”: “The monuments erected on German soil dedicated to the victims of war and tyranny are respected and protected under German laws. The same applies to war graves; they are preserved and cared for.”¹² This legal basis should be emphasised especially because it was repeatedly incorporated into the arguments in the discussions on how to deal with Soviet memorials in the spring of 2022, and many discussions ended with references to this legal framework.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the future handling of the Soviet War Memorial in Tiergarten was also briefly under discussion. The focus was particularly on the two T-34 tanks (fig. 2). In March 2022, unknown activists wrapped them in Ukrainian flags, which were removed by the police the next morning. The action was criticised by representatives of both the Russian and German governments, which in turn provoked criticism. Shortly afterwards, Stefanie Bung, a member of the Berlin Christian Democratic Union (CDU), demanded the removal of the tanks, arguing that today they “no longer only stand for the liberation of Germany from Nazi fascism, but also for aggressive warfare that disregards territorial borders and human lives”¹³.



Fig. 2: One of the tanks of the Soviet War Memorial in Tiergarten, seen from the Straße des 17. Juni. Photo: Stephanie Herold, 2023.

This concern was contradicted by the current Senator for the Environment and Mayor of Berlin, Bettina Jarasch (Die Grünen), who referred to the function of the site as a cemetery: “This is about commemorating the dead of World War II, in which soldiers of many nationalities of the Soviet Union, including quite a few Russians and Ukrainians, died on the side of the Red Army in the fight against the Nazi regime.”¹⁴ She was referring to the legal protection status of the ensemble, but beyond that this also refers explicitly to the layer of meaning of commemorating the dead and places this in the foreground. The memorial is thus read primarily as a place of remembrance and a memorial against war.

It should be mentioned here that even before 2022 – for example, with the uprising on 17 June 1953, which was crushed by Soviet tanks, and after which the street in front of the memorial is named today – there were reasons to read the Soviet tanks as more than symbols of liberation. It cannot be forgotten that Russia has been actively engaged in historical politics to establish a symbolic link to the Soviet Union and has thus itself contributed to these historical objects becoming the scenes of current political disputes. Anyway, these arguments did not shape the public discussion that took place in 2022. Instead, in this case study, the reference to the status as a war grave-site seems to have largely ended further discussions.

The Soviet Memorial in Dresden

The Soviet Memorial (also known as the Memorial to Red Army) in Dresden is another very early example of war commemoration after the end of World War II. Unlike the Berlin example, however, it did not serve as a war grave-site, and thus it is covered by a slightly different legal framework.

The memorial consists of a granite base with relief slabs, on which there is a bronze statue of two Red Army soldiers holding a flag in combat (kneeling with a rifle and standing, throwing a hand grenade). The monument was commissioned by the Soviet City Command, executed by the German sculptor Otto Rost and inaugurated on 25 November 1945. It was originally located on Albertplatz in Dresden's Neustadt (1945 Platz der Roten Armee, 1946–1991 Platz der Einheit), where it replaced a fountain sculpture destroyed during the war (fig. 3). Its relocation to the current location on Olbrichtplatz in the immediate vicinity of the Military History Museum took place in 1994 and was the result of the post-reunification debate on the GDR's monuments¹⁵.

In fact, a lively discussion took place in Germany in the early 1990s on how to deal with the political monuments of the GDR. Even though the number of monuments actually removed was relatively small¹⁶, the term *Bildersturm* (iconoclasm) made the rounds at the time, prompted by prominent examples, such as the controversial removal of the Lenin statue on Platz der Vereinten Nationen (previously Leninplatz) in Berlin. Experts, including historians, art historians and monument conservators, advocated the preservation and critical contextualisation of the works at that time. In his contribution to the Historikertag of 1996, Winfried Speitkamp noted, for instance, that the contemporary popular concept of iconoclasm falsely suggested emotional, impulsive acts of the people, whereas the actual events were planned political actions¹⁷. Parallels to the current discussion can certainly be found.

An exhibition initiated by students entitled *Erhalten, zerstören, verändern? Denkmäler der DDR in Ost-Berlin* (Preserve, destroy, change? Monuments of the GDR in East Berlin) took place in 1990, for example. At the opening, the art historian Hans-Ernst Mittig warned that "destroying [...] is the most resolute, but soon most indistinct, if not forgotten, defence

against what has been"¹⁸. In 1993, an international conference organised by ICOMOS took place in Berlin, where experts from 15 countries shared their experiences with political upheavals and the effects on national monument landscapes¹⁹. So at that time, too, an international exchange of ideas was sought, while a plea was made at the national and local levels for a detailed examination of each individual object, its statement and intention, as a basis for finding possibilities for further treatment.

As in many other cities, an expert commission was formed in Dresden to deal with the Soviet Memorial in 1992. In the end, the commission suggested moving the memorial²⁰, which deprived it of part of the symbolism conferred by its urban setting, but also opened up a new contextualisation and historicising reading through the reference to the Military History Museum. (It is curious that the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin's Tiergarten was, of course, not included in the monuments examined in 1990s, because of its location in West Berlin. But another monumental site of the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin-Treptow, the largest of its kind in Germany, was also explicitly excluded by the Berlin Commission because it too serves as a war grave-site and thus has the protection status described above²¹.)



Fig. 3: Wreath-laying ceremony at the Soviet Memorial in Dresden, Albertplatz, 1960. Photo: Erich Höhne and Erich Pohl (Deutsche Fotothek).



Fig. 4: The Soviet memorial in Dresden with the artistic intervention by the artist Svea Duwe, 2023. Photo: Svea Duwe (Dieses Gebilde ist fragill!; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn).

After the Russian war of aggression began in 2022, however, voices were raised demanding the complete removal of the Dresden monument from the public space. As early as March 2022, the local politician Stefan Scharf of the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) spoke out on Twitter: “No, the Soviet Memorial in Dresden cannot stay. Not because of 1945, but because of 1953, 1968 and 2022.”²² However, his colleague Jens Matthis (Die Linke party) disputed this, calling the memorial “a tribute to the fallen Soviet soldiers in World War II” and also pointing out the flawed nature of a connection between the Red Army and today’s war in Ukraine²³.

The scientific director of the neighbouring Military History Museum, Kristiane Janeke, also spoke out clearly against removing the monument from the public space and was instead in favour of a visual and artistic intervention commenting on it²⁴. An artistic commentary took place in 2023 on the occasion of Liberation Day, on 8 May. Traditionally, this day was used for official commemorations in the GDR. In Dresden, for example, wreath-laying ceremonies were

held at the memorial at its old location on the Platz der Einheit until 1989. Despite the political changes, this tradition of commemoration, which was originally a politically intended gesture that also represented a demonstration of power by the party internally, as well as a demonstration of political affiliation externally, was also continued at the new site of the monument in the 1990s.

In 2023, an installation by the artist Svea Duwe was installed to mark the anniversary. This installation took advantage of a safety ring that had been placed around the base due to the monument’s dilapidation, on which the artist wrote in German, English and Russian: “This structure is fragile” (this also being the title of her project, fig. 4). She thus not only drew attention to the structurally fragile condition of the object, but also called to mind the fragile constructions of the attributed meanings and their transformations and thus wanted to encourage active engagement with the monument²⁵.

The temporary installation is to be followed by a restoration of the object in 2024, whereby the art ac-

tion is also seen by the city as a starting point for a discussion and new contextualisation of the monument²⁶. However, the fact that even this form of commentary is not accepted by everyone was made clear by its removal by unknown persons in the night of 10–11 May 2023. The reasons remain unclear, but the city was committed to restoring the artwork as quickly as possible²⁷. The removal of the monument from public space thus seems to be an isolated case with few repercussions. This does not make the site uncontroversial, although it remains unclear whether the removal of the artistic commentary was due to new interpretations of the monument in the context of the war in Ukraine, or to the attempt to critically question a traditional culture of remembrance.

The Tank Memorials of Beilrode and Kienitz

A tank on a pedestal: this simple form of war memorial can be found in various places, especially in smaller communities across the former GDR. Unlike the examples presented above, these are not memorials erected by the Soviet military administration directly after the war, but rather commemorative sites which date mostly from the 1970s and were connected to the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the end of the war²⁸. However, since the tanks erected are mostly T-34s used by the Soviet army²⁹, which are now supposed to symbolically commemorate liberation by the Red Army at various locations, these sites have also attracted severe criticism since spring 2022. Due to their location – mostly in smaller towns – and their role in the local culture of remembrance, this criticism is often less public. This testifies to the struggle for a way of dealing with events in Ukraine, while at the same time preserving local meanings and commemorative traditions.

The significance that these monuments can have for community life, especially in smaller towns, is illustrated by the example of the tank memorial in Beilrode, a town with about 2,600 inhabitants in northern Saxony (fig. 5). The tank there, originating from the stocks of the GDR National People's Army (NVA), was to be erected on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of liberation, hence also known as the Memorial to Liberation. Due to a lack of time and resources, not



Fig. 5: Tank memorial in Beilrode before the restoration. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, 2014.

only local businesses but also the local population took part in its installation in the form of a *subbotnik* (i.e. a voluntary work effort according to the Soviet model), also contributing to designing the surrounding open space. The tank then drove onto the pedestal under its own power and was inaugurated in a solemn ceremony on 24 April 1975 to commemorate the first meeting of the Soviet and US armies on German soil. The inauguration took place in the presence of some 5,000 visitors, including the Soviet Russian ambassador³⁰.

Since then it has stood unchanged in its place and, unlike some other tank memorials, was not removed even in the immediate post-reunification period³¹. However, its state of preservation deteriorated, the tank rusted, and the base was sprayed with graffiti, making renovation necessary. In 2017, local companies once again participated in the community-initiated rust removal of the tank. After the municipality started looking for financial support for further renovation, which it was unable to manage with its own funds, it finally received a donation from the Military History Museum in Volgograd through contacts with the Russian House in Berlin. In addition, with reference to the participation of the population in the erection of the monument, the mayor called for a new *subbotnik*, in the course of which the monument was cleaned and the surrounding open space refurbished³². This communal action makes it clear that the monument has social significance for the town that goes beyond its purely political function as a memorial. Indeed, on the city's homepage, it is stated that the monument is "part of the community landscape, a piece of local history"³³.



Fig. 6: Tank memorial in Kienitz. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, 2008.

The situation is quite similar with the tank memorial in Kienitz (also Monument to the Soviet Army, fig. 6), another small community in Brandenburg near Seelow. This is where one of the largest battles of World War II took place in 1945, in which, according to official estimates, over 40,000 soldiers died. In 1970, on the initiative of the then mayor Emil Krüger, a tank memorial was erected there on the site of the former war memorial. This memorial, too, consists of a simple plinth onto which the tank was driven in August 1970 and then de-fuelled and sealed³⁴. The memorial plaque on the plinth bears the inscription “31 January 1945 – Kienitz. First place liberated from fascism on our national territory. Glory to the fighters of the 5th Shock Army and the 2nd Guards Tank Army”.

Despite these martial words, this tank also seems to be perceived primarily as part of local history. The town’s homepage describes in detail the history of the tank, the efforts of the then mayor (“also affectionately called ‘Panzeremil’”³⁵), and the commitment and cooperation of the various actors. At the bottom of the page, there is a bold note:

*“With the attack on Ukraine in violation of international law [...] many questions and reasons for discussion have arisen about the memorials located in Germany. Several opinions have already been expressed that even the Kienitz tank or tank memorial no longer has the status it had before 20 March 2022.”*³⁶

More than a clear distancing from the events of the war, a regretful concern about the continued existence of one’s own monument can be seen here. In

fact, the Kienitz tank had also previously been the scene of actions critical of the war. In March 2022, for example, a Ukrainian flag was attached to its smooth-bore gun³⁷.

Even though there has been a certain unease, the dismantling of the tank installations both in Beilrode and Kienitz has never been seriously discussed, but a visible confrontation is taking place. At the base of the tank in Beilrode, a sign with Berthold Brecht’s poem *Bitten der Kinder* (Pleas of the children) was installed by the local primary school in summer 2023³⁸. In Kienitz, a banner with “Kienitzer Friedensappell” (Kienitz appeal for peace) was erected as early as spring 2022, with the message: “The dead admonish us. Future means peace. Survival means peace. Europe must never again burn at the hands of war.”³⁹

This reading of the monuments, which focuses on their functions as (anti-)war memorials, has a clear tradition despite the rather glorifying inscriptions. The mayor of Beilrode, for example, expressed this in his speech at the inauguration of the renovated monument in 2019:

*“The monument is a place of remembrance for all of us [...]. However, the memorial is much more than just part of a remembrance, it should also be an urgent reminder and call for future generations to always stand up for human rights, peace and democracy, here in Germany and of course beyond.”*⁴⁰

Nevertheless, one can observe that the places continue to wrestle with their roles and meanings in today’s context. In Kienitz, for example, the municipality decided to hold the annual liberation celebrations on 31 January 2023 for the first time not at the tank memorial, but at the memorial to the victims of the war, explaining that a

*“commemorative event at the Kienitz tank memorial can no longer be arranged. However, in cultivating a living and current culture of remembrance, we stick to the core message that wars, no matter in what part of the world and for whatever reason, are completely unacceptable.”*⁴¹

In addition, a project took place in the summer of 2023 in which the local artist Jörg Hannemann asked young people living in Kienitz about their attitudes to the tank. He also asked them to record them symbolically in photographs. The answers and photos of the young people were shown in an exhibition on the central square until the end of October. The young people's attitudes to the tank were quite controversial, ranging from acceptance to rejection⁴². Older residents also came to the opening, so the exhibition has the potential to become a place where different generations can exchange ideas. The fact that the memories are often much less shaped by official political symbolism than by everyday life is illustrated by the statement of a 58-year-old inhabitant: "We children played on it. It was the centre of the village. That's where the shop was. And on every anniversary there was a lot going on there."⁴³

Multi-layered Meanings in Transition

The examples chosen served to illuminate the different layers of controversy that have been articulated at various monuments since the Russian war of aggression. The focus was deliberately not on the side of those commenting through actions, but was placed on the discourse taking place in public. Overall, it can be said that the treatment of the monuments seems to be quite level-headed. Voices in favour of a radical solution, e.g. dismantling, were rare, mainly heard at the beginning of the war. This is due to the legal situation, but also to German memory culture, especially in the GDR.

In some places, however, there has been a renewed interest in the objects. As historical monuments, all of the objects described have different levels of meaning, which are composed of the intentions of the people who erected them, official remembrance policies and personal memories. In this way, the meanings of the monuments also change in the current political context, and will continue to change, adding new layers of meaning, as long as the sites are preserved.

Endnotes

1. Hanna-Renata Laurien, President of the Berlin House of Representatives. Quoted from Wolfgang Gottschalk, *Ausländische Ehrenfriedhöfe und Ehrenmale in Berlin*, Berlin 1992, p. not numbered.
2. Volker Hassemer, Senator for Urban Development and Environmental Protection. Quoted from *ibid.*
3. See also Jürgen Danyel, Thomas Drachenberg and Irmgard Zündorf, "Vorwort", in: *Kommunismus unter Denkmalschutz? Denkmalpflege als historische Aufklärung*, eds. Jürgen Danyel, Thomas Drachenberg and Irmgard Zündorf, Worms 2018, pp. 7–8, here p. 7; Leo Schmidt, "Panzerdenkmale. Narrative vor und nach 1990", in: *ibid.*, pp. 77–82, here p. 82.
4. Frank Schumann and Fritz Schumann, *Denkmale der Befreiung. Spuren der Roten Armee in Deutschland*, Berlin 2020. The museum's homepage contains a detailed database and references to project partners and sponsors: Sowjetische Kriegsgräberstätten in Deutschland. Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, s.a., <http://www.sowjetische-memorale.de/> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
5. Museum Berlin-Karlshorst / Музей Берлин-Карлсхорст, s.a., <https://www.museum-karlshorst.de/en/> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
6. Schumann 2020, *Denkmale der Befreiung*, p. 208.
7. Gottschalk 1992, *Ausländische Ehrenfriedhöfe...*, p. 6.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
10. "Genfer Abkommen zur Verbesserung des Loses der Verwundeten und Kranken der bewaffneten Kräfte im Felde", Art. 17, 12.8.1949, Genf, in: Fedlex. Die Publikationsplattform des Bundesrechts, s.a., https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1951/181_184_180/de (last accessed 27.11.2023).
11. See e.g. Mischa Gabowitsch, "Der Umgang mit sowjetischen Kriegsdenkmälern seit 1989/91. Ein Überblick", in: *Kommunismus unter Denkmalschutz?* 2018, pp. 49–64, here p. 50.
12. "Gemeinsamer Brief des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen und des amtierenden Außenministers der DDR im Zusammenhang mit der Unterzeichnung des Vertrages über die abschließende Regelung in Bezug auf Deutschland", in: bpb: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 13.6.2002, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/zwei-plus-vier-vertrag/44124/gemeinsamer-brief-des-bundesministers-des-auswaertigen-und-des-amtierenden-aussenministers-der-ddr-im-zusammenhang-mit-der-unterzeichnung-des-vertrages-ueber-die-abschliessende-regelung-in-bezug-auf-deutschland/> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
13. "Weltkriegspanzer am Sowjetischen Ehrenmal mit Ukraine Fahnen verhüllt", in: Spiegel, Politik, 30.3.2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/berlin-weltkriegspanzer-am-sowjetischen-ehrenmal-mit-ukraine-fahnen-verhuellt-a-bebf8d6a-36c2-49f3-b5a1-147b21b968fd> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
14. Quoted from Vera Friedrich, "Deutschlands Sowjet-Kriegsdenkmäler unerwünscht?", in: DW, 8.5.2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/sowjetische-kriegsdenkm%C3%A4ler-in-deutschland-nun-unerw%C3%BCnscht/a-61699871> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
15. *Ibid.*
16. "Sowjetisches Ehrenmal", in: Dresden, s.a., https://www.dresden.de/de/kultur/kunst-und-kultur/erinnerungskultur-regionalgeschichte/03_01sowjetisches-ehrenmal.php (last accessed 27.11.2023).
17. Leonie Beiersdorf, "Zum Umgang mit dem Denkmalerbe der DDR nach 1990", in: *Kommunismus unter Denkmalschutz?* 2018, pp. 17–26, here p. 20.
18. Winfried Speitkamp, "Denkmalsturz und Symbolkonflikt in der modernen Geschichte. Eine Einleitung", in: *Denkmalsturz. Zur Konfliktgeschichte politischer Symbolik*, ed. Winfried Speitkamp, Göttingen 1997, pp. 5–21, here p. 18.
19. Quoted in Martin Schieder, "Linke Geschichtsideologie oder restaurative Erinnerungskultur? Die Agency von sozialistischen

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20. Bildersturm in Osteuropa. Die Denkmäler der kommunistischen Ära im Umbruch, ed. Deutsches Nationalkomitee ICOMOS, München 1995.
 21. Sowjetisches Ehrenmal s.a.
 22. Hubert Staroste, “Politische Denkmäler in Ost-Berlin im Spannungsfeld von Kulturpolitik und Denkmalpflege. Ein Bericht zu Arbeit der ‘Kommission zum Umgang mit politischen Denkmälern der Nachkriegszeit im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin’”, in: Bildersturm in Osteuropa 1995, pp. 84–86.
 23. Quoted in Friedrich 2022, Deutschlands Sowjet-Kriegsdenkmäler unerwünscht? In mentioning 1968, Scharf is referring to the suppression of the Prague Spring by Soviet tanks.
 24. MDR Investigativ, “Sowjetische Ehrenmale in Deutschland abreißen?”, in: MDR, 12.5.2022, <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/welt/osteuropa/politik/ukraine-krieg-denkmal-sowjetunion-deutschland-100.html> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
 25. Friedrich 2022, Deutschlands Sowjet-Kriegsdenkmäler unerwünscht?
 26. “Svea Duwe ‘Dieses Gebilde ist fragil!’”, in: Kunsthaus Dresden, 4.5.–4.6.2023, <https://www.mdr.de/kultur/ausstellungen/dresden-kunstinstallation-sowjetisches-ehrenmal-100.html> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
 27. MDR Kultur, “Dresden: Kunstaktion will Debatte über Sowjetische Ehrenmale anregen”, in: MDR, 11.5.2023, <https://www.mdr.de/kultur/ausstellungen/dresden-kunstinstallation-sowjetisches-ehrenmal-100.html> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
 28. “Sowjetisches Ehrenmal: Kunstwerk ‘Dieses Gebilde ist fragil’ entwendet”, in: Dresden, 11.5.2023, https://www.dresden.de/de/rathaus/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2023/05/pm_029.php (last accessed 27.11.2023).
 29. For detailed information on the history of the tank memorials, see Schmidt 2018, Panzerdenkmale.
 30. This had quite practical reasons, as the World War II tanks were used by the NVA for training purposes until about 1970 and then decommissioned, which freed them for further use for decal purposes (Ibid., p. 81).
 31. “Panzerdenkmal”, in: Gemeinde Beilrode, s.a., <https://www.beilrode.de/seite/457523/panzerdenkmal.html> (last accessed 27.11.2023)
 32. Schmidt 2018, Panzerdenkmale, p. 82.
 33. MDR Geschichte, “Denkmal-Subbotnik. Der vergessene Panzer von Beilrode”, 8.12.2021, <https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte-gegenwart/politik-gesellschaft/sojanka-und-subbotnik-panzer-beilrode-102.html> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
 34. Panzerdenkmal s.a. (Beilrode).
 35. “Das Kienitzer Panzerdenkmal”, in: Kienitz in Oderbruch, s.a., <http://www.kienitz-du.de/panzerdenkmal.html> (last accessed 27.11.2023).
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Fig. 3: Erich Höhne and Erich Pohl (Deutsche Fotothek).

Fig. 4: Svea Duwe (VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn).

Abstract

The article deals with Soviet memorials, especially those dedicated to the liberation by the Red Army in Germany. Using case studies of different objects, times and places, it highlights facets of the discussions on how to deal with these monuments, which took place mainly directly after the Russian attack on Ukraine, but which are still going on. In doing so, a link is not only made to the discussion that took place in the 1990s on the public treatment of political monuments of the GDR after the fall of communism. It is also argued that the monuments, which were erected with a clear political intention, now have different layers of meaning that accompany and shape today’s discussions and thus must also be taken into account in the further handling of this not only Soviet but also German local heritage.

Author

Stephanie Herold is an art historian and monument conservator. After working as a research assistant at the Technical University of Berlin and the University of Bamberg, since 2021 she has held a professorship in Urban Conservation and Cultural Heritage at the Insti-

tute for Urban and Regional Planning at the TU Berlin. Her research focuses on young architectural heritage, from modernism to postmodernism (with a focus on GDR architecture), dissonant heritage in Eastern Europe and processes of emotional heritage appropriation and aesthetics. She is a member of various professional associations, including the Association of Critical Heritage Studies and ICOMOS, and since 2022 has been vice-chair of the Working Group on Theory and Education in Heritage Conservation. Since 2021, she has been a deputy spokesperson of the Research Training Group "Identity and Heritage".
Email: s.herold@tu-berlin.de

Title

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