Mediating heritage
Tour guides at the former Nazi Party
Rally Grounds, Nuremberg

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abstract This article draws on media theory in order to theorize the role of tour
guides as a form of cultural mediation. It does so by analysing the work of tour
guides at a site of ‘difficult heritage’, the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in
Nuremberg, Germany. The work of tour guides is here conceptualized primarily as a
process in which guides, and the organization for which they work, are engaged in
trying to encode preferred readings. The empirical study shows how this ‘encoding
attempt’ is a complex, negotiated and sometimes conflictual process in which guides
try to deal with the materiality of the site and the social dynamics of the tour group.
This has implications for understanding the nature of mediation and of different forms
of tourism.

keywords difficult heritage; Germany; mediation; Nazi tourism; tour guides

Introduction
This article explores the work of tour guides as a form of cultural mediation.
The significance of the role that tour guides play in the tourist experience is
recognized in a now significant body of research that draws on a range of disci-
plinary perspectives (see Dahles, 2002 for an overview). According to Heidi
Dahles, what these different approaches ‘have in common [is] . . . a strong
emphasis on the mediation activities of guides’ (p. 784). Dahles criticizes this
emphasis for ‘portraying [the guide] as someone who builds bridges among
different groups of people’ (p. 784) and for operating ‘according to a harmony
model of ‘mediation’, of keeping all parties involved satisfied’ (p. 784). This, she
argues, is problematic, not least because it ‘fails to capture the political com-
ponent of guiding’ (p. 785). While Dahles is surely right to be critical of a
‘harmony model’ which screens out the political, my argument here is that
rather than doing away with the notion of ‘mediation’ we need a more
thoroughgoing understanding of what it might involve. Here I draw on media
theory, in which concepts of mediation have been best developed, in order to
suggest an alternative approach to mediation in relation to tourism, and more specifically in relation to the work of tour guides.

In doing so, I draw upon empirical material about tour guides at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, Germany. This is part of a broader study in which I have been exploring the post-war treatment of the Nazi past in Nuremberg (see Macdonald, 2006a, 2006b). While the form of tourism involved in this case might be viewed as ‘atypical’, in that it is less concerned with pleasure seeking than many other forms of tourism, this makes it no less valuable for an exploration of processes of mediation. Indeed, the particular struggles involved in trying to represent a site that was built in order to enlist visitors to fascist sympathies helps to highlight some of the difficult – and ‘non-harmonious’ – dimensions that may be involved in mediation. Moreover, as contemporary representation of the Nazi past is highly political, and implicated in ongoing identity projects, this case also illustrates well how ‘mediation’ is not necessarily – and perhaps is only rarely, if ever – apolitical.

Here, I first briefly discuss some of the existing literature on tour guiding, before introducing ideas about mediation drawn from media theory. I then develop these further through a discussion of tour guiding at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds.

Tour guides and guiding

As Dahles (2002) points out, ‘guides are of crucial importance in cultural tourism, as theirs is the task of selecting, glossing, and interpreting sights’ (p. 784). Del Casino and Hanna (2000: 29) even argue that tourism workers are so much part of the performance of a site that they in a sense ‘become’ it. Guides’ mediatory significance has often been recognized through reference to them as ‘culture brokers’. For example, in the now classic work on the anthropology of tourism, *Hosts and Guests* (1977/1989), Valene L. Smith uses this term to refer to the local guides who emerged to present ‘Eskimo culture’ to tourists, and Dennison Nash (1977/1989), while not specifically mentioning tour guides, writes of the ‘cultural brokers’ or ‘mediators’ who tend to emerge to manage relations between ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’. In both of these examples, as reflected in the book’s title and many of the cases with which it deals, the situation depicted is one of discrete bounded cultures, that of the locals and that of the outsiders, the members of which frequently misunderstand each other. Indeed, in Nash’s theorizing, one result of an expansion of tourism tends to be an increasing polarization between the two groups. In such contexts and accounts, cultural brokers become the means through which contact between the separate groups is managed. The term ‘cultural broker’ is also used in this way by others, such as Christopher Holloway (1981), who, in a study of guides on coach tours, describes guides as ‘initiat[ing] the tourist into the culture of the host country’ (p. 387) – a task which may entail negotiating between providing information and actually performing and even personifying the ‘host culture’.
One criticism of the notion of ‘culture broker’ is that it implies a model of discrete ‘cultures’ and a clear-cut gulf between ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’. Such a model has been increasingly questioned within anthropology and tourism research (e.g. Abram et al., 1997; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Sherlock, 2001). Nevertheless, while it may be inappropriate to think of ‘brokers’ necessarily working between pre-existing ‘cultures’ of longstanding, most touristic situations involve organizations, groups and individuals who are consciously engaged in the task of creating representations of ‘the place’ or ‘the culture’. These are the ‘directors and stage-managers’ who ‘choreograph tourists’ movements’ (Edensor, 2001: 69), and often involve ‘professional experts’ who ‘help to construct and develop our gaze as tourists’ (Urry, 1990: 1). Such ‘culture workers’ are engaged in processes of ‘mediation’, even if the representations involved do not mediate between two distinct ‘cultures’ in the sense set out by Nash and others, and even if they may be being consumed by those who might think of themselves as part of ‘the culture’ being represented.

Rather than seeing ‘culture broking’ as the essence of tour guide activity, Erik Cohen (1985) – in an important article on tour guides – regards it as one possible dimension within a range of forms of ‘mediation’ performed by guides. More specifically, ‘culture broking’ is classified by Cohen as a form of ‘communicative mediatory’ work, a ‘sphere’ which also includes ‘selection’ (indicating that which is worthy of touristic attention), providing ‘information’ and, sometimes, ‘fabrication’ (inventing accounts or deceiving tourists). Communicative mediation is distinguished from ‘interactional’, which consists of ‘representation’ (which considers how the guide negotiates between tourists and hosts) and ‘organization’, which is concerned with practical arrangements. Despite the scope of activity covered by ‘mediation’ here, and the large number of sub-categories identified, Cohen’s complex attempt to set out the roles and activities involved in tour guiding posits ‘mediation’ as just one of two main types of tour guide activity, and indeed as characteristic of a type of guide that he refers to as ‘the mentor’. ‘Pathfinders’, by contrast, engage in ‘leadership’ rather than ‘mediation’; and ‘leadership’, like ‘mediation’, is broken down into a range of ‘components’ and sub-components.

While Cohen’s attempt at a taxonomy is useful both in distinguishing between different kinds of guides and the range of activities that they undertake, it is often difficult to see why certain activities are classified as they are or to know how to categorize empirical material. Although he attempts to relate his taxonomy to notions of centre and periphery – understood (though with further qualifications) as the extent to which a site is established as worthy of tourism or not – there is less sense of an overall governing model than in his influential typology of tourist types (Cohen, 1979). Apart from the centre/periphery division, it is unclear how to bring in consideration of the kind of site involved. Moreover, like other taxonomies of guides and guiding that have followed in its wake, it is not well attuned to the kinds of transformations and indeterminacy that may be involved in the guiding process –
something that has been especially well illustrated by ethnographic research
(such as Fine and Speer, 1985; Dahles, 1996; Handler and Gable, 1997; Eade,
2002; Bruner, 2005). And although Cohen refers to the ‘dynamics’ of the role,
and provides some interesting observations on what is entailed in the profes-
sionalization of tour guiding, the scheme here does not give much handle on
how to analyse the process – or cultural work – of guiding.

Nevertheless, Cohen et al. (2002) alert us to many aspects of tour guide activ-
ity that may need to be considered in its analysis. This includes not only such
matters as the ‘sight sacralization’ (see also Fine and Speer, 1985) that guides may
perform, but also their more mundane work of managing the group (something
also emphasized, though not really linked to the analysis, by Holloway, 1981).
Later, I shall turn to media theory for an alternative framework for looking at
the work of guides. In doing so, I will suggest that the term ‘mediation’ be used
to consider the broad scope of the work that they do, rather than to refer more
specifically to, say, ‘interpretation’ or to ‘making harmonious’. Moreover, rather
than taxonomically dissecting tour guide work into discrete elements, I suggest
a model in which the interrelationship of different elements is key.

Mediation, encoding and tour guides

According to Kelly Askew (2002), ‘[t]he term “mediation” – which together
with “media” derives from the Latin medius meaning “middle” – assumes two or
more poles of engagement’ (p. 2). Thus, in looking at tour guiding as a form of
mediation, we are prompted to consider the different engagements involved,
and the particular positioning of those involved in the engagements. As Roger
Silverstone (1999) writes in relation to media studies, ‘mediation involves the
movement of meaning’ (p. 13). As such, this

requires us to think of mediation as extending beyond the point of contact between
media texts and their readers or viewers. It requires us to reconsider it as involving
producers and consumers of media in a more or less continuous activity of engage-
ment and disengagement with meanings which have their source or their focus in
those mediated texts, but which extend through, and are measured against, experience
in a multitude of different ways. (p. 13)

A thoroughgoing account of mediation would thus require a tracing through of
the making of a media text/tourist site and the various engagements of audi-
ences/visitors with – and beyond – it. But even if particular studies do not cover
the full range of what might be included, they can usefully consider particular
aspects of the wider mediation process. As Mieke Bal (1996) notes of museum
curators, they are ‘only a tiny connection in a long chain of events’ (p. 16). So
too with tour guides: they are not the expository agents or the only mediators.
Nevertheless, as noted earlier, they play an important role partially mediating
between the site and its visitors. Interestingly, this does not have a self-evident
parallel in many other media studies cases, where audiences generally confront
a ‘text’ (e.g., a television programme) directly. As such, attention to the work of
tour guides usefully disrupts a model of a relatively linear process in which the
‘text’ is conceptualized as fixed and only open post hoc to the diverse ‘readings’
or ‘interpretations’ of the audience.

Of the many varied attempts to theorize mediation (see, for example,
Williams, 2003 for an overview), one of the most influential is Stuart Hall’s
(1980) ‘encoding’/‘decoding’ model. Put simply, this entails considering the
meanings, or ‘preferred readings’, that producers attempt to ‘encode’ into cul-
tural products (‘texts’) and the meanings that audiences (‘readers’) extrapolate,
or ‘decode’, from these. Particularly important here is Hall’s acknowledgment
that there could be a disjuncture between the meanings ‘written-in’ and those
‘read-off’, and that this was not simply a matter of ‘media effects’, that is, of
readers being ‘impacted upon’ by the media. Instead, he sets out the following
range of processes that can be involved in ‘decoding’: ‘dominant-hegemonic’
(identifying with and not questioning ‘the message’), ‘negotiated’ (questioning
or reinterpreting what has been presented), or ‘oppositional’ (rejecting or ignor-
ing the message). In doing so, he helped to open the way for more sophisticated
accounts of media consumption in which audiences are recognized as an active
rather than passive part of the communication process.

More recent media theorizing has sought to refine, complicate and to some
extent challenge this model. Hall’s (1980) important recognition that produc-
tion may implicate imagined or actual audiences, thus creating a feedback loop,
has been extended to theorize further the complexities of production (du Gay,
1997). Ethnographic work in particular has highlighted the ways in which cul-
tural products are not necessarily simply the outcomes of producers’ intentions,
and thus that ‘encoding’ cannot necessarily be extrapolated from the ‘media text’
(Handler and Gable, 1997; Macdonald, 2002). There has also been consideration
of the implications of different media, genres and their contexts for shaping
possible readings (Askew and Wilk, 2002). This has included, to a limited extent,
recognition of the variable materiality of different ‘products’.2 Such recognition
is also related to a challenge to the text-based model, which might be said to
over-emphasize the cognitive and ignore more sensory or embodied processes
(Bial, 2004).

Drawing on these various ideas, I suggest that we see tour guides as engaged
in trying to encode ‘preferred readings’ as part of a wider process of mediation.
The nature of their engagement, however, may vary: they may subscribe strongly
to conveying a particular account, or may be less engaged, or perhaps even
ironic. Their own positioning here is crucial. Equally, ‘encoding’ needs to be
understood as negotiated and sometimes even contested. Based upon the media
literature mentioned earlier, we might expect that that any attempt to encode
meaning – or make it travel – would be shaped by the following:

- conventions and restrictions of the medium (the guided tour) and genre
  (e.g., a city tour or a tour of a site of atrocity);
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- audiences – both those actually encountered on tours and those ‘imagined’ in the planning of the tour;
- the materialities of the tour context, including the place and space of the tour itself, and in particular the way in which, say, buildings, statuary, graffiti or bystanders may suggest readings that are not those that the tour guides might prefer.

It is important to see these as interrelated within a process of mediation and the attempt to encode meaning. I shall now turn to the empirical case of tour guides at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg. After a brief background, I look at first at guides’ positioning in relation to the site and the account that they attempt to encode. Then I turn to questions of medium and genre, before looking in more detail at guides’ attempts to encourage preferred readings – a discussion that focuses especially upon audience and materiality.

Tours at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg

The former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg lie just outside the city’s Old Town. Built between 1933 and 1938 to stage the annual week-long Nuremberg rallies, the site today contains several large Nazi buildings – most famously the Zeppelin building – in varying states of repair and large areas of grassed-over marching grounds. It is visited by a mix of tourists who are making dedicated visits as part of learning about the Nazi past – many of whom will have also visited other Nazi sites in Germany, such as the Topography of Terror in Berlin or concentration camps such as Dachau and Bergen Belsen – and local people who come for leisure purposes, such as picnicking or cycling.

While brief stops at the site (usually just the Zeppelin Building) feature on the itinerary of many, especially foreign, coach tours, here I am concerned with dedicated walking tours of the site. These were initiated in 1984, by the city’s Kunstpüdagogische Zentrum and replaced in 1986 by those of an organization called Geschichte für Alle (GfA) – ‘History for All’. Today GfA provides most of the tours of the site. Begun by a group of history students at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, GfA is a registered and non-profit-making organization that, as its own literature states, focuses upon local and regional history. In addition to running tours (of other places too, though to a lesser extent), it also carries out commissioned historical research and produces publications.

GfA tours are largely organized according to a ‘script’ that has been collectively produced and revised by various GfA members over the years. This is not a script that aims to set out precisely what guides should say and is not intended for word-for-word memorization, though much of it could be used in this way. Rather, it sets out the main recommended tour stops and for each gives a list of themes that should be covered and others that might be, together with information on the content to fill in these themes. There are some suggestions for activities or, say, making use of particular information boards, and, in addition, each guide is given a folder of pictures to use to illustrate points. The script
also includes several pages of additional information on which guides can draw to expand upon certain themes, a list of relevant literature (it being assumed that they are likely to read up more themselves), and a check-list of useful facts and figures.

Tours take about two hours. Group size varies, there usually being between about 6 and 30 people on each tour, depending on how many happen to turn up (no pre-booking being required for many tours). Unless specially arranged, tours are in German. Generally, groups are taken first to the Luitpoldhain marching ground, which is now grassed over though it has remnants of the staged seating still visible. They then walk to the Congress Hall, which was constructed to hold the annual meetings of the National Socialists, and to seat 50,000 delegates. What would have become the main hall is today a large unroofed yard, surrounded by the raw red-brick interior walls of the horseshoe-shaped building. A documentation centre, containing an exhibition about the history of the site and of Nazism, was opened here in 2001, located in an architectural structure of steel and glass, designed to be a ‘stake through the heart’ of the Nazi building.

Groups are then taken part way along the Great Road, the 60-metre wide, granite-covered central axis which links various parts of the site. Some guides take their groups from here to see the foundation stone of the never built Great German Stadium, or even around the lake (Silbersee) which has formed in the pit dug for its foundations. The stadium was to have been larger than any stadium that has ever existed or that exists today, with seating for 400,000 spectators – a fact which is always pointed out to tourists. From the Great Road many guides also talk about the other parts of the larger rally grounds site that originally existed. This includes the Mürzelfeld, the Mars Field, an enormous marching ground that was blown up and built over in the 1960s, and extensive areas of barracks for accommodating the hundreds of thousands who attended the rallies. Guides may also mention the Stüdtische Stadion – the municipal stadium – now used by Nuremberg football club and for other matches (including World Cup 2006) and originally built prior to the Nazi development of the area, but used in the rallies especially for Hitler Youth events, and the Strength-through-Joy village, which was destroyed in the War.

Following a pleasant tree-lined walk along a lake, groups reach the Zeppelin Building. Its marching field is now divided off into football pitches but the towers surrounding the former marching ground mark its former extent. One of the few buildings to have actually been completed, its upper galleries were removed in the 1960s. Guided tours end at the Zeppelin Building.

Tour guide positioning

In line with the analytical framework suggested earlier, we need to understand the positioning of the guides in relation to the organization for which they work and the script which is provided. More broadly, however, positioning also
needs to take into account the nature of the organization and its positioning in relation to wider society and politics.

GfA was founded (1986) at a time when the idea of ‘working through’ (durcharbeiten) the Nazi past, and of the importance of doing so in order to have a ‘healthy’ rather than ‘repressed’ identity, had become widespread within West Germany. Those on the left of the political spectrum, in particular, promulgated the idea that ‘facing up to’ the Nazi past was a necessary moral task, and in many places history workshops were established in order to accomplish this political-moral-historical work. When I interviewed Alexander Schmidt, who has been one of the main guiding forces of GfA over the years, he was keen to highlight the differences between GfA and history workshops, and to emphasize the academic and politically non-aligned character of the organization’s work – something that has been important for its continued funding by the city government under different ruling political parties over the years. Nevertheless, the founding of the organization and its tours of the rally grounds were clearly part of a wider movement – perceived as counter-cultural at the time – to publicly address the Nazi past, and Schmidt conceded that those working for the organization would be more likely to be politically on the left than on the right.

History students at the university have always been one of the main sources of tour guides for GfA and posters in the university, and word of mouth, are the main ways in which guides are recruited. As several such students explained to me, GfA tour guiding is attractive employment because it relates to your subject more than most other casual work, is interesting, provides useful experience in valued skills such as public speaking, and pays relatively well. While several guides stressed how important it was to appear objective and to ‘just tell the facts’, some came to such work out of a specific experience of anti-Nazi concern. One former guide, for example, described to me how she had been brought up in Wunsiedel, the town in northern Bavaria where Rudolf Hess’s grave is located. Seeing neo-Nazi pilgrims to this site politicized her and fostered her commitment to a different kind of representation of Nazi sites. Two others noted that their interest in this topic had been influenced by concern with the ways in which immigrants are treated. And even those who described their participation in less politicized terms nevertheless expressed a sense of commitment to what they regarded as worthwhile work – ‘it’s a part of our history that everybody should know, so it’s good to tell it’, as one guide put it.

All of those who act as GfA guides undergo training to do so. Currently this entails attending a number of training sessions (some of which I attended) and guided tours as an observer during the year and then giving a tour under supervision.

The training and the script can be seen as part of the process of encoding by the organization, and in theory there is scope for slippage between the script and the guides’ own versions of a tour. This is to some extent encouraged: the script states that ‘you can amend, expand or shorten this tour: it is your
tour’ (GfA, 1999: 4). Nevertheless, the fact that certain themes are listed in bold as ‘the most important’ and the script’s injunctions to repeat or emphasize certain points makes it less open than the idea of the tour belonging to the guide implies. In practice, the main variations made by guides are those flagged up as alternatives in the script itself, such as whether or not to go to the foundation stone of the German Stadium and how much detail to pursue. The training and script thus contribute to a fairly high degree of consistency between tours, as does the fact that the guides mostly come from similar backgrounds and share views on the importance of informing people about the past, especially this particular past. This is a context, then, in which guides are committed to the encoding preferred by the organization for which they work. (I never witnessed any ironic or dissenting comments by guides about the topic that they were addressing or the organization itself.)

**Medium and genre**

The tour script has been produced according to conventions widely shared by walking tours. Each tour involves one guide, who will lead a group for a designated time, moving from one location to another, and providing information along the way. Unlike media such as television, this medium requires that the audience physically moves to the place being represented — and, as such, it demands a greater degree of separation from everyday life than some other media (such as TV), and a fairly concentrated form of attention. The conventions of any medium have implications for both encoding and decoding. Only so much complexity and detail are possible within the constraints of time and the fact that the guide cannot assume much prior knowledge. Furthermore, the audience is in direct contact with the site as well as with the guide’s account and this potentially opens up a space for readings that differ from that attempted by the guide. This, I suggest, is a particularly significant feature of guided tours as a medium. As I shall discuss further later, it is of particular significance in the case discussed here: a site that was built in order to glorify the Nazi regime, and guided tours which seek to avoid such glorification.

This disjunction relates to the question of genre — the particular kind of tour involved. There is not yet an established discourse for talking about genres of tourism (by contrast, say, with literary studies in which genres such as ‘tragedy’, comedy’ etc. are thoroughly conventionalized). In the case that I discuss here, I suggest that the genre might be termed ‘difficult heritage’. It is ‘heritage’ in that it involves material from the past that has implications for identity. This heritage is ‘difficult’, however, in that rather than affirming a positive sense of identity, it strains against it and sets up a struggle. Difficult heritage is an inheritance that many might wish to disown even while they acknowledge it to be part of their defining history. Difficult heritage may also be particularly likely to arouse strong emotions, to be a topic of continued public discussion and to attract a potentially diverse audience.
Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) capture something of this with their term ‘dissonant heritage’, which is heritage that in some way clashes with attempts to use it in the present, and which jars with the place images that those in charge of tourism really want to project. Their definition includes a wide range of different types of heritage and tourism that in some way or another ‘involve ... a discordance or lack of agreement and inconsistency’ (p. 20). The sub-category that they label ‘atrocity heritage’ seems closest to being able to include a site such as the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, though as this is not directly a site of ‘deliberately inflicted human suffering’ (p. 94) (despite being part of the broader apparatus of such), it does not fit easily. It also does not fit with the ‘collective victim identity’ that atrocity sites are more usually bound up with and which, as Tunbridge and Ashworth note, ‘can be a powerful instrument of state-building’ (p. 106). Where, as in the case of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds and other sites in Germany such as Hitler’s lair at Berchtesgarten, the identity-heritage is of perpetration, this can be much more awkward, and, indeed, Tunbridge and Ashworth observe that the most common responses to such heritage are denial and amnesia (p. 108).

Where ‘difficult heritage’ is addressed, however, it is likely to be implicated in a range of quite complex and even conflicting emotions and responses. This is a function of its ‘double encoding’ of meaning: that originally ‘written in’ to the site and the ‘preferred readings’ that guides attempt to encourage. A key struggle for guides dealing with this genre of tourism is how to manage this.

**Encouraging preferred readings**

In trying to do so, guides often attempt to gauge something of group members’ prior knowledge, interest and viewpoints early on in the tour. Typically they do so by directly asking the questions that the script suggests that they cover themselves: ‘What were the party rallies?’ and ‘Why did Nuremberg become “City of the Party rallies”?’. The first question usefully highlights general knowledge of the history of National Socialism, and the second more specific knowledge of the history of the rallies and of Nuremberg, something that can also help to indicate whether visitors are themselves from the local area or not.

Asking questions is, more generally, recommended in the script as a way of engaging the audience and ensuring that tourists do not have to listen to a monologue. However, this is recognized as potentially problematic as it may produce ‘wrong’ or even politically risky, answers. From the ways in which tour guides handle answers to questions it is clear that they seek quite carefully governed preferred readings. In other words, although they ask questions – a technique which would seem to indicate openness to multiple interpretations – they are nevertheless attempt to encode a relatively ‘closed’ audience interpretation. They want visitors to get it right, and not to continue or go away with what guides regard as misconceptions. In Hall’s (1980) terms, what they are seeking is a ‘dominant-hegemonic’ reading, though as the tours might them-
selves be seen as counter-dominant-hegemonic (in that when the tours were first begun they were undertaken against the preference of the city authorities at that time to ignore the party rally grounds) the terminology seems less appropriate in this case.

The importance to guides of ‘closing off’ what guides see as inappropriate readings was made clear to me on a number of occasions during tours. Often, this involved saying ‘No’ very firmly after certain answers to questions. One tour guide explained to me that she thought it very important to be absolutely categorical about errors and misconceptions in relation to the Nazi past as this was not a subject on which you wanted to leave people with doubts.

Guides also used other techniques to encourage preferred readings and avoid those that they judged misguided. For example, on seeing that the Congress Hall (see Figures 1 and 2) tourists are often impressed by its grandeur and do not see it as particularly ugly or threatening. In other words, the materiality of the building might prompt admiration of Nazi achievements. To deal with this, the script suggests asking groups whether they like the façade. It continues: ‘Generally there will be a lively mix of agreement and disagreement, beautiful and ugly. Leave this entirely as it is. Perhaps try to steer it via particular problems, such as “Does it seem friendly to you?”’, or later “What sort of stone is used for the façade?”’ (GfA, 1999: 15), the latter being a question that can lead into discussion of the use of concentration camp workers for quarrying and the

*Figure 1. Scenic exterior: view of the Congress Hall. Photograph by the author.*
Nazi ambition to create lasting monuments. In this way, visitors’ own impressions are elicited but the ‘reality’ behind the façade – in this case rather literally, especially when visitors are later taken into the ugly inner courtyard of the building – is gradually revealed. This ‘façade peeling’ is a major feature of a tour such as this and stands in interesting contrast to the ‘sight sacralization’ (Fine and Speer, 1985) – and indeed ‘site sacralization’ – of many other tourist genres.

Revealing reality
‘Façade peeling’ is also used on other occasions by guides. On one tour, for example, when a picture of rows of male workers, clutching spades against their naked chests, was shown to the tour group, a woman exclaimed, ‘Oh, beautiful men!’ The group laughed and the guide went on to explain how although the men in the picture were all attractive, this was a carefully staged image, and those who were not so good-looking were placed behind. Similar stories were also told about, for example, the impressive and famous lighting effects designed by Albert Speer. The spur to creating these, as Speer recounts in Inside the Third Reich (1995), was trying to find a way to detract from the rather unimpressive and ugly middle-ranking Nazi officials who were due to appear on the Zeppelin building stage. Speer’s idea was to bring them out in the dark accom-
panied by a distracting spectacular light show which would leave them in shadow. The preferred reading being encoded through such stories, then, is one of not trusting façades. Impressive and attractive though the Nazi rituals, buildings and bodies might have been, the reality was thoroughly ugly.

Façade-peeling stories like these sometimes elicit laughter or at least wry smiles. Guides encourage this, and indeed it can be seen as part of the way in which they attempt to dissipate emotions such as admiration. Laughing at some of the great efforts expended on the rallies is, like façade peeling itself, a technique which helps to disenchant them. Examples used by guides include accounts of the organizers’ attempts to curb alcohol consumption (some guides ask their groups to imagine how difficult that would be in Bavaria), and descriptions of some of the ‘sports’, such as swimming with a full military uniform and gas-mask (the pictures are quite comical), that were performed during the rallies. Laughter also helps to encourage a more relaxed approach from the group, something that seems to be valued by guides in itself. One guide showed his group contrasting pictures of the Zeppelin Field, one during a rally and one during a Bob Dylan concert. He pointed out the different body comportments: the former rigid and uniform; the latter relaxed and individualized. The latter, he implied, was politically preferable. The kind of laughter being encouraged was part of this same, freer, body–politics matrix.

The other kind of façade peeling, used in careful counterpoint to the examples already given, entails highlighting the atrocity which the façade sought to hide. Thus, facts are related such as that concentration camp inmates were used to quarry the stone for the Congress Hall, that Jews were deported from a railway station on the grounds, and that the ‘sports’ were part of the preparation for war. The question, ‘Why Nuremberg?’ is used, among other things, to tell of the virulent anti-Semitism of Nuremberg’s Gauleiter, Julius Streicher, of the reprehensible newspaper that he produced, and of the Nuremberg Laws, according to which Jews were denied citizenship. In this way connections are made between the two terms in the title of the Rally Grounds exhibition – ‘fascination’ (Fazination) and violence (Gewalt) – and potential admiration of the buildings, rallies and Nazi regime is undercut.

Seeing past/through

Encouraging these preferred readings entails complex visualization work. Guides have to guide tourists through layers of different ways of seeing the rally grounds, beginning with ‘seeing past’ some of those that they see around them. This includes seeing past the now pleasant grassy lawns occupied by 21-century relaxed bodies, sunbathing or playing frisbee. Guides must, thus, first help the tourists to ‘see’ the grounds as they were in the 1930s and 40s. They must enable them to see the site in use, during the rallies, and also as it never was but would have been had it been fully completed. The latter is needed to help convey the extent of Nazi megalomania, something told through the medium of the planned enormous buildings.
To help visitors to see the site as it was, guides show pictures (see Figure 2), and they point to indicate where, say, the seating at the edge of a marching ground might have been. Tourists look from the pictures to the site, and back again, shielding their eyes with their hands as they gaze into the distance and try to imagine the original extent. Size relative to context can be particularly difficult to convey, and while the size of the marching grounds generally remains impressive to those visiting today, that of the buildings does not so readily. Nowadays skyscrapers and large buildings are common and by comparison the buildings at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds do not seem especially überdimensional – outsize. This is partly why the story of the never completed German stadium is so important: that would have been bigger (for 400,000 spectators) than any stadium in existence today and the idea that it would have been so large that those seated at the rear would not have been able to see properly usually draws a gasp and a smile at the absurdity of Nazi gigantomania. So too does a picture of the planned building, in which visitors typically initially mistake the doorways for ventilation grilles or cellar windows. The quest for enormity in Nazi architecture is explained by guides as part of the Nazi subjugation of the individual, expressed also in the National Socialist motto, ‘You are nothing, your people is all’ (GfA, 1999: 23). Here guides play on visitors’ initial ‘mis-seeings’, telling them to try to see past their initial impressions and ‘see the reality’.

Helping visitors to see architectural enormity and linking this to the ideology of subjugation of the individual is one of the ways in which guides also try to effect another kind of ‘seeing beyond’ that which they see before them: in this case, seeing beyond the propaganda to the wider brutality that the rallies also contributed to. As I have noted, this is a particular problem at a site of ‘difficult heritage’ such as this which is not itself directly a site of atrocity. The tourist gaze must be both directed to the site itself but also directed elsewhere, to other sites where the wider violence took place. Double- and sometimes triple-seeing is necessary. Yet, this must not be done in a way that will seem gratuitous or not part of the place, for a key part of visiting a particular site is to see in situ, to experience directly and not be related a general account that could be given anywhere.

All of the attempts to make visitors see Nazi atrocity, then, are thoroughly linked to the site itself: they are ‘here-sited’. At the Congress Hall visitors are shown images of emaciated men in striped pyjamas quarrying the stones that they see before them; on the Great Road they are shown photographs of Jews, carrying suitcases, lined up at the railway station that lies further along the Road; at the Zeppelin Building they are shown the preparations for war that took place directly on the marching ground before them. Of course, such images are hardly unfamiliar, even if these particular ones have not been seen by visitors before. The work of visualizing the linked ‘elsewhere’ of the rally grounds is already partly accomplished by the fact that the tourist already knows the image of the concentration camp, deportation and warfare. The pictures are
a visual trigger to remind the visitor of that larger set of images and knowledge that they already possess. In this way, guides also draw on existing encodings to help encourage a preferred reading of the site.

Identity complexes
As noted earlier, one feature of ‘difficult heritage’ such as this is its contested place in relation to contemporary identity. The script explains that the tour is not only about the past: ‘The time since 1945 is also a theme of our tour: the party rally grounds have remained through to the present an exemplary mirror for “the Germans” and their attitude towards the past’ (GfA, 1999: 6). Guides show this mirror by talking about the ways in which the site has been treated since 1945: the periods of blowing up and grassing over, and some of the ideas for redeveloping and reusing the buildings. In the Congress Hall groups are asked what they think should be done with it. There are sometimes suggestions, mainly from younger visitors, that it be made into a drive-in cinema or disco, while most usually reply ‘leave it as it is’ or ‘turn it into a museum’. Guides then explain some of the plans over time, including those in the 1980s to turn it into a shopping and leisure complex, complete with swimming pools and golf driving ranges. The reasons why some people objected to this are outlined and visitors are then told of the moves towards the creation of the documentation centre that was opened in part of the building in 2001. This factual discussion contains a clear allegory of movement since 1945 away from trying to obliterate or hide the evidence of the Nazi past towards, in the present, actively addressing, and reflecting on, it. Without saying so directly, a progressive story is told, the encoded meaning of which is that reflection on the past is a proper part of contemporary identity.

This is not to say, however, that guides emphatically try to drive such a message home or that they present this as the only acceptable way of relating to the past. When visitors suggest that the Congress Hall would make a good disco, some guides agree; and in one case when a visitor expressed disapproval of the fact that a fairground was set up next to the building the guide said that he thought that it was fine and that it helped to ‘trivialize’ the Nazi grandiosity. The guide who showed the picture of the Bob Dylan concert did so approvingly, implying that these kinds of uses were resistant readings and thus appropriate responses to the Nazi past. This does not mean that guides were expressing ambivalence to the Nazi past or that they were saying that ‘anything goes’. Rather, they were pointing to the acceptability of a range of responses, provided that there was also reflection on the Nazi atrocity and an attempt to understand the mechanisms that made it possible. The kind of identity that their tour was encoding was one in which addressing the Nazi past has an acknowledged but not necessarily highly emotive, guilt-ridden or overwhelming presence.

While for most visitors the Nazi past is something against which they want to define their current identities, something that may simultaneously entail acknowledging it as part of their nation’s heritage, there are others for whom it
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has more positive connotations and who visit the former Nazi party rally grounds in order to admire the Nazi achievement and identify with its ambitions. None of the tour guides with whom I spoke had encountered those expressing openly pro-Nazi views on their tours nor did I ever witness this myself. However, there was sometimes open fascination with the militaristic or comments that tour guides referred to as ‘the “But, of course, Hitler also built the motorways” type’. On one occasion, when a large photograph of ranked soldiers was unfurled, some boys in a visiting school group exclaimed ‘Cool!’. The guide dealt with this by asking the boys how long they would like to stand there silently like that. All guides know the booklet with answers to ‘But of course Hitler also . . . ’ type of statements and so are ready to counter these (pointing out, for example, that motorway building was already underway in the Weimar republic) (Ogan and Jahn, 1996). Through such strategies guides also discourage or at least unsettle positive evaluations and identifications. They also contain such responses by moving swiftly on, avoiding being drawn into longer discussions.

Tours are also sometimes attended by elderly tourists for whom the past of the rally grounds is also their own lived past. On the two occasions when I witnessed this, such tour members only shyly, and late on in the tour, revealed their own memories of, say, waving flags when Hitler visited Nuremberg. In both cases the interventions that they made were to try to emphasize for the rest of the group the compulsions that made individuals feel that they had to participate, that they had little agency to do otherwise. Not surprisingly, the presence of an ‘eye witness’ has a gravitational effect on other tour members who transfer the focus of their attention away from the guide to this speaker with the authority of having been there. This could potentially be problematic for guides, partly because of the shift of attention but also because such apparently authoritative speakers might send preferred readings off course. For example, guides tried to deflect the suggestion of a lack of agency by politely pointing out that many people chose to participate and that not everybody took part. Yet none of the guides with whom I spoke recalled such experiences as problematic, perhaps because they deal with them so fluently.

Group dynamics and materialities

One move within media theory has been a shift from understanding media ‘reception’ as necessarily individual to seeing it as potentially collective. This move is evident in the replacement of the singular notion of the ‘spectator’ by the collective one of ‘the audience’ (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003: 127) and in a tendency to draw less on psychology and more on sociology and anthropology (Askew, 2002). Guided tours, collective by nature, highlight the social dynamic of reception. This is manifest not only in the case of eye witnesses but also in more mundane contexts. Lack of interest or attention from some tour members can cause particular difficulties for guides. On the long walks between stations, members of the group chat to one another and some continue to do so, per-
haps more quietly, as the guide addresses the group. I witnessed occasions when just a couple of group members had a disruptive effect on the attention of the whole group by making their disinterest evident by talking among themselves or making crude remarks. Several of the guides told me that school teachers could be the worst offenders for while the school party tended to still look to them for leadership, they sometimes regarded themselves as ‘off-duty’ and on a day out. One guide recounted an occasion when a school teacher, part way into the tour, opened her rucksack and took out her lunch and began to eat it, prompting all of the pupils to reach into their bags for their own snacks. Then she took out a banana and proceeded to pretend to shoot the pupils with it. After that, recalled the guide, it was almost impossible to hold the attention of the group.

Another aspect of ‘collective reception’ is the speed at which tourists are willing to walk. Trying to make them go sufficiently quickly to cover the site within the available time is a particularly taxing for guides, as I not only witnessed on tours by others but also experienced directly when I gave tours. This can also be understood as part of the materiality of a tour: there is a distance that must be covered. Other materialities include the weather. At the Rally Grounds there is little shelter. Wind and rain leave guides struggling to show the pictures in their folders and to be heard. In the heat, tourists sometimes become increasingly unwilling to keep walking, or to stand and listen in areas lacking shade, and there is a danger of temporarily losing group members – and precious minutes – to drinks stalls. These practical materialities are thoroughly part of the mediatory process, constraining the agency of the guides and what it is possible for them to say and for the group to hear and see.

Conclusion

I have suggested here that tourist studies might draw on media theory to consider the work of tour guides. Such an approach to mediation does not entail that it is seen as a necessarily harmonious or non-political process. On the contrary, fundamental to the approach that I have taken here is regarding mediation as a positioned and negotiated process, as an at least partly politically willed struggle to try to make meanings ‘stick’. Through a discussion of tour guiding at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg I have tried to elucidate some of the strategies by which guides try to encourage their preferred readings and close off those which they regard as inappropriate. This entails a complex work of visual mediation in which guides attempt to enable visitors to see the site in a set of different ways; of temporal mediation, between various pasts and the present, and sometimes also with the future (‘What do you think should be done with . . .?’); and identity mediation, between the possibilities that the site, and the history of which it is part, suggests.

The account here illustrates, then, that attempts at ‘encoding’ involved in the mediation by guides are not straightforward matters of ‘telling and showing’
Rather, the attempt to encode entails complex negotiation between guides’ self-positioning, that of their organization, the particular genre of tourism involved, the audience and the site itself. Guides work with, and around, the sometimes monumental and sometimes banal materiality of the site and of each specific tour encounter in order to try to encourage particular preferred readings. Detailed attention to audience interpretations is beyond the scope of this article (though I have conducted many interviews with visitors to the site). Nevertheless, the earlier discussion shows how guides try to manage audience readings that, although for the most part relatively compliant with the guides’ account (there is rarely open disagreement), may be negotiated (as when tour group members suggest that most of those participating in Nazism lacked agency) or even oppositional (as in the case of tourists who do not bother to even listen to the guide).

In several respects guided tours make evident features of mediation that media theory was relatively late to recognize, in particular, as I have emphasized here, the materiality of media and the potentially non-linear nature and social relations of reception. While here I have drawn on some aspects of media theory to explore the mediatory work of tour guides, I suggest that the reverse exercise might also be profitable, that is, to draw on insights from the study of tourism to inform and refine aspects of media theory. To do so would be another article. Nevertheless, the relatively interactive nature of the tourist/guide/site inter-relationship, the physical movement and embodiment involved in going on tour, and the fact that tourism genres do not readily match those conventional in other forms of media all offer scope for refining understanding of media specificity. Equally, attention to different genres of tourism, such as the ‘difficult heritage’ explored here, helps to enhance our understanding of the particular challenges and dilemmas of touristic mediation in different contexts as well as of the varied and complex cultural work involved in tour guiding.

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NOTES

1. This is a theme taken up in other work, such as Katz (1985) and Cohen et al. (2002), which also attempts to identify good models and practice. Pearce (1984) provided a social–psychological taxonomy of different tourist–guide interactions and activity.

2. This tends to be discussed in media studies in terms of ‘technology’. See, for example, Morley (1992) and Silverstone (1994, 1999).
3. The section on the conclusion of the tour also states, ‘Geschichte für Alle does not want to present a “lesson” from the rally grounds and the dealings with them. How you conclude the tour depends on the group and individual opinions/desires/feelings’ (GfA, 1999: 42).

4. The same is also the case for the notion of ‘thanatourism’ – the tourism of sites associated with war, atrocity and other kinds of human suffering (Graham et al., 2001).

References


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