

Research Report

Speeches by Prof. Dr. Ulf Wuggenig, Dean of the Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences of the Leuphana, and Dr. des Marina Gerber, Queen Mary University London, held at the inauguration ceremony of the Daniel Libeskind building ("Central Building") of the Leuphana University of Lüneburg on 03/11/2017 in the Daniel Libeskind Auditorium in the presence of Daniel Libeskind and Minister-President Stephan Weil as well as around 600 ceremony guests from the fields of politics, law, science, culture, and the military mainly from the region of Lüneburg and the state of Lower-Saxony

Prof. Dr. Ulf Wuggenig

Dear ceremony guests,

First I would like to express how great a pleasure it is for me that the building of Daniel Libeskind – without doubt a 'black swan' – that deliberately refuses to adapt to the Nazi architecture surroundings in the regional style, as was occasionally demanded, is being inaugurated today, sending a strong message in the direction of lowering regional disparities in the form of a large investment in the cultural capital of a relatively marginalized region.

A further aspect was decisive for the support of the project by the Kunstraum of the Leuphana University of Lüneburg from 2007 onward, namely, the architectural intervention in facilities that had objectified the accelerated militarization of Lüneburg from 1935 to 1939. This is also how all students participating in the workshop held with Daniel Libeskind exactly ten years ago in New York viewed it. With Dr. des Gerber on my left, one of them will speak in a few moments. Today, Mrs. Gerber is involved in the research and exhibition project 'Backstage.'¹

In Max Weber's famous speech "Science as a Vocation," one can also find a normative statement: It is the primary task of a university teacher "to teach his students to recognize 'inconvenient' facts."² This is a principle I will follow today.

¹ Cf. Exhibition *Backstage*, Kunstraum of Leuphana University Lüneburg 2017.
<http://kunstraum.leuphana.de>

² Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," lecture held in Munich on 11/07/1918 in the Kunstsaal of the bookshop Steinicke. In: *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*

“Backstage,” the title of the project I am heading in cooperation with, among others, the military historian Prof. Dr. Christoph Rass (University of Osnabrück), a member of the *Historical Commission for Lower Saxony and Bremen*, takes up Erving Goffman’s distinction between “frontstage and backstage”³ to address aspects of the military history of the region of Lüneburg that have been suppressed, concealed and also obstructed by disinformation. In methodological terms, the project is based on, among other foundations, big-data analyses of around 600,000 digitized pages of the regional press (*Landeszeitung*) from 1945 until today, and on the analysis of process-produced data from the military field. This is supplemented by the translation of sources in Russian that have been unused in Germany to date and are for the most part unknown, a task that Mrs. Gerber, as a Russian, is in a position to realize. The research as a whole is carried out based on military-historical and military-sociological approaches and the recent state of art as well as the attempt to further develop it.

When in 2007 we set off with students to Daniel Libeskind in New York for first model constructions obliged to “divergent thinking” for the intervention in the barracks structure, we knew that the unit (Infantry Regiment 47) that had moved into Lüneburg’s Scharnhorst barracks in 1936 was deployed in Holland, Crimea and the Balkans, among other places. We didn’t have the “Lions’ wing” – “Löwengeschwader” – of the air force on our minds at the time, and were fully unaware that in December 1940 the 110th Infantry Division (I.D.) had been positioned in Lüneburg for “Operation Barbarossa.”

I will limit myself to two results of the research work:

1. It was no other than the 2nd Group of the “Löwengeschwader” stationed at the Lüneburg airfield that was deployed in the Poland campaign and on 09/03/1939 bombed the area of Łódź, the city in which Daniel Libeskind was born just a few years later.

2. The second result has to do with the unsustainability of the thesis referring to the 110th Infantry Division stationed in Lüneburg in 1940, a unit anchored in the city via a monument, a memorial stone and – as long as veterans still existed – an affirmative “welcoming culture.”

edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, Abingdon 1991, p. 147.

³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh 1952, pp. 78ff.

Even as late as in 2015, one can find the following formulation in a document of Lüneburg's public prosecution department – chief prosecutor – that makes reference to the suspicion that this unit was involved in serious war crimes in Belarus in 1944. It is, quote, “not attested by historical research that precisely the 110th Infantry Division or members of this division actively participated in the transport, internment and murder of at least 9,000 civilians in the complex of camps erected near the town of Ozarichi in March 1944.”⁴

1. This assessment is based – this must be stated clearly from a scientific perspective – on an obsolete state of research stemming from the last century. More recent research clearly proves, against this assessment, that the Lüneburg 110th Infantry Division participated in an “elevated” position (Rohrkamp 2014⁵) in the outrageous war crimes committed in Ozarichi in three areas:

1. The deportation of around 3,000 civilians.
2. The building of four camps, two interim and two final camps, with an estimated death of up to 3,600 persons in the area of the 110th Infantry Division.
3. The allocation of 250 persons to the 110th Infantry Division, who were subjected to forced labor.⁶

This form of participation is proven by both the war logs of the LVI Tank Corps and the orders given to erect and guard the camps. The 110th Infantry Division is among the combat units of the Wehrmacht – this has been elucidated by the research of Prof. Dr. Rass since more than 10 years⁷ – in which “unbounded war practices against international law successively became patterns of action practiced

⁴ From the response by chief prosecutor Thomas Vogel to Bernadette and Joachim Gottschalk on 07/16/2015 regarding their charge filed on 07/05/2015 against the memorial stone of the 110. I.D. in Lüneburg at the Graalwal in the name of the public prosecution department of Lüneburg, p. 3.

⁵ René Rohrkamp, “Ozarichi 1944 – Die Beteiligung der 35. Infanterie-Division an einem Kriegsverbrechen gegen Zivilisten,” in: Stadt Karlsruhe (ed.), *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Last oder Chance der Erinnerung*, Karlsruhe 2015, p. 25.

⁶ Cf. Prof. Dr. Christoph Rass, “Gutachten zur Frage der Beteiligung der 110. Infanterie-Division der Wehrmacht an den Deportationen bei Ozarichi, Weißrußland im März 1944”. University of Osnabrück, 03/10/2017. This expertise was formulated upon the request of the Dean of the Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences at Leuphana university.

⁷ Christoph Rass, *Menschenmaterial Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939-1945*, Paderborn 2003; and also the film by Christoph Rass et. al., *Ozarichi 1944*, RWTH Aachen 2006.

systematically and on a daily basis.”

The representation and detailing of and the critical reflection on this fact, which is only weakly anchored in the social and cultural memory of the city and region, is now being conducted step by step by the university, initially in the frame of the “Ozarichi March 1994” section of the exhibition “Backstage,” but also in the form of translating available, yet hitherto unnoticed or hardly noticed Russian sources.

I now ask Mrs. Gerber to take the floor.

Dr. des Marina Gerber

For the first time, interrogation minutes as well as the indictments and verdicts of officers of the 110th Infantry Division, among others, were translated from Russian into German.

The documents at stake originate from materials of the Soviet military, including statements by the commander of the 110th Infantry Division at the time of the massacre of Ozarichi, Lieutenant General Eberhard von Kurowski; transcribed, extensive interrogation minutes; as well as the indictment and verdict by the Soviet military tribunal in Gomel in 1947. The verdict is based on statements by the commander of the 110th Infantry Division, von Kurowski, as well testimonies of the survivors. The Soviet military tribunal came to the conclusion that the 110th Infantry Division clearly employed illegal and criminal military methods leading to monstrous results.

On the way back to Minsk from Kalinin near Moscow, the 110th Infantry Division was “prominently” involved (Rohrkamp 2014) in the deportation of tens of thousands of Belarussian civilians. The generals gave the equally gruesome and criminal order to create a so-called “death zone” on their retreat from the east. As the translated documents evidence, this meant that the German Wehrmacht systematically destroyed everything that was alive, and everything that was economically, historically and culturally valuable in the area of Ozarichi. For example, the commander of the 110th Infantry Division, Lieutenant General Eberhard von Kurowski, set up four so-called “death camps” surrounded only by barbed wire. In the nine days that these camps existed in March 1944, more than 9,000 people died: women with children under the age of 10, old, sick and disabled people. After the 110th Infantry Division had participated in deporting everyone fit for work to

perform slave labor in Germany, its commanders decided that individuals who were unfit for work and dependent on help had no right to live. The Soviet army was only able to rescue very few of them.

In total, 2.2 million people became victims of the German Wehrmacht alone in what is today Belarus. The incredibly inhumane connotations of the Lüneburg barrack grounds cannot be rectified by any new building. But a new building can symbolically stand for a permanent reminder of these crimes committed by the 110th Infantry Division.