

# H-Net Reviews

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Eckart Dietzfelbinger, Gerhard Liedtke. *Nürnberg - Ort der Massen: Das Reichsparteitagsgelände. Vorgeschichte und schwieriges Erbe*. Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2004. 159 S. + zahlr. SW-Abb. EUR 29.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-86153-322-1.

Steven Lehrer. *Hitler Sites: A City-By-City Guidebook (Austria, Germany, France, United States)*. Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2002. vi + 218 pp. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-2454-2.

Stephan Porombka, Hilmar Schmundt. *Böse Orte: Stätten nationalsozialistischer Selbstdarstellung - heute*. Berlin: Claassen Verlag, 2005. 223 S. EUR 19.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-546-00380-3.

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## Visiting the Sites of Nazism: Official and

Hardly a month goes by, especially in Germany, without controversy as to how the Third Reich, its sites of horror, its artifacts and its victims, should be commemorated. The recent debate over the exhibition in Schwerin of the works of Hitler's favorite sculptor, Arno Brecker, is but one example. Because commemoration is at least in part supposed to educate the public about the Nazi past, debates arise over what message, or messages, such exhibits or memorials should convey. On the one hand, knowledge about the Third Reich should prevent a recurrence of Nazism. Yet on the other, the official messages of deterrence embedded in museums and documentation centers are not the only meanings that arise. As scholars of tourism have recently argued, tourists are hardly blank slates, who in uncomplicated fashion swallow what promoters of tourism transmit. Indeed, places of memory, particularly in the case of Nazism, are often explicitly designed to contest alternative readings of the past that their visitors might implicitly share. The three books reviewed here, all of them written for a general audience, expose in different ways the inherent tensions and unstable meanings embedded in the remains of the Third Reich.

As a guidebook, Steven Lehrer's *Hitler Sites* is most explicitly directed to tourists, especially Americans, who according to the author would find it difficult to locate important markers of the Nazi regime from most travel guides. An associate professor at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York who has written a previous work on the house where the Wannsee Conference took place, Lehrer's city-by-city guidebook traces the places associated with Hitler's birth and early life in Austria, his emigration to Munich shortly before World War I, his leadership of the fledgling Nazi party afterwards, his rise to power and subsequently his rule of the Third Reich. Although places of importance to the Nazi hierarchy are included (an example being Hermann Göring's Brandenburg estate, Carinhall), Lehrer focuses primarily on the Führer. Generously illustrated with appropriate references following each entry, the book argues that tourism to Nazi sites "can furnish insights into Hitler and Nazi Germany that are difficult to obtain in any other manner. The visitor comes away with a more profound understanding of who and what Hitler really was" (p. 2).

Presumably because Lehrer's attention is drawn to

sites in which Hitler was physically present, tourists, or more generally readers, will not find entries for the death camps, most of the concentration camps, or major war sites for that matter, except for the West Wall, Compiègne and Paris. The closest one comes to the eastern front is via the author's entries on Hitler's field headquarters. Nevertheless, there is plenty here to keep even the most determined World War II buff occupied, beginning with Hitler's birthplace in Braunau am Inn and the well-tended graves of the Führer's parents outside Linz and concluding with the neighborhood in Queens, New York, where Hitler's half-Irish nephew Willie lived, having made his living during the war through speaking engagements in which he attacked his infamous uncle. Unlike most guidebooks, *Hitler Sites* provides an extensive bibliography of English and German sources, including many German newspaper articles, which support detailed and competent descriptions of each place. Even if one lacks the resources or inclination to follow Lehrer's tour from start to finish, this is a well-informed and handy reference.

Consistent with the purpose of guidebooks, however, Lehrer intends to educate tourists, or more precisely direct them to places that will (with the aid of the information that the author provides) produce the appropriate appreciation for Hitler's ferocious brutality, as well as that of the Nazi regime. Thus, readers learn relatively little about the controversies surrounding many of the sites or the multiple meanings associated with them. To be sure, allusions to conflicts arise now and then, such as Lehrer's reference to the recently constructed documentation center in the Obersalzberg as a response to the efforts of neo-Nazis to peddle Hitler hagiography (p. 155), or the author's conclusion to his entry on Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia ("Wolfschanze"), which transmits the promise of the present owner not to turn it into a "Hitlerian Disneyland" (p. 182). Nevertheless, *Hitler Sites* imparts a didactic confidence that tourists will absorb the appropriate lessons, so much so that author feels no need to explain how or why Hitler sites are better teachers of the historical realities of Nazism than other sources. Perhaps Lehrer assumes as much from an American audience, for whom Nazism carries less baggage.

By contrast, Stephan Porombka's and Hilmar Schmudt's anthology *Böse Orte* focuses on the competing meanings and uses of ten remnants of Nazism: the Hitler bunker and Holocaust memorial in Berlin, the naval memorial near Kiel, Göring's villa Carinhall, the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg, the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, the Strength through Joy (KdF) resort at

Prora, the Berghof in the Obersalzberg, the Autobahn, the Peenemünde rocket factory and the "model village" of Alt Rehse in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which trained Nazi doctors in the techniques of forced sterilization, euthanasia and annihilation. As the editors state in their introduction, this volume describes places that the perpetrators once inhabited, but where—unlike concentration camps, for example—violence and terror were not immediately front and center. As examples of Nazi self representation, however, they convey as well the regime's amalgamation of modernization, entertainment, fantasy, imperialism and lethal racism. Finally, the collection is less interested in the official memory embraced in the documentation centers that have proliferated since the early 1990s. Rather, the contributors, nearly all of them writers or journalists, attend to "wild" memories—that is, autonomous forms of knowledge, which implicitly challenge the messages that academic historians or museum curators have sought to transmit. Each essay is a much of the author's reflections of his or her own tour of the site as it is about the thoughts of other visitors, many if not most of them German. The result is, in contrast to Lehrer's guide, a lack of confidence that that one can so easily control the meanings arising from the built environment of Nazism, or what remains of it.

To be sure, as Jürgen Trimborn's essay on the Berlin Olympic Stadium suggests, the racially-infused imperial imaginings of Nazism survive despite the postwar parade of Rolling Stones and Tina Turner concerts, the open air mass of Pope John Paul II, and numerous football matches, the extensive renovations undertaken for the 2006 World Cup final, or even, I dare say, Zinedine Zidane's head butt of Marco Materazzi. While federal and state authorities envisioned a structure that would demonstrate Germany's democratic present and future, the stadium nonetheless includes the obligatory documentation center that educates visitors about its dark origination. Yet the guide who leads Trimborn through his tour reveals contrary forces at work. When the author asks her why the tour brochure makes no mention of Hitler, she confesses her ambivalence: "I am never very sure about how much of this period [i.e., the Third Reich] I should discuss. I have no idea what people want to hear about it, or whether they are even interested in it" (p. 131). Similarly, in Jana Simon's report on the tiny Brandenburg village of Alt Rehse, the irascible retired veterinarian Wolfgang Kopp fights for the survival of an exhibit in the manor house where doctors once learned the ideology and practice of racial hygiene. Nevertheless, the mayor in this economically hard-pressed former East

German village fears that calling attention to the ghosts of the past will only undermine the town's potential as a picturesque vacation and leisure destination. Even more troubling, the stray comments of the elderly visitors who sign the manor house's guest register reveal little disagreement with the premises that defined it during Third Reich.

In other chapters as well, studied ignorance, deliberate suppression, trivialization or instrumentalization come into play. Thus, Henryk Broder's piece on the Führer bunker in Berlin, which veers into a pointed analysis of the new Holocaust memorial, describes the unintended consequences of the Berlin Republic's claim that it has learned from the past, as well as the desire of many Jews to be recognized as "victims of the first order" (p. 27) by the nation of their one-time victimizers. Increasingly, the author notes, German attitudes assume the air of moral superiority, which means relativizing the Holocaust: unlike Germans, so the argument goes, Israel (assumed to represent all Jews in this interpretation) has not learned from history, and thus it treats Palestinians like the Nazis once treated the Jews. Or, as reported by David Pfeifer, the student groups who traipse to the naval memorial at Laboe near Kiel find the objects for sale at the souvenir stand an opportunity to challenge official taboos. Thus, a twelve-year old sporting a Simpsons T-shirt dares a classmate to purchase a Nazi naval flag, raise it at school and sing "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles." Or finally, Michael Rutschky's trip to Prora on the island of Rügen to see the ruins of the mammoth KdF resort for twenty thousand working-class vacationers comes across a mixed-use jumble in place of "Nazi wellness" monumentalism. So, in addition to the documentation center opened in 1992, one finds a western German businessman's rival museum, a youth hostel, a plethora of restaurants and bars, as well as (incongruously) the Miami Disco. The absence of a plan to restructure or sell off the entire ruin has given birth to a postmodern pastiche. Although unvarnished neo-Nazi and/or antisemitic sentiments clearly emerge from the mouths of tourists in these essays—such as the outlandish utterances of some German visitors to the place where Hitler's Berghof once stood (when one asks how Hitler could have lost the war another suggests that it was the result of "a Jewish conspiracy"), which Hilmar Schmundt quotes in his article (p. 50)—the anthology leaves the impression that there is less the danger of a recurrence of Nazism than the consignment of the past to irrelevance in the face of more pressing cultural, consumerist or personal agendas.

Of the three books under review, *Nürnberg-Ort der Massen* on the Nazi party rally grounds in that city, would appear most to exemplify the "official" memory that has become so prominent in Germany over the past decade and a half. Written by the political scientist Eckart Dietzfelbinger, who has been central to the "Fascination and Power" exhibit that opened at the grounds in 2001 and the historian of architecture Gerhard Liedtke, this work is the latest in a well-illustrated and detailed series of books on Nazi sites published by the Berlin publisher Ch. Links Verlag. Although the grounds' history during the Third Reich is obviously the focus, the authors move backwards to place it within the broader historical context, and forwards to a discussion of the development of the grounds as a site of memory.

Nuremberg was a logical choice for the annual party conventions that occurred every fall from 1933 until the outbreak of war. After World War I, the city and its surrounding region became bastions of antisemitism and the *völkisch* movement. The fledgling Nazi party staged its first mass rally in Nuremberg in September 1923. During Hitler's imprisonment after the failed Munich putsch, many among the party faithful hid out in the city, a core that provided crucial financial support for the NSDAP following the Führer's release and the party's legalization. Nuremberg held deep symbolic significance as well. Having been the most important imperial city between the Danube and the Thuringian forest under Habsburg rule, the Nazi party could claim its continuity with the German imperial past. The rally grounds' axis, the Grand Avenue, pointed in the direction of the old city to underscore the connection between the old empire of the German nation and the new.

In essence, the Nazi party colonized a district that incorporated the Dutzendteich Lake, a reservoir that originated in the fourteenth century, which in addition to becoming an important industrial location by the nineteenth century, developed into a public space for recreation or mass political gatherings. Following Hitler's assumption to power, the twenty-nine-year-old architect, Albert Speer, took charge of the party's effort to transform the Dutzendteich district into a Nazi showplace. The monumental neoclassical structures that were to be created, among them the Congress Hall and the huge "German Stadium" that supplemented the preexisting municipal stadium, would impose a *völkisch* consciousness on the built environment and signify a German *imperium* so durable that it would rival the empires of the ancient world. Thus, the Pergamon altar became Speer's inspiration for the reviewing stand at the Zeppelin land-

ing field; the stadium of ancient Athens the model for the German stadium. Because Hitler designated Nuremberg as a “Führer city,” along with Berlin and Linz (among others), the party rally grounds were but a part of a massive urban renewal project on the drawing boards. Despite huge cost overruns, much of the grounds project remained unfinished even though rallies took place annually. During the war, construction continued to some degree thanks to the forced labor of prisoners of war and concentration camp detainees. Franconian Jews scheduled for deportation to the death camps in the east were forcibly congregated at the grounds, a hideous irony given the proximity of yet another dark place, the house of Industry and Culture Association, where in September 1935, the Reichstag passed the Nuremberg Laws.

Despite partial destruction by bombing, Nuremberg’s status as a Nazi city convinced the Allies and especially the Americans to stage the international war crimes tribunal there. The Nazi party barracks became a temporary DP camp, as well as the headquarters of the American military. The Nuremberg city government, however, rapidly returned the grounds to popular recreation, punctuated by the modest memorial to the victims of fascism (insisted upon by the American occupiers) and the inclusion of Nazism’s victims in the Hall of Honor, built in the 1920s to commemorate the fallen of the First World War and revamped by the Nazis to stage their own cult of the dead. The status of the entirety of Speer’s monumentalism, however, was intermittently and haphazardly dealt with, weakened as it was by the desire to suppress the Nazi past that characterized the early Federal Republic and disrupted only by sixties protesters who found the conservative premises of official commemoration want-

ing. A turning point occurred in the mid-1980s, when enough time had passed for the city to consider the direct engagement with its past—one that would grounded in solid historical research. Despite the financial burden, the documentation center in one wing of the Congress Hall on the rally grounds moved ahead, ultimately incorporating the striking glass and steel corridor designed by the Austrian architect, Günther Domenig. Transecting all floors in a style opposite to that of the hall itself, the corridor structurally assaults the neoclassical monumentalism of the regime.

Outside, the restoration of Speer’s Grand Avenue, the central axis that connected the grounds venues, became the occasion for confronting Nuremberg’s difficult past while simultaneously reinventing it as “the city of human rights.” Yet according to the authors, the Dutzensteich’s complex history as a site that has spawned democratic as well as fascist mass cultures—one that embodies continuities and transformations—resists an overarching message that integrates the diverse elements of its past, not to mention the multiple cultural and recreational uses of the present. To be sure, the authors recognize that the ghosts of the Third Reich continue to lurk in the built environment despite the passage of time, and they call our attention to the oft-repeated need to come to terms with the past. Nevertheless, the confusion of meanings and uses leads them to suggest by way of conclusion that confronting the Third Reich depends on one’s inclination to do so. Thus, if *Nürnberg—Ort der Massen* is an example of “official memory,” it is one that understands the precariousness of its mission. The paradox of tourism—the desire to explore a different or past world without leaving one’s present behind—undoubtedly deepens this unsettlement.

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