

Idyll and Atrocity

The new permanent exhibition at Dokumentation Obersalzberg

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I. Preliminary remarks

On 20 October 1999, Dokumentation Obersalzberg – the documentation center at the site of Adolf Hitler’s second seat of government, where he spent around a quarter of his time in office between 1933 and 1945 – opened its doors to the public. For more than twenty years now, the permanent exhibition there has informed visitors about the history of the place, providing a well-founded overview of the Nazi regime and the crimes it perpetrated. The exhibition is curated by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München–Berlin (IfZ) – the Leibniz Institute of Contemporary History. More than three million people have visited the exhibition to date, 170,000 in 2019 alone. Dokumentation Obersalzberg has thus firmly occupied a historically charged location, conferring it with transparency and offering information on a sound scholarly basis.

The success of the documentation center has brought it to the limits of what its museum infrastructure can deal with, having originally been conceived in the mid-1990s to accommodate around a fifth of the current volume of visitors. The Bavarian government has therefore decided that the time has come to expand the center. The new building currently under construction will offer a floor area of 800 square meters and thus more than twice as much space for the permanent exhibition as the present building does. Once the new building is completed, the existing one will be turned into an educational center with additional seminar space for educational work, likewise conducted by the IfZ.

Almost twenty-five years have passed since the current exhibition was conceived. In the course of these two and a half decades, research into the history of the Nazi era has advanced; we need only recall the new perspectives raised by the debate about the concept of a national community (“*Volksgemeinschaft*”). In the context of broader research into Nazi crimes, it was this debate in particular that led to a better understanding of murder and exclusion as social phenomena. Like any other medium, exhibitions need to be regularly revised and brought up to date if they are to reflect the latest research. Dokumentation Obersalzberg is no exception. A number of other exhibitions by comparable institutions at historic sites that were first conceived by historians around the turn of the millennium are currently being renewed. For our new building the staff of Dokumentation

Obersalzberg at the IfZ have developed a revised concept for the permanent exhibition.¹ The work is being overseen by a distinguished Scientific Advisory Board² and a Board of Trustees consisting of political and social representatives.³

II. Leitmotifs and the narrative principle

“Idyll and Atrocity”. It is precisely this contrast between the beauty of the mountain setting and the horrors of the Nazi regime that defines Obersalzberg as a place of perpetrators. Located above Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps, the high plateau of Obersalzberg is a proverbial picture-postcard idyll (nowadays offering numerous motifs for the modern selfie culture). Yet Obersalzberg is no ordinary mountain, for it was here that, as Martin Bormann put it in a letter to regional Nazi leaders, “the private residence and private household of the *Führer*” were located between 1933 and 1945.⁴

Nevertheless, to describe it merely as the private retreat of Nazi bigwigs would be misleading. In fact, Obersalzberg was not just a refuge to which Hitler liked to withdraw in order to relax. This deliberately apolitical and naïve perspective disseminated by Nazi propaganda was adopted by many even after 1945. It corresponded to a desire to construct an image of a decent or at any rate non-violent Hitler, a desire to exonerate him and by extension to exonerate themselves as well. The many postcards and illustrated books that helped to propagate this distorted picture among the masses made Obersalzberg a key source for establishing this image of the *Führer*. In essence it harks back to the *Führer* cult for which Nazi propaganda for a long time used Obersalzberg as a backdrop against which to portray Hitler as an accessible chancellor of the people, as a good neighbor who loved children and animals, as a keen mountaineer and lover of nature, and as a leader

¹ The conceptional foundations for the new exhibition were developed by a team led by the authors of this article and the curator Sylvia Necker, who became director of the LWL-Preußenmuseum Minden and the LWL Visitor Centre at the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Denkmal in 2019. Other members of the team involved in various stages of the project were Moritz Fischer, Anna Greithanner, Susanne Maslanka, Sebastian Peters, Maren Richter and Christina Rothenhäusler as curators, research associates or research trainee; they developed and worked on individual topics and media elements. Sonja Herzl-Förster, Mathias Irlinger, Marie-Luise Kreiling, Magdalena Oberpeilsteiner, Karin Wabro and Leonie Zangerl provided didactic and educational expertise; Anja Deutsch and Sora Stöckl took care of the collection management. Eva-Maria Zembsch provided vital support together with the student and research assistants Mario Boccia, Korbinian Engelmann, Leonhard Gruber, Laura Lademann, Monika Malessa, Fabio Raineri, Caroline Rieger, Alina Schneider, Helena Schwinghammer, Andreas Stelzl and Margaretha Vordermayer.

² The members of the Scientific Advisory Board are: Dr. Gabriele Hammermann (director of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site), Prof. Dr. Hans Walter Hütter (President of the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), Prof. Dr. Alfons Kenkmann (Chair of History Didactics, Historisches Seminar der Universität Leipzig), Prof. Dr. Volkhard Knigge (Director Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, retired.), Prof. Dr. Alexander Koch (†) succeeded by Prof. Dr. Raphael Gross (President of the Deutsches Historisches Museum Foundation Berlin), Prof. Dr. Wolfram Pyta (Director of the Department of Modern History, Historisches Seminar der Universität Stuttgart) and Prof. Dr. Joachim Scholtyseck (Director of the Department of Modern History, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn and until March 2020 Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board of the IfZ).

³ A list of the current 24 members of the Board of Trustees chaired by Dr. Walter Schön (retired Ministerial Director, former administrative Head at the Bavarian State Ministry of Justice) together with an overview of other people involved in the project can be found at www.obersalzberg.de/neugestaltung/beteiligte-und-gremien [16 October 2020].

⁴ Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 187/320, Bulletin of the Obersalzberg administration, Martin Bormann, 5 October 1938.

who worked tirelessly for the good of the people and that of each and every “national comrade” (“*Volksgenosse*”).

In a nutshell, what the photographs taken by Hitler’s personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann – a large number of them at Obersalzberg – seek to have us believe is that Hitler the *Führer* was simply “your friendly neighborhood uncle”. This stock of images and the interpretation they engendered offered exoneration, not only for the place itself, where Hitler allegedly spent time purely as a private individual “in his mountains”,⁵ but also for the large number of people who travelled to Obersalzberg in the 1930s hoping to catch a glimpse of “their *Führer*”, or perhaps to meet him or even be touched by him. By taking the propaganda at face value, people could keep the persecution and crimes of the Nazi regime at a safe distance and pretend that Obersalzberg was not implicated in these any more than Hitler’s former sympathizers were. Likewise, the fascination that the place exerted on many visitors post-1945 was able to cloak itself in a de-politicized and voyeuristic “peep-hole” naiveté. Only this specific form of historical denial allows us to understand the blithe commercialization of Obersalzberg by locals with a nose for business which targeted the many German and foreign visitors as well as members of the occupying forces.

The new exhibition “*Idyll and Atrocity*” takes this casting of Obersalzberg in an innocent light as a starting point to show the close links that actually existed between Obersalzberg and the policies of persecution and mass murder of the Nazi regime. More strikingly than before, it highlights the fact that these crimes cannot be regarded as something disconnected that took place far away from Obersalzberg and therefore did not touch it for reasons of geographical distance alone. In reality, these crimes represented the very essence of Nazism and they are connected not only in abstract but also in very concrete ways with Obersalzberg – through the decisions that were taken here, through the fates of the victims and the biographies of the perpetrators, but also through the light they shed on Nazi society. In developing a narrative concept for the exhibition the team followed three distinctive leitmotifs:

The first is to show the discrepancy between, on the one hand, Hitler’s idyllically situated Alpine residence in a grandiose landscape and on the other, the scenes of million-fold murder; but also, or more specifically, between the beauty of the landscape and the policies of persecution and murder pursued here. What the exhibition illustrates is that this discrepancy is a purely superficial one and that in fact myriad links and connecting lines existed, which it sets out to reveal.

Another of its themes is simultaneity: the fact that the artificially staged everyday life at Obersalzberg was going on at the very same time that Nazi crimes were being perpetrated. It exposes the illusion that served to mask the discrimination, violence and mass murder that were the real hallmarks of the Nazi regime. The exhibition illustrates this not only in its portrayal of the Berghof society of Hitler’s close associates at Obersalzberg, but also in its examination of the everyday mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion that characterized the “national community”.

⁵ See Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler in seinen Bergen. 86 Bilddokumente aus der Umgebung des Führers*, Berlin 1935.

Deconstructing the propaganda images created at Obersalzberg is a central goal of the exhibition. Obersalzberg was, after all, one of the main backdrops for the *Führer* cult. Indeed, many of the images that Hitler and Hoffmann created there continue to influence our picture of Obersalzberg to this day. Their portrayal in an exhibition context cannot and should not be avoided: on the contrary, they should be used as a theme that is constantly called into question, without falling into the trap of re-emphasizing their aesthetics.

These three leitmotifs are closely linked to three narrative principles. The narrative is based on examples; it is driven by the exhibits themselves; and it presents the material in the local context – in other words, the story is consistently told from the perspective of the historic location. When visitors enter the exhibition space, they have come directly from the landscape of contemporary Obersalzberg, and it is with Obersalzberg that the narrative begins. The specifics of the “authentic location”⁶ are the unique point of interest and it is these that draw the public to the exhibition. As such they can be used to communicate a more general picture. The reasons why people want to find out more about the history of Obersalzberg vary widely. The new exhibition builds on this interest and uses it to convey its own educational message, embedding established facts solidly in the broader historical context.

The principle of presenting the material in a local context provides the curators with central thematic threads and a basis for deciding which examples to choose – and to some extent how to present them – for a narrative limited by the available space and by the time budget and attention span of visitors. “Local” here should be understood broadly. The historical topography that the exhibition presents does not stop at the Berghof or at the boundaries of the *Führer’s* off-limits area, but includes the local and regional contexts of the town of Berchtesgaden and the Berchtesgaden region as well as, in some chapters, Salzburg and Munich as the nearest major cities and regional Nazi administration centers.

At the same time, these places offer many starting points for narratives that cover a broad spectrum of topics of Nazi history, leading visitors far away from Obersalzberg to many other places in the German Reich and in occupied Europe. The exhibition repeatedly draws connections between places and people – connections with the victims but also with those responsible for persecution and extermination. The leitmotif of discrepancy and the principle of presenting the material in a local context also form the basis for the narrative structure. Thus the social perspective can be conveyed to visitors by focusing on selected locations of the “national community”.

The central chapter of the exhibition “Perpetrator Site and Crime Scenes” presents the Nazis’ mass crimes and genocide at selected sites, which are then related back to the historical location of Obersalzberg.

⁶ See Axel Drecol/Thomas Schaarschmidt/Irmgard Zündorf (eds.), *Authentizität als Kapital historischer Orte? Gedenkstätten, Dokumentationszentren und die Sehnsucht nach dem unmittelbaren Erleben im Stadtraum*, Göttingen 2019.

III. A tour of the exhibition

As visitors enter the prologue to the exhibition the first thing they encounter is a collage of views of Obersalzberg, showing Hitler's Haus Wachenfeld and the later Berghof. The forms of presentation range from an oil painting to a series of little vedutas in cheap, aluminum foil frames and even a porcelain wall plate. In deliberate contrast to the mediocre quality of the works, the exhibits are hung in so-called Petersburg style (arranged close together on a single wall). Most of what we see here is mass-produced trash and kitsch. The impression is additionally shattered by a series of contrasting, back-lit images showing scenes of Nazi crimes, war and genocide, which the visitors will encounter again later in the exhibition as part of the key visuals – more on this below. On the back wall of the prologue is the metalogue, which once again echoes this staging at the transition between exhibition and bunker.

The new permanent exhibition is divided into seventeen narrative units, which in turn are grouped into five chapters. The first chapter, entitled "Obersalzberg as a Backdrop", is devoted to the historical location in a narrower sense, examining it from various perspectives. The exhibition begins by acquainting visitors with the topography of Obersalzberg before and during the Nazi era. A three-dimensional model of the *Führer's* off-limits area with Hitler's Berghof at the center offers geographical orientation and at the same time shows the transformation of the mountain ridge that took place between 1933 and 1945. The model serves as a guide to a historical landscape from which visitors have just come but where few historical traces remain after the radical transformation of the postwar decades.

The next unit is devoted to the significance of the Berghof and the Berghof society for Hitler and his regime – that strange mixture of seat of government in an idyllic mountain setting and private residence along with the ersatz family that the dictator gathered under his roof. This is illustrated using examples of places where Hitler and his consorts gathered, such as the terrace or the Great Hall of the Berghof, but also his daily, highly ritualized walks. The first chapter concludes with a narrative unit dealing with propaganda imagery as well as the kitsch and devotional merchandise connected with Obersalzberg that promoted the *Führer* cult and at the same time represented a lucrative business opportunity. A large media table developed in cooperation with the Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien in Tübingen offers visitors an opportunity to deconstruct Heinrich Hoffmann's propaganda images interactively. Here visitors can find information about the origin and photographic construction of the images, about traditional motifs and their technical execution, about retouching and coded content.

"*Führer, People, and Off-limits Area*" is the title of Chapter 2, which introduces the social aspect of Nazi history. A narrative transition from the previous section is provided by a view of the many "national comrades" who initially made pilgrimages right up to the fence surrounding Hitler's Haus Wachenfeld (later, after the expansion of the building into the Berghof, they were increasingly excluded from the *Führer's* off-limits area). This is followed by a portrayal of the sites of the "national community" already mentioned where persecutors and persecuted encountered one another. Inclusion and exclusion are thus presented not as two sides of a single phenomenon, but as intricately linked, with one conditioning the other. The narrative interweaves its presentation of the "national com-

munity” sites with stories of the fates of persecuted individuals and families from the region. Biographical connections are then drawn from the Obersalzberg region to the sites where genocide was committed. In this way, places and biographies are used to illustrate the mechanisms and consequences of the Nazis’ policies of persecution and annihilation and revealed to be a social phenomenon in which the everyday life of one group was radically changed by the actions of the other, reconfiguring everyday locations according to the racist principles of the “national community”; for the victims these locations dramatically changed their face, jelling into the focal points of exclusion, discrimination and persecution. Finally, in the transitions between chapters 2, 3 and 4 a cross-sectional sequence is devoted to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, the second volume of which was largely written at Obersalzberg. The consequences of the world view outlined in this piece of inflammatory literature form the subject of the adjacent chapters.

Chapter 3, “Summits of Aggression”, is divided into two parts. The first looks mainly at the pre-war phase of Hitler’s expansionist policy, returning to aspects of “Obersalzberg as a backdrop” for this policy. After the Berghof was completed in 1936, Obersalzberg became an important place for Hitler’s foreign policy and his cultivation of allies. Taking as a starting point the reception of state visitors on the grand steps leading up to the Berghof, it questions the staging and cultural practice of foreign policy. The three expansionist moves in which Obersalzberg played an important role – the Saarland, Austria and the Sudetenland – are then examined in more detail. The exhibition’s narrative of the events of World War II likewise focuses on the significance of Obersalzberg. Its aim is thus less to present an overview of military events than a focus on the crucial decisions determining the direction of the war and the many orders issued from Obersalzberg that defined the criminal character of the war. For weeks and months on end the Berghof served as the *Führer’s* “headquarters”, from where Hitler, the military commander, sent the troops of the Wehrmacht across Europe while himself remaining far away from the realities of the war. In this chapter we encounter for the first time the Mountain Infantry Regiment 100, whose 2nd Battalion had been housed in the barracks at Strub near Berchtesgaden since 1938. The regiment marched into Salzburg in March 1938, crossed the Polish border in early September 1939, took part in the western campaign in 1940, landed on Crete in May 1941, fought from the beginning of 1942 in the ring that laid siege to Leningrad, and was active in Italy after 1943. Visitors can follow the Mountain Infantry to the sites of war crimes and the war of extermination.

Chapter 4 is located at the center of the exhibition. Its title “Perpetrator Site and Crime Scenes” (“*Täterort und Tatorte*”) not only forges a close linguistic link (in German) between the historical location and the scenes of Nazi crimes but also a spatial and conceptual one. The sites where Nazi atrocities were committed – from euthanasia to the deliberate policy of starvation in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, the Holocaust and genocide – form the centerpiece of the exhibition at the perpetrator site Obersalzberg. The link is not just symbolic but substantive as well: the atrocities for which these places stand are related to Obersalzberg – through the orders given there or through simultaneities, through the biographies of perpetrators and victims. The exhibition makes it impossible to consider Obersalzberg separately from Hartheim, Leningrad, Kaunas, Warsaw, Treblinka or Auschwitz. This narrative focus on the places where atrocities were committed is supplemented by a media element presenting the temporal, spatial and numerical dimensions of Nazi crimes in visual terms.

The final chapter introduces the period “post-Hitler” by returning to the focus on the historic location. It tells how the war ended in Berchtesgaden and how American and French troops were able to seize the *Führer’s* off-limits area without encountering any resistance. The fundamental transformation of the mountain by the Nazis after 1933 is now followed by a second transformation brought about by the bombing raid of April 1945 and the relentless elimination of all remains of the Nazi era carried out in the postwar era, up to and including the present day. The triumph of the Allied liberators was followed by the development of Obersalzberg into a tourist attraction, which critical journalists in the 1950s described as a “theme park of contemporary history”.⁷ The recreation area that the American forces maintained in Berchtesgaden and in the remaining Nazi-era buildings until the mid-1990s is just as much part of this final chapter as the nostalgic, wistful view of “old” Obersalzberg, the mountain village as it was pre-Hitler.

In many respects, Chapter 5 takes us back to Chapter 1. Hitler came to Obersalzberg in 1923 and left in July 1944, never to return. The beginning and end of the exhibition reveal the multiple transformations that this historic location has undergone – the changes in topography, but also the complex semantic and visual resonances that remain with us to this day and lend the historic location heterotopic features. Initially, the images with which the visitor leaves the exhibition are of present-day Obersalzberg. The metalogue refers back to the prologue and intermingles the same images of persecution, war and atrocities among the photographs of the present. The final part of the tour takes the visitor down to the bunkers. As visitor surveys have documented, at least half of all visitors are especially interested in this aspect. An introduction to the bunker is presented in a vestibule in front of the gate leading into the bunker. The bunker itself is not an exhibition space but rather an exhibit in itself that is given no more than an expanded commentary. The media rooms that offer space to two topics particularly closely connected with the bunker form an exception to this. The audio room documents the experiences of forced laborers deployed at Obersalzberg who had to help construct the bunker. The old temporary exhibitions room, the former air-raid shelter of the Hotel Platterhof, houses information about the bombing of Obersalzberg. After the tour of the bunker, visitors are led back to ground level and to an epilogue section in which surviving victims of the Nazi regime will, fittingly for an exhibition about Obersalzberg, have the last word.

IV. On the nature of visual history

Dokumentation Obersalzberg carries a fundamental decision in its very name, a decision that can be traced back to the historical context of the time when it was founded. For a long time, exhibitions at historic locations associated with the self-representation of the criminal Nazi regime tried to avoid any semblance of being museums. As a rule, one aspect of this was to avoid presenting any three-dimensional objects for fear that an alleged special aura radiated by “museum pieces” would risk exerting an undesirable fascination on their viewers⁸; objects of this kind were much more likely to be found in exhibitions at

⁷ Abendzeitung, 6 September 1960.

⁸ See Gottfried Korff, *Museumsdinge: deponieren – exponieren*, edited by Martina Eberspächer/Gudrun Marlene König/Bernhard Tschofen, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2002.

memorial sites, where displaying the artefacts of the victims was regarded as a suitable means to generate a sense of emotional connectedness and empathy. Such a practice was not, however, welcomed at the places where the Nazis had sought to project their own image. Instead, it was decided to document the history of these places using official documents and photos, “flat objects” in other words, whose two-dimensionality was considered to have a more sobering effect. In this sense Dokumentation Obersalzberg was, of course, never purely a documentation center – right from the start it did indeed show a number of three-dimensional objects. The new exhibition will not only continue this tradition but will also incorporate a much larger number of three-dimensional objects, thus openly acknowledging the museum character of the institution and the presentation. Nevertheless, as before, the intended impression is not one of a museum constructed around the *Führer* or around devotional objects associated with Hitler. Over the past few decades, through the debates about the use of images as historical sources and visual history we have learned that images as sources (and as exhibits) are by no means unproblematic; this applies in special measure to the photographic propaganda presentations of Heinrich Hoffmann. In addition, the assumption that the large-format illumination of a photograph is not a form of staging or that it does not generate an auratic effect does not seem entirely logical. Whether it is photos or objects we are dealing with – both require a historically sensitive and restrained presentation and staging with sufficient contextualization. At the same time, an exhibition is a demonstrative medium, which invites viewers to engage with the exhibits – regardless of whether they are two- or three-dimensional – and to reflect on them. Notwithstanding a clearly formulated fundamental attitude, this also involves allowing a certain degree of openness and ambiguity, including the option of finding the exhibits appealing. The attraction of an exhibit, including a three-dimensional object, should be understood as an opportunity, not as a danger; people are likely to engage all the more intensively with the exhibition material (rather than simply consuming it) if they are allowed sufficient space for their own ideas.

Our goal is to let the exhibits tell the story. The main focus is not on texts to be read but rather on that which invites contemplation. The exhibits are not there to illustrate the text, but to tell their own story; in this sense, they are the true bearers of the exhibition narrative, in keeping with the medium. It is not just since Instagram culture radically changed the way we see and consume media that the objects in exhibitions have become the attention generators. They awaken and channel the desired degree of interest, which we need in order to successfully communicate information. Of course, the exhibition texts remain important, but without occupying center stage. Presented in German and English they offer the necessary background for an informed examination of the subject matter in easy to understand language and a highly readable format. The individual exhibits can thus be placed in their historical context and combined into a larger narrative. Our intention was also to appeal to those who are accustomed to following a text hierarchy in order to gain an efficient overview of a particular segment of an exhibition and on this basis to decide whether they wish to explore this particular aspect of the exhibition in more depth or not. A balance needs to be maintained between openness and freedom for thought on the one hand, and the provision of guiding information, orientation, interpretation and perspectives, on the other – a balance that suggests a critical, non-affirmative reading.

V. The exhibition space and exhibition design

Exhibitions are primarily a visual medium. They are based on displaying things in a space, and in that sense they are always staged. How the space is arranged and designed is therefore of utmost importance. The extension currently under construction was designed by the Austrian architects Aicher Ziviltechniker (Dornbirn). Theirs is a highly convincing design that sets very few conditions. The exhibition space is located in an open, continuous space without dividing walls or different levels to which the exhibition would have to accommodate. This leaves a great deal of latitude for the exhibition design realized by ramićsoenario Ausstellungsgestaltung (Berlin). For the new permanent exhibition at Dokumentation Obersalzberg the design bureau has developed an unobtrusive yet distinctive formal language inspired by the surrounding mountain landscape. It thus forges a connection to the outside, to the idyllic setting, but keeps this to a minimum, thus paying heed to the premises of sobriety and restraint appropriate to an examination of the historic location of Obersalzberg. The design concept deliberately detaches itself both from the propagandistic showcasing of Obersalzberg in the Nazi era and from its reduction to an idyllic Alpine landscape stripped of any historic context and thus avoids the danger of a double re-aestheticization.

Very few walls divide the exhibition space. In combination with discreetly deployed secondary space-shaping devices such as lighting and ceiling structure, the few walls nonetheless allow visitors to orient themselves and find their way around the exhibition. At the same time, an open effect is created that permits a tour of the exhibition that does not necessarily follow a predetermined path. That said, part of the concept is to guide visitors, once they have finished viewing Chapter 1, through ever broader areas to the centrally located Chapter 4, i.e., to the presentation of the sites of Nazi crimes.

The exhibition's hierarchical structure offers an additional orientation aid. The five chapters are color-coded and each has a prominent introductory text and a key visual. These are the only installations in the exhibition that present photographs in large formats. They are designed to convey the central message of each chapter by superimposing a propaganda image of Obersalzberg with a contrasting image from the contexts of persecution, war and genocide. Together with the texts of each chapter they form anchors that are connected with one another via sight lines, allowing the most important information about Obersalzberg to be communicated quickly.

As already mentioned, the chapters are further subdivided into seventeen narrative units. These function largely as modules and hence do not assume knowledge of the previous sections. Each of the narrative units has a prominently placed key exhibit, which together with an introductory text provides initial access to the topic and some basic information. Depending on the visitor's level of interest and available time, he or she can then use this exhibit as a starting point to explore that section of the exhibition in more detail. The tour of the exhibition as intended by the designers uses these key exhibits by way of orientation. Like the key visuals they are connected by sight lines.

Visual axes are also used right from the start in order to draw substantive connections that go beyond the confines of the individual chapters and narrative units. The gaps in the walls allow visitors to see Chapter 4 while they are still viewing Chapter 1 – they look directly from Obersalzberg to the scenes of atrocities. In Chapter 2 the biographies of the

victims correspond with the visual axes that lead from the “national community” and the Berchtesgaden region to the scenes of atrocities of Chapter 4. The close connections between war and mass crimes are likewise shown via a visual axis.

Placing Chapter 4 in the center of the exhibition space allows access from all the other chapters arranged in a circle around it and offers numerous views from the outside in, thus further underlining the significance of Nazi crimes and underpinning the core message spatially and in terms of design: Idyll and Atrocity – the historic location Obersalzberg is intimately bound up with war and genocide.

VI. Outlook

The work on the concept for the new permanent exhibition is largely finished. The exhibition script and the texts are ready. Depending on the progress of construction, the exhibition will probably open within the next two years. Dokumentation Obersalzberg will thus attain for the years to come a modern and attractively designed permanent exhibition based on the latest research. It will – more than before and other than its name might suggest – not be merely a static medium. Various forms of engagement with the material and further development, for instance through interventions or in the framework of an educational program, mean that we will continue to work not only with, but also on the exhibition.

Above and beyond this, Dokumentation Obersalzberg will in the future be equipped with the space to accommodate loaned or self-curated temporary exhibitions, allowing a more detailed exploration of relevant topics and a general broadening of horizons.

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