REASSEMBLING NUREMBERG,
REASSEMBLING HERITAGE

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This article explores the reassembly of the city of Nuremberg, Germany, through its heritage post-World War II. It does so primarily through consideration of two aspects of post-War heritage assembly and reassembly. First, it looks at the reconstruction of the city in the aftermath of bombing, with particular attention to the reassembling of historically significant architecture, though also in light of debates about reconstruction (of former buildings) versus construction (new build). Second, it investigates the making of Nazi architecture into heritage, initially through legislation and later through other accoutrements of heritage, such as information panels and guided tours. It is concerned, both for this specific case and also more widely, with what work the distinctive assemblage known as ‘heritage’ can perform, including assembling and reassembling other entities, such as place, temporality, moralities and citizenship. In this way, the article seeks to explore the contribution that an assemblage perspective might make to the understanding of heritage as well as to consider some of its limitations.

KEYWORDS: heritage; architecture; assemblage; citizenship; Nazi; Germany

In 1945, Nuremberg’s heritage and image lay in ruin. Most of its famous mediaeval Old Town had been destroyed by bombing and the city had come to be seen as a, or even the, Nazi city. The city faced the task of rebuilding itself, its present and future, and also, in a thoroughly entangled undertaking, its heritage.

This article looks at the reassembly of Nuremberg through its heritage – first through some of its pre-War architectural gems and, later, through its more recently acquired Nazi heritage. It is concerned, both for this specific case and also more widely, with what work the distinctive assemblage known as ‘heritage’ can perform, including assembling and reassembling other entities (such as place or particular temporalities). In this way, the article seeks to explore the contribution that an assemblage perspective might make to the understanding of heritage as well as to consider some of its limitations.

It has become commonplace in heritage research to highlight the ways in which heritage is defined and shaped to political ends. In such accounts, heritage is depicted as the outcome of particular political interests, and the past as manipulated to service the present. While any contest involved in this may be acknowledged, or even made central, what is usually given less attention is the way in which heritage acts as what Bruno Latour calls a ‘mediator’. That is, rather than simply being the material worked upon, heritage plays a part in shaping the interactions in which it is enmeshed. It does so, as I explain further below, both as part of a wider ‘heritage assemblage’ as well as through specific material, symbolic and perhaps even legal features of the particular heritage involved.
In this article, then, I am concerned to show how heritage may act as a mediator even while it is being reassembled, and, in particular, how it may mediate, or shape, a city and its citizens, present and future. It does not do so alone but as part of a complex web of cultural materials, practices and interactions. Moreover, it does not necessarily do so in the same way as do other ‘working surfaces on the social’ (Bennett 2007) that are produced by interactions between such diverse cultural agents. Cities and citizens are assembled in multiple and sometimes untidy and even contradictory ways. The focus here is on how heritage – both in general and in its more specific forms – tends to perform that assembling, and the particular features it possesses that help it do so.

To explore this, I look at the reassembly of two different aspects of Nuremberg’s heritage at two different ‘moments’ in the post-War period: the reassembly of the city’s Old Town in the immediate post-War period through to the 1950s; and the designation of the Nazi architecture at the grounds of the Nuremberg rallies as heritage in the 1970s and some of the subsequent negotiations over that designation, its implications and the material structures to which it was applied. Before doing so, however, I discuss further what might be entailed in an assemblage perspective on heritage.

Heritage as Assemblage

Taking an assemblage perspective on heritage directs our attention less to finished ‘heritage products’ than to processes and entanglements involved in their coming into being and continuation. While a good deal of other heritage research in recent years has also been concerned with the ‘construction’ of heritage (rather than taking its existence and legitimacy as given), an assemblage perspective also tries to avoid imputing ‘magical’ notions such as, say, ‘society’ or ‘ideology’ as part of its explanations. Instead, it focuses on tracing the courses of action, associations, practical and definitional procedures and techniques that are involved in particular cases. In so doing, it takes into account not only the human and social but also the material or technical. This typically has the following consequences. First, instead of reading a finished heritage product as an outcome of, say, a set of political interests, policy decisions or individual decision-making, the emphasis is on the multiple, heterogeneous and often highly specific actions and techniques that are involved in achieving and maintaining heritage. This does not mean that policy decisions and so forth are ignored – on the contrary – but they are not seen as a sufficient explanation. An assemblage perspective also asks what else helped to sustain their implementation, perhaps giving them a new inflection in the mediatory process. A usual consequence of this is that greater degrees of indeterminacy as well as, sometimes, of unintended courses of action, are made visible. Outcomes typically become more fragile and less inevitable.

Second, moments that previously may have seemed like clear punctuations – moments of novelty or invention – often become more blurred as we see how certain pre-existing elements are taken up into a reshaping assemblage. Although here I look at two different stretches of time which are often seen as belonging to distinct cultures of memory – sometimes defined as before and after 1968 – the detailed focus and attention to assemblage shows continuities alongside the more usually noted shifts.

Third, because of assemblage theory’s commitment to trying to avoid imputing analytical divisions a priori and, more specifically because of its rejection of scalar models in which, say, the micro is seen as nestling inside the macro, or the local inside the global,
an assemblage perspective potentially provides more nuanced accounts of complexes of interrelationships. This does not mean that categories such as ‘global’ and ‘local’ necessarily become irrelevant but rather than marking out the territory to be investigated at the outset, and being fixed points of reference within the analysis, the interest is instead in how such categories and divisions are themselves produced. Heritage is of particular interest here, for it is a supreme means of assembling and sustaining ‘the local’ but at the same time it assembles cosmopolitan and global elements and can itself be characterized as a ‘global assemblage’ in its capacity to ‘move across and reconstitute’ ‘specific situations’ (Collier & Ong 2005, p. 4).

This particular mode of spatializing – and its constitutive effects – is not the only characteristic feature of heritage that will be illustrated below. Another is its distinctive temporality. Heritage is always something from the past; yet its possession is equally ‘a mark of modernity’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, p. 180). It brings different temporal orders together, mediating the present and future; while at the same time ‘heritage interventions attempt to slow the rate of change’ (p. 180). A third feature of heritage that plays into its distinctive capacities is its materiality. Even so-called ‘intangible’ heritage is typically materialized in some form, such as recordings, and arguments about its materialization are often central to policy debates about its maintenance as heritage. Both the fact of materialization and its interaction with temporality – its persistence or decay over time – and more specific material characteristics, such as the way in which, say, limestone crumbles, can have particular affordances and, thus, potentially, certain mediatory effects.

Heritage is, of course, also a linguistic term with particular connotations that do not necessarily map onto those in other languages. In German there is a constellation of terms that might be translated as ‘heritage’ and that refer broadly to the same kinds of entities but not in quite the same way. These include, for example, das Erbe and die Erbschaft (Macdonald 2006a; 2009, pp. 9–10) which also refer more widely to inheritance or legacy, and, although primarily carrying the positive evaluation that usually typifies heritage, can also refer to the negative, or what we might wish not to have had passed down from the past. The term Erbe has been taken up recently in relation to the idea of ‘world heritage’ – Weltkulturerbe’ (though note that the German term specifies that this is cultural heritage in order to differentiate it from other kinds of inheritance). More usually in relation to institutionalized heritage practices and products, however, terms related to Denkmal would be more likely to be used. While often more specifically translated as ‘monument’, Denkmal is also used more generically, especially in relation to heritage protection and conservation, which goes under the terms Denkmalschutz and Denkmalpflege. The root form is shared with that for ‘to think’ – denken – which suggests a different inflection from the English term ‘heritage’, giving emphasis to historical relics as prompts to reflection rather than as a more organic and even unconscious inheritance. These sometimes subtle varied conceptual constellations may be constitutive of the ways in which particular debates and arrangements play out, even while, at the same time, many heritage practices are assembled from elsewhere and there is, increasingly, a globally applied set of heritage practices and institutions. It is telling, for example, that a recent German edited academic collection employs the English-language term in its title, Prädikat ‘Heritage’ (Hemme et al. 2007). The selection of ‘heritage’ as the orienting concept for the volume is an indication of its valence internationally, both in scholarship and through institutions such as UNESCO with its world heritage listings. The title also acknowledges, similarly to an assemblage perspective, heritage not simply as a topic for investigation or management but as itself
constitutive – and this brings us to a further characteristic mediatory effect of the heritage assemblage. A Prädikat is an evaluation or rating and to predicate is ‘to assert or affirm as true or existent’ (OED). Contributors to the book are concerned with what we might call the truth- or existence-effects of cultural products coming to be designated or treated as heritage. Heritage, as evident in the account that follows, can help make other entities with which it becomes entangled more ‘real’.

Reassembling Nuremberg after the War

Following the War, a massive amount of clearing of rubble, demolition and building work was begun across Germany. This was a necessity in the aftermath of bombing – Nuremberg’s Old Town, for example, was recorded as 90% destroyed (e.g. Bruckner 2002, p. 12). In addition to having a functional aim, building was also a moral project, involving the reassembling of cities and citizens both discursively and through the practices entailed in the work of building, reconstruction and preservation.

Post-War building was widely conceived as being of two types – Aufbau (construction) and Wiederaufbau (reconstruction) – and there were often conflicts between proponents of each (Koshar 1998; 2000; Whyte 1998). Those wanting Aufbau were concerned to get buildings up quickly in order to return as soon as possible to functional daily living; though some also argued for new construction on grounds that to try to reconstruct was based on a misguided attempt to deny the War years. Proponents of reconstruction – returning as far as possible to a pre-War state – argued their case most strongly in relation to buildings that had been deemed to have historical or architectural significance. This was frequently expressed in terms of salvage from loss, of restoring that which had suffered a terrible onslaught – and the parallels between the physical fabric of the city and its population were often explicitly as well as more implicitly made. There were, however, differences in view of how restoration should be undertaken – some arguing for reconstruction to create replicas as true to the originals as possible, others for a ‘modified historicist reconstruction’ (Koshar 2000, p. 156) in which only aspects or just exteriors were reconstructed; some wanting whole areas to be reconstructed, others just specific significant buildings. These arguments were mobilized variously in relation to specific contexts and buildings, including how much damage they were calculated to have sustained; and all of these various positions were evident in Nuremberg as in so many other places. Alongside the apparently objective technical calculations about how practically feasible reconstruction was, cases were also sometimes couched in symbolic terms. In Nuremberg, for example, a monument to the renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer had withstood the bombing and this was taken by some as a sign that the city, and especially its Dürer heritage, was destined for restoration – and indeed the Dürer house was the first historic building to be restored in the city. Nevertheless, although a considerable amount of reconstruction was carried out in Nuremberg and the city was generally regarded as one in which trying to preserve old buildings was a priority, there was also extensive construction of new buildings, especially for homes and workplaces. This too could be given symbolic inflection. In 1948, for example, a sixteen-metre high letter A was erected in the city’s centre by the Bavarian Social Democrats, as part of ‘Aufbautag des Volkes’ – ‘People’s Construction Day’ (Figure 1). As well as standing for Aufbau – of clean new building work – the A was to stand for ‘Anfang’, beginning (Mittenhuber et al. 1995, p. 24). The fact that this event was presented in the name of ‘the
FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2
Reopening of the reconstructed Dürer House, Nuremberg, 1949. Courtesy of the Picture Archive of the Nürnberger Nachrichten.
people’ shows the alignment of physical construction with that of constituting a new post-War citizenry. The crowds who came to the city centre to celebrate the day, and surround the sculptural A, were a physical manifestation of a collectivity of Nuremberg citizens supporting this project; as too were the large crowds who came to the re-opening of the Dürer House (Figure 2).

Not only were citizens assembled by the building projects, so too were structures to organize the work of construction and reconstruction. After the War, governmental structures, procedures and personnel had to be rebuilt, a process in which the allies played a major role. Especially in Western zones this tended to entail a return to structures that had been in place before the Nazi seizure of power. While in some cases the allies were involved in detailed policy-making and also controlled certain buildings and finances, most matters to do with construction and reconstruction were the remit of the newly reconstituted local authorities.

In Nuremberg, shortly after the War, the Americans (who occupied this zone) set up a committee to conduct a detailed survey of the condition of individual buildings and art works; and they also put in place procedures to prevent building structures being either plundered or further damaged by members of the public (Wachter 1999, p. 316). The physical state of buildings – what possibilities they afforded – was central to debate about whether to build afresh or try to reconstruct. Several commentators argued that destruction was so great in Nuremberg’s centre, the Old Town, that reconstruction was simply not physically possible (p. 315). Despite this, the city’s mayor categorically ruled out the possibility of simply filling in the Old Town with rubble and building from scratch (p. 316). That Nuremberg would engage in the reconstruction of at least some buildings was also solidified into place by a set of planning documents, media commentaries and two competitions for ideas – one for the public, one for architects. Although the competitions might have had the result of opposing Wiederaufbau, they were framed in ways that did not readily allow for this possibility. The architects’ competition was worded in terms of a request for proposals that, while not trying to reconstruct the Old Town exactly, would ‘be based on the same principles that had brought the city into being originally’ (quoted in Wachter 1999, p. 319, my translation). The competition for the public was also framed in terms of Wiederaufbau – its title being ‘A Thousand Ideas for Reconstruction’ (Mittenhuber et al. 1995, p. 24). That this competition was conducted at all is perhaps surprising, for it was the architects’ proposals that would be used to rebuild the city. But it was not so much a search for ideas as a means of trying to gauge public opinion and to assemble an engaged public – a citizenry of Nuremberg (Nürnberg Bürger). It received more than the 1000 responses anticipated.

Elsewhere in parts of Germany, there was opposition to reconstruction on moral grounds. In Frankfurt some argued that to rebuild the bombed Goethe House would be:

an act of historical amnesia. A reconstruction, regardless of whether it reproduced the previous building or abstracted from it . . . would erase memories of wartime destruction. Even more seriously, it would obscure the intimate connection between the heritage of Goethe’s thought and the rise of Nazism. Regardless of the great poet’s intentions, argued the opponents, he had helped to create a German tradition of idealism that led many German Bürger to avoid their political and civic responsibilities in favor of ‘inwardness’ and individualism . . . (Koshar 2000, pp. 156–157)
In Nuremberg, where buildings – most notably the castle – had been appropriated into Nazi propaganda, there were good grounds for similar arguments. However, although the debate about the Goethe House was known in Nuremberg, no controversy on a similar scale occurred (Wachter 1999, pp. 324, 322). In part this was due to the processes just described, by which some form of Wiederaufbau became solidified as the route to be taken. In addition, a 1921 building plan (governing basic principles) for the city was adopted post-War and this had the effect of legitimizing decisions as following what had been laid down before the Nazi period (p. 319). Moreover, according to Wachter, in Nuremberg there was no ‘dualism between an autonomous citizens’ culture and the city government’ (p. 324) as there was in Frankfurt. One reason for this, he argues, was that the council was careful to avoid bringing too much public notice to the reconstruction of historical buildings – especially ones that would not be put to immediate practical use – in order to avoid seeming to be dedicating too much resource to them (p. 323). Building and rebuilding were carefully intertwined, paying attention to the immediate needs of the city’s inhabitants while also arguing for the symbolic importance of the reconstruction of the Old Town as what the Mayor called ‘the beating heart of the city’; and citizens were more carefully enlisted through the means described above.

Even in Frankfurt, however, the opposition to the reconstruction of the Goethe House failed. It did so partly because, as Koshar explains, ‘proponents of an exact historical copy . . . benefited from the fact that reconstruction had an international constituency that went well beyond the Germanophone world. Financial contributions came from all over North America and Europe, including the Soviet zone’ (Koshar 2000, p. 157). In Nuremberg too, there was some wider financial support from the allies but the council’s softly-softly and locally-oriented approach had the side-effect that buildings that might have most gained from external support – most notably the Dürer House – did not benefit to nearly the same extent (Wachter 1999, pp. 323–324); though it was reconstructed all the same.

The potential of heritage to pull in international support was not, however, entirely ignored in Nuremberg. In making an argument for reconstructing historic buildings the city archivist pointed out that, ‘Otherwise no foreigner will ever come here any more – it is a money or currency question’ (quoted in Wachter 1999, p. 325). This was perhaps best recognized and realized in the ‘reconstruction’ of apparently traditional ‘little places’ (Örtlichkeiten) – especially ‘wine bars whose walls appeared to have been blackened by centuries of tobacco-smoke’ – ‘that had never in fact existed’ (p. 325). In addition, buildings that had been made more mediaeval-looking by the Nazis were returned to this – rather than their earlier – appearance (Schmidt 1995).

The reassembling of Nuremberg’s heritage in the decade following the War, then, was not all of a piece – this was not a complete reconstruction of the pre-War Old Town. Nevertheless it succeeded in reassembling Nuremberg as a city of significant heritage – as, in the title of one post-War guidebook, ‘A Treasure Chest Once More’. Here, the fact that reconstruction in situ seems to have been accepted as the reconstruction of an authentic original – as legitimately ‘heritage’ – rather than as a new building, enabled this work to be effective (Macdonald 2006a). This did not mean that reconstruction was forgotten. On the contrary, plaques were put up, giving dates of bombing alongside those of rebuilding – for Nuremberg as a victim of destruction was also another, related, and very significant, way in which the city was being assembled at this time (Gregor 2003a).

The reassemblage of heritage in post-War Nuremberg, then, was an uneven process of partial reconstruction in which pre-War elements were gathered together, some of
which had never been there previously. Not only was heritage assembled, however, so too was Nuremberg as a potential heritage location once more, and so too was a heritage-supporting citizenry which would appreciate the restoration of the city as a moral project. This process did not come to an obvious end but has continued and been reshaped over the years as new buildings or adaptations to old ones have been proposed and as heritage has itself been reworked and reproduced. Prior to the 1970s, however, although there were plans, procedures and offices in place for managing such developments, there was no heritage legislation as such. This was introduced in 1973. In the following section I turn to this legislation and, in particular, its implications for another dimension of the city’s post-War legacy: its Nazi buildings.

Legislating Heritage

The 1973 Bavarian State Historic Preservation Law was Germany’s first heritage conservation legislation, although there had been organizations dedicated to trying to preserve historic buildings for over a century. It was introduced primarily to try to regulate post-War building and became a model not only for other German states but also for heritage legislation in a number of other countries (Pickard 2002).

Its introduction was controversial in Nuremberg, not least because it meant that the Munich-based Bavarian Heritage Conservation Office (BHCO) officials could play a role in governing what occurred in the state’s ‘second city’. There was considerable dispute over the first list drawn up by the BHCO, especially over Nuremberg’s Old Town, which the Munich officials wanted to be listed as ‘an ensemble’. The consequence of listing in such a way was that all buildings would be covered by the new rules and any possible developments in the city centre would be restricted. Although there had been an emphasis on reconstruction in the Old Town, as described above, there had also been new developments, especially during the 1960s. After haggling and managing to considerably reduce the number of buildings in the overall listing, Nuremberg council finally accepted the listing of the whole of the Old Town as an ensemble.

Laws created primarily for one purpose can, however, have unanticipated application. In the case of the 1973 Bavarian State Historic Preservation Law, an initially unintended application was some Nazi architecture. As Gavriel Rosenfeld, in his detailed study of Munich, explains, the new legislation ‘automatically’, rather than intentionally, included Nazi buildings (2000, p. 260). The law was phrased in fairly general terms to potentially include any buildings of ‘historical significance’ of ‘an already completed era of architectural history that no longer exists in the present’ that had been erected before 1945. Certainly, a judgment still had to be made about ‘historic significance’ – and it was not applied to all Nazi architecture – but the effect was that this judgment was largely evacuated of moral evaluation. That Nazi buildings fell under a definition and set of procedures that had been primarily devised for the kinds of buildings that were already largely accepted as heritage – such as those of the Old Town – was not a matter of concern to the officials in the conservation office. For they operated under what Rosenfeld calls a ‘normalized perspective’ in which they saw these buildings as just another historical form (2000, p. 261).

In Nuremberg, however, the city council was extremely concerned because the site of the former Nazi Party Rallys – the Nuremberg Rally Grounds – was listed by the BHCO as an ‘ensemble’ for its fascist style of architecture and significance as a ‘witness of the past’ (Zeuge der Vergangenheit). Consisting of a considerable area of former marching grounds
(many of which had already been grassed over and some even built upon) and large monumental fascist buildings (some of which had been totally or partly destroyed or left to fall into decay), the site was not at that time marked as heritage in any official way. It did not feature in any tourist literature and there were no signs or other information provided on site. Instead, it was used for numerous everyday functions by the council and local people, including storage, sport and leisure events. The council was concerned primarily for the following reasons. First, the listing would potentially restrict further building on the site, sizeable portions of which had already been used for new developments such as housing and a concert hall. Second, it might mean that the council would have to dedicate funds for the buildings’ upkeep and perhaps even for restoration. Third, as an outraged Nuremberg city councillor put it during the debate about the listing at the time, it would have the effect of ‘cement[ing the buildings] into the catalogue of all those buildings . . . deemed worthy of protection’. That is, the legislation would make the Nazi buildings part of a ‘heritage assemblage’ with the risk that this would transmit the kind of positive evaluation that a heritage designation usually implies. Listed as heritage, the buildings would be fixed – or in the councillor’s words, ‘cemented’ – to the city, its citizens and its future. Since the War, the rally grounds had mostly been viewed as a dirty mark, best ignored, on the city’s image (Dietzfelbinger & Liedtke 2004). What heritage listing potentially did was to make the site – and its associated history – more visible and more indelibly part of Nuremberg. Despite these concerns – and, as with the debates about the Old Town, partly as a result of horse-trading over numerous cases and winning an overall reduction in listing – the council did not succeed in removing the rally grounds from the BCHO list. Nazi architecture was legislated into heritage.

Deleuze argues that an assemblage ‘can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change’ – processes referred to as ‘territorialization’ and ‘deterritorialization’ respectively (DeLanda 2006, p. 12). Designating Nazi buildings as heritage might potentially have destabilized the heritage assemblage, perhaps by throwing into question the whole business of designating heritage and valuing certain kinds of buildings. There were hints of this in the challenge to the heritage listing but nothing emerged sufficiently strongly to destabilize an assemblage that was in the process of being increasingly stabilized through gaining legal powers and the apparatus of conservation officials and procedures. Alternatively, as some in Nuremberg feared, Nazi buildings might become territorialized – stabilized not only as part of a heritage assemblage, with its capacities to ensure durability and confer worth, but also as part of the assemblage of Nuremberg and its citizens.

**Destabilizing and Recognizing Nazi Heritage**

The listing of the former Nazi site was not, however, followed by many of the other accoutrements of the heritage assemblage – at least, not immediately. No plaques were erected and it was still not included in tourist information. Moreover, in 1976, against the wishes of the BCHO, the city council removed some parts of one of the main buildings at the rally grounds site – the Zeppelin Building, which is familiar to many from photographs of Hitler giving speeches at its podium to rally crowds below. The council justified this partly with a claim that the listing had not yet come into full effect but also through arguments that preservation was too costly and that the physical structures had become dangerous due to decay. The latter argument effectively blamed the buildings – their
materiality – for the decision taken. While this was the last major physical destruction of
buildings at the grounds, development around the site and proposals for major alteration
of buildings continued over the years – such that in my longer account of this I have talked
about a process of ‘oscillation’ in which moves towards turning the site into heritage are
followed by encroachments on the area and vice versa (Macdonald 2009). The destruction
at the Zeppelin Building, for example, was followed some years later by the restoration
(with financial assistance from the BCHO) of its interior so-called ‘Golden Hall’, which was
partly justified by the council by a claimed intention to use it for the hosting of exhibitions.
It was followed in turn by the division of the old Zeppelin Field into football fields. And so
on. To see the incursions into the site as a consequence of the preservation legislation
would be to overstate the case but, nevertheless, following through the chains of
associations involved suggests that they are not entirely disconnected. In some cases,
explicit arguments were made in favour of destabilization of the possible heritage aura of
the site. Culture minister Hermann Glaser's notion of ‘banalization’ – which argued that the
site should be ‘de-mythified’ through ordinary trivial uses (such as storage or leisure) – was
widely referred to in arguments about how the site should be treated (Macdonald 2006b; 2009). In effect it was an argument for continuing what was already – and had long been –
happening anyway. And in effect it was a rejection of fully acknowledging and stabilizing
the site as heritage, and the status of Nuremberg as a city of Nazi heritage. Other heritages
— and other Nurembergs — were preferred. These included not only the mediaeval
‘Treasure Chest’ that had been reconstructed with the Old Town but also others, especially
Nuremberg as an important centre of commerce, of industry, and of left-wing politics (‘red
Nuremberg’) — all of which had historical legacies on which they could draw.
A telling playing out between some of these (further discussed in Macdonald 2006b; 2009), as well as a graphic indication of the continuing refusal to fully accept the heritage
listing of the Nazi site, was a controversy in 1987 over another of the main Nazi buildings
at the grounds – the Congress Hall, an enormous unfinished building modeled on the
Roman Colosseum. A private company proposed that it be turned into a shopping and
leisure centre, arguing that this would be important to Nuremberg as a leisure destination
and major commercial centre (Figure 3). Many members of the city council supported the
plans, partly because they were keen that Nuremberg further develop in this way and also
because this would defray the costs for the upkeep of the decaying building from council
coffers to the private company. The motion to go ahead with the plans was only narrowly
defeated in a city council vote, despite opposition from both the BHCO – on grounds of
the significance of the building as heritage – and a local citizens’ initiative, which argued
that to allow the building to be used in this way would be the equivalent of a repression of
the city’s Nazi past.
A citizens’ initiative is a legally enshrined right in Germany for ordinary citizens to
oppose actions by governments. In a sense we might say that the Nazi heritage spurred
the creation of this group of citizens; and the citizens who formed the initiative in turn
assembled more people and arguments to their cause. What they argued in particular was
that the Nazi buildings could perform an important civic function of informing the public
about this history in order to help avert the possibility of it being repeated in future. In
other words – in what was an important shift of language – the vast Nazi site should be
recognized not so much as a Denkmal (a monument) but as a specific kind of heritage, a
Mahnmal. With its root shared with the verb mahnen, meaning to warn, a Mahnmal is a
kind of warning from the past. This was the first time that this term, which was in use in
other parts of Germany at that time (Neumann 2000), had been used with reference to Nuremberg’s Nazi buildings.

What followed this was an intensification of attempts to assemble the site as ‘warning heritage’, though these did not displace leisure activities and developments. Most of these activities were driven by either an organization called the Pedagogical Institute, which was a semi-independent branch of city government in which some of those involved in the citizens’ initiative worked, or by Geschichte für Alle (History for All), an organization that was initially independent but later funded by the city council. There was also the more short-lived Congress Hall Initiative Group, assembled even more directly in association with the site. Over the following years, the initiatives included exhibitions, guided tours, information booklets and information panels. On the one hand, in their content, these destabilized the Nazi heritage as an assemblage deserving the kind of admiration that heritage is usually expected to command. On the other, however, they further stabilized it as heritage by making it into a recognizable site of history and providing it with the kinds of paraphernalia that accompany other visitor sites. Not least, the new tourist information made it easier for potential visitors to find the site. It also began the work of more fully assembling Nazi heritage to other aspects of Nuremberg’s heritage, though it was not until the end of the century that organizing the site became part of the remit of the branch of city governance dealing with tourism.

None of this is to say, however, that the Nazi heritage could straightforwardly become a component of Nuremberg’s existing heritage assemblage – that is, that it carried no risk of destabilization or deterritorialization. On the contrary, it called for special treatment, partly because of its tension with the worth-conferring capacities of heritage. This had to be unsettled and turned to educational purposes. So, for example, while the
city council approved the building of one of the most visible and expensive accoutrements of heritage – an information centre – and while this was officially part of the museum service, it was not called a ‘museum’ because this might imply a positive evaluation of the worth of the subject matter. Instead, the new centre, opened in 2001, was called a Documentation Centre – ‘documentation’ being more associated with academia than tourist sites. In its materialization too, the Documentation Centre was designed to avoid being seen as conventional heritage or endorsement. The winning architectural proposal was for a glass and metal ‘stake’ through the Congress Hall – described as ‘cutting through’ the Nazi building (Figure 4). And while the Centre does contain a café and shop – other typical features of visitor attractions – these are low-key, the latter containing only books related to the subject-matter.

In developing its Nazi sites as warning heritage in this way, Nuremberg was not alone. In many other parts of Germany, and indeed in other countries too, there has been a considerable expansion since the 1980s in using former sites of atrocity in this way. And while sites such as the rally grounds, which were not directly sites of victims, were in many ways more problematic – because of their potential endorsement effect – there were other instances of perpetrator-sites, such as the excavated remains of the SS and Gestapo headquarters in Berlin, whose display (resulting in an exhibition called The Topography of Terror) had been much discussed by the time that Nuremberg began to develop its Documentation Centre. Local activists (including those working in the Pedagogical Institute and Geschichte für Alle) incorporated such examples in their arguments about why Nuremberg and its citizens should publicly acknowledge their terrible heritage and take on the role of reminding for the sake of the future. Nuremberg’s citizens were

FIGURE 4
effectively positioned as moral guardians – safeguarding the heritage for the sake of safeguarding the future. They were so, moreover, not only in relation to the future of the city’s own inhabitants but also citizens of (the new, post-unification) Germany, or Europe and even the world (see Macdonald 2009, pp. 116–120).

**Nazi Heritage and Human Rights**

An important part of assembling Nurembergers, Nuremberg and Nazi heritage to this role of ‘warning’ and ‘guarding’ – and to elevating this beyond a local concern – was the global assemblage of Human Rights. There were historical components available for such a reassemblage, the Nuremberg trials being usually seen as the first international trials and the precursor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nevertheless, before the 1990s this was not an association that had been made explicit through the city’s self-presentation. The trial courtroom, for example, was only opened for visitors in 2000, and then only at restricted times. (An information centre at the court is due to open in 2010.) The explicit articulation to Human Rights, however, linked the city into a network of international organizations and its scale-shifting had implications for how the city was seen and could operate.10

The way that Nuremberg became coupled to a global Human Rights assemblage highlights how international connections may work in practice as well as their contingency. In 1988 the city council put out a tender for a new architectural and art development for the refurbished Germanic National Museum. Israeli artist Dani Karavan won the commission primarily because he managed to solve an awkward architectural dilemma in a particularly elegant way. In the working up of his design he proposed that the street of pillars that he had drawn would be a Street of Human Rights, each pillar bearing one of the statements of the Universal Declaration (Figure 5). And although some in the city were initially nervous of the idea of Nuremberg daring to call itself a City of Human Rights, by the time of the unveiling of the sculpture in 1993, Karavan’s proposal had taken hold and the unveiling was accompanied by a conference on Human Rights – bringing together numerous famous activists and commentators from around the world – and the announcement of a biannual Human Rights award to be funded by the city. Subsequently, the council also approved a biannual film festival on Human Rights and set up an office of Human Rights, directly accountable to the mayor; and in 2000, the city was awarded a prize by UNESCO for its Human Rights initiatives. Opening the new Documentation Centre at the former Nazi Party rally grounds was presented in official documents and speeches as a further important substantiation of the commitment to Human Rights.

Making Nuremberg’s Nazi heritage a component of an assemblage of Human Rights education enabled those involved in Nuremberg’s official self-presentation, especially various agencies of city governance, to draw attention to other atrocities and abuses beyond the locality and the nation. This does not necessarily lessen the crimes committed by the Nazis, especially where what is being emphasized is the continuing occurrence of Human Rights abuse. Nevertheless, following the empirical realization of the Human Rights assemblage in the Nuremberg case suggests that the shift of scale may lead to certain components falling out of the assemblage. In particular, scaling to the global seemed to displace – or further stabilize an existing partial displacement of – some aspects of the local. Certainly, Nuremberg remained in the assemblage as a historical generator of,
first, terror and then as the beginning of Human Rights (via the trials). What was not part of the assemblage, however, were some of the local and placed aspects of the Nazi past in Nuremberg and most of the continuities between past and present.

In particular, what was occluded by the shift of scale was attention to the particular social, political and especially business relations of the city – matters such as which firms had supported the Nazi regime and had used slave labour. Some of these firms are still in operation today and have either only recently settled compensation claims or are in the business of contesting or acceding to them. While these did not necessarily have to be ignored, or disassembled by the Human Rights assemblage, in practice this was what occurred. Moreover, in some cases the emphasis on Human Rights, and the claims of what the city was doing, were used instrumentally by politicians to enable this displacement. For example, in 1997 the new CSU (Christian Socialist Union) mayor made much of the city’s human rights initiatives in countering objections to his proposal to confer honorary citizenship on a major industrialist whose company had manufactured armaments and used slave labour during the War (Gregor 2003b). The mayor’s argument in effect was: how could a city that was being so evidently open and honest about its past, and was doing so much to highlight Human Rights abuses, possibly be accused of paying insufficient attention to that past and its political ramifications?

Reflections

In this article I have been concerned to explore some of the work that heritage – in various forms – has done in the reassembly of Nuremberg and its citizens post-War; and in
the process to consider some of the particular capacities of the ‘heritage-assemblage’. In these final paragraphs, I want to draw on some of that to add some reflections on the assemblage perspective itself. Because ‘assemblage theory’ is not a fully agreed-upon set of ideas, some and perhaps all of my comments on its possible limitations might be argued to be covered by parts of the work of some assemblage theorists (see note 3). I offer them here, nonetheless, as a stimulus to further debate and possible correction.

As I noted above, one much-noted feature of an assemblage perspective is its emphasis on the mediatory effects of materiality. In the Nuremberg case there are many examples of how buildings’ materiality co-shapes the events that ensue – for example, whether a war-damaged building can be restored or not. Equally, however, it is clear that human decision-making and conceptual categories (e.g. heritage) can override this. For example, in the case of two equally war-damaged buildings, one may be judged ‘restorable’ – especially if ‘heritage’ – and the other not. This raises questions about how much agency an analyst should attribute to the buildings themselves, and how far analysis should seek to go beyond the claims of the human players involved. People, in Nuremberg and elsewhere, frequently attribute agency to materials. For example, some commentators in Nuremberg worried that restoring Nazi buildings might give them power to beguile their viewers into sympathy with the Nazi project; or, as described above, Nuremberg council claimed that it was the fault of the Zeppelin building (and indirectly of the Nazis for their earlier shoddy workmanship) that it needed to be partly destroyed. Making such attributions of agency can, however, also have the effect of demoting human agency, especially in morally-fraught contexts (Macdonald 2006b). Whether a social or cultural account should stick close to the actors and go along with this is a question which assemblage theory has not, perhaps, sufficiently addressed. Intentionality, even if inevitably mediated in practice, is important too – as Nazism shows us in particularly disturbing forms.

In addition to highlighting materiality as mediatory, the account above also frequently gives attention to linguistic and conceptual classifications, inflections and connotations, as constitutive parts of the course of events. For example, the distinction between Aufbau and Wiederaufbau and its application, or the shift from Denkmal to Mahnmal, motivates particular actions and has certain ramifications. While consideration of language, classification and meaning is not ruled out by an assemblage perspective, it is given relatively little emphasis. Yet, it seems from the case explored, these are often crucial in the course that assembling takes.

Any account of assemblage is, of course, inevitably partial – it is never possible to follow all of the chains of connections that might be involved. In this short article I have only been able to give an indication of some of the connections between human and non-human players involved in heritage assemblage in post-War Nuremberg. Hopefully this has been sufficient to indicate something of the range and mix that might be involved, as well as the mix and range of what might be called ‘local’ or ‘short-range’ and ‘longer-range’ players. In so doing, this shows how these can co-exist without tension and without separating into different levels as parts of the assemblage. However, as I have suggested in the discussion of Nazi heritage as a heritage of Human Rights, associations made (in this case ‘global’) can be involved in the displacement of others (in this case, certain aspects of the ‘local’). Following connections risks not attending to those severed or not made in the first place (see Strathern 1996) – and it might even deflect attention from them. Without a prior set of analytical concerns or some kind of framework that can alert us to the
apparently unconnected, might an emphasis on assembling restrict perception of disassembling – and even of dissembling?

An assemblage perspective can productively open up questions for heritage research, not least about the capacities of heritage and its implication in the production of other entities, especially temporalities, place and citizens. At the same time, however, it tends not to push in certain directions that, here, have nevertheless seemed to have been particularly significant, at least in the post-War reassembling of Nuremberg. It is hoped that this article might contribute to more attention being paid to some of these areas and questions, and perhaps to some reassembling of assemblage perspectives themselves.

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NOTES

1. For a useful account of directions in heritage research see, for example, Kockel and NicCraith 2007.
2. Latour distinguishes between the intermediaries, which ‘transport … meaning or force without transformation’ and ‘mediators [which] transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry’ (2005a, p. 39).
3. What constitutes an ‘assemblage perspective’ has itself to be assembled from various sources and the introduction to this volume gives a fuller account. I draw on Latour (especially 2005a), Deleuze and Guattari (especially 1987), DeLanda’s exposition (2006), and Bennett (2007). It might also be noted that Latour points out that anthropology often uses such an approach without naming it as such (2005a, p. 68).
5. It was categorized as such, for example, at the Great German Building Exhibition in 1949. See Ausstellungszeitung (exhibition newspaper) NCA AV Pe 10 2, 4.9.1949.
7. Rosenfeld’s translation (2000, p. 260), from Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus (1974, p. 7). The reason for the 1945 cut-off was in order to exclude post-War redevelopment.
9. See Macdonald (2009, pp. 60–61) for discussion of ways in which economic calculations could be made.
10. I have discussed this also in Macdonald (2009). The scaling to the global that articulation in terms of Human Rights allowed is in many respects similar to that involved in UNESCO World Heritage listing. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s characterization of the way in
which ‘World heritage lists arise from operations that convert selected aspects of localized descent heritage into a translocal consent heritage – the heritage of humanity’ (2006, p. 170) could apply equally well to the process of linking Nuremberg’s Nazi heritage to a Human Rights assemblage. Moreover, a similar process of removing ‘volition [and] intention’ (p. 179) from those whose heritage is listed can be seen in the Nuremberg case, though to very different political effect.

11. It is evident, for example, in the attention to representation in Latour’s discussion of ‘Making Things Public’ (2005b) – where there is also much authorial play with etymology. Yet it does not seem to be fully extended into any critique of the politics of attributions of agency or of the assemblage perspective itself, especially its emphasis on materiality.

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