

The Anarchy of Nazi Memorabilia: From Things of Tyranny to Troubled Treasure. By Michael Hughes. 2021. 260 pp. Routledge, London. ISBN 9780367422004.

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Michael Hughes' book promises a lot in its title and, on the whole, it delivers. Hughes gives us an overview and analysis of the medals and badges that became ubiquitous in National Socialist culture. From the Hitler Youth to the Wehrmacht, the use of culture to smelt state institutions with party goals is recorded in the exponential growth of this ephemera. If this were the only contribution of the book, it would already be a solid addition to understanding an important area of Nazi material culture. But as the use of the word "memorabilia" and the subtitle suggest, each chapter also deals to greater or lesser degrees in the postwar trading, selling, and collecting of these objects. The book thus takes us from the philosophical and moral questions raised by Susan Sontag's "fascinating Fascism" to a sober sociological overview of the motivations and interests of dealers and collectors today. As such, it expands the cultural analysis of the Nazi period and its legacy beyond the usual suspects of architecture and the arts to include objects circulating in everyday life.

Hughes organizes his chapters thematically and in a roughly chronological order. He begins with an introduction that sets out his categorical areas for material culture – aesthetics, value, the concept of the gift, and the auratic character of memorabilia – as well as some of his methods, including oral histories and communications gathered from contemporary dealers. After this, he opens his historical analysis with an overview of Nazi symbols from their origins

in the Weimar Republic through early pins that were meant to create community and inculcate Nazi values, such as the badges for the Winter Help campaign to support the indigent (*Winterhilfswerk*). He then follows with chapters on three of the most prominent examples of Nazi pins and badges: the German Eagle Order award (received by Henry Ford, among others); the Honor Cross of German Mothers; and the Iron Cross, given during the war years. In each case the author provides an historical account of the origin and purpose of the award but also explores its significance to contemporary collectors and markets. The book concludes with three chapters geared to postwar collecting: collectors' literature as itself material culture; the question of whether these objects should be preserved or not; and aspects of collecting today.

A good example of Hughes' strengths appears in the chapter on the award for German mothers, titled "Medals for Babies: The Honour Cross of the German Mother." He lays out the origin of the cross in 1938 amid natal campaigns that foresaw an ongoing need for German workers and soldiers into the future. The first cross was given in 1939 and was meant to show that women were as important as soldiers in the war effort. It is not by chance that the form of the cross has an elongated stem but also reflects basic visual characteristics of the Iron Cross, thus blending the supposed moral role of women signaled by the Christian symbol with the militant sign of heroism almost exclusively given to men. Here and elsewhere, Hughes is especially good at discussing the materials used in the medal and their social and hierarchical significance. This continues into his discussion of postwar collectors, notably almost all men who favor the Iron Cross and consider the Mother's Cross only for its aesthetic and "pretty" qualities. This makes Hughes' broader and important point that the postwar market exists and thrives on de-contextualizing these objects, which can serve to distance the sellers from their

Nazi past but also plays into contemporary social values such as the continued patriarchal nature of the market for military memorabilia. That Hughes is himself part of this market – most of his illustrations come from his personal collection – is something he also comments on as a leitmotif of his analysis and an explanation of his snowball sample of oral histories from dealers. (See in particular his discussion of his purchase of an Iron Cross [p. 97]).

However, the book’s attempt to cover so much ground can be a problem at times. In some places the historical context is painted on rather thinly (such as the Weimar chapter), and, more problematic, the author’s arguments are at times too brief when he tries to connect the objects with major events in Nazi Germany. We learn, for example, that the Winter Help badges helped “cement” Nazi Ideology, and that the Mothers Cross had “considerable agency.” Such claims are occasionally nuanced, but too often the concise nature of the book does not allow for them to be explained fully, a problem that is particularly in evidence when he tries to connect the production and awarding of medals to forced labor. Like most industries, conscripted and forced labor was certainly involved, but too often this gesture towards the most criminal aspects of Nazi Germany is asserted rather than really argued. In this regard, his more sociological analysis of both past use and present collecting tends to be the strongest aspect of the book.

While such problems are not uncommon in a book that takes on such a large scope in its history and range of objects, here they do not obscure the contributions Hughes makes, especially in terms of highlighting these overlooked objects of material culture. The book is a real addition to our growing concerns with an expanded analysis of historical objects. It also provides much to think about in terms of memorabilia markets and the trade in material culture

associated with criminal regimes. These are worthy and interesting questions that Hughes' book opens for us and helps us address.

The book will be of particular interest to scholars following contemporary trends in Nazi-era studies such as the archaeology of everyday sites of genocide, the looting of not only fine arts but an array of objects that constituted the violent transfer of wealth during the war, and the exploration of material culture more broadly. It also complements scholars interested in exploring areas of collecting that are ethically problematic, such as memorabilia from the Confederacy in the American South.