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INTERACTIONS WITH THE NARRATIVE OF JEWISH SUFFERING: METHODS OF INTERACTION
AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEMORY AT THE DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS

by

Maggie Fisher

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the German

Waltraud Maierhofer
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2020

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
German have been completed.

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**Interactions with the Narrative of Jewish Suffering:
Methods of Interaction and Development of Memory
at the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas***

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Theory, Culture and Power in the Creation of a Monument

Immortalization of the past is inevitable. As the old adage goes the victor writes the history, and within that account creates a past suited to the narrative of their success. This is a reality facing every historian who examines the markers of the past. We move forward tentatively, working to shift through historical biases to find historical truth. If it is true that we cannot trust the victor to write an accurate historical record then how do we treat the historical record developed by a perpetrator? How do we interpret the perpetrator of injustice writing the historical narrative of that injustice? Do we trust the narrative displayed even when its creation is steeped in an ethos of guilt and remorse? How does the collective culture of historical memory affect the way these events are remembered, and is that collective past a living memory easily manipulated or is it stoically rooted in unchallenged historical myth?

The intangibility of narratives of the past can be remedied with the study of the products of these events, namely the erection and effect of historical monuments. The very nature of a monument denotes its identity as a product of narrative of the past. The question then remains which narrative does it support and develop? In this paper I will examine the public production of narratives through the creation of monuments and the subsequent public interaction with these narratives. It is within the analysis of monuments erected through governmental funding that one can see how a national narrative can be put forward through a governmental body but developed by national discourse and cultural memory.

Memory Studies Scholar, Mark Wolfgram, notes that society is not typically set in an immovable power structure completely derived from an authoritarian dictation of cultural

development and values.¹ In fact, Wolfgram argues that the development of power is most often blended with a leader's ability to interact with and shape the cultural structure of the time. The ability to shape the culture while simultaneously being shaped by it, is a process he describes as the cultural matrix.² I believe this dynamic of continual refinement between power structures and culture becomes especially relevant when discussing the development of a cultural memory. We cannot say that the historical memory of a group can be completely formatted to fit a political agenda though power structures, just as we cannot say that the collective culture of remembrance born out of living through historical events gives authoritative direction to those in power. They are working in tandem, at once dependent on and independent of each other. This relationship allows for the development of collective memory in society, often portrayed through the use of the monument.

As the monument is often seen as an outpouring of a need to memorialize or to remember the past, its position within the historical narrative is one that provides direction. We must ask ourselves three questions. What historical event or movement does the memorial seek to memorialize? How does its structure and process of creation seek to memorialize this event? And what effect does the memorial have on the historical narrative? According to Wolfgram in answering these questions, we can begin to understand the way collective memory shapes the way a memorial encapsulates the events of the past.³

It is also imperative that the monument is viewed as having an impact in the future and not just as token of the past. A memorial must speak to future generations as effectively as it does to the generation who initially erected it, preserving the memory of the injustices of the past

¹ Mark Wolfgram, *Getting History Right: East and West German Collective Memories of the Holocaust and War* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 18.

² Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 18 .

³Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 20.

in a form that allows it to be experienced in the future.⁴ The call to remember what that memorial represents is what lends it its power to admonish us to listen to the narrative it carries through time.

The role monuments play is critical in the study of the post-1945 German reactions to the Shoah.⁵ The scale of the Nazi's genocidal efforts to extinguish Europe's Jewish population has left an undeniable scar on the psyche and culture of Germany and much of Eastern Europe. After seventy years of debate, denial and excavation of the extent of Nazi war crimes, Germany has developed a national movement unique among nations actively confronting the extent of their past. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [coming to terms with the past] has been a staple of German national/international policy and education since the unconditional surrender of the Third Reich in 1945. The extent to which the German states have dealt with the legacy of the Shoah has varied over time, fluctuating with the political ideologies of governing bodies and the willingness of the German people themselves to interact with the darkest corner of their history. Throughout the last seventy years of German history, monuments have played a key role in defining the German process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. They have also assisted in the creation of a national memory and narratives that attempt to accurately define the horrors of the past, who perpetrated them, and who was victimized by them.

Due to the extent of the Holocaust from a purely geographical standpoint, locations that bear the mark of Nazi war crimes are numerous and the events immortalized there vary in meaning and intensity. As James E. Young, Professor of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies,

⁴ James E Young, "Berlin's Holocaust Memorial: A Report On the Bundestag Committee on Media and Culture," *German Politics & Society* 17, no. 3, 1999, 1–18.

⁵ Both the terms Holocaust and Shoah represent the murder of European Jews under Hitler's National Socialist Regime. Holocaust is colloquially used to refer to Hitler's mass extermination policies of many groups, Jews being one, between 1939 and 1945. Shoah is Hebrew for catastrophe and is used to refer to specifically to the murder of European Jews.

writes, “the *raison d’être* for Holocaust Monuments is ‘never to forget’ ... for what is remembered here now necessarily depends on how it is remembered and the shape memorial icons lend them [memory].”⁶ Young’s question, what are we never to forget?, is one that has shaped discussions of Holocaust memorials since their emergence. Surely it is easy to say that one would not look to memorialize the horrors of the gas chambers of Auschwitz in the same manner as the destruction of the Neue Synagogue in Berlin during Kristallnacht. Certainly, these two events are defined by their connection to the Shoah in a chronological perspective, but the beginning of religious persecution and mass murder cannot be depicted accurately through the same monumental form. Each event and location carries their unique historical perspective and contributes individually to a larger national narrative that has fluctuated over time.

It is our inability to remember the extent of the Shoah through singular points of memory that has led to the debate surrounding the erection of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (DEJE) in Berlin on May 12th, 2005. This monument stands before the entrance to the famous park, *Der Berliner Tiergarten*, and the *Bundestag* (the seat of the German parliament). A monument to the victims of the Holocaust in such an auspicious location within the German capital causes one to ask what its presence should call us to remember. To be sure its existence identifies the importance of the Shoah to German history through public acknowledgment but what is the contribution of this monument to the narrative of the Shoah in Germany? And how does its existence and evolving interaction between the monument and visitors contribute to the processes *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? It is these questions that I will attempt to answer within this paper. Through analysis of academic literature that investigates the shifting narratives surrounding the Shoah and German post-war cultural memory, I will trace the narratives German

⁶ James Edward Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 173.

memorial movements spanning the period of division (1945 – 1990) and formation of Berlin Republic (1990 to present). Through this analysis I will isolate a need for a specifically Jewish narrative of the Holocaust, leading to the creation of the DEJE. My analysis of the monument itself will focus on its impact through visitor interaction, focusing on personal, photographic and political lenses. It is through analyzing the interactions of individuals and organizations with the monument that I will prove that the DEJE represents an abstract canvas on which the German people have continued to develop a national narrative that recognizes the nature of Jewish suffering and integrate this narrative into then irreconcilable reality of the Holocaust in German cultural memory.

Memorialization and Redefinition

On April 16th 1945 2,000 German citizens of the town of Weimar were marched into the Buchenwald Concentration Camp by American Military forces to view the tangible horrors of Hitler's Final Solution.⁷ This event was one of many in a government mandated education campaign by Allied occupying forces to bring to light the destruction of the Holocaust, and to supposedly show the German people the atrocities for which the world held them responsible. The realization of the true nature of Hitler's racial policies or the lack thereof, has been a theme that Germany has wrestled with for the last seventy years. The question of German guilt and generational responsibility have been heavily debated within a country who has actively struggled to heal from the national trauma of WWII while accurately portraying the horrors of the past.

⁷ Wolfram, *Getting History Right*, 12.

The Monument has been instrumental to this continual development of German narratives surrounding the Holocaust. Germany currently has around 2,000 monuments that stand in relation to the holocaust on some level,⁸ not including 32,000 *Stolpersteine*⁹ (Stumbling blocks) embedded in the pavement of German cities. These monuments stem from waves of memorialization that have developed steadily as German rhetoric has changed to reflect a continual deepening and redefining of the Holocaust. As Germany has only existed as a unified entity for the last thirty years, the majority of the holocaust memorials standing today were developed independently under either East or West German supervision. The division in state, as well as the inherent division in ideologies helps us to trace the development of the German response to the Holocaust through the development of monuments in both states. The understanding of the slow and divided road to a cohesive German understanding of the Holocaust is then much easier to see within the context of its history.

In general, the tone of Germany post-1945 can be categorized as exhausted. The brutality of the Nazi's six-year war had devastated the German economy, infrastructure and society. The call to acknowledge German suffering was audible, and the German people were tangibly demoralized. It is within this atmosphere that Germany was divided into four separate zones following the Potsdam conference of 1945. In 1949 these zones would become the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), characterized by Allied oversight and western democratic structure, and the socialist workers state, the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The political structure of both states was an influential aspect of the development of cultural memory related to the Holocaust in both east and west. For both states the demoralization of the populous led to a

⁸ Caroline Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 1.

⁹ Martin Winstone, *The Holocaust Sites of Europe: An Historical Guide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 82.

recasting of the war in a light that served to validate the new ideologies of the state and minimize the responsibility of German citizens to recognize their role in the Holocaust.

For the purpose of my analysis I have categorized the post-1945 period of German holocaust recognition into four general categories, drawing on categorizations shown in the monograph *Postwar German* by historian Caroline Sharples.¹⁰ These categories are:

1. *Gemeinsame Erinnerungslücke* (Collective Amnesia), 1945 – late 1950's
2. Critical Engagement, 1960 – 1980's
3. Academic Discussion, 1980 –1990
4. Unification and redefinition, 1990 – present

While these categories are broad and lacking in critical definition, they will prove helpful when identifying the general trends seen throughout the post-war period. It must also be said that while these trends were in some form present in Eastern Germany the censoring of East German media and political voices led to the domination of official state policy over public opinion.¹¹ Therefore, these trends will be more tangible in the examination of West German sources.

Through the work of Sharples's and Wolfgram's comparative monographs of post-war media *Getting History Right*, we can clearly see the development of similar and distinct post-war memory in both East and West Germany. During the period of *Gemeinsame Erinnerungslücke* (1945 – 1950s) we do not see a missing narrative surrounding the abuses of the Third Reich, instead a reinterpretation. In both east and west the war was redefined to reflect narratives that were complementary to the emerging political systems and which refrained from challenging a war-weary German populace. It was this redefinition of the recent past that created a sense of amnesia among the German public in both the East and West concerning the gravity of the Holocaust.

¹⁰ Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 6.

¹¹ Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 37.

In Eastern Germany the newly formed Socialist Union Party worked to develop narrative of the holocaust that reflected the communist and socialist values on which it had been founded. The DDR developed a myth of the German class struggle to help define and deal with the fallout of Nazism. To form a new national identity, the DDR began to develop a past where Nazism was an abnormality, and class struggle was exaggerated to depict the DDR as a haven for all the survivors of fascism.¹² The state pushed this narrative by publicly honoring the so-called “Resisters of Fascism.” The erection of monuments to figures such as Ernst Thälmann, a political leftist murdered at Buchenwald, demonstrated the spirit of the leftist resistance.¹³ Thälmann’s death made him a martyr of leftist German resistance under National Socialism. His internment at a camp that held a multitude of different prisoners including homosexuals, political prisoners and Jews, allowed the memorial of his death to be seen as an inclusive memorial to the fate of all those who were murdered in the concentration camps. Sharples analysis shows that the trend in consolidating all suffering under the hands of the Nazi regime under the banner of class struggle, allowed the GDR to consciously erase the uniqueness of the persecution of European Jews and effectively silence their perspective in the post-war period.¹⁴

The argument of universal suffering under the hands of the Third Reich was also essential to the development of West German Holocaust amnesia. Built upon the massive cries of German suffering, the formation of a western identity was deeply rooted in the idea that all Germans were victimized equally during the war.”¹⁵ In order to validate the post-war position of the German people and to acknowledge the depravity of Nazi war crimes under the eyes of the world, the

¹² Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 4.

¹³ Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 4-5.

¹⁴ Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 4.

¹⁵ Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 6.

FGR focused on the end of the war as a liberation of humanity.¹⁶ Under Hitler all had suffered and therefore the suffering of all groups must be recognized.

This brand of universalism is clearly represented in the erection of the first monument to victims of NS at the Plötzensee Prison in West Berlin in 1952. This monument serves to commemorate the 2,500 political prisoners who were murdered during Nazi rule. While the location itself has little connection to the mass murders of the Holocaust, the monument is dedicated to the “millions who had been persecuted or killed because of their political convictions, religious beliefs or racial heritage.”¹⁷ The trend of dedicating monuments to general victimization continued in West Berlin with *the Mahnmal für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (memorial for the victims of national socialism) and *Für die Opfer der Gewalt* (for the victims of violence) on November 9th, 1963.¹⁸ Monuments such as these provide a clear depiction of West German universalism. Wolfram argues that the dedication “to victims of fascism/violence” acts as a generalization to acknowledge to the fate of German Jews as well as German POW’s. He concludes that it is this generalization of suffering under the banner of humanity that obscured the Jewish experience during WWII.¹⁹

Within both of their analysis, Sharples and Wolfgram identify another factor commonly found in the amnesiac rhetoric of both states, which we will refer to as the German Terror State. Broadly defined the German Terror State refers to the division of Germans during WWII into good Germans and evil Nazis.²⁰ In the fallout of the war Germans began to who was actively complicit in the destructive racial policies of the Third Reich. The existence of the Gestapo and

¹⁶ Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 6.

¹⁷ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 150-51.

¹⁸ Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 64-65.

¹⁹ Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 65.

²⁰ Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 21.

SS allowed the blame for the actual murders committed to be laid on specific groups in German society.²¹ The threat of swift persecution from the Nazi regime toward political adversaries/dissenters also helped to explain the lack of active German resistance. Therefore, the myth of the Nazi Terror state overwhelming worked to explain away the need to ask about compliancy.²² Through this myth the question of the complicity to German citizens remained unanswered, and the debate over passive or active complacency was buried by the previously stated forms of general amnesia.

As a decade passed West Germany entered the phase of Critical Engagement (1960 – 1980) and faced a particularly interesting development in its development of holocaust narratives. In the midst of the cold war the DDR continued to quietly maintain its rhetoric of universal class struggle, which greatly contrasted by the West German student movement categorized as the *Achtundsechziger-Bewegung*. The 68ers was the name given to the first generation to be born after the horrors of WWII. Categorized by their heightened political activism surrounding imperialism as a factor in the war in Vietnam, the continuing development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and development of the German left, the 68ers are credited as having explicit effects on the development of West German politics moving into the latter half of the 20th century.²³ As the first generation not to have experienced National Socialism in Germany, their reaction to the Third Reich and the Holocaust will help to trace the development of cultural memory in West Germany leading to the debates of the 1980s.

The 68ers are recognized as having used the generational divide between themselves and their parents to portray their political perspectives as a divergence from the suffering narrative of

²¹ Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 65.

²² Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 23.

²³ Karrin Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 69.

previous generations.²⁴ In essence the movement sought to protect democracy from the forces of capitalism and remnants of fascism perceived by the 68ers to be active and present in the West German government.²⁵ It is within the rhetoric of the 68ers surrounding these political motivations that we see a more direct form of engagement with the Holocaust. This generation is sometimes accredited with the introduction of the idea of German perpetrators into holocaust rhetoric, although Marshall Fund Fellow Hans Kundnani argues that the true nature of the 68ers was a call to recognize both victims and perpetrators.²⁶ Through the movement to resist new German fascism in the late 1960s, the 68ers began to use the Shoah and the policies that led to it, as a model from which to criticize the current political culture. Auschwitz and global conflicts such as Vietnam were closely associated. In an effort to explain this trend Kundnani references Dan Diner's term "Exonerating Projection."²⁷ to describe this behavior. By equating death tolls in Vietnam and capitalism with the Holocaust and fascism, this generation sought to find parallels within their own history to help explain the present²⁸. The strange acknowledgement of the horror of the German past as parallel to injustices happening abroad, demonstrates a willingness to see the Holocaust as an act of horror and violence. However, this rhetoric does not take into account the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a measure of racial/religious extermination. It fails to highlight the position of the Jews as a group explicitly targeted for arbitrary and anti-Semitic reasons. Kundnani acknowledges that discussion of the Holocaust by

²⁴ Eric Lagenbacher, "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany," *German Politics and Society* 21, no. 2 (2003): 1–23.

²⁵ Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany*, 5.

²⁶ Hans Kundnani, "Perpetrators and Victims: Germany's 1968 Generation and Collective Memory," *German Life and Letters* 64, no. 2 (2011): 273–82.

²⁷ Dan Diner, *Feindbild Amerika. Über Die Beständigkeit Eines Ressentiments* (Munich: Propyläen, 2002), 138.

²⁸ Kundnani, "Perpetrators and Victims," 275.

the 68ers may have helped to normalize it as a viable topic of conversation, but he maintains that it is the urge to compare tragedies that again communicates a universalistic view of suffering.²⁹

As shown, the uniqueness to the Holocaust question remained unanswered in Germany for most of its time as a divided nation. Themes of universal suffering and the need to recognize German pain were common, as the perspective of European Jews during WWII remained constrained to the concentration camps in which they were murdered. Germans lacked a national understanding of the depth of the Shoah and its true impact on Europe, because conversation about the topic had not yet been stimulated in a way that caused a ripple effect of academic discussion among Germans. This state of passive engagement with the question of the Holocaust was interrupted publicly in the spring of 1986. On April 25th, 1986 right-wing historian Michael Stürmer published a piece in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* entitled “A Land Without History”, in which he argued that the focus on the NS Regime in Germany eclipsed the positive aspects of German history.³⁰ Stürmer’s portrayal of Nazism as a stumbling block for the formation of a German national identity prompted an outcry from other German academics either in defense or opposition to Stürmer’s position. This academic discourse was termed the *Historikerstreit* and was unique as it took place completely within the view of the public. Throughout the summer of 1986 and into 1987 academics took to the pages of national newspapers such as *Die Zeit* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to dissect the rhetoric of their peers. The topics within the debate varied but leveled out to address four main questions:

1. Was there uniqueness to the crimes of the Holocaust, and was it comparable to other acts of violence and genocide committed under other totalitarian regimes?
2. Is there validity to the historical argument of *Sonderweg*, or the theory that Germany had followed a special path that led to Nazism?
3. Were Nazi crimes a reaction to crimes already perpetrated under Stalin?

²⁹ Kundani. “Perpetrators and Victims,” 275.

³⁰ Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989), 21.

4. Should Germans bear a burden of guilt for Nazi crimes, or can they find pride in their national history?³¹

German Historian Richard J. Evans demonstrates that this debate came on the heels of rising conservatism across the west. The development of neo-conservatism in other western world powers such as the United States and Great Britain also focused on a renewal of national pride and identity. While this movement sought to bring citizens back to pre-1960 historical ideas of religious and cultural unity, he notes that West Germans viewed Neo-conservatism with suspicion.³² The act of taking pride in German national history was a concept that had been deeply intertwined with the nationalistic policies of Hitler as well as the destructive brand of nationalism brandished by Otto von Bismarck during the Prussian chapter of German history. Nationalism and pride were dangerous terms with tangible consequences for the German people. The rise of neoconservative among German Historians signaled to many that perhaps a “right-wing version of thinking could be seen as respectable”³³

As the newspapers settled in January of 1987, over 136 articles had been published by German academics spanning the divide of left and right, but the German public was left without a decisive victor. There was no final say as to whose interpretation of national history had won the day, but rather a sense of the true difficulty and abstraction surrounding the “German Problem”.³⁴ This debate signaled that the Holocaust and the consequences of Nazism on the historical record could not be easily reconciled. It also hinted at the depth of narratives that had been built around the twelve years of Nazi rule, and whose unchecked existence could and would be manipulated as West Germany grew and continued to develop a post-fascism identity.

³¹ Wolfgram, *Getting History Right*, 55.

³² Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow*, 124.

³³ Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow*, 136.

³⁴ Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust*, 57.

From this historical portrait we see academic literature describing post-1945 German debate over the Holocaust as a war of narratives. In the initial post-war period, the narratives of German suffering and universal suffering were developed to help negate the reality of German responsibility for the events of the Shoah. In East Germany the narrative that depicted benevolent socialism as the antidote to fascism ignored the particular nature of Jewish suffering. The narrative of exonerating projection during the West German *Achtundsechziger-Bewegung* allowed post-war second-generation Germans to use the shame and guilt attached to the Shoah to influence anti-fascist student protest, without understanding the consequences of the Shoah on German society. And finally, the presentation of narrative of national identity debated in the *Historikerstreit* of 1986 – 97, which favored a revisionist view of history that refused to see the murder of Europe's Jews as an irreconcilable part of the German identity.

Within all of these historical narratives we are greeted with the same consequence, failure to recognize the position of Jews within the narrative of National Socialism from 1933 to 1945, and the unique events of the Shoah in relation to the multiple forms of suffering experienced during World War Two. It is the recognition of this missing narrative that is attempted through the erection of the *Denkmal für die Ermordeten Juden Europas*. It is the reactions of the public with this narrative through the monument that I will focus on for the remainder of this piece.

Indeterminate Space in Comparison to Museum Pedagogy

As we can see through the historical record, the narrative of Jewish suffering had not been truly recognized in Germany leading up to the establishment of the *Berliner Republik* in 1990. It is this missing narrative that architect Peter Eisenman has attempted to represent in his design for the *Denkmal für die Ermordeten Juden Europas*.

To understand the uniqueness of the DEJE we must first begin with its design and intended impact. At its essence this monument is relatively simple. The design consists of 2,711 grey concrete rectangles/pillars or stelae arranged in a grid formation. Each of the stelae are uniform in shape, 95 centimeters wide and 2.375 meters long. The only varying feature of these stelae are their heights. They range from 0 to 4 meters, fluctuating throughout the monument. The stelae are spaced exactly 95 centimeters apart and the pathways through them are just wide enough for one person to walk through, forcing one to face the monument alone, although perhaps surrounded by others pursuing the same goal.³⁵ Small plaques dot the perimeter of the field detailing appropriate visitor behavior, including no climbing or use of strollers. This field of stone, roughly 19,000 m², is constructed as an undulating grid on which the ground beneath the visitor's feet slowly rises and falls. This movement is almost undetectable until the viewer slowly realizes a sense of physical disorientation.³⁶ The scale of the monument is immense, and as one looks over its grey façade it is difficult to see where the monument stops and the nearby *Tiergarten* begins. Due to its size the monument also exerts a certain force over its surroundings. It exists in sharp contrast to the Berlin cityscape and denotes a sense of weight. The space engenders a gravitational pull that invites you to enter its borders, partly due to the sudden shift from city to memorial, but also because of the abstractness of its design. This abstraction is at once striking and confusing, full of space that should indicate meaning but explicitly refusing to grant simplistic understanding.

³⁵ Winstone, *The Holocaust Sites of Europe*, 85.

³⁶ Hanno Rauterberg, H el ene Binet, and Lukas Wassmann, *Holocaust Memorial Berlin: Eisenman Architects* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars M uller Publishers, 2005), 12.



Figure 1: Visitors explore the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*³⁷

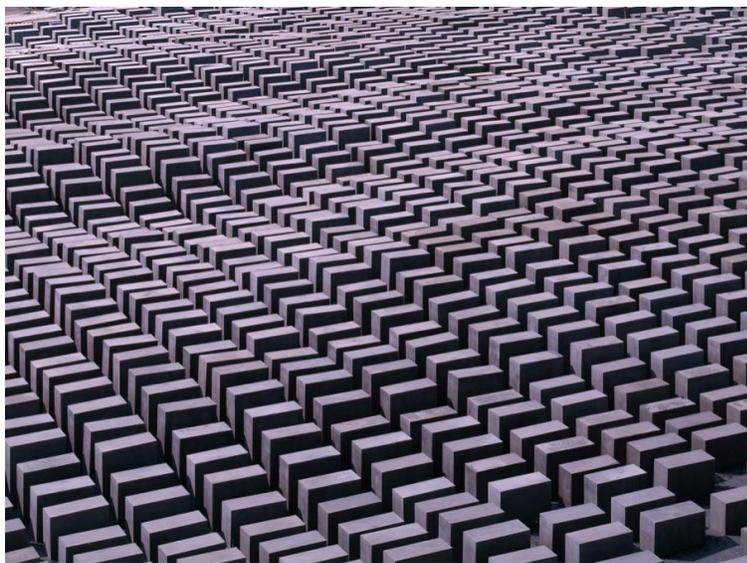


Figure 2 The Grey Stelae of the DEJE show the undulating motion of the grid³⁸

The abstract structure above ground is accompanied by an underground visitor's center aptly titled *Ort der Information* (place of information). This subterranean space is comprised of

³⁷ "Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," *EISENMAN ARCHITECTS*, n.d., accessed February 27, 2020, <https://eisenmanarchitects.com/Berlin-Memorial-to-the-Murdered-Jews-of-Europe-200>.

³⁸ "Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," *EISENMAN ARCHITECTS*.

four rooms, each highlighting aspects of the Shoah. In one all the names of the 6 million victims of the Shoah are read aloud.³⁹ In another, one finds a timeline of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. This educational center follows a more traditional pedagogical approach to memorial and museum culture and therefore exists in an air of contrast to the abstract stelae above. As visitors emerge from the underground information center, they are once again confronted with the abstract stelae above, allowing for a secondary moment of reflection with the monument.

In January of 2019 I visited the DEJE on a cold winter's night. It was 11pm and the lights of the cars had faded away. Berlin seemed to be asleep and the monument stood before me like an ocean of dark grey stone. Mentally I had prepared for this visit. I expected to feel emotion, to be guided on a sort of illuminating journey through the stelae to emerge with a wealth of knowledge I couldn't find in my history textbooks or documentary footage. I waded into the field slowly, laughing with my friend about the ridiculousness of visiting a monument so late at night, in an attempt to cut the tension I felt the space. Moving deeper into the field of stelae the monument began to rise above my head. I felt the natural sense of panic as the buildings disappeared and the claustrophobic closeness of the grey cement seemed to close me in. Minutes later I emerged from the grid and looked to see my friend standing meters away. We sat silently for a moment and then cautiously I asked, "Did you feel anything?".

Unlike many visitors, my experience at the DEJE did not include a trip to the *Ort der Information* because I explored the monument after official visiting hours. Therefore, I only experienced Eisenman's abstract design, and was quite honestly confused by it. I entered the monument, as many do, looking to be guided into a deeper understanding of the Shoah. In my mind I was subconsciously comparing the DEJE to other memorial monuments, such as the

³⁹ "Ort Der Information," *Förderkreis Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*, n.d, accessed March 31, 2020. <https://www.holocaust-denkmal-berlin.de/index.php?id=26>.

Ground Zero monument in New York City, or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in D.C. In comparison to the DEJE, I had interacted with these American monuments with an implicit understanding of their connection to my history as an American. I had lived through the aftermath of the terror attacks of 9/11 and had family members who had fought in Vietnam. Because of my personal history with the events these monuments represented, I felt a very natural connection with them. I did not have to engender reflection, it came immediately. This was not the case at the DEJE.

The nature of the title “The Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe”, instilled an expectation of finality in me. It felt as if in visiting this monument I would have seen and understood the pain of the Shoah and left with a sense of closure about the crimes of the Nazi regime. I was asking this monument to unlock an understanding of a horror whose consequences have had little direct effect on my life as an American. In essence I asked the monument to do something it was never designed to do.

In James E. Young’s Juror’s Report to the German Bundestag in 1998, Young describes Eisenman’s design as, “rather than pretending to answer Germany’s memorial problem in a single, reassuring form, this design proposes multiple, collected forms arranged so that visitors have to find their own paths to the memory of Europe’s murdered Jews.”⁴⁰ In Young’s analysis we explicitly see that the Eisenman design is not meant to gently lead the visitor into a structured and factual view of history, instead it leaves indeterminate space, without instruction and without direction. The abstraction of the design is in direct contradiction to the form of museum culture described by Orsten Bach Stier in his monograph *Committed to Memory*. Stier uses the German word *museal*, often used to describe an object with which the viewer does not have a strong

⁴⁰ Robin Ostow, ed., *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*. German and European Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 201.

relationship, in an effort to help explain the way museums can nullify the past. In his words, “we seize memory in order to ensure its general transmission” in the context of the creation of a museum.⁴¹ The process of organizing and displaying remnants of the past informs the viewer of a past described by not only the physical existence of pieces but also the process of which pieces are chosen to form a historical collection. In the choosing and defining of remnants of history we can inadvertently or purposefully distance ourselves from the history we are trying to preserve.

The opportunity to engage with the past as a living entity is integral to the work of developing and preserving cultural memory. It is up to the culture to choose which lessons from history it will bring with it into the future. The development of monuments and museums to educate the viewer are immensely important, as they inform us as to what memories of the past have been preserved. Cultural memory is then developed as a society takes the facts of the past and begins to apply them to how they move forward into the future. How do they define the past to new generations? Which policies should or should not be implemented due to precedent? What forms of governments will not be tolerated by the populous? The application of memory into action is a crucial step that comes to pass when a society is given apt time and space in which to develop an understanding of the gravity of the past and to personally connect with it as an active force in their daily lives. It is this opportunity for reflection, personal contemplation and discussion that the DEJE was created to stimulate

In his description of the monument on his official website Eisenman says, “In this monument there is no goal, no end, no working one’s way in or out. The duration of the experience of it grants no further understanding, since understanding the Holocaust is impossible. In this context there is...no memory of the past, only the living memory of the

⁴¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 113-114.

individual experience.”⁴² In essence the abstract nature of the stelae provides an arena on which each generation can come to wrestle with the unsolvable question of how to understand and come to terms with the Holocaust. As communicated by Young in his Report to the Bundestag Committee on Media and Culture in March of 1999, the jurors of the *Findungskommission* were looking for a design that “should reflect the terms of the debate itself, the insufficiency of memorials, and the contemporary generations’ skeptical view of official memory.” it should also “put people on even-footing with the forms of memory.”⁴³ “To put one on “even-footing “with memory one must give the viewer the opportunity to participate in the process of remembering. This is what the DEJE was designed to do. It provides an abstract, yet structured form comprised of indeterminate space in which to experience the past openly. The stelae exist to allow you to contemplate the irreconcilable nature of the Shoah and to reflect on the past on an individual and communal level, without the direction of pedagogical efforts to frame the past into neatly digestible facts. It is a space solely dedicated to furthering the creation of new narratives that stem from an understanding of the perspective of Jewish victimhood.

This monument is not created to be user friendly. It is a space where individuals must decide to interact with the monument in order to go about the work of memory. One must give themselves over to the stelae and decide to reflect. It requires an aspect of personal participation that is not explicitly stated, which has caused a continual debate over the reaction of the public to the monument. In the next section I will be examining public interaction with the monument in the aspects of personal, photographic, and political interaction. However, before moving to this analysis I think it is pertinent to address the fact that we are working in an atmosphere of postmemory regarding the monument. The term postmemory was coined by Marianne Hirsch in

⁴² “Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” *EISENMAN ARCHITECTS*.

⁴³ Young, “Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial.”

Family Frames and is used to signify the distance between viewers who don't have personal memories of the past that they are attempting to identify with.⁴⁴ To engender postmemory in one's self one must first recognize the distance between oneself and the past. The formation of postmemory then occurs when a deep personal connection is formed between the past in question and the individual.⁴⁵ It is the DEJE ability to create a space for those who are viewing the past in an atmosphere of postmemory will be essential to my analysis.

Daily Interaction: The Choice of Memory

In an observational article for *Die Zeit*, Henning Sußebach provided a perspective of the DEJE and the reaction of the people of Berlin to the monument three weeks after its grand opening in 2005. In his work he fundamentally asks, "Sind Sie zu fröhlich?"⁴⁶ The question of how the public should interact with the DEJE has been a source of debate and discussion since the monument's construction. While it clearly stands as a monument to trauma and loss, the existence of a massive maze-like structure of concrete blocks could look at first to be a playground of sorts, a place of exploration. Visitors have been known to use the stelae as the perfect platform for a midday picnic, game of tag, or space for sunbathing. While these behaviors are not present during all visitor interactions, the frequency at which such "inappropriate behavior" is observed has been a constant topic of debate.

The argument of appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior raises its head when we begin to analyze the way the public looks to experience this monument. Part of the confusion with appropriate behavior most defiantly stems from the abstract nature of the design, but even more

⁴⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, 22.

⁴⁵ Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 13.

⁴⁶ Henning Sußebach, "Ein weites Feld," *Die Zeit*, published June 2, 2005. https://www.zeit.de/2005/23/Mahnmal_23/seite-4.

from the abstract series of events it serves to commemorate. Unlike many monuments DEJE does not commemorate a singularity. Its position within the former death strip of the Berlin Wall, obviously does carry weight, but not in relation to the Shoah. One cannot go to this field of stelae and solemnly remember a day of destruction; one must endeavor to remember a genocide, a systematic and organized extermination. Is this possible? No, not in its entirety, which is of course the point of the abstract nature of the DEJE. This may mean that to the average visitor on a walking tour of Berlin or passing by on their way back from work, the monument's abstraction does not provide a sense of reverence. It may simply look to be the perfect spot to eat one's lunch or rest one's legs after a long day of sightseeing.

In this analysis we must also keep in mind that the monument is also a form of trauma architecture, inasmuch as it exists to attempt to make the narrative of Jewish suffering⁴⁷ and trauma tangible. Eisenman's interpretation of trauma architecture requires personal interaction. The monument is designed in such a way that one must walk through the monument's grid, moving through the field of Stelae. One must subject themselves to the monument. In the process of walking, one is making a conscious decision to connect one's physical reality with that of the monument, to interact with the design. Movement brings a sense of commitment to the process of understanding the monument's narrative. Once you have subjected your physical body to the design, it makes it easier to subject your mind to the questions of trauma the monument is made to embody. In essence to experience the monument, one must choose to forgo the temptation to simply sit on the stelae and instead interact with the void it represents. Physical interaction with

⁴⁷It is important to note that in this piece I will not attempt to provide an exact definition of a singular narrative of Jewish Suffering, as a singular narrative may not truly exist. I will use this phrase to encapsulate the suffering endured by Jews under the Hitler's National Socialist Regime, and the generational trauma inflicted on the families and communities of survivors.

the DEJE in the manner of Eisenman's design suggests, is a choice visitors may or may not decide to make.

The actions of visitors who seem to refuse to do the work of personal remembrance in their interactions with the monument, have brought out critics in both academia and the media. In a strongly opinionated 1,500-word piece for *The New Yorker*, commentator Richard Brody likens the DEJE to an "austerely modern yet pleasantly welcoming park" before explaining how his perspective changed to one of contemplation and questioning once he physically entered the monument itself.⁴⁸ Again the park narrative is reflected in Haaretz reporter Avner Shapira's piece "The Holocaust Memorial that became a Refuge of Drunks and Sunbathers" which calls into question the cavalier actions of the monument visitors. Like Brody he also insinuates that Berlin may be viewing the Stelae as a sort of twisted public park, where locals sunbathe and oblivious tourists cross The Holocaust Memorial off their list of top five things to see in Berlin.⁴⁹ Shapira then goes deeper into the analysis of public interaction with the DEJE by asking who is supposed to interact with the monument? Is it built simply for those who come from a German ethnic background? Does that make the monument simply inaccessible to tourists who visit or German citizens who claim Turkish or Arab heritage? To question the accessibility of Eisenman's design is a natural direction for the debate on personal interaction to progress. If the monument is only accessible to certain groups, that may explain the individuals exhibiting "inappropriate behavior" at the monument.

The topic of the DEJE's accessibility to non-ethnic Germans is a focus of American anthropologist Damani Partridge's article, "Monumental Memory amidst Contemporary Race."

⁴⁸Richard Brody, "The Inadequacy of Berlin's 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,'" *The New Yorker*, published July 12, 2012, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-inadequacy-of-berlins-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe>.

⁴⁹ Avner Shapira, "The Holocaust Memorial That Became a Refuge for Drunks and Sunbathers," *Haaretz*, published June 2, 2005. <https://www.haaretz.com/life/books/what-not-to-do-at-the-holocaust-memorial-1.5246533>.

In this piece Partridge explores the themes of race in Germany and the barriers that race erects during efforts to experience current Holocaust memorials. He does this through eyewitness testimony collected while accompanying Turkish and Palestinian-German students to the DEJE in 2009. After being asked to explain what they thought of the monument, Partridge records that the students assembled at the DEJE saw the stelae as a place to play hide and seek, while one student fell asleep as the group listened to the DEJE tour guide's presentation.⁵⁰ The students were told later on by the group liaison that if their behavior did not improve they would not be able to continue with the program, which ended with a tour of Auschwitz.⁵¹

The inappropriate behavior of the students seems, in Partridge's perspective, a product of the failure of the monument, and its inability to speak to non-ethnic Germans. He argues that due to Eisenman's design, the memorial lacks the agency to address the current issues of racial tension in Germany and in Europe as a whole. Partridge maintains that the contemplative design frames the Shoah as singular crime for which the German state was wholly responsible, and which fails to make a tangible connections between the racist ideologies that led to the Holocaust and the racism currently present in the lives the Palestinian students who visited that day. He writes that the students could not truly interact with the monument in a tangible way "because no hand is reaching out to them directly to recognize the connection between these past events, their own histories and their contemporary social injuries."⁵² A lack of contemporary connection with the Holocaust seems to be Partridge's explanation for the student's inappropriate behavior at the DEJE. I believe this viewpoint has merit. Partridge is right in identifying the racial tension, which exists between immigrant groups in Germany and ethnic-Germans, and directly

⁵⁰ Damani Partridge, "Holocaust Mahnmahl (Memorial): Monumental Memory amidst Contemporary Race," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 4 (2010): 829–50., 825.

⁵¹ Partridge, "Holocaust Mahnmahl (Memorial)," 826.

⁵² Partridge, "Holocaust Mahnmahl (Memorial)," 841.

contributes to the difficulty of communicating the subject of the Holocaust. The teaching of German narratives of singular responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism poses a great challenge for the nation, and a possible stumbling block for those attempting to integrate into German society.

I do, however, take issue with Partridge's critique of the monument's effectiveness for non-ethnic Germans. The lack of explicit contemporary connection with current issues of race in Germany is not a failure of the monument, it is built into its design. The DEJE was never created to be a check and balance on German citizenry. Its existence is not meant to police the emergence of potentially racist ideologies in Germany's future. If its presence is credited as doing this in the future, I would consider that a positive effect of its existence but not its purpose. Simply put the DEJE is made to recognize the narrative of Jewish suffering in the story of the Holocaust. It stands simply to communicate that Germany recognizes the 6 million Jews who lost their lives to racist National Socialist policies from 1933 to 1945. It may implicitly speak to racism and its consequences in contemporary Germany but Partridge's conclusion that the monument's power is handicapped for Turkish and Palestinian-German youth, assumes that it was built with them in mind. It was not. If a visitor leaves the DEJE feeling they have learned nothing from their visit, it may be beneficial to reflect on our preconceived understanding of the Shoah. If interacting with the narrative of Jewish suffering is something only possible for ethnic Germans, then we should be questioning how the Shoah is taught to all populations, not the effectiveness of the monument itself.

In our defense of appropriate behavior at the DEJE we are not defending a graveyard, we are defending a narrative. We are not there to walk through the stelae and learn about racial propaganda or the Warsaw Ghetto, we are there to commemorate the loss of life. The narrative of

Jewish suffering was unique and the lack of historical recognition of this narrative up until the erection of the DEJE, makes the explicit depiction of Jewish suffering a necessary endeavor. The presence of the 2,711 stelae represents one architect's attempt to ground that narrative in the reality of space. If you disrespect the monument by interacting with it in an irreverent manner, you cannot harm the narrative. It will exist whether you decide to recognize the reality of its existence. Therefore, any argument aimed at policing behavior at the monument is truly an attempt to fight back against the slippage of memory.

In defending the Stelae and admonishing those who choose to jump from Stele to Stele, we are fighting against a sense of ambivalence that we in a post-holocaust world fear. The narrative the DEJE represents will stay grounded in the gray concrete of the monument, but our response to that narrative shows how we value it. When a couple decides the DEJE is the perfect place to have a picnic or a mother allows her children to climb the stelae unrestrained, that doesn't speak to a destruction of the validity of the Jewish narrative, it speaks to our inability to prioritize this narrative in our personal and cultural memory. We can attempt to control the ways others interact with the DEJE. Visitors can be encouraged to participate in personal memory by physically interacting with the space, but the choice over how to interact with this narrative is an individual one, and one we must allow visitors to make.

In understanding that visitor interaction is a choice, we must also be mindful of how we encourage or enforce types of behavior at the monument. Along the lines of enforcement there are instances when local police should be present to ensure the safety of visitors and the monument itself. In the hierarchy of visitor interactions those most often involving law enforcement would fall under behavior that can be interpreted as hate crimes. Expressions of hate and anti-Semitism have no place at the DEJE and should be dealt with by local authorities.

Moving down the hierarchy it becomes less clear who has the authority to enforce standards for behavior, as actions deemed inappropriate may not always be illegal. Having law enforcement aware of the sensitive nature of the monument is important, but it is also imperative that those who work at the DEJE are equipped to deal with visitors who may choose to interact with the monument irreverently. Tour guides can use the plaques detailing standards for interaction to remind visitors that this is a place of memorial. They also can use pointed questions to help visitors to consider the stelae in a more critical light. Asking the question, “What do these stelae represent?”, may help a sunbathing teenager to reconsider the way they see the monument they are interacting with. Visitors must also communicate with each other within the Stelae. Engaging in conversation or even debate with others at the memorial is a way to continue the development of narrative of the Shoah in the lives of one another. Therefore, we can see that in asking how we should behave at the DEJE, we inadvertently stumble on a reflection upon the past.

Photographic Interaction: The Positioning of Focus

The next subset of monument interaction that I will explore is the way that visitors to the DEJE have elected to use photography to frame their interactions with the monument. With the widespread use of devices such as digital cameras and smart phones, the ability to record memory has never been easier. The tendency to capture aspects of our daily lives photographically has exponentially increased and this technology allows us to capture moments and create tangible encapsulations of memory within the camera rolls of our devices. As a product of our ability to capture memory, we are also allowed to frame those memories for ourselves. We do this based on what we photograph and how we format our photos. I will call this phenomena personal photographic memory. The process of constructing memory through

photography takes on a more critical function when we begin to use photography to capture sites dedicated to the memory of the Shoah within our own pictures.

For my purposes I will focus my analysis of personal photographic memory on the way visitors to the DEJE frame the monument photographically. That is not to say that the debate of appropriate photography doesn't extend to other Holocaust memorials. For example, photography at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp has been a topic a public discussion for years. Periodically scandals, such as the 2014 Auschwitz Selfie Girl,⁵³ flow into the news cycle reigniting the debate around appropriate behavior concerning photography at sensitive historical sites.

Commenting on the phenomenon, which seems have become a trend, reporter for *The New Yorker*, Ruth Margalit asks are these picture takers “a bunch of technology-obsessed, self-indulgent narcissists?”⁵⁴ I will not endeavor to answer Margalit's question in my analysis but I believe the ideas of focus and narration both play a role in understanding how people choose to interact with the DEJE using photography.

I will differentiate photographic interaction with the DEJE as either focusing on a monumental narrative or personal narrative. I define photography that focuses on the monumental narrative as pictures in which the monument is the focus of the photo without a competing subject filling a large section of the frame. In contrast, photos that follow the personal narrative are those where the monument is present in the photo but is forced to compete with other subjects in the frame. I recognize that these categories are not strictly defined and do not encompass all photographs taken at the DEJE, but they will help me to differentiate between

⁵³ Caitlin Dewey, “The Other Side of the Infamous ‘Auschwitz Selfie,’” *Washington Post*, published July 22, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/>.

⁵⁴ Ruth Margalit, “Should Auschwitz Be a Site for Selfies?,” *The New Yorker*, published February 20, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/should-auschwitz-be-a-site-for-selfies>.

types of photography for the remainder of my analysis. To accomplish this analysis, I will use photographs that were highlighted through media sources and were therefore inserted into the discussion of the DEJE. While these photographs are not representative of all photographic interaction at the monument, I will use them as a litmus test through which I will analyze trends in photography that are already present in the public sphere.

Critics usually flag photography following the personal narrative as inappropriate behavior. For example in 2014, *Die Zeit* published an article in which San Antonio Spurs player Danny Green was highlighted for his selfie with the DEJE captioned “You know I had to do it one time lol, #Holocaust”⁵⁵ In his response to the public outcry against his post, Green tweeted, “I have great respect n [sic] understanding for this country’s history n [sic] wanted to continue chronicling my experience in Berlin.”⁵⁶ We see a similar reaction surrounding British model Rhian Sugden’s selfie among the Stelae, in 2018. Her response to backlash on social media? “This is insane! I posted a pic of me sightseeing in Berlin...the abuse I got is mental.”⁵⁷ In both cases Green and Sugden defended their photography by portraying it as an attempt to capture their experience in Berlin as tourists. These two examples are simply two of many photographs posted to social media in which the DEJE is regulated to a secondary position behind individual who exists as the focus of the photograph. The positioning of the individual in these photos depicts a refocusing of the narrative. Instead of visitors placing themselves in surrender to the monument and the narrative of Jewish suffering, the visitor has elected to place themselves as a

⁵⁵ “Holocaust-Selfie von Danny Green von San Antonio Spurs in Berlin,” *Der Spiegel*, published October, 9, 2014, <https://www.spiegel.de/sport/sonst/holocaust-selfie-von-danny-green-von-san-antonio-spurs-in-berlin-a-996279.html>.

⁵⁶ Dann Green, *Twitter*, published October 8, 2014. https://twitter.com/DGreen_14/status/519862273058562049?s=20

⁵⁷Helen Coffey, “British Model Criticized for Posting Holocaust Memorial Selfie,” *Independent*, published December 5, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/holocaust-memorial-model-tourist-selfie-rhian-sugden-instagram-a8668076.html>.

focus point in the photo. In doing so the narrative of their “trip to Berlin” or “experiencing German history” becomes the focal point of the photography. The memory has been saved not as remembrance of the loss of Europe’s Jews, but as a memory of how the monument fits into the narrative of their life. The photo then becomes a prop in the visitor’s memory of that monument not the focus.



Figure 3. Yolocaust; A juggler at the DEJE is superimposed onto a historical photograph of a mass grave⁵⁸

In 2017 Israeli-German writer Shahak Shapira decided to contribute to the discussion of photography at the DEJE in a unique manner. Shapira collected a number of photographs from visitors who had posted selfies or portraits of them at the monument and edited them. The edited photos place the figure from the original photo superimposed on scenes from concentration camps and mass graves.⁵⁹ On his website dedicated to the project, Shapira shared his thoughts and the reactions he received to his work. Each of the 12 individuals whose pictures were photoshopped contacted Shapira after the publication of the project asking to have their images

⁵⁸ Shahak Shapira, “YOLOCAUST – The Aftermath,” n.d, published January 19, 2017, <http://yolocaust.de>.

⁵⁹*This article describes Shahak’s photography and uses example photos from the authors work. Joel Gunter, “Yolocaust’: How Should You Behave at a Holocaust Memorial?,” *BBC News*, published January 20, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38675835>.

removed, including lengthy apologies for their behavior.⁶⁰ The reaction of these individuals to Shapira's edited version of their photo provides interesting insight into the narratives being manipulated in Shapira's work. As shown in figure 3 the juggler in the image is meant to be the focal point of the photo. The monument serves as a backdrop, which draws one's eyes back to the juggler. In photoshopping a mass grave in place of the monument, one's eyes quickly move from the juggler to identify the horror being depicted behind him. In essence Shapira is refocusing the narrative of these photographs. In replacing the abstract grey with actual visual depiction of the death it represents, the urgency of the monument's narrative quickly dwarfs the narrative of the individual. Before the photos were edited the individuals to whom they belonged saw the DEJE as a backdrop on which to capture a moment in their lives. After the images of the Shoah are superimposed, the meaning of the grey stelae becomes painfully clear.

When asked about the Yoloocaust project for Deutschlandrundfunk, memory scholar Aleida Assman described the developments over behavior regarding photography as a natural occurrence of the monument's existence. She stated: "Das heißt, es gibt nicht eine Bild dieses Denkmals. Das finde ich faszinierend. Jeder kann das Kunstwerk in gewisser Weise verlängern, indem er selbst sein Bild davon macht."⁶¹ With this statement Assman has neither condemned the selfie takers who flock to the DEJE or commended Shapira's work as a defender of the monument. Simply put, she recognizes the monument's ability to be simultaneously a background in an Instagram post and the focus of contemplation and remembrance. It is artwork that can be depicted in various lights, all of which are valid.

⁶⁰ Shapira, "YOLOCAUST -- The Aftermath."

⁶¹Henning Hübert, "Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin – 'Eine Bühne, auf der sich Demokratie ereignet'," *Deutschlandfunk*. Published January 27, 2017, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/holocaust-mahnmal-in-berlin-eine-buehne-auf-der-sich.691.de.html?dram:article_id=377496.

While I don't question the validity of all photographic depictions of the monument, I do believe the prioritization of narrative within photos shows us how visitors to the DEJE interpret the monument. In positioning themselves with the monument serving as the background to their perfect photo, they communicate that the narrative of their personal experience at the DEJE is paramount in comparison to the actual narrative of the monument. Furthermore, the strong public reaction to Shapira's edited photos and the immediate retraction of originals online by those who took them, shows a lack of understanding in regard to the monument they photographed. If one needs to see explicit images of the Shoah in order to realize the suffering the DEJE stands to represent, then perhaps it reflects a way of deflecting the monument's narrative. In choosing to see the DEJE as background for personal photos, visitors have the ability to reject the monument's invitation to engage in the work of personal and cultural memory.

Political Interaction: Transition and Integration of an Intangible Narrative

So far I have defined two aspects of interaction (personal and photographic) that have emerged throughout my study of the DEJE. For my third and final section I will analyze how the narrative of the DEJE lends itself to a role in interaction within the political sphere. As previously discussed the monument stands as a physical depiction of the nature of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. While its presence in Berlin denotes a certain weight, the existence of the monument in Germany's capital city does not mean that the narrative it represents is only present outside of the *Bundestag*. The narrative of Jewish suffering exists in every mention of the Shoah and therefore I believe that the spirit of the DEJE does not simply rest in the field of Stelae but rather that it is an active narrative across all of Germany.

When visitors first see the monument they often liken it to a graveyard or as I saw it, an ocean. One of the aspects I found personally interesting is the way the monument begins. The first stele begins at ground level, zero meters tall. The way the stelae slowly grow as you enter the monument and shrink as you emerge on the other side, gives the structure an uncontained air. It is as if the field of Stelae have only appeared from the earth for a brief moment and then quietly sunken back into the soil of Germany. Let yourself imagine that this monument continues past the borders of Eisenman's grid, stretching out from Berlin in grey waves. With this picture in our minds it becomes easier to see the monument and its narrative as a current running throughout Germany, ever present and tantalizingly intangible. If we then entertain the idea that wherever the Shoah is evoked the monument (i.e. it's narrative) is present, then we see how the monument becomes not just a concrete mass in Berlin but a very real force in the life of Germany. It is with that assumption of the monument's transcendentalist nature that I will connect it to the current political climate in Germany.

In 2013 a new political party entered the German political sphere. The AfD or Alternative für Deutschland developed as a nationalist offshoot of the Christian Democratic Union and currently holds 89 seats in the German Parliament.⁶² The party is the most radically right German political party in Parliament and has grown on a platform dedicated to a nationalist response to Germany's recent immigration reform.⁶³ The AfD's most radical member is Björn Höcke, leader of the AfD party in Thüringen and "Der Popstar der Neurechten."⁶⁴ He is well known for his ultranationalist views. During a speech in Dresden in January of 2017, Höcke referred to the

⁶² "German Bundestag – Distribution of Seats," *Deutscher Bundestag*, last modified January, 28, 2020, <https://www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats>.

⁶³ Melissa Eddy, "Alternative for Germany: Who Are They, and What Do They Want?," *The New York Times*, published December 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/world/europe/germany-election-afd.html>.

⁶⁴ Severin Weiland, "AfD-Politiker Björn Höcke: Nur ein Scheinriese im rechten Reich?," *Der Spiegel*, published August, 10, 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-politiker-bjoern-hoecke-nur-ein-scheinriese-im-rechten-reich-a-1280569.html>.

DEJE as a “Denkmal der Schande”⁶⁵ (memorial of shame) insinuating that the monument was degrading to the perception of German history. The nationalistic and right wing undertones to Höcke’s words inspired a German political art organization Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty) to confront Höcke on his perspective of the DEJE. The Zentrum für Politische Schönheit or ZPS, rented the property directly next to Höcke’s house in the sleepy town of Bornhagen, and overnight erected a mini replica of the DEJE on the property directly within eyesight of Höcke’s residence.⁶⁶

The ZPS claims that “Das Holocaust-Mahnmal Bornhagen ist ein Mahnmal gegen die Normalisierung des Faschismus in Deutschland.”⁶⁷ They have also stated that if Höcke were to fall to his knees at the DEJE in Berlin, invoking German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s *Kniefall* at the Warsaw Ghetto, they would gladly remove their mini-monument from Bornhagen.⁶⁸ As of now Höcke has yet to fall to his knees at any iteration of the DEJE and the Bornhagen DEJE stands while the AfD in Thüringen call for the ZPS to be labeled as a terrorist organization.⁶⁹ While the court battles over the legality of this mini-monument continue to arise, I believe the meaning of this mini-monument goes deeper than the legal questions surrounding its existence. In building the Bornhagen-DEJE the ZPS have broken the boundaries of the DEJE. No longer are the grey stelae contained to their ordered grid behind the *Bundestag*. Through the manifestation of the monument in Bornhagen as a form of protest, the ZPS have demonstrated

⁶⁵ Christoph Twickel, “Björn Höcke: Kommentar zur Mahnmal-Aktion gegen AfD-Politiker,” *Der Spiegel*, published November, 23, 2017, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/bjoern-hoecke-kommentar-zur-mahnmal-aktion-gegen-afd-politiker-a-1179933.html>.

⁶⁶ Adam Taylor, “Activists Build a Mini-Holocaust Memorial Outside German Far-Right Politician’s House,” *Washington Post*, published November, 22, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/22/activists-build-a-mini-holocaust-memorial-outside-german-far-right-politicians-house/>.

⁶⁷ “Holocaust Mahnmal Bornhagen,” Zentrum für politische Schönheit, n.d. accessed April 2, 2020, <https://politicalbeauty.de/mahnmal.html>.

⁶⁸ “Holocaust Mahnmal Bornhagen,” *Zentrum Für Politische Schönheit*

⁶⁹ Twickel, “Björn Höcke: Kommentar zur Mahnmal-Aktion gegen AfD-Politiker.”

and perhaps even created a transcendental aspect to the DEJE. While the narrative of Jewish suffering is truly woven into the framework Germany, the physical expression of that narrative outside Berlin moves the monument from a singular representation of a narrative, and towards multiple expressions of a singular narrative.

By giving the monument the ability to transcend its boundaries in Berlin, the ZPS have allowed the monument to come to individuals instead of waiting for them to come to it. The movement of the DEJE allows the narrative of Jewish suffering to have agency, which expands its ability to reach into the hearts and minds of Germans. Through this expansion I believe that the DEJE will only continue to have a more prominent voice in contemporary German politics but also in the continual discussion of the legacy of the Shoah. In this way the narrative of the DEJE has begun to take its rightful place in the dialogue surrounding the Shoah, the Holocaust, and the future of Germany.

Conclusion and Future Considerations:

As shown in this thesis, the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* is a unique piece of memory architecture. The undulating field of grey stelae designed by Peter Eisenman is an attempt to ground the intangible and particular narrative of Jewish suffering under the tyranny of Hitler's national socialist regime in clear and indeterminate space. The monument seeks to provide space for visitors to engage in the vital work of cultivating personal postmemory, leading to the greater development of cultural memory, which plays an essential role in the continual remembrance of the Shoah. By allowing visitors to physically interact with the indeterminate space the stelae present through motion, the monument allows the visitor an

intimate and uninterrupted grid in which to wander and contemplate the irreconcilable loss of the Shoah.

The grounding of this narrative in a physical space is and was essential to its survival in the face of a unified Germany in 1999. Within the histories of both the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) there existed a failure to recognize the nature of Jewish suffering under the Nazis. As a consequence, the narrative of Jewish suffering was not given an active voice in discussion and debate as Germany struggle to understand and atone for the horrors of the Holocaust. The erection of this monument cements the narrative of Jewish suffering into a physical space, and signals to the world the recognition of this narrative by the Berliner Republik.

In analyzing three distinct variations in which individuals have interacted with the DEJE since, I have examined the reaction of visitors to the monument's open invitation to participate in the recognition of its narrative and in the cultivation of memory. By examining the forms of "inappropriate behavior" demonstrated by visitors to the monument I have concluded that for many visitors the act of surrendering oneself to the monument in order to do the work of memory is not instinctual. Many individuals approach the memorial in expectation that it will dispense a critique on contemporary issues or simply teach them about the Shoah. These expectations speak to both a failure to teach and/or pursue an understanding of the Holocaust from a historical viewpoint that hinders visitors from interacting with the memorial as a place of reflection.

Through my analysis of photographic representations of the DEJE through the camera of its visitors, we can recognize that the monument's identity as artwork is under continuous reinterpretation. While this speaks to a positive trend of visitors creating memory of the monument through photography, the focus of the monument as a background to the individual's

personal narrative shows of prioritization of narratives. The choice to place the individual as the focus of a photo at the DEJE depicts a resistance to the work of reflection and memory. This decision then reduces the monument to a background in the memory of that individual's experience. It does not honor the narrative of the monument or further the goals of personal and cultural memory cultivation.

The expression of the DEJE's narrative as a tangible and transcendental through the work of the political protest group *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit* demonstrates the developing position of the DEJE in Germany's political sphere. In the erection of the Bornhagen-DEJE outside right-wing AfD member Björn Höcke's residence, the ZPS has allowed the DEJE to embody movement. The physical representation of the monument outside Berlin also references the existence of the narrative of Jewish suffering throughout Germany and gives the monument the ability to confront those who would not physically interact with it otherwise. This manifestation of the DEJE signals that the narrative of Jewish suffering is being integrated into the current political conversations in Germany, taking its rightful place in the discussion of Germany's political future.

This paper demonstrates the power of the manifestation of the Jewish narrative through the existence of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*. Through my analysis of personal and photographic behavior one can see a tendency in some visitors to ignore or misinterpret the monuments call to reflection and cultivation of memory. This is an unfortunate consequence of public interpretation, and one that can be mitigated with continued public discussions of the Shoah and educational initiatives to deepen our understanding of the Shoah outside of the DEJE. The proliferation of the Bornhagen-DEJE also shows an instance of

promising integration of the narrative of the DEJE into contemporary German politics and shows that the German people are willing to recognize the narrative that the DEJE represents.

As discussions continue to rise concerning this monuments effectiveness there will always be critics of Eisenman's attempt to memorialize the Shoah in physical space, but the existence of this debate indicates the success of the monument. It has served to continually engender discussion over the irreconcilable legacy of the Shoah and the perspective of Jewish suffering, which was the purpose of his interactive and abstract design. The public interactions with the DEJE described in this thesis indicate a gradual integration of this missing narrative into discussions of Germany's cultural and political future. While the extent and impact of this integration remains to be seen, the physical permanence of the monument ensures that the narrative of Jewish suffering will always have a tether-point from which to guide the formation of individual postmemory for generations to come.

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