

Filling in the Voids:
Berlin's "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe"

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis takes Peter Eisenman's soon to be built Holocaust memorial as a focal point for considerations of contemporary memory practices that test the limits of representation. It begins by situating the memorial within the spatial and discursive landscape of contemporary Berlin, one that is dominated by the mythology of former chancellor Helmut Kohl. The intended function of Eisenman's monument is then questioned through an examination of its relation to several central figures of deconstruction and trauma theory, such as the *chora*, the uncanny, and the witness. This thesis ultimately argues that the Eisenman memorial problematically presents the Holocaust as a sanctified event that is beyond even partial comprehension. By positioning the traumatic events of the past as impenetrable voids that lie beyond the limits of representation, the monument assumes the ethical burden of remembering, rather than dispersing this ethical call amongst its audience. The emerging aesthetic tradition of the counter-monument is looked to for examples of self-critical contemporary memorials that initiate an active process of remembering within specific communities.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
Introduction	2
Chapter One Confronting Berlin	10
Chapter Two Inhabiting the Void	40
Chapter Three Ethical Displacements	66
Afterword	89
Works Cited	94

List of Figures

fig.1	The Berlin memorial site (author's photo).	1
fig.2	Eisenman's memorial design (from Young <u>Memory's Edge</u>).	1
fig.3	The Topography of Terror (author's photo).	11
fig. 4	Sony building – Postdamer Playtz (author's photo).	30
fig. 5	The Palast der Republik (author's photo).	32
fig. 6	Walking in the field of pillars (from Young <u>Memory's Edge</u>).	37
fig. 7	Libeskind's Jewish Museum (author's photo).	39
fig. 8	The Gerz 'Monument Against Fascism' (from Young <u>Memory's Edge</u>).	75
fig. 9	<i>Anschleage gegen Rechts</i> mural (author's photo).	90

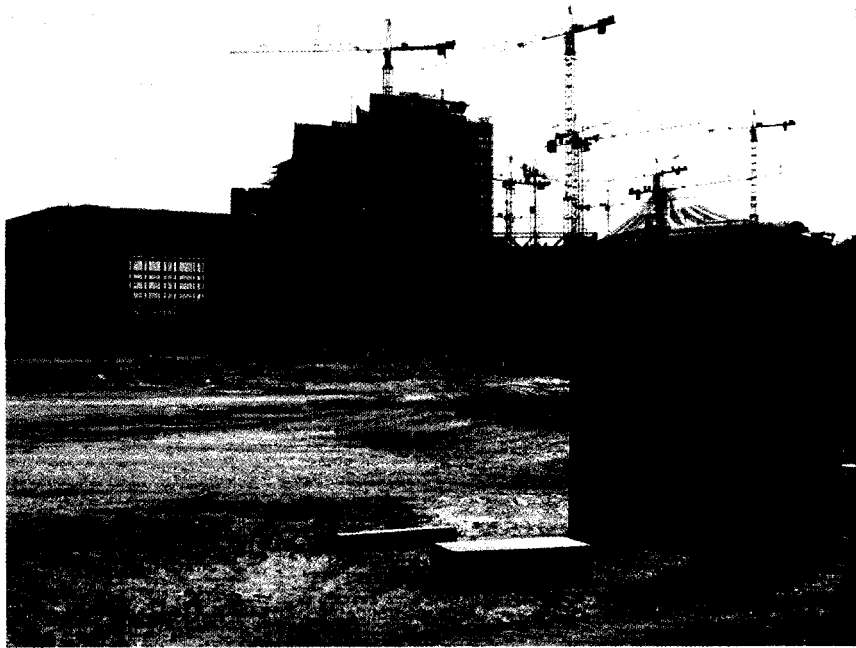


fig.1 The Berlin memorial site (author's photo).

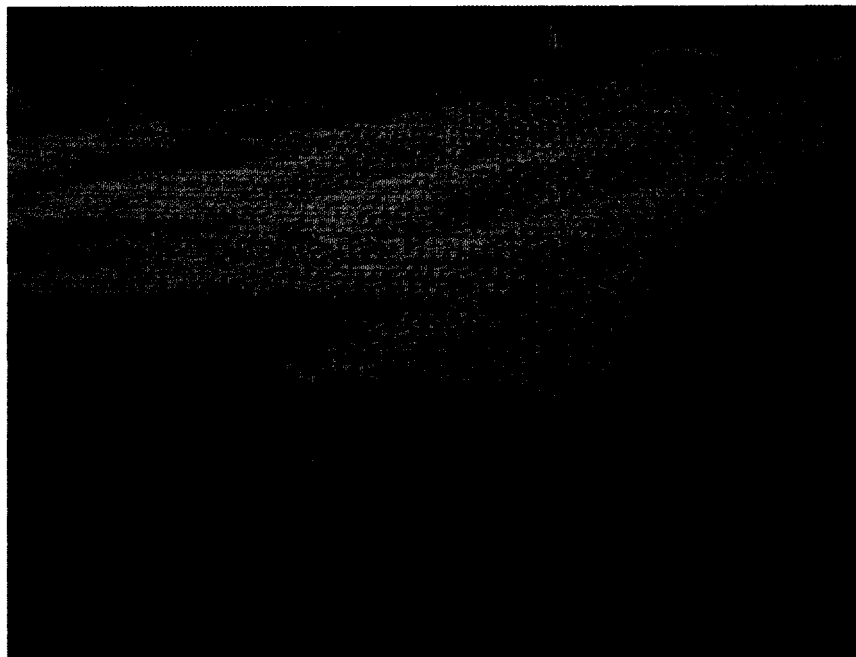


fig.2 Eisenman's memorial design (from Young Memory's Edge).

Introduction

The site is in many ways unremarkable – a field of earth, a bulldozer, a few temporary shelters for construction workers (fig. 1). Until very recently, it has been just one Berlin building site among many, but as more and more of the construction projects peppered across the city reach completion, this empty seven-acre plot of land in the geographic and symbolic center of the city appears increasingly aberrant. A hundred meters north is the Brandenburg Gate. The Reichstag lies just beyond it. Directly across the street, a golden whale tail fancifully folds out over Frank Gehry's redesigned DG Bank. To the South a dwindling number of cranes bring the gleaming high-rises of Postdamer Platz closer to completion. On the Western border lies the Tiergarten park and the angel atop the Victory Column surveys her rapidly changing city.

But this empty construction site is remarkable. Fifteen years ago it was allocated for the construction of a monument to the six million European Jews killed by the Nazis in WWII. On August 16th, 2003, after many years of heated debate and two design competitions, construction began on what will be the “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe¹.” The design, provided by American architect Peter Eisenman, calls for the area to be covered by an “undulating field” of 2,700 stone pillars (fig. 2). Visitors to the site are intended to silently walk between the blank pillars, contemplating the personal implications of the events of the past. There is a certain elegance in the design's abstract simplicity.

¹ The title of the monument has been translated as both the “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe” and the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.” I have chosen the former as it is a more direct translation of the German title “Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas.”

The controversy surrounding the project, however, is far from being resolved. Many Berliners criticize the project's "monumentality" fearing that it will have no resonance for future generations and will become a place people casually pass by on their way to the Tiergarten park or to do their shopping. Others wonder if the overall intentions of the project are misguided, worried it will simply be a type of receptacle for German guilt; a final act of duty in order to reconcile wrongs committed, so that the German people, now two generations removed from these events, can move ahead with the affluent future promised by the European Union and a global economy.

The form of the monument has become the focal point for the consideration of Western culture's relationship to history and memory; it is a material indicator of our continuing struggle to remember and to be remembered. In some ways the monument is a conscious communicator with the future; a cryonic writing tablet that allows impressions of ourselves to be imprinted onto the landscape for subsequent generations to see. But the audience of the monument is both a future public and a present one. Determining which of these temporal audiences the monument is directed towards is one of the central points of contention for Berlin's Holocaust memorial. In other words, is the memorial intended to be a marker to the future, a self-declared sign that Germany has once and for all released itself from the ghosts of the past? Or is it possible for the monument to function as a medium intended for the present population, one that operates as a vehicle for a productive and ethical remembrance of the nation's troubling history?

The monument is a sometimes uncomfortable point of intersection between politics and aesthetics². In the case of the Berlin Memorial this juncture is pushed further

² At no time was this more evident than during Germany's National Socialist period.

towards the limits of representational ethics by the monument's difficult subject matter. In her essay "In Plain Sight," Liliane Weissberg pauses to consider where we now stand in terms of aesthetic reactions to the Holocaust. She wonders whether we have heeded either of Theodor Adorno's aesthetic warnings following the traumatic events of WWII: his much-cited declaration that to write poetry after Auschwitz would be barbaric, or his later claim that art, if it is to speak at all of the tragic events of the 20th century, must attempt to render the scream (18). But Weissberg concludes that contemporary Holocaust representations have adopted neither of Adorno's stances. She writes:

The Holocaust aesthetics no longer centers on the scream, but on its absence . . . In its introduction of silence, the void, breaks, and afterimages, this aesthetics has found its allies in psychoanalytic theory and its conception of the unconscious, and poststructuralist philosophy. It has also produced criteria of judgment: Holocaust memorials and museum buildings, as well as individual artworks, selected through competitions whose judges ask not only for historical message or educational impact, but also for "good" art (26).

Central to this thesis is a consideration of this emerging aesthetics of absence and the role that it plays within contemporary representations of the Holocaust. Monica Bohm-Duchen writes, "Art does have power: not, unfortunately, to change the course of history, or even to stop the recurrence of genocide; but to cast new and sometimes unexpected light on a subject by moving the spectator . . . and by prompting discussion and debate" (*Art After Auschwitz* 130). But might art also have the ability to silence or forestall discussions surrounding the events of history? Could an aesthetics of absence, with its emphasis on the void, relegate the Holocaust to the realm of the unspeakable and unknowable? This thesis ultimately resists such a theoretical fixation on impenetrable absences, suggesting instead the possibility of what Dominick LaCapra calls a productive

“working-through” of historical traumas at a societal level. This is a process that is undeniably difficult and always incomplete, yet entirely necessary.

I do not wish to downplay the role of artistic interventions in this process of confronting the past. This thesis is in many ways a defense of the productive potential for media and representations of the past to initiate an active form of remembrance and contemplation. But it does so without failing to recognize the representational status of these artistic responses³. The aesthetics of absence denies its own status as representation and claims instead to act as a veridical channel through which the traumas of history flow through to the present. This relegation of the traumatic past to the register of pure presence and experience forecloses a process of coming to terms with the events of history, forcing instead a melancholic form of traumatic repetition. An attempt to work through the implications of the Holocaust through an act of language (whether written or visual) should not be seen as a debasement of the event’s traumatic essence. It is instead an effort to bring the traumatic events of the past into a necessarily mediated relationship with the social space of the present. The Holocaust is thus no longer positioned as a sacred unspeakable historical event, but rather one that it is in some sense still in a process of becoming. This is not to equate the experience of those who lived through the Holocaust with the experience of later generations attempting to learn from it. It is instead a recognition that if the memory of these events is to live on, it must do so within the representational space of the present.

³ I am also skeptical of the “ontological alterity of art” suggested by Lyotard (in Carroll 27), for fear that it theorizes a counter-productive division between social and artistic spheres.

How then is one to think about the particular space of the memorial and its significance within the city of Berlin and beyond? In his description of the monument's operation, Henri Lefebvre claims that, despite its appearance as a fixed element of the landscape, a "monumental work . . . does not have a 'signified' (or 'signifieds'); rather, it has a horizon of meanings: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning come momentarily to the fore" (222). The first chapter of this thesis will consider the Berlin memorial's possible horizon of meanings by situating the site within an existing field of geographic, historical, social and political influences. Inherent in this chapter is a realization that although construction on the monument has just begun, the site of the memorial has never truly been empty; it is a space already engaged in a process of becoming. Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space will be consulted in order to think through the way in which the space of the memorial has been inscribed with meaning.

A discursive and material effort to re-establish the city of Berlin as the capital of a united Germany has been underway since reunification and the memorial assumes a particular position within this restructuring of the city. Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl has been a particularly influential figure in the construction of the city's new relationship to the nation and its past. I argue that Kohl's production of a German national mythology capable of uniting East and West is based in part on the resurgence of a modified sense of *Heimat* and a proliferation of a discourse of "Victim Germany" in relation to the period of National Socialism. The former Chancellor's explicit influence on the memorial project leads to questions concerning the monument's relationship to Kohl's overall rehabilitation project.

The site of the monument sees the congregation of many historical and political influences. It can also be viewed as the point of materialization for a number of theoretical discourses that have emerged in response to considerations of trauma and memory. Within the second chapter of this thesis I will engage with the theoretical concepts underpinning Eisenman's memorial design. In particular, the influences of deconstructive philosophy and the related field of trauma will be considered. It is my contention that a discourse orbiting around the figures of absence and trauma has come to dominate discussions of Holocaust representation in such a way as to encourage, whether intentionally or unintentionally, a problematic silence in response to the events of the past. While inspired by deconstructive philosophy, these discourses paradoxically privilege the literal testimony of the witness and the presence of direct traumatic experience, to the point of debasing any attempts to bring the events of the past into the realm of language.

By thinking through several of the central deconstructive figures at play within Eisenman's design (the concepts of *chora*, the uncanny, and the crypt) I raise a number of theoretical and ethical concerns in relation to the memorial project. Chief among them is an unease with the tendency of these discourses to become fixated on the voids of history and the inexpressibility of trauma. I argue that this theoretical move forestalls an ethical reaction to the events of history, allowing the Holocaust to be remembered as a terrible event, but one removed from its historical context and therefore incapable of engendering a meaningful response in the present. This discourse of absence has particularly troubling implications for a memorial located in the capital of the nation that perpetrated these historical crimes.

The third chapter of this thesis will attempt to find a way through the theoretical and ethical impasses presented by Eisenman's design and the discourses from which it draws. In resisting the tendency to present the Holocaust as an event located beyond the limits of representation, it becomes necessary to consider ways of responsibly engaging with the events of the past. This chapter will consider a growing body of literature concerned with both the traditional and the potential role of the monument in the formation and stimulation of memory practices. Pierre Nora's often cited distinction between the official form of memory contained in the *lieux de mémoire* and the lived memory fostered by the *milieux de mémoire* acts as a starting point for this discussion of the monument's relationship to history.

I argue that Germany's counter-monumental tradition, as documented by James Young, presents an aesthetic reaction to the nation's past that has important points of difference with the discourse of absence expressed in the Eisenman memorial. Using a number of specific counter-monumental examples, I suggest that these artistic interventions resist a fixation on the traumatic voids of history. They do so by acknowledging the limitations of their status as representation and incorporating aesthetic techniques that shift the focus of memory away from the space of the monument and towards the communities in which they reside. These counter-monuments present an ethical call to their audiences to actively begin a process of working through the events of the past, often through an act of writing.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge that this thesis is also an act of writing. It is an act of writing about a particular space within a particular city. Berlin is an urban patchwork and historical attempts to provide it with a visual coherency have been largely

unsuccessful. The danger in writing about such a city is the urge to selectively choose from its many offerings – to construct a particular argument around particular constructions. There is a tendency to be overwhelmed by the monumentality of the space of which you are writing and the ideas with which it is articulated. An alternative writing strategy is to allow the city's many elements and social settings, however minute and ephemeral, to inspire thought. This writing tradition has a history in Berlin, one that predates the traumatic events of the 20th century. It is, perhaps not inconsequentially, a Jewish tradition. It is a writing tradition embodied by the flaner of Walter Benjamin and Franz Hessel and also by the feuilletons of Joseph Roth. In this tradition the city's landscape is viewed as metonymic – a material expression of the modern condition. The flaneur is in search of the *heimlichkeit* (the native secrets) of the place in which he or she lives (Gleber 72) and as such has the potential to operate from a self-critical position with respect to both memory and his or her surroundings. While the relationship of the Weimar flaneur to memory is often a nostalgic one, a romanticizing of childhood, the idea of the post-Holocaust flaneur holds the possibility for envisioning Berliners that hold politically and ethically active relationships to the history of the place in which they live. It is this position in relation to the past that is encouraged by the counter-monument. And it is in the spirit of this critical flaneur that this thesis is written.

I am not beyond, I am in the midst [of things], yet I know that everything
given is already memory.

-Franz Hessel

Chapter One

Confronting Berlin

Confronted with the truly microscopic, all loftiness is hopeless, completely meaningless.
The diminutive of the parts is more impressive than the monumentality of the whole.

-Joseph Roth

But in this vertical city, in this compressed city where all voids tend to fill up and every block of cement tends to mingle with other blocks of cement, a kind of counter-city opens, a negative city, that consists of empty slices between wall and wall...

-Italo Calvino

Berlin is a city built on sand; it shifts.

-Christopher Hope

The grassy embankment on the corner of Berlin's Wilhelmstraße and Niderkirchnerstraße provides a most remarkable view. From it you may look down into an excavation site where a brick structure has been uncovered beneath the ground. Black and white photographs and text line the walls of the structure. This is the former site of the German Gestapo headquarters, now an open-air information site chronicling the repressive policies of National Socialism and the organisations responsible for carrying them out, all of which were located adjacent to these grounds: the Gestapo (the secret state police), the SS (Schutzstaffel, the army of the Nazi party), the SA (Sturmabteilung, the Nazi party militia), the SD (Sicherheitsdienst, the Nazi security and intelligence service), and the Reich Security Main Office (which coordinated these groups). If you

read the text you would learn that this was known as “the most feared address” in Berlin and that Bertolt Brecht had been detained and interrogated here.



fig.3 The Topography of Terror (author's photo).

After a competition to memorialize the site failed to produce a winner (a relatively common occurrence in Berlin), there occurred an astonishing example of a city's citizens taking memory into their own hands. In May of 1985, a group of volunteers calling itself the “Active Museum of Fascism and Resistance in Berlin” dug up the ruined remains of the Gestapo headquarters' basement and kitchen. The excavated site eventually became “The Topography of Terror,” an aptly named permanent exhibit. It has become a required stop on the “German terror tourism circuit”¹. On the far side of

¹ See James E. Young's The Texture of Memory (pgs. 81-91) for an account of the site's history.

the excavated trench, lining Niderkirchenerstraße, is one of the largest remnants of the Berlin wall. Mostly free of graffiti, it appears strangely unannounced. Its grey concrete is crumbling in parts revealing an iron skeleton beneath - the declining years of a former media darling. Across the street, visible through the gaps in the wall, is the Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus, the former Reich Air Force Ministry designed in oppressive monumental style by Hermann Göring. With over 2,000 rooms, it was once the largest office building in Europe. While the unearthed Gestapo headquarters functions now as a museum site, Göring building has been re-inhabited, now housing the Federal Ministry of the Economy. The ornamental bas-relief swastikas have been removed, but otherwise the exterior of the building remains relatively unchanged. But if every building in Berlin housing a troublesome past were removed, there would be few remaining.

This particular space makes visually apparent the overlapping semiology of Berlin: structures made to re-signify; residual traces of once defining symbols now virtually removed; the unearthing of the history that lies beneath so much of the city. This is but one such space in Berlin; there are many. But how might we come to think about this space? Is it possible to come to an understanding of a space? And if so, what epistemological frameworks might be put in motion in order to come to such an understanding? Is a space to be read? Deconstructed? Lived? In Berlin, these questions do not simply constitute an academic exercise. As the city is quite literally reconstructed into the capital of a united Germany, negotiations over the significance of particular spaces take place through discussions ranging from political boosterism to city sewage planning. The remarkable process of transformation being undertaken in Berlin sees philosophers, historians, civic engineers, politicians and artists collaborating and

competing in attempts to inscribe the city's landscape and define its spaces. It is within the heart of this network of signification that Berlin's "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe" will be constructed. Even though construction has only just begun, the memorial is already a site of contested meanings and competing discourses. This chapter will outline the material and discursive influences that have begun to frame the monument, even prior to its existence. It will do so by first presenting a conceptual framework for thinking about space.

A Brief History of Space

The turn to a consideration of space as being in itself a worthy object of study is a relatively new development in critical thought. Edward Soja writes of Michel Foucault's "[l]ooking back at a century in which time and the making of history were privileged in critical discourse over space and the making of geography" ("Heterotopologies" 13). In Foucault's words, "Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (Ibid.) Victor Burgin asserts that far from being fixed and immobile, conceptions of space have changed substantially over time. "Space", as he puts it, "has a history" (40). Burgin points to a Middle Ages view of finite space under God's gaze, in which every being or thing had a preordained place in the world. During the Renaissance this medieval cosmology was disrupted by Galileo's conception of space, one sustained by the principles of Euclidean geometry, in which space is conceived as being infinite in all directions with the viewer occupying the position of the center point. Henri Lefebvre

points to this period of Western thought as establishing a strictly geometrical meaning for the word 'space.' He argues that "[w]ith the advent of Cartesian logic . . . space had entered the realm of the absolute" (1). For Descartes, space, viewed as a field which contained all bodies and all senses, came to dominate the subjects contained within. Kant's notion of space followed, one which saw space as belonging to "the *a priori* realm of consciousness" and therefore being "transcendental and essentially ungraspable" (2).

Burgin suggests that the commonly held view in the West is still one that conceives of "'places in space,' a system of centers of human affairs (homes, workplaces, cities) deployed within a uniformly regular and vaguely endless 'space in itself'" (42). Rather than being thought of as a cultural formation, space is conceived as a formless, unchanging and infinite container of culture. It exists prior to and independent of the human activity which takes place within it². Despite its ability to traverse space with increasing speed through technological means, Burgin presents modernist concepts of space as essentially unchanged from the Euclidian geometric model. He argues, however, that in the "postmodern" period, one in which the electronic speed of telecommunications eclipses the mechanical speed of machines, geographic spaces "once conceived as separated, segregated, now overlap . . ." (44). The microscopic inner-space of SARS and West Nile viruses and the distant geographic spaces of Iraq and Northern Ireland inhabit the local spaces of our homes on a nightly basis. Ironically, these postmodern conceptions appear to awaken a sense of space at the same moment that they suggest its

² We might look to Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* for a visual metaphor of this conception of space. In the final scene of the film, the ocean like surface of the planet Solaris is revealed to us as an incomprehensible mass containing islands of human culture upon its surface.

demise at the hands of speed. As Paul Virilio suggests, “After the spatial and temporal distances, speed distance obliterates the notion of physical dimension” (385).

Edward Soja and Frederic Jameson position Los Angeles as the ultimate manifestation of a postmodern spatial restructuring. Soja writes of the city, “everything seems to come together in Los Angeles . . . Its representations of spatiality and historicity are archetypes of vividness, simultaneity, and interconnection” (Postmodern 248). Mike Davis criticizes both Jameson and Soja’s readings of Los Angeles as a space that serves to forecast the necessary outcomes of late capitalist forces, claiming they overlook the particular historical and social circumstances, operating at local, national, and international levels, which came to form the city. He writes that Soja and Jameson “tend to collapse history into teleology and glamorize the very reality they would deconstruct” (86). While Davis identifies a certain amount of theoretical revelry taking place in the supposed discontinuity of the new postmodern order, Doreen Massey levels a supplemental complaint at many postmodern conceptions of geography. She questions the apparent anxiety created in theorists like David Harvey by what is described as a new phase in Marx’s notion of the “annihilation of space by time” (“Power-Geometry” 59). Massey argues that postmodern Marxist theories of “space-time compression” too simplistically reduce our experience of space to economic effects. She also suggests that these theorists participate in a nostalgia for an idealized place that might offer a respite from the sped up pace and instability caused by the flow of global capital. Massey cautions against conceptions of space that rely on a Heideggerian notion of places as possessing fixed boundaries and long internalized histories. She argues that places must be seen as “always constructed out of articulations of social relation . . . which are not

only internal to that locale but which link them to elsewhere. Their 'local uniqueness' is always already a product of wider contacts . . ." ("Places" 183). Within Massey's conception, places are always in a state of Becoming rather than Being. "They are processes" ("Power-Geometry" 66).

How then can we move towards an understanding of a space that neither presupposes an abstract absolute space, nor conflates the space itself with the objects inhabiting it? How might we conceive of locales without regressing to desires for places with essential identities, nor participating in a postmodern evaporation of material space into mental space? This is the project that Henri Lefebvre undertakes in his ambitious book The Production of Space. Lefebvre claims that, following in the tradition of Cartesian logic and mathematic topologies, modern epistemology continues to think of space as a "mental thing" or a "mental place" (3). In fact, according to Lefebvre, we have witnessed the proliferation of mental spaces, each with its own inherent logic: literary space, ideological space, the space of dreams, etc. Yet none of these theoretical spaces have successfully theorized the relationship between mental spaces and real spaces. Lefebvre describes a failure in critical thought to bridge the conceptual gap between "the theoretical (epistemological) realm and the practical one, between mental and social, between the space of philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things" (4).

Lefebvre sees a privileging of the mental realm of language in contemporary "epistemologico-philosophical" theories of space. Spaces are interpreted using the same conceptual framework as texts, creating the impression that spaces are to be read and not lived in. In a critique that resembles Massey's, Lefebvre suggests that this approach to

considerations of space can only conceive of a space already filled, already in a state of being. “[A]n already produced space can be decoded, can be *read*. Such a space implies a process of signification” (17). It is the process by which a space is encoded with meaning and the forces that govern its production that interest Lefebvre. He theorizes space as a social creation, a product of human practice. In Lefebvre’s theoretical framework, social space holds a position distinct from both mental space and material space, perhaps a point of mediation between the two. It is a space shaped by human agency and is therefore always in a process of becoming.

Lefebvre sets out to formulate a conceptual framework for thinking about space that is capable of investigating both actual spaces and the structures and processes that produce them. He introduces a conceptual triad for thinking about all aspects of spatial relations. This triad is comprised of: 1) Spatial practice (the material expression of social relations in space); 2) Representations of space (conceptualized space that influences the configuration of spatial practices); and 3) Representational space (space as appropriated by the imagination of its “users” or “inhabitants”). “Spatial practice” refers to the products and networks, “the particular locations and spatial sets” (33) that encourage the “reproduction of social relations” (50). It is the material space of the senses, the realm of plazas, housing complexes and highways. “Representations of space” are conceptual frameworks which attempt to demarcate the possibilities of social relations. This is the space of city planners, politicians and social engineers and, according to Lefebvre, the dominant space of “...both knowledge and power [leaving] only the narrowest leeway to representational spaces” (50). It is the realm of the architectural plan, the social vision and the political platform, a predominately verbal space. “Representational spaces”

belong to the unofficial or personal social life of the inhabitants of space. It is the realm of the imagination, memories and affect. Lefebvre describes it as a dominated space that "...overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects..." (39). Together these components make up a perceived-conceived-lived spatial triad. The three components are overlapping both in terms of time and space.

Lefebvre's theory of space bears some resemblance to another triadic model of spatiality suggested by architect Paul Shephard. Just as Lefebvre attempts to extend the parameters of how space is conceived, Shephard looks to push outwards the limits of what is commonly considered the domain of architecture. Shephard positions buildings, which are the focal point for traditional definitions of architecture, as the middle node in an array consisting of landscapes, buildings and machines. The strongest similarity between the two models is at the level of landscape. Shephard explains that "Every architectural move is set in a landscape strategy. The eighteenth-century grid cities of the New World are a strategy of reason . . . Norman England was constructed as a network of strong points, in a strategy of occupation" (xiii). Like Lefebvre's representations of space, Shephard's landscape strategies produce the spatial code that delimits the architectural (or social) practices that are to take place within a space. Shephard's categories of buildings and machines, which he thinks of as the architectural tactics and operations through which landscape strategies are carried out, correspond roughly to Lefebvre's category of spatial practice. What is missing from Shephard's conceptual model is an accounting of how the buildings and machines put in motion by landscape strategies are received by the users of these spaces. After all, Shephard claims, architecture is not everything. For Lefebvre an understanding of the social production of

space can not be complete without a consideration of the social reception and appropriation of these spaces.

The site of the Berlin Memorial demands a conception of space with the complexities of Lefebvre's model, for it is neither truly empty, nor has it been entirely filled. It is both an imagined space and an actual space. A sign has been erected on the vacant site reserved for the memorial. It indicates that a Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe will be built here and shows the design that, it suggests, will one day be completed. The sign points both forwards to the monument to be and backwards to the events it will commemorate and yet the space of the memorial also exists within a present moment. While far from stable the present significance of this space can be thought of as "a constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus" (Massey "Power-Geometry" 66). The project of understanding such a space entails a description of the discourses, events and interactions that influence its horizon of meaning. What follows is a consciously, and necessarily, incomplete account of the discourses impacting the space reserved for the Berlin Memorial. It is less an attempt to know this space as it is an effort to partially understand the process through which it has been produced.

Welcome to Kohlopolis

Given the enormity of the rebuilding going on in the city, it seems naïve to point to the impact of one individual on the remaking of Berlin, yet the influence of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl on the city (never mind the country and continent) is undeniable. The massively reconstructed central area of Berlin has been referred to on

more than one occasion as Kohlopolis (Boyes). As Lefebvre informs us, architectural projects and city developments are formed within and participate in a particular spatial code or discourse and no one has had a greater influence on the spatial code of postwar Berlin than Helmut Kohl. His leadership term of more than 15 years (1982-1998) is the longest of any German leader since Kaiser Wilhelm II fled the country during the waning moments of WWI. He will be forever known as the chancellor who orchestrated the reunion of East and West Germany. With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 the German nation was once again unified geographically and hopes of a psychologically and economically painless suturing of East and West abounded. After a few years the initial exuberance over unification gave way to the realization that the two halves of the country had become two very different people and that, frankly, they may not be very fond of each other. How then to overcome the lagging enthusiasm for a united Germany at the same time as the costs of reunification continued to rise (“Kohl’s Debterdammerung” 57)? Kohl, the leader who succeeded in initiating the process of reunification, was also charged with the task of constructing a new united national identity that would ideologically bind the now physically joined East and West.

As Lefebvre indicates, the relationship of material constructions of space to the mental and social models that delineate them is rather fluid and interwoven. The history of the city of Berlin is a testament to this claim. Its spatial landscapes play out like a game of “which came first...” In some cases large scale architectural reformations have been consciously designed to present an analogous materiality to a political regime change. (Albert Speer’s plans for a “great axis” running the length of Unter den Linden Street would have been Berlin’s most terrifying example [Jones]). In the case of a

reunited Berlin, a radical change in material space generated a need for a new conception of space that would buttress these changes. A coherent structure had to be felt to underlie the city, now an aberrant fusion of post-war modernist architecture, deteriorating pre-war apartment blocks and pre-fabricated concrete socialist realist complexes. In short, a new common narrative was needed to promote the notion of a shared German national identity³. But what story to tell? Where to find a narrative compelling to two people that had, by now, spent almost as much time apart as they had together? A common strategy for the creation of a persuasive national narrative is the connection of the country's present situation and future aspirations to the ideals and principles on which the nation was founded. In his analysis of Ronald Reagan's rhetorical style, William Lewis identifies the former American President's success in creating a national myth of "origins and destinies" (282)⁴. In this rhetorical strategy the past is mined for salient metaphors and tropes that will form the foundation of a persuasive narrative that might guide the nation through the difficulties of the present towards a common vision of the future.

This process of trawling the past for narrative guidance is a problematic one in Germany, where the events of the nation's past are not easily commemorated. A separated Germany allowed the disturbing consequences of National Socialism to remain largely unaddressed by both sides of the iron curtain. The West was able to attribute the

³ In positing his theory of narration as a rhetorical paradigm, Walter R. Fisher suggests that "humans are essentially storytellers" (7), responding not so much to rational argument as to coherent narratives, or stories, that have a fidelity to their personal experiences.

⁴ A study of the influence of President Reagan's oration on Chancellor Kohl's rhetorical style would be an interesting one. Not only can elements of Reagan's rhetorical style be seen in Kohl's formation of a new German narrative, Reagan can also be seen as playing an active role in Kohl's project of cleansing the nation's past through his ceremonial visits to German war memorials and his claims that Germany should no longer feel guilty for the actions of the past [see Farrell (292-3) and Wiedmer (81-2)].

terrible acts of WWII to the primitive barbarism of the communist East, while the East could label Fascism a logical consequence of Western excess (Wiedmer 84-5). A unified Germany seemed to demand that the past be accounted for at long last. Not an easy task, but of any post-war German leader, Kohl appeared must capable of, at least partially, confronting the country's history. Kohl's greatest skills as a politician were said to be his ability to connect to the "average" German, to speak the right language about the nation's past and to make Germans feel content with themselves again ("Extra Extra" 25). Kohl's rhetorical strategies and political actions in the process of crafting an acceptable German identity and national narrative can be viewed as directly addressing this dilemma presented by the nation's troubling past.

Kohl's success as a politician was due in part to his ability to create a representation of space capable of accommodating a united Berlin and a unified Germany. Lefebvre insists that a conception of space as but another text to be read is insufficient and he finds the semiotic strategies of literary scholars like Roland Barthes incapable of providing a complete depiction of the factors influencing lived social space.⁵ Yet Barthes' semiotic approach does present an invaluable tool for analyzing the construction of an existing representation of space. In other words, Barthes' semiotics provides a framework for identifying and interpreting the material and discursive influences governing social practices in particular spaces. Lefebvre hesitates to reduce social space to the status of a message, but there is no doubt that the reconstruction of the city of Berlin and its reinstatement as the capital of Germany is intended to convey a

⁵ This is a charge fully acknowledged by Barthes himself, who stresses, "Semiology, once its limits are settled, is not a metaphysical trap: it is a science among others, necessary but not sufficient" (112).

particular political message. The degree to which this message is successfully delivered or how it might be appropriated by the inhabitants of the city, is another matter still.

Barthes' concept of myth is especially relevant to deciphering the rhetorical strategies employed by Kohl. In brief, Barthes describes myth as a second order semiological system. It rests on top of an existing sign system and thus can be thought of as a mode of signification or a form, one that is independent of content. Barthes describes myth as a "metalanguage that gets hold of language in order to build its own system . . ." (115). The creator of myth employs existing signs in the formation of a new message. The original sign is imbued with a new level of signification. Barthes uses the example of a young black soldier on the cover of a Paris-Match magazine (116). The black soldier is dressed in a French uniform and is saluting beneath the French tri-colour flag. The first level sign, "this image is of a black soldier giving a salute" is overlaid with a second level of signification, one suggesting that "France is a great Empire, one that does not discriminate based on race." The power of myth is that it neither fabricates signs nor hides them. It operates with a set of pre-existing signs, in fact it relies on the meaning of the signs it employs to be established already. The myth system does not create the black soldier in uniform, it imposes a particular meaning on this sign and on we how receive it. "Myth," Barthes tells us, "hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (121).

Barthes concept of myth allows us to think about Kohl's project of reconstructing both the city of Berlin and the identity of the nation precisely because it shows us how myth is founded on what is already there. Kohl's initial success as a leader was

predicated not on an ability to create (for by anyone's account Kohl was no innovator⁶), but on a skill in rehabilitating what already existed. Faced with an unspeakable history and a disjointed landscape, Kohl created a myth capable of returning Germany to its former unified state and restoring its self-confidence. To a large degree, Kohl's system of myth formed the representation of space (or landscape strategy) that governed the spatial relations of the city of Berlin.

With the fall of the wall, Berlin's Mitte neighborhood (meaning literally "middle") regained its status as the city's centre. The regal Unter den Linden street ("under the lime trees") which runs through Mitte, bookended by the Brandenburg Gate and the Alexanderplatz television tower and home to many prominent landmarks such as Humboldt University and the Komische Opera House, became a focal point for the restoration of the city. The German Historical Museum, also located on Unter den Linden, played a particular role in Kohl's mythology construction. While residing in the GDR, the Museum presented a decidedly Ost version of recent German history. Ian Buruma writes:

Here we learn, for example, that Nazism was supported by reactionary forces of British and American monopoly capital (as well as the big German industrial corporations, now about to 'invade' the GDR from the West), that the German Communist Party (KPD) was the only party to defend the interests of working people, that the victims of fascism were comforted by the unceasing struggle and resistance of all progressive forces, led by the Communist Party, and that, with the victory of the Soviet Union over the fascist powers, a fundamentally new order was born which would strengthen peace, democracy and socialism (13-14).

⁶ Even Kohl's push to reunify the country can be traced back to Chancellor Willy Brandt's "Ostpolitik," an attempt to reestablish West Germany's bounds with Eastern Europe ("Extra Extra 25").

In the months following the fall of the wall (but prior to reunification) a remarkable example of historical resignification was on view in the museum. A sign was placed at the entrance of the museum reading:

Dear visitors. This exhibition reflects a view of history meant to justify an increasingly bureaucratic-authoritarian society. As we know now, this stands in the way of a lively and active engagement with history and the present. As we move towards democracy, we must claim responsibility for our mistakes. We shall work hard to offer a new section on 1945-1949 by 1991. Everything must be revised and viewed in a new light. We ask you humbly for your help in showing history as it actually happened (14).

The transition period between a divided and a unified Germany produced this striking example of a culture that has turned away from one myth, but has yet to find a replacement. It was largely Kohl who assumed the responsibility of generating this new myth, a task that was as needed in the West as in the East. One of the Chancellor's first projects in a reunited Berlin was the establishment of the German Historical Museum coupled with a conscious effort to remind Germans of their common heritage predating the events of recent history⁷. The museum was intended to, as journalist Jane Kramer claims, "take the Germany that Bismarck had pieced together in 1871 and give it a coherence and a continuity – a 'Germanness', so to speak – that went back centuries" (275). Kramer suggests that the Kohl-appointed director of the museum, Christoph Stölzl (a non-Berliner), was a popular choice amongst Western conservatives because he "told them the good news about German history that they wanted to hear" (276). He was "someone for whom the aesthetics of 'Germanness' would not be diluted by too much

⁷ The attention paid to the National Historical Museum occurred in conjunction with a general effort to restore the numerous galleries and museums located on Mitte's Museum Island, including the Museum of Antiquities, the National Gallery and the Pergamon Museum. I would argue that these museums also contribute to the establishment of a shared cultural legacy of both creation and preservation.

scholarship or too much soul-searching,” presenting German history as a “river of Enlightenment” (276) flowing through the history of the West.

The history of enlightened “Germanness” promoted by Kohl and Stölzl played on romantic images of the country’s natural landscape and emphasized more distant and less controversial historical events. With undeniable disparities between East and West urban environments, the country’s shared natural setting (however romanticized), presented a more feasible platform for bonding. A historical precedent exists for this turn to the aesthetics of the land in order to generate a sense of political and social unity. Historian Alon Confino looks to Bismarck’s unification of 1871, the founding period of German nationalism, and suggests that the idea of *Heimat* (literally “home”), an image of “the ultimate German community,” (50) was instrumental in facilitating unification at a national level of what was up until then a fragmented and regionalised German population. Bismarck’s challenge was to promote an imagined German community (to borrow Benedict Anderson’s well known concept) that transcended the disparate histories, landscapes and customs of these regions. The rather fluid idea of *Heimat* combined a poeticization of nature with an interest in a German folklore that was not particularly concerned with historical accuracy. The *Heimat* depiction of the nation was one of communities living in harmony within a generic and idealized natural setting. Confino suggests that the image of the *Heimat* “elevated national forgetfulness to its highest level” allowing Germans to seize to “associate the nation with the real social and political processes and [view] it as immemorial” (76).

Kohl and Stölzl’s narrative construction incorporates a similar move, shifting the focus of the nation’s sense of identity from divisive historical events and towards a

unifying and less contentious “natural” history and a distant past that is more ripe for mythologizing. Of course by the time of reunification Kohl had been laying the groundwork for his rehabilitation of German identity for some time. Financial Times reporter Peter Bruce writes in 1986 that Kohl is able “to talk without guilt of Vaterland or *Heimat* . . . to claim them as symbols of a German history going back centuries and not merely of a time when the country admittedly went mad” (2). Kohl’s reassuring discourse was even more potent to West Germany during the uncertainty of unification and offered a much needed replacement myth for the East.

This selective mining of the nation’s past, a careful process of removing an indigestible period of time, is echoed in an ongoing debate over appropriate architectural strategies for the reconstruction of Berlin. There are two architectural philosophies vying for dominance in the united city. Andreas Huyssen identifies the movement known as “critical reconstruction” as a call to return to traditional forms of Berlin architecture (“Voids” 81). This movement, championed by Hans Stimmann (the city’s director of building from 1991 to 1996)⁸, suggests a return to pre-WWI architecture and the traditional organisation of neighbourhoods (known as the *Kiez*). The *Kiez*-oriented city plan can be viewed as the urban equivalent to the *Heimat* community, a romantic view of a series of small neighbourhoods built with traditional facades and made out of traditional materials (or made to look so), all in harmony with the city as a whole. The concept is not

⁸ Stimmann has been described as controlling the architectural style of reconstruction “with the kind of determination that Baron Haussmann brought to the remaking of Paris in the 1850’s” (“Germany’s Once and future capital” 80).

without its positive features, calling for restricted building heights and preserving a mix of residential and business space within the city centre⁹.

But in this representation of space the conflicting ideologies and difficult reminders contained in post-WWI architectural forms are avoided. The non-conformity of the Bauhaus movement and the fascist architecture of the Third Reich are equally shunned. Huyssen describes this architectural proposal as an “[attempt] to create a seamless continuity with a pre-1914 national past that would erase memories of Weimar, Nazi, and GDR architecture in the process” (81). At its best, critical reconstruction draws from the most socially responsible spatial elements of the past. At its worst, it is stagnantly uncreative and its spirit risks being bastardized in projects like the remaking of the Hotel Adlon. The 1997 replica version of the famed luxury hotel that was destroyed in 1945 overlooks the Brandenburg Gate and has been called “a faded second-hand stage [set] of past glories” and a “Disneyfied [version] of the past” by the Architectural Review (“Outrage” 2).¹⁰

At the centre of the critical reconstruction movement is a kernel of utopic nostalgia, a sense that the solutions to the spatial and aesthetic dilemmas of the 21st century lie in a return to pre-20th century landscapes. In this sense it shares with Kohl’s rhetorical narrative the romanticism of the distant past that recent history simply will not allow. Yet it would not be entirely accurate to label Kohl’s national narrative strategy as

⁹ Curiously though, the trademark Berlin public space of the courtyard does not seem to have survived the critical reconstruction of Unter den Linden. The disappearance of these courtyards in the central areas of the city would be an unfortunate instance of the city’s voids being filled.

¹⁰ But there seems to be little room for purism in the new Berlin. During my last visit to the city, the Hotel Adlon overlooked a Brandenburg Gate under construction and covered in a Deutsch Telecom advertisement, reassuring Berliners that their Handys (cellphones) will continue working in all types of foul weather.

simple regressive nostalgia or equate it too closely with past political calls to remember the Fatherland. Kohl's mythology looks backward beyond the problematic events of the twentieth century, but it also looks forward to a future German nation poised to assume a central role, both politically and economically, in a united Europe¹¹.

These representations of Berlin as a progressive hub within a re-unified Germany, a European Union and a Global economy are also expressed materially within the city. Once the largest construction site in the world, but now reaching completion, Potsdamer Platz is located only a kilometre from the site reserved for the Holocaust Memorial. Prior to WWII the area was Berlin's busiest commercial and entertainment centres and was home to the first European traffic light. It was razed to the ground in a single night of allied bombing and then was bisected by the wall, becoming one of the city's many voids. Instead of symbolically returning to a safe pre-WWI past, Potsdamer Platz's ultramodern structures of glass and steel, occupied by multi-national corporations, represent a leap to a safe and affluent future. In this "capital and global metropolis of the twenty-first century" (Huysen 66), ties to a German architectural style and subsequently ties to a troubling German past are effectively severed. Here at Daimler Chrysler Place and the Sony Centre (an architectural representation of an erupting Mount Fuji), the history that permeates the rest of the city seems incredibly distant¹². Potsdamer Platz presents itself as a trans-national every place, no more connected to German WWII

¹¹ It is interesting to see that the first exhibit in the National Historical Museum's new exhibition building is entitled "The Idea of Europe: Concepts for an Eternal Peace." The exhibit traces the history of ideas concerning a united Europe.

¹² Given that Potsdamer Platz is a celebration of images – images of prosperity, images of internationalism, images of the future – it seems strangely appropriate that the area houses two Imax theatres. But images can be deceiving and in reality the economic miracle promised in these architectural forms has been slow in coming and much of the Potsdamer Platz office space remains empty.

atrocities as its international equivalents: Times Square, or Canary Wharf. If the traditional, pre-WWI neighbourhoods envisioned by the critical reconstructionists are the materialization of Kohl's mythic German past, then the ultramodern workplaces of Potsdamer Platz are the manifestations of his vision of a prosperous German future. Both offer their own particular reconfigurations of time and space. Critical reconstruction points backwards in a disavowal of the 20th century, while Potsdamer Platz points outwards, away from the specifics of German geography and history.



fig. 4 Sony building – Potsdamer Platz (author's photo).

GDR structures have fared poorly when confronted with either of these dominant landscape strategies. One of the continuing spatial debates in the city is over the fate of the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic), built between 1973 and 1976 to house the Volkammer (the people's chamber) the location of the GDR communist government. It is located on the site of the Hohenzollern Palace that, having been

damaged by bombing during the war, was completely destroyed under the orders of GDR leader Walter Ulbricht in an ideological statement against imperialism¹³. Prominently located amongst the cities best remaining examples of classical architecture, the Palast der Republik has long been an aesthetic thorn in the side of Western city planners. Its reflective orange glass and stark concrete are commonly regarded in the West as a glaring example of the shortcomings of communist architectural practices – a historical mistake that should be rectified through demolition. But for many people in the East, the disdain for the building is symptomatic of the West's general sentiments of condescension and contempt towards 50 years of GDR history. The building is not only an ideological symbol of Eastern Germany, it also housed over 12 restaurants and cafes, not to mention a bowling alley, and is associated with fond memories for many of the city's eastern inhabitants. Kohl heavily supported the removal of this remainder of German division and favoured the construction of a replica of the Hohenzollern Palace. The structural discord presented by the Palast der Republik was simply incapable of being incorporated into Kohl's spatial model for the city.

¹³ The only surviving part of the Hohenzollern Palace is the balcony from which Karl Liebknecht declared the republic in 1918. It has been grafted onto the façade of the State Council Building which stands perpendicular to the site of the Palace. The Palast der Republik has actually remained empty for the past ten years due to asbestos poisoning. It now stands gutted, waiting for its fate to be decided.



fig. 5 The Palast der Republik (author's photo).

The socialist style of Alexanderplatz, the central shopping area and public square of East Berlin and still a popular destination for locals and tourists, is threatened not by the selective memory of critical reconstruction, but by the complete amnesia of ultra-modernism. The area will be converted into a series of seven high-rise office towers by 2013 that, apart from the continued presence of the famous television tower, retain little or no reference to the current space. Indeed, the television tower may be the only GDR landmark to find a place in the new spatial practices of the city.

But does Kohl's selective and sometimes amnesiac spatial representation of the city fall outside of the category of myth, which after all Barthes suggests hides nothing? Barthes also tell us that the analogy between history or geography and the concept developed by myth "is never anything but partial: the form drops many analogous features and keeps only a few" (127). Myth does not exhaust the possibilities for representation offered up by history and geography. It chooses malleable elements from

this field of possibilities and shapes them into a coherency that had no prior existence. Myth has no need to hide, for without an alternative mythology with which to attach themselves contradictory elements will recede from view. Severed from the myth and representation of space that brought them into being, the city's remaining GDR structures have little hope of finding a place in the new Berlin. Unless incorporated into a new mythology they have lost the ability to signify anything but their own broken chain of signification. The alternative history they embody is a poor fit for Kohl's myth of common German origins.

Far from hiding the events of the 20th century, Kohl's myth construction is remarkably adept at incorporating (however selectively) the most troubling period of the nation's history. Barthes writes that the form of myth does not suppress the meaning of a nation's history or geography, "...it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal" (118). Although certain to be remembered as the leader who united a divided Germany, Kohl is also the leader who brought the country's Holocaust guilt into the public realm. The disturbing events of the past are acknowledged within Kohl's mythology, but are given a particular place within this narrative and are relegated to certain spaces within the city. One of Kohl's rhetorical strategies in dealing with the nation's Nazi period was to put forward a discourse of "Victim Germany." This positioning of Germany as victim of its past is one which Saul Friedlander claims presents "Hitler and Nazi party as perpetrators [and] German people as bystanders" (25). The historical spin presented by Kohl is that of a German nation invaded by Hitler, occupied by the Third Reich for twelve years, and then liberated by the allied forces. The effect of this historical construction is to break the connection between National

Socialism and the German nation, allowing the Holocaust and other atrocities to be commemorated without implicating the people of Germany in these events. The country's troubling past is not hidden, for such a strategy would result in the continuation of a paralysing guilt, it is positioned in a way that allows it to be present yet undisruptive to the mythology being formed¹⁴.

Markers of these difficult events find their place within Kohl's spatial representation, but not in the explicit discourse of a German Historical Museum or in the foundational structure of a city plan. Memory of these events is housed in the malleable and isolated spaces of memorial sites. By proliferating the notion of Victim Germany, Kohl is able without contradiction to erect monuments such as the memorial "For the Victims of War and Rule by Violence" in Berlin's Neue Wache - a wreath laying site for visiting dignitaries which conflates the victim and perpetrator. The influence of this narrative can also be seen in the much written about visit of Ronald Reagan to the military cemetery of Bitburg in 1985, the resting place of German soldiers (including members of the Waffen SS), where he stated that these soldiers were "victims just as surely as the victims in the concentration camp" (qtd. in Hartman 240)¹⁵. The visit was

¹⁴ Alternatives to Kohl's myth have certainly been put forward in Germany, but the difficulty in responsibly incorporating the nation's past while still providing an effective vision for the country's future should not be understated. Thomas Farrell describes the rhetorical failure of the speaker of the West German parliament, Philipp Jenninger, on the fiftieth anniversary of "Kristallnacht," the night the Nazi's put into effect their systematic extermination of the Jews. The speech in which Jenninger stated: "The question of our guilt and evasion of responsibility must be answered by each person for himself. But which ever way we turn, we will come full circle, to face our public and ourselves" (in Farrell 315) was not well received at the time of delivery. While many people were sympathetic to Jenninger's attempts to directly confront Germany's past, his speech seemed to offer no suggestion as to how the average German is to "take responsibility" for the nation's history, and no vision of a reconstituted German identity.

¹⁵ In an outrageous example of an inappropriate identification with the victims of history, Reagan's speech contained the lines: "I am a Berliner. I am a Jew in a world still

seen by most as an obvious attempt to symbolically cleanse the German people of their implications in the atrocities of WWII, contributing directly to Kohl's rhetorical formation of a new guilt-free German nationalism.

The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe

It is within this representation of space, one dominated by Kohl's mythology of a new Berlin, that the "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe" finds itself. The ongoing reconstruction of the city frames the monument on all sides and its ability to signify is delimited by the competing discourses seeking to determine its meaning. The project of a central Holocaust memorial was highly contested from its conception, with many Berliners suspicious of the very monumentality of the project. Others felt that the monument presented a misplaced identification with the Jewish victims or that it would deliver the problematic message that Germany had come to terms with its past and was ready to move on. Its most vocal proponent was television personality Lea Rosh. Rosh, a Berliner with an adopted Jewish name, had been accused by some of being in the Shoah Business, as in the unfortunate saying: "there's no business like Shoah business" (Kramer 261). Rosh succeeded in winning Kohl's support. Kohl's allocation of central Berlin real estate raised the question of what role the monument was to take in the chancellor's ongoing project of reconstructing a German identity. Former Mayor Eberhard Diepgen refused to attend the dedication of the site (Williams B1) and a group of 19 prominent

threatened by anti-Semitism. I am an Afghan, and I am a prisoner of the Gulag. I am a refugee in a crowded boat foundering off the coast of Vietnam, I am a Loatian, a Cambodian, a Cuban, and a Miskito Indian in Nicaragua. I, too, am a potential victim of totalitarianism" (Brown).

German intellectuals, historians and authors, including Günter Grass, wrote an open letter to Kohl urging him to abandon the project. Author Paul Schneider questioned the intended function of the memorial, saying: “If it’s a German monument for the victims, you cannot penetrate the feelings of the victims...The suffering of the victims is their suffering. You cannot stimulate it from the side of those who are not the victims” (Cowell E10).

An international design competition in 1994 yielded 528 entries, the majority of which confirmed the fears of those who criticized the inappropriate monumentality of the project. One design called for the construction of an enormous vat, large enough to hold the blood of 6 million slaughtered Jews. Another suggested a massive Ferris wheel be constructed with deportation cars instead of baskets. The final selection, an immense gravestone on which the 4.5 million recoverable names of Jewish victims would be inscribed was met with intense criticism for its brutishly heavy-handed symbolism and its appropriation of Jewish names and traditions. Kohl determined that the grim monument would make an entirely inappropriate centerpiece for his new Berlin. He vetoed the selection and called for a period of contemplation to reflect on the intentions of the project.

In 1998 a new committee was formed to re-open the discussion on the still absent memorial. A new selection emerged from these deliberations, that of American architect Peter Eisenman¹⁶. The winning design concept involved covering the area in 2,700 stone columns of various heights, forming an undulating field of stone pillars. Visitors to the site would walk amongst the pillars, contemplating the magnitude of the horror of the

Holocaust and reflecting on its implications for them personally. James Young describes the memorial as “an audacious, surprising, and dangerously imagined form” (Memory’s Edge 203).



fig. 6 Walking in the field of pillars (from Young Memory’s Edge).

On August 16th, 2003 construction began on Eisenman’s design. The memorial site is clearly still in a state of becoming, yet it has been the focal point of a discursive debate over appropriate memory practices for nearly 15 years. The memorial space finds itself in the midst of an ongoing competition over which representation of space will dictate the development of the city. Whether the memorial will simply echo the city’s dominant landscape strategy, or whether it is able to create an opening for the intimate and imaginative practices of representational space remains to be seen. In the absence of the monument itself, the point of investigation currently available is a questioning of the

¹⁶ The design was originally a partnership between Eisenman and American artist Richard Serra, but Serra withdrew his name from the project when the selection committee requested alterations to the design.

theoretical and discursive formation of the monument's design. What is the memorial's perceived relationship to its terrible referent? Is it designed to assume the burden of memory? Or does it displace this responsibility to its audience? Is it intended to relay the traumas of the past into the present? Or does it relieve the present of the weight of the past?

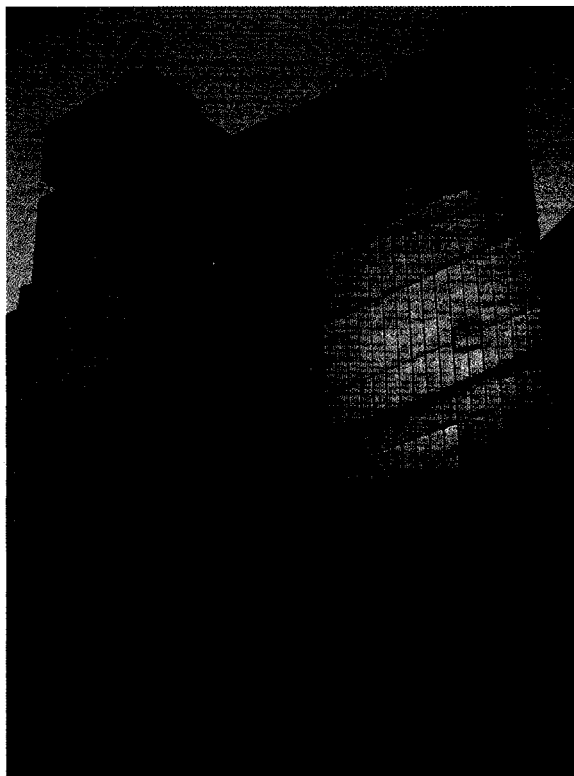


fig. 7 Libeskind's Jewish Museum (author's photo).

Chapter Two

Inhabiting the Void

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

– Wittgenstein

When walking in the borough of Kreuzberg, it is easy to lose sense of what side of the city you would find yourself in were the wall still to exist. The Berlin wall of course did not neatly bisect the city into East and West. Berlin was parceled into neighborhoods and as a result the wall ran like a jagged cut through the city. The wall wound along the North and East sides of Kreuzberg. The most “Ost” of the neighborhoods of West Berlin, Kreuzberg attracted those Germans and other western Europeans seeking a different way of life (the area has been the home of squatters, artists, social activists) and eastern Europeans looking to improve their lives (Kreuzberg is home to the largest Turkish population outside of Turkey).

It is within this neighbourhood that you will encounter the Daniel Libeskind-designed Jewish Museum. Not unlike the irregular pattern of the wall itself, Libeskind’s zinc-paneled structure is a striking jagged form extending out from the 18th Prussian courthouse that already stood on the site of the museum¹. The gleaming surface of the structure is interrupted by erratic cuts and slashes – tectonic fissures of glass allowing light to pass within. The building is further cut through with a space that Libeskind calls “the Void,” forming a series of gaps within the museum that may be viewed but are otherwise inaccessible to the visitors. James Young calls this void “the building’s

¹ Libeskind describes the museum’s irregular form as being “an irrational matrix” (radix-matrix 34), a historical and cultural constellation derived from plotting the addresses of important Jewish figures within the city, such as Arnold Schoenberg and Paul Celan.

structural rib, its main axis, a central bearing wall that bears only its absence” (Memory’s Edge 165). Libeskind’s design has been praised as an architectural triumph that expresses in material form what has been inexpressible through language. Indeed, the notion of the unutterable is at the core of Libeskind’s creation. He cites Schoenberg’s unfinished opera Moses and Aaron, an opera concerned with the inexpressibility of God, as a central inspiration for the structure (“Between the Lines” 65). For some, the museum’s voids, cuts and absences present a symbolic register that offers a tangible equivalent to the nation’s memory problem. Andreas Huyssen states that “[Libeskind’s] building itself writes the discontinuous narrative that is Berlin, inscribes it physically into the very movement of the museum visitor, and yet opens a space for remembrance to be articulated and read between the lines” (Voids 80). The museum’s architectural language has stretched out into the rest of the city and beyond².

The selection of Eisenman’s memorial was couched in a similar discourse of absence, trauma and unrepresentability. The shocking literalness and insensitive symbolism of many of the submissions to the first design competition (as described in chapter 1) seemed to demand a shift in aesthetic and formal approaches. American academic James E. Young, who served as spokesperson for the second design competition, identifies the difficult task of the memorial to acknowledge “the void left behind” (Memory’s Edge 198) by the elimination of Jewish European civilization and not simply focus on the terrible destruction of the Holocaust itself. He praises Eisenman’s work as one that strikes a balance between critiquing traditional memorial practices and

² Libeskind’s architectural aesthetic has been enlisted for sites of memory and/or trauma such as the Danish Jewish Museum, the Felix Nussbaum Museum in Osnabrück, Germany and the World Trade Center site.

aesthetics, and providing an effective call to personal memory. He writes of the memorial: “Rather than pretending to answer Germany’s memorial problem in a single, reassuring form, this design proposed multiple, collected forms arranged so that visitors have to find their own path to the memory of Europe’s murdered Jews. As such, this memorial provided not an answer to memory but an ongoing process, a continuing question without a certain solution” (206). While admitting that the most immediate interpretation of the memorial is of a field of tombstones, Young praises the undetermined meaning of the blank stone columns. He suggests “in their abstract forms, they will nevertheless accommodate the references projected onto them by visitors” (212). Eisenman’s justification for the design again invokes a language of absence and aporia. He explains his design as follows: “It is a field of pillars that attempts to decontextualize the Holocaust, in the sense of trying to see it as a cut in the history of Germany . . . Not to try and locate it, not to try to make it a thing of nostalgia, not to try and make it be able to be rationalized, but to be able to be unrationalized” (“Building” R1). This chapter will examine the theoretical underpinnings that support this discourse of absence and consequently frame the space of the Berlin memorial.

An Architecture of Deconstruction

The extent to which the perceived success of Libeskind’s particular spatial representation of memory influenced the design and selection of the Eisenman memorial is indeterminable. Libeskind has reportedly suggested that the similarities between Eisenman’s field of stone columns and his own garden of contemplation adjacent to the

museum were more than coincidental³. That there are similarities between the architectural discourses and design of Libeskind and Eisenman is perhaps not unexpected. The two are among the most prominent members of a group of architects that have been labeled “deconstructive”. The relation of this loosely defined architectural movement to the deconstructive philosophy espoused by Jacques Derrida and others is far from stable. Indeed, the deconstructive practice of disrupting seemingly stable structures may in some respects be viewed as inherently anti-architectural. The 1988 MoMA exhibition entitled “Deconstructivist Architecture” curated by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley brought seven individuals or design teams together under the common rubric of deconstruction. Libeskind and Eisenman were joined in the exhibit by Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Zaha M. Hadid, Coop Himmelblau and Bernard Tschumi. While admitting that the architectural examples chosen for the exhibit were not a straight forward application of deconstructive theory (as if such a thing were possible), Johnson identifies in the works a common “ability to disturb our thinking about form” (10). Wigley maintains that the architecture within the exhibit befits the label of deconstructive due to its refusal to acquiesce to architectural contextualism and its privileging of the familiar. Deconstructivist architecture, according to Wigley, chooses instead to excavate the unfamiliar from within familiar forms and uncover the architectural assumptions that structure the discipline. He sees the collected works as exhibiting “an architecture of disruption, dislocation, deflection, deviation, and distortion, rather than one of

³ In a piece of architectural gossip, Gerald Blomeyer claims in the pages of the Architectural Review that upon learning of the memorial design, Libeskind wrote a letter to German parliament accusing Eisenman of plagiarism (30).

demolition, dismantling, decay, decomposition, or disintegration...[displacing] structure instead of destroying it” (17).

The extent to which these architects identify themselves as deconstructive varies and whether a material creation can truly be thought of as an act of deconstruction bears consideration. Neil Leach, for example, argues that the theory’s “links with architecture are clearly only metaphorical” (317). But this statement is itself problematized by theories of deconstruction that while identifying the linguistic structures that underpin systems of thought, nevertheless remain cognizant of the power of the metaphor. Deconstruction’s recognition of the metaphorical structures that legitimate metaphysical philosophy offers a point of critical entry for the questioning (although not dismantling) of these structures, but deconstruction remains conscious of its own reliance on figurative language. In Derrida’s words, “there is nothing outside the text” (Deconstruction in a Nutshell 80) and thus nothing outside the territory of language. The implications of the free-play of signs identified by deconstruction need not be confined to the verbal act of writing and can certainly be applied to architectural and artistic practices. A metaphorical link between the architecture of deconstruction and the philosophy of deconstruction is therefore no trivial connection. Libeskind and Eisenman are among the architects that most directly acknowledge their relationship with deconstructive philosophy, confronting an established architectural discourse with an emerging philosophical discourse in order to destabilize a discipline that has at its core the desire for stability. Libeskind and Eisenman approach architecture as text. Their collaborations with non-architects; incorporation of literary and artistic references within their work; and their numerous

writings on the topic of architecture intentionally blur the line between architectural theory and practice.

Eisenman views a deconstructive approach as a necessary questioning of the anthropocentric underpinnings of architecture; a mode of thought which ultimately (and paradoxically) culminated in the machine aesthetics of modernism and the atrocities of Hiroshima and the Holocaust (House of Cards 170-2). According to Eisenman, “Traditional architectural aesthetics takes for granted the hierarchy, closure, symmetry and regularity, thus foreclosing the possibility of dissonance, non-closure, non-hierarchy...” (Derrida Chora L 7). Eisenman’s earlier projects involved the design and construction of houses intended to avoid reliance on historical antecedents and displace traditional assumptions about the function and aesthetics of individual dwelling. He writes, “while a house today still must shelter, it does not need to symbolize or romanticize its sheltering function, to the contrary such symbols are today meaningless and merely nostalgic” (House of Cards 172). Through his houses, Eisenman attempts to create a self-referential architecture, unbounded by deference to a human scale. In Eisenman’s design scheme, doorways may still allow passage, but apart from this basic function are freed from other aesthetic or formal restrictions imposed on them by convention.⁴ It is the contingency of signifier and signified within architectural tradition that Eisenman seeks to disrupt. He states that “One has to pull apart the one-to-one relationship between structure, form, meaning, content, symbolism, etc., so that it is

⁴ In these earlier works Eisenman also suggested the possibility of truly “architectural signs,” beams that support only their own weight - structural elements that have no function other than to signify the practice of architecture. He has since renounced this strategy as being a search for a non-existent architectural essence and a reaffirmation of the metaphysics of centering.

possible to make many meanings. This pulling apart is what I call a displacement” (“Strong Form” 34).

The traditional architectural hierarchy of presence over absence, solid over void, is also questioned in Eisenman’s structures. He argues that, as an object capable of both sensory and conceptual meaning, architecture always refers to both a presence and an absence, a physics and a metaphysics. This exploration of absence is often overt; in the center of one house is a room that can be seen from all other rooms, but never entered (reminiscent of Libekind’s Void). The overall goal of these “deconstructive” practices is to free the object from the history of architectural objects; to release it from pre-ordained associative meanings, so that it might take on a new meaning independent of its traditional role. The possibility exists, according to Eisenman, for the architectural object to exist as a dislocating text, “involved in the generation of fiction, of histories, archaeologies, and narratives that are other than . . . the history, archaeology, and narrative of origin and of truth in the metaphysics of architecture” (House of Cards 186).

The *Chora* and the Void

In 1985 Eisenman and Jacques Derrida began collaboration on an architectural project – an effort to bring philosophical and architectural discourses into cohabitation. The space that they were charged with designing was part of a larger project undertaken by Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi to redesign the Parc de la Villette in Paris. Tschumi’s project called for a radical decentering of the idea of a park and attempted to bring function to three superimposed systems of ordering (a point grid of red architectural

follies; lines of curving promenades and covered galleries; and surfaces of large horizontal spaces)⁵. Eisenman and Derrida were to collaborate on a small section of the park which would add yet another layer to the overlapping systems of Tschumi's design.

The starting point of the collaboration was a consideration of Derrida's writings on a relatively brief, yet pivotal, section of Plato's *Timeaus* that introduces the enigmatic notion of the *chora*. Eisenman believed that the concept of the *chora* might present a radical figure through which to question the common assumptions on which the discipline of architecture had been founded. The concept of the *chora* (or more precisely the non-concept) is a necessarily illusive one in Plato's text as it occupies a position that is not simply at the margins or limits of discourse and representation, but rather pre-exists and pre-supposes all forms of discourse and representation. In fact, Derrida refuses to use the name 'the *chora*,' preferring instead just '*chora*,' for the addition of an article lends fixity to a concept that must by necessity have none. The concept of *chora* emerges from the cosmology presented in Plato's text as a realm apart from both the eternal, indestructible space of being and the created, sensible space of becoming that is its copy. Plato reasons that the places belonging to the space of becoming, these imperfect representations of eternal being, must have a space in which to be received. He writes:

we distinguished two kinds, but now we must specify a third, one of a different sort. The earlier two sufficed for our previous account: one was proposed as a model, intelligible and always changeless, a second as imitation of the model, something that possesses becoming and is visible . . . Now, however, it appears that our account compels us to attempt to illuminate in words a kind that is difficult and vague. What must we suppose it to do and to be? This above all: it is a *receptacle* of all becoming – its wetnurse, as it were (49a).

⁵ See the Bernard Tschumi Architects website (www.tschumi.com).

This third discourse and third genus is *chora*, that which acts as a type of intermediary between the realms of sensible and intelligible knowledge, the division of logos and mythos, and the states of being and becoming. It is the place (or rather non-place) that brings the formal boundaries of these dualities into question.

John Sallis identifies *chora* as something “intrinsically untranslatable,” for being inaccessible to both sensible and intelligible understanding, it is without meaning in any classical sense (115). It is not space, at least not in the post-Cartesian sense, nor is it the void (empty space) of Greek atomism. “[I]t is that in which that which is generated comes to be and from which that which is destroyed passes away, departs. It is presupposed by all generation and destruction and thus is not itself subject to generation and destruction” (119). In thinking through *chora* Derrida points to the figure of the receptacle or container used in Plato’s text, while acknowledging that no metaphor could ever fully contain the concept of *chora*. (How can you contain in language the container of all things and that which pre-exists language?) *Chora* then, is that which allows the becoming of the world to be imprinted on its surface. It is a non-material in which all that is material resides. It is the wax tablet on which the memory of existence is impressed and as such is both prior to and after all that is available to our senses. Yet it remains virgin, all that makes its impression upon its surface is effaced⁶. Plato writes, “We must

⁶ In his discussions with Eisenman, Derrida uses the metaphor of the “mystic writing pad” in explaining how *Chora* effaces all that is inscribed on its surface (*Chora* L 35). The mystic pad, a children’s novelty item, consists of a slate of dark brown wax covered by a thin wax paper, which in turn covered by a thin transparent sheet. A message may be inscribed on the pad using a pointed stylus and then could be wiped clean by lifting the celluloid sheet away from the wax pad. It is interesting to remark that Freud, in his essay “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad,” uses the toy as a metaphor for the way in which memory functions, which suggests a possible link between the concept of *Chora* and the interior space of memory.

always refer to it by the same term, for it does not depart from its own character in any way. Not only does it always receive all things, it has never in any way whatever taken on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter it” (50c). *Chora* is a concept that defies approach from a rational perspective. As Derrida states, *chora* “does not proceed from the natural or legitimate logos, but rather from a hybrid, bastard, or even corrupted reasoning” (Chora L15).

It is the seemingly impossible task of representing materially the concept of *chora* that Eisenman undertook in his work with Derrida. Eisenman’s strategy was not to represent *chora*, but to represent the impossibility of representing *chora*⁷. One can readily see why the concept of *chora* would be so attractive for Eisenman’s overall project of architectural deconstruction and its questioning of traditional notions of scale, function and aesthetics that center around the human form. The figure presented for Eisenman the possibility for conceiving of an architectural practice released from its own obsession with presence. For it is, as Derrida claims, “inaccessible, impassive, “amorphous”...and still virgin, with a virginity that is radically rebellious against anthropomorphism...” (17). The *chora*, in its virgin state, presents a space entirely free from the presuppositions of architectural tradition.

Chora, it must be said, is not directly referenced in Eisenman’s design for the Holocaust memorial, but it can be argued that its trace exists in the project; Eisenman’s interest in the concept of *chora* has been deferred in some sense to this later project. How are we to think about the concept of *chora* in light of the Holocaust? Can we think of

⁷ In actual fact, due to budgetary and logistical complications (and perhaps due in part to Derrida’s refusal to compromise his view of what *Chora* is not) the garden was never constructed.

chora as providing an opening for a consideration of history that bridges the distance between the sensible and the intelligible? And might it then provide the entry point to thought needed for the visitors of the memorial, one absent of the pre-conceived historical assumptions that stifle personal contemplation? Could the bastard, hybrid reasoning needed to gain a glimpse of *chora* be a state of thought appropriate (or necessary) in order to come to terms with the atrocities of the 20th century? While *chora*, in its emptiness, seems to suggest a space of possibilities, it must be remembered that this space exists only as the pre-existence of any form of inscription. Once a possibility is realized in the space of *chora*, the space is no longer *chora*. It is indeed a non-anthropomorphic space, but it is radically non-anthropomorphic, to the extent that humanity could find no place within it. It is a concept of an originary space, a place prior to all acts of becoming and devoid of all representation.

Chora, as has already been stated, is not the void (a point that Derrida repeatedly emphasized to Eisenman during the Chora L project). It is not the empty space that exists between two things. It is neither historically, nor socially produced. To conflate *chora* and the void is to degrade both concepts. It should not be *chora* that exists in the empty voids of Libeskind's Jewish Museum, a point that Derrida makes clear in a response to Libeskind. In reference to Libeskind's architectural design, he states:

The void which has to be made visible is not simply any void. It is a void that is historically determined or circumscribed; and it is not, for example, the indeterminate place in which everything takes place. It is a void that corresponds to an experience which somewhere else you have called the end of history – the Holocaust as the end of history (“On Between”111).

This is a crucial distinction, for the historical void is something that exists among us. It is truly an absence that is present. It exists within our register and although perhaps

incapable of being inhabited, it may be looked upon, reacted to and entered into in some respects. *Chora* is the non-place from where all things have come and will eventually return. To invoke *chora* in relation to the Holocaust raises both conceptual and ethical concerns. It betrays a desire to return the Holocaust to the non-location of *chora* and to efface its continued reverberations amongst the city's inhabitants. To cast it back from whence it came. It suggests a desire to return to an originary state, a state prior to the awful acts of becoming that have marred the 20th century. It is for this reason that the absences and voids that inhabit Eisenman's memorial must be interrogated – brought into view. Do these absences contain the possibility/imperative, for acknowledgment, action and atonement? Or do they betray a desire for the virgin blankness of *chora*? The sometimes difficult distinction between the historical void and the *chora* reveals the problem inherent in invoking a dialogue of absence in response to the Holocaust.

There is another danger in invoking the concept of *chora* in Berlin's Holocaust memorial and that is the possibility that the receptacle of the monument may be filled in unintended ways. The blank forms and of Eisenman's memorial may present the ideal backdrop on which to project Kohl's mythology of victim Germany. By presenting the Holocaust through a discourse of absence, the possibility exists for a monument that blurs crucial historical distinctions between the trauma of the victims and that of the perpetrators. The historical particulars of the Holocaust are at risk of being lost in the void.

The *Oikos* and the Uncanny

Mark Wigley claims that deconstruction, like the metaphysics it questions, is inherently architectural. In writing that pre-dates Derrida's direct address of architectural topics, Wigley explores the architectural metaphors that underpin the tradition of metaphysics and also its check, deconstruction. As an art/practice in which function supersedes representation, one based on structural stability, the invocation of the image of architecture presents a powerful figurative support for the practice of the philosopher. The philosopher as builder of a grounded structure is the foundational philosophical metaphor. Wigley writes that, "Architecture is invoked as a kind of touchstone to legitimize routine practices within the discourse of philosophy, to relieve those practices from examination, to block them from view, to disavow that they are practices" (12). But while deconstruction is concerned with disrupting this foundation and revealing the structure that hides within, it does not itself escape from the metaphor of architecture (which is inherent even in the name deconstruction). While acknowledging the impossibility of escaping the metaphoric and the representational, Derrida seeks out metaphors that may open a space for thought, rather than confine it within a rigid structure.

Just as Eisenman questions the seemingly stable role of the house within the tradition of architecture, Derrida questions the apparent stability derived from the figure of the house within the tradition of metaphysics. Derrida suggests that "the general form of philosophy, is properly familial and produces itself as *oikos*: home, habitation, ... the guarding of the proper, of property, of one's own" (Glas 134). The house presents the

metaphor par excellence of interiority and exteriority. The figure of the *oikos* produces a sense of presence, removed and in opposition to representation. It helps to conceal the structure of metaphysics, being as it is the most familiar of spaces. According to Wigley, “the house is the metaphor of that which precedes metaphor. It determines the condition of the proper, from which the metaphorical is then said to be detached and inferior” (102). The ability of the *oikos* to appear apart from the realm of representation provides it with a considerable power. It is this sense of the homely (*heimlich*) that provides Kohl’s rhetoric with its force, while simultaneously concealing the source of this power. The *oikos/home/heimat* conceals its own status as myth. In this sense, Derrida and Eisenman (in his earlier projects) share a concern with revealing the presuppositions contained within the *oikos* and with reaffirming the metaphorical status of the house (and by doing so displacing it).

Eisenman claims that the memorial resists this nostalgic sense of *heimlich*, instilling instead in the visitor its opposite, a feeling of *unheimlich* (what is translated somewhat imprecisely as the uncanny). In his description of the memorial’s effect on its audience, Young writes, “Part of what Eisenman called its *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness, derived precisely from the sense of danger generated in such a field, the demand that we now find our own way into and out of such memory” (Memory’s Edge 206). In Eisenman’s words, “The whole idea is, What does it feel like to be alone in space? What is it to be without any goal . . . no beginning, no end, no direction?” (“Building” R2)⁸. But the *unheimlich* is a notoriously slippery term. What precisely is the

⁸ Eisenman’s explanation of his field of columns, recalls another oft used architectural metaphor in Derrida’s writing, that of the labyrinth. But it should be noted that Derrida

source of the *unheimlich*, which Eisenman seems to associate with an unfamiliar and isolated feeling of danger? And is it actually the uncanny that the memorial calls forth? Freud attempts to lend some precision to the term. He notes that the word *unheimlich* does at first glance appear to be the opposite of *heimlich* and therefore signify what “is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar” (220). Yet Freud observes that although the uncanny is associated with what arouses dread and horror, this fear is not in fact derived from the unfamiliar. For if it was, it would be indistinguishable from fear in general. The uncanny is instead “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220). Freud comes to this perhaps surprising conclusion regarding the uncanny by revealing an inherent paradox in the word which is apparently its opposite, *heimlich*. While most often carrying the meaning of that which is familiar, comfortable and pleasing, *heimlich* also bears another less common definition: that which is concealed and kept from view. It is as if the word holds within it two perspectives, that of the member of the household and that of the outsider kept from the domestic secrets of the *oikos*. It is this second sense of the word *heimlich* which produces a definition of the *unheimlich* (from Schelling) as “the name of everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light” (224). So it is not danger, the unknown or an absence that instills in us the sense of the uncanny, it is instead the return of something secretly familiar that has at some point been repressed.

This distinguishing point between the uncanny and the simply frightening begs the question of what emotive effect the Eisenman memorial is actually intended to

insists that inherent in the labyrinth is the hope of escaping its confines, so it is perhaps not quite analogous to Eisenman’s endless and directionless space.

produce.⁹ What precisely is the affective register of the monument? Eisenman states, “The fact of its scale, its dimension, in a sense its anonymity, its autonomy, its coolness, its silence, is what has caused the controversy” (“Building” R2). Indeed, more than a trace of the anti-anthropomorphic, autonomous architecture of Eisenman’s earlier projects inhabits the absences of the memorial. What then are the implications of an anti-anthropomorphic aesthetic response to the Holocaust? The memorial presents itself, intentionally, as a break in the topography of the city, an alien landscape inserted within the unfolding geography of Berlin. Its design is intended to produce an unfamiliar spatial sensation – disorientation, rather than orientation. The sheer monumentality of Eisenman’s design (both of the site itself and the individual columns) threatens to dwarf the visitor, to overwhelm them with the immensity of the memory task that faces them. The invocation of the uncanny has potential to act as a catalyst for a productive confrontation with the past. Through a sense of the uncanny, the Holocaust might be presented as a terrible event, yet one that is now inextricably linked to the history of the city and the nation – an event that is at times incomprehensible, but is not without elements of the familiar. The invocation of fear and the unrecognizable in relation to the Holocaust may serve to distance these events further from those that must be called on to remember them. It may drive the secrets of the *oikos* deeper within.

⁹ What affective response the Eisenman actually produces is another question still and one that cannot yet be answered.

The Crypt

The uncanny is the disquieting feeling aroused by the resurfacing of what was once concealed behind the screen of the familiar. In contemplating the significance of the uncanny, Derrida invokes the figure of the crypt, a not entirely unfamiliar structure, but one associated with secrecy and the concealment of the secrets it keeps. Abraham and Torok refer to the crypt as “a sealed-off psychic place” (Shell 141) and “a *secretly perpetuated* topography” (125). Derrida writes of the crypt: “The grounds [*lieux*] are so disposed as to disguise and to hide . . . But also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds” (Wolf Man xiii). The crypt is not just a metaphor of the unconscious (the hidden, the secret, the underground), it is instead a metaphor for an artificial unconscious; it conceals its own willful act of hiding. The crypt is the creation of an interior space that defies access and prevents penetration. As such it is paradoxically an interior space that remains exterior to the interior space of the *oikos*. But the crypt is not hermetically sealed; it tends to leak. And it is this release of the secret held within the crypt – a release into the familiar realm of the *oikos* – that triggers the sense of the uncanny.

The figure of the crypt has an intimate relation to the opposing states of mourning and melancholia in response to loss. While the person who mourns is able to release the object of loss, allowing it to exist only in a diffused state as a part of them (what Derrida terms introjection), the person moored in melancholia refuses to allow the object of loss to be anything but alive and intact (a state of self-delusion). By incorporating the object

fully formed into interior space of the body, the crypt mimics the act of mourning, but is actually a concealed state of melancholia. Derrida writes:

Sealing the loss of the object, but also marking the refusal to mourn, such a maneuver is foreign to and actually opposed to the process of introjection. I pretend to keep the dead alive, intact, safe (save) inside me, but it is only in order to refuse, in a necessarily equivocal way, to love the dead as a living part of me, dead save in me, through the process of introjection, as it happens in so-called normal mourning (xvi-xvii).

The object of loss is never truly accepted into the interior space of the body, for it is only held in the exterior-interior space of the crypt. The crypt is a holding cell, generating an anti-metaphoric state of incorporation by keeping the object of loss removed from figurative language. Abraham and Torok write: “*Incorporation entails the fantasmatic destruction of the act by means of which metaphors become possible: the act of putting the original oral void into words, in fine, the act of introjection*” (*Shell* 132, italics are theirs). While the process of introjection, according to Derrida, is “gradual, slow, laborious, mediated, effective,” the process of incorporation is “fantasmatic, unmediated, instantaneous, magical, sometimes hallucinatory” (*Wolf Man* xvii). The object of loss remains in the body, but only as a foreign object and one that remains in a clandestine state of silence. It must retain its status as secret for fear of a return of the trauma of loss. Derrida writes, “The inhabitant of the crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living” (xxi). According to Abraham and Torok, the role of the psychoanalyst in relation to the individual in a state of melancholic incorporation, is to reestablish communications with the hidden topography of the crypt. By exposing the secret contained within through the exteriority of language, a productive process of introjection and mourning may be initiated.

Eisenman's field of tombstones certainly has a visual connection to the figure of the crypt, but what is inferred by the use of this architectural metaphor? Of what significance is the concept of the crypt to those struggling to deal with the memory of perpetration? Does the memorial encourage mourning or melancholia, and which is more conscionable given the task of remembrance facing the nation? The fear of many is that the memorial will indeed play a cryptic role within Berlin. That it will act above all as a receptacle for Holocaust guilt, a crypt for the containment of the nation's memories of transgression. Despite its central location, they fear the memorial will act as a place in which secrets are kept, allowing the rest of the city to continue unhindered by its troublesome past. It is precisely the centrality of the monument that arouses this fear. It is a fear that the memory of the past is being taken care of through the construction of an elaborate memory vault, effectively sealing it away from the rest of the city.

There is a second possible interpretation of the memorial as crypt, one that sees the monument as vehicle for incorporation, rather than introjection, of the traumatic past. This is a view of the memorial as a crypt that conceals its act of hiding. By presenting the Holocaust as a frightening rather than uncanny event, a terrible historical memory but one that bears no relation to the *oikos*, the memorial serves to incorporate the memory of the Holocaust as a foreign (or alien) body. Such a memorial sits comfortably beside a Kohl sanctioned discourse of victim Germany, of a nation invaded by National Socialism. In another sense the memorial may well function as a form of time capsule. One in which the meaning of what lies within slowly erodes over time. This is a view of the memorial as cryptic signifier growing increasingly distant from both its referent and its intended signified.

Trauma and Absence

The figure of the crypt's relation to mourning and melancholia leads us to a second academic meme that has established a currency in the ongoing discussion of memory in Germany, namely the concept of trauma. The idea of trauma (like its affiliate, memory) has become virtually ubiquitous in the study of the humanities. The concept has found particular purchase within a deconstructive and psychoanalytic inspired stream of comparative literature, with Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman being perhaps its most notable expounders. Caruth defines trauma as an occurrence in which, "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Trauma 4). Caruth makes a claim that traumatic memories operate outside the limits of representation, returning to the victim as entirely unmediated experience. According to Caruth, there is a veridical literalness in the return of the traumatic event; it is experienced again in the fullness and urgency of its original form. The memory is thus unable to be expressed in figurative language and is incapable of being integrated into the personal narrative of the person who has experienced the traumatic event.

In her influential book Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, Caruth comes to many of her conclusions concerning the nature of traumatic memory through interpretive readings of Freud's writing on the topic. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle Freud describes a story from the epic poem Gerusalemme Liberata, one in which the hero Tancred mistakenly kills his beloved Clorinda and later repeats this act of

wounding by unwittingly cutting a tree in which his lover's soul has been imprisoned.

Tancred recognizes his double act of wounding when he hears his lover's voice crying out from the tree. Caruth interprets this parable as a poetic expression of what lies at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma. She writes that:

trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language (Unclaimed 4).

Caruth presents the notion of a traumatic memory that speaks out, almost independently from the person within which it is housed. Traumatic memory asserts itself by testifying not only to an event that is historically unknowable, but also to a fundamental aporia in the ability of language to represent such an event. The witness of the traumatic event is conceived as a receptacle for the traumatic memory – the bearer of a testimony, the significance of which lies beyond his or her ability to comprehend. The primary position of testimony and the witness within Caruth's theorizing is shared with, and perhaps inspired by, Shoshana Felman. In her long treatise on Claude Lanzman's Shoah, Felman argues that the film presents the definitive example of art as witness, while paradoxically pointing to the impossibility of testimony in the face of the Holocaust. She writes:

In its enactment of the Holocaust as the *event-without-a-witness*, as the traumatic impact of a historically ungraspable *primal scene* which erases both its witness and its witnessing, *Shoah* explores the very boundaries of testimony by exploring, at the same time, the historical impossibility of witnessing and the historical impossibility of *escaping* the predicament of being – and of having to become – a witness (224)¹⁰.

¹⁰ Felman's frequent collaborator Dr. Dori Laub echoes this notion of the Holocaust as an event that produced no witnesses when he writes, "Not only, in effect did the Nazis try to

Like Caruth, Felman presents the act of testimony as operating beyond the comprehension of the witness. It is ushered forward involuntarily from the host witness, in the case of Shoah through the techniques of the filmmaker. She writes:

Lanzmann's tour de force as interviewer is to elicit from the witness . . . a testimony which is inadvertently no longer in the control or the possession of its speaker . . . Lanzmann's performance is to elicit testimony which exceeds the testifier's own awareness, to bring forth a complexity of truth which, paradoxically, is not available as such to the very speaker who pronounces it (263).

In Caruth and Felman's conception the only legitimate (indeed the only possible) method of transmitting the traumatic event is through direct transference from witness to listener, what Caruth refers to as "a speaking that awakens others" to a feeling that "I, too, have seen" (Unclaimed 108).

This idea that the traumatic event (with the Holocaust being the ultimate example within this discourse) must in some sense speak for itself is inherent in many of Germany's memorial projects and certainly in the designs of both Libeskind and Eisenman. The influence of a certain strand of trauma theory can be seen in the many references to absence and voids, the resistance to narrativising the events of the Holocaust, and profound skepticism of the abilities of traditional architectural forms and practices to adequately respond to the task of remembrance. Indeed, these designs seek not to represent the Holocaust or the memory of the Holocaust, but rather to represent the fundamental unrepresentability of the event. I do not wish to dismiss entirely the theoretical direction and discussion generated by Caruth and Felman's work. It has

exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own act of witnessing, even by its very victims" (65).

helped create a productive debate around the concept of trauma. I do, however, wish to question precisely how these theories of trauma have come to operate within the context of Eisenman's memorial, a memorial created by the descendents of the perpetrators of a trauma. And I also wish to consider the possibility that while encouraging certain discussions around the topic of memory, the discourse supported by Caruth and Felman may serve to foreclose other necessary areas of enquiry with respect to historical trauma. And it may do so in a particularly problematic way in the context of Berlin.

Despite the considerable influence of Caruth and Felman's claims concerning the nature of traumatic memory, these ideas have also engendered their share of criticism. A consideration of this criticism is important to the understanding of the potentially problematic place this discourse holds within Berlin's memorial project. In her book entitled Trauma: A Genealogy, Ruth Leys mounts a rather vociferous attack on Caruth's theoretical suppositions, claiming that "the concept of trauma has become a debased currency" (2). Leys questions Caruth's reading of Freud's writing on the subject of trauma and challenges the conclusions she draws from them. While Caruth presents Freud's writing as support for a view of traumatic memory as the unmediated return of the causal event, Leys suggests that Freud's thoughts on the subject reveal moments of ambiguity, but ultimately present a view of traumatic memory as "inherently unstable or mutable owing to the role of the unconscious motives that confer meaning on it" (20). Leys suggests that Freud's initial concept of trauma was actually constituted by the relationship between two events (a past event temporarily unable to be remembered, understood and interpreted, and one which acts as a memory trigger), neither of which are

necessarily traumatic¹¹. While the experience of shell shocked WWI soldiers forced Freud to reconsider the importance of exterior forces (not directly related to the economy of libidinal pleasure) in inducing trauma, Leys argues that at no time did Freud perceive trauma as a literal return of this exterior force. According to Leys, Caruth ignores Freud's consideration of the role of mimemesis and transference within the analytical process, particularly his views on the vulnerability of the trauma victim to hypnotic-suggestion. An acknowledgment of Freud's views on the ability of the traumatic memory to be influenced by exterior forces (including the suggestive power of the analyst) would call into question Caruth's claim that trauma lies beyond the limits of representation¹².

Historian Dominick LaCapra criticizes this literary strand of trauma studies for its tendency to sever the connection between historical events and the socio/political/ethical responses they demand. LaCapra accuses literary critics like Felman and Caruth of conflating a perceived foundational metaphysical absence with the losses produced by particular historical events. He writes, "absence is the absence of an absolute that should not itself be absolutized and fetishized such that it becomes an object of fixation and absorbs, mystifies, or downgrades the significance of particular historical losses" (Writing 50-1). Capra suggests that in their fascination with the aporias generated by the

¹¹ In this sense Freud's initial concept of traumatic memory bears some relation to his concept of the uncanny.

¹² Leys also calls into question the way in which Caruth gains authority for her literary based investigation of trauma through affiliations with the scientific work of Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart in the research of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart claim that a distinction exists between ordinary narrative memory (that which can be verbalized and integrated into a coherent personal narrative) and iconic traumatic memory, which is "inflexible and invariable" (163) and which returns to the victim as uncontrolled and reoccurring flashbacks. Leys throws doubt on the conclusions reached by Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart by pointing to research on the flashbacks of Vietnam veterans that suggest that far from being literal recurrences of past events, these flashbacks are in fact mutable and symbolic (see Leys Chapter 7).

supposed failure of historical witnessing, literary trauma theory finds itself caught within an emulatory melancholic state of repetition, one that resists a productive process of mourning traumatic loss. Within Caruth and Felman's theoretical framework, destructive historical events that test the limits of representation are presented as evidence of our metaphysical state of structural trauma. The representational failures that accompany a traumatic event like the Holocaust testify to the general failure of the symbolic order to comprehend the real. As a result, LaCapra claims, distinctions between perpetrators, victims and bystanders become blurred as we all share in the originary traumatic absence of being¹³. LaCapra suggests instead the possibility of "working-through" past traumas in such a way as to initiate a process of mourning specific historical losses and responding ethically to their call. He writes, "Working-through would thus seem to involve a modified mode of repetition offering a measure of critical purchase on problems and responsible control in action that would permit desirable change. It is thus intimately bound up with the possibility of ethically responsible action and critical judgment..." (*History* 186).

What then is the relationship of the Berlin memorial to the traumas it refers to? Eisenman's explanation of the memorial's relationship to its difficult subject invokes the direct traumatic transference depicted by Caruth and Felman. His desire to "decontextualize" and "unrationalize" the events of the Holocaust, in order to stimulate instead an affective response, suggests that the traumatic nature of these events may be

¹³ LaCapra recognizes that both victims and perpetrators may experience trauma, but he is careful not to equate the two. He writes, "There is the possibility of a perpetrator trauma which must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices. Such trauma does not, however, entail the equation or identification of the perpetrator and the victim" (*Writing* 79).

transmitted veridically through the memorial to its audience. This purely tranferential role assumed by the memorial is unfettered by more explicit representations of the Holocaust. There is a form of absolutism with regards to trauma in both the discourse of Caruth and Felman and the architectural aesthetic of Eisenman. The Holocaust is presented as an event too terrible to comprehend in its totality and therefore one that is entirely unavailable to verbal and visual language. It is a view of trauma that is as monumental as the memorial itself. LaCapra presents instead the possibility of a consciously partial and necessarily incomplete understanding of past traumas. The specific historical losses of the Holocaust (both the loss of life and the loss of European Jewish culture) are in danger of being mystified and absorbed into Eisenman's abstract form¹⁴. The feelings of isolation and disorientation engendered by Eisenman's design seem to initiate a melancholic repetition of guilt, or worse, a mimetic relationship between victims and perpetrators. The challenge presented by LaCapra is to envision a memorial form that might initiate an ongoing process of working-through the past by acknowledging the historical specificity of the Holocaust and activating an ethical response to this traumatic history.

¹⁴ Perhaps anticipating this eventuality, the memorial selection committee insisted on the inclusion of Holocaust documentation center on the site. Given the monument's various financial crises, it is unclear whether this documentation center will ever be realized.

Chapter Three

Ethical Displacements

When it comes to fascism, Germans tend to be speechless. But here, you see, they have been offered a blank slate on which to vent their feelings.

-Jochen Gerz

The silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated.

-Joseph Beuys

As suggested by its commonly used name, the Hamburger Bahnhof art gallery resides in a converted 19th century train station, Berlin's last remaining original terminus¹. The gallery also goes by another rather strange official name, 'The Museum for the Present'. It is not entirely clear whether this name is in reference to the contents of the museum, or its intended audience. Is this a museum intended to house objects belonging to the present? At what point do objects cease to be of the present and would they then require relocation to 'The Museum for the Past'? It is possible that the gallery, which houses works of art from the second half of the 20th century, is insisting through an act of naming the relevance of its contents to the inhabitants of a post-war Germany. And the gallery may be right.

The Hamburger Bahnhof is home to the city's largest collection of two artists who are arguably the visual mainsprings of a self-critical post-war Germany – Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer. Kiefer's burned out landscapes make strained nods to German

¹ The gallery, which was restored by Josef Paul Kleihus and has incorporated the lighting effects of installation artist Dan Flavin, is one of the relatively few buildings in Berlin that has achieved a measure of success in integrating historical context with a sense of the contemporary.

landscape painting, but in such a way as to deny the continuation of romantic notions of the German countryside. In a slightly more oblique way, Beuys also places into conflict the symbols of historical myth and nature. The destructive force of the Blitzkrieg is transformed within Beuys' symbolic order into a lightning bolt illuminating a stag. The terrible events of history are given uneasy parallels in the natural world, simultaneously implicating both and offering the possibilities for redemption. The terrible events of history now belong to our world just as surely as the lightning bolt does and there is a call for us to atone for them. Like the trauma of history, the flash of lightning demands that we look upon it, even if it means shielding our eyes. Beuys' work sits uneasily in the confines of the gallery, as if it wished to mingle with the world outside. The piecemeal materiality of his symbol system defies any simple form of curation. The initial effect upon entering this section of the gallery is to wonder whether you may have accidentally stumbled upon the gallery's loading dock area, or an exhibition not yet ready for the viewing public. The works of both artists are provocative, unsettling and incomplete. Yet they defy the notion that the terrible events of the twentieth century are best left unspoken, unwritten, unrepresented.

But does Germany's visual culture that addresses the difficult issues of its past extend beyond the confined and relatively exclusive boundaries of the gallery space? Is there hope for a popular, public space that approaches the nation's traumas with the affective complexity of Beuys and Kiefer? Are we to dismiss any public act of Holocaust remembrance as a hopeless recurrence of a melancholic acting out of historical traumas? Or worse, a deceptive form of nationalism? Is the Holocaust an historical trauma that is doomed to be either ignored or sacralised? What hope is there for an incursion into public

space that helps encourage a constructive form of representational space, rather than a closed representation of space? And would these public memorials succeed in encouraging LaCapra's working through of historical loss, rather than a compulsive acting out of past traumas?

The Monument

To charge a public memorial with the task of even partially aiding a nation to come to terms with its troubling past may seem an unlikely choice of medium. The monumental form has long been identified as being inherently nationalistic and perhaps even fascist in its enforcement of an officially sanctioned, singular interpretation of the past. It is often recognized as a deceptive form and has been critiqued, according to Huyssen, for its "burying memory and ossifying the past" ("Monument" 15). Lefebvre condemns the form even more vehemently when he writes, "Monumentality . . . always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wishes to say – yet it hides a good deal more: being political, military and ultimately fascist in character" (143). If memory is invoked at all by the public monument, it has typically been a selective one – commemorating triumphs and ignoring failures. The monument has functioned as a myth marker, staking a claim for a nation's perpetual existence.

The traditional monument both reinforces and draws from the myths embedded within the nation's natural landscape. James Young writes:

In suggesting themselves as the indigenous, even geological outcrops in a national landscape, monuments tend to naturalize the values, ideals, and laws of the land itself. To do otherwise would be to

undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state's seemingly natural right to exist. ("Counter" 270)

The monument is an inscription onto the nation's topography, but one that hides its status as writing (for to acknowledge its status as writing would be to introduce the possibility that it contains within it an element of fiction). It is an evidential sign of mastery over nature that must itself appear natural. The monument is intended to appear timeless, existing independently of political and social change. As Lefebvre states, "Monumental imperishability bears the stamp of the will to power" (221). It infuses the natural landscape with the history of the nation, creating the sense that the two are inextricably linked and irrevocably permanent.

The monument then would seem an improbable apparatus for acknowledging a nation's period of shame, challenging the meaning of *heimat*, and prompting a culture of atonement. As Peter van Wyck writes:

One could say that monument *to* something is an anchor of presence dropped into time by a people unsure that they will be remembered, or perhaps *how* they will be remembered if they are at all . . . The desire is to make permanent that which threatens to disappear irretrievably. The very idea of a monument to something that we wish would never have come to presence to begin with . . . is a very unsettling thing (235).

Memory Debates

French historian Pierre Nora's much cited work on the relationship between history and memory bears extended consideration as it has become a touchstone in academic discussions on the nature of public memorials. Nora condemns the official memorial space as an impotent response to a modern crisis of memory. He makes a clear distinction (an opposition even) between memory and history when he writes, "The

'acceleration of history,' then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory—social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history; which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past" (8). According to Nora, the *lieux de mémoire* (the historical site of memory) has all but replaced the *milieux de mémoire* (the collective environment of memory). For Nora, the *lieux de mémoire* reduces the past to a static representation, robbing memory of its lived, ritualistic relationship to the past. Collective memory practices (with their phenomenological presence) have been replaced by a compulsive archiving of the events of the past for fear that they will be lost entirely. The past then exists only in this embalmed form within the crypt of the archive, not entirely dead, yet hardly alive. The *lieux de mémoire*, according to Nora, betrays a society "deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past" (12). It would seem that the *lieux de mémoire* holds little hope of actualizing a lived response to the traumatic events of the 20th century. The process of working through called for by LaCapra appears to be foreclosed rather than encouraged by the official sanctioned site of memory.

Nora's arguments are provocative in the urgency with which they warn of the modern crisis of memory, but they have engendered their share of criticism. John Frow criticizes Nora for his mysticizing dematerialisation of the concept of memory; a move that Frow suggests ignores the institutional/social organization of memory and the technological mechanisms of memory practices. Frow claims that such a theory of memory "cannot account for the materiality of signs and of the representational forms by

which memory is structured” (224). Frow favours instead the conception of memory as a practice of writing that, he claims, avoids Nora’s logical fallacy of “[affirming] the reality of an origin by proclaiming its loss” (225). Not unlike Frow, LaCapra sees the neat distinction between memory and history drawn by Nora as an over-simplified and absolutist denial of the potentially productive tension between the two. He views Nora’s argument as pathos-laden nostalgia for a mythical primitive state (History 19).²

It is difficult to defend Nora against the accusation that a nostalgic defeatism resides within his writing. His distrust of modern historical practices and his privileging of the presence of memory over mediated representations are not unrelated to the discourse of trauma and witnessing offered by Caruth, Felman and Lanzmann. Given the apparent irretrievability of the collective memory state described by Nora, the warnings contained within his writing risk veering towards a similarly paralyzing fixation on the absences of history and the silences that accompany them. Such a theory seems incapable of envisioning (or allowing for) a potential redemptive form of public Holocaust commemoration, particularly for the perpetrators³. Yet if we cut through the absolutism of Nora’s argument contained within may be some insights into the nature of collective memory and the potential value of active public memory practices.

In her consideration of nostalgia, Svetlana Boym affirms Nora’s distinction between collective memory and national memory. She writes:

² LaCapra views Nora’s argument as a rehashing of Lévi-Strauss’s problematic distinction between “hot” and “cold” societies, one that ignores Derrida’s convincing deconstruction of this opposition (History 19).

³ While a monument would be seen by Nora as a hopelessly inadequate form of memory for the perpetrators of the Holocaust, he would most likely view such a monument as unnecessary for the victims since he labels the Jews of the diaspora as “peoples of memory,” committed to keeping memory alive ritualistically (8).

Collective memory . . . is not the same as national memory, even when they share images and quotations. National memory tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections. The gaps and discontinuities are mended through a coherent and inspiring tale of recovered identity. Instead, shared everyday frameworks of collective or cultural memory offer us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives (53).

Boym's conception of collective memory (and Nora's) stems from the writing of Maurice Halbwach who insisted on the influence of social structures on individual recollection.

Halbwach states that "there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory" and "it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in memory that it is capable of the act of recollection" (38).

Frow traces this lineage of thought on collective memory back to a problematic Durkheimian dichotomy "between authentic memory and a debased and mediated relation to the past" (219), one that surfaces quite clearly in Nora's writing. Yet there is a possibility of acknowledging the existence of collective memory practices while in the same instance resisting the nostalgic mythology of Nora's primitive memory society.

Such a conception of memory need not draw a binary opposition between the related and intersecting domains of memory and history. Rather than create a hierarchy of memory or valorize a mythical unmediated state of being, Boym acknowledges that collective and national memory both rely on mediated representations of the past (in fact they often draw from the same pool of iconography and images). While national memory lends an artificial and singular coherency to the past, collective memory is both shared and multiple. Collective memory then "is a messy, unsystematic concept that nevertheless allows one to describe the phenomenology of human experience" (54). The collective and ritual-based memory practices suggested by Nora may be conceived as

also belonging to the domain of representation and as related to the writing techniques discussed by Frow. These techniques of recollection are intimately related to the point at which Lefebvre's representations of space (the framing of space by the powerful) and representational space (the lived space in which symbols and images are internalized through an act of imagination) overlap. In the *milieux de mémoire* the symbols provided through official representations of space become infused with individual meaning and intermingle with more personal forms of memory. A souvenir ticket from Expo 67 sits next to a family photo on your bookshelf or mantelpiece. A stroll by Lenin's tomb triggers a memory of the day you were married.

Perhaps this productive opening is already inherent in Nora's theory when he states that, "Contrary to historical objects . . . *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs" (23). Nora's recognition of the detached signification of the *lieux de mémoire* makes it paradoxically both problematic and liberating in respect to Holocaust commemoration. While it presents the threat of the Holocaust *lieux de mémoire* being severed completely from real historical events, floating in a sea of pure mediation, it also acknowledges that the *lieux de mémoire* is fundamentally a space of representation. Nora, perhaps unintentionally, suggests the possibility of a productive *lieux de mémoire* that, through an act of representation, brings the real historical events of the past into a constructive dialogue with the present. It obliquely suggests the ability of the *lieux de mémoire* to function as a catalyst for a process of working through historical trauma.

The Counter-monument

This opening in Nora's theory of the monument introduces the possibility for the conception of a different type of memorial. The problematic nature of the traditional monument has been thrown into relief quite clearly in post-war Germany, yet in recent years German artists and architects have responded with a number of memorials and public art projects that challenge traditional monumental aesthetics and respond to the particular memory problems facing the nation. These artistic public interventions are intended to encourage an active and personalized form of remembering, disrupting the unquestioned acceptance of national narratives. Eschewing the representational silence surrounding Germany's implications in the events of the 20th century, these memorial projects (often created by artists born after WWII) seek out new methods of engaging with the past. The memorials have been labeled counter-monuments.⁴ They are what Young calls, "brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being" ("Counter-monument" 271).

Perhaps the most discussed counter-monument is Jochen and Esther Gerz's "Monument Against Fascism" unveiled in Harburg (a suburb of Hamburg) in 1986. The Gerz monument is a twelve-meter high column covered by a layer of soft black lead. The intention of the artists was to confront the residents of the community with an imposing intrusion into their community that would compel them to make a commitment against

⁴ James E. Young's extended cataloguing of these various works has done much to bring them to the attention of North American academics and has been an important source for most of the memorial descriptions in this chapter. See Young's At Memory's Edge, The Art of Memory, and The Texture of Memory for detailed descriptions of many German and Austrian counter-monuments. See also Caroline Wiedmer's The Claims of Memory for another account of contemporary Holocaust representations in Germany and France.

fascism. This commitment would take the form of a signature, written on the face of the monument using a stylus provided by the artists⁵. The Gerzes envisioned an accumulation of signatures on the monument's surface, which would lead to the submersion of a portion of the structure into the ground. Once the monument had been fully covered in signatures it would disappear entirely into the Harburg landscape.



fig. 8 The Gerz 'Monument Against Fascism' (from Young Memory's Edge).

⁵ The monument had a temporary inscription at its base that read: "We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. A more and more names cover this 12 meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice" (qtd. in Young Memory's Edge 130).

In actual practice, the Gerz monument aroused a diversity of sentiments. In addition to the intended signatures of support, the monument was inscribed with various graffiti including swastikas and other expressions of neo-fascism. The reception and reaction to the monument indicated the complex and divergent memory practices at work in Harburg. Instead of projecting an officially sanctioned message towards its audience or offering a straightforward representation of the nation's fascist past, the monument now served to reflect the actual conflicting sentiments of a community – sometimes concerned, sometimes racist, sometimes indifferent. Young writes, “As a social mirror, it became doubly troubling in that it reminded the community of what happened then and, even worse, how they responded now to the memory of the past” (*Memory's Edge* 139). As the column descended into the ground it delivered its fascist and anti-fascist messages into the earth, implicating the German soil in the crimes of the past and indicating that the nation's healing process is far from complete.

On a surface level, the Eisenman memorial design, with its deconstructive references, draws from the same conceptual stream as this emerging German memorial aesthetic. Young championed the selection of the design based specifically on its participation in a counter-monumental tradition, praising its “[insistence] on its [own] incompleteness, its working through of an intractable problem over any solutions” (216). The discursive practices of the counter-monument are used to justify a growing number of architectural and artistic projects in and outside of Germany. As Young notes, the counter-monument has become “the standard” (139) for German memorial projects. The danger of any discourse designed to challenge prevailing assumptions is that its language of disruption may eventually become an unquestioned norm. The previous chapter

examined the potentially problematic ways in which the Eisenman memorial participates in a discourse of deconstruction and trauma. The remainder of this chapter is an evaluation of the Berlin memorial design in the context of several important debates invoked by the counter-monument: the monument's performative status as witness and the ethical imperative inherent within it.

The Performance of Witnessing

At first glance, it would seem that the German counter-monument shares much in common with the post-modern monumental form theorized by Carol Blair in her rhetorical analyses of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC (co-written with Marsha Jeppeson and Enrico Pucci Jr.) and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama (co-written with Neil Michel). Blair claims that these monuments utilize a postmodern rhetoric that incorporates suspicion of all-encompassing meta-narratives, encourages multivalent readings, takes into account geographic context and necessitates the reader taking an active role in the construction of meaning. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial presents a site of commemoration for the tragic deaths of the soldiers lost in the war, but it does so without valorizing the war itself. The Civil Rights Memorial remembers the men and women who lost their lives in the fight for racial equality, but refuses to declare that equality has been attained in America. Rather than being left with an official interpretation/justification of these events, the viewer of both memorials is left questioning the events of the past and their implication for the present and future. Blair and her co-writers argue that these monuments, both designed by American architect

Maya Lin, do not simply represent the events that they commemorate in a way that would allow them to be easily incorporated into the larger context of a nationalistic rhetoric. Instead, the monuments enact these events with their many complexities intact, in a sense, bringing them to life for the viewer. The contradictory sentiments, multiple interpretations, and lack of closure that surround these events are reproduced within the monuments that commemorate them. Blair and Michel argue, for example, that the Civil Rights Memorial in Alabama enacts the same tactics of disrupting public space that were implemented by the civil rights movement itself. The Memorial deliberately interrupts the Montgomery sidewalk, forcing pedestrians to engage with it, or consciously avoid it. The Memorial disrupts the banality of everyday space and provides a marked contrast to the city's predominant confederate symbols and sites of commemoration.

Blair claims that these monuments generate a type of twofold process of enactment, in which the commemorated events of the memorials are reproduced in the present, thereby calling on the viewer to take action in order to ensure that the injustices of the past are not perpetuated. She suggests that these monuments actually move beyond representation into a performative relationship with the past. In reference to the monument in Montgomery, she writes that "the Memorial does more than represent those past actions; it reproduces them" ("Reproducing" 41). Blair's rhetoric of performance recalls Caruth's theory of direct traumatic transference from witness to listener. Only in Blair's theorizing, the monument replaces the witness as the interlocutor that enacts the traumatic historical event. Blair downplays the monument's role as mediator of history, positioning it as somehow a more direct link to the past.

The relationship between the monument and performance, however, becomes strained when considering Holocaust commemoration. How exactly might we conceive the enactment of the disturbing events of Nazi Germany? And is the reproduction of the Holocaust in any form a desirable effect of a counter-monument? It is precisely this conceptual bind in which Eisenman's memorial finds itself caught, seemingly creating a performative space, yet unclear of what exactly it is that it is performing. According to Eisenman, the design is intended to invoke an affective response, producing through its unsettling abstraction feelings of isolation and anxiety, but the source of these feelings remains undefined. Is this the enactment of the sense of terror derived from inability to understand the events of the past? Is this the creation of an affective connection to the victims of the Holocaust? Andreas Huyssen uses the term "mimetic approximation" to describe "a mnemonic strategy which recognizes [the Holocaust] in its otherness and beyond identification or therapeutic empathy but which physically relieves some of the horror and pain in the slow and persistent labor of remembrance" ("Monument and Memory" 16). But the formation of a mimetic relationship (even an approximate one) between Holocaust victims and the descendants of perpetrators would seem highly misguided.

The nebulous position of this first act of enactment, in the case of the Eisenman memorial, leads to a further confusion with regards to Blair's second level of enactment. In Blair's theory, this second enactment is procured by an ethical call. The monument confronts its audience with a historical trauma that requires vigilance in the present in order that it never be repeated. Jonathan Bordo identifies this "ethical injunction" as a primary element of contemporary art. He writes, "The visual enunciation as a whole is a

bearing witness. The artist bears witness to a condition through the work, which initiates an episode, demanding an ethical response from the viewer, who is asked to complete the work by taking in its lesson and acting accordingly. Viewing is thus a corroborating act of witnessing” (“Witness” 180). In relying on its aesthetics of absence and silence, Eisenman’s memorial finds itself in a dilemma with respect to its status as witness. The memorial is left with the task of visually enunciating what Felman (as noted in chapter 2) has called: “the *event-without-a-witness* . . . a historically ungraspable *primal scene* which erases both its witness and its witnessing (204). In his one-page manifesto entitled “*Hier ist kein Warum*” (Here There Is No Why), Lanzmann echoes this sense that the events of the Holocaust are unable to be both witnessed and understood. He writes, “There is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding. . . . Blindness has to be understood here as the purest mode of looking, of the gaze, the only way to not turn away from a reality which is literally blinding . . .” (“Obscenity” 204).⁶ According to Lanzmann, the Holocaust’s inability to be looked upon makes it, in turn, an event beyond the limits of even partial comprehension. The ability for an ethical reaction in the face of such an event, an event that is blinding, is foreclosed. For Lanzmann, the only ethical response to these events is to listen to the testimony of the survivors, in order that their trauma may be transferred. This is not an ethics of action on the part of the listener, but one of traumatic reception. LaCapra takes “the object of [Lanzmann’s] quest” to be “the

⁶ I contend that Lanzmann’s denial of the legitimacy of questioning reinforces his position as the privileged artist with a unique ability to face the horrors of the past. Lanzmann in fact asks many questions of those he interviews in *Shoah*. Yet questioning and the quest for answers are withheld from those outside of the creative process. Eisenman may be similarly positioned, allowing himself to creatively contemplate the limits of representation, while denying his audience a similarly direct confrontation with the issues surrounding the Holocaust.

incarnation, actual reliving, or compulsive acting out of the past – particularly its traumatic suffering – in the present” (History 100).

The Berlin memorial’s participation in a similar discourse of silence in the face of the Holocaust precludes its ability to initiate the ethical enactment envisioned by Blair. The memorial presents the Holocaust as incomprehensible abstraction, an unbridgeable historical void. Even the witness testimonies, on which Lanzmann’s ethical injunction rests, are absent here. If the memorial operates through an affective register, as Eisenman suggests, then it is unclear what action its audience is intended to take in response to the feelings the monument provokes. Young describes the monument as “a pointedly anti-redemptory design” (Memory’s Edge 206) and indeed, it seems the memorial leaves little possibility for either redemption or atonement. The memorial’s recipients may truly be left alone between Eisenman’s pillars of stone.

The Ethical Turn of the Counter-Monument

For all its shared qualities with Blair’s postmodern monument, the counter-monument makes an important distinction with respect to performance and witnessing. If the counter-monument is to be a witness to the events of history then it remains critically aware of its status as a partial witness – one that did not see these crimes first hand. The counter-monument does not confuse its status as representation. It is not an eyewitness, but rather always one that is already mediated. The artists and architects involved in these projects, often more than one generation removed from WWII, are unable to claim a direct connection to the events of the Holocaust. Their relationship to the past is

necessarily mediated, whether that be through the accounts of family members or more removed forms of representation (films, photographs, etc.). In a nation saddled with the guilt of the perpetrator, a narrative tradition surrounding the events of the 20th century is largely absent (or perhaps silence is the narrative tradition)⁷. As the Holocaust becomes increasingly separated from us in terms of time, the testimonial transference privileged by Caruth becomes a less likely form of memory transmission, but this does not make the past entirely unavailable. As Young states, this “new, media-savvy generation of artists rarely presumes to represent these events outside the ways they have vicariously known and experienced them” (Memory’s Edge 1)⁸. Marianne Hirsch uses the term postmemory to describe the indirect historical knowledge of a younger generation of Jews. She writes, “postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (22). But Hirsch does not diminish the importance or potency of postmemory, which she describes as “a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.” Counter-monumental artists attempt to marshal a form of creative postmemory in order to work through the implications of the past for a generation once or twice removed from the experiences of the perpetrators.

⁷ In his book entitled On the Natural History of Destruction, W.G. Sebald claims that this narrative silence encompasses all of the experiences of the war, including the suffering Germans faced as a result of allied bombing.

⁸ The New York Jewish Museum’s controversial 2002 art exhibit entitled “Mirroring Evil” demonstrated the unavoidably mediated condition of contemporary Holocaust memory. The young artists within the exhibit demonstrated the forms through which Holocaust memory is available to them (often limited to images from popular culture) and the means they have to express their relationship to the past. The pieces range from moving to insensitive, but each represents a certain engagement with the past.

The counter-monument avoids the conceptual and aesthetic impasse of attempting to perform the trauma of the Holocaust by shifting the focus of its enactment into the present. Jochen and Esther Gerz make clear that the intention of their memorial is not to perform the nation's fascist past, or to provide a way to channel directly the trauma of these events. Theirs is not a memorial of fascism, but rather a memorial against fascism. Although it's true that the Gerz monument does not represent the city's fascist history in any straightforward way, it nevertheless affirms its own status both as media and as point of mediation. It calls for an act of writing and in so doing, it enacts in the present the community's current relationship towards its controversial past. The viewers became not only active agents in the process of associating meaning to the memorial, they became part of the material formation of the monument itself. In participating in the formation of the memorial, the people of Harburg are not performing the nation's past experience with fascism, they are instead expressing their current feelings towards their nation's past. The intention of the monument is not to conjure up the ghosts of fascism, but to provoke discussion and debate in the present, thereby encouraging the process of working through the significance of the past.

To his claim that contemporary art takes up the role of bearing witness Bordo adds a caveat. He questions whether the art work is capable of assuming the enormity of its ethical task asking, "But why should we trust the artist in such serious matters? Why should one entrust one's life to such enunciations? . . . The performative character and ethical import of such visual enunciations raise questions concerning their sincerity as art works. How can one test their sincerity?" (180-1). Inherent in the counter-monument is a self-doubt towards its own ability to bear this ethical burden alone. The counter-

monument ultimately shrugs its burden. It defers the responsibility of bearing witness onto its audience. The Gerz monument in Harburg performs the definitive act of ethical displacement – it disappears. Young writes, “as the monument would rise up symbolically against fascism before disappearing, it calls upon us to rise up literally in its stead” (Memory’s Edge 135). The counter-monument recognizes both its inability to be a veridical witness to the past and its inability to shoulder the burden of memory. In order to compensate for its limitations, the counter-monument calls on its audience to take up where it must necessarily leave off. Van Wyck recognizes this ethical turn as a fundamental disruption in the typical role of the monument. He writes that the traditional monument, “is the bearer of the responsibility – not a community, and not memory – and this is precisely what counter-monumental strategies seek to challenge” (236).

Jochen Gerz’s submission to the Berlin memorial competition further emphasized this ethical shift from monument to audience. In what seems a direct rebuff of Lanzmann’s stance, Gerz entitled his memorial proposal, “*Warum ist es geschehen?*” (Why did it happen?). The focus of the site of memory would have been a discussion center called “the ear,” in which visitors would engage in mediated conversation about the events of the past and their implications today. Like the monument in Harburg, Gerz’s Berlin memorial provokes the community in which it is placed and calls on the inhabitants to take action. In this case the action comes in the form of speech – a dialogue. Gerz counters Lanzmann’s claims of the obscenity of understanding, by suggesting that the only true obscenity in the face of the Holocaust is silence.

The Sanctity of the Unspeakable

The positioning of the Holocaust as an event beyond the limits of representation and comprehension is further challenged by Giorgio Agamben when he questions, “why unsayable? Why confer on extermination the prestige of the mystical?” (32). Agamben resists treating the Holocaust as in any way a sacred event⁹. This resistance is an effort to avoid positioning the Holocaust as an event entirely incapable of being grasped by the human mind, an almost otherworldly occurrence unavailable to even partial comprehension.

The counter-monument refuses to assign a sacred status to the events of the past and it does so partly through a self-critical engagement with its surroundings. These anti-memorials are conscious of the historical particularities of the landscapes they inhabit. Michel Foucault used the label *heterotopia* to categorize the persistence of spaces that, despite the effects of Galileo’s theoretical desanctification of space, retain an aura of sacredness¹⁰. According to Foucault, heterotopic spaces are those “absolutely *other*” (352) places, in which the arrangements and structures of society are represented, yet are somehow in a state of suspension. Among his various examples of heterotopic space, Foucault lists the heterotopia of crisis in which the adolescent is sent away from his or her family to a privileged, sacred or forbidden space in order to make the transition to adulthood (Foucault suggests that the boarding school retains a trace of this tradition).

⁹ Agamben suggests that even the conference of the term “Holocaust” on a series of historical events is part of the process of sanctification.

¹⁰ Foucault’s relatively brief writing on heterotopias is notoriously ambiguous, yet I believe still a useful concept for understanding the traditional space of the monument. I emphasize here only some of the aspects Foucault associates with heterotopic space.

Thus the heterotopic space holds a position within society, but as a place that is always both internal and external. Of particular relevance to a consideration of the monument are what Foucault calls heterotopias of compensation, places that have the “function of forming another space, as perfect, meticulous and well-arranged as ours is disordered, ill-conceived and in a sketchy state” (356). The traditional monument operates as a heterotopia of compensation, arranging the messy and contradictory elements of the history into a seamless totality. Several critics of the Eisenman memorial fear that it may inadvertently function as both a heterotopic space of crisis and compensation, in which the task of memory is relegated to a centralized, sanctified place¹¹. In this scenario, the visitor to the Holocaust monument would undertake a transitional process of cleansing, arriving conflicted but leaving assuaged. With the monument functioning as a heterotopia of memory, the rest of the city of Berlin would be free from the influence of the past.

The strategy of the counter-monument is to disperse, rather than contain memory, diverting attention away from arbitrary ceremonial locations, towards specific neighbourhoods and existing historical sites. These memorials resist confining the process of memory to an “other” heterotopic space, choosing instead to encourage active forms of remembrance that are intimately connected to particular communities. As Huyssen states, “There is much to be said to keep Holocaust monuments and memorials site-specific, to have them reflect local histories, dig up local memories, make the Final Solution palpable, not just by focusing on the sites of extermination, but on the life-worlds of those murdered in the camps” (“Monument and Memory” 16). In this sense, the counter-monument can be seen as rehabilitating the *milieux de mémoire* Nora claims is

¹¹ In referring to the memorial as a “[work] of terrible beauty” (*Memory’s Edge* 203), Young intimates that monument may belong to the secular sacred register of the sublime.

all but extinct. The power of the Gerz memorial was contingent on its placement within a typical German neighborhood rather than the originally allotted space within an established park. By allowing its audience to write on its surface, the Gerz memorial encourages the desacralization of the monumental form. As Young suggests, "By inviting its violation, the monument humbled itself in the eyes of the beholders accustomed to maintaining a respectful, decorous distance" (Memory's Edge 134). Through the sanctity of the heterotopic space, the traditional monument hides the fact that it is not hermetically sealed; it keeps this knowledge like a secret. The counter-monument remains aware of its status as a permeable container. The Gerz memorial both leaks its memory of the past out into the community and also allows itself to be filled with meaning by those that receive it. By positioning itself within a particular community, the counter-monument helps ensure that its meaning will not be co-opted by dominant national narratives. The authoritative weight of official representations of space are neutralized through the counter-monument's relationship to its surroundings. It forms instead a representational space which engages directly with the memories and imagination of the community in which it resides.

Through its connection to a specific community (an extended *oikos*), the counter-monument evokes a true feeling of the uncanny. It reveals the community's secrets. The nature of what it divulges can be terrifying, but it is not entirely unfamiliar. As a result, it presents history not as an unbridgeable void, but as something that, although it may be concealed, is intimately connected to a place and its inhabitants. It is this relationship to the uncanny (to the familiar secrets of the *oikos*) that allows the counter-monument to make its ethical injunction. The traumas of the past are presented not as abstracted and

impenetrable, but rather as historically specific losses involving actual communities (both in terms of the victims and perpetrators). These traumas therefore demand an ethical response, however symbolic that response may be.

Kassel-based artist Horst Hoheisel's project entitled "*Denk-Stein Sammlung*" (Memorial-Stone Archive) exemplifies the counter-monument's relationship to the uncanny and the ethical call that follows. The project involved Hoheisel visiting the classrooms of Kassel students, educating them about the city's once vibrant, but now absent Jewish population. Hoheisel viewed the gradual deportation of the town's Jewish population as a secret that must be revealed. The students were asked to learn more about one member of Kassel's former Jewish population. They were then to prepare a short piece of writing describing the person they had researched. These narratives were individually wrapped around a stone and deposited in bins located at each school. The stones and writing were then brought to the rail platform from which the Kassel Jews were deported, forming what has now become a permanent installation. This installation represents an act of revealing. What it reveals is in some ways an historical absence – the absence of Kassel's Jewish population. But the memorial also testifies to the ability of historical losses to be bridged, however partially through an act of representation. It becomes a witness to an act of remembering. This monument cannot replace what is no longer there – what has been traumatically removed from the community – but it can contribute to insuring that a memory of this loss remains.

Afterword

I visited Berlin's "Topography of Terror" in the spring of 2002. I had already read a good deal about the exhibit and believed I knew roughly what to expect. I had not, however, expected to have a glass of wine thrust into my hands as I entered the excavation site. It seems on this particular day on the site of the former Gestapo headquarters a vernissage was taking place. A group of Communication and Media Design students from the Art College of Berlin were exhibiting their work under the title, "*Anschleage gegen Rechts*," meaning both action against and postering against the political right. The exhibit took the form of a public art mural (the cultural relevance of using a wall to engage with the city's past not being lost on these students) displaying a series of works that juxtapose elements of history with contemporary events covered in the German media. One section of the mural drew a connection between the political language used by current right leaning political parties and infamous Third Reich propaganda. Another presented the faces and brief biographies of recent victims of anti-immigration attacks.

The exhibit did not possess the polish of a state funded memorial and yet its simple aesthetic techniques were remarkably affecting. Here was a group of young German students who would surely not be accused of bearing any form of direct responsibility for the events that had occurred in their nation over a half century ago, yet they somehow felt an ethical call to confront their national secrets. In an example of representational space making room for itself within official representations of space, the

students sought to inscribe their own impressions on an existing site of memory – in many ways transforming a *lieux de mémoire* into a *milieux de mémoire*.

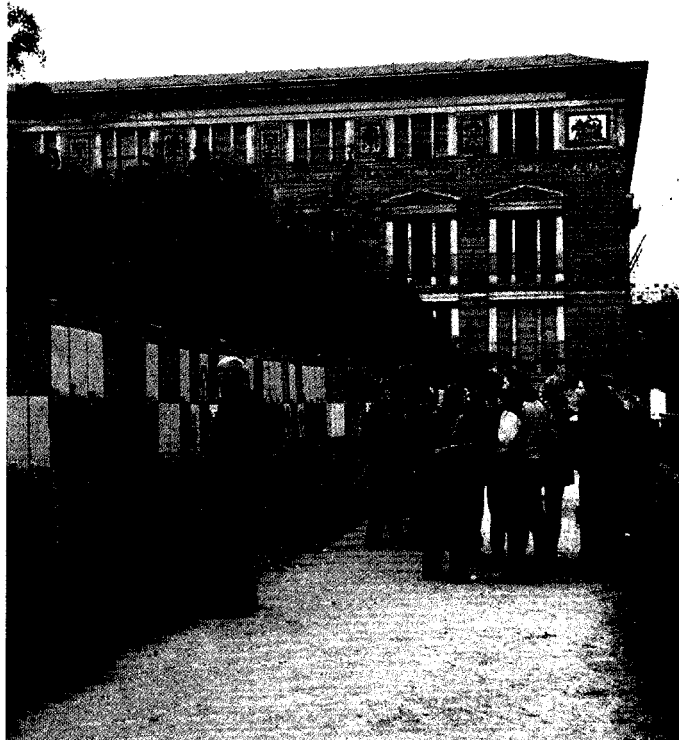


fig. 9 *Anschleage gegen Rechts* mural (author's photo).

Yet appropriation of public space is not always met with enthusiasm. One of the students, Tania Mourinho, explained to me the difficulty the group had in mounting the event. Local politicians claimed they were worried about the site becoming a target of neo-nazi attacks. It took nearly two years for the group to be granted permission to exhibit the project. In the post-Kohl era, links between the nation's past and present are still discouraged. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has not been overly supportive of projects that remind Germans of the past. He has stated, "People who have no experience of their own – that includes my generation and those generations that came after – do not need to run around in a guilt complex" ("Don't Feel Guilt" A14).

But is it a guilt complex that motivates these students? Are they engaged in another form of melancholic repetition? Mourinho claimed that the intention of the project was to provide a public expression of national questions that are otherwise addressed only at the level of official government discourse or internal personal questioning. In other words, it is an attempt to fill a void that has too often been left vacant – to counter a silence with an act of representation.

The motivation for such an action need not be guilt. The ethical injunction of the counter-monument is not just to bear witness to the crimes of the past. It is also a call to witness the traumas that are taking place in the present. The connection to these traumas may not necessarily be one of lineage or geography. The “*Anschleage gegen Rechts*” mural called to me just as surely as it did to the Berliners who viewed it. Yet this is not to discount the fact that the residents of Germany are faced with a specific historical circumstance and a particular ethical call. No nation has been called on to remember its transgressions in quite the same way. It is for this reason that the possibility exists for Germany to present an example to us all. (As it is already doing in many ways through its counter-monumental tradition.) Germany’s efforts to bridge the historical void that it has created may in turn send an ethical call for other nation’s to do the same.

The Holocaust, it should be said, is not the only historical void that exists for Germany. In his book entitled On the Natural History of Destruction W.G. Sebald writes of another event that seemingly had no witnesses. The allied bombing of Germany destroyed 131 towns, 3.5 million homes and 600,000 lives. Yet Sebald claims that virtually no collective memory of these events exists. He writes, “In spite of strenuous efforts to come to terms with the past, as people like to put it, it seems to me that we

Germans today are a nation strikingly blind to history . . . we are always looking and looking away at the same time” (viii-ix). Voids, once created, may grow. The gap in German history formed by the Holocaust has grown to encompass many more events. A culture committed to looking forward, as Sebald describes German culture, is in danger of losing sight of the past completely. In Berlin, for example, the relatively recent memory of the Soviet era is now in danger of being left behind. While the Holocaust presents a particular imperative of memory, the importance of working-through the events of the past extends still further for Germany.

The central interest of Sebald’s account is the absence of literary representations in response to the experience of the bombings. Sebald identifies what few literary examples that exist as incapable of capturing the reality of the trauma. Yet he still recognizes the need for their existence. The partial and insufficient testimonies provided by these works are one of the few memory aids remaining for this period of German history. Even diary entries are largely silent in respect to the period, perhaps due to a resolve to begin rebuilding and a shame-motivated sense that the nation was getting its comeuppance. Whatever the reason, the experience has been wiped clean from the mystic writing pad of collective memory. But Sebald’s act of writing and his call for others to excavate the buried memories of the experience has partially resuscitated a remembrance of this period of the past.

Inherent in Sebald’s project is a recognition that a mediated intervention may be capable of initiating a working-through of the past, however partial, and that no period of history should be met with silence. What place the Eisenman memorial will assume within the city’s complicated memory practices is not yet known. This thesis has outlined

several concerns regarding the monument's design and the very conception of a central Holocaust memorial. I fear that the monument may present the Holocaust as a sanctified absence and an entirely incomprehensible event. It may paradoxically foreclose an engagement with the past. But this remains to be seen and the temporary exhibit at the "Topography of Terror" reminds us that spaces may always be re-inscribed with new meanings and that they are always in a process of becoming. Perhaps the memorial will become the site of an as yet unanticipated ethical engagement with the city's past. And perhaps the blank pillars of Eisenman's monument will one day be filled.

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