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# “Desk Killers”: Walter Christaller, Central Place Theory, and the Nazis

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Trevor J. Barnes

*I live in the Managerial Age, in a world of “Admin.” The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid “dens of crime” that Dickens loved to paint. It is not even done in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices.*

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

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## Introduction

C. S. Lewis’s (1942) Christian apologetic novel, *The Screwtape Letters*, consists of 31 epistles written by a head demon, Screwtape, to his junior demon nephew, Wormwood. They advise how best to secure the damnation of a British man, known in the book as only “the Patient.” Screwtape counsels that to spread evil more effectively in the world, his nephew needs to get into management, to go into “Admin,” to work behind a desk. C. S. Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters* in 1941. Already by that year, a number of German Nazi managers inhabiting the world of “Admin” had begun committing terrible evil acts, and the situation worsened in the following year when Hitler initiated the “Final Solution.” By war’s end, the Nazi “Admin” had dispatched millions of people to a frightful death.

Those managers were not usually raving monsters, psychopaths foaming at the mouth. Certainly, none had horns or a tail. Instead, as in Lewis’s description, they

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T.J. Barnes (✉)  
Department of Geography, University of British Columbia,  
1984 West Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2, Canada  
e-mail: [tbarnes@geog.ubc.ca](mailto:tbarnes@geog.ubc.ca)

were often “quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices.” One example is Arendt’s (1977) account of such a manager in her famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Adolf Eichmann joined the SS in 1932, and because of his administrative skills, particularly in logistics, he was given the task of deporting Austrian Jews after the 1938 *Anschluss* (annexation). His “success” resulted in an appointment at the Berlin branch of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) that dealt with Jewish affairs and evacuation. In 1942, Eichmann was promoted to Transportation Administrator for the Final Solution, responsible for coordinating the travel of millions of Jews across the Reich to the six death camps in Poland (Auschwitz alone had 44 separate lines of railway track leading into it, twice as many as New York’s Penn Station; Clarke, Doel, & McDonough, 1996, p. 467). At the end of the war, Eichmann managed to evade detection by the Allies, secretly emigrating to Argentina in 1950. But no place was safe from the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence force. In 1960, they got their man, clandestinely capturing Eichmann in Buenos Aires and abducting him to Israel for a criminal trial. Found guilty of all 15 charges, including crimes against humanity, he was executed in May 1962.

Arendt’s account of Eichmann is not of a wild-eyed, frenzied killer, “the Beast of Belsen.” Rather, he comes across as an intensely ordinary person, “terribly and terrifyingly normal,” as Arendt (1977, p. 276) describes it. Eichmann said at his defense, “I sat at my desk and did my work” (Papadatos, 1964, p. 29). Even one of the Israeli psychologists who examined Eichmann concluded, “This man is entirely normal ... more normal at any rate than I am after examining him” (Arendt, 1977, p. 25). Consequently, there was an “incongruity,” as Bruno Bettelheim reflected, “between all the horrors recounted, and this man in the dock, when essentially all he did was talk to people, write memoranda, receive and give orders from behind a desk” (quoted in Cole, 2000, p. 69). That same incongruity also struck Arendt, leading her to coin the now well-known phrase that forms the subtitle of her book, “the banality of evil.” It conveys both the ordinariness and the awfulness of Eichmann’s work.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, one should never forget the awfulness. The memoranda that Eichmann wrote produced dreadful consequences. “Death by memoranda,” as Cole (2000, p. 69) puts it. Gideon Hausner, Israel’s attorney general and the chief prosecutor of Eichmann, said in his opening remarks in court:

In this trial we shall ... encounter a new kind of killer, the kind that exercises his bloody craft behind a desk ... it was [Eichmann’s] word that put gas chambers into action; he lifted

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<sup>1</sup>Arendt’s thesis is contested in Lozowick’s (2002) book *Hitler’s Bureaucrats*. Drawing on detailed archival sources, Lozowick examines the intentions of an elite group of Nazi SS administrators that included Eichmann. He finds that rather than passively sitting back, simply passing on orders from above as mere functionaries, Nazi managers actively participated in the design of the Final Solution, marshaling resources and ensuring its maximal efficiency. As Lozowick (p. 279) writes, Hitler’s bureaucrats “worked hard, thought hard, took the lead over many years. They were the alpinists of Evil.”

the telephone, and railroad cars left for the extermination centres; his signature it was that sealed the doom of thousands and tens of thousands.<sup>2</sup>

He was a "desk killer" (*Schreibtischtäter*) (Milchman & Rosenberg, 1992). The purpose of this chapter is to explore further the notion of a "desk killer," relating the idea to another Nazi paper-pusher working in "Admin" for the SS, albeit someone much lower in the bureaucratic hierarchy than Eichmann, the geographer Walter Christaller (1893–1969). I am especially interested in how Christaller, who was fearful of the Nazis before the war began, and who became a communist after the war came to an end, could be a Nazi during the war. Christaller allowed himself and his work to be used for the most regressive political ends. He was never a "desk killer" in the same sense as Eichmann, but he participated at least as a bureaucrat, and even in a minor way as an architect, in the Nazi's "*Generalplan Ost*" (General Plan for the East). That plan did terrible things: Expelling non-Aryans from their homes in German-conquered Eastern territories (*Entfernung*); replacing them with "Germanized" immigrants; and physically transforming the acquired lands according to the aesthetics, values, and rationality of National Socialism. Power and knowledge came together starkly, and in a brutal way. I make my argument by drawing on especially the works of Burleigh (1988) and Bauman (1989), both of whom are concerned with outlining the crucial role and techniques of modern bureaucracy ("Admin") within the larger Nazi project in which the Holocaust was central.

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## Space, Modernity, and Nazi Academic Bureaucrats

The Nazi project, while it clearly changed over time, was nonetheless in its various guises bound inextricably to problems and issues of space. My argument will be that those problems and issues were worked out using modern bureaucratic management and techniques. That is, the Nazis drew upon modernity in part to solve their geographical problems (as well as non-geographical ones too). But here lay the paradox. The Nazi objectives which propelled those spatial issues, and which modernity was supposed to solve, were informed by deep-seated reactionary beliefs, frequently turning on racial purity, and representing the rankest anti-modernity. Herf (1984) labels this paradox, which he believes was at the heart of the Nazi project, "reactionary modernism."

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<sup>2</sup>The court transcripts for the entire Eichmann trial are available online at the Nizkor Project website: <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/>. The quotation is from Attorney General Gideon Hausner's opening remarks, Session No. 6, April 17, 1961; retrieved December 14, 2012, from <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-006-007-008-01.html>

## Space

The Nazi quest for Aryan racial purity produced at least two geographies, which became inseparable from the larger regime (Charlesworth, 1992; Clarke et al., 1996; Doel & Clarke, 1998; Gregory, 2009). The first was about defining the boundaries of Aryan space. For the Nazis, this space was defined by *Lebensraum* (living space), the idea that German Aryan people naturally required a specific amount of land and resources for their habitation. The notion of *Lebensraum* first emerged in the nineteenth century, and was associated in particular with the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel. It was elaborated in the early twentieth century by another German geographer, Karl Haushofer. In turn, Haushofer introduced the concept to Hitler in the mid-1920s, providing him with geographical instruction while he was imprisoned (with Rudolf Hess) following the failed 1923 Munich (“Beer Hall”) putsch. Moreover, it was while Hitler was in prison that he wrote *Mein Kampf*, in which the concept of *Lebensraum* plays a role: “Germany must find the courage to gather our people and their strength for an advance along the road that will lead this people from its present restricted living space [*Lebensraum*] to new land and soil. . . . It is not in colonial acquisitions that we must see the solution of this problem, but exclusively in the acquisition of a territory for settlement.”<sup>3</sup> In particular, Hitler saw territories in eastern Europe as part of Germany’s *Lebensraum* (“Drang nach Osten”—a yearning for the East). *Lebensraum* justified the various Nazi German territorial expansions that began in the 1930s and culminated in the invasion of Poland in September 1939, sparking the Second World War.

Nazism, then, was about reterritorialization (especially of the East), enlarging the Reich through military conquest to an appropriate size for the Aryan people, as justified by the concept of *Lebensraum*. But there was a complementary (and second) geographical issue, deterritorialization. Here the problem was expelling, removing, and separating “inappropriate” people (i.e., non-Aryans) from the land they occupied, taking them elsewhere. Deterritorialization was about *Entfernung* (expulsion, removal), which in the process created “empty space” for reoccupation by Germanized people (Hitler’s phrase in a 1937 speech given in secret was “volksloser Raum”; Doel & Clarke, 1998, p. 53). *Entfernung* began with the intimidation of Jews, which followed the long-established (European) precedent of the pogrom (e.g., *Kristallnacht* in Berlin in 1938). By 1940, the plan was ratcheted up to forced marches and ghettoization (e.g., in Warsaw). It culminated in the Final Solution, the extermination of non-Aryans that occurred on a mass scale at six death camps in Poland. With “inappropriate” people removed, the empty lands were available for settlement by *Volksdeutsche* and Germans from the Reich. *Volksdeutsche* were defined as people whose language and culture had German origins but who did not hold German citizenship and lived outside the German Reich.

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<sup>3</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol. 2, chap. 14, “Eastern Orientations or Eastern Policy” (1926). An English translation of the two volumes is available online at <http://www.crusader.net/texts/mk/index.html>, from which the quotation is taken.

The great majority of these people lived in the Baltic states, Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

## Modernity

Spatial issues, then, were integrated into the very nature of the Nazi project, inseparable from its realization. But to realize a project of this vast scale required enormous energy and resources, the coordinated efforts of myriad different people and material objects, and a decisive organization and directed instrumental rationality. In short, it required modernity. Herf's (1984) reactionary modernism thesis partly speaks to this argument, but even more direct and pointed is Bauman's (1989) writing on modernity and the Holocaust. Bauman argues that "the social norms and institutions of modernity ... made the Holocaust feasible. Without modern civilization and its most central essential achievements, there would be no Holocaust" (p. 87).

Bauman interprets the Holocaust expansively, allowing him to consider both how the Nazi regime could conceive such a terrible purpose and how techniques and technologies were forged within the regime to realize it. For Bauman (1989, p. 91), Nazism is modernist because it set down a benchmark, however perverted, of a "perfect society" that it then rationally sought to "social[ly] engineer." The Nazi "perfect society" was a "pure" Aryan society, a society without Jews but also without other groups such as Slavs, Romani people, homosexuals, and the physically and mentally challenged (Gregory, 2009). Non-Aryans were removed not because their eradication permitted the acquisition of new resources and territory. Military funds were actually diverted away from such acquisitions in order to increase the capacity for killing non-Aryans. The murder of non-Aryans was the prime goal, creating for the Nazis an "objectively better world" (Bauman, 1989, p. 92).

The tasks that needed to be carried out to construct that dreadful "objectively better world" were gargantuan, requiring large-scale investments in infrastructure, knowledge, and labor. The killing of Jews and people in other groups represented a magnitude of mass murder never before historically attempted. It could not be done sporadically, haphazardly, or casually. If it were, it would never be completed. Instead, it required concerted effort, systematicity, purposeful institutions, and comprehensive formal rules and procedures. Sabini and Silver (1980, p. 330; quoted in Bauman, 1989, p. 90) write that to complete "thorough, comprehensive, exhaustive murder required the replacement of the mob with bureaucracy, the replacement of shared rage with obedience to authority." A hierarchy of decision-making responsibilities needed to be drawn up to develop large-scale plans and to gather, organize, control, and direct the means for their implementation.

Similarly, the machinery of death required substantial management and expertise. Killing was undertaken on a mass, Fordist scale, in assembly-line factories of murder, requiring a meticulous, functional division of labor, scientific management,

exact timing, and logistical efficiency.<sup>4</sup> Labor and management practices were necessarily integrated with advanced technology, with machines, and with qualified scientists who produced both machines and specialized knowledge. Black (2001), for example, has examined how IBM, through its German subsidiary Dehomag and the scientists who worked there, provided cutting-edge technology (the Hollerith system) for reading punch cards and enabling cross tabulation of information. That technology and the expertise associated with it combined to produce the machinery of death: To identify Jews in censuses and registrations, to trace ethnic ancestry, to run the trains, to organize concentration and slave labor camps.

The larger point is that although these scientists, experts, and high-level bureaucrats were heirs to the Enlightenment tradition, they generally failed to raise critical questions about the dark political ends to which their modernist practices were directed. At best, there was complicit silence. At worst, there was active collusion, the initiation of newly concocted horrors, taking Germany ever closer to a moral *Stunde Null*. Bauman (1989) writes:

With relish, German scientists boarded the train drawn by the Nazi locomotive towards the brave, new, racially purified and German-dominated world. Research projects grew more ambitious by the day, and research institutes grew more populous and resourceful by the hour. Little else mattered. (p. 109)

## Nazi Academic Bureaucrats

As Bauman's point implies, the more Nazi ends became regressive and irrational, the more its bureaucracy charged with implementation became larger, more determined, more motivated. The aim was for a "technocracy," the "management of society by technical experts" (Renneberg & Walker, 1994, p. 4). Hence the need for academic administrators and their concomitant research institutes. The National Socialist project relied crucially on academic labor. Admittedly, some of those projects, such as a few of those carried out at Heinrich Himmler's *Das Ahnenerbe* (ancestral heritage) institute, were madcap. For example, the institute propounded *Glazial-Kosmogonie* ("world ice cosmogony"), the idea that the universe begins and ends as frozen water (Szöllösi-Janze, 2001, pp. 1–2). Or again, the "H-Special Commission" ("H" is for *Hexen* [witches]) inside the Reich Main Security Office was charged with documenting everything there was to know about witchcraft, compiling a "witch card index" of 33,000 entries (Szöllösi-Janze, 2001, p. 3). But such work was the exception, and clearly incapable of realizing National Socialist military and ideological objectives. But the work of ordinary, everyday academics—scientists, social scientists, and assorted technocrats—who were "largely rational,

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<sup>4</sup>While it may seem that the metaphor of Fordist production is over the top, death camps were run by the Economic Administrative Section of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* and expected to make a profit. Train transportation for death camp victims was booked using ordinary travel agents, with discounts given for mass bookings, and children under four traveling for free.

and result oriented ... [and] not ideologically dogmatic" (Szöllösi-Janze, 2001, p. 12) could realize these objectives.

The National Socialist reliance on academics coincided with the general impulse of National Socialism toward a modernism based on expertise and rationality. It also reflected a specific cultural belief in the general superiority of German scholarship and intellectuality. If any group could achieve Nazi goals, it would be German academics. As Aly and Heim (2002, p. 3) write, "the National Socialist leadership sought to maximize the inputs for scientific policy advisors and used their research findings as an important basis for their decisions—including the decision to murder millions of human beings."

Burleigh (1988) provides a brilliant case study, which is germane to my examination of Walter Christaller, on German wartime scholars carrying out research on the newly colonized Eastern territories (generally known as *Ostforschung*—Eastern research), particularly in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and later the Soviet Union. With respect to this case, Burleigh writes:

Exponents of the view that academics are without influence have to explain why hard-headed SS managers thought and acted otherwise. Rightly or wrongly the latter recognised that the domination of conquered populations ... could be achieved through research institutes in Berlin or Breslau.... As scholarly experts in the East, the *Ostforscher* had a distinctive contribution to make to the accurate "data base"—the statistical and cartographic location of persons—upon which all aspects of Nazi policy in the East, as elsewhere, ultimately rested. Deportations, resettlements, repatriations and mass murder were not sudden visitations from on high, requiring the adoption of some commensurate inscrutable, quasi-religious, meta-language, but the result of the exact, modern, "scientific" encompassing of practices with card indexes, card sorting machines, charts, graphs, maps and diagrams.... This was why [*Ostforschung*] received generous funding. (p. 10)

Their bosses, however, wanted only very particular kinds of academic knowledge, which brings us back to Bauman's point about complicity. According to Burleigh (1988), academic bureaucrats

did not challenge existing stereotypes and misconceptions; they worked within their boundaries and reified them through empirical "evidence" ... This is not a history of a radicalized and opportunistic "lunatic" fringe but of a section of the established, educated élite ... The *Ostforscher* voluntarily and enthusiastically put their knowledge at the disposal of the Nazi regime ... taking on board as many aspects of Nazi racial dogma as were consistent with their own (limited) notions of scholarly propriety. (p. 9)

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### **Walter Christaller: Reactionary-Modernist, Nazi, *Ostforscher***

Walter Christaller was an *Ostforscher*. He "voluntarily and enthusiastically" put his knowledge, in his case, central place theory—a spatial theory of settlement he devised in the early 1930s—"at the disposal of the Nazi regime." In doing so, his work necessarily took on "many aspects of Nazi racial dogma." The reterritorialization of the newly acquired German East was to be in accordance with the principles of central place theory, and involve both the expulsion of non-Aryans from that

space and their replacement by *Volksdeutsche*, whose resettlement Christaller personally helped to arrange. Christaller as an academic bureaucrat was up to his neck in the nasty racial politics of German National Socialism. But, in line with Burleigh's argument, Christaller was never part of a lunatic fringe. In the early 1930s he opposed Hitler, even seeking political refuge in France because of fears for his safety from the Brownshirts. But in the end, like Eichmann, he sat at his desk in his office in Berlin's Dahlem district, working for the SS, and did his job.

## Christaller and the Development of Central Place Theory

Christaller's central place theory had a long gestation period. When he was 8, Christaller (1972, p. 601) received an atlas as a Christmas present from a geographically enlightened aunt, and was instantly "bewitched." As Christaller recalled, eerily anticipating what he was to do as a grown-up, "I drew in new railroad lines, put a new city somewhere or other, [and] changed the borders of the nations, straightening them out or delineating them along mountain ranges . . . I designed new administrative divisions and calculated their populations" (p. 602). He broke into tears only when his father refused to purchase a statistical handbook to add greater veracity to his map doodling (p. 602).

Christaller's subsequent university education was interrupted by the First World War, in which he fought and was wounded. It took him 17 years variously studying in Heidelberg, Munich, Berlin, and Erlangen before in 1930 he finally received his diploma in economics (Hottes, Hottes, & Schöller, 1977). Hottes et al. (1977) suggest that Christaller's intention at Erlangen was to carry on with a PhD in economics, but because he "found no response from the economists" (p. 11), he returned to his childhood interests and asked the biogeographer Robert Gradmann in the geography department to supervise his dissertation. Gradmann accepted, and Christaller (1972, p. 607) returned to his "games with maps" and drawing "straight lines," subsequently seeing "six-sided figures (hexagons)" emerge on the southern German topographic landscape that he studied. The thesis was completed in 1932 in just 9 months, and published the following year as *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* (Central Places in Southern Germany).

An enormous amount has been written about the substance of Christaller's central place theory, especially since the second half of the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this short chapter, I shall make only three brief points. First, it was a *spatial* theory, in this case about the geographical distribution of different-sized cities (central places) that ranged from traditional individual farms surrounding a rural hamlet to the largest, most modern metropolis jam-packed with factories. Central to that theorization was the peculiar geometry of the hexagon that Christaller (1972) thought he could see surfacing from the very landscape itself if he stared at it (and

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<sup>5</sup>There are many excellent reviews of central place theory. Berry's (1967) and Beavon's (1977) are two of my favorites in what forms a vast body of literature. More than thirty years ago, Beavon (1977, p. 3) estimated that already "the total literature encompassed some 2,000 papers."



“hiked” in it) long enough (p. 610). Second, Christaller at least believed that he was putting forward a *modern* scientific theory based on underlying spatial laws. “My goal was staked out for me: To find laws according to which number, size, and distribution of cities are determined” (p. 607). Consequently, this theory was no old-time regional geography, à la Alfred Hettner’s chorology. It was something new. It was modern. It was the future. Finally, and possibly of greatest interest to Christaller, central place theory was a planning tool, a technology for practicing instrumental rationality. That intent was already demonstrated in his doctoral thesis, laid out as three planning principles (K=3 [marketing], K=4 [transportation], and K=7 [administrative]). Later these principles were further refined in his 1938 *Habilitation* (in effect, a second PhD in the German system, allowing him to become a professor—which he never did). From 1940 onward, after joining the Nazi party, Christaller was finally able to put into practice his planning principles while serving on Konrad Meyer’s staff, which was charged with transforming the newly acquired German East.

### Konrad Meyer and Generalplan Ost

Konrad Meyer was one of the key academic bureaucrats employed by the Nazis. A member of the SS from 1933, he was also professor of agronomy at the University of Berlin. He had his administrative finger in a larger number of pies, including from 1936 the Reich Association for Area Research (*Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für Raumpforschung*), in which Christaller, along with many other German geographers, undertook work (in Christaller’s case, it was research on the “German Atlas for Living Spaces” [*Atlas des deutschen Lebensraumes*]; Rössler, 1989, p. 422). More important for the purposes of this chapter, in 1938 Meyer was appointed chief of the Planning and Soil Department (*Hauptabteilung Planung und Boden*) under the Himmler-led Reich Commission for German Resettlement and Population Policy (*Reichskommissariat für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, RKFDV). In 1940, Christaller began working in Meyer’s main office, which was concerned with planning Germany’s newly acquired Eastern territories and which later was to fold into *Generalplan Ost*.

*Generalplan Ost* was top secret, developed and overseen within the SS (Aly & Heim, 2002; Burleigh, 1988; Rössler, 1989). Much of the plan’s documentation was deliberately destroyed just before the end of the war for fear of its incriminating nature. One of the plan’s principal architects was Konrad Meyer. In spring 1941, Himmler charged Meyer with planning Polish territories annexed by Germany (Madajczyk, 1962, pp. 3–4). The invasion of Poland by Germany on September 1, 1939, resulted in Poland being divided into three regions: Western Poland was incorporated into the Third Reich, becoming the provinces of Wartheland (later known as Warthegau) and Danzig West Prussia; Central Poland became a German military-occupied territory known as General Government (*Generalgouvernement*); and Eastern Poland (Galicia) was ceded to the Soviet Union as part of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed a week before Germany’s assault on Poland.

Himmler was pleased by Meyer's planning efforts for Poland, so, taking an opportunity to impress again, Meyer submitted to Himmler just 3 weeks after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 an even more expansive plan that applied not only to Poland, but to all subsequent German Eastern conquests (Madajczyk, 1962, p. 4).<sup>6</sup> Himmler approved, ordering Meyer in January 1942 to set out the full legal, political, and geographical foundations necessary for the reconstruction of the East, which Meyer did on May 28, 1942 (Burleigh, 2000, p. 547).

The Generalplan involved the two geographical pivots of the Nazi regime: *Lebensraum* and *Entfernung*. As Meyer said in a speech on January 28, 1942, "The *Ostaufgabe* [task in the East] is the unique opportunity to realize the National Socialist will, and unconditionally to let it become action" (quoted in Deichmann & Müller-Hill, 1994, p. 176–177). Action was to be effected by applying modernist planning principles along with the associated bureaucracy of experts and practitioners. Once land and resources were acquired, permitting Germany to fulfill the imperative of *Lebensraum*, those spaces would be Germanized by bringing in people of Aryan heritage. The plan estimated that resettlement would require more than four and a half million *Volksdeutsche* over a 30-year period (later revised upward to ten million). In contrast, *Entfernung* was the fate of most of the original inhabitants of the East, Slavs and Jews, who did not fit the Nazi Germanic ideal racial type. That could mean being dumped at a train station somewhere in *Generalgouvernement*; expulsion to the Warsaw Ghetto; incarceration in a slave labor or concentration camp; forced inclusion on a "death march"; or execution by firing squad, mobile gas van, or at one of the six Nazi death camps, all of which were located in the East, with two in annexed Poland and four in *Generalgouvernement* (Gregory, 2009). The number of planned expulsions varied from a low of 30 million to a high of 65 million (Burleigh, 2000, p. 547).

## Christaller, Central Place Theory, and Generalplan Ost

Christaller's central place theory may have been given the cold shoulder by economists, and it certainly was no traditional Hettnerian regional chorology, but it was perfect theory for the Nazis. The theory was fundamentally about spatial relations, speaking to key aspects of the Nazi project. It was seemingly modernist (rational, law-seeking, scientific), but also made overtures to tradition and the past. Theoretically, its starting point was individual farmers surrounding the smallest urban unit, the village (*Dorf*), emphasizing rural community, people, and soil, or *Volksgemeinschaft*. But the culmination of the hierarchy was modernity, leading to industrial urban behemoths such as Dortmund, Essen, Bochum, and, the ultimate, Berlin. Finally, central place theory came as a ready-made planning tool. Christaller's detailed maps, figures, and plans needed only to be unfurled, the bulldozers brought in, and the East became "central places in southern Germany." As Rössler (1994)

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<sup>6</sup>Various versions of Generalplan Ost existed from 1940 onward; but after some wayward arithmetic in earlier incarnations, "the more practiced Meyer" got the job (Burleigh, 2000, p. 547).

notes, the “aim was the transformation of the East into German land and as German landscape” (p. 134). That is exactly what Christaller’s model did.

Preston (2009), who has examined Christaller’s various wartime contributions existent in German archives, concludes that while working for Meyer, Christaller “contributed directly to plans facilitating German *Lebensraum* [search for living space] policy, on the one hand, and Himmler’s RKFDV [Germanisation], on the other” (p. 6).

The first of these roles was associated with Christaller’s application of central place theory initially used in annexed Poland, or, more specifically, Warthegau. Warthegau would be the “workshop” for the Reich, as Joseph Umlauf, a colleague of Christaller in Meyer’s Planning and Soil Department, put it (quoted in Fehl, 1992, p. 96). Christaller shared this view. Writing in 1940, he said:

Because of the destruction of the Polish state and the integration of its western parts into the German Empire, everything is again fluid.... Our task will be to create in a short time all the spatial units, large and small, that normally develop slowly by themselves ... so that they will be functioning as vital parts of the German Empire as soon as possible. (translated and quoted in Preston, 2009, p. 23)<sup>7</sup>

A year later, Christaller was more strident and more specific.

The aim of regional planning ... is to introduce order into impractical, outdated and arbitrary urban forms or transport networks, and this order can only be achieved on the basis of an ideal plan—which means in spatial terms a geometrical schema ... central places will be spaced an equal distance apart, so that they form equilateral triangles. These triangles will in turn form regular hexagons, with the central place in the middle of these hexagons assuming a greater importance ... (quoted in Aly & Heim, 2002, p. 97)<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, parts of Warthegau were redesigned, “completely changing the face of the countryside,” as Himmler had demanded in 1940 (quoted in Aly & Heim, 2002, p. 74). For example, the district of Kutno, in northeast Warthegau, was made over on paper at least according to Christaller’s “geometrical schema.”

But clearly there was work to do in making the world conform to the “ideal plan.” Christaller wrote in the same 1941 planning document quoted above: “[where] it seemed absolutely essential ... that a new town of at least 25,000 inhabitants” be built, then a new town would be “created from scratch” (quoted in Aly & Heim, 2002, p. 97). If Upper Silesia needed “a Duesseldorf or Cologne” of 450,000 people “to provide a cultural centre,” then so be it (quoted in Aly & Heim, 2002, p. 97). If “Posen ... has the power and potential to develop into a town of 450,000 [from 350,000],” it should (quoted in Aly & Heim, 2002, p. 97). More specifically, Christaller planned 36 new *Hauptdörfer* for Warthegau. Each one came, as Rössler

<sup>7</sup>The quotation is from an article that Christaller (1940) published in *Raumforschung und Raumordnung*, “Die Kultur- und Marktgebiete der zentralen Orte im Deutschen Ostraum und die Gliederung der Verwaltung” (Cultural and Market Segments of Central Places in the German East and the Structure of Administration).

<sup>8</sup>This translated quotation is originally from Christaller (1941), *Die Zentralen Orte in den Ostgebieten und ihre Kultur- und Marktgebiete* (Central Places in the Eastern Territories and Their Cultural and Market Segments).

(1994) notes, with a “National Socialist celebration hall, buildings for the Hitler Youth or a central parade square, in other words the visible buildings of the model for National Socialist society” (p. 134).

Before this could happen, however, many of the non-Aryan residents had to go—560,000 Jews and 3.4 million Slavs. Only 1.1 million of the existing population were thought to be Germanized enough to stay. Given the large expulsion, 3.4 million Germanized settlers needed to be brought in. This goal defined Christaller’s second role, to assist in the migration of *Volksdeutsche* from various places in Europe so as to strengthen Germandom, which now included Poland. As Christaller put it, this goal provided another reason to construct a new central place system: “To give settlers roots so they can really feel at home” (quoted and translated by Preston, 2009, p. 21).<sup>9</sup>

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## Conclusion

Walter Christaller used to be a household name, at least for a period in the 1960s and 1970s in Anglo-American human geography. His central place theory was perhaps the only indigenously devised formal geographical theory in the discipline. It would have been scandalous to have called Christaller a “desk killer.” There was rarely mention of his entanglements or the entanglements of his theory with the Nazis and the Second World War. Bunge (1977), who dedicated his book *Theoretical Geography* (1966) to Christaller, even maintained that Christaller “was not a fascist.” Rather, Christaller was “a man of science” (1977, p. 84). His central place theory was neat and pure, the tidy arrangement of an unsullied logic. For this reason, Bunge was dumbfounded that Christaller was never offered a professorship in Germany.

Of course, logic is never unsullied, never separated from history and geography. There is no realm of knowledge that is hermetically sealed from the context of its production, and—most germane for the essays collected in this book—there is no realm of knowledge that is removed from the appropriation, distribution, and circulation of the concomitant imbricated social power. Michel Foucault, of course, famously joined knowledge and power in his hyphenated couplet, “power-knowledge.” The hyphen is perhaps the most important element, connoting a single term. It is not knowledge on the one hand, social power on the other; or science on the one hand, the state on the other. It is mutual inherence. Power is exercised, asserted, denoted, and applied through knowledge, just as knowledge relies upon, demands, is manifest as, and takes up social power.

The Nazi regime was a regime of power-knowledge of an extreme kind. Its “Admin” departments shockingly exemplified the power-knowledge nexus. They provided data, records, typological criteria, anthropological assessments, planning

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<sup>9</sup>This quotation is originally from Christaller’s (1942) article “Land und Stadt in der Deutschen Volksordnung” (Country and City in the German National Order), published in the journal *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*.

precepts, and so much more. But this wasn't just information to be selectively picked over, haphazardly taken up, and discarded. It came with tremendous social force to direct action, to unfurl on the ground, and in the process to make multiple concrete conjunctions, sometimes of a very bad kind. The Gestapo arrive to search Anne Frank's hideaway attic in an Amsterdam apartment complex. Romanian *Volksdeutsche* take over now empty farmhouses in Kutno, Warthegau. The train pulls in at Auschwitz.

As Foucault makes clear, no one escapes such forces, certainly not Walter Christaller. There is no "outside." Christaller at first was against Hitler and National Socialism. Accused of sympathizing with the Communist Party, Christaller had been investigated in 1934 by the Gestapo. He bicycled to France to become a political refugee; friends helped him return (Wardenga, Henniges, Brogiato, & Schelhaas, 2011, p. 21). In the end, the disciplining force of power-knowledge was too strong; it was a temptation he could not resist: Christaller joined the National Socialist party in 1940 (Wardenga et al., 2011, p. 33). Christaller did not want to become part of the Nazi war machine, but he could not help himself. He needed a job; he sought academic credibility and relevance; he wanted to show that his ideas were not mere childhood squiggles on atlases but capable of remaking the world. Moreover, the SS gave him not a piece of paper on which to draw, but Warthegau, a whole conquered territory of 44,000 km<sup>2</sup>. He couldn't resist the offer. Power-knowledge overwhelmed. This decision might explain why Christaller joined the Communist Party after the war, and from 1951 to 1952 represented the Communist Party as municipal councilor in Jugenheim (Kegler, 2008, p. 92), although he left the party in 1953 following accusations that he was an East German informant (the charges were never formally made, however).

The larger point, which is applicable to a number of Nazi bureaucrats (Lozowick, 2002): Although during the war Christaller may have just sat at his desk in "clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices," and he may never have "raised [his] voice," what he and they did was hellish.

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