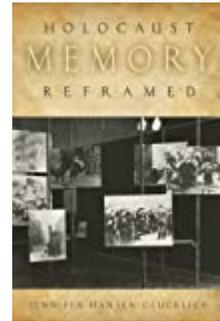




Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Illustrations. 280 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8135-6324-4; \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8135-6323-7.



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Holocaust Museums and Civil Religion: Berlin, Jerusalem, and Washington

At the conclusion of *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*, Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich asks whether the ever-multiplying number of Holocaust museums and memorials, as well as books, movies, and artistic representations, signal that we have succumbed to an obsessive and unremitting ritual of mourning (p. 216). Indeed, the proliferation of memorials may constitute an obsession. Wikipedia's List of Holocaust memorials and museums includes well over 150 entries in 26 different countries. No doubt Wikipedia's list is woefully incomplete, perhaps by an exponential factor if one includes makeshift remembrances and online memorials. But Hansen-Glucklich wants readers to resist succumbing uncritically to obsessive mourning. She instead encourages us to view memory practice with the critical eye it deserves and maintain an attitude to the Holocaust that neither sanctifies it nor simply historicizes it (p. 218). *Holocaust Memory Reframed* exemplifies this strategy, critically interpreting the architecture, exhibition spaces, and intended visitor experiences at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Jewish Mu-

seum Berlin, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC.

Hansen-Glucklich structures *Holocaust Memory Reframed* around a number of familiar tensions: past and present, destruction and redemption, secular and sacred, presence and void. Her work is deeply indebted to Edward T. Linenthal, Oren Baruch Stier, and James E. Young, all of whom have published extensively on memorializing trauma. She also relies on theoretical frameworks provided by scholars and theologians, including Catherine Bell, Mircea Eliade, Emil L. Fackenheim, Jonathan Z. Smith, Elie Wiesel, and rabbis Irving Greenberg and Abraham Joshua Heschel, among others. *Holocaust Memory Reframed* will not replace work by Linenthal, Stier, or Young, nor will it alter the dominant scholarly paradigm governing interpretation of Holocaust museums and memorials, but that does not seem to be Hansen-Glucklich's intention. Instead, her book adds to the existing literature, delving into three museums by using a disciplinary specific lens of analysis. Hansen-Glucklich's book is a revision of her dissertation

in Germanic languages and literatures, completed at the University of Virginia. In this sense, it is a book for specialists. Those who bring to it familiarity both with the scholarly literature in the field and the three museums she engages will benefit the most.

Hansen-Glucklich links Yad Vashem, the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the USHMM because each institution seeks to commemorate extreme trauma in a way resonant with the context culture (p. 4). She relies on civil religion as an organizing interpretive principle, exploring that which is most holy and sacred in the political culture through the lenses of these influential national institutions (p. 21). Alternatively joining together and distinguishing among the three museums depending on the subject of discussion, Hansen-Glucklich's narrative relies on presenting Yad Vashem as a sacred institution, where a redemptive Zionist story dominates. At the Jewish Museum Berlin, the sacred is inverted, with the museum built around a structural absence, but one that seeks to instill in visitors an appreciation for multiculturalism and tolerance (p. 47). The USHMM, by contrast, tells a story where American democracy is made sacred, and where the Holocaust is often seen by visitors through the proxy eyes of American GIs who encountered Jewish victims across Europe as the war neared its end. Hansen-Glucklich clearly favors the strategies at Yad Vashem, and she is most skeptical of those at the USHMM. She appreciates the ways that both Yad Vashem and the Jewish Museum Berlin resist directly representing the Holocaust and especially the way that Yad Vashem focuses on victims as individuals, rather than as anonymous masses represented by stacked objects—such as suitcases or shoes—that elide individual identity (p. 11).

The early chapters of *Holocaust Memory Reframed* take up the architectural efforts by Moshe Safdie at Yad Vashem, Daniel Libeskind at the Jewish Museum Berlin, and James Ingo Freed at the USHMM. Hansen-Glucklich contrasts Yad Vashem's near-organic relationship to the landscape with Libeskind's jarring representations of absence and void in Berlin as well as with Freed's indirect representational strategies that recall guard towers, chimneys, and barbed wires (pp. 57, 75). Moving in the second half of the book to exhibition spaces within the museums, Hansen-Glucklich laments the Jewish Museum Berlin's failure to pose the question of why and how the Holocaust happened. In stark contrast to the evocative architecture, then, the Holocaust exhibit of the Jewish Museum Berlin remains shrouded in inarticulateness and even muteness (p. 118).

By contrast, Hansen-Glucklich argues that the USHMM has been too literal in its interpretation, heaping up the plundered possession of victims in an attempt to make a coherent narrative out of the Holocaust (p. 129). She thinks museums instead should heed Wiesel's dictum (first published in the *New York Times* on June 11, 1989) that only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so (p. 134). And she therefore faults the USHMM for too often encouraging visitors to imagine what the victims experienced by virtue of the fact that they have walked through a Holocaust-era railcar (p. 141). The most problematic flaw in this strategy, Hansen-Glucklich argues, is that visitors remember the victims in the very state to which they were reduced by their oppressors (p. 142).

Both the Jewish Museum Berlin and Yad Vashem avoid stacking up objects that belonged to victims. They take a much more personal, one-by-one approach to victims. The contrast surfaces especially when Hansen-Glucklich discusses the USHMM's *Tower of Faces*—a three-story tower displaying unlabeled portraits of Jews from Eishishok, a small town in what is now Lithuania that was liquidated in two days in 1941—with Yad Vashem's *Hall of Names*, a circular hall containing names and short biographies of 2.5 million individual Jews who perished in the Holocaust. (The institution's goal is to collect names of all Jews who perished.) Hansen-Glucklich argues that Yad Vashem succeeds by restoring individuality to the victims of the Holocaust, where the USHMM too often presents those who were murdered as anonymous victims.

The book has some shortcomings that may derive from its origins in comparative literature rather than in art history or museum studies. *Holocaust Memory Reframed* often mentions iconic photographs of the Holocaust, though those images are not reproduced within the book. A short section titled "Iconic Images" includes no images at all. Multiple artistic works and sections of museum exhibitions are discussed without any illustration. This absence will be especially difficult for readers who have not visited these museums.

Additionally, Hansen-Glucklich too often assumes a universal and uniform visitor experience at each of these institutions, reliant on her own theoretically informed reading of their spaces and presentations. What is absent, however, is a discussion of on-the-ground, actual visitors' experiences, which each museum most likely tracks

and studies. This is perhaps most acute in the book's final chapter, which focuses on museum visits as pilgrimages. Especially in her reading of the Holocaust History Museum at Yad Vashem, where she tells us that, upon exiting, the visitors' integration into the Zionist ideology is complete (p. 191), Hansen-Glucklich assumes a universal Jewish visitor. Would the same integration be true for non-Jewish visitors? Or is she suggesting that all visitors, regardless of background and by proxy, became integrated ideologically by the fact of their visits? Some exploration of visitor reception among the three in-

stitutions would have grounded the book, which remains at the theoretical level throughout, with the author's reading standing in as the singular possible interpretation of the elements discussed. Nonetheless, Hansen-Glucklich's readings are engaging, and should provoke discussion among scholars interested in museum studies, Jewish history, and Holocaust memory.

Editor's Note: The reviewer has been on staff at the USHMM in the past and is currently guest exhibition curator there. The opinions expressed here are his and do not represent those of the USHMM.

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