

## **“Desk killers:” Walter Christaller, central place theory, and the Nazis.**

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* (1942, x)

### **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 began to commit some terrible evil acts, and which by the next year when Hitler initiated the “Final Solution,” only got worse. By War’s end, the Nazi “Admin” had dispatched millions of people to a frightful death.

Those managers were not usually raving monsters, foaming-in-the-mouth psychopaths. Certainly, none had horns or a tail. Instead, as in Lewis’s description, they were often “quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices.” For proof, there is Hannah Arendt’s (1977) account of just 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*. 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 co-ordinating 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; Doel *et al.*, 1996, 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, abducting him to Israel for a criminal trial. Found guilty of all fifteen charges, including crimes against humanity, he was TAKEN TO THE SCAFFOLDING AND HUNG 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, 276) writes. Eichmann said at his defence, “I sat at my desk and did my work” (Papadatos 1964, 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, 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 to talk to people, write memoranda, receive and give orders from behind a desk” (quoted in Cole, 2000, 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.

Certainly, one should never forget the awfulness. The memoranda Eichmann wrote produced dreadful consequences. “Death by memoranda” as Tim Cole (2000, 69) puts it. Gideon Hausner, Israel’s Attorney General and 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 the gas chambers into action; he lifted the telephone, and railway cars left for the extermination centres; his signature it was that sealed the doom of thousands and tens of thousands.”<sup>1</sup> He was a “desk killer” (*schreibtischtäter*) (Milchman and 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 was finished, 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 General Plan for the East (*Generalplan Ost*). That plan did terrible things: expelling non-Aryans from their homes in German conquered Eastern territories (*Entfernung*); replacing them with “Germanised” immigrants; and physically transforming the acquired lands according to the aesthetics, values and rationality of National Socialism. Power and knowledge came together brutally starkly. I make my argument by drawing on especially the works of Michael Burleigh (1988) and Zygmunt 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.

### **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 that 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. Jeffrey Herf (1984) labelled this paradox that he believed was at the very heart of the Nazi project, “reactionary modernism.”

*Space*

The Nazi quest for Aryan racial purity produced at least two geographies, becoming inseparable from the larger regime (Charlesworth, 1992; Clarke, Doel, and McDonough, 1996; Doel and Clarke, 1998; and Gregory, 2009).

The first was around defining the boundaries of Aryan space. For the Nazis it was given by *Lebensraum* (living space), the idea that German Aryan people naturally required for their habitation a specific amount of land and resources. The notion of *Lebensraum* first emerged in the nineteenth century, associated especially with the German geographer, Friedrich Ratzel. It was further elaborated in the early twentieth century by another German geographer, Karl Haushofer. In turn, Haushofer introduced the conception 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*, and in which *Lebensraum* played 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 . . . . [I]t 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>2</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, which sparked the Second World War.

Nazism, then, was about *re-territorialization* (especially of the East), enlarging the *Reich* through military conquest to an appropriate size for the Aryan people, and justified by *Lebensraum*. But there was a complementary (and second) geographical issue: *deterritorialization*. Here the problem was expelling, removing and separating “inappropriate” people (ie., non-Aryans) from land they occupied, taking them elsewhere. Deterritorialization was about *Entfernung* (expulsion, removal), and in the process creating “empty space” for re-occupation by Germanised people (Hitler’s phrase in a 1937 secret speech was “*Volksloser raum*”; Doel and Clarke 1998, 53). *Entfernung* began with the intimidation of Jews that followed the long established (European) precedent of the pogrom (e.g., *Kristallnacht* in Berlin in 1938). By 1940 it was ratcheted up to forced marches and ghettoization (e.g., in Warsaw). And it finished with the Final Solution, the extermination of non-Aryans and occurring on a mass scale at the six death camps in Poland. With “inappropriate” people removed, the empty lands were available for settlement by at least Germanised people (*Volksdeutsche*; Berger, 1992) if not the real McCoy, Germanised Germans. The *Volksdeutsche* were people whose ethnic roots, even if they were historically distant, were German, albeit who lived outside of Germany in places like the Baltic states, Romania, and the Netherlands.

### *Modernity*

Spatial issues, then, were integrated into the very nature of the Nazi project, inseparable from its realization. But to realise a project of this vast scale required enormous energy and resources, the co-ordinated efforts of a 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 (1989, 87) 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.”

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 realise it. Nazism is modernist for Bauman (1989, 91) 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 other groups like 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 to increase the capacity for killing non-Aryans. The murder of non-Aryans was the primey goal, creating for the Nazis an “objectively better world” (Bauman, 1989, 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 labour. The killing of Jews and the 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, comprehensive formal rules and procedures. Sabine and Silver (1980, 230; quoted in Bauman, 1989, 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 labour, scientific management, exact timing, and logistical efficiency (and Eichmann’s main task).<sup>3</sup> Labour and management practices were necessarily integrated with advanced technology, with machines, and with qualified scientists who produced both machines and specialized knowledge. Edwin Black (2001), for example, recently 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 labour camps.

The larger point is that while the various scientists, experts, and higher order 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 worse, there was active collusion, the initiation of newly thought up horrors, taking Germany ever closer to a moral *Stunde Null*. Bauman (1989, 109) writes:

With relish German scientists boarded the train drawn by the Nazi locomotive toward 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 (Bauman 1989, 109).

### *Nazi academic bureaucrats*

As Bauman's quote implies, the more the Nazi ends became regressive and irrational, the more that 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 and Walker, 1994, 4). Hence the need for academic administrators, and their concomitant research institutes. The National Socialist project relied crucially on academic labour. Admittedly, some of those projects, such as some carried out at 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, 2001a, 1-2). Or again, "H- Special Commission" ("H" is for *Hexen* (witch)) inside the Reich Security Main Office was charged with documenting everything there was to know about witchcraft, compiling a 33,000 "witch card index" (Szöllösi-Janze, 2001, 3). But such work was the exception, clearly incapable of realising National Socialist military and ideological objectives. But the work of ordinary, everyday academics – scientists, social scientists and assorted technocrats – and who were "largely rational, and result oriented ... [and] not ideologically dogmatic," could (Szöllösi-Janze, 2001, 12).

The National Socialist reliance on academics coincided with the general impulse of National Socialism towards 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, 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."

Michael Burleigh (1988) provides a brilliant case study, and germane to my later examination of Walter Christaller: German wartime scholars carrying out research on the newly colonised Eastern territories (generally known as *Ostforschung* – Eastern research) particularly in Poland, Czechoslovakia and later the Soviet Union. For this case Burleigh (1988, 10) 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.

Their bosses, however, wanted only very particular kinds of academic knowledge. This returns to Bauman's point about complicity. As Burleigh (1988, 8) writes, 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 *Ostforschung* voluntarily and enthusiastically put their knowledge at the disposal of the Nazi regime ... taking onboard as many aspects of Nazi racial dogma as were consistent with their own (limited) notions and scholarly propriety.

### **Walter Christaller: reactionary-modernist, Nazi, *Ostforschung***

Walter Christaller was an *Ostforschung*. He "voluntarily and enthusiastically" put his knowledge, in his case, a spatial theory of settlement he devised in the early 1930s, central place theory, "at the disposal of the Nazi regime." In doing so, his work necessarily took on "many aspects of Nazi racial dogma." The re-territorialisation of the newly acquired German East was to be in accordance with the principles of central place theory, and involving both the expulsion of existing non-Aryans in 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 following Burleigh, 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 Dahlem, Berlin office 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 eight, Christaller (1972, 601) received an atlas as a Christmas present from a geographically enlightened aunt, and was instantly "bewitched." As Christaller recalled, and 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" (Christaller 1972, 602). He broke into tears only when his father refused to purchase a statistical handbook to add greater veracity to his map doodling (Christaller 1972, 602).

Christaller's subsequent university education was broken up by the First World War, and in which he fought and was wounded. It took him 17 years variously studying in Heidelberg, Munich, Berlin and finally Erlangen before in 1930 he finally received his Diploma in economics (Hottes et al., 1977, 11). Hottes et al. (1977, 11) suggest that Christaller's intention at Erlangen was to carry on with a Ph.D. in economics, but because he "found no response from the economists," he went back to his childhood interests and asked the biogeographer Robert Gradmann in the Geography Department to supervise his dissertation. Gradmann accepted, and Christaller (1972, 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 nine 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>4</sup> For the purposes of this short chapter, let me 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 metropole jam-packed with factories. Central to that theorization was the peculiar geometry of the hexagon that Christaller thought he could see surfacing from the very landscape itself if he stared (and "hiked" in it) long enough (Christaller, 1972, 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" (Christaller, 1972, 607). Consequently, this was not old-time regional geography, Hettner's chorography. It was something new. It was modern. It was the future. Finally, and possibly Christaller's greatest interest, central place theory was a planning tool, a technology for practicing instrumental rationality. That was already there in his doctoral thesis, laid out as three planning principles [K=3 (marketing), K=4 (transportation), and K=7 (administrative)]. Later they were further refined in his 1938 *habilitation* (in effect the second Ph.D. that in the German system allowed him to become a Professor). Then from 1940 onwards, after Christaller joined the Nazi party, he was finally able to put into practice those planning principles, serving on Konrad Meyer's staff 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 Raumforschung*) 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, 422]. More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, in 1938 Meyer was appointed chief of the Soil and Planning Department (*Hauptabteilung Planung und Boden*) under the Himmler-led Reichs Commission for the Strengthening of Germanism (*Reichskommissariat für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, RKFDV). In 1940, Christaller began working in Meyer's main office concerned with planning Germany's newly acquired Eastern territories and which later was to fold into *Generalplan Ost*.

*Generalplan Ost* was top secret, produced and overseen within the SS (Burleigh, 1988; Rössler, 1989; Aly and Heim, 2002). Much of the Plan's documentation was deliberately destroyed just before the end of the war for fear of its incriminating character. 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, 3-4). The invasion of Poland by Germany on September 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Polish planning efforts, so, taking an opportunity to impress again, Meyer submitted to Himmler three 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, 4).<sup>5</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, and which he did on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1942 (Burleigh 2000, 547).

*Generalplan* involved the two geographical pivots of the Nazi regime: *Lebensraum* and *Entfernung*. As Meyer said in a speech on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1942, "The *Ostaufgabe* (task in the East) is the unique opportunity to realise the National Socialist will, and unconditionally to let it become action" (quoted in Renneberg and Walter, 1994, 17). 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 fulfil the imperative of *Lebensraum*, those spaces would be Germanized by bringing in people of Aryan heritage. The *Plan* estimated resettlement would require more than four and a half million *Volksdeutsche* over a thirty year period (later revised upward to 10 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 bereft on a train station somewhere in *Generalgouvernement*; expulsion to the Warsaw ghetto; incarceration in a slave labour 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 which were located in the East either in annexed Poland (two) or *Generalgouvernement* (four) (Gregory, 2009). The numbers of planned expulsions varied from a low of 30 million to a high of 65 million (Burleigh 2000, 547).

#### *Christaller, central place theory and Generalplan Ost*

While Christaller's central place theory may have got the cold shoulder from economists, and it was no traditional Hettnerian regional chorography, it was perfect 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 made overtures also to tradition and the past. Theoretically, its beginning point were individual farmers surrounding the smallest urban unit, the village (*dorf*), emphasizing rural community, people and soil, *Volksgemeinschaft*. But the culmination of the hierarchy was *über* modernity, industrial urban behemoths like 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, 134) writes, the "aim was the transformation of the East into German land and as German landscape." That is exactly what Christaller's model did.

Richard Preston (2009, 6), who has examined Christaller's various war-time contributions that exist in the 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."

The first of these roles was associated with Christaller's application of central place theory initially used in annexed Poland, specifically Warthegau. Warthegau would be the "workshop" for the Reich as Joseph Umlauf, a colleague of Christaller's in Meyer's Soil and Planning office put it (quoted in Fehl 1992, 96).

This was Christaller's view too. 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, 23).<sup>6</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 .... [C]entral 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 and Heim 2002, 97).<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, parts of Warthegau were redesigned, "completely changing the face of the countryside" as Himmler had demanded in 1940 (quoted in Aly and Heim 2002, 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 and Heim 2002, 97). If Upper Silesia needed "a Dusseldorf or Cologne" of 450,000 people "to provide a cultural centre" then so be it (quoted in Aly and Heim 2002, 97). If "Posen ... has the power and potential to develop into a town of 450,000 [from 350,000]," it should (quoted in Aly and Heim 2002, 97).<sup>8</sup> More specifically, Christaller planned for Warthegau 36 new *Hauptdorfs*. Each one came, as Rössler (1994, 134) writes, 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."

Before this could happen, though, many of the non-Aryan existing residents had to go – 560,000 Jews and 3.4 million Slavs. Only 1.1 million of the existing population were thought to be Germanised enough to stay. Given the large expulsion, 3.4 million Germanised German settlers needed to be brought in. This was Christaller's second role, to assist in the migration of *Volksdeutsche* from various places in Europe so as to strengthen Germanhood (and which now

included Poland). As Christaller put it, this was 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, 23).<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

Walter Christaller at least for a period in the 1960s and 1970s in Anglo-American human geography was a household name. His central place theory was maybe the only indigenously devised formal geographical theory in the discipline. It would have been scandalous to have called Christaller a “desk killer.” There was never mention of his entanglements or the entanglements of his theory with the Nazis and the War. His central place theory was presented as if it were neat and pure, the tidy arrangement of an unsullied logic separated from history and geography.

But 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 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. But 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 judgments, planning precepts, and so much more. But this wasn’t just information to be selectively picked over, taken up and discarded in a desultory way. It came with tremendous social force to direct action, to unfurl on the ground and in the process make multiplicitous concrete conjunctions sometimes of a brutal kind. The Gestapo arrive to search Ann 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 is against Hitler and National Socialism. He even attempted a get-away to a seeming “outside”, bicycling to France in 1934 to be a political refugee. But the disciplining force of power-knowledge was too strong. Christaller did not want to become part of the Nazi war machine, but he could not not join. 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 didn’t give him just a piece of paper on which to draw, but a whole conquered territory of 44,000 square kilometres, Warthegau. He couldn’t turn them down. Power-knowledge overwhelmed.

While Christaller may have just sat at his desk in a “clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted office,” and he may never have “raised [his] voice,” what he did was NONETHELESS hellish.

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<sup>1</sup> The court transcripts for the entire Eichmann trial are available on line at <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/>

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The quotation is from Attorney General Hausner's opening remarks, session number 6, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1961; <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-006-007-008-01.html>

<sup>2</sup> Adolph Hitler *Mein Kampf*, volume 2, chapter 14, Eastern orientations or Eastern policy (1926). An English translation of the two volumes is available on-line at <http://www.crusader.net/texts/mk/index.html> and from which the quote is taken.

<sup>3</sup> While it might seem that the metaphor of Fordist production is over the top, death camps were run by the Economic Administrative Section of the *Reichsicherheitshauptamt* and expected to make a profit. Train transportation for death camp victims was made using ordinary travel agents, with discounts given for mass bookings, with children under four going free.

<sup>4</sup> There are many excellent reviews of central place theory. Berry's (1967) and Beavon's (1977) are two of my favourites in what is a vast literature. More than thirty years ago in 1977, Beavon (1977, 3) estimated that already "the total literature encompassed some 2,000 papers."

<sup>5</sup> Various versions of *Generalplan Ost* existed from 1940 onward but after some wayward arithmetic in earlier incarnations "the more practised Meyer" got the job (Burleigh, 2000, 547).

<sup>6</sup> The quote is from an article Christaller published in *Raumforschung und Raumordnung*, 4, 498-503 (1940), "Die Kultur- und Marktbereiche der zentralen Orte im Deutschen Osteraum und die Gliederung der Verwaltung" (Cultural and market segments in central places in the German East and the breakdown of administration.)

<sup>7</sup> Taken from Walter Christaller, *Die Zentralen Orte in den Ostgebieten und ihre Kultur- und Marktbereiche* (Central places in the Eastern territories and their cultural and market segments), Leipzig (1941).

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Walter Christaller, *Land und Stadt in der Deutsche Volksordnung* (Country and city in the German national order), *Deutsche Agrarpolitik* 1, 53-56 (1942).

Central Place Theory is a spatial theory in urban geography and urban economics. CPT explains the spatial arrangements, patterns and distribution of urban. Walter Christaller explained why the highest order settlement has very peculiar activities. These activities can only be supported by one large central city and the reason behind those activities taking place only in those particular highest order settlements. He also explained the nature of activities in different order of settlements such as metropolitan areas. Central place theory is of great importance even after decades and forms the basis of various present-day theories used in urban planning. It also explains various advantages of living in urban areas and large cities. Central Place Theory. A theory that explains the distribution of services, based on the fact that settlements serve as centers of market areas for services; larger settlements are fewer and farther apart than smaller settlements and provide services for a larger number of people who are willing to travel farther. There is a central place for every range of markets with different markets within a certain distance from the center. This is a pretty self-explanatory one. Just picture a ring with rings in it. Central Goods and Services. provided only at a central place, or city (available to consum Space Central place theory Nazism World War II German geography. 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. Cite this chapter as: Barnes T.J. (2015) "Desk Killers": Walter Christaller, Central Place Theory, and the Nazis. In: Meusbürger P., Gregory D., Suarsana L. (eds) Geographies of Knowledge and Power. Knowledge and Space (Klaus Tschira Symposia), vol 7. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9960-7\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9960-7_9). Christaller's task was to plan the newly Nazi-annexed territory of western Poland in conformance with his central place theory, which he set out in his doctoral thesis in the early 1930s at the University of Erlangen. For western Poland to be transformed into Christaller's central place model, most of the region's residents, primarily Jews and Slavs, were forced to leave; many of them were sent to their death. Geographers often supported or assisted Nazi ideology and the war, be it in their academic or public writing or in the more practical form of planning the spatial reorganization of the occupied countries such as Walter Christaller and his involvement in Generalplan Ost. Central Place Theory (CPT) is an attempt to explain the spatial arrangement, size, and number of settlements. The theory was originally published in 1933 by a German geographer Walter Christaller who studied the settlement patterns in southern Germany. In the flat landscape of southern Germany Christaller noticed that towns of a certain size were roughly equidistant. By examining and defining the functions of the settlement structure and the size of the hinterland he found it possible to model the pattern of settlement locations using geometric shapes.