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# Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem—and Mine

JAMES E. YOUNG

ONCE, NOT SO LONG AGO, Germany had what it called a “Jewish Problem.” Then it had a paralyzing Holocaust memorial problem, a double-edged conundrum: How would a nation of former perpetrators mourn its victims? How would a divided nation reunite itself on the bedrock memory of its crimes? In June 1999, after ten years of tortured debate, the German Bundestag voted to build a national “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe” on a prime, five-acre piece of real estate between the Brandenburger Tor and Potsdamer Platz, a stone’s throw from Hitler’s bunker. In their vote, the Bundestag also accepted the design—a waving field of pillars—by American architect, Peter Eisenman, which had been recommended by a five-member *Findungskommission*, for which I served as spokesman.

Proposed originally by a citizens’ group headed by television talk-show personality and journalist Leah Rosh and World War II historian Eberhard Jäckel, the memorial soon took on a fraught and highly politicized life of its own. Although I had initially opposed a single, central Holocaust memorial for the ways it might be used to compensate such irredeemable loss, or even put the past behind a newly reunified Germany, over time I began to grow

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skeptical of my own skepticism. Eventually, I was invited to join the five-member *Findungskommission* charged with choosing an appropriate design for Germany's national memorial to Europe's murdered Jews, the only foreigner and Jew on the panel. Here I would like to tell the story of Germany's national Holocaust memorial and my own role in it, my evolution from a highly skeptical critic on the outside of the process to one of the arbiters on the inside. I find that as the line between my role as critic and arbiter began to collapse, the issues at the heart of Germany's memorial conundrum came into ever sharper, more painful relief.

Along with a private citizens' initiative they had organized, Leah Rosh and Eberhard Jäckel at first hoped to place their memorial on the *Gestapo-Gelände*, a scarred wasteland and former site of the Gestapo headquarters in a no-man's land near the wall in the center of Berlin. But the "Gestapo-terrain" had long been enmeshed in a complicated debate over its own future and how to commemorate all the victims of the Gestapo in a single place.<sup>1</sup> With the fall of the wall in 1989, however, the project gained the backing of both the Federal Government and the Berlin Senate, who recognized that such a memorial might serve as a strategic counter-weight to the *Neue Wache*. Shortly after, the government designated an alternative site for the memorial, also at the heart of the Nazi regime's former seat of power. Bordered on one side by the "*Todesstreifen*," or "death-strip" at the foot of the Berlin wall, and on the other by the Tiergarten, the former site of the "Ministerial Gardens" was still a no-man's land in its own right, slightly profaned by its proximity to Hitler's bunker and the Reich's Chancellery. But in its 20,000 square meters (almost five acres) at the heart of a reunified capital, it would also become one of Berlin's most sought-after pieces of real estate—and was thus regarded as a magnanimous, if monumental, gesture to the memory of Europe's murdered Jews.

In 1994, about a year after the dedication of the *Neue Wache*, a prestigious international competition was called for designs for Germany's national "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," and some 528 designs were submitted from around the world. Submissions ran the gamut of taste and aesthetic sensibilities, from the beautiful to the grotesque, from high modern to low kitsch, from the architectural to the conceptual. There was, for example, Horst Hoheisel's proposal to blow up the Brandenburger Tor, as well as Dani Caravan's proposed field of yellow flowers in the shape of a Jewish Star. Berlin artists Stih and Schnock proposed a series of bus-stops whence coaches would take visitors to the sites of actual destruction throughout Berlin, Germany, and Europe. Other designs included numerous variations on gardens of stone, broken hearts, and rent Stars of David. Round, square, and triangular obelisks were proposed, as well as a gigantic

1. For more on the debate surrounding the discovery of ruins on the *Gestapo-Gelände* and subsequent architectural competitions to memorialize this site, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 81–90.

empty vat (130 feet tall), an empty vessel for the blood of the murdered. One artist proposed a ferris wheel composed of cattle-cars instead of carriages, rotating between “the carnivalesque and the genocidal.”<sup>2</sup>

The jury was composed of some fifteen members, experts and lay-people, appointed by the three sponsoring agencies now involved—the Bundestag, the Berlin Senate, and the original citizens’ group. Though the deliberations had been shielded from public view, many of the jurors subsequently told of rancorous, biting debate, with little meeting of the minds. The citizens’ group resented the intellectuals and experts on the jury, with what they regarded as their elitist taste for conceptual and minimalist design. “This is not a playground for artists and their self-absorbed fantasies,” Leah Rosh is reported to have reminded her colleagues on the jury. Meanwhile, the intellectuals sniffed at the lay-jurors’ middle-brow eye for kitsch and monumental figuration, their philistine emotionalism; and the Bundestag’s appointees glanced anxiously at their watches as the right political moment seemed to be ticking away.

In March 1995, organizers announced the jury’s decision: first prize would be shared by two teams who had submitted similarly inspired designs—one led by Berlin artist Christine Jacob-Marks and the other by a New York artist living in Cologne, Simon Ungers. Of these two, only that proposed by Jacob-Marks would be built, however, possibly with elements incorporated from the other, and an additional eight projects would be recognized as finalists in the competition. Jacob-Marks’s winning design consisted of a gargantuan, 23-foot thick concrete gravestone, in the shape of a 300-foot square, tilted at an angle running from six feet high at one end to 25 feet high at the other. It was to be engraved with the recoverable names of 4.5 million murdered Jews, and in the Jewish tradition of leaving small stones at a gravesite to mark the mourner’s visit, it was to have some 18 boulders from Masada in Israel scattered over its surface.

Its literal-minded and misguided symbolism seemed to have paralyzed a jury as unable to resist it as to love it. Since eighteen is the Hebrew number representing *chai*, or life, the number of stones seemed right. But according to Josephus, Masada was the last stronghold against the Romans at the end of the Jewish revolt of 66–73 C.E. and also the site of a collective suicide of Jews that prevented the Romans from taking them as slaves. A German national Holocaust memorial with Jewish self-sacrifice as part of its theme? Within hours of the winner’s announcement, the monument’s mixed memorial message of Jewish naming tradition and self-sacrifice generated an avalanche of artistic, intellectual, and editorial criticism decrying this “tilted gravestone” as too big, too heavy-handed, too divisive, and finally just too German. Even the leader of Germany’s Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, hated it and told Chancellor Kohl that the winning design was simply

2. See *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Künstlerischer Wettbewerb: Kurzdokumentation* (Berlin: Senatsverwaltung für Bau und Wohnungswesen, 1995).

unacceptable. Kohl threw up his hands in exasperation, pronounced the design as “too big and undignified,” and obligingly rescinded the government’s support for the winner of the Holocaust memorial competition. Germany’s “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe” seemed to have been sunk by its own monumental weight—and once again, Germany was left pondering its memorial options.

Between the announcement of the winner and its subsequent rejection, the organizers showed all 528 designs in a grand memorial exhibition at Berlin’s *Stadtratshaus*. Good, I wrote at the time. Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions and exhibitions in Germany than any single “final solution” to Germany’s memorial problem. This way, I reasoned, instead of a fixed icon for Holocaust memory in Germany, the debate itself—perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions—might now be enshrined. Of course, this was also a position that only an academic bystander could afford to take, someone whose primary interest lay in perpetuating the process itself.

### *My Holocaust Memorial Problem*

After yet another year of stormy debate over whether a new competition should be called, whether a new site should be found, or whether the winners should be invited to refine their proposals further still, the memorial’s organizers once again took the high road. They called for a series of public colloquia on the memorial to be held in January, March, and April 1997, which they hoped would break the memorial deadlock and ensure that the memorial be built before the Holocaust receded further into the history of a former century. Toward this end, they invited a number of distinguished artists, historians, critics, and curators to address the most difficult issues and to suggest how the present designs might best be modified. Among those invited to speak at the last colloquium in April 1997, I was asked to explore the memorial iconography of other nations’ Holocaust memorials in order to put the Germans’ own process into international perspective.

The first two colloquia, in January and March 1997, roused considerable public interest on the one hand, but as the exchanges between organizers of the memorial and invited speakers grew more acrimonious, a gloomy sense of despair gradually settled over the proceedings. The organizers, led by Leah Rosh, insisted that the “five aims” of the project remain inviolable: (1) this would be a memorial only to Europe’s murdered Jews; (2) ground would be broken for it on 27 January 1999, Germany’s newly designated “Holocaust Remembrance Day” marked to coincide with the 1945 liberation of Auschwitz; (3) its location would be the 20,000-square-meter site of the Ministers Gardens, between the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz;

(4) the nine finalists' teams from the 1995 competition would be invited to revise their designs and concepts after incorporating suggestions and criticism from the present colloquia; and (5) the winning design would be chosen from the revised designs of the original nine finalists.<sup>3</sup>

Not only did the designs continue to come under withering attack by the invited experts, but the aims of the project itself were now called strongly into question. Among other speakers at the first colloquium, historian Jurgen Kocka suggested that although there was an obvious need for a memorial to Europe's murdered Jews, the need for a memorial to encompass the memory of the Nazis' other victims was just as clear. Other speakers, such as Michael Sturmer, then questioned the site itself, whether its gargantuan dimensions somehow invited precisely the kind of monumentality that had already been rejected. Other critics focussed more narrowly on the first colloquium's theme: "Why There Should Be a Holocaust Memorial in Berlin," concluding that with the authentic sites of destruction and memory scattered throughout Berlin, there shouldn't be a central memorial at all.

These vociferous challenges to the memorial were met by a seemingly stony indifference by the speaker of the Berlin Senate, Peter Radunski, who had been appointed to convene the proceedings. Because these criticisms had no place on the agenda, he said, they need not be addressed here. Leah Rosh's response was less measured. She opened the third colloquium with a bitter attack on what she called the "leftist intellectual establishment" responsible for undermining both the process and by extension memory of Europe's murdered Jews. The aim here was how to go forward, she said, not to debate the memorial's very *raison d'être*, which was already established. Her angry words, in turn, merely served to antagonize the critics and harden the positions of the memorial's opponents, who included many of Germany's elite historians, writers, and cultural critics, including Reinhart Koselleck, Julius Schoeps, Salomon Korn, Stefanie Endlich, Christian Meier, and eventually Gunter Grass and Peter Schneider.

By the time I spoke at the third colloquium in mid-April, both the organizers and a large public audience at the *Stadtratshaus* in Berlin had grown visibly and audibly agitated by the spectacle of their tortured memorial deliberations. Over and over again, the other speakers—senators, art historians, and artists—bemoaned the abject failure of their competition. All of this was compounded by their acute embarrassment over the incivility of it all, the petty bickering, the name-calling, and the quagmire of politics into which the whole process seemed to be sinking. Bad enough that we murdered the Jews of Europe, one senator whispered to me, worse that we can't agree on how to commemorate them.

3. From Peter Radunski's "Opening Remarks" to the First Colloquium on Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 11 January 1997.

When my turn to speak came, I began by trying to reassure the audience: decorum is never a part of the memorial-building process, not even for a Holocaust memorial. “You may have failed to produce a monument,” I said, “but if you count the sheer number of design-hours that 528 teams of artists and architects have already devoted to the memorial, it’s clear that your process has already generated more individual memory-work than a finished monument will inspire in its first ten years.” I then proceeded to tell the stories of other, equally fraught memorial processes in Israel and the United States, the furious debate in Israel’s Knesset surrounding the day of remembrance there, and the memorial paralysis in New York, Los Angeles, and Washington that had eventually resulted in several competing memorials, all of them contested. I could almost hear the collective sigh of relief.

In fact, here I admitted that until that moment, I had been one of the skeptics. Rather than looking for a centralized monument, I was perfectly satisfied with the national memorial debate itself. Better, I had thought, to take all these millions of Deutsch Marks and use them to preserve the great variety of Holocaust memorials already dotting the German landscape. Because no single site can speak for all the victims, much less for both victims and perpetrators, the state should be reminding its citizens to visit the many and diverse memorial and pedagogical sites that already exist: from the excellent learning center at the Wannsee Conference House to the enlightened exhibitions at the Topography of Terror at the former Gestapo headquarters, both in Berlin; from the brooding and ever-evolving memorial landscape at Buchenwald to the meticulously groomed grounds and fine museum at Dachau; from the hundreds of memorial tablets throughout Germany marking the sites of deportation to the dozens of now-empty sites of former synagogues—and all the spaces for contemplation in between.

Here I also admitted that with this position, I had made many friends in Germany and was making a fine career out of skepticism. Most colleagues shared my fear that Chancellor Kohl’s government wanted a “memorial to Europe’s murdered Jews” as a great burial slab for the twentieth century, a hermetically sealed vault for the ghosts of Germany’s past. Instead of inciting memory of murdered Jews, we suspected, it would be a place where Germans would come dutifully to *unshoulder* their memorial burden, so that they could move freely and unencumbered into the twenty-first century. A finished monument would, in effect, finish memory itself.

On the one hand, I said, we must acknowledge the public need and political necessity for a German national Holocaust memorial; at the same time, we must also recognize the difficulty of answering this need in a single space. If the aim of a national Holocaust memorial in Berlin is to draw a bottom-line under this era so that a reunified Germany can move unencumbered into the future, then let us make this clear. But if the aim is to remember for perpetuity that this great nation once murdered nearly six million human beings solely for having been Jews, then this monument must

also embody the intractable questions at the heart of German Holocaust memory rather than claiming to answer them. Otherwise, I feared that whatever form the monument takes near the Potsdamer Platz would not mark the memory of Europe's murdered Jews so much as bury it altogether.<sup>4</sup>

These were persuasive arguments against the monument, and I am still ambivalent about the role a central Holocaust monument will play in Berlin. But at the same time, I said, I have also had to recognize that this was a position of luxury that perhaps only an academic bystander could afford, someone whose primary interest was in perpetuating the process itself. As instructive as the memorial debate had been, however, it had neither warned nor chastened a new generation of xenophobic neo-Nazis—part of whose identity depends on forgetting the crimes of their forebears. And although the memorial debate has generated plenty of shame in Germans, it is largely the shame they feel for an unseemly argument—not for the mass murder once committed in their name. In good academic fashion, we had become preoccupied with the fascinating issues at the heart of the memorial process and increasingly indifferent to what was supposed to be remembered: the mass murder of Jews and the resulting void it left behind.

The self-righteous and self-congratulatory tenor of our position had also begun to make me uneasy. Our unimpeachably skeptical approach to the certainty of monuments was now beginning to sound just a little too certain of itself. My German comrades in skepticism called themselves “the secessionists,” a slightly self-flattering gesture to the turn-of-the-century movement of artists, many of whom would be Jewish victims of the Nazis. What had begun as an intellectually rigorous and ethically pure interrogation of the Berlin memorial was taking on the shape of a circular, centripedally driven, self-enclosed argument. It began to look like so much hand-wringing and fence-sitting, even an entertaining kind of spectator sport. “But can such an imperfect process possibly result in a good memorial?” parliamentary Peter Conradi asked me at one point. I replied with an American aphorism that was altogether unfamiliar to his German ears: “Yes,” I said, “for perfect is always the enemy of good.” To this day, I'm not sure he understood my point.

And here, I realized, my own personal stake in the memorial had begun to change. The day after I returned from that third colloquium in April, Berlin's Minister of Culture, Senator Peter Radunski, called to ask if I would join a *Findungskommission* of five members appointed to find a suitable memorial design. Who were the other four, I asked. He replied with the names of the directors of the German Historical Museum in Berlin

4. For articulate arguments against the memorial, see Reinhard Kosellek, “Wer das vergessen werden? Das Holocaust-Mahnmahl hierarchisiert die Opfer,” *Die Zeit*, no. 13 (19 March 1998); Gyorgy Konrad, “Abschied von der Chimäre: Zum Streit um das Holocaust-Denkmal,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (26 November 1997): 41.

(Christoph Stoelzl) and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bonn (Dieter Ronte), as well as one of Germany's preeminent twentieth-century art historians (Werner Hoffmann) and one of Berlin's most widely respected and experienced arbiters of postwar architecture (Josef Paul Kleihues)—all authorities he believed to be above reproach. We would be given free rein to extend the process as we saw fit, to invite further artists, and to make an authoritative recommendation to the chancellor and the memorial's organizers. I was to be the only true expert on Holocaust memorials, he said. And, as I then realized, I would be the only foreigner and Jew.

Before answering, I had to ask myself a series of simple but cutting questions: Did I want Germany to return its capital to Berlin *without* publicly and visibly acknowledging what had happened the last time Germany was governed from Berlin? With its gargantuan, even megalomaniacal restoration plans and the flood of big-industry money pouring into the new capital in quantities beyond Albert Speer's wildest dreams, could there really be no space left for public memory of the victims of Berlin's last regime? How, indeed, could I set foot in a new German capital built on the presumption of inadvertent historical amnesia that new buildings always breed? As Adorno had corrected his well-intentioned but facile (and hackneyed) "Nach Auschwitz . . ." dictum, maybe it was also time for me to come down from my perch of holy dialectics and take a position.

But as one of the newly appointed arbiters of German Holocaust memory, I would also find myself in a strange and uncomfortable predicament. The skeptics' whispered asides echoed my own apprehensions: a mere decoration, this American Jew, a sop to authority and so-called expertise. I asked myself: was I invited as an academic authority on memorials, or as a token American and foreigner? Is it my expertise they want, or are they looking for a Jewish blessing on whatever design is finally chosen? If I can be credited for helping arbitrate official German memory, can I also be held liable for another bad design? In fact, just where is the line between my role as arbiter of German memory and my part in a fraught political process far beyond my own grasp?

So when asked to serve on this *Findungskommission* for Berlin's "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," I agreed, but only on the condition that we write a precise conceptual plan for the memorial. Perhaps the greatest weakness in the first competition had been its hopelessly vague conceptual description of the memorial itself, leaving artists to founder in an impossible sea of formal, conceptual, and political ambiguities. In contrast, we would be clear, for example, that this memorial would not displace the nation's other memorial sites, and that a memorial to Europe's murdered Jews would not speak for the Nazis' other victims, but may, in fact, necessitate further memorials to them. Nor should this memorial hide the impossible questions driving Germany's memorial debate. It should instead reflect the terms of the debate itself, the insufficiency of memorials, the

contemporary generation's skeptical view of official memory and its self-aggrandizing ways. After all, I had been arguing for years that a new generation of artists and architects in Germany—including Christian Boltanski, Norbert Radermacher, Horst Hoheisel, Micha Ulmann, Stih and Schnock, Jochen Gerz, and Daniel Libeskind—had turned their skepticism of the monumental into a radical counter-monumentality. In challenging and flouting every one of the monument's conventions, their memorials have reflected an essentially German ambivalence toward self-indictment, where the void was made palpable yet remained unredeemed. If the government insisted on a memorial in Berlin to "Europe's murdered Jews," then couldn't it too embody this same counter-monumental critique?

Rather than prescribing a form, therefore, we described a concept of memorialization that took into account a clear definition of the Holocaust and its significance, Nazi Germany's role as perpetrator, current reunified Germany's role as rememberer, the contemporary generation's relationship to Holocaust memory, and the aesthetic debate swirling around the memorial itself. Instead of providing answers, we asked questions: What are the national reasons for remembrance? Are they redemptory, part of a mourning process, pedagogical, self-aggrandizing, or inspiration against contemporary xenophobia? To what national and social ends will this memorial be built? Just how compensatory a gesture will it be? How anti-redemptory can it be? Will it be a place for Jews to mourn lost Jews, a place for Germans to mourn lost Jews, or a place for Jews to remember what Germans once did to them? These questions must be made part of the memorial process, I suggested, so let them be asked by the artists *in* their designs, even if they cannot finally be answered.

Here I also reminded organizers that this would not be an aesthetic debate over how to depict horror. The Holocaust, after all, was not merely the annihilation of nearly 6 million Jews, among them 1.5 million children, but also the extirpation of a thousand-year-old civilization from the heart of Europe. Any conception of the Holocaust that reduced it to the horror of destruction alone ignored the stupendous loss and void left behind. The tragedy of the Holocaust is not merely that people died so terribly but that so much was irreplaceably lost. An appropriate memorial design would acknowledge the void left behind and not concentrate on the memory of terror and destruction alone. What was lost needs to be remembered as much as how it was lost.

In addition, I suggested that organizers must be prepared to accept the fact that this memorial was being designed in 1997, more than fifty years after the end of World War II. It would necessarily reflect the contemporary sensibility of artists, which includes much skepticism over the very appropriateness of memorials and their traditional function as redemptory sites of mourning, national instruction, and self-aggrandizement. To this end, I also asked organizers to encourage a certain humility among designers, a respect

for the difficulty of such a memorial. It is not surprising that a memorial such as Jacob-Marks's was initially chosen: it represented very well a generation that felt oppressed by Holocaust memory, which would in turn oppress succeeding generations with such memory. But something subtler, more modest and succinct might suggest a balance between being oppressed by memory and inspired by it, a tension between being permanently marked by memory and disabled by it. As other nations have remembered the Holocaust according to their founding myths and ideals, their experiences as liberators, victims, or fighters, Germany will also remember according to its own complex and self-abnegating motives, whether we like them or not. Let Germany's official memorial reflect its suitably tortured relationship to the genocide of Europe's Jews, I said.

Before proceeding, we also had to address two further concerns shared both by us, as members of the *Findungskommission*, and the memorial's opponents: Should it be a contemplative site only, or pedagogically inclined, as well? By extension, would this memorial serve as a center of gravity for the dozens of memorials and pedagogical centers already located at the actual sites of destruction, or would it somehow displace them and even usurp their memorial authority? Because we did not see Holocaust memory in Germany as a zero-sum project, we concluded that there was indeed room in Berlin's new landscape for *both* commemorative spaces and pedagogically oriented memorial institutions. In fact, Berlin and its environs were already rich with excellent museums and permanent exhibitions on the Holocaust and other, more contemporary genocides—from the Wannsee Villa to the Topography of Terror, from the new Jewish Museum on Lindenstrasse and the proposed Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism, to the critical and insightful exhibitions at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen.

The question was never whether there would be only a memorial or a museum. But rather: in addition to these already existing pedagogical houses of memory, was there room as well for a commemorative space meant for memorial contemplation and national ceremonies? Again, we concluded that in Berlin's constellation of memorial sites, there was indeed room for a central memorial node in this landscape, one that would inspire public contemplation of the past, even as it encouraged the public to visit and learn the specifics of this past in the many other museums nearby and throughout the country.

In fact, though still suspicious of the monument as a form, I also began to see how important it would be to add a space to Germany's restored capital deliberately designed to remember the mass-murder of Europe's Jews. This would not be a space for memory designed by the killers themselves, as the concentration camp sites inevitably are, but one designed specifically as a memorial site, one denoting the current generation's deliberate attempt to remember. Of course, the government must continue to support the dozens of other memorial and pedagogical sites around the country. But these are,

after all, already there. To build a memorial apart from these sites of destruction, however, is not merely the passive recognition and preservation of the past. It is a deliberate act of remembrance, a strong statement that *memory must be created* for the next generation, not only preserved.

Finally, I would have to reserve the right to dissent publicly over any final design which I could not stand by. I would agree to serve on such a *Findungskommission* even as I still held strong doubts that a resolution was even possible. I would suspend judgement on whether such a resolution was desirable until the end. If in the end, we arrived at nothing we could justify to the organizers, then my early skepticism would have been vindicated. But if we did find something in a collaborative effort with artists and architects, it would be our responsibility to explain our choice to the public. For if we could not justify it formally, conceptually, and ethically, then how could we expect the public to accept it?<sup>5</sup>

### *The Designs*

In weighing the power of concept against formal execution in a final group of designs, the members of the *Findungskommission* unanimously agreed that two proposals, one by Gesine Weinmiller and the other by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra, far transcended the others in their balance of brilliant concept and powerful execution. Though equally works of terrible beauty, complexity, and deep intelligence, the proposals by Weinmiller and Eisenman/Serra derived their power from very different sources. The choice here was not between measures of brilliance in these two works but between two very different orders of memorial sensibilities: Weinmiller's was the genius of quietude, understatement, and almost magical allusiveness; the collaboration of Eisenman and Serra resulted in an audacious, surprising, and dangerously imagined form. One was by a young German woman of the generation now obligated to shoulder the memory and shame of events for which she was not to blame; the other was by two well-known Americans, architect and artist, one of whose Jewish family left Germany two generations ago. Together, we felt, these two designs would offer the public, government, and organizers of the memorial an actual and stark choice. Their cases were equally strong, but in the end, one would have to gather the force of consensus over the other.

In Gesine Weinmiller's three-sided plaza, visitors would descend into memory and wend their way through eighteen wall-segments composed of giant sandstone blocks scattered in a seemingly random pattern in the

5. I raised many of these same issues, in slightly different form, in James E. Young, "Gegen Sprachlosigkeit hilft kein Kreisichen und Lachen: Berlins Problem mit dem Holocaust-Denkmal—und meines," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2 January 1998): 28.

square. The walls surrounding the area on three sides created a rising horizon as one came further into their compass, slowly blocking out the surrounding buildings and traffic noise. This space would be both part of the city and removed from it. And only gradually would the significance of these forms and spaces begin to dawn on visitors: the eighteen sections of stone wall recall *life* in Hebrew gematria (*chai*); the descent into memory space countered the possible exaltation of such memory and suggested a void carved out of the earth, a wound; the stacking of large stone blocks recalled the first monument in Genesis, a *Sa'adutha* or witness-pile of stones, a memorial cairn; the rough texture and cut of the stones visually echoed the stones of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the ruin of the Temple's destruction; their rough fit would show the seams of their construction; the pebbles on which visitors tread would slow their pace and mark their visit in sound, as well as in the visible traces their steps would leave behind.

Then there was a striking, yet altogether subtle perspectival illusion created from the vantage point in one corner above the plaza: the seemingly random arrangement of scattered wall segments would suddenly compose themselves into a Star of David, and then fall apart as one moved beyond this point. The memory of Jews murdered would be constituted momentarily in the mind's eye before decomposing again, the lost Jews of Europe reconstituted only in the memorial activity of visitors here. Built into this design was also space for historical text on the great wall at the bottom of the decline into memory. Such a text would not presume to name all the victims of the crime but would name the crime itself. Built into this space was the capacity for a record of Holocaust history and for the changing face of its memory.

In its original conception, the proposal by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra also suggested a startling alternative to the very idea of the Holocaust memorial. Like Weinmiller's, theirs was a pointedly anti-redemptory design: it found no compensation for the Holocaust in art or architecture. In its undulating field of 4,000 pillars, it at once echoed a cemetery, even as it implied that such emblems of individual mourning were inadequate to the task of remembering mass murder. Toward this end, it took the vertical forms of its pillars—sized from ground level to five meters high, spaced 92 cm. apart—and turned their collected mass into a horizontal plane. Rather than pretending to answer Germany's memorial problem in a single, reassuring form, this design proposed multiple, collected forms arranged so that visitors have to find their own path to the memory of Europe's murdered Jews. As such, this memorial provided not an answer to memory but an ongoing process, a continuing question without a certain solution.

Part of what Eisenman called its *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness, derived precisely from the sense of danger generated in such a field, the demand that we now find our own way into and out of such memory. And because the scale of this installation would be almost irreproducible on film shot from the ground, it demanded that visitors enter the memorial space and not try

to know it vicariously through their snapshots. What would be remembered here are not photographic images but the visitors' actual experiences and what they remembered *in situ*. As might have been expected in a piece partly designed by Richard Serra, this design also implied a certain physical danger in such memory, a danger meant to remain implicit but so close to being actualized in its scale and forms as to suggest something more than a mere figure of threatening memory.

Before long, public consensus (though far from unanimous) gathered around the design by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra. It was reported that Chancellor Kohl also strongly favored the design by Eisenman and Serra and even invited the team to Bonn to hear them personally explain their proposal. During their January 1998 visit with the Chancellor, Eisenman and Serra were asked to consider a handful of design changes that would make the memorial acceptable to organizers. As an architect who saw accommodation to his clients' wishes as part of his job, Eisenman agreed to adapt the design to the needs of the project. As an artist, however, Richard Serra steadfastly refused to contemplate any changes in the design whatsoever. As a result, he withdrew from the project, suggesting that once changed, the project would in effect no longer be his.

Although we were sorry to see Richard Serra withdraw from the project, we could also fully understand the artist's prerogative to resist recommended changes in what he regarded as a finished work. Here, in fact, the artist's and the architect's modes of operation may always diverge: where the architect generally sees an accommodation to the clients' requests as part of his job, the artist is more apt to see suggested changes, however slight, as a threat to his work's internal logic and integrity. This conflict, too, is normal in the course of collaborations between artists and architects.

Despite our enthusiastic recommendation of Eisenman and Serra's design, in the sheer number of its pillars and its overall scale in proportion to the allotted space, the original design left less room for visitors and commemorative activities than we had wanted. Some of us also found a potential for more than figurative danger in the memorial site: at five meters high, the tallest pillars might have hidden some visitors from view, thereby creating the sense of a labyrinthine maze, an effect desired neither by designers nor commissioners. The potential for a purely visceral experience that might occlude a more contemplative memorial visit was greater than some of us would have preferred.

Therefore, among the modifications we requested of Peter Eisenman, now acting on his own, we asked for a slight downscaling of both the size of individual pillars and their number. In June 1998, I spent a day in Peter Eisenman's New York City studio to hear his rationale and to see the changes he had made, a day before he sent his newly designed model off to Berlin for safe-keeping. Shortly after, I could report to the other commissioners that our suggestions had not only been expertly incorporated into

the design by Peter Eisenman, but that they worked, in unexpected ways, to strengthen the entire formalization of the concept itself. Here I also found that I had, in effect, collapsed my roles as arbiter, critic, and advocate—all toward finding the language that the chancellor himself might use in justifying his decision to a still-skeptical public.

In Eisenman's revised design, I found that he had reduced both the number of pillars (from 4200 to about 3000) and their height, so that they would now range from half a meter tall to about three meters or so in one section of the field. Where the "monumental" has traditionally used its size to humiliate or cow viewers into submission, this memorial in its humanly proportioned forms would put people on an even footing with memory. Visitors and the role they play as they wade knee-, or chest-, or shoulder-deep into this undulating field of stones will not be diminished by the monumental but will be made integral parts of the memorial itself, now invited into a memorial dialogue of equals. Visitors would not be defeated by their memorial obligation here, nor dwarfed by the memory-forms themselves, but rather enjoined by them to come face to face with memory.

Able to see over and around these pillars, visitors will have to find their way through this field of stones, on the one hand, even as they are never actually lost in or overcome by the memorial act. In effect, they will make and choose their own individual spaces for memory, even as they do so collectively. The implied sense of motion in the gently undulating field also formalizes a kind of memory that is neither frozen in time, nor static in space. The sense of such instability will help visitors resist an impulse toward closure in the memorial act and heighten one's own role in anchoring memory in oneself.

In their multiple and variegated sizes, the pillars are both individuated and collected: the very idea of "collective memory" is broken down here and replaced with the collected memories of individuals murdered, the terrible meanings of their deaths now multiplied and not merely unified. The land sways and moves beneath these pillars so that each one is some 3 degrees off vertical: we are not reassured by such memory, not reconciled to the mass murder of millions but now disoriented by it.

In practical terms, the removal of some 1200 pillars out of an originally proposed 4200 or so has dramatically opened up the plaza for public commemorative activities. It has also made room for tourist buses to discharge visitors without threatening the sanctity of the pillars on the outer edges of the field. By raising the height of the lowest pillar-tops from nearly flush with the ground to approximately a half-meter tall, the new design also ensures that visitors will not step on the pillars or walk out over the tops of pillars. Since the pillars will tilt at the same degree and angle as the roll of the ground-level topography into which the pillars are set, this too will discourage climbing or clambering-over. In fact, since these pillars are neither intended nor consecrated as tombstones, there would be no actual desecra-

tion of them were someone to step or sit on one of these pillars. But in Jewish tradition, it is also important to avoid the appearance of a desecration, so the minor change in the smallest pillars was still welcome.

In their warm, sandy tone, the concrete-form pillars will reflect the colors of the sun and sky on the one hand and remain suggestive of stone, even sandstone, on the other. The concrete will not have the rough lines of their pour forms but will be smooth, close to the texture of sidewalk. They can also be impregnated with an anti-graffiti solution to make them easy to clean. Over time, it will be important to remove graffiti as it appears, in order not to allow it to accumulate. The crushed-stone ground surface is also an excellent idea, in that it inhibits running, frolicking, or lying on the ground, even as it marks the visitors' own footsteps in both sound and space.

The architect prefers that the pillars, though stone-like, remain underdetermined and open to many readings: they are alternately stones, pillars, blank tablets, walls, and segments. This said, in their abstract forms, they will nevertheless accommodate the references projected onto them by visitors, the most likely being the tombstone. This is not a bad thing and suggests the need to keep these pillars blank-faced. With written text, they might begin to look very much like tombstones, in fact, and so might generate a dynamic demanding some sort of formal treatment as tombstones, even symbolic ones.

For this reason, I suggested that a permanent, written historical text be inscribed on a large tablet or tablets set either into the ground or onto the ground, tilted at a readable angle, separate from the field of pillars. Their angled position will bring visitors into respectful, even prayerful repose as they read the text, with heads slightly bowed in memory. These could be placed at the entrance or on the sides, under the trees lining the perimeter of the field, leaving the integrity of the field itself formally intact, while still denoting exactly what is to be remembered here. Thus placed, the memorial texts will not create a sense of beginning or end of the memorial field, leaving the site open to the multiple paths visitors take in their memorial quest. This, too, will respect the architect's attempt to foster a sense of incompleteness; it will not be a memorial with a narrative beginning, middle, and end built into it.

On 25 June 1999, the German Bundestag took a series of votes on the matter of the memorial. It finally passed three principal motions: (1) The Federal Republic of Germany will erect in Berlin a "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe"; (2) The design for this memorial will be the field of pillars proposed by Peter Eisenman, to which an information center will be added; and (3) A public foundation made up of the directors of other memorial institutions, as well as representatives from the organization of Jews in Germany, will be established by the Bundestag to oversee both the building of the memorial and its information center in the year 2000.

Now that Germany's "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe" has been dedicated and construction has begun, is this the end of Germany's Holocaust memory-work, as I had initially feared? Obviously not. Debate and controversy continue unabated. Moreover, now that the parliament has decided to give Holocaust memory a central place in Berlin, an even more difficult job awaits the organizers: defining exactly what it is to be remembered here in Peter Eisenman's field of pillars. What will Germany's national Holocaust narrative be? Who will write it and to whom will it be written? The question of historical content begins at precisely the moment the question of memorial design ends. Memory, which has followed history, will now be followed by still further historical debate.

On the dedication of the memorial in January 2000, fittingly fraught as always, the debate continued. Some, like Mayor Eberhard Diepken, stayed home like a petulant child who didn't get his way; others stayed home out of the deeply felt conviction that no memorial will ever be adequate to the task. Of those who came to the dedication, most came to remember, some to mourn, and some to share in the memorial's unflattering political limelight. Had I been able, I surely would have come—both to mourn and to watch with some satisfaction as Berlin continued to wrestle with its memorial demons.

From this American Jew's perspective, this last year has been a watershed for German memory and identity. No longer paralyzed by the memory of crimes perpetrated in its name, Germany is now acting on the basis of such memory: it participated boldly in NATO's 1999 intervention against a new genocide perpetrated by Milosevic's Serbia; it has begun to change citizenship laws from blood- to residency-based; and it has dedicated a permanent place in Berlin's cityscape to commemorate what happened the last time Germany was governed from Berlin. Endless debate and memorialization are no longer mere substitutes for actions against contemporary genocide but reasons for action. This is something new, not just for Germany but for the rest of us, as well.

For whether Germans like it or not, in addition to their nation's great accomplishments over the last several centuries, they will also always be identified as that nation which launched the deadliest genocide in human history, which started a world war that eventually killed some 50 million human beings, and which used this war to screen its deliberate mass murder of some 6 million European Jews. It is not a proud memory. But neither has any other nation attempted to make such a crime perpetrated in its name part of its national identity. For this space will always remind Germany and the world at large of the self-inflicted void at the heart of German culture and consciousness—a void that defines national identity, even as it threatens such identity with its own implosion.