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Inventing and Invoking Tradition in Holocaust Memorials

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This essay is an expanded revision of a presentation made at a symposium entitled "The Meaning of Things" held at the Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum (Smithsonian Institution) in New York City, May 18, 1996.

When ground was broken for the World War II Memorial on Veteran's Day of 2000 in Washington, D.C., a symbolic center for the nation, several speakers shared the hope that the structure about to be built would provide a sacred space that could become a backdrop for a ritual of remembrance. They hoped for the kind of ritual response that the Vietnam Memorial on the National Mall had inspired, and privately worried that the memorial would go the way of neglected sculpture for the Korean War (see Haas 1998). They hoped that the memory of a conflict in "good time" more than fifty years after the event, and thought of as "a good war," fought for a noble cause, would inspirit the memorial, indeed go beyond being symbolic to become "cultural."

In ritually breaking ground, and expressing hopes and plans for memorials, especially for wars and tragedies, speakers confront a central problem of inventing and invoking tradition for public consumption. While private ceremonies for individual deaths have prescribed customs of grief, according to ethnic and regional traditions, the process of constructing memorials for the whole meant for public display, have less predictable responses. Since the purpose of public memorialization is more common on the landscape, memorial design, particularly for wars and tragedies that many citizens want to forget, struggles to create a location as well as an aesthetic for tradition.

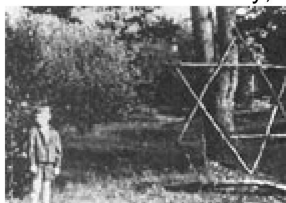
While artists and planning committees can articulate the aesthetic purposes of designed memorials, they have more difficulty predicting the ritual and cultural response, even if they try to strategize possible uses of their structures. A paradox that comes out of this thinking is the expectation, on the one hand, that the markers will be original, unique, outstanding--to name some common adjectives of praise for successful memorial art--and on the other, able to invoke tradition to offer a space that is socially memorable, spiritual, and even iconic. It is a typical wish that it serve as a location for ritual return. As such, memorialization that forces issues of inventing and invoking customs and renders markers meaningful is a test of the processes of the emergence, and indeed of the modernization, of tradition.

In this article, I focus on Holocaust memorials because objectively they intrude on the landscape with remembrance of both an event and an idea. Although the gravestone and cemetery bookshelf is abundant, historical precedents for edifices of genocide memorialization are not readily apparent.

For some they have an ethnic reference, and for others a human one. For some, the Holocaust demands remembrance, although its images call for something besides the common nation-state-municipality representations of soldiers, statesmen, and service professionals. For others, the disturbing images of the Holocaust need no reminder. For consideration of emergent traditions from a folkloristic perspective, Holocaust memorialization often has a special cultural location. Unlike the World War II memorial, Vietnam War memorial, and other "national" monuments, Holocaust memorials tend to involve more "local knowledge," since they transcend national commemoration and involve ritual grieving in and of various discrete communities and social groups (Rothman 1989; Gillis 1994).

The issue has been taken up in at least one major exhibition at the Jewish Museum accompanied by a stirring set of essays under the title *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (1994) edited by James E. Young and an insightful book *Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (1993) written by Young. His contribution has been to show the ways that major monuments such as those for the Warsaw Ghetto, Dachau Concentration Camp, and Birkenau Death Camp have been used for political ends by the societies which erected and used them. In his words, "Through this attention to the activity of memorialization, we might also remind ourselves that public memory is constructed, that understanding of events depend on memory's construction, and there are worldly consequences in the kinds of historical understanding generated by monuments" (Young 1993: 15). Young offers the thesis that memorials remember the past to serve the present, and that current moment may indeed obscure the events of history in deference to social and political needs. Holocaust memorialization suggests intentionality, because the images it raises are meant to inspire by disturbing the calm of modern surroundings.

After World War II, designing memorials at major scenes of destruction raised the expectation of creating an art with moral and political messages for a historical event to be interpreted as unique, even aberrant. Informally, concentration camp survivors at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Bergen-Belsen arranged temporary memorial towers from the debris of dismantled barracks within days of liberation (Young 1993, 48). Official memorials sanctioned by cities and nations went up in Warsaw in 1948, Berlin in 1952, Mauthausen (Austria) in 1957, Buchenwald in 1958, and Dachau in 1965. Typically created by national government boards, the memorials in this early period tended to reflect national concerns that were often at odds with the subcultural views of Jews and other persecuted groups. The often stated theme of these memorials was for "victims of Nazi [or fascist] terror." For Jews, the memorials held the danger of on the one hand, neglecting or misstating the root of their suffering and rise from survival, and on the other, signifying that they were singled out for extermination. A reluctance to memorialize the Holocaust as hero-less, detestable events could be discerned in the years after World War II. As rhetoric shifted to gaining lessons from an aberration of humanity, the possibility of shaping stone to pronounce meaning seemed more necessary (see Gottlieb 1990).



Monumental Meaning

The cultural scenes I want to discuss are not so monumental as the ones in Young's exhibition, but the processes involved will, I believe, offer views of the inspiration of meaning in artistic markers and the ways they became ritualized and traditionalized in separate cultural scenes. They are ones in which Jews organized to create their markers. The first is in the Jewish cemetery of Oswiecim, Poland, as a counterpoint to the camp of Auschwitz

less than two miles away.

It is a study of memorialization in a private, spiritual location where memorializers are distant from the site. The second is in the public location of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where Jewish memorializers conceived of a structure to engage an anesthetic community. The significance of memorializing the Holocaust for a discussion of the invention and invocation of tradition is that it is a destructive event for which construction, indeed art and design, may seem antithetical. In concept it bridges humanity, but in praxis, it can bring out conflicts between perceptions of individuals and their communities separated by time and distance.

In the past, my approach to the meaning of things has been to describe artifacts in action, to analyze them as parts of cultural scenes where actors' roles can be identified and their behavior interpreted. From these observable conditions, the workings of mind should be revealed. The perspectives, biases, and ideas that drive the ways that society and culture operate become apparent. This attention to action, the human ability to form identity and extract experience from social activity, I have labeled cultural praxis. In my book *Grasping Things* (1986), I used the double meaning of grasping as a physical and intellectual act to bring out the theme of the ways that self-knowledge derives from action. Even "things" had different levels of meaning; it had a specific physical reference and a general sense of life. When talking of the state of "things," one summarized existence, and some special symbolic things had the potential for condensing experience and conveying values in persuasive ways.

Befitting a consideration of material behavior, the kinds of things I previously considered were mostly those made for everyday use--tools, houses, foods--and in deference to my folkloristic and historical training, I tended to look for behaviors--gravestone carving, architectural decoration, picnicking--associated with historical precedent. Many of these behaviors could be construed as fitting into the sphere of "folk culture," and befitting my subtitle of "Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America," I tried to show the interplay of this sphere with a rising sphere of "mass culture."

The challenge I take up here is to think less of separate spheres consistent with the main trends of post-World-War-II folkloristic scholarship, and consider the invention of tradition as a folk process within mass culture and for public consumption (see Bronner 1998). I shift from the intellectual consequences of action to the related, but thorny issue of ways that intangible spirituality is both attained and referenced in material worlds. The markers in question are created objects meant to be inspirited and also meant to inspire reflection, although the nature of that reflection for different actors and audiences can become controversial. This matter is complicated by the tensions between public and private purposes for memorials, in addition to renewing meaning meaningful in the future for a past event.

I also focus on Holocaust memorials for a subjective reason of my personal connection to the Holocaust identity in question. In *Grasping Things*, I played the role of impartial ethnographer analyzing scenes with detachment to find meanings often outside the awareness of participants. In this essay, my perspective is gained as an insider to the process of creation. For questions of identity formation and public presentation, the subject of Holocaust memorialization became my object. Concerned for raising awareness of the Holocaust as my object through study as well as advocacy for remembrance, I found myself questioning the processes of memorialization. The "reflexive position" I assumed, and more scholars are forced to consider as participants in the culture they seek to explain, according to anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff, takes "into account our role in our own productions" and results in subject and object fusing (Meyerhoff

1992).

I grew up with the Holocaust as a child of Polish-Jewish survivors of ghettoes and concentration camps, and I listened to the special meanings derived from our family homeplace once called Auschwitz. There were stories, but no things. It was a self-knowledge essentially devoid of shrines or markers, until redoubled efforts in the last two decades created a landscape of memorials forcing a discourse on meaning in design. It was an identity strained by distance between several "homelands"--Poland, Israel, and the United States--and the issue of where memorialization, and indeed inspiration, is appropriate and for whom. If distance caused a strain on establishing an agreed-upon collective meaning to events of a world away, it also enhanced the identity by allowing a mystification of reality (see Gruber 1994).

Remembering Jews in Oswiecim, also Known as Auschwitz

The Jewish community in Oswiecim numbered about 5,000 persons before World War II and constituted 40 percent of the town's population. Most of the population were engaged in trades and constituted an underclass of the region. Occupying Nazis pressed Jews into forced labor, including working on what would later become the death camp across the Sola River. In 1941, the Jews were removed to Bedzin and Sosnowice, and from there to concentration camps. After the war, the community was not re-established. All but one of the town's religious structures had been destroyed, and few of the town's Jewish residents survived the war. Most of the residents went to the United States and Israel, although some remained isolated in the Soviet Union for many years.

My father's experience was not atypical. Liberated from the camp of Gross Rosen at the age of 21, he went back to Oswiecim to find relatives. He found that his parents were gone, his house occupied. He heard that two of his nine siblings were alive and they decided together to get away from the Soviet zone. They went to Weiden in Germany, because it was the first outpost they found occupied by Americans. He met my mother there and two weeks later they were married. With the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, he moved his family to Israel. His sister went with her husband to the United States, while his brother, the oldest of the family, remained in Germany. I was born in Israel in 1954; my sister was born in Germany in 1946.

With the discovery of another living brother in the Soviet Union in 1957, the family decided to unite together in the United States. Although he knew no English and was concerned about finding employment, my father took my sister and me to America. He did not affiliate with the Oswiecim Society in Israel because it was dominated by the pious segment of the community, which included a strong Bobover Hasidic influence. In addition to family help in America, however, he was aided by a working-class *landsmanschaft*, or "hometown association" from the Oswiecim area, the mutual-aid society of the Workmen's Circle, and concentration camp survivors he remembered from Gross Rosen. As a survivor, he did not feel great sympathy from American Jews, or the American public in general, until late in his life. He was not one for publicly relating his Holocaust experience, although during the 1990s he began to participate in ceremonies for Yom Hashoah, the holiday invented for Holocaust commemoration after Passover.

Plans in Israel for constructing memorials for the Oswiecim Jewish community did not emerge until the 1970s when the opening of Yad Vashem's Hall of Remembrance in Jerusalem inspired memorial activities for destroyed communities of Europe. Following the construction of the museum

at Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem, the hall provided an epilogue to the suffering in the earlier drama of Europe. It pointed to Israel as the ultimate place of ingathering in keeping with Biblical prophecy. It also held a social message of Jews forming community for themselves rather than wandering in the world and enduring pain.

In keeping with this theme, the Oswiecim Society formed in Israel conceived of a memorial honoring the past in Tel-Aviv Cemetery and the future in a newly planted forest near Jerusalem. The memorial in the cemetery contained human ashes brought from Auschwitz. On the stone an ark with representations of a flame topped carvings of Torah scrolls. On the plot, six pillars holding lit flames, one each for a million Jews destroyed, was surrounded by barbed wire. Some dispute arose over whether to use the Polish, Yiddish, or German names of the town. Religious leaders wanted to use the Yiddish name of Oshpitzin, while younger members wanted the German name of Auschwitz on the stone to draw attention of visitors to the site. Using Yiddish would establish continuities from the Jewish life of eastern Europe, whereas German projected a historical discontinuity. Finally, the designers decided that the Polish name of Oswiecim written in Hebrew letters should be prominent with Auschwitz, also in Hebrew letters, in small type surrounded by parentheses. Ceremonies featuring prominent rabbis kindling each flame established the site as sacred in accordance with traditional burial practice. The ceremony became an unveiling usually meant for an individual a year after he or she dies. It became generalized for all the townspeople of Oswiecim who did not survive the war. The site became a sacred material presence mainly for survivors to mourn their parents before Rosh Hashanah. At other times, the memorial is rarely visited.

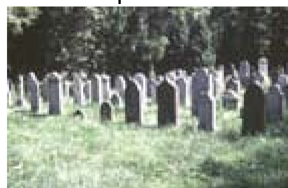
Along with many other societies, the Oswiecim community in Israel sponsored a section of the Martyrs Forest in the Judean Hills outside Jerusalem (Yaar Hakedoshim) and placed a plaque in the chamber of the Holocaust (Martef Hashoa) on Mount Zion. The forest was intended "as a living memorial" reinforcing the connection of land and state in Israel. The memorial related to Poland, however, in the sense that the forested landscape that was being reproduced was essentially a Polish one, a realization that became painfully clear in 1995 when thousands of acres burned in the hot desert climate of Israel. The tree became an object of memory that signaled growth of a new society out of Polish roots. The ceremony involved was one of planting, on TuB'shvat, or to commemorate *simchas*, celebratory rites of passage such as a birth, bar mitzvah, and marriage. With no divisions between other sections of the forest sponsored by other communities, the overall sense is of a united whole. It was not a site to be visited as much as a symbol of the return to and prosperity within the original Jewish homeland.

Although many of the former residents of Oswiecim who settled in America followed these activities by purchasing a memorial book privately published in Israel in 1977, few had attended ceremonies for the events (Wolnerman, et al 1977). An Oswiecim *landsmanschaft* did not form in America, although informal gatherings formed in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, and New York. Despite the rise of Auschwitz as a symbol of the Holocaust generally, the story of the town escaped public notice. Having a community attached to the nearby death camp might suggest a normality and stability that did not fit into the consciousness of the Holocaust as an aberrant event. For many writers on the Holocaust, camps did not belong to towns; they were treated as terror zones outside any moral community set historically in place (see Langer 1977; Rosenfeld 1980).

Because of memories of the Holocaust, most survivors of Oswiecim expressed little interest in returning to the town or supporting efforts to reconstruct Jewish sites. There were exceptions, who would appeal to the Jewish tradition of honoring the graves of family members. Jacob Hennenberg, living in Cleveland, Ohio, started collecting historical material on artifacts and photographs from his hometown of Oswiecim, and he returned frequently to the town. But into his seventies, he sought to take surviving stones of his grandfather from the cemetery to the United States to continue his tradition of saying a memorial prayer over the family grave. Two prominent families of Oswiecim--the Haberfelds and the Scharfs--who had settled in the United States and Canada, respectively, took significant interest in retaining Jewish memory in the town.

Little remained to save. The surviving religious structure had become a

carpet factory. The cemetery had been destroyed although stones remained scattered over the site. Some retired former residents who took trips to view the town once more came back with distressed reports of the cemetery's state. Anticipation of the visit of Pope John Paul II



in 1979 to Auschwitz and a possible tour of the town initiated restoration activity in the cemetery. Stones once piled in one section were stood up in rows. The Haberfelds, now living in California, arranged to have a memorial built from portions of gravestones that could not stand by themselves.They designed a structure in the stepped shape of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and contracted Polish laborers to build the monument. The stepped shape is reminiscent of monuments made of broken tombstones in cemeteries of Siedlce and Sandomierz, Poland (Young 1993, 195, 198).

The Oswiecim memorial now stands in the center of the Oswiecim cemetery, although few visitors view it. The memorial is not visible to Poles from the street because it is hidden behind walls erected by the town to protect the cemetery from vandals. At the bottom of the memorial is a plaque honoring Rudolf Haberfeld, for whom no stone could be found. Deceased in 1921, Rudolf had been president of the Oswiecim Jewish community. Mieczyslaw Kapala, whose father had worked for Jews, is caretaker for the cemetery and was not aware of the religious symbolism of the memorial. For him, it was a sign of family interest--since the name Haberfeld was widely known because of its bottling of spirits.

Another new structure, this one built by the Scharfs, went up in the Oswiecim cemetery with the help of the Poles. Kapala called it a family shrine, a mausoleum. The structure took the form of buildings usually reserved for Tzadikkim--righteous, and even miracle-working, rabbis among the Hasidim. It was more than a shrine, however. Placed toward a secluded corner of the cemetery, the structure erected by the Scharfs provided a place to leave messages to the dead who presumably dwelled near the cemetery. For the Scharfs, the interior made it sacred, and its form reminded Oswiecim residents who came back to visit of a continued presence.

For Jacob Hennenberg from Oswiecim, the need to mourn a material presence resulted in his taking his grandfather's stone out of the cemetery to New Jersey where it was consecrated by a rabbi. To those who question the significance of the stone so far from its original site, he tells a story of looking for his grandfather's grave. Giving up the task, he said the mourner's prayer

near the pile of stones when a ray of light shone on a stone and by his account, reflected into his eyes. He went to it and found his grandfather's inscription. This oft-repeated motif of discovery and revelation in Holocaust narrative reinforces the homeland as sacred ground meant to be left intangible, while the tangible signs of growth should thrive in a new land.

Closer to the Auschwitz camp, controversy erupted through the 1980s and 1990s over the landscape of death. Polish plans to develop a commercial strip close to the camp to serve tourists raised protests from Jewish groups that insisted on respecting the area as sacred ground. It was inconceivable for many observers in the 1990s that a mini-mall with its modern exploitative taint of consumer culture should be built near the Auschwitz camp, as much as a Jewish memorial would be built in the town of Oswiecim. Indeed, until recently the town of Oswiecim hardly confessed any relation to the Holocaust in memorials or exhibits. Yet changes in Polish governmental policies and a renewed effort by some aging survivors, ironically not connected to Oswiecim, resulted in one public overture to Oswiecim's Jews. In March 1998, the Polish government following a new restitution law gave to a three-year-old organization calling itself the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation a house and synagogue building. It was the first communal property ever given back by the government to the Jewish community under the law. Thus Auschwitz again as the symbolic center of the Holocaust gained notoriety as the first expression of post-Communist Polish redemption. Plans for the buildings included restoration and creation of a Jewish museum and cafeteria to serve visitors to Auschwitz. With only one remaining Jew in Oswiecim, the synagogue's oversight was given to the nearby Jewish community of Bielsko-Biala. The headline announcing the transfer in *The Jewish Week* made sure to proclaim the ritual close to collective memory by blaring, "At Last, Kaddish in Auschwitz" (Greenberg 1998).

The pattern of memorials for Oswiecim essentially provided settings and events for mourning the dead by the saying of "Kaddish" at gravesites in keeping with Jewish religious tradition. In the United States, survivors of Oswiecim typically light memorial candles at home for their deceased relatives, and participate in ceremonies that reflect on Holocaust victims generally, rather than for specific communities. At a gathering of Jews from Oswiecim in Los Angeles, I innocently asked about any efforts to create a more public memorial to specifically recognize the town's Jewish past. Their heated response made it clear that memorialization had followed their memory of their pre-war experience as a minority out of public culture. Holocaust memorialization for them was divided into its ethnic components, and the Jewish part was reserved for the private realm of the Jewish community. This led to a discussion of surprise concerning the boom in public Holocaust memorials in America. When I mentioned that I had been in Poland and seen many new public memorials to the Holocaust, I heard the response that the those memorials were Polish. Public memorials in America pleased, indeed surprised them, and at the same time, disturbed them.

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Memorializing the Holocaust in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

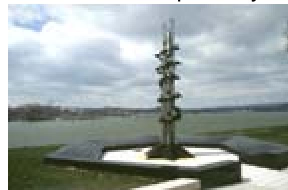
The experience with Oswiecim memorialization was fresh in my mind when I was called by the Jewish Community Center of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1992 to help with something of a social problem. In light of publicity given to the U.S. Holocaust Museum, a group of survivors that had lived for many years in Harrisburg pressed for a local memorial. Specifically, three survivors, all who had experience in public life, hatched the project to build a conspicuous memorial and museum to the Holocaust by the Jewish Community Center. The two oldest of the group had vivid memories of Auschwitz and were frequently called to talk to area students. The youngest was involved politically in the city. I was called because I seemed reasonable to the Community Center board; while board members were careful to honor the survivors, they generally found them unreasonably grand in their request. New resources for the community were scarce and the board had plans underway to renovate the Center. The rabbis in the city appeared cool to the project and their education initiatives were oriented toward Israel.

I soon realized the difficult situation I had agreed to. Board members appealed to my professional sense by making appointments and addressing me as Dr. Bronner, while survivors called me on the phone and hailed me as "Shimele," dimunitive, intimate form of my name in Yiddish, ordinarily used in discourse between a parent and child. I organized a committee with representation from the survivors and other segments of the Jewish community. The committee generated discussion of the meaning--its sense of being-- that the memorial held. For the survivors, the project legitimized their experience in the community. Yet it became clear that the group was not unified. One prominent survivor wanted to memorialize the Holocaust with educational activities, but she was overruled with the opinion that the memory of the event required a physical thing to spark remembrance. An orthodox rabbi hoped for an object of prayer, while younger members of the committee insisted on a public structure that spoke to the human lessons of the Holocaust beyond the impact on Jews. Representatives of the Yeshivah hoped for a museum or educational program aimed at youth. The survivors steered the committee toward a focus on the memorial idea to perpetuate their presence in Harrisburg as much as to educate about the Holocaust. The Center announced a competition for designs with a budget limit of $100,000.

The choice came down to a stark representation of concentration camp pillars and a more abstract design of silver shafts surrounded by barbed wire. The group was divided. The survivors and rabbi preferred the harshness of the pillars while younger members of the committee liked the abstraction of the Holocaust in the second design. The survivors wanted a place to mourn death and a lost world, while others hoped for a sign of life and progress. As chair of the group, I suggested alterations of the second design to include historical information and the remembrance theme on the

black stones surrounding the pillar. To compensate for this extra material, cascading water and eternal light dropped out to bring the project under budget. The idea narrowly passed and we had a design with multiple meanings. The artist's explanation of the sculpture's meaning failed to make an impression. In his words, "The element of 'Hope' is conveyed in the manner in which the stainless steel core reaches above the strangle hold of the Nazi 'snake.' It continues to grow and shows the redemptive hopes and the rebirth of the Jewish people through the establishment of the State of Israel, and the maintenance of 'Jewish Identity' and Jewish survival in the diaspora." To the contrary, the design seemed widely acceptable because of its lack of direct reference to Israel or Diaspora.

When the committee made inquiries to the city about a location for the monument, the response was to move the structure closer to downtown along the Susquehanna River where other memorials to fire fighters and war veterans stood. The mayor offered his support to the project as part of enhancing the attractiveness of the river view. He publicly opined, "The need for this memorial could not have been fulfilled were it placed at the Jewish Community Center or some other more private place. This is a memorial that must belong to all, should be seen by all, should be understood by all. From this park, we can see upon a river, a river that has been a constant thread, a common link, from generation to generation, from one era to the next." His statement raised additional discussion within the Jewish community about the public component of the project.



The Board became more enthusiastic about a project that would make the community more visible within the city. The survivors weren't so sure, and they had something to point to when hearings at City Hall raised objections that spilled over into the letters to the editor of the city daily. Gay rights advocates protested that the memorial left out persecution of homosexuals, and some African-American spokespersons used the occasion to complain of the lack of historic markers honoring African Americans in the city. In response, designers of the memorial shifted the justification for the memorial to honoring survivors of the Holocaust who had settled in the city, much as the nearby war memorials honored soldiers from Harrisburg. The wording also changed to recognize that Jews were the "primary" victims and the intent of the memorial was to warn against "racism and prejudice" wherever it is found. At that point, Kurt Moses, the leader of the survivors group called for a reconsideration of Jewish Community Center support for the memorial, but the president of the Community Center continued to press for the memorial as a civic project. The survivors complained to me that they had lost control not just of the location of the memorial, but the representation of their experience.

A serious threat to construction of the memorial occurred when environmentalists questioned whether more memorials belonged on the riverside. They opposed the project in Council, complaining that the river, a natural wonder, was becoming obstructed by too many memorials. The natural space in their view had become industrialized by memorials rather than factories. The City Council agreed to halt permits for memorials after the Holocaust structure was completed. Publicly relieved that the city supported the project, representatives of the memorial project privately fretted about undertones of anti-Semitism in opposition to the project.

A site was eventually prepared north of existing memorials, a location that placed it closest to city synagogues and away from the city center. The rabbis became more involved as plans were made for the groundbreaking. "A Song for Ascents," Psalm 121, became the theme for the event and the closing was a cantor's rendition of "God Bless America." The keynote speech was given by the Mayor. While survivors were given seats of honor toward the front, they were not accorded time at the podium. After the event, Kurt Moses complained to the Holocaust Education Committee about the management of the program, especially when press releases issued for the event did not recognize the survivors' involvement in the original concept of the memorial. As the structure came closer to completion, survivors hoped to give the site a sense of the sacred and offer themselves a moment to be heard. The Holocaust Education Committee arranged for a more elaborate ceremony to consecrate the structure. Two rabbis were given time to give remarks, followed by a statement from Kurt Moses. The survivors then stepped en masse to the sculpture to unveil it much as one would uncover a gravestone in Jewish tradition. The ceremony closed with a cantor's rendition of "El Molay Rahamim" (God Full of Mercy).

The site has since only been used for an annual ceremony sponsored by the Jewish community on Yom Hashoah, a Jewish day of remembrance for the Holocaust in April. It attracts little notice in the press and has not become a center for reflection its designers had hoped for. It nonetheless turns a few head from passersby in any day, more so from my observation than nearby statues for firefighters and soldiers. Park officials often have to chase skateboarders from the site, and other passersby use its seats to view the river. Its significance has been greatest to the survivors who gained recognition for their participation in their adopted community. Many in the survivors group still felt dissatisfaction with the memorial standing away from the Jewish community, and partly in response, Kurt Moses helped organize an annual Kristalnacht commemoration by the survivor group in November featuring the lighting of candles at the Jewish Community Center.

Memorials to the Holocaust have become especially symbolic of resolving the meaning of survival from guilt to triumph, from the unfathomable to the comprehensible. It is part of the reason that many Holocaust memorials offer more resistance to our senses than other monuments in the landscape of remembrance. It is also a reason why designing the meanings to be imparted presents more of a challenge for viewers and creators; there seem to be few givens beyond some recurrent motifs of barbed wire and Jerusalem stone.

Ritualizing and Traditionalizing Memorials

The appeal to sacred tradition in Oswiecim's graveyard memorial debatably created a collective, if private, understanding of its meaning, although its distance created a problem of alienation from the action of mourning centered on a site. The memorial in Harrisburg lacked this communal aspect, but it provided a backdrop for occasional performance of identity in a multiethnic city. Indeed, Harrisburg's memorial needed signs to inform what it was about; it needed confirmation of its Holocaust reference. Oswiecim's did not; it relied on memory of response to a long series of past tragedies. Harrisburg's reinforced the singularity of an event in organizing the future. In fact, it took on more organizational ways of creating the object, whereas Oswiecim's was more communal, and in many cases personalized. The tales of these two cities, and their memorials, are sketches of the varieties of Holocaust landscapes that have emerged with increasing frequency during the 1990s.

Why so many Holocaust memorials during the 1990s? The period is the great decade of memorials for the events of World War II. With the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, a milestone has been passed that prompted many institutions to reflect on history. In the wake of Vietnam, and the rise of human rights rhetoric, a new sensitivity within America is evident in memorialization that recognizes victims. The thinning of Holocaust survivor ranks added an emotional element to the proceedings. The memorials were their preview of their own funerals and markers that their struggle to overcome adversity and come to the United State mattered. Many of the memorials reflect less on the past than the announcement of triumph over history. The future-directed spires and upward reaching hands are among the most common symbols of public vindication, but I suspect that efforts will increasingly turn from markers to museums.

The realization of multiple, contested meanings of the monuments for the survivors, American-born Jews, environmentalists, homosexuals, and politicians has caused some shift from the emphasis of memorialization to museums and education programs that leave less of the lessons open to interpretation. One strongly worded editorial in the *New Jersey Standard* in 1998 called memorials and museums the "latest Jewish Battlegrounds." It asked whether the "craze" toward memorialization "isn't . . . a bit of idol worship with big-giver egomania thrown in for good measure?" (Tobin 1998, 49) It argued, "Rather than looking to monuments or statues to commemorate the Holocaust or to celebrate our community history, let us instead invest in our children and their education." If we must choose--as I fear we must--between schools and museums, then let the choice be for Jewish education." (Tobin 1998, 49)

The monument-building will continue while a need is felt to tangibly provide an inspiring edifice to bridge the distance between the socially troubled present and hidden atrocious past, to lay to rest through ritual and tradition the memory of many ancestors not given burial, and to belatedly announce the arrival and triumph of survivors. Moving from private to public purpose, traditionalizing of memorials has widened the meaning of Holocaust markers for a late-twentieth-century social vision. During the 1990s, the Holocaust memorials have been instrumental in bringing out before the public the wider discourse of human rights and ethnic pluralism set against the integrity of nation-states. Harrisburg's memorial had this meaning ascribed to it, but it arguably was not successful in having this message conveyed, maybe because the public traditions surrounding it were not convincing. The invention of Oswiecim's memorial invoked more continuity with the historical precedent of Jewish tradition, but the loss of community made it inaccessible as a ritual location.

As types of parables, objects made and used are not meant to be understood by all. The morals of the objects may come from connection to other objects and persons, and its perceived location in tradition. The marker is artificial, fictional and true like the parable, and equally designed to persuade and hold emotional as well as practical meaning. It is formed from customary modes of life we may analyze and compare as praxis. It has a presence that causes response and resistance. It announces its meaning in the ways that people act toward it and the manner in which it is performed, traditionalized, and ritualized. The degree of influence people bring to object or that objects hold over people in these scenes may be less the issue than the process of transformation that turns ideas into icons.

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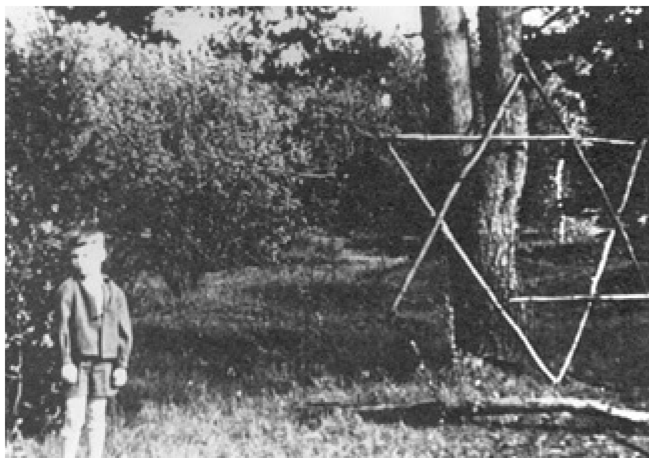
A homemade, wooden Star of David nailed to a tree 100 meters from a mass grave in the Rumbuli Forest, Latvia



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From The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History, edited by James Young, New York: Jewish Museum, 1994, p. 28

Oswiecim Memorial in Tel-Aviv Cemetery

(Photo From Oswiecim Memorial Book)

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Oswiecim Memorial in Martyrs Forest near Jerusalem, Israel

(Oswiecim Memorial Book [Sefer Oshpitizin])

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Remains of Jewish Cemetery, Oswiecim, Poland, after World War II

(From Oswiecim Memorial Book [Sefer Oshpitizin])

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Memorial erected by the Haberfeld Family, Jewish Cemetery, Oswiecim, Poland

(Photo by Simon Bronner, 1994)

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Memorial erected by the Haberfeld Family, Jewish Cemetery, Oswiecim, Poland (Detail)

(Photo by Simon Bronner, 1994)

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Ceremony for Transplanting Hennenberg Stone from Oswiecim to America, Clifton, New Jersey

(photo courtesy of Jacob Hennenberg)

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Portion of Text from Harrisburg Holocaust Memorial

(Photo by Simon Bronner, 1996)

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Spires of Harrisburg Holocaust Memorial

(Photo by Simon Bronner, 1996)

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Harrisburg Holocaust Memorial

Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) Holocaust Memorial, designed by David Ascalon, erected 1994

(Photo by Simon Bronner, 1996)

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Kurt Moses, Leader of Harrisburg Survivors Group, Speaking at Unveiling Ceremony for the Harrisburg Holocaust Memorial, July 17, 1994

(Photo by Simon Bronner, 1994)

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Bibliography

- *Inventing and Invoking Tradition in Holocaust Memorials (article)*