

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin: Global Memory, Trauma and the ‘Negative Sublime’

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This essay argues that the construction of the Jewish Museum Berlin and the Berlin Holocaust Memorial constitutes a paradigm shift in Holocaust commemoration in Germany. The structures architecturally resemble their US counterparts and particularly the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum more than they do the other memorials and museums in Berlin’s complex commemorative landscape. American responses to the European catastrophe have significantly impacted European commemorative forms. Indeed, an internationally recognizable memorial architecture seems to be emerging, one emphasizing gaps, voids, incongruities and the personal relation to what theorists and commentators have begun to call ‘negative’ or ‘evil sublime’. Contemporary memorials and museums are not designed to ‘merely’ house collections; rather, they draw attention to themselves as symbols and symptoms of traumatic memory. They *act out* the trauma of the Holocaust as architecture; walking through them is supposed to be a step towards *working through* that trauma as feeling and experience.

Holocaust memorial, traumatic architecture, the Jewish Museum Berlin, the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, negative sublime, Holocaust tourism.

Holocaust tourism is, as a rule, treated with more suspicion than Holocaust commemoration.* As early as 1955, Alain Resnais’ *Night and Fog* invoked the spectre of tourists posing for photographs to contrast the harmless appearance of abandoned crematoria – ‘pretty as a postcard’ – with their historical function. In his 1966 essay ‘Torture’, Jean Améry introduces the fort in Belgium where he himself was tortured by the SS

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

with the ironic remark that perhaps some of his readers may have stumbled upon the place as tourists (2002: 55). In 1998, the Swiss author Daniel Ganzfried exposed Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* for a fraud with the invective: 'Wilkomirski knows Auschwitz and Majdanek only as a tourist' (1998).¹ Ruth Gruber, author of a popular guide to Eastern Europe called *Jewish Heritage Travel* (1999), has more recently expressed her anxieties about a possible result of tourism: 'virtual Jewishness' or fascination with 'things Jewish' in the absence of actual Jewish communities (2002: 5, 10–11). In *Still Alive*, Ruth Kluger, the former director of the University of California's Education Abroad Program in Göttingen and herself a child survivor, suggests that tourists visit the sites of former concentration camps for largely narcissistic reasons (2001: 66).

What is the relation of Holocaust commemoration to Holocaust tourism? Why do we tend to praise one while disparaging the other? These questions have become increasingly important since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) opened East European sites of atrocity to growing numbers of visitors. This article will deal with the two most recent and most visited memorials in the capital of reunified Germany, the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) and the Berlin Holocaust Memorial (BHM). The design of these memorials constitutes a paradigm shift in Holocaust commemoration in Germany. They architecturally resemble their US counterparts – and particularly the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) – more than they do the other memorials and museums in Berlin's complex commemorative landscape. In fact, both were constructed by Jewish American architects who have worked together in the past, Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman. Neither memorial is constructed on a site of any particular historical significance. Finally, both are prominent tourist attractions, drawing significantly larger numbers of visitors than the other memorials in Berlin. More than 700,000 people visited the Jewish Museum in 2004, an increase of over 40,000 from the previous year (Jüdisches Museum 2005).² It is difficult to gauge the number of visitors to the new BHM, which opened to the public in May 2005, since it is accessible on all sides and at all times; but its location between Potsdamer Platz and the Reichstag puts it on one of the most travelled tourist routes in the city, and over half a million people have already visited the memorial's underground documentation centre, often braving long queues to do so (Keller 2006: 10). By way of comparison, the Topography of Terror, a



Figure 1: *The Berlin Holocaust Memorial. (Photograph by the author).*

memorial in the ruined cellar of the former Gestapo headquarters, receives an impressive but significantly smaller number of visitors – an estimated 350,000 annually – in spite of its accidental location on the high-traffic route between Checkpoint Charlie and Potsdamer Platz (Rürup 2005: 83). The press office for Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp communicates similar figures on request (over 300,000 visitors a year).

The increasing number of visitors is related to, and arguably the result of, a corresponding migration of commemoration experts and forms. Some of the most influential figures in the Berlin memorial landscape are US Americans of Jewish descent: I have already mentioned Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman, but W. Michael Blumenthal, the director of the JMB, and James Young, spokesperson for the official commission recommending the Eisenman design, should be added to the list.³ Whatever the causes of the growing American fascination with the Holocaust, there is little doubt that US responses to the European

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

catastrophe have significantly affected European commemorative forms. Indeed, an internationally recognizable memorial architecture seems to be emerging, one emphasizing gaps, voids, incongruities and the personal relation to what theorists and commentators have begun to call ‘negative’ or ‘evil sublime’ (Brumlik 2004; Lang 2000). Contemporary memorials and museums like the BHM and the JMB are not designed to ‘merely’ house collections. Rather, they *act out* the trauma of the Holocaust as architecture; walking through them is supposed to be a step towards *working through* that trauma as feeling and experience.

Traumatic architecture is, in a sense, an expression of the US relationship to the Holocaust. The formal irregularities both reflect and try to make up for geographical and historical distance, introducing visitors to a range of experience beyond their immediate knowledge. The intended effect of such architecture – encouraging visitors to feel like witnesses to the events – has been alternately praised as ‘prosthetic memory’ (Landsberg 1997) and criticised as ‘memory envy’ (Hartman 1996) and ‘trauma envy’ (Mowitt 2000). A look at Berlin shows that the commemorative forms that developed in the United States have returned to the sites of atrocity, or at least nearby. This article will demonstrate the similarities between US and German commemorative structures by comparing the USHMM to the JMB and the BHM. Central to this comparison will be an analysis of the abstract forms of traumatic architecture, the narrative exhibition strategies that fill them out, and the impact of these built forms on the experiences – and memories – of the visitors. This article will also analyse contemporary theories of trauma and memory, which it is argued should be understood in relation to international memorial architecture: the attempts by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), Geoffrey Hartman (1996) and, to some extent, Jean-François Lyotard (1988) to articulate a symptomatics of the Holocaust, and the parallel efforts by Lyotard (1988), Berel Lang (2000) and others to conceptualize the Holocaust in terms of the negative sublime. What trauma theory and the negative sublime have in common is the notion that the past exceeds our capability to represent it, and that this excess manifests itself through formal distortions and narrative gaps. Irregular form, in other words, is the index of unknowable content. The memorial architecture that is the subject of this article not only reflects these theories but can be understood, in turn, as another symptom of unknowable content, displacing history into the spatial and experiential registers of architecture and memory.

A comparison of international commemorative forms, coupled with a critical reading of the theories supporting them, provides at least a provisional explanation for the conflicting imperatives to build Holocaust memorials and not visit them (i.e. the resistance to tourism). The new memorial architecture positions itself at the crossroads of conflicting imperatives by simultaneously placing and displacing the historical unknown. It ‘stages authenticity’, to borrow Dean MacCannell’s phrase (1989:), in a way that abstracts setting from location, subordinating the site of history, the place where events happened, to the process of memory production; and historical narratives to personal feelings and experiences. This shift from the particular *place of history* to the ‘universalizable’ *space of memory* is evident in the layout of the memorial museum, which transforms the centripetal design of the traditional memorial – a sculpture drawing visitors to the centre of a public place or square – into a field of multiple and overlapping trajectories.⁴ Moving through these centrifugal spaces renders the experience of the past both personal and universal: personal because the past is represented as memory and activated through bodily experience; universal because the architecture that does the ‘activating’ can be constructed anywhere.

Remembering the Holocaust is a general trend, one that has become more important, and more ritualistic, as the generation of survivors and witnesses – those with first-hand memories – ages and passes away. The growing fascination with second-hand memory is evident in both Holocaust tourism and Holocaust studies: the representation and commemoration of the past *as* memory is often theorized as a return *of* the past according to the mechanisms of memory (resurfacing trauma, the return of the repressed, collective memory etc.). Theorists have been quick to point out the mystical aspects of the current fascination with memory (Klein 2000; Misztal 2004). This observation is particularly relevant to commemoration of the Holocaust, which has, in recent years, assumed the status of a secular religion. Visitors are drawn to museums and memorials not only – or even primarily – out of morbid curiosity, but in the same way pilgrims are drawn to sites of martyrdom. The structure of this kind of pilgrimage is not only transnational but fundamentally nondoctrinal. What we experience at sites of Holocaust commemoration is not so much a confirmation of religious belief, nationality or ethnicity; visitor demographics cut across these traditional markers of identity.

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

Rather, *memory* itself has become the ritual, open to virtually anyone who experiences the sites. Concerns about ‘the Holocaust industry’ and ‘the Shoah business’ seem to me to miss the point, and in a way typical of conspiracy theories generally, i.e. by mistaking structures and experiences for agency and intent. What we are witnessing in Holocaust commemoration is not the profit motive – most Holocaust memorials and museums do not charge admission – but a popular movement. The ecumenical design of the new memorial museums makes them postmodern cathedrals, transcending national boundaries in their embodiment of the personal relation to the absolute.

My comparison of international commemorative forms is inspired by Levy and Sznajder’s persuasive claim that the Holocaust has become a universal moral standard – the consensual symbol of absolute evil – in an emergent ‘global memory culture’ (2001: 9–10, 15). Global memory finds its architectural equivalent in universal memorial design. However, in Sznajder and Levy’s analysis the term ‘global’ really means ‘Western’. *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust* focuses on a triangular or three-point memory culture with its anchors in the United States, Germany and Israel. The focus of my study is even narrower than Levy and Sznajder’s, which is why I will use the term ‘transnational’ rather than ‘global’. My primary concern is the confluence of commemorative forms in the United States and Germany. While the memorials in these countries bear obvious and significant similarities to, for instance, some of the newer constructions at *Yad Vashem*, they have a specific rhetoric and structure meriting distinct analysis. Israeli memorials tend to emphasize the national significance of memory, linking the Holocaust to the founding of the State of Israel; German and US memorials are Diasporic, emphasizing the links between memory, individuals and nonnational collectives, rather than those between memory and nation.

I. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

As both its critics and its supporters have repeatedly pointed out, the USHMM is designed to bring the significance of the Holocaust home to America – a project underscored by its location on the Mall in Washington D.C. Michael Berenbaum, deputy director of the Presidential Commission

that proposed the museum and later project director of the museum itself, describes the Holocaust as an object lesson in the violation of American values (Cole 2000: 154). Critics have called into question both the morality and the desirability of communicating 'American values' by demonstrating their opposite (Cole 2000: 156–58; Gourevitch 1995; Young 1999: 73). Peter Novick, for instance, sees the widespread preoccupation with the Holocaust as symptomatic of a US victim culture generally, and he suspects that the Holocaust often functions as a collective screen memory for avoiding homegrown atrocities like slavery and the wars against Native Americans (2000: 13–15). James Young also sees the USHMM as a symptom of contemporary identity politics, which he claims has turned the USA into a 'culture of competing catastrophes' (1999: 81). Young and Novick both agree that the Holocaust has come to replace shared rituals, customs and beliefs as the defining centre of US Judaism (*ibid.*). These accounts of the national significance of Holocaust commemoration need to be supplemented by an analysis of the forms, techniques and theories of memory production developed in the United States and exported abroad, particularly to Germany.

The official museum guide to the USHMM⁵ signals the ascendancy of memory over historical comparability.⁶ The following passage is typical in its efforts to understand the universal relevance of the Holocaust in relation to the visitors' individual experiences:

The Museum's educational responsibility is to help visitors apply the metaphoric meaning embedded in Holocaust history to their contemporary experience as individuals and as members of society. To best achieve this, thematic neatness has to be observed in the depiction of the historic event as presented in the exhibition. The exhibition has to be limited to the historic event, so as not to obscure its metaphoric universality (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 19).

The tensions evident in this argument – universality and metaphoric applicability realized through the imposition of historical limits and 'thematic neatness' – reflect the conflicts of the so-called German Historians Debate of the 1980s, which dramatically impacted historiography not only in Europe but also in the United States. The core of the debate involved the issue of uniqueness or exceptionalism: i.e. whether comparing the

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

Holocaust to other historical atrocities also trivialized – perhaps deliberately – its moral significance.⁷ In recent years the debate seems to have lost its urgency, but it dominated academic discussions of the Holocaust for at least a decade, and set the stage for the USHMM's attempts to assert the universal significance of the Holocaust by limiting its historical comparability. As the passage above indicates, the compromise position involves making the *universal* a function of the *personal*. This shift in emphasis from the comparative to the universal/individual is at the heart of what critics call the 'Americanization' of the Holocaust (Flanzbaum 1999). It also marks the emergence of memory – as opposed to history – as the dominant paradigm for representing and experiencing the past. The USHMM commemorates the Holocaust in the United States because the Holocaust is significant for everyone everywhere, not because there are any comparison points to American history.

This shift from the historical to the personal/universal perspective is forged in part through the museum's traumatic architecture, which is designed to transmit (or, to be more accurate, *produce*) the feelings of the victims through the spatial experiences of the visitors. The architect James Ingo Freed constructed the outside of the building to blend in with the other architecture on the Washington Mall. The inside, however, translates catastrophic history into a fragmented space that functions as both symbol of the past and stage setting in the present, encouraging visitors to assume the victim role in the 'ghost world of the Holocaust exhibition' 'hint[ing] at the state of the world in Holocaust times' (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 25). Moving through this space can be disconcerting, as the internal elements are designed to evoke 'an immediate emotional reaction' of 'fear, loneliness, helplessness, almost of panic, but also of holiness' (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 25–26). A distinguishing feature of the USHMM, and of contemporary memorial architecture in general, is its symbolic and theatrical layout, which on the one hand evokes the past, and on the other functions like a stage setting to guide visitors through historically determined roles.

The exhibit is the script to the museum's stage setting, working to integrate the fragmented, emotional architecture into what the museum guide calls a unified 'storyline' (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 51, 55). The storyline is not a historical narrative but a trajectory of experience, arranging a series of visual and audio images according to the highs and

lows of an emotional score. The storyline's emphasis is visual and experiential rather than textual, featuring photographs, artefacts and replicas from the camps, an actual freight car from Poland once used to transport victims, and interactive exhibits like the identity cards encouraging visitors to identify with the experiences of historical figures (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2000: 6). Weinberg calls the museum 'narrative' as opposed to 'collection-based', arguing, 'Just as people go to museums and exhibitions not to listen but to see, they do not go there to read' (1995: 51, 69). Weinberg maintains that the filmic construction encourages a process of identification by 'affect[ing] visitors not only intellectually but also emotionally' (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 49). The experiential structure of the narrative museum is designed to put visitors in the victims' place in order to help us feel or experience the victims' time (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 49).

The difference between plays, films and novels on the one hand and museums on the other is the role of the spectators' mobility in relation to the sequencing. Visitors propel themselves through the 'circulation path', experiencing the story as a product of personal effort, even though they can alter their itineraries in a narrative museum as little as they could change the ending of a film (Weinberg and Elieli 1995: 51). The memorial museum represents a revolution in the mnemotechnics of corporeal inscription: visitors are transformed from mere spectators into approximate witnesses, their own movements establishing a personal relation to the historical events (or at least their representations) and to other visitors. This revolution involves a paradigm shift in historical discourse from what Paul Connerton calls 'inscribing practices' to 'incorporating practices' (1989: 72–73, 101). The latter, according to Connerton, are more typical of oral cultures, but they do persist or emerge in print cultures to commemorate those past events to which a culture attaches particular significance. The incorporating practices performed by visitors to the USHMM put them in a ritualistic and identificatory relation to the past. Their movements place them in victims' shoes, but at a distance; they are not transported beyond their immediate situation but instead recognize 'the authority of force deemed to derive from beyond the immediate situation', as Catherine Bell remarks of ritualization generally (1997: 82). What visitors are encouraged to take on authority is that the Holocaust must be *felt* because it can never be *understood*.

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

Critics are divided about the significance of the museum's emphasis on memory and feeling. As indicated above, writers such as Gourevitch, Novick, Young and Cole are skeptical. Alison Landsberg, on the other hand, praises the USHMM for offering a 'transferential space' where 'memory and affect get transferred from one person to another' (1997: 72). She argues that it is important for people who have no direct relationship to the Holocaust to remember it in a personal – even corporeal – way, precisely because those who do remember it, the last generation of survivors, are passing away, and because the community structures and rituals that traditionally transmitted memory were destroyed by the Holocaust (1997: 65, 72–73): 'these spaces [of transference] might actually install in us "symptoms" or prosthetic memories through which we didn't actually live, but to which we now, after a museum experience or a filmic experience, have a kind of experiential relationship' (1997: 82). Landsberg's argument stresses the ritual significance of memory production, which she calls memory 'transmission' and understands as bridging the gap between historical writing and the actual past. Her medical and psychoanalytic vocabulary ('symptom', 'prosthesis', 'transference') invokes a physical body that is not only the mechanism for memory production, but a synecdoche for a social body or community comprised of both victims and visitors – one might even go so far as to say the dead and the living. This mystical community is the extreme expression of the kind of victim-identification that Novick and Young find so problematic.

II. The Jewish Museum Berlin

Young is critical of the USHMM because of its emphasis on emotional identification with the victims. He argues that visitors leave the museum more concerned with their own suffering, and whether or not it measures up to Jewish suffering, than with preventing the suffering of others (Young 1999: 77, 81). The main problem, however, is the museum's location:

Unlike European memorial often anchored in the very sites of destruction, American memorials are necessarily removed from the 'topography of terror.' Where European memorials located in situ often suggest themselves rhetorically as the extension of events they would

commemorate, those in America must gesture abstractly to a past removed in both time and space (Young 1999: 71).

Young has a point: Holocaust commemoration has a different significance in Europe. But in what sense are European memorials ‘extensions’ of the events towards which US memorials can merely gesture? Young seems to be suggesting that spatial proximity in some way makes up for temporal remove. This is at least the most plausible way to read the statement that American memorials are more abstract because removed ‘in both time *and* space’, as all memorials are equally removed in time. In an essay praising the JMB, Young implies a homology between geography and culture, arguing that it is location that makes the JMB a counterexample to the USHMM. Young calls the JMB a ‘counter monument’ (2000: 161), a structure that embodies rather than answers questions (2000: 164) and that discourages identification and premature resolution by foregrounding the visitor’s role in remembering the past (2000: 7–8, 154–55). In short, the museum is ‘an architectural interrogation of the culture and civilization that built it, an almost unheard-of achievement’ (Young 2000: 183).

I find Young’s account of the *symbolism* of the Libeskind building – and especially its external significance – convincing. Its shape has been described as a double reference to a deconstructed Star of David and a lightening bolt; from an airborne perspective the structure invokes symbols common in Nazi iconography to represent the destruction brought about by Nazi ideology. Even though it houses a collection underscoring the continuity of Jewish life in Germany, the structure itself refers to a break. It is a Jewish museum but also a Holocaust memorial, collecting the remains of the past and commemorating the events that make the collection necessary. The building interrogates its geographical and social context so effectively that while it was commissioned as an annex to a baroque building housing a local history museum, the original building has been transformed into an antechamber and the original collection displaced. The strength of the Libeskind building’s symbolism has literally transformed Berlin’s political and commemorative landscape.

However, the *symptomatics* of the building – and the way its internal structures shape visitor experience – have more to do with international trends in memorial architecture than with a specific urban context. The

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

JMB, like the USHMM, *acts out* the trauma of the Holocaust as emotional or traumatic architecture; walking through these buildings works like exposure therapy, helping visitors *work through* historical trauma at the level of experience. Libeskind has stated that to understand Jewish history the public must also feel or experience it, and in a physical way (Dorner 1999: 16). The types of prescribed experience are evident in the way Libeskind names and describes the various parts of his building, especially the subterranean axes running beneath the main structure, one representing the continuation of Jewish history, another exile, and a third axis leading to a tower called the *Holocaust Void*. These corridors are slanted at angles to physically reproduce the feeling of seasickness and exile (Schneider 1999: 50; Museumspädagogischer Dienst 2000: 14). Discomfort and disorientation are central to the design.

Libeskind's most famous architectural reference to the Holocaust is the void running through the entire structure, which he says the public is supposed to 'experience' as the 'not-visible', the 'invisible', that which has been *voided* but cannot be *avoided* by history (quoted in Young 2000: 165). Young is enthusiastic about these voids because they disorient the visitors, and analogously because they embody historical questions rather than answers. He says that Libeskind

has simply built into it [the museum] any number of voided spaces, so that visitors are never where they think they are. Neither are these voids wholly didactic. They are not meant to instruct, per se but to throw previously received instruction into question. Their aim is not to reassure or console but to haunt visitors with the unpleasant – uncanny – sensation of calling into consciousness that which has been previously – even happily – repressed. The voids are reminders of the abyss into which this culture once sank and from which it never really emerges (Young 2000: 180).

In defining the voids as architectural evocations of a historical abyss, Young follows Libeskind's own articulation of his project. His psychoanalytical vocabulary (e.g. 'uncanny') points to a double symptomatic: the voids act out or embody the absence of the Jews who once lived in Berlin and the Jewish culture that once flourished here; moving through these spaces makes absence manifest in experience.

Critics have raised three main objections to the way the voids represent history: Derrida argues that (1) a *constructed* void is never *empty* (Libeskind 1994: 117). Others argue that (2) the voids transform the Holocaust into an abstraction or a metaphysical problem; and (3) they predetermine the arrangement and therefore the experience of the collection (Dorner 1999: 67). Elke Dorner points out that where Libeskind sees uncanny ambiguity, the architectural embodiment of questions rather than answers, others see semantic overdetermination and an architectural limit on the shape and meaning of various exhibits, and indeed on Jewish history (*ibid.*). Whatever we make of these specific objections, the nature of the debate between Derrida et al. on the one hand and Libeskind and Young on the other is clear. The latter see the voids as ways of evoking history without defining it (or confining it) within a narrative; the former argue that voids do have a meaning because they are situated within specific narratives of history, which is to say within public debates about how we are supposed to experience and commemorate the past. I find the second argument most convincing. It seems to me that Libeskind's traumatic architecture generally, and the voids in particular, enact a scripted collapse of meaning, displacing history into the registers of architecture, personal experience and memory. If Libeskind's museum embodies the force of Holocaust memory in Berlin, it also exemplifies the pervasiveness of the memory trope in international discourses of the Holocaust.

This international discourse is also evident in the museum's exhibition strategy. Young seems most concerned with the USHMM's emotional emphasis on the victims' experiences. What the designers see as a personal storyline he sees as narrative closure. However, the JMB also emphasizes feeling: for instance, feeling what it is like to be in exile. Young, writing before the museum had acquired a collection, could not have predicted the shape that the exhibition would take (he thought the artefacts would have a hard time comparing with the architecture [Young 2000: 169]). In fact, many feel that the JMB's collection betrays the building's symbolism. Although the narrative exhibition struggles against and in some places even obscures the architecture, it is, I believe, not a betrayal but a consummation of Libeskind's design. The voids were already full; the collection merely underscores what filled them: history experienced corporeally and personally, or in other words as memory.

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

The JMB has been designed as a narrative exhibition by many of the same design experts who worked in Washington D.C. The first director was former director of the USHMM, Jeshajahu Weinberg, who died before the project got properly underway. Ken Gorbey, the actual director, has been influenced by Ralph Appelbaum, who also worked at the USHMM. Like his Washington counterparts, Gorbey defines a museum dramaturgically, emphasizing the emotional pacing between exhibits, spaces and scenes (quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2000: 7). The emotional organization of the exhibits, their narrative structures, and the interaction and overlap between the design teams are all factors that suggest a family resemblance between the two museums.

Another point of similarity is the emphasis on personal experience and memory. The exhibit at the JMB encourages visitors to experience historical periods from the perspective of particular people, such as the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century businesswoman Glikl bas Judah Leib, and it emphasizes prominent figures such as Moses Mendelssohn and Walther Rathenau, often displaying their personal artefacts and documents. The building itself is supposedly coordinated along geographical axes pointing to the former Berlin addresses of Jewish writers and artists. The logic of identification works differently in Berlin than it does in Washington D.C. Rather than encouraging Germans to feel Jewish, the exhibit homogenizes the German Jewish community, making it look very much like the non-Jewish community – or at least the Enlightenment version of that community (Lackmann 2000: 65). There is little evidence in the exhibition of disagreement or diversity *within* the Jewish community, little discussion of the political Right or Left, and, until the year 2005, absolutely no mention of Karl Marx, who has now been somewhat surprisingly relegated to a new section entitled Integration Experience. The exhibit seems to suggest that the Jews persecuted and killed by Germans during the Nazi period were just like Germans, only more so. This is an important message, but only part of the story. It is much easier for German visitors (and visitors to Germany) to identify with assimilated Jews who were just like the Germans anyway.

Another similarity between the two museums is their mystical reference to the Holocaust. Libeskind, like Freed, hints at the 'holy' aspects of his building. In a lecture on Bauhaus delivered in Weimar in 1998, suggestively juxtaposed with his 1999 opening speech for the JMB

in his recent book *The Space of Encounter*, Libeskind links the void in architecture to the 'void of God', explicitly distinguishing himself from 'those who constructed cathedrals and sacred graves' (Libeskind 2001: 23). It is clear that Libeskind sees himself as a secular architect, but his secularism is a form of negative theology defining itself against (state) religion, not a rejection of religion altogether. One might go so far as to claim that the 'void of God' becomes the 'Holocaust void' in the JMB, and that traditional religious belief is transformed into the secular religion of the Holocaust. Memory is mystical for Libeskind because it forges a personal link to absence, making history a matter of conviction rather than interpretation, feeling rather than knowledge.

Young's distinction between the JMB and the USHMM is grounded in the belief, which most of us probably share, that Holocaust commemoration should have a special significance in Germany. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to exaggerate the formal differences (which are few) to make the geographical point. Both memorial museums emphasize visitor experience and identification, both embody historical trauma as architectural rupture, and both emphasize the mystical and unknowable elements of the past. The two museums are evidence of migrating memorial forms and of an emergent commemorative architecture that is at once transnational and locally inflected (Levy and Sznajder 2001: 18–24). Young seems to downplay the transnational component of Holocaust architecture, arguing that memorials function best when they challenge as well as commemorate the actual sites of atrocity. Such an argument has intuitive appeal, but I think it is too committed to an oppositional theory of art, which does not accurately account for the wide political and public (not to mention financial) support necessary for structures like the JMB. This museum, like the BHM, which will be discussed below, has been seamlessly integrated into Germany's tourist landscape. The oppositional, in other words, has become the status quo. To focus on international forms of Holocaust commemoration (as Young does) without accounting for their transnational similarities is to miss the most significant counterinternational or 'countermonumental' force of our age: globalization.

III. The Berlin Holocaust Memorial

Young was originally an outspoken critic of the efforts to build a central Holocaust memorial in Berlin, but in 1997 he accepted an offer to serve as spokesperson of the commission charged with recommending a design. His stated reasons for accepting the position might involve some rationalization, but they also reveal the strong link between memory, identity and place in his theories – a link that, as previously observed, obscures the significant design overlaps between the USHMM and the JMB. Young holds that his presence was needed to provide the ‘Jewish sensibility’ and the ‘Jewish eye’ on a German commission because ‘When Germany murdered half of its Jewish population and sent the rest into exile, then set about exterminating another 5.5 million European Jews, it deliberately – and I’m afraid permanently – cut the Jewish lobe of its culture from its brain, so to speak’ (2000: 196). These organic metaphors (similar to the ‘body’ of memory invoked by Landsberg) make the mistake of conflating national borders and biological ones, and thus inadvertently recapitulate the ‘blood and soil’ rhetoric of Nazi propaganda. This is evident in the way Young’s metaphors elide the presence of the German Jewish community, which was outspoken (and not always positive) about the memorial project (Korn 2005: 1).

The plan endorsed by the commission became, with some modifications, the memorial that opened to the public in May 2005: a field of 2,751 waving concrete pillars, distributed over 19,000 square metres of uneven ground, designed by Peter Eisenman (originally in collaboration with Richard Serra, who withdrew from the project rather than alter the initial proposal). The design itself is evidence of migrating commemorative forms, this time within the city of Berlin. The BHM bears a striking resemblance to one of the structures built on the outside of Libeskind’s JMB: the Garden of Exile. The Garden of Exile is much smaller in scale, made up of forty-nine columns filled with earth which serve as planters for trees growing out of their tops. The individual columns are also considerably taller than Eisenman’s and of a uniform height. However, the experience of walking through these memorials is strikingly similar. The close placement of the pillars forces visitors to walk alone; entering the field of pillars is like descending into a maze that partially cuts out light, sound and the surrounding buildings; and the uneven ground of both

structures increases the feeling of disorientation and unease (Heinke 2005: B3). Eisenman is more reluctant than Libeskind to interpret his forms: in multiple interviews he has maintained that visitors have to make up their own minds because his memorial means nothing beyond emptiness and silence (Reich 2004). But this resistance to theory, like Libeskind's evocation of exile, places the emphasis on the visitors' experience.

In a sense these twin fields of waving columns are the culmination of traumatic architecture's mnemotechnics: the supplanting of content by form, and the elevation of personal experience and emotion over historical understanding. Visitors come in masses, but the pillars function as sieves or filters separating them momentarily into discreet trajectories of experience. Exiting the fields, visitors become members of a loose community by virtue of their common feelings and experiences. What narrative museums attempt to achieve through a single trajectory of experience these outdoor memorials realize through multiple trajectories: *individual* feelings of discomfort become the index of *universal* significance, a point of identification with the victims and a point of commonality with other visitors.⁸

The information centre – added to the *Berlin Holocaust Memorial* as a political compromise after the initial proposal had already been accepted – reinforces the 'personalization of memory', as the memorial website's homepage phrases it, by listing the names of victims and describing 'exemplary lives'.⁹ Salomon Korn, the current vice-president of the official German Jewish community, argues that the information centre adds individual and transgenerational components to the commemorative process, which he understands as a form of 'collective ritual' (2005: 1). Korn claims that the 'individual internalization' of collective ritual is typically Jewish, and while this is perhaps overstated, he is right to point to the religious and ritualistic nature of the memory work encouraged by the memorial. The ritual involves the personalization of history, or what I have been calling the production of memory.

IV. Testimony, Pilgrimage and Diaspora

Since the 1980s, theorists have been less inclined to talk about the differences between memory and history and more inclined to talk about

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

their continuities (Klein 2000: 127–28). The focal point of these discussions in Holocaust studies has been survivor testimony. Part of the impulse has been to provide a therapeutic corrective to earlier histories of the Holocaust, which some feel unfairly dismissed survivor testimony because of its perceived inaccuracies or emotional distortions (Greenspan 1999: 50–55). The timing is also significant, as researchers have become increasingly interested in recording eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust before the generation of survivors passes away.

The case for the central importance of Holocaust testimony has been most famously made by Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub (1992). They define testimony as a symptom of the history it seeks to describe: ‘As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance’ (Felman & Laub 1992: 5). Arguing that testimony does not have to ‘*possess or own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it’ (1992: 15), Felman and Laub effectively divorce testimony from the juridical, epistemological and historical criteria of verification. Testimony, in their usage, does not convey facts; rather its distortions and inaccuracies index the overwhelming experiences that render factual reportage difficult. Felman and Laub shift the focus of analysis from the *content* to the *form* of an utterance, a move that on the one hand foregrounds the materiality of language (syntax), and on the other hand stresses the material manifestations of unsuccessful communication (e.g. physical symptoms and thwarted social interactions).

In place of historical knowledge, and perhaps as a compensation or consolation for its lack, trauma theory turns to the community that can form around shared suffering. Felman and Laub argue that trauma is transferable: ‘By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event’ (1992: 57). Geoffrey Hartman, suspicious of what he calls ‘memory envy’ (1996: 90), or overidentifying with the traumatic memories of others, nevertheless suggests that ad hoc communities often form around suffering, ‘based on the hope of finding a witness for the witness’ (1996: 156). Kai Erikson emphasizes the ‘spiritual kinship’ formed through sharing trauma (1995: 186). Landsberg, as mentioned above, understands ritual kinship as a function of memorial architecture’s ‘transferential space’ (1997: 72). Trauma theory – with its emphasis on individual memories and historical

mystery, and its concomitant valorization of form over content, affect over fact, community over linguistic content – is the theoretical articulation of what memorial museums produce through architecture.

Another concept relevant to the discussion of the emergence of memory in historical discourse and memorial architecture is what Berel Lang calls the ‘negative’ or ‘evil sublime’. Lang, like Felman, is concerned with the way the Holocaust calls into question our ability to represent it: the atrocity *imagined* and *documented* by the perpetrators nevertheless remains fundamentally *unimaginable* (2000: 56–57, 124). Lang’s response to this crisis of representation seems, at first glance, to contradict that offered by Felman, as he advocates removing individuality (memory and identification) from representations of the Holocaust. Because art is ‘intrinsically personal’ (2000: 163–64, 69), Lang argues, it distorts the distinguishing feature of Nazi genocide: the destruction of individuality, both in the bureaucracy of murder and in the mass anonymity imposed by genocide on its victims (Lang 1992: 316; Lang 2000: 164). According to Lang, the alternatives to ‘individualizing’ the Holocaust through art are to ‘let the facts speak for themselves’ (2000: 69) and to strive for objective or ‘nonrepresentational representation’ (2000: 12). Lang’s position might be summarized as elevating the individual in the production of art, then removing the individual from the production of history, precisely because the Nazis destroyed individuals – and individuality – in society. Inhuman destruction demands objective representation.

Felman and Lang are not as far apart as they may appear. Both ground historiography in the recognition that the event exceeds its representations. Felman develops this insight into an aesthetic based on the vagaries of individual memory, Lang into an anti-aesthetic doing away with memory and individuality altogether. Lang’s ideal model of history – a perfectly objective and endlessly expandable chronicle – is an infinite attempt to perform an impossible act of mourning. Amy Hungerford has pointed out that the lists of dates and events that would make up such a chronicle bear more than an accidental resemblance to the lists of victims’ names read aloud at commemorative rituals or inscribed on memorials (1999: 111). The identity Felman tries to recover through community and identification, Lang mourns as irrevocably lost, projecting this absence on the entire representational landscape. The premise common to both theories – that the Holocaust exceeds the tools we have to represent it –

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

turns history into an act of memory in Felman, and into a commemorative form for Lang. 'Act' is the operative term for both theories because history, as it is conceived in Felman and Lang, 'acts out' its own vexed relation to a past it cannot fully describe.¹⁰ Also, the practice of history is seen as an act with ethical implications grounded in the limits of narrative. For Felman the ethics of memory involve listening to what the victims cannot say; Lang holds that writers should not say more than the victims have already said for themselves. The theories intersect at the crisis of representation brought about by the moral enormity of the Holocaust, trauma theory inscribing the crisis as poetics, and 'the negative sublime' as ethical imperative.

The crisis of representation that is so central to current theories of commemoration can be traced back to what I would argue is a misunderstanding of Adorno's famous dictum 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric', which first appeared in the 1951 essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society' (1981: 34). Adorno is commonly understood to be pointing to the formal limitations of art in the face of historical atrocity – this, I would argue, is implicit in Lang's 'negative sublime'. However, Fredric Jameson, Michael Rothberg and others have, to my mind, convincingly argued that the object of Adorno's critique is not so much the aesthetic *discontinuity* between representation and its object as the historical *continuity* between totalitarianism and the 'total society' of consumer culture, which Adorno describes as an 'open-air prison' (1981: 34; Jameson 2000: 106; Rothberg 2000: 35–36). Lyotard's influential reading preserves Adorno's critique of contemporary culture but emphasizes representational discontinuity over historical continuity.¹¹ Lyotard designates the representational crisis precipitated by the Holocaust the 'differend': 'The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be' (1988: 13). The differend does not describe the collapse of language per se, which persists as material and medium, but it does point to a collapse of meaning analogous to 'the notion of the sublime' in which 'the absolute is not presentable' (Lyotard 1988: 77). The nonpresentable absolute is the primary concern of theorists like Felman and Lang and architects like Libeskind and Eisenman.

There are significant mystical and ritual aspects to the current fascination with 'sublime' memory. Klein, in a critique that aligns trauma

theory with theories of the sublime, argues that the reemergence of ‘memory’ in historical discourse is actually a ‘re-enchantment’ with those elements of postmodernism aligned with ‘the excess, the unsayable, the blank darkness, the sublime, or some other Absolute whose mysteries can be grasped only by those initiates armed with the secret code’ (2000: 137). Misztal makes a similar argument (2004). The paradoxical nature of second-hand memory at both the theoretical and practical levels (how do we *remember* an event we did not *experience*?) suggests the kind of widespread misrecognition typical not only of mysticism but also of ritual. Bell’s previously cited observation is relevant here: ‘In ritualization, people tend to see themselves as responding or transmitting – not creating’ (Bell 1997: 167). It is my argument that memorial museums *create* memories by encouraging tourists (and theorists) to feel as if they are *transmitting* them. Memorial architecture is both the inscription and generating matrix of memorial tourism, which should be understood as a ritual act of remembering.

The international proliferation of commemorative forms and practices suggests a mass movement that might be usefully analysed in terms of a secular religious awakening. Theorists like Young seem less concerned with analysing the ritual function of Holocaust commemoration than with preserving its sanctity, usually by distinguishing authentic sites from fake ones, pilgrimage from tourism. By the logic of this approach, only the wrong kind of commemoration collapses into tourism; the right kind encourages pilgrimage. Tim Cole, for instance, distinguishes those who visit Auschwitz as a *site* of memory (pilgrims) from those voyeuristically interested in it as a *sight* (tourists) (2000: 97–98). Cole also defines Auschwitz as the site all other memorials point to; and he links the spread of Holocaust memorials in the United States to the dispersal of relics, understanding them primarily as depositories of hair, ashes and shoes (Cole 2000: 168). Griselda Pollock distinguishes between Holocaust pilgrims and tourists on the basis of those who understand (or experienced) the singularity of the event versus those interested in spectacle (2003: 180). Oren Stier characterizes the actual sites of atrocity as ‘sacred’ spaces possessing a radically negative ‘sanctity’ and argues that the organized Jewish tour to Auschwitz called The March of the Living ‘has the qualities of civil religion’ (2003: 167, 176). In this he is slightly revising Jack Kugelmass’ more skeptical characterization of such tours as ‘secular ritual’ (quoted in Stier 2003: 175).

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

These arguments make intuitive sense. There are good reasons to be sceptical of proliferation and standardization of Holocaust memorials. The emphasis on 'visitor experience' in contemporary memorial architecture can be seen as a natural outgrowth of tourism's promotional rhetoric. This is the argument implicit in the title of Thomas Lackmann's (2000) book on the JMB, *Jewrassic Park*, which provocatively refers to the fact that the original directors of 'visitor experience', Nigel Cox and Ken Gorbey, were selected because they had designed a popular interactive dinosaur exhibit at a natural history museum in New Zealand. The title of course also pokes fun at the influence of Hollywood. Standard museum design is often seen as threatening the Holocaust with the homogenization of individual memory. Visitors believe that they experience their own unique relation to the absolute, but what they really encounter is a universal, transnational and variously marketable commodity form.

However, it would be a mistake to simply dismiss recent commemorative forms as commercial – always the end result of trying to distinguish 'authentic' experiences and places from staged ones. As MacCannell has made clear, the disparagement directed against certain kinds of tourism is a part of tourism's standard rhetoric, producing a hierarchy between sites and practices while at the same time motivating the quest for 'new' places, more 'intense' experiences, the 'real thing' (1989: 94, 104, 107). Thirty years of tourism studies has pointed to the overlaps, rather than the divisions, between pilgrimage and tourism. Victor Turner and Edith Turner point out that 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (1978: 20). Valene Smith draws attention to the structural continuities and overlaps between tourism and pilgrimage, distinguishing them mainly on the scale of social approval (1992: 4). Erik Cohen has pointed out that 'the *roles* of pilgrim and tourist are often combined, particularly in the modern world' (2004: 7). Cohen, in particular, has offered a way to understand differences along a continuum of cultural experience: pilgrimage tends to move 'from the periphery toward the cultural centre' and tourism tends to move 'away from the cultural centre into the periphery' (2004: 7). This model is difficult to apply to the new Holocaust memorials because their transnational similarities place the Holocaust at the cultural centres of geographically distant regions. The cultural centre of the disaster is, in other words, everywhere; as Adorno, Lyotard and others have argued, Auschwitz calls into question *all* Western political narratives.

A way to preserve Cohen's insights about the phenomenological similarities between pilgrimage and tourism, without dismissing the universal significance of the Holocaust or the transnational similarities of commemorative architecture, is to shift the terms of analysis from the spatial register still evident in the centre-periphery model to a more portable concept of ritual. The mediating link between tourism and commemoration is the ritual practice of memory. The Holocaust, in recent years, has assumed the status of secular religion, and visitors are drawn to museums and memorials as scenes of ritual remembering. What we experience at sites of Holocaust commemoration is not necessarily – or even primarily – a confirmation of religious tradition or national, ethnic or religious identity. Rather, the emotional identification with the victims and the experience of the 'negative sublime' are linked elements in a conversion experience, committing the visitors – not in understanding but in *feeling and practice* – to the principle of collective individualism. This democratizing function is in line with the contemporary 'sacralization of memory' described by Barbara Misztal, who links the sacred to the possibility of 'social solidarity' (2004: 81). What Misztal calls the 'role of the sacred' perseveres in pilgrimage patterns resembling those of the historical religions: an increasing number of people travel all over Europe, the United States – and of course Israel – to commemorate the same unknowable truth at memorials built along similar architectural principles. It is no longer necessary to visit the actual sites of martyrdom; the experiences of the victims can be evoked almost anywhere – a claim that could perhaps be made vis-à-vis church architecture as well.

The Libeskind and Eisenman memorials are typical of traumatic architecture in the way they introduce *distance* and *abstraction* into the Berlin scene. Unlike memorials constructed at sites of former concentration camps, government offices and synagogues, these memorials are not built on particular sites of atrocity. Of course, building a Holocaust memorial somewhere in Berlin – the city in which the 'Final Solution' was planned and administered – is not the same as building one somewhere in the United States, but the intrusion of distance at the point of origin does indicate the increasing importance of personal experience relative to geography. The changing significance of geography is also suggested by the form of the memorials. They are *locations* because they are not exactly *destinations*: visitors can walk through them again and

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

again without being 'there', in a particular *place*; the experience is a function of moving through *space*.

The international style of memorial architecture and the growing significance of Holocaust tourism lend strong support to Levy and Sznajder's thesis that the end of the Cold War opened up the global space for an international memory culture grounded in a general abhorrence of the Holocaust (2001: 18). The Jewish German publicist Micha Brumlik follows Levy and Sznajder in recognizing the possibility that a common memory of the Holocaust could result in a new 'ecumenicism' grounded in a 'general moral standard' (2004: 29). However, we should be careful about exaggerating the significance of the 'global'. The contemporary transnational memory grounded in the Holocaust is troped as Jewish, in more or less secular ways, and has become a major dividing line between East and West, as recent diplomatic tensions with Iran, for instance, make clear. It is also, in some significant ways, non-Israeli, by which I mean Diasporic. Both W. Michael Blumenthal, the current director of the JMB, and Peter Eisenman speak of coming to Germany as Americans and leaving as Jews (Blumenthal is Jewish by birth but not practice), Eisenman explicitly labeling (and valorizing) this experience as Diasporic (Lackmann 2000: 179; Meyer 2005: B12). Jewishness, in these formulations, does not refer to a set of beliefs or a fixed locus of identity, and Diaspora does not mean what it used to mean before the founding of the State of Israel (i.e. deferred nationalism). The Diaspora Eisenman refers to is a transnational field, or a trajectory between a historical home, understood as the absent place of Jewish cultural and spiritual memories, and a new secular one. The Jewishness he refers to is also secular without being Zionist, grounding itself in awareness of the Holocaust rather than in shared religious belief or national identity.

Diaspora, in recent years, has become a fashionable theoretical term. Boyarin and Boyarin have gone so far as to argue that Diaspora, rather than monotheism, is the most important lesson of Judaism, defining Diaspora as a counternationalistic model of identity grounded in memory rather than place (2003: 110). While this is not the place to speculate on all the factors contributing to the current theoretical trend, it seems clear that the new commemorative architecture produces Diaspora in its more genteel form, i.e. as a voluntary experience. The tourists who visit the new Holocaust memorials, and the experts who design them, do so to

experience a deterritorialized and mystical form of memory, in other words the *space* of memory understood as the absence of home or *place*. Diaspora has become a metaphor for transnational community in a global age. There is, of course, a poignant irony in the way this model of counterterritorial identity converts one of the staples of anti-Semitic propaganda – Jewish cosmopolitanism – into a paradigm of transnational experience. One can only hope that the term will come to express not a perverse pleasure in vicarious victimization but the beginnings of a sense of world citizenship.

Notes

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1. All translations from German are mine unless indicated otherwise.
 2. The Jewish Museum Berlin's press release of 5 January 2005 reads: 'Rekordjahr im Jüdischen Museum Berlin, Mehr als 700.000 Menschen besuchten im Jahr 2004 die Ausstellungen zur Deutsch-Jüdischen Geschichte' http://www.juedisches-museum-berlin.de/site/DE/06–Presse/01–Pressemitteilungen/2005_01_05.php (accessed 10 August 2005).
 3. German commemorative projects tend to look to US Americans, especially Jewish Americans, for the stamp of expertise and approval, often resisting local Jewish opinions (as was the case with the Berlin Jewish Community's repeated objections to the Eisenman project [Korn 2005; Leggewie and Meyer 2005: 299]) and Jewish Israeli input. The short and controversial tenure of the Israeli Amnon Barzel, the first director of the Jewish Museum Berlin, proves rather than poses an exception to this general trend (Lackmann 2000: 41–57).
 4. See Koselleck (1979) for an analysis of the changing shape of war memorials over the course of the twentieth century.
 5. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Press Kit: General Museum Information <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/press/> (accessed 26 August 2005).
 6. Compare Weitz's argument for the importance of making historical comparisons (2003: 12).
 7. See LaCapra (1992) for an analysis and summary of the German Historians Debate.
 8. Claus Leggewie and Erik Meyer's history of the Holocaust Memorial, *Ein Ort, an den Man Gerne Geht*, also links its construction to a recent personalization of history and politics: "Das Politische ist hier privat geworden" (2005: 317).
 9. *Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (2005), 'Ort der Information', <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/ortinformation> (accessed 20 October 2005).

Holocaust Tourism in Berlin

10. LaCapra's theory of historical transference is relevant here (LaCapra 1994: 111; see also pp. 45–48).
11. Lyotard, in 'Defining the Postmodern', makes this famous statement: 'Following Theodor Adorno, I use the name of Auschwitz to point out the irrelevance of empirical matter, the stuff of recent past history, in terms of the modern claim to help mankind to emancipate itself' (2001: 1614).

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