

Ideology in Stone: Re-interpreting the Architecture of Albert Speer in Contemporary Germany

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Introduction

This past spring break, I traveled to Germany and Austria with 22 fellow students and two of my professors. Through class time and real world experience we were able to discover how ideas, emotions, and political agendas are conveyed through architecture and physical structures.

Nazis were perceived in two general ways :

1. “Primitive Barbarians” due to lack of compassion and horrible crimes committed
2. “Modern Europeans” who reaffirmed cultural tradition through arts

Who is Albert Speer?

- Hitler’s Chief architect
- Responsible for the architectural plans of the Nazi Rally Grounds



Why Nuremberg as Site of Nazi Rally Grounds ?

- 1933 -Nuremberg declared as the location of the annual week-long Nazi Party Rallies.
- 1934- Albert Speer named as the architect
- Reasons Hitler chose Nuremberg:
 - very rich cultural history
 - local police chief sympathized with the Nazi Party
 - Nuremberg was centrally located in Germany
 - Empty land available SE side of Nuremberg
- City of Nuremberg underwent changes to traditionalize it; wooden beams exposed, archways, windows., etc.



Methods Used: Our research methods included reading sections of “Nuremberg: The Imaginary Capital” along with reading the article “Words in Stone?”. These articles aided us in getting a basic understanding of the architecture used at the Nazi Rally Grounds and why. We also were able to gain knowledge through our personal experiences while touring the Nazi Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, Germany.

Techniques Used in Nazi Rally Ground Architecture

- Granite
 - Most was mined by prisoners in quarries that were set up near concentration camps.
 - Granite was used to exude a sense of power, strength, and immortality.
- Monumental Size
 - Size was used to intimidate and awe the public
 - Also used as a sign of immense power



- Lighting
 - Used lighting to complement message of power displayed by the architectural structures.
 - “Invokes the power of faith into the Nazi Party, which is conceived as a kind of religion”-Hitler
 - glass ceiling was going to be installed over the Congress building to create “holy” affect above Hitler
 - “Cathedral of Light” designed by Albert Speer -used 130 anti-aircraft searchlights around Zeppelin Grandstand and the Zeppelin Field.



Nazi Rally Ground Structures

- Congress Building
 - Modeled after ancient Coliseum in Rome
 - Exterior was made from granite, planned to make interior out of marble but too costly during war
 - The construction is incomplete
 - Current height is 128 ft
 - Was meant to be twice as tall as what we see today
 - Planned to have glass ceiling installed
- German Stadium
 - Hold up to 400,000 people
 - Would be the world’s largest stadium
 - Modeled after Athens Panathenaic Stadium
 - Construction never made it past excavation
 - Hitler hoped to host Olympics here every year, even though facilities did not meet Olympic standards and regulations
- Zeppelin Grandstand and Zeppelin Field
 - Grandstand modeled after the Pergamon Alter
 - Made out of granite
 - Field could hold 100,000 people
 - Stands seated 60,000 people



Conclusion: By reading the texts listed below, I was able to conclude that by using certain techniques and styles, Nazi architecture was able to exude images of power and strength and leave an impression of “holiness” through certain lighting methods. Through my personal experiences in Nuremberg, Germany I was able to fully grasp the concepts I had read about. While visiting the Nazi Rally Grounds, I could personally feel the intimidation factor that was given off by the monumental structures. I was also able to understand how these grand structures were used as a political message to portray the power that the Nazi Party held.

References:

- Brockmann, Stephen. (2006). *Nuremberg: The imaginary capital*. Camden House.
- MacDonald, Sharon. (2006). Words in stone? Agency and identity in a nazi landscape. *Journal of Material Culture*, 11 (1/2),105-126
- Some material was obtained through my personal experience while on a faculty-led MSU study abroad tour in the spring of 2014. I would like to give a special thanks to our tour guide at the Nazi Rally grounds and also to Dr. Kramer for all of her guidance.

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