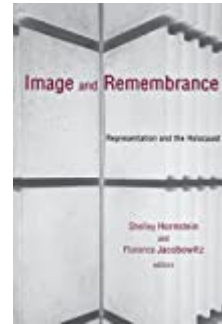




**Shelley Hornstein, Florence Jacobowitz, eds.** *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. viii + 332 pp. \$55.00 (library), ISBN 978-0-253-34188-4; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21569-7.



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## Memorializing the Holocaust through Art

*Image and Remembrance* focuses on the dilemmas that arise when artists attempt to represent the Holocaust in their creations. It is a book that deals with “thorny” issues like aesthetics and memory in artwork about the Holocaust. The central question that emerges after reading this text is: can the Holocaust be represented in a tasteful way that both reveals its horrors yet properly commemorates its victims? The nineteen contributors to this book—Ernst van Alphen, Monica Bohm-Duchen, Tim Cole, Rebecca Comay, Mark Godfrey, Reesa Greenberg, Marianne Hirsch, Shelley Hornstein, Florence Jacobowitz, Berel Lang, Daniel Libeskind, Andrea Liss, Leslie Morris, Leo Spitzer, Susan Rubin Suleiman, Janet Wolff, Robin Wood, James Young, and Carol Zemel—point to the problems of artistic representations of the Holocaust, namely the tendency to overwhelm viewers with the visual horrors of the Nazi “Final Solution,” horrors that numb, distract, and distance audiences from remembering the victims of Nazi actions. They also point to the choices artists make, sometimes at the behest of local and national authorities, choices that often remove or de-emphasize the victims of Holocaust atrocities in fa-

vor of their liberators. Recent movies about the Holocaust exhibit these same problems. Tim Blake Nelson’s *The Grey Zone* literally overwhelms the viewer with its depictions of Nazi atrocities in relating the story of the Sonderkommando revolt in Auschwitz. Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* celebrates Oskar Schindler as hero and liberator while presenting Jewish victims as passive “sheep” to the slaughter.

Editors Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz organized the book into four sections, each dealing with an important aspect of post-1945 representations of the Holocaust. Part 1 deals with “Commemoration and Sites of Mourning,” grouping articles that explain individual artists’ attempts to commemorate the Holocaust. Articles on Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, as well as the works of Shimon Attie, Arie Galles, and Horst Hoheisel, among others, point to one of the central paradoxes of commemorating the Holocaust: how to represent great loss while not sentimentalizing it? Memorializing “absence” is central to these artists’ works. The famous architect Daniel Libeskind, in an article entitled “Trauma,” tells first-hand

the dilemmas of memorializing this absence. His successful project, the Felix Nussbaum Haus in Osnabrück, showcases the works of the forgotten Jewish painter Felix Nussbaum. The exhibit is in three parts: the first is a “traditional wooden building” (p. 49), housing Nussbaum’s pre-war work, that is “violently cut” by a second, narrow, exhibit, the Nussbaum *Gang*, which shows Nussbaum’s works in a confined space. Here, Libeskind shows the work of Nussbaum the fugitive, who painted secretly in confined spaces while on the run from the Nazis. Such space destroys the traditional distance between viewer and art work, illustrating Nussbaum’s artistic perceptions during war-time under duress. The third part, the Nussbaum *Brücke*, holds the “newly discovered paintings of Nussbaum” (p. 49), paintings in which Nussbaum’s signature had been erased. Thus, Libeskind attempts to reverse Nussbaum’s “absence” from history by showing forgotten works and conveying, through spatial reorientation, the experiences of Nussbaum the fugitive, who was eventually caught and sent to Auschwitz, where he was gassed. More radically, artist Horst Hoheisel has attempted to commemorate the absence of the Aschrott Fountain, a pyramidal, gothic, fountain “funded by a Jewish entrepreneur from Kassel, Sigmund Aschrott” (p. xx). Built in 1908, the fountain was destroyed in 1939 by the Nazis, who called it the “Jews’ Fountain” (p. 64). As James Young shows in his article “Memory and the End of the Monument,” Hoheisel commemorated the loss of the fountain not by building a new one, but by building an inverted pyramidal fountain, a sort of “negative” of the original, which both memorialized the original Aschrott Fountain and mourned its absence.

Part 2, entitled “Personal Responses and Familial Legacies,” contains articles dealing with the issue of memory and the Holocaust, particularly with regard to survivors, but also with regard to those who were witnesses. As with part 1, the theme of “loss” also plays a large role in these essays. Of greatest significance is the article by Ernst van Alphen, “Caught by Images. Visual Imprints in Holocaust Testimonies.” Alphen adopts the concepts of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, who distinguishes between “narrative memory” and “traumatic memory” (pp. 102-103). As van Alphen explains it, “a narrative memory is retrospective; it takes place after the event. A traumatic memory—or better, reenactment—does not know that distance from the event. The person who experiences a traumatic reenactment is still inside the event, present at it” (p. 103). Van Alphen then goes on to apply these concepts to the writings of Tadeusz Borowski and Charlotte Delbo, Holocaust sur-

vivors whose prose continually slips back and forth between past and present, often confusing the reader. Van Alphen explains that in both cases, the writers continue to experience past traumatic events in the present. Such inability to escape the events of the past, Van Alphen indicates, have led to tragic consequences. In the case of Borowski, he committed suicide as “a direct consequence of Auschwitz” (p. 111). He could not escape the loss he experienced and thus remained trapped in the past, in the Holocaust.

Part 3, entitled “Memento Mori: Atrocity and Aesthetics,” focuses on aesthetics in post-Holocaust art, particularly in photography. This section of the text addresses the question of whether viewers should derive “pleasure” from Holocaust related art. Janet Wolff, in her article “The Iconic and the Allusive: The Case for Beauty in Post-Holocaust Art,” sums up the dilemma: “The fear is that visual pleasure negates horror, by aestheticizing violence and atrocity, by proposing redemption in the face of outrage, or by providing consolation in the encounter with beauty” (p. 165). Nowhere is this more of a problem than in photographic representations of the Holocaust. Carol Zemel, in her article, “Emblems of Atrocity: Holocaust Liberation Photographs,” argues that in concentration camp liberation photographs, “the transcendent force of the Sublime combines with familiar forms of Christian iconography (i.e. Christian martyrdom) to provide moral rescue of the images’ horrors and fascinations” (p. 217). For Zemel, the numbing, distancing effect of the photographs is not the most problematic issue, nor is the fascination we experience when viewing them. What is most disturbing is the transformation of Jews into Christian martyrs, remaking Holocaust victims into something they were not.

Part 4, entitled “National Expressions of Remembrance,” is basically an extension of part 1, continuing the discussion of “absence,” but discussing it in regard to national expressions of Holocaust remembrance. Rebecca Comay’s discussion of the British sculptor Rachel Whiteread’s Holocaust memorial in Vienna in many ways continues James Young’s analysis of her work in part 1. Whiteread’s memorial, an inverted library on the Judenplatz in Vienna, invokes “absence” through negation. Similar to Hoheisel, Whiteread’s memorial also caused a great deal of political controversy. While Hoheisel’s Aschrott Fountain Memorial was picketed by Neo-Nazi skinheads, the building of Whitehead’s Viennese Holocaust memorial was delayed again and again by city politics and the rise, on the national political stage, of the extreme right, as represented by Jörg Haider’s Aus-

trian Freedom Party. Almost miraculously, Whiteread's memorial was eventually built and unveiled to the public in 2000. As in Austria, politics have also interfered with the national commemoration of the Holocaust in neighboring Hungary. Tim Coles's article on "Holocaust Memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-1995," shows how national Holocaust memorials can be used for political ends, often omitting the very people who were victimized: the Jews. Holocaust memorials in Budapest have mostly honored liberators, whether they be Soviet (1945-1989) or individuals like the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. The few memorials to Jewish victims, such as the Memorial of the Hungarian Jewish Martyrs, are hidden or obscured, and not easily visible to visitors. Thus, the victims themselves are absent from the very memorials built to remember the event in which they were murdered.

*Image and Remembrance* is a book that raises more questions than it answers. Themes such as "absence," "memory," and the "aesthetics of representation," raise more problems than solutions. They point to the difficulties of visually representing the Holocaust in today's world. Hornstein and Jacobowitz intended this book as "a place of reflection that intentionally does not offer a redemptive, concluding chapter." "There is no narrative structure, with a problem established at the outset and resolved at the end" (p. 5). They wish to invite the reader

to raise his or her own questions. In that, they have succeeded admirably. The interdisciplinary nature of this collection, with scholars from the disciplines of History, Comparative Literature, Art History, Film Studies, and German, all contributing their expertise to a multifaceted view of how art has represented and memorialized the Holocaust, is a major contribution to the field of Holocaust studies. There is, however, one problem that I see with this text. One article, "Gays and the Holocaust: Two Documentaries," appears out-of-place in this collection. Nazi persecution of homosexuals is an important subject of recent research. The article's author, Robin Wood, purports to analyze two documentaries on the persecution of Gays in the Third Reich: *Paragraph 175* and *Desire*. Yet only a third of the article really addresses the films and issues they raise about persecution of homosexuals and their representation on the screen. The rest of the article consists of Wood's personal views on the potential for Fascist regimes arising in present-day Canada and the United States, as well as his proposals to scrap the nuclear family and monogamous relationships. I do not believe that this book is the proper forum for the expression of such views. The editors should have exercised better judgment in this regard. However, despite this one major flaw, *Image and Remembrance* remains a significant contribution to the study of the representation of the Holocaust in art.

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