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Memorializing Absence: The Ambiguous Place of Holocaust Legacy in the Memorials, Countermemorials, and Museums of Berlin

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Memorializing Absence: The Ambiguous Place of Holocaust Legacy in the Memorials,
Counter Memorials, and Museums of Berlin

Senior Project Submitted
to the Division of Social Studies
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by

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Introduction

In the German city of Berlin, the layers of memory cast a pall, matching the generally gray, dismal sky. Even on the sunniest of summer days, it is impossible not to notice the bullet holes left in buildings by the fighting of World War II, the remaining pieces of the Berlin Wall on display, the proliferation of Holocaust memorials and museums. As the central seat of the German government and the capitol of the country, Berlin holds a rarefied place in German culture. More than perhaps any other people, Germans have made a point of unpacking the most difficult parts of their collective memory, doing their utmost to address the complicated legacy of their country's progression through the 20th century. For most people, "20th century Germany" immediately evokes the events of the Nazi era, specifically the Holocaust, a systematic and brutal genocide perpetrated by the country from 1933-1945. More than any other single legacy, the Holocaust has irrevocably shaped German identity, affecting nearly every facet of modern German culture, politics, and society. By looking at the memorials, "countermemorials," and a museum in Berlin that relate directly to the Holocaust and World War II, the ambiguities and complexities of this memory become perfectly clear.

Chapter 1: Historical Background, Theory, and Geographical Overview

Historical Background¹

Though Germany today stands as the de facto leader of the European Union, for much of its history, the nation stood as a collection of territories in varying states of unification. For over 700 years, the German lands were loosely governed under the general protectorate of the Holy Roman Empire, an association of nominally Catholic territories answering to the Pope. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which established some basic principles of national self-determination, the Empire continually lost power until its full dissolution during the Napoleonic Wars in 1806. By the beginning of the 18th century, the large territory of Prussia had emerged as a powerful operator in the region, governed by the Hohenzollern dynasty. Through this dynasty, ruled by notable kings such as Frederick the Great (ruled 1740-1786), Frederick William III (1797-1840), and William I (1861-1888), Prussia was able to conquer more and more neighboring territory, leading to full German unification under the leadership of William I and Otto von Bismarck in 1871.

Upon unification, Bismarck feared the potential for a two-front war, based on Germany's geographical position in Europe. To avoid this hazard, he devised a system of complex alliances which would prevent Germany from encountering a war on both eastern and western fronts. Unfortunately, after William I's death in 1888, his grandson William II took the throne. Described as impetuous, arrogant, and hasty by biographers, William II led Germany into the 20th century after Bismarck's dismissal as chancellor in 1890 and his eventual death in 1898.

¹ Information in this section is taken from the following texts unless otherwise noted: Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Richard J. Evans, *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification 1800-1996* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Press, 2003); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

Without Bismarck's guidance, William soon made a mess of the alliance system, and Germany found itself embroiled in a two-front war with the start of World War I in 1914. Fighting against Great Britain, France, Russia (until its exit in 1917) and the United States, Germany and its allies were defeated in 1918.

The Paris Peace Conference was held in 1919 to write the treaty concluding WWI, now known as the Versailles Treaty. Nearly thirty nations were present at the negotiations, but the proceedings were dominated by the "Big Four," which included Great Britain, France, the United States and Italy; Bolshevik-controlled Russia was not invited, and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria) received similar treatment. The Versailles Treaty laid the blame for WWI – the most destructive war in European history at that point – directly at Germany's feet. This attribution is noted in Article 231, colloquially known as the "War Guilt Clause": "The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies." As a result of this clause, Germany accepted full responsibility for the war. Severe limits were placed on German military proliferation, and the country had to give up considerable territory, both on the continent and the entirety of its colonial possessions. Reparation payments were levied against the newly-formed Weimar government, which emerged as the democratic successor to the Hohenzollern dynasty when William II abdicated. Though the initial figure demanded was a staggering 132 billion Reichsmarks, this number was reduced to 51 billion Reichsmarks (12.5 billion USD), less than half of which was actually paid.



A notepad made of one-million mark notes.

In spite of the reduction of required reparation payments, the Weimar government soon ran into a financial crisis in the early 1920s. Unlike the French government, which had imposed its first income tax to help pay for wartime costs, William II and his

administration had simply planned to pay for the war entirely through borrowing, which would be paid off when they won. With characteristic hubris, William planned to annex resource-rich territories and levy hefty reparations of his own towards his defeated opponents to pay off his debts. Of course, losing the war did not allow that plan to succeed. After suspending the gold standard during the war, the country was printing money with no backing, leading to a devaluation of the currency. Though it stabilized in early 1921 at about 90 marks to one U.S. dollar, the first scheduled reparations payment in July of that same year accelerated inflation drastically. A 1943 U.S. Federal Reserve Board research document outlining the course of German hyperinflation in the Weimar period reports that by December 1922, the mark-to-dollar exchange rate had fallen to 7,400:1. According to that same report, the course of hyperinflation over the next year was truly exponential, reaching the rate of 4.2 trillion marks to a single U.S.

dollar.² With rates like those of the early 1920s, German currency literally was not worth the paper it was printed on.

Through a reclassification of the Reichsmark currency and a complex system of loans, leniency, and debt forgiveness, the Weimar economy did rebound in the mid-1920s, actually ushering in a “golden age” of culture and social change. This success of the Weimar Republic’s democratic experiment, though exciting, was fleeting. The onset of the Great Depression in the U.S. had a devastating impact in Europe, where countries like Germany were heavily dependent on American post-war economic assistance through programs like the Dawes Plan.

After years of political and economic instability, the prospect of yet another financial meltdown made Weimar society ripe for radical political change. Fringe German political parties took the opportunity to break into the political mainstream, and the nationalist-leaning *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers’ Party; abbreviated as NSDAP or Nazi) was able to garner 19% of the popular vote in the September 1930 parliamentary elections. Over the next three years, the Nazi party accrued increasing power under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, a WWI veteran who had been jailed until 1924 for an attempted coup. In the wake of extensive political turmoil, Hitler was appointed to the position of Chancellor, effectively securing control of the government in January 1933.

Hitler’s Nazi party stoked and exploited the jingoist anger and resentment that had been brewing in Germany since the country’s defeat in WWI. The Nazis perpetuated what is now known as the “stab-in-the-back myth.” They contended that WWI was not lost as a result of the military failure of German soldiers, but that those soldiers were betrayed by civilians on the

² Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Banking and Monetary Statistics, 1914-1941, Rep. (1943); One-million mark notes used as notepaper, October 1923, photograph, Bundesarchiv - Bild, German Federal Archives.

homefront, especially those who overthrew the German monarchy at the end of 1918. Advocates of this ideology labeled German leaders who had signed the November 1918 armistice as the “November criminals” and blamed them for the financial crises of the 1920s as well. The Nazis were also able to feed off of preexisting German anti-Semitism in order to blame the Jews for the failure of the German state.

Through this strategic demonizing, the Nazis were able to rally moderate German citizens to their radical cause, as noted by famed German author Thomas Mann: “A straight line runs from the madness of the German inflation to the madness of the Third Reich...Inflation is a tragedy that makes a whole people cynical, hard-hearted, and indifferent. Having been robbed, the Germans became a nation of robbers.”³ By emphasizing the failures of the Weimar government, Hitler and the Nazis successfully rose through the political ranks, finally gaining complete control of the government in March 1933 with the passage of the Enabling Act, a proposal that Hitler pushed through the parliament. Once the Enabling Act was passed, Hitler no longer needed parliamentary approval to pass laws, rendering the government effectively obsolete.

Once Nazi power was consolidated, their program of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism took hold. Hitler quickly took full advantage of the Enabling Act, choosing to rearm Germany and rebuild domestic industry in direct violation of the Versailles Treaty. A belief in Aryan supremacy manifested in a plan to “cleanse” Germany of all undesirable demographics, and the first concentration camp was established in early 1933 to capture and intern (and later, expressly to murder) designated groups. Starting in 1941 with the official adoption of the “Final Solution,” the Nazis carried out the Holocaust, a planned genocide of European Jews that also

³ Thomas Mann, *Disorder and Early Sorrow* (n.p.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1925), 36.

involved the enslavement and murder of Sinti and Roma (commonly known as Gypsies), blacks, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, and any other group in German society that did not fit the Nazi categorization of “Aryan.” Some German citizens were able to escape the Holocaust, imposing a self-exile in countries outside of the reach of Hitler and the Nazis. However, though estimates vary slightly, it is generally accepted that somewhere between 11 and 12 million civilians were murdered by the Nazis between 1941 and 1945, with around 6 million of the victims being Jews.

While the Nazi campaign of genocide continued, Germany also provoked a second world war (or, according to some historians, a continuation of the first) with their annexation of Poland in 1939, an act that severely violated the principles of the Versailles Treaty. Alongside fellow fascist-led countries Japan and Italy in an association termed the Axis Powers, the Germans fought yet another two-front war against the Allies: Great Britain and France to the west and the Soviet Union to the east. Though the Axis Powers seemed to prevail in the first year and a half of the war, the balance changed when the Germans engaged in a brutal, stalled campaign of attrition throughout the winter of 1941 on the Soviet front. The entrance of the United States into the fray in December 1941 also had a demonstrated effect on the Allied efforts. By early 1945, the Allies invaded Germany, an offensive that culminated in the capture of Berlin and the suicide of Hitler in late April. By May 8, the Germans acceded an unconditional surrender, and the war was over.

Despite the calamity and devastation of the war coming to an end, Germans still had to figure out how to handle the legacies of the genocide that their country had perpetrated and the world war that they had provoked. After concentration camps were liberated and the realities of the Holocaust became clear, ordinary Germans struggled for a way to process what they had allowed (and facilitated). As Germans began to grapple with this guilt, the country was suddenly

cleaved in half, into East and West Germany. Led by Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union now controlled East Germany, while the west belonged to a coalition led by the United States, with Great Britain and France in tow. Though the capitol city of Berlin lay within the borders of East Germany, the city itself was similarly divided, creating an East Berlin and a West Berlin.

In 1949, both halves of Germany formed official governments, with the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR) in the west and German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the east. Nominally their own countries, both governments were closely allied with their respective superpower benefactors throughout the Cold War, a period of extended tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Due to the advent of nuclear weapons, the two superpowers never reached a traditional military conflict, instead channeling their animosity into political subterfuge, espionage, and proxy wars. Based on its location, Germany served as a gate between the Western and Eastern hemispheres, with Berlin as one of the most significant points of interchange.

A physical border between East and West Germany was erected in 1952, but travel between East and West Berlin remained relatively open until the sudden construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 by the Soviets, which substantially limited the flow of travelers between the two halves of the city. This physical barrier exacerbated the political and social divide between both the East and West Berlin and the GDR and the FDR. Under Western influence, the FDR remained ideologically and culturally liberal, while the GDR typically followed the more repressive Soviet directives – the Wall was officially called the “Anti-Fascist Protection Barrier” in East Berlin. Throughout the next three decades, Berlin served as a microcosm of the Cold War, a divided city where the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. could exert their respective influences without the overt risk of direct military engagement.

Due to each side's respective political projects, Holocaust and WWII legacy was treated differently in East and West Germany. As historian Tony Judt notes in his behemoth *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*:

Far greater care was taken by the post-war authorities in [East Germany] to erase all public memory of the Holocaust. It is not that the horrors and crimes of the war in the east were played down – on the contrary, they were repeatedly rehearsed in official rhetoric and enshrined in memorials and textbooks everywhere. It is just that Jews were not part of the story... The burden of responsibility for Nazism was imputed uniquely to Hitler's West German heirs, the new regime paid restitution not to Jews but to the Soviet Union.⁴

In order to prop up the Soviet political aims of ensuring the Eastern Bloc's ideological congruency, the official stance on this legacy was that it was the fault of the Nazis and their capitalist tendencies run amok. In service of that myth (and of the justification of continued anti-Semitism in Eastern Bloc countries), the anti-Semitism of the Nazi project was downplayed, emphasizing instead what had happened to all Eastern Europeans in the name of Hitler's ambitions. Though the Soviets and the East Germans did indeed pursue memorial projects, these projects commemorated the sacrifices of the people of Eastern Europe and the triumph of communism over the fascist Nazi scourge.

In West Germany, despite having a generally more culturally "open" society than east of the Wall, the Holocaust legacy and its treatment was considerably more complicated. Immediately after the end of WWII, the Western powers began a process of "denazification," which entailed removing traces of Nazism from society entirely. Unfortunately, it is estimated that over 50% of Germans were either official members of the Nazi party or members of Nazi-related organizations like the Hitler Youth, and denazification therefore proved to be more difficult than expected. Additionally, in the context of the Cold War, Western nations like the

⁴ Judt, *Postwar: A History*, 821-822.

United States routinely shirked convention in order to gain any edge possible against their Eastern opponents. In service of these politics, the Americans quietly smuggled Nazi scientists and intellectuals out of the country immediately after the end of the war. These Nazis were not reported or subject to the legal process in any way. They simply entered the United States under new identities and began work for the American government. Many West Germans also simply could not discuss the Holocaust; either they had been directly involved in the perpetration of genocide and feared legal repercussions, or they psychologically could not accept their roles as bystanders that allowed that genocide to occur. The narrative was therefore devised to portray the Nazis as an “other” in German society, a splinter group that took control and exacted their will upon the country. German victimhood, both in reference to life under Hitler and the violence of WWII, was heavily emphasized. Due to this rampant historical revisionism, memorial projects in the early years of the FDR were few and far between; only after the cultural upheaval in the late-1960s did proper Holocaust commemoration begin.

The Cold War continued as a period of extended tensions throughout much of the latter half of the 20th century, finally coming to a close with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. After the Soviets relinquished their grasp on the Eastern Bloc states, those countries were able to wriggle free of the oppressive communist ideology, and many soon held special elections to decide the fate of their newly-free societies. In Germany, the FDR remained as a political institution, and the country has kept the name of the Federal Republic of Germany to this day. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl remained in power through parliamentary elections in which his Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) – a center-right political party that has been one of the largest parties in the

German political spectrum since its inception in 1945 – obtained a majority of the vote. Upon reunification, German memory culture experienced a clear shift.

The political attitudes of the CDU and Kohl emphasized the importance of moving forward into the 21st century as a unified Germany. Though a perfectly acceptable aim in theory, this type of progress-focused outlook can often implicitly sanction a neglect or minimization of history, reducing the events of the past in an effort to simply unify the population in pursuit of future goals, which is exactly what Kohl's approach engendered. Both in spite of this official outlook and after this approach fell out of style, German artists and architects took matters into their own hands, reconsidering how the events of the Nazi period should be commemorated. The following analysis encompasses the layered legacies of German history and the German artistic and architectural responses.

Theory

In order to begin to understand the difficulties of forming a relatable and positive German national identity in the wake of the Holocaust and the division of the Cold War, it is important to first create and define a theoretical framework with which to engage these issues. In the past forty years, trauma theory has emerged as a burgeoning interdisciplinary area of study. Beginning as a study of trauma as it applies to individuals, the discipline has expanded to encompass the origins, processes, and consequences surrounding both individual and collective traumas. It is through the lens of cultural trauma that the creation of German national identity in the latter half of the 20th century will be best understood.

Cultural trauma can be defined here as the indelible marks upon the consciousness of a collectivity that occur as a result of a horrendous event or process, marking their collective

memory and affecting their future in fundamental ways.⁵ When combined with psychoanalysis, trauma theory contends that a trauma engenders repression, distorting the traumatic event in an actor's psyche. The impact of trauma derives not only from the event itself, but also from the anxiety produced by unconsciously repressing the truth about the original trauma. Under this framework, the impact of trauma can only be resolved by unearthing the repressed feelings and memory and working through them. It is important to note that an event does not constitute a trauma in and of itself; trauma is signified by an event's relevance in the development or change of an individual or a society.⁶

Dominick LaCapra identifies the distinct processes of "acting out" and "working through" trauma in his "Interview for Yad Vashem." Originally a Freudian dichotomy, LaCapra applies these terms to historical analysis, and he specifically designates the reaction to the Holocaust as a significant example of each process. LaCapra relates acting out to repetition, saying, "People who undergo a trauma...have a tendency to relive the past, to be haunted by ghosts or even to exist in the present as if one were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. Victims of trauma tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurrences intrude on their present existence."⁷ Though the concept originally described the traumatic process of the individual, it applies to societies as well. According to LaCapra, in the same way that a trauma can unknowingly subvert and affect an individual's identity, an event can be subconsciously internalized in a collective identity, affecting its character.

⁵ Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, et. al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷ Dominick LaCapra, "Interview for Yad Vashem (June 9, 1998)," in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 142-143.

Though it is tempting to view working through as an antithesis to acting out, LaCapra specifically warns against this - "it's a distinction, not a dichotomy." In his words: "In working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future...working through does not mean avoidance, harmonization, simply forgetting the past, or submerging oneself in the present. It means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details, and critically engaging the tendency to act out the past."⁸ At the individual level, this process would involve something similar to seeing a therapist; there are of course no collective therapists. Instead, societies must choose to engage with a traumatic event, incorporating it into their cultural discourse and potentially into their distinct cultural identities.

In his essay "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity," Bernhard Giesen notes that, for Germans, the trauma of war would have easily been enough to contend with, simply based on the devastation of World War II alone.

More than ten million Germans lost their lives as soldiers on the battlefield and in prison camps, as casualties of the Allied bombing raids...in the bombing of Dresden more than a hundred thousand died in a single night. More than two million Germans were killed as victims of ethnic cleansing in the lost eastern provinces after the war; hundreds of thousands of women and girls were raped; twelve million refugees were displaced in the wake of Russian invasion or expelled from their homes in the eastern provinces; most German cities were turned to ruins.⁹

Giesen goes on to note that in any other situation, destruction of this magnitude would have engendered some degree of public mourning, either from the international community or at least from Germans internally, which may have lessened the pain of the war. Of course, this was no ordinary war, and the end of the war brought with it the realization of the Holocaust. Not only

⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹ Bernhard Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, by Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 115.

was Germany the loser of a war that it had seemingly provoked, but it had committed previously unthinkable atrocities throughout that period. Though the extent to which common Germans knew about the Holocaust is still debated to this day, the outing of their crimes internationally had an irreversible effect. Any form of even moderate moral justification for the war was unequivocally denied, leaving room only for shame in the German collective consciousness.

Giesen goes on to outline what he describes as the process by which Holocaust guilt and discourse made the shift from tacit, traumatic memory to the forefront of German cultural consciousness. In the Freudian tradition, a trauma is constituted by a violent event “that at the time when [it] occurs [is] ignored or disregarded - the individual mind cannot perceive the possibility of its own death.” By that same token, Giesen argues, a society rejects perceiving its own barbarism at the time that the barbarism takes place.¹⁰ In the case of Germany, this process necessitated a “coalition of silence” in the period immediately after 1945. During those years, Germans avoided collective guilt by assigning guilt only to those individuals who directly perpetrated the Holocaust. Nazis were portrayed as an “other” within the German populace, a relatively small group that was able to take control of the country. This postwar generation included not only the survivors of the Holocaust, but also the perpetrators – former soldiers, SS officers, and Nazi party members. Apart from those that had participated directly in the genocide, who kept silent in the name of self-preservation, many simply could not come to terms with what they had been associated with, and it was often assumed that others too had participated, and that therefore they as well would buy into the common shame.

The next generation no longer suffered that collective internalized guilt. This new generation brought the guilt and trauma of their parents’ generation directly into the spotlight,

¹⁰ Ibid., 116.

questioning the silence of their parents and creating a generational schism in German culture. The student revolution of the mid-1960s illustrated this schism, attacking the trauma at the root of postwar German identity. The new focus on the trauma of the Holocaust also altered the perception of guilt in German culture, shifting guilt from an individual burden to a collective one. For the first time, Germans were holding society as a whole responsible, at least as bystanders to a horrific crime committed in their name.¹¹

No single event better encapsulates this shift than West German chancellor Willy Brandt's 1970 visit to Warsaw. After laying a wreath at a memorial to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising - an act of Jewish resistance to Nazi concentration camp deportations - Brandt suddenly knelt in front of the memorial, in what is largely considered as a gesture of apology and an acceptance of collective guilt. This momentous acceptance and reckoning with collective guilt is ultimately what came to be reflected with sharp acuity in Berlin's memorials and museums.

There is, of course, an argument in favor of looking at visual art, literature, film, or any number of other artistic disciplines to delve into the guilt and trauma of the Holocaust and its incorporation into the German collective identity. Just as it is reflected in memorials and museums, these disciplines are indeed veritable sources for meditations on national identity. However, the significance of public space cannot be stressed enough in this context. When creating a painting or making a film, an artist works without restraint. He or she is free to depict what they choose and in the way that they choose. With a public structure, that freedom is removed to a degree. These structures are typically designed for some sort of governing body or committee to approve, based on the reality that they will need to serve a general public, as opposed to a restricted public like the attendees of a gallery. Public structures must have the

¹¹ Ibid., 130.

ability to speak to a variety of visitors, allowing them to interact with the history in question in their own individual way while still commemorating the event that the structure is built for. Therefore, it seems to follow that successful memorials and museums can be seen as clear manifestations of collective will and identity.

In 1995, a design competition was held for a German national memorial “to the murdered Jews of Europe.” Horst Hoheisel, a German artist known for his work with the Aschrottbrunnen Fountain in Kassel, proposed an especially provocative solution. Hoheisel suggested demolishing Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate (far and away the most recognizable site in Berlin), grinding it to dust, sprinkling this dust over the former location at the end of Unter den Linden, and paving it over with granite plates.¹² A believer in Theodor Adorno’s philosophy of “no poetry after Auschwitz,”¹³ Hoheisel felt that, rather than attempting to fill the void of a destroyed people, it would be more appropriate to mimic that void in the most noticeable way conceivable. For the competition, he even rendered a theoretical representation of the completed space, displayed next to a photograph of the Gate as it existed at the time with names of concentration camps listed underneath. The rendering is truly unsettling. The enormous void left by the absence of the highly-visited structure is chilling, forcing the viewer to grapple with why there isn’t anything in the space. Of course, the German government would have never sanctioned this proposal, but that does not seem to be the point; Hoheisel would be near-certifiable if he truly believed Berlin would destroy its most famous structure. It makes abundantly clear that, for Hoheisel, there is no definitive and proper way to commemorate the Holocaust. Instead, his project is a “perpetual irresolution...Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany than any

¹² James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 90-92.

¹³ Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," 1951, in *Collected Works* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977).

single ‘final solution’ to Germany’s memorial problem.”¹⁴ Though the language employed is perhaps dramatic, James Young’s analysis of Hoheisel’s position is emblematic of the general quandary with Holocaust commemoration and memorialization. When dealing with events as destructive, tragic, and expansive as the Holocaust and World War II, how can a memorial or museum even begin to properly capture and acknowledge the innumerable experiences contained in such a memory?

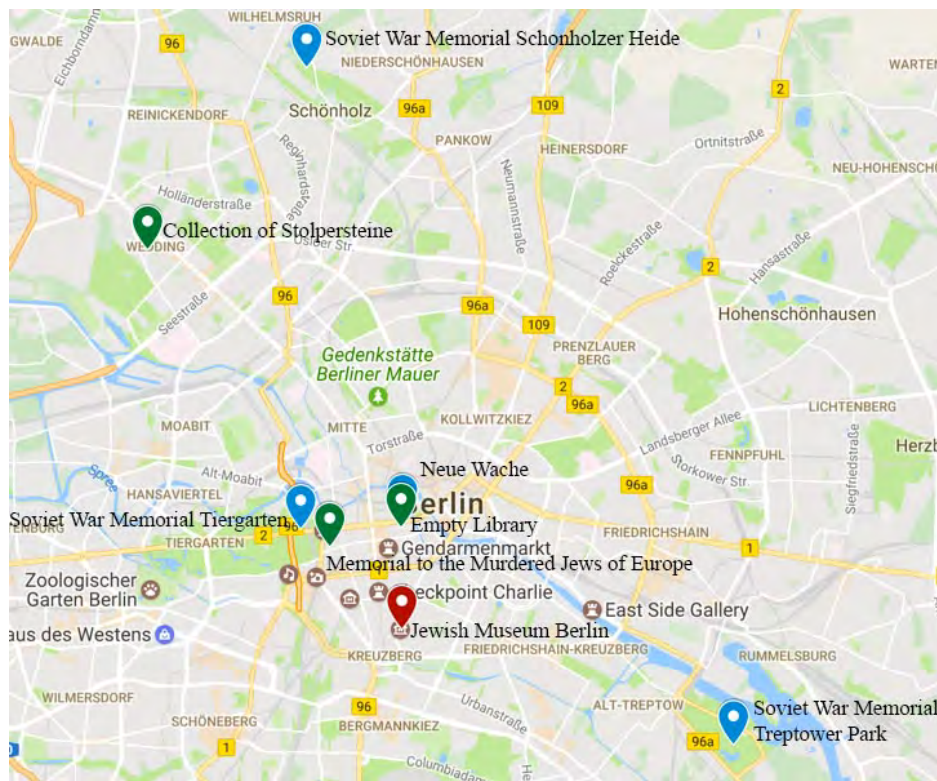
Indeed, as Young later notes, this problem is somewhat layered. Along with the question of how to properly commemorate the Holocaust, German architects, memorial committees, and curators all must similarly wrestle with the subsequent issue of how to navigate “a deep distrust of monumental forms in light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis and a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the killers through memory.”¹⁵ Traditional memorials take a typically celebratory form, publicly recognizable as sites of commemoration for a specific event, as is their purpose. Due to the logic of memorials - often large structures that solidify a specific event in public consciousness and reflect sentiment, not rationality - the concept lends itself especially well to fascism. Therefore, a memorial in opposition to fascism should almost be an anti-memorial, built with an opposition to traditional memorial qualities in mind. In order to circumvent this problem (specifically in relation to Holocaust commemoration), Young claims that German artists have evolved the form of “countermonuments,” which play with expectations of monumentalization and utilize ideas like Hoheisel’s void. These structures are able to convey the historical significance of the event they concern while constantly wrestling with the question of how to properly remember such a striking, horrific absence. Though Young points to Germany as the origin of the countermonument, he notes examples in other countries, such as

¹⁴ Young, *At Memory's*, 92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C., a memorial that centers around two large, black granite blocks, a clear oppositional reference to the surrounding white marble throughout D.C. Since the structures referenced in my analysis are titled as memorials and not monuments, I will use the term “countermemorial” in place of “countermonument” here. When considering the complex entanglement of responsibility, guilt, trauma, and sadness that surrounds the Holocaust in the German collective psyche, it seems almost obvious that a new artistic concept would be needed in order to properly represent that entanglement.

Geographical Overview



Overview of sites to be analyzed. Traditional memorials are marked in blue, countermemorials are in green, and museums in red.

It would be neither possible nor productive to attempt to look at every memorial, countermemorial, and museum in Berlin for examples of this phenomenon. Instead, a select few of each category will be considered and analyzed. Berlin is a large and expansive city in the

northeast of Germany, spanning some 344 square miles. Throughout the city, there are three traditional memorials to Soviet soldiers killed in World War II, each erected by the Soviet Union in the period immediately after the end of the war in 1945. Beginning with the *Sowjetisches Ehrendenkmal* (Soviet War Memorial) in Tiergarten, we travel southeast, moving to the Soviet War Memorial Treptow located in Treptower Park. Next, following the path of the Berlin Wall, we journey up to the *Sowjetisches Ehrenmal* in Schonhölzer Heide, in the northern reaches of the city. To finish the Traditional Memorials, we go back down to Mitte, near the Tiergarten memorial, to the Neue Wache. Moving into the Countermemorials section, we travel west along Unter den Linden and then south by Tiergarten to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, nearly adjacent to the Brandenburg Gate. Returning to a site across the street from the Neue Wache, the Empty Library is located at Bebelplatz. Though the point that represents the *Stolpersteine* (Stumbling Stones) on the above map is in the northwestern neighborhood of Wedding, this memorial is in fact spread throughout the city (and indeed throughout Europe), as represented by the many small cobblestones that bear the names and information of victims of the Holocaust and Nazi oppression. Finally, we move just to the south of the city center, to Kreuzberg, to visit the Jewish Museum Berlin.

Chapter 2: Traditional Memorials

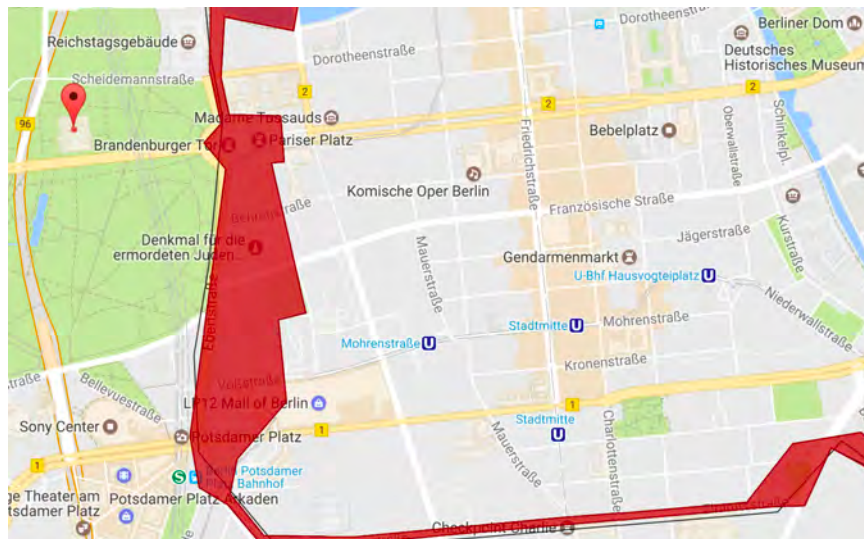
As Young notes, the countermemorial is an important example of German memory culture. However, in a city laden with the weight of history built upon itself like Berlin, more traditional sites inevitably still hold significance. Like many structures in Berlin, some of these memorials have been rebuilt after their destruction in World War II. Others, though they still stand as originally designed, have been repurposed to serve today's German public. In either

case, many of these memorials illustrate the ambiguities and complexities surrounding Holocaust/WWII commemoration in post-reunification Germany. In this analysis, I focus on the three Soviet war memorials throughout Berlin and the storied Neue Wache.

Soviet War Memorials

In the very center of Berlin, an uninformed traveler may happen upon an enormous park, known as the Tiergarten.

Destroyed by firebombing and stripped for lumber during the final days of World War II, the



Enhanced map of location of Soviet War Memorial Tiergarten (marked by pin in top left corner). Red border indicates where Berlin Wall stood.

reconstituted 520-acre park carves out a swath of the city directly adjacent to some of Berlin's most notable sights: the Reichstag is directly outside the northeast entrance, as well as the Brandenburg Gate and the popular wax museum Madame Tussaud's. Along with its prime location, Tiergarten provides a lovely atmosphere for a warm day's stroll, an escape from the underground banality of the U-Bahn or the touristy bustle of nearby Unter den Linden. Walking southwest from the Reichstag, a stunning mass of stone and metal emerges out of the trees, immediately distracting from the serenity of the quiet trees and dirt paths.

The *Sowjetisches Ehrenmal Tiergarten* (Soviet War Memorial in the Tiergarten) was erected in November 1945, shortly after the fall of the German forces in May of that same year. Built with Allied permission in the British section of divided Berlin before tensions truly surfaced, it commemorates the lives of Soviet soldiers who perished in the final days of the war while fighting the Battle of Berlin.¹⁶ The memorial's central location is intentional; it was built directly on the axis of Nazi architect Albert Speer's planned *Siegesallee* ("victory avenue").¹⁷ It is a truly impressive structure, falsely but persistently rumored to have been built from stone



Main structure of the memorial.

taken from the fallen Reich Chancellery.

The centerpiece of the construction is a large curved colonnade, dominated by a larger center column with a formidable 8 meter bronze statue of a solemn Soviet soldier atop it. The soldier's weapon is slung

over his shoulder, signifying the end of the war, and his left arm stretches downward, pointing to his fallen comrades, nearly 2,000 of whom are buried at the foot of the structure. On the main column, a golden Cyrillic inscription reads, "Eternal glory to heroes who fell in battle with the

¹⁶ Paul Stangl, "The Soviet War Memorial in Treptow, Berlin," *Geographical Review* 93, no. 2 (April 2003): 217.

¹⁷ German Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment, "Soviet Memorial in the Tiergarten," Berlin.de, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/umwelt/stadtgruen/friedhoefe_begraebnisstaetten/en/sowjet_ehrenmale/tiergarten/index.shtml.

German fascist invaders for the freedom and independence of the Soviet Union,” accompanied by the Soviet crest.¹⁸ In addition to the main structure, the memorial is flanked by the first two Soviet tanks to reach Berlin in 1945 and accompanying artillery guns. Throughout the Cold War period, Soviet soldiers from East Berlin stood as honor guards at the memorial, with administration and maintenance of the site now under the control of the city government.¹⁹

Traveling southeast from Tiergarten, down past Checkpoint Charlie and into former East Berlin, the same traveler arrives at the beautiful Treptower Park, located directly on the bank of the Spree River.



Aerial view of the memorial with Soviet honor guards.

Apart from squirrels and foliage, the park is home to

perhaps the most spectacular war memorial Berlin has to offer. Like Tiergarten, Treptower Park houses another *Sowjetisches Ehrenmal*, though a considerably larger one. Built in 1949, it would become the most important Soviet memorial in Berlin, since the Tiergarten memorial’s location in West Berlin excluded it from consideration. Though other locations were considered, as Stangl notes, “a huge Soviet soldier looming over the historic structures testifying to Prussian and German history on Unter den Linden boulevard would have counteracted press efforts to appear as liberators.”²⁰ By choosing this location, the Soviets were able to continue their

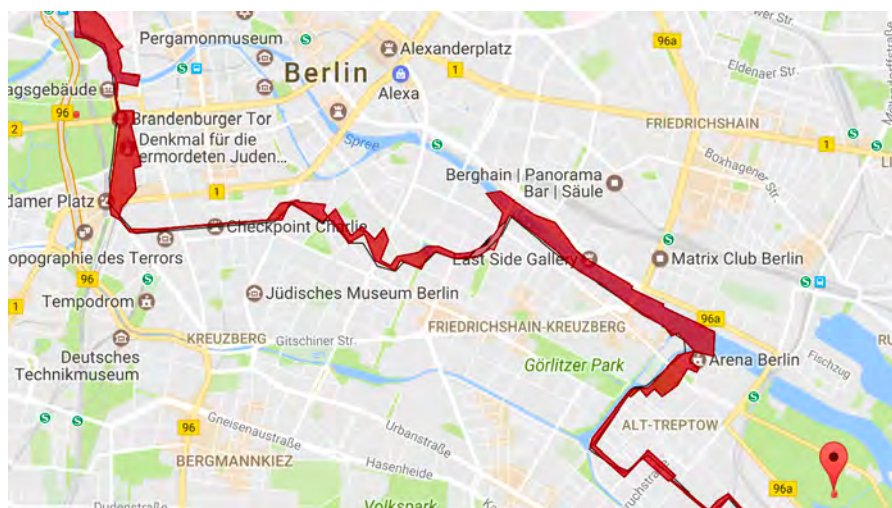
¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ View of the memorial with honor guards, West Berlin, 1983, photograph, JPEG.

²⁰ Stangl, "The Soviet," 217.

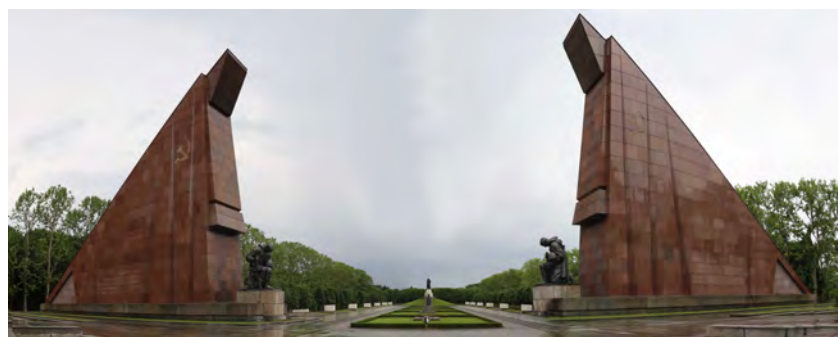
tradition of spectacular memorialization while maintaining the narrative of German salvation at the hands of Soviet communism, a narrative integral to their political project in Berlin.

Even more than the Tiergarten memorial, the Treptower Park structure is truly imposing. It easily dwarfs even its tallest visitor, presiding over the entire park. Though not located in as historically and politically significant of an area, the memorial holds a different cache. The neighborhood around Treptower Park is more casual, filled with supermarkets, restaurants, schools, and homes. Families who live in the neighborhood undoubtedly explore Treptower, enjoying the convenience of having a well-maintained park situated in their community.



Enhanced map of location of Soviet War Memorial Treptower Park (marked by pin in bottom right corner).

The Treptower Park memorial is laid out as a long lane, beginning at one end with a sculpture of a grieving woman, meant to symbolize the Soviet



Entrance to the memorial.

Motherland mourning her lost sons. Walking past this statue, two enormous abstractions of

Soviet flags rise out of the ground, made entirely of red granite and flanked by two kneeling soldier statues, helmets in hand.²¹ Both flags have a Stalin quote carved into them, reading, “Now all recognize that the Soviet people with their selfless fight saved the civilization of Europe from fascist thugs. This was a great achievement of the Soviet people to the history of mankind.”

These structures serve as gatekeepers to a long center lane, lined on either side by sixteen sarcophagi, each representing one of the former Soviet republics and decorated with reliefs of



View of central lane.

Soviet soldiers.²² The centerpiece of this memorial is the massive, 12 meter high statue of a Soviet soldier, built atop a mausoleum.²³ He looks

stoically forward, standing with his sword buried in a shattered swastika and carrying a young child. The statue depicts Soviet soldier Nikolai Masalov, who supposedly risked his life during the final days of the Battle of Berlin to save an abandoned German child.²⁴

The memorial holds historical significance as a site of celebration throughout the Cold War period. May 8, known as Liberation Day, or *Befreiungstag* in German, is celebrated

²¹ *Panorama of the Russian War Memorial at Treptow*, photograph, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_Memorial_\(Treptower_Park\)#/media/File:Panorama_of_the_Russian_War_Memorial_at_Treptow.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_Memorial_(Treptower_Park)#/media/File:Panorama_of_the_Russian_War_Memorial_at_Treptow.jpg).

²² *Soviet War Memorial Treptow*, photograph, JPEG.

²³ *Sowjetisches Ehrenkmal Treptow*, photograph, JPEG.

²⁴ Vasili I. Chuikov, *The Fall of Berlin: With the Russian Army in Berlin, the Last Battle of Nazi Germany* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 210-212.

throughout Europe as the day when the Nazis were officially defeated, liberating Europe from their control. The Treptow memorial was dedicated on what was then known as *Siegestag*, or Victory Day, in May 1949, immediately becoming the central point for these celebrations in East Berlin. Since the previous *Siegestag* celebration in 1947, the German political situation had crystallized considerably, with the declaration of the West German state quickly dividing the country. The Treptow memorial quickly became a symbol of

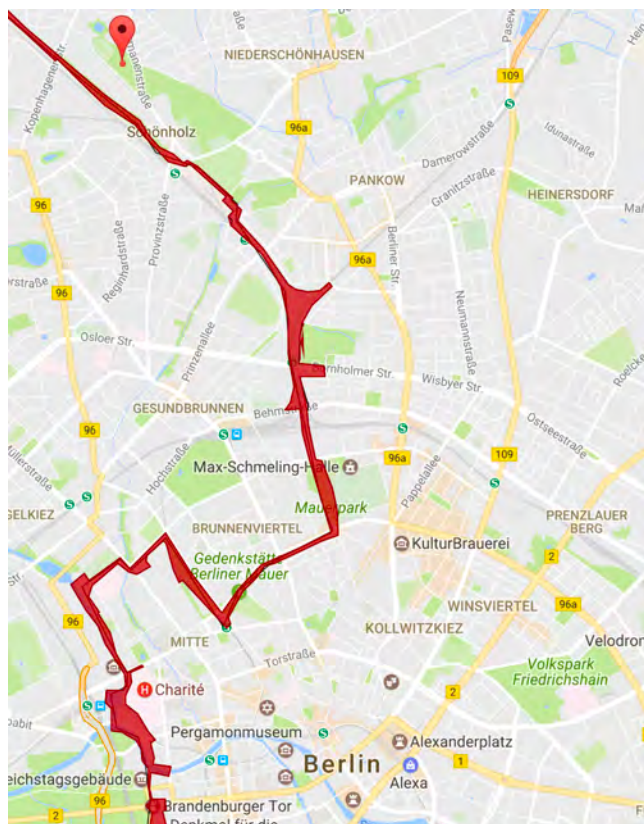


Statue of Soviet soldier holding German child.

Soviet influence in Germany, especially after the establishment of the GDR in November 1949. On May 8, 1950, *Siegestag* was recharacterized (under Soviet directive) as *Befreiungstag*, implying that the German people themselves had been liberated from fascism by their Soviet benefactors. On the first *Befreiungstag* in 1950, Soviet and East German delegations were in attendance. The Soviet honor guard stationed at the memorial was replaced by East German *Volkspolizei* (People's Police), an event referred to by East Berlin Mayor Friedrich Ebert as "a special sign of trust."²⁵ The assumption of responsibility for the Treptow memorial by the East German government signified a debt of gratitude to their supposed liberators, and the site remained a location of pilgrimage for East Germans on *Befreiungstag* until the demise of the GDR.²⁶

²⁵ Stangl, "The Soviet," 228.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 229-230.

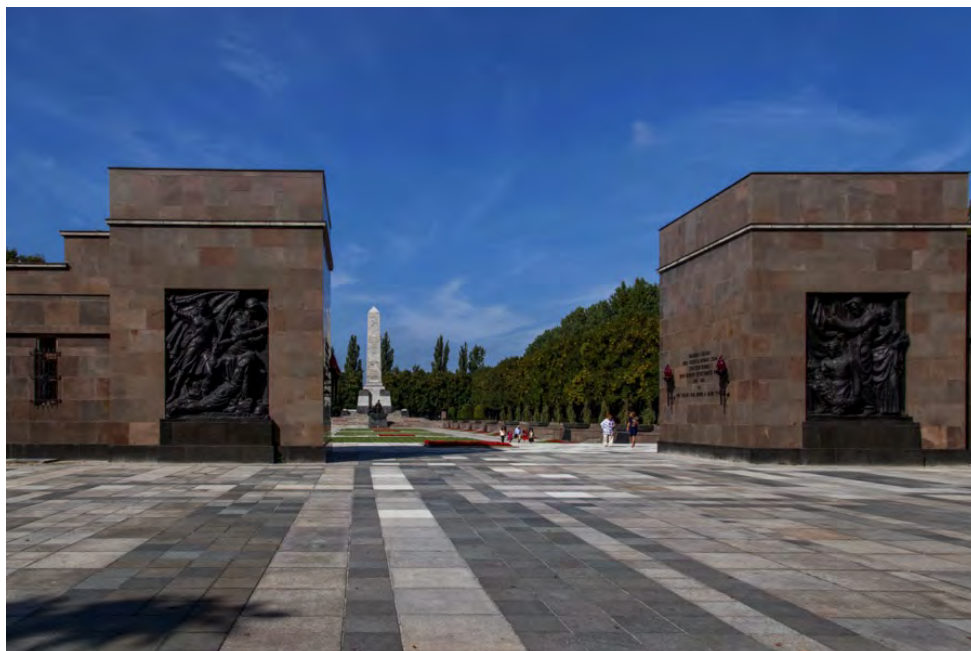


Enhanced map of location of Soviet War Memorial Schönholzer Heide (marked by pin in top left corner).

Following the serpentine path of the Berlin Wall, a third massive Soviet memorial can be found in the northern neighborhood of Pankow. Now a quiet, mostly residential area far from the historical sites of Mitte and the nightlife of Neukölln, Pankow is the former diplomatic hub of East Berlin, as the neighborhood used to house many embassies from foreign countries that maintained friendly relations with East Germany. Most structures from this era have been rebuilt, abandoned, or repurposed; Bard College, which has a satellite campus in Pankow, uses the former Cuban embassy as a classroom building and the former Angolan embassy as a cafeteria, and a common adventure for students is climbing the fence into the former Iraqi embassy, which stands looted but intact.²⁷

²⁷ Florian Becker, comments in a personal email, April 1, 2017.

However,
 one structure that
 remains in its Cold
 War splendor is the
 Soviet War
 Memorial in
 Schönholzer
 Heide, a park along
 the former path of
 the Wall.²⁸



Entrance to the Schönholzer Heide Memorial.

Opened in November 1949 after being designed by a group of Soviet state architects, the entrance to the Pankow memorial is flanked by two large square gatehouses, both made of red granite like the flag abstractions that mark the entrance to its Treptower Park counterpart. The buildings display bronze reliefs of Soviet soldiers fighting off the invading Nazi army, as well as a depiction of the willingness of the Soviet people to make sacrifices for the greater good. As opposed to the other two Soviet memorials in Berlin, which act both as declarations of victory and remembrances of Soviet losses in the war, the Schönholzer Heide memorials focuses more on the latter, also serving as the final resting place for over 13,000 Soviet soldiers (making it the largest Russian cemetery in Europe outside of Russia).²⁹ Laid out similarly to the Treptower Park memorial, the gatehouses lie at the foot of a long lane, which has sixteen sarcophagi (like the

²⁸ *Entrance to Soviet War Memorial Schonholzer Heide*, photograph, Elephant in Berlin, <http://www.elephantinberlin.com/2013/11/restored-soviet-war-memorial-in.html>.

²⁹ "Soviet Memorial, Schonholzer Heide," Berlin.de, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/umwelt/stadtgruen/friedhoefe_begraebnisstaetten/de/sowjet_ehrenmale/schoenholzerheide/index.shtml.

Treptower Park memorial) lining the center row. Along the outside wall can be found 100 tablets, on which the recoverable names of Soviet soldiers are inscribed. Sharing yet another feature with its Treptower Park comrade, the central lane leads to a large structure, though here it is a simple, 33.5 meter-tall obelisk, which sits atop the tombs for two decorated Soviet colonels.³⁰ The obelisk also towers over a large black sculpture of a mother standing stoically over her son's body, mimicking a Pietà – a motif in Christian art depicting the Virgin Mary cradling or mourning over the dead body of Jesus – and meant to symbolize the Soviet Motherland mourning her fallen sons. Though the Schönholzer Heide memorial never served as a notable ceremonial site like the Tiergarten or Treptower Park memorials, it still represents the same complicated legacy as its counterparts.



View of Obelisk and Motherland Statue.

The three Soviet memorials in Berlin

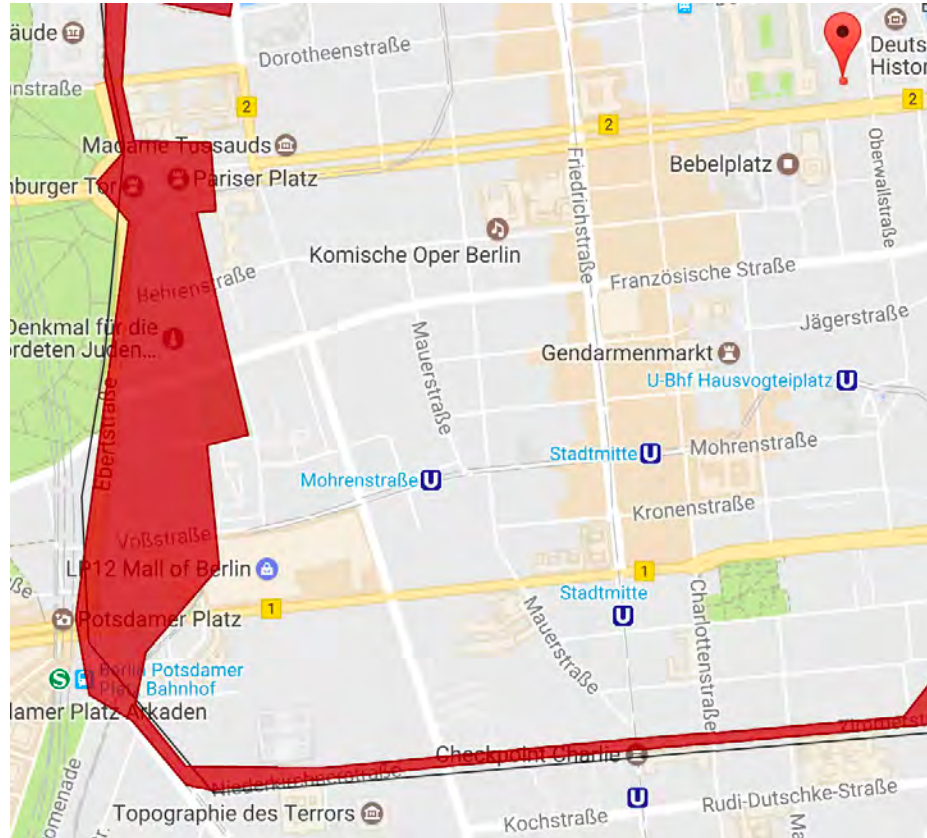
retain their significance as symbols of former Soviet influence even after the fall of the nation they were built for, due to the so-called “Two Plus Four Treaty,” officially known as the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany. The treaty, ratified in 1990 denotes the terms under which the “Four” (the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France) would relinquish their control in German territory, allowing the reunified Germany (the GDR

³⁰ *Obelisk and Sculpture, Soviet War Memorial Schönholzer Heide*, photograph, Elephant in Berlin, <http://www.elephantinberlin.com/2013/11/restored-soviet-war-memorial-in.html>.

and the FRG, the eponymous “Two”) to become a full sovereign. One of the conditions in the treaty stipulates that the German government must maintain Soviet memorials within Germany, thereby requiring the continued upkeep of the Tiergarten, Treptower Park, and Schönholzer Heide structures. In this agreement, the German sense of guilt and responsibility is clearly reflected. It is difficult to imagine another situation in which a country would willingly support and maintain multiple memorials that commemorate a foreign nation’s soldiers that died fighting its native sons. Indeed, critics both in Germany and outside it have called into question the continued maintenance of these sites. In response to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, some German newspapers called for a removal of the tanks from the Tiergarten memorial – which has been referred to as the “Tomb of the Unknown Rapist,” due to the actions of Soviet soldiers in Berlin at the end of WWII – starting a formal petition that was later denied.³¹ In spite of this fact, Germany agreed upon its reunification to continue the commemoration project begun by the Soviets after Germany’s defeat in 1945. By token of maintaining these sites, Germany demonstrates its interest in a remembrance of its own guilt and a consideration of the ambiguities and complexities of the Nazi legacy, acknowledging its own wrongdoing and appreciating the efforts of the opposing nations that defeated National Socialism.

³¹ Lucy Ash, "The Rape of Berlin," *BBC News*, May 1, 2015, [Page #], <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32529679>; "Petition Fails to Remove WWII Russian Tanks," *The Local Europe*, April 16, 2014, [Page #], <https://www.thelocal.de/20140416/petition-seeks-to-banish-russian-tanks-from-tiergarten>.

Neue Wache



Enhanced map of location of Neue Wache (marked by pin in top right corner).

Though Unter den Linden now serves largely as a tourist attraction, it has been the central point of much of Berlin's complicated history throughout the past three centuries. Walking east from the Brandenburg Gate, the street today is home to embassies (Great Britain, France, Russia, the United States), office buildings (Google, Microsoft), and Humboldt University. Crossing a bridge over the Spree River, it leads to Museum Island, home to multiple museums and the soon-to-be reconstructed City Palace. Before its repurposing as a museum in 1918 and subsequent destruction in 1950, the City Palace was home to the various Prussian kings and German emperors dating back to the 16th century. Of course, these rulers needed protection, and thus a

guardhouse was built just before the bridge onto the island, now known as the *Neue Wache* (New Guardhouse).³²

The Neue Wache was commissioned in 1815 by King Friedrich William III, who selected Karl Friedrich Schinkel as the architect. Schinkel, whose notable works include Konzerthaus Berlin and the Altes Museum on Museum Island, was one of the main



View of façade from Unter den Linden.

faces of German neoclassical architecture, incorporating mostly Greek revivalist influences into his designs. Once completed, the space housed palace guards and gave the regiments a central meeting place. After unification in 1871, the guardhouse became largely ceremonial, serving as a “living museum to drill and display historic uniforms.” It also was the site of notable state visits and declarations, such as the birthdays of rulers and the mobilization and demobilization orders for World War I.³³ With the formal end of the monarchy 1918, the building was repurposed by the Weimar Republic and turned into a WWI memorial. The administration chose an austere design by Heinrich Tessenow, which called for an opening in the roof of the building, through which light could fall on the altar-like block of black granite, crowned by a silver and gold

³² *Neue Wache*, photograph, Oh-Berlin, March 12, 2012, http://blog_de.all-berlin-apartments.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/DSC_0056.jpg.

³³ Harold Marcuse, "The National Memorial to the Victims of War and Tyranny: From Conflict to Consensus" (paper presented at German Studies Association Conference, Washington, DC, September 25, 1997), <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/present/neuwach.htm>.

wreath, in the center of the room. This iteration of the memorial remained unchanged by the Nazi leadership, but it was damaged heavily by bombing in World War II. After Berlin was divided, the building came under East German control.³⁴

The GDR restored the Neue Wache, renaming it yet again in 1960 as the “Memorial to the Victims of War and Dictatorship.” The interior was also redesigned in 1969 to include remains of both an unknown resistance fighter and an unknown German soldier, soil from concentration camps and from significant WWII battlefields, an eternal flame centerpiece, and a standing East German honor guard, complete with a changing-of-the-guard ceremony reminiscent of Buckingham Palace.³⁵ As Brian Ladd notes, this design seems oddly tone-deaf, even in retrospect.³⁶ Memorializing the remains of a German soldier alongside those of a resistance fighter (associated directly with the soil from concentration camps) equates the loss of each, despite the fact that the German soldier can be said to represent those who ran the concentration camps. Additionally, the changing of the guard could be viewed as glorifying the German military, less than 30 years after German soldiers and generals conspired to commit genocide. Though problematic, this memorial project is not entirely surprising from the GDR government, an administration whose focus on socialist progress reduced history to a pliable narrative with which to justify the present.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the city’s reunification brought with it myriad questions about how to handle the territory that had been controlled by East Germany. Of course, the Neue Wache was within that territory, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl had plans of his own for the building. Kohl’s memorial project was a unifying one, following the spirit of his time. Kohl

³⁴ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 218.

³⁵ Marcuse, "The National."

³⁶ Ladd, *The Ghosts*, 217.

wanted a “worthy common memorial for the victims of both world wars, tyranny, racial persecution, resistance, expulsion, division, and terrorism,” a space where the multitude of affected groups could come together and lay wreaths or hold remembrance ceremonies for all of those killed during the 20th century in Germany.³⁷ For Kohl, this all-encompassing collective of victims would express a sense of national unity at a time when Germany needed to demonstrate that unity most. According to Ladd, “[Kohl’s] desire to build an identity out of their common status as victims ‘of war and tyranny’ speaks volumes about the state of German national identity. The many objections to his project for the Neue Wache also reveal how fractured that identity remains.”³⁸ The newly-reunified Germany was a nation without a national identity, that identity having been incinerated by the hateful fires of Nazism and the ashes scattered by the division of the Cold War. The Neue Wache’s architecture, through Schinkel and Tessenow, anchors the memorial in a more “honorable” German legacy, one before the horrors of the mid-to-late 20th century, a legacy that a national identity could be built around.³⁹

However, Kohl’s plan encounters the same problem as the GDR’s previous design, in that it links and effectively equates concentration camp prisoners and German soldiers:

Kohl’s formula of “war and tyranny,” according to his critics, equated soldiers fighting for Hitler with Jews herded into gas chambers. He honored SS concentration camp guards along with the inmates they killed. Was Roland Freisler, the sadistic chief judge of the Volksgerichtshof, who died in a bombing raid in February 1945, a victim just like the many courageous resisters he sentenced to death? “German murderers are not victims!” chanted the demonstrators.⁴⁰

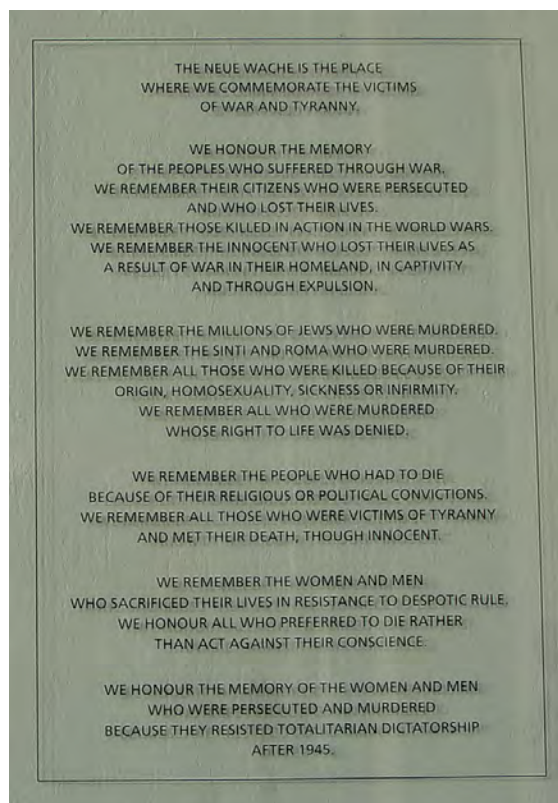
³⁷ Ibid., 218.

³⁸ Ibid., 219.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 220.

Ladd's deeply-rhetorical question truly drives the point home. Kohl's idea reduces any distinction between those victims murdered by German soldiers and German soldiers who were killed defending their right to subjugate those victims. Though Kohl likely harbored no intention to equate those two groups, critics felt that this depoliticizing project would have a minimizing effect, detrimental to the process of memorializing the victims of Nazism. Despite the opposition, Kohl held fast to his proposal, though he conceded the addition of a bronze plaque next to the building's entrance that would specify the groups honored by the memorial.⁴¹ Once this concession was made, Kohl's plan moved forward, and the memorial stands with his design to this day.



Plaque displayed on building's entrance.

From the outside, the Neue Wache presents a neoclassical front. The façade is made up of 10 columns, supporting a tympanum depicting Nike, the goddess of victory, deciding the outcome of a battle. Upon entering the structure, visitors are confronted with an open space, centered around a bronze sculpture. The sculpture, known as *Mother with her Dead Son*, was designed by Käthe Kollwitz in 1937. The sculpture sits in the center of the room, directly under a perfect circle cut into the ceiling of the building (also known as an oculus). Through this design, the sculpture is

⁴¹ Galen Frysinger, *Neue Wache Dedication Plaque*, photograph, People and Places of the World, http://www.galenfrysinger.com/berlin_neue_wache.htm.

exposed to the rain and snow of Berlin's climate, meant to symbolize the suffering of Germany's civilian population during WWII.⁴² Aside from the aforementioned plaques on the entryway and a caption under the sculpture that reads "To the Victims of War and Dictatorship," there is little text or signage at the memorial.

Though the main problems with this memorial were thematic, many felt that the formal qualities also begged reconsideration. For critics, the most glaring error was the use of Kollwitz's sculpture. Though Kollwitz is a respected artist in the German tradition, using a sculpture that mimics a Pietà seemed insensitive, as many of the victims in question were Jews. In this mythology, the Virgin Mary is praised and glorified for her strength in the face of sacrifice, a theme that felt problematic when remembering the victims of such a complex legacy. Indeed, the historian Reinhart Koselleck argued vehemently against Kohl's personal advocacy on behalf of Kollwitz's sculpture, claiming that the focus on this sculpture would represent "the very rupture that divides Christians from Jews. Or should the (surviving) Jews be obliged to recognize the dead son as their savior?"⁴³ For critics like Koselleck, the use of Kollwitz's sculpture simply added to the larger thematic controversies that surrounded the memorial, making Kohl's original proposal even more objectionable.

At the time when the Neue Wache memorial was being updated, Kohl felt that Germany needed a space or theme to rally the newly-reunified country around. Though he was presumably well-intentioned, his proposal for the repurposing of the Neue Wache was predictably controversial, due to its reduction of a complicated legacy to a single catch-all memorial. Today, the memorial holds little sway in Germany national memory, serving more as a tourist attraction than as Kohl's desired central site for memory, a fact that reflects Germans' ambivalent attitudes

⁴² Ladd, *The Ghosts*, 223.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

toward the mixing of memory in this way.⁴⁴ Predicting trends to come, Ladd notes, “[Kohl’s] opponents wanted an active confrontation with the past, not a traditional monument suitable for gazing and for laying wreaths. Their kind of memorial would teach or admonish, not affirm anything, and certainly not affirm the legitimacy of German national pride.”⁴⁵ In the eyes of these critics, the amalgamation of suffering at the hands of “War and Dictatorship” was an inappropriate reduction of an ambiguous legacy, one that could not be put to rest. On the contrary, Kohl’s critics wanted a memorial that would ask and inspire questions that could not be easily answered (or even answered at all), a memorial that challenged the traditional restraints and guidelines of the form.

Despite being built before the true advent of the countermemorial, both the Neue Wache and the series of Soviet War Memorials in Berlin bear consideration when analyzing German memory culture. These locations functioned as traditional sites of memory at the time of their construction, but the progress of history has forced them to be adapted. For the Soviet memorials, their form has not been modified, but their significance and purpose has had to change; today, these sites function more as relics of a complicated past than as locations for pilgrimage on relevant holidays. Though the idea of the German government maintaining Soviet-era sites creates some controversy both in the context of the history and current Russian politics, these sites are not considered important enough in today’s German culture to deserve any true reconsideration. In terms of encapsulating the tumultuous, layered history of Germany in the modern era, no one site serves better than the Neue Wache. From its construction in the early 19th century to its repurposing by Chancellor Kohl in the 1990s, it has remained an example of

⁴⁴ Young, *At Memory’s*, 187.

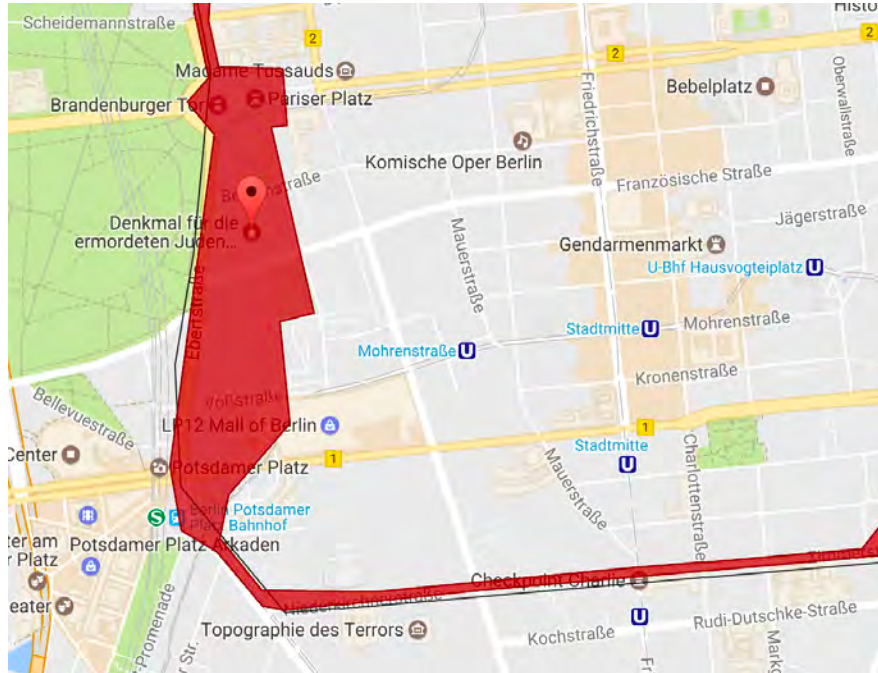
⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

the mutability of German politics and history. Though all of these sites hold relevance for considerations of ambiguity in German history, it is important to note that they do not hold an especially significant place in contemporary German culture. All of these sites are limited by their form. Because of this traditional form, they are seen to represent the ambiguous Holocaust legacy less effectively than other sites, such as the countermemorials that Young commends.

Chapter 3: Countermemorials

According to James Young, the countermemorial was developed as a reaction to the ambiguities of German memory. Though German artists wanted to commemorate the Holocaust in a public, accessible form, the legacy of the memorial in relation to Nazism was unavoidable. As a structure that tends to facilitate nationalist representation, that form was easily coopted by Hitler and his government, rendering it unusable by modern German standards. Instead, the following artists created abstract, alternative memorials in an effort to memorialize this legacy without directly referencing the shortcomings of the traditional form.

Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe



Enhanced map of location of Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (marked by pin in center-left).

Less than a ten minute walk south of the Brandenburg Gate, one can find the central Holocaust memorial of Berlin.⁴⁶ Peter Eisenman's *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe) rises like an unconventional cemetery out of the city landscape, its collection of headstone-like structures sandwiched between Tiergarten and Unter den Linden. Completed in May 2005, the memorial carves out a vertical void amongst apartment buildings and offices, catching the eye immediately. It is here that Young's counter-memorial is encapsulated best, solidified in the 2,711 concrete blocks that replace any traditional representation of daily life in the space.

⁴⁶ Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany, September 13, 2011, photograph, <http://www.amusingplanet.com/2016/05/memorial-to-murdered-jews-of-europe.html>.

As the Cold War began to thaw in the late 1980s, a German television journalist named Lea Rosh emerged as the most prominent citizen in a group of Germans drawing attention to the lack of a central German national Holocaust memorial. Originally, Rosh hoped to build this memorial on the site of the former Gestapo and S.S. headquarters on Niederkirchnerstrasse, located in West Berlin. Supporters of the Topography of Terror Holocaust museum won out for that site, but the unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 opened up an entire new city of possibilities for Rosh, who turned her focus to a site south of the Brandenburg Gate, surrounded by the former locations of Hitler's Reich Chancellery and his underground bunker.⁴⁷ Rosh – whose non-Jewishness is noted in nearly every article mentioning her – helmed a group of private citizens, Perspektive Berlin, to advocate the construction of the memorial and to help raise funding.⁴⁸ In 1992,

Perspektive Berlin's project was recognized and approved by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and an initial design contest was opened in 1995.⁴⁹

From its very beginnings, the project for a central memorial to the victims



Western view of the site.

of the Holocaust was met with opposition from various sources. In his 1998 book *The Ghosts of*

⁴⁷ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 168.

⁴⁸ Hugh Williamson, "Painful birth for memorial to Holocaust," *Financial Times* (London, UK), May 4, 2005, [Page #], <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/66f5757c-bc38-11d9-817e-00000e2511c8.html#axzz3wUXCCYWX>.

⁴⁹ Ladd, *The Ghosts*, 168.

Berlin, written in the midst of one of the many controversies surrounding the memorial, Brian Ladd outlines the many issues with the plan. As mentioned previously, the question of how to encapsulate the multitude of horrors of the Holocaust in a physical structure is central to much of the controversy. The original design chosen, created by Berlin architect Christine Jakob-Marks, consisted of an enormous, twenty-three-foot thick slab of concrete in the shape of a tombstone, placed at an angle from six feet high on the lower end up to twenty-five feet high on the other. The slab would bear the recovered names of 4.5 million murdered Jews, along with spaces for the unnamed. The structure would be complemented by eighteen boulders taken from Masada (an ancient Jewish mountaintop fortification) in Israel, a reference both to the Jewish tradition of placing stones at a grave and the number eighteen, which represents “*chai*,” or “life,” in Hebrew.⁵⁰

Though the symbolism intended by Jakob-Marks is clear, it comes off as horribly misguided in analysis. According to the early Jewish historian Josephus, Masada did exist as a Jewish fortress, but it was taken by the Romans at the end of the Jewish revolt in the 1st century C.E., and those Jews that held the fortress allegedly committed collective suicide rather than be taken as slaves by the Romans. A Holocaust memorial to murdered Jews that incorporates Jewish sacrifice as a main theme hardly seems appropriate. Additionally, the size and design of the proposed structure recalls a memorial to the soldiers of a war, less so a memorial to victims of vicious genocide. In Kohl’s own words, the design was simply “too big and undignified,” and the government withdrew its support for the design.⁵¹

Indeed, James E. Young, the historian noted in the above theory section for his advocacy on the countermemorial, had his doubts originally about the very idea of a central Holocaust

⁵⁰ Young, *At Memory's*, 189.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 190-191.

memorial. Young felt that the perpetual inability to decide on and to construct one encapsulating structure was in fact the best memorial possible; the debate would continue, always forcing those involved to remember. In his own words: “If the aim is to remember for perpetuity that this great nation once murdered nearly six million human beings solely for having been Jews, then this monument must remain uncompleted and unbuilt, an unfinishable memorial process.”⁵²

However, Young’s chapter in which this quote is placed goes on to discuss his involvement in the memorial process and how he would come to embrace the spirit of Rosh’s original project.

After the abandonment of Jakob-Marks’s design, the memorial’s organizers sponsored a series of colloquia about the project, to which they invited various artists, curators, historians, and critics, including Young. By Young’s account, the exchanges between the organizers and critics grew more and more acrimonious as the colloquia proceeded. Many took issue with the proposed tenet of the memorial as one exclusively dedicated to the Jews affected by the Holocaust, and they advocated for a memorial that included the various other demographics targeted by the Nazis. Other critics felt that victims could be honored at more appropriate sites throughout the country, such as the dozens of concentration camps, and that a central memorial in Berlin was not fitting at all, due to the “authentic sites of destruction and memory scattered throughout [the city].” Lea Rosh herself fired back at the critics, attacking the “leftist intellectual establishment” that she viewed as undermining the process of memorialization and imploring them to move forward with their debate, forgetting the question of whether the memorial should exist at all.⁵³

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 192; Ladd, *The Ghosts*, 169.

Young himself spoke at the third colloquium, and he describes in painstaking detail the many factors that led him to reconsider his skeptical position.⁵⁴ After noting the similarly fraught process of memorialization around the day of remembrance in Israel and competing museums in New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., Young admits that he too was originally in favor of continued debate, as opposed to a finished product. He also explains his fear, along with many critics of the project, that the site would be a way for the reunified Germany to “draw a bottom line under this era so that [the new nation] can move unencumbered into the future.”⁵⁵ However, Young is quick to admit to his own rarefied position as an academic bystander, someone that can afford to invest his primary interest in the debate around the memorial, rather than someone with a vested interest in the myriad effects that a realized memorial might have on German memory.

Young’s involvement did not end with the colloquium. After he returned home from the conference, then-Speaker of the Berlin Senate Peter Radunski asked Young if he would join as the fifth and final member of the *Findungskommission* (search committee) in charge of finding a suitable design. Though the four other members (all also men) were each respected German academics in their own right, Young would be the only Holocaust memorial expert, as well as the only foreigner and the only Jew. Young describes his apprehension in regards to his own identity, asking “Was I invited as an academic authority on memorials or as a token American and foreigner? Is it my expertise they want, or are they looking for a Jewish blessing on whatever design is finally chosen?”⁵⁶ Of course, it seems inappropriate to create a memorial to Jews

⁵⁴ Though Young’s account is my primary source for information on the colloquia and general process for choosing the memorial, it is important to remember that it is a first-person account, and thus requires a certain amount of critical awareness when considering Young’s central role in these deliberations.

⁵⁵ Young, *At Memory’s*, 194.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

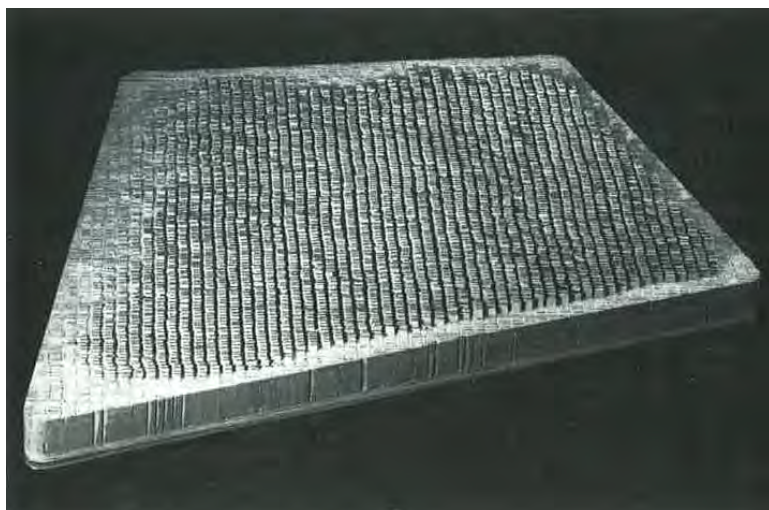
murdered in the Holocaust without the influential input of someone of Jewish faith, and Young notes the lack of a Jewish population in Germany as a consequence of the Holocaust and the “Jewish aphasia” that comes with that reality, leading to the process of memorialization being ridden with self-doubt on the German side. Just as the lack of a Jewish part of German culture remains a palpable void, Berlin’s reunified architecture must reflect that absence.⁵⁷

To that end, Young decided to join the Findungskommission, going on to outline the team’s specified conceptual plan for the design submissions. Young and his colleagues agreed that the memorial should reflect the unanswerable questions of the debate surrounding its construction and perhaps even engender more, rather than attempting to answer any of these questions. Additionally, though the sheer destruction of the Holocaust is the centerpiece of its remembrance, the Findungskommission was careful to draw attention to the irreplaceable losses and voids that the Holocaust created, from the literal loss of millions of Jews from Europe to the loss of a positive German identity that so many Germans experienced after WWII. An open-mindedness to alternatives to traditional forms was also encouraged, in order to parse the balance of being oppressed by memory and being inspired by it. Finally, the commission recognized the importance of building a new, commemorative memorial: despite the abundance of relevant historical sites throughout Germany, the conscious choice to build a new site demonstrates the significance of continuing the memorial process.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 197-199.

After solidifying these conditions, the Findungskommission reopened a second round of the contest, after which they selected the eight strongest designs and invited the artists to present their work to the committee. After extended deliberation, Young and his colleagues chose the design put forward by American architect Peter Eisenman and American artist Richard Serra, originally titled “Waving Field of Pillars.”⁵⁹ The initial proposal called for a field of four thousand pillars of varying heights from ground level to sixteen feet tall, spaced three feet apart



Original design by Eisenman and Serra.

and combined into one collective mass. The massive structures and their tight spacing is part of what Eisenman denoted as the design’s *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness), in that the space creates an atmosphere of danger; a visitor must work to find his or her way out of the

memory experience. The size of the pillars would intimidate even the tallest visitor, suggesting something more than the mere idea of threatening memory.⁶⁰

After their design was accepted, Eisenman and Serra visited with Chancellor Kohl, at which time they were asked to consider some changes to make the plan more palatable to the memorial’s organizers, who were not involved in the Findungskommission. As Young tells it, Eisenman agreed to adapt the design, since as an architect he was used to catering to a client’s wishes. Serra, the artist, conversely refused to incorporate any suggestions, claiming that

⁵⁹ Ibid., 211; Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra, “Waving Field of Pillars” - Proposal for Berlin Holocaust Memorial Contest, 1997, illustration, Berlin.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 206.

including any outside changes would render the design no longer his and withdrawing from the project altogether.⁶¹ Though the commission enthusiastically recommended the design, they felt that the spacing of the pillars restricted the accessibility of the space beyond an acceptable point. Additionally, though the element of figurative danger was within limits, the commission worried that the size and spacing of the pillars could give visitors more of an entrapment feeling than the commission desired, and therefore requested that Eisenman reduce both the number of total structures and the size of the individual pieces. Though negotiations stretched into the summer of 1999, Eisenman's design (having incorporated numerous modifications, including the addition of an information center to complement the largely blank memorial space) was finally accepted by the Bundestag on June 25, 1999. After over five years of construction, the memorial opened to the public on May 10, 2005.⁶²



Aerial view of the stelae.

Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is visually arresting, pulling the focus down away from the buildings surrounding it and the trees of Tiergarten across

⁶¹ Ibid., 208.

⁶² Roger Cohen, "Berlin Holocaust Memorial Approved," *The New York Times* (New York), June 26, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/26/world/berlin-holocaust-memorial-approved.html>; Richard Bernstein, "Holocaust Memorial Opens in Berlin," *The New York Times* (New York), May 11, 2005, [Page #], <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/11/world/europe/holocaust-memorial-opens-in-berlin.html>.

Eberstrasse.⁶³ The field of stelae is serene aesthetically, a sea of gray color and uniform angles. From a bird's eye view, the space is even reminiscent of a rolling wave in a calm ocean. However, this serenity belies a subtle yet palpable unease. The visitor quickly notices the absence of height compared to the surrounding area, which conveys a feeling of something having been cut down, like a large clearing of stumps in a thick forest. Stepping into the field mirrors the evocation of an ocean, but instead of flying above it, the visitor is wading into it, step by step until his head is submerged under the surface. Despite the Findungskommission's requirement that Eisenman reduce the height of the stelae, the tallest structures still tower at a steep 15.5 feet tall, engulfing anyone who dares to enter their domain. Though the size of the larger stelae provides for an encompassing experience, it is a voluntary one, and each visitor can choose how deep he or she wants to wade. For every person dwarfed by the largest stelae, there is a family sitting on some of the smaller ones, or schoolchildren jumping between those stelae low enough for them to climb. On the eastern edge, visitors can descend into the Place of Information, a subterranean information center on the Holocaust and its victim. The memorial truly cuts a notable figure in the cityscape, though in a way that feels neither ostentatious nor overwrought.

Even after the construction of the memorial, controversy persisted to engulf the project. In 2003, a Swiss newspaper published an article about Degussa, a company that had been subcontracted to supply an anti-graffiti coating to the memorial for the stelae. According to this article, Degussa had been involved with the Nazis in various ways, including a subsidiary of the company producing the Zyklon B gas that had been used to kill Jews in the gas chambers during

⁶³ *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe - Stelae*, photograph, <http://www.visitberlin.de/en/spot/memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe>.

the Holocaust. As the controversy unfolded, it also became clear that Lea Rosh and the memorial foundation had known about Degussa's involvement in the project for over a year, though Rosh claimed ignorance about Degussa's past connections with the Nazis. Degussa had also already coated many of the stelae in their product, meaning that these blocks would need to be destroyed and rebuilt, at an additional cost of over 2 million euro. Degussa's involvement with the project was largely protested by representatives of the Jewish community, while others (including Peter Eisenman himself) advocated simply continuing with the construction as planned. After a month of debate, the decision was made to move on with the project without destroying the Degussa-treated blocks. Though the decision was predictably and heavily criticized, the chairman of the memorial foundation Wolfgang Thierse was quoted as saying, "Germany, the country, is building this memorial for the murdered Jews... We should not exclude parts of society and certain companies, even if their predecessors are linked with the crimes of the Nazis... We have learned again that the past reaches into the present."⁶⁴ Though this controversy largely dissipated with the decision to move forward and the subsequent completion of construction, others carried on well past the opening of the memorial.

As with other sites that Young would categorize as countermemorials, Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe veers sharply away from traditional memorial form. Nowhere on the site are the names of those affected listed, nor does the main memorial site even include the word "Holocaust," either in the title or in the physical space. Though Young argues that this abstraction – an integral aspect of the concept of the countermemorial – is a natural and effective response to the adoption of traditional forms by the Nazis and other fascist regimes, many visitors to Eisenman's memorial have found the abstraction problematic. In a 2012 article

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Fleishman, "Nazi-Era Firm Finds Forgiveness," *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 2003, [Page #], <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/nov/14/world/fg-holocaust14>.

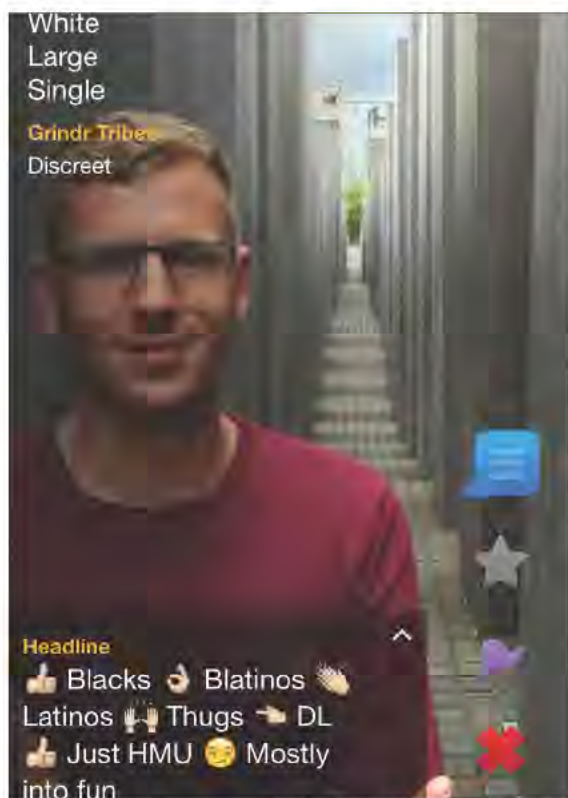
in *The New Yorker* titled “The Inadequacy of Berlin’s ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,’” culture writer Richard Brody focuses his critique around Eisenman’s use of abstract form and language, noting that, “Without [the title], it would be impossible to know what the structure is meant to commemorate.” Though this critique makes it seem like Brody at least appreciates the title, he immediately goes on to assail the title’s vagueness, lamenting the fact that it contains no mention of the Holocaust or the Nazis, a fact that he claims reduces the catastrophe to the level of a natural disaster. Brody finishes his review of the memorial with a general criticism of its abstraction, writing, “The mollifying solemnity of pseudo-universal abstractions puts a great gray sentiment in place of actual memory.”⁶⁵ For Brody, Eisenman’s abstraction removes the appropriate historical context, which Brody claims as absolutely necessary to the project of Holocaust memorialization. It should be noted that Brody did not know about or visit the Information Center, since “it’s not marked prominently, it’s not easy to find, and it’s not integral to the display.”⁶⁶ Regardless, it seems as if he would still hold many of the same critiques even if he had visited the Information Center, since the memorial remains an abstract representation.

In addition to critiques specific to the Eisenman memorial, many have spoken out against the general concept of modernist abstraction in memorialization. Over twenty years before the completion of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Maya Lin’s proposal for the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C. faced similar criticisms from those who felt that modernism was an inappropriate language for a memorial. Though Lin’s memorial is for veterans of war and not victims of genocide, her choice of form has earned her recognition from

⁶⁵ Richard Brody, "The Inadequacy of Berlin's 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,'" *The New Yorker*, July 12, 2012, [Page #], <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-inadequacy-of-berlins-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

James Young, who called Lin's design the "greatest [American] countermonument," making the comparison with Eisenman's memorial logical.⁶⁷ Lin's design, two large black granite blocks



Example of a photo posted on Grindr Remembers. Stelae are visible in the background.

that come to a point at their center axis, acts similarly to Eisenman's, flying in the face of the ostentatious, bright white structures that surround it in Washington. Additionally, many also felt that Lin's design needed a more traditional, informative component, and thus the realist sculptor Frederick Hart was commissioned to design a statue of three American soldiers, placed near Lin's structure. Hart himself had comments on the state of modernism in contemporary art: "The simple, bold, flat, unequivocal truth is that modernism has failed in its utopianist dream of creating a new and universal language... Art now

is nothing more than a cult, held to the bosom of smug elitists who dictate what is, and is not, fit for public consumption."⁶⁸ For Hart and those of similar mind, modernism works against the memorial project, making the site less accessible as a place of memory for the everyman in its abstract representation. Without recognizable representation, how will visitors know how to interact with the memorial?

⁶⁷ James E. Young, "Holocaust Monuments and Counter-Monuments," interview by Adi Gordon and Amos Goldberg, Shoah Resource Center, last modified May 24, 1998, http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203659.pdf.

⁶⁸ Marita Sturken, "The Wall and the Screen Memory: The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial," in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 49.

Hart's concerns have been partially realized at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. As an open air space with no specified guidelines on how to experience the site, it is not uncommon to see schoolchildren sitting on the stelae, eating lunch or laughing. In his review of the memorial before it officially opened to the general public, journalist Nicolai Ouroussoff noted the sight of a 2-year-old boy jumping from one pillar to the next with the help of his mother, and even Richard Brody admits in his piece to having sat down on a bench-high pillar to check his text messages.⁶⁹ The internet age has expanded the ways in which these issues can be confronted, with sites like Twitter and Facebook available as immediate forums for discussion. This is also evidenced by sites like the blog Grindr Remembers, a website dedicated to cataloguing the phenomenon of homosexual men posting profile pictures taken at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe on the popular men's dating app Grindr.⁷⁰ In a similar vein lies the work of Israeli-German artist Shahak Shapira, creator of *Yolocaust*. After noticing a "disturbing" trend of selfies being taken at the Eisenman memorial, Shapira selected 12 photos and edited them, displaying them on a website so that hovering over the original image changed the background of the image to a picture from the Holocaust, superimposing the original subject into the historical image. Though many felt that Shapira's project was an appropriate reaction to a bizarre phenomenon, Peter Eisenman did not agree. After seeing the website himself, Eisenman was quoted as saying, "'To be honest with you I thought [Shapira's project] was terrible. People have been jumping around on those pillars forever. They've been sunbathing, they've been having lunch there and I think that's fine. It's like a Catholic church, it's a meeting place, children

⁶⁹ Nicolai Ouroussoff, "A Forest of Pillars, Recalling the Unimaginable," *New York Times* (New York), May 9, 2005, [Page #], http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/09/arts/design/a-forest-of-pillars-recalling-the-unimaginable.html?_r=0; Brody, "The Inadequacy."

⁷⁰ *Grindr Remembers* (blog), <http://grindr-remembers.blogspot.com>; "I just love this guy", photograph, Grindr Remembers, November 21, 2014, <http://grindr-remembers.blogspot.co.uk/>.

run around, they sell trinkets. A memorial is an everyday occurrence, it is not sacred ground."⁷¹

Eisenman designed the memorial as an accessible public space, one unencumbered by traditional forms of memory. For him, it is entirely acceptable for people to experience the



Example of one of Shapira's images from Yoloocaust.

memorial in whatever way they prefer.

In light of the continued controversy surrounding Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, it seems as if the memorial still satisfies the original mission generated by James Young and the Findungskommission. It is important to remember that one of the original conditions was not that the memorial would answer the many questions surrounding Holocaust memorialization in Berlin, but in fact that it would hopefully generate more, which it certainly has. Degussa's involvement, though problematic, is a perfect example of the impossibility of confining history to the history books; German industry's complicated past should not be forgotten, and Degussa's role in the construction of the memorial lets no one forget that past.

With regard to Eisenman's choice of form, modernist abstraction feels like both the most effective and most appropriate language with which to approach the myriad issues around Holocaust memorialization. As Ouroussoff claims, "The memorial's power lies in its willingness to grapple with the moral ambiguities arising in the Holocaust's shadow. Its focus is on the

⁷¹ Joel Gunter to BBC newsgroup, "'Yoloocaust': How should you behave at a Holocaust memorial?," January 20, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38675835>; Shahak Shapira, *Untitled - Yoloocaust*, image, Yoloocaust.

delicate, almost imperceptible line that separates good and evil, life and death, guilt and innocence.”⁷² The traditional memorial form has been proven to lend itself easily to fascism, employing ostentatious form and nationalist rhetoric often. Since recognizable form is left out, abstraction leaves room for ambiguities in interpretation, an absolutely necessary aspect of this memorial. As Esther da Costa Meyer notes, the memorial inspires ambiguity even in its nomenclature: the project is officially designated as *Denkmal* (memorial), but the public commonly refers to it as *Mahnmal* (warning).⁷³ “Memorial” evokes official commemoration, but “warning” is directly evocative of the “never again” refrain that surrounds Holocaust memory. Da Costa Meyer also praises Eisenman’s rejection of *architecture parlante* (“speaking” architecture), a form that explains its own function or purpose. In forsaking *architecture parlante*, she argues, Eisenman leaves room for a personal experience for the viewer. “Nothing affects [visitors] without their active, willed participation,” and each visitor is forced to make a conscious choice about how they want to engage with this legacy.⁷⁴ Eisenman himself, in an interview commemorating ten years of the memorial, points out very clearly, “You can’t arrange the way people remember the Holocaust.”⁷⁵ Dictating the memorial experience for visitors was simply never the aim of the memorial.

Eisenman’s choice to include no type of map or guideline for how to experience the space is also integral to the project. The memorial is untethered, a space for the memory process to continue as society deems it appropriate. The phenomenon of visitors taking selfies and the subsequent outrage and debate is simply a new way in which the memorial serves its public. The

⁷² Ouroussoff, "A Forest."

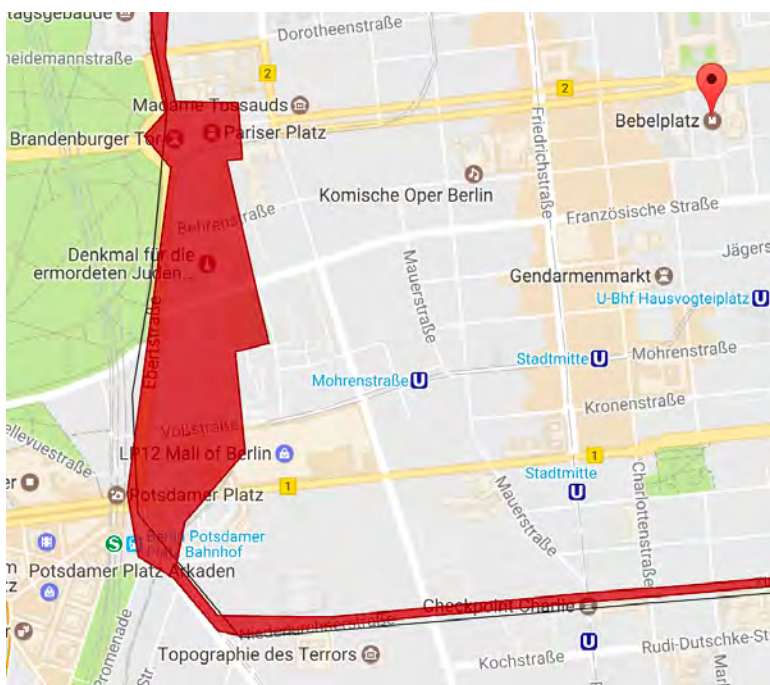
⁷³ Esther Da Costa Meyer, "Speak, Memory: On Peter Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial," *Artforum* XLIV, no. V (January 2006): 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁵ Iveta Ondruskova to Deutsche Welle newsgroup, "Ten-year Anniversary of Berlin's Holocaust Memorial," May 8, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/ten-year-anniversary-of-berlins-holocaust-memorial/g-18438425>.

conflicted use of the space also recalls Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil," and Ouroussoff asserts that "[The public space use] speaks to one of the Holocaust's most tragic lessons, the ability of human beings to numb themselves to all sorts of suffering."⁷⁶ Though some worry that the public, abstract nature of the memorial lends itself to forgetting, that tension is truly emblematic of the difficulty of memorializing the Holocaust. Rather than be affected by controversy, Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe incorporates it into the memorial process, retaining the ambiguities of the German past and embracing the ambiguities of the German present.

Empty Library



Enhanced map of location of Empty Library (marked by pin in top right corner).

Directly across the street from the Neue Wache, the Humboldt University Law building stands proudly, right next to the Berlin State Opera. In between these two stately structures, there

⁷⁶ Ouroussoff, "A Forest."

is a large plaza, known now as Bebelplatz (formerly Opernplatz). In an experience similar to noticing one of Gunter Demnig's Stolpersteine, a large glass square catches the eye when walking across the plaza. Standing above the glass, a ghostly collection of empty shelves stares up at anyone looking down into the space, with little explanation to be found.

The glass covers Micha Ullman's *Empty Library*, an installation created to memorialize the Nazi book burnings. In early 1933, after Hitler's appointment to the chancellery, the Nazi party began their campaign to "synchronize" German cultural organizations and trends with Nazi ideology. In charge of this process was Joseph Goebbels, the Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. Under this process, art that did not fit the Nazi model was labeled as "degenerate," and therefore then excluded from acceptable society. Since much of the party's early support came from students, Goebbels enlisted the National Socialist German Students' Association to help with the monitoring and exclusion of literature deemed offensive. The Association took on this mission with gusto, proclaiming a nationwide "Action against the Un-German Spirit," which included asking local chapters to plant commissioned articles in the press, sponsor and advocate speeches by well-known Nazi figures, and provide lists of "un-German" authors.⁷⁷ This process culminated on May 10, when book burnings of works by "degenerate" authors were held around the country, ushering in the pervasive Nazi control of culture. The most notable book burning was held at the then-Opernplatz in Berlin in the face of Humboldt's law department, where a reported 40,000 onlookers gathered to listen to Goebbels's speech: "No to decadence and moral corruption," he proclaimed, "Yes to decency and morality in family and state! The era of extreme Jewish intellectualism is now at an end."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Book Burning," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005852>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

On the 60th anniversary of the book burning in 1993, the German Senate and the Mitte local government announced a competition for a memorial to the book burning, an idea that Jennifer Jordan refers to as “a moral project embedded in the urban landscape.”⁷⁹ Ullman, an Israeli artist, submitted the winning design, which he described personally:

The work is composed of a subterranean, hermetically sealed room in the middle of Bebelplatz. It represents a library, whose walls are covered in shelves of white-plastered concrete. Twenty thousand books would fit here...Einstein formulated that energy is matter times the square of the speed of light, or the opposite – matter (books) in connection with light (fire) is transformed into energy...Only the spirit of the books and the people remains; they meet each other in the heavens (reflection).⁸⁰

There is a way to access the enclosed room through an underground entrance, but visitors are not allowed inside.⁸¹ Ullman also chose to include a small tablet set into the stones where the glass is laid, simply noting the significance of the site in relation to the Nazi book burnings and quoting German



View of Empty Library from Bebelplatz.

⁷⁹ Jennifer A. Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 102.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸¹ *Bebelplatz Night of Shame Monument*, photograph, February 22, 2007, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/1/1d/Bebelplatz_Night_of_Shame_Monument.jpg.

writer Heinrich Heine's famously prescient prose, "Where books are burned, so one day will people be burned as well."⁸²

In Ullman's design, visitors can see down into the library, but they are unable to enter, a reality that both notes the immutability of history while acknowledging its omnipresence. In a unique occurrence, Ullman led a tour and gave his personal interpretation of the memorial in 2014 for a small group of artists and a journalist: "You can see the emptiness and the silence. Those are the two important materials the memorial is made of...When I look at the glass, I see the sky's reflection. In Berlin's case – there are usually clouds too. As far as I'm concerned, they're like smoke. So the books in the library are burning almost every day."⁸³ Though the site does not deal directly with the death of human beings, it too memorializes an absence, an absence that, as Heine notes, preceded and paved the way for the more familiar and more tragic absences.

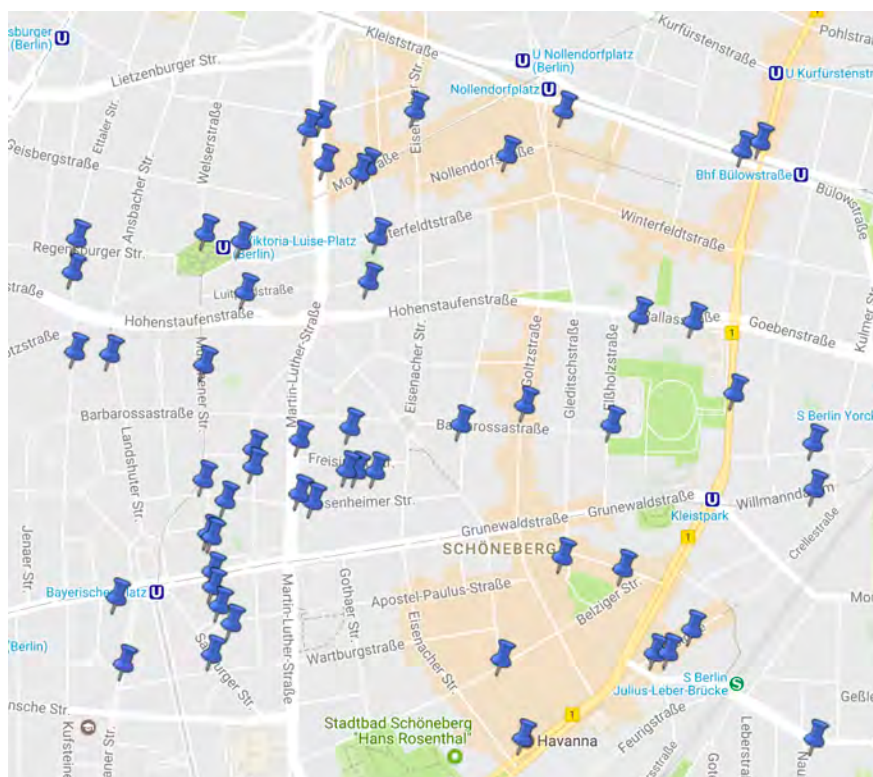
Ullman's memorial was never embroiled in any type of debate – he himself admits that he "didn't know how people would react when it was completed, but what happened here is a miracle. People loved it from the beginning...They come to see something that almost doesn't exist."⁸⁴ Even though *Empty Library* does not reflect the myriad layers of ambiguity and controversy that something like the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe does, it still represents an absence that is emblematic of the Nazi era, a further example of the complicated place of that legacy in German identity.

⁸² Young, *At Memory's*, 107.

⁸³ Ofer Aderet, "Israeli Sculptor Gives Rare Tour of his Book-burning Memorial in Berlin," *Haaretz*, September 7, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/1.614229>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Stolpersteine



Enhanced map showing Stolpersteine in southwestern neighborhood of Schöneberg.

Walking through the streets of Berlin, it is often easy to be distracted by the neon signs in the windows of the *spätkaufs* (literally, “late-shops”), the yellow buses and trams, or the mouth-watering pictures on the menus of the ubiquitous casual kebab and *currywurst* restaurants. Once in a while, when looking down at the ground, a brass plate can catch the eye. Simple but noticeable, these plates, known as *Stolpersteine* (“stumbling stones”), may be inscribed with a person’s name, their birth date, deportation date, and where they were killed during the Holocaust. Helmed by German artist Gunter Demnig, the *Stolpersteine* project has been memorializing the streets of Europe since the early 1990s.

Demnig was living in Cologne in December 1992, when the 50-year anniversary of Heinrich Himmler’s “Auschwitz decree” – the order for the deportation of Sinti and Roma to

concentration camps – came around. To commemorate those who had been deported, Demnig had built a rolling printing machine that he could push through the streets of Cologne, marking the pavement with the phrase “a trace against forgetting.” While wheeling his device through Cologne, Demnig says that an elderly resident came up to him and claimed that there had never been any Gypsies in the city to begin with. Once he completed his own independent research, it was clear to Demnig that there in fact had been plenty of Gypsies and Jews in Cologne, living alongside Germans until the beginning of the Holocaust.⁸⁵

After this episode, Demnig first came up with the idea to create the Stolpersteine.⁸⁶ In 1994, the first 250 blocks were originally shown in an exhibition, then installed throughout Cologne. Soon after, Demnig took the project to Berlin, affixing a little over 50 plaques to the sidewalks of the Kreuzberg neighborhood as part of an exhibition organized by the New Art Society.⁸⁷ However, what was originally intended as a relatively small installation quickly grew in scope, as Demnig realized he could install more and more in different cities. German individuals, as well as school groups and organizations, reached out to Demnig in order to sponsor a plaque. To do so, the interested group researches a person – often a Jew – killed in the Holocaust, finding out their name, where they lived, when they were deported, and where and when they were killed. This information, along with a modest payment raised by the group, is sent to Demnig, who originally forged the plaque himself and installed it personally. In 2007, after interest from foreign groups, Deming expanded the scope of the project beyond Germany’s borders. Eventually, the demand became too high for Demnig to create and install every single

⁸⁵ Kirsten Grieshaber, "Plaques for Nazi Victims Offer a Personal Impact," *New York Times* (New York), November 29, 2003, [Page #], <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/29/arts/plaques-for-nazi-victims-offer-a-personal-impact.html?scp=1&sq=demnig&st=nyt>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Monika Richarz, "Stumbling Stones: Marks of Holocaust Memory on German Streets," in *Mediating Modernity*, ed. Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 330.

plaque himself, so another sculptor now makes the stones for Demnig to install by hand. Demnig has estimated that he spends around 260 days out of the year on the road installing the plaques, leading to over 60,000 Stolpersteine having been installed in over 20 countries across Europe by 2016.⁸⁸

Deming's Stolpersteine are placed in front of the house where a Holocaust victim lived or at their last-known place of employment. The inscription begins "Here lived" (when appropriate), continuing to list the subject's name, the year of birth, and then information about the subject's Holocaust timeline when available, including when they were deported, what camp they were sent to, and even their death date. Each stone focuses directly on an individual, making them feel more like a gravestone than a memorial at times.⁸⁹ Indeed, since this is a memorial focused on the victims of the Holocaust, the Stolpersteine can actually



Stolperstein for Berthold Goldschmidt, Reichenberger Strasse 181, Berlin.

act as a gravesite in practice, since many victims were never laid to rest in a traditional marked grave. The coordinator of the project for Hamburg, Peter Hess, described this phenomenon in an interview:

I personally am most touched by the reaction of the relatives who want to have stones laid for murdered family members. The ceremony is very, very important for them. They come from Australia, from America, from Israel to witness the ceremony...other relatives, who live here, or sponsors regularly go to visit the stones on the victims' birthdays or the anniversaries of their death; they clean

⁸⁸ Swann Nowak, comp., *Stolpersteine vs. Memorial*, [Page #], December 2015, <http://infovis.fh-potsdam.de/mappingzebras/stolpersteine/>; Anne Thomas to Deutsche Welle newsgroup, "20 Years of 'Stolpersteine,'" May 5, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/20-years-of-stolpersteine/a-19252785>.

⁸⁹ David Yates, *Stolpersteine Berlin 203e (Reichenberger Strasse 181)*, photograph, and Berlin, <http://andberlin.com/stolpersteine-in-berlin/stolpersteine-berlin-203e-reichenberger-strasse-181/>.

them, lay a flower on the stone, or silently commemorate their murdered relatives.⁹⁰

In the Holocaust, the Nazis were able to dehumanize and to remove the individuality of their victims by replacing their names with numbers and killing them en masse, leaving little trace (besides their extensive record-keeping) of any individual man or woman to mourn. The Stolpersteine project is a way to recapture the individuality of those victims, zooming the focus of the memorial project all the way in to look at one person and how the Holocaust changed (and ended) his or her life.

Because the idea for the Stolpersteine began in the early 1990s and execution continued throughout the mid-2000s, this “decentralized” memorial is often compared to Peter Eisenman’s Holocaust memorial in Berlin, which shared a similar timeline. Though the Eisenman memorial communicates the vastness of the Holocaust well, inviting visitors to get lost exploring the immersive field of stelae, the Stolpersteine reduces the magnitude of the genocide to an individual level. Monika Richarz argues that the Stolpersteine force passersby to stop and realize that the victims of Nazi oppression are not just a numerically inconceivable, historically distant group of millions, but that they were also individual people, living amongst those who would eventually stand by and allow their deportation and subsequent murder.⁹¹ The Stolpersteine have also been referred to as a more “grassroots” memorial, since the creation and installation of a plaque requires no formal institutional backing, which would demand a potentially-arduous approval process similar to that of the Eisenman memorial. Instead, the research and fundraising for stones is often completed by school groups, making the memorial a creative supplement to traditional teaching methods about the Holocaust (a predictably complex issue itself in

⁹⁰ Richarz, "Stumbling Stones," 329-330.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 335.

Germany).⁹² The involvement of schoolchildren ensures that Holocaust memory lives on, even as the survivors who experienced it directly pass away.

The memorial has not been the source of as much controversy as Eisenman's, but the stones are not always well-received after their installation. Some critics have complained that the installation of the stones may depreciate the value of their real estate, as one Hamburg district council originally did, but many with this specific complaint are successfully convinced to allow the project to continue as planned.⁹³ The plaques are small enough to avoid the vandalism that larger memorials have space for, but some have been pulled up altogether and stolen. Demnig recalls multiple occasions where he has heard anti-Semitic remarks from onlookers while he was installing a plaque, with some even going as far as one homeowner who was not consulted about the installation and yelled, "Now I have two gravestones on my doorstep. If I'd known that Jews had lived here, I'd have never bought the house in the first place!"⁹⁴ An offensive statement without a doubt, this denigration actually hearkens back to part of the namesake of the memorial. The initial double-entendre is clear: by catching the attention of someone walking down the street, that person is made to "stumble" on the Holocaust legacy, and they have to stop walking (as one would when tripping over something in their path) and think about something that they may not have naturally. However, the "stumbling stone" characterization also evokes an expression from the Nazi era. As noted in the debates around installing the memorial stones in Munich, a common response was "A Jew must be buried here."⁹⁵ Through this subtle reference,

⁹² Ibid., 332.

⁹³ Ibid., 331.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 334-335.

⁹⁵ Memorandum, "Munich City Council Meeting Minutes - 6.16.2004," June 16, 2004, <http://alt.stolpersteine-muenchen.de/Archiv/Docu/docu-040616-sitzg.htm>.

the stones remind Germans that this anti-Semitism is an indelible part of their past, an integral part of the Holocaust memorial process.

In addition to ordinary vandalism, the installation of Stolpersteine was also heavily debated in some cities. As mentioned above, the city of Munich had extensive discussions in 2004 about whether or not to allow Demnig to expand the project into its streets. When the Nazis destroyed Jewish cemeteries, they would often repurpose the gravestones in order to pave sidewalks, implicitly intending to desecrate the Jewish dead by forcing Germans to literally walk over the gravestones of those Jews. Christian Ude, the former mayor of Munich, spoke out against the Stolpersteine, claiming that memorializing the victims of the Holocaust in a way that would necessitate their plaques being walked over denigrates their memory; his view was also shared by then-President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Charlotte Knobloch, who similarly condemned the project in favor of a more traditional, centralized memorial. The City Council of Munich eventually decided against formally allowing Stolpersteine, opting instead for Knobloch's plan of engraving the names of the Jewish victims of Munich on a tablet in their central synagogue. As Richarz notes, "[In the synagogue, the names] are protected from too much public exposure to a certain extent, but they no longer have any function in the everyday life of the neighborhoods where the victims used to live."⁹⁶ This method also goes against one of the integral tenets of the Stolpersteine project, which is to memorialize all victims, as opposed to only considering Jews.

Despite its differences from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Demnig's Stolpersteine constitute a successful counter-memorial by James Young's standards.

Traditionally, memorials occupy one central space which can be visited by people who have the

⁹⁶ Ibid.; Richarz, "Stumbling Stones," 331.

intention of engaging with the legacy in question. Instead, Demnig's project brings the legacy to the people, making visitors of anyone who happens to glance down at the shiny brass plaque. Demnig's memorial also specifies the memorial focus, placing importance on each individual life lost in the Holocaust and reinstalling those lives in the context that they used to exist in, as opposed to the conventionally wide lens used to examine the victims of the Nazis. Finally, the fact that some critics find the Stolpersteine completely inappropriate reinforces the relevancy of the project, since it further embodies the emphasis on the constant and unchanging ambiguity of the Holocaust legacy in German national memory.

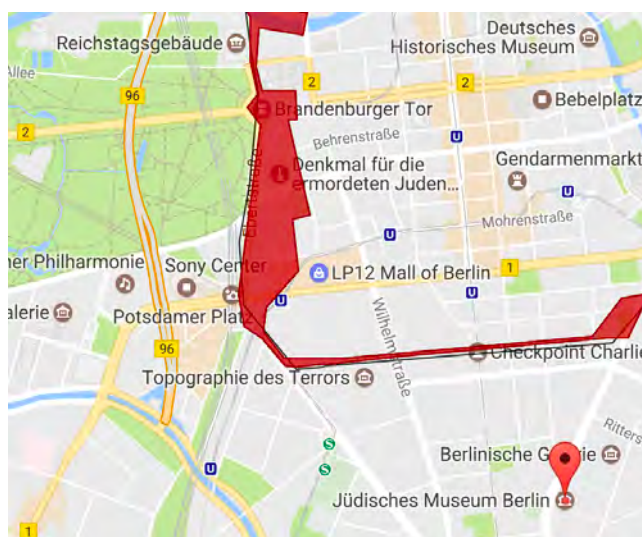
When attempting to memorialize and engage with a legacy as complicated as that of the Holocaust in Germany, it becomes exceedingly difficult to avoid the implications and references to Nazi and Soviet culture that traditional memorials often contain. The countermemorial was created in order to deter this very problem. In its abstraction, the countermemorial does engender controversy; simply look to the seemingly never-ending debate about the form and use of the Eisenman memorial for an example. However, as Young notes in his description of the process of choosing Eisenman's design, reducing controversy was never the plan. Holocaust legacy in Germany is a door that can never be fully shut, and these sites do not attempt that. Rather, they beg for more questions and more discussion, never allowing that door to close.

Chapter 4: The Jewish Museum Berlin

In a city rife with memory stacked upon itself, memorials and countermemorials are everywhere. However, when dealing with the Holocaust legacy in Berlin, it is also appropriate to include analysis of museums when looking at these other sites. Before combining these

categories, it should be noted that museums can be differentiated from memorials, in that they are not quite as publicly accessible. A memorial is a completely public space, one that anyone can walk by and look at on their daily walk to work, a space that can be used in a wide variety of ways by a wide variety of visitors (as seen in the aforementioned controversy around the Eisenman memorial). Museums, on the other hand, necessitate some sort of barrier to entry. Being housed in a building requires a door of course, and even just that door creates a certain degree of separation. Some museums also require an entry fee, barring those who do not have the means and making the museum not as public of a space as a memorial. Finally, museums are meant to serve as a setting to display exhibitions, meaning that their focus should be on the internal design over the external. Despite these differences, the museum does become part of the landscape, and the façade could be seen as fulfilling some of the same functions as a memorial. Museums still function as sites for memory to be preserved, analyzed, and discussed, meaning that they retain a certain relevance for considering how that memory affects identity.

Jewish Museum Berlin



Enhanced map of location of Jewish Museum Berlin (marked by pin in bottom right corner).

Though the central museum area in Berlin is the appropriately-named Museum Island, a small island at the end of Unter den Linden home to four of the main city museums, the most significant museum for Holocaust memory is located south of there, in Kreuzberg. Just within the boundaries of former West Berlin and a stone's throw from Checkpoint Charlie sits Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum of Berlin. Walking down Lindenstrasse, passing squat apartment buildings and small shops, the Jewish Museum rises like a mountain of glass and steel out of the pavement.⁹⁷ Grafted onto the baroque Collegienhaus, Libeskind's design disrupts the quietude of the neighborhood, presenting itself as a sight that cannot be overlooked. Inside, the museum houses the legacy of the German Jewish community, a community that is inextricably linked with its destruction and erasure at the hands of its neighbors.

Though iconic, Libeskind's museum is not the first Jewish Museum in Berlin. The original Jewish Museum was located in northern Berlin, originating simply as a collection of religious artifacts, portraits, manuscripts, prints, and other items bequeathed to the Jewish Community of Berlin in 1907 by Albert Wolf, a Dresden jeweler. After setting up a fund for the purchase of contemporary pieces, art historian and curator Karl Schwarz founded the Jewish Museum association in 1929. Schwarz significantly grew the collection, expanding it to the point that he was able to build a museum for it, and his Jewish Museum was opened on January 24, 1933. However, Hitler was appointed as Reich Chancellor six days later, and Schwarz soon after took a job in Tel Aviv. Despite Schwarz's departure, the museum remained open and actually functioned as an important hub of the Jewish community in the face of growing antisemitism in

⁹⁷ Bitter Bredt, *Overall Composition - Jewish Museum Berlin*, photograph, Studio Libeskind, <http://libeskind.com/wp-content/uploads/overall-composition-of-jmb-c-bitterbredt-2280x1770.jpg>.

the mid-1930s, but it was shut down in 1938 when the Gestapo seized its collection. Though some works were recovered, most of the pieces housed there still have yet to be located.⁹⁸

After World War II and the construction of the Berlin Wall, West Berliners were unable



View of Collegienhaus from Lindenstrasse.

to access the Märkisches Museum, which had served as a museum for the city's history; in order to fulfill this need, the Berlin Museum was created in West Berlin in 1962. The Berlin Museum was located in the

Collegienhaus, which had originally served as the building for the Royal Court of Justice in Germany's imperial era.⁹⁹ After its destruction in WWII, the Collegienhaus was rebuilt in the 1960s for the Berlin Museum.¹⁰⁰

Once the museum was finished, a plan for a Jewish museum began to be discussed by the board of the Jewish Community, the Berlin Senate, and the management of the Berlin Museum. To support the project, members of these institutions – as well as interested citizens – formed the Society for a Jewish Museum in Berlin, chaired by journalist Hanns-Peter Herz and Heinz Galinski, then-chairman of the Jewish Community of Berlin.¹⁰¹ Originally, the organization had planned to rebuild the palace of Veitel Heine Ephraim – the chairman of the Jewish Community

⁹⁸ Inka Bertz, "The First Jewish Museum in Berlin," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/first-jewish-museum-berlin>.

⁹⁹ Jorg Zagel, *Collegienhaus, Lindenstrasse, Kreuzberg*, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, April 22, 2012, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin,_Kreuzberg,_Lindenstrasse_14,_Juedisches_Museum,_Kollegienhaus.jpg.

¹⁰⁰ "The Baroque Old Building," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/baroque-old-building>.

¹⁰¹ "Our Museum's History, Part 1," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/objects-from-our-museums-history-1>.

of Berlin in the courts of both King Friedrich William I and Friedrich the Great – directly across the street from the Collegienhaus. The Ephraim Palace would house the Jewish Museum, as well as departments of the Berlin Museum such as theatrical history and artifact storage. Though the Ephraim Palace rebuild was eventually canceled by the Berlin Senate, the Berlin Museum had already begun collecting pieces for the future Jewish Museum, and it held its first exhibition of the Jewish collection in 1978.¹⁰²

The idea for a Jewish Museum still remained after the cancellation of the Ephraim Palace, though it soon became tied to the Berlin Museum’s desire for a space to house its local historical collections and special exhibitions, known as the “integrative approach.” Through this plan, the museum could “unite the two museum concepts with their different collections, target demographics, and content, while giving the Jewish Museum some autonomy.”¹⁰³ Instead of a creating a new building just for the Jewish Museum, this approach called for a new building that would mostly house collections from the Berlin Museum, with about a third of the space dedicated to the Jewish Museum and its collections. A competition was announced for the “Extension of the Berlin Museum with a Jewish Museum Department” with this focus in mind in late 1988, and the prize was awarded to Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, whose parents narrowly escaped into Soviet-controlled central Asia at the beginning of the war. After spending the war years interned in separate forced labor camps, they returned to find that eighty-five of their family members were murdered by the Nazis.¹⁰⁴

Most of the submitted designs followed the Berlin Museum’s prescribed approach, creating a new building and dividing the floor area in a way that adhered to stipulations about

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Libeskind, *Breaking Ground: An Immigrant's Journey from Poland to Ground Zero* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), 111-112.

reserving about a third of the space for the Jewish Museum collection, thus designating Jewish history in Berlin as significant yet separate. According to historian Gavriel Rosenfeld, Libeskind's design, known as "Between the Lines," was created in order to view German-Jewish history with the devastation of the Holocaust as a central theme. This design – which features a dominant, unbroken zigzag and a straight line that breaks when it intersects with the zigzag's gaps – called attention to the problems of the Berlin Museum's integrative approach, noting that simply throwing Jewish history under the umbrella of Berlin's city history was reductive and symptomatic of the conservative German project of "[creating] a normal sense of national identity by relativizing the crimes of the Nazi era."¹⁰⁵ The Berlin Museum was looking for a design that would map onto their philosophy of viewing Jewish history in Berlin as a subsection of the city's history, but Libeskind's plan was created with an entirely different ideology in mind. As discussed in Studio Libeskind's history of the building, the design was created with three central tenets:

The impossibility of understanding the history of Berlin without understanding the enormous intellectual, economic and cultural contributions made by the Jewish citizens of Berlin...the necessity to integrate physically and spiritually the meaning of the Holocaust into the consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin...and, that only through the acknowledgement and incorporation of this erasure and void of Jewish life in Berlin, can the history of Berlin and Europe have a human future.¹⁰⁶

These pillars focus Libeskind's design not on the history of Berlin (the intended focus of the Berlin Museum), but on the history of Jews in Berlin, and the impact that their eradication had (and continues to have) on German society, identity, and culture. Unfortunately, this important

¹⁰⁵ Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Building After Auschwitz: Jewish Architecture and the Memory of the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 186.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Andenmatten, Caitlin Walsh, and James Wisniewski, *Jewish Museum Berlin*, Rensselaer Case Studies Project (Troy, NY: Rensselaer School of Architecture, 2011), 10.

intellectual debate inspired by the design would soon take a backseat to more pressing political matters in the wake of Germany's sudden reunification.

Once the Wall fell and Berlin was no longer divided, many West Berlin institutions were forced to absorb their Eastern counterparts, and the Berlin Museum was no exemption. In June 1995, the Berlin Museum, the Märkisches Museum, and several other city institutions were aggregated into the new Berlin City Museum Foundation, and Reiner Güntzer, the Senate spokesperson responsible for museums, was named director. In the wake of this process, the Berlin Museum was shuttered, and its collection was folded in with the aggregated collections of all the institutions that suddenly existed under the purview of the Berlin City Museum Foundation.¹⁰⁷ As noted in the history published by the Jewish Museum itself on its official website:

The Jewish Museum was now one of five “departments,” comprising two of the twenty-three “sections” of this museum association. This development jeopardized the original “integrative concept” of Jewish and Berlin history, and minority and majority perspectives, coexisting on an equal basis. The exhibition and storage rooms of the extension were to contain not only holdings of the Berlin Museum, but also the far more substantial collections of the Märkisches Museum.¹⁰⁸

By combining these collections, the Jewish Museum project was placed in competition with a much greater number of departments, all vying for limited space.

Just before the formation of the City Museum Foundation, Israeli art historian and curator Amnon Barzel was chosen as the head of the “Jewish Museum Department” – a name that Libeskind took offense to in his design submission, since he claimed it evoked Adolf Eichmann's Jewish Department in the SS and thus exemplified what he designated as rampant

¹⁰⁷ "Our Museum's History, Part 2," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/node/2011>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

historical amnesia in post-reunification Germany.¹⁰⁹ Barzel emphasized his own interpretation of the project, asserting “that the Jewish Museum should tell the story of the majority society from the perspective of the Jewish minority and not vice versa, as previously planned.”¹¹⁰ Barzel’s position was the first official administrative recognition of the idea that the Jewish Museum should be a physically and administratively autonomous entity, separate from any city museum, and this interpretation necessitated a reconsideration of the project. A tension soon emerged between Barzel, Libeskind, and their supports and Güntzer and his camp, including the city’s then-building director, Hans Stimmann, who is still famous for his rigid directives mandating a conservative architectural style for new projects in Berlin in the post-reunification era.¹¹¹ Unsurprisingly, the conservative Stimmann did not approve of Libeskind’s design, even going as far as to deem it an “architectural fart.” Stimmann also validated Libeskind’s concerns about the German tendency to want to close the door on Holocaust history, saying “I’m sick and tired of all this Jewish history. We’ve got too much Jewish history in Berlin as it is. We don’t need any more.”¹¹² These tensions came to a head in 1997, when Barzel was fired, attracting extreme criticism against Güntzer and Stimmann from both the Jewish Community and international institutions.¹¹³

The Jewish Museum’s inclusion in the City Museum Foundation also drew attention to the potential incompatibility of some of the collections. In 1992, before the official merger with the Berlin Museum, the Märkisches Museum showed items from its Jewish history collection in the Berlin Museum’s Jewish history section in an exhibition titled *The Other Half*. Included in

¹⁰⁹ Rosenfeld, *Building After*, 187.

¹¹⁰ “Our Museum’s History, Part 2.”

¹¹¹ Andreas Tzortzis, “Berlin’s Post-Wall Master Builder Retires,” *New York Times* (New York), September 27, 2006, [Page #], <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/27/arts/design/27stim.html>.

¹¹² Libeskind, *Breaking Ground*, 136.

¹¹³ “Our Museum’s History, Part 2.”

this exhibition were pieces such as a collection of “Jewish silver,” a term denoting metals taken from Jews as a result of Nazi pillaging in the late 1930s. After these metals were taken, the museum’s then-director was able to purchase them at a lower price from the Nazis, thus adding to the museum’s collection and profiting off of the oppression of Jews. Merging these two museums placed the Jewish Museum in an exceedingly problematic position, combining a museum that had benefitted from Nazi looting and the Jewish Museum itself, which had received funding and donations based specifically on the fact that the Berlin Museum was created after WWII, excluding it from any possibility of Nazi sympathizing.¹¹⁴ Reminiscent of the aforementioned Degussa controversy during the building of Peter Eisenman’s Holocaust memorial, the situation reinforces Libeskind’s emphasis on the Holocaust as an unavoidable part of German history.



Collegienhaus and Main Building from Lindenstrasse.

Though Barzel’s firing represented a setback, the Berlin Senate reached out to former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury W. Michael Blumenthal, who was German-born and had escaped the Nazis when his family moved to Shanghai in 1939, though they were forced

to spend the next eight years in the Japanese-controlled Shanghai Ghetto.¹¹⁵ Blumenthal agreed

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Clare Crawford, "From Nazi Refugee to Treasury Chief: Mike Blumenthal's Next Step May Be Closer to Carter," *People*, August 29, 1977, [Page #], <http://people.com/archive/from-nazi-refugee-to-treasury-chief-mike-blumenthals-next-step-may-be-closer-to-carter-vol-8-no-9/>.

to come on as director in Barzel's place in the fall of 1997 and he quickly showed his affinity for Barzel's ideological position, championing the museum's administrative independence. Under Blumenthal's direction, the previous plan of a Jewish Museum in connection with the City Museum Foundation was dropped in favor of a fully autonomous, standalone Jewish Museum.¹¹⁶ Libeskind's design was completed in 1999, attracting as many as 350,000 visitors in two years before there were any actual exhibitions.¹¹⁷

On September 9, 2001, the museum held a black tie, invite-only grand opening gala in advance of the public opening, which was itself planned for September 11 but delayed due to the U.S. terror attacks. Written about in the next day's issue of the *New York Times* by journalist Steven Erlanger in an account entitled "A Memory-Strewn Celebration of Germany's Jews," the museum's gala was illustrative of the ambiguities swirling around the opening of a Jewish Museum in Berlin. In an interview at the event, Blumenthal said, "With this museum, I want Germans, when they think of the word 'Jew,' to think of something other than Auschwitz and guilt. I want them to think of the Jews as people – and here are their faces – who were loyal citizens and helped build the country. A sense of national responsibility is different from a sense of guilt." However, at the same event, Blumenthal gave a speech, in which he reminded revelers that the event was "an occasion for sadness and somber reflection."¹¹⁸ Then-President Johannes Rau also noted the Holocaust legacy's significance, though he similarly warned that "we shouldn't come to the false conclusion that the Holocaust was the sum of German-Jewish history."¹¹⁹ Blumenthal and Rau's comments demonstrate the inevitable difficulty of the Jewish

¹¹⁶ "Our Museum's History, Part 3," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/objects-from-our-museums-history-3>.

¹¹⁷ Steven Erlanger, "A Memory-Strewn Celebration of Germany's Jews," *New York Times* (New York), September 10, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/10/world/a-memory-strewn-celebration-of-germany-s-jews.html>.

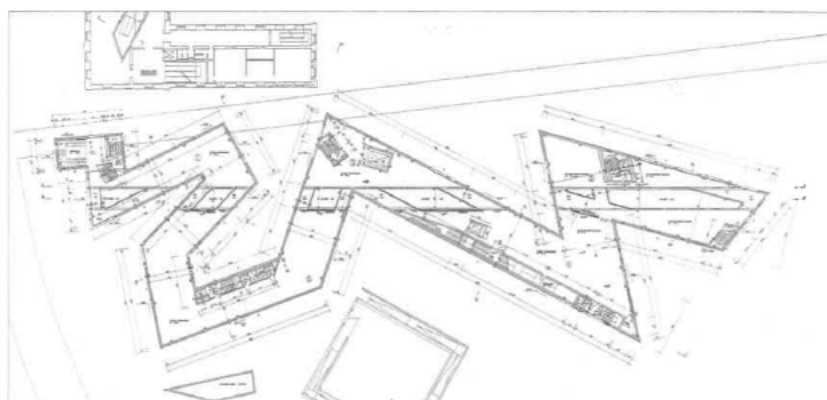
¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Museum's project. Though the museum was not meant as a Holocaust memorial and the curators and management wanted it to encapsulate more than just the history of German Jews under the Nazis, the Holocaust is an inescapable memory, and few involved with the museum wanted to figuratively shut the door on that legacy.¹²⁰ This gala was celebrating the opening of the Jewish Museum, a museum that was intended to serve as an illustration of all Jewish life in Germany over centuries, but the night was "thick with the haunting acrid scent of the Holocaust," as Erlanger so dramatically writes. This constant presence of Holocaust legacy is integral to German cultural memory, and Libeskind's design reflects that reality.

Though Libeskind's massive building is the focal point of the museum architecturally, the first building that visitors enter is actually the Collegienhaus, where the Berlin Museum was originally housed.¹²¹

Libeskind connects the two structures in an attempt to communicate immediately the interconnectedness of German and Jewish history,



"Between the Lines" architectural rendering.

mandating visitors to first interact with a building evocative of pre-Nazi Germany.¹²² From outside, the two buildings look totally separate, both in terms of direct physical connection and architectural design. Upon entering Collegienhaus, visitors must access the main building via an underground passageway, whereupon they fully enter into the exhibit space. As briefly described

¹²⁰ Andenmatten, Walsh, and Wisnewski, *Jewish Museum*, 34.

¹²¹ *Collegienhaus and Main Building*, photograph, Studio Libeskind, <http://libeskind.com/work/jewish-museum-berlin/>.

¹²² Rosenfeld, *Building After*, 188.



The “memory void” and Kadishman’s Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves installation.

earlier, the museum’s dominant shape is an outsized zigzag, representing a deconstructed Star of David (which could be designated as the central symbol of Judaism).¹²³ The façade is made of silvery zinc, with violent, slashing cuts ripping windows into the walls. Plowing through this structure is a straight line that breaks when it meets one of the zigzag’s gaps.¹²⁴ The internal line has the effect of creating gaps in the structure, opening up what Libeskind terms as “voids,” which are integral to the design. In

Libeskind’s words: “The idea is very simple: to

build the museum around a void that runs through it, a void that is to be experienced by the public. Physically, very little remains of the Jewish presence in Berlin...I thought therefore that this ‘void’...should become the structural feature that is crystallized in this particular space of the city.”¹²⁵ Visitors walking through the museum have to confront the voids as they cut through the normal progression of their museum experience, perhaps interrupting contemplation about an exhibition not related to the Holocaust. The voids were not designed with any specific purpose in mind, serving only as symbolic entities. Though almost all of them remain empty, the “memory void” includes an installation by Israeli artist Menashe Kadishman called *Shalekhet (Fallen Leaves)*, which consists of 10,000 faces cut into iron plates covering the ground. Visitors are

¹²³ Bernhard Schneider and Daniel Libeskind, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin: Between the Lines* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 1999), 27.

¹²⁴ Daniel Libeskind, *Between the Lines*, 1988, illustration, Jewish Museum Berlin.

¹²⁵ Rosenfeld, *Building After*, 187.

encouraged to walk across the piece, creating a grating, rattling sound that echoes throughout the void. The mouths of the faces are agape, evoking surprise, fear, and horror, and the sound of the plates can be observed to cause similar expressions on the faces of visitors.¹²⁶ Additionally, the internal design includes concrete pillars jutting through walls and ceilings at peculiar angles, creating a sense of chaos in a space that should be calm and quiet. Through these architectural devices, Libeskind is able to forge a space that distracts the museum-goer, constantly alluding to the absent hole in German society caused by the Holocaust.¹²⁷

Libeskind's museum is arranged on various axes, each of which lead to different parts of the exhibition space. The Axis of Continuity leads visitors to the permanent exhibition space, which traces the history of Jews in Germany chronologically in an exhibition entitled "Two Millennia of German Jewish History," as well as incorporating information about Jewish religious traditions and notable German Jews throughout history. Of course, the exhibition includes a section on the Holocaust, though in keeping with the mission of the museum, this narrative focuses on Jewish reactions and forms of resistance, emphasizing Jewish agency in a time when that agency was being stolen from them.¹²⁸ Apart from the permanent collection, the museum rotates temporary exhibitions with contemporary significance, such as *Cherchez la femme*, which analyzes evolving trends in women's religious dress, and Israeli artist Eran Shakine's *A Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew*, a series of somewhat humorous but relevant illustrations that draw on the shared history and similarities between the three titular religions.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ "Shalekhet - Fallen Leaves," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/shalekhet-fallen-leaves>; *Shalekhet - Fallen Leaves*, photograph, Studio Libeskind, <http://libeskind.com/work/jewish-museum-berlin/>.

¹²⁷ Rosenfeld, *Building After*, 190.

¹²⁸ "Our Museum's History, Part 1."

¹²⁹ "Cherchez la femme" [Look for the Woman], Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/cherchez-la-femme>; "Eran Shakine: A Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew," Jewish Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/eran-shakine>.

If a visitor chooses to take the Axis of Exile, they walk down a long hallway that widens as it goes, leading to a glass door that opens outside the museum building. Lisa Costello describes this layout as part of the building's "performative" aspect, in that the building's design adds metaphorical context to the exhibits. In Costello's words, "Even if [the visitor] does not see this widening and narrowing, their body will sense it physically as an opening and closing of space."¹³⁰ The walls of the corridor are inscribed with the myriad cities that those fleeing the Nazis emigrated to, and travel documents, suitcases, and possessions belonging to exiles are also shown. Though exile is a concept with generally negative connotations, the widening of the tunnel and the glass door imply a figurative light at the end of the tunnel. That light is complicated, however, by what lies on the other side of the heavy, uneven door. Visitors step outside onto slanted ground and are presented with the Garden of Exile, a collection of forty-nine tall planters vertically placed on an angle. The physical presentation of the garden disorients visitors, who must confront this disorientation much as those exiled in the Nazi era had to undergo the disorientation of leaving their homes. The garden is also accessible via the street, meaning that passersby can enter as they please and affect the space, symbolizing the importance of strangers to an exile in a foreign land. The number of planters also holds significance; forty-eight are filled with earth from Berlin to signify the creation of Israel in 1948, and the last one is filled with earth from Jerusalem, representing the Jewish presence in Berlin.¹³¹ Though the meaning of the garden can be explained by a museum guide or informational placards, Libeskind's design principles are only fully realized through the visitor's interaction with the

¹³⁰ Lisa A. Costello, "Performative Memory: Form and Content in the Jewish Museum Berlin," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 9, no. 4 (November 2013): 11.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12; Libeskind's intention in this design is inscribed on a placard displayed in the space.

space, and each visitor creates a personalized interpretation of the space through his or her individual experience.¹³²

Following an alternative path takes visitors down the Axis of the Holocaust, which contains names of concentration camps as well as photos and information about Jews killed in those camps. Similar to Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine*, this exhibition recontextualizes the dehumanized victims as individuals who held jobs and owned homes before their lives were destroyed.¹³³ The Axis of the Holocaust also narrows as it progresses, as opposed to the Axis of Exile, and it ends in a solid black metal door instead of its counterpart's glass door, which opens to what Filler calls "the most affecting memorial chamber of modern times."¹³⁴ The Holocaust Void is a ninety-foot concrete tower without heat or air conditioning, lit only by a small slit in the ceiling. Visitors enter through the heavy black door – opened by a museum employee, not the visitors themselves – which shuts with menacing weight, giving an impression of imprisonment. Though an industrial ladder that leads up to the roof is affixed to one of the walls, it is impossibly high, and its inaccessibility is evocative of the hopelessness of the concentration camps. Libeskind also built small, nearly-invisible holes into the wall of the structure, allowing the sounds of the outside world to filter into the isolation imposed on the visitor. In Filler's words, "There is no escape and no refuge; there is not a comforting word nor an uplifting image – no inscription, no natural form, no eternal flame."¹³⁵ Instead of actual items in an exhibit, which represent the material history of the event, Libeskind's Holocaust Void focuses on emulating the emotions that victims would have felt; visitors are forced to engage with acute feelings of being trapped with little hope and confined in a dark, cold space, though the space

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 14-15.

¹³⁴ Martin Filler, "Into the Void," *New Republic*, October 2001, <https://newrepublic.com/article/66008/the-void>.

¹³⁵ Ibid; Costello, "Performative Memory," 15.

can never and does not try to recreate the physical ghetto or concentration camp experience. Again, Costello notes that, much like Eisenman's use of abstraction, Libeskind's design is based on personal experience and the individual's choice of how he or she wants to engage with the space.¹³⁶ Just as visitors to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe can decide whether to venture into the center of the larger stelae or simply linger around the smaller ones on the outside of the space, visitors to Libeskind's museum are not forced to go to the Garden of Exile or the Holocaust Void. By choosing to engage with these spaces, the visitor decides to open himself or herself up to a deeper consideration of the Holocaust legacy, a choice that is important to offer when commemorating such a complicated history.

Through this design, Libeskind created a generally well-received museum, which still serves as one of Berlin's most popular attractions. Of course, like any space in Berlin that incorporates Holocaust commemoration, the museum and its design are not without their critics. In his essay "Into the Void," Martin Filler notes a trend that he dubs the "Bilbao Effect," named in reference to Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Filler suggests that the acclaim of Gehry's building catalyzed a shift in museum design, drawing attention to the exterior façade and design of spaces as opposed to the internal exhibitions. Admitting that Libeskind's building is "a profound and powerful work of art," Filler questions how well such a building serves its purpose as a museum. He also notes that, despite the thematic value of the intricate and subtle references that Libeskind's design makes (such as its layout as a deconstructed Star of David), these references are unintelligible to the average visitor without some kind of explanatory guide, which the museum provides via placards placed throughout the space that directly quote

¹³⁶ Ibid., 15-16.

Libeskind and his intentions. Filler does concede that, once inside, Libeskind's concepts like the Garden of Exile and the Holocaust Void have an evocative and impressive effect on the visitor. For example, with regard to the voids: "The average visitor will not understand precisely what is going on. You simply find your way around one of these obstacles without giving it much thought. And yet the sense that something is not right, that everything is really wrong, remains unavoidable... There is nothing esoteric about the effect of his building: it connects with the force of a blow to the solar plexus."¹³⁷ Filler's analysis contradicts itself, noting that, even if the common visitor does not understand every architectural reference, it is unavoidable to notice that something is awry in the space. The feeling that Filler describes, that barely-tangible sense of something being wrong, is critical to Libeskind's project of Holocaust commemoration. For Libeskind, learning about German-Jewish history in Berlin should have a complicated ambiguity attached to it, and Filler's comments confirm Libeskind's success.¹³⁸ In spite of his critiques of the high-minded concepts surrounding the building, Filler finishes his analysis of the building by praising it as "grounded," calling it "a work that will explain to future generations what cannot be said in words about the twentieth century's darkest deed."¹³⁹

Though Filler was able to overlook some of the problems that he noted in his critique of Libeskind's design, other writers were not as forgiving. In a review of Libeskind's 2004 memoir for the *New Republic* sarcastically titled "Mr. Memory," literary critic Ruth Franklin outlines her myriad complaints about Libeskind as a person, his book, and his architectural work. Franklin begins by noting the "vulgar didacticism" that she claims is imbued into Libeskind's designs, which she feels only serves to negate the visual power of these works. The Jewish Museum was

¹³⁷ Filler, "Into the Void."

¹³⁸ Schneider and Libeskind, *Daniel Libeskind*, 30.

¹³⁹ Filler, "Into the Void."

Libeskind's first actual building design – he largely worked in complex theoretical drawings until that point – and Franklin claims that this concept-heavy background plays out in his museum, which she denotes as the first example of his “signature synthesis of highly conceptual gimmickry and morbid historical obsession that would become his brand.” Though her review is full of *ad hominem* attacks on Libeskind and his artistic perspective, Franklin's main criticism of his design for the Jewish Museum is as follows: “Libeskind could not have made his intention any clearer: his building is not a Jewish museum, it is a Holocaust memorial.” Franklin subscribes to Filler's earlier concerns about the focus on museum buildings and not museum exhibitions, and Libeskind's Jewish Museum is undoubtedly a beneficiary of that focus. For Franklin, what she terms as Libeskind turning a Jewish museum space into a Holocaust memorial is “grotesque,” in that it overwhelms the exhibits inside the building, relegating them to a parenthesis.¹⁴⁰

This question of memorial vs. museum is central to most critiques of Libeskind's work. When the building was opened to the public in 1999 before any exhibits were set up, many called for the space to remain empty, serving Berlin as an enormous, brutal countermemorial of Holocaust commemoration.¹⁴¹ Franklin views this debate as a mark of failure, for Libeskind failed to fulfill the task of creating a building that was strictly a museum. For Filler, who also acknowledges this debate, Libeskind's design would have made an incredible memorial:

Libeskind has to a great extent usurped the original purpose of the building, producing a memorial scheme that overwhelms all other references and purposes, and I am inclined to agree with those who would have preferred the structure to stand as a pure monument. There are any number of other places in Berlin where the story of the Jewish people can be told with less competition from the

¹⁴⁰ Ruth Franklin, "Mr. Memory," *New Republic*, February 7, 2005, <https://newrepublic.com/article/68033/mr-memory>.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*; Filler, “Into the Void.”

architectural setting, but none that captures the spirit of a colossal human tragedy as effectively as this one.¹⁴²

Of course, that change was not made at the time, and Libeskind's first-ever building design still stands today as one of the main points of Jewish history and Holocaust legacy in Berlin. Though Franklin and her supporters may not appreciate the ambiguity, this debate about Libeskind's design is absolutely integral to its success as a place of memory. Like Eisenman's memorial, Libeskind's design evokes emotion without invoking conventional architectural practices, generating questions and facilitating extended debate around the place of the Holocaust in both German and Jewish history. Though German-Jewish history encapsulates so much more than just the Holocaust, the destruction of the Nazi era is unavoidable when analyzing that history, and Libeskind's design clearly and beautifully reflects that reality.

In 1988, Daniel Libeskind submitted his design to the competition to design the new wing of the Berlin Museum. With this design, the then-unproven architect flipped the paradigm of the competition on its head, catalyzing debate and eventually completely redefining the purpose of the new building. Libeskind's building necessitated a consideration of how German-Jewish life would be commemorated; not only did his vision extricate this history from that of the city of Berlin, but it also incited important conversation about the role and weight of the Holocaust in this history. By incorporating the voids, as well as spaces like the Garden of Exile and the Holocaust Void, Libeskind firmly asserted his position on the matter, emphasizing that the memory and commemoration of Jewish history in Berlin (and Germany as a whole) is invariably linked to the Nazi era. Despite his design serving as the Jewish Museum, Libeskind

¹⁴² Filler, "Into the Void."

was able to create a structure that directly references the ambiguities and complexities of Holocaust, further illustrating the perpetual struggle to memorialize this legacy in Germany.

Unlike memorials and countermemorials, museums are not created to serve as strictly public sites. As noted above, the housing of museums within a building inherently creates a barrier to the memory process not included in the other sites analyzed here. However, in the case of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, the goals achieved by the building are similar to that of memorials and countermemorials. The abstract design and symbolic features create a space that forces visitors to think about the Holocaust in relation to German-Jewish history; this phenomenon is notable enough that scholars to this day have debated whether or not the museum is itself a memorial site. That debate and the criticism of those who feel that the museum does not function exclusively for its primary aim denote Libeskind's museum as a relevant site, encapsulating many of the ambiguities inherent to German-Jewish history and Holocaust commemoration.

Conclusion

During the fall of my junior year of college, I elected to spend the semester abroad at Bard's Berlin campus. As a newly-moderated history major who had an interest in 20th century European political history but had never been to Europe, Berlin seemed like an obvious choice. I still remember my moderation board urging me to keep an open mind and an observant eye in my time there, in the hope that I would find some phenomenon or legacy to build my senior project around. Upon my arrival in Berlin, I too understood Martin Filler's characterization of something being slightly off, though I noticed it throughout the entire city as well as in

Libeskind's museum. My mother –who visited for a week in October – had also never been to Berlin, and she astutely observed that feeling in her first two days in the city. “It's like the whole city feels just a little guilty, all the time,” I distinctly remember her saying.

As the central location of Hitler's command throughout the Nazi period, Berlin's Holocaust history is ubiquitous. No matter where you are in the city, it is difficult not to encounter the memories of the Holocaust, World War II, and the division of the Cold War. Of course, these memories are most clearly exhibited in the sites created expressly to commemorate them. The traditional memorials built by the Soviet Union in the Cold War remind visitors that the city was dominated by Soviet influence for over forty years, prolonging the trauma of WWII. Though it was built over one hundred years before the Soviet memorials, the Neue Wache serves both as a symbol of the ambiguous layers of German history and a reminder of the reductive approach favored by the post-reunification government. Together, these traditional memorials embody the complex themes of the Cold War period, while also signifying the limitations of the traditional form.

If the aforementioned traditional memorials demonstrate their form's limitations, Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe shows the power of the countermemorial form. The debates about its ambiguity, its abstraction, and its potential for varied use simply deepen the power of this memorial. The countermemorial seeks to embrace debate, hoping to create more questions than it answers, and Eisenman's design fulfills that purpose. Micha Ullman's Empty Library, despite being overshadowed by the Eisenman memorial, beautifully illustrates how the countermemorial can be seamlessly integrated into an otherwise grandiose setting, continuing the memorial process in an alternative yet subtle fashion. Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* project presents what could be even described as a counter to the countermemorial,

using a decentralized space to show the reach of the Holocaust throughout Europe and to recontextualize the lives lost back into their original spaces. Through their use of abstraction and decentralization, these artists are able to create countermemorials that beautifully encapsulate the difficulties of the Holocaust legacy in Berlin, showcasing the ambiguities and creating questions that continue the complex memorial process.

Finally, though museums typically demand a slightly different analysis, Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin is able to straddle the line between museum and memorial. Commissioned to create a new space to house the Jewish collection of the Berlin Museum alongside other exhibits, Libeskind instead devised a building that would only be fitting for an independent Jewish museum. Through the building's design, Libeskind creates a highly referential space that emphasizes the Holocaust legacy as an unavoidable and unforgettable component of the German-Jewish experience. Libeskind's design both evokes the somber tone of the city of Berlin and builds upon it; museum-goers are compelled to confront this legacy at every turn, no matter what exhibits they might be visiting. In this way, the experience ensures that the Holocaust legacy in Berlin will never be forgotten.

The complex trauma and guilt surrounding Holocaust memory in Germany becomes more than apparent in examination of these sites. Germans were forced to give up any opportunity to coalesce around this memory after World War II, due to the circumstances of the Cold War. Following the bifurcation of the Cold War, post-reunification Germany had to figure out both how to rebuild its culture and how to heal the wounds of the 20th century. The explosion of memory and commemoration following reunification is a direct reflection of this ambiguous history; no one memorial can be all-encompassing, and thus many were created in an attempt to process the decades of guilt, trauma, and devastation. Though many of these sites are successful

in continuing the memorial process, and Germans should be commended for undergoing this process of unpacking difficult history, how much ambiguity is too much when dealing with this legacy? Because of the impulse to avoid any appearance of “closing the book” on Holocaust memory, German memorials rarely provide answers to the myriad questions that they provoke. Indeed, the legacy feels as if it is truly unanswerable. Despite the importance of engaging with this legacy and incorporating it into national identity, how can any country truly heal the gaping void left by an event like the Holocaust?

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