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Introduction

In 1945, following the defeat of the German military, Germany's cities, including its capital, Berlin, were left in ruins. The German fiction films made in the four years after the end of World War II are largely set in the country's devastated cities. They became known as "rubble films" (*Trümmerfilme*), a label that focuses attention on the presence of the ravaged urban landscape within the films. [1]

Scholars have understood rubble films as artefacts of national reckoning. For instance, Robert Shandley defines them as "films that take the *mise-en-scène* of destroyed Germany as a background and metaphor of the destruction of Germans' own sense of themselves". However, this definition, in which place is either "background" or "metaphor", risks overlooking the power of specific locations captured by the films, even as it asserts the broader significance of Germany's ruined spaces within the cinema of the period. [2]

Some attention has been paid to the ways the characteristic portrayal of destruction in these films shapes – or obscures – the meanings and perceived causes of the ruins they show. Under the title, "Rubble without a Cause", Wilfried Wilms argues that the air war that was responsible for most of the damage is rarely acknowledged on screen. Eric Rentschler writes that "the rubble film stylizes and transfigures" reality [3] and that the rubble itself "assumes a mythic status within a vanquished nation's fantasy of reconstruction" [4] – leaving little room

for careful reflection on its causation. Ruins are complex structures, carrying the traces of times past without making those times easily legible. This is why the inclusion of archival footage of pre-war, undamaged Berlin in two of the period's films is so striking: it reveals a moment in the ruins' past lives… although, I will argue when discussing what the archival footage shows, there are issues of legibility here too.

This article brings together two of the period's films – *And the Heavens above Us* (*…und über uns der Himmel*, 1947) and *Marriage in the Shadows* (*Ehe im Schatten*, 1948) – to explore their use of archival footage of a single recognisable location. I use a particular understanding of the function and legibility of archival images of place in fiction films, drawing on the work of Jaimie Baron and Priya Jaikumar. Specifically, I argue that archival images carry no clear fixed meaning, even as they appear to offer direct access to the past. When inserted into fiction films, their meaning emerges from the interplay between what they show, the ways they are contextualised within the narrative, and the prior knowledge the audience brings to them. These three elements will be discussed throughout the article. Through their combination, archival images of place can be found to construct competing – and politically charged – narratives about the country's past, present, and future.

And the Heavens above Us and *Marriage in the Shadows* feature archival footage of the same Berlin location – Breitscheidplatz (until 1947 named Auguste-Viktoria-Platz), home to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church – but do so in strikingly different ways. In both films, archival images are used not simply to evoke a lost past, but to shape how the city's destruction, and the history behind it, is to be interpreted. In each case, the footage serves a distinct ideological function: either to obscure the history of persecution that preceded the

city's destruction, or to bring it into view. And so, in this article, I explore how archival footage of a single location can be used to tell different stories about the past. This illuminates how the richness of images of real places enables them to serve both as records of the past and as sites where political and historical questions are contested.

Archival Footage and the Cinematic Representation of Place

As Elena Gorfinkel and John David Rhodes argue, "the particularizing lens of place" offers a heuristic that can produce both "new readings of individual moving image artifacts" and "a new understanding of how the moving image […] constitutes itself in and through emplacement". [5] It should also be acknowledged – as Gorfinkel and Rhodes do – that an image of a particular place is also an image of that place at a particular time: they write, "we are interested in how films – whether they are fictional or documentary – can act as archives of specific places". [6] But when a fiction film incorporates archival footage, the idea of films as "archives of specific places" becomes less straightforward: this footage is both a record of a place in the past and becomes part of a newly constructed narrative.

Jaimie Baron offers a way of thinking about the power of archival footage and what happens when archival footage is used in a new cinematic context. Although she focuses on films that make extensive use of archival material, her ideas are also applicable to brief yet significant uses of archival footage in the two films this article discusses. Baron writes about film's "unruly indexical excess" [7]: compared to written documents, archival filmic images "seem 'closer' to the past they represent and are potentially seductive in their seeming transparent textuality" while also being "especially resistant to full comprehension or interpretation". [8]

Baron does not dismantle the indexical relationship between these images and the reality they record. However, in her shift away from the images themselves and towards their reception when they are reused in a new cinematic context, she recognises that their power lies not in any inherent authenticity but in the appearance of authenticity: "archival documents exist as 'archival" only insofar as the viewer of a given film perceives certain documents within that film as coming from another, previous – and primary – context of use or intended use". [9] The perceived archival status of these images, then, bestows on them a rhetorical power shaped as much by context as by content. It is this experience of reception that she terms "the archive effect".

A key mechanism for producing the archive effect is disparity. "Temporal disparity" arises from the juxtaposition of footage from visibly different time periods [10]; the contrast may be the result of gradual transformation over a long period of time, or of abrupt change. [11] "Intentional disparity" stems from the recognition that the footage incorporated into the new context was made for a different purpose, with different intentions. [12] Baron characterises "the archive affect" – as produced by the viewer's recognition of these disparities – as a kind of nostalgia. [13] Drawing on Svetlana Boym's taxonomy of nostalgia, Baron distinguishes between two feelings archival footage might promote: "restorative" nostalgia [14], a reactionary longing for a return to an idealised past, and "reflective" nostalgia, which might value the traces of the past that the footage makes visible, while recognising that the past is ultimately "irretrievable". [15]

While this categorisation of nostalgia has a political dimension, the opening gambit of Baron's book is to sidestep questions of power by redefining the archive as "an experience of

reception" rather than the holdings of an institution. [16] But the footage that is captured, preserved, and reused is often shaped by hegemonic forces. Priya Jaikumar is precisely concerned with questions of power and visibility when she writes about the ways cinema frames the meanings attached to a particular place. Writing about the depiction of India on film, she states that although "histories reside everywhere, […] institutional and visual regimes ensure that we only look at that which we are conditioned to see, or see in particular ways". [17] Jaikumar also highlights what escapes, or is excluded from, the frame. There is an "unverifiable substratum of the cinematic image" that she suggests film historians should seek to uncover, even if "we can never know" it: "the passersby who scoffed, inhabitants who watched, farmers who laughed, or children who cried". [18] This uncovering would have a double effect: it would open up the possibility of recovering suppressed histories, while also "undermining the image's exclusive claim to the real" [19] – a claim that, in many cinematic contexts, serves to legitimise the politics of a dominant regime.

Taken together, these theorists suggest that archival footage of place – particularly of an ideologically charged location such as Breitscheidplatz – should not be accepted as a direct record of the past. Rather, its meaning is shaped both by the conditions under which it was originally captured and by the ways it is recontextualised when it is reused. Therefore, to understand how *And the Heavens above Us* and *Marriage in the Shadows* make use of archival footage of Breitscheidplatz, we must first consider the meanings this particular location already carried.

Breitscheidplatz

The makers of *And the Heavens above Us* and *Marriage in the Shadows* chose to feature the same iconic location within their films, no doubt aware that early postwar German audiences would bring their own knowledge of this place with them into the cinema – knowledge the films could either activate or challenge. This section outlines the historical and ideological significance of Breitscheidplatz, of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, and of the Kurfürstendamm. By situating these locations within Berlin's history, we can better understand the narrative weight they carry in both films and the ways the archival images used interact with audiences' prior knowledge.

The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was built in the 1890s as a monumental assertion of the centrality of the German nation and of religion in the face of accelerating modernisation. Commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm II to honour unified Germany's first sovereign, Wilhelm I (Kaiser from 1871 to 1888), the church was designed by Franz Heinrich Schwechten. Its architecture invokes the buildings, and so the authority, of the medieval Holy Roman Empire, creating a vision of German power grounded in – and continuous with – this distant past.

The church sits in Breitscheidplatz, a square at the end of the Kurfürstendamm, a broad avenue lined with shops, cafés, and entertainment venues. While the church stood for the veneration of tradition – if not for tradition itself – nearby structures were at the centre of the modern urban culture that the church stood against. Its immediate neighbours were the Ufa Palast am Zoo and the Gloria Palast, housed in buildings constructed at about the same time as the church in a similar architectural style. However, in the interwar period, these structures were remodelled as lavish cinemas, joining the Capitol am Zoo and the Marmorhaus to form a district of picture palaces. In reference to these venues, and to the contrast between them

and the nearby church, Siegfried Kracauer would write that cinema's "community of worshipers […] can be content, for its gathering places are a worthy abode". [20]

In early 1928, Josef Goebbels, already a prominent member of the Nazi Party and, from 1933, its minister for propaganda, published an article in which he characterises the Memorial Church as an "anachronism" and as an "alien" presence among the "corruption and decay" that surrounds it, which he associates with the Jews. [21] He ends his article by imagining (or threatening) a "day of judgment" that "will demolish the abodes of corruption all around the [Memorial Church]". [22] This rhetoric and focus on the area as a particular location in need of cleansing led to action. The district's Jewish population experienced periodic outbreaks of violence throughout the 1930s: significant anti-Jewish riots, orchestrated by the Nazi Party, took place in 1931 and 1935, and again in 1938 during the country-wide pogrom known as *Kristallnacht*. These events were part of the increasing persecution of Jews, which would lead to genocidal violence by the state.

The area around Breitscheidplatz was marked and quietened by these actions. And World War II would bring further changes. The bright city lights were extinguished as blackout regulations were enforced [23], and in 1943, many local buildings were struck in Allied bombing raids: the Memorial Church, the Ufa Palast am Zoo, the Gloria Palast, and the Capitol am Zoo were all severely damaged. By the end of the war, the cityscape was one of ruins.

In 1946, German-Jewish philosopher Günther Anders encountered a photograph of the ruined church and wrote in his diary: "We should not *erect* monuments, but rather *adopt* things as monuments. For example, the ruins of this church. As a monument to Hitler. Every inch a

falsehood […]. What monument could be more fitting for an emperor? […] Preserve it! Leave it intact! Conserve its damage!" [24] The Memorial Church was, from the beginning, a nationalist intervention in the urban landscape that attempted to assert a vision of Germanness defined in opposition to modernity. For Anders, this particular history made it a fitting memorial that not only pointed to the catastrophe that had occurred but also suggested a cause. Yet by 1953, he had changed his mind. The meaning of the ruin had shifted: rather than provoking reflection on the roots or ideology of Nazism, it was being absorbed into a general narrative of loss and resilience that obscured its political specificity – if the ruin was even looked at any more. [25]

In fact, both of Anders' reflections were prescient. In the late 1950s, in response to public pressure, a decision was made to preserve the church's tower. [26] It now serves as a religious memorial to the war, as well as to the Kaiser, supporting Anders' later reservations about it as a symbol. [27] The doubts Anders developed about the church's symbolic weight inform my discussion of the way the church is presented in *And the Heavens above Us* – a film that preceded his doubts by some years.

And the Heavens above Us

Like many other German films of its era, *And the Heavens above Us* features shots of the ruins of Berlin. However, it is extremely unusual in contrasting this destruction with archival images of the city as it was before the war. In this section, I will explore how the film's juxtaposition of the intact and damaged Memorial Church creates an argument about how to understand the country's recent history.

The film tells the story of Hans, a soldier returning to Berlin after the end of the war, Edith, his widowed neighbour, and Hans's son Werner, also a returned soldier, who has an eye injury that has rendered him blind. In a pivotal scene, Hans drives Edith and Werner to a medical appointment. The trio travels in a small van through the quiet streets of the ruined city, past large, crumbling buildings and towering piles of rubble. Werner, in an effort to orient himself, asks, "Where are we now?". The reply given – "in the Potsdamer Straße" – prompts a dramatic shift in the style and content of the images on screen as a montage of archival footage, showing a bustling and undamaged Berlin, unfolds. It culminates in a shot of Breitscheidplatz as it was before its destruction.

The image shows the square in daytime. The Memorial Church sits beside the Gloria Palast. In front of the cinema is the entrance to the U-Bahn, with an advertising pillar. Cars and trams pass by the church and move away from it, towards the bottom of the frame. The pavement to the left of the shot is crowded with people. The camera pans down to follow the path of one of the cars, and the montage ends.

This downward camera movement, following a car, creates a visual bridge to the next shots, which are of the van still travelling through Berlin, and of its passengers. The vehicle rounds the corner, and the area we had seen in the archival footage reappears – but as it is in the present. The Memorial Church is the only recognisable building: it sits at the centre of the shot, and the damage it has suffered is clearly visible. To its left are other ruined buildings, and the road is almost empty of cars. There are few pedestrians too – and those who are present walk along the road because large heaps of rubble have made the pavements impassable. It is with this 13-second shot of the ruined church that the scene ends.

Here we have a clear example of Baron's *archive effect* at work: the audience easily recognises the inserted footage as originating from another time and context. This recognition is produced both through the contrast in content – images of a vibrant, crowded city replace those of a quiet, devastated one – and the contrast in style – the subdued, long shots of the present give way to a fast-paced montage. Together, these differences cue the audience to read the footage as archival, offering (or seeming to offer) direct access to the "real" Berlin before its destruction. Yet, as Baron emphasises, this appearance of transparency is not neutral. Indeed, it is a rhetorical effect produced by the way the footage is recontextualised within the film: its persuasive force depends not on its actual historical origin, but on the audience's recognition that it originates from another era.

If, as Baron suggests, archival footage can function as a rhetorical device – creating the impression of historical transparency – then the question becomes: what kind of past is being constructed through it here? Or, as Jaikumar might frame it, what "perspectival and political regimes" shape how this place is "produced as a visual environment"? [28] In the previous section, I outlined how Breitscheidplatz and its surroundings embodied ideological oppositions – between sacred and secular, tradition and modernity – that became the grounds upon which state violence was pursued. Yet none of this history is activated in the archival footage. The framing does not monumentalise the church or sharply contrast it with the activities going on around it. The shot's composition gives almost equal weight to church and picture palace, and their architectural similarities make them a compatible pair. While the area is busy, the bustling pavement is confined to the bottom left-hand corner of the frame: the viewer is not overwhelmed. The presence of scaffolding along the front of the church lessens its symbolic weight, rendering it not an untouchable monument, but a somewhat

vulnerable building among others, requiring maintenance and care. Indeed, the neighbourhood is shown as a calm and pleasant place in which two emblematic buildings (church and picture palace) coexist in harmony.

There are no Nazi symbols in the image or in any of the footage contained within the montage. This leads Wilms to suggest that it dates from the Weimar era. [29] But while the footage lacks visible traces of the Nazi regime, it seems unlikely that the images that make up the montage are meant to recall the Weimar era specifically. Wilms' surprise at the absence of Nazi iconography suggests an expectation that every part of Berlin underwent a highly visible transformation in the 1930s and that the city ceased to resemble a vibrant urban metropolis. But this assumption may not align with the reality of Berlin's gradual and less overt shifts during the course of the decade. Indeed, in a draft screenplay, the scene is prefaced with the note, "the shots are based on the material that is still available of the undamaged Berlin" [30] – placing the emphasis on showing the city before it was bombed, rather than before the Nazis came to power. It is likely, then, that some or all of the footage originates from the Nazi era, even if no explicit signs of the regime were allowed to appear onscreen. In this sense, the footage exemplifies what Jaikumar describes: a cinematic image in which certain aspects of place are put on display while others are excluded. The "unverifiable substratum of the cinematic image" [31] in this case would seem to be the city's political reality, and the persecution of some of its residents. The result is a version of the past emptied of its political specificity.

In the film, then, the Breitscheidplatz of the past conforms to the postwar "perspectival and political regime" [32] in which visible markers of Nazism are unacceptable, and in which

examining the political reality of the recent past would disrupt and endanger the emerging narrative of German suffering. [33] This neutralising of the history of the place thus enables a particular framing of the postwar present. In the images of the postwar period, the church has increased in significance, sitting in isolation at the centre of the shot as the van drives towards it. This compositional shift makes it the focal point of a devastated cityscape, and so of the devastated city. The camera lingers on it, inviting contemplation. If the church is a national symbol, then here it is a symbol of survival in the face of warfare and attack, rather than in a battle against urban modernity – as it once was. In this way, the film plays a part in the emptying of historical and political meaning that Anders observed. The church here is framed as a site of endurance, but its place in Germany's previous ideological battles is not captured: the conflict between urban modernity and the veneration of tradition that it once symbolised has disappeared. Just as the building has been hollowed out, so has its meaning.

The two images of the area around Breitscheidplatz presented in *And the Heavens above Us* thus work together to shape the meaning the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church holds. The archival footage strips it of the ideological tensions it once embodied. This erasure allows the subsequent image – in which it appears as a solitary ruin – to take on its own particular symbolic weight. It can stand as an emblem of resilience, unburdened by the conflicts the church once represented.

So far, I have looked at how the contrasting images of Breitscheidplatz carry meaning. But the juxtaposition between the place in the past and in the present also constructs a narrative about change – and it is impossible to read that change as anything other than negative. The archival image shows Berlin as a flourishing, modern city, full of life and movement; in the

postwar image, by contrast, loss and devastation are everywhere evident. This framing creates a kind of nostalgia, which Baron labels, following Boym, restorative: the film seems to exploit the absences of Nazi imagery in its footage to uncritically create a longing for a return to the Nazi period. The understandable wish that the city had not been destroyed leaves no room for an examination or rejection of Nazism.

And there is a further layer to the way the film exploits its archival footage. Audiences are supposed to take in the striking contrast between past and present, but within the story, the footage of the past is not meant simply to represent Werner's memories. Rather, because he is not able to see present-day Berlin, he uses his memories to imagine what the city might look like now. In this way, the montage represents an alternative Berlin in the present, rather than just its past. This double temporality is made more explicit in the draft screenplay. In lines of dialogue that were cut, Werner says to Edith (in this early version of the script, a newcomer to Berlin), "You'll like Berlin. It is a city!", to which Hans exclaims, "It will be one again!". [34] For Werner, the image of a lively and undamaged Breitscheidplatz is a vision of the present. For Hans – and the audience – it is a vision of a lost past that can be restored, implying the desire to return to – or bring about the restoration of – a politically unexamined past.

In the images of pre-war Germany used in *And the Heavens above Us*, we can see the ways archival footage is no more than a fragment of a much larger history. A second film that uses old footage of the same area of Berlin – *Marriage in the Shadows* – grapples more explicitly with this issue. As will be explored, the film contextualises the images of pre-1945 Breitscheidplatz in order to show how urban life in Berlin was transformed not only by the

Allied bombing raids but by the rise to power of the Nazis. It uses this archival footage first to grant audiences the pleasure of looking at images of Berlin's formerly intact streets and squares. However, it then withholds these images, as the central Jewish character is refused access to the urban life she had previously led.

Marriage in the Shadows

Unlike *And the Heavens above Us*, *Marriage in the Shadows* is set entirely before the end of World War Two. The film follows a Jewish actress, Elisabeth, alongside her non-Jewish husband, Hans, from 1933 to their suicides during the war. The bombing of Berlin in 1943 is depicted, but it appears near the end of a long period of worsening conditions for Elisabeth and other Jewish protagonists. While the film has been written about in the context of its depiction of Jewish characters [35] – a focus that was rare even within the Soviet Zone in which it was made, and was rarer still in postwar German cinema more broadly – its use of archival footage of Breitscheidplatz has not been examined. Here, I will read the film in a way that centres on these recovered images, which appear at three points, and examine how *restorative* nostalgia is avoided.

In *Marriage in the Shadows*, the archive effect operates in a slightly different way than in *And the Heavens above Us*. Unlike in the latter, *Marriage in the Shadows* does not offer an image of the present to contrast with its footage of the past. Rather, the audiences recognise the footage as archival because they recognise the temporal disparity between the time when the film was made and the origins of the footage, which shows a Berlin that no longer exists. This temporal disparity might also lead to a recognition of an intentional disparity: the documentary-style footage captures a positive image of the area in the Nazi period, while the

film asks its audience to sympathise with a fictional visitor to the area who is being persecuted by the regime because she is Jewish.

The first and second appearances of archival footage of Breitscheidplatz occur shortly after the Nazis have come to power. Elisabeth and Hans are accompanying their Jewish friend, Kurt, to the train station – he is leaving Germany because of the political situation. After a shot of the three characters inside a taxi, we see a long exterior shot of the city at night, as if filmed from a moving vehicle. The camera is part of the flow of traffic passing along the Kurfürstendamm and around the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, barely visible in the darkness. It is rainy and the pavements are not very busy, though there is a steady flow of people. What stands out clearly are the many brightly lit signs advertising cars, Meissen porcelain, hairdressers, a café, and, most prominently, the Capitol am Zoo cinema, where a film called *Hotel Sacher* is playing. Unlike in *And the Heavens above Us*, the focus is not on the Memorial Church, but rather on the cinema and shops.

Even though Wilms's comments on the archival footage used in *And the Heavens above Us* – that "the images provide no indication of Nazi rule [and could date] back to the years of the Weimar Republic" [36] – might also apply here, the cinema facade allows us to date the footage precisely: *Hotel Sacher* had its premiere at the Capitol am Zoo on 21 March 1939, a temporal disparity some members of the audience might notice. The contrast between the sombre trio sitting inside the cab and the vibrant nightlife around them is striking, and the film seems to ask how everyday life can persist alongside the persecution that is taking place. The context in which the footage appears thus transforms the apparent normality it shows

into something unsettling, highlighting the incongruity and contrast rather than allowing the images to pass as ordinary.

At the train station, Kurt begs Elisabeth to leave Germany with him, but she and Hans refuse. She expresses concern about Hans's career if they were to go, while Hans says that it is wrong to give up so quickly and to abandon "our Berlin". After bidding Kurt farewell, the couple are shown walking along the Kurfürstendamm. Once more, archival footage is used. The scene opens with a shot of the Gloria Palast. This time, however, the footage functions as a backdrop to the action unfolding in front of it, where a man hands out copies of *Der Angriff*, a Nazi newspaper. Within the film, the insertion of the Nazi newspaper seller is a rebuttal of Hans's optimistic view of Berlin – the film is insisting that the Nazi influence on the city is already visible. But I am interested in the reasons for and effects of this insertion, in which the film superimposes the presence of Nazism on footage of Berlin's streets. The filmmakers have had to add to the available images in an attempt to make visible the "unverifiable substratum" [37] of the footage they have used. They thus seem to be grappling with how to convey aspects of the political reality of the Nazi period that were absent from the footage available to them.

A few years pass in the film's narrative before Berlin at night appears for the third time. The structure of the scene may be similar to the previous appearances of archival footage, but the context is different. It is now November 1938. Hans has become a film star and wants Elisabeth to attend his premiere, a suggestion she refuses – understanding, as she does throughout the film, the threat he fails to see until the very end. He is therefore alone when he travels to the premiere and in a cab to an afterparty – a near repetition of the scene from

1933, but without the two Jewish characters who had previously accompanied him. Once again, we cut from the interior of the cab to archival footage in which the camera is part of the flow of traffic, sweeping along the Kurfürstendamm. Once again, the area's many streetlights, cinema frontages, and advertisements shine through the darkness and are reflected in the puddles on the road (it seems plausible that the footage representing 1933 and this footage were captured at the same time).

This is the last time archival footage of the area appears. And the date is significant: it is *Kristallnacht*, and the footage is followed by a recreation of the event, filmed on a studio set. So once again, the film contextualises the normalcy of the archival footage by placing it within a story about the persecution of Berlin's Jewish residents – a narrative intervention that works against the apparent truthfulness of the archival image.

Marriage in the Shadows thus explores the ways cinema actively created Berlin's image. The archival sequences present a city that seems modern and lively by placing the camera within the flow of traffic and choosing to film at night, making the many illuminated signs particularly prominent. As Jaikumar argues, such images of place are shaped by "perspectival and political regimes" [38] – in this case, by the Nazi regime in power when the footage was captured. As I have suggested, the apparent normality of the footage is unsettled in its reuse in *Marriage in the Shadows*, as it is made part of a story about Elisabeth's exclusion from public life and – more specifically – from the screen, a point the film makes by showing her husband becoming a film star while Elisabeth is forbidden to act. In this way, the absences in archival images and Elisabeth's absence from Nazi-era cinema within the narrative mirror each other. And so the reuse of Nazi-era footage in the film tells a story about place, but more

specifically about cinema's role in the Nazi period – supporting the regime and sustaining an image of Berlin and its normality – while, in *Marriage in the Shadows*, the reuse also exposes the politics that shaped its capture.

In *And the Heavens above Us*, the lack of any Nazi presence in the archive footage – and the resulting absence of any visual distinction between the Weimar- and Nazi-era city – makes possible a troubling restorative nostalgia for 1930s Berlin. In *Marriage in the Shadows*, by contrast, the seemingly benign archival footage is transformed through the context in which it is placed. Over the course of the film, we watch Elisabeth's access to the world diminish as she is excluded from the public sphere and the life of the city: at the film's start, she travels around Berlin and visits the countryside, but as the narrative progresses, she is confined first to the city and then, largely, to her apartment. So as the film unfolds, Elisabeth loses access to the attractions and pleasures of the modern city that she enjoyed and, as a successful actress, helped to create. After the *Kristallnacht* sequence, which occurs halfway through the film, Berlin's lively streets are shown neither through archival footage nor through studio recreations. So the audience, too, is denied the pleasure of the vibrant, possibly nostalgic, images of city streets that featured in the film's first half.

In this way, the film suggests that the loss of modern urban life that we witness in wartime Berlin – and that the audiences themselves are experiencing in the ruined postwar city – was not caused solely by the war and the Allied bombing campaigns. Instead, it results from the coming to power of the Nazis and the actions they are shown to have taken against some of the city's residents. The film thus suggests that the destruction of urban experience was

caused by the violent segregation and exclusion practised by the Nazis – and Elisabeth's isolation from a city in which she had once played a central role becomes emblematic.

Furthermore, *Marriage in the Shadows* implies the impossibility of any future in postwar Germany for some of those who were at the heart of urban life before the Nazis came to power. Through its depiction of Elisabeth's isolation and death, and the persecution of her Jewish friends and family – emphasised by the striking inclusion and then absence of archival footage – it shows the irreparable loss of a vibrant urban culture and the key role Jewish residents had played in shaping it: the nostalgia produced by the archival footage is therefore *reflective*. As in *And the Heavens above Us*, this footage shows us that Berlin was once a city – but here we are not offered the reassurance that it will be a city once more. The inclusion of the archival footage of Breitscheidplatz and the Kurfürstendamm is central in conveying the film's message.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined how two early postwar German films engage with a particular Berlin location. Both films use archival footage of the significant structures in and around Breitscheidplatz to recall the site, but they treat this footage in very different ways. *And the Heavens above Us* offers a nostalgic vision of the city before its wartime destruction, and offers the hope of a return to Berlin as it once was. By contrast, *Marriage in the Shadows* confronts its audience with the persecution that was taking place leading up to the time when its archival footage was captured, making it clear that a return to this past is neither possible nor desirable. Through these two examples, I have explored how archival footage serves both as a powerful and a partial record of a place – and the different ways

filmmakers can react to the dual properties of the medium. By focusing on the films' depiction of a single location, I have examined how cinematic representations of place are shaped by histories and ideology, and how cinema, in turn, contributes to shaping these histories.

The use of archival footage in the two films restores specific aspects of Breitscheidplatz's former life before its ruination. Yet the question of what Germany's World War Two ruins signify remains contentious. How should the death and suffering they imply be understood alongside other deaths and sufferings – above all in the genocide carried out by Nazi Germany? While each of the two German states established in 1949 had different and complex answers to this – including narratives of victimhood and periods of evasion – reunification in 1990 brought it firmly back to the fore. The Nazi period was, after all, "the last moment of shared history between the two partial German states" and thus provided (a not unproblematic) common reference point for negotiating and constructing a unified state identity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. [39] In the early postwar era, however, German cinema was already grappling with these questions, using images of place to explore how the country's recent past might be understood – debates that would go on to shape its future.

Notes

[1] The term was in use by 1947, as a label used to denigrate early postwar German filmmaking (see, for instance, "'Arche Nora' läuft vom Stapel', *Der Spiegel*, 18 July 1947), and is now used to refer to early postwar German films that to describe films whose subject matter and setting reflect contemporary issues at the time of their making.

[2] Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 2.

[3] Eric Rentschler, "The Place of Rubble in the Trümmerfilm." In *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 428.

[4] Ibid, 435.

[5] Elena Gorfinkel, and John David Rhodes, eds., "Introduction: The Matter of Places." In *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), ix.

[6] Ibid., xi.

[7] Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 4.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 7.

[10] Ibid., 18.

[11] Ibid, 20.

[12] Ibid., 23.

[13] Ibid, 123.

[14] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

[15] Baron, *The Archive Effect*, 130.

[16] Ibid, 7.

[17] Priya Jaikumar, *Where Histories Reside: India as Filmed Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 402.

[18] Ibid, 384.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces." In *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323.

[21] Josef Goebbels, "Around the Gedächtniskirche." In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 561.

[22] Ibid, 562.

[23] Jennifer V. Evans, *Life among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 54.

[24] Günther Anders, *Die Schrift an der Wand: Tagebücher 1941–1966*. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1967), 238. Unless stated otherwise, translations are my own.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Rüdiger Zill, "'A True Witness of Transience': Berlin's Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche and the Symbolic Use of Architectural Fragments in Modernity." *European Review of History* 18, no. 5–6 (2011): 819.

[27] A plaque attached to the ruin dedicates it to the memory of Kaiser Wilhelm I, and states that "the old church's tower should remind us of the judgement of God, which befell our people during the war years". A later plaque, from 1987, states that "it is a place that warns against war and destruction and calls for reconciliation in Jesus Christ".

[28] Jaikumar, *Where Histories Reside*, 384.

[29] Wilfried Wilms, "Rubble without a Cause: The Air War in Postwar Film." In *German Postwar Films: Life and Love in the Ruins*, ed. Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33–34.

[30] "'Und über uns der Himmel' [Film script]." n.d., 133, *DFF Archive*, Frankfurt.

[31] Jaikumar, *Where Histories Reside*, 384.

[32] Ibid.

[33] For analysis of discourses around German suffering see Helmut Schmitz, ed. *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

[34] Ibid, 135.

[35] See, for instance, Elizabeth Ward, *East German Film and the Holocaust* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), 23–46; Kobi Kabalek, "Commemorating Failure: Unsuccessful Rescue of Jews in German Film and Literature, 1945–1960," *German History* 38, no. 1 (2020): 96–112; and Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 81–90.

[36] Wilms, "Rubble without a Cause," 33–34.

[37] Jaikumar, *Where Histories Reside*, 384.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Schmitz, *A Nation of Victims?*, 3. This identity is one shapes how Germanness in understood and how Germany positions itself in the present, as shown in its response to Israel's war in Gaza (see Stefani Engelstein, "German 'Erinnerungskultur' and the Gaza War." *Interjekte* 15 [2025]: 9–27).

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Biography

Nancy Wilson recently completed her AHRC-funded PhD at Queen Mary's University of London. Her thesis, titled ‘How Will We Live?: The Spaces of Postwar German Cinema’, examines the presentation and significance of filmic spaces from an interdisciplinary perspective rooted in film studies.