

Journal of Material Culture

<http://mcu.sagepub.com>

Words in Stone?: Agency and Identity in a Nazi Landscape

Sharon Macdonald

Journal of Material Culture 2006; 11; 105

DOI: 10.1177/1359183506063015

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://mcu.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/11/1-2/105>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Material Culture* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://mcu.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://mcu.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

WORDS IN STONE?

Agency and Identity in a Nazi Landscape

◆ SHARON MACDONALD

University of Sheffield, UK

Abstract

This article considers questions of agency, materiality and identity through a focus on a landscape largely shaped by the German National Socialists in the 1930s: the former Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg. It looks at Nazi ideas about architecture and the agency of buildings as 'words in stone' and the Nazi intention that the built heritage would endure and continue to 'speak' over time. It then goes on to discuss some of the post-war struggle with the Nazi heritage (and more specifically the Zeppelin Building) and the ways in which agency has been variously attributed. This highlights contests and changes in the attribution of agency, and shows how such attributions are embedded in wider understandings and politics of identity (including processes of 'de-Nazification' and 'facing the past'), as well as being co-shaped by the connotations and 'suggestiveness' of material forms.

Key Words ◆ agency ◆ Germany ◆ identity ◆ landscape ◆ materiality ◆ Nazi architecture ◆ Nuremberg ◆ swastika

In *The Materiality of Stone*, Chris Tilley argues that we should regard landscapes 'as *agents* which actively produce . . . identity' (2004: 31). This, he explains, is different from an understanding of landscapes 'primarily as systems of signs, or as texts or discourses which encode meaning and reflect social identities in various ways' (Tilley, 2004). Considering material culture more generally in terms of agency rather than in terms of meanings encoded has also been powerfully argued for elsewhere in anthropology and material culture studies, the work of Alfred Gell (1998) and Bruno Latour (e.g. 1993) generally being cited as seminal (e.g. in Miller, 2005).

Journal of Material Culture Vol. 11(1/2): 105–126

Copyright © 2006 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)

[DOI: 10.1177/1359183506063015]www.sagepublications.com

Downloaded from <http://mcu.sagepub.com> at Senate House Library, University of London on December 7, 2007
© 2006 SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

These emphases on the agency of the material take their inspiration from various areas of theory (e.g. Tilley from Merleau-Pontian phenomenology) and contain some important differences, as well as areas less well worked through (Layton, 2003; Miller, 2005: 13–15). Nevertheless, they share an ambition to recuperate material agency in social analysis and to avoid predefined oppositions between the social and the material. Here, rather than expound upon the positions and their variations, I explore the idea of the landscape, and materiality more generally, as an agent in relation to a case in which it is particularly pertinent and problematic. This is a landscape that was created in order to have social effects, including producing specific identities: the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg, Germany.

In looking at this case, my intention is not to try to tackle ontological questions about materiality, agency and identity but to look at how these are understood, experienced and played out in this particular case. Assumptions about the capacities of physical entities, such as buildings and landscapes, inevitably shape how those entities are experienced, related to, and acted upon. The same is the case for identity. If, as in this German case, it is commonly held that landscapes and architecture have psychological effects and are closely and constitutively bound up with senses of self (see, for example, Schama, 1996; Heynen, 1999), then this imbues them with a potency that has implications for how they should be dealt with. If, as in the case of the Nazi party rally grounds, a landscape was fashioned to generate senses of identity and feelings of enthusiasm that have since come to be widely regarded as problematic or reprehensible, this poses problems over what to do with it. Can such a landscape be left safely in place or might it continue to have effects, perhaps enlisting new generations to Fascist sympathies? To what extent does the originally intended agency of the site still operate? And which particular material features matter?

As I discuss later, these are questions which, if not always asked in quite these terms, have frequently been raised and struggled with in Nuremberg since the war. There have also been times, however, when they seem not to have been publicly considered. Likewise, while for some people the possible persistence of agency is a preoccupation, for others it is not. While there is not space here to do more than pick out some examples from the rich post-war history of the rally grounds, these serve to highlight some of the different positions and contests that have been involved. What is also evident from this history, however, is that attributions of agency are themselves frequently attributed with political motive. Such matters as which agent is claimed or inferred, whether it is a material or human agent, whether intentionality is said to be involved (and, if so, whose), are bound up with wider political positions (though often ambivalently). Attributions and non-attributions also have

consequences for the kind of actions deemed appropriate or inappropriate and, therefore, play into subsequent events.

In this article I first provide some background to the rally grounds and the social – and enduring – effects that they were designed to have. The site still exists, though in altered form, and attracts over 100,000 tourists each year to view the Nazi architectural heritage. After providing a sketch of some of the main changes since 1945, I draw on my historical and ethnographic research to look in more detail at some instances from the site's history. These have been selected to illuminate significant struggles over what to do with this Nazi '*Erblast*' – a term that has been devised specifically to indicate this 'heritage burden' (Dietzfelbinger, 1995), this enduring material problem for contemporary German identity.

The questions that I raise, and the ways in which I tackle them, are, I think, very much in the spirit of Barbara Bender's work (especially, 1993, 1998 and Bender and Winer, 2001), though she might, of course, disagree with some of what I say. Her insistence on considering the politics of perspectives and, more specifically, of paying attention to contests and negotiations over ways of seeing the landscape, inform the way in which I look at the Nazi party rally grounds. Furthermore, there are parallels with Stonehenge. Both are substantial, stone, human-erected constructions, much visited by tourists, under official 'monument protection' legislation and practices, and sometimes taken as iconic of national identity. Although there are both major and subtle differences between the cases, comparison (here largely implicit) is helpful in identifying some of the specificities involved.

WORDS IN STONE: BUILDING GERMAN IDENTITY

The rally grounds were created by the National Socialists in the 1930s in order to stage their annual, week-long, mass rallies (Burden, 1967; Doosry, 2002; Zelhefner, 2002). The rallies themselves were carefully orchestrated spectacles in which nationalist fervour was whipped up and images of German might filmed for wider dissemination. War interrupted the completion of the full plans for the grounds but a considerable amount of construction over an extensive area (25 km²) was nevertheless undertaken. This included the building of three large marching grounds, surrounded by tiered seating; barracks for the SS and accommodation for others attending the rallies, including a Strength-through-Joy village; and several enormous monumental Nazi buildings, including the Luitpold memorial, the Congress Hall and the Zeppelin Building (see Figure 1). The area also included a pre-existing sports stadium, which was used for staging events during the rallies, and was also to have included what would have been the world's largest stadium

(for 400,000 spectators). A 60 m-wide granite-paved 'Great Road', to join the various areas, was partially completed.

The construction of the Nuremberg rally grounds was, together with the planned but largely unrealized monumental rebuilding of Berlin, the largest-scale and most well-known of the Nazi building projects. It was part of a much more extensive Nazi revision of town and city-scapes. In Nuremberg's old-town, for example, buildings – including the synagogue – considered 'out of keeping' were destroyed and many other buildings were given a more mediaeval look (Schmidt, 1995). This 'mediaevalization' included timbering being exposed, smaller multiple-paned windows replacing larger single-paned ones, and modern shop fronts being replaced with archways. Elsewhere, new buildings were constructed, often on pared-down functionalist lines, or, most notably in the Strength-through-Joy village, using a folkloric style of wooden buildings with artisanal craft motifs (Koch, 1995).

Clear from the amounts of effort, money and lives involved, was that crafting particular landscapes was of considerable importance to the Nazi regime. As Albert Speer, Hitler's favourite architect and later armaments minister, explained in his memoirs, 'architecture' was a 'magic word' to Hitler (1995: 61). It was so because it offered the potential to both shape the present population and to leave a lasting legacy that would endure into the future. As Speer recounts, Hitler would muse on

FIGURE 1 Zeppelin Building c.1935.

Photograph courtesy of Nuremberg Stadtarchiv



the way in which, say, a 'small farmer' from the provinces might feel on encountering particular buildings (1978: 8) and how buildings could influence people by their 'impact on the eye' ('Menschenbeeinflussung im Auge' - Speer, 1978). In this, he seems to have been influenced by popular psychological ideas of the day (Kershaw, 1998: 156), as well as by architectural ideas, derived partly from a fascination with ancient Greece and Rome (Scobie, 1990).

Although architecture was sometimes described by the members of the Nazi regime as 'words in stone' (*Worte aus Stein*), these 'words' were not conceived as being quite like linguistic words. Rather, they were envisaged as working primarily at a direct, non-cognitive, affective level, bypassing reasoning - a form of abduction (Gell, 1998). Their impact was to be on the sensory organs and emotions, unmediated by language. Indeed, in setting out what he understands by 'words in stone', Speer argues that architecture is incapable of inscribing *specific* meanings - it is not language-like in this sense (1978: 8). This means, he claims, that it cannot be seen as ideological; and, therefore, that his own architecture cannot be regarded as Fascist. Architecture could operate, in his view, as an important tool in the aestheticization of politics but that process of aestheticization was itself universal and ideologically neutral. Aestheticization, that is, was a mere enhancement, working to bring out whatever meaning the politics happened to have. Of course, this is the argument

FIGURE 2 Zeppelin Building 2003.

Photograph copyright Sharon Macdonald



of a man seeking to play down his active role in the Nazi regime and to recover a significance for his work as 'art' – an enterprise that he conceives as apolitical, a perspective largely shared by allied prosecutors at the Nuremberg trials and that contributed to his being spared execution. Others, notably Walter Benjamin, have argued precisely the contrary, that the aestheticization of politics is 'the logical result of Fascism' (1992: 234). It is so, according to Benjamin, because Fascism turns politics into spectacle and, in so doing, appears to give expression to the masses, while failing to address underlying social structures (he says 'property relations'). As such, aestheticization deflects attention from important matters of political substance, and is a kind of misrepresentation (Hewitt, 1993: 166).

Speer's argument is also disingenuous in that it is clear from his own writings, as well as other sources, that specific architectural features were designed to support the political ambitions of the Nazi regime (Burden, 1967; Speer, 1978, 1995; Jaskot, 2000; Doosry, 2002). The rally grounds were explicitly intended to help produce among those who encountered the site – especially, though not only, during the rallies – a sense of belonging to a greater German people. The landscape was an exercise in sculpting identity, or, as Gell (1998) might put it, the landscape could be seen as part of the distributed Nazi 'person' or 'mind'.

ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGIES

As architectural historians (e.g. Scobie, 1990; Beer et al., 1995) have shown, the various architectural styles mobilized or developed by the Nazis were part of a set of calculated ideas which drew on notions of history and of the kinds of effect which the particular styles were expected to have upon those who encountered them. Certainly, this was not always well thought through or fully coherent; there were sometimes conflicts of opinion, and actual construction processes could result in all kinds of compromises, revisions and accidental results (Jaskot, 2000). Nevertheless, Hitler, Speer and associates clearly intended that their revision of landscapes and architectural projects would have the desired effect upon the population and help generate particular identifications.

In doing so, they drew eclectically on ideas about how certain physical features, such as size, would have an impact of themselves and on the connotations of particular styles. Making the old town look more mediaeval, for example, was part of an historical allusion to the imperial First Reich, which had a base in Nuremberg, of which the Third Reich was intended to be an eminent successor (Koch, 1995). Nuremberg's historical association also contributed to it being given the honour – later to become a legacy against which the city has struggled – of official 'City of the Party Rallies' and home of the declaration of the infamous Nazi

rules for defining, and denying citizenship to, Jews – the Nuremberg Laws. Party rallies took place not only on the designated rally grounds, but also through the streets of Nuremberg's old town, Hitler's procession against the back-drop of steep gables, timbering and leaded windows thus bearing an imprint – an 'eye impact' – of imperial processions of earlier times. Likewise, the vernacular 'heimatschutzlich' ('protecting the Heimat') style of the Strength-through-Joy village drew on and evoked notions of tradition and community, the designs being intended to foster senses of 'deutsche Gemütlichkeit' (German cosiness/togetherness) among those who stayed there (Zelnhefer, 1992a: 117).

It is, however, the enormous 'stripped classicist' (Benton, 1999: 211) buildings, such as those at the rally grounds, especially the Zeppelin Building (Figures 1 and 2), that are most widely seen as a realization of a Fascist aesthetic. Like other styles employed, this so-called 'kolossal' style also drew on historical precedents, in this case, classical architecture. The Zeppelin Building, for example, was, Speer explained, modelled on the Pergamon altar (1995: 96). In the reformulations of Speer and his associates, however, the corners and edges were made harder and more angular; and dimensions were expanded to the überdimensional – the Zeppelin Building stretching horizontally to a length of 360 m.

In making allusions to classical buildings – allusions that were indeed likely to work directly on the eye even of those who had never directly encountered the originals, although the Pergamon altar was in the Berlin Museum – what was evoked was not simply the historical significance of these empires, but also their aggressive imperialism and total power (Petsch, 1992). Moreover, Speer and his colleagues worked with ideas that certain physical forms could produce certain effects. In particular, large size relative to the human body was understood to impress and give the individual a sense of awe. As Speer explained, what was involved here was a 'violation of human scale' (Speer, 1995: 204). While he seems to have seen this as a violation that is diminished in contexts in which more and more buildings are constructed with larger dimensions, the Nazi emphasis on making buildings which were, at the time, violations of the scale of the landscapes in which they were situated can be seen as part of a calculated Nazi ideology of dwarfing the individual, and subsuming individual identity to the collective project. This ideology was summed up in one of the slogans of the rallies: 'Du bist nichts, dein Volk is alles', 'You are nothing, your people is all' (Zelnhefer, 1992b: 89).

The massive dimensions of the marching grounds also allowed for a mass – though rigidly ordered – grouping of bodies that was likewise intended to have emotional effects on both participants and viewers. As well as incorporating the individual body into the collective, this 'body work' was supposed to generate emotions of *Begeisterung* and *Faszination* – a heady mix of enthusiasm, awe, fascination and excitement. These

responses were understood to be spontaneous and non-cognitive. Nevertheless, although affect drummed up at the rallies is sometimes described as a kind of 'mass hysteria', it was also carefully controlled and channelled (Burden, 1967). This was achieved by extremely strict choreography – movements of participants were calculated to the inch (Burden, 1967: 119) – and the hard lines and strong axiality of the architectural space in which they took place.

Other architectural features were also designed in order to achieve or enhance desired social effects. Party hierarchy was physically set out on the tribunes, on which party officials were ranked, above the flat mass of the crowd. And at the centre of the Zeppelin Building, elevated above the crowd and pre-eminent among the officials, was the pulpit-like so-called Führer podium from which Hitler made his speeches to the masses below. The quasi-religious effect was further stimulated by the use of light, Speer's 'Lichtdom' – a 'cathedral of light' – being created by projecting numerous searchlights into the night sky (Zelnhefer, 2002).

The selection of materials too was shaped both by ideas about their connotations and what were regarded as inherent properties. Granite was chosen for the Congress Hall partly because of its qualities of hardness and durability (Jaskot, 2000: 36). The white limestone cladding of the Zeppelin Building was selected to provide a striking and even dazzling stage for the display of Nazi officials and the numerous banners, with the Nazi red, black and white insignia, with which it was bedecked during rallies. This choice of colours – made personally by Hitler (Kershaw, 1998: 147) – was itself an example of the calculated 'impact on the eye', the 'speaking directly' at some kind of linguistically and rationally unmediated level. The colours are those which Berlin and Kay identify as 'basic' (1969) and that Victor Turner sees as having the capacity to generate 'heightened bodily experiences . . . informed with a power in excess of that normally possessed by the individual' (1967: 89) on account of their being 'the three colors representing products of the human body whose emission, spilling, or production is associated with a heightening of emotion' (Turner, 1967: 88–9). Such Hertzian ideas, of the kind being recovered in contemporary accounts of materiality and agency (e.g. Tilley, 2004), were, then, also recognized and put to calculated work by the Nazi regime.

DURABILITY AND CHANGE

Architecture was also valued by Hitler because of its capacity to endure over time. On laying a foundation stone at the rally grounds, Hitler said that he hoped that the buildings would 'speak as eternal witnesses' – 'rede als ewiger Zeuge' (Reither, 2000: 6) – that is, that they would leave a lasting legacy via a physical presence, which would remain in the

landscape, capable of 'speaking to' future generations. This was articulated by Himmler too (who as head of the SS was responsible for commissioning various buildings) in an article in 1941 he said: 'When people are silent, the stones speak. By means of the stone, great epochs speak to the present' (quoted in Jaskot, 2000: 114).

This idea of buildings or stones as capable of speaking, and doing so across time, was shared by Speer, who drew up what he called a 'Theory of Ruin Value' (Speer, 1995: 97). This was based upon consideration of how buildings from Classical Antiquity had decayed over time yet retained a capacity to impress and generate feelings of awe over the centuries. His theory thus aimed to take into account the ways in which buildings would decay and to set out principles that would ensure that even as they did so they would remain capable of acting as 'bridges of tradition' (Speer, 1995). That is, that they would retain sufficient of their shape and qualities even as they fell into ruin to remain able to 'speak'. Not only, then, was there an intention that the structures as built would be capable of effects, calculations were made about how agency might be made to continue into the distant future.

Creating such large buildings, and using durable materials such as granite, was one way of making the 'kolossal' buildings more durable than they might have been otherwise. Certainly, the sheer cost and difficulty of removing them has been an argument used at certain times by the city council in the post-war years against such proposals. For example, these were the grounds used by a Social Democrat city council for rejecting proposals for major demolition made by the Association of German Architects in a document entitled *Schönes Nürnberg* (*Beautiful Nuremberg*) in 1963 (Weiss, 1992: 231).

Nevertheless, some parts of the grounds have been removed or altered. Allied bombing resulted in the destruction of the wooden Strength-through-Joy village and a hall elsewhere on the site; and part of the granite-faced Congress Hall was damaged. Areas at the north and south extremities of the grounds have since been removed, mainly in the 1960s, prior to the site coming under Monument Protection (*Denkmalschutz*) legislation in 1973. Thus, during the 1950s and 1960s the areas of accommodation and the vast March Field and its towers in the south of the grounds were blasted away and the area was used for building housing. Meanwhile the Luitpold arena was turned into parkland (and partially given over to a concert hall) by being grassed over and the surrounding tiered seating either bulldozed or turned into flower beds. The two largest Nazi buildings – the Zeppelin Building and the Congress Hall – are, however, still *in situ*, though the side-galleries of the former were exploded off in 1967. In addition, there are material traces of other parts of the original site; and the large open areas between the buildings give an impression of the vast spaces involved.

Today, since 2001, there is also an architecturally striking documentation centre, built as a glass and steel 'stake' (*Pfahl*) through the Congress Hall (Figure 3), which contains an exhibition about National Socialism and the Nuremberg rallies. Information boards are also provided near key landmarks on the rally grounds. As well as being a site of historic interest, attracting tourists and, sometimes, Nazi pilgrims, the area is also a popular public park. Numerous local people, from the immediate vicinity and also further afield come to walk, cycle and roller-blade along the Great Road, to watch a football match at the stadium, to picnic or sunbathe on the grassed-over marching fields, and to play tennis against the walls of the Zeppelin Building.

Before returning to look how the site is experienced by some of the many people who come to it, I first describe a number of post-war changes – and struggles over its agency and materiality – that have made it what it is today. In doing so, I focus on the Zeppelin Building, for this is the building that 'speaks Nazism' more than any other part of the landscape, images of it during the rallies having circulated widely. This is the building that most tourists come to see, coach tours often stopping only here. It has also been at the centre of some of the most symbolically

FIGURE 3 Documentation Centre of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in the Congress Hall, designed by Gunther Domenig.

Photograph copyright Sharon Macdonald



redolent developments and politically fraught struggles in the post-war history of this Nazi landscape.

REMOVING SWASTIKAS: DE-NAZIFICATION AND THE CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF AGENCY

In a ceremony on the 24 April 1945, the large central swastika on the Zeppelin Building was draped in the US flag and detonated (Heigl, 2003: 22). Press reporters from around the world recorded the event, and photographs of it were published in newspapers across the globe. Elsewhere too, though usually without such ceremony, swastikas were stripped from facades.

The removal of swastikas was not, however, only a symbolic act. Swastikas were widely understood not only as symbols, but also as agents, possessing what Paul Virilio has called an 'arresting power', a capacity to create a kind of 'paralysis of the spectator's gaze' (Virilio, 1989: 54; Quinn, 1995: 14, 15). This dangerous capacity was an extended agency of Hitler's supposed hypnotic powers to entrance. The removal of swastikas was thus both a ritual de-Nazification and an obliteration of a significant item in the Nazi technology of enchantment.

Significant though the removal was, however, it also served to locate Nazi agency in swastikas alone and to ignore the fabric – in this case architectural – which they embellished. Nazi buildings, including the Zeppelin Building, were, thus, left intact. There seems to have been very little call for their destruction in the post-war decade, one of the very few instances being a campaign by an association of local people living near the Luitpold arena for the area to be returned to its pre-war state (Wachter, 1999: 336). In general, however, removing swastikas was deemed a sufficient removal of Nazi agency.

This appears to have been the view not only of German post-war city governments, but also the occupying US Allied forces, who played an important part along with the city council in making decisions about the buildings. The Zeppelin Building was primarily assigned for use by the US military, the Zeppelin field being used as a runway and for military training. Perhaps the confidence of the victors, and the fact that the buildings were not part of their heritage and identity, neutralized any sense of continuing agency. However, most other Nazi buildings were also left intact, being only stripped of their most visible Nazi insignia.

In later accounts, pragmatic motives are often given (e.g. Weiss, 1992). In a city that had been reduced to rubble by Allied bombing, any buildings left standing could be, and were, put to use. More generally, the period was one in which building and rebuilding – *Aufbau* and *Wiederaufbau* – were the major preoccupation; and regarded as vital psychological as well as practical enterprises.

The circumscription of material agency was also, I suggest, part of a more general move at the time to locate and remove Nazi agency – and to do so in highly visible ways – while avoiding identifying Nazi agency too widely. Official ‘de-Nazification’ included the Nuremberg trials, held in public and filmed, which led to the execution or imprisonment of mainly high-profile Nazi war criminals. It also included individuals filling in a lengthy questionnaire, which resulted in some being removed from office. However, just as the removal of swastikas can be said to have left the substance of the Nazi building intact, so too, some argued, did broader political de-Nazification (e.g. Niethammer, 1982; see also, Frei, 1999; Reichel, 2001). That is, ‘de-Nazification’ remained fairly superficial and, in that it gave an appearance of having removed the key agents, its procedures could also act simultaneously as processes of rehabilitation (Niethammer, 1982). This was the case not only in politically conservative areas but also in cities like Nuremberg whose councils were Social Democrat and even included some former political prisoners. Involved here then, was a politics of the attribution of agency embedded in the widely shared preoccupations of the time with quick and visible removal of Nazism, maintaining whatever existing (material and social) fabric was possible, identity-building and ‘moving on’.

AMPUTATING THE ZEPPELIN BUILDING: CONTESTED MOTIVES IN THE DISARMING OF AGENCY

Although swastikas were officially banned from public display in post-war Germany there have been claims over the years about some remaining. Not only do such claims have a counterpart in allegations about the continued presence in public life of Nazi individuals, they act as material evidence of a perceived lack of will to fully eradicate Nazi influence in German life. For this reason, they often produce particularly heated, and sometimes confused, responses.

In 1965 a visiting student from Israel claimed that Nuremberg still had swastikas open to public view (reported in *Nürnberger Nachrichten* 1 September 1965). These alleged swastikas were on the ceilings of the side-galleries of the Zeppelin Building – part of a design that is also on the ceiling inside the building (Figure 4), in the so-called Golden Hall (though this was not open to the public at the time). In response to the claims, the Mayor of Nuremberg’s personal minister declared that ‘nowhere on the former Zeppelin field do there still exist swastikas in the form used by the National Socialists. All such emblems were removed immediately after the end of the War’ (*Nürnberger Nachrichten* 1 September 1965, my translation). The ceiling design was, the minister emphasized, a classical meander motif that had been seen as nothing more than a pattern from classical antiquity by numerous visitors,

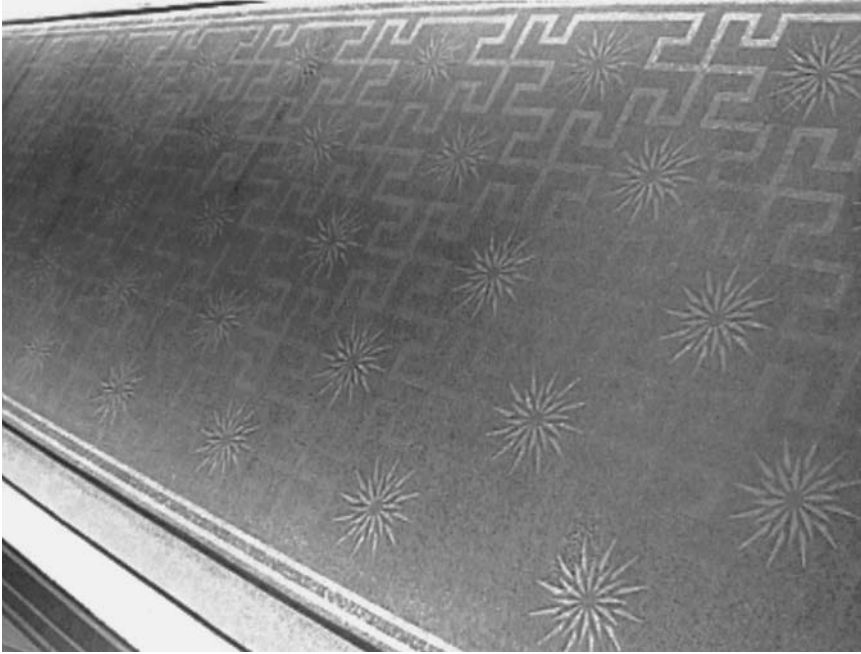


FIGURE 4 Swastikas or 'just pattern'? Design on the ceiling of the Golden Hall.
Photograph copyright Sharon Macdonald

including 'Americans of Jewish background'. The director of the city's art collections was also called upon to show images of ancient vases with the same design, in an attempt to show that the pattern on the Zeppelin Building could not be interpreted as having a Nazi meaning. The fact that the swastika itself had an older history and could have been made subject to the same arguments was never noted.

The case was an interesting example of the intertwining of alleged material and political agency – and the politics of attributions. The council's hyper-defensiveness was a function of a post-war determination to be seen as having eradicated Nazism. That there was an unacknowledged recognition that they had not in fact done so, may have been implicated in their decision less than two years later to dynamite away the Zeppelin Building's side-galleries – those containing the swastika design. In taking this action, the council emphasized that their decision was a purely material one: the galleries had become structurally unstable and, therefore, there was a risk that they might fall and cause injury. Certainly, in all of the recorded minutes from the meetings of the council, only material problems with the side-galleries were reported, and the ceiling design was never mentioned. Some consideration was

given to the possibility of repairing the building – and detailed calculations produced – but this was dismissed as being too costly. The agency for the destruction of the galleries was, thus, located squarely in the building itself: it had brought about its own demise by becoming unsafe. This could also, in a kind of Azandean ‘second-spear’ type argument (Evans-Pritchard 1937), be inferred to be ultimately the fault of the Nazi builders and architects, for the poor workmanship involved in the building’s hasty construction. Whichever, though, the originating agency of the council was deleted: they were merely carrying out the inevitable.

The council was clearly aware that political motives might be attributed, however. In announcing the decision, the Buildings minister stated that it ‘had nothing to do with getting rid of a *Zeitgeist*’ (*Nürnberg Nachrichten* 30 May 1967). Some letters to the newspaper, however, deemed otherwise, writers commenting variously that it was right that Nazi buildings should be removed as the Nazis had got rid of buildings such as the synagogue or that the council were acting as ‘Jewish knaves’ (*Judenknechte*) by destroying the architectural heritage (*Nürnberg Nachrichten* 30 May 1967). Surprisingly, however, none of the reports or letters made the link with the student’s claims, though later, getting rid of the embarrassing swastikas that the student had pointed out, came to be widely seen as one of the motives for removing the galleries (e.g. *Geschichte für Alle*, 2002: 101).

The council’s lack of willingness to acknowledge the swastikas and the blasting off of the side-galleries was part of a broader post-war discourse of trying to ‘wash away’ the Nazi ‘stain’, as President Theodor Heuss put it on a visit to Nuremberg in 1952. Blasting away buildings, or parts of them, and grassing over the marching fields, all of which occurred with relatively little comment in the 1960s, were the material correlates of such sentiments. They were exercises in wiping away the past and denying it a place in contemporary identity. Nevertheless, the removal remained only partial. As noted earlier, in the 1960s there were proposals to remove the Nazi buildings altogether but these were resisted mainly on grounds of cost, calculations that included the rental income that the city derived from using the Congress Hall and Zeppelin Building for storage. Again, human and material agency were thoroughly entangled.

Whatever the motives for the actions taken, one effect of the partial destruction of the Zeppelin Building was that it lost some of its ‘impact on the eye’. Denuded of its side galleries it was visually fore-shortened, making it appear stunted (Figures 1 and 2). This impression does not only rely on a contrast with its earlier state. Rather, in a bodily parallel that draws on a common way of apprehending buildings (Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994), the building appears ‘amputated’ and, thus, ‘disarmed’ (see Benton, 1999). Rather than decaying elegantly in the way that Speer had hoped, the council actions – whether they intended to do

so or not – had surely resulted in an actual material intervention that altered the ‘affordances’ (Tilley, 2004; after Gibson, 1986) or ‘material suggestiveness’ that the building offered for its subsequent ‘eye impact’. As we see later, this certainly seems to have been the case.

RESTORING AND COUNTERING AGENCY?

In explaining the decision to ‘disarm’ the Zeppelin Building, the minister responsible refused to accept arguments that the Zeppelin Building should be considered a ‘Baudenkmal’ – a building worthy of monument preservation (*Nürnberger Nachrichten* 30 May 1967). In 1973, however, the State of Bavaria (in which Nuremberg is situated) introduced monument protection legislation and, to the annoyance of the city council, designated the rally grounds as a site that should be preserved for its historically significant ‘kolossal’ architecture. This largely put a stop to destruction of the kind that the Zeppelin Building had undergone, though did not do so entirely. In 1976 some remaining structures at the ends of the former galleries were removed, again on grounds of structural instability. The removal signalled a refusal to comply entirely with the monument regulations which emanated from Munich, a city whose comparative ease in distancing itself from its Nazi past – as well as its ability to exercise agency over other Bavarian cities – was a source of some (and continuing) resentment in Nuremberg.

Nevertheless, amends were made in the following years, when the council agreed to restore the Zeppelin Building’s Golden Hall – with its ‘swastika ceiling’ – in the run-up to 1983, the 50th anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power. The restoration went ahead with little public questioning. A major reason for this seems to be that it was undertaken on the grounds not of restoring Nazi heritage but in order to provide a space in which the city’s ‘recent history’ would be addressed and ‘overcome’ (as a newspaper report put it: *Nürnberger Nachrichten* 5 December 1981). This represented a significant shift in ways of thinking about the past and its potential enduring agency. Rather than trying to ‘wipe off’ the ‘stain’ of the past, as had been the predominant approach through to the early 1970s, by the 1980s a more psychoanalytically-infused identity-discourse of needing to ‘face up to’ and ‘work through’ the past had become more widespread. (Texts like *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern – The Inability to Mourn* – 1967 by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich were particularly influential.) Only by such ‘facing up to’ what was ‘repressed’, could lingering insidious agency be recognized and properly addressed or ‘overcome’. This active *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – ‘mastering of the past’ as it is usually translated (see Maier, 1997) – was materially manifest in, among other things, exhibitions about Nazism. This included a new permanent exhibition, entitled *Faszination und Gewalt*

(Fascination and Violence), that opened in the newly restored Golden Hall in 1985.

However, this 'facing up' was hardly extensive and could be seen as 'an alibi', an excuse not to do anything more extensive. The exhibition itself was criticized for, among other things, failing to properly acknowledge Nuremberg's role in Nazi atrocity (e.g. *Nürnberger Nachrichten* 17 January 1985). Moreover, although in subsequent years competitions were held for ideas about what to do more extensively with the rally grounds site – and although there were entries which included radical proposals for flagging up and commenting on its history – little that was substantive was done until the new documentation centre opened in 2001. Neither was much restoration undertaken.

This rather piecemeal and non-interventionist state of affairs was, however, seen by some as the most appropriate course of (in)action in any case. In the mid-1980s the SDP culture minister, Hermann Glaser (who had been involved in most of the developments to address the site's past, including the exhibition) publicly argued for a policy of neither restoring the buildings – which would potentially reinstate at least some of their original power to attract – nor allowing them to fall into ruin (Glaser, 1989). The latter, he warned, might merely fulfil the Nazi hope of their becoming elegant ruins, a physical form that some Germans might find compelling. The best approach, he suggested, was one of 'Profanierung' – 'profanation': leaving the buildings in a state of unsightly semi-disrepair. Although his argument could be seen as simply a validation of the status quo – or an alleged intentionality where there was, perhaps, rather little – it attracted some dissent from others on the council for its implication that there was something 'sacred' to 'profane'. Nevertheless, as far as the Zeppelin Building, and indeed much of the rest of the site, was concerned, letting it fall into disrepair but not attractive ruin has been one of the main 'strategies' that has continued until today. As such, so is the logic of Glaser's argument, the buildings remain in place and can be recognized as part of German heritage, but they are depleted of their agency to attract and to shape identities in the ways that their original creators would have wished.

DO THE STONES STILL 'SPEAK'?

So how far does this landscape, and the Zeppelin Building in particular, continue to 'speak' today? Does it contain continuing agency and 'eye impact' to attract admiration from those who encounter it or to shape their identities?

As I have already outlined, the former rally grounds site is a heterogeneous landscape, bearing the imprint not only of its Nazi history but also of more recent developments. The latter also include a partial

attempt to return the area to its pre-Nazi state as a public park. It has also been shaped by the various policies of confronting the past – especially in its new documentation centre – and ‘profaning’ it by letting the surface of the Zeppelin Building crack and fill with weeds or seep rusty stains onto the white limestone, and by using it as a stand for viewing motor racing or a stage for rock concerts (Bob Dylan and Mick Jagger, among others, having performed here). This is a landscape that includes semi-decayed monumental Nazi architecture alongside attractive woodland walks and a boating lake. It includes a football stadium, a South-Sea Island lakeside café and a war memorial. Such surreal juxtapositions were partly what drew me to carry out research – and to talk with some of the numerous people who spend time there.

Unlike Stonehenge, the rally grounds are visited not only by heritage tourists or ‘pilgrims’, but also by people from the city for everyday leisure and relaxation. They are, thus, visited as a once in a lifetime trip for those who feel it a modern duty to ‘face up to’ such a history, and also for those who admire the Nazi regime. They are also part of more regular, sometimes daily, practices by those who come, in great numbers, to take a stroll, to sit on a bench, to sit on the steps of the Zeppelin Building and read a newspaper, to walk their child in a buggy or to meet their friends. Among the numerous different visitors and ‘regulars’, however, I did not once meet anybody who did not know who had built these buildings and of what history they were part. Nevertheless, how they related to them – and their attributions of continuing agency – varied significantly.

At one extreme were pilgrims like Mr Smith (as I will call him) from England, who was ‘collecting’ a visit to this site in much the same way that he collected Nazi memorabilia. In extolling the magnificence of the site, and the achievements of the Nazi regime ‘until it went wrong in 1936’, he proclaimed that the buildings have ‘so much power, you can really feel it’. Having seen Leni Riefenstahl’s film about the rallies, *Triumph of the Will*, ‘many, many times’, he had no difficulty projecting images of the rallies onto what he saw around him: ‘I can just see it all with the rallies, the crowds down there, the shouting. And Hitler just there, where I’ve just been standing . . . You’ve got to admit it, it’s impressive. You can feel the power of the place. Feel the power of the buildings. Can’t you?’ Partly because I was reluctant to stand on the Zeppelin Building sharing a sense of its ‘power’ with a Nazi admirer, I pointed to the cracks, weeds and broken bottles and said that, although if I imagined it with a rally in place I could see that it must have been impressive to those there, today it was not. Mr Smith conceded the point – such was the affordance of the ‘profanation’ of the building – and pitied me for being unable to ‘see beyond’ its current appearance. He argued vehemently that the building should be restored ‘back to its

proper glory' so that 'people will be really able to feel the power of it', even if, like me, they lacked sufficient knowledge or imagination to picture it as it had been intended.

Even a pilgrim like Mr Smith, then, acknowledged that changes to the Nazi landscape, and the Zeppelin Building in particular, depleted some of the power that it might be able to exercise over those who encountered it. To him, this was a 'crime' perpetrated by Nuremberg authorities unwilling to recognize and embrace the nation's historic achievements. For many other visitors, however, especially those from outside Germany, the sorry state of the site, and especially the Zeppelin Building, was evidence of the city's – and often the nation's – unwillingness to 'face up to' its past role in the perpetration of evil. Decay was understood not as a calculated countering of agency or 'profanation', but as neglect rooted in a form of repression. Such visitors also typically saw those who play tennis against the walls of the Zeppelin building, or skate-board on its steps, as historically ignorant or unconcerned about their country's terrible history.

Yet, as I have noted, those who play tennis or skate-board are not ignorant of the site's past. Nor are they necessarily unconcerned. One man who came to play tennis weekly, for example, was also involved in anti-Nazi educational programmes. But rather than seeing these as in some sense contradictory, or as surreal juxtapositions, he regarded them simply as a matter-of-fact. The Zeppelin Building happened to be a good – and free – place for practising tennis. Doing so was not, then, a matter of profanation either. Everyday leisure was not to be located in a political or identity framework of agency. This was so too for almost all of those who came to use the space in such ways.

Among them, was a minority which deeply resented the fact that there were new proposals and moves, in particular the documentation centre, to address the area as a Nazi space. Such moves were, as they saw it, a continuing attempt to besmirch the German character and to make new generations have to pay for what had gone on earlier. In other words, the very attempts to address the site's history were, for women such as Frau Muller (who remembered a difficult post-war childhood), a writing of the past into contemporary identity when, she thought, 'a closing line should be drawn' and people should be left to 'simply live'.

* * *

What we see here, then, if only cursorily, is that whether the stones are attributed with a continuing power to 'speak' or not – as well as what they are understood as 'saying' – is bound up with contemporary political positioning and identity. Yet, what is involved is not simply interpretative 'free-flow'. Rather, individual articulations are a co-product not only of individual circumstances and preferences, but of particular ways

of understanding identity and agency, coupled with the historical connotations and material affordances of the site. Whether identity is understood as requiring a 'facing up to' the past or not, and whether history is regarded as an inevitable part of contemporary identity or as a 'burden' imposed by misguided people unable to 'simply live', are factors that contribute to how individuals experience the agency of the landscape. Other factors include whether there is a will to 'feel the power' of the past – either to admire or to reject it; or a compartmentalization in which the site can at some times be related to as a Nazi space and at others as a leisure opportunity, without this being experienced as some kind of identity conflict.

Looking at a landscape like this in terms of its agency is, as both the historical and contemporary examples here have shown, part of the way in which those who encounter it do so too. Yet, as also evident here, this is deeply problematic, not least because attributing agency to the material can, in some circumstances, be part of a denial of human responsibility and intention. Likewise, circumscribing agency to tightly specified agents (such as the swastika or high-profile criminals), can be a means of not acknowledging wider accountability. These are hypersensitive matters in post-war Germany, as evident, for example, in the controversy over the publication of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996).

How Germany should deal with a landscape such as this is undoubtedly fraught with dilemmas. As we have seen, neglect can be variously interpreted as – and can be – a result of failure to act or as a purposeful strategy to counter a Nazi technology of enchantment. Likewise, both restoration and addressing the site's past risk according it a continuing agency. Equally, letting it vanish entirely not only silences its potential ability to enact something of its original intention, it also forgoes deploying it within other political projects – in particular, using the stones to say 'never again'.

While this case is undoubtedly specific, it suggests that discussions of materiality and agency need to find ways to recognize material relativities (especially those whose 'suggestiveness' is derived from comparisons with the human body) alongside located conceptualizations of identity, materiality and agency. Moreover, it also highlights that these cannot be adequately understood without attention to the politics of the attribution of agency.

Acknowledgements

I thank participants at the 'Landscape, Heritage, Identity' seminar organized by Chris Tilley, and also Morgan Meyer and Clive Norris, for helpful comments on earlier, and rather different, versions of this article.

References

- Beer, H., Heyden, T., Kock, C., Liedtke, G.-D., Nerdinger, W. and Schmidt, A., eds (1995) *Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–1945. Architektur und Bauformen im Nationalsozialismus*. Nuremberg: Tümmels Verlag.
- Bender, B., ed. (1993) *Landscape. Politics and Perspectives*. Oxford: Berg.
- Bender, B. (1998) *Stonehenge. Making Space*. Oxford: Berg.
- Bender, B. and Winer, M., eds (2001) *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*. Oxford: Berg.
- Benjamin, W. (1992) *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn. London: Fontana.
- Benton, T. (1999) 'From the Arengario to the Lictor's Axe: Memories of Italian Fascism', in M. Kwint, C. Breward and J. Aynsley (eds) *Material Memories. Design and Evocation*, pp. 199–218. Oxford: Berg.
- Berlin, B. and Kay, P. (1969) *Basic Color Terms, their Universality and Evolution*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Burden, H.T. (1967) *The Nuremberg Party Rallies*. London: Pall Mall Press.
- Dietzfelbinger, E. (1995) 'Erblast aus Stein. Der Umgang mit dem ehemaligen Reichsparteitagsgelände', *Nürnberg Heute*: 60–5.
- Doosry, Y. (2002) *Wohlauf, laßt uns eine Stadt und einen Turm bauen . . .'* *Studien zum Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg*. Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag Tübingen.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Frei, N. (1999 [1996]) *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Gell, A. (1998) *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Geschichte für Alle (2002) *Geländebegehung. Das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg*, 2nd edn. Nuremberg: Sandberg Verlag.
- Gibson, J. (1986) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Glaser, H. (1989) 'Rumpelkammern im deutschen Kolosseum', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 16 June: 15.
- Goldhagen, D. (1996) *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. London: Little, Brown and Company.
- Heigl, P. (2003) *Die US-Armee in Nürnberg auf Hitlers 'Reichsparteitagsgelände' (The US Army in Nuremberg on Hitler's Nazi Party Rally Grounds)*. Nuremberg: Documentation Centre of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds.
- Hewitt, A. (1993) *Fascist Modernism. Aesthetics, Politics and the Avant-Garde*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Heyden, T. (1995) 'Ludwig Ruff (1878–1934): "Des Führers zweiter Baumeister"', in H. Beer, T. Heyden, C. Kock, G.-D. Liedtke, W. Nerdinger and A. Schmidt (eds) *Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–1945. Architektur und Bauformen im Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 180–203. Nuremberg: Tümmels Verlag.
- Heynen, H. (1999) *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jaskot, P.B. (2000) *The Architecture of Oppression. The SS, Forced Labor and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kershaw, I. (1998) *Hitler. 1889–1936*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Koch, C. (1995) 'Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–45', in H. Beer, T. Heyden, C. Kock, G.-D. Liedtke, W. Nerdinger and A. Schmidt (eds) *Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–1945. Architektur und Bauformen im Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 14–113. Nuremberg: Tümmels Verlag.

- Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Layton, R. (2003) 'Art and Agency: A Reassessment', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9(3): 447–64.
- Maier, C.S. (1997 [1988]) *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Miller, D. (2005) 'Materiality: An Introduction', in D. Miller (ed.) *Materiality*, pp. 1–50. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Mitscherlich, A. and Mitscherlich, M. (1967) *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens (The Inability to Mourn: Foundations of Collective Behaviour)*. Munich: Piper.
- Niethammer, L. (1982) *Die Mitläuferfabrik: Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns*. Berlin and Bonn: Dietz.
- Parker Pearson, M. and Richards, C. (1994) 'Ordering the World: Perceptions of Architecture, Space and Time', in M. Parker Pearson and C. Richards (eds) *Architecture and Order. Approaches to Social Space*, pp. 1–37. London: Routledge.
- Petsch, J. (1992) 'Architektur als Weltanschauung. Die Staats- und Parteiarchitektur im Nationalsozialismus', in B. Ogan and W.W. Weiß (eds) *Faszination und Gewalt. Zur politischen Ästhetik des Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 197–204. Nuremberg: Tümmels Verlag.
- Quinn, M. (1995) *The Swastika. Constructing the Symbol*. London: Routledge.
- Reichel, P. (2001) *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute*. Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Reither, I. (2000) 'Worte aus Stein' und die Sprache der dichter. *Das Reichsparteitagsgelände als poetische Landschaft*. Nuremberg: Geschichte für Alle.
- Schama, S. (1996) *Landscape and Memory*. London: Fontana.
- Schmidt, A. (1995) 'Saubere Altstadt', in H. Beer, T. Heyden, C. Kock, G.-D. Liedtke, W. Nerdinger and A. Schmidt (eds) *Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–1945. Architektur und Bauformen im Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 130–51. Nuremberg: Tümmels Verlag.
- Scobie, A. (1990) *Hitler's State Architecture. The Impact of Classical Antiquity*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Speer, A. (1978) *Architektur*. Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna: Verlag Ullstein GmbH.
- Speer, A. (1995) *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. R. and C. Winston, 1970. London: Phoenix.
- Tilley, C. (2004) *The Materiality of Stone. Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg.
- Turner, V. (1967) *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of ndembu Ritual*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.
- Virilio, P. (1989) *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. P. Camiller. London: Verso.
- Wachter, C. (1999) *Kultur in Nürnberg 1945–1950. Kulturpolitik, kulturelles Leben und Bild der Stadt zwischen dem Ende der NS-Diktatur und der Prosperität der fünfziger Jahre*. Nuremberg: Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.
- Weiss, W.W. (1992) "'Ruinen-Werte" Das Nürnberger Reichsparteitagsgelände nach 1945', in B. Ogan and W.W. Weiß (eds) *Faszination und Gewalt. Zur politischen Ästhetik des Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 225–40. Nuremberg: Tümmels Verlag.
- Zelnhefer, S. (1992a) 'Inszenierte Volksgemeinschaft', in Centrum Industriekultur *Kulisen der Gewalt. Das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg*, pp. 99–121. Nuremberg: Hugendubel.

- Zelnhefer, S. (1992b) 'Rituale und Bekenntnisse. Die Reichsparteitage der NSDAP', in *Centrum Industriekultur Kulisen der Gewalt. Das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg*, pp. 89–98. Nuremberg: Hugendubel.
- Zelnhefer, S. (2002) *Die Reichsparteitage der NSDAP in Nürnberg*. Nuremberg: Verlag Nürnberger Presse.

◆ SHARON MACDONALD is Professor of Cultural Anthropology in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. Her books include *A Companion to Museum Studies* (ed. 2006, Blackwell) and *Exhibition Experiments* (co-ed. with Paul Basu, forthcoming, Blackwell). Address: Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield Building, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S10 2TU, UK. [email: s.j.macdonald@shef.ac.uk]
