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# Presenting the Extremely Difficult Past: Günther Domenig's Documentation Center of the National Socialist Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg, Germany

Rumiko Handa

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [rhanda1@unl.edu](mailto:rhanda1@unl.edu)

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## *Presenting the Extremely Difficult Past: Günther Domenig's Documentation Center of the National Socialist Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg, Germany*

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Rumiko Handa

University of Nebraska

### Abstract

Buildings have a way of bringing the past into the present. This is important because experiences of the past often constitute impactful moments in everyday lives and allow a contemplation of existential meaning. It is an aspect often neglected by architectural professionals and critics because it lies outside the Vitruvian triad of aesthetic, functional, and structural virtues. It goes without saying that a building's presentation of the past is ontological. In other words, individual perceptions of a building are subjective, and the building's objective traits or histories do not guarantee that it will turn into a place of memory for everybody. The question then is: How can architectural design assist in making the past present in meaningful ways when applied to pre-existing buildings that carry particularly notable and troubling pasts? In order to address this question, I will investigate the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds, in Nuremberg, Germany, designed by the Austrian architect Günther Domenig, who thrust a stake of steel and glass diagonally through the block. I will first provide a brief historical background, including why Nuremberg became the Party Rally location and how postwar memory culture and politics had evolved in Germany in general and in Nuremberg in particular. I will then present an analysis of Domenig's design,

through on-site investigation and archival study at the Architecture Center, Vienna, which now houses materials from Domenig's office. In organizing this section, I will apply the framework concerning how a piece of architecture brings the past into the present – by designation, formal characteristics, physical traces, and memento.

## Introduction: Architecture as a Place of Memory

Buildings have a way of bringing the past into the present. This is important because experiences of the past often constitute impactful moments in everyday lives and allow a contemplation of existential meaning, as discussed by philosophers and historians such as Pierre Nora, Paul Ricoeur, David Lowenthal, David Carr, and Edward Casey.<sup>1</sup> It is an aspect often neglected by architectural professionals and critics because it lies outside the Vitruvian triad of aesthetic, functional, and structural virtues, which have served as the intellectual baseline of the discipline for over two millennia. The memory-inducing mechanisms of buildings can vary, among which the following are notable:<sup>2</sup> First, a building may commemorate a particular event or individual by being *designated* as a memorial. For example, at the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., visitors recall what they learned in a history lesson and read an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. Secondly, a building may refer to the time of its origin by its *formal characteristics*, carrying a certain style. On the National Mall, people are shown the pasts near and far by the contrast between the National Gallery's East and West Buildings. Thirdly, a building may recall an otherwise neglected past by bearing *physical traces*, just like the palimpsest, on the surface of which an old writing, once washed off, has resurfaced.<sup>3</sup> At the southwest corner of the East Building, astute observers would have noticed an erosion of Tennessee Marble and determined it to be a result of past visitors' repeated brushing against the stone's sharp edge. Water leakage was discovered in the building in 2005, and for a remedy, all the marble slabs were removed from the building's surface, resurfaced, and reinstalled. Only a couple of months into the re-opening of the East Building of September 30, 2016, however, the stain was once again visible at the same location.<sup>4</sup> And lastly, a physical place may also serve as a *memento* simply because an event took place there, even when there is no deliberate designation, formal characteristics, or material trace.<sup>5</sup> A family may remind each other of their previous visit to the nation's capital, standing at the same spot on the Mall as before to purchase ice-cream bars from a food truck. It goes without saying that a building's presentation of the past is ontological. In other words, individual perceptions of a building are subjective, and the building's objective traits or histories do not guarantee that the building turns into a place of memory for everybody. The question then is: How can architectural design assist in making the past present

in meaningful ways when applied to pre-existing buildings that carry particularly notable and troubling pasts? To address this question, I will investigate the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds, or *Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*, in Nuremberg, Germany.

The Documentation Center in question is located a couple of miles outside Nuremberg's old, albeit reconstructed city wall, on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds.<sup>6</sup> Albert Speer designed the overall site plan for the stretch of 25 square kilometers as well as several buildings on the Grounds. The Congress Hall, however, a portion of which the Center reuses, was by Ludwig Ruff, a Nuremberg architect and professor of the city's art craft school and a Nazi member since February 1, 1933, and, after his death in 1934, by his son Franz Ruff.<sup>7</sup> Modeled after the Roman Coliseum, but in a U-shape instead of an oval, the Hall was to consist of an auditorium for 50,000 people and two orthogonal blocks terminating the ends of the U. The construction began in 1935 with the intended completion year of 1943, and the roof structure over the auditorium was still being designed in 1938-1940. The work was interrupted in 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland, then restarted and proceeded between 1940 and 1941, but was abandoned at the end of the War.<sup>8</sup> The area for the auditorium, surrounded by the U-shaped building, was left without a roof. The two end blocks were missing their topmost floor, and the space between them, intended for the main entrance hall, remained void. While the outer surface of the building and the U-shaped colonnade were finished with polychrome marble, the rest was for the most part unfinished, with exposed bricks for the walls and concrete for the floor and ceiling. Still, 275 meters wide, 265 meters deep, and 40 meters tall, it was the "largest preserved monumental building from the Nazi era in Germany."<sup>9</sup> In 1998 an invitational competition was held to turn the upper floor of the northern end block into a documentation center, with the explicit purposes of serving as "a permanent establishment to the numerous visitors, who come to the site all year round and expect a comprehensive education about its history" and of presenting the "emergence, manifestations, and consequences of National Socialism."<sup>10</sup> The Austrian architect Günther Domenig (1934-2012) won the first prize with a design to thrust a "*Pfahl*," a stake of steel and glass diagonally through the block.<sup>11</sup> Visitors enter the building at one end of the stake, meander through the orthogonal building through the "Fascination and Terror" exhibit, re-connect with the spear which jets out over the vast exterior court, and return to the entrance foyer through the stake. The Center, opened on November 4, 2001, has 1,300 square meters of exhibition space and 450 square meters of the "International Learning Center" for films, lectures, and seminars.

For many reasons the architecture of the Documentation Center is ideal for the question being posed. First, the design has been applied to a pre-existing building at which significant historical events took place. In this sense, the Documentation Center differs from, for example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., which, although a memorial by designation, stands on a location with no relation to the past that it memorializes. Second, remembering the Nazi past is not just worthwhile, but a civic duty. Third, the Center addresses an *extremely difficult* past. While it is very challenging and painful to recall an experience in which one was the victim, I use the term *extremely difficult*

to mean the past in which one was, or the people one closely associates with were, the perpetrator(s). In this sense, this institution is different from other Holocaust-related documentation centers in Germany and elsewhere, at which the visitors' focus is as much on the victims as on the perpetrators.<sup>12</sup> It took half a century after the War for the City of Nuremberg to establish a board of trustees for a new documentation center that would constantly remind its citizens of their *extremely difficult* past. Willful forgetfulness and self-victimization were prevalent during the 1950s and 60s. During the 1970s, fearing that preserving the building as a historical relic would promote neo-Nazism, they used and proposed to use it for mundane purposes. Finally, toward the end of the 1980s, recognition emerged that a building could be a means to transmit the lessons of the past to the future. Additionally, the architect's personal background makes this case important. Domenig struggled with his own anti-Semitism: His father was a party member killed by the resistance, and as a young man, he had a hard time reconciling with the fact that many important architects were Jewish.<sup>13</sup>

My research question is applicable not only to buildings associated with Nazism and the Holocaust, but also to debates in memory, culture, and politics in general. A typical reaction in Germany and elsewhere, when confronted with artifacts carrying both difficult and extremely difficult pasts, is to destroy the artifact. The most striking recent example in the United States was the popular decision to take down the Confederate flag in Columbia, South Carolina. Another reaction is to resort to forgetfulness, witting or unwitting. To many visitors, Fort Robinson in Nebraska is just a friendly state park, but many forget that it was the site of the 1879 massacre of the Cheyenne people by the U.S. Army. In Washington, D.C., any reference to the founding fathers' personal slaves is absent at the Jefferson Memorial. The problem is that obliterating the artifact or their associations with the past does not eradicate the past itself and instead removes the artifact's ability to remind us of the past and our chance to confront and understand it. Conversely, preserving artifacts alone does not yield productive discussion unless accompanied by a clear indication that keeping them does not affirm the past actions. Recent debates surrounding the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, are perfect examples of a city struggling with these issues. At a symposium held at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in March of 2017, Hilary Beckles of the University of West Indies quoted one of the judges of the Nuremberg Trials: "We are walking into the desert, and somewhere out there is water. Let us go and find it."<sup>14</sup> Beckles used the passage to characterize the complexity of the issues involving universities' past relations to slavery, but, at the same time, was warning against paralysis and indecision. Despite, or rather because of, its extreme difficulty, keeping such a past in the present and carrying it to the future is a social responsibility. My research will contribute to the ways architectural design can participate in this effort.

In this article, I will first provide a brief historical background, including why Nuremberg became the Party Rally location and how postwar memory culture and politics had evolved in Germany in general and in Nuremberg in particular. The overview will help us understand how extremely difficult this particular past had been to the City of Nuremberg and its citizens. I will then present an analysis of Domenig's

design through on-site investigation and archival study at the Architecture Center, Vienna, which houses materials from Domenig's office.<sup>15</sup> In organizing this section, I will apply the above framework concerning how a piece of architecture brings the past into the present – by designation, formal characteristics, physical traces, and memento.

## Nuremberg and the Nazi Party Rallies

The City of Nuremberg's tie to the Nazi past is at least four-fold. First, it held the *Reichsparteitage*, meaning literally the Empire's party days but translated usually as the Nazi Party Rallies. Secondly, the Race Laws, later known as the Nuremberg Laws, were announced there in 1935 during the Party Rally. Thirdly, the propaganda newspaper *Der Stürmer* [Stormtrooper] was published there by Julius Streicher (1885-1946), a former schoolteacher and one of the earliest to join the Party, who led the Party's Franconian division. And fourthly, during 1945-1946 major Nazis responsible for the Holocaust were tried there at the so-called Nuremberg Trials. Among these past ties of Nuremberg to Nazism, that to the *Reichsparteitage* would be the most difficult for the citizens because of their direct involvement in human crimes. The Rally was held for the first time in 1923 in Munich, but moved to Nuremberg, then in 1926 was held in Weimar, and in 1927 and 1929 in Nuremberg. When Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 the rally became an annual event in Nuremberg until its cancellation in 1939. The primary purposes were to stir National Socialism and anti-Semitism among the German people and to demonstrate power both nationally and internationally. Up to one hundred thousand soldiers marched through the city, and a growing number of onlookers, reaching nearly a million, cheered and gave the Nazi salute.

Nuremberg was chosen for the Party Rallies for a number of reasons: The city was fairly centrally located; A large park called Luitpoldhain was available for congregation; The Party could rely on its well-organized Franconian branch led by Streicher; and the police were highly sympathetic to the Party. The selection also was subsequently justified by the Party in relation to the notion of the Third Reich. The Nazis adopted the term to legitimize themselves in the historical lineage of the Holy Roman Empire (962-1806) and the German Empire (1871-1918). Nuremberg fit into this scheme, having been one of the places of the medieval Imperial Diet. Playing on the linguistic similarity, the Nazis highlighted Nuremberg's transformation from the city of the *Reichstag* to that of the *Reichsparteitage des deutschen Volkes*.<sup>16</sup>

The Rally involved the entire city, physically and socially. The procession started from the Castle at the hilltop at the northern edge of the walled city where the *Reichstag* had met. It then descended on the sloped *Burgstraße* toward the river *Pegnitz*, passing St. Sebald church, and the *Rathaus*. It came to the *Hauptmarkt*, then called Adolf Hitler Square, where *Frauen Kirche* stands, the place of worship for the Holy Roman Emperors. After crossing the river on *Königstraße*, and climbing upward, it passed *Lorenz-*

*kirche* and reached the *Frauentorturm* at the southern end of the walled city in front of the *Hauptbahnhof*. From there it continued southward on *Allersberger Straße*, which now is traced by tourists on a tram. The crowd's enthusiastic reactions were captured in numerous photographs and films, regarding which Hermann Glaser, influential social historian and Nuremberg's culture minister since 1964, retrospectively noted: "Eternal jubilation of the Franconians met the *Führer* when he appeared on Adolf Hitler Square. There was a storm of enthusiasm which subsided only after quite a while.' The overwhelming majority of the women and men of Nuremberg could have avoided this event without any danger of retaliation. Instead, they applauded these national criminals."<sup>17</sup>

## Evolving Memory Culture and Politics

Nuremberg's citizens and their leaders went through a number of ideological, political, and moral stances regarding the colossal material evidence of the City's involvement in the genocide. Denial of the past and willful forgetfulness were prevalent during the 1950s and '60s which manifested in a number of different forms: changing in the building's name; shifting the focus to a different past, and proposing destruction of the building. They portrayed themselves as innocent victims, expounding that Nazism had come from outside Nuremberg and that the City was a casualty of allied bombing. At the same time, the City's medieval and Renaissance pasts were promoted. The Castle and Albrecht Dürer House, destroyed during the war and newly reconstructed, were elevated to the level of exemplary built heritage. Once the former Congress Hall building became the City property, it was renamed the Round Exhibition Building to sever the ties with the Nazi past. When the City held the German Building Exhibition in 1949, the express intention was to promote "the rehabilitation of the reputation of the City of Nuremberg," which "has suffered considerably ... because of the political events of the past years." A restaurant was set up to offer a panoramic view of the courtyard. Other shows included the 900 years of Nuremberg exhibit in 1950 and a restaurant exhibition in 1951. In 1963, the Association of German Architects proposed the demolition of the building, for the reason that it "remains a contravention of the spirit of the new city. ... We have the responsibility to erase this sign and to sacrifice it."

There also were attempts at adapting the building to other mundane purposes. Already in the 1950s the City administration attempted economic exploitation. Ideas included a football stadium (1955) and an event hall with a covered courtyard (1958), both of which were not pursued due to the prohibitive cost or the infeasible structure. However, the notion that trivial use would suppress the monumental power of Nazi architecture drew philosophical support from Hannah Arendt's "Report on the Banality of Evil," originally published in a series of five installments in *The New Yorker* in 1963.<sup>18</sup> During the 1970s and '80s,

Herman Glaser promoted a profanation of Nazi buildings. The U-shaped building was used as a storage facility with annual rental income to the City. The *Nürnberger Symphoniker* gained a practice room and a recording studio in the southern end block, and a private recording company also rented space. Since 1986, the courtyard within the southern block was turned into the *Serenadenhof*, an open-air music venue. Other proposals included a drive-in cinema or a home for the elderly, which were not realized.

Meanwhile, a new perspective was emerging. On November 9, 1959, in Wiesbaden, in a lecture addressing school teachers, Theodor W. Adorno rejected the contemporary catchphrase “working through the past” as misleading, observing that “its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory,” and arguing that “the attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven” would be appropriate “for those who suffered injustice” but “is practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice.”<sup>19</sup> Adorno instead promoted the kind of critical self-reflection, which Freudian theory called for in order to come to terms with the past. Influenced by this Frankfurt School thinker, the mid-1970s saw an emergence of interest in the central role architecture played in Nazism. With the increasing willingness to confront Nazi crimes, the *Reichsparteitagsgelände* were listed under the Bavarian State Historic Preservation Law in 1973. In 1985 an exhibition entitled “Fascination and Violence” was installed in the Zeppelin Stand building designed by Albert Speer. There were some constraints: The exhibit was open only during summer months because the building was not heated, and it was not easily accessible because it was located at the furthest end of the former Rally Grounds. Still, the number of visitors to the exhibit climbed to 35,000, including many youths who did not have a personal memory of Nazism and the Holocaust. And yet the idea of preserving the building was still highly controversial, with a fear that it would promote and support the Neo-Nazis.

A turning point came in 1987 when Nuremberg’s businessmen proposed to convert the former Congress Hall into a leisure center. Strong oppositions were raised, among which was that of Michael Petzet, Conservator General of the Bavarian Conservation Department in Munich, a branch of the National Office for the Preservation of Monuments.<sup>20</sup> Petzet wrote to the City administration that the building was the “most important testimony of the gigantomania of National Socialism” and should be left unused, differentiating the *Mahnmal*, a critical statement about or a warning from the past, from the *Denkmal*, a mere reminder, or *Ehrenmal*, which honors someone or something from the past.<sup>21</sup> The *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* [Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime] also protested against the proposal, drawing attention to the exploitation of concentration camp prisoners as forced laborers at the site. Some Nuremberg citizens, welcoming the state office’s position, offered a counterproposal of leaving the courtyard to a planned decay, which they said would take care of its criminal world of thought. According to their idea, a small pavilion in the space between the two end blocks would inform visitors of the Nazi period and the history of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds, and a path in the center of the courtyard fenced with barbed-wire would symbolically exclude National Socialism from their lives.

A resolution to face the artifact of the Nazi past head on finally arrived. With a solid consensus formed among those involved by the mid-1990s, a board of trustees was established for a new documentation center in 1997, and on August 3, 1998, the City announced an invitational architectural competition for the *Dokumentationszentrum Reichspartitagsgelände*, to be housed in the uppermost floor of the northern end block.<sup>22</sup> The Center was to become the first step towards an overall concept for the future use of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. Having run the exhibit in the Zeppelin Stand building, the City expected 100,000 annual visitors.<sup>23</sup> Middle Bavarian and Federal Governments joined the City to fund the project; so did private sponsors and cultural foundations. Eight teams of architects were invited to the competition; three from Nuremberg and its environs and four from other German cities.<sup>24</sup> Domenig from Graz, Austria, was the only one from outside Germany. The deadline was October 23, and the jury met on November 11. The first prize went to Domenig, the second to Johannes Hölzinger of Bad Nauheim, Germany, and honorable mention to Volker Staab of Berlin and Frese & Kleindienst of Nuremberg.<sup>25</sup>

Even after the competition, the City's leaders engaged in debate concerning how best to create a place of memory. On November 13 and 14, 1999, the Nuremberg City Museums held an international symposium titled "Future of the Past: How Should the History of the Third Reich be Transmitted in the 21st Century?" at the *Deutsch-Amerikanischen Institut*.<sup>26</sup> Invited speakers represented various Holocaust-related museums including the U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Museum, which had opened in 1993. At this occasion, Franz Sonnenberger, Director of Nuremberg's City Museums since 1994, spoke, looking back at the City's attempts to deal with the built relics of the Nazi past. The resolve and determination of those involved in the project to confront the past through the construction of the Documentation Center is clear in his statement: "the historical burden of the former Reich Party Congress site is perhaps a unique opportunity. Where else would there be a comparable possibility of throwing critical light on the façade of the Third Reich, thereby giving the lie to new myths and legends? Where else would it be possible to analyse the 'motivation machinery' of National Socialism?"<sup>27</sup>

At the time of the competition, the City expected to have the construction completed by the fall of 2000, in time for the City's 950th anniversary. However, construction was delayed. The topping ceremony instead was held on November 15, 2000, and the building was opened a year later, on November 4, 2001. The permanent exhibit titled "Fascination and Terror" presents such themes as the rise of the National Socialist Party, mass myths and the *Führer* cult, Nuremberg as the city of the annual National Socialist Party Rally, the propaganda and reality of the Party, World War II and the Holocaust, and the Nuremberg Trials after 1945.

## Architectural Design for a Place of Memory

The following section offers an analysis of Domenig's design, addressing the question of how architectural design can assist in making the past be present in meaningful ways when applied to a pre-existing building that carries a particularly notable and troubling past. One of the four categories that I stated in the beginning, that is, the designation of the former Congress Hall as a Documentation Center, had already been made by the City prior to the architect's involvement in the project. I will, therefore, focus on the other three categories – formal characteristics, physical traces, and memento.

### Formal Characteristics

The most striking and pronounced aspect of Domenig's design for the Documentation Center, acknowledged both by the architect himself and by the community leaders involved in the project, is the *Pfahl*, or stake, of glass and steel, which cuts diagonally through the orthogonally organized massive pre-existing building of stone, bricks, and concrete. Domenig explained the *Pfahl* in his speech at the building's opening ceremony: "A 'stake' cuts the right-angled geometry of the north wing. It begins across from the Bayern Street, penetrates diagonally spatially the building, and floats in the void space of the inner courtyard of the congress hall. This "pile" is formed into the longitudinal and vertical main access of all intended functional areas."<sup>28</sup> In explaining this design element at the topping ceremony, Domenig recalled his first visit to the former Congress Hall.<sup>29</sup> The building tour took place on September 16, 1998, as a part of a colloquium offered by the City of Nuremberg to the invited competitors.<sup>30</sup> Domenig stated, "During the visit, icy coldness came over me. The dust of the dead in the interior spaces and the architectural translation of the power - there were only right angles and axes." To destroy this power, his idea was to drive a stake into the building. Others also acknowledged the new "surgical incision" of steel and glass in Deconstructivist style contrasting against the monumentality of the Nazi propaganda architecture of marble, bricks, and concrete based on right angles and bilateral symmetry.<sup>31</sup>

Visitors to the Documentation Center are presented the Nazi past via the stark contrast in forms and materials to Domenig's new insertion. The clash of the two is presented in a number of strategic locations. From afar, the end of the stake thrusts out of the massive polychrome marble building works as an unequivocal marker for the entrance. Visitors climb up the steel steps, passing through the opening made into the heavy wall of marble and brick, arriving at the entrance hall. The study center's auditorium hovers above the space, with its underside composed of diagonal planes. The main stairs and the elevator, of steel and glass, running parallel to the stake, lead visitors up to the room for an introductory video. After going through a couple of orthogonal exhibit rooms, visitors arrive at the upper part of the stake,

which forms a lookout to the front street on one side and to the entrance hall on the other. The floor here is of frost glass, making clear the notion of incision. After going through another set of exhibition rooms, visitors now cross a bridge over the space located on the central axis of the old orthogonal block, which was to become a secondary entrance to the Congress Hall and the only space whose interior finish of polychrome marble was completed during the Nazi era. Given the limited size of the pre-existing space, Domenig could not have set up the bridge diagonally on the floor plan. Instead, he presented an incline downward to the middle point of the bridge's span, creating the diagonal section-wise. At the end of the exhibit sequence, visitors come out to the stake at its other end, which provides a balcony overlooking the courtyard. Visitors then return to the entrance hall walking through the stake, descending the full height of a floor. The City Museums characterized this descent as a kind of "lock from the past to the present," referring by the "lock" to the device that controls the flow of water in a canal.<sup>32</sup>

## Physical Traces

Architectural and local journalism commenting on Domenig's design and its execution mostly focused on the formal and material contrast between the pre-existing building and the new insertion. An actual visit to the Documentation Center, however, is endowed with a much richer architectural experience. This has been a consequence of a number of architectural design decisions, many of which were made during the construction phase, and which were motivated by the decision the City had made earlier to keep the Nazi building in the raw state it was left in at the end of the War. These design decisions contributed greatly in bringing the extremely difficult past to the present in meaningful ways. The City's decision to leave the building's pre-existing condition was partly for financial reasons, but, more importantly, had been based on the desire to treat the building as an exhibit in its own right. Presenting the building as a physical trace of the Nazis' actions and showing its incomplete state meant for the City to present to visitors its resolute commitment not to allow fulfillment of the Nazis' intentions. Sonnenberger, at the occasion of the building's opening, shared his reading of the unfinished interior wall of bare bricks as the banality behind the intended grandeur of Nazi architecture.<sup>33</sup>

Accepting the City officials' charge to treat the unfinished building as a piece of the exhibit, Domenig stated, "This task is exceptional. The exhibition ... is a 'remembrance memorial' in the truest sense of the words," and he resolved to leaving intact the building in which "There is nothing, however small... that does not demonstrate this frightening ideology."<sup>34</sup> He kept the walls and ceilings as they had existed before him, stating that "The existing rooms, their walls and ceilings, are largely preserved in their raw concrete or brick surface structure."<sup>35</sup> As a result, the walls are not only in bare bricks but also with irregular protrusions wherever the original design called for an additional wall, which was planned but

never constructed. The exhibition panels were to be detached from the wall surface so that the bare surface of the wall was left without cover. And the ceilings were also left in the state of bare concrete slabs with sharp pointed metal still exposed.

When it came to the floor, however, the rough surface of the pre-existing concrete slabs needed to be finished for the sake of visitors' safety. For this, Domenig simply stated, "The existing bare floors are provided with industrial floor coverings (sealed concrete screeds)."<sup>36</sup> While Domenig's text does not go any further on this topic, the site-inspection and the archival search have revealed an explicitly intentional strategy. A metal piece was inserted at every edge where the horizontal plane of the floor meets with the vertical planes of the existing wall or column, prior to pouring the floor finish. As a result, the newly applied smooth floor materials never touch the rough vertical surfaces, and the thickness of the newly added floor finish is clearly visible to the visitors. This strategic detail design is specified in a drawing, now in the Domenig Archive, titled "Screed Finishing Profile," and drawn by Gerhard Wallner of Domenig's office on January 19, 2000, during the construction phase (Figure 1). According to this drawing, the rough surface of the existing floor was first leveled with mortar 40 mm thick, on top of which insulation 40 mm thick, foil, and heated flooring 70 mm thick were applied before the surface was treated. To be noted for the present discussion is the treatment of the borders of the floor finish. The drawing shows a bent metal piece of either steel or aluminum of 120 mm height and 60 mm width, which was fixed to the pre-existing floor before the mortar was laid, so that it kept the insulation and the heated floor finish away from the pre-existing wall, with a gap of 60 mm wide and 60 mm deep along the perimeter of the floor (Figure 2).

Keeping new elements away from the existing fabric of the Congress Hall seems a strategy applied by Domenig throughout this project. In addition to the floor finish and the exhibition panels that are detached from the wall, the *Pfahl*, or the stake, discussed earlier in relation to the formal and material contrast, also was kept away from the existing wall as it ran through the building. Also detached from the pre-existing fabric of stones and bricks are the newly constructed stairs of steel in the entrance hall, running parallel to the stake, and the bridge. While the prohibition to touch may have created the sense of reverence in some other buildings, in the design of the Documentation Center, it clearly generated repugnance and aversion to the pre-existing building. In so doing, Domenig succeeded in demonstrating to the visitor the position his building takes in confrontation against the Nazi building, and ultimately the contemporary Nuremberg citizens' stance to condemn the Nazi past.

Installing the *Pfahl*, stairs, or bridge meant cutting through the pre-existing walls and floors. There also were additional places where walls had to be cut, in order to open a window or to allow access from one exhibition space to another. A set of floor plans and sections, now at the Domenig Archive, shows where the walls and floor slabs were to be cut. To execute what is specified in these drawings, a circular saw was used (Figure 3). This was a significantly challenging task, as described by Walter Anderle, Nuremberg's City Master Planner, at the building's opening ceremony: "The existing building materials - hard bricks and high-quality concrete - offered an unexpectedly great resistance to demolition work." "...the

construction work was faced with the most difficult tasks. 2 m thick masonry work had to be cut through in different places. With diagonal penetrations, this increased to 5 m.”<sup>37</sup> Throughout the Center, the cuts made by the circular saw are dramatically presented to the visitor (Figure 4). The architect made sure that the sections of the granite, bricks, and mortar were left just as they were when the saw was used on them, without adding any finish or even polish. Consequently, the visitor is confronted with the physical traces of the Documentation Center’s actions against the Congress Hall, from the moment they enter the building and throughout.

The architectural design of the Documentation Center takes advantage of the physical trace. It takes the pre-existing building as the physical trace of Nazis’ actions. And in turn it leaves physical trace of its own actions against the Nazi building. In so doing, the design has become an agent of countering the Nazi past.

## Memento

The memento by definition requires that the person who experienced the past event in person recall it. The Documentation Center presented a difficulty as those who experienced the Congress Hall during the Nazi era were aging or had passed away. In order to fulfill its mission, the Documentation Center had to establish itself as a memory place for the younger generations who do not have personal experiences of the Nazi past. In order to turn the former Congress Hall into a place of quasi-memento, they turned to oral history. In April 1998, four months before the competition was first announced, Gregor Schöllgen, Professor of Modern History at the University of Erlangen, and author of a report for the permanent exhibition in a new setting, published a piece in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.<sup>38</sup> He shared that “many witnesses agreed to talk about their experiences” of the Nazi rallies. The last segment of the Center’s exhibit shows videos of elderly women recollecting their experiences of the Rally days, in which they competed with each other on how many times they managed to have glimpses of the *Führer*. In another video, an elderly man demonstrates a military salute, using his umbrella for a gun. Some other exhibits, too, intend to make the past experiences transferable, with the use of large-size photographs and cut-out exhibits in the middle of the space devoted to Wehrmacht soldiers.

Architectural design also worked in the area of memento. In the space near the end of the sequence of exhibits, where the exhibit’s narrative depicts the height of the horror of the War and the Holocaust, the strategy of detaching the new construction away from the pre-existing is at work, turning the exhibit floor into a sort of a bridge, detached both from the floor and the walls of the Congress Hall. But what Domenig did in addition allows the architecture, the old and the new together, to give a warning to the future. In the existing building, a three-dimensional horizontal layering of bricks was to be observed, with

bricks protruding and receding significantly from one layer to the other. The documents attached to the competition program in fact included a black-and-white photograph of this space (Figure 5). Taking a hint from this, Domenig took advantage of the experiential effect of this wall detail. The corner of the brick wall was pronounced, hinting that around the corner a space exists. When the visitor reaches the corner, the exhibit shows a full height floor-to-ceiling photograph depicting a horrific and devastating scene from the war. Using the strategies of physical trace as well as memento, the architecture makes a statement that the danger of repeating the same grave error is just around the corner (Figure 6).

## Conclusion

Nuremberg's Documentation Center, tasked to show the causes and connections of the "criminal power exercise" of the Nazi state and to display its "violent consequences,"<sup>39</sup> stands at a point in time, being a fruit of the decades of the struggles and efforts against the extremely challenging past, and the will to effectuate that past toward the future.

Domenig commended the city of Nuremberg for having a clearly defined task of showing the more profound connections through exhibit, media, and training, and hoped that he was able to express these requirements architecturally. He intended for the overall structure to become an extremely powerful and impressive experience. He tasked himself and all to realize the goal consistently and incorruptibly. He, in his professional capacity, has tackled the task by inflicting wounds to the Nazi building, avoiding the touch, and creating a space of unease and foreboding: "It is satisfactory for me - through my creative potency and profession - to respond to this historical tragedy with hope." "I hope that I have succeeded in expressing these requirements architecturally."<sup>40</sup>





Figure 3. The circular saw used to cut the pre-existing brick and stone walls. (Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände, no. 1159-25)



Figure 4. The trace of the circular saw visible in the gallery, Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds, 2017. (Photo by author)



Figure 5. The former Congress Hall, Nuremberg, interior. Photograph provided by the Nuremberg City Museums at the time of the competition, 1998, taken in 1997. (Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände, no. 0275-02)



Figure 6. The Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds, interior. Space between Galleries 17 and 18, 2017. (Photo by author)

## Notes

- 1 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24; Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Second edition, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
- 2 The deliberate designation, formal characteristics, and physical trace identified here are parallel to Charles Sanders Peirce's categorization of signs – that which stands for something for somebody – into symbol, icon, and index.
- 3 Author.
- 4 "National Gallery of Art Reopens Newly Renovated and Expanded East Building," accessed July 29, 2017, <https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/press/2016/eastbuilding.html>.
- 5 For the discussion on memento, refer to Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
- 6 After the allied bombing destroyed much of the city, the old fabric was reconstructed, taking four decades. See: "Nuremberg Rebuilt – City at the Crossroads," *New York Times* (April 8, 1984) NYTimes.com, accessed July 27, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/08/travel/nuremberg-rebuilt-city-at-the-crossroads.html?pagewanted=all>.
- 7 Alexander Schmidt, *Geländebegehung : das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg* (Nürnberg: Sandberg Verlag, 2002), 177.
- 8 Schmidt, *Geländebegehung*, 48. See also: Nuremberg City Museums, "Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände," pamphlet (November 4, 2001); and H.-W. Lübbecke, Chief Conservator of Bayern state office for the preservation of monuments, Munich, an attachment (WU14) to "Eingeladener Realisierungswettbewerb Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände Nürnberg, Anslober: Stadt Nürnberg, Tag der Anslober: 03.08.1998," [Invitational realization competition Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds Nuremberg, Issuer: The City of Nuremberg, Day of Issue: August 3, 1998] (competition program hereafter), Architekturzentrum Wien (Az-W hereafter).
- 9 Museen der Stadt Nürnberg, „Neues Zeichen – Die Architektur des Dokumentationszentrums Reichsparteitagsgelände," news release (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 10 Competition program.
- 11 The pun of Speer and spear, which works in English, is from: Steven Erlanger, "Nuremberg Journal; The Architect Who Speared His Own Nazi Demon," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/08/world/nuremberg-journal-the-architect-who-speared-his-own-nazi-demon.html>.
- 12 This was acknowledged at the building's opening: "In contrast to concentration camps or Gestapo prisons, the Nazi party rally grounds were not a place of physical violence, but instead, it deciphers the 'motivation machinery' of the National Socialism that made it possible. Therefore it is important not only to deal with the structural remains pragmatically. They must

be linked to a historical assessment and the clear position of our democratic community.” See, Nuremberg City Museums, “*Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*,” section titled “*Kulissen der Gewalt*” [Scenes of Violence].

- 13 Günther Domenig, presentation script (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 14 Conference “University and Slavery: Bound by History,” held on March 3, 2017, at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.
- 15 At Domenig’s death of 2012, the office was succeeded by Gerhard Wallner, who had studied under Domenig at the Technical University in Graz, and had been working at Domenig since 1987. He directed the office from 1990 to 2000. In 2005 Wallner became CEO of the office of Architekten Domenig & Wallner. Wallner in fact had a heavy hand during the execution of the Documentation Center building. Many correspondences between the architect’s office and on-site contractors bear his name.
- 16 An exhibition titled “Stadt der Reichsparteitage” [The City of the Nazi Party Rally] was held on September 8-30, 1937, at the Germanic National Museum of Nuremberg, organized by the *Amt Schrifttumspflege bei dem Beauftragten des Führers für die Überwachung der gesamten geistigen und weltanschaulichen Erziehung der NSDAP* (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), or the Office of the Führer’s representative for the supervision of the entire spiritual and ideological education of the or National Socialist German Workers’ Party. The poster announcing this exhibit highlighted the city’s transformation from that of the Imperial Diet to that of the Nazi Party Rally.
- 17 Hermann Glaser, “The Majority Could Have Stayed away without the Risk of Repression,” *The German Public and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1945*, ed. by Jörg Wollenberg and Rado Pribić (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1996): 15-21; 15-16. Glaser is quoting a reporter from the *Fränkische Tageszeitung*, November 11, 1938.
- 18 Hannah Arendt, “Eichmann in Jerusalem” I-V, *The New Yorker*, February 16 – March 16, 1963.
- 19 Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 89. The lecture was originally titled “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,” and was given at a conference on education hosted by the Duetsche Koordinierungsrat der Gesellschaften für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (German Coordinating Council of Organizations for Christian-Jewish Cooperation) in Wiesbaden.
- 20 Michael Petzet later became the President of the German National Committee of ICOMOS (1989-) and the President of ICOMOS International (1999 and 2008). See: “Michael Petzet, Advisor, Conservationist,” “DOCUMENTA (13) - DOCUMENTA (13),” accessed May 25, 2017, <http://d13.documenta.de/#participants/participants/michael-petzet/>.
- 21 Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and beyond* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 22 Competition program, section 2.
- 23 Franz Sonnenberger, “A City Confronts Its Past: Nuremberg’s Documentation Centre on the Reich Party Congress Site; 1999,” *Museum International* 51, no. 3 (July 1999): 53–57; 54, accessed May 25, 2017, [http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=116849&set=0059274FF7\\_2\\_321&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1](http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=116849&set=0059274FF7_2_321&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1). For information on Franz Sonnenberger, see: “Nürnberger Museen-Chef Geht in Ruhestand,” *Nürnberger Nachrichten*

[Nuremberg News] (August 23, 2008), accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.nordbayern.de/cm/2.244/kultur/nurnberger-museen-chef-geht-in-ruhestand-1.853649>. See also: *Nuremberg: The Imaginary Capital* - Page 272; Sharon McDonald, p. 207.

- 24 Dürschinger & Biefang; Frese & Kleindienst; and Arbeitsgemeinschaft Hennig & Mihm with Dietrich Lohmann from Nuremberg and its environ; Johannes Hölzinger from Bad Nauheim (north of Frankfurt); Architekten am Pündterplatz with Jörg Homeier and Gerold Richter from Munich; Johann Peter Kulka from Cologne; and Volker Staab from Berlin.
- 25 *Wettbewerbe Aktuell*, March 1999, 44-45.
- 26 Franz Sonnenberger et al., eds., *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit: wie soll die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus in Museen und Gedenkstätten im 21. Jahrhundert vermittelt werden?* [The future of the past: how should the history of the Third Reich be transmitted in the 21st century?] (Nürnberg: Museen der Stadt Nürnberg, 2000).
- 27 Franz Sonnenberger, "A City Confronts Its Past," 54-55.
- 28 Press release, by Günther Domenig (October 31, 2001), Az-W.
- 29 Presentation script, by Günther Domenig (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 30 Competition program, page 14.
- 31 See, for example: pamphlet "*Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*," by the Nuremberg City Museums (2001), the section titled "Pfahl aus Glas und Stahl" [spear of glass and steel]; news release "*Neues Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände – eine nationale Aufgabe*," by the Nuremberg City Museums (November 15, 2000); and news release "*Neues Zeichen – Die Architektur des Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*," by the Nuremberg City Museums (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 32 News release, by the Public Relations Office, Nuremberg City Museums (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 33 News release, by the Public Relations Office, Nuremberg City Museums (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 34 Press release, by Günther Domenig (October 31, 2001), Az-W.
- 35 Press release, by Günther Domenig (October 31, 2001), Az-W.
- 36 Press release, by Günther Domenig (October 31, 2001), Az-W.
- 37 Press release, by Walter Anderle (October 31, 2001), Az-W.
- 38 Gregor Schöllgen, "Speichern: In Der Kulisse Des Führers," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 7, 1998, sec. no. 82, page 44, [https://fazarchiv.faz.net/fazDocument/saveSingleDoc/FAZ\\_\\_F19980407REICHSP100](https://fazarchiv.faz.net/fazDocument/saveSingleDoc/FAZ__F19980407REICHSP100).
- 39 Press release, by the Public Relations Office, Nuremberg City Museums (November 15, 2000), Az-W.
- 40 Presentation script, by Günther Domenig (November 15, 2000), Az-W.

## About the Author

Rumiko Handa is Professor and Interim Associate Dean of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Architecture. A registered architect in Japan, she holds Ph.D., M.S. and M.Arch. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.Arch. from the University of Tokyo. She received the American Institute of Architecture Students' 2001-2002 National Educator Honor Award. Her writings have appeared in: *Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture*; *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*; *Preservation Education & Research*; *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*; *Design Studies*, etc. She co-edited *Conjuring the Real: The Role of Architecture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2011), and authored *Allure of the Incomplete, Imperfect, and Impermanent: Designing and Appreciating Architecture as Nature* (2015).