



4.9 The Altes Museum in Berlin, by Shinkel, contains references to ancient Greek architecture and yet was extraordinarily contemporary in other ways. It was later to become the backdrop for the hideous rallies of Nazi Germany. My only experience of it until the demolition of the Berlin Wall was from historic footage of these awful events. So strong were these images that the space continued to ‘speak’ of them to me on my first visit, and I could not help but feel uncomfortable with the way the tourists around me seemed oblivious to this! This place had perhaps one of the most complex and confusing layers of meaning of space I have ever experienced

at this place apparently oblivious to its terrible past. Then we go inside this extraordinary building and find it full of the art of the socialist democratic republic of East Germany. I cannot now think of this building without all these confusing and powerful associations; it is absolutely laden with meanings that sit uneasily together.

This at least suggests that buildings and features of buildings can acquire meanings for a particular group of people – perhaps because of some events actually unconnected with the spatial or material forms, but simply because they happened there. Other associations might be with the events for which the building was constructed and with the people and organizations behind those events, and consequently with their values and behaviour. Next, we might associate elements of buildings with other buildings either in the past or present. Architects of course are much more likely to make such associations than the rest of us, and the whole post-modern architectural movement is built on intellectual games played by architects with this kind of material. This can become a sort of secret language or a kind of visual jargon quite beyond those outside the circle of aficionados. Even when not playing