THE RHETORIC OF REMAINS





Grosser Mercedes 770 – Hitler at Nuremberg in 1935

Twenty artifacts, twenty cars – how do you decide which is the most historically significant?

This was the challenge of one of our classes in the Revs Program this term.

We have considered the obvious criteria that might be applied – a car associated with an event or person; a car representing some important part of engineering history; a car carrying with it a lot of information or cultural value.

Consider that often *design is an argument* for something like "the good life" – "buy this, use this, and things will be better".

And in class we have certainly found ourselves *making cases* for different cars to be more historically significant than others. History and archaeology do, of course, have a strong forensic component – working with evidence, sources, witness statements, traces and remains to piece together an account of what happened. And we have found ourselves researching our twenty car cases, like detectives, seeking key facts that will enable us to distinguish the more from the less significant.

We're in the archaeological law court. Consider the rhetorical features of this archaeological forensics:

- the car as witness – the car was there!
- the car as perpetrator, as agent – the car did it!
- the car comes clean and speaks for itself – it is genuine and authentic
- the car has a lot to say – a key witness that perhaps helps unravel a complex story (in contrast to others that may have little to say or offer)
- the car is a character witness – trust what this car, and those associated with it, has to say
- the car is worth listening to if it has credentials, a pedigree, a genealogy, and you know where it comes from, its background

we may resort to figures of speech in our forensic rhetoric

- synechdoche, when part stands for whole – a Porsche standing for motor sports
- metonymy – a car closely associated with something such that it comes to stand for it – the Mercedes-Benz 770 standing for the Third Reich
- metaphor and allegory – a car standing for a story – "this is adventure" – here the car may be like an ikon – standing for much more than itself

then there's the way the case is presented

- a car may make an emotional appeal – "this is so beautiful it must be important"
- the case may be made to appear to be about much more than it seems from first impressions – "there's a lot more at stake here – this is not just any Mercedes"

history – all about advocacy



1960 Porsche-Abarth 356B on the track at Laguna Seca – a piece of racing history?