How Power and Memory change within The Berlin Holocaust Memorial

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Design and Development

1

1988 Citizen-led initiative starts for the monument already sparking debate over the appropriate form of remembering
1989 Berlin wall falls and the monument acts as a Western 'correction' to the GDR remembrance interpretation of fascism
1992 Government approves the project
1994 Contest opens for the monument's design yielding 528 entries
1995 50th anniversary of the end of WWII and 40th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz
1997 Second competition was opened after extensive parliamentary debate and Serra and Eisenman's design was chosen
1998 Serra, the co-designer, drops out after extensive changes were made to the design to included more Jewish imagery and the addition of the Place of Information
1999 Parliamentary hearing was called to settle ongoing controversy
2000 An independent public foundation was created to be responsible for the monument
2003 Construction of the Monument begins

2 The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, or the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, is located in central Berlin on the old border between West and East Berlin, close to the Brandenburg Gate. The memorial designed by American-Jewish architect Peter Eisenman, has remained a contested space of interpretation, representation, and memory since its opening in 2005.

Figure 1: The monument's design consists of a 2,711 unmarked steles of various heights arranged in a grid pattern along a sloping field. The maze-like setup provides a disorienting feeling focusing on individualism and pathways.

Figure 4: Image taken during PM Trudeau's visit to Berlin in 2017 to discuss NATO. Trudeau's International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), mandated in 2021, was issued by Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, including $90.2 Million package to combat antisemitism

Experience

5 There is a general perception of the Holocaust as sacred which plays a significant role in remembrance and representation, as the aura of sanctity imposes increased considerations for moral and ethical practices surrounding the event, and how it is communicated.

"Then let the public decide just how hollow or how substantial a gesture this Memorial is, and whether any memorial can ever be more than a ritual gesture to an unredeemable past"

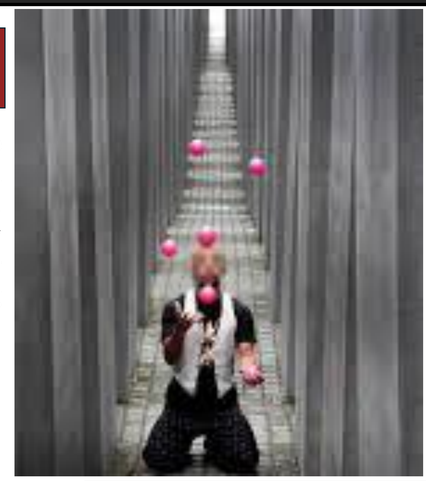

Figure 5: This image was part of project YOLOCAUST, created by Shahak Shapira. YOLOCAUST explores commemorative culture by combining selfies from the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with footage from Nazi extermination camps (not pictured). Many of the people featured in this project have since taken down their original selfies

Vergangenheitsbewältigung:
To look towards the future through reflecting the past

3

What was the purpose?
Does it address the descendants of the perpetrators, or does it honour the victims?
Should it not address all the victims of the Reich's violence?
Is it the victims of the genocide, or the Germans' loss of Jewish contributions to German culture the object of German society's grief?

Figure 6: A Star of David has been constructed out of flowers on top of one of the Stelae. This image is used at part of the Information Centre's Arts workshop where students are asked to create an art project (whether visual or literary) about their experience at the monument

Figure 2: The *Orte der Information* is a museum-like addition with no archive or location and mainly digital projections. It is located underground and consists of 4 rooms: The Room of Dimensions, The Room of Families, The Room of Names, and The Rooms of Sites

Change

4 What sets this Memorial apart is the detachment of any specific historical event or geographic location, as well as the lack of symbolism. It is constructed as an open-air, ambiguous landscape intended to guide people to an independent experience memorialization, focusing on confronting dark heritage and the present over commemorating one event. The addition of *Orte der Information* underneath counters this by providing a bounded place featuring a fixed narration of the past and cannot speak on the horrors of the present.

Figure 3: View of the sky from between the stelas

"A Place With No Meaning"

Power

Figure 7: Many Holocaust memorial in Europe have been vandalized with Pro-Palestine imagery and slogans, such as the Palestinian flag which was spray painted in front of Block der Frauen memorial located in Berlin. Memorials are essential, complex representations of community values and public memory that can unite people in times of tragedy and hardship, or prompt vocal nationalism and lethal violence, or become sites of political protests.

6 A central part of Eisenman's embedded message in the memorial is a future-oriented gaze toward creating a new society, reckoning with tragedy, ad discussing contemporary Jewish and other minority group's place and experience within Germany.

Figure 8: Individual wearing a protest shirt for Gaza at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial taken in 2018. The BHM creates space of individual memory, including the longer-term consequence s of the Holocaust.

Bibliography and Further Reading

Tough, H.P. (2024). *How Marginalization and Power are Enacted through the Memorial Landscape: The Berlin Holocaust Memorial in Relation to the Israel-Palestine Conflict* [Undergraduate Honours Thesis]. Memorial University of Newfoundland. Center of Newfoundland Studies.