

heute die Situation um das Siegesdenkmal unwillkürlich an die Haltung, welche die Sowjetmacht gegenüber dem Freiheitsdenkmal hatte: Einerseits wurde dieses „Objekt“ ignoriert, andererseits als skulpturales Werk auch toleriert; so ging man auf die Deutung und Reflexion von dessen symbolischer Bedeutung nicht näher ein. In beiden Fällen dienen die Denkmäler nur als materielle Symbole für bestimmte ideologische Schemata. Das Problem reicht jedoch tiefer als die Deutung der Ereignisse des 20. Jahrhunderts. Es liegt im Geschichtsbewusstsein und im Mangel an Zivilgesellschaft, was sich im Verhältnis der lettländischen Gesellschaft zum eigenen Kulturerbe ausdrückt.

SUMMARY

*The Political Interpretations of Cultural
Heritage: On History Policy and
Heritage Protection in Latvia*

Cultural memory might be treated as a kind of mental construction comprising, along with other aspects, the interpretations adapted to various historical narratives. The construction of cultural memory, therefore, includes a set of certain themes and stories as well as the selection of a particular set of heritage objects suited to these interpretations. It is due to the nature of commemorative objects like historical buildings and sculptural monuments that they have an important role in the creation of cultural memory. For the very definition of cultural heritage imposes ideological implications reflecting the current understanding of this heritage.

In Latvia today, the social meaning attributed to monuments and buildings of the Soviet era differs. Architectural objects are predominantly perceived in terms of their aesthetic qualities and practical function whereas sculptural monuments are more often regarded as symbols of Soviet ideology and therefore neglected and subject to decay. Thus one of the ways that ideology is represented within cultural heritage is the changing encoding of commemorative sites and their symbolic meaning.

The paper deals with the distinction between ‘monuments’ and ‘buildings’ as relics of the past, and how they have been perceived and even semantically re-shaped in Latvia since 1990/91. The examples chosen are linked to architectural objects from the 1950s to 1970s and to monuments like the complex built for the commemoration of the Latvian Red Riflemen (1970) that was redesigned in 2000. The particular experience discussed in this article reflects the peculiarity of cultural memory shared in present day

Latvia and shaped by the (absence of) history policy since the re-establishment of statehood after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Latvia today, the attitude towards this legacy of material culture is still uncertain and tentative as if these objects were placed in a grey zone with at most slight reflection of historical experience available.