

The Australian National University

**National Institute of the Arts**



**School of Art**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Ede Horton**

**SUB-THESIS**

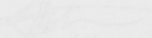
**PRESENTED IN PART FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN VISUAL ARTS**

**2002**

Declaration of originality

Please insert and sign the following at the bottom of page 2 of the thesis

**DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I,  hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project I have undertaken during my candidature. I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations or expressions attributable to other authors.

## Acknowledgements

Over the course of this three and a half year period, there has come to be many people to whom I owe a great deal of thanks for ordinary reasons. I wish to express my gratitude to my family and friends who have supported me and made my Master's experience a very enjoyable one. I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Stephen G. ... for his guidance and support. I wish to thank the members of the ... for their help and support. I wish to thank the members of the ... for their help and support.

Listening Between the Generations: research into the nature of identity and how this transfers through the medium of glass. The work explores Expressions of Contemporary Australian Jewish Identity. The Sub-thesis investigates the nature of memoir writing as a vehicle for exploring the impact of migration across three generations and the adaptation and expression of personal identity. A study taking the form of an exhibition of glass objects exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from March 12 to 31, 2002 which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component - 80%, together with a Sub-thesis - 20%, and the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

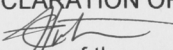
## Dedication

To Mom and Emil for motivating and encouraging me to study my Masters degree.

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Over the course of this three and a half year period, there has come to be many people to whom I owe a great deal of thanks for so many reasons. I wish to express my gratitude to David Williams and Stephen Procter whose impetus made my Master possible and moved mountains to gift me this opportunity to grow. Stephen's gentleness and pearls of wisdom still speak to me. To Anne Brennan for having the foresight and persistence to hold my hand as I travelled through a difficult and at times painful passage. Gordon Bull for his consistent encouragement.

To everyone who contributes to making the Glass workshop such a unique place, especially Jane Bruce for keeping me focused and on track. Nigel Lendon for your reassuring advice and commitment. My sincere gratitude to Renata Schnall and Helen Light for assisting me beyond the call of duty.

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This paper is part of a much broader context of narrative writing as a vehicle for exploring identity. Many second generation survivors have used memoir as a way of exploring their parent's experience. Memoirs such as *Under the Sun* by Anne Garner Day, *Daddy and Me* by Susan Vargo and *Lost in Translation* by Eve Koffman were my starting point. Other memoirs by writers, Samia Spill, Judith Spector, Yvonne Singer and Silverstein Schwartz and Well have been instrumental in the process of writing this paper.

Samia Well maintains "grounding" occurs when "the image projects forward, rather, as long with us from old images to new, represent the link between fathers and sons. For people and families who have been displaced, the process is complicated. The family is usually the only remaining link to the home they have lost. It can be as difficult for children to distance themselves from their parents as for parents to distance themselves from their children. For some severity of event, leaving the family that ground them in connectivity, as Well suggests "can be experienced more as a rupture than an alleviation of self."

Her ongoing sense of the rupture, why I, the many, others in my life, came to understand the information from aging parents, seems, it is too late and not soon. It is a sense of identity connected with the changing relationship, away with my mother, starting with a father dependency as she grows older and more frailty.

Wellman, *The Family: Between Life and Death*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1984, 103.

Wellman, *Intergenerational Family Change: Disruptions, Transitions and Continuities*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1984, 217.

Wellman, *Intergenerational Family Change: Transitions and Disruptions*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1984, 217.

## Adapting One's Identity: The Impact of Migration Across Three Generations

*"I know that I cannot sustain my sense of a separate reality forever, for after all, the only reality is a shared reality, situated within a common ground".<sup>1</sup>*

Eva Hoffman

Introduction:

This essay is about my search for my identity. This impetus arose from my need to understand who I am as Ernest and Nina Horton's daughter as well as a Jew, a Mother, an Artist and an Australian. It grew out of a sense of absence to fill the spaces of silence created by my parents whose stories had remained untold and withheld from me. In order to understand who I am in the present, I need to fill in the gaps. Spiegelman's character Vladek says in Maus "All such things of the war, I tried to put out from my mind once for all... until you rebuild me all this from your questions"<sup>2</sup>

This paper is part of a much broader context of memoir writing as a vehicle for exploring identity. Many second generation survivors have used memoirs as a way of exploring their parent's experiences. Memoirs such as Sister Sister by Annie Rosner Blay, Heddy and Me by Susan Varga and Lost in Translation by Eva Hoffman were my starting point. Other articles by writers Sidonie Smith, Judith Sloan, Yvonne Singer and Silverstein Schwartz and Wolf have been instrumental in the process of writing this paper.

Simone Weil maintains "grounding" occurs when the things (objects, stories, rituals) we take with us from old homes to new represent the link between future and past. For people and families who have been displaced this process is complicated. The family is virtually the only remaining link to the home they have lost, it can be as difficult for children to distance themselves from their parents as for parents to *let go* of their children. For some severing, or even loosening the bonds that ground them in community, as Weil suggests "can be perceived more as a negation than an affirmation of self."<sup>3</sup>

This explains some of the reasons why I, like many others in mid-life, dare to extract this information from aging parents, before it is too late and lost forever. This search for identity corresponds with the changing relationship I have with my mother and the shift in her dependency as she grows older and more fragile.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, Eva, Lost in Translation-Life in a new Language, Vintage UK Random House, 1989, p1997

<sup>2</sup> Hirsch, Marianne, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory, cited in Mourning and Post Memory, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.1997 p17

<sup>3</sup> Bammer, Angelika, Edit "Mother Tongues and Other Strangers Writing "Family" across Cultural Divides", Cultural Identities in Question- Displacements, Indiana University Press, 1994, p 98

Paul Bartrop comments on the complexity of Jewish identity in Australia as follows:

We Jews are a distinct group within the Australian community, designated by religion and other identifiers. But we make up part of the collective known as 'Australians' and should not lose sight of what our predecessors a century and a half ago achieved.<sup>4</sup>

This quote encapsulates the dilemma of a community, which must accommodate itself to a problematic past whilst still contributing to a common present and future.

To do this I will discuss my parents life in Europe, their migration to other countries and eventual settling into Australia. I will also reflect on the changing role of religion in their lives, and how they adapted to and absorbed the culture of the places they lived in. I will explore how this has affected me and I will draw conclusions about the impact of their attitudes and beliefs on who I am and how I work.



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<sup>4</sup> Paul R. Bartrop, The Australian Jewish Experience, (ed) Malcolm. J. Turnbull, pub Australian Historical Society, 1998, p 8



I want to tell the story that my parents couldn't tell. They made a pact to spare their children the loss and grief that at times overwhelmed them. They wanted to step forward into the "new world" and shed the horrors of the past. I know the emotional strings that bind the family together are partly due to the experiences of the past, resonating in the present through the hardships and celebrations of life.

My story is like many other first generation migrant tales. What make it special are the personal details. My family story spans three generations. My parents migrated from the city of Leignitz, in Germany and the shtetl of Svinov, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to make a family in Australia, the country of my birth and the future of my children.

Many of my beliefs are grounded in things I learnt as a child and remembered. None of this mattered to me until I had children. I was too busy living my dreams and achieving for myself a life that I wanted. Children have changed my life. The questions they ask in such innocence impact on their lives and require truthful answers.

History happens to you because you are born at a particular time and place. As Silverstein, Schwartz and Wolf observe, there are many missing and ambiguous pieces of information surrounding family history as a result of being uprooted and exiled and as a result of choices individual members made. "Identity transforms as the choices we make to construct a viable identity continually change"<sup>5</sup>

When I was a little girl, my father would tell me stories before I went to sleep. I remember vividly the wonderful feeling, warm and snug in bed, his soft voice and the images I conjured up in my mind's eye. Some of the stories were about his childhood in Germany. Others were stories passed down through the generations usually with a moral ending. My mother's past, on the other hand, unravelled through what I saw as a child and understood later as an adult. Mostly she was silent but sometimes her Sunday morning tears recalled pain and loss of family. History revolved around precious snapshots, a scarf or brooch and anecdotes about the war years in England, stories told in quiet moments or while cooking in the kitchen.

I remember being forced by my mother to watch a documentary on TV about the Holocaust. I was twelve at the time. There was no discussion beforehand. She said "sit down and watch what I went through during the war" then marched into the kitchen to clean up. This abrupt and disturbing introduction to my mother's

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<sup>5</sup> Singer, Yvonne, "Forgetting & Remembering: Fragments of History", Silverstein Schwartz, Suzanne & Wolf, Margie, From Memory to Transformation Jewish Woman's Voices, Second Story Press, Toronto, 1998, p115.

past was a typical example of her inability to express her emotions and her pain in a manner that we could understand. In tears of disbelief, I switched off the television. This incensed my mother and an argument arose. With the raised voices my father emerged from his study and mediated a solution. He could sense my horror and confusion and explained to her that maybe I was too young to understand. My brother, two years older, coped better than I did. The subject was dropped. Then around the age of fourteen or fifteen I became inquisitive, having studied world history at school I started devouring books about the Holocaust. My parent's reaction at the time I found odd. My mother was reluctant to speak "I don't remember much", she would say. "It's so long ago" and I know now this was the way she protected herself for all these years.

My parents' memories of before and after the war were laid out before me, complete and pulsating with life, but between those years the tragedy and loss were rarely spoken of, they were disjointed, condensed accounts, shreds that veered away from distressing reality. I never stopped asking them about their experiences, trying to choose the right moment or explaining that I was mature enough to understand and cope. Sometimes their answers satisfied my curiosity and other times the gaps were answered years later when I visited relatives overseas. The silence and mystery surrounding this part of their lives made me feel cut off from some strong element of who I was. I needed to know from where I came before I could figure out where I belonged.

These fragments of re-membered parts reconstruct a history for me. What I have discovered by sifting through the oral histories, letters and mementoes, yields up a kind of truth. Who knows how accurate events are, each person's interpretation is different as seen from their perspective. What was an important incident for one person is different for another. With older family members senility steps in and distorts recollection. Sometimes I've had to read between the lines, when their sense of loss created protective barriers of silence.

But ultimately I'm not sure that the truth is the point, this journey through time reveals the multi-layered nature of our experiences. Like my parents, I, too have been adapting or rejecting, appreciating and rationalising various aspects of my religion, culture and lifestyle to feel comfortable today.





Stephanie & Herman Klein



Erna (my mother) and her sisters  
Edith and Herta



Herman Klein as a prisoner  
of war during WW1



Home in Olomouc, Moravia



My mother, Erna Klein was born in the Austro- Hungarian Empire on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1915, the second daughter of Stephanie Buchwalder and Herman Klein. Her sisters were called Edith and Herta. Svinov, where they lived, was a suburb of Moravska, Ostrava which is now in The Czech Republic. It was a region of coalmines and iron works: an industrial area. My grandfather was on the local council and an active sportsman. He owned a tinning factory, which was located behind the building where they lived in a two- bedroom apartment; my great grandfather lived on the floor above. They led a fairly secular/traditional Jewish life.

"I remember my mother doing a lot of work for our small community, there were only about fifteen Jewish families. I used to love the Jewish holidays because my father would invite Jewish soldiers from the garrison near us and strangers to celebrate with us", said my mother.

Mum went to a private Jewish primary school and then to a private German high school where she graduated at seventeen. Quite the rebel in the family, she found the authoritative manner of her father very restrictive. She attended a Commercial college to learn secretarial and bookkeeping skills but this she found too constricting. Whilst on holidays with relatives Mum was impressed by her father's cousin, who was earning a good living as a corsetiere. At 19 years of age, this was the perfect opportunity to leave home. She moved to Vienna with a cousin of her aunt and enrolled with the same corsetiere specialist to learn her trade. Six months later she moved to Olomouc, Moravia and worked from home to establish her own salon called "Kleinova". My aunts Herta and Edith were happily married by this time, living in the same town. But the Nazi party was becoming a powerful force in the area.

My mother said, "I remember, the day my parents arrived abruptly at my apartment, suitcase in hand. The Germans had invaded Sudetenland. Friends my father had coached on the soccer team and with whom I had grown up were aware of the imminent danger, offered to drive them to my place. We were all in shock. 'How could this be happening, I fought in the war, I am a good citizen', my father kept saying."

Mum's chance to leave Europe came unexpectedly via her friend's brother who worked as a political journalist for the *Manchester Guardian* in England. This permit stipulated the person had to be either a midwife, nurse or a domestic. Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1939. Within a few weeks, with passport in hand and an overnight suitcase, she travelled by train to England arriving on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1939. "I was very scared but the officials looked at my passport, they only glanced at the permit and asked no questions."



Ernest Martin Haurwitz (my grand father)  
as an officer in the German army



Ludwig, Martin and Paul on holidays



Four generations of woman:  
Ulricha Katz, Sara Litten, Bertha  
Haurwitz, my grandmother with my  
Aunt Gerda Haurwitz



My father, Ernest Martin on  
his first day at school

When my father started at the gymnasium (high school) in 1928, there was already a considerable amount of political tension. In his memoirs he writes:

"In those days, first year high school started with Latin, third year with English and fourth year French. It must have been around 1932 when during an English dictation test I gained eighty five percent while the rest of the class was around fifty percent and even under. The Nazi teacher was absolutely livid, his scathing comment to the class was "well amongst the blind the one eyed must be king". I left school in 1935 to start an apprenticeship with a Jewish electrical engineer in what was considered far away Reutlingen, an electrical town near Stuttgart".

My father's sister Aunt Gerda married a general practitioner /gynaecologist who had lived in the Philippines since 1923. She moved there in early 1936 and his brother, Heinz, emigrated there in 1937. My father was ready to leave but grandmother insisted he finish his training. Since by then Jews were barred from entering any institution of higher learning, he studied at a private engineering academy in Berlin.

My father lodged with a Jewish lawyer. On the night of November 8, 1938 the lawyer was tipped off by one of his colleagues that something was about to happen. Dad and a fellow lodger Franz Ucko were advised at 4.30pm to "dress warmly, take food, and go to the suburbs. Make yourselves as scarce and inconspicuous as possible, and don't come back till 10am tomorrow." By so doing, he evaded being rounded up on the infamous *Kristallnacht*. All his uncles were taken into "protective custody" and transported to either Buchenwald or Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Release was only possible with a valid passport to emigrate.

He wrote in his memoirs:" That day was the end of my schooling and a whole change of life. I worked full time to get visas from my brother-in-law for my grandmother, mother, uncle and myself."

After much effort, on March 29th 1939 they left on a German ship bound from Genoa, Italy and arrived in Manila on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1939. "We fled to what we thought was far away from the war to the Philippines." Most of his uncles, aunts, and some of his cousins and their families were less fortunate, they died in the camps.



Mum in national costume – photo taken  
in England as a publicity shot



Mum in WAAF uniform



Erna Klein anglicised her name to Nina Kent. She said, "The way the English pronounced my name sounded so harsh and often incorrect so I changed my name." At first, she worked as a domestic, learning her English from the children she looked after and reading them bedtime stories. Later she worked as a machinist in a clothing factory.

There was a Czech club in London which became a magnet for refugees and through the club mum heard news of Czech pilots from her hometown who had flown straight to England on the outbreak of war. The girls bonded with them, and whenever they were in London they would get together.

Mum's English improved, and she enlisted as a truck driver in the W.A.A. F. Of small stature, she had trouble reaching the pedals on the big lorries. It was hard work, driving in convoys mostly at night but she was determined to break the monotony of her work in the factory. When her knowledge of Polish, German and Czech became known to an Administrative Officer in the W.A.A.F., she was promoted to Sergeant in air intelligence where her skills could be better utilised. The "Y SERVICE" in West Kingsdown, Kent, became her new home for four years. My mother's role was to re-direct radar messages to enemy planes.

At the end of the W.W. 2, armed with her British passport, mum returned to Czechoslovakia to find her family. One of her Czech friends flew her back home in a bomber. What was to be a short trip turned into a month-long search for her family and friends. She knew her mother had died on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1942 but to be told her sisters and their families were interned in Theresienstadt and that there was no record of her father was devastating news. Most had perished in the Holocaust. The only relative left alive was Uncle Eric and his new family, whom she brought to Australia many years later. The grief she felt must have been overwhelming, to this day causing her to internalise emotions.

Of this return to Czechoslovakia, she said: "I kept hoping to meet old friends, to see familiar places and faces. I'd turn a corner and know exactly what would be there. I felt so empty. In Pardubice, a woman came up to me and said 'You are Miss Edith's sister. She gave me a suitcase to look after. I'm sorry, we used the towels because of the shortage, please come to my home and collect her belongings.' I didn't care about the linen but the photographs I treasure to this day."

My mother travelled to the States to connect with my grandfather's sisters who had both left in the early 1900s. She wanted to identify with family members again, people who were close, who understood and had shared a common past. First she visited a cousin in New York, but she soon realised his impoverished circumstances, so she travelled west to Youngtown, Ohio to visit her other cousins. Having seen the menial jobs they were employed in, Mum felt she could do better. The Australian and New Zealand colleagues she had met in England seemed down to earth, hard working people. They were genuine and direct in their manner and this appealed to my mother, who decided to go as far from

Europe as possible to start a new life in Australia. Mum arrived in Sydney on the ship "Marine Phoenix", in November 1947.

Alone, she quickly found a job as a corsetiere. Gregarious by nature, she soon developed a network of friends who were mostly European- Czech.



Dad embraced the Filipino culture with excitement and a newfound sense of freedom. He learned Tagalog, the local language, and was employed on the Stock Exchange as a provider of statistics and proof reader. The exchange folded as war broke out in Europe and he secured a job with the Manila Daily Bulletin the only American newspaper. He became involved with the logistics of newspaper supplies, insurance claims and assisting with the supervision of printing equipment.

Manila was bombed on December 26<sup>th</sup> 1941. My cousin Ed (aunt Gerda's youngest son) described the nightmare to me. "The noise of the bombs was deafening and the houses so flimsy I huddled with our housemaid and the pigs underneath the house waiting for the planes to go away". He couldn't forget his embarrassment as a young child, wetting his pants in fright, as the bombs fell and he ran out of the house and into the jungle.

Realising that the Japanese invasion was imminent and the battles yet to come dangerous, the family moved deep into the mountains for nine months. They ate the local food- bananas, yams and rice. After beseeching dad many times he finally told me the story of how he got a scar on his leg. While carrying his grandmother over a mountain, a Japanese plane spotted them and opened fire. Part of a bomb exploded nearby and lodged in his leg. "But we were lucky no one got killed" he insisted.

They moved further into the jungle living in a cave for part of this time and traded their skills with the villagers. As the tide of battle turned, they were able to leave the highlands and flee to the invading American forces. In 1946, he resumed work at the newspaper. He wrote "But the battle cry after the war was 'the Philippines for the Filipinos'. In that climate, I gratefully accepted an Australian permit for my mother and myself. We arrived by boat, June 1947. After eight years in the tropics Sydney was freezing. I remember buying long johns and a navy blue great coat".





Mania my grandmother Bertha Haurwitz, Cousin Frank, my great grandmother Sara Litten, Cousin Ed and my Aunt Gerda Eulau



The Eulau Family standing where their house had been, Manila 1941

First impressions capture a moment and embed in one's memory forever. Dad would tell me this story often.

"The first week after we arrived by ship I remember going into the city by myself. The sounds, smells and atmosphere were quite different to Manila. There was a young boy on the corner yelling at the top of his voice "*Paper paper, Sydney mournin Herald!*". Why was he yelling and what was he saying? I thought I had a pretty good grasp of the English language but it wasn't until I noticed the paper he was holding and read the large print that I realised he was selling the morning paper. That was my introduction to strine."

His new life began in Sydney, with a succession of jobs. In 1949 he met my mother at a friend's home. They had similar pasts: loss of family – relocating to a strange country so different to European culture and the traditions of their past. After a nine-month courtship, they married at Temple Emmanuel Synagogue.

My parents' early marriage was a difficult time. My mother moved into a flat in Bondi with my father and his mother. It was my father's role to look after his mother. Now with two women seeking his attention and the responsibilities of supporting the family, the tension in the small space became strained.

Dad's childhood was spent in a middle/upper class environment where learning was highly prized. His mother was a well-informed and articulate woman with a broad knowledge of world events. They were cosmopolitan, coming from a large town of 70,000 people. By contrast, my mother's family came from a rural environment and it wasn't until my mother lived in Vienna that she became aware of a cultural life. Her education was elementary but she was streetwise, a survivor. It was clear that apart from my father, the two women had little in common.

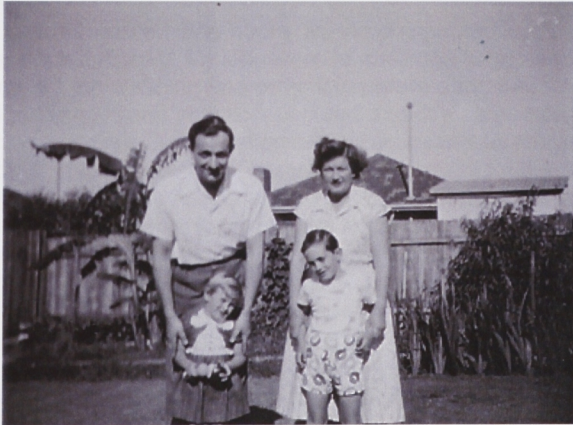
The emigration itself was difficult emotionally, culturally and intellectually. Yet, how could this be compared with the pain my parents had been through? They recognised their luck and the freedom of their new country. They were determined to build a new life for themselves, to re-create order and re-establish continuity.

When my brother, Stephen, was born in 1950 my grandmother left for The States to be with her daughter, Aunt Gerda and sons Frank and Ed. I was born eleven months later, named after my mother's older sister Edith. Our life as a nuclear family began in Strathfield with a banana tree in the backyard, a memento from the Philippines.

Another memory I cherish is of our home in Strathfield, industrial West Sydney. At the age of three, I would help my father in his veggie garden and he would talk to me, tell me things. He grew shallots, chives, green peppers and other plants and herbs not found at the greengrocers. There were tomato plants that towered over me. But his pride and joy was the banana tree right in the middle of the backyard. He thought of it as his link to the Philippines. Each year we waited for the bananas to grow bigger and ripen but alas the weather wasn't hot enough.



My parents on their wedding day



Horton Family, Strathfield, 1955

Another dramatic change for the family occurred in 1957 when we moved to Canberra. My brother and I both suffered from asthma and I was a sickly child with eczema, the doctors said clean air and fresh food would make a difference. At that time Canberra was going through a building boom. These factors created a perfect opportunity for my parents to re-establish themselves in private enterprise. With a building materials distributorship in hand, he set up a store in Fyshwick. Mum helped out by being the truck driver and salesperson for the business.

When I was six or seven there was a knitting craze at school. I remember asking mum to teach me how to knit. After a full day of work and cooking the evening meal, out came the four knitting needles and the wool. "What do you want to knit, gloves, socks, a beanie?" I suggested a scarf. "Well that's easy, choose your colours and I'll start you off." The next day I turned up at school but everyone was knitting twice as fast as me and to make matters worse in a different way. I thought their method looked so much easier and promptly went home and told my mother that she knitted the wrong way. "But this is the European way, Didi. This is the way my mother taught me and the way she was taught by her mother". I was beside myself in tears and frustrated, how would my peers accept me if I couldn't knit properly? My mother knew the pain of assimilation and before school she drove me to dad's workplace where his secretary taught me the rudiments of "English knitting".

As both my parents worked long hours, we were expected to do jobs around the home for our pocket money. My jobs were to make the lunches for my brother and me, hang out the washing and bring it in before dark, clean the dishes and pots after dinner and "keep your rooms clean and tidy", a constant phrase of my mother. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon when mum was relaxed she would teach me how to make her special poppyseed or chestnut cake. It was on these occasions that stories from her past were told. This ritual was rare; a shared time of intimacy, but when it came to folding the egg whites into the mixture this was serious business. Everyone was warned, "stay out of the kitchen, there is a cake in the oven and I don't want it to sink". Chicken soup and matzo balls were another speciality of hers. She would tell me what to do, how to cut the carrots all the same thin size, how to roll the matzah balls and why she put brown onions in the chicken soup. Alas she no longer cooks but her food was always fresh and delicious. Now I use her cake recipes and they are still as good as ever. My children eat grandma's meatballs and the culture of passing on a tradition goes through to the next generation.



Within a decade my father had built a magnificent house for us to live in. My brother and I were sent to private schools. My mother initiated her own corsetiere business and was establishing herself with the social set in Canberra. The house was the focal point of our lives where all the Jewish festivals and celebrations occurred. Slowly paintings, rugs and fine furnishings were acquired. The need to have possessions they cherished around them became important and we as children were taught the beauty and significance of these objects. Their obsession with these objects had nothing to do with materialism in its ordinary meaning. Their identity has been rooted in the things they have chosen accumulated, inherited, and were forced to leave. The fight to regain those things was correspondingly intense; as if this accumulation could redeem the past, salvage what they had lost and create a secure environment. Any disorder meant and still means, to my mother, genuine distress, a threat to the way my mother struggles to live her life.

The fear of impermanence, the readiness to flee, of loved ones being taken away took the form of deep distrust and conservatism. My parent's need for order and control at times overpowered the spontaneity and little pleasures of life. Everything was so serious. This feeling of insecurity has never shifted and for my mother it only grows stronger as she gets older and loses her independence and memory.

Dad had come from a strict religious background and in Germany wore the typical signs of a Jew. After the war and in their desire to sink roots in Australia my parents' lifestyle changed dramatically. Mum's religious affiliations had waned after the war and she asked "How could G-d let this happen". How could a true G-d let so many of his "chosen people" suffer and die? She experiences deep guilt at having survived when her family had perished. Her identity as a Jew was culturally rather than religiously based. Her methods were grounded in Jewish traditions, where ritual and custom were her connection to Judaism. Her role as a mother was as nurturer and provider. Emotional support for us was seriously lacking. She was unable to empathise and relate to my problems due to the trauma she had experienced. I felt a burden of responsibility to my mother for her loss of family and her happiness, to be their caretaker when they grew old.

There wasn't a support network my parents would call on. There was no psychological counselling they could afford let alone have the time to deal with their losses. Like many new immigrants they worked hard to give their children opportunities they dreamed of, for themselves and their lost youth.



Passover dinner, Canberra, 1991



Horton Family 1993

Being the only Jews, we knew we were different from the other kids at school. The trials of the Holocaust were never talked about but my parents' anxieties and tensions were subconsciously transferred to us. I knew in a confused way that my parents had suffered during the War, and that there was some extra intensity and obsession in our relationships with each other that had to do with the past. "Don't cry. It's not the end of the world. Be happy" These were catch phrases I heard all my life and led me to the belief that I didn't have a right to feel sadness, regret or loss. I was only acceptable when I was happy, successful, achieving. Any negative feelings were too close to my family's pain and triggered too much personal anguish ever to be acknowledged.

When we first arrived the Canberra Jewish Community consisted of approximately 10 families, who were very warm and supportive. At various times my parents held positions of office and contributed in whichever way possible. Our formal Jewish education was scant, there was no Rabbi or Jewish school, only lay volunteers to teach us. My father, a workaholic by this stage, always made time to explain the significance of what it means to be Jewish and the values involved. He would take me to synagogue and guide me with his knowledge. An orthodox synagogue divides the sexes and I resented sitting with the women listening to gossip.

The cultural aspect of making matzo balls and fish aspic I found tedious. I wanted to pray like my father. My personal search started like most adolescents of the 60s. Judaism seemed too vast to fathom and Meditation, Buddhism and Eastern Philosophies were more comprehensible.

In 1978, my father helped establish the Liberal Synagogue in Canberra. He believed all Jews, converts included, should be entitled to pray, to seek inspiration, not authority, in Jewish tradition. His focus was for harmony within the community.

Three stores and three decades later my father retired and at last could spend more time with his beloved grandchildren. He died in 1996 at the age of 78 of a brain tumor and our loss was profound. He was the pivotal person in our nuclear family. The mediator, the silent rock, the quiet achiever with so much wisdom to share not only to his family but to everyone around him.

My mother felt isolated from her family and in 1998 moved to Melbourne. She lives close-by, we speak each day and we share Sabbath dinner together as a family.

Jewish celebrations and rituals provide an enduring link between my parents' beginning in Europe, their journey and my own relationships with my Jewishness in the present.



Dad outside his shop in Woden



Mum with her medals the "Order of St. John"  
for services to the community



## Conclusion

Yvonne Singer, an environmental artist, wrote, "Identity transforms as the choices we make to construct an identity continually change." There are many missing and ambiguous pieces of information surrounding my family history, as a result of their dislocation and exile. In the absence of this information, the construction of a satisfactory Jewish identity for me has meant a constant negotiation with change, and a self-conscious process of construction.

*"All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare"*<sup>6</sup> as Arthur Danto observes.

What does it mean to be Jewish? For my parents' generation living in Europe at the time of the Second World War, identity as a Jew was imposed from outside. Jewishness was understood as a racial characteristic not as a religious or cultural choice.

Although my parent's emigration and the trauma of their experience in Nazi Europe grew out of an enforced confrontation with their Jewishness, emigration was also a choice. This was to form their personal identity. Through tracing their journey, I have found the resources to make my own choices, to become a liberal Jew. My brother has taken another very different path by choosing an ultra conservative, orthodox approach, embracing the Lubavitch Movement.

How Jewish is Jewish? Jewish identity and sense of community in Australia is complex and can take many forms. For example, there are religious as well as cultural, linguistic, or political dimensions, which have attracted Jews from different places and in different circumstances. The Yiddish culture, which flourished in Eastern Europe until the Nazi Holocaust, is one such manifestation of socio-cultural identity. A political group like the Jewish Bund, socialist and secular but non-Zionist grew out of pre-war Poland and still exists today. Other aspects of the Jewish experience, which impacted on previous emigrants, were their lack of a homeland and anti-Semitism.

The degree to which I have chosen to practice my Jewishness has been something I have found for myself. My level of Jewishness suits me. It has taken many years and study to reach this point of acceptance. This helps me structure my life, and as an artist my source material. It gives me set boundaries and a code of behaviour to live within. This form of conduct I have consciously chosen. It gives me a path between ritual and spiritual practice, as well as integrating other philosophies and it gives me beliefs. For example, responses to feminism, social change and global technology.

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<sup>6</sup> Danto, Arthur C. Embodied Meanings -Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations, Farrar Straus Giroux, NY, 1994, p 336

The silence my parents kept about their experiences was a way of coping. I needed to write about my past, their journey, to make sense of my future. Yet the way silence articulated unspoken suffering and the trans-generational aftermath of trauma has taken considerable understanding and compassion, essential to my journey and sense of identity.

Singer has written "there is no question that my gender, social class, cultural, religious, historical background have contributed to my awareness as a person. However, my relationship to these factors is constantly shifting; some aspects are out of my control: some I chose to avoid others to affirm".<sup>7</sup>

Living is the hard part, heaven is easy.

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<sup>7</sup> Singer, Yvonne, "Forgetting & Remembering: Fragments of History", Silverstein Schwartz, S & Wolf Margie(ed), *From Memory to Transformation- Jewish Woman's Voices*, Second Story Press, Toronto, 1998, p120.

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## Contemporary Memorials: their role in Modern Society

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Every country has its own traditional forms of memorials. For example, national monuments are erected by their governments to honour their heroes and their war-discharged people. In Poland, monuments are usually erected in honour of fallen soldiers. In Germany, monuments are erected to honour fallen soldiers. In the United States, monuments are erected to honour fallen soldiers. In the United Kingdom, monuments are erected to honour fallen soldiers.

This essay discusses the ways in which different forms of memorials can be erected to honour fallen soldiers. It examines the role of memorials in modern society and the ways in which they can be used to honour fallen soldiers. It also examines the ways in which memorials can be used to honour fallen soldiers in different countries. It examines the ways in which memorials can be used to honour fallen soldiers in different countries. It examines the ways in which memorials can be used to honour fallen soldiers in different countries.

<sup>1</sup> Hanyang, Andrea, "Memorial and Modernity: A Study of the Role of Memorials in Modern Society," *The Art of Memorialization*, 2010, <http://www.artofmemorialization.com/>.

## Contemporary Memorials: their role in Modern Society

“Remembrance as a vital human activity shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present. As individuals and societies, we need the past to construct and to anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future. As readers of Freud and Nietzsche, however, we know how slippery and unreliable personal memory can be, always affected by forgetting and denial, repression and trauma, and, more often than not, serving to rationalize and to maintain power.

A society's memory is negotiated in our beliefs and values, rituals and institutions, and in the case of modern societies in particular; it is shaped by such public sites of memory as the museum, the memorial, and the monument. Yet the promise of permanence a monument in stone will suggest is always built on quicksand.”<sup>1</sup>

Memory is never shaped in a vacuum. Society's memory changes when the political and social framework changes. Society's memory is shaped and altered by political change, social change, the passage of time and people's will to remember. Remembrance of the Holocaust is one of the most complex tasks of public memory which we have witnessed in modern times, because, if social memory shifts and changes, societies also have a capacity to forget the things which it is inconvenient to remember.

Every country has its own institutional forms of remembrance. In Germany, for example, memorials recall Jews by their absence, non-Jewish German victims by their political resistance or difference, for example gays, Romas and Sinti's or disadvantaged people. In Poland, memorials and museums were established in former death camps like Auschwitz. Israel commemorates martyrs and heroes equally with the birth of the State. For example Yad Vashem is situated on the Hill of Remembrance in Jerusalem, whereas in America, Holocaust memory is shaped by distinctly American ideals, such as liberty, pluralism and immigration: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

This essay discusses the way in which changes in public memory of the Holocaust can be traced in its memorials. I will compare the Holocaust's earliest memorials with the work of three contemporary artists who have been invited to make memorials to the Holocaust in the context of recent political changes in Europe, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany and the debate over the way in which Germany's responsibility for the events of the Holocaust should be remembered. The essay argues that earlier monuments concerned themselves with the experience of the Holocaust itself and in a sense can be seen to bear witness to its events. Contemporary monuments, on the other hand, tend to explore issues of loss and absence.

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<sup>1</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age” in Young, James (ed.) The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History, Prestel, New York, 1995, p 9.





Auschwitz - Birkenau



Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument

The very first monuments to the Holocaust were the places of destruction themselves: in July 1944, the Soviets turned Majdanek concentration camp into the first memorial and museum of its kind. In 1947 the Polish parliament declared that the ruins at Auschwitz-Birkenau would be "forever preserved as a memorial to the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples," recalling that the Germans used 250 Jews from Oswiecim to build the camp. Though both camps have changed in the last fifty years, they seem to have been preserved almost as the Russians found them. Guard towers, barbed wire, barracks, and crematoria are mythologized elsewhere, yet here they stand relatively, intact. This site suggests fragments of past events. The collections of eyeglasses, hair, toothbrushes, represent the absence of those who once animated them. Only recently was an inscription provided at Auschwitz-Birkenau engraved in stone, which reads, "4 million people suffered and died here". A sign of a government's acknowledgement of what had happened. They are the sites of the Holocaust's events: visitors have to bear witness to them by making a pilgrimage to the places where they happened.

Early memorials reflected a need to have their experiences represented in identifiable ways. The victims or the opponents of the Nazis didn't have to articulate the pain of their experiences; it was there in the actual death camps and sites of mass murder.

Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument was the first memorial after the war to mark both the heroism of Jewish resistance to the Nazis and the complete annihilation of the Jews in Warsaw. Unveiled on 19th April 1948 (the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), it portrays human struggle and suffering in typical larger than life figures of the Stalinist era. At the time of the unveiling there were mixed reactions to the work. Scorned by curators as kitsch figuration, various political figures described it as proletarian drivel. For survivors, like Rapoport "the reality of their experiences demands as literal and figurative a memorial expression as possible. ' We weren't tortured and our families weren't murdered in the abstract,' survivors complain. Or in the words of Nathan Rapoport... 'Could I have made a rock with a hole in it and said "Voila! The heroism of the Jews?"<sup>2</sup>

With the state's consent, it is now a gathering place for Polish war veterans as for Jews; to the former Polish government's dismay, the square where the monument stands was also a gathering place for Solidarity and other dissident groups, who turned it into a place for protests. Influential people have visited the monument from all around the world, prime ministers, touring presidents and even the pope. Everyone memorializes something different here, of course; each creates different meaning in the monument. Its individual figures are echoed in dozens of other monuments to this period throughout Europe and Israel, its images exported as distinctly Jewish martyrs and heroic icons. The monument has been recast and nationalized in

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<sup>2</sup> Young, James, "Memory and Counter-Memory: Towards a Social Aesthetic of Holocaust Memorials" in Bohn-Duchen, Monica (ed.), *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*, Lund Humphries, London, 1995, p 90.

Israel, it is pictured on both Polish and Israeli postcards and stamps and with time the monument has found its' place in history.

In Australia, Anzac Day is a national holiday when groups of people met to remember part of our Australian history. These memorials sites are where people gather to create a common past for themselves, tell their shared stories and share with their neighbours and the community at large. For the younger generations or for people who weren't there the ritual of remembering together becomes the shared experience, part of a shared memory, itself to be remembered.

With this in mind, a new generation of artists and monument makers in Europe are probing the limits of both their artistic media and the very notion of a memorial. How does a country like Germany build a new and just state on the bedrock memory of its terrible crimes? How does a nation such as Austria, remember events it would rather forget?

One of the most fascinating responses to Germany's memorials is the rise of its 'counter-monuments'. For these artists are aware that in the past Nazi propaganda exploited monumental forms and there is a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the Nazis' through memory.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt, herself a refugee from Nazi Germany, called the Holocaust "the burden of our century"<sup>3</sup>. Arendt wrote of the challenge of coming to an understanding of the Holocaust, the need to face the reality without closing ourselves off to the sorrow that comes with knowledge.

With the passage of time circumstances change, those who lived through the Holocaust will soon no longer be with us. Their lived experiences transfer into history as the next generation bears witness in a different manner, place and time. It is important that we all remember these events, not just Jews and survivors, Germans and Austrians, but people everywhere in the hope that these atrocities will never be repeated.

There are many processes involved in the construction of a monument. From the complicated historical, political and aesthetic aspects to the material, spatial, ideological angles which converge in one memorial site. I have chosen to study the site specific memorial work of three contemporary artists to investigate the ways in which physical spaces in Europe constantly articulate absence and the passing of time and history as well as the way memory and memorializing can be seen to be continuous activities, the responsibilities for which lie with the community not the monument itself. These artists are Rachel Whiteread and her commission, for the Judenplatz in Vienna. Shimon Attie's, "Acts of Remembrance" in the Central Railway Station of Dresden and Jochen Gerz and Ester Shalev - "Monument Against Fascism, War, and Violence-and for Peace and Human Rights " in Harburg-Hamburg.

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<sup>3</sup> Moynagh, Patricia, Hypatia, Vol 12, Fall, 1997, p 27.

Coming of age after, but indelibly shaped by the Holocaust, this generation (fifty years after the fact) are no longer willing, or able, to recall the Holocaust separately from the ways it has been passed down. 'What happens to the memory of history when it ceases to be testimony?' asks Alice Yeager Kaplan.' "It becomes memory of the witness's memory, a vicarious past." <sup>4</sup>

To my mind, we also need to consider to what end these monuments move us, how we perceive them in the light of history, and the way they affect our understanding and actions in our lives. This is to suggest that we cannot separate the monument from its public life, the social function of such art and its aesthetic performance. As Marianne Doezema has suggested, there is much more to the monument's performance than its style, or school of design. 'The public monument,' she writes, 'has a responsibility apart from its qualities as a work of art.... It is not only the private expression of an individual artist; it is also a work of art created for the public, and therefore can and should be evaluated in terms of its capacity to generate human reactions.'<sup>5</sup>

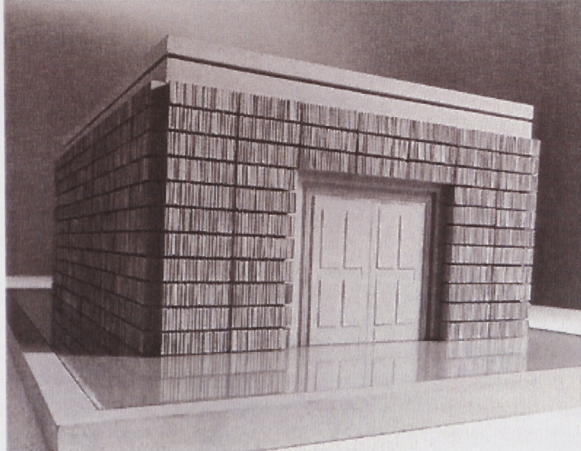
James Young's suggests "public memory is constructed, the understanding of events depends on memory's construction, and that there are worldly consequences in the kinds of historical understanding generated by monuments."<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the need to understand events both publicly and privately has historical implications and significance when expressed in these monuments and the way this is transferred to future generations.

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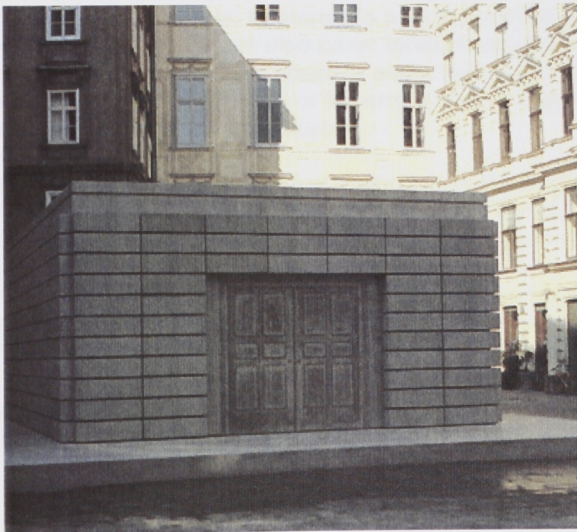
<sup>4</sup> Young, James, At Memory's Edge, Yale University Press, 2000, p1

<sup>5</sup> Doezema, Marianne, 'The Public Monument in Tradition and Transition', in The Public Monument and Its Audience, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1997, p.9.

<sup>6</sup> Young, James, At Memory's Edge, p101



Scale model of the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna 1997



Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna 2000

There are many layers of meaning when visiting memorial sites. It is not just their aesthetic presence that is represented but they also provide the memory of a past event. How we relate to it now and the impact and effect it will have for us in this given moment is important. For if the viewer leaves unchanged by the recollective act it could be said we haven't remembered at all. It is important when encountering these memorials that we don't passively view the object from one perspective (aesthetically) but consider the meanings and processes behind its construction.

As the last generation of survivors begins to pass on, many seem almost desperate to leave behind a place, an object, around which Holocaust memory might live on. With the decrease in Jewish learning and traditional education amongst assimilated generations the vicarious memory of past catastrophe serves increasingly as a center for Jewish identity and knowledge.

In 1996 the Jewish Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal initiated a competition for a memorial in Vienna's Judenplatz to recall Austria's missing Jews. The English sculptor Rachel Whiteread's winning proposal for Vienna's official Holocaust memorial consisted of a positive cast of the space around books in an anonymous library, approximately 33 feet by 23 feet, and 13 feet high, resembling a solid white cube. On the front wall facing onto the square is a double-wing door, cast inside out and inaccessible. The interior turned inside out extends her sculptural preference for solidifying the space over, under, and around everyday objects. Whiteread's work since 1988 has focussed on the concept that materiality can also be an index of absence: whether it is the ghostly apparition of the filled-in space of a now demolished row house in London, as in her project, "House" or the empty spaces between the book leaves and the wall in a full-sized library.

Whiteread's memorial echoes the first memorials to the Holocaust which, as James Young observes, took the form of narratives: "The Yizker Bikher (memorial books) recalled both the lives and the destruction of European Jewish communities according to the most ancient of Jewish memorial media: the book."<sup>7</sup> As the preface to one of these books suggests, "Whenever we pick up the book we will feel we are standing next to [the victims'] grave, because even that the murderers denied them."<sup>8</sup> In response to what has been called "the missing gravestone syndrome," the first sites of memory created by survivors were interior spaces, in their hearts, imagined gravesites.

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<sup>7</sup> Young, James, *Memory and Counter-Memory*, p 80

<sup>8</sup> From "Fortwort," in *Sefer Yizkor le- Kdoshei ir (Przedecz) Pshytask Khurbatnot ha'shoah*, p 130, as quoted in Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, (eds.), *From a Ruined Garden*: the memorial book of Polish Jewry, New York, Stocken Books, 1983, p 11.

Like other artists of her generation, Rachel Whiteread is concerned less with the Holocaust's images of destruction and more with the terrible void this destruction left behind. In its concepts based on absence and of books, the work found an enthusiastic reception among a jury looking for a design that "would combine dignity with reserve and spark an aesthetic dialogue with the past in a place that is replete with history." <sup>9</sup>

The proposal sparked much controversy. Like many such sites in Vienna, the Judenplatz was layered with the invisible memory of numerous Anti-Semitic persecutions, the most serious being the torching of the synagogue during a pogrom in 1421 in which hundreds of Jews died. Though Whiteread's design had left room at the site for a window into the archaeological excavation of this buried past, the shopkeepers on the Judenplatz preferred that these digs also represented the recent murder of Austrian Jews as well. An anti-Whiteread petition of two thousand names refers only to the potential for lost revenue and lost parking they feared this "giant colossus" would cause, they may also have feared the loss of their own Christian memory of this past, for the sole memorial to this medieval massacre was to be found in a Catholic mural and inscription on a baroque facade overlooking the site of the lost synagogue. Alongside an image of Christ being baptized in the River Jordan, an inscription in Latin reads: "The flame of hate arose in 1421, raged through the entire city, and punished the terrible crimes of the Hebrew dogs."

The revival of a distinctively Jewish narrative in the Judenplatz through Whiteread's monument showed the true feelings and racial prejudices of the local Viennese, for how does a nation remember events it would rather forget? Unlike Germany's near obsession with its Nazi past, Austria's connections with its wartime past has remained submerged, politely out of sight. Yet although the truth has never been denied that 50 percent of the Nazi S.S. was composed of Austrians or that Hitler himself was Austrian-born, these facts have never found a place in Austria's carefully constructed post-war history. In a city that seemed to have little national reason for remembering the murder of its Jews, the entire memorial project was soon engulfed by aesthetic and political controversy, and the vociferous arguments against the winning design brought the process to a halt. Whiteread resigned, believing her memorial would never be built but compromise was found later two years later in 1998. The City of Vienna announced that by moving the great cube three feet within the plaza itself, there would be room for both the excavations of the pogrom of 1421 and the new memorial to Vienna's more recently murdered Jews.

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<sup>9</sup> Judenplatz Wien 1996, p 94. Part of the proposal guidelines cited in Young, James, At Memory's Edge, p108.

Lost in the discussion were the words one of the jurors and a curator at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Robert Storrs, had used to describe what made Whiteread's work so appropriate in the first place. "Rather than a tomb or cenotaph," Storrs wrote,

Whiteread's work is the solid shape of an intangible absence, of a gap in a nation's identity, and a hollow at a city's heart. Using an aesthetic language that speaks simultaneously to tradition and to the future, Whiteread in this way respectfully symbolizes a world whose irrevocable disappearance can never be wholly grasped by those who did not experience it, but whose most lasting monuments are the books written by Austrian Jews before, during and in the aftermath of the catastrophe brought down on them.<sup>10</sup>

Although Whiteread's project was commemorated in 2000 the whole process of construction brought to the surface many unresolved issues regarding the way Austrians deal with the past and the real presence of Neo Nazi political powers. It is the hope of artists such as Whiteread that when the public at large engage in some way with these monuments they consciously question their beliefs and values of the past and the future in favour of a more humane world.



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<sup>10</sup> Young, James, At Memory's Edge, p112.





Almadtstrasse. Religious Book Salesman, 1930, 1992  
(Writing on the Wall) Berlin



Former Dresden Jewish Citizen (Trains Dresden), 1993

Shimon Attie is an artist–anthropologist who digs into archives and then reconfigures his non-artistic source material into complicated artwork. By doing this, he seeks to unearth a buried history for Jews. Attie works with images from the past in a process of investigating his own history from the personal, political and communal perspective. Obsessed with the Holocaust since boyhood he has spent five years in Europe between 1991-1996, the first year living in Berlin. Attie uses projections on surfaces to reanimate the memory of specific individuals and places that no longer exist. These site-specific installation pieces last for a short period and in the process is photographically documented.

When Attie moved to Germany, he found the city of Berlin haunted by the absence of its murdered and deported Jews. Like many Jewish tourists preoccupied by the Holocaust, he saw Jewish ghosts in many places in Europe. For Attie, these private acts of remembrance where he alone saw the faces and forms of now absent Jews in their former neighborhoods was not enough. He needed to depict them in the present, to externalize them and bring them into a larger picture of public memory. He hoped, once these images entered the inner worlds of the private individual who saw them, they would bear witness to his monument and they would no longer be necessary.

This project from 1991-1996 consisted of a series of simple recollective acts, attempts to repair a broken past. The sites Attie chose were as diverse as the Scheunenviertel in East Berlin to the central train station in Dresden; from the canals of Copenhagen to those of Amsterdam; from Cologne's annual art fair to Krakow's Kazimierz neighbourhood.

These *Acts of Remembrance* as he called them recast memory and linked their relationship to the site, past and present. Attie was working with sites, which were hidden from the West; for only recently since *the Wall* came down in 1990 had those sites in East Berlin become accessible to the rest of the world. In many cases, these past histories were lost or forgotten, destroyed or demolished. Attie's desire to retrieve this hidden past is therefore indirectly about the national, political and social changes shaped by reunification.

James Young has observed that

Like the Scheunenviertel in Berlin, haunted by its now absent Jews, the Dresden train station seemed haunted to Attie by its absence of any sign of the central role train stations played throughout Germany during the Holocaust. These were the sites of collections for deportations, the last places many German Jews ever saw of their homeland, the tracks constituting a literal, material line connecting Germany to the death camps. The image of cattle cars loaded with Jews on their way to (and from) death camps remains pervasive in the iconography of the Holocaust. This memory remains alive in the present when riding these trains in Germany today; many young Jewish travellers can't escape the sense of "having been there before". "The sense of travelling the same routes as the victims, watching the same landscape flit by, and hearing

the same clackety-clack on the same tracks induces an illusory identification with the victims unlike almost any other experience in Germany.<sup>11</sup>

With his 1993 series *Trains*, Attie researched the archives of Dresden's tiny Jewish community, through family albums to portray specific faces which were projected directly onto the trains, tracks and walls of the central station.

In this way Attie linked the photographic memory of the victims directly to their fate: to the exact sites of deportation, of emigration, of German Jewish leave-taking. For two weeks beginning on the ninth of November 1993 ([the anniversary of Kristallnacht), immense black and white slides of former Dresden citizens confronted travellers face to face. The familiar daily routine of post-war German commuters was disrupted by the visual imagery of other travellers at the same place in a different time and under different circumstances. "Now they, too, were forced to see and remember what the Jewish traveller cannot put out of his or her mind: that on this platform, on these tracks, the Jews whose faces I see began to die."<sup>12</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> Young, James, *At Memory's Edge*, p 74

<sup>12</sup> Young, James, *At Memory's Edge*, p 74

Jochen Gerz was one of six artists invited to propose a design in Hamburg for a "Monument Against Fascism, War, and Violence and for Peace and Human Rights". Visiting Israel in 1983 he met the Israeli sculptor and performance artist Esther Shalev who, gesturing out her window to Israel's own monument dotted landscape said, "What do we need with another monument? We have too many already, what we need is one that disappears."<sup>13</sup> Then and there she agreed to work with Gerz toward finding a form that challenged the monument's traditional illusions of permanence, its authoritarian inflexibility. The resulting collaboration between Gerz and Shalev would thus combine a traditional Jewish scepticism of material icons and a post-war German suspicion of monumental forms. With these conditions in mind, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev Gerz, now married, designed their counter-monument. "What we did not want," they declared, "was an enormous pedestal with something on it presuming to tell people what they ought to think."<sup>14</sup>

The site they chose was in the commercial centre of Harburg, a suburb of Hamburg located thirty minutes by subway across the river and populated with a mix of Turkish guest workers and blue-collar German families. Set in a pedestrian shopping mall, their counter-monument would rise amidst the everyday lives of this community who could like it or hate it, but they could not avoid it.

In 1986 the monument was unveiled. This 12-meter high, 1 meter square column was hollow and aluminium plated, with a thin exterior of soft, dark lead. A temporary inscription near its base was translated into the languages of the local inhabitants and reads in German, French, English, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish:

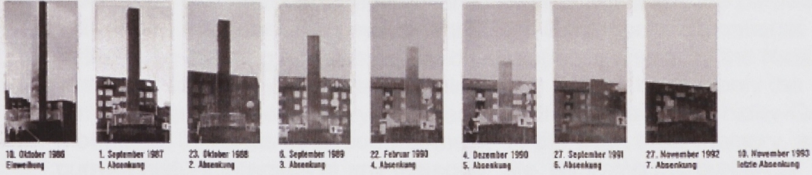
We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12-meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice.

A steel-pointed pen attached at each corner by a length of cable was provided for markings. As the 1.5meter sections were covered with memorial graffiti, the memorial was lowered into the ground, like a time capsule to be buried into a chamber as deep as the column was high. The more visitors participated with their names, the sooner the monument disappeared. After several lowerings over the next seven years, the monument itself vanished on 10 November 1993 with its last sinking. Nothing is left but the top surface of the column, now covered with a burial stone inscribed to "Harburg's Monument Against Fascism " In effect, the vanishing monument.

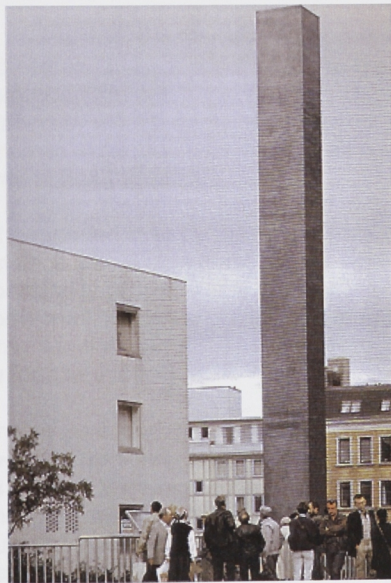
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<sup>13</sup> Young, James, *At Memory's Edge*, p128

<sup>14</sup> Young, James, *At Memory's Edge* p130 Young's interview's with the artists



Citizens add their names to the Harburg's disappearing monument, 1986



The Harburg Monument Against War and Fascism and for Peace at its unveiling, 1986

Gerz and Shalev's intention with the counter monument was to create a "performance piece" between artist, work and viewer. Their motive was to engage the public in this antifascist act and in the process to desanctify the memorial, demystify it, and become its equal. Like other performance artists of the day, Gerz made his process the artwork itself. Once the monument moves its viewers to memory it also becomes unnecessary and so may disappear. Or as Gerz suggests, 'We will one day reach the point where anti-Fascist memorials will no longer be necessary, when vigilance will be kept alive by the invisible pictures of remembrance.'<sup>15</sup>

How better to remember forever a vanished people than by the perpetually unfinished, ever-vanishing monument? Here Gerz mocks his national forbears by creating a memorial, which disappears, similar to the Nazi's intentions to destroy all traces of their victims leaving behind only the rememberer and the memory of a memorial. In this way, the Shalev-Gerz monument functions as a "counter-index" to the ways time, memory, and current history intersect at any memorial site, returning the burden of memory to visitors: now all that stands here are the memory-tourists, forced to rise and to remember for themselves.

In their original conception, the Gerzes had hoped for row upon row of neatly inscribed names, a visual echo similar to the war memorials of another age. Execution did not follow design, however, and even the artists were stunned by what they found after a couple of months: an illegible scribble of names scratched over names, all covered over in a scrawl. People had come at night to scrape over all the names, even to pry the lead plating off its base. Swastikas began to appear. How better to remember what happened than by the Nazis' own sign? After all, Gerz insists, "a swastika is also a signature" In fact, when city authorities warned of the possibility of vandalism, the Gerzes had replied, 'Why not give that phenomenon free rein and allow the monument to document the social temperament in that way?'<sup>16</sup> The Gerzes found that even resentment is a form of memory.

As a social mirror, it reminded the community of what happened then and, even worse, how they responded now to the memory of this past. To those members of the community who deplored the way in which this work was violated, the local newspaper answered succinctly: "The filth brings us closer to the truth than would any list of well-meaning signatures. The inscriptions, a conglomerate of approval, hatred, anger and stupidity, are like a fingerprint of our city applied to the column."<sup>17</sup> The counter monument accomplished what all monuments must: it reflected back to the people and thus codified their own memorial projections and preoccupations.

It appears to me, the memorial has returned the burden of memory to those who come looking for it as well as changed the way a generation of

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<sup>15</sup> Young, James, *At Memory's Edge* p 134

<sup>16</sup> Young, James, *At Memory's Edge* p130

<sup>17</sup> Gibson, Michael. "Hamburg: Sinking Feelings." *Art News*, Summer, 1987, p105 – 106.

artists and the public regard the very idea of the monument. This became apparent not only in the somewhat monumental piles of articles written about the memorial but in the dozens of "counter memorial" projects that became the standard for subsequent Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany.



Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-gerv, overview  
of the Harburg's disappearing monument, 1986-1993

## Conclusion

“What matters (about the Holocaust) is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement.”<sup>18</sup> The Holocaust cannot be allowed to numb us to evil, but sharpen our insights, sensitise us to the importance of human dignity and human rights everywhere.

As the Holocaust is about to pass out of lived experience and into history, how do second generation artists (i.e. those who haven't lived through it) deal with the challenge of memorializing the Holocaust in ways, which respond to the needs of this generation?

The work of Whiteread, Attie and the Gerzes work all reflect both the past and current lives of their communities. But they represent them as second-generation artists, once removed from the Holocaust experience. These memorials reflect the temper of the memory-artists' time, their place in aesthetic discourse, their media and materials.

Though each project is very different, all memorials share common threads, which call for a fragmented community to frame diverse values and ideals in common spaces through the connection of the collective memory. Attie and the Gerzes chose their sites deliberately to evoke reactions from the local community whereas Whitereads' site was designated for her. The place itself was loaded with past memories, negated and denied memories because of Austria's implication in the Holocaust.

Whiteread created an experience which forced Austrians to get in touch with a memory that had been buried. Individuals write books, from an inner private space but once written, they can become public and placed on a shelf in a library. Books are tangible proof of life and memory. Just as Europe was turned inside out so was the library. From the public perspective, access to memory in this situation is being denied which was akin to the absence of Jewish people.

In the case of Attie, individuals from the past are brought into the future, into the face of the unconscious public of Dresden commuters. Attie draws parallels between modes of transport to trigger memory and emotional connections. For trains in this day and age, represent people being transported from home to work or on holidays whereas during WW 2, trains represented a sinister vehicle which was the end of the line or life for their victims. Whether it is national myth, self-idealization or the silver screen that blurs the distinction between actual past and present memory, it is Attie's expressions and gestures to what was lost and how we now recall it that is important to consider.

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<sup>18</sup> Frankl, Viktor, E, Man's Search for Meaning, Washington Square Press, 1946 p 135



The Gerzes' work is the most abstract both in concept and physicality. They chose a prominent site in a politically and culturally diverse suburb of Hamburg. They devised a work with the intention of active participation by the public to stimulate discussion and public reaction, the issue of fascism and its place in Germany today. The column, like an obelisk of a past, to me represents the pillar of the community and the inscriptions on the column reflect back the burden of collective memory from the monuments to the community itself. The "Monument Against Fascism, War, and Violence and for Peace and Human Rights " disappeared into the ground leaving an empty plate to remember the site.

What has happened in the past cannot be changed or undone. But as Michael Berenbaum says "whoever closes his eyes to the past becomes blind to the present. Whoever does not wish to remember inhumanity becomes susceptible to the dangers of new infection."<sup>19</sup> This is what the three artists whose work I have discussed have done. They have forced us to confront and take responsibility for the legacies of the Holocaust. The absences which these works invoke gesture to the absences left by the Holocaust, but they are also blank spaces into which we are able to project our own identification with the past, which in turn passes the responsibility for remembering from the memorial back to the community.

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<sup>19</sup> Berenbaum, Michael, The World Must Know -the history of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, p 223.

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## **Addenda**

### Images

#### Page 3

Figure 1 Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Figure 2 Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument.

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Figure 3 Scale model of the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna, 1997.

Figure 4 in situ Scale model of the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna, 1997.

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Figure 5 Almadtstrasse, Religious Book Salesman, 1930,1992 (Writing on the Wall) Berlin.

Figure 6 Former Dresden Jewish Citizen (Trains Dresden), 1993.

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Figure 7 Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, overview of Harburg's disappearing monument, 1986-1993.

Figure 8 The Harburg Monument Against Fascism, War, and Violence and for Peace at its unveiling, 1986.

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Figure 9 Graffiti scrawl on Harburg's disappearing monument, 1989.