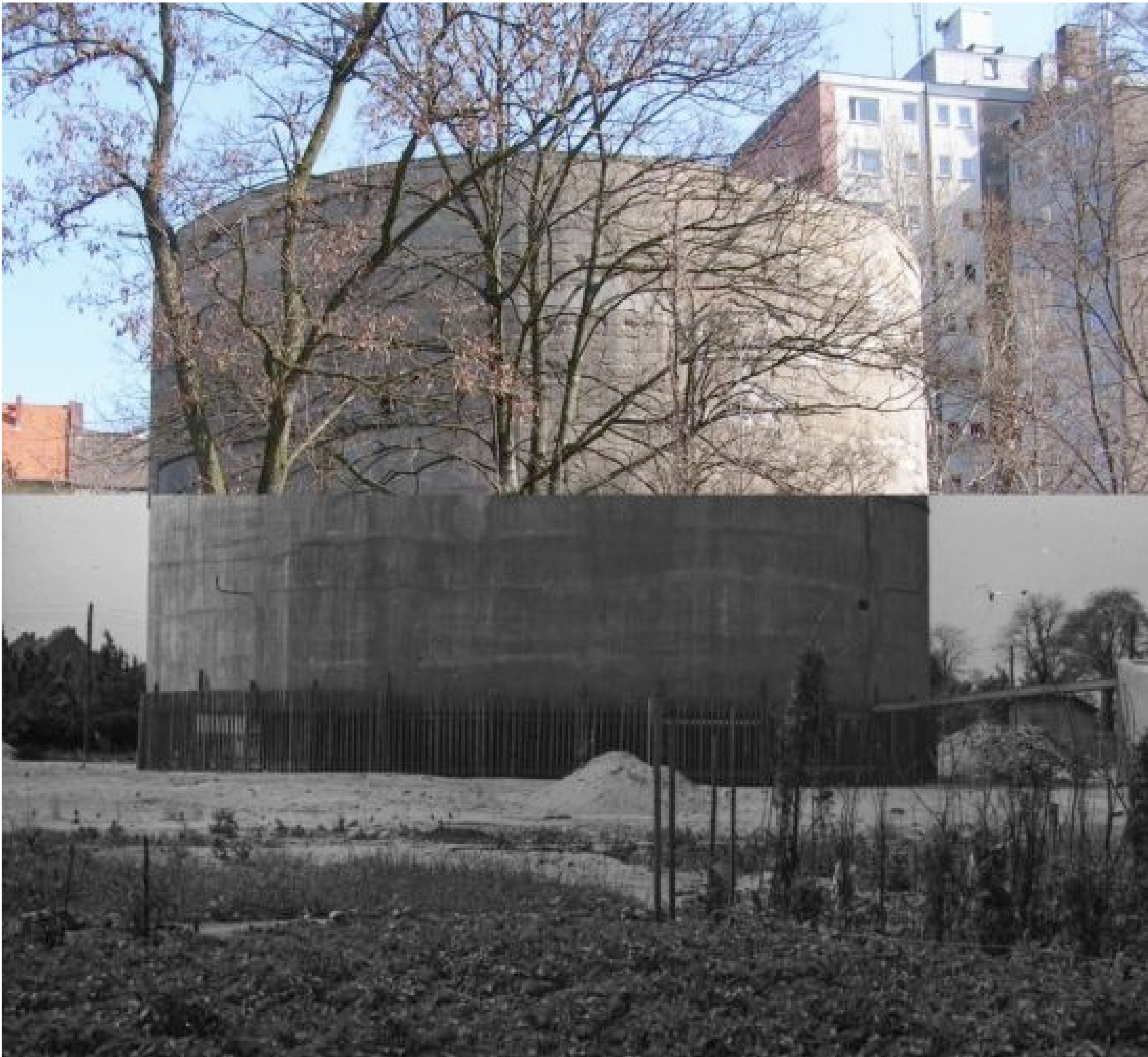


Dialectical Image



Caption

In this montage, I juxtapose a photograph of the heavy load-bearing cylinder taken at the time when the construction was just being finished in 1941, with the current shot used in the official wikipedia entry. The image highlights the difference between these two historical moments, but also suggests their spatio-temporal simultaneity. The data yielded by the cylinder was used to inform the construction of dams, train stations, high rises, and other heavy infrastructural nodal points necessary to handle the urban space. Thus, this technology, inspired by fascist fantasies of world domination, sparked substantial technological "progress," that is internationally applicable. It thus shows us how complicated it is to draw the line between culture and barbarity, and how the concept of progress proceeds dialectically. Or, does it suggest that progress is a fictional narrative saturated with teleological concepts of time? Doesn't the cylinder show that antiquity can be a moment infused with the present, as well as the other way around?

Kurek, Paul. 2019. "Dialectical Image: Heavy Load-Bearing Cylinder."

In "Toxic Memory: The Weight of 12,650 Tons of Nazi Concrete." In Visualizing Toxic Subjects, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

<https://tinyurl.com/y3fpdcod>



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Design Statement

This image focuses in on a complex, multidimensional object of study that is ripe for structuring ethnographic and historical inquiries into the toxic entanglements of the sciences of soil engineering and imperial fantasies. The ambivalent legacies of Nazi science experiments, such as the "heavy load-bearing cylinder," provoke critical reflection on facile and apolitical renderings of the relationship between time, technology, culture, and the built environment. By generating this multi-temporal rendering, the cylinder is enabled to function as a "scalar vehicle" (Hecht 2018), allowing me to guide the viewer across social, spatial, and temporal scales and systems in ways that complicate linear and panglossian historical narratives.

Project Statement

This essay grapples with a unique material remnant of the Nazi period: Albert Speer's so called heavy load-bearing cylinder; a massive ferroconcrete structure outweighing the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, and the statue of Jesus Christ in Rio de Janeiro combined. Originally planned as an engineering measure to prepare Berlin's unpredictable soil for the erection of a gigantic triumphal arch, this fragment of an unfinished project still haunts the collective consciousness. Ill-reputed as "fungus" in the public narrative, voices that demand its erasure summon, while others call for its preservation. Here I explore ways to structure a visual archive of the cylinder and critically analyze the "toxicity" or "intoxication" of this mute object in the urban memory. The questions is: shall it be erased, as it attracts neo-Nazis who are on the rise in Germany, or, does it have to be preserved for public memory? Can an object be toxic for our memory? How can we express that visually?

