



Jewish Cultural Memory and Holocaust Memorialization

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Opening Activity: Jewish and Non-Jewish Perspectives



Overview: My Research and Experience

- Research Focus(es)
 - Diasporic Jewish Life and Identity
 - Cultural Memory of the Holocaust
 - Youth Engagement with Jewish Tradition
 - Examining Youth as Sociocultural actors
- I-Witness Field School
 - Scholarly program offered to undergraduate/masters students through GMST department at UVic
 - Focuses on Holocaust Memorialization in Europe
 - 23 days: Berlin, Germany - Wrocław, Poland - Krakow, Poland - Linz, Austria - Vienna, Austria (+day trips)
- Personal Importance:
 - Bearing witness to the destruction of Jewish life
 - Gaining deeper awareness of Jewish cultural and religious perspectives on the Shoah
 - Understanding how the Holocaust is memorialized throughout Europe, and how this contributes to cultural perceptions of Jews

Sites Visited (Sample)

- Berlin (and surrounding area)
 - Berlin Jewish Museum
 - Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe
 - Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp
 - Ravensbrück Concentration Camp
 - Weißessee Jewish Cemetery
- Krakow, Poland
 - Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp
 - Galicia Jewish Museum
 - Tour of mass graves (Tarnow, Brzostek)
 - Schindler Factory Museum
- Linz, Austria
 - Mauthausen and Gusen Concentration Camps
- Vienna, Austria
 - Shoah Wall of Names (Hannah Lessing)
 - Vienna Jewish Museum
 - Servitengasse Memorial

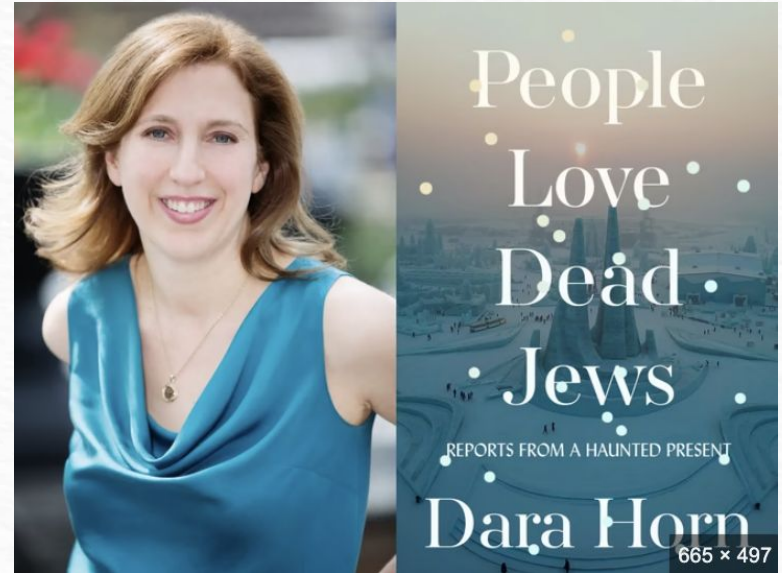


Key Research Questions:

1. What is the purpose and position of Holocaust Memorialization within the Jewish/broader community?
2. How does Jewish cultural memory exist in relation to that global memory of the Holocaust?
3. Within memorial sites, which cultural perspectives are highlighted/dismissed?
4. Within which spaces is the gaze of the perpetrator reproduced? In which spaces is memorialization politicized?
5. Is the enormous interest in Jewish suffering a genuine representation of regard for living Jews?

Global Memory of the Holocaust: Overview

- There is no “global” memory of the Holocaust -
 - non-Jewish memory is fractured by many political and ethnic perspectives
- “Look what happened to them”
 - Vs. look what we endured, look what they survived, ect...
 - Often reproduced in memorial settings
- Universal traits of the victims
 - Victim homogeneity
- “People Love Dead Jews” (Horn, 2021)
 - Moral and educational paradigms creating a co-constitutive relationship between Jews and suffering/injustice
- Case Study for hatred and intolerance



The Atlantic, n.d.

Jewish Memory of the Holocaust

- Fackenheim and the 614th commandment (Fackenheim, ~1965)
 - Unequivocally denying Hitler a posthumous victory
- Triangular relationship between Israel, Judaism, and the Shoah
- Implicit recognition of Jewish Life
 - Not only the currently living Jew, but the Jew capable of more than simply death.
- Jewish expressions of time and the secondary witness (Horn, 2021)

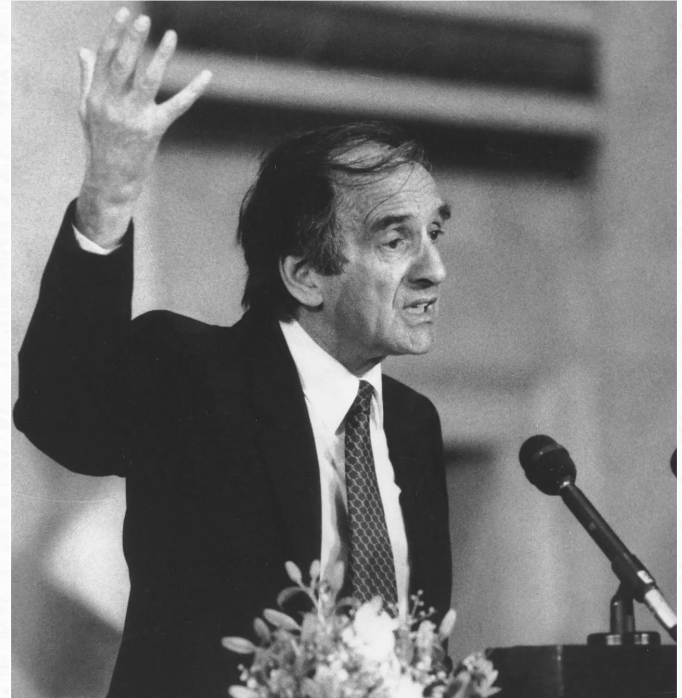


Yad Vashem Exhibit, Auschwitz (BM)

Anne Frank & Elie Wiesel



Anne Frank, 1940
(annefrankhouse.org, n.d.)



Elie Wiesel, 1986
(time.com, n.d.)

Anne Frank vs. Elie Wiesel

- Global (non-Jewish) fascination with Anne Frank
- Defined by the shortness of her life
- Wrote for a non-Jewish audience
- Ultimately absolves the non-Jewish reader of their participation in systems of violence and oppression:
 - “In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” - (Frank, 1944)
 - (Horn, 2021)
- Initially wrote for a Jewish audience with his first publication of *Night: Und die welt hot geshvign*
 - This 1958 addition goes into greater depth on his anger towards the perpetrators (Seidman, 1996).
- Expressions of anger towards hatred and indifference expressed in the very title are unsettling to the non-Jewish reader:
- “His cold eyes stared at me. At last, he said wearily: "I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He alone has kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people.” (Wiesel, 1961)

Memorialization in Europe - Introduction

- All memorialization is curated and political - seeking to position the visitor *within* the sociopolitical landscape of the nation *within* memorial contexts
- Visitors to memorial sites (according to Cole, 1999) often fall into categories of 'pilgrims' and tourists (Cole, 1999, p. 116)
- The approach and curation of the memorial site impacts how cultural memory is expressed and produced within them
- Sites which reproduce the gaze of the perpetrator often reproduce (not simply discuss) the 8 stages of genocide

8 stages of Genocide
(Stanton, 1987)

1. Classification
2. Symbolization
3. Dehumanization
4. Organization
5. Polarization
6. Preparation
7. Extermination
8. Denile

Non-Jewish Cultural Memory within Memorialization

- Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory
 - Strangely voyeuristic
 - Historically inaccurate
 - Minimal discussion of Schindler (?)
- Reproduces:
 - Symbolization - frequently misplaced headstones creating a visible association between Jewish people and death
 - Polarization - idolization of Hitler
 - Denile - no mention of Polish participation in the Holocaust



Schindler Factory (continued)



Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory

Lipowa 4, Kraków, Poland

4.5  21,682 reviews 



Gusen Concentration Camp

- Images of atrocity
- The first time I really understood what dehumanization means
- Images so horrific, I couldn't look at them for more than a few seconds, the atrocity of the images blended together so that I couldn't tell what I was seeing
- They looked like anything but people
- Cloaked in an explanation that these images were taken upon liberation

TAKING THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Apart from the Signal Corps teams, who were carrying out a military order, photographers of civilian news agencies also came directly to the location – frequently upon the official invitation of the allied military. In addition, allied soldiers used their private cameras to preserve what they had found in the camp for the future.

Every documentation objectifies the documented event and creates a certain distance to it. Photographers derive a sense of reassurance from the camera and it enables them to remain at a safe remove from the event. A photographer distinguishes him or herself from the victims who become object in front of the lens.

Every image results from an act of objectifying the terror. The iconography of concentration camps, which evolved within only a few weeks due to the surge of documentation, says at least as much about individual ways of coping with the found suffering on the part of the photographer and liberator, as it does about the suffering as such.

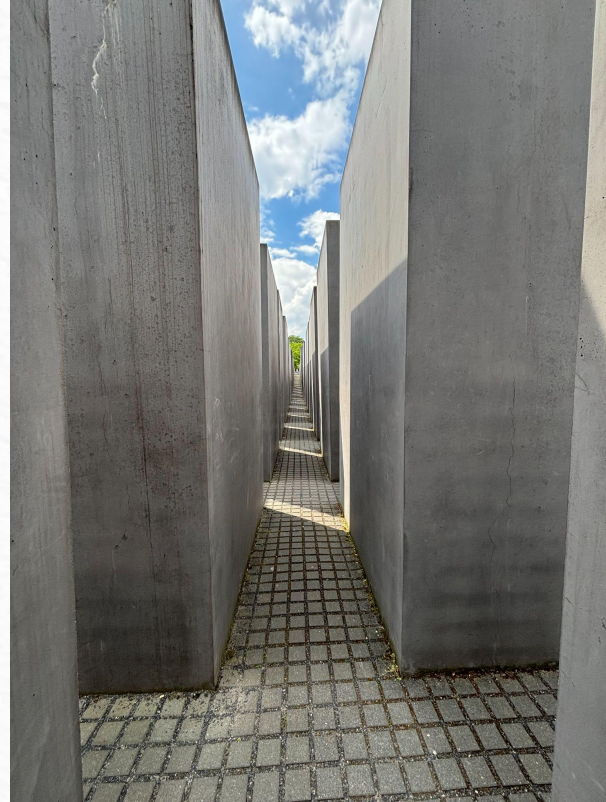
Auschwitz Concentration Camp

- Material Proof of Crimes
 - Homogenization of Victims - materials removed from deportees (shoes, suitcases, prosthetics, eyeglasses, tallisim, cups and bowls, children and baby shoes, and human hair)
- Extremely detailed plaster model of the undressing rooms, gas chambers, storage areas, and crematorium (9m large)
 - Felt like a part of the Holocaust Experience that I should not have witnessed



Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

- Reflective of a non-Jewish perspective through public engagement with the site
- People sit on the staele, play games, have picnics, smoke/vape, take photos, ect.
- No names/details carved onto the blocks
- People cut through on their commutes, ect.
- Representative of the broader global engagement with the Holocaust - passivity



Absence of Jewish Perspectives - For the Right Reasons?



Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted under National Socialism (BM)



Memorial to the Murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe (BM)

Jewish Perspectives in Place-Based Memorialization

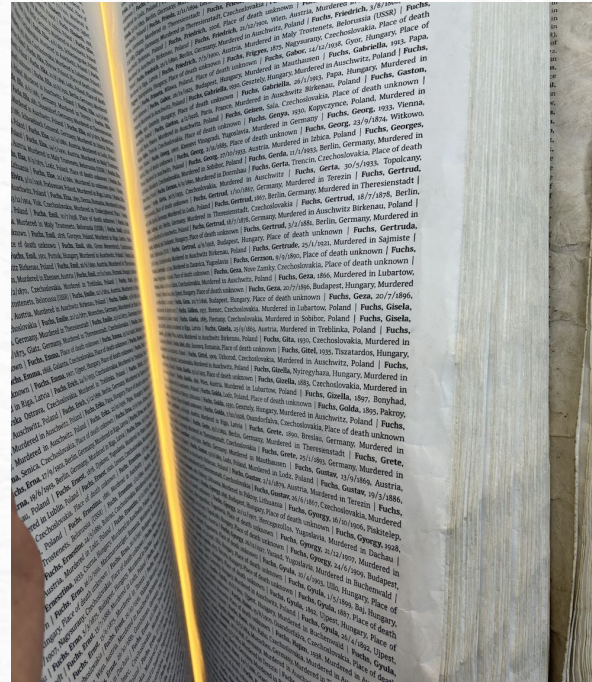
- Jewish Museum of Berlin
 - Portrayed Jewish life is much broader than the Holocaust, broke the PLDJ paradigm
 - Demonstrated the emotional/community experience and trauma of the Holocaust
 - Opted for emotional over physical simulation
 - Jewish presence and perspectives encouraged Jewish engagement



Left: Fallen Leaves (BM), Right: Libeskind Building (Jewish Museum of Berlin)

Yad Vashem Exhibit at Auschwitz I

- Upon entry - Ani Ma'amin playing, mezuzah on door
- Portrayed Jewish life before the war
- Demonstrated that the Holocaust did not occur in a vacuum
 - Recognition of the rise of NS
- Highlights survivor and victim testimonies
- Highlights children's experience
- Book of names
- <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/block-27-auschwitz/about.html> - 5:30



Book of Names,
Auschwitz (BM)

Museum under the MMJE

- Deeply humanizing - took a people first, perpetration second approach
- Portrayed the Shoah as the dissolution of families and communities, not only the slaying of 6 million Jewish individuals
- Imprint of the staele on the ceiling of the museum effectively illustrating public engagement with the memorial - one must dig below the surface to truly honour the victims.



Images: MMJE
(BM)

Shoah Wall of Names - Vienna (With Hannah Lessing!)

- The product of extensive research and development
- Hannah Lessing - awareness of the fact that this memorial will not:
 - Bring back her grandmother
 - Bring back her fathers childhood
- Encourages Jewish engagement through stones in receptacles nearby



Wall of Names, Vienna (BM)

Multidirectional Memory (Rothberg) and Contemporary Politics in Holocaust Memorialization



Bring them Home at Bebelplatz (The Jerusalem Post, 2024)



Mass Grave, Góra Zbylitowska (Galacia Interns, 2018)

Discussion Questions:

- What do we, as visitors, hope to gain from visiting sites of memory?
- Should we have guidelines and regulations for how people engage with sites of memory?
- Is there value in portraying the Holocaust with complete objectivity?
- Is there value in the use of images of atrocity? Why are they problematic?
- Discuss the importance or issues with programs such as March of the Living - how and why have they become a sort of “right of passage” for Jewish youth?

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