Hitler's Germania: Propaganda Writ in Stone

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Hitler’s *Germania*: Propaganda Writ in Stone

Senior Project submitted to the Division of Arts of Bard College

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Introduction

In the spring of 1936, Adolf Hitler, accompanied by his chief architect, Albert Speer (1905-1981), surveyed a section of the Autobahn as it was being completed. According to Speer’s memoirs, Hitler hinted at a major assignment for which he had Speer in mind: “‘The greatest of all.’ There was only this one hint. He did not explain.”¹ By the time of Speer’s appointment as Berlin’s Inspector General of Buildings in January 1937, the meaning of this enigmatic episode had become clear: Speer was to design and oversee the reconstruction of Berlin as Germania, an urban reconstruction project that was, from its inception, steeped in Nazi ideology of control, permanence, and monumentality.² The project consisted of a single monumental boulevard, the *Via Triumphalis*, which would run three miles to form a north-south axis. It was to be a street of consistent proportions and style, the buildings lining it all sharing a cornice of level height, recalling the unified proportions of the facades of Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s renovation of Paris in the prior century. At the southernmost point was to stand a massive Arch of Triumph; to the north an enormous plaza with capacity for 1 million people, overwhelmed at its northern edge by the *Volkshalle*, a monumental domed structure designated for the assembly of 180,000 Germans to hear the Führer speak. Hitler had sketched designs for these two major monuments, the Arch of Triumph and the *Volkshalle* [Figs.], as early as 1925, the same year he published the first volume of *Mein Kampf*. This fact alone begins to aid in

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understanding the way in which architecture and ideology were bound up in one another from the Hitler’s initial vision of the Nazi Party.

The connection between politicians and the architecture of capital cities is one of the major themes of this project, which will explore the terms in which ideology is expressed physically and symbolically through monumentality. The models on which Germania was based range from the form of military monuments dating from the Roman Empire, to the symbolic significance of religious monuments, to the revolutionary theoretical designs of Étienne-Louis Boullée and their imprint on the consciousness of France during and following the Revolution.

Hitler had been interested in architecture from the days of his humble origins in rural Austria. In 1906, by the age of 17, he was sketching designs for elaborate residences. That same year he visited Vienna for the first time, sending home postcards of the city’s grand baroque buildings designed by Gottfried Semper. The following year, his sights set on moving to Vienna, he took the entrance examination to the Academy of Art to study painting, but failed. On meeting with the Academy’s Rector, he was told that he was an unsuitable candidate for a student of painting, but that his talent lay rather in architecture. Although he stated to colleagues that he would reattempt the entrance exam for years, he never did. Amid the picturesque monumentality of that city, he had his first encounter with the National Socialists, and became increasingly obsessed with the nationalist anti-

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4 Kershaw, 23
5 Kershaw, 24
Semitism prevalent under Vienna’s mayor Karl Lueger, all of which he recounts in *Mein Kampf*, in the biographical section of his formative years.\(^6\)\(^7\)

*Mein Kampf*, the “granite foundation” of the murderous ideology of the Nazis, which appeared in two volumes, published in 1925 and 1926, contains passages on architecture, focusing on monumentality as a means of glorifying, legitimizing, and memorializing Empire. The section devoted to the “question of the causes of the German collapse” in the late-nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century is conceived in surprising structural terms.\(^8\) Unflinching in his belief in the superiority of the German military command (“the mightiest the Earth had ever seen”), Hitler claims that Germany’s defeat in the First World War was a result of “a large number of symptoms of disease and their causes.”\(^9\) Expounding the necessity of government intervention in artistic and aesthetic concerns, it is clear that the system he is envisioning is omnipresent and omnipotent both on the scale of its world politics, but also in the country’s physical environment and on the human scale within the urban setting.\(^10\) He particularly remarks on the construction of the urban space and advocates large-scale planning and the importance of monuments. While the relative smallness of Germany’s more picturesque, traditionally “princely cities,” renders them inadequate to suit the surging population growth of the Post-Industrial era, Hitler laments that Germany’s large cities are simply “Masses of apartments and tenements, and nothing more.” These are “mere human settlements” that lack the

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\(^6\) Kershaw, 31.  
\(^8\) Hitler, 227.  
\(^9\) Ibid., 229-231.  
\(^10\) Ibid., 255.
character of “cultural sites” so valuable to Hitler.\textsuperscript{11} The problem, as Hitler sees it, is that “our big cities of today possess no monuments dominating the city picture, which might somehow be regarded as symbols of the whole epoch.” Rife with formal and aesthetic assumptions Hitler does not bother to unpack, these statements on monumentality resonate with the dominant tone of a stubborn, ambitious vision. Turning to classical antiquity, Hitler reveres community monuments “which seemed made, not for the moment, but for eternity.” Strong nationalistic undertones permeate this preference: the unflinching belief in the common significance of “the magnificent edifices of a whole community” assumes on the part of the individual unquestioning support for the policies of government, and sees impressive monuments as permanently providing a site for almost religious reverence to the power of state.\textsuperscript{12} These are to be large altars, reviving “the dimensions of the ancient state structures.” In sweeping historical terms, Hitler then goes on to relate the scale of classical public structures to the immensity of the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages: “Like giants, these monumental structures towered over the swarming frame, wooden, and brick buildings of the medieval city, and thus became symbols which even today, with the tenements climbing higher and higher beside them, determine the character and picture of these towns.”\textsuperscript{13} The long-lasting physical authority of immense structures, then, removes from them the ephemeral mutability of the scale of humbler structures within expanding environments. Already he talks about Berlin, Germany’s capital for less than 50 years at the time, claiming that “if the fate of Rome should strike Berlin, future generations would some day admire the department stores of a few Jews as the mightiest work of our era and

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 264.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 265.
the hotels of a few corporations as the characteristic expression of the culture of our times.”

Here, amid the stifling Anti-Semitism that renders Mein Kampf intolerable, Hitler suggests an awareness of the ephemerality of greatness: he does not seem to promise that Germany will overcome the coursing tides of history to remain great forever, but rather acknowledges the unknown of history, and indicates a conception of monumentality that acts more to preserve the ideals of a period of “greatness”, however long or short. There is an irony to the morbidity and awareness of the unknowable built into this attitude of ambition.

To accompany the permanent symbolic nature of these communal monuments, Hitler professes a preference for stone over other building materials in a brief section where he praises Paul Wallot’s Berlin Reichstag building, criticizing simultaneously the frugal attitude that led to the interior being sheathed in plaster rather than stone, as well as the politics of the Weimar Republic. Although Hitler’s preference for the structures he intended for his Third Reich would have been stone, he says that, in the case of the current government: “this time, I must admit, the parliamentarians did right for a change: stone walls are no place for plaster heads.” Monuments, for Hitler, represent “the outstanding symbol of the national community.” The lack of them results in “the total indifference of the big-city dweller to the destiny of his city.”

He ends the section: “we have no call for surprise if under such a deity little sense of heroism remains.” Architecture for Hitler represents a major political tool in glorifying the state and thus the individual. Lacking any mention of the practical concerns of architecture, this section focuses solely on its symbolic

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14 Ibid., 265.
15 Ibid., 266.
function. The section is brief in comparison to the tome that is *Mein Kampf*, representing one approach to a radical, total critique of Weimar Era culture and politics. This general attitude is pervasive here, where he criticizes the structure and allocations of the current government, emphasizing a lack of ambition that has resulted in the decay of a nation. Hitler promises to deliver a hero, in surroundings befitting of unbridled ambition.

Hitler had another victim beyond the Jews, Poles, homosexuals, vagrants, and political dissidents murdered in the Holocaust, the total number of deaths of which remains unclear to this day but is estimated as 5.7-5.8 million.\(^{16}\) This victim was the city of Berlin. Berlin was made the capital of a newly unified Germany in 1871. Its population grew heavily from 826,341 at that time to 4,242,501 in 1933, the result of a dramatic urbanization of the working class.\(^{17}\) The rate of construction increased accordingly to the exponential population growth, and the majority of new construction was aimed at economy and efficiency: buildings to be put up quickly and cheaply, with little consideration towards style. The city’s growth was structured in a corresponding grid layout, which produced stark, uniform effect.\(^{18}\) It was certainly a city with problems by the 1920s: affordable housing and jobs were scarce, class divisions were rampant, the German economy was a disaster in the wake of the First World War and the reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, and the government on both the municipal and national level had been destabilized significantly.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) Hake, 19.
Hitler’s proposed plan sought not, however, to eradicate the problems of Berliners but instead to slash through the urban fabric of the city and inflict upon its face a city center whose function was symbolic rather than utilitarian, to glorify a regime which history rendered the Nazis incapable of achieving and whose foundation was increasingly eroding at the same time he and Speer were planning its monumental glorification, ultimately rendered a nonexistent tomb for a demonic stillborn baby. Speer quotes a speech Hitler gave on August 2, 1938, at the ceremony raising the ridgepole for the new Reich Chancellery: “Berlin must change its face in order to adapt to its new great mission.”

What Hitler sought was really an elaborate stage set which would assert, through sheer aggression, control and dominance over the individual and serve as the Party’s greatest work of propaganda, written in stone rather than ink. The central axis with its monuments, the Arch of Triumph and the Volkshalle, at either end were in turn bracketed by massive train stations to the north and south, so that movement through the capital could be facilitated on an insane, frenetic scale. This would make the population of the city center essentially transient and render invisible the daily lives of the city’s actual inhabitants. The relationship of Germans to Germania is a completely distinct conception from the relationship of Berliners to Berlin. This was a city meant to represent the site of holy pilgrimage for the Volk to worship the Reich, a summons to become part of the Nazis’ ruthlessly dehumanizing display of power.

Hitler met Speer in 1933 when the architect was a minor Party official in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. Hitler had been appointed Chancellor on January 30 of that year, and the election of March 5 resulted in an attainment of 43.9 percent of the vote which, along

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with their coalition partners’ 8.0 percent, gave the Nazis a majority within the Reichstag.\(^\text{21}\)
A week following the election, Speer was tasked with the renovation of Goebbels’s new Ministry of Propaganda, as well as the Minister’s new residence, which had been seized from the former Minister of Nutrition.\(^\text{22}\) In July, following his completion of this assignment, he was dispatched to Nuremberg to design preparations for the first Party Rally following the Nazis’ control over the government, and following his visit to Nuremberg he travelled to Munich where met the dictator who was to be his patron.\(^\text{23}\) That autumn Speer was appointed to collaborate with Hitler’s other major architect, Paul Ludwig Troost, on the renovation of the Chancellor’s residence in Berlin. He was subsequently tasked with remodeling the former palace Goering had selected as his residence in the winter of 1933.\(^\text{24}\)
On the death of Troost the following January, Speer at twenty-eight years old became the de facto architect on Party projects, electing to embrace Troost’s austere neoclassicism and leave behind the more humble style of Heinrich Tessenow, his teacher at the Technical University Berlin-Charlottenburg.\(^\text{25, 26}\)

Four years later, on January 30, 1937, Speer was appointed Berlin’s *Generalbauinspektor* (GBI, Inspector General of Buildings), his official title as the executer of Hitler’s vision of *Germania*. This was due mainly to his exceptional organizational talents: Speer talks often of the remarkable turnaround he would manage in very short periods for the earliest projects he was assigned; later he pledged to the Führer

\(^{21}\) Kershaw, 461.  
\(^{22}\) Speer, 26-7.  
\(^{23}\) Kitchen, 4.  
\(^{24}\) Speer, 36.  
\(^{25}\) Kitchen, 4.  
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 19.
the completion of *Germania* by 1950. In his position as GBI Speer made gross abuses of power: his firm, which remained independent, was employed as a consultant to the office, adding exorbitantly to the large stipend he was already granted by the government; he profited from real estate speculation; he was responsible for the relocation of the tens of thousands of Berliners displaced by the intended plan, and placed them in homes seized from Jews expelled from the city, many of whom were ultimately sent to the death camps. Beginning in 1941 he colluded with the SS to employ slave labor to build a road through the Ukraine meant to link Berlin to Crimea. As well, Speer’s office increasingly colluded with the SS throughout the 1930s to attain granite and brick from forced labor camps which had begun to be established as early as 1933, when the NSDAP came to power. The SS continued to enforce increasingly harsh demands of production on the camps until 1943, when all resources were directed to the needs of the war. By this point the population of the forced labor camps exceeded 300,000.

Following the death of Minister of Armaments Fritz Todt in a plane explosion on February 8, 1942, Speer was immediately appointed as his successor, while still maintaining the position of GBI and overseeing ongoing work in Berlin. Despite Goering’s and the Nazis’ unbounded confidence in the superiority of the German military, just over three years later Hitler shot himself in his bunker as Allied bombs rained down

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27 Ibid., 4.
28 Speer, “Hitler then recollected that a young architect had finished an annex for Goebbels in a remarkably brief time.” 29.
29 Ibid., 139.
30 Kitchen, 71
31 Ibid., 5
33 Jaskot, 33.
34 Kitchen, 6.
on Berlin and gunfire tore apart Speer’s Chancellery, the largest project he had completed in Berlin.

Speer is a historically problematic but enigmatic figure. After his indictment at the Nuremburg Trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Speer was sentenced to twenty years in prison. During his incarceration, Speer wrote his memoirs, first published in 1969. The book immediately became a bestseller, and is a major primary source regarding the operations of the Nazi party and Speer’s role within it. Through personal anecdotes throughout the book – meals shared, Party retreats at Obersalzburg – Speer repeatedly attempts to humanize Hitler, and thus to deflect and refuse to address his own involvement in a murderous authoritarian regime. Speer writes on the large amount of input contributed by Hitler and is frequently given to contemplation on Hitler’s obsession with power and longevity, and the dysfunctional dynamics of the NSDAP.

Speer casts his own role as the young, impossibly naïve architect with a charismatic and generous patron, using this character to absolve himself of responsibility. As well, he is attractive because he represents a position of authority on one of the preeminent political figures in history, who had already been dead for years before Speer set to work on his memoirs. Working with a personal narrative such as this one requires careful consideration and cross-referencing with other literature. Speer has an understated talent, capable of comporting his agenda within the narrative. One cannot begin to underestimate the duplicity and opportunism of a man who ended up with a position remarkable in its scale and prestige by aligning his interests with those of Hitler, and procuring materials for his projects from labor internment camps. There is extensive literature on the dubiousness of many of Speer’s claims. Martin Kitchen begins his book, *Speer: Hitler’s Architect*, by
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contrasting Speer’s account of his own birth with conflicting historical facts according to public record, suggesting an overly dramatized, egotistical figure.\(^{35}\) The account progresses from there, and certain facts come to light that Speer does not divulge in his memoirs: his grandfather and father were also successful architects, making him the third generation within an established family trade, challenging his adopted tone of naïveté towards his profession.\(^{36}\) Even this account, as well as many others, rely heavily on Speer’s memoirs as a primary source, while simultaneously adopting a tone of skepticism.

The fact is that the topic has been neglected. It is certainly a challenging subject to address, for one because any scholarship on the subject involves bearing in mind for the duration of the project that the architectural program, which is remarkably rich and interesting considered in relation to political history, represents the will of a man who incited genocide and world war. The buildings at times are fascinating, and here requires a particular mindset where one must constantly bear in mind the whole of the plan. Having spent a year with these drawings and these photos of models, I personally still cannot fathom the degree of systematic dehumanization inherent within the plan for *Germania*, the total assertion of dominance, the disregard for the city’s inhabitants, and the sheer madness of all of it. For this reason among others the area is not as ripe with scholarship as one might like.

The foremost scholars on Speer – Barbara Miller Lane, Martin Kitchen, Alexander Scobie, and Paul Jaskot – acknowledge this deficiency. All have adopted remarkably different investigative modes. Barbara Miller Lane’s *Architecture and Politics in*

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\(^{35}\) Kitchen, 14.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 15.
Germany: 1918-1945 focuses on the politicization of architecture in the years leading up to and following Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor. She investigates increasing conservative opposition to the modern movement, which began independently of the Nazis in Weimar in the 1920s, and traces its incorporation into their ideology from the initial alignment of conservative aesthetic attitudes through to what is seen by many architectural historians as an ultimate, unrecoverable blow: the dissolution of the Bauhaus on April 12, 1933, three weeks after the Nazis’ coalition gained control of the Reichstag. Alexander Scobie examines the impact of classical antiquity on Hitler’s plans, and in particular suggests a connection between the appropriation of the architecture of Augustan Rome by Benito Mussolini, who had become Prime Minister of Italy over a decade before Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Hitler’s emphasis on the monumentality of Imperial Rome in Mein Kampf can be seen as evidence of this connection; Scobie illustrates the intriguing idiosyncrasy of appropriating an architectural attitude while intending it to be an expression of intensely nationalist ideology. Scobie examines the way in which the monuments of Imperial Rome were intended to express expansionist policies, and their subsequent revival and formal echoes in Mussolini’s and Hitler’s plans. Scobie’s examination was formative in determining the focus of this project.

Paul B. Jaskot investigates the evolution of the economic framework of the SS in employing forced labor. This analysis is key because it brings to light the conditions of

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38 Miller Lane, 69-86.
39 Ibid., 1.
labor within the Nazi regime and imbues the deceptively innocent drawings and images of scale models with a reality that can be traced within the economy. Kitchen investigates Speer’s character, his biography, and his work as GBI as well as the Minister of Armaments for wartime Germany. He analyzes Speer’s character, referring to his status as an anomaly at the Nuremberg trials compared to the other members of Hitler’s inner circle. In his introduction, Kitchen remarks on the Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper’s interview of Speer while he was detained awaiting trial at Nuremberg. Trever-Roper carefully examines Speer’s character, contrasted with those of the other detestibles awaiting trial. He concludes that: “Speer’s deeply flawed character was a key to the understanding of the Third Reich…it was the Speers that made the regime possible.”

Throughout the general discourse of architectural history, the Nazi period tends to be grouped with other totalitarian regimes, and only analyzed within a general critique of totalitarianism as a political system. Of the resources that include commentary on Speer and Hitler, these are often included in chapters with titles such as “Totalitarian Critiques of the Modern Movement,” or “Architecture and Politics,” in which the architecture of the Third Reich is contextualized by that of the Soviet Union and Fascist Italy. Many authors of larger reference books on architecture simply ignore or refuse to address how Nazi Germany fits into the discourse on modern architecture. To treat Nazi Germany (or Fascist Italy, or Soviet Russia) as merely another example of totalitarianism is to broadly

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42 Kitchen, 2015.
43 Kitchen, 2.
essentialize the impact of loosely associated political systems that although they were developing simultaneously were doing so largely independently, and along radically different ideological programs, as exemplified by the variety of styles adopted: Constructivism (Fig. 7) and Socialist Realism (Fig. 8) in Russia, or Modernism in Italy (Fig. 9). This is not to say that neoclassical forms were not prevalent within these regimes (ex. Figs. 10-11), however the scale of the German projects and their specific qualities are what set them apart from other fascist or totalitarian states; if Germany had won the Second World War and construction had gone according to plan, they would have been armed with a terrifying new capital city by 1950 that would represent an undeniable symbol of global power.

Amid the historical confusion surrounding the Nazi period, my project will focus mainly on the designs for *Germania* themselves and the extent images of the models for the city. It will combine visual analysis with historical aesthetic and symbolic investigations into the connotations of the monumental forms and elements in the project to produce an original reading of the way in which the ideology of the Nazis was concretized into a conception of an urban environment. The motivations of *Germania*’s perpetrators will be analyzed, and the central themes of militarism, conquest, and dominance embedded in the city will be exposed.

The three chapters will each be oriented around a central feature of Speer’s plan for Germania, and in each the structure being discussed will determine the mode of investigation.

The first chapter will focus on the Triumphal Arch designed by Hitler in 1925, and explore the form’s historical associations of imperial expansionism, as a symbol that
creates connections between the Third Reich and the Roman Empire, and articulates an imperial vision.\textsuperscript{46} The form will be traced to ancient Rome, and its use throughout history and accompanying ideological ramifications explored, centering on a discussion of the Arch of Titus. Its central location and function as the threshold through which Germania is accessed will be looked at in detail. As a more contemporary example, the Arch will be discussed in terms of its formal and ideological echoes with the Arc de Triomphe, once again suggesting Paris as a major influence for Hitler and Speer. A section is devoted to the discourse in the 1930s and 40s among influential architectural critics including the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne regarding the function of monumentality in the modern era, and how this building in particular and the \textit{Germania} project at large represents outmoded conceptions of urbanism.

The second chapter will be devoted to looking at the central boulevard which forms the north-south axis of Germania, the “Via Triumphalis.”\textsuperscript{47} Germania’s design will be considered in the relation to the rebuilding of Paris overseen by Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the prior century, and the similarities and differences in terms of their motivation and execution. This chapter will also explore in detail of the regulations set forth by Speer which governed the overall structures along the boulevard, and discuss the resulting homogeneity of the facades. The \textit{flâneur}, the literary archetype who documented the Paris of the nineteenth century will be incorporated as a counterpoint to the homogenous intended population of \textit{Germania}. Mobility will be discussed in the context of its various implications within the plan, such as pedestrian-only areas, the widening of

\textsuperscript{46} Kitchen, 66.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 65.
roads to decrease traffic, and the train stations bracketing the plan at both ends. The “Iron Band of Terror,” the metaphor Hannah Arendt employs in explaining the suspension of freedom she considers essential to totalitarian regimes will be compared to Germania’s corresponding lack of freedom of the individual to navigate space. As well, it will explore the role the train stations would play in connecting Germania to the vast, ever-expanding German Empire envisioned by the Nazis.

The third chapter will be centered on the Volkshalle and the adjacent complex of the Adolf Hitler Platz. Like the Triumphal Arch, this structure will be considered in relation to its historical precedents. As well it will look at two radically different buildings – Hitler’s initial sketch of 1925, and Speer’s final design. Speer cites three main precedents that inspired his design. The first two have distinct formal echoes: Hadrian’s Pantheon which more closely resembles Hitler’s sketch; and Étienne-Louis Boullée’s designs for a “Cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton,” which are similar formally and conceptually to Speer’s final design, particularly in Speer’s appropriation of geometrical abstraction. The third building Speer cites is St. Peter’s Basilica, which, though it is also a domed structure, serves more as a model of a symbolic monument for Hitler and Speer. This connection is key in terms of understanding the emphasis on this building as the endpoint of the Via Triumphalis, its symbolic relationship with Hitler, the first in an imagined line of many future Führers of the Third Reich. St. Peter’s also spells out explicitly the role of all three structures as places of devotion, which suggests, along with Speer’s designs themselves, a conflation of state ideology with religion. As a space for the containment of the public, the structure speaks to Hitler’s populism – rather than giving speeches from a balcony to an
assembled crowd, this structure would house the German people while their Führer communicated with them directly.

There are certainly other events and monuments worthy of discussion. Hitler’s decision to relocate the Berlin Victory Column, which commemorated the Prussian defeat of Poland in the Danish Prussian War of 1864, to its current location at the center of the Tiergarten. Another interesting example would be the Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus, which during the Nazi period housed the Ministry of Aviation, and still stands as one of the only extent specimens of administrative architecture built during that period in Berlin, currently inhabited by the Federal Ministry of Finance.48 Another vast construction program overseen by Hitler and Speer, the Nuremberg Party Rally Grounds, represent the cult-like efforts of the Nazis to indoctrinate the population with their ideology. Germania, as the capital city and showcase of Nazi power Hitler and Speer intended it to be, and particularly on the monumental features of the plan and its organization along a central axis, retains the focus of this project both for the way in which it was emblematic of political ideology and economic power structures, as well as its enigmatic status as a city totally planned and never executed.

Totalitarianism in particular appears obsessed with the utopian impulse as a means of legitimizing or removing from sight the human rights violations embedded in their conception. In reality they represent, as Germania specifically does, dystopian projections in which individual will is negated and aggressively placed second to that of the state. What we end up with, beyond mere images of a model city conceived by a man who is among the most universally detested in history, represents an odd permutation of Marx’s

48 Kitchen, 65.
commodity fetishism: despite never being presented with the concrete physical reality of Welthauptstadt Germania, evidence of the material and cultural conditions that allowed for its conception and the beginning stages of its building remain. All that remain physically are photographs of a model, and of a few completed buildings that were destroyed long ago, the streetlamps designed by Speer, and one indestructible 12,000-metric-ton concrete block designed to test the effect of such enormous structures on Berlin’s loamy soil.49 These remnants appear relatively innocuous compared with what could have actually been a nightmare city of horrible power. It is only through consideration of the historical factors surrounding Germania’s design and construction that its actual significance begins to be understood. In exploring both the ideology embedded in the physical environment and the political and economic conditions surrounding it, it becomes evident that these were not simply model that sat in a ministry in Berlin for years, but that actual violence and violations of human rights were instrumental from its conception. This city was designed to reinforce the “fictitious quality of everyday reality”50 central to a totalitarian regime. Drawing on great cities of the past together Hitler and Speer conceived of a place with no equivalent, where the architecture would force the individual into submission, controlling experience on an inconceivable scale, built to even to outlive a Reich meant to last a thousand years.

Were it only an elaborate fantasy conceived as the physical embodiment of the ideology of a racist and anti-Semitic totalitarian regime, the fact of its conception in the first place would be subject to the universal condemnation of the ideology of the Nazi party.

49 Kitchen, 65
However, that it was on track for completion well into the war years, and that political dissidents and so-called “enemies of the state” were put into forced labor camps as the foundation of an entire sector of the German economy, that undertones of aggressive politics permeate its every square inch, serve as irrefutable evidence a most horrifying urban reality.
Chapter One

Hitler’s Arch of Triumph: Germany’s Future and a Bridge to Antiquity

Introduction

Adolf Hitler’s fiftieth birthday was celebrated as a national holiday on April 20, 1939. Throughout Nazi Germany, Goebbels had planned elaborate public celebrations and claimed later that “The Führer is fêted like no other mortal has ever been.”51 The evening before, Hitler was driven amid a procession of fifty limousines along the central boulevard, the Via Triumphalis, of Germania.52 Amid the piles of gifts of Miessen porcelain, Old Master paintings, and models of fighter planes that had not yet been put in use, that festooned the reception rooms of the Reich Chancellery, Albert Speer “delighted”53 Hitler with a model of Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, which was to serve as the point of entry into the recently opened boulevard.

The fourteen-foot-tall scale model (Fig. 13) was indeed larger than life. In 1939 delivered a speech to a construction crew that included a key to understanding the relation of physical size to Nazi ideology: “Why always the biggest? I do this to restore to each individual German his self-respect. In a hundred areas I was to say to the individual: We are not inferior; on the contrary, we are the complete equals of every other nation.”54 The way Hitler frames this statement suggests his measured empathy for the common feeling of inferiority of the German people, and delivers a blunt promise to make Germany a nation

52 Kershaw, 183.
53 Kershaw, 183.
in which inferiority will be permanently eradicated. (Speer also understood that Hitler felt 
the current monument was entirely inadequate, referring to the Neue Wach, designed by 
Karl Friedrich Schinkel (Fig. 17), as “a paltry affair… put up by the Republic.”55)

Hitler’s enormous Arch of Triumph (aerial view, Fig. 2; Figs. 12-13) represents the 
physical and symbolic threshold through which Germania would be accessed. Intended to 
sit at the end of a vast plaza56 opposite the South Train Station, the end of its interior 
corridor would mark the beginning of the Via Triumphalis, Germania’s central boulevard. 
Following a descent from the station down a massive exterior staircase, the plaza was to 
be lined at either end with rows of captured enemy weapons such as tanks and heavy 
artillery.57 Speer wrote that Hitler’s Arch of Triumph “would have towered over all the 
other buildings on this southern portion of the avenue and would literally have dwarfed 
them.”58 59

This chapter will examine the symbolic meaning of the form of the triumphal arch. 
It will focus on its militaristic connotations from its inception in Ancient Rome to its 
appropriation by later figures, specifically Napoleon Bonaparte. The triumphal arch will 
be will be discussed in terms of its role as an ornamental and ceremonial structure, designed 
to commemorate major military victories, pointing to its significance in the plan for 
Germania as emblematic of a wish for military dominance and expansionist politics. (The 
war ultimately rendered futile the Nazis’ claim of establishing a Third Reich of 
unprecedented might and control, a historical reality strikingly epitomized by the

55 Speer, 74.
56 3,300 feet in length and 1,000 feet in width, from Speer, 135.
57 Speer, 135, and Kitchen, 66.
58 width of five hundred and fifty feet, depth three hundred and ninety-two feet, and height three 
hundred and eighty-six feet, in Speer, 135.
59 Speer, 135.
Schwerbelastungskörker, the indestructible 12,000-metric-ton concrete which still stands in Schöneburg, built to see whether Berlin’s soil could endure the immense weight of Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, and all that remains of that attempted expression of stupid might.\(^{60}\) Hitler’s Arch of Triumph is emblematic of the assumption of Hitler’s ambition, that the city’s construction, for it to exist not as a series of architectural models but rather as an unquestionable urban reality, would plainly have necessitated major military victories. As Goebbels wrote in his diary on 8 May 1941: “The Führer expresses his adamant certainty that some day the Reich will dominate all of Europe. For this to be so we shall have to fight many battles, but without doubt they will be brilliant successes.”\(^{61}\) This immensely ironic statement expresses an attitude of unbounded confidence not only in terms of symbolic glory, but also of assumptions of victory. Hitler’s Arch of Triumph symbolizes the rebirth of greatness Hitler was so fixated upon when he wrote Mein Kampf, in which he argues that Germany’s defeat in the First World War could only result in two possible outcomes: death, or resurrection.\(^{62}\)

Only if one imagines emerging from the South Train Station, indifferent to that vast construction of granite, glass, and steel, and seeing Germania for the first time through the opening of the Arch, can one begin to understand Hitler’s “Architectural megalomania”. Speer records that Hitler often tried to simulate a similar experience, bending down so that his eye was nearly level with the model.\(^{63}\) Through the barrel vaulted interior of that stone


\(^{61}\) As quoted by Kitchen, 70.

\(^{62}\) “[W]hen military defeat is the payment meted out to peoples for their inner rottenness, cowardice, lack of character, in short, unworthiness. If this is not the case, the military defeat will rather be the inspiration of a great future resurrection than the tombstone of a national existence.” From Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 229.

\(^{63}\) Speer, 133.
edifice, past the three-mile long stretch of boulevard lined with blocks of ministries and office buildings hundreds of feet in length, the eye would come to rest on the domed Volkshalle. The Volkshalle, looming at the end of the arrow-straight boulevard, would be geometrically complemented by the shape of the opening, which would mirror in negative space the vast solidity of the domed structure it would frame.

Hitler’s and Speer’s particular conception of monumentality will be examined and put in dialog with the international discourse which emerged in the 1930s surrounding the fate of monumentality in the modern period, suggesting that not only was the arch an unimaginative folly in obscene terms, but that it was in direct contradiction to the views held by institutions such as the CIAM and modern visionaries such as Fernand Léger and Siegfried Giedion. This tension, pervading the community of artists, architects, and social theorists during the period in which Speer designed Germania, puts into shocking relief Hitler’s disregard for the individual in the pursuit of greatness, taken from classical ideals of empire, the very source material for his sketch.

Hitler’s Bridge to Classicism

The triumphal arch was a ceremonial structure built by the Romans to commemorate a major military victory and was a central site in the procession known as a triumph. The exact date that this ritual began is unknown, however the act of celebrating victories with a procession to the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus predates the written history of Rome. Its purpose was to make offerings to the Liber Pater, the god of fertility,

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on the Capitol, in order to attain his blessing for the crops. By the late Republic the triumph had become a mandated ritual: the procession would enter Rome through the *porta triumphalis* (‘triumphal gate’), the use of which was reserved for this occasion, and make its way to the Capitol. The procession included the *triumphator*, the conquering military commander, on a four-horse chariot accompanied by his sons, followed by captives destined for execution, freed Roman prisoners of war, the spoils of victory, the entire Roman army, and sacrificial animals, escorted by the senate and magistrates.65

By the time of the founding of the Roman Empire (27 BCE), triumphs had become increasingly political and not solely militaristic, and this right was reserved solely for the emperor, who would assume public responsibility for military victories. However, major victories by military emperors continued to be celebrated in this way. One of the most notable was that of Vespasian and Titus over Judaea, in which spoils taken from Jerusalem were included in the procession. This major triumph was later commemorated following Titus’ death with a triumphal arch erected by the senate in 80-81 CE.66

Hitler’s Arch of Triumph bears a striking resemblance to the Arch of Titus (Fig. 18). Despite the latter being a quadrifons, open on all sides, and differences in embellishment and scale, the form is incredibly similar and even many features of the Arch of Titus appear to have been used. Both contain two levels of plinths topped by an entablature and then flat surfaces that meet a cornice slightly higher than the peak of the arch. Both structures are then surmounted by an additional height bordered by cornices above and below. Hitler’s Arch does not have fluted columns on its main façade, however.

65 Hornblower, 1509.
these exist on the columns of the smaller peristyle within the opening. The continuous frieze above the plinths on Hitler’s Arch of Triumph is similar to that above the Arch of Titus. The strange, gargantuan ‘colonnade’ crowning Hitler’s Arch of Triumph could be read as similar to the window-like impressions in the piers to either side of the Arch of Titus.

The similarities are many, although the comment that “Despite its simplicity, the arch [of Titus] is a remarkably harmonious structure of elegant proportions” could not be said to hold true for Hitler’s design, whose structure and proportions assert strength and dominance rather than a decorative ceremonial function. More so other arches from classical antiquity, there seems to be a particular affinity between Hitler’s Arch of Triumph and the Arch of Titus. Given what is known about the anti-Semitic visual program on the antique which commemorated the victory if the Roman Army over Judaea, these shared affinities appear less random.

After antiquity, a major example of a triumphal arch whose design was derived from that of the Arch of Titus is the Arc de Triomphe in Paris (construction begun 1806, Fig. 19). Built by Napoleon to crown the Champs Elysées, it was conceived to commemorate Napoleon’s victory at the Battle of Austerlitz (Austria) in December of the previous year. For this reason it is conceivable that Hitler’s Arch was motivated on some level by revenge. Napoleon’s Arc, too, was a site of military processions, which would make their way to three major monuments of Paris: the Panthéon, the Invalides, and Notre-Dame. Many affinities are present between Napoleon’s Arc de Triomphe and the Arch of

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67 Richardson, 30.
Titus, and proportionally the two structures are much more similar. One of the major deviations of the nineteenth century design from that of the antique model is that it is open on four sides, with larger arches on the principle facades and smaller ones on the sides, and this modification could have been adopted by Hitler while he was designing his Arch, especially given Hitler’s fixation on Paris as an exemplary model for Germania, cited constantly by Speer. The visual program of the Arc de Triomphe, specifically its relief friezes, contrast the heroism of the French army with the barbarism of the Austrians, so that the adaptation produced by Hitler in obscene proportions could be seen as political sour grapes.\textsuperscript{70}

The Arc de Triomphe, and Hitler’s Arch of Triumph represent examples of political leaders with military and expansionist ambitions appropriating the role of the emperor in Ancient Rome in structural and aesthetic terms. In examining the role of the triumphal arch from antiquity, as well as these two examples whose forms contain affinities with Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, the militaristic function of this form, as well as its centrality to regimes obsessed with military domination, become clear. That these central features of the capital cities of militarily dominant cultures throughout history were appropriated by Hitler on unprecedented scale for what he conceived as a city greater than any in history highlights a reliance on recycled, recognizable emblems of greatness rather than a desire to create a unique and original utopia. This predilection was the foundation of the criticism of Nazi Germany by modern aesthetic and social theorists discussed in the next section.

\textbf{The Discourse on Monumentality}

\textsuperscript{70} Ben-Amos, 65.
From the 1930s until the late 1950s, there emerged an international critical discourse on monumentality, characterizing classically conceived monuments as outdated impediments to social change. What resulted was a modern conception of monumentality closely linked to utopian architecture via the mutual desire for buildings with utilitarian social functions: hospitals, schools, and museums were to be imbued with the same cultural importance previously reserved for the costly and functionally useless spectacle of freestanding commemorative monuments. Following the origins of this discourse, members of the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM), inaugurated in 1922, became involved in this discourse in 1943 with the essay “Nine Points on Monumentality.” Siegfried Giedion’s essay “The Dangers and Advantages of Luxury” references “the direct suppression of modern architecture in most (and soon, very likely, in all) totalitarian countries,” illustrating the hostile relationship between modern art and architecture and the confining aesthetic conservativism and outmoded monumentality of totalitarian regimes. The Nazis’ shuttering of the Bauhaus in 1933 can be read as the most direct blow to the theory and practices advocated by this group.

Speer and Hitler took many of their ideas on monumentality, as they did with urban planning, from the major Continental metropolises. That Germania was being designed and its construction organized at the same time as these new theories of urbanism were being developed complicates the reception of monuments and structures emblematic of power and wealth but lacking the utilitarian function demanded by modern cities.

72 Eric Mumford, 151
Lewis Mumford took the view that monumentality had been conceived by Western cultures since antiquity in basically the same way. He argued that monuments represented the wish for those in power to be immortal. Modern architecture is concerned with utility rather than vanity, and so the structures of more recent cultures, rather than being dictated by the irrational obsession with conquering mortality, were instead designed as “offerings to the living.” Mumford claims that: “The notion of a modern monument is veritably a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument, it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument.” He felt that the traditional conception of monumentality was anathema to new utopian forms of urbanism. If the essence of a monument is cultural relevance, then that relevance could be transferred to more practical structures with a shift in attitudes toward urban planning. Mumford saw the declining value of traditional monuments – in his eyes, superfluous, irrational structures – as offering potential for new visions of urbanism. Rather than long-lasting agglomerations of bulky stone structures, Mumford is excited by a conception of cities where “capacity for renewal” is central. For him this means embracing the metaphorical ideal of the nomad: the city “must not merely travel light but settle light” in order to adapt more easily to changes in living that will be achieved through advances in scholarship, science, and technology. He directly criticizes of the source material for Hitler’s and Speer’s monumentality: the very idea that what is capable of expressing the spirit of a culture in a given period will remain relevant a millennium into

74 Lewis Mumford, 439.
75 Ibid., 438.
76 Ibid., 433.
77 Lewis Mumford, 439
the past or future goes against the urban fluidity Mumford is advocating. The conception of urbanism stemming from Western antiquity sees culture as plastic, finished, incapable of change, and permanent monuments are the embodiments of attitudes antagonistic to cultural evolution, vast, extravagant tombs dominating the urban environment.

J.L. Sert, Fernand Léger, and Siegfried Giedion argued that modern architecture and monumentality had not yet achieved their potential symbiosis. They felt that modern architecture had been met with resistance from its emergence and had thus its use had been limited mainly to utilitarian structures, for which the economy of modern architecture seemed best fit. Among the political implications of this critique were the idea that the monument is a collaborative feat; and that “those who govern and administer a people… represent the average man of our period in their artistic judgments”\(^\text{78}\) and are therefore unfit to conceive of such structures. Hitler’s contribution to monumentality in Germania, both in terms of initial designs for structures as well as the copious input he gave Speer, contradict this view.

Giedion on his own refines some of these points the following year, in an essay entitled “The Need for a New Monumentality.” He wrote that many notions from the great monuments of history had been transparently and poorly replicated in subsequent structures, so that their brilliant significance had become obscured. He claims that most of the nineteenth century was a “period of pseudo-monumentality.”\(^\text{79}\) This process of recycling forms without considering their contemporary relevance led, Giedion claims, to the devaluation of monuments, which were now “mere clichés without emotional


justification.”80 Contemporary architecture, on the other hand, takes it referent from common reality, and thus fashioned something true, resonant, and original. Again, Giedion reiterates the claim made in “Nine Points on Monumentality” that government officials are ill-equipped to be in a position of authority where aesthetics are involved, mainly because they are still caught up in the ideals that produced the failure of current monumentality. Again, Giedion emerges as an especially vocal critic of totalitarianism as fundamentally out of step with the utopian urbanism he is advocating, blatantly alluding to the control exerted by authoritarian leaders, and characterizing them as enemies of progress.

Following the publication of “Nine Points on Monumentality,” Louis Kahn published “Monumentality,” his first major essay on the same subject in 1944, linking monuments to a sacred, spiritual quality. Kahn claims that this enigmatic quality means that monuments “cannot be intentionally created.”81 Mainly his essay focuses on the history of architecture and engineering. Kahn suggests that during the nineteenth century a lack of inventiveness on the part of the engineer was a result of reliance on formulas and principles derived from handbooks, and so there was a move away from adapting to new materials and technologies that must be revived for the creation of new, original structures. While Kahn does not go so far as to suggest what form these structures might take, he urges that a “new spirit” be sought that can only be found through the application of new theories and technologies.82 While he shies away from the manifesto quality of Giedion, Sert, and Léger, Kahn is essentially in agreement with Lewis Mumford, claiming that, following the revival

80 Giedion, 550
82 Kahn, 30.
of a receptive attitude toward new ideas, “Nostalgic yearning for the ways of the past will find but a few ineffectual supporters.”

This group of critics are unified in their attempt to translate the historical attitude toward monumental, symbolic structures into the language of modern styles, materials, and building techniques, and to impart upon buildings with useful rather than purely ornamental or symbolic significance the quality and care that were historically associated with monuments: a new monumentality.

Speer himself claimed to have created a Theory of Ruin Value (Theorie von Ruinenwert) in response to Hitler’s desire “to transmit his time and its spirit to posterity.” According to Speer, Hitler was fascinated by the power of the emperors of Ancient Rome, embodied in their monuments which still stood nearly two millennia later. Central to this theory was a disdain for modern materials such as steel and concrete and a preference for permanent materials rooted in the taste of classicism: limestone, marble, and German granite. Again, there is an obvious discord with the proponents of the CIAM discourse who favored modern materials for their necessity to original modern structures. Speer’s theory appeared in the Four Year Plan of 1937, where Speer’s main contribution was to advocate the use of stone for its permanence, in an article entitled “Stone not Iron.” Speer criticized modern architecture for its use of impermanent materials, claiming that modern buildings rarely lasted more than fifty years. He cited the architecture of the Ancient

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83 Kahn, 30.
85 Speer, 55.
86 Speer, 56.
87 Speer, 56: “The idea was that buildings of modern construction were poorly suited to form that ‘bridge of tradition’ to future generations which Hitler was calling for.”
88 Scobie, 94.
Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans which stood for posterity as a testament to former power. Hitler approved of this theory after Speer presented him with a sketch of the ruined, future state of the Nuremberg Haupttribüne (grandstand).89

Here there is a clear disagreement with Mumford’s idea that the impermanence of modern buildings is favorable as it allows cities to adapt more easily to functional needs. Mumford even went so far as to claim that “The blight of ancient Rome upon the imagination of Italy in the ensuing ages bears witness to the congealing strength of the monument.”90 This example of the stifling impact of permanent construction on subsequent cultural consciousness conflicts with Hitler’s praise of the monumentality of antiquity, and condemnation of modern cities:

… our big cities of today possess no monuments dominating the city picture, which might somehow be regarded as symbols of the whole epoch. This was true in the cities of antiquity, since nearly every one possessed a special monument in which it took pride. The characteristic aspect of the ancient city did not lie in private buildings, but in the community monuments which seemed made, not for the moment, but for eternity, because they were intended to reflect, not the wealth of an individual owner, but the greatness and wealth of the community. Thus arose monuments which were very well suited to unite the individual inhabitant with his city in a way which today sometimes seems almost incomprehensible to us.91

One will recall from the Introduction Hitler’s claim that he believes in a unified “spirit of the whole epoch” which is embodied by these central features of an urban plan, and the way in which he believes monuments glorifying a nation become sources of pride for the citizen who, in his conception, is unflinching in support for and pride in the nation.

89 Scobie, 94.
90 Lewis Mumford, 435.
91 Hitler, 264.
If this thinking is applied to the Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, it becomes obvious that militarism is a major part of the culture he is conceiving. It is not surprising, then, that Ancient Rome is such a source of fascination to Hitler: to his mind this was a culture in which every citizen shared pride in the superiority of the military. Here is a clue toward understanding Hitler’s fixation on a culture with common, mandated values: military superiority would form the basis of Germany’s importance, and Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, the threshold to the capital city of the Third Reich, would stand for posterity to assert the cultural centrality of militarism. Not only would it look back upon the 1.8 million German soldiers who died during World War One, whose names would be inscribed on the granite bays for eternity, but it would be a central, inescapable feature passed through to access the Via Triumphalis.92

Kahn writes: “the images we have before us of monumental structures of the past cannot live again with the same intensity and meaning.”93 While the discourse on monumentality of the 1930s-50s advocated urban structures intended for social, utilitarian functions assuming an importance that had previously been reserved for major monuments, Hitler envisions the exact opposite: a revival of ornamental symbolic structures glorifying the Reich. From its classically-inspired form to its stone construction to its dehumanizing immensity to its lack of function, Hitler’s Arch of Triumph represents exactly the dated conception of monumentality that these authors denounce. Instead, it represents an immortal structure emblematic of power that, “even in a state of decay, after hundreds or… thousands of years would more or less resemble Roman models.”94

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92 Kitchen, 66
93 Kahn, 22-23.
94 Speer, 56.
Hitler’s Arch of Triumph

Hitler’s Arch of Triumph is open on all four sides. The structure was to consist of two large openings, on the north and south facades, and two smaller ones, to the east and west. The openings are flanked by column-form masses on either side. The top of the Arch has perforated walls along the two main facades, suggesting a balcony on a massive scale, and a large figural sculpture, apparently of bronze.

Hitler’s Arch of Triumph has numerous vertical stages. If one thinks of each façade as a solid wall with an arch cut through it, these walls are raised first on an unadorned plinth, then an angled stone base, suggesting structural solidity reminiscent of feudal city fortifications. Above this, atop a decorative cornice, appear relief friezes. The subject of the friezes is a mystery, as they are illegible in the preliminary drawings and the model, however the idea of creating a Triumphal Arch after a major war would suggest that, like the Arc de Triomphe, the visual program would predominantly depict scenes from battle, glorifying Germany’s imagined victories. The superiority of his military was, unsurprisingly, a great source of pride to the Führer, who insisted that even in the face of defeat its strength and leadership were unsurpassed.95

Above the friezes, which extend around the entire structure, only interrupted by the openings, are another cornice, and then massive walls of sheer stone. The “columns” flanking the principle (larger) openings on the north and south facades have a vertical fluted

95 “the German victories, won for four years against a whole world, must regardless of all heroic courage and ‘organization,’ be attributed solely to superior leadership, and this is a fact which cannot be denied out of existence. The organization and leadership of the German army were the mightiest that the earth had ever seen.” Hitler, 229.
detail, one of the few references to classical architectural features upon the structure. These then project back onto the plane of the arched openings, which are also of sheer stone. Toward the edges of the principle facades, the texture of the stone changes to become rusticated, which carries around to the side facades. Above this layer of plain stone is an unadorned frieze, topped by another cornice which wraps around the entire building. The arches are surrounded by stone *voussoirs* beginning above the relief friezes, again laying bare the structural solidity of the monument by exposing its massive vaulted system of support. The construction is stone, rather than one that could have been achieved considerably more easily with steel. This deliberate archaism reinforces the permanent type of construction of interest to Hitler, and conformed to Speer’s Theory of Ruin Value: despite the passage of thousands of years, triumphal arches from antiquity such as the Arch of Titus were still standing by the twentieth century, even if they had been heavily restored.

Within the principle openings are smaller, more delicate classically styled structures consisting of six-columned peristyles, flanked by larger arched openings, and then two-column peristyles. The arched openings are crowned by stepped stone roofs which form plinths for large bronze sculptures. The contrast between these colonnades and the superstructure highlights the tension between the fragility of the human scale and blunt, sheer solidity.

Echoes of the ceremony of Imperial Rome, and, later, of Imperial France, can be seen in many aspects of Nazi culture: the total synchronization of bodily movement in the military, rallies and processions held at specially designed sites throughout Germany. It seems possible that there would have been similarly rigorous customs on display in Germania upon its completion, and Hitler’s Arch of Triumph appears the logical starting
point for processions that would likely have progressed up the boulevard and terminated at the *Volkshalle*, reinforcing the necessity of militarism in protecting the polis. The placement of a military monument at the threshold to the capital of a nation bluntly associates the fate of a nation with its military outcome. While wars may be fought in far-off places, and ideally not on one’s own soil, the triumphal procession is a way of bringing militarism back into society, albeit when a threat has been conquered and a danger no longer exists. This establishes an almost divine reverence for the victor: where victory is presented in celebratory terms and as the only outcome of war.

To appropriate an architectural form whose origin lay in antiquity served to legitimize German claims of Aryan descent. As Alexander Scobie observed in writing about the influence of antiquity on the Nazis’ style of architecture, Hitler regarded the Greeks as “Nordic” and identified them as the ancestors of the Germans.96 (Particularly the Spartans, who were associated with a mythological military dominance, and also maintained a city-state based on race.97) Stylistically, more so even than the other buildings of Germania, whose immensity are tempered to some degree by neoclassical elements, the Arch is emblematic of blunt strength. Its very form, an unimaginable stone mass, adopts none of the classical proportions of the structures it imitates. As a testament to might, faced on one side with an immense display of captured artillery, the Arch is the muscular, stupid Neanderthal blighting *Germania*’s more or less uniform architecture. In the context of *Germania*, the Arch appears too severe, too devoid of ornament, and one cannot but associate it with a mind baser, more primal, a foil to rigorous order. Paradoxically, it is the

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96 Scobie, 13
97 Ibid., 14.
only building whose external form appears remotely permeable, as it is essentially hollow, but at the same time the most foreboding.

While Speer’s task was the implementation of the Führer’s vision, he often altered elements of Hitler’s initial ideas. The Arch of Triumph represents a structure that remained unchanged from its conception. Hitler had sketched designs for the Arch as early as 1925, and shared them with Speer around the time he appointed him GBI in 1937.98 Despite Speer’s urge to modify the structure’s proportions and simplify its design, Hitler opted to keep it exactly as he had designed it over a decade earlier, “before encountering the purifying influence of Professor Troost,”99 Speer’s predecessor and advocate of the spare neoclassicism characteristic of the rest of the plan. Speer characterized the Arch as “the classic example of the architectural fantasies [Hitler] had worked out in his lost sketchbook of the twenties.” Speer found the monument so abhorrent that he designated the Führer as the architect on all the plans so that no one would make the mistake that Speer was to blame.100 Despite his aesthetic objections, Speer remarks that what most surprised him about Hitler’s designs was less their ostentation than “the obsessiveness with which he had been planning triumphant monumental buildings” and that, “while continually proclaiming his desire for international reconciliation, he was planning buildings expressive of an imperial glory which could only be won by war.”101 This remark reveals the nature of the kind of building that aroused such passion in the Führer, and the assumptions of victory on which they were predicated, even a decade prior to his ascent to Chancellor.

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98 Ibid., 76.
99 Ibid., 135.
100 Ibid., 135.
101 Ibid., 75.
Conclusion

Hitler’s Arch of Triumph represents *Germania’s* clearest allusion to classical antiquity. Its scale allows it to tower over all surrounding buildings. Its proximity to the South Train Station would allow great masses of people to mobilize in the wide, empty plaza between the two structures. Coupled with the historical ceremonial function of the triumphal arch, this suggests Hitler’s Arch of Triumph as the starting point of military processions through *Germania*. Although ceremonial plans are not mentioned by Speer, nor by historians, this intent would give meaning to this otherwise purely ornamental, gargantuan structure.

It is clear that this structure is completely at odds with the experimental urban theories that were emerging as *Germania* was being designed and its construction planned. This group of critics blatantly condemned almost every characteristic of this type of building: the recycling of a stale typology with little originality; the disdain for modern materials and techniques which were allowing architects greater creative freedom at the time; its ornamental function; that it was designed by the leader of a totalitarian regime who bred hostility toward change and difference. More so than any other feature of Germania, because its form is so clearly derivative, does the Arch represent an embodiment of an aesthetic discourse that was closely tied to politics. Its sheer facades of stone, its reliance on classical techniques of building, its permanence, are antagonistic toward new conceptions of urbanism; it represents Hitler’s attempt to revive the glorifying monumentality of antiquity achieved through conquest, indifferent to ethical consideration.
Chapter Two

The Via Triumphalis, Iron Band of Terror

Adolf Hitler entered Paris three days after the June 25, 1940 declaration of an armistice between Germany and France. The armistice followed the French government’s evacuation of Paris and relocation to Bordeaux after the Nazis threatened to occupy the capital. Despite this major military triumph, which symbolically made good on Hitler’s promises to reverse the embarrassment endured by Germany at the hands of the French and the Allies following the First World War, the purpose of Hitler’s trip was not militaristic or diplomatic, nor one of destruction. Speer wrote: “This was not to be an official visit, I learned, but a kind of ‘art tour’ by Hitler.” Bizarre as this impulse appears, it is useful to keep in mind that, according to Speer, Hitler had been obsessed with Paris prior to the inception of his plan for Germania. Speer wrote that Hitler regarded Georges-Eugène Haussmann as the greatest urban planner in history, not to mention contemporary precedent for major urban redevelopment, as Haussmann’s prefecture and renovation of Paris (1853-1870) concluded fewer that 20 years before Hitler’s birth.

It is less surprising, then, that the visit did not consist of tours of embassies and official buildings, but rather the great landmarks of Paris, beginning with the Opera, designed by Charles Garnier in the neobaroque manner during Haussmann’s tenure under Napoleon III. Accompanied by Speer, the sculptor Arno Breker, and the artist Paul Giessler, Hitler led the tour through the immense building conceived as emblematic of the cultural splendor of the Second Empire. Despite never having entered the building before,

102 Speer, 170
the Führer, according to Speer, knew its plan so well that he was remarked on the rearrangement of some of its rooms in subsequent renovations.\footnote{Speer, 171}

Afterward, we drove past the Madeleine, down the Champs Elysées, on to the Trocadéro, and then to the Eiffel Tower, where Hitler ordered another stop. From the Arc de Triomphe with its tomb of the Unknown Soldier we drove on to the Invalides, where Hitler stood for a long time at the tomb of Napoleon.\footnote{Speer, 172}

Speer wrote that Hitler expressed little interest in such sites as the Place des Vosges, the Louvre, the Palace of Justice, and Sainte-Chapelle, but that: “He became animated again only when he saw the unitary row of houses on the Rue de Rivoli.”\footnote{Speer, 172} On the eve of his return from Paris, Hitler asked Speer to draft a decree ordering work to resume on the construction of Germania, which he antedated June 25, 1940, the date of the armistice.\footnote{Speer, 173} Hitler’s first trip to Paris, as its conqueror, affected him greatly, both in his exultations on the city’s beauty and in terms of its significance for his own plans in Berlin. After ordering the decree, Speer writes, Hitler said the following: “Wasn’t Paris beautiful? But Berlin must be made far more beautiful. In the past I have often considered whether we would not have to destroy Paris… But when we are finished in Berlin, Paris will only be a shadow. So why should we destroy it?”\footnote{Speer, 172}

Leaving aside the question of whether Germania, had it been completed, would have been a more remarkable city than Paris, Speer’s many references to Hitler’s obsession
with Haussmanian Paris as an inspiration for Berlin suggest several interesting parallels: Napoleon III’s violation of the French Constitution in order to proclaim his Second Empire and himself Emperor in 1851 as similar to Hitler’s own ascent to power; Haussmann’s relationship as the executor of Napoleon III’s vision for Paris as similar to Speer’s relationship to Hitler; and several elements of Haussmann’s renovation of Paris – from the manner in which the work was executed and paid for to distinct features within the city – that have echoes in the plan for Germania. Perhaps Speer is trying to cast his relationship to Hitler as similar to that of Haussmann and Napoleon, one of the most famous examples of a patron-architect relationship on a massive scale, and thus to normalize it with a known historical context and again remove much of the blame from his own end. Perhaps Hitler was obsessed with the First and Second Empire as a template for his own ambition, and thus coopted elements of the urban environment to correspond to the one he was planning.

Historical questions aside, Haussmann’s Paris is remarkable for its use of the boulevard as a means of connecting various disjointed points in what was basically a medieval city until Napoleon Bonaparte began an urban renewal plan that led to Napoleon III’s larger scale collaboration with Haussmann. Other than Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, which was again very likely inspired by the one begun by Napoleon Bonaparte in Paris in 1805, the only other concrete feature Hitler had conceived of prior to his collaboration with Speer was the central boulevard, the Via Triumphalis, which Speer referred to as “a Berlin Champs-Elysées two and a half times the length of the original” and “seventy-odd feet wider.”

108 Speer, 77
109 Speer, 76
The preference for monumental and symbolic rather than functional concerns permeated the planning stages, and nowhere is this more evident than in planning the city around a singular, monumental axis, reducing the circulation function of the boulevard and rendering it merely ornamental. Speer wrote: “[Hitler’s] passion for building for eternity left him without a spark of interest in traffic arrangements, residential areas, and parks. He was indifferent to the social dimension.”\(^{110}\) He also commented: “the plan, which would also have been a boon to traffic, was sacrificed on the altar of ostentation, and the flow of north-south traffic considerably hampered by a detour.”\(^{111}\) (Speer did sent Rudolf Wolters, one of the three young architects working in his office to whom he delegated important tasks, on a tour of America to research road traffic, though this possibly had more to do with the construction of the Autobahn and other major infrastructure projects than in Germania, where the rigid axial plan was more symbolic than functional, designed to express power.\(^{112}\) Thus the Volkshalle, the seat of power of the Führer and the Reich, served as the terminus of the boulevard, which did not continue in a straight line following this monument, but veered off at a northwest angle (Figs. 2 and 3).

The boulevard terminated at its southern- and northernmost points in two massive new train stations, so that a unique motion became inherent in the plan for the city: one could enter it at either of these points, travel the length of the boulevard, stopping at the Volkshalle along the way, and ultimately leave at the opposite end. In this motion is contained a kind of pilgrimage association, where the seat of power is accessible to all

\(^{110}\) Speer, 79
\(^{111}\) Speer, 77.
subjects of the Reich. Whereas medieval cities expanded radially from the most prominent physical and cultural monument – a church or cathedral – Germania was distinguished most prominently by its domed hall, and its main road was subject to the needs of that structure. The almost magnetic force of imperial power is concretized in a vast, rational boulevard, unified in its architectural style and the level height of the cornices on the facades of its buildings which all draw the individual, perspectively, to this immense structure.

While Hitler and Speer may have taken cues from Napoleon III and Haussmann (in terms of style and proportion, in their adaptation of the boulevard, but also in the way the plan for urban development was enacted), the former group sought entirely different ends from the latter. Although many of the motivating factors for these separate renewals were similar, they differ in that ultimately the degree of control exerted by the Germania would have been exponentially harsher and extend beyond simply shaping the lives of its inhabitants as they navigated the city. Hitler sought to create a city that psychologically exerted dominance over the individual, and further sought to build a population where every member was modelled on an ideal German of Aryan descent. This was not merely a city emblematic of imperial splendor and military might, but also of one man’s complete, ruthless domination over a nation. As the street shapes the life of the masses, and likewise the masses the life of the street, so that, in Paris, the boulevards were “the poetry through which the city primarily gets represented,”113 the one major axis of Germania, the Via Triumphalis, would become the most undeniable, terrifying testament to the strength of a

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totalitarian nation which ultimately, in reality, lacked the power to ever see it completed, although they came frighteningly close.

Haussmann’s Renovation of Paris

David Harvey writes of Paris in 1850, prior to the prefecture of George-Eugène Haussmann and the massive urban “renovation” he aided Napoleon III in executing: “Some saw it as a sick city, wracked by political torments, torn apart by class struggles, sinking beneath its own weight of decadence, corruption, crime, and cholera.”

On moral decay, one of the major motivations for the renovation, the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Morlot, remarked at the time that the rebuilding would combat “moral misery indirectly but surely by improving the conditions and habits of the working classes. One does not comport oneself in broad and straight streets, inundated with light, with the same carelessness as in narrow, tortuous and dark streets.” The economic depression pervading Europe at the time led to a massive displacement of France’s population, from the countryside to its capital city, the result of which was an increase from 786,000 residents in 1831 to over one million in 1846, resulting in housing and job shortages. The mythical heroism of the French Revolution had instilled in the population a tendency to “put political interpretations on the least sign of economic difficulty, take to the streets, erect barricades,

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114 Harvey, 93.
116 Harvey, 93.
and proclaim their rights as the rights of man,“117 so that the political situation was unstable to say the least.

Physically, there were problems with what was essentially still a medieval city. Hygiene was an enormous concern, particularly following the major outbreak of cholera in 1832, and a general rise in cases of tuberculosis and other illnesses.118 Narrow, curving streets made popular insurgence a far easier accomplishment than in Haussmann’s *grands boulevards*, which were both more difficult to blockade due to their width and allowed increased efficiency of police and military mobilization. Many working-class neighborhoods where violence was more likely to break out were situated directly in the heart of the city, within walking distance of the capital’s government institutions.119 Haussmann speaks in his memoirs of the historically “impressionable and turbulent character of the Parisian masses,” citing the decisions of Philippe-Auguste to build the Louvre as a fortress outside what were then the city limits, and of Louis XIV who moved the entire court out of the city to Versailles.120 Beauty was a major consideration, as Napoleon III wanted a city that would reflect the prestige of his and his uncle’s empire.

The squalor of the lives of most Parisians in the first half of the nineteenth century was the subject of literary exploration by Charles Baudelaire and Honoré de Balzac. They developed and embodied the trope of the *flâneur*, a male bourgeois who endlessly roamed the city and witnessed countless scenarios, tragic and comic, which they recorded and which epitomized the spirit of the time. David Harvey wrote “They decoded the city and

117 Harvey, 95.
118 Kirkland, 66.
119 Kirkland, 66.
120 As quoted in Kirkland, 67.
rendered it legible,” suggesting that this way of perceiving represented the birth of modernism. These characters attempted to explain the new, wild world which sprang up around them daily, many of whom had endured the difficult transition from rural to urban life as a result of the economic turmoil in Europe at the time, as Balzac himself had done.

In the autumn following the coup d’état that allowed Napoleon III to dissolve parliament, suspend the constitution, and proclaim himself emperor on December 1, 1851, Napoleon gave a speech in Bordeaux in which he claimed: “Everywhere we have ruins to raise again, false gods to bring down, truths to make triumph.” Following Napoleon’s relocation of his residence from the Palais d’Elysées to Palais des Tuileries in 1852, he adorned his wall with an enormous map of Paris which he studied voraciously, planning necessary improvements. By 1853, he had produced a map of Paris with proposed alterations demarcated in colored ink, the initial focus being to connect new train stations – the Gare Saint-Lazare, Gare de l’Ouest, Gare de l’Est, Gare du Nord – to the heart of the city. While his uncle, Napoleon Bonaparte, had focused on erecting impressive monuments and costly throughout the city, Napoleon III was more concerned with questions of efficiency and hygiene. Like Berlin, Paris had experienced a surge in population growth in the years prior to its urban redevelopment, a boon that had left the city racked with housing shortages, as well as a socio-economically segregated population suffering from the aftereffects of an economic depression. In 1853, he appointed

121 Harvey, 25.
122 Harvey, 29.
123 Kirkland, 52.
124 Kirkland, 61.
125 Kirkland, 61-2
126 The population of Paris in 1831 was 786,000; by 1846 it had grown to over 1,000,000, from Harvey, 93.
Georges-Eugène Haussmann as prefect of the Seine, and tasked him with organizing and assisting in the process of this major urban renewal. Like Speer, Haussmann was young and ambitious, although rather than an architect, he was essentially a bureaucrat.

This plan meant destruction of many old parts of Paris to allow for the long vistas of the boulevards Napoleon III envisioned, a task Haussmann embraced.

I would be able to begin ripping open the neighborhoods of the center of the city with their tangle of streets almost impossible to navigate by carriage and their crowded, sordid, and unhealthy houses; these neighborhoods that are for the most part a seat of misery and disease and a subject of shame for a great country such as France.127

There is present in this statement a great deal of nationalist sentiment, echoed in Walter Benjamin’s explanation: “Empire is the style of revolutionary heroism for which the state is an end in itself.”128 It is unclear here whether Benjamin is referring specifically to the Empire style or speaking in more general terms about architectural programs expressive of the strength of an empire. However, the latter, more general interpretation could be seen as applying to Germania itself, where function is subsumed by the desire to glorify the Reich, which Hitler clearly conceives as the ultimate function of architecture in the capital.

Napoleon III’s ambition drove him to set the Paris Universal Exposition for 1855, just two years following Haussmann’s appointment, and for which he demanded the completion of the expansion of the Rue de Rivoli. It had been built on a much shorter stretch than it now occupies by Napoleon Bonaparte, who had named it Rivoli to commemorate his victory over Austria at the Battle of Rivoli (January 3-4, 1797).129 (Like

127 Haussman, as quoted by Kirkland, 90.
the depiction of Austrians as a barbaric people in the visual program of the Arc de
Triomphe, here is another example of the extant tension between France and Germany that
curred the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.) The street was duly extended, and, as
as customary, covered with canvas until its completion and dramatically publicly
unveiled, the same street where Hitler reportedly expressed animation toward the dignified
uniformity of the facades.\textsuperscript{130} This mandated theatricality has echoes in the Berlin plan as
well: Hitler and Speer also imagined holding a world exposition upon the completed
execution of their design, planned for 1950, during which Berlin would be formally
christened \textit{Germania}: “Until then the buildings will remain empty, and then they’ll serve
as exhibition buildings. We’ll invite the entire world.”\textsuperscript{131} Here Hitler belies the kind of
capital he intends to create: it is not meant as a functional city for Berliners, and indeed
much of the actual goings-on of Berlin’s residents are to be hidden from sight. Even prior
to its intended completion, the models were shown at various receptions of dignitaries so
that they became an expression of the terrifying ambition of the Third Reich.

A Berliner would have no less claim to Germania than any other German. Instead,
it functions as a show piece for the world, expressive of the power of Germany.

\textbf{The \textit{Via Triumphalis}}

By the time that Hitler ascended to power in 1933, Berlin had many of the same
problems that Paris had nearly a century earlier. As Paris was basically still a medieval city

\textsuperscript{130} Benjamin, 92.
\textsuperscript{131} For more information on the World’s Exposition planned for 1950, see Kitchen, 66.
Hitler’s quote can be found here: Speer, 141.
at the time of the Renovation, “Berlin during the 1920s and 1930s remained essentially a Wilhelmine city.”

Berlin had experienced even greater population growth than Paris. In 1871, when Berlin was made the capital of a newly unified Germany, its population was 826,341; by 1933 it had risen to 4,242,501. There were housing and job shortages. Berlin’s enormous class divisions had been opposed since the rise of working class movements in the 1870s, and the hold of many government institutions had been either dismantled or else weakened significantly by the effects of the First World War. The economy was a disaster, both roiling with the depression that struck all of Europe after the War, as well as the absurd reparations imposed on Germany by the Allies. Because of the massive influx of population, streets were mainly laid out in geometrical grids which allowed for easier, more efficient construction of new buildings, which produced a uniform though austere effect. Moreover, many of the buildings that were constructed to accommodate the surging population were modernist in style, which ideologically conflicted with National Socialism. While the modernist style initially met with conservative disapproval in the postwar period, it became increasingly used on account of its economy. In less than a decade, between 1924 and 1933, 14,000 residential buildings in modern and experimental styles were completed in Berlin alone, so that the somewhat brutal plainness of this structures became ubiquitous in the German capital and marked it.

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133 Kitchen, 58.
134 Hake, 19.
135 Hake, 23.
modernist building could remain visible, but to undo all the construction that had been completed would have been nearly impossible, even thinking on the scale Hitler and Speer were. Even the absurdly egotistical Hitler was concerned about security: “You know it is not out of the question that I shall some day be forced to take unpopular measures. These might possibly lead to riots... If [the SS] come rolling up here in their armored vehicles the full width of the street – nobody will be able to put up any resistance.”

Beginning at Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, the _Via Triumphantis_ stretched three miles north on a perfectly straight axis. At its northernmost point was the Adolf Hitler Platz, in which could fit one million people, crowned by the gargantuan dome of the Volkshalle. The Platz, discussed in detail in the third chapter, was part of a new complex that comprised the Hall, Hitler’s Palace, the Chancellery, and the new Reichstag. The structure of the old Reichstag was to be incorporated into this complex as well, although it was to be used mainly for social purposes upon the completion of the new. All of the new structures would have substantially dwarfed the old Reichstag, the one extant structure of Wilhelmine Germany.

According to Speer, the design was such that one third of the boulevard would be lined with government buildings. The remainder was to be occupied by privately owned businesses at the street level:

A luxurious movie house for premières, another cinema for the masses accommodating two thousand persons, a new opera house, three theaters, a new concert hall, a building for congresses, the so-called House of the Nations, a hotel of twenty-one stories, variety theaters, mass and luxury restaurants, and even an indoor swimming pool… were deliberately

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^137 Speer, 158.

^138 Speer, 151.
included in the plans with the idea of bringing urban life into the new avenue. There were to be quiet interior courtyards with colonnades and small luxury shops set apart from the noise of the street and inviting strollers… The whole avenue was also conceived by Hitler and me as a continuous sales display of German goods which would exert a special attraction upon foreigners.\footnote{Speer, 134.}

The idea of a central boulevard was, according to Speer, an idea developed by Hitler in the 1920s, the decade in which he wrote \textit{Mein Kampf} and sketched designs for both the Arch of Triumph and the Volkshalle, developing architectural ideas at the same time as he invented the foundation of Nazi ideology. As a map of Berlin indicates from 1918 (Fig. 20), this axis incorporated existing streets of Berlin’s layout, although it expanded them significantly. The \textit{Via Triumphalis} extended the \textit{Sieges Allee}, an existing north-south axis that culminated in the Konigsplatz in the Tiergarten, a round plaza bordered by the Reichstag, where the Berlin Victory Column had stood until it was relocated to its current position further west by the Nazis in 1939.

The \textit{Via Triumphalis} was to be literally cut three miles through the center of the existing city, although the clearing of buildings never made it that far, destroying many smaller streets, decreasing the number of intersecting streets, and literally wiping out blocks due to the boulevard’s immense width. In reality, only the site of the \textit{Volkshalle} was cleared, beginning in 1939, concurrent with the east-west axis that was to intersect with the main north-south axis of the boulevard just south of Adolf Hitler Platz.\footnote{For more information on the clearing of the site of the \textit{Volkshalle} complex, see: Speer, 154, and: Ian Kershaw, \textit{Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis}, (New York: Norton, 2000) 183} The most prominent change to the topography of Berlin was the consolidation of the railroad tracks to the south, which were reorganized so they no longer reached their terminus at the old
Potsdam Bahnhof, but instead at the new train station at the southern end of the boulevard. Additionally, a new line was added to accommodate the new train station at the northern end.  

Arendt’s “Iron Band of Terror”

Arendt writes that “terror is the essence of totalitarian domination,” that “Terror is the realization of the law of movement; its chief aim is to make it possible for the force of nature or of history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action.” Terror then becomes the apparatus through which conceptions of natural or historical law are enforced. “It substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic proportions.” Terror in this way acts as a normalizing force which restricts the activities of those under totalitarian rule to those expressly condoned by the state; it molds individuals into manifestations of ideology through each one’s “fear-guided movements” and “suspicion-ridden actions.” “It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.” In this way, the culturally pervasive development of the supposed laws of nature or history is supposed to be accelerated, and they become integrated into every aspect of the lives of those subject to totalitarian rule.

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141 Speer, 77.
143 Ibid. 466.
This fixation on the suspension of freedom of motion, which Arendt equates with the abolition of civil liberties, takes concrete form in in the central boulevard of Germania. While there are intersections with perpendicular streets, the *Via Triumphalisa* is the principle axis of power within Germania. The numerous boulevards of Paris provided aesthetically uniform links between residential, civic, and economic hubs, and simultaneously integrated them, so that landmarks became the foci of radial axes. In Germania, there are only two focal points: the Arch of Triumph, and the Volkshalle, the latter of which constituted the central point of the 50-kilometer-long stretch, thus locating the seat of power of the Führer as the center from which the vast city radiated. The train stations bookending the city would ensure an endless supply of stupefied subjects to come pay tribute in terrified awe. The entire arrangement is predicated on permanence: structures built in stone to stand for eternity, even planned to assume a reverent morbidity as they decay. As well, the location of the seat of the Führer at the center of the monumental capital, the point to which all energy in the city is directed and from which supreme power radiates assumes the supreme power of the Führer for posterity. Hitler, whose health was in decline from the time of his ascension to leader of the German people, must have been aware of the inherent morbidity of this arrangement, which explains at least in part why he found appealing Speer’s *Theory of Ruin Value*, while it shocked other party members.144 The whole plan for Germania, the insane ideology of the Nazi party, including its wish for an identical population based on ancient links to Aryan heritage, can be read as a way of overcoming the inevitability of death. The desire to halt the effect of chaos on history, to accelerate selective aspects of

144 Speer, 56
Nature or History, is to remove agency from all the world and replace it with a singular egotistical vision.

Conclusion

What, then, is the kind of citizen dictated by the urban environment of Germania? Symbolically, the architectural prominence once reserved for religious institutions had been given to a the seat of political power. Visually, the boulevard with its massive blocks was the equivalent of horse blinders, obstructing from view anything beyond the confines of the street and creating perspective indicating the Volkshalle. The boulevard’s conception violates the human will in its severe control and enforcement of the visible landscape. There was not to be, as in Paris, a series of boulevards linking various institutions of government, religion, commerce, and entertainment. In Germania there was to be one road, one Führer, which neither even Napoleon Bonaparte or Napoleon III dared attempt. There is no diverse community but one individual, tall and blonde and virile, with ice-blue eyes, an ideal for which the cost of construction was millions eradicated through war and genocide.

Speer commented: “Whenever, nowadays, I look through the plans and the photos of the models, even the varied parts of the avenue strike me as lifeless and regimented.”145 He talks of a “monumental rigidity that would have counteracted all our efforts to introduce urban life into this avenue.”146 It is interesting that Speer here talks about the way that

145 Speer, 134
146 Speer, 134
urban space would have led to a lifeless city. At one point, Speer talks about Hitler, bent over, with his face a few inches above the base of the model, in a simulation of the perspectives within the plan, for instance, the way in which the arch framed the Volkshalle at the end of the boulevard. This almost becomes a way to simulate the reality of daily life in Germania, or rather the ideal they perceived, that was almost a sculpture rather than a city. Devoid of people, the boulevard is almost a museum (Speer refers to it as a “showcase”), perhaps beautiful in an abstract way, lined with buildings of uniform height and a singular style, faced in immaculate granite. Perhaps the pair spent too long with these architectural models, and became enamored with the idea of an empty shell. For vibrancy to exist within the urban environment, the realization of a metropolis necessitates a transference of power from the authority in charge of creating that environment to the individual. The flâneur was constantly delighted and intrigued by the city, finding moments of aesthetic wonder precisely because of the element of mutability. In the Adolf Stahr passage quoted above, what is exciting and remarkable is the ability of a population to adapt to their surroundings, to observe others as they go about their daily lives. Rather than allowing the population of the city a say in how they will live, Germania dictates what life will be: here is your movie theater, here your opera house, here your cobbler, all aligned and proportioned and regimented along an arrow straight path bookended at the south end by the Arch of Triumph and at the north by the Volkshalle. The commercial and professional hub of the city is stuck between its two most prominent monuments, and their presence is thus inescapable. Whereas in Paris one might look along a boulevard and see a magnificent theater or cathedral, in Germania the only focal points are testaments to the
enduring power of the Empire, a power which is then turned around to threaten and intimidate the population into sameness, into living one’s life along prescribed, rigid lines.

It is possible the motivation for the single central axis was not only a symbolic assertion of dominance, but also a practical means of controlling the points of access to the old city, where presumably Berliners would continue to go about their lives in the shadow of madness. In Fig. 3, where new construction is signified by white, beyond the boulevard itself little of what surrounded would actually be changed. This could account for the massive blocks and the intense perspective: while the new design of the central axis was ambitious, it would have been impossible to eradicate the mass of architectural styles Hitler found distasteful, so that instead what is created is a kind of stage set, the illusion of monumental neoclassical splendor, the employment of perspective more reminiscent of gardens at Versailles than of a great metropolis. Speer writes: “For a city planner such an avenue could only have meaning and function as the core of a general reorganization of the city. For Hitler, however, it was a display piece and an end in itself.”

Much is shown, in a manner similar to the spectacle of Paris. The individual is plunged into an elaborate fantasy that, in its blatant intimidation, concusses one into a state of stunned belief of an infinity that would be burst by simply walking a few blocks east or west. The massive lengths of the blocks could be seen as a bizarre folly of an urban planner obsessed with grandeur, because they would appear to stifle access to the rest of the city. Alternately, this decision could be seen as strategically eliminating access to the fabric of a functional city that would have been grossly appended purely for the sake of ornament. The real city would be hidden away from the individual roaming the boulevard. Unlike the

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147 Speer, 77.
flâneur, it is difficult to imagine the casual stroller of Germania, if for no other reason than the psychological brutality of the urban experience. This was not a city center for Berliners, who would likely lead their daily lives beyond its seemingly inescapable grasp. Rather, it is conceived for a transient population who could arrive from anywhere on the Continent at one of the massive train stations, descend the stone stair, and drop their jaws in terrified reverence of the impressiveness of the Reich. Had the Nazis achieved their massive global aims of conquest, the world’s population would be increasingly composed of Germans or German-subjugated people, who would arrive to find one grand boulevard, populated by a physically and culturally homogenous race.

The other actor in this play was the Führer, who also served as its director, casting agent, and set designer. Hitler envisioned himself there, hoping to take residence of his new palace upon its completion, however he was also thinking, typically, in terms of posterity. Speer writes: “the future headquarters of the Reich which was meant to manifest for hundreds of years to come the power that had been attained in the era of Hitler. Just as the Champs Elysées finds its dramatic focus in the residence of the French kings, so the grand boulevard was to culminate in a group of buildings which Hitler regarded as central to his political activities.” Had the Nazis achieved the empire they were pursuing, here, amid so many million tons of German granite, would always reside a Führer. In the end, though, it was just another prop.

148 Speer, 151.
Chapter Three

The Volkshalle, Cathedral of the Reich

The Volkshalle ("People’s Hall," Figs. 1-5) served as Germany’s focal point, both architecturally as the most immense building and in terms of its physical placement at the center the city and the terminus of the Via Triumphalis. Perched on an almost perfectly semicircular curve of the Spree, the Volkshalle constituted the main building of an enormous complex of official Reich buildings. The plan was such that the axis of the Via Triumphalis led into an immense forecourt with a capacity of one million, the Adolf Hitler Platz, which was to be flanked on all sides by government buildings as well as, to the east, the old Reichstag. Hitler’s Palace (Figs. 25-26), grotesquely gaudy in style, was to face the plaza’s east side. The enormous domed structure of the Volkshalle, designed with a height just shy of that of the Eiffel Tower, “would tower above low clouds,” despite objections of Reich Air Ministry officials who claimed it would act as a guide to enemy fighter planes. (According to Speer, Goering assured Hitler that no enemy plane would ever enter Germany; such was their confidence in the superiority of the German military.) Resting upon an enormous square structure, whose exterior walls of granite were one and a half the length of the US Capitol and nearly as tall as the height of the Capitol’s dome. The dome of the Volkshalle was designed with a diameter of 845 feet, and projected upwards a further 482 feet. At its crown was a turret 132 feet in height, topped by an enormous sculpted eagle sitting atop a globe.

The subject of the visual program was world conquest. The exterior decoration was simple, contrived by Speer to restore some sense of scale to the plan, “undoubtedly a vain hope,” in his words. From the façade of the building projected a slightly smaller rectangular box, and from there a colonnade supporting a “delicate frieze.” The copper plates that clad the expanse of the dome would, with the oxidation of age, acquired the green patina that would make it loom above the city “like some green mountain,” presided over by the eagle, symbolic of German might, sovereignty, and conquest.\(^{150}\) Speer reports that Hitler, initially presented with the standard swastika-bearing eagle to top the structure, rejected this and insisted that: “To crown this greatest building in the world the eagle must stand above the globe.”\(^{151}\) Such was their conception of the significance of the structure. Flanking the colonnaded façade would stand two sculptures, each fifty feet in height, depicting Atlas and Tellus, bearing with the severe, inhuman dignity of the Nazi sculptors the weights of the Earth and the Heavens, continents and constellations figured in gold amid blue enamel backgrounds.\(^{152}\)

To aid in beginning to even conceive of the immensity of the structure, Speer makes several comparisons to buildings which served as models, both architecturally and symbolically, for what he and Hitler hoped to achieve with the *Volkshalle*. Of the new Reichstag, to be built next to the old building designed by Paul Wallot and completed in 1894, Speer writes: “as if Hitler wanted by architecture alone to denigrate the whole process of popular representation, the hall had a volume fifty times greater than the

\(^{150}\) Speer, 153.  
\(^{151}\) Ibid., 160.  
\(^{152}\) Ibid., 154.
proposed Reichstag building."153 (Conversely, by comparison to the old Reichstag, the new one was to more than double the capacity of the chamber, allowing space for 1,200 deputies. By the ratio established during the Weimar era, which Hitler maintained, of sixty thousand voters per deputy, the size of the new chamber anticipated a population of 140 million Germans, not including the population of subjugated peoples who, as in Imperial Rome, were not allowed the rights of citizens. Although the function of the Reichstag had been made moot through the introduction of the one-party system, Hitler evidently wished to preserve at least the appearance of the tradition of democracy.)

By comparison to the Roman Pantheon, which Speer cites as a major source of inspiration, particularly for Hitler’s own initial design for the structure of 1925 [Fig. 21], the oculus cut out of the dome of the Volkshalle would have actually been larger than the entire dome of the Pantheon.154 The same would be true in comparison to St. Peter’s Basilica, which provided a more symbolic rather than aesthetic reference: Speer and Hitler hoped that the Volkshalle would acquire through time “an importance similar to that St. Peter’s in Rome has for Catholic Christendom.” While Speer claims that “without some such essentially pseudoreligious background the expenditure for Hitler’s central building would have been pointless and incomprehensible,” it will become clear that the religious connotations of the structure are anything but arbitrary.155 Consistent with the architectural megalomania which characterize the plan for Germania, the interior of the Volkshalle would have been sixteen times the size of St. Peter’s.

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153 Ibid., 152.
154 Speer, 152.
155 Ibid., 153.
The scale and capacity of the interior chamber (Fig. 5) were likewise dictated not by the size of the existing population, but by what Hitler envisioned he would achieve through conquest and subjugation. The result was a round, marble-walled interior with a diameter of 825 feet and height of 726 feet, suggesting a nearly perfect sphere, and room for 180,000 people standing. A three-tier gallery would have receded to the limits of the space, above which would project marble pillars 80 feet in height. An arched recess opposite the entrance, clad in gold mosaic, would house a marble pillar supporting a gilded eagle clutching a swastika in its talons. Before this sculpture, which with its gold background would have been reminiscent of an altar, was the Führer’s podium. (Of course, given the scale of the structure, the figure who stood there before the crowd would have “dwindled to an optical zero.”\textsuperscript{156}) The immense vaulting of the stone ceiling receded in scale toward the oculus, through which sunlight would filter to illuminate the space.

Attached to the Volkshalle via a series of covered galleries would be Hitler’s new palace which, compared to the immense but stark simplicity of the domed building was a fiasco of opulent ornamentation, recalling the proximity of parish to church. Despite all this ornamentation, ostentation, and the unfathomable quantity of resources being chucked at the project, the structure is notable more for its spiritual connotations. In contrast to the chapter of space devoted in his memoirs to the entire plan for Germania, which includes mention of the Volkshalle, Speer devotes another entire chapter just to the complex of the structure and its adjacent buildings, and the Adolf Hitler Platz. In this chapter, called “The Globe,” he frequently remarks on the religious connotations of such a structure.

\textsuperscript{156} Speer, 153.
The Divine Right of the Citizen

“In a sense the Pantheon in Rome served as our model,” Speer writes. Formally, the Pantheon (Figs. 21-22) has a greater affinity with Hitler’s sketch of 1925 (Fig. 20) than it does with Speer’s final design. Hitler’s drawing is actually nearly identical, beyond having a box-like base rather than a cylindrical one, a façade projecting higher above the roof of the porch before the dome begins, and a sculpture atop the dome rather than an unobstructed oculus. While no drawings by Hitler are known to exist depicting the interior of the Volkshalle, Speer’s design bears considerable resemblance to the antique. Rather than beginning the colonnade at the floor, Speer rests it atop the projecting galleries; there are narrow vertical niches above the cornice rather than windows spaced at interval; there stands one recess for the Führer to address the Volk, rather than the multiple openings that alternately contained altars or served as niches for sculpture in the Pantheon. Instead of walls and floors with large geometric inlays of marble specimens, the interior of the Volkshalle was to be clad in white marble, the only ornamentation being the mosaic behind the Führer’s podium. The section does not indicate Corinthian pediments atop the columns; the overall style appears slightly less opulent and more restrained. Still, many elements of the Pantheon’s design are present in the final design of the interior, perhaps most notably the coffered ceiling. Like the Volkshalle, the Pantheon was positioned on a north-south axis, flipped so that the entrance and main façade were at its northern end. The Pantheon also gave onto a large forecourt surrounded by public buildings.

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157 Ibid., 153.
The Pantheon also has major significance in terms of Western aesthetics as a whole. It was not until May 1938 that Hitler saw the Pantheon in person, more than a decade after he made the sketch to which it bears such a striking resemblance.¹⁵⁹ (Visiting the Panthéon in Paris, Hitler was reportedly disappointed by the appropriation of its form from Hadrian’s.¹⁶⁰) In the Middle Ages the structure maintained the fascination of architects and engineers who were incapable of replicating the principles that allowed for its construction. It was not until the Renaissance that its form was adapted on a monumental scale.¹⁶¹ Speer initially wanted the entire construction dictated by classical principles, rather than using any modern techniques, but ultimately practical considerations left him with a steel skeleton supporting the gargantuan weight of the stone structure.¹⁶²

Scobie observes that Agrippa’s Pantheon, which was replaced by that of Hadrian, was probably an Augusteum, a temple whose purpose is the worship of a ruler within that ruler’s lifetime.¹⁶³ As well, the Pantheon has a metonymic relationship with Hadrian and the Roman Empire in the same way that the Volkshalle would have had for Hitler and the Reich. Although it is uncertain whether Hadrian was its architect, it remains “Hadrian’s building,” and the variety of marbles used throughout were culled from the corners of the Roman Empire so that the round structure, which recalls a globe, becomes a symbolic, unified home for all the Empire’s citizens.¹⁶⁴ Here the assembled are not divided; all are

¹⁵⁹ Scobie, 109.
¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 109-110.
¹⁶¹ Macdonald, 95
¹⁶² Speer, 154
¹⁶³ Scobie, 114
¹⁶⁴ MacDonald, 12
Romans, and this devotional structure becomes symbolic of their freedoms as citizens, particularly in this case in the form of freedom of worship.

Speer signed the *Volkshalle* plans “Developed on the basis of the Fuehrer’s ideas,” so that despite Hitler’s meager contributions, both the concept of a domed hall and his original sketch, he and the building would be united for posterity.\(^{165}\) The immediate proximity of the vast square the *Volkshalle* crowned, the Adolf Hitler Platz, as well as the underground connection between the Führer’s palace and the *Volkshalle* reinforces this relationship. It was a building whose sole function was the elevation of the Führer to an almost divine dimension via the vast and impossible architectural context he had fashioned for himself. The *Volkshalle* would have constituted a self-reflexive historical relationship wherein the role played by Hitler as the father of the Third Reich was impossible to deny. Rather than uniting Germans in a reminder of their freedom as subjects of the Reich, Hitler instead conceives of a structure where Germans will be unified in their privileged access to the Führer.

In Hadrian’s Pantheon statues of the gods were recessed in openings surrounding the interior chamber, observing from all angles as one navigated the space, the building’s most blatantly spiritual aspect.\(^{166}\) Despite the gazes of these sculptures, the individual still would have had the ability to navigate the space and worship freely, to statues which served as earthly symbols of heavenly deities. In the *Volkshalle* the Führer would address the assembled from the single central podium, the enormous sculpted eagle rising up behind him against the massive gold mosaic. The Führer is the only point on which to focus one’s

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\(^{165}\) Speer, 152
\(^{166}\) MadDonald, 77
attention, while the Führer can freely observe any member of the crowd, not unlike the position of authority at the center of a panopticon. Here the divine right of freedom is seized from the mass and bestowed upon their scrutinizing savior.

Reverence and Legitimacy

Despite St. Peter’s famous dome (“Michelangelo’s Dome,” Fig. 23), the building’s structure is actually somewhat irrelevant to this chapter, as Hitler and Speer were more interested in the veneration it had gained as “the heart of the western World,” which had already been attained during the Middle Ages, prior to the design of the current structure. Speer’s statement to this point aids in understanding its somewhat surprising placement amid the other two sources he cites – the Pantheon and the designs of Boullée – as the latter are more explicitly formally connected with the different iterations of the design.

St. Peter’s Basilica was originally a funerary church of the apostle whose name it bears. According to the New Testament, St. Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven by Christ, and became the first Pope (Matthew 16:13-16:19), thereby establishing the Vatican as the seat of Christian authority throughout the Middle Ages via the entombment of his remains there.167 Christoph Luitpold Frommel writes that: “During the Middle Ages the Basilica of St. Peter had come to represent the heart of the Western World,” and that it became the ultimate site of Christian pilgrimage.168 If this was this was

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168 Frommel, 399.
its qualification to serve as a model of the symbolic function of the Volkshalle, this represents an extreme conflation of political ideology with religion. Just as St. Peter’s served as a site of pilgrimage and simultaneously reaffirmed, through its invocation of St. Peter himself, the legitimacy of the Vatican’s power, the Volkshalle was to become a point of pride for Germans the world over, and a site for them to bask in the divine right of their birth, the underlying assertion of the idea of a chosen race.

Monumental Theatricality

Of the design for the Volkshalle, Speer claims that: “Our plans did not belong to that supergrandiose category envisioned by Claude Nicolas Ledoux as the swan song of the Bourbon dynasty of France, or by Etienne L. Boullée to glorify the Revolution – projects which were never meant to be carried out. Their scale, however, was by no means vaster than Hitler’s.” 169 It is ambiguous whether Speer means to argue that his designs shared few or no formal qualities of the two French architects, or whether he is simply stating that Boullée and Ledoux had envisaged buildings they lacked the means to complete, whereas Speer did not. The first is false. The second rings with that irony all too familiar to the reader by now, that history rendered its truth unknowable. Boullée (1728-1799) in particular has many formal affinities with Speer’s designs.

While Boullée is not nearly as controversial a character as Speer, he represents another example of an enigmatic, ambitious personality who sought to work on an immense scale. So obsessed was Boullée with monumental structures that his politics remained

169 Speer, 154.
conservative amid the aggressive fluidity of the French Revolution. Prior to the Revolution Boullée was a Royalist, and submitted designs to a competition to alter the garden façade of Versailles in 1780. This early work is notable for Boullée’s characteristic obsession with monumentality and symmetry: he proposed flanking the new façade with columns modelled after the Column of Trajan. Boullée did not take a side in the Revolution, for which he was later denounced with Ledoux as a Royalist sympathizer. During the Revolution his work became more experimental and his theoretical writings and designs inspired the students at the Academy of Architecture, where he taught. None his monuments were ever realized. Boullée also had ambitions beyond designing monuments: he advocated for a contest amongst architects whose goal would be the urban redesign of Paris, predating Haussmann by a century. In his writings he proposes ways of cultivating and civilizing uninhabited lands, and writes that “Architecture ranges from a country cabin to the general plan for an Empire.”

Characteristic of many of his designs are an emphasis on pure geometrical form, minimal ornament, a pervading tension due to use of scale, and the dramatic use of light for which he developed a theory of architectural chiaroscuro. Over his career Boullée increasingly eschewed characteristics of classical architecture, so that his structures came

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171 Kauffman, 455.
173 Kauffman, 459.
175 Boullée, 109.
176 Kauffman, 465.
closer and closer to resembling the combination of pure geometrical masses. Monumental scale was essential, and so many of his buildings had exclusively monumental purposes: gargantuan edifices of geometrical perfection were conjured as memorializing appropriately major figures and events, some real and some invented. In the case of The Cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton (Figs. 27-28), Boullée illustrated his reverence for this proponent of the Enlightenment era with a building whose astonishing effects paid homage to Newton’s memory. In selecting this prominent recipient for his Cenotaph, Boullée was simultaneously glorifying Newton’s name and his own.

The design consisted of a spherical chamber suspended within two graduated cylinders, with an underground entrance. (Boullée praised the funerary monuments of the Egyptians, and felt that an association with a subterranean environment was suitably expressive for the function of this kind of building.) The building possessed other characteristics equally appropriate in the eyes of Boullée, such as the use of long-lasting materials “designed to withstand the ravages of time.”

In the base of the vast chamber (500 feet in diameter, 325 feet smaller than Hitler’s) would sit a small recess for the sarcophagus, and the only light would be provided by holes cut through the vault to resemble the constellations. In this bare chamber devoid of ornament, no classical order was employed to mediate the immense difference in scale between the structure itself and the sarcophagus, the lone object it was built to contain:

It is a rather skillful arrangement of the whole which produces the effect of an all-pervading tension. The tiny sarcophagus at the bottom is the only object in the immense room, and from any point of the infinite sphere the eye ever returns to it. The room becomes a vast magnetic field traversed by...

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177 Boullée, 105.
innumerable lines of force. By an extraordinarily simple compositional device, the void lives.\textsuperscript{178}

Here becomes evident the immense success of theatrical effects due to tension created by architectural space in Boullée’s designs. In thinking about the effect of a conical interior, Boullée wrote:

Its curve ensures that the onlooker cannot approach what he is looking at; he is forced as if by one hundred different circumstances outside his control, to remain in the place assigned to him and which, since it occupies the centre, keeps him at sufficient distance to contribute to the illusion.\textsuperscript{179}

While the conical chamber and classical detailing of the Speer’s design for the interior of the \textit{Volkshalle} represents a departure from the sparse severity of the perfectly spherical interior of the cenotaph, the two interiors are related in terms of the comparative scale of their respective focal points: Newton’s sarcophagus and the Führer. Here it seems possible that Speer was taking cues from Boullée’s plans, from the mesmerizing tension of a single focal point amid a vast interior. While not a sphere, the dome of the interior chamber would have constantly ensured lines of sight that terminated at the floor of the chamber, so that the “lines of force” Kaufmann mentions would direct attention toward the performance of the speaker, rather than resulting in an abstractly contemplative experience.

The exterior of the \textit{Volkshalle} as well gives the impression of the merging of pure geometrical masses (although Speer’s dome was actually slightly parabolic).\textsuperscript{180} The base of the structure’s exterior is closer to Boullée’s design for an assembly hall (Fig. 29), where the walls are largely devoid of ornament and communicate solidity, not unlike a fortress.

\textsuperscript{178} Kauffman 468.
\textsuperscript{179} Boullée, 107.
\textsuperscript{180} Speer, 153.
Of course in Boullée’s design there is an inscription which reads “Droits de l’Homme” ("Rights of Man"). There is a humanism in the way Boullée thought about monumentality: the structures might be dismissed as overly decadent rather than functional by the critics of the 1930s and 40s, however there is a conception of what a civic building ought to be in the post-Enlightenment, Revolutionary era. Boullée’s commitment to purely theoretical work meant he no longer had to make allowances to patrons, and thus allowed him to work through problems of structure and leave behind the ornament of the Baroque. In this context, monumentality seeking to glorify the achievements of science and culture seem hopeful and reassuring when juxtaposed with the period’s extremely turbulent politics.

This was the difference between Boullée and Speer: the former was a visionary who worked almost purely theoretically, exploring the varying effects over the course of a career devoted to innovation on a monumental scale. Following the Revolution, Boullée no longer had to concede any of the features he was developing to the whim of a patron. He was a theoretical visionary rather than a subordinate. Speer believed he was in the position of realizing architecture on a scale that the truly visionary architects of history had dreamed of, however the price was that he was realizing another man’s vision. This is interesting to consider in terms of Hitler’s and Speer’s respective designs for the Volkshalle: Hitler’s closely related to Hadrian and Imperial Rome; Speer’s final design over a decade later trying to emulate his architectural hero. The comment Speer makes about Ledoux and Boullée rings with a kind of bitterness, both perhaps for the whole of architecture that these kinds of structures have remained unrealized, but also for Speer, for whom their achievement was for the first time in the realm of possibility, even if he was a lesser visionary.
Speer borrowed notions from a largely theoretical architect whose career became devoted at an accelerated pace to the study of the composition and function of monumental structures. Speer was then able to take this knowledge and produce a vast shrine, to Hitler, the Reich, and simultaneously, uncomfortably, Boullée. This only hardens the morbidity that permeates the whole of the Germania project: in Boullée’s case, his mortality and the fact that few of his buildings were completed, would have left his work defenseless and forever associated with the Nazis, had the force of history gone another way.

Conclusion

The Volkshalle is the ultimate expression of the control of the Reich over its population. It represents a perversion of the populist ideals of the assembly hall, and becomes a place of worship. One imagines it packed with people (for certainly the Führer’s ego would accept nothing less than a mob) as the orator whips the crowd into a passionate frenzy. Here was the stage, the altar of Germania, a building which could stand for millennia as a testament to its author, who would be forever responsible for fathering both the Reich and the building in which the Reich was performed. Speer took stylistic cues for the interior chamber, certainly, from the Pantheon, which likely inspired Hitler’s original sketch. He however adjusted the masses of the and minimized the ornament of the structure more in the vein of Boullée and, in that sense, updated the overall form to reflect the French theorist’s more contemporary work.

The three references provided by Speer all, incidentally, have in common elements of morbidity: Hadrian’s Pantheon, built atop a previously existing structure which housed
remains; St. Peter’s as the legendary funerary church of the Apostle for which it was named whose devotion legitimized the power of the papacy; and the Newton Cenotaph. While Hitler’s remains were to be housed in a massive mausoleum complex in Munich, the Volkshalle would have some sense preserved the spirit of the first Führer after his death.¹⁸¹

The three structures explored in depth conflict in terms of the ideologies they represent: Pagan, in the case of the Pantheon; Roman Catholic, in the case of St. Peter’s; and the divine reverence an Enlightenment architect held for Newton. They all, however, have contributed to glorifying their respective creators, and have served as testimonies to their places in history. Even prior to his death, on the completion of the Volkshalle, Hitler might have assumed the place of the guide and savior of the German people, effectively combining through his place within this structure, formally inundated with religious or at least reverential associations, the final stage of converting ideology into deity: the completion of his ambition.

¹⁸¹ Scobie, 117
Conclusion: Germania’s Lesson

The fate of Hitler’s Germania was ultimately determined by history. The few buildings Speer actually completed were wrecked by the Allies and their remains subsequently destroyed. Almost nothing of the plan remains in Berlin today, which rather than becoming a symbolic theater of total control became, in the postwar years, a city physically and ideologically divided for the duration of the Berlin Wall, which scarred the city in a less ornamental way than the central monumental boulevard envisioned by Hitler. Daily life is not obscured by massive facades of granite but rather on display everywhere, and the city is permeated by a shared historical consciousness. It is a sight which I think would intrigue Balzac. Modern monuments serve as reminders of the atrocities committed during the Third Reich, which hardly lasted one one-hundredth of the thousand years the Nazis envisioned.

What I hope has become evident through this project is the appropriation of historical precedents, styles, and symbolic structures into a city of terrifying proportions and dehumanizing intentions. The monumentality of the Roman Empire, which obsessed Hitler, is perhaps the most closely ideologically related to the Nazis. The triumphal arch, in particular, seems to epitomize Hitler’s monumentality: a symbolic ceremonial structure which inserted militarism directly into the consciousness of the urban environment. Hadrian’s Pantheon served to glorify the reign of a military dictator, however, its purpose was devotion to the gods; Hitler borrowed from it to deify himself, as he did from St. Peter’s Basilica. It appears that Speer then translated this vision into the more contemporary terms of Boullée, tainting the work of an experimental visionary with the
purposes of a murderous regime. Napoleon III, ruthless military commander that he was, used the boulevard as a means of connecting all of Paris and allowing the mobility of its residents; Hitler used it to suspend the will of the individual and frame a city within the overwhelming power of the Reich expressed in architectural terms.

This city represents a perversion of the progression of architectural history in order to create an environment whose intention was to negate individual will and stun the individual into submission. From the moment one exits the train, to the first glimpse of Germania through Hitler’s Arch of Triumph, to traversing the single central axis, to assembling at the Adolf Hitler Platz among hundreds of thousands, to the final moment of entry into the Volkshalle where the Führer would hold forth, the experience is overwhelming and incomprehensible. The ability to import citizens on a mass scale via the immense organization of transportation is an extension of the will of the Reich over its subjects.

Germania is a city of death, the glorification of a murderous regime. It represents the absence of human will, and is redolent of morbidity in its aim to memorialize a regime which ironically, thankfully, was prevented from ever reaching a point of stability.

This project has given me course to reevaluate monumental building programs throughout history, which it has become clear always have major political associations due to their scale and cost. Ultimately little is known of these plans, which becomes perhaps clearest when considered in their permanent relationship to the memoirs of Speer, which regrettably are among the only thorough primary documents of this period. In consequence, this project became focused more on trying to decode the plans and images themselves, and trying to imagine the experience of the immensity of Germania which was never
realized. Certainly interpretations can differ, however the dehumanizing scale intended and the aggressive ideological associations bound up within the structures’ historical referents tell a story of a particular kind. These, and Hitler’s attempted revival of a classical conception of monumentality devoid of practical function produce a reading that is terrifying.

Germania’s particular role within the architectural programs of the Third Reich adds greater depth to this reading. The horrible utilitarianism of the labor and death camps speaks to their favoring function over form. The quaintness Hitler sought to create in Linz, the city on the border of Austria and Germany where he spent much of his childhood, expresses more a nostalgia that plays a part in the Germanic myth he sought to create: the humble and rigorously picturesque origins of the father of the Third Reich. The focus on spectacle reminiscent of the Roman Colosseum for the cult-like rituals of the Nuremburg Party Rally Grounds plays its own role in the formation of this myth. The latter two, Linz and Nuremburg, are conceived along more national lines. Only in Germania is the Reich expressed in global terms, and this accounts for the appropriation of neoclassicism and the revival of classical monumentality.

It is a thoroughly totalitarian conception, that architecture, like everything else, must be mobilized and its function become a reflection of the will of the Reich.
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