

discussions of the Holocaust did take place during this period, but within limited circles. These postwar Holocaust representations may not have commanded widespread popular attention, like their successors a generation later, but it simply is not accurate to assert that the Holocaust was not discussed in the 1950s.⁴

To investigate this vital question of the changing audiences for Holocaust representations, this chapter examines one early representation intended for a limited audience: the memory books known in Yiddish as *yizker-bikher* (yizkor books). Published in the years after the Holocaust by and for Jews from specific communities, yizkor books were intended to memorialize those who had perished in mass graves and gas chambers. The very existence of yizkor books reveals that intense, public discussion of the Holocaust did indeed take place in the postwar period, and the books themselves show how that discussion concerned itself not only with the latest, grim chapter of Jewish history, but with the longer history of Jews in Eastern Europe. But persistent anti-Semitism and a realigned postwar political climate meant that the audiences for this particular kind of Holocaust representation stayed small. Not everyone wanted to hear this discussion, and because it took place in Yiddish or Hebrew, many people could not even understand it. Yet it was an important discussion, because it emphasized the point that to understand the Holocaust's impact, we must understand its place within broader arcs of Jewish history.

The myth of silence and the question of audience

Before examining how yizkor books challenge the myth of silence, it is useful to revisit the postwar political context that produced this myth, even as it shaped—and perhaps muted—the Holocaust representations that did appear at the time. The argument that generally explains postwar silence begins in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when the atrocities that we now consider the Holocaust were seen not as a discrete genocide, but rather as one particularly gruesome aspect of wartime violence that affected people of many nations and ethnicities. Radical changes in postwar geopolitics also made it taboo to discuss the specifics of Jewish suffering with non-Jewish audiences. During World War II, the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union shared a common enemy in Nazi Germany. However, after a capitalist West Germany and socialist East Germany emerged from the ruins of their defeated nation, new fault lines emerged, with the Americans and their NATO allies on one side and the Soviet Union and, eventually, the Warsaw

Pact nations as their enemies on the other. During the ensuing Cold War, a period of intense political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, downplaying German crimes in the interest of buttressing support for these new nations became politically expedient on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the political line between Western and Eastern Europe. West Germany was a particularly important ally for Americans and other Western Europeans, which made it less than desirable to criticize their past actions. Meanwhile, the Soviets and East Germans cynically—and inaccurately—claimed that, as communists, they too were victims of Nazi Germany, and that West Germany, not East Germany, thus bore the entire burden of German guilt.⁵ At the same time, the Soviets and other Eastern European States maintained anti-Semitic policies and denounced Jews as anti-Soviet and pro-Zionist, making it politically unwise for Jews to draw attention to themselves by talking openly to non-Jews about their suffering—to say nothing of their rage or desire for vengeance.

Another argument about the myth of silence suggests that, across national contexts, Jews had good reasons to self-censor. In Europe, the United States, Israel, and elsewhere, many Holocaust survivors wanted only to rebuild their shattered lives and purposefully repressed the horrors of the recent past. But politics also conditioned the behavior of Holocaust survivors and other Jews. First in Jewish Palestine and then in the newly created State of Israel, the image of the Holocaust survivor was, in one scholar's phrasing, "hardly complimentary because Israeli society emphasized 'heroism and resistance,' and suppressed narratives of vulnerability and victimization."⁶ Zionist caricatures represented Holocaust survivors as Yiddish-speaking, overly intellectual, indecisive, weak Jews who had for centuries allowed themselves to be victimized by gentile majorities in Europe and elsewhere.⁷ They represented the opposite of the Zionist ideal and their experience of destruction, coupled with their apparent failure to resist, was downplayed in favor of stories of Jewish heroism.

In postwar America, attitudes were gradually liberalizing, but Jews were often still associated with the evils of unwelcome immigration and radical communism. In the politically conservative early 1950s, the media attention devoted to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, American Jewish communists tried, convicted, and executed for passing nuclear secrets to the Soviets, only reinforced the stereotype of the Jewish Bolshevik. Before the Civil Rights movement, when American universities and professions still had Jewish quotas, such negative publicity only reminded Jews that it was in their interest to downplay their religious and ethnic identity by assimilating, playing up their status as Americans, and limiting their discussions of the Holocaust in mixed audiences.

Although these arguments about Cold War politics and postwar Jewish self-images help to explain the relative absence of Holocaust representations

during this period, the existence of a wide range of cultural artifacts made exclusively by and for Jews during these same years cautions us against totalizing accounts of silence and self-censorship. In the succinct phrasing of historian Mark L. Smith, "The claim that Holocaust survivors were largely silent during the early postwar years neglects the internal culture of the Yiddish-speaking survivors."⁸ The key word here is "internal." Around the world, Jews discussed and represented the Holocaust, but not necessarily in ways that non-Jews could easily access. Historian Laura Jokusch has written of the early efforts of Holocaust survivors "to chronicle, witness, and testify."⁹ By assembling materials while memories were fresh, these efforts helped to establish important historical archives. In the displaced persons camps that housed Holocaust survivors immediately after the war, former concentration camp inmates organized theatrical performances that addressed their wartime experiences.¹⁰ In texts that literary scholars would later describe as examples of *khurbn literatur* (Holocaust literature), writers such as Abraham Sutzkever and Mordecai Strigler explicitly addressed the fates of Jews during the war, but in Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jews.¹¹ Along similar lines, Hasia R. Diner has argued that American Jews with varying personal connections to the Holocaust publicly commemorated and discussed it in a wide range of forms, including bulletins, magazines, newsletters, sermons, concerts, speeches, radio programs, and songbooks.¹² These postwar Holocaust representations are united by the fact that they were specifically created by and for Jews. Written in Jewish languages or presupposing insider knowledge of key aspects of Jewish history, religion, and culture, these representations did not appeal to mass audiences of gentiles, nor were they meant to.

Yizker-bikher: By and for Jews

Yizker-bikher (the plural form of *yizker-bukh*, also spelled *yizker-bukh*) are memorial books that commemorate towns and regions whose Jewish communities were destroyed during the Holocaust. The word "yizkor" ("remember" in Hebrew) is the first word of a prayer for the dead that Jews recite in synagogue four times a year. In their very name, yizkor books reference Jewish religious practice, suggesting a limited audience. Post-World War II yizkor books belong to a significantly older tradition of Jewish memorial texts that commemorate significant calamities in Jewish history. The first known yizkor book appeared in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1296, to memorialize Jews killed in the region over the previous 200 years, beginning with those murdered by Crusaders en route to Jerusalem in 1096.¹³ It served the practical function of supplying Jewish mourners with specific names to include in their prayers. Yizkor books appeared after subsequent catastrophes, but the genre

truly came into its own after World War II, when the unprecedented scale of the slaughter of Jews gave rise to hundreds of new titles.

These Holocaust memory books generally appeared under the auspices of *landsmanshafn*, mutual aid societies for immigrant Jews from the same hometowns in Central and Eastern Europe. Many *landsmanshafn* formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to help new immigrants get their bearings after arrival in the United States, Palestine, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Cuba, Brazil, and elsewhere. The resources available to individual *landsmanshafn* varied, depending on the economic situation of their members. The production values, size and scope, press runs, and professionalism of their yizkor books varied accordingly, from amateur paper pamphlets published in displaced persons camps to deluxe, multi-volume editions edited by professional historians and published decades after the Holocaust.¹⁴ Some volumes focus on individual small towns, while others cover entire regions or even countries. Such variations in form and content have made it difficult to establish either the limits of the genre or the exact number of yizkor books in existence. Using a broad definition, Yad Vashem classifies 1,421 titles in its collection as yizkor books. More conservative estimates suggest 700–800.¹⁵ Individual titles were rarely published in more than a few hundred copies, given the limited size of their intended audiences.

Yizkor books were intended to spur memory and to provide a sort of textual gravestone for those who perished in mass graves and gas chambers.¹⁶ Their necrologies (lists of deceased individuals to be remembered) suggest close familial or communal relationships between readers and the dead. The titles of many yizkor books feature the word *sefer* (tome), a word used by Orthodox Jews only in reference to books related to Torah study, which reinforces their specific grounding in Jewish religion and culture. Meanwhile, their contents embody the specific community they reference: the core materials of a yizkor book include a history of the town's Jewish community, essays on its prewar politics, biographic sketches of its residents, Holocaust testimonies, discussion of survivors' postwar lives, and, at the end, memorial dedications and a necrology.¹⁷ Photographs, drawings, maps, and other visual elements further personalize the books, anchoring them to specific people and places, sometimes to the point of evoking a photo album or yearbook. Their readers were those most directly impacted by the Holocaust: survivors and the families of victims, known in Hebrew as the *she'erit hapletah* (surviving remnant).

The Yizker-bukh Khelm

While no single work exemplifies the yizkor book genre, the memory book for Chelm, Poland (Polish: Chelm, Yiddish: Khelm) is fairly typical of mid-1950s

Yizkor books. A detailed examination of the contents of the *Yizker-bukh Khelm* can provide us with a richer understanding of this particular kind of Holocaust representation as well as how Jewish communities talked about the Holocaust in the first decade after the war.¹⁸ In 1939, Chelm was a *shtetl* (market town), with 18,000 Jews making up approximately 60 percent of its total population. Today, no Jews live in Chelm. The destruction of Chelm's Jewish community began early in World War II. On December 1, 1939, the Germans trucked hundreds of Jews to nearby Hlubieszów where they were forced onto a death march to the Soviet border. In October 1940, a ghetto was established for the remaining Jews, and in late 1941, it was sealed. Throughout 1942 and early 1943, the Germans deported waves of Chelm's Jews to death camps, usually Sobibor and Majdanek, virtually eradicating the population. About 200 Chelm Jews survived the Holocaust. Two yizkor books have been published to commemorate the town's once thriving Jewish community. In 1954, the Yiddish-language *Yizker-bukh Khelm* (translated within the book itself as *Commemoration Book Chelm*) appeared under the auspices of the Chelemer Landsmanschaft Society of Johannesburg, South Africa. In 1981, the Chelm Society in Israel and the U.S. published the Hebrew-language *Sefer ha-zikaron le-kehilat Chelm*.

The *Yizker-bukh Khelm* totals over 750 pages, a notable but not unprecedented length. It is divided into six sections: (1) History of the Jews in Chelm; (2) Men of Fame, Personalities, Types, and Characters; (3) Memoirs and Notes; (4) Destruction of Chelm; (5) *Chelemer landsmanshaftn*; and (6) Yizkor (the necrology). Strikingly, the book does not discuss the town's fate during the Holocaust until page 505. Even though the Holocaust motivates its very existence, the *Yizker-bukh Khelm* is not exclusively fixated on death and destruction. To the contrary, it turns to the Holocaust only after fully chronicling local history and life. Its structure implicitly stresses that there is much more to Jewish history than the Holocaust. Focusing solely on Jewish death, as so often happened in the years after World War II, ignores the long, complex, and irreducible history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

To reinforce this point, the first section of the *Yizker-bukh Khelm* provides a diverse account of the town's prewar life, including its political parties and youth groups, library and theater, local artists and writers, and significance in Yiddish literature. The various contributions paint a rich and frequently nostalgic portrait of a nearly 600-year-old community. With a proud tone of civic boosterism, the preface emphasizes Chelm's history as a center for Torah study and adds, "In the field of Jewish industry, commerce and handicraft, as well as in the world of culture, Chelm played its great part."¹⁹ Again emphasizing the town's significance, an essay entitled "The Myth of Chelm in Jewish Literature" considers the town's mythic status in Jewish folklore as a community of loveable fools. In the "Chelm stories" of Yiddish literature, the *chelemer khakhomim* (wise men of Chelm) perform absurd but humorous

actions like trying to capture moonlight in buckets or push two mountains further apart to create more room. Additional essays create a rich mosaic of political diversity within Chelm's Jewish community, describing the roles of Jewish and Zionist political parties and youth groups. In the "Memoirs and Notes" section, the first-person reminiscences of former Chelm residents exemplify how yizkor books smooth over differences and produce positive memories. Contributions such as Faivel's Zygielbojm's "Chelm as I Remember it" and Rivka Szojts's "Jews of My Town" fondly recount the town's celebrity status in Jewish literature even as they angrily lament episodes of anti-Semitism by the town's Polish residents.

The sketches of local personalities in the section "Men of Fame, Personalities, Types and Characters" complement these accounts of the town's social groups by focusing on individuals. Like a school yearbook, these stories, along with the personal memories and poems in "Memoirs and Notes," are meaningful to former Chelm residents and their families, but of limited interest to others. Short narrative sketches and captioned photographs commemorate individuals now obscure. Yet the original readers might very well have remembered neighbors such as Berl Askrad, "a well-known person in Chelm, known as an active communal worker who was represented in the most important communal organizations in Chelm. He was the synagogue warden of the *kehile* [religious governing body], councilman and alderman in the Chelm city council and was managing director of the Jewish public school."²⁰ These short biographical sketches disproportionately focus on men but do mention important local women, including Dora Dubkowska, a famous singer [...] distinguished by her beautiful lyrical voice"²¹ and Dr. Leah Fryd, "a gifted and extraordinarily capable woman," who provided medical care to Chelm's poor and indigent and "acquired a very good reputation in Chelm."²² In his 1955 review of the *Yizker-bukh Khelm*, historian Jacob Shatzky devalued the value of these sketches, noting that "all biographies are written in a bombastic style and contain errors." Yet Shatzky's subsequent comment is telling: "there is a lot of reverence in this style of writing but not much concrete biography."²³ Although he intended this comment as a criticism, Shatzky inadvertently emphasized the important therapeutic and memorial functions of yizkor books for their first readers. They helped survivors and victims cope with the destruction of their hometowns and put a generally positive spin on local history.

A distinguishing characteristic of yizkor books is their emotionally fraught tone. The *Yizker-bukh Khelm* includes not only dispassionate, documentary essays, but also contemplative, nostalgic, angry, and even vengeful language. Such mixed emotional language is unsurprising, given the book's collective authorship and its appearance not fifteen years after the annihilation of their community. One author, for example, writes angrily of a Jewish collaborator

who helped the Germans loot Chelm. An anonymous poem titled "Revenge, Revenge!" speaks of pain, rage, recurring nightmares and the final words of the narrator's father: seek vengeance.²⁴ Yet as scholars Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin note, even these differences in content and tone are "subsumed within a positive image of the Jewish community."²⁵ The retrospective look back at Chelm ends up being a positive appraisal, more an obituary than any kind of critical history.

Following generic convention, the *Yizkor-bukh Khelm* concludes with the "yizkor," the specific call to remember the dead. This section divides into two parts: a set of memorial dedications gathered from victims' families around the world and a list of the murdered. As they commemorate the departed, the dedications, short texts that often include photographs, again speak in a distinctly Jewish idiom. A dedication from Miriam Fligelman-Szteinberg recalls:

My most beloved and dearest who perished as martyrs at the hands of the Hitlerists, may their names be erased. Father, Jakob Fligelman; mother, Cwia Fligelman; brothers, Josef, Shmuel-Shimkha; sisters, Frimet, Feyga. Your holy memory will remain forever. May these lines serve as a headstone for their holy souls as well as for our dear city, Chelm. May their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal life.²⁶

The phrase "may their names be erased" is the translation of *yimakh shemo*, a Hebrew-Yiddish curse directed at enemies of the Jewish people. Originally applied to the biblical enemy Haman, here aimed at the "Hitlerists" (i.e. the Germans or Nazis), it has been recycled for new enemies over the centuries and places the Holocaust within a longer history of anti-Jewish persecution. We see here, once again, how the yizkor book represents the Holocaust through the lens of Jewish history and tailors it to a Jewish audience still coping with raw anguish.

Yizkor books and the future of Holocaust memory

The *Yizkor-bukh Khelm* commemorates a single *shtetl*. Yet as one book among a corpus of hundreds of yizkor books, it helps form a unique chapter in the history and memory of the Holocaust, one narrated by the survivors. Because not every destroyed community has a yizkor book, and because the nostalgia and grief of contributors shaped and often biased their accounts, yizkor books are an imperfect historical source that may offer little insight to a mass cultural

audience. Yet for the communities that did create them, like the Jews of Chelm, they clearly played a powerful emotional and practical role in negotiating grief and perpetuating memories.

In recent years, interest in yizkor books has spiked, thanks in no small part to the Internet. Free online archives have made vast libraries of rare yizkor books instantly accessible in their original Hebrew and Yiddish and in translation. Digital reprints have made it possible to own facsimile copies of individual books. At the same time, social networking websites now replicate the role of *landsmanshaftn* by virtually circulating news about survivors and publishing memorial announcements. Yet technology alone does not explain the revived interest in yizkor books. These online archives and virtual *landsmanshaftn* are themselves responses to perceived needs. At a personal level, descendants of Holocaust survivors want to learn more about family genealogies and ancestral homelands. Meanwhile, scholars seek to understand the Holocaust in greater detail from the perspectives of its victims and to learn about the lives as well as the deaths of murdered Jews.

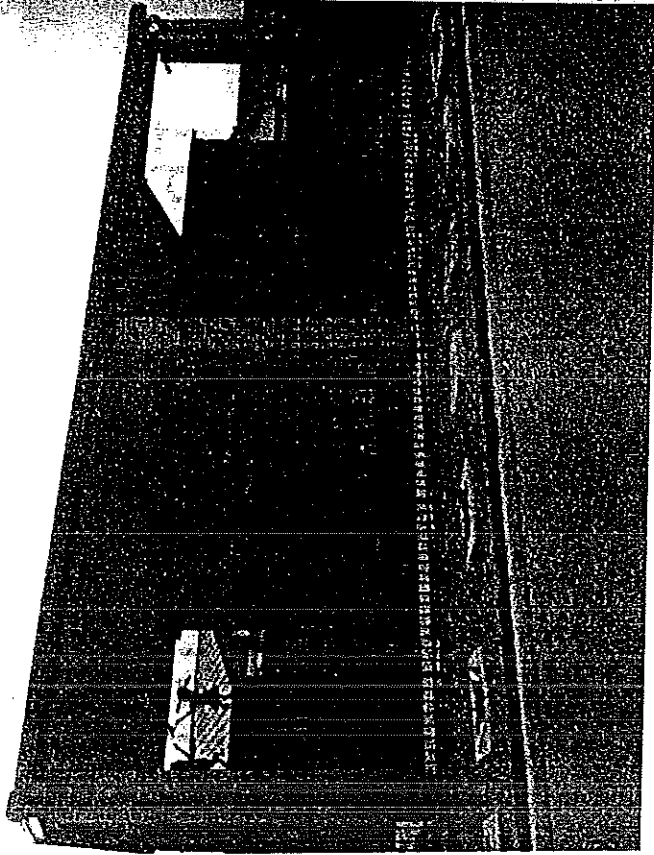
While yizkor books must be read with an eye to the personal and political biases of the grief-stricken people who made them, they play a significant role in the history of Holocaust representation. They offered and continue to offer a voice to those who ostensibly kept silent after the war. They are a powerful reminder of what has become a cliché: that there is a story for each of the six million Jews lost in the Holocaust. Even if they did not lead extraordinary lives or achieve postwar or posthumous fame, these people deserve to be remembered. Ultimately, the audiences for Holocaust memories are as diverse as these victims themselves: they have different needs that are met by different representations, and we cannot understand the full range of Holocaust representations without taking them into account, whether they be a handful of survivors from a small village reading a Yiddish memory book or tens of millions of people reading *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*.

The Children's Holocaust Memorial (memorial, 2001):

How is the Holocaust Used to Teach About Diversity?

A rural community, Whitwell, Tennessee is one of the last places one might expect to find a Holocaust memorial. Like many small towns in the American South, its roughly 1,700 inhabitants are overwhelmingly white, evangelical Protestants. No Jews live there and the town has no historical connection to the Holocaust. But since 2001, Whitwell Middle School has hosted the Children's Holocaust Memorial, a representation of the Holocaust that first attracted attention for its unorthodox form. The memorial consists of 11 million paper clips, one for each victim of Nazi Germany, which Whitwell students collected for a project aiming to teach about tolerance and diversity. The paper clips are displayed in a rail car once used to transport victims to death camps.

Although it has faded into relative obscurity in recent years, the Whitwell paper clip project received international media coverage in the late 1990s and early 2000s. People sent paper clips and letters of encouragement from around the world; donors included presidents, actors, athletes, and celebrities. The undertaking drew praise from Jewish community leaders and political figures, including First Lady Laura Bush, and it inspired two children's books, the 2004 documentary *Paper Clips*, and similar collecting memorials. Organizations like the Anti-Defamation League frequently recommend the Children's Holocaust Memorial and the *Paper Clips* documentary for middle- and high school curriculum units about tolerance and diversity. On June 28, 2001, New York Congressman Benjamin A. Gilman even commended the Whitwell project in the House of Representatives and invited his colleagues, "to help the Whitwell Middle School realize their noble goal, and in the



This October 2012 image shows a World War II-era rail car of the type used to transport prisoners to concentration camps. It is the centerpiece of the Children's Holocaust Memorial in Whitwell, Tennessee. It houses 11 million paper clips, one for each victim of the Holocaust, which Whitwell students collected for a project to learn about tolerance and diversity.

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process, spread their vital message of tolerance and compassion and to remember this devastating, inhumane chapter of world history." Yet the Children's Holocaust Memorial still draws praise today for its novel approach. On January 25, 2014, *The New York Times* indirectly praised it when describing *And Every Single One Was Someone*, a new book consisting only of the word "Jew" repeated six million times. The *Times* emphasized that this book—really an art project—by the Orthodox Jewish educator Phil Chernofsky was not entirely original because "more than a decade ago eighth graders in a small Tennessee town set out to collect six million paper clips, as chronicled in a 2004 documentary."² Like the Whitwell project, Chernofsky's book attempted to make comprehensive the overwhelming statistic that 6,000,000 Jews died in the Holocaust.

But the Children's Holocaust Memorial has also had its fair share of critics. Some questioned why Whitwell students didn't focus instead on local histories of intolerance. Others pointed to the problematic myths that underlie the choice of paper clips, the trivializing effects of that choice, and what they consider the offensive use of powerful Nazi and Jewish symbols without proper context. Still, now-retired Whitwell Middle School Principal Linda Hooper repeatedly emphasized the project's tremendous value for students, teachers, and staff, noting that "the Paper Clip project has allowed our students, staff, and community to forcefully confront our own prejudices."³

When the project first developed, many also dismissed the Children's Holocaust Memorial as Holocaust kitsch. Yet we cannot deny that this amateur, local memorial resonated with wider audiences. For better or worse, the debates it incited about contemporary Holocaust representations oriented toward children extend far beyond Whitwell and continue to influence Holocaust memorials. With its use of ubiquitous Holocaust symbols, such as Anne Frank, cattle cars, and swastikas, the Whitwell memorial exemplifies the popular tendency, especially prevalent in Holocaust education, to interpret the genocide through a series of well-known icons that create a redemptive moral narrative about the dangers of bigotry and intolerance. Its establishment in 2001 also reveals how popular Holocaust memory in the United States developed during the spike in interest that followed the 1993 opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the success of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* that same year. Yet ultimately, the debates around the Children's Holocaust Memorial and other projects like it invite questions that remain open: who owns the history of the Holocaust and who can decide how best to represent it? To what extent is it acceptable for projects by and/or for children to simplify history if their goal is to educate tomorrow's citizens to be tolerant of difference? How much simplification is acceptable, especially when, as some scholars have argued, the moral obligation for historical accuracy is greater than usual for Holocaust representations that target

juvenile audiences? To address such questions, it is useful to examine the origins and development of the Children's Holocaust Memorial and then to examine the objections to it in greater detail.

The project's origins

The defining characteristic of the Children's Holocaust Memorial is that it was created out of a collection of paper clips. To understand this curious choice of material, we must return to its origins in a class project. In 1998, Whitwell Middle School teacher David Smith attended a regional conference on youth enrichment programs. Inspired by a presentation about the Holocaust, Smith and colleague Sandy Roberts set out "to develop a program that teaches tolerance for students who grow up in a homogeneous society and then leave for college," noting that "Many of these students return to the area after graduating from high school because they can't deal with the diversity in the bigger world."⁴ They chose the Holocaust as their focus so that, as the children's book *Six Million Paper Clips: The Making of a Children's Holocaust Memorial* puts it, the project would "demonstrate what intolerance is and what it can lead to."⁵ The project developed over several years, with the support of parents and the school principal. Each year, new classes learned about the history of the Holocaust, but rather than just looking at the specific politics, ethnic conflicts, and regional history of mid-twentieth century Europe, they learned about the genocide as a worst case scenario for the evils of prejudice, an educational strategy that dates back to the popularity of Anne Frank in the 1950s (see Chapter 4).

The paper clip memorial emerged out of student efforts to comprehend the overwhelming statistic that 6,000,000 Jews died in the Holocaust. In the documentary *Paper Clips*, one student explains how the idea to collect 6,000,000 paper clips came from a website, where they learned that Norwegians wore paper clips on their lapels and shirt pockets during World War II, as a sign of resistance to German occupation and anti-Semitism (this account was in fact inaccurate, as discussed below). Duly inspired, the Whitwell students began to collect paper clips, which they originally intended to have melted down into the raw material for a memorial, possibly a stop sign in which a paper clip would diagonally block out a swastika, in the manner of a No Smoking sign. This idea proved infeasible, given that different kinds of paper clips are made of different materials. Ultimately, the students decided just to collect 6,000,000 paper clips, with no clear plan for what to do with them, at least at first.

As news about the Whitwell project spread, two Washington, DC-based German journalists, Peter Schroeder and Dagmar Schroeder-Hildebrand,

became its advocates. They met with the teachers in Whitwell and publicized the undertaking through their media contacts. As a result of this publicity, thousands of letters and, ultimately, millions of paper clips came to Whitwell from around the world, although mainly from the United States and Germany. Heartfelt letters of support accompanied paper clips offered to commemorate specific victims. In the end, Whitwell far surpassed its goal, receiving approximately 30 million paper clips, leaving teachers and students to decide what to do with them. Inspired by their experience in an authentic World War II-era cattle car at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Dagmar Schroeder-Hildebrand and Linda Hooper decided to recreate that experience in Whitwell. The Schroeders began searching for a cattle car and eventually found one near Chełmno, Poland, the former site of a death camp. They had it shipped to Whitwell in the autumn of 2001. On November 9, 2001, the 63rd anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the Children's Holocaust Memorial was officially dedicated. Local dignitaries spoke and a Hebrew school class from Atlanta recited *kaddish*, the Jewish mourner's prayer.

In its final form, the Children's Holocaust Memorial—like many youth-oriented Holocaust projects—brings together a diverse set of references and objects related to the Holocaust, Judaism, and American popular culture. The memorial's centerpiece, the rail car, has two display areas behind protective glass, with a small viewing area in between them. The display areas house 11 million paper clips along with letters and other memorial objects sent to Whitwell. Many of the memorial objects are clearly created by and/or meant for children, including a suitcase with letters of apology to Anne Frank and a Scrabble board with words about the project like Jews, Holocaust, tolerance, and compassion. Others include a *kippah* (skullcap), a dollar bill folded into a Star of David, and a baseball cap with the phrase "You had me at Shalom" in mock-Hebrew script. The threshold of the train car features a *mezuzah*, the ceremonial parchment placed on the doorframe of Jewish homes.

Reinforced to support the weight of millions of small pieces of metal and plastic, the rail car sits on a small set of train tracks in a gravel field next to the school. The field is decorated with another key motif of the memorial: mosaic tiles of butterflies. Numbering eighteen because eighteen in Hebrew numerology signifies *chai* (life), these butterflies refer a poem by Pavel Friedman, a young Czechoslovak Jew who was sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in April 1942. There he composed "The Butterfly," a short poem about his longing for natural beauty while "Pinned up inside this ghetto," that ends with the lines:

Only I never saw another butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
in the ghetto.

The poem's brevity and clear symbolism have made it a staple of American Holocaust education, but the Children's Holocaust Memorial takes the butterfly symbolism a step further, interpreting it as an act of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews. In the words of the memorial's website, butterflies are "the Christian symbol of renewal and the Children of (the concentration camp) Terezine [sic]." A plaque on the gravel field adapts the famous quotation by cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The Whitwell plaque states, "Never Doubt that a group of thoughtful, committed students can: 'CHANGE THE WORLD—ONE CLASS AT A TIME.'" A few feet away, inside Whitwell Middle School, a resource room houses a library of Holocaust books and dozens of binders containing the letters that accompanied the paper clips donated to the project. It also houses a few binders of hate mail from white supremacists and Holocaust deniers with, among other things, paper clips bent into the shape of swastikas.

Criticisms of the project

The creators of the Children's Holocaust Memorial developed it with laudable intentions: as an educational opportunity for children, a memorial to the Holocaust victims, a gesture of interfaith reconciliation, and, more broadly, as proof that people far removed from centers of power and commerce can contribute to public discourse in meaningful ways. The director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman, had a copy of *Paper Clips* sent to President George W. Bush and praised the film for showing "how the Holocaust can be relevant today, even in middle-America" and for becoming "a catalyst to teach others about the lessons of the Holocaust." To such supporters, the Children's Holocaust Memorial was a resounding success.

To its critics, however, the project failed to fulfill these noble intentions, and their lines of criticism reveal powerful unspoken protocols for how the memory of the Holocaust should be represented in public. One argument is that the Holocaust is inappropriate subject matter for teaching tolerance in the American South, which has its own histories of racial intolerance. Another is that the memorial's defining motif, the paper clip, in fact lacks the very historical connections to the Holocaust used to justify its use and instead carries much more ominous overtones. Finally, some critics argue that the memorial's use of Nazi and Jewish symbols is insensitive and that rather than honoring Holocaust victims, it instead reflects the project's fascination and over-identification with them. These concerns imply that there are proper rules of engagement for Holocaust memory—the who, what, where, and

how—that can easily be violated when individuals fail to properly contextualize the event. Given that the Children's Holocaust Memorial originated as an educational project, one understandable response to these criticisms is to point out that it was a project for children. But this response also raises the question of what kind of leeway we provide for the sake of educating the young.

The after-school program at Whitwell Middle School that culminated in the Children's Holocaust Memorial was in many ways typical of Holocaust education programs for children in the United States. For the sake of tolerance education, these programs often focus on a handful of iconic figures, images, and places, such as Anne Frank, cattle cars, and Auschwitz. Rather than seeking to understand what motivated the perpetrators, they center on the experiences of Jewish victims, using identification with innocent victims as an educational strategy.⁹ Although the Holocaust is a powerful example, critics allege that American history offers many instances of intolerance that the students at Whitwell could have studied, including some in which their families and neighbors might have been implicated as perpetrators. They could, for instance, have created memorials to honor local victims of intolerance: the Ku Klux Klan was founded in 1865 in nearby Pulaski, Tennessee, and in the 1830s, the U.S. Government expelled indigenous Cherokee. Studying more recent episodes of local racial intolerance might have led the students to the stories of Rosa Parks refusing to give her up bus seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, lunch counter boycotts in North Carolina, or even to Byron De La Beckwith, the white supremacist who assassinated civil rights leader Medgar Evers in 1963 and who until his 2001 death lived in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, just 20 miles from Whitwell. One uncomfortable explanation for the Whitwell students' Holocaust focus choice may have been that studying the history of American intolerance in the Jim Crow South would have been too close to home for a politically conservative small town. Studying the Holocaust gave Whitwell and its students a comfortable, low risk way to talk about intolerance without having to consider their own possible commonalities with Germans and their collaborators in the 1930s and 1940s. But this approach was not unique to Whitwell's program. To the contrary, it exemplifies how Holocaust education programs can allow many Americans to avoid potentially painful self-reflection.

The memorial's lack of historical rigor, particularly in the matter of paper clips, has been another concern. During World War II, some nationalistic Norwegians did wear paper clips (*binders* in Norwegian) to symbolize standing together during a time of national crisis. They chose the paper clip because Norwegians consider it a Norwegian invention, though in point of fact, Norwegian Johan Vaaler only invented a particular paper clip design.¹⁰ Still, wearing a paper clip for Norway did not necessarily translate into support for

persecuted Norwegian Jews. When Germany invaded in April 1940, Norway's Jewish population was tiny, totaling about 1,700 (including 200 refugees from Austria and Germany), essentially the same size as Whitwell; it would not have registered as significant for most Norwegians. Though some paper clip-wearing Norwegians may have opposed anti-Semitism, the vast majority wore the symbol to protest their country's loss of sovereignty and demonstrate loyalty to the exiled King Haakon VII and his government-in-exile in London.¹¹ Thus, the Whitwell students falsely equated symbolic Norwegian resistance to German occupation as support for persecuted Jews, reducing historical complexity to a simple binary of bad Germans and Nazis and their good—and united—enemies.

A related historical problem concerns the failure of the Whitwell students and teachers to grasp—or acknowledge—the ominous echoes of their Paper Clip Project. "Operation Paperclip" was a top secret U.S. government program that whitewashed the political histories of Nazi scientists after World War II. This cover-up allowed the United States, rather than its archrival the Soviet Union, to benefit from these scientists' technological know-how at the height of the Cold War. Established by the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency, the program violated official U.S. government policy against recruiting German scientists who had belonged to the Nazi party or actively supported the German war effort. The name "Operation Paperclip" derived from the paper clips used to attach sanitized biographies to the scientists' official American personnel files. In this case, paper clips symbolized ignoring crimes in the name of political expediency. Thus, albeit unintentionally, the Whitwell "Paper Clip Project" referenced an unseemly chapter in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust when, far from condemning Nazism, the American government engaged in a cover-up and welcomed Nazis into the United States. At no place in the Children's Holocaust Memorial is this historical affinity even acknowledged.

The third line of criticism about the memorial concerns its casual, even offensive, use of powerful symbols. As we have seen, the project assembled well-known Holocaust tropes, including butterflies, a cattle car, Anne Frank, and Stars of David, alongside the millions of paper clips. Critics such as rabbi and columnist Marc Gellman denounced the use of paper clips for essentially equating human lives with disposable office supplies, thereby trivializing the Holocaust and dehumanizing its victims, an act that historians argue served as the first step on the path to genocide.¹² Rather than represent victims' lives as rich, complex, and indispensable, the memorial turns each life into an identical, disposable piece of metal. Furthermore, the association of paper clips with office work alludes to, but hardly repudiates, the Holocaust's profoundly bureaucratic character. As Hannah Arendt argued (see Chapter 6), the genocide happened at such a large scale in good part because of the efforts of bureaucrats like Adolf Eichmann who managed its logistics.

Perhaps the most serious criticism of the Whitwell project was that, as it gained attention and paper clips began pouring in, it lost sight of its goal and became more about Whitwell than the Holocaust. In his review of the documentary *Paper Clips*, film critic A.O. Scott recorded his uneasiness with the sense of accomplishment displayed in the documentary:

I found myself bothered by the sense of self-congratulation that radiated through the film, and that seemed to tug against the gravity of the historical cataclysm that the students were meant to be studying. The dedication ceremony at the Whitwell memorial, which includes a German railway car once used to transport people to the death camps, is touching, but also a little strange. It testifies not only to the hard work and high-mindedness of the people of Whitwell, but also to the stubbornly affirmative character of American educational culture, which can turn even the most unfathomable horrors of history into a reason for people to feel good about themselves.¹³

Scott's critique gets to the heart of the concerns about the Whitwell project and teaching the Holocaust to schoolchildren. To what extent has the Children's Holocaust Memorial been celebrated as a project that effectively commemorates the victims of the Holocaust, and to what extent has it garnered so much attention because it was made in rural Tennessee by schoolchildren? Some scholars, such as Lawrence Langer, have argued persuasively about the dangers of searching for meaning in and putting redemptive endings on Holocaust testimonies and representations.¹⁴ Is it ever permissible for the Holocaust to become a feel-good redemption story?

The criteria for success

In spite of the criticism that has been leveled at it, the Children's Holocaust Memorial still commands attention and the praise of respected adult voices, including the Anti-Defamation League, Elie Wiesel, and even the United States House of Representatives. Recognizing that the teachers and students at Whitwell undertook their project with the sincerest of intentions and that it raised awareness in ways other Holocaust education efforts could not, they have been willing to overlook its historical errors and inadvertent insensitivities. Certainly the project's goals—to raise awareness and promote diversity—fundamentally resembled those of Holocaust education programs in schools, colleges, and local communities across the United States. What made the Whitwell project a worldwide—and controversial—phenomenon was a unique confluence of factors: the fact this small town would produce a Holocaust memorial at all, the memorial's use of millions of paper clips as its material,

and the vocal advocacy of two professional journalists who could direct attention to the project.

The project's most immediate legacy—and an argument in its favor that it has helped raise awareness—is the number of other collecting projects it has inspired, including the Peoria Holocaust Memorial Project's collection of six million buttons, the Holocaust Museum Houston's 1.5 million paper butterflies, and Project 6 Million, which seeks to collect six million statements about tolerance, memory, and diversity. Several projects aim to collect six million pennies for charity, a curious choice given the notorious anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as miserly penny pinchers.¹⁵ While the criticisms of the Children's Holocaust Memorial and other such projects are significant, many people still recognize them as positive gestures toward teaching children to appreciate diversity. The impetus to somehow make tangible the horrific enormity of the murder of six million Jews continues to preoccupy Americans and others interested in teaching children about the Holocaust. Ultimately, however, one must ask if well-intended but historically flawed efforts to represent and commemorate the Holocaust actually do what they intend, and even if they do not, whether they are nevertheless more valuable than no attempts at all. We may not know the answer until the children who collect paper clips, butterflies, and pennies become adult citizens facing the everyday demands for tolerance in a multicultural society.

Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/ Recent Art (museum exhibition, 2002):

Has the Memory of the Holocaust Become Too Commercial?

On September 9, 2001, *The New York Times* published a preview of the season's upcoming cultural events. Among the descriptions of new museum and gallery shows was a listing for *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, scheduled to run from March 17 to June 30, 2002, at New York's Jewish Museum. Its one-sentence blurb read: "While much art about the Holocaust centers on its victims, the 13 contemporary artists in the exhibition use images associated with its perpetrators to explore the nature of evil." *Mirroring Evil* was a group show of 13 artists from eight different countries. Some of them were Jewish, and all were born after the Holocaust ended. Their 19 images, sculptures, and video installations criticized popular Holocaust representations for their widespread commercialization and tendency to fall back on clichés and iconic photographs rather than engage the genocide in all its historical and moral complexity. They also challenged the ways these representations invite people to create simplistic dichotomies of good and evil, easily identify with victims, and thereby imagine that they have nothing in common with perpetrators. By contrast, as described by curator Norman Kleeblatt, the artists in the show "created works in which viewers would encounter the perpetrators face to face in scenarios in which ethical and moral issues cannot be easily resolved."²



LEGO Concentration Camp, by artist Zbigniew Libera, is displayed as part of the *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York City. The exhibit attracted controversy from critics who saw it as insensitive to Holocaust victims, while supporters argued that the artworks drew needed attention to the commercialization of the Holocaust.

Mario Tama/Getty Images

Shows at New York's Jewish Museum do not usually receive national attention. But scarcely 48 hours after the listing for *Mirroring Evil* appeared in *The New York Times*, hijackers flew airplanes into the World Trade Center, and evil suddenly moved to the forefront of public attention. Responding that evening to the day's traumatic events, President George W. Bush announced that "Today, our nation saw evil." A few months later, in early 2002, he used his State of the Union Address to denounce Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as an "Axis of Evil." In this radically changed cultural context, *Mirroring Evil* erupted into a full-blown scandal, as the national media got wind of the intentionally provocative, ironic, and offensive nature of its artworks, which relied heavily on Nazi imagery and references. Among the more eyebrow-raising pieces were a set of poison gas canisters emblazoned with Tiffany, Chanel, and Prada logos, boxes for an imaginary *LEGO Concentration Camp*, and a digitally manipulated photograph that placed its artist in an iconic Holocaust photograph holding a can of Diet Coke. Defending these confrontational artworks, the Jewish Museum's Director Joan Rosenbaum underscored the show's radically different approach to Holocaust representation, explaining that instead of offering up pathos-laden images of victims for viewers to identify with, its artists all "dare to invite the viewer into the world of the perpetrator."³

Mirroring Evil was hardly the first multi-artist show of Holocaust art. The decades after 1980 saw an outpouring of artistic representations of the Holocaust, in parallel with the proliferation of Holocaust books and films. Yet artworks remained less visible than these other media because they could only be seen in exhibition spaces, museums, and galleries, often for a limited amount of time.⁴ While some of this art challenged the written and unwritten rules surrounding Holocaust representation, the intensely self-reflexive and provocative nature of the work showcased in *Mirroring Evil* took this challenge to another level, forcing viewers to confront their own biases and avoidance mechanisms about the Holocaust.

Although *Mirroring Evil* had been in development long before 9/11, the terrorist attacks provoked new questions about the exhibition and its underlying principles, and revived old questions with new urgency: Was it appropriate to exhibit art focused on perpetrators when Holocaust survivors were still alive? Could it ever be appropriate to exhibit that art? Was the Jewish Museum a suitable venue for the exhibition? Was the exhibition's timing inappropriate, given that New York was a newly victimized city? Or did the trauma of 9/11 make the exhibition even more relevant?⁵ Many critics of *Mirroring Evil* framed their questions by drawing explicit 9/11 analogies: "Imagine if a performance artist walked over to Ground Zero and mocked those who had been burned alive and crushed to death," one wrote. "Everyone would repudiate such artistic license as being morally repulsive. How is what the Jewish Museum has done any different?"⁶

These questions clearly extended far beyond the exhibition's original mandate to challenge the commercialized nature of Holocaust representations. In the decade since the exhibition, they have continued to be raised and examined, not only through art exhibitions, but in the construction of new memorials and museums dedicated specifically to the memory of the Holocaust (see Chapters 12, 14, and 16). By revisiting the works displayed in *Mirroring Evil* and the controversy that surrounded them, this chapter delves into the important issues related to Holocaust representation that the exhibition first brought to a broad public audience. The show intentionally represented the Holocaust with obscene and offensive images in order to argue that the ways in which popular culture commercializes and trivializes the memory of the Holocaust are themselves obscene. But the negative response it received showed that it also unintentionally foregrounded questions about the implicit rules that govern the exhibition of Holocaust art, including when, if ever, it will no longer be too soon to represent the Holocaust ironically or playfully. Ultimately, *Mirroring Evil* made a plausible case for the value of Holocaust representations that go beyond factually recounting events and reverentially mourning the dead.

(Pre)Judging Mirroring Evil

Controversy began to envelop *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* months before it opened. By its opening, on March 17, 2002, as art critic Eleanor Heartney notes, "Many people had already formed an opinion about the show."⁷ The exhibition catalogue had appeared already in December 2001, offering a clear overview of the show, but also fueling the controversy in advance of its opening. Published by a reputable academic press, it featured essays by art critics, curators, and scholars who provided rigorous intellectual and historical contexts for the artworks. On January 10, 2002, however, *The Wall Street Journal* took the conversation in another direction when it suggested that *Mirroring Evil* could become the next *Sensation*. *Sensation* was a 1999 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art that then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani denounced for its inclusion of sacrilegious artworks such as Andrea Serrano's *Piss Christ* (an eerily beautiful close-up photograph of a crucifix in a glass of Serrano's urine) and Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* (pejoratively described as the *Elephant Dung Madonna*). Giuliani threatened to revoke the museum's public funding and even evict it from its building. The episode raised many issues about controversial art, including censorship and public funding, which were widely debated. Soon after *The Wall Street Journal* article, other newspapers began reporting on the upcoming show, often offering preemptive criticism.⁸ Two months before it opened, a commentator

who obviously had not yet seen the artworks wrote in *The New York Daily News* that "These images will generate thousands of words and deep visceral responses. To count as art, these responses—verbal or otherwise—would have to go beyond the predictable. I doubt they will."⁹

Recognizing the sensitive nature of *Mirroring Evil*, the Jewish Museum planned the exhibition's catalogue and physical layout to make it clear that the show was designed not to trivialize the Holocaust, but rather to confront visitors with difficult but important questions about its representation. Even so, the advance protests put the museum on the defensive. In response to the media storm, curators placed an explicit disclaimer at the beginning of the exhibit, noting that some Holocaust survivors had found the show disturbing, and visitors might find some or all of the artworks offensive. An additional exit was added so visitors could leave in the middle, before they encountered the most incendiary pieces.¹⁰

In its final form, the exhibition's design juxtaposed two very different museum experiences. On the one hand, Reesa Greenberg points out, white walls, bright lighting, and an uncluttered installation focused on *Mirroring Evil* as art. On the other, protective devices such as the dark, empty transitional room between the Museum lobby and the exhibition, the introductory disclaimer, the carefully plotted route, and a "decompression space" at its end highlighted the show's solemn and reflective dimensions.¹¹ Through this hybrid exhibition design, *Mirroring Evil* thus evoked both the exploratory playful, experimental tone of contemporary art spaces and the darker, more somber tone of commemorative historical exhibitions, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (see Chapter 12). The intent was clearly not to insult, and the Jewish Museum took pains to accommodate those who alleged the contrary.

In early 2002, as the media continued to publicize the exhibition, the storm around *Mirroring Evil* intensified. Much of the resentment arose less from objections to individual artworks, which the public had not yet seen, and more from the belief that a respected, mainstream Jewish cultural institution had in business legitimizing representations that might be perceived as devaluing the Holocaust. Brooklyn Assemblyman Dov Hikind, whose district included the heavily Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Borough Park, even called for a boycott of the exhibition. One the loudest voices of dissent was Menachem Z. Rosensaft, a prominent New York attorney, advocate for children of Holocaust survivors, and long-time member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. Rosensaft objected to how the venue "gives the imprimatur of the Jewish Museum to this exhibition and . . . thereby legitimizes all future trivializations of the Holocaust by others."¹² In an op-ed in the Jewish newspaper, *The Forward*, Rosensaft supported his point with an explicit 9/11 analogy. Referring to Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp* (1996) and Alair

Séchas's *Enfant's Gate* (*Spilled Children*, 1997), which depicted five Disney-like animals with Hitler moustaches, Rosensaft asserted that the Jewish Museum would not have been likely "to feature a LEGO model of the ravaged World Trade Center, surrounded by severed plastic heads with tiny NYPD and FDNY caps, alongside a benign 'Disney-like' depiction of Osama bin Laden."¹³

While they say there is no such thing as bad publicity, the uproar around *Mirroring Evil* did not translate into huge crowds of museum-goers. Approximately 100 yeshiva students, Holocaust survivors, and concerned community members briefly protested on opening day, chanting "Shame on you!" and "Don't go in!" to museum visitors. While these individuals denounced the show without seeing it, even critics generally receptive to experimental art responded negatively to the exhibition. Writing in *The New York Times*, art critic Michael Kimmelman described the issue as "not whether the museum can do the show, but whether it has taken minor art, elevated it to the status of significance by exhibiting it, thereby provoking an inevitable reaction, then defended its action as part of its responsibility to show significant art, even if it is offensive to some Jews."¹⁴ One had only to read the headline of the review in *The New York Observer* to know how the reviewer felt: "Jewish Museum Show Full of Vile Crap, Not to Be Forgiven."¹⁵

Amid this barrage of negativity and indignation, a few critics dared to speak out in support of *Mirroring Evil*. Art historian Linda Nochlin praised the show for uniting a disparate array of artworks that, through their very diversity, rejected the notion that there was only one way to narrate the history of the Holocaust.¹⁶ Nochlin also recognized that *Mirroring Evil* marked a generational shift in the representation of the Holocaust. Its artists grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, and, she noted, they "make clear their complete separation—temporal, spatial, ideological—from that *univers concentrationnaire* [the world of the concentration camp] that is their ostensible subject."¹⁷ Unlike older generations, these artists never experienced a world that didn't speak about the Holocaust. Rather, they came of age in a media landscape saturated with memorials, films, documentaries, plays, novels, memoirs, and other Holocaust representations. From these myriad representations, they "vicariously" experienced the traumas of the past.¹⁸ Whereas earlier artists protested the obscenity of staying silent about the genocide, the artists in *Mirroring Evil* argued that a culture oversaturated with mass-produced, hackneyed Holocaust imagery was itself obscene. Such an environment lets posterity delude itself with the self-satisfied belief that it has mastered the past and will not repeat its errors, despite significant evidence to the contrary. The only way to draw attention to this perceived obscenity, these artists believed, was to co-opt, exaggerate, and satirize these formulaic commercialized representations. In Nochlin's words, "The horror of the Holocaust . . . has been so often iterated

that it has sunk to the level of cliché. What can bring back the original shock? Reviving the corpse of feeling with a salutary slap in the face."¹⁹

“Duchamp is our Misfortune”: *Mirroring Evil* and the avant-garde

One important response to *Mirroring Evil* was not an essay, but an editorial cartoon. Drawn by Art Spiegelman, best known for his graphic novel *Maus* (see Chapter 11), it appeared in the March 25, 2002 issue of *The New Yorker*. Spiegelman's sharply critical take on the exhibition consisted of six panels. In the first five, a skinhead with a paintbrush and paint bucket stealthily looks to see if the coast is clear and defaces a brick wall with a large red swastika. The final panel zooms out to reveal the wall as one of the artworks at the Jewish Museum. Still dressed like a thug, but now with one hand in his pocket and the other cradling a glass of wine, the skinhead has become an artist who chats about his transgressive project at an art opening. Spiegelman's cartoon echoed the argument that *Mirroring Evil* legitimized tasteless, low quality, shock artwork by granting it the prestige of a show in a New York museum.

Spiegelman's cartoon also helps clarify the intent and art historical lineage of *Mirroring Evil*. Its caption, “Duchamp is our Misfortune,” refers to a popular Nazi propaganda slogan, *Die Juden sind unser Unglück* (The Jews are our misfortune), and French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Duchamp scandalized the early twentieth-century art world with his “readymades”: mundane, everyday objects—in one notable case a urinal, in another a cheap postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*—which he slightly altered, signing the urinal “R. Mutt” and drawing a moustache on the *Mona Lisa*, and submitted to exhibitions. Duchamp's readymade artworks asked to what extent art depends on galleries, museums, collectors, critics and other institutions to acquire its monetary and social value. Art historians consider them examples of modernist avant-garde art, which as Peter Bürger defines it, is art that critiques the institutions that control how artworks are produced, exchanged, and consumed.²⁰ Spiegelman's caption acknowledges that the avant-garde Holocaust artworks in *Mirroring Evil* sought to draw attention to the ways in which contemporary culture has reduced the Holocaust to a set of stock images and clichés. But in insisting that “Duchamp is our misfortune,” he points out that Duchamp's anti-institutional gestures have themselves been so frequently imitated that they are no longer shocking. The implication is that claiming the status of avant-garde art is simply a way for *Mirroring Evil* to inoculate itself against legitimate criticisms about its propriety.

Several artworks in *Mirroring Evil* explicitly cited Duchamp. In *Zugzwang* (Forced movement; 1995), the German artist Rudolf Gerz arranged copies of portrait photographs of Marcel Duchamp and Adolf Hitler in an alternating checkerboard pattern. Both photographs were taken by Heinrich Hoffmann, who photographed Duchamp in 1912 and became Hitler's personal photographer two decades later (Hoffman's studio assistant Eva Braun became Hitler's wife). In German, a *Zugzwang* is a situation in chess when a player is forced into an undesirable move. According to Gerz, the thesis of *Zugzwang* is that “one can not speak or even think about modern art, one can not make art without having Hitler and Duchamp in one's head, however conveyed.”²¹ Like Gerz, Israeli artist Boaz Arad also referenced Duchamp, but more playfully. Arad's video project *Marcel Marcel* manipulates a well-known scene of Hitler making a speech in Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Arad mimics Duchamp's defacement of the *Mona Lisa* with a moustache. As his speech becomes jumbled, Hitler's own moustache comes to life, dancing around his head, lengthening and shortening, morphing into a beard, entering his nostrils, and otherwise drawing attention away from his speech to mock how he has become an icon in his own right, much like the *Mona Lisa*.

Other artworks in *Mirroring Evil* evoke Duchamp less explicitly. The American artist Tom Sachs contributed the found object projects *Giftgas* (Giftset (1998) and *Prada Deathcamp* (1998). Curator Norman Kleebblatt noted that “Sachs turns the strategies of Marcel Duchamp around by 180 degrees.”²² Where Duchamp took everyday objects and made them art, *Giftgas Giftset* takes luxury objects and makes them banal instruments of murder. *Giftgas Giftset* puns on the German *Giftgas* (poison gas). It consists of three empty canisters that resemble the containers for Zyklon-B, the pellets that produced the toxic gas used to murder Jews at Auschwitz. Sachs took discarded Chanel, Hermès, and Tiffany wrapping materials and wrapped them around the canisters, creating a poison gas giftset, which he placed in a white display cube to make the luxury gas canisters appear even more exclusive and valuable. Sachs's other project, “Prada Deathcamp” is a small model of a concentration camp built on a discarded cardboard Prada hatbox. Describing how his artwork relates to fascism and the Holocaust, Sachs said, “I'm using the iconography of the Holocaust to bring attention to fashion. Fashion, like fascism, is about loss of identity.”²³ Sachs seemed to be comparing Holocaust victims to fashion victims in the kind of self-absorbed statements that surely contributed to reviews of *Mirroring Evil*, such as Peter Schjeldahl's in *The New Yorker*, which argued that the artworks said less about the Holocaust and more about how controversial the artists believed themselves to be. “Overall,” Schjeldahl wrote, “the show suggests an emergency ward for narcissism.”²⁴

Like Sachs, Polish artist Maciej Toporowicz juxtaposes Nazi imagery and luxury consumer goods in *Obsession* (1993). Toporowicz's five-and-a-half

"playing the Holocaust" and using "play and toys to represent the Holocaust in Nazi Germany" or "playing the Holocaust," as Ernst van Alphen calls it, it hints at what might prove to be the show's most significant legacy.²⁴ *Mirroring Evil* fundamentally challenged the traditional role of Holocaust representations, namely to memorialize the dead in a reverential and historically accurate manner. In an exhibition catalogue essay about Libera's project and other "Holocaust toys," van Alphen explained that linking toys and the Holocaust would spark controversy almost by definition, because "in the context of Holocaust education and remembrance, it is an unassailable axiom that historical genres and discourses, such as the documentary memoir, testimony, or monument, are much more effective and morally responsible in teaching the historical events than imaginative discourses."²⁵

By providing a reputable forum for imaginative approaches to the Holocaust, *Mirroring Evil* challenged this "unassailable axiom." It showed how transforming, challenging, and even playing the Holocaust does not necessarily entail trivializing it. Indeed, it can accomplish the opposite. Properly contextualized, art that plays the Holocaust can potentially help one appreciate the genocide in ways traditional genres and discourses cannot by highlighting not only the sadness, but also the trauma triggered by Holocaust remembrance. *Mirroring Evil* suggested that confronting the trauma of the Holocaust demands more than simply learning the historical events, or even facing understanding, and accepting what happened. It also requires that one confront the range of emotions that the Holocaust provokes in a culture where Holocaust representations had become and arguably remain profoundly unimaginative, this exhibition showed how imagination can force us to engage the past in new ways that make it meaningful once again.

minute video montage jumps between clips of 1930s Nazi propaganda films, scenes from 1970s Italian *sadiconazista* films, such as Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974) and Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969) (see Chapter 8), and television commercials for the Calvin Klein perfume "Obsession," exposing profound stylistic similarities between these ostensibly different kinds of representations. The idealized and sexualized bodies of Nazi propaganda films and *sadiconazista* movies closely resemble the attractive fashion models in the perfume advertisement, as Toporowicz underscores the extent to which Nazified imagery has uncritically entered contemporary advertising culture. In Kleeblatt's description, *Obsession* forces viewers "to a self-examination about the continuing seduction of Nazi imagery."²⁶ At the same time, its title refers to the ongoing, commercialized obsession with the Holocaust in popular culture.

Another Polish artist, Piotr Uklański, examines this commercialization in perhaps its most visible venue: cinema. Uklański's *The Nazis* (1998) is a frieze constructed from 166 identically sized photographs. Each photograph shows a famous leading man playing a Nazi. The actors include Clint Eastwood, Tom Selleck, Michael Douglas, Ralph Fiennes, Frank Sinatra, Harrison Ford, and even Ronald Reagan. The project began when Uklański noticed a magazine article about best dressed-actors that ignored the fact that many were clad as Nazis; he assembled the photographs and movie stills into a long line of images that reveal how cinema and celebrity culture make Nazis desirable. In its sheer length, the series of portraits resembles a long roll of film. As it exposes the mass media's complicity in perpetuating images of handsome Nazis, it also implicates the moviegoers who flock to each new Nazi movie, perpetuating the cycle of commercialization. Another artist in the exhibition, Austrian Elke Krystufek, appropriated the images that Uklański had already appropriated and placed them alongside naked paintings of herself, often holding a camera. These images ask whether deriving pleasure from looking at Nazis (in films) has become fundamentally pornographic.

Playing with the Holocaust?

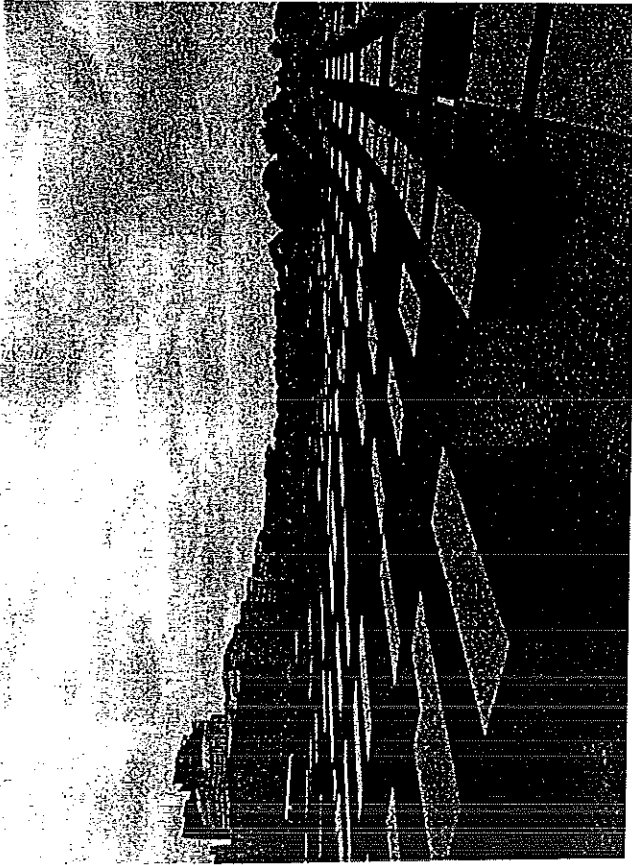
Of all the inflammatory artworks in *Mirroring Evil*, Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp* (1996) was among the most controversial, though it is also one of the most useful for understanding the exhibition's legacy. Because Libera's project literally represented the Holocaust as a toy, it gave critics an easy example to cite when dismissing *Mirroring Evil* as juvenile, trivializing, and offensive. In point of fact, however, *LEGO Concentration Camp* was not a toy at all; it was a set of empty boxes that demanded that museum visitors imagine what such a toy might look like. By taking as its theme the idea of

Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (memorial, 2005):

Is There an End to Holocaust Memory?

In January 2013, BuzzFeed.com, a website that promotes viral content, on the internet, picked up a story that was rapidly gaining traction. Titled "14 Grindr Profile Pics Taken At The Holocaust Memorial," the post highlighted what it called a "disturbing new trend" on Grindr, a popular dating smartphone app for gay men.¹ In their dating profiles, men were posting photographs of themselves standing among, leaning on, and climbing on top of the concrete slabs, known as stelae, that make up the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. Undoubtedly, these romance-seekers were drawn to the eye-catching aesthetic and profile-enhancing possibilities of the field of 2,700 evenly spaced coffin-like stelae of varying heights (some as tall as 13 feet), stretching in rows over nearly 19,000 square meters. Commentators were appalled by this tawdry use of the memorial, but Grindr members were not deterred. By the end of 2013, *Totem and Taboo*, a blog launched in November 2011 specifically to document the trend, had registered more than 100 such photos.²

The Grindr furor was only one of many incidents that have incited public outcry over supposedly inappropriate uses of the memorial. In 2009, the budget-airline easyJet withdrew almost 300,000 copies of its in-flight magazine after numerous passengers and Jewish organizations complained about an eight-page fashion shoot, titled "A Quick Guide to the Chic Side of Berlin," that posed stylishly dressed models next to the stela, as well as in front of Berlin's Jewish Museum. Unlike easyJet, the magazine's publisher defended the photo shoot, arguing that the article would encourage more tourists to visit the Jewish sites. Indeed, the article identifies them as must-see attractions for



eter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, just south of the Brandenburg Gate in the center of Berlin in May 2011. With its 2,700 concrete slabs, known as stelae, the memorial has drawn praise for suggesting the open-ended character of memory but also criticism for not being clear enough about its purpose.

ric D. Gedenk

savvy tourists: "Ravaged by war and torn in two by conflicting ideologies, Berlin may not be a picture-perfect jewel . . . but it's a treasure trove for the culture vulture . . . no visit would be complete without exploring testaments to the city's turbulent past, such as . . . the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Memorial."³

These incidents are only some of the most recent instances of the controversies Berlin's Holocaust memorial began inciting long before it opened to the public in 2005. Complaints started pouring in as soon as Germany's parliament, the Bundestag, approved architect Peter Eisenman's design in June 1999, the chief concern being that it was too abstract to serve as a memorial at all, let alone a Holocaust memorial.⁴ German author Martin Wiesel dismissed the design as a "nightmare the size of a football-field."⁵ But Eisenman staunchly defended the memorial as a counterbalance to traditional monuments, which evoke nostalgia, allowing people to remember the past they desire, rather than the past as it really was.⁶

Unlike most monuments, Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has no focal point for visitors. It has no beginning or end, and visitors can enter and exit from any direction. There are no plaques or inscriptions that would transform it into a more concrete representation. In a BBC interview on the occasion of its opening, Eisenman noted, "I fought to keep names off the stones, because having names on them would turn it into a graveyard," adding, "I like to think that people will use it for short cuts, as an everyday experience, not as a holy place."⁷ While Eisenman may not have anticipated dating websites or fashion shoots when he defended the memorial's anonymity and envisioned its use, his design purposefully did nothing to discourage such engagements.

Given the centrality of the Nazis, Berlin, and Germany in instigating and carrying out the murder of Europe's Jews, it might seem obvious that Berlin should have a Holocaust memorial. But the long, fraught story behind the monument's development reveals that its construction, sixty years after the end of World War II, represents both a turning point in Germany's postwar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) and a change in how we perceive Holocaust memorials more generally. Since the opening of the memorial, the discussions over its meaning and use have continued, as thousands of people visit the site every day, some crying as they reflect upon the Holocaust, others playing hide and seek, skateboarding, and sunbathing. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe thus brings crucial questions about Holocaust memorials into sharp relief: What exactly is the function of a Holocaust memorial, especially in Germany? What is the relationship between the sites where the Holocaust actually took place—the prisons, death camps, and mass graves—and a newly fabricated site like this monument? And are there unwritten rules for how one should behave at a Holocaust memorial?

Germany's countermonuments

The idea of constructing a national Holocaust memorial in Berlin was initiated in 1988 by German television talk show host Lea Rosh and historian Eberhard Jäckel. But the history of Holocaust memorials in Germany precedes their effort, and that history includes a number of memorials by artists who questioned whether traditional monuments, ironically, impede public memory rather than encourage it.⁸ If a Holocaust memorial too closely references or symbolizes a real event, that is, if it is too easy to interpret, they argued, it could also be too easy to forget. James E. Young sums up this critique:

Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always be there to remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience. To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. In effect, the initial impulse to memorializing events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them.⁹

Perhaps in part because of what we might call this forgetting effect, when it comes to the Holocaust, many Germans have expressed a desire to draw a *Schlussstrich* (concluding line) to bring this dark chapter of their history to an end and allow them to move on.

Even before a competition was announced for the memorial in Berlin, a number of German artists had designed memorials that they felt would emphasize the difficulty of memorializing the Holocaust, precisely for the purpose of perpetuating its memory. James E. Young helpfully terms these efforts "countermonuments," since they, ironically, purport to do the opposite of what they are supposed to do. Rather than constructing edifices to commemorate the destruction of a people, they attempt to highlight empty space as a way of drawing attention to people who are no longer there. Where traditional memorials are made out of materials designed to last, the countermonument deliberately challenges the idea that memorials should stand the test of time and aims to disappear or change over the years. Rather than standing untouched, a countermonument invites violation and desanctification. In terms of the Holocaust, a countermonument commemorates a vanished people with a "vanished" monument, aiming to provoke its visitors rather than console them.¹⁰

One of the first countermonuments in Germany was the Anti-Fascist Memorial constructed by artists Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz to memorialize the victims of fascism in Hamburg's Harburg neighborhood. The memorial consisted of a 12-meter pillar that, between 1986 and 1993, was lowered further into the ground every year until all that remained was its top,

a lead plaque, now level with the ground, which marks the project. In Kassel, in 1987, German artist Horst Hoheisel recreated the *Aschrott-Brunnen* (Aschrott Fountain), a 12-meter neo-Gothic pyramid surrounded by a pool, as an inverted countermonument buried in the ground. The Nazis had destroyed the fountain because it was built with funds provided by a Jewish businessman from Kassel named Sigmund Aschrott. By creating a mirror image of the fountain, rather than recreating the fountain as it had existed, Hoheisel turned its destruction into a symbol of the subsequent deportation and murder of Kassel's 463 Jewish residents. As James E. Young notes, "the negative space of the absent monument will now constitute its phantom shape in the ground," thus preserving the absence of the monument and, along with it, the knowledge of how and why it was destroyed.¹¹ The monument is still a functioning fountain, and the sound of water rushing underground offers a ghostly reminder of a lost past.

A unique memorial in Berlin formalizes the absence of the Jewish population by incorporating the memory of the Holocaust's effect on the everyday lives of Nazi Germany's Jews into contemporary everyday life. In 1993, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, two artists based in Berlin, created Places of Remembrance: Memorial to the Deported Jewish Citizens of the Bayerische Viertel in a Berlin neighborhood where many Jews murdered in the Holocaust once lived. The memorial consists of eighty signs with images on one side and texts of Nazi laws and decrees on the other, such as an empty ashtray and the inscription "Jews are allowed no more cigarettes or cigars. 11.6.1942," or a pair of swimming trunks and "Berlin public pools may no longer be entered by Jews. 3.12.1938." Word and image function together to emphasize the seemingly banal beginnings of the exclusion of Jews from German society that culminated in their deportation and extermination. This decentralized memorial allows residents and passersby to experience history as they go about their daily business in the neighborhood, where the signs blend in with the local cityscape, and symbolize how deeply anti-Semitism was enmeshed in the everyday life of local Germans.¹²

The history of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, 1988–2013

Unlike the localized countermonuments of the 1980s and 1990s, the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was intended, from the start, as a grand national gesture. It was conceived in an atmosphere of dramatic transition, as the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and German reunification (1990) raised questions about what it meant to return to a single German state that

had not existed since the Nazi era, causing Germans to reflect once more on the role of the past in German self-identification. Germans sought not to forget the past, journalist Jane Kramer writes, but to make it usable, as a source of positive identification. This entailed identifying with its victims, rather than focusing on its perpetrators, or, as Kramer put it, describing Chancellor Helmut Kohl's vision, using the politics of commemoration to "put Germany on the winning side."¹³ In other words, deeply political agendas shaped all stages of the debate surrounding the memorial.

This was the context in which plans for the memorial took root and developed. With the support of historian Eberhard Jäckel, television talk-show host Lea Rosh—a Protestant whose maternal grandfather was Jewish—and who had changed her name from Edith to the more Jewish-sounding Lea—used her celebrity connections to raise twelve million dollars and extracted a promise from Chancellor Kohl that the memorial would be located on prime real estate in central Berlin, near the ruins of Hitler's bunker. From the start, Rosh's enthusiastic and unsophisticated approach to Holocaust memory rankled Berlin intellectuals and others, some of whom claimed that Germania had no place memorializing victims when they should be focusing on their own role in the destruction. But by the mid-1990s, argues Kramer, most Germans were "absorbed in an elaborate exercise in solidarity: if not identification, with Hitler's victims," which combined with Rosh's relentless promotion of the idea, described aptly by Kramer as "ghoulish public entertainment," to provide the conditions for the project's success. After Kohl announced his support for the project, an open competition was launched and 523 designs were submitted.¹⁴

One key topic of debate was whom the memorial should commemorate. Although Rosh had, from the beginning, insisted that the memorial would be a German initiative to memorialize Jews, this proposed limitation sparked controversy, for many other memorials commemorated Jewish victims of Nazi persecution together with Sinti and Roma (gypsies), homosexuals, and other victims of fascism. The memorial's location also proved controversial. Originally, Kohl had promised that it would be built on the site of the former Gestapo headquarters in central Berlin, but that idea fell through as many people thought this was an inappropriate location if the memorial was going to commemorate only Jews, not all of Hitler's victims. Others felt that the memorial project would detract from the actual sites where killings took place, like the Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen concentration camps, which, as many pointed out at the time, were falling into disrepair and badly in need of funds, making the "most expensive memorial project in Berlin's history" (the memorial ultimately cost \$35.7 million) a lamentable irony.¹⁵

But the deepest and most lasting controversy surrounded the memorial's design. Lea Rosh was among those who envisioned a traditional-style

memorial heavy on symbolism. By the mid-1990s, German attitudes toward memorializing the Holocaust had swung away from countermonuments, and the winning design in the initial 1994 competition was a huge concrete slab on which the names of the millions of victims would be engraved, much like a symbolic tombstone. Under heavy criticism, however, Chancellor Helmut Kohl rejected the design, and a second competition was launched in 1997, which resulted in the design that was eventually built just south of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. But media debates continued, both about the still-controversial focus on Jewish victims, and about the failure of the design to adequately educate visitors about the Holocaust. Eisenman added an underground library and study center to the design, the Bundestag approved the revised plan in 1999, and funds were raised over the next several years. Ultimately, the idea that Jewish victims were deserving of their own memorial, as the only group singled out for complete destruction, prevailed. And, indeed, in many ways the memorial has fulfilled its intent: to allow non-Jewish Germans to tell the story of the Holocaust from the "victims' perspective" at a different kind of memorial designed to complement "authentic" sites of Holocaust memory.¹⁶

Experiencing the Memorial

Controversy over the memorial did not end with its opening in 2005; it simply shifted, as visitors engaged with the vast countermonument. It soon became apparent that many visitors did not even know what the stelae were, so the planned library and study center was transformed into a formal information center that plays an important role, through its presentation of texts, images, and audiovisual material, in mediating how individuals experience the memorial. The Information Center offers group guided tours, an audio tour, workshops, a searchable video archive, and informational materials about the memorial, the Nazi campaign against the Jews, and preparing for and processing a visit. Hosts are stationed near the entrances to the Information Center to offer guidance and keep order at the site, which is also monitored by cameras and live security.¹⁷

As sociologist Irit Dekel notes, visitors experience the memorial in a wide variety of ways. While the media is quick to pounce on blatantly exploitative uses, like the dating profile pictures and fashion shoots described above, Dekel's research shows that many visitors to the memorial do learn about the Holocaust and reflect upon the memory of its victims, whether they use the information Center or not. She explains how the memorial's open-ended layout sets the stage for a variety of unregulated memorial encounters: visitors can enter and exit from different points, and the rules for entering and exiting are purposefully left open, which encourages reflection. Those who work at

the memorial draw visitors into the range of emotions that the abstract and open nature of the memorial encourages, and they urge visitors to experience it however they like, often using the phrase "Everything goes. There are no wrong answers."¹⁸ When visitors have no knowledge about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, guides invite them to visit the Information Center. Marita Sturken observes that merely walking among the stelae provokes emotional responses in many visitors, as the memorial foregrounds distance and reflection, rather than easy identification of paths:

visitors can feel the shifting terrain, as the pillars change in height and one goes from light to cavernous spaces to undulating stones. If we see others walk into the field of pillars, their heads disappear within it—we know they are there, but they are lost to us . . . As one gets deeper into the chasms and loses the city behind, one catches glimpses of others moving through, fleeting and then gone, never to be seen again. Thus, in walking through the memorial, visitors can experience the arbitrariness of life with a tenuousness.¹⁹

In 2010, the number of visitors reached 461,000. According to a public survey from 2009, about half of the Information Center's visitors are German, while the other half come from other countries. As per its original intent, those who work at the memorial consider the memorial to be primarily for the benefit of non-Jewish Germans, suggesting that one of the most significant political implications of the site is the way it maintains German memory of the Holocaust.²⁰

The end of Holocaust memory?

As Karen E. Till notes, "The Holocaust Memorial, of course, is not just a replica of memorials elsewhere. It was an outcome of negotiated German and international cultures of memory, each defined by distinct hauntings, political perspectives, social relations, and histories."²¹ Today, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is part of a surge in new sites of memory in Berlin, including the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime, and the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National Socialist Regime. It also serves as a counterpart to architect Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, dedicated in 2001. Libeskind's design also incorporates countermonument elements, notably absence, emptiness, and the invisible, which express the disappearance of Jewish culture in the city. The museum is constructed in the form of a straight line repeatedly intersected by a zigzag. The straight line represents the continuities

of German-Jewish history, while the zigzag speaks to unexpected twists, turns, and periods of exclusion and persecution. Unlike the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (see Chapter 12), the building itself disrupts any attempt to understand the history it presents as a smooth progression or seamless narrative. Although it, too, has over time received its share of criticism, Libeskind's design has also drawn much praise because rather than smoothing over the tensions in German-Jewish history, it masterfully gives physical form to Germany's fraught relationship with its Jewish minority. In many ways, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Jewish Museum Berlin function in tandem: the memorial can be seen as an open museum, while, in its very structure, the museum functions as a kind of monument.

The 17-year period between Lea Rosh's initial idea and the final construction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe incited renewed pessimism about memorials, as well as doubts about the efficacy of countermonuments. Some commentators suggested that the uproar that inevitably accompanies the construction of monuments is their only beneficial outcome: scholar Gert Mattenklott noted, "the only valuable thing about monuments is the discussion they provoke." For others, the very act of commemoration, ironically, serves to diminish its effect: as scientist and political activist Jens Reich remarked, "It seems the more we commemorate, the more we dilute the seriousness of commemoration; the better we describe, the less we mean."²²

Some feel that the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe veers too far in the direction of the countermonument in its efforts to prevent forgetting and nostalgia. To those critics, Peter Eisenman's defense of the memorial as the cutting edge of memory work falls short of its goals precisely because of its insistence on providing only a figurative experience. In Eisenman's words, "Our memorial attempts to develop a new idea of memory . . . In our memorial there is no aim, no end, no way in or out . . . In this context, there is no nostalgia, no remembrance of the past, only a living memory of individual experience."²³ But even today many remain concerned that in attempting to address all the concerns of memorialization at once, the memorial ends up serving none of them.

Ultimately, the controversy surrounding the memorial shows that there is no single way of commemorating the Holocaust that will satisfy every need. Other complementary memorials will always be necessary. One such continuing effort throughout Europe is artist Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* (stumbling blocks) project that commemorates the victims of Nazi persecution through plaques embedded in the ground near their homes. Any individual can sponsor a small, commemorative brass plaque at a cost of 120 Euros; as of the end of December 2013, over 43,500 *Stolpersteine* had been placed in over 610 locations throughout Germany, Austria, and other countries.²⁴ Demnig

sees the plaques as an antidote to the Berlin memorial: "The monument in Berlin is abstract and centrally located. But if the stone is in front of your house, you're confronted. People start talking. To think about six million victims is abstract, but to think about a murdered family is concrete."²⁶ But even this small-scale memorial has its detractors, who think the possibility of people stepping on or ignoring the small, unobtrusive plaques fails to keep the memory of the victims intact. In a similar but more ephemeral direction, a Munich-based technology firm recently released a smartphone app that displays the names and pictures of Holocaust victims on the phones of those who pass by their former residences, thereby creating "a virtual, floating museum over Munich."²⁵

Photo shoots, picnicking, skateboarding, and tanning at the memorial only confirm the judgments of its staunchest critics. Yet it may be more fruitful not to condemn the memorial as a failed site of remembrance, but to consider how visitor engagements with the site, whether casual or profound, can be understood as acts of remembrance more broadly construed. In other words, as Irit Dekel notes, what happens at the memorial can help us understand how Holocaust memory is always mediated—through filters of time, place, and social codes—and how unwritten codes of remembering will shape the experience of every visitor. The process of memory work and self-understanding is "performed in the act of remembrance and the reflection on that act."²⁷ As such, whether people like it or not, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe opens up new possibilities for engagement with Holocaust memory, some perhaps more meaningful than others, but each relevant in its own way.

Memorials are signs of their times, as well as the past they represent. Given the conditions in which it was envisioned, designed, and built, Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe may very well have been the best possible answer to the question of how a Germany newly reunited, sixty years after World War II, might best commemorate the Jews of Europe murdered by the Nazis. Over the years, a more traditional monument with easy symbolism and clear directives for behavior could easily fall into obscurity. Perhaps a controversial structure that constantly points to its own limits, even as it forces visitors to determine their own paths through both its current space and the past it represents, best signals the continuation of Holocaust memory rather than its end.