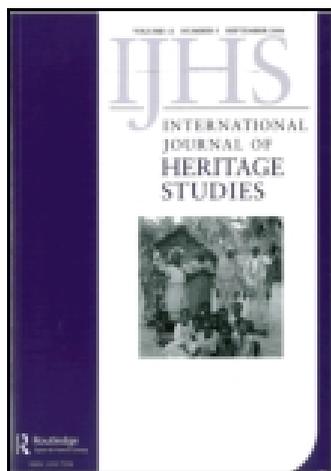


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Undesirable Heritage: Fascist Material Culture and Historical Consciousness in Nuremberg

Sharon Macdonald

This article seeks to explore the relationships between heritage and identity by drawing on analytical discussions of material culture and historical consciousness and focusing on an empirical case of ‘undesirable heritage’, that is, a heritage that the majority of the population would prefer not to have. The case is that of the Nazi or fascist past in Germany, with specific reference to the former Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg. By looking at some aspects of the ways in which this vast site of Nazi marching grounds and fascist buildings has been dealt with post-war, the article seeks to show both the struggle with the materiality of the site and changing forms of historical consciousness. It focuses in particular on some of the post-war dilemmas associated with the perceived agency of architecture, the sacralising and trivialising of space, the role and implications of musealisation, and the growth of a more reflective identity-health form of historical consciousness.

Keywords: Fascist Architecture; Nazi Past; Germany; Historical Consciousness; Material Culture

My Collins *German–English Dictionary* (1980) gives two related German words for ‘heritage’: *das Erbe* and *die Erbschaft*. Turning to the German, I find *das Erbe* first explained as ‘heir’ and then given a separate entry as follows:

Erbe *nt -s, no pl* inheritance; (*fig*) heritage; (*esp unerwünschtes*) legacy. **das ~ des Faschismus** the legacy of fascism.

‘Unerwünschtes’ means ‘undesirable’ or ‘un-wished-for’. ‘Heritage’ is, thus, described as an undesired legacy. The only gloss given, ‘the legacy of fascism’, effectively explains this primary interpretation. The entry for *die Erbschaft* is almost identical:

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Erbschaft *f* inheritance. **eine** ~ **machen** or **antreten** to come into an inheritance; **die** ~ **des Faschismus** the legacy of fascism.

As these dictionary entries indicate, the idea of ‘heritage’ in Germany has come to be bound up with a particular past: that of fascism. While this is not the only possible referent of the terms *das Erbe* and *die Erbschaft*, and while these terms given for ‘heritage’ may also be applied to more positively experienced history, the ‘undesirable heritage’ of fascism infuses wider understandings of heritage and the past. Not only does fascist heritage show that heritage is not necessarily to be cherished and celebrated, as is the dominant assumption in much popular heritage discourse elsewhere, it also makes many Germans acutely aware of the politics of heritage—its susceptibility to manipulation and the dangers of its attractions.

In this article, I explore some aspects of the ways in which Germany’s Nazi heritage has been dealt with post-1945. In doing so, my aim is to highlight some of the particular (though changing) ways in which ‘heritage’ is understood in Germany, and at the same time to draw upon this ‘against-the-grain’ case in order to develop and theorise understandings of the relationship between heritage and identity more generally.

My empirical focus is upon Nuremberg, a city whose very name conjures up an image of Nazism for many people around the world. Nuremberg’s primary identity to much of the outside world is a deeply undesirable one, thoroughly tainted by its fascist heritage. In addition to the fact that its name is now indelibly linked to the Nuremberg Laws (which denied Jews citizenship) and the Nuremberg trials (of Nazi crimes), Nuremberg was also the city of the Nazi Party rallies—those mass spectacles in which a strong, proud and aggressive German identity was proclaimed and enacted. The extensive site of marching grounds and monumental buildings constructed by the National Socialists for this identity-spectacle still lie, largely intact, within Nuremberg’s boundaries, just a few kilometres from the picturesque ‘old town’. This largest existing site of Nazi architecture—and the debates and sometimes silences over what to do with it and the various changes that have been wrought—are the specific empirical focus of this article. Before examining the substantive case and its implications, however, I first outline some more general arguments about the relationship between identity and heritage, with particular reference to questions of material culture and historical consciousness, two concepts and associated fields of research which are, in my view, particularly useful for an understanding of identity and heritage.

Heritage, Identity and Material Culture

The idea that heritage shores up and even performs peoples’ sense of themselves as a recognisable and worthy group or people is widespread. In many parts of the world, as numerous articles in this journal have shown, heritage is deployed to show that the collective identity in question—perhaps that of a nation or a region—has not just been formed in the very recent past but somewhere further back, preferably ‘in the mists of time’ or deepest antiquity. Age—the ‘age’ of ‘heritage’—commonly confers legitimacy. Heritage presents identity—which literally means sameness—as persisting over time.

The cultural equation at work here is that being of the past confers the right—or even creates a demand—to continue into the future.

The field of material culture studies as it has grown up over the past 10 years or so has put questions of the implications of materiality, and of the mutual enmeshing of the material and social, to the fore.¹ Its insights are useful in drawing our attention to the importance of the physical or material cultural dimension of much heritage. In English, as in many other languages, when we talk of heritage we are most likely to have material culture, and especially buildings, in mind. Certainly, we will recognise that less durable cultural forms—such as, say, dance or music—can be ‘heritage’, but it is the lasting physical inheritance from previous generations that is most often our primary referent. (The government-funded organisation English Heritage, for example, is concerned primarily with architectural heritage.) While it is certainly not universal that notions of the continuity of people across generations are located in a durable material heritage—important anthropological studies have shown counter-examples²—this is the widespread implicit, and often explicit, conception in many, especially European, countries. As such, material culture as heritage is understood not simply as representing or somehow ‘carrying’ identity but as *materialising* or *objectifying* it.³ That is, physical heritage acts as the material substance of identity.

By understanding collective identity as manifest in physical objects that persist, often unchanged and unchanging, over time, the more abstract concept of collective identity is itself given substance and durability. Heritage thus acts as a kind of physical proof, a material testimony, of identity. Furthermore, buildings and other forms of material remains themselves provide evidence of age: they existed in the past as well as today, implying that the collectivity did so too, even if none of its present members or even their great-grandparents were born at the time. Heritage, and especially material cultural heritage, is, then, primarily a discourse and set of practices concerned with the continuity, persistence and substantiality of collective—often national, though also regional or municipal—identity.

It is for these reasons that I want to focus on what happens when ideas of the continuity, persistence and substantiality of heritage for identity become problematic, as in the Nazi instance. This is a case in which the physical remains of the past offer up an identity that many of those in the present wish to distance themselves from, even while, at the same time, recognising it as fully part of their history. This is the dilemma of ‘undesirable heritage’, a subcategory of what Tunbridge and Ashworth call ‘dissonant heritage’.⁴ Undesirable heritage raises questions about just what continues over time and whether identities can change even if their former physical manifestations remain the same. Undesirable heritage may also generate practical dilemmas over whether, for example, physical heritage should be destroyed or altered in order to obliterate an ugly past or to try to shape changing identities. In the case of the Nazi Party rally grounds, as we shall see below, these questions are especially pertinent, for the place was constructed as part of a carefully calculated identity-building project and its buildings and grounds were designed in order to become a lasting material cultural heritage, supposedly reflective of a strong persisting collective identity.

Heritage and Historical Consciousness

The difficulties and dilemmas of Nazi heritage and its relationship to contemporary identity are actively debated in Germany, as in discussions about what to do with the former Nazi Party rally grounds and other sites, such as Hitler's 'eagles nest' in Berchtesgaden, which has recently been refurbished as a hotel,⁵ Hitler's bunker, the former Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and also concentration camps.⁶ Such debate shows that heritage and the past are not simply subject to processes of remembering and forgetting, but that participants are also reflexively aware of the past and its possible significance in the present. Partly prompted by the particularities of their own national circumstances, German theorists of history have argued that we need to employ a concept of 'historical consciousness' (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*) in order to grasp the ways in which people may (variously) relate to the past.⁷ As Jörn Rüsen, one of the major theorists of historical consciousness and metahistory, explains, a notion of historical consciousness recognises and seeks to theorise people's awareness of the past, history and historicity.⁸ It entails not simply examining how the past affects the present or is used in it, but investigates people's self-conscious definition of some aspects of the past as 'history', their notions of the agency of the past, their apprehensions of time, and their 'temporal orientations'—how they perceive past, present and future and their interrelations.

As yet, the term 'historical consciousness' has not often been used in English-language discussions, though there have been some recent anglophone suggestions that 'historical consciousness' may be productive as a supplement or even alternative to the current widespread focus upon 'memory'.⁹ The latter has become a key term in much contemporary theorising, shifting the analytical landscape away from objective accounts of historical facts towards consideration of subjective constructions of the past.¹⁰ For historians, the notion of memory has posed a major challenge, prompting them to consider the selectivity of accounts, and processes such as triggering, suppression and distortion.¹¹ Memory studies have, among other things, usefully drawn attention to the ways in which individual memories may diverge from official or accepted accounts, or the role that particular forms of encoding—e.g. oral versus documentary accounts—may play in the durability of certain memories.¹²

The 'memory shift' has also raised questions about the relationship between memory and history and their relative status.¹³ As Jeffrey Olick has noted, distinctions between memory and history typically rest on seeing the former as subjective and the latter as objective.¹⁴ This understanding of history, however, has become contested, rendering this premise of distinction untenable. Rather than trying to make such a clear-cut distinction, Olick suggests that it may be more helpful to see both 'history and memory [as] varieties of historical consciousness'.¹⁵

This move puts the emphasis on modes of apprehending the past rather than on the status of different modes of apprehension for providing evidence of 'what happened'. Historical consciousness is, then, a reflexive and meta-perspective that investigates ways of relating to the past, including various forms of history (e.g. professional, amateur, social, economic) and memory (e.g. individual, familial, national), and their implications. As such, it necessarily encompasses consideration of such matters as

popular expectation or assumption about how the past should be represented in particular contexts, local distinctions between history and memory, the truth-value accorded to particular media and spokespersons, and the extent to which the past is understood as acting upon the present.¹⁶

It should be noted here that in the literature on historical consciousness the term ‘consciousness’ (and the German *Bewusstsein*) does not refer only to matters of which the participants are themselves aware. A broader field is intended: one that is concerned with the ways in which knowledge and belief as they relate to history are configured in their entirety, including matters of which participants are relatively self-aware and others of which they are not.

It should also be noted that while the field of historical consciousness has been developed primarily by historians and historical theorists (and has also had a good deal of influence in the theorising of pedagogy on the Continent), they have often drawn upon anthropological ideas.¹⁷ In my view, this has sometimes been undertaken with too much emphasis on trying to identify universal structures, applicable cross-culturally. The concept and general field of historical consciousness seem to me, however, to be equally, and indeed perhaps better, suited to trying to grasp the particularities and varieties of forms of historical consciousness, including possible variations in concepts such as ‘heritage’. This more cultural anthropological take—which is particularly concerned to explore variety and to use this to reflect upon theoretical assumptions—is the one that I emphasise and use here.

By focusing on historical consciousness in this article, then, my attention is directed towards the ways in which the relationships between past and present—and between heritage and identity—are played out. It is concerned with how people explicitly and implicitly orient themselves in relation to the past and to its physical legacy, to their understandings and enactments of ‘heritage’ and ‘identity’, and to the ways in which such understandings and enactments may in turn feed back into the ways in which certain histories, and certain material culture, come to be represented and understood.

In order to explore these themes, I focus on two debates about how to deal with the Nazi Party rally grounds post-war. The first, which took place in the 1970s and 1980s, was concerned with the physical decay of the site and whether or not restoration or demolition should take place. The second is focused on the recently opened Documentation Centre of the Nazi Party rallies, and on questions raised about musealisation and architecture. Both cases show struggles over the physical nature of the site and how this might affect the consciousness of those coming into contact with it. Before discussing these, however, I give a brief background to the Nazi Party rally grounds and outline some of the arguments about their possible architectural agency—an agency that is assumed in the examples of post-war struggle or what in German is known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the attempt to manage or master the past.¹⁸

Nazi Heritage in Nuremberg

The Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg were built by the Nazis between 1933 and 1938 as a site on which to stage their mass rallies. Images of these rallies are well known

around the world, as iconic of the Nazi terror in both its regimented order and frenzied nationalism. In creating the rally grounds, the Nazis deliberately aimed to create a new heritage site, one that would be looked back on in the future as imposing and significant—as a place suitable for the active performance of a proud German *Volk*. A massive building programme was begun, though much was still semi- or unfinished by the end of the war.¹⁹

Included in what remains today is the Zeppelin Building—a 360 metre long building, with a speaker's podium at the centre from which Hitler addressed the masses on the enormous Zeppelin field below. In the late 1960s the long side galleries were removed from the building, ostensibly for reasons of structural instability, though perhaps also partly out of an intended symbolic amputation (as, for example, Benton argues) (see Figure 1).²⁰ The site also includes the Congress Hall, modelled on the Roman Colosseum, though—in typical Nazi gigantomania—it is even larger. Unfinished, this building is nevertheless imposing, and today is the site of the new Documentation Centre. This has been cleverly designed, in an architectural move to which I shall return, as a glass and steel stake through the heart of the building (see Figure 2). Joining these two buildings is the granite-clad Great Road, along which the troops paraded. At its south lie the remains of yet another great marching field (the Marsfeld) and to the north is yet another, the Luitpoldarena. The latter is also the site



Figure 1 Symbolic amputation? Albert Speer's Zeppelin Building in 2003, side galleries having been removed in 1967. Photograph © Sharon Macdonald.



Figure 2 A stake through the heart of Nazi architecture. Documentation Centre of the former Nazi Party rally grounds, opened 2001. Photograph © Sharon Macdonald.

of a War Memorial, built in commemoration of those who died in the First World War, that became a centrepiece of some of the Nazi ceremonies, and that, since the Second World War has become a memorial also to those who died in that war, whether as soldiers or as victims of the Nazi regime.

In designing the rally grounds complex, Hitler's architects Albert Speer and Ludwig and Franz Ruff drew on classical ideas to try to summon up a ready-made antiquity for their project.²¹ They deliberately constructed a heritage for their so-called 'Third Reich' by invoking both the great empires of Greece and Rome and Germany's own imperial First Reich that had its base in Nuremberg. The German First Reich was one reason why Nuremberg was chosen as the city of the party rallies. Nuremberg's castle, seat of the imperial majesties, is visible from the Great Road, whose axis points directly towards it; and the castle iconography was deployed in Nazi posters and rally graphics. It is probably also worth noting that the Nazis did not only try to construct a heritage for themselves through the past-alluding new architecture of the rally grounds. In Nuremberg's old town, through which the Nazis also marched, the town façades were altered in order to make them look more 'mediaeval', as they might have done during the First Reich.²²

After the war, Nuremberg was left with the massive site of the rally grounds, lying just a few kilometres from its old town. Most of the buildings had survived the war

relatively unscathed—in contrast to those in the old town, which was almost entirely destroyed (though which has since been carefully rebuilt, with Nazi ‘heritagising’ mostly reconstructed). The question was what to do with it. This has changed over time, with the question scarcely being asked in some periods and agonised over in others.²³ There is not space here to go over all of the different strategies and approaches over the last 60 years (which are the subject of my larger project), but those that I select here seem to me to illustrate particularly well certain contrasting dimensions of material culture and historical consciousness as they relate to identity and heritage.

Architectural Agency

As is illustrated by the Nazis’ ‘heritagising’ of Nuremberg’s old town, and by their drawing on classical architectural forms in the design of the buildings at the rally grounds, they clearly held views about the symbolic potency of architecture and the possibility of constructing a ‘heritage’ that would allude to the past and was intended to last into the distant future. Nazi architect Albert Speer referred to buildings as ‘words in stone’, and through buildings he aimed to speak directly to those who encountered them. His reminiscences show his ideas that the architecture and dimensions of buildings and spaces would ‘speak’ to the audience in ways that would not necessarily be cognitively processed but that would make their impression more directly by stirring up emotions.²⁴ At the Nazi Party rally grounds, the massive size of the buildings and marching grounds was intended to impress with the enormity of the nationalist project and to make the audience feel a sense of insignificance in the face of a greater and mightier presence. The sharp architectural geometric lines and axially of the ‘muscular classical’ style were intended to convey a sense of rule and order; the tiered stands and podiums of clear hierarchy and of the leader as priest, or even God-like, in his pulpit. The rallies and parades themselves were an extension of these ideas, involving a meticulous choreography of bodies, subsuming individual identity to that of the mass—of the German *Volk*—and engaging all in collective obedience to, and worship of, the *Führer*.²⁵

If the Nazis were successful in their architectural ambitions to the extent that they managed to create buildings that would speak directly to some deep instinctual level in the viewer, bypassing their reasoning faculties, this obviously sets up a dilemma for the future. If the buildings remain intact, there is a risk that they continue to speak the words that Albert Speer intended. In the language of heritage and identity, this material heritage risks generating an inappropriate identification.

The fear of this possibility is one that surfaces periodically in the post-war history of the rally grounds and lurks beneath the surface of the many practically oriented city council memos concerning the site. Over the years, there have been a number of attempts to explicitly address and cope with this potential problem. The following are two ‘moments’ showing very different ways of trying to ‘deal with’ this physical and symbolic legacy of fascism. As such, they illustrate something of the range of possibilities and also highlight some of the persistent underlying concerns about the site and about the nature of material heritage.

Ruins, Restoration and Repression

One of the most interesting and explicit debates over the problem of potential architectural agency arose in relation to the question of the restoration of the rally grounds, especially in the face of their decay. In their megalomaniac plans for the rally grounds, the Nazis also envisaged their future—after 1,000 years—as ruins.²⁶ Once fallen into ruin, the Congress Hall and the Zeppelin Building would come to look even more like the now-ruined classical forebears on which they were modelled. Rather than diminishing their ability to ‘speak’, this would only add to their allure and it would bear proper testimony to the achievements of the Third Reich. At work in this imagination of future decay was a familiar German romanticisation of ruins. Rooted in a German love of classical heritage and antiquity, the ruin was seen as particularly likely to generate feelings of awe, wonder and sympathy in the audience.

This Nazi assumption about the nature of German historical consciousness—a consciousness that they projected into the future—is one that has also been shared by various later commentators. It came to be articulated particularly clearly during the 1970s and 1980s as the buildings, especially the Zeppelin Building, began to fall into disrepair. Despite the 1,000-year ambitions of the Nazis, most of the buildings were not well built, partly because they were constructed so quickly and also because it was not always possible to obtain sufficient good-quality materials (severe exploitation of labour and concentration camp workers notwithstanding).²⁷ Consequently, they were becoming ruined more quickly than anticipated, raising fears among some that they might take on a seductive allure as ruins. In a city council discussion on 15 July 1987 about what to do with the rally grounds site, for example, a CSU representative argued that there is a danger that if the buildings are neglected they will become ‘mythologised as ruins’—and he called for ‘demythification’ (*Entmythologisierung*) to help counter this danger.²⁸

Since the war, some repair work had been undertaken with the aim of making buildings watertight so that they could be used for storage; and there had also been some destruction of buildings or parts of them where space was needed for new projects or where structures had become unstable and restoration was too costly. For the most part, such decisions had been made on ostensibly practical grounds, arguments in the city council meetings being based mainly on matters such as cost and opportunities for practical use.²⁹

In the 1970s, however, this began to change. In Nuremberg, one factor involved in this was the new Bavarian state law on monument protection.³⁰ This came into force in 1973, though there was plenty of haggling in the year that followed between the Nuremberg city council and the Bavarian authorities, based in Munich, about which buildings and areas would be designated as ‘*denkmalschutzwürdig*’—worthy of monument protection.³¹ In the end, as had initially been proposed by the Munich authorities, all of the Nazi rally grounds area was deemed worthy of monument protection because of the historical significance of its fascist ‘*Kolossal*’ style of architecture, and their significance as ‘witnesses of the past’ (*Zeugen der Vergangenheit*)—one of the specific categories of monumental preservation.³² This decision could be seen as

making the rally grounds official heritage. It also had practical implications, for no longer could buildings be demolished, as some had been earlier, and the city was obliged to undertake at least some upkeep of them—though there seemed to be a good deal of room for negotiation over just what was done, and the Bavarian Landesamt could also be called upon to provide some assistance.³³

The very fact of designating the buildings as heritage, however, signalled a new consciousness of them as historically significant and as part of a historical record—even though this was a record that many in Germany would have preferred to forget, as some of those who wrote to the local newspaper complaining about the decision maintained.³⁴ Some also argued that the Nazis had destroyed the historically significant buildings of other political persuasions, and so that their architectural legacy should likewise be removed.³⁵ Others, however, argued that they should be maintained either because they saw them as analogous to buildings such as the Roman Colosseum, or as a historical warning.

The new heritage regulations themselves prompted debate, then. They did so, however, at a time when there was increased discussion of the Nazi past within Germany. As various historians have described, for over a decade after the war the predominant temporal orientation seemed to be one of moving on rather than reflecting back (though the private reality was no doubt more complex).³⁶ Beginning in the late 1960s, however, a generational critique began in which the post-war generation became increasingly critical of their parents' generation for apparently refusing to properly face up to and address the Nazi past.³⁷ A new historical consciousness developed in which medical and psychoanalytical ideas structured many of the debates.³⁸ The older generation was criticised for having 'repressed' their memories, and it was argued the failure to face up to and work through past experiences was leading to a malaise or sickness in German society. Educational initiatives were called for to try to address the problem.³⁹

Within this new form of public historical consciousness, Nuremberg's use of the former Nazi Party rally grounds for banal usages such as storage and sports training risked being seen as symptomatic of the more widespread 'failure' to face up to the past. This was recognised by some working in the civic institutions, especially the Pedagogical Institute, who called for educational developments, such as information boards and a centre of fascist studies. The former were eventually erected in the 1980s and the latter took shape not quite as originally envisaged but as a 'Documentation Centre', responsible for providing an exhibition and education about the site. This was finally opened in 2001 and is discussed below.

The educational calls did not, however, resolve what to do about the physical state of the buildings. In the arguments during the 1970s and 1980s in the press and city council in Nuremberg, two dangerous alternatives seemed to loom. One was to allow the buildings to fall into ruin, so letting them take on the attractive allure of the ruin. The other was to repair and restore the buildings. This, however, was regarded as risking returning the buildings to their former glory and imbuing them once again with the agency with which they had been originally invested. Both risked triggering the 'wrong' kind of reaction within the German historical

consciousness as it was understood by local participants themselves. Both risked a problematic identification.

In the face of this seemingly intractable problem, Hermann Glaser, the then culture minister, Social Democrat and well-known social historian, devised an ingenious solution. What should be done, he suggested, was to let the buildings fall into a state of semi-disrepair but not total ruin.⁴⁰ They should be allowed to look ugly and uncared-for. And they should be used for banal uses, such as for storage, and leisure activities like tennis and motor-racing. Such uses were already underway but they had been put in place unreflectively and for pragmatic reasons. In Glaser's new vision, however, they became something more significant and subtle: they became forms of material resistance to the Nazi meanings and potential agency of the architecture. That is, their very form made them into modes of neutralising the Nazi agency. Calculated neglect was understood as blocking the two dangerous potential triggers. Glaser called this strategy *Trivialisierung*—trivialisation.

Implicated in the idea of trivialisation—or 'profanation' as it was also sometimes called—is a notion of heritage as sacred and special. The Nazis had deliberately tried to create a sacred heritage site—a site of non-trivial meaning. Glaser recognised this and drew on the practice already underway of using the site pragmatically. While this had earlier been undertaken unreflectively and largely out of pragmatic need—here were some scarce substantial buildings that could be used for storage in the badly damaged Nuremberg—Glaser's formulation transformed this practice into one of countering the 'heritage-ising' consciousness. Using the buildings for banal ordinary purposes, rather than for anything ceremonial or grand, and leaving them unkempt, constituted a refusal to allow them to become any kind of glorious heritage or desirable materialisation of identity.

Reflection, Documentation and Anti-museumification

The argument for trivialisation was not intended by Glaser to be an exclusive approach. He also called for it to be undertaken in concert with educational initiatives and indeed he was a major player in some of the most significant early educational initiatives related to the site. These included an 'alternative' Nuremberg tourist brochure, dealing with Nuremberg 1933–1945, which was produced in 1977; and an exhibition dealing with Nazism and the history of the site itself, which was established in the Zeppelin Building in 1985. The exhibition in the Zeppelin Building was produced on a fairly tight budget and, owing to the fact that the building was unheated and damp, it was only on display in the summer months. While the fact that it had been mounted at all received praise, it was also widely seen as a rather minimal gesture by many of those who were calling for the Nazi past to be more properly and fully acknowledged within Nuremberg. Some even suggested that it was an 'alibi' for doing anything more.⁴¹

There were, however, debates about what more could or should be done; conferences were held and discussion documents produced containing various ideas. One interesting dilemma that emerged from this concerned whether or not a museum was an appropriate institution in which to deal with Nazi history. On the one hand, given

that the site was now recognised as ‘heritage’, and given that one function of museums is to provide education about the past, building a museum on the site seemed a logical development. In the 1980s it was called for by a group of Nuremberg Social Democrats among others. However, Hermann Glaser warned that a museum was potentially dangerous, for it risked ‘giving value to a pile of rubbish’.⁴² This danger was particularly great if the museum was housed in one of the original Nazi buildings, for just by its presence it risked performing a consecrating function. What was at issue here was the cultural assumptions about the nature of museum: that it has a sacralising role.⁴³

It was for these reasons that the new ‘Documentation Centre’ that opened at the former Nazi Party rally grounds was not called a museum. While it was in preparation, I, like various of my acquaintances, sometimes referred to it as a ‘museum’ (and formally it was governed by the Nuremberg Museums organisation). Staff working on the project corrected me, however. Although the reason given for the avoidance of the term ‘museum’ was often that the Documentation Centre would not, for the most part, contain objects, it is clear from the careful debates about the nature of the displays and of the architecture of the Documentation Centre itself that heed has been taken of Glaser’s warnings.

One particular concern of Glaser’s in his 1989 article had been that housing a ‘museum’ in the former Nazi building of the Congress Hall would enhance the value of the building, and that it would even ‘perfect its space’. His own view was that it would be better to create a new building specifically for the museum/information purpose and to leave the Congress Hall to banal usages. While the new Documentation Centre, with its exhibition entitled ‘Fascination and Violence’, is housed in the Congress Hall and not in a new building, great care has been taken to avoid ‘perfecting the space’. The Congress Hall itself was not tidied up or restored, but its ugly raw brick interior—still visible as the building was never completed with its full façade by the Nazis—was left visible by the transparent medium of glass used in the design of the centre. Looking beyond and through the transparent information panels, rough brickwork is fully visible (see Figure 3). The architecture of the Documentation Centre, designed by Gunther Domenig, also works with metaphors of transparency and profanation. It is described as a glass and steel ‘stake’ or ‘spear’ (*Pfahl*) ‘making a deconstructive slice through the building ... and so breaking [its] monumentality and strong geometry’.⁴⁴ Its glass and steel ‘point’ visibly juts out from the façade, and the glass interior allows visitors a clear view into the unvarnished side of Nazi production. This architectural strategy did not entail destruction of the heritage in which it was located, but it did nevertheless challenge it. Heritage was put on display—it was marked as heritage—but at the same time the full ‘heritage effect’ was negated and neutralised.⁴⁵

What was attempted here, then, was to try to discourage visitors from looking at the displays and the building itself through a ‘museum-gaze’.⁴⁶ Such a gaze, shaped by a particular historical consciousness, seems to have been understood as potentially entailing admiration and a suspense of the critical. As those involved in creating the exhibition explained, one of the most challenging tasks in shaping the exhibition was to avoid in any way contributing to a potential allure—or ‘fascination’ (*Faszination*)⁴⁷—of the subject matter. For this reason, they eschewed some of the strategies of



Figure 3a–b The reality behind the façade. Brickwork visible in the ‘Fascination and Violence’ exhibition in the Documentation Centre. Photograph © Sharon Macdonald.

the museum, such as displays of uniforms or insignia. By using the name 'Documentation Centre', a different kind of viewing relationship, and a different kind of input from the visitor, was demanded. Documentation would require serious cognitive work and an ability to self-distance from that which was displayed; unlike museum-ification which risked invoking what Stephen Greenblatt has called 'wonder', an immediate emotive response of awe.⁴⁸ In the context of the Nazi attempt to create just this kind of response, it was especially important to find ways of avoiding this.

Of course, this is not to say that museums only and necessarily traffic in 'wonder' and a suspense of the critical. Rather, there was an awareness—a historical consciousness—by exhibit creators that the exhibition media could potentially encourage visitors to adopt this kind of mode of apprehending the exhibition. That is, visitors' ways of relating to the content—their historical consciousness—could be shaped by the genre of 'past' on offer. Although this was not how those involved expressed it, I suggest that what was involved in the preference for documentation over museumification was conceptualising the past on display as 'history' rather than 'heritage'.⁴⁹ The difference implicitly involved is well described by Steven Hoelscher, drawing on David Lowenthal: 'Where history remains remote and critical in its view towards the past, heritage thrives on personal immediacy and embraces the past as building blocks of identity.'⁵⁰ Documentation, it seems to me, was a strategy to try to invoke a historical rather than a heritage gaze. Documentation was a particular strategy—a particular manifestation of a specific historical consciousness—to try to deal with the perceived agency of fascist material culture.

So what does this mean for Nazi heritage and German identity, and for the relationship between heritage and identity more generally? The Nazi Party rally grounds, I have suggested, are perhaps a revelatory case through which to address such questions for they constitute such a massive physical presence and one that is instantly recognisable and symbolic of the power, might and potential attraction of the Nazi regime. It might have been possible to raze the Nazi buildings to the ground and to try to forget all about them—to try to deny their place in German identity. Some of this has indeed been done and there have been many proposals over time for doing so entirely. But, partly because of their great size and the physical difficulty of destroying them, they have remained, and Germans, especially those of Nuremberg, have had to live, knowing that they are there. They have also had to live in the knowledge that people come from across the world to see this site, and that they identify Germany and Germans in relation to it. In a world in which cities seek to market themselves in terms of their distinctive heritage and image, this creates a further dilemma. Nazi relics and Holocaust history more generally have a global tourist pull.

The trivialisation and reflection/anti-museumification approaches that I have discussed in many respects mirror more general ways in which Germany's Nazi heritage is dealt with in present-day constructions of identity. Both show a complex and sophisticated debate about how to recognise the place of National Socialism as an unavoidable part of Germany identity but at the same time to try to prevent it taking on too central and sacred a role. Both reveal the perceived dangers of the heritage effect. But where trivialisation seeks to counter this by letting the banal supersede, the strategy

of the Documentation Centre is to make a performative statement of a German willingness to recognise the past and to learn from it. Both can be understood as forms of a particular historical consciousness.

In this discussion I have used the term ‘the heritage effect’ after Svetlana Alpers’ ‘museum effect’. By ‘museum effect’ Alpers means the way in which museums turn ‘all objects into works of art’.⁵¹ The museum effect is a particular ‘way of seeing’,⁵² and as such it can be understood as a particular kind of consciousness. So too is the ‘heritage effect’. But heritage turns its objects not into art but into ‘identity pasts’, into material that should be preserved because of its significance to a people. The heritage effect is, simultaneously and inevitably, an identity effect.

It is for this reason that a site such as the former Nazi Party rally grounds is so problematic. It bears many of the hallmarks of heritage: impressive architecture, monumentality, immediate visible recognition, a role in a significant history. But its place in present-day identity is ambivalent and problematic. Far from shoring up a positive self-identity, this is a heritage that unsettles. Moreover, while a predominant theme in debates about identity and heritage has concerned the ways in which favourable heritages are creatively fashioned to support existing self-visions, the Nazi heritage is one that intrudes whether or not those who have to bear its stigma want it to do so. Like the colossal buildings of the former Nazi Party rally grounds, the enormity of the Nazi heritage is an indelible presence. As such, it reminds us, perhaps, that heritage is not always as manipulable as it sometimes seems to be. Furthermore, it reminds us of a basic axiom of identity formation: that it is never constructed by the ‘self’ alone, but also in relation to the images and visions held by others.⁵³ This also imposes limits upon the self-fashioning of heritage.

The current much remarked ‘heritage crusade’ is often said to be largely a reaction against a culture of amnesia, in which we fear the loss of the past.⁵⁴ That fear is also bound up with a fear of a loss of distinctive identity in an age of globalisation and an increased desire and need to differentiate, not least for place-marketing. But as the case here shows, the dwelling on the past that these developments produce can raise its own problems, not least for identity. Heritage—so often understood as a rather soporific discourse that dulls questioning and forecloses answers⁵⁵—is, here, quite the opposite, at least for some.

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Notes

- [1] This field is represented especially by the *Journal of Material Culture* begun in 1995. For an overview, see also Miller, *Material Cultures*.
- [2] See especially the work of Susanne Küchler, e.g. 'The Place of Memory'.
- [3] For discussion and illustration of the term 'objectifying' see Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*; and for 'materialising' see Macdonald, 'Museums and Identities'.
- [4] Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*.
- [5] M. Davidson, 'A World of Evil and Hope amid the Dark Pines', *The Observer*, 13 March 2005.
- [6] See, for example, Niven, *Facing the German Past*, chap.1; Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*; and for a detailed study of one case, Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*.
- [7] Some of the key works in German are Jeismann, *Geschichte als Horizont der Gegenwart* and books by Rüsen listed in the reference list. Some of Rüsen's work has recently been translated into English: *Western Historical Thinking*; and Macdonald, *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness*, contains an essay by Rüsen and other key contemporary contributors to the debates on historical consciousness.
- [8] E.g. 'Introduction' to *Western Historical Thinking*.
- [9] See Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness*, and 'Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum'. See also Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory', whose perceptive discussion draws on German- and English-language discussions of collective memory, though he does not especially elaborate the notion of 'historical consciousness' or suggest it as a means of moving beyond some of the dilemmas as does Crane. See Olick, 'Introduction', *States of Memory*, for an interesting, though unelaborated, note on historical consciousness.
- [10] See Crane, 'Memory, Distortion', and Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning'. See also Radstone, *Memory and Methodology*, especially the introduction.
- [11] See, for example, Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance*. There are, however, problems in the tendency for such discussions to simply transpose psychological notions of memory from the discussion of individual memory to that of collective memory; see Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning'.
- [12] The latter focus intersects with the focus on material culture discussed above. Texts exploring the relationship between memory and materiality include Kwint et al., *Material Memories*, and Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*.
- [13] See Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning', for a useful summary.
- [14] Olick, 'Introduction', 8.
- [15] Ibid.
- [16] It might be noted here too that this also avoids the psychologising tendency of memory studies, in which concepts from the study of individual memory—such as trauma or suppression—are applied to collective memory. An emphasis on historical consciousness is more concerned to explore when and where psychologising constructions are employed in practice, a matter that I discuss in relation to the case of post-war Germany in S. Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage* (in preparation).
- [17] See references in note 7.
- [18] For a discussion of this term and the debates and events that have come to be seen as symptoms of it, see Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*.
- [19] Sources concerning the history of the Nazi Party rally grounds include: Burden, *The Nuremberg Party Rallies*; Doosry, 'Wohlauf, laßt uns eine Stadt ...'; Geschichte für Alle, *Geländebegehung*; Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression*; Ogan and Weiß, *Faszination und Gewalt*; Zelnhefer, *Die Reichsparteitage*.

- [20] Benton, 'From the Arengario'.
- [21] See, for example, Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture* and also the writings of Albert Speer: *Architektur* and *Inside the Third Reich*.
- [22] Beer et al., *Bauen in Nürnberg*.
- [23] For discussion of the post-war history of the site see: Dietzfelbinger, *Der Umgang der Stadt Nürnberg* and 'Reichsparteitagsgelände Nürnberg'; and Weiß, "'Ruinen-Werte'". The account here also relies on primary historical sources held mainly in the Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.
- [24] See Speer, *Architektur* and *Inside the Third Reich*.
- [25] See Burden, *The Nuremberg Party Rallies*; chapters in Ogan and Weiß, *Faszination und Gewalt*, especially Reichel; and Zelnhefer, *Die Reichsparteitage*.
- [26] On Nazi notions of ruin see references in note 21 and Weiß, "'Ruinen-Werte'".
- [27] See Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression*, especially chap. 2.
- [28] CSU is the Bavarian wing of the Christian Democratic Party. For the debate and quote, see Stadtrat Protokollen, Sitzung des Stadtrats 15.07.1987, Rathaus Nürnberg.
- [29] This echoes through many of the city council records and is particularly clear, for example, in debates about repairing the main roof of the Congress Hall in 1958. A report of these debates in the *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, 25 April 1958, states that the key word involved is 'amortisation'—the requirement that any money spent is recouped; and all of the letters from readers in the following weeks focus on questions of economics and practical use, only one making tangential mention of the possible symbolic dimensions of restoration.
- [30] Laws themselves, of course, may be expressions of forms of historical consciousness that are more or less nationally distinctive. For an interesting discussion of differences between English and German ideas and practices about conservation, see Soane, 'Agreeing to Differ?'
- [31] See reports of debates of the Building Committee for 1973 and 1974; Nürnberg Stadtarchiv, refs. C85/III 479–485.
- [32] Building Committee report 25.6.1973, Nürnberg Stadtarchiv, ref. C85/III 479.
- [33] See debates listed for note 31. My understanding of these matters also rests on helpful discussions with officials at Nuremberg's office for monument protection and the head of the department of buildings.
- [34] E.g. letters to and articles in *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, 13–16 November 1973.
- [35] Ibid.
- [36] See, for example, Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*; Niven, *Facing the German Past*; Fulbrook, *German National Identity*.
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] See Moeller, *War Stories*.
- [39] Ibid.
- [40] A published version of this idea—though not with the specific term—Hermann Glaser, 'Rumpelkammern im deutschen Kolosseum', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 16 June 1989. I am also grateful to Hermann Glaser for information. Many other interviewees engaged in 'history work' in Nuremberg told me about this idea and credited it to Glaser.
- [41] See, for example, F. S. 'Hitler im Hinterzimmer', *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, 3 July 1986.
- [42] Glaser, 'Rumpelkammern'.
- [43] I have also discussed this issue and some of its wider implications, as well as some of this example, in 'Enchantment'.
- [44] Museen der Stadt Nürnberg *Projekt*, n.p.
- [45] This is based on Svetlana Alpers' notion of the 'museum effect' as discussed below and in Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing'.
- [46] Cf. Urry's notion of the 'tourist gaze'.
- [47] This is the term given to the Nazi attempts to enchant. The exhibition in the Documentation Centre is called 'Fascination and Violence'.
- [48] Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder'.

- [49] See Gable, 'Maintaining Boundaries', for a fascinating discussion of the politics and cultural assumptions of 'documentation' in a different heritage context.
- [50] Hoelscher, *Heritage on Stage*, 166; Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*.
- [51] Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26.
- [52] *Ibid.*, 27.
- [53] Important anthropological sources of this idea are Barth, *Ethnic Groups* and *The Voice of Prophecy*, chaps. 3, 14.
- [54] Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*; Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* and *Present Pasts*. See also Walsh, *The Representation of the Past*, for a critique of this idea.
- [55] Kirshenblatt Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 159.

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