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Nazi Party Rally Grounds

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04 The Architecture

A shaft – a 110 meter long walkway made of glass and steel – pierces the intimidating National Socialist architecture of the Congress Hall. This deconstructivist section designed by Graz architect Günther Domenig cuts right through the monumental structure and the severe geometry of the Nazi building. By breaking into this rectangular system, Domenig clearly makes his contemporary architectural mark, at the same time expressing a powerful counter-point.

In summer 1998, the City of Nuremberg issued invitations for an architects' competition for the Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds. With the backdrop of a sinister past, the design brief was not only to accommodate the Documentation Centre into the north wing of the former Congress Hall, but also to originate a credible way of dealing with the NS architecture and the mindset that produced it. Graz architect Prof. Günther Domenig won the competition. His design, a section through the building, a diagonal walkway made from glass and steel, pierces the North wing of the Congress Hall like a shaft or a surgeon's cut.

One particular point in favour of Professor Domenig's design is its open aspect, ideal for exhibition and instructive purposes. The building measures suggested and implemented by the architect open up an almost ideal tour around the rooms on the upper floor of the north wing of the Congress Hall. The round tour generally follows existing room structures with room sizes varying between 18 and 450 square metres.

This difference between the rooms alone makes the tour interesting. Very few technical changes have been made. Among these are the bridging of an interior courtyard between two stairwells and the provision of entry facilities for disabled visitors. Neither the architect nor the exhibition makers did change the essence of this listed building.

The exhibition rooms remained largely in their present unfinished state. In no way wanted this construction "finish off" what the National Socialist builders began and were subsequently unable to complete. Rather the bare, unfinished brick construction is intended to demonstrate – beyond the mythology and glorification – the banality of megalomania of the "Thousand Year Reich".

The tour of the exhibition ends in the south corner of the north wing, allowing a view of the interior courtyard of the Congress Hall and conveying the sense of the vastness of the building. The glass "shaft" leads visitors from the last exhibition room back down to the entrance hall. The walkway cuts through the entire north wing – thus allowing further glimpses of parts of the Congress Hall which are not normally accessible, such as the "Hall of Pillars" or the "Standard Courtyard". The name "Hall of Pillars" is derived from its twelve marble columns.

