These I recall: traces of a repeated past in the Worms Synagogue reconstruction

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The historic synagogue in Worms, a German Rhineland city of approximately 85,000, does not present as a particularly extraordinary structure. The unknowing passerby might only be made aware of its significance by the slew of UNESCO-branded banners and leaflets marking something genuinely remarkable: as of 27 January 2021, this synagogue, along with other nearby medieval synagogue sites and Jewish cemeteries, forms Germany's first, and so far only, Jewish UNESCO World Heritage Site.[1] The collection of sites is known as Schum, a medieval Yiddish acronym for Speyer, Worms, and Mainz, the cities where the sites can be found. The Worms Synagogue, an intact, living building, nearly a millennium old, is the crown jewel of the collection. The more astute visitor might ponder how such an important edifice in German Jewish history survived the Holocaust. The answer: it did not. It was a victim of the Kristallnacht pogroms of 9 and 10 November 1938, which saw thousands of Jewish businesses vandalised, tens of thousands of Jews arrested, an unknown number killed and more than one thousand German synagogues damaged. The present building is a historical reconstruction. And it is not the first on this site. Worms has a long and violent history with its Jewish community, going back to the devastating crusader pogroms of the eleventh century. In all, Holocaust included, the synagogue has been reconstructed a full five times due to violent destruction. Moreover, the present reconstruction was undertaken in a 1950s Worms that had no Jewish presence and against the wishes of many of the surviving community in diaspora. This troubling history begs the following questions: how are we to read the current reconstruction in the context of the many previous reconstructions? What world heritages are represented in the material of the site? And how can findings from this site enrich the practice of reconstructing sites of trauma?

Investigating these questions will require developing a relationship with a sometimes overwrought and inconsistent literature on memory and space. This article chooses to use *memory-work,* which will be more rigorously defined, as a methodological framework for focusing on the material of site and its cultural productions as evidence and storyteller of conflicting, contradictory, and often semi-fictitious struggles for agency and identity.

Escaping Berlin

Memory scholarship is somewhat slippery. From Freud to Benjamin, there are few in the canon of Western social commentary who have not written about memory.[2] Much of the literature of the past decades concerning memory and space derives from the work of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora. Halbwachs distances *memory* as the more dynamic, collectively formed, and socially heritable sister to the more stolid, deliberate and controlled *history*.[3] Nora ties memory to space with *lieux de mémoire* ('sites of memory'), which are spatial acts of 'commemorative vigilance', modern 'objects beneath the critical gaze of history' to replace the spontaneous and oral memory of past eras, vanquished by the conquest of industrialisation and colonisation.[4] A contemporary adaptation of this would be Maria Lewicka's *place memory*, a form of Halbwachsean *collective memory* that is held in the material of place as urban 'mnemonics aids'.[5] So too is Andreas Huyssen's reading of postmodern memory spaces as *urban palimpsests*, spaces that become monuments through the accumulation of layers.[6] But Huyssen's palimpsests remain metaphorical, activated only by the 'urban imaginary', as too are Lewicka's mnemonics. The abuse and overuse of memory in literature have given it a vague semantics (Marc Treib concedes that academic *memory* could just as easily be substituted with *history*, *civilisation*, or *culture*).[7] Huyssen himself describes a 'memory fatigue' within the field, something this author certainly feels.[8] Part of this onset scepticism may derive from long-held assumptions made by Huyssen and the like, in the tradition of Halbwachs and Nora, that 'historical memory today is not what it used to be'.[9] While Huyssen may correctly argue that modern media has indeed changed the representation and consumption of memory, whatever memory may be, this author is not particularly convinced that memory today is fundamentally different from our supposed pastoral past. Kathleen James-Chakraborty demonstrates that the palimpsestic space is not a postmodern invention, and that German modernism, rather than the tabula rasa Huyssen claims it to be, has long traditions of memory conscientiousness predating even the First World War.[10] This author would like to draw connections with even older legacies of memory.

How then can we avoid 'forgetting memory' while dodging the slippery pitfalls of memory discourse?[11] One solution may be to turn to material traces of cultural engagement with the past rather than traditional academic theory. The concept of *memory-work* becomes useful towards this end, where actions concerning memory and their material traces, the 'work', rather than memory itself, are the subject of inquiry. This idea of doing work on the past in the present is frequently used in the context of contemporary memorial design, as best stated by Karen Till: '[memory-work] is the process of working through the losses and trauma resulting from past natural violence and imagining a better future through place.'[12] Till cites the activism surrounding the Topography of Terror site in Berlin as a key example of this.[13]

Berlin is so often the subject of memory-work study, and for a simple reason. As Mary Fulbrook writes, Berlin is 'arguably one of the most historically self-aware cities in the world' that 'brazenly, self-consciously, almost obsessively' shows off its 'lowest points'.[14] But the need for such self-awareness reduces the scope of study largely to museums and memorials, places of explicit (and often very controlled) intentionality, and, as James-Chakraborty reminds us, largely touristic consumption.[15] But not all cities are as self-aware as Berlin, and not all memory-work is performed actively and intentionally in memorials and museums. For James-Chakraborty, shifting the lens to any other region of Germany, such as the Ruhr, reveals different legacies of memory-work that long precede Berlin's more recent self-discovery, and are far less self-critical.[16] The Worms Synagogue, like many of the Schum sites, is not a memory site by design, though memory-work of some kind certainly takes place. And it is certainly not a flashy Berlin pageant project of a star architect, and in fact has a distinct lack of authorship that is typical of most urban spaces. A broader scholarship of memory-work is needed, one that moves away from Berlin, from discussions of individual architects and style, one more interested in 'how architecture operates within society', as James-Chakraborty insists.[17] Other such work includes that of Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose. They believe the more 'banal' materialities of postconflict reconstruction are more attuned to regional landscapes of heritage.[18] They hope to 'move beyond traditional sites of heritage, such as monuments and museum collections'[19] that are too

1   **Present-day approach to the synagogue from the Judengasse.**

2a, b **A. Heinrichs and J. Segatz, from reconstruction by S. Paulus, TU Braunschweig, 2007: ground plan and cross-section to the east of the Old Synagogue Worms as it would have appeared following its 1175 reconstruction, and the 1213 construction of the woman's synagogue annex to the north.**

2a
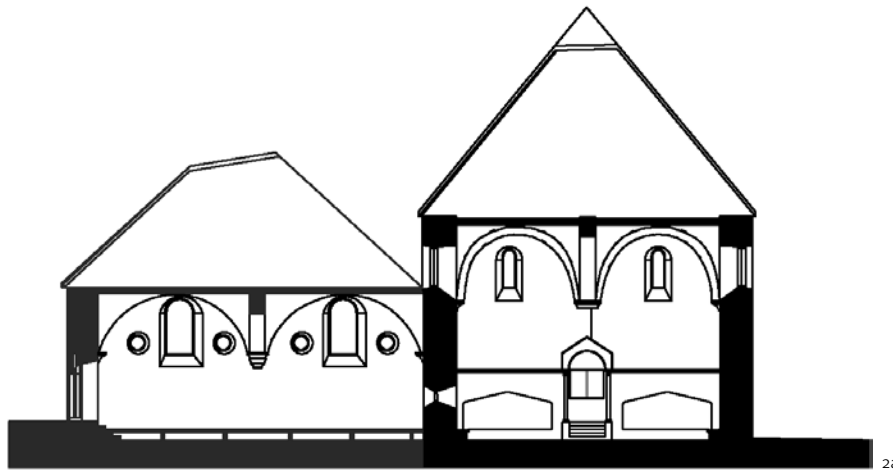
official and 'monolithic' and do not capture a 'fluidity and dynamism of places'.[20] An adaptation of this decentralised, dynamic and unofficial theory is more appropriate for the mundane materialities of Worms. Andrew Demshuk's comparative investigation of postwar reconstruction in Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Wrocław is another precedent that privileges the mundanity of site with 'comparative local-level analysis' and 'site specific human stories'.[21]

This article then will view memory-work as the material evidence of cultural and societal interaction with the past, however mundane the material and however intentional the interaction. This is a two-way street. Buildings are studied as 'primary sources' of human impact,[22] but so too are cultural products that represent buildings and their traumas, such as newspaper articles, archival records, folklore, religious liturgy, and artwork, among other works, as evidence of impact of the built environment on humans.[23] This study is not purely forensic, however, seeking evidence to establish a singular, legal truth. Rather, the building is elevated as storyteller, one that may fabricate some details, leave out others, or produce multiple, conflicting truths, as a means of constructing identity for many different groups of people. With memory-work as research lens and the Worms Synagogue as storyteller, multiple accounts of the reconstruction emerge, with the architectural material bearing witness and influencing the very human struggle for narrative agency in urban space. Though architecture may be the subject of investigation, it is access to this multiplicity of half-truths, the narratives of inaccuracy, amnesia, confusion, and myth that are the aims of this method.

This study serves as a further challenge to the premodern-postmodern memory divide insisted upon by Huyssen and others. While there are very real distinctions between the memory-work of the postwar synagogue reconstruction at Worms from all those preceding, and these will be discussed, they do not represent the site's exclusive truth or narrative. The employment of memory conceptions not traditionally used in similar studies of reconstruction, particularly those of Jewish tradition and ritual, reveal heritages of memory-work that complicate the splitting of history into arbitrary binaries.

2b
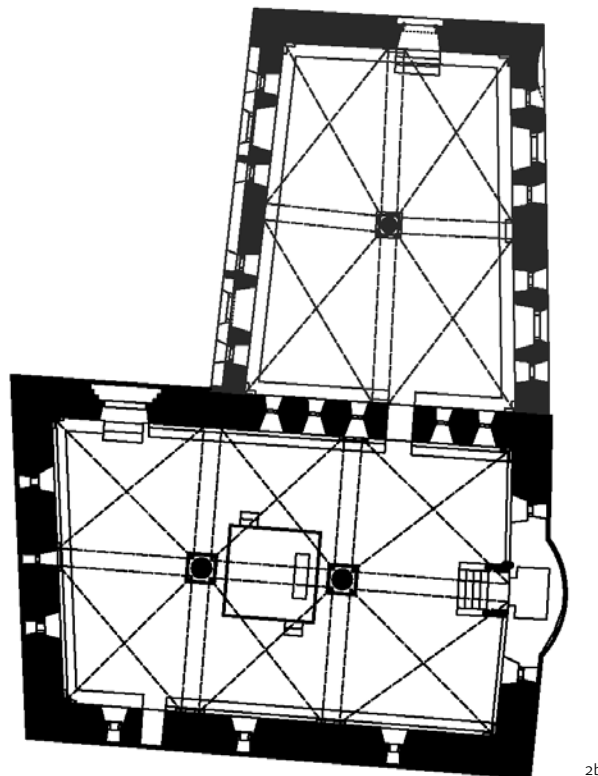
The many deaths and lives of the Worms Synagogue

It is believed that Jews settled in Worms towards the end of the tenth century. By the middle of the eleventh century, their economic success warranted recognition and protection from King and future Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, an imperial tie the community would long cherish well past the demise of the empire. The flourishing rabbinical community in Worms attracted the likes of renowned biblical and Talmudic commentator Rashi.[24] Worms's first synagogue, erected in 1034, is the earliest recorded synagogue construction in central Europe, though there is no surviving representation of its appearance[25]. The synagogue as it currently stands is an evolution of a second synagogue construction in 1175 on the same site.[26] This

simple rectangular structure, built in brick Romanesque, appears to be the originator of the so-called double-nave synagogue, a type later employed in other regional synagogues: a single hall with two aisles of three groin-vaulted bays separated by two central columns, between which stands the bima, an ornate elevated enclosure for reading Torah and giving sermons.[27] Likely the work of regional Christian craftsmen,[28] the decoration resembles that in Worms's St Peter's Cathedral, particularly the richly decorated north portal and column capitals, which are exemplar works of the 'Wormser Dom school', as per local art historian Otto Böcher.[29] A separate women's synagogue (only men were allowed in the main hall), the first recorded of its kind, was added as an annex in 1213, giving the building its current rough footprint *[2]*.[30]

Though today's synagogue and that of the thirteenth century are recognisable as the same building, little of that older build remains in the present.[31] This is due to Worms's long, violent relationship with its Jewish population and its synagogue, which over the course of its nearly millennium long existence has been destroyed and reconstructed a full five times. Such violence is in fact the origin of the seminal 1175 build. The economic and

liturgical success of the eleventh-century community was brought to a crashing halt when crusaders and townspeople descended on Jewish Worms in 1096, killing most (possibly 800) and forcibly baptising the very few spared.[32] Though the community was re-established in 1112, a second, though less severe, crusade swept through in 1146.[33] The original synagogue sustained serious damage as a result of the two crusades, and it was this damage that necessitated the construction of the 1175 synagogue that became a model for others in the region.[34]

The following destructive events can be traced in the architectural fashions that influenced the subsequent reconstructions through the eras. In 1349, Jews found themselves the scapegoats for the Black Death, and in the resulting attacks in Worms, some 400 Jews died, many in a blaze in the synagogue.[35] The damage was so severe, only three metres of wall remained in places. Because of this, in the resulting reconstruction the formerly rounded Romanesque windows could become pointed Gothic ones in the contemporary trend *[3]*.[36] Similar destruction in a 1615 pogrom brought about Renaissance-era additions in a 1620s reconstruction, namely a new entrance hall, Jewish council chamber and a yeshiva (seminary), the so-called

3 **Heinrich Hoffmann (date unknown), aquarelle of the medieval synagogue interior much as it would have appeared following its reconstruction in the mid-fourteenth century through the mid-nineteenth century. Stadtarchiv Worms (315_M07858).**
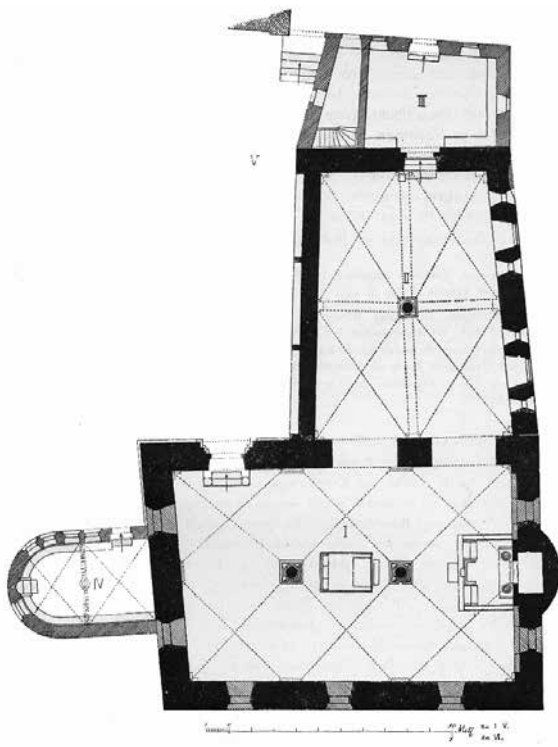
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but first we must establish why such a synagogue reconstruction was so exceptional in its postwar context. Why didn't Worm's cycle of synagogue reconstruction end with Jewish life in Worms, with the Holocaust?

Why is this reconstruction different from all other reconstructions?

The immediate postwar German landscape was that of 400 million cubic feet of rubble.[39] Rapidly clearing the debris became a task of practical necessity and an exercise in equivocation with the past. The focus of preservationists became what Rudy Koshar terms 'archipelagoes of memory': small clusters of restored buildings, often surrounding a landmark, around which all other historical substance was cleared.[40] This focus privileged churches as landmarks as well as for their 'Christian themes of sacrifice and redemption' and the false perception of being untinged by Nazism.[41] Synagogue sites, by contrast, very much bore the marks of Nazism. Those selected islands of reconstruction often erased all traces of their recent destruction, with ruins and scars of war viewed as 'pessimistic' and 'out of place' in the new West German city.[42] These reconstructions recalled less so much specific past events but rather a general, idealised past upon which to base a new, 'better Germany'.[43] Synagogues, however, could never avoid linking to the specific and uncomfortable events of the Holocaust, a past doubly difficult to process for the already struggling German war survivor.[44] A combination of lingering legal battles over property rights and ambivalence towards the Jews (Nazi era antisemitism did not vanish overnight, after all) left synagogue sites neglected to the point of becoming public health hazards, which were cleared.[45] In Berlin, synagogues that survived the war largely intact, such as the massive Fasanestraße Synagogue, were torn down while the ruined Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, or Gedächtniskirche, was saved from demolition by public protest. As a turn of the century Romanesque Revival church, the Gedächtniskirche was not a historic monument per se, but it was highly symbolic of German war suffering.[46] Synagogue ruins were also highly symbolic of recent suffering, but at the hands of Germans, not along with them, which made them difficult and uncomfortable as monuments. It is little surprise that the local activism that saved sites like the Gedächtniskirche did not extend to synagogues. If 1940s and 1950s Berlin, Germany's largest Jewish population centre before the Second World War and still host to a community in its immediate aftermath,

Rashi Chapel, giving the synagogue its current plan.[37] Following exile imposed by the French, who in 1689 torched the entire city, the community restored the ruined building at the turn of the eighteenth century with new Baroque decoration, including an elaborate new Torah ark.[38]

One final set of pre-Holocaust alterations came about in the mid-nineteenth century not through violence, but through emancipation. As Jews gained access to modern Enlightenment-era German society, a major liturgical reformation, part of the greater Haskalah movement, transformed congregations, including Worms's. To accommodate a more modern and assimilated practice, changes to the synagogue's internal layout were undertaken [4]. The partition between men's and women's synagogues was opened to allow mixed seating. This seating, which had once circled a central podium, was rearranged in linear pews facing east, as in local churches [5]. An organ gallery was added to the west, as was the practice of their Christian brethren. Alteration and reconstruction then were well-established at the Worms Synagogue long before the advent of Nazism. How Worms's often violent legacies of reconstruction materialise in this most recent iteration will be discussed,

failed to save its historic synagogues, how is it that a small city on the Rhine undertook the effort to historically rebuild its own synagogue in a postwar Worms completely devoid of Jews?

Reconstruction as amnesiac

The general reconstruction of Worms itself was fairly typical. The city's reconstruction plans, under the directorship of city planner and former NSDP member Walter Koehler, included churches but not the synagogue.[47] The synagogue project was spearheaded outside of planning spheres by Friedrich Illert, Worms's archivist. From earlier imaginings of marketing the city as the birthplace of Nazism, Illert shifted to becoming the self-proclaimed savior of Worms's Jewish artefacts, which consisted of highly valuable manuscripts, ritual objects, and remains from Worm's legendary Jewish sites, including the Worms Machzor, a thirteenth-century Jewish codex with the oldest known example of Yiddish writing.[48] Illert's claim to this property thrust him into restitution battles. Disagreement among the Allied occupiers towards issues of Jewish restitution left decisions on so-called 'heirless' property to the whim of local politics.[49] In Worms, this whim was Illert's, and he frustrated every claim at his prized artefacts.[50] Given the value of the Worms collection, this particularly angered the only just established Israelis, who maintained that the 'Nazi era had disqualified Germany as a "trustee of Jewish antiquities"'.[51] Chancellor Adenauer intervened to avoid a confrontation, and it was settled that Israel would be custodian of the artefacts until a new Jewish community formed in Worms.[52] Having lost his collection, Illert then turned towards reconstruction of the synagogue, seemingly to force into reality the condition for the artefacts' return: the re-establishment of the Worms Jewish community, or at least the perception of re-establishment.

The inception of the reconstruction project then had little to do with critical reflection or consideration for Jewish heritage but was rather an extreme manifestation of a phenomenon described by Gavriel Rosenfeld: that German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung,* or 'coming to terms with the past', often manifested as a conflicted 'mastering of the past'.[53] This lack of reflection and regard became painfully apparent in the process of the restoration itself. While he had his supporters, Illert was often rebuffed, in no uncertain terms, by former community members in diaspora, who were doubtful of the reforming of a community and did not see in the 'destroyers of Worms' the right to rebuild their synagogue as some sort of empty shell.[54] Illert had to turn towards the West German government for support to 'eradicate a Nazi mark of shame', as one official put it,[55] with the project even reaching Adenauer's attention.[56]

In preparation for the project, the so-called Levy Synagogue, which had survived both Kristallnacht and air raids, was demolished *[6]*. The nineteenth-century changes of the Haskalah were perceived as a step too far by those in the community who valued tradition. One such community member, Leopold Levy, erected his own synagogue to provide a space for more traditional Orthodox services.[57] Levy then bequeathed the new synagogue to the larger community as an extension of the one, central congregation, thus avoiding the split into Reform and Orthodox congregations common in other German cities.[58] The Schum UNESCO application dossier claims the Levy Synagogue was raised due to risk of collapse.[59] But if

accurate preservation of Jewish heritage was the aim, then surely the Levy Synagogue's restoration too would be prioritised, especially as a more intact survivor.[60] Simply rebuilding the more historic structure while clearing the intact Levy building represents a double destruction and incomplete reconstruction and is a betrayal of the Jewish community as it actually was before the Holocaust.

It is also questionable if the reconstruction of the ruined medieval synagogue even serves the aim of accurate preservation. As Rosenfeld observed in his study of postwar Munich, Demshuk in Frankfurt, Leipzig and Wrocław and Wójcik, Bilewicz, and Lewicka in Warsaw, construction can be just as amnesiac and as much an erasure as clearing ruins. Before the reconstruction, Worms's synagogue ruins became a near sacred site in Jewish spheres as the 'wailing wall of the twentieth century', representative of the demise of European Jewry.[61] Among the many who visited were Jewish Allied soldiers, including one who took a bit of the rubble back with him to the United States in a symbolic gesture of dispersing the rubble, like the survivors of the community, into a New World diaspora.[62] By undoing the ruins, the reconstruction denies these Jews agency in memorial experience of the site. It is true, efforts were made to incorporate the ruins into the reconstruction. As the UNESCO dossier notes, found 'spolia' were integrated into their original positions, though most material is new. It claims that any new material is 'marked' and 'clearly distinguishable'.[63] In person, however, discerning such differences is quite difficult. To the typical visitor, the building reads less as a reconstruction than as a building never destroyed.

A confused historicism

The reconstruction project as conceived by Illert then was one of amnesia rather than of remembering. However, as Rosenfeld notes, this amnesia is hardly ever monolithic and Illert's appeal to politicians also meant an appeal to their diverse politics.[64] As a result, mixed and confused messages surrounding the intentions of the reconstruction emerged, which allowed for the infiltration of new voices into the project. Illert's core focus on Jewish property as relevant to German cultural heritage, albeit a non-specific heritage, became seriously undermined. So concerned were the involved politicians with public *Wiedergutmachung* (literally 'making good again') in the face of rising antisemitism, such as recent vandalism at Worms's Jewish cemetery, that a bitter Illert was forced out of the project entirely.[65] The speeches at the dedication ceremony in 1959 were a cacophony of mixed intentions. Some called the synagogue a memorial. Some spoke of reconciliation. Some espoused hope for a future community, some for restoration of Jewish pilgrimage. Others still spoke of the project as a demonstration of the long-established Germanness of Worms's Jews.[66] The message was inconsistent.

It should be no surprise that this work in mastering the past resulted in a reconstruction laden with contradictions. The building as it stands is not a faithful representation of any of the synagogue's antebellum incarnations. Even experts seem confused on the exact nature of the project. Nils Roemer argues that the preservationists favored the medieval and early Baroque era,[67] while the UNESCO dossier maintains that the pre-1938 state was restored.[68] A simple analysis of the material evidence on site reveals both

narratives to be half true. On approach one sees quite clearly the current synagogue adorned by a full hip roof, much as its medieval predecessor likely bore *[7]*. Photographs of the building's immediate prewar form show a synagogue with half-hip roof after an Enlightenment-era remodeling *[8]*. Here medieval detailing has been valued over the recent past. But step inside and there is nothing medieval in the internal arrangement, instead modeled on the egalitarian changes of the Haskalah: the women's synagogue partition broken with broad portals and church-like pews ordered in rows towards the Torah ark *[9]*. Here the synagogue looks much as it did on the eve of its destruction. But even this stylistic choice is non-committal; gone from the sanctuary are the gallery and organ of the reformed community *[10]*, rendering an interior arrangement unlike any in the building's history. There are other odd details and absences that contradict historical record. The eagle candelabras, once a proud mark of the community's imperial ties, have been replaced with simplified fixtures, and the new windows have circular, rather than rectilinear, panes. That last alteration was made in consultation with certain rabbis, who found the historical windowpanes too cruciform in resemblance.[69] It is thus false that no Jewish hands influenced the project. Isidor Kiefer, Worms's last Jewish community president before immigration to the United States and Illert's chief ally in the project, was also regularly consulted on details of the restoration.[70] But these contributions have only added to the indecisiveness of the reconstruction. The result is a confused historical representation of a building that had never before taken this exact form. Yet no textual representation of the building seems to acknowledge this, even though the material memory-work of the reconstruction is open for all to see.

Inevitably, this confusion of intention and execution had unintended consequences. While the reconstruction effort may have been a local attempt at asserting agency over Worms's Jewish past, its controversies and widespread attention in the media kept the surviving community connected, who, spurred on by the developments in postwar Worms, formed networks that drew the vast diaspora together on the premise of remembering.[71] This is another of the memory-works of the reconstructed synagogue's heritage abuse, one of many that challenges the narratives of German mastery and identity-building on the site as the only set of postwar stories. This building is an old one, and it has other stories to tell. The involvement of German officials in postwar memory-work does indeed make this reconstruction different from all the others. But there are material traces of other agencies on site, and their memory-work is of a much older, medieval vintage.

Traditions of material memory-work

This is, after all, the synagogue's fifth reconstruction in nearly one thousand years. The actors involved in the postwar build and their intentions are significant points of divergence from those past reconstructions, but if it were possible to privilege the building's own sage wisdom and not our postmodern preconceptions, one finds that materially, this recent reconstruction is hardly unusual. Recall that following each moment of violence in the historical record, the synagogue changed form in its reconstruction. The crusades of the eleventh century begot a completely new build, while the Black Death pogroms spurned Gothic-style alterations. Seventeenth-century pogroms brought about the new Rashi Chapel and entrance annex, while destruction in the Nine Years' War with France preceded new Baroque interior decoration. All these built developments occurred in the memory-work of reconstruction, specifically out of violent destruction. And as this newest build takes on a new and altered form from any of its past guises, so it (inadvertently) continues this tradition of memory-work into the present. Though perhaps a forced and artificial extension of this legacy (also a world heritage of the site) over the Holocaust, the current synagogue fails to freeze any single historical moment, as its designers may have wished, and is therefore a living and dynamic extension nonetheless.

The German dedication plaque of 1961 on the building's north façade nearly admits as much: 'often during nine centuries this vulnerable site was destroyed in town fires

7 The synagogue as it currently stands from the southwest, with full hip roof and protruding Rashi chapel.

8 The synagogue in 1924 from the south, as it would have appeared before its 1938 destruction, with a half-hip roof, among other details that diverge from the current form. Stadtarchiv Worms (303_06013).

and persecutions; most recently in 1938.'[72] In refusing to ascribe any specific responsibility for the 1938 destruction or to contextualise any of the other destructions other than that they occurred 'often', a reader with no knowledge of local history could interpret this 1938 event as being one in a long series of events that is no different to the previous ones. Moreover, this statement normalises the recent reconstruction within the synagogue's nine-century history. In a further normalisation, this inauguration plaque joins the many others the aged synagogue has accrued over time. An inscription in one of the lintels from 1842 marks the rearrangement of the interior to suit the community's reformed needs.[73] Another dedication stone in the north wall, the oldest dated Hebrew text in Northern Europe, marks the construction of the first synagogue on the site in 1034. In praising the sponsors and craftsmen involved and the god that inspired them, it quotes Isaiah, 'yad vashem', a memorial and a name,[74] that the synagogue may both recall as much as it establishes new. In building community pride through physical building, the synagogue should absorb marks of the past. These marks are another form of material memory-work with long roots in Worms.

As a result of the waves of trauma and persecution, the historic community modeled its identity on an 'epic of defeat', a society of holy martyrs, with new liturgy and ritual custom specific to Worms revolving around the various destructions, particularly those of the crusades.[75] These liturgical and ritual developments that entered into the Jewish canon as a result of the crusade massacres are not merely historic, however, but are a core part of contemporary Jewish prayer. Nowhere is this more present than in the Eleh Ezkerah service, part of the liturgy of the fast of Yom Kippur. Known in English as the martyrology, but literally translating as 'these I recall', the Eleh Ezkerah recounts a series of mass atrocities that have befallen Jews across history. In the version printed in the Lev Shalem prayer book, the official High Holiday liturgy of the Rabbinical Society found in many American synagogues adhering to the Conservative Movement of Judaism, primary source texts recounting the Roman execution of Rabbis, the crusader massacres of Schum, the expulsion of Spanish Jewry and the Holocaust sit side by side, linked only by the phrase 'eleh ezkerah, these I recall'.[76] The crusade account printed is that of Solomon bar Samson, survivor of the crusade in Mainz, which opens: 'When the members of the pious and holy community in Mainz […] heard that the communities in Speyer and Worms had been attacked a second time and some had been killed, their hearts melted and despaired.'[77] Jewish liturgy is not palimpsestic, where the prayers of one era overwrite the previous. It is a cumulative list, always growing. The destruction of Worms at the hands of crusaders is one event in a series of events that includes, but is not capped by, the Holocaust. This Jewish, accumulative reading of memory-work makes no distinction of pre- or postmodern, pre- or post-Holocaust, even in these postmodern, post-Holocaust times.

Under this Jewish conception of memory as cumulative, the material markings of the synagogue too read as accumulation and continuity over the supposed rift of the Holocaust. Graffito and inscriptions marking the former presence of noteworthy community members over the centuries abut a plaque in the women's synagogue marking the life of Herta Mansbacher (1885–1943) a teacher who was the true saviour of the community's artefacts in November 1938, and who perished in the death camps.[78] The biggest plaques of any, the set of four lists on the eastern wall naming 550 known local Jewish victims of the Holocaust, read just like the Memorbuchs of the medieval community chronicling the dead at the hands of crusaders.[79] Indeed, the content for the plaques derives from efforts of the Memorial Committee for Jewish Victims of Nazism from Worms, a product of the diaspora community's networking, who commissioned Henry Huttenback of the City College of New York to complete a Holocaust memorial book of names. The plaques' position, unveiled in a ceremony in 1980, was more prominent and invasive than the German conservationists of the synagogue had hoped, but their placement was insisted on by the community. For those members that returned to the synagogue for the reading of the names, the restored building had a profound effect: 'you get the feeling of ancient history, *continuity*, suffering and even triumph', noted Miriam Gerber. For her, it was an experience akin to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, that allusion that Illert had tried to remove from the synagogue ruins in their reconstruction.[80] In this alternative narrative, this other building truth, Illert's attempts to dispossess Jewish agency at the synagogue were unsuccessful. Though the community itself was glaringly absent from the reconstruction, its survivors brought Worms's Jewish traditions of documenting and ritualising trauma into the diaspora, and their efforts continue to mark the synagogue interior with a particularly Jewish memory-work, just as they did before the Holocaust.

Jewish memory-work and German identity

Though these continuities emerge when we expand our library of memory-work analysis to include those of Jewish ritual, tradition, and myth, such conceptions are not exclusive to Jewish identity and agency on site, and similar continuities emerge in memory-work of German identity-making. After all, we should not fall for the assumption that German and Jew are oppositional and discrete identities. Questions of what it means to be a German Jew have long troubled Germany's emancipated Jewish population. The synagogue's Romanesque roots were viewed by some in the era of emancipation as justification for use of that perceived Germanic style in more monumental synagogue designs. Edwin Oppler, one of Germany's foremost Jewish architects of the nineteenth century, cited Worms as precedent for his *heimische* synagogue creations,[81] like that in Hannover, in an act of 'architectural emancipation' from the eastern and thus othering styles often assigned to Jewish buildings.[82] It is nothing new, then, that the synagogue should serve as an inspiration to assert regional German identity through design in the postwar period, albeit for secular Worms at large. The 1970s brought a recession, reduced industrial growth and increased public dissatisfaction with modernism in West Germany which caused a planning about-face. There was a greater sense that decades of future-forward reconstruction had neglected preservation, and many cities implemented *Sanierung*, or restoration, of their city centres. This often entailed a gentrification of sorts, recreating a quaint and comfortable history through heimische and pastorally Germanic designs.[83] This trend did not escape Worms, which in the 1980s decided that the Judengasse, the street that once contained the city's Ghetto, was prime for Sanierung. Though before the war described as 'a narrow street consisting of antiquated, squalid tenements',[84] the Judengasse was treated with 'harmonious' colours[85] and historic feeling, if not strictly speaking historic, restorations. These have made the Judengasse into a new little corner of old Worms that never quite was. The actual historic synagogue at the street's centre, with its authentic 'Wormser Dom school' detailing, justified the historicising regeneration.

The influence of Jewish Worms on its secular memory-work is not unprecedented. The Christian community often bought into its Jews' foundation myth, that Jewish settlement in Worms (apocryphally) predated the birth of Christ, because it gave the entire city ancient legitimacy.[86] Worms went so far as to add Hebrew lettering to the decoration of its new city archives in the late nineteenth century as a sign of historic Jewish presence being a defining attribute of Worms's heritage.[87] They have gone even further today, resurrecting an old Jewish myth associated with the synagogue. Mythmaking and folklore have long been core forms of memory-work in Jewish Worms. The synagogue's Rashi Chapel, built long after the death of Rashi, who himself only resided in Worms briefly for his studies,[88] became the seat of the great scholar's legendary court in apocryphal folklore, telling of Rashi's wondrous, oracle-like wisdom.[89] More recently, as part of Sanierung, a new structure was built on the foundations of the old Jewish community hall adjacent to the synagogue and is part of the UNESCO heritage site. It has been named the Rashi House, and it contains all of the city archives, not just Judaica.[90] An abstract sculpture of Rashi by Speyer artist Wolf Spitzer joined the court between synagogue and archive in 1991. These moves canonise Worms's Jewish myths into the secular city's conscience of identity. Just as Worms's Jews falsely believed in Rashi's deep roots in the city, so too now, it seems, does the general public at large.

As a result of these developments, the secular city has taken on an increased interest in Jewish history, with dedicated educational and political institutions formed.[91] The Warmaisa Society, started in 1995 with largely non-Jewish membership, promotes the preservation of Jewish culture through 'lectures, seminars, concerts, and excursions'.[92] Members of the active Mainz Jewish Community were invited to the opening of the Worms Volkshochschule (a post-secondary college) as representatives of practicing Judaism in Germany.[93] Some, though not all, of these contemporary urban memory-works would have been unthinkable in a pre-Holocaust Germany. But synagogue reconstruction as a catalyst for architectural historicism and romanticism, new urbanism, mythmaking, and German identity formation, is nothing new at all.

On continuity

'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric', said Theodor Adorno; the Holocaust, in this earlier Adornoian perspective, was an irreversible rupture in the possibility of cultural expression.[94] In this view, the restoration of a synagogue in a postwar context with no Jewish life to a seemingly prewar form would be to draw an unacceptable continuity over the Holocaust, and in doing so make light its unchangeable destructive impact. This is one reading of the site, and it is not without merit. But it is not the only one. By privileging traces of material memory-work accumulated over the building's long and repetitive history, along with the cultural artefacts that evidence human-building interaction and influence, over predominant postmodern literature on collective memory, alternative conceptions of memory practice come to the forefront that are perhaps less monolithic or unilateral. Of particular relevance to this site are accumulative Jewish memory ritual, liturgy, and mythology. The site as storyteller has served as a repository and curator of these practices and conceptions and challenges Adornoian, Huyssenian, or other assumptions. Continuity across the past and through the present as an ongoing accumulation becomes another valid reading of this site, and indeed of the other sites of Schum, and perhaps beyond. In Worms, the Holocaust proves itself to not always be a completely clean break in history and memory-work.

There is of course serious limitation to the amount of historical continuity possible at places like Worms. Adorno's proclamation is not to be disregarded. The fact of the matter remains that the horrors of the Holocaust cannot be undone. With the synagogue torched repeatedly while town officials stood by in 1938, with the liberties of emancipated Jews confined again to the shackles of a ghetto by 1940, with the 185 remaining practicing Jews of Worms shipped to Theresienstadt by 1943, with a 'purification' of Worms of all Jewish blood by 1944, no amount of historical continuity will restore Jewish Worms to its former prominence.[95] The rebuilt synagogue has not brought about Illert's wish: there remains to this day no official

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Jewish community in Worms to call the synagogue home. Instead, it is operated by the Jewish community in Mainz, a full thirty miles away.

There have also been uncomfortable continuities. Despite not hosting an official Jewish community, the synagogue suffered an antisemitic arson attack in 2010.[96] No one was hurt and the building damage was minor. But it goes to show that even in its confused form, the reconstruction of the historical synagogue seems to have contributed to the reconstruction of the historical violent tendency that led to its repeated destruction in the past. Despite its limitations, it is too historically continuous for its own good, reviving both past glory and past violence.

The scale of the Holocaust and its impact is not to be dismissed in recognising these historic continuities.

German and Jewish life and memory-work are unlikely to ever again be quite what they were before the war. But they are not entirely dissimilar. The Adorno/Halbwachs/Huyssen dichotomous frameworks of prewar/postwar, premodern/postmodern, pre-Holocaust/post-Holocaust are perhaps more hindrance than help in certain discussions of memory. Memory-work need not be fundamentally different across the binary divisions we impose on history.

Conclusion: both-and

These readings of continuity are not meant to negate, undo or overwrite existing scholarship, but to complicate, to allow for multiple contradictory half-truths to coexist, a both-and approach. The intention is not to elevate one reading of site over another, or to pass value judgement on the merits of any, but to level all such readings onto the same plane of cacophonous conversation. That sites, particularly sites of trauma, are complicated is news to no one. But the instinct to seek out a singular, monolithic historical reality among the complexity should perhaps be questioned. That, after all, is itself a form of mastery of the past. Narrative always involves some fabrication, some myth making, some exaggeration, and certainly quite a lot of contradiction. But these narratives are worthy of our inquiry, for as Yael Navaro-Yashin argues, when it comes to cultural production and identity construction, 'make-believe spaces' are as real as any other.[97]

There are implications of these conversations for the real practice of architects in the field concerned with reconstruction on sites of trauma. When similarly considering the fate of all the Schum synagogue sites together, it becomes clear that questions of form are not a particularly strong determining factor of impact. In contrast to the (mostly) historic reconstruction in Worms, Mainz now has a radical and contemporary new synagogue by Manuel Herz Architects, inaugurated in 2010 on the site of the synagogue destroyed on Kristallnacht. In Speyer, the ruins of the medieval Jewry Court (though not, it should be said, of the synagogue destroyed on Kristallnacht) have instead been preserved in their ruined state. And yet, like the historic restoration in Worms, this radical new-build and preserved ruin, very different formal solutions to the question of reconstruction, both, under similar investigation to that

in this article, bring to the fore historical continuities through struggle for agency over the material of the site.[98] It is these agency struggles, not stylistic decisions, that are the important determiners of present-day memory-work on reconstructed sites of physical trauma. This is true not just of past reconstructions, but also of present-day sites of destruction. In Hamburg, efforts are presently underway to historically reconstruct, as in Worms, the massive Bornplatzsynagoge, another Kristallnacht victim. The project, which was initiated by the local community in the name of countering antisemitism and is supported by the local government, has been met with significant ideological pushback from those who believe the reconstruction amounts to an erasure of Nazi crimes.[99] We know from Worms that this need not be the only reading of such an approach. But we also know that the approach remains complex and problematic.

But there is no comfortable, unproblematic approach. Sites of mass trauma are uncomfortable. Any conversation concerning reconstruction of such sites will be fraught with disagreement and conflict. These struggles are as much a part of a site's heritage as anything else. Any application dossier or UNESCO promotional material that attempts to neatly package a site's heritage will ultimately be reductive. The question of whether the UNESCO World Heritage system does more harm than good in regard to nuanced heritage advocacy is not addressed in this article, but it is a question that looms large nonetheless. What can perhaps be said in closing is this: while memory-work engages with building material, and thus building form, when it comes to reconstructing sites of trauma, form is largely immaterial. The important question is not what a reconstruction's form should be, but who should have the power to form it.

Notes

1. The research for this article was conducted before the approval of the Schum UNESCO application, instead in the phase between the submission and approval of the application. The author has visited the site since the approval and found the synagogue to be under some state of renovation. He is very interested in what the results of this work will be.
2. For a good survey of this body of work, see: Uta Staiger and Henriette Steiner, 'Introduction', in *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City: Building Sites*, ed. by Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner, Andrew Webber (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–13.
3. Anita Bakshi, Topographies of Memories: a New Poetics of Commemoration (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 11–2.
4. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire', trans. by Marc Roudebush, in *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7–24.
5. Adrian Wójcik, Michał Bilewicz, Maria Lewicka, 'Living on the Ashes: Collective Representations of Polish-Jewish History among People Living in the Former Warsaw Ghetto Area', *Cities*, 27:4 (2010), 195.
6. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022), p. 7.
7. Marc Treib, 'Yes, Now I Remember: An Introduction', in *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape*, ed. By Marc Treib (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), p. xiii.
8. Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, p. 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Kathleen James-Chakrabarty, *Modernism as Memory: Building Identity in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 3.
11. Huyssen, *Present Pasts,* p. 3.
12. Karen E. Till, *New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 19.
13. Ibid., pp. 21, 66.
14. Mary Fulbrook, 'Historical Tourism: Reading Berlin's Doubly Dictatorial Past', in *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City: Building Sites*, ed. by Staiger, Steiner, Webber, p. 126.
15. James-Chakrabarty, *Modernism as Memory*, p. 6.
16. Ibid., p. 3.
17. Ibid.
18. *War and Cultural Heritage: Biographies of Place*, ed. by Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 2.
19. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
20. Ibid., p. 11.
21. Demshuk's comparison spans a divided Germany and crosses the iron curtain into Poland, in an attempt to reveal qualified similarities in approaches to postwar urban reconstruction. The politics of East vs West are not within the scope of this article, but Demshuk's work suggests the distinction may not be as pronounced as one might expect. See: Andrew Demshuk, *Three Cities*

After Hitler: Redemptive Reconstruction Across Cold War Borders (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), p. 5.

22. James-Chakraborty, *Modernism as Memory*, p. 5.

23. The author is heavily indebted to the scholarship of Nils Roemer, who in *German City, Jewish Memory: The Story of Worms*, does much of the heavy lifting gathering and analysing important primary source documents concerning Worm's Jewish history. See: Nils Roemer, *German City, Jewish Memory: The Story of Worms* (Lebanon: Brandeis University Press, 2010).

24. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 11–12.

25. Paulus, 'Worms: alte Synagoge', p. 109.

26. Otto Böcher, 'Die alte Synagoge zu Worms', *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 90 (1965), 466 <http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/resolveppn/?PID=urn:nbn:de:bsz:21-dt-21091%7Clog00364> [accessed 15 April 2021].

27. Ilia Rodov, 'Revisiting the "Blind Synagogue": Vision and Voice in Double-Nave Prayer Halls', in *Jewish Architecture: New Sources and Approaches*, ed. by Katrin Keßler and Alexander von Kienlin (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2015), pp. 83–4.

28. Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), p. 43.

29. Böcher, 'Die alte Synagoge', p. 466.

30. Simon Paulus, 'Worms: alte Synagoge hintere Judengasse', in *Synagogenarchitektur in Deutschland: Dokumentation zur Ausstellung*, ed. by Aliza Cohen-Mushlin and Harmen H. Thies (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2008), p. 109.

31. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe*, p. 321.

32. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 12–13.

33. Zvi Avneri, 'Worms', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 21, 2nd edn, ed. by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007).

34. Böcher, 'Die alte Synagoge', p. 466.

35. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 25–7.

36. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe*, p. 321.

37. Christoph Cluse, Florence Fischer, Stefanie Hahn, Nadine Hoffmann, Ellen Schumacher, Matthias Untermann, *ShUM Sites of Speyer Worms and Mainz: Nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage List*, ed. by Barry Gamble and Christoph Cluse ([n.p]: State of Rhineland-Palatinate, 2020), pp. 136, 147.

38. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe*, p. 322.

39. Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 200.

40. Ibid., p. 210.

41. Ibid., pp. 204–05.

42. Ibid., pp. 219–20.

43. Ibid., pp. 234–5.

44. Demshuk, *Three Cities*, p. 14.

45. Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 96–8.

46. Ibid., pp. 98–100, 104.

47. Roemer, *German City*, p. 160.

48. Ibid., pp. 151–2.

49. Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, pp. 31–2.

50. Roemer, *German City*, p. 152.

51. Ibid., p. 166.

52. Ibid., p. 167.

53. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1–5.

54. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 168–9.

55. Ibid., p. 161.

56. Ibid., p. 169.

57. Ibid., p. 94.

58. Cluse and others, *ShUM Sites*, p. 133.

59. Ibid., p. 234.

60. Demshuk discusses a number of similar, less historic German synagogues that survived Kristallnacht in some form and were restored in some capacity shortly after the war, further undermining the reasoning behind the Levi Synagogue's demolition. See: Demshuk, *Three Cities*, pp. 403–05.

61. Roemer, *German City*, p. 154.

62. Ibid., pp. 156–7.

63. Cluse and others, *ShUM Sites*, pp. 101, 121.

64. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory*.

65. Gerold Bönnen, '"Es ist mein Lebenszweck": Isidor Kiefer und sein Anteil am Wiederaufbau der Wormser Synagoge 1957–1961', *Aschkenas*, 12:1 (2002), pp. 91–113. DeGruyter.com.

66. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 171–3.

67. Ibid., p. 174.

68. Cluse and others, *ShUM Sites*, p. 241.

69. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 174–5.

70. Bönnen, 'Isidor Kiefer', pp. 105–06.

71. Roemer, *German City*, p. 179.

72. Cluse and others, *ShUM Sites*, p. 100.

73. Ibid., p. 112.

74. Ibid., p. 107.

75. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 13–18.

76. Edward Feld and Rabbinical Assembly of America, *Mahzor Lev Shalem: for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*, 1st edn (New York, NY: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2010), pp. 337–44.

77. Ibid., pp. 338–9.

78. Cluse and others, *ShUM Sites*, p. 122.

79. These Memorbuchs, which list local Jewish martyrs, constitute part of the 'epic of the defeat', coined by Roemer to describe the identity of Worms's medieval Jews forged through great loss of life. This also included ritual, liturgy and martyrology specific to the Worms community. See Roemer, *German City*, pp. 13–18.

80. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 179–81.

81. This is a German word tinged with nationalist undertones. Literally 'homely', it implies a fundamentally German regionalism. The word *Heimat* is sometimes translated as 'fatherland', and is still used in contemporary German to indicate one's place of origin, but the term has a nuanced political history. See Maiken Umbach and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, 'Introduction: Towards a Relational History of Spaces under National Socialism', in *Heimat, Region, and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism*, ed. by Maiken Umbach and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–22.

82. Harold Hammer-Schenk, *Synagogen in Deutschland: Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (1780–1933)* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1981), pp. 197–202.

83. Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts*, pp. 292–3.

84. Isidore Harris, 'Worms and its Jewish Legends', in *The Sunday at Home: a Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, 1 January 1896, p. 635. ProQuest.

85. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 177–8.

86. Henry R. Huttenbach, *The Destruction of the Jewish Community of Worms 1933–1945* (New York, NY: The Memorial Committee of Jewish Victims of Nazism from Worms, 1981), p. xi.

87. Roemer, *German City*, pp. 60, 98.

88. Ibid., p. 12.

89. Harris, 'Worms and its Jewish Legends', p. 636.

90. Cluse and others, *ShUM Sites*, p. 97.

91. Roemer, *German City*, p. 181.

92. Allan Arkush, 'Next Year on the Rhine', review of *German City, Jewish Memory: The Story of Worms*, by Nils Roemer, *Jewish Review of Books* (Autumn 2011), p. 17.

93. Alfred Epstein, 'Nach dem Nationalsozialismus (1945 bis heute)', in *Juden in Mainz: Katalog zur Ausstellung der Stadt Mainz im Rathaus-Foyer*, ed. by Friedrich Schütz (Mainz: Stadtverwaltung Mainz, 1978), p. 96 <https://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm> [accessed 13 April 2021].

94. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Building After Auschwitz: Jewish Architecture and the Memory of the Holocaust* (New Haven. CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 46.

95. Huttenbach, *The Destruction*, pp. 4–5, 18–46.

96. 'Empörung über Anschlag auf Synagoge', *Der Spiegel*, 17 May 2010 <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/worms-empoerung-ueber-anschlag-auf-synagoge-a-695226.html> [accessed 15 April 2021].

97. Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 13–15.

98. The exact nature of these power struggles, continuities, and memory-work at the Mainz and Speyer sites, along with Worms's, is the subjects of the rest of the author's dissertation work not included in this article.

99. Till Briegleb, 'Neue Synagoge, alter Stil', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 February 2021 <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/hamburg-synagoge-bornplatzsynagoge-juedische-gemeinde-holocaust-shoa-architektur-wiederaufbau-1.5215269> [accessed 15 April 2021].

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Stadtarchiv Worms, Germany, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10
Ernst Wörner, 4
Ramessos, 9

Competing interests
The author declares none.

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