Exhibiting the Nazi Past: Museums, Memory, and Public History in Berlin

by

Kristin Anne Semmens
B.A., University of British Columbia, 1995

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

[redacted]

Dr. Thomas Saunders, Supervisor (Department of History)

[redacted]

Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, Departmental Member (Department of History)

[redacted]

Dr. Peter Liddell, Outside Member (Department of Germanic Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. Elizabeth Tumasonis, External Examiner (Department of History in Art)

University of Victoria

Supervisor: Dr. Thomas Saunders

ABSTRACT

Since the re-unification of Germany, historians have written numerous books about reworking, reconstructing and rethinking the country's Nazi past. These works do not consider the way in which Germany's institutions of public history, such as museums and memorial centres, are also involved in a reworking of this past. This thesis explains why academic historians rarely consider the exhibit to be a valid form of historiography and addresses their critiques of the exhibition medium. The thesis also argues for a recognition of the museum's role in creating public memories of the Nazi past. By focusing on a range of displays about the Third Reich in the city of Berlin, from those at the major national museums to smaller, temporary exhibits, the work analyzes how museums depict the perpetrators, victims and resisters of this period. In describing the sources used, and in evaluating the individual exhibits, the thesis also establishes a methodology for studying the oft-neglected museal narrative as a form of historiography.

Examiners:

[redacted]

Dr. Thomas Saunders, Supervisor (Department of History)

[redacted]

Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, Departmental Member (Department of History)

[redacted]

Dr. Peter Liddell, Outside Member (Department of Germanic Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. Elizabeth Tumasonis, External Examiner (Department of History in Art)

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

CONTENTS iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

INTRODUCTION: EXHIBITING THE NAZI PAST IN BERLIN 1

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY ON DISPLAY: EVALUATING THE EXHIBITED PAST 8

CHAPTER TWO: MASS MURDER WITHOUT THE MURDERERS? THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANS AS PERPETRATORS 41

CHAPTER THREE: DISPLAYING THE HOLOCAUST: REPRESENTING THE GERMANS' VICTIMS 64

CHAPTER FOUR: "WE SUFFERED TOO": THE REPRESENTATION OF THE GERMANS AS VICTIMS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR 84

CHAPTER FIVE: REDEFINING RESISTANCE: THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANS AS RESISTERS TO HITLER 104

CONCLUSION: THE *WEHRMACHTAUSSTELLUNG* 121

EPILOGUE: BERLIN'S NEW MUSEUM LANDSCAPE 135

BIBLIOGRAPHY 137

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thesis writing, like museum history itself, is a co-operative effort. I am particularly grateful for the assistance of Ute Stiepani and Anneke de Rudder at the German Resistance Memorial Centre, Burkhard Asmuss and Levke Harders at the German Historical Museum and Helmuth Braun at the Jewish Museum. These individuals made my research trip to Berlin both a productive and an enjoyable experience.

Thanks must also go to my professors, Tom Saunders and Elizabeth Vibert, for the time they devoted to reading and critiquing drafts of this thesis. Their insightful comments and questions made this a better paper.

Finally, I am grateful for the encouragement and support I received from my family, friends, and fellow graduate students. Their interest in this project provided continual inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

EXHIBITING THE NAZI PAST IN BERLIN

> Where … museum histories discriminate and omit,
> they further legitimize discrimination and omission.
> Where they commemorate and celebrate, they permit
> commemoration and celebration. Where they question
> and consider, they promote questioning and consideration.[1]
>
> Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*

Every year, approximately 7.3 million people visit the more than 150 permanent collections housed in Berlin's museums.[2] "The variety of the exhibits is boundless," reads a recently published museum guide, "the abundance of valuables and treasures [is] incomparable."[3] Visitors to Berlin's museums can walk through the Ishtar Gate from Babylon, built during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC), gaze at a 14th century BC bust of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti, and climb aboard a sailboat from Tonga, reconstructed according to a sketch completed by Captain James Cook -- all before admiring paintings by such masters as Cezanne, Renoir, van Gogh, Picasso, and Klee, as well as sculptures by Rodin and Degas.

A very different type of museum experience is also available in Berlin. Its highlights might include reading the minutes of the Wannsee Conference, at which a "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question" was determined, in the very room in which the conference was held in 1942. It could also include listening to the recorded voices of the

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[1] Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 127.

[2] Christiane Theiselmann, *Museumsführer: 150 x Kunst, Geschichte, Technik und Natur in Berlin* (Berlin: Jaron Verlag, 1997), 4.

[3] Ibid., 4.

Jewish survivors of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp or watching film clips of the liberation of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Those with an interest in art can view the painting that once hung above Adolf Hitler's desk, displayed in contrast to those by artists the Nazis banned as "degenerate." These exhibits are also crucial features of Berlin's "wonderfully varied museum landscape."[4]

Richard von Weizsäcker has said of the city that "in good and evil Berlin is the trustee of German history, which has left its scars here as nowhere else."[5] Berlin's urban landscape is indeed scarred by its Nazi past and the exhibits created to document this period of German history prevent these scars from fading. Adolf Hitler once claimed that, "It is my ambition to establish a memorial to myself within the German *Volk*."[6] The museums and exhibits in Berlin provide a memorial of the horrors perpetuated in his name. Such history museums and exhibits are more than memorials, however; they also function as a form of historiography which constructs narratives about the Nazi past for the German public and international visitors alike. In general, academic historians have yet to acknowledge the museum as a key site in the production of historical narratives, or to examine the resulting narratives themselves in any depth. The stories museums tell about the Nazi past are thus still marginalized in the rapidly expanding historiographical literature.

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[4] Theiselmann, *Museumsführer*, 4.

[5] Richard von Weizsäcker, quoted in Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 6.

[6] Adolf Hitler, quoted in William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1960), 73-4.

Germany's Museum Boom

Since the late 1960s, Germany has witnessed a growing public interest in the Nazi past. Certain events have played key roles in sparking this interest, among them, the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, the publication of Albert Speer's memoirs, and a steady stream of biographies and documentaries about Adolf Hitler. The 1979 telecasting of the series "Holocaust" is also often viewed as a turning point in (West) Germany's confrontation with Nazi crimes.[7] This television series both attracted a massive audience and provoked a highly emotional response. It also provided a new way of "seeing" or "viewing" the Holocaust in a popular, public historical form.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Germany has also experienced a museum boom. The number of displays and exhibits on historical themes, particularly relating to the Nazi period, continue to proliferate at an unprecedented pace both in Berlin and in Germany as a whole.[8] Germany is not alone in experiencing this "relentless museummania."[9] Commentators have noted similar trends throughout Britain and North America. This increase in the number of museums has been accompanied by an enormous growth in the

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[7] On the public and critical reception of the "Holocaust" series, see *New German Critique* 19 (Winter, 1980).

[8] See Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass,: Harvard University Press, 1997), 123; Gottfried Korff, "Ausgestellte Geschichte," *Saeculum* 43, no. 1 (1992): 24-25. Korff also notes that visitor numbers seem to indicate their preference for *history* museums over other kinds of museums (25).

[9] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 14. On the proliferation of new history museums in Germany and the German public's "new" passion for history, see Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), 247; Beatrice Heuser, "Museums, Identity and Warring Historians - Observations on History in Germany," *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 2 (1990): 419-420.

literature on museum studies.[10] In general, this literature addresses why the public has become increasingly interested in the past and why museums have become an increasingly popular medium of historical representation. Within the German context, this proliferation of museums and exhibits must also be linked to the country's wider attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to re-examine, re-evaluate, and perhaps even master the most horrific chapter of its history.

New memorials, monuments, exhibits, films, books, and plays about the Third Reich are produced every year in Germany as part of an ongoing public "rediscovery" of the Nazi past. However, a growing chorus of voices, once led by former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, has claimed that the "grace of late birth" exempts the present generation from this often tortured examination of the Third Reich. It is time, these voices say, for Germany to escape from the shadow of Hitler.[11]

The museum boom has thus gone hand-in-hand with renewed debate over the Nazi past. The *Historikerstreit* (historians' debate), which erupted in Germany in 1986, saw journalists, historians, and the general public all join in a protracted and acrimonious dispute over how to interpret the country's Nazi past, a past, as historian Ernst Nolte wrote at the time, that will not pass away. Was the Holocaust to be seen as a "unique" event, as social theorist Jürgen Habermas claimed, or could it be compared to other genocides of the twentieth century? Generally speaking, the Left argued that such

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[10] Ian Wolfenden, "Introduction," in *Museums and Late Twentieth Century Culture*: *Transcripts Taken from a Series of Lectures Given at the University of Manchester, Oct.-Dec., 1994* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 3.

[11] Kohl made this controversial statement characterizing his generation - in a sense absolving it of responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich - during a state visit to Israel in 1984.

comparisons "relativized" Nazi atrocities, the Right, that the continued focus on the Holocaust as an unparalleled event was a detriment to the formation of a positive German national identity.[12] At the same time, the "museum debate" swirled around Kohl's plans to build two new national history museums: the German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum - DHM) in Berlin and the House of German History in Bonn.[13] This debate raised questions about how central the Third Reich was to be in a display of German history from the Middle Ages to the present in Berlin and in the story of the West German republic in Bonn. Suddenly, museums were front page news.

Three years after the *Historikerstreit*, the Berlin Wall fell and the unification of the two Germanys quickly followed. Together these events have served as catalysts for a major reconsideration of the history of the Third Reich. Numerous books have been published recently about "reworking," "rethinking," and "reconstructing" the Nazi past in a unified Germany.[14] The vast majority of these rework, rethink and reconstruct this

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[12] As Peter Baldwin has noted, such a "simple polarity does not do justice to the complexity of themes intertwined with the *Historikerstreit*" ("The *Historikerstreit* in Context," in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust and the Historians' Debate* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1990], 11). Charles Maier's *The Unmasterable Past* is widely regarded as one of the best and most balanced accounts of the debate. See also Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon, 1989). The original essays by the key participants, including Ernst Nolte and Jürgen Habermas, appear in Rudolf Augstein et al., eds., *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich: Piper, 1987). The debate continues to inspire commentary today. See, for example, Dominick LaCapra's most recent contribution, "Revisiting the Historians' Debate: Mourning and Genocide," in *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust beyond Memory*, ed. Gulie Ne'eman Arad, *History & Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (fall 1997): 80-112.

[13] See Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 121-139. Heuser argues that the museum debate actually sparked the *Historikerstreit* itself ("Museums, Identity, and Warring Historians," 425). However, Maier's contention that it was but one of many aspects of the historians' controversy seems more convincing (*The Unmasterable Past*, 122).

[14] For example, see Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath, eds., *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997); Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past*; Graham Bartram, Maurice Slawinski and David Steel, eds., *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-War European Culture* (Keele, England: Keele University Press, 1996); Richard

period by focusing almost exclusively on the written interpretations of academic historians. History is not, however, constructed only within the halls of academia. The Nazi past is also represented and contested throughout Germany in institutions of public history such as museums and *Gedenkstätte* (commemorative sites or memorial centres).

This thesis examines museum history in a single German city: Berlin. As the former capital of the Third Reich and now the new capital of a re-unified Germany, Berlin is an obvious and fascinating prism through which to view the intersecting discourses of national identity, collective memory, commemorative culture and public history which converge in discussions of history museums. My aim is not only to describe and analyze the museal landscape of Germany's capital, but also to address larger questions about public historical representations of the Nazi past.

Little scholarly literature has been devoted to the public historical representations of Hitler's Germany, because few academic historians appear to take the museum seriously as an institution out of which "good" history can emerge. Museums have been dismissed as tourist attractions and entertainment venues on the one hand, or as the producers of politically-manipulated history on the other. At the end of the twentieth century, however, many more people gain their historical knowledge from forms of public history, such as novels, films and museums, than they do from academic historians. Exhibits in museums thus play crucial roles in shaping popular historical consciousness and forging a collective memory of past events.

Evans, ed., *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification, 1800-1996* (London: Routledge, 1997); Richard Evans, ed., *Rethinking German History: Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

It is therefore not enough simply to denounce the exhibition medium. One must engage it critically and ask: How is the Nazi past represented in Berlin's institutions of public history? Which interpretations do historical exhibits validate? Have these exhibits changed over time? What are the politics of museum display which affect and influence this representation? Alexandra Richie has written that "more than anywhere else in the world Berlin can contribute to an understanding of the Holocaust and of the other crimes committed by Nazi Germany."[15] This thesis examines one of the most important ways through which the city makes such a contribution: its museums and exhibits.

[15] Alexandra Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf, Inc.: 1998), 889.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY ON DISPLAY: EVALUATING THE EXHIBITED PAST

Since 1986, when the editors of *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* remarked that "historians have paid remarkably little attention to the presentation and perception of history outside the classroom," there has been significant change, at least with regard to certain forms of what might be termed "non-academic historicizing."[16] In 1988 contributors to the *American Historical Review* debated the issue of historical films in a forum entitled "History in Images / History in Words."[17] The latest *AHR* Forum, "Histories and Historical Fictions," deals with historical novels.[18] A recent issue of *History and Theory* is devoted to "*Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy*." In his contribution, John E. Toewes notes the recent trend toward a "'broader historical turn' involving not only the academy, its disciplines, and disciplinary

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[16] Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), xvi.

[17] *American Historical Review* 93B (fall 1988). On historical films, see also Anton Kaes, "History and Film: Public Memory in the Age of Electronic Dissemination," in *Framing the Past: The Historiography of German Cinema and Television*, ed. Bruce A. Murray and Christopher J. Wickham (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), vol. 1, *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*; Robert A. Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Green (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988); R.C. Raack, "Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 3 (1983): 411-38; I.C. Jarvie, "Seeing Through Movies," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 8 (1978): 374-97.

[18] *American Historical Review 103* (winter 1998). See also Dominick LaCapra, "History and the Novel" in *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). For a comparison between films and novels as media of historical representation, see Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (fall 1980): 121-40.

discourses, but the problems of cultural or social production of historical consciousness outside the academy."[19]

Despite these developments, exhibits have still not received the kind of coverage devoted to television, films or, most recently, novels. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill notes:

> It is only fairly recently that museums have been subjected to any rigorous form of critical analysis. In the past, museums have somehow escaped the careful study to which schooling or the media, for example, have been subjected. … The study of the way in which knowing is enabled, constructed, and consumed in schools, through films, in television, and in literature is well established. However, the analysis of the various elements that together make up the 'reality' that we call 'the museum' has barely begun.[20]

Hooper-Greenhill made this observation in 1992. Since then the literature on museums has continued to grow, but without addressing the specific ways in which exhibited history constructs narratives about the past for public consumption.[21] Andreas Huyssen has argued that the steady proliferation of museums over the last generation and their "newly acquired prominence … beg for an explanation."[22] Those who have attempted such an explanation tend not to be academic historians, and rarely do the commentators

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[19] John E. Toewes, "A New Philosophy of History? Reflections on Postmodern Historicizing," *History and Theory* 36 (1997): 236. The inclusion of an analysis of the histories produced in German museum exhibits in this issue marks a unique attempt to deal with the museum as a site for the production of history. See Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum," *History and Theory* 36 (1997): 44-63.

[20] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 3.

[21] Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., "Introduction: Frameworks for Critical Analysis," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994), ix.

[22] Andreas Huyssen, "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age," in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, ed. James E. Young (Munich: Prestel, 1994), 12.

view the museum as a form of historiography, similar to the written page, or even to the television or film screen. Rather, this admittedly growing literature tends to analyze the *history museum* from three limited standpoints: as a pedagogical project, as an instrument of social control, or as a form of monument or memorial. In other words, authors have viewed museums as a means of teaching about the past, of instrumentalizing the past for the present, and of commemorating the victims of the past. Few have offered detailed studies of the museal narratives about the Third Reich or have positioned these narratives as a form of historiography.

The Museum as Teacher

Hooper-Greenhill has asserted that "virtually all [critical studies of the museum] ... have been written from outside a direct experience of the museum as a profession."[23] Significantly, her generalization does not hold true for Berlin. Most articles about Berlin's museums and memorial centres are written by the staff members of the institutions themselves. These writings are rarely as critical as they could be and their focus tends overwhelmingly to be on the *teaching* of history through the exhibit medium.[24] They classify the museum as a pedagogical instrument, equivalent to the

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[23] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, 3.

[24] Annegret Ehmann, "Thesen zur pädagogischen Arbeit in der Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz," in *Reaktionäre Modernität und Völkermord. Probleme des Umgangs mit der NS-Zeit in Museen, Ausstellungen und Gedenkstätten*, ed. Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Josef Jelich. *Geschichte und Erwachsenenbildung* 2 (1994). Thomas Lutz, "Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des NS-Regimes: Geschichte - Arbeitsweisen - Wirkungsmöglichkeiten," in *Gedenkstätten im vereinten Deutschland: 50 Jahre nach der Befreiung der Konzentrationslager*, ed. Jürgen Dittberner and Antje von Meer (Berlin: Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten und Edition Hentrich, 1994); Janni Müller-Hauck, "Brauchen die Museen Museumspädagogik?" *Durchsicht: Forum für Museumspädagogik in Berlin und Brandenburg* 9, no. 1 (1998): 3-6; Bodo von Borries, "Präsentation und Rezeption von Geschichte im Museum," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 48, no. 5/6 (1997): 337-343; Manfred Treml, " 'Schreckensbilder' - Überlegungen zur historischen Bildkunde: Die Präsentation von Bildern an Gedächtnisorten des Terrors,"

textbook or classroom lecture. This literature thus examines the way in which museum exhibits teach, educate, and inform visitors about the Nazi past. They evaluate how objects are chosen to awaken and sustain (primarily students') interest, how images teach in museums, and how guided tours, archives, libraries, and audio-visual material add to the educative potential of museums.

The museum is indeed a crucial component of *Geschichtsdidaktik* (the didactics of history) and does need to be addressed as such. However, the existing literature on museums and exhibits in Berlin tends all too often to study the exhibit medium and not the exhibit's message. It focuses on the means by which the story is conveyed, to whom it is conveyed and even to some extent, how it is received, but not on the story itself. The actual interpretation or narrative argument in its totality is rarely the object of analysis. Such articles appear to take the Nazi past as a given, something about which museum curators, like other educators, then use a variety of methods to teach. It is thus on the museum exhibit as a teaching method that Berlin's museum professionals continue to focus. The actual historical narrative about the Third Reich which the museum displays, however, is seldom problematized.

The Museum as Disciplinary Institution

In recent years, the *history* of history and art museums has received increasing attention from academic historians. Working within the analytic frameworks of Foucault

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Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 48, no. 5/6 (1997): 279-294. Particularly indicative of the focus of these articles is the kind of journals in which they often appear. For example, the *Museums Journal*, published by the Museum Pedagogy Service, *Durchsicht*, a "Forum for Museum Pedagogy in Berlin and Bonn," *GEP*, a "Magazine for Historical and Political Education," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (History in Knowledge and Instruction) and *Geschichtsdidaktik* (Didactics of History).

and Althusser, many such treatments categorize the museum - in the past and the present - as a disciplinary institution similar to the prison. The museum in these studies is not viewed as a form of historiography or even as a means of teaching about the past, but as an instrument of power and social control, and as an active agent of ideological persuasion.[25] By gaining control over the past and by displaying the past for the public in an authoritative manner, the museum, it is argued, also enables the state to gain control of society's memory, thereby conditioning its hierarchy of power; in other words, the museum allows the state to support its own hegemony while simultaneously disempowering others.[26]

In general, such literature is of little use for a study of the actual historical interpretations on display in museums. As Sharon Macdonald explains, such works tend to present too simplistic a picture of museums as "unproblematic reflections of dominant ideological interests."[27] Also problematic is the fact that such histories of these institutions speak not of individual museums but of "the" museum as a monolithic entity, without variance or distinctions. Little sustained analysis of the actual exhibits is

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[25] Analyses using this framework are numerous. See, for example, Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1992); Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, especially Chapter 7 "The Disciplinary Museum"; Jim McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[26] Sharon Macdonald, ed., "Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition: An Introduction to the Politics of Display," in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 3-4, 19; Walsh, *Representation*, 31; Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Vera Zolberg, "Museums as Contested Sites of Remembrance: The Enola Gay Affair," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 79.

[27] Sharon Macdonald, "Introduction," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 4.

presented. Such studies also fail to examine why the museum lends itself to this political instrumentalization so easily. The link between the medium and its capability for social control is rarely explained.[28]

However, in discussing the Berlin museum scene, this discourse which castigates the museum as an instrument of political persuasion is not without relevance. Social Democrat and Green Party critics of Chancellor Kohl's plans to build national history museums in Berlin and Bonn viewed these museums as an attempt by the conservative government to establish some kind of "cultural hegemony." They accused the Right of using museums to usurp the German past to serve its own interests and to advance party politics.[29]

The presentation of Germany's Nazi past was particularly contested in the debate about the German Historical Museum (DHM) in Berlin. "The museum," Charles Maier wrote as the DHM was first established, "represents a claim to master the [Nazi] past.

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[28] Hartmut Boockmann is an exception. He links the way in which the message is "hammered home" in a "head-on" style of instruction with the museum's capability for political "indoctrination" ("Zwischen Lehrbuch und Panoptikum: Polemische Bemerkungen zu historischen Museen und Ausstellungen," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 11 [1985]: 68-9).

[29] The Green Party criticized the museum as being a "medium for the [Conservatives'] self-representation" and a means for "power-stabilizing and self-legitimizing" (Geschichtswerkstatt Berlin, ed., *Die Nation als Ausstellungsstück: Planungen, Kritik und Utopien zu den Museumsgründungen in Bonn und Berlin* [Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1987], 8, 128).
Kohl explicitly addressed these fears:

> German history [will] be presented in a manner that will [be] open to conflicting interpretations and discussions, open to the multiplicity of possible historical points of view. We are convinced there can be no such thing as a definitive view of history, and least of all a historical view imposed by the government. No one - no one! - has the right to force his view and his interpretation of history on others.

See Peter Paret, "National Identity in a Divided Nation: The New Historical Museum in West Berlin," *Working Papers in International Studies Series* (August 1988): 8. It was also feared that in serving as a "corrective" to the "ideological distortions" of the Museum of German History (in East Berlin), the new

The Germans will package and subdue their history by suitably arranging its relics."[30] Leftist critics voiced fears that the new museum threatened to "white-wash" the Third Reich by focusing predominantly on "positive traditions" in German history from the Middle Ages to the present.[31] A Green Party member said at the time that "the museum serves as an instrument to discard and lock away the memory of the horrors and the crimes of national-socialism."[32]

The plans for the museums in Berlin and Bonn sparked a flurry of articles in the late 1980s, many written by historians. Since these museums opened their doors, however, few critics have addressed the narratives that these museums display.[33] The assumption on the part of Kohl's most vehement critics had been, *a priori*, that a state-supported museum would inevitably support the party line and buttress the status quo. I do not believe that such fears were realized in the resulting permanent exhibit. As the political controversy died out, few evaluated the exhibits in order to prove or disprove such assumptions. The museums ceased to draw attention, indicating that the debate had

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German Historical Museum in the West would present a similarly one-sided interpretation of the past, one which legitimized the conservative, right-wing government of Chancellor Kohl.

[30] Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 136.

[31] Heuser, "Museums, Identity," 424.

[32] Christoph Stölzl, ed., *Deutsches Historisches Museum: Ideen - Kontroversen - Perspektiven* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1988), 483.

[33] See, for example, Wolfgang Ernst, "Das historische Museum: Über die Kunst, die Unausstellbarkeit der Vergangenheit dennoch zu zeigen," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 2, no. 4 (1991): 25-43; Tom Holder, "Berlin Museums and the Third Reich," *Historian* 26 (1990): 19-21; Jürgen Kocka, "Die deutsche Geschichte soll ins Museum," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 11 (1985): 59-66; Andreas Ludwig, "Das Deutsche Historische Museum in Berlin," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 2, no. 4 (1991): 102-106; Wolfgang Ruppert, "Zwei neue Museen für deutsche Geschichte? Vorschläge zu ihrer demokratischen Öffnung," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 12, no. 1 (1986): 81-92; Paret, "National Identity"; Heuser, "Museums, Identity."

always been much more about the present political constellation than about interpreting the past itself.

The Museum: Memorial or Monument?

Much of the academic discussion about museums tends to subsume them under other headings; for example, they are seen as pedagogical instruments or as part of the ideological apparatus of the state. A third body of work subsumes museums under the broader heading of commemorative forms, a category encompassing memorials, monuments and other media, apart from written historiography, through which the past is passed down to us. This body of literature, much of which has been influenced by James Young's studies on the commemoration of the Holocaust, does not treat the museum as an individual medium of historical representation with its own unique properties and characteristics.[34] Instead, it is assumed to be one and the same as a memorial or monument: it serves as a reminder to the public in the present of events or people in the past. As such, commentators have addressed the historical exhibit as part of a broader memorialization process. However, museum displays are rarely analyzed in terms of how they construct more complex, historiographical narratives. Yet this capability is undoubtedly something which sets them apart from other commemorative forms.

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[34] James E. Young, "Memory and Monument," in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1993); Young, ed., *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (Munich: Prestel, 1994).

In 1985, James Young wrote: "It is surprising how little attention is being devoted to the forms and meanings of remembrance engendered by memorials and museums expressly to deepen the memory of the Holocaust."[35] Young's extensive work, including the curating of an exhibit hosted by the German Historical Museum on Holocaust memorials in Europe, Israel and the United States, has done much to alter this. Studies now abound of German memorials to the victims and events of the Third Reich.[36] Try as some authors might, however, the museum cannot be subsumed so easily under these two other forms of commemoration. While all these forms may be viewed as "memorial texts," the museum exhibit is not the equivalent of a *Gedenktafel* (commemorative plaque) or *Denkmal* (monument).[37] Andreas Huyssen combines the three -- museum, monument and memorial -- as the "major modes of aesthetic, historical and spatial expression" in the late twentieth century.[38] This blurring of boundaries among the three forms of representation erases the very important differences between them. By addressing only the commemorative function of the museum, this body of literature

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[35] Young, "Memory and Monument," 104-5.

[36] The most extensive of these is Ulrike Puvogel and Martin Stankowski, eds., *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus: Eine Dokumentation*. 2nd ed. (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1995). This is more of an encyclopaedic approach which lists and describes monuments and memorials throughout Germany. See also Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*. There are has numerous books devoted to cataloguing Berlin's monuments and commemorative plaques. See Martin Schönfeld, *Gedenktafeln in Ost-Berlin: Orte der Erinnerung an die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Aktives Museum, 1991); Stefanie Endlich and Thomas Lutz, *Gedenken und Lernen an historischen Orten: Ein Wegweiser zu Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in Berlin*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit, 1998). There is currently a growing literature on the planned Holocaust memorial in Berlin as well. See Silke Wenke, *Ein "Altar des Vaterlandes" für die neue Hauptstadt? Zur Kontroverse um das "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas"* (Frankfurt am Main: Fritz Bauer Institut, 1996).

[37] Young, *Texture of Memory*, ix.

[38] Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 5.

overlooks the museum's capacity to construct a history of the Holocaust, in addition to memorializing its victims.

In sum, the museum studies literature continues to flourish while almost totally ignoring the way the way in which exhibits construct historical narratives and what those narratives look like. Gaynor Kavanagh is an exception. "As with all other forms of history," she says, "exhibition is a construction, a representation and an interpretation of a past moment, based on ideas derived from consideration of available sources."[39] Many historians, however, would likely disagree with the parallels Kavanagh draws. They view the museum medium itself as highly problematic, arguing that it discourages variant readings of the past, lacks an authorial voice, tends toward a superficial representation of the past and is resistant to change. As a result, they have continued to overlook and at times dismiss the exhibit as a valid form of historiography.

The Museum Medium

Critics of the exhibit medium often call attention to its alleged inability to represent historiographical debate or multiple and contradictory points of view and interpretations. Unlike written histories, which have recourse to footnotes to provide the "perhapses" and the "may-have beens," museums usually show only single interpretations of past events.[40] The exhibit guides the visitor through the objects, images and texts "in only one way" and as a result, the past on display in museums is presented as if it

[39] Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, 127.

[40] Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), viii. Anthony Grafton's *The Footnote: A Curious History* is a thorough and engaging

occurred "just so and not any differently."[41] "Exhibitions," writes Sharon Macdonald, thus "tend to be presented to the public … as unequivocal statements."[42] In the vast majority of exhibits -- and this certainly holds true for those Berlin exhibits discussed in this thesis -- no competing theories are articulated, no differences of opinion appear, the objects are fixed, and there are no footnotes calling attention to historiographical debate. This fact naturally does not preclude the narrative being read by different people in different ways. There has always been variation in the *reception* of museum histories. However, the presentation of them, as so many critics suggest, often gives the impression that they show the past "as it truly was."

On the one hand, therefore, critics accuse the museum narrative of being inevitably "uni-vocal"; on the other, they critique the exhibit's *lack* of voice, or more specifically, the *anonymity* of that voice.[43] In other words, because exhibits rarely name the creators of a display or offer information about them, the exhibit medium, it is argued, provides a false objectivity. Sharon Macdonald has argued that "museums inevitably give the impression that exhibition content - its 'storyline' - is somehow disconnected from

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treatment of the importance of footnotes to the historical discipline (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[41] Klaus-Peter Sick and Siegfried Weichlein, "'Walther Rathenau 1876-1922. Die Extreme berühren sich': Rückblick auf die Ausstellung im Deutschen Historischen Museum Berlin, Dezember 1993 bis April 1994," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 45, no. 6 (1994): 518; Boockmann, "Zwischen Lehrbuch," 70.

[42] Macdonald, *The Politics of Display*, 2; Edward T. Linenthal also suggests that the museal narrative appears as a "seamless tale" with the "major interpretive dilemmas resolved" (*Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* [New York: Viking, 1995], 168). Even Peter Steinbach, director of the German Resistance Memorial Centre, questions whether the museum is the right medium for our pluralistic society since it does not display a plurality of interpretations ("Vermächtnis oder Verfälschung? Erfahrungen mit Ausstellungen zum deutschen Widerstand," in *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstands gegen das NS-Regime*, ed. Gerd Ueberschär [Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1994], 170-71).

personal agency: it is 'objective'." The effect of this, she suggests, "is to close off debate."[44]

A concrete example will illustrate these points. At the DHM, the exhibit text makes an explicit argument about Hitler's war aims at the very outset: Hitler had but a single goal, to "establish the hegemony of an Aryan German master race on the skeletons of the underdogs." Thus, in the DHM, the Holocaust is interpreted as being the inevitable outcome of Hitler's seizure of power in 1933.[45] This argument is emphasized several times throughout the display on the Third Reich in a variety of manners, from the anti-Semitic posters and newspapers, which are prominently displayed, to highlighted passages from *Mein Kampf*. The DHM's argument might be termed an "intentionalist" interpretation.[46] Hitler's hatred of the Jews, unchanging and formed at the outset, was in all senses congruent with the eventual outcome. Many historians, in contrast, have proposed a more "functionalist" interpretation of the Holocaust. For them, the road to Auschwitz was a twisted one. Hitler's war against the Jews represented a gradual escalation of his plans; it was a function of events and not necessarily a planned policy

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[43] Linenthal, *Preserving*, 168.

[44] Macdonald, *The Politics of Display*, 1, 232.

[45] Kevin Walsh is particularly critical of the "progressionist, linear narrative" of museum histories, which moves in a seeming "straight line" (*Representation*, 34, 35). Unlike some of the other non-academic forms of history production such as film or novels, which can foreshadow and flashback, museum histories do tend to move in a straightforward chronological way, from year to year and from event to event.

[46] On the "intentionalist" versus "functionalist" debate, see Ian Kershaw, Chapter Four, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1993) and Baldwin, *Reworking the Past*, 11-12. This was an important sub-debate of the *Historikerstreit.* The intentionalist interpretation is dominant in Berlin's museums.

from the very outset.[47] The DHM makes no mention of this alternative viewpoint. The historians who wrote the text and curated the display go unnamed. Even the catalogue refers to them by their initials only. It therefore appears as "fact" and not as an interpretation.

It is fair to criticize both current exhibits in Berlin and those in the last decade for a rather one-sided narrative about the Third Reich. However, just because exhibits have tended toward straightforward master narratives does not mean the medium itself is incapable of representing different viewpoints. Macdonald suggests a "solution":

> Museums might consider more explicitly authored exhibitions … from a particular perspective. Visitors would be encouraged to regard them as partial and positioned perspectives and to read them in this light. … Perhaps museums should provide multiple perspectives or standpoints on the same issue, though this raises delicate questions of balance and selection … . This is, nevertheless, a format which is better suited to the notion of debate than is a single uni-vocal authoritative representation.[48]

Macdonald is one of the few critics to admit and examine the exhibit medium's *potential* -- what it *could* do -- in addition to what it has done incorrectly and insufficiently in the past.

Underlying such criticisms of the museum's uni-vocal, yet still anonymous, historical narrative, lies the unspoken assumption that museums *do* indeed create narratives, tell stories, and produce historiographical interpretations. The exhibit is not viewed simply as a random assortment of interesting or valuable images and artifacts.

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[47] Baldwin claims that the functionalist view is now accepted by most historians (*Reworking the Past*, 11).

[48] Macdonald, *The Politics of Display*, 233.

Gottfried Korff is explicit on this point. He has argued that "the museum proceeds with its presentation *identically* as does the narrative form of historical representation."[49] However, there are some critics who argue that the museum medium itself prohibits such constructions. They view exhibits as containing objects that speak not to larger social, political or economic processes and contexts, but to their own aesthetic worth and value. The museum becomes, for them, a showcase for objects "sacred in themselves" and not a site for the production of a coherent historiographical narrative.[50] The German Historical Museum's permanent display, "Images and Objects of German History," has been criticized along these lines. Peter Reichel calls it a "curiosity cabinet" ruled by "King Coincidence."[51] When it first opened in 1994, some press reviews categorized the exhibit as a "spectacular show" of valuables, while other visitors saw it as a "grandiose … flea-market." The overall impression seemed to be that the contextual information played second fiddle to the objects' status as valuable or beautiful or interesting.[52]

For such critics, the objects on display are not the building blocks out of which are fashioned informative and intelligent stories about the past. Instead, they are more like

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[49] Korff, "Ausgestellte Geschichte," 28 (emphasis mine). Bodo von Borries also argues that "images and objects can be installed in narrative structures or can themselves be 'narrativized'" through written commentary or a combination of objects ("Präsentation," 340). See also Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 2-3.

[50] Donald Horne, *The Great Museum: The Re-Presentation of History* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 16-17.

[51] Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 253.

[52] Kurt Geisler, "Zeit-Reise mit Care-Paketen und Cranach-Bildern," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 10/11 December 1994; Visitor Books, "Images and Objects of German History," German Historical Museum, Berlin, 1994. The danger of individual objects taking precedence over a coherent narrative is probably more acute in the case of authentic artifacts. However, curators continually struggle with the possibility of any object or image overwhelming the overall storyline, be it an artifact or a copy or facsimile. The debate over "real" objects versus "reproduced" ones is an important one within Berlin

relics in a shrine. The vital relationships they once had to the viewers or to the past itself are severed.[53] The museum thus becomes little more than a "funerary site," a "living fossil," and an example of "cultural ossification."[54] As such, critics charge the museum with being incapable of keeping pace with current events and cultural trends.[55]

There is indeed some truth to such statements. The standing display in a museum is designed with endurance and permanence in mind. To alter a museum narrative requires much more than adding a preface to, or altering the footnotes of, a book or article. It involves the physical re-arrangement of objects, the revising of written texts, changes in lighting and exhibit architecture, and alterations to accompanying catalogues and brochures. "How permanent exhibits can accommodate the continual revision of historical consciousness," writes Charles Maier, "will remain a difficult problem."[56] However, this does not mean that revisions are somehow impossible, nor does it invalidate the museum medium entirely as a means of historiographical representation. The flurry of revisions to Berlin's history exhibits which followed so closely on the heels

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museum circles, but the issue is not particularly pertinent to this thesis, apart from the danger that artifacts associated with Nazi perpetrators pose in terms of "fascination" for the visitors. See Chapter Two.

[53] Theodor Adorno's negative characterization of the museum as a "mausoleum" and a "graveyard for works of art" continues to influence perceptions of the museum today. See his "Valery Proust Museum," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: 1981); Sherman and Rogoff, "Introduction," xii; Wolfgang Zacharias, "Zur Einführung: Zeitphänomen Musealisierung," in *Zeitphänomen Musealisierung: Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart und die Konstruktion der Erinnerung* (Essen: Karltext Verlag, 1990), 11-12. I do not use the term "museal" to denote the death-like overtones the word conjures for Adorno. Instead I use the term to mean simply "of the museum."

[54] Sherman and Rogoff, "Introduction," xii; Vergo, *The New Museology*, 4; Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 13.

[55] Peter Fowler, *The Past in Contemporary Society: Then, Now* (London: Routledge, 1992), 116; Wolfenden, "Introduction," 3.

[56] Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 138.

of the 1989 revolution is testimony to the fact that exhibits *can* be altered and *will* adapt to changing social conditions.

Peter Fowler suggests that "the word 'museum' has generally come … to be a term of denigration."[57] However, in recent years, it is not the museum as a relic shrine but as a veritable Disneyland that has sparked the most hostile critiques. In museums today, the past, according to some critics, becomes an attraction to be visited for fun, and not for elucidation. Such terms as "infotainment" or "edutainment" are used in a derogatory sense to describe curators' attempts to make the museum experience entertaining as well as educational and to add an emotional component to the exhibit.[58] The result, it is alleged, is often something resembling a theme park, where the standards of historical scholarship disappear amongst the bells and whistles used to attract visitors and sustain their interest. The assumption appears to be that what is interesting, accessible, entertaining, or even fun, is not to be equated with "serious" (read: "good") history.

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[57] Fowler, *The Past in Contemporary Society*, 115-116. This is certainly the case in Berlin, with some memorial centres explicitly avoiding the term "museum" when describing their institutions. Johannes Tuchel, for example, was determined that the German Resistance Memorial Centre would not be "understood as a museum" ("Zur Geschichte und Aufgabe der Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand," in *Aufstand des Gewissens: Militärischer Widerstand gegen Hitler und das NS-Regime 1933-1945*, ed. Heinrich Walle Berlin: Verlag E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1994], 714). Helmuth Braun at the Jewish Museum insists, in contrast, that it is the term "*Gedenkstätte*" which carries those static, "death-like" connotations (Helmuth Braun, exhibit curator, Jüdisches Museum. Interview by author, 19 October 1998, Berlin). When Günther Morsch took over as director at the Sachsenhausen site, he demanded that it be termed *both* a museum *and* a memorial.

[58] Burkhard Asmuss, "Zum Problem der Ausstellbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus - ein Bericht aus dem Deutschen Historischen Museum (DHM)" in *Historikertagung Prora: Fachtagung zum Aufbau einer Dauerausstellung in den neuen Bundesländern zum Thema _ Der Nationalsozialismus_ vom 5. Bis 7. Juni 1997 im Strandhotel Prora / Rügen* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung / Stiftung Neue Kultur, 1997), 146; McGuigan, *The Past*, 131; Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987), 20; Huyssen, *Monument and Memory*, 12; Boockmann, "Zwischen Lehrbuch," 76. Bonn's House of History and Berlin's "Questions of German History" have both been explicitly criticized for being too "Disneyland-ish." For a totally different perspective (i.e. that museums can learn valuable lessons from theme parks), see Ira Diana Mazzoni, "Von Disney Lernen? Zukunftsperspektiven für das Museum: Themenpark? Multi-Media-Salon? Kulturzentrum?" *museumskunde* 63, no. 2 (1998): 14-16.

"Infotainment" also frees the past from its most horrific elements: it creates a too tidy, sanitized version of history. "Museums," so Robert Hewison claims, "are smoothing away the nightmares of yesterday."[59] Such charges, popular among British critics of the heritage industry, have serious ramifications when leveled at a depiction of the Holocaust. Yet Berlin exhibits are rarely denounced for providing too "tidy" a portrayal of the Third Reich. The above critiques -- the exhibit's one-sided approach, lack of voice, and superficial style -- have been directed at history exhibits in general. What, if any, special conditions apply to displaying Germany's history under Hitler?

Is the Nazi Past "Exhibitable"?

Volker Dürr has argued that the "twelve years of Nazi rule … constitute one of the most difficult challenges historiography (in the widest sense) has ever faced," a challenge noted frequently with specific respect to the Holocaust.[60] Displaying the Nazi past, and more specifically, the murder of millions, thus symbolizes a special case of a more general problem: Is the Holocaust at all amenable to representation?[61] The parallels between the debates over the "representability" of the Holocaust in written and exhibited form are notable. Saul Friedländer, while maintaining that "writing about Nazism is not like writing about sixteenth-century France," believes nevertheless that "the

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[59] Hewison, *Heritage Industry*, 83.

[60] Volker Dürr, "Introduction," *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, ed. Kathy Harms, Lutz R. Reuter and Volker Dürr (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 3.

[61] Raul Hilberg, paraphrasing Theodor Adorno's comment that the writing of poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, has asked "Is it not equally barbaric to write footnotes after Auschwitz?" Is it not also barbaric to attempt to *display* the Holocaust? As Manfred Treml has asked, "Is the unimaginable of the Holocaust actually exhibitable?" ("Schreckensbilder," 291-92).

extermination of the Jews in Europe is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event."[62] In the case of museums, commentators take varying viewpoints on the question of the "exhibitability" of the Nazi past. For example, Günter Morsch, director of the Sachsenhausen Museum and Memorial Centre, argues that the Nazi past "can be exhibited just as any other epoch."[63] Bernd Faulenbach qualifies such a statement, suggesting that the "'totality' of National Socialism is not capable of being 'museumized'," although certain aspects or elements are.[64] Much more than seems to be the case with written history, "any failure of historical or aesthetic representation" here would "resonate not just as a 'mistake,' but as a desecration of the memory of the Holocaust victims."[65]

Once again, such questions about the "exhibitability" of the Third Reich have tended too often to be asked and answered on the theoretical, hypothetical level, without regard or even reference to specific exhibits and museum narratives. In contrast, those museum professionals who *have* written reviews or analyses of certain exhibits avoid the question altogether; they take it as a given that museums can display the Nazi past. In

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[62] Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2; *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), 80. See *Probing the Limits* for a good discussion of these issues. The volume contains an essay on film (Anton Kaes' "Holocaust and the End of History: Postmodern Historiography in Cinema") and poetry (Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's " 'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry"), but nothing on exhibits or museums.

[63] Günter Morsch, "Überlegungen zur Ausstellungskonzeption in der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen," in *Reaktionäre Modernität und Völkermord. Probleme des Umgangs mit der NS-Zeit in Museen. Ausstellungen und Gedenkstätten*, ed. Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Josef Jelich, *Geschichte und Erwachsenenbildung* 2 (1994), 93.

[64] Bernd Faulenbach, "Der Nationalsozialismus in historischen Museen und Ausstellungen. Zum Thema der Tagung," in *Reaktionäre Modernität und Völkermord. Probleme des Umgangs mit der NS-Zeit in Museen. Ausstellungen und Gedenkstätten*, ed. Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Josef Jelich, *Geschichte und Erwachsenenbildung* 2 (1994), 12.

part, I do something similar here. The larger theoretical questions about representability in the museum, whether or not the Third Reich can be *exhibited* as can other epochs, are not my concern. Since museums *are* exhibiting the Nazi past, it bears asking how they are doing so.

A Methodology for Studying the History Museum

Berlin's history museums and its exhibits devoted specifically to the Third Reich are the focus of this thesis. These do not, however, comprise the sum total of the ways in which the legacy of Nazism appears in museal form in Berlin. The permanent display at the Museum for Post and Communication emphasizes the importance of the radio during the Third Reich; the Luftwaffe Museum displays airplanes emblazoned with swastikas; the German Technical Museum includes a chilling section on the role of the German railway in the deportations to the death camps. Thus, even when the Nazi past is not the primary focus of exhibits, it is incorporated into many as a part of the overall narrative. Sometimes, the Third Reich serves as the "preview" for later events. For example, the Allied Museum of Berlin begins the story of the Allied occupation and division of Berlin with the key events of the Third Reich. Many different types of museums have also housed temporary exhibits concerning the Nazi past, which fall outside my purview. The *Neue Nationalgalerie* (New National Gallery), for example, hosted "Inner Emigration: German Art 1933-1945" in 1997, which dealt with works by artists like Käthe Kollwitz

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[65] Linenthal, *Preserving*, 109.

who stayed in Nazi Germany, but did not lend outright support to the regime.[66] Even the Puppet Theatre Museum has hosted an exhibit on toys and puppets "as propaganda" during the Third Reich.[67]

I have also chosen to limit my examination of Berlin's museum displays on the Nazi past to those mounted during the time period from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the present.[68] Including both permanent and temporary or traveling exhibits, these range from the standing displays at such major institutions as the German Historical Museum (DHM) and the *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand* (GDW), the German Resistance Memorial Centre, to the variety of temporary exhibits Berlin has hosted over the last decade which have dealt with aspects of National Socialism, Jewish history in the Third Reich, and Germany's involvement in the Second World War.[69]

Generally, I concentrate on the major exhibits: those which are most well-known, or have generated the most controversy, and therefore more academic treatment and press reviews. However, I have also tried to integrate an analysis of those displays which are ignored entirely in the museum literature, from any perspective, and those which are less well-known, such as the Memorial Centre in Köpenick. Readers with any knowledge of the Berlin exhibit scene over the last ten years will also notice some surprising omissions, for example, the big, "blockbuster" type exhibits such as "UFA," "Degenerate Art," and

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[66] See Fritz Jacobi, " 'Kein Atem der Freiheit der Kunst und des Künstlers. Starke Bedrückung. Kein Licht.': Innere Emigration. Deutsche Kunst 1933-1945," *Museums Journal* 11, no. 4 (October 1997): 32-33.

[67] "FrontPuppenTheater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen," *Durchsicht* 8, no. 2 (1997): 53.

[68] The "Topography of Terror" exhibit, which opened in 1987 is one exception.

[69] In total, I have visited, read about and researched over 65 exhibits.

"Art and Power" at the German Historical Museum.[70] Since these exhibits deal with only a single aspect of the Nazi past - its films or its art - and not a wider survey of the history of the period or a more comprehensive narrative about the Nazi past, I have not included them.

Another omission will be the *Heimat* museums, the local history museums found in each of Berlin's 23 districts. Many of these have hosted temporary exhibits on resistance or the persecution of Jews in particular districts during the Third Reich. While I have tried to include several of these exhibits in my study, it proved very difficult to ascertain much about them. Few had accompanying catalogues and they rarely received much attention in the form of press reviews.

Two of the exhibits discussed below focus on a broad expanse of German history, within which the Nazi era is but a single part: the permanent display at the DHM and the exhibit entitled "Questions of German History" housed in a converted cathedral. At the present time, Berlin has only one museum devoted exclusively to Jewish history, the Centrum Judaicum in the New Synagogue, but the opening of the new Jewish Museum is eagerly awaited. In terms of temporary exhibits, more have dealt with the history of Berlin's Jews than with any other topic relating to the Third Reich. Two displays focus primarily on resistance to Hitler, one at the national level (German Resistance Memorial Centre - GDW), the other one local (Köpenick Memorial Centre), but again they have been supplemented by various temporary exhibits at the Anti-War Museum and various *Heimat* museums throughout the city. The "Topography of Terror" exhibit and the display

[70] "Die UFA, 1917-1945: Das deutsche Bildimperium" (DHM, 1993); "'Entartete Kunst': Das Schicksal der Avantgarde im Nazi-Deutschland" (DHM, 1992); "Kunst und Macht in Europa der Diktaturen 1930 bis 1945" (DHM, 1994).

at the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial Centre deal primarily with the perpetrators, while the museum at Sachsenhausen and the documentation at Plötzensee mainly remember the victims. The other major museum, the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, is unique for its dual perspective, German and Russian, on the war with the Soviet Union.

When Berlin's museum landscape is examined as a whole, a very comprehensive history of the Nazi period emerges. From stories of local resistance movements to the broader history of the "Final Solution," from individuals to groups, museum history in Berlin covers a wide range of those topics addressed in written form by academic historians. However, there are some noticeable gaps. Far more attention is devoted to the portrayal of political history than to *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life), particularly where women are concerned. There is an even more conspicuous absence of information about the role of "ordinary" Germans in the perpetration of the Holocaust. This omission is all the more notable when contrasted with the current focus in academic historiography on bystanders or onlookers. In general, however, the epithet "wonderfully varied" applies as well to Berlin's public history of the Third Reich as it does to the city's museal landscape as a whole.

The Sources

Despite similarities between written and exhibited historiography, each exemplifies a different way of constructing narratives about the past. However well trained academic historians may be to critique and evaluate the former, few are equally prepared to deal with museal narratives. How then does one analyze the historical narrative on display in a museum? In addition to examining the actual content and form

of the exhibits - what is displayed and how - I have organized my research around the three contexts I see as crucial to an analysis of exhibited history: the contexts of production, reception and criticism.[71] I have gathered information not only on *what* was exhibited, but on *who* was doing the exhibiting, and under what circumstances, *how* it was received by the public, and what the critical reaction was to each exhibit.

The Objects on Display

> The history museum exists to record and interpret ways of living and working through evidence derived from objects, oral testimony, music and sounds … [There is a] recognition that objects have value as evidence … and that their explanation through the medium has genuine value.[72]

The most important way in which museums construct their narratives about the past is through the presentation and display of material objects. The museum is therefore a predominantly *visual* medium. Raphael Samuel has characterized historians as suffering from a certain "suspicion of the visual." Our training, he suggests, "predisposes us to give a privileged place to the written word, to hold the visual … in comparatively low esteem, and to regard imagery as a kind of trap."[73] Analyzing and evaluating what one *sees* in the museum, instead of what one *reads*, can be a different - and somewhat disconcerting - experience. However, one quickly discovers, as the introductory exhibit text at the

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[71] In outlining these three contexts, I follow Dominick LaCapra's method of critical analysis for historical writing. See *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). These three contexts naturally intersect and overlap.

[72] Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, xii-xiii, 3.

[73] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 266, 268.

German Historical Museum claims, that "pictures and objects can also speak eloquently about the past."

Photographs, primarily of people, predominate in almost all the Berlin exhibits, from the tiny temporary exhibit on German army deserters at the Anti-War Museum to the permanent display at the German Resistance Memorial Centre (GDW). In fact, the display at the GDW alone contains over 5000 photographs. Most exhibits include full-size National Socialist election campaign posters and anti-Semitic propaganda posters. The documents displayed range from the minutes of the conference at Wannsee, to passports and identification cards taken from Jews as they arrived in the camps. Exhibits often include personal letters both from Nazi officials and their victims. The larger museums, such as the DHM and the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, display uniforms and weapons. The DHM's collection also includes works of art both censored and approved by the Nazi regime. Many exhibits incorporate film clips into their display, from scenes of the liberations at Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen to panoramic shots of the destruction Germany faced at the end of the war. Finally, several museums make use of *non-visual* sources: visitors can listen to Hitler's radio speeches in "Questions of German History," and to tape-recorded interviews with Jewish survivors of the Holocaust at Sachsenhausen. At the Centrum Judaicum, "tone fragments" play continuously. The sound of school children laughing melds with the noises of re-building and re-constructing the ruined synagogue.

Techniques of Presentation

Objects, photographs, and posters are the building blocks out of which curators fashion their narratives about Nazism, about the Holocaust, and about the Second World War. However, it is not only *what* is displayed, but *how* it is presented to the public that is important. Peter Vergo has written that "Every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object … together with other objects … within the context of a temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history."[74] Museum curators are, of course, well-versed in these techniques of presentation. In what follows I describe three of the most obvious ways in which curators position the objects so as to emphasize certain themes and shape the resulting narrative. These do not, of course, exhaust the possibilities for non-written "narrativization" in the museum.

Burkhard Asmuss at the German Historical Museum terms one of the most basic and most frequently employed techniques *Gegenüberstellung* (setting in contrast).[75] Such a technique, which quite literally involves placing objects in opposition to one another, is used, Asmuss suggests, to symbolize an "inherent tension" between the two forces, ideas and/or people the objects represent. For example, the DHM captures the confrontations between the left- and right-wing parties which defined Weimar Germany by displaying a Communist party uniform directly across from, and facing, that of a National Socialist stormtrooper. At the GDW, one of the first rooms in the exhibit contains pairs of photographs: above, a class of school children, arms raised in the Hitler salute, below, a

[74] Vergo, *The New Museology*, 2-3.

[75] Burkhard Asmuss, exhibit curator, Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM). Interview by author, 5 October 1998, Berlin.

young boy, arms raised in terror, behind him, an SS guard, gun pointed;[76] above, a picture of a throng of women enthusiastically welcoming Hitler's entry into Austria, below, a group of women behind the barbed wire of a camp.[77] This technique simply and effectively conveys the very different experiences of "life" in the Third Reich.

A second, oft-used technique of presentation I term "biographizing." Museal narratives may be characterized not only as moving from event to event, but also from person to person, from his story to her story to their stories. In certain cases it may be more accurate to speak of "museum biographies" rather than "museum histories." Images of and objects associated with the actors of the past, both the "great" and the "ordinary," are key components of almost any exhibit. While the accompanying text may discuss the discourses, socio-economic forces and ideologies at play during a certain period, they are personalized and made more accessible through individual biographical portrayals.

A focus on people is of course common to all forms of historiography. As the novelist Margaret Atwood has suggested, "history may intend to provide us with grand patterns and overall schemes, but without its … life by life … foundations, it would collapse."[78] For example, in the museum at the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp, the exhibit text describes the National Socialist "Euthanasia Campaign" and the

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[76] This is one of the most famous images of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and indeed one of the most famous of the Nazi period. On its "icon-like" status, see Jürgen Hannig, "Bilder, die Geschichte machen: Anmerkungen zum Umgang mit 'Dokumentarfotos' in Geschichtslehrbüchern," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 40, no. 12 (1989): 10-32.

[77] While this poignant display was one of the most moving I saw in Berlin, it was also highly problematic if the visitor were to note the dates on the photographs. The "above" pictures, the scenes of support and enthusiasm for the Nazis, are all earlier than the images below, those of persecution, terror and death. The effect, while perhaps not intended, is that such scenes could never have taken place concurrently. Women could not have cheered while others were deported to camps.

[78] Margaret Atwood, "In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 5 (December 1998): 1505.

racial ideology behind it. The Nazis' justifications for the murder of the so-called "not fit to live," the disabled, the mentally ill, and others deemed to be outside the *Volksgemeinschaft* are recounted; the numbers of victims are listed; the methods employed in their murder detailed. The curators chose to personalize this story, to humanize its horror, in a strikingly simple and effective manner. In a single display case a photograph of one man murdered in the "T4 Action" stands beside his death certificate (cause of death: pneumonia). Here, as often in museums, the story of a single individual represents the tragedy of thousands of victims. The "biographizing" approach is used to awaken visitors' interest and it does tend to work at a more emotional level than an intellectual one; however, the technique also makes the historical narrative on display that much more accessible and meaningful to the public.

Finally, in addition to *Gegenüberstellung* and biographizing, curators and museum historians use architecture, lighting and colour to shape the narrative. In the German Historical Museum, the display on the Holocaust has its own room, physically separated from the rest of the exhibit. The walls are black, the lighting is dim. This installation stands in stark contrast to the white walls and brightly lit display cases outside. By so directing a visitor's movement, in this case, into another room, museum professionals can also shape a narrative and influence the reception of that narrative. In "Questions of German History," the visitors enter the exhibit at the turn of the century and then ascend the spiral staircase until they reach the highest level and the pinnacle of historical development: the display on Germany after reunification. In "Life Stages in Germany, 1900 - 1993" (DHM, 1993) visitors descend into the Third Reich down a set of

stairs and walk between walls shaped into a half-swastika.[79] At Sachsenhausen, the exhibit space, housed in re-created camp barracks, is narrow and uncomfortably crowded, giving visitors a sense of the former inmates' conditions. At the "Topography of Terror" documentation centre, built on the former site of the Gestapo, SS, and Reich Security Office headquarters, the remains of the prison floor and other ruins and rubble are incorporated directly into the exhibit; the photographs and documents are displayed around them. Such choices in lighting, colour and architecture reflect intentional decisions on the part of curators. Even without words, and even without the objects themselves, something is conveyed - a feeling, a tone, or a mood.

Exhibit Text

Museums do not, of course, rely only on objects to tell their stories. Words are used to create a context for these objects and to describe the relationships between them. Curators and museum historians also use the text to describe more abstract or theoretical concepts not easily displayed in visual form. As academic historians more used to dealing with words than photographs, we are likely to feel more comfortable analyzing and evaluating text. There are certainly different criteria to consider in an examination of museum text, primarily in terms of the audience to whom it is directed or even such practical matters as the available space for words. However, many of the same standards and criteria we use to appraise any piece of written history can also be applied here. Word choice, language usage, readability, and accessibility - all must be considered for exhibit

[79] For the sake of consistency and stylistic convenience, *all* exhibits in this thesis will be discussed in the present tense as if they were literary texts.

text as well. In Chapter Two, I will provide a detailed critique of the exhibit text at the Wannsee Conference Memorial Centre where the uncritical or careless use of Nazi terminology reproduces Nazi propaganda itself.

Visitor Books

In analyzing *public* history, one cannot ignore the public. The context of the reception of museum exhibits can, however, be very difficult to assess. Museum staff often visit a new exhibit to "watch" the visitors' reactions, noting how much time they devote to certain displays and which objects they overlook.[80] Such a reading of visitors' reactions is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, not least because many of the exhibits discussed here have now come and gone. One of the only ways to evaluate the visitors' response to exhibited history, therefore, is through the comments they leave behind in the museum visitor books. There are problems in using visitor books as primary sources: many of the comments are inane or obscene, so vague as to be unhelpful, or do not relate at all to the exhibit itself, and of course they only provide insight into the impressions of those visitors who bothered to leave comments. Nonetheless, the visitor books remain important sources, because they provide one of the only available glimpses into the public's perception of exhibited Third Reich history. Even when the commentary appears to have little to do with the exhibit at hand, it often provides information about the context -- social, political, and cultural -- in which the exhibit was created and displayed. This is crucial, for in analyzing the public's response to a certain historical exhibit in 1994, for example, one should be aware of the issues shaping perceptions at

[80] Asmuss, DHM. Interview by author.

that time. The dialogues that emerge in the visitor books often provide an intriguing view of what those issues were. And there are, of course, thoughtful, insightful, well-written comments that pertain directly to the exhibits. For example, one visitor to the "Topography of Terror" exhibit in 1987 objected to the use of the word *Schicksal* (Fate) in connection with the deaths of millions of Nazi victims. She or he writes:

> The horrible word "fate" could easily be excluded.
> The exhibit aims to show that here, people
> did this … . [It was] not simply fate or coincidence.[81]

The word "fate" appears in many museum texts in Berlin and in many written, academic histories as well. This anonymous comment reveals how much word choice and language usage affect historiographical interpretation.

Exhibition Reviews

When a new piece of academic history is published, it is reviewed, if not by an expert in the field, then at least by a fellow historian with some degree of knowledge about the subject matter and the current state of the literature. By contrast, exhibition reviews in Berlin tend for the most part to be written by journalists "covering a story" rather than critiquing the display. Often they are no more than press releases issued by the institutions themselves. The standard review of an historical exhibit in Berlin commonly appears within a day of the opening. It mentions a few of the key objects on display, usually provides some historical contextualization for the topic, and often ends with a quote or two from the museum director. Generally speaking, the authors of these reviews

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[81] Visitor books, "Topography of Terror," 8 August 1987.

describe rather than critique. This does not mean that press reviews should be ignored as sources for an analysis of museum history of the Third Reich. For those temporary exhibits I was unable to visit firsthand, any additional descriptive information was helpful. As with the visitor books, there are also exceptions to the rule. Examples of astute, perceptive commentary appear, especially for the bigger, better-known museums.[82]

In sum, to examine how the Nazi past is represented in Berlin's museums, I looked at the kinds of objects on display and the ways in which they are presented. I examined the museum text that accompanies the display, paying close attention to matters like word choice. To address the ways in which these visual and textual representations of the past are received by the public, I analyzed the comments left in visitor books. As part of my own critical review of these exhibits, I drew upon the critiques of journalists and, when possible, academic historians.

Museum history is a group project: curators, historians, designers, architects, conservators and archivists work together.[83] Rarely do their names appear in the exhibit itself. As I have noted, the exhibit medium has often been criticized for its apparent lack of an "authorial voice," which some commentators feel lends a false note of objectivity to the narrative on display. As part of my research in Berlin, in both formal interviews and informal discussions, I attempted to discover something about this context of creation. For the most part, I came up against a closed door. Museum professionals were not

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[82] I find it frustrating that academic historians rarely write reviews of historical exhibits and that journals rarely publish them. The *History Workshop Journal* is an exception in English, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* in German. This deficiency reveals yet again a reluctance on the part of academic historians to accept museum history as a valid form of historiography.

[83] Jay Winter argues that it is in fact this "collective" nature of museum history that "individualistic" historians in the academy find so distasteful ("Public History and Historical Scholarship," *History Workshop Journal* 42 [1996]: 169).

prepared to discuss the problems and controversies that accompanied the creation of certain exhibits. When asked about differences of opinion or disputes, they usually denied that there had been any. Nonetheless, interviewing the individuals involved in the production of museum history plays a very important part in interpreting how the Nazi past is presented in museums. In Chapters Three and Five, I provide examples of what can be gleaned from these interviews. While they do not serve as the foundation for my analysis, the comments from those at work behind the scenes prove valuable nevertheless.

The Framework: Perpetrators, Victims, Resisters

Dan Bar-On has written that "the Holocaust divided people according to broad categories: the victims and the survivors, the perpetrators, the rescuers, the bystanders and the noninvolved."[84] Academic historians have concentrated on each of these groups, some to a greater degree than others. Raul Hilberg, in one of his most recent works, focuses on the triad of perpetrators / victims / bystanders. Museums in Berlin have thus far done very little with the latter. Instead, their usual triad is perpetrators / victims (which also includes the notion of *Germans* as victims) / resisters. In this essay, I analyze individual exhibits as they seek to depict these groups. There is naturally some overlap, since these groups are often defined by one another. This framework provides only one of several possible organizing principles. Alternatively, I could have focused on the way museums depict certain critical events or interpret key issues or themes of the National Socialist past. Since museum narratives are themselves so people-centered, however, it

[84] Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 6.

seems logical to concentrate on their representations of the historical actors of the Third Reich. Each of the following chapters therefore focuses on the history of a particular group and the way it is represented in exhibited form.

CHAPTER TWO

MASS MURDER WITHOUT THE MURDERERS? THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANS AS PERPETRATORS

In 1987 the city of Berlin celebrated the 750th anniversary of its founding. As part of the celebrations in West Berlin, the Martin-Gropius-Bau hosted a lavish exhibit, entitled "Berlin-Berlin." While it did not neglect the Nazi years, the exhibit reflected a not-so-subtle focus on the city's "highest values" and "proudest moments" rather than on its most shameful.[1] That same year, a very different kind of exhibit opened next door on the site of the former Gestapo, SS, and Reich Security Office headquarters. The curators of the "Topography of Terror" refer quite proudly to the exhibit on the *Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände* (Prince Albrecht terrain) as the city's "open wound."[2] This phrase is in part a literal description of the scarred terrain and excavated remains which the curators had incorporated into the documentation itself. It is also metaphor: By drawing attention to the violence and terror that had been both planned and perpetrated at this site, the curators hope to prevent this "wound" of memory from healing. It is "very late," writes one visitor, a former concentration camp inmate, "but not too late an attempt to make state

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[1] Duncan, "Art Museums," 91. Duncan argues that such displays act to "bind the community as a whole into a civic body" (91).

[2] Reinhard Rürup, ed., *Topographie des Terrors: Gestapo, SS und Reichssicherheitshauptamt auf dem "Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände" - Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Verlag Willmuth Arenhövel, 1987), 216. The "Topography of Terror" had been devised as a temporary exhibit. From the opening day, however, visitors expressed their hopes that it would become a permanent display. In 1997 it celebrated its tenth anniversary, having welcomed over 1.5 million visitors. Today the "Topography of Terror" Foundation awaits the completion of the revised exhibit's new home, a concrete and glass structure to be erected on the same site. On plans for the new building, see Reinhard Rürup, ed., *10 Jahre Topographie des Terrors* (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 1997), 54-61.

terrorism … visible." The "repressed," writes another, "has finally come up for discussion."[3]

James E. Young notes how rarely "a nation call[s] upon itself to remember the victims of crimes it has perpetrated."[4] The museum exhibits and memorial centres I describe in this thesis are each important elements of Berlin's commemorative landscape, and each honours the memory of the victims of National Socialism. The "Topography of Terror" exhibit intends to make an additional call, however, to remember the *perpetrators* of those crimes. *Gedenkstätte* pedagogues often note the "tension" which exists at the sites of the perpetrators between their function as places of "ritual commemoration" of the victims and as "sites of learning" about the perpetrators.[5] Some visitors to the "Topography of Terror" leave wreaths in memory of those persecuted by the Nazis, but others undoubtedly come to learn about the men who worked at the most feared address in Berlin.[6]

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[3] Visitor Books,, "Topography of Terror," Berlin, 8 August 1987. This kind of "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*" (coming to terms with the past) was attempted only in West Berlin museums and memorial sites prior to 1989. In the GDR, both academic and museum historians portrayed East Germany as the successor state of the Communist resistance. A direct confrontation with the Germans' roles as perpetrators therefore had no place here. On East German memorial centres, see Heidi Behrens-Cobet and Norbert Reichling, "Bilder erhalten, die den Schlaf stören: KZ-Gedenkstätten in Ostdeutschland," *Geschichtswerkstatt* 6 (1993): 80-85. H. Glenn Perry III's study of the Museum for German History in East Berlin describes how the myth of anti-fascism was translated into museal form. See "The Museum für deutsche Geschichte and German National Identity," *Central European History* 28, no. 1 (1995): 343-372.

[4] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 21.

[5] Ehmann, "Thesen," 137; Lutz, "Gedenkstätten," 32; Bernd Faulenbach, "Der Nationalsozialismus," 12.

[6] Heidemarie Uhl stresses the importance of such "sites of mourning" for those "left behind, without knowledge of where loved ones are buried" ("Erinnerung als Versöhnung: Zur Denkmaler und Geschichtspolitik der Zweiten Republik," *Zeitgeschichte* 23, no. 5-6 [1996]: 146). Dominick LaCapra, however, questions to what degree these "modern sites," memorials and museums, are "viable in making mourning possible" ("Revisiting the Historians' Debate," 80).

Bernd Faulenbach argues that the "victim perspective must dominate" in Germany's museal histories of the Third Reich.[7] In Berlin, it does. The memorial centres document the "suffering experienced" to a far greater degree than they portray those behind the "suffering caused."[8] In the past, the academic literature has tended to focus on museums and *Gedenkstätte* as media of commemoration. Few studies have offered adequate critiques of the ways in which histories of the perpetrators have been constructed for the public in museums and other sites. This lack of analysis stands in sharp contrast to academic histories of the period which are relatively "perpetrator centered," ranging from innumerable biographies of Hitler to studies of "ordinary" Germans during the Holocaust. In this chapter, I intend both to describe and to critique the ways in which Berlin's memorial centres represent the perpetrators of genocide, from the "desk murderers" to Hitler and his inner circle of committed idealogues. These exhibits too often tell a story of mass murder without the murderers.

Plötzensee Memorial Centre

Thomas Lutz has suggested that the Plötzensee Memorial Centre is meant to be a place of "silent remembrance" rather than a "documentation site."[9] Between 1933 and 1945 nearly 3000 people accused of resisting the Nazi regime were imprisoned and executed on this site.[10] The execution room itself has been restored; the iron hooks used

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[7] Faulenbach, "Der Nationalsozialismus," 12.

[8] Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History," 59.

[9] Lutz, "Gedenkstätten," 44.

[10] Endlich and Lutz, *Gedenken und Lernen*, 41.

for hangings have been left intact. This "*Gedenkraum*" (room of remembrance) serves as Berlin's central location for commemorating all those murdered by the National Socialist judiciary. The wreaths and flowers placed there attest to this purpose.

The monument which greets the visitor upon entering the site is dedicated "To the Victims of the Hitler Dictatorship 1933-1945." The booklet available to visitors in German, English and French notes the "profound differences" between these victims both in deeds and intentions.[11] Here at Plötzensee, the victims are personalized. Their names are provided and their images appear. Their stories are also told, albeit rather briefly and somewhat superficially.[12] Yet Plötzensee is also, the booklet continues, "more than just a site commemorating victims."[13]

The room next door to the execution site, where the condemned awaited their fate, now contains a very austere display of documents in black cabinets along opposing walls. It includes a photograph of the guillotine, a poster announcing the execution of Communist resister Hanno Günther, death sentence documents, execution orders, memoranda detailing the numbers of executions, lists of prisoners, admission "tickets" to the hangings and documents detailing the execution proceedings. The purpose of this display is to educate the visitor about the practice of National Socialist "justice."[14] It aims to show how judges, prosecuting attorneys and ministerial and judiciary officials became

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[11] Brigitte Oleschinski, *Plötzensee Memorial Center* (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1996), 8.

[12] See "People in Resistance against National Socialism," in Oleschinski, *Plötzensee Memorial Center*, 20-42.

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] Endlich and Lutz, *Gedenken und Lernen*, 43.

culprits in the Nazi campaign of terror and violence, "strip[ping] justice and law of every bond with human dignity."[15]

Yet these culprits, these judges, lawyers and executioners, remain relatively anonymous since they are both nameless and faceless. There are no photographs of them. The documents displayed are addressed not to individuals but to offices, for example, to the "Reich Minister of Justice" from a "justice employee." A signature may appear, but the accompanying captions rarely make reference to the actual names of the correspondents.[16] The fact that Plötzensee serves, perhaps even primarily, as a site of remembrance should not obscure its stated intention to document both the crimes and the criminals of the Nazi judicial system. Here, the representation of "National Socialist justice" remains an entity devoid of individual perpetrators.

The "Topography of Terror"

The story of the site of the "Topography of Terror" exhibit serves as a metaphor for the entire process by which "NS history was first repressed and forgotten, before one was ready to remember it again."[17] After the buildings and prison cells were destroyed by Allied bombs, city planners decided to demolish the remains of what had been the most feared address in Berlin. It was thought at the time, according to James Young, that preserving the remains might lead to their use as a memorial to the SS and not to its

[15] Oleschinski, *Plötzensee Memorial Center*, 10.

[16] There is one exception. The exhibit mentions the name of Reich Minister of Justice, Otto Thierack, repeatedly.

[17] Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 196.

victims.[18] Once the Wall had been built, the site became a virtual "no man's land," untouched by developers. Rubble from the demolished buildings, garbage, and layers of soil covered the site. History had become quite literally invisible. The site had become "geographically lost," while the memory of what had been committed there was repressed.[19]

On May 8, 1985, the Active Museum of Fascism and Resistance in Berlin performed what it called a "symbolic excavation action":

> In this "memorial operation," volunteers … symbolically excavated their nation's buried past by literally digging up the terrain in preparation for a "document house." Theirs [was] … a model of memorial activism, an unearthing of memory, all part of reinfusing an amnesiac site with memory.[20]

In 1987, the "Topography of Terror" exhibit opened on the site. It incorporates the excavated remains of the basement and kitchen areas of the Gestapo headquarters into the textual and visual display, which documents the Nazi regime's institutions of terror. The display also keeps intact the physical traces of the attempt to "let the grass grow over" this site.[21] Likewise, the text and photographs give visitors more information about how

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[18] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 84. Some Berliners continue to criticize the exhibit on this site as a monument to and by the perpetrators. See Ulli Jassner, "Ein Mahnmal von den Tätern," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 26 August 1998. Rudy Koshar links postwar preservation efforts in Germany with an attempt to come to terms with the Nazi past. See *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 199-287.

[19] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 84-85; *Rürup, Topographie des Terrors*, 195 -205; Rürup, *10 Jahre Topographie*, 9-12.

[20] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 88. For further descriptions of this dig, see Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 197-200; Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin, *Zum Umgang mit dem Gestapo-Gelände* (Berlin: Aktives Museum, 1989).

[21] This is an oft-repeated phrase in newspaper reviews and press releases. Visitors have reacted very positively to the curators' efforts to display these traces of repression. For example, one visitor writes: "I find it terrible that until now, the centre of German state terror has been more or less hidden. It seems to

the site had long stood as a gaping wasteland after the war, its former function intentionally erased.

Brian Ladd calls the "Topography of Terror" exhibit "perhaps the most self-conscious attempt to uncover the historical legacy of a particular place in Berlin."[22] I would tend to agree. The recovery of the site irrevocably altered the museal landscape of Berlin. This is a *Gedenkstätte* where the victims can be mourned and their memory honoured. However, it also focuses on "discovering the perpetrators and their motives."[23] An enthusiastic visitor remarked on the opening day: "For once, the perpetrators are finally also shown next to the victims."[24]

The exhibit relies heavily on photographic material. Pictures of Richard Heydrich, Heinrich Himmler and other Nazi officials abound. Biographical information about the key figures in the SS and the Gestapo is given in the accompanying text. Reproductions of documents, orders, letters and reports appear as well. The main protagonists of terror do not go faceless or nameless here as at Plötzensee; their activities are recounted in full detail. Yet information about individual lower-ranking members of the SA, the SS and the police is scarce. Uniformed men appear in group photographs or in "action shots," beating or humiliating their victims, but their individual life stories, motives, and ideological convictions remain somewhat of a mystery. The "Topography of Terror"

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me that the present exhibit is therefore not only a 'topography of terror' but also a 'topography of repression'" (Visitor Books, "Topography of Terror," 8 August 1987).

[22] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 154.

[23] Johannes Tuchel, one of the historians responsible for the exhibit, as quoted in Rolf Brochschmidt, "Ein Ort der Angst und des Terrors wird zur Ausstellungsstätte," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 5 July 1987.

[24] Visitor Books, "Topography of Terror," 8 August 1987.

includes no biographies of the "ordinary" men who have become the subject of so much of the most recent and controversial written historiography.

It must be remembered that the exhibit opened in 1987 and that its frank confrontation with the most notorious perpetrators of the Nazi regime represented a break with previous public history which had dealt even less with individual Nazis. Some reviews are critical, however, of the way in which even these perpetrators are represented. Both Jochen Winters and Sylvia Zacharias criticize the focus on Heydrich and Himmler, but for very different reasons. Zacharias argues that "Hitler appears to have totally slipped their minds - perhaps he never visited the Gestapo central?"[25] Jochen Winters, in contrast, feels that such a focus on the "directors of the main offices and the office chiefs" overlooks the lower ranks. "What sort of people were they?" he asks, "What must have happened, for them to have acted as they did?"[26] Winters raises the questions that I feel the "Topography of Terror" fails to address. Hitler is far from absent in the display, but the more "ordinary" members of the SS and the Gestapo exhibit rarely appear. Apart from these two pieces, little criticism or praise exists for the way in which the "Topography of Terror" tells the stories of the perpetrators. Far more attention is and has been given to the inventive way in which the terrain is incorporated into the exhibit and the self-reflexive way in which the exhibit makes a display of the repression of the Nazi past.

The display at the *Gestapo-Gelände* will soon move into a new structure currently being constructed where Nazi Germany's worst crimes were once discussed, ordered,

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[25] Sylvia Zacharias, "Die essentielle Abstraktheit der Gestapo: Ein neuer Mythos - Anmerkungen zur 'Dokumentation: Topographie des Terrors'," *Zeitschrift für Bürgerrechte und Gesellschaftpolitik* 27, no. 5 (September 1988): 5.

codified, registered and approved. Only when the exhibit re-opens in its new home will it be possible to see if the curators have broadened their definition of "perpetrator." There is something sadly ironic, however, about the new structure being built on this site. Its construction will bury forever the remains that the curators of the original "Topography of Terror" exhibit once worked so hard to expose.

House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial Centre

Five years after the "Topography of Terror" opened, a new memorial centre in Berlin welcomed its first visitors. Fifty years prior, the villa overlooking Wannsee lake had been the site of the conference at which the decision was made to implement the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Problem." The restored rooms of the villa now serve as the "environment" for the permanent, documentary exhibit on both the conference itself and the horrors of the Holocaust.[27] The exhibit text, enlarged photographs, documents and quotations are set onto free-standing glass panels through which visitors can view the villa's rooms, which have been meticulously restored.[28] This technique of incorporating elements of the authentic site is one many *Gedenkstätte* use. What sets this memorial centre apart from those at Plötzensee and the Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände, however, is that it was the site neither of imprisonment nor of execution. It is a metaphorical rather than literal "site of the victims," which in no way undermines the brutality of the decisions taken here.

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[26] Peter Jochen Winters, "Ein Grundriss wird zur Gedenkstätte," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 August 1987.

[27] Endlich and Lutz, *Gedenken und Lernen*, 48.

Annegret Ehmann argues that the site's history prevents the Wannsee villa from functioning as do other *Gedenkstätte*, as places where ritual commemoration can be enacted. "The memorial centre serves memory much more," she writes, as a "site of learning."[29] The House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial Centre is thus meant to serve as a "reminding site" (*Mahnstätte*) rather than as a site of remembrance.[30] Its purpose is to remind its visitors not only of the horrors perpetrated against the Jews in the Third Reich; it is also to remind us of who the participants in violence were. The exhibit curators stress the exhibit's lack of "theatrical production." In creating this museal narrative, they argue, they followed the principles of authenticity and actuality.[31] Certainly very few of the display techniques used in other exhibits -- architectural design, colour, lighting -- are employed here. However, this rather austere style of presentation hardly justifies the curators' claim that they have constructed a more objective or "realistic" history of the Holocaust.

In fact, by adopting the euphemistic language of the perpetrators themselves, the exhibit at times comes very close to describing events not as self-conscious historians should, but as the National Socialists themselves did. In using many of the terms the Nazis used to describe their own activities and to categorize people, the exhibit is less an explanation of why the perpetrators used such terms, than a problematic reproduction of the perpetrators' own words. I am not suggesting any apologetic intentions on the part of

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[28] Ibid., 49.

[29] Ehmann, "Thesen," 137.

[30] I use Peter Reichel's term for the Wannsee site (*Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 193).

[31] Kurt Schilde, "Instruktionsort für den Massenmord," *Museums Journal* 6, no. 1 (January 1992): 59.

the curators. I believe it is more a case of uncritical scholarship, which in this case perpetuates perceptions which stem from the Third Reich itself.[32] Visitors' comments, however, indicate almost no recognition of this problem.[33] Neither do the exhibit reviews, while critical of several features of the display, comment on what I find to be one of the most offensive elements of the exhibit: its word choice.[34]

The Nazis were masters of euphemism. "Deportation" became "evacuation" (*Aussiedlung*). "Forced re-location" became "re-settlement" (*Umsiedlung*). The murder of ghetto inhabitants was termed "*Räumung*" (eviction) and "cleansing" (*Säuberung*) was used for mass killings. The Nazis created a language in which the words themselves ceased to have any actual referents. The question of word choice thus becomes an important issue for historians of the Nazi period. Many historians enclose terms such as "Final Solution" or "euthanasia" in quotation marks to indicate that they are Nazi terms. Yet I wonder whether punctuation marks alone are sufficient to lay bare the dimensions of the falsity these terms represented.

I am not suggesting that one should never employ Nazi terminology when constructing a history of the period. But I do believe that as historians, university- and museum-based alike, we should problematize their meaning and their effect. The Wannsee exhibit, however, adopts the perpetrators' language of lies and euphemism

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[32] The exhibit is based on the work of the centre's director, Gerhard Schoenberner, whose 1960 documentary film, "The Yellow Star - The Persecution of the Jews in Europe 1933-1945," became quite well-known in Germany.

[33] For example: "A gripping exhibit"; "Wonderful"; "Poignant and moving - well-done" (Visitor Books, House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial Center, September - October, 1998). Such comments appear throughout the visitor books, from 1992 on.

[34] See Anita Kugler, "Die Täter sind der Hölle entstiegen," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 23 January 1992; Sibylle Wirsing, "Edel sei der Mensch, hilfreich und gut," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 17 January 1992.

without comment. For the most part, it encloses such terms in quotation marks. The repeated use of terms such as "evacuation," "eviction," and "re-settlement" when "deportation," "massacre," and "murder" paint a truer picture is nevertheless difficult to understand.[35] The exhibit should have provided more explicit commentary on the use of euphemisms by the Nazis to shield the truth from their victims.

The exhibit at times also utilizes the Nazis' own derogatory terms. For example, the Sinti and Roma peoples are termed "*Zigeuner*" (gypsies); the ghetto inhabitants of Warsaw are called "*Bettler*" (beggars); the mentally ill are referred to as "*Geisteskrank*," which can mean "insane." The exhibit is now seven years old, and I doubt such terms will appear if and when it is revised. By not calling attention to the fact that these were terms the Nazis used, however, the curators come dangerously close to recreating Nazi propaganda.[36]

Along with the problematic word choice at Wannsee, the exhibit employs disturbing syntactical constructions. The examples are countless: "From Warsaw 310,000 people were deported." "The Ghetto was liquidated for good." "They were forced to remove their clothes and stand at the edge of the grave." "Wild terror, torture, plundering and pogroms followed." The caption above a photograph of an old man, yellow star visible, reads "Sentenced to Death." The German language admittedly uses the passive tense more often than does English, and museum historians must also vary their sentence

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[35] Such comments apply to certain sections of the exhibit more than others. The display devoted to the "deportations" (the term itself is used) contains far fewer examples of Nazi euphemism.

[36] One of the more disturbing examples comes from the display on "everyday life" in the Warsaw ghetto. The family huddled in blankets on a street corner is defined as a "beggar family" (without quotes). The ghetto inhabitants, the text explains, "vegetate in primitive mass accommodation" or "live … on the streets and breed (*vermehren*) an army of beggars."

structure to make the text more interesting for the visitors. However, the predominance of the passive tense and other types of "subject-less" sentence construction create a depiction of what Ingrid Strobl describes as "an extermination without exterminators."[37] With no named subject in these sentences, the perpetrators remain anonymous, hidden. The acts of terror and violence occur without actors.

The effect of the Wannsee exhibit is all the more surprising in light of its intended aim: to name the perpetrators. The curators were determined to show that the perpetrators were not only "SS beasts."[38] The perpetrators also included the men who drew up plans, made decisions, gave orders, organized data and ensured that the killing machine functioned smoothly. These were the so-called "*Schreibtischtäter*" (desk murderers), the agents at work in the "administration of death."[39] This focus on the roles of "different areas of public service and civil organizations in the persecution and murder of the European Jews" represented a new direction for Berlin's public history of the Nazi past, one much praised at the time.[40] The room in which the conference took place devotes an entire wall to the biographies of each of the direct participants. However, the bureaucrats, the thousands of administrative officials, railroad employees and camp administrators and others whose work made the "Final Solution" possible remain nameless and faceless.

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[37] Ingrid Strobl, "Vernichtung ohne Vernichter" *Konkret* 5 (1992).

[38] Ulrich Roloff-Momin, "Erinnern an die Orte des Grauens in Berlin-Brandenburg," in *Gedenkstätten im vereinten Deutschland: 50 Jahre nach der Befreiung der Konzentrationslager*, ed. Jürgen Dittberner and Antje von Meer (Berlin: Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten und Edition Hentrich, 1994), 91.

[39] *Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz Dauerausstellung Katalogbroschüre* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1992), 102.

[40] Ehmann, "Thesen," 137. Most of the reviews which appeared after the opening were also very positive. See, for example, "Ein Lehrhaus der Demokratie," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 20 January 1992.

Equally invisible are the "ordinary" Germans, the citizens of the towns where deportations, forced labour, torment and killings took place. As either active or passive participants in the perpetration of the Holocaust, their role is entirely overlooked.

The Wannsee exhibit has been criticized more often for its depiction of the victims of the Holocaust than for its representation of the perpetrators. The following chapter describes the way in which the exhibit depicts the victims' experiences. This too is highly problematic and borders on the offensive. Yet as the first German *Gedenkstätte* devoted to the Holocaust, the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial Centre remains an important part of Berlin's commemorative landscape. Thousands of visitors come each year. The library and archives are rich resources. The above criticism is thus not meant to obscure what the site does well and the value of its intentions. As I left the exhibit, I overheard a group of young, German navy cadets: "I never knew that," one said in a hushed voice. Like the "Topography of Terror," this memorial centre too will prevent the grass from ever growing over this chapter of German history. In this, at least, it is a success.

Sachsenhausen Memorial Centre and Museum

In a nearly empty room, a pair of glass-topped display cases enclose a series of small, everyday items: a wooden comb, woolen socks, a tin plate. These few possessions once belonged to the people who had been imprisoned here. The accompanying text describes the "persecution of those who thought differently," their "suffering and death" due to hunger and disease, and the gruesome executions. The unobservant visitor could easily assume this display was a continuation of the Sachsenhausen Memorial Centre's

documentation of the site's history under the Nazis. This provisional exhibit, however, is devoted not to the victims of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, but to the inmates of "Special Camp 7," the Soviet prison camp, between 1945 and 1950.[41] Sachsenhausen thus represents a "doubled site of memory," with two sets of victims and two kinds of perpetrators.[42]

Due to a lack of funding, the "decentralized concept" of the memorial centre's director, Günther Morsch, has yet to be completed. Eleven permanent exhibits, mini-museums in a sense, are planned for various locations throughout the site, from the infirmary to "Station Z," the camp's execution site and crematorium.[43] So far, only one such museum has been completed, the Barracks 38 Museum, which is the home for the permanent exhibit "Jewish Inmates in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp 1936 - 1945." The research for the exhibit on the Soviet camp is still being carried out. For now,

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[41] For the most part, the SS and the Soviet secret police used the buildings at Sachsenhausen for identical purposes: "Inmate barracks remained inmate barracks, kitchens remained kitchens, infirmaries remained infirmaries." See Günther Morsch, "Sachsenhausen - auf dem Weg zur Neugestaltung und Neukonzeption der Gedenkstätte," in *Gedenkstätten im vereinten Deutschland: 50 Jahre nach der Befreiung der Konzentrationslager*, ed. Jürgen Dittberner and Antje von Meer (Berlin: Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten und Edition Hentrich, 1994), 49. Because the Soviet use of the former concentration camps had long remained a taboo theme for historians in the GDR, and because access to Soviet archives had long been denied, much work still needs to be done to provide a full documentation of the *Speziellager* (special camps). See Sarah Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways: Commemorating the Victims of Nazism and Stalinism at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen," *Representations* 49 (winter 1995), 97; Paul Stoop, "Wo die Sowjets Andersdenkende quälten," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 20 October 1992. A very similar display, with similar kinds of items, has been added to the memorial centre at Buchenwald, which also served as both a Nazi concentration camp and a Soviet "special camp". See Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 273.

[42] Alexander Zeiger, "Von der vergessenen Topographie des Grauens," *Die Welt*, 7 August 1998.

[43] Morsch, "Sachsenhausen," 58-60; *Jahresbericht der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten* (1997), 7-8. I am especially grateful to Anneke de Rudder, a research assistant for the permanent exhibit "Jewish Inmates in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp 1936 to 1945," for her explanation of the "decentralized concept" and insight into the plans for the site (Anneke de Rudder, research assistant, Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen and Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand. Interview by author, 19 October 1998, Berlin).

the Museum of the Resistance Struggle erected by the GDR remains standing; that exhibit includes some photographs of Jews and makes reference to their suffering, but the overt intention is to pay tribute to those who died in the "anti-fascist struggle of the righteous patriots of many nations."[44]

The Sachsenhausen Memorial Centre and Museum, at least at the present time, devotes itself to a representation of the victims. The following chapter provides greater details about the Barracks 38 display, in which the curators honour those who died and those who survived with an effective combination of personal possessions, photographs and, in some cases, recordings of survivors' voices.[45] This is a story about the Jews as victims, but one which, for once, does not depend solely on the images taken by the Nazis to tell it. The perpetrators themselves, however, are almost entirely absent. No biographical approach is devoted to them.[46]

It remains to be seen how the "decentralized concept" will be realized at Sachsenhausen. The director has suggested that the history of the Nazi perpetrators will

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[44] The photographs of Jews come not from Sachsenhausen itself, however, but from the death camps, such as Auschwitz. On GDR memorial centres built at former Nazi concentration camps, see Farmer, "Symbols" and Claudia Koonz, "Germany's Buchenwald: Whose Shrine? Whose Memory?" in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, ed. James Young (Munich: Prestl, 1994). The story of Buchenwald parallels that of Sachsenhausen in many ways. On concentration camps as memorial centres in the former West Germany, see Harold Marcuse, "Die museale Darstellung des Holocaust an Orten ehemaliger Konzentrationslager in der Bundesrepublik 1945-1990," in *Erinnerung: Zur Gegenwart des Holocaust in Deutschland-West und Deutschland-Ost*, ed. Bernhard Moltmann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Haag + Herchen Verlag, 1993).

[45] *Jahresbericht der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten* (1997), 8.

[46] The exhibit is extremely well-done in terms of content, but the museum itself is not at all "visitor friendly." The narrow walkways cause traffic jams when the museum is full. Much information is displayed too high for a person of average height to read without difficulty. The sliding drawers which contain further historical documents are almost impossible to open. The sound recordings are very difficult to hear, for the speakers are set into the wall and positioned too high. None of the security guards mentioned that, with some effort, these speakers could be pulled out from the wall. In my interview with Anneke de Rudder, I learned that these were among the most frequent visitor complaints.

be exhibited in the *Kommandantenhaus* (commanders' house). At the site of the mass graves of the Soviet special camp, a display is planned that will "separately thematize" this era of the site's history. Whatever form the finalized versions of these exhibits take, they will inevitably arouse anger and outrage. Many people, Nazi camp survivors and historians alike, fear that any type of "dual commemoration" threatens to equate Nazi terror with Stalinist terror. Such an equation, they maintain, inevitably relativizes the suffering of the Nazis' victims.[47] The introduction of the site's history as a Soviet camp remains a deeply troubling and controversial issue for the Sachsenhausen Memorial Centre. Morsch, the director, suggests that dealing with this doubled burden of memory has become the "biggest problem" facing the site's curators and historians today.[48]

At Sachsenhausen, then, even the most infamous Nazis appear only rarely, because the only completed museum devotes itself to telling the stories of the victims. At Plötzensee the judges, lawyers and other employees of the Nazi "justice" system remain nameless and faceless. Hitler's henchmen remain the key protagonists of terror at the Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände and at Wannsee. By contrast, the relative anonymity of the bureaucrats, administrators and other officials involved in the planning of genocide is retained. Each of these exhibits has been careful to avoid an interpretation which blames Adolf Hitler exclusively for the horrors perpetrated at these sites. Yet is it not also important to ask how they *do* deal with the Führer, "the first and foremost perpetrator" of the Third Reich?[49]

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[47] Behrens-Cobet, "Bilder erhalten," 81-82; Farmer "Symbols," 97-98.

[48] Morsch, "Sachsenhausen," 49.

[49] Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystander*, ix.

Dealing with Hitler

Ian Kershaw's *The Nazi Dictatorship* remains one of the standard overviews of the key historiographical debates and interpretations of the NS state. Kershaw devotes an entire chapter to debates about Hitler. Was he the "master in the Third Reich" or a "weak dictator"? Are the horrors of the Holocaust to be explained chiefly through his "personality, ideology and will" or was the Führer himself a "prisoner of forces" beyond even his control?[50] Kershaw does not address the ways in which other forms of historiography have grappled with explaining Hitler. This is not surprising, given that very few academic historians assign much importance to how history is produced outside the academy. What I do find surprising, however, is the relative lack of detail about Hitler provided by the museums and memorial centres in Berlin. Burkhard Asmuss, curator and historian of the Nazi period at the German Historical Museum, suggests that the question of "how to deal with Hitler" is one of the most difficult museums face.[51] How then do institutions of public history deal with Adolf Hitler?

The Führer is far from invisible in either memorial centres or the main museums in Berlin. Exhibits contain numerous photographs of him. His image adorns election posters and newspapers. His signature can be read on some of the documents displayed. Yet little biographical information is offered. There are no individual exhibits which take Hitler alone as their subject or attempt to address any of the questions Kershaw raises.

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[50] Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 59. Kershaw takes a synthetic approach. "If not a 'weak dictator'," he writes, "Hitler was not 'master in the Third Reich' in the implied meaning of omnipotence" (79).

[51] Burkhard Asmuss, exhibit curator, DHM. Interview by author, 15 October 1998, Berlin.

This is in stark contrast to the state of the academic literature on the Nazi past in which biographies of Hitler abound. Why is there no similar biographical treatment here? Why is an explicit focus on the personality of Hitler so often avoided? I raised these questions with Burkhard Asmuss of the German Historical Museum (DHM), because its exhibit on the Third Reich does in fact devote a part of the display to the figure of Hitler. At the DHM, a bust of the Führer stands on a raised pillar within a darkened cabinet. Beside the sculpture, a copy of *Mein Kampf* lies open.

Asmuss believes that this stark, simple method of representation exemplifies "the only adequate way to present Hitler." Any more attention, any greater detail, any more intense focus on "him alone" might go too far in absolving others of responsibility. The DHM does not want "to display a '*Psychogram*' [psychological portrait] of this person, [or describe] his socialization," because this, Asmuss continues, is "much less important than what he *did* or what the German *Volk* did in his name."[52] I do not know if the other Berlin exhibits have avoided an inclusion of Hitler's biography for similar reasons. I imagine, however, that Asmuss' further explanation of why the DHM had decided against a more thorough display on Hitler's life would certainly have found resonance with other curators, museum historians and memorial centre pedagogues, particularly those engaged at the sites of the perpetrators.

The DHM prides itself on its collection of "real" artifacts: Luther's own bible, the chair Goethe once sat on, Frederick the Great's army uniform and so on. No such objects once read, sat on or worn by Hitler appear. The curators wanted to avoid any semblance

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[52] Ibid.

of a "positive identification" with Hitler, to which they worried "authentic" pieces could give rise.[53] Thus, the way in which Hitler is presented to the public becomes, according to Asmuss, "a protection, a self-protection for the visitors" from the power that Hitler, or even the objects associated with him, continues to exert.[54]

Thomas Lutz suggests that it is the "stony witnesses" at the "actual" sites of terror, persecution, and murder which continue to draw the most visitors to *Gedenkstätte* in Berlin.[55] In other words, the most important element of the exhibits at these sites is the "authenticity" of their location. Hannah Arendt has said that the preserved existence of such sites acts as a "guarantor of remembering."[56] Preserving them works against any denial of what occurred there. On the other hand, Sylvia Zacharias speaks of the "magic of [the] authentic site," which leads not to revulsion, or even understanding, but to potentially dangerous fascination.[57]

Curators fear the spectre of "terror-tourism" -- visitors who come neither to mourn the victims nor to increase their knowledge of the perpetrators, but out of some "ghoulish

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[53] Asmuss, "Zum Problem der Ausstellbarkeit, 145.

[54] Asmuss, DHM. Interview by author.

[55] Lutz, "Gedenkstätten," 35.

[56] Hannah Arendt, as quoted in Morsch, "Überlegungen," 90. On the "power of materiality," see Farmer, "Symbols," 98; Spencer Crew and James Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Young, *Art of Memory*, 12.

[57] Zacharias, "Die Abstraktheit," 1. On the "aura" (Walter Benjamin) exerted by the authentic, be it an object or a place, see Korff, "Ausgestellte Geschichte," 30. In another article, Korff uses Karl Markus Michel's term, "*Topolatrie*" ("topolatry"), to describe the fetishization of the original site. See Korff, "Aporien Musealisierung: Notizen zu einem Trend, der die Institution, nach er benannt ist, hinter sich gelassen hat," in *Zeitphänomen Musealisierung: Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart und die Konstruktion der Erinnerung*, ed. Wolfgang Zacharias (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1990), 65-66.

desire" to see the remains of Nazism.[58] The far greater threat, however, comes not from tourists, but from right-wing extremists. In 1992, for example, the "Jewish Barracks" at Sachsenhausen were the object of an arson attack shortly after Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, visited the site. Henrich Enderlein suggests that the preservation of former Nazi sites of terror works against Nazi ideology itself.[59] However, these sites also threaten to become "cult sites" for neo-Nazis.[60] Swastikas have been emblazoned on the exhibit text at the "Topography of Terror." At the DHM, visitor books for various exhibits on the Third Reich contain phrases such as "*Ausländer raus*!" (foreigners out) and "*Deutschland nur für Deutsche*!" (Germany for Germans only!). The curators and historians at Berlin's museums and memorial centres thus make every effort to work against right-wing extremism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism today, in addition to teaching about them in Germany's past. The Wannsee Memorial Centre, for example, organizes a variety of seminars to educate the public about such topics in a present day context. In this way, such institutions of public history hope to combat the creation of any more perpetrators' sites in the future.

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[58] Morsch, "Überlegungen," 90; Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 190; "'Holocaust-Tourismus' in Wannsee Villa," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 31 January 1992; Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 162, 199-201. The touristic "use" of the sites of the perpetrators in Germany has only begun to be addressed. See Annegret Ehmann, "Aspekte touristischer Nutzung historischer Orte," in *Historikertagung Prora: Fachtagung zum Aufbau einer Dauerausstellung in den neuen Bundesländern zum Thema _Der Nationalsozialismus_vom 5. bis 7. Juni 1997 im Strandhotel Prora / Rügen* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung / Stiftung Neue Kultur, 1997).

[59] Hinrich Enderlein, "Gedenkstätten als Elemente politischer Kultur," in *Gedenkstätten im vereinten Deutschland: 50 Jahre nach der Befreiung der Konzentrationslager*, ed. Jürgen Dittberner and Antje von Meer (Berlin: Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten und Edition Hentrich, 1994), 139.

[60] Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 188; Wolfgang Benz, "Notwendigkeit und Abgrenzung (gegenüber Gedenkstätten und Museen) der alltaggeschichtlichen Darstellung des Nationalsozialismus," in *Historikertagung Prora: Fachtagung zum Aufbau einer Dauerausstellung in den neuen Bundesländern zum Thema _Der Nationalsozialismus_vom 5. bis 7. Juni 1997 im Strandhotel Prora / Rügen* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung / Stiftung Neue Kultur, 1997), 149; Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 132.

The many critics of museum history have often suggested that it can only offer "neutered reproductions" and "tidied up version[s]"of the past.[61] This critique holds true in some ways for the representation of Germans as perpetrators during the Third Reich in Berlin's memorial centres. The anonymity of mass murder is maintained, because the bureaucrats, administrators, and officials too often go unnamed and unrepresented. In addition, none of the exhibits I visited deal with one of the most controversial issues in academic historiography today, the role of the *Zuschauer* (bystanders) in the perpetration of the Holocaust. Nor has this yet been a topic for the literature which reviews and critiques museal displays of the Nazi past.[62] Ordinary Germans, the citizens who observed the deportations which followed the implementation of the "Final Solution," who denounced friends and colleagues at the Gestapo headquarters, or who passed the Plötzensee prison on their way to work, remain invisible, or in some cases, explicitly and completely exonerated.[63] This reluctance to deal with German citizens as supporters of the most disturbing tenets of Nazi ideology or as the perpetrators of terror is indeed extremely problematic. Berlin's history exhibits need to address these subjects, no matter how troubling, if they wish to provide an honest and open confrontation with Germany's Nazi past. However, as Andreas Huyssen suggests, the notion that museums "*invariably* … repress and sterilize" is itself sterile, and in the case of Berlin, untrue.[64] Berlin's museal histories of the perpetrators contain many faults and weaknesses. However, since

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[61] Walsh, *Representation,* 2; Malcolm McLeod, "Museums: Open to Whom?" in *Museums and Late Twentieth Century Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 10-11.

[62] I should note one exception. Bernd Faulenbach asks: "To what degree is it worth considering … the perspective of the bystander?" ("Der Nationalsozialismus," 12).

[63] According to the information booklet at Plötzensee, "only a handful of people on the outside were aware of what went on behind the high walls" (Oleschinski, *Plötzensee Memorial Center*, 6).

the "Topography of Terror" opened in 1987, they have continued to make a concerted effort not only to document the crimes committed, but to name the criminals as well.

[64] Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 35 (emphasis mine).

CHAPTER THREE

DISPLAYING THE HOLOCAUST: REPRESENTING THE GERMANS' VICTIMS

> There's no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence.
> Memory dies unless it's given a use. ...
> If one no longer has land but has the memory of land, then one
> can make a map.
>
> Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*.[1]

As do all other forms of historiography, the historical exhibits in Berlin map a landscape that once was; they tell the stories of people who once were. They document not only an absence, but the memory of that absence. The previous chapter noted the "dual function" of many memorial centres and museums in Berlin: to commemorate and to teach, to honour and to educate. All displays on the Nazi past in Berlin are to some extent concerned with remembering the victims of the Third Reich. Edward T. Linenthal's comments on the building of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. thus have resonance for all exhibits on the Third Reich: "From the beginning ... creating the museum was understood as partially fulfilling the debt of remembrance. Any failure of historical or aesthetic representation would resonate as not just a 'mistake,' but as a desecration of the memory of Holocaust victims."[2] The museal representation of the

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[1] Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996), 193.

[2] Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 109. Linenthal reiterates this point even more strongly. "Failure to carry satisfactorily the burden of survivor memory," he says, "would be tantamount to spitting on a grave and then removing the gravestone so that memory of the dead was effaced" (110). Although the commemoration of the Holocaust in an American context raises several different issues than does its memorialization in Germany, there are definite similarities between any exhibits dealing with the "burden" of Holocaust memory, be they in Washington, D.C. or in Berlin.

Germans' victims bears a great responsibility, a responsibility which grows as the number of survivors dwindles and the Holocaust itself passes from memory into history.

There is a growing literature on Holocaust commemoration in the form of monuments and memorials, which grapples with how they recall and pay tribute to Hitler's victims. Too often, as noted in the Introduction, museums are simply equated with these other memorial texts. Little has been written on how museums and exhibits construct their narratives about victims' experiences. This chapter seeks to answer a number of questions about the exhibited history of the Germans' victims. Do Berlin's exhibits define the Holocaust as a singularly Jewish tragedy? How central is the Holocaust to the story of the Third Reich more generally? How do museums attempt to represent an experience that, while too terrible to be imagined, was not too terrible to have happened? In sum: How do Berlin's history exhibits construct the histories of the victims of the Third Reich?

"First And Worst": Defining Holocaust Victims in the Museum

Linenthal describes the "grotesque competition for status as 'first and worst' victims," which played out between members of the American Holocaust Museum's planning committee.[3] Brian Ladd discusses a similar "unseemly squabble" that has erupted between various groups of victims over the building of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.[4] Equally heated debates over who constitutes the primary victims of the

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[3] Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 14.

[4] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 169. The memorial is planned as a central monument to "the murdered Jews of Europe," explicitly excluding the Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, political opponents of Nazism and all other victims' groups. The long, bitter controversy that was sparked by the initial plans continues today.

Holocaust have also played out within written, academic historiography. Exhibition reviews and other commentaries do not often refer to how intensely controversial the "ranking" of victims, which inevitably takes place in museum displays, can be. Neither do they remark on how fully the exhibits document the Holocaust in comparison to how they depict other events and themes. However, both issues, the definition of victimhood and the centrality of this story, remain emotional and critical issues for many visitors to these exhibits. The visitor books are filled with angry exclamations about the omission and/or marginalization of certain groups of victims and with critiques regarding the attention devoted to the victims' experiences relative to that given to other topics.[5]

Museums perform certain legitimizing functions. As Carol Duncan suggests, the exhibit has the power "to define and rank people, to declare some as having a greater share than others in the community's heritage - in its very identity."[6] Certain groups in German society - among them, the Sinti and Roma peoples and homosexuals - link their invisibility or marginalization in the public history of the Nazi past to a continued invisibility in the present. The call for inclusion in exhibits on the Holocaust can thus also be seen as a call for inclusion and recognition on the part of oppressed groups today. The memory of the gay victims of the Third Reich, suggests one museum historian, is effaced by their routine exclusion from public historical accounts of the Holocaust.[7] Gay activists

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[5] Visitors to Berlin's exhibits often use the guest books themselves as memorials. For example, in the visitor book for "Mahnmale des Holocaust" ("Holocaust Memorials") at the DHM (1994), one reads comments such as "In memory of Elli-Marie Joelson and her husband Fritz Joelson († Auschwitz)" and "In memory of the Hungarian Jews, especially my grandparents and relatives." Museum visiting here seems to be part of an active memorialization process.

[6] Duncan, "Art Museums," 102.

[7] Klaus Müller, quoted in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 187. Müller goes on to suggest that "reconstructing the history of gay victims [is] directly related to present social concerns" (189).

claim that Hitler's homosexual victims have been forgotten and their stories silenced. The Sinti and Roma peoples, in contrast, concede that exhibits regularly represent their experiences under the Nazis during what they call the "Porrajamos," the "great devouring." However, they also believe that their stories are not fully integrated into the exhibited history of the Holocaust as a whole. They demand that their suffering be recognized not only as *equal* to, but *identical* with, that of the Jews.[8] As with most issues concerning the depiction of the Hitler period, the curators in Berlin face the potential for great controversy in their definitions of victimhood. How have they responded?

In Berlin museums, the Holocaust[9] tends to be depicted as a centrally Jewish experience. In fact, the term used far more commonly is *Judenvernichtung* (extermination of the Jews), although "Holocaust" is becoming more frequent. The experiences of the Sinti and Roma, the disabled,[10] and homosexuals are naturally included, but they remain marginalized: the Jewish experience is central, that of other victims remains on the

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[8] See Romani Rose, the President of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, "Der Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma und seine gegenwärtige Bedeutung für Deutschland," in *Gedenkstätten im vereinten Deutschland: 50 Jahre nach der Befreiung der Konzentrationslager*, ed. Jürgen Dittberner and Antje von Meer (Berlin: Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten and Edition Hentrich, 1994), 68-78.On the Sinti and Roma controversy in the Washington museum, see Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 240-248.

[9] For the purposes of this thesis, "the Holocaust" is defined as the German Nazi state's "calculated mass murder and internment" of Jews, Poles, Sinti and Roma peoples, Soviet POWs, political prisoners, homosexuals, and others during World War II (Young, *Art of Memory*, 21).

[10] In general, relatively little attention is paid to the victims of the "Euthanasia Campaign" in the permanent displays in Berlin. At the GDW, those who resisted on behalf of the victims of the so-called "T4 Action" are represented, but not the victims themselves. This was one of the most noticeable omissions for me, but I found no reference to it in the museum literature and no comments in the visitor books. There are, however, plans to build a museum devoted entirely to these victims on the site where the murder of thousands of mentally and physically disabled people was organized (Tiergartenstraße 4). See Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 153; Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 190; Ulrich Amling, "Haus des Eigensinns: Ein Berliner Museum für die Opfer der 'Euthanasie' geplant," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 28 January 1998.

periphery.[11] Thus, the exhibits implicitly "rank" the victims. In examining this depiction, another question arises about how central that experience of suffering, Jewish or otherwise, is to the exhibited story of the Third Reich more generally. In the following, I will offer some comments on *who* is exhibited as the principal victims of Nazi persecution and how central their experience of suffering is to the larger narrative. Following this overview, I will describe in greater detail *how* certain exhibits construct the history of the victims of the Third Reich.

The German Historical Museum (DHM)

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the DHM devotes a separate room to a display on the Holocaust. The visitor leaves the white walls and brightly-lit display cases of the rest of the exhibit to enter a black-walled room, its lighting dim. By entering this space, the visitor is removed, physically, from the flow of German history. An incredibly detailed model of Auschwitz containing over 3000 individual figures dominates one side of the room. It was created by a Jewish survivor, Mieczyslaw Stobierski, to serve, the text explains, not only as "didactic model" but as a "poignant monument to the murdered." Two paintings by the Jewish artist Felix Nüssbaum occupy one wall. The first depicts a family celebrating the Seder. The second, concentration camp inmates. Among the items

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[11] This current representation greatly differs from the interpretations of the Nazi past formerly displayed in East Berlin. The experiences of Jews - suffering *as Jews* and not as anti-fascist freedom fighters - were often totally excluded from museum narratives. The Holocaust was itself totally marginalized and victims were only defined in terms of their role as members of the Communist resistance. See, among many others, Behrens-Cobet and Reichling, "Bilder erhalten," 80-85; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Koonz, "Germany's Buchenwald"; Wolfgang Ruge, "Historiography in the German Democratic Republic: Rereading the History of National Socialism," in *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, ed. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997).

highlighted in the display cases are documents forbidding Jews to use public transportation, and a list numbering the Jews among the citizens of the French town, Champigny-sur-Marne. In the corner, a monitor plays film footage of the death camps. The text outside the room is inclusive in its definition of racism: "Hitler's manic racism, which he had already boldly proclaimed before 1933, became [a] terrible reality in the systematic persecution and murder of the sick and disabled, of the homosexuals, of the Sinti and Romany Gypsies and of the Jews." Inside the room, the text briefly mentions that the *Völkermord* (ethnic murder) claimed Sinti and Roma as victims as well, but none of the objects on display are associated with these victims. The emphasis is overwhelmingly on the Jewish experience. Nothing documents the murder of the disabled or the oppression of homosexuals. The one prisoner uniform displayed bears a yellow star.

The visitors to the DHM appear not to take issue with the Jews being defined as the primary victims here; nor do their comments indicate a lack of satisfaction with how the exhibit tells their stories once inside the "Holocaust room." They do, however, object to the overall technique of presentation. This display, which makes use of the exhibit architecture, colour, and lighting to shape its interpretation, emphasizes the importance of the Holocaust to the narrative of the Third Reich more generally, by giving it its own space. However, such placement simultaneously threatens to move this event to the periphery of the display and thus to the margins of the story itself. One visitor felt that "unfortunately a documentation of the Jewish persecution is missing."[12] Because objects and images representing this persecution are placed in a separate room, it is possible, as

[12] Visitor Books, Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM), Berlin, 1994.

this visitor may have done, to pass by it altogether. Other visitors were outraged by the installation: "I find it offensive that in a museum of this size the section concerning the mass murder of millions of people is tucked quietly in a corner."[13] This comment was echoed repeatedly.

Burkhard Asmuss, an exhibit curator at the DHM, explains why the museum made the decision to represent the Holocaust in this manner. The physical separation of the room from the rest of the exhibit symbolizes the removal of Jews from German society in the Third Reich. This space is also meant to serve as a *Trauerraum* (mourning room). Asmuss further suggests that the alternative portrayal might well have raised another set of criticisms. If the DHM had depicted the Holocaust in a similar style to the other parts of the exhibit, with white walls and bright lights, if there had been no physical separation, the critique would likely have been that the museum was attempting to "normalize" this period by inserting it "into the line of normal German history."[14] It will be interesting to see what approach will be taken in the German Historical Museum's new permanent display due to open in 2003.

The "Topography of Terror"

The "Topography of Terror" remembers less the victims of the Holocaust *per se*, and more the political opponents of the regime, who were arrested, imprisoned, beaten and killed at this site. The exhibit describes what the Nazis termed "protective custody" (*Schutzhaft*) as "the sharpest weapon the NS state held against 'enemies of the state and

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Burkhard Asmuss, DHM. Interview by author, 15 October 1998, Berlin.

people'."[15] One of the many victims individually depicted is Franz Künstler, a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), who died as a result of the beatings inflicted by the Gestapo. Another, Theodor Haubach, the editor of an SPD newspaper, was executed at Plötzensee shortly after his imprisonment here. The "Topography of Terror" devotes more attention to its narrative about the political victims of Nazism. The political prisoners are individually biographized; their names and photographs are provided. The exhibit does not provide the same degree of detail in recounting the stories of the Nazis' racial victims. There are sections of the display devoted to the "fates" of racially-defined groups, the Jews, the "Gypsies," and the Soviets and Poles, but these victims are represented as groups rather than as individuals. Nonetheless, the "Topography of Terror" attempts to construct a narrative about their experiences as well.

In terms of the sheer number murdered, it is fitting that the display on the "Fate of the Jews" is much larger, more detailed and more prominent than those devoted to the "fates" of the other groups. The exhibit text also emphasizes that this group's experience is understood as the central one. For example, the text on the "Fate of the Gypsies" reads: "*next to* the Jews, the Gypsies (Sinti and Roma) were *also* exposed to racial persecution in the Third Reich … [which] claimed thousands of victims."[16] On the one hand, the display on the Sinti and Roma victims emphasizes similarities in their experience to those of the Jews. Both sections display similar documents, such as deportation orders, they both provide almost identical chronologies of the persecution and extermination of these peoples, and they both include similar photographs of groups awaiting deportations. On

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[15] Exhibit text, "Topography of Terror."

[16] My emphasis.

the other hand, by devoting a separate narrative to the history of the Sinti and Roma under Hitler, the exhibit also implies that their experience and their suffering differed from that of the Jews.[17] It is this distinction which tends to anger the Sinti and Roma today. They do not deny that the Jews suffered in far greater numbers, only that Jewish persecution in the Third Reich was not unique or unparalleled. The "Topography of Terror" might provide a satisfactory resolution of the issue for the Sinti and Roma by merging the two victims' narratives. However, such a move would likely invoke strong condemnation from those who claim that the Jewish experience must be depicted as a unique event, without comparison.

The "Topography of Terror" also includes a representation of homosexuals as victims of Hitler. The text reveals that many thousands of gay men were imprisoned, and in a rare case of identifying individual perpetrators, names one official who led the "Reich Central Office for the Fight against Homosexuality and Abortions." The visitor books, however, repeatedly condemn the relative lack of information about the suffering of gay men and women. Visitors write: "Why is there so little written about the persecuted homosexuals?"; "[The] persecuted, imprisoned and deported homosexuals are forgotten. This is dangerous"; "Hostility to gays and racism come from the same corner."[18] Once again, visitors link oppression in the present with the representation of persecution in the past.

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[17] This separation is common in Berlin exhibits. For example, the German Resistance Memorial Centre has separate displays on "The Resistance of the Jews" and the "Resistance of the Sinti and Roma."

[18] Visitor Books, "Topography of Terror," 8 August 1987 and May 1995.

"Questions of German History"

Even more so than at the "Topography of Terror," victims of the Third Reich are defined in predominantly political terms in "Questions of German History." Thus, it is not the Holocaust but the persecution of the opposition, which takes centre stage. The display highlights key events in the story of political oppression in the Third Reich: the end of the multi-party political system and the creation of the single party state, the terror actions against members of the Social Democratic and Communist parties, and the acts of resistance against the Nazis. While "Questions of German History" does not overlook the suffering of the "racially unacceptable", the exhibit text does imply a kind of ranking of the victims. It reads: "*Next to* the political inmates, were *also* imprisoned in the KZ's [concentration camps] the 'dangerous to the Volk element' (*volksschädigende Elemente*) and members of the persecuted minorities, Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals and others." The exhibit devotes a separate section to Jewish persecution and extermination, but unlike at the "Topography of Terror," no other category of victim receives this special and individualized treatment. "Questions of German History" categorizes the Holocaust as a predominantly Jewish tragedy, but provides a far fuller documentation of the political victims of the regime.

Few exhibition reviewers pay much attention to how *museums* define and rank the victims of the Holocaust, but the public can read about the intensely emotional, ongoing debate over the planned Holocaust memorial on an almost daily basis. Markedly similar concerns and issues are involved. As Jane Kramer suggests, "everyone in Berlin [is]

fighting about what the definition of a Holocaust victim should be."[19] The Sinti and Roma peoples and gay activist groups have long been calling for the complete inclusion of their history under Hitler in Berlin's exhibits. Reinhard Rürup has expressed concern, however, that memory and mourning will be "lost to the banality of [these] conflicting claims" for victim status.[20] All museum narratives indicate what was at stake when they were created. However "grotesque" or "unseemly" such arguments over who counts as a Holocaust victim may appear, they also point to the importance that the public grants to museum histories. The exhibits inside the museum are seen as being capable of changing the balance of power in the world outside. In order to resist what they view as continued oppression in the present, activist groups and ordinary museum visitors alike will therefore continue to challenge the museal representations of Germany's victims.

The previous pages have documented how several Berlin exhibits define the victims of the Holocaust and the degree to which their experiences are either central to, or on the periphery of, the main historiographical narrative on display. In the following, I will discuss the way in which exhibits construct what might best be termed "narratives of suffering." What images and objects predominate in these displays? How are victims of the Third Reich represented in museal form? Rather than describe each individual exhibit in turn, I will focus primarily on two displays, the Wannsee Memorial Centre and the Jewish Museum at Sachsenhausen, but will also make reference to other exhibits where pertinent. I consider these two displays to be the least and most effective representations

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[19] Kramer, *Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York: Random House, 1996), 260.

[20] Reinhard Rürup, as quoted in Kramer, *The Politics of Memory,* 266.

of the victims' stories respectively. In what follows, I thus establish a set of criteria for what good museum history of the Holocaust looks like in terms of the depiction of its victims.

Depicting Atrocity: Victims' Narratives on Display at Wannsee and Sachsenhausen

In 1942, the conference held to implement the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem" was held at a luxurious villa at Lake Wannsee on the outskirts of Berlin. Today, the villa serves as a memorial centre. Its permanent display on the Holocaust and the steps leading up to it places the Jewish experience at its very core. The exhibit text acknowledges that others, namely "Communists and partisans, 'gypsies' and the mentally ill," suffered as well, but the racially-motivated persecution of the Jews remains the central theme of this narrative.[21]

In Chapter Two, I criticized the portrayal of the perpetrators at this site -- the anonymous manner in which they are presented to the public, the exhibit text's uncritical adoption of the language of the perpetrators, and the total lack of information about the roles of "ordinary" Germans in the implementation of the "Final Solution." If the representation of perpetrator history is problematic, however, the exhibit's display on the victims' experiences is even more so. Through "one horrific picture after another," the

[21] Once again, visitors have objected to the omission of homosexuals as victims. For example: "One group of victims is not mentioned with one word: gays and lesbians? Why?" (Visitor Books, House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial Centre, 13 August 1998). It should be remembered, however, that the Wannsee Memorial Centre is explicitly concerned with documenting the implementation of the extermination of the Jews and not the experiences of other victim groups.

exhibit de-humanizes and renders anonymous the victims of the Holocaust.[22] The result, I believe, is indeed a desecration of their memory.

At Wannsee, the so-called "atrocity photos" predominate. The visitor is confronted by image after image of piles of corpses, groups of naked women awaiting their execution,[23] mass graves, starving children in the ghettos, hangings and shootings, and other scenes of humiliation and degradation.[24] There is no documentation of Jewish life before 1933. Jews are pictured in groups, rather than as individuals. None are named. The curators have not provided any biographical information about them or attempted to tell their distinctive life stories. The "biographizing" approach used so effectively elsewhere is disregarded here, except with regard to the key participants at the conference. This representation of the Jewish experience of suffering ensures that the victims remain anonymous, "robbed of their … individuality"; they also appear "sub-human" and "ugly."[25] If Wannsee's display of the perpetrators is akin to a history of murder without the murderers, the display of the victims provides an account of human suffering without "human" subjects.

One can well ask how museum curators could possibly construct a history of the Holocaust *without* relying on such images. Is not one of the primary educative purposes

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[22] Anita Kugler, "Die Täter sind der Hölle entstiegen," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 23 January 1992.

[23] Peter Reichel argues that these repeated images of naked women represent examples of a "highly questionable" male voyeurism at work (*Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 194).

[24] Barbie Zelizer's *Remembering to Forget* is a fascinating study of the link between such photographs and our collective memory of the Holocaust. Zelizer also argues that museums have played key roles in "freezing" these images of atrocity (*Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 194).

[25] Kugler, "Die Täter"; Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 194. On the de-humanizing effect of such images, see also Treml, "Schreckensbilder," 287-290.

of such a display to "make real" the horror of what occurred? Would not the alternative danger of an exhibit less dependent upon such gruesome images be, as so many critics of exhibits worry, a too "tidy" version of the past? Wannsee's almost total reliance on the depiction of atrocity to construct its narrative about the victims of the Holocaust has two effects worth noting. First, it threatens to overwhelm visitors and make them recoil from what is displayed or, conversely, to anesthetize them, to make them numb. Second, it memorializes the Jews as the Nazis themselves would have wanted them to be remembered.

Michal Bodemann has suggested that the pictorial material at Wannsee is not only "gruesome," but "grueling" as well.[26] A visit to the Wannsee Memorial Centre can indeed be an emotionally overwhelming experience, one which potentially leads not to understanding and knowledge but to a "fearful turning away" on the part of the visitor.[27] Images of camps and corpses threaten to "paralyze" the visitor "to the point of critical inattention"; that is, they prohibit an active engagement with the historical narrative.[28] Such images may even prevent visitors from grasping the museum's message. The relentless depiction of atrocity at Wannsee also poses an alternative danger: it threatens to numb the viewer, to deaden his or her own response.[29] The images may cease to shock or

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[26] Bodemann, "Reconstructions of History," 180.

[27] Treml, "Schreckensbilder," 291. Peter Jahn, the director of the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, has asked: "What is made understandable through [the display of] horror?" He describes how his museum attempts to provide some "emotional distance" for the visitors so as not to overwhelm them "psychologically," by presenting horrific images in an "un-dramatic" manner. See Peter Jahn, "Gemeinsam an den Schrecken erinnern: Das deutsch-russische Museum Berlin-Karlshorst," in *Der Krieg und seine Museen*, ed. Hans-Martin Hinz (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 19, 22.

[28] Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 1.

[29] Susan Sontag's oft-cited reflections on her reaction to the photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau are pertinent here: "Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror: I felt irrevocably

horrify, simply because they are repeated in such numbers. They become too "familiar." If the visitor ceases to be moved by these images, the emotional component so intrinsic to museum histories is lost. Eduardo Cadava has suggested that photographs symbolize a "return of the departed," a "return of what was once there," and that this return "takes the form of a haunting."[30] Visitors will inevitably leave the Wannsee exhibit haunted by what they have seen, but questions remain: Will their historical understanding have increased? Will those images have added to their knowledge about the loss of humanity the Holocaust represented? My opinion is that they do not.

Several critics of the Wannsee exhibit have focused upon the anonymous and de-humanizing way in which the Jewish victims are presented to the public. These critics fail to make the connection between this presentation and the manner in which the Nazis wanted the Jews to be portrayed. National Socialist anti-Semitic propaganda turned on an image of the Jew as sub-human and monstrous. The curators of any exhibit concerned with narrativizing the Holocaust must attempt to strike a balance between documenting the horror the victims experienced, and reproducing the dehumanizing images the Nazis themselves used to turn German citizens into "vermin" needing to be exterminated.

The Wannsee exhibit fails to strike such a balance. Many of the photographs on display here were taken by the Nazis themselves. The subjects of the photographs were thus intentionally positioned so as to appear un-human and anonymous. The exhibit text at Wannsee fails to call attention to who was behind the camera and to the reasons why

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grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead" (Sontag, *On Photography*, [New York: Anchor Books, 1977], 20).

[30] Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 11.

such photographs were taken. Thus, the curators also fail to provide a full context for the images. Photographs are not mirrors of the past. They are texts themselves; they are interpretations of a particular moment, taken from a particular point of view.[31] Jürgen Hannig provides a telling example of how much the "meaning" or "message" (*Aussage*) of a photograph can change as we learn more about the context in which it was taken. The image he describes is one of the most famous and terrible of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: a young boy, arms raised in fear, stands in front of an SS officer, whose gun is aimed and ready. Wannsee reproduces this photograph, as do many other exhibits in Berlin.

This photograph is actually one of a series that comprises the visual portion of the "Final Report" on the ghetto uprising completed by SS leader Jürgen Stroop. At Wannsee, Stroop's name is mentioned as the author of a document close to the photograph, but no mention is made of the source of the photograph itself. How does this information change our understanding of the photograph as a document of the Nazi past? Hannig argues that it becomes "a document of a perverse pride in the accurate fulfillment of duty, a document in the history of the successful perpetrators, not a document in the history of the accusing victims."[32] This photograph and others are thus, he believes, less documents of victims' suffering, than documents of and from the perpetrator's perspective. In this, they are no less valuable sources. At Wannsee, however, the curators

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[31] I have found two articles to be extremely valuable in my analysis of the photographs at the Wannsee Memorial Centre. See Hannig, "Bilder, die Geschichte machen" and Treml, "Schreckensbilder," 279-294.

[32] Hannig, "Bilder, die Geschichte machen," 15.

have not used them to construct the appropriate narrative. Too often they use the perpetrators' photographs to attempt to create a history of their victims.

Photographs, Walter Benjamin has written, "form part of the history of how a person *lives on.*"[33] In Berlin, the victims of the Holocaust, be they Jewish, Sinti and Roma, homosexual or disabled, "live on" in photographs which to some extent deny the importance of their former lives, before they became Hitler's victims. The major exhibits on the history of the Third Reich, from the DHM to "Questions of German History," rely primarily on these atrocity photos to document the perspective of the victims. Such images do not - and cannot - tell their stories. Nor do they remember them as they would have wanted to be remembered. A history of the Holocaust, be it in written, filmic, fictional or museal form, cannot ignore its horror. However, it *is* possible to convey the horror of this loss without a total reliance on images of atrocity. The exhibit at the Jewish Barracks Museum at Sachsenhausen is testimony to that possibility.

In contrast to the display at Wannsee, which focuses only on death and dying, the exhibit in the reconstructed Jewish barracks at Sachsenhausen is strangely vibrant. It is, in fact, full of life or rather, full of lives. The curators personalize the story of the Jewish experience at Sachsenhausen through twenty-three "biography cabinets," each representing the life of a former Jewish inmate.[34] Unlike the group photographs of emaciated bodies at Wannsee, these cabinets present individual faces and singular stories. Personal possessions, such as religious objects, family albums, and written

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[33] Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, ed. Gershom Scholen and Theodor Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), 220.

[34] Most of the inmates represented are men. Transports of Jewish women began arriving in 1944, but until that time, Sachsenhausen was an exclusively male camp.

correspondence complement the exhibit text, which provides further biographical details. In some cases it is possible to listen to the recorded voices of those who survived, to hear them tell their own stories in their own words. For example, one of the cabinets is devoted to Johann Hüttner, a Communist Youth member brought to Sachsenhausen in 1936. He escaped during an air attack in April 1945, and later became a politician in East Germany. His story is supplemented by personal letters and photographs. The exhibit is not merely a collection of such fascinating and poignant biographies. These individual stories are woven together to form a comprehensive museal narrative about the suffering and resistance of the Jewish inmates at this camp. The exhibit text next to the cabinets contextualizes these experiences: it describes the racial policies of the National Socialists, the treatment of Jews in contrast to other prisoners, and the overall workings of the "camp system" of which Sachsenhausen was but one part.[35]

The exhibit "Jews in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, 1936-1945" thus manages to provide both an emotional and an educative experience for its visitors. It neither overwhelms them with horrific images, nor does it depict the victims solely as the Nazis sought to depict them. In Berlin, there seems to be an observable difference between the way in which exhibits devoted to *German* history display the victims' experiences and how institutions concerned with *Jewish* history represent their lives.

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[35] According to the "decentralized concept," this permanent display will eventually be one of several exhibits devoted to various groups of victims. As noted in the previous chapter, it is the only exhibit to have been completed so far. The visitor is thus inevitably left with the impression that Sachsenhausen was predominantly a Jewish camp. Jewish prisoners certainly "occupied the lowest rung of the social hierarchy," as the exhibit text argues, but many thousands more Soviet POWs were murdered here than were Jews. In my opinion, the exhibit does not sufficiently make explicit the fact that, before the outbreak of war, Jews were not interned here specifically *as Jews*, but as alleged political opponents of the regime. Acknowledging this fact would in no way diminish the suffering inflicted upon them. It would, however, paint a more historically accurate portrayal of the function of Sachsenhausen prior to 1939.

Generally speaking, the former rely to a far greater extent on the "by-now familiar images of the bunks of Buchenwald, heaps of bodies at Dachau, and pits of bodies at Belsen."[36] Atrocity photos are not missing entirely from the exhibit at Sachsenhausen. A screen at one end of the room projects larger-than-life images of executions, of deportations, of ghetto life. A large glass cabinet in the middle of the exhibition space contains fragments of suitcases and shoes once owned by the inmates.[37] However, these images and objects, unlike those at Wannsee and many other museums of German history, do not form the sum total of how the Jews are to be remembered.

The Centrum Judaicum's most recent temporary exhibit, "Lawyers without Rights: The Fates of Jewish Lawyers in Berlin after 1933," was recently described as "radiating … a fascinating vitality," even though its subject was the exclusion, harassment, persecution, and eventual murder of Berlin's Jewish lawyers.[38] Similarly vital and vibrant exhibits on Jewish lives during the Third Reich have been hosted by

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[36] Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 194. The German Resistance Memorial Centre is a notable exception. In its displays on the resistance of Jews and Sinti and Roma, it includes pre-1933 photographs. The display at Köpenick also deserves special mention for its inclusion of a picture of a Jewish survivor from the 1970s. Most "survivor" images on display in Berlin tend to be those photographs taken within days of the liberation of the death camps. Thus, survivors are depicted as skeletal, un-human figures, not as the resilient men and women they were.

[37] James Young asks thought-provoking questions about the display of items such as the bins of hair, shoes, and eyeglasses exhibited in the museum at Auschwitz and Majdanek: "To what extent do the bins of artifacts … represent the absence of those who once animated them? Or to what extent do they remember the victims as the Nazis would have remembered them to us?" (*Art of Memory*, 24)

[38] Christian Dirks, "Ausstellung: 'Anwalt ohne Recht'," Centrum Judaicum, H-German, 30 November, 1998.

numerous *Heimat* museums.[39] By including pre-1933 images, they document the loss of individuals and communities in ways that images of Auschwitz simply cannot.

This thesis focuses primarily on the exhibit as a form of historiography. As such, it is possible to evaluate it in terms which parallel those appropriate to any other medium of historical representation. The commemorative component of exhibited history of the Nazi past must not be ignored, however. How a museum remembers the experience of Holocaust victims, how it fulfills the debt of remembrance, is arguably just as important as how it constructs a history of that experience.

[39] For example, "Jüdische Bürger Spandaus 1933-1945" (Spandau Kulturhaus, 1989/90); "The missing House" (Heimatmuseum Mitte, 1992); "Jüdische Lebenswege in Prenzlauer Berg" (Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997), and many others.

CHAPTER FOUR

"WE SUFFERED TOO": THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANS AS VICTIMS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

> The entire German people were caught up in a terrible situation. It (*sic*) was under enormous pressure, an enormous burden.
>
> They always tend to undermine how much the German people suffered during the war.[1]
>
> To identify with the victims is … morally less ambivalent.
>
> Björn Krondorfer[2]

In the film *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter* (Germany, pale mother), images of the decaying corpse of a German soldier and bombed-out German cities serve as the backdrop against which the director, Helma Sanders-Brahms, reconstructs her mother's experiences during the Second World War: the Allied bombings, her rape at the hands of American GIs and her flight from war-torn Berlin. The film makes an implicit reference to the misery of the Germans' victims when mother and daughter take refuge amongst the remains of a factory's ovens and smokestacks. However, the primary message of Brahms' film seems more to be that "she suffered too."[3] After interviewing 76 German children of Nazi perpetrators, the Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On concluded that a similar phrase,

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[1] Children of Nazi perpetrators, quoted in Dan Bar-On and Amalia Gaon, "'We Suffered Too': Nazi Children's Inability to Relate to the Suffering of the Victims of the Holocaust," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 3/4 (Fall, 1991): 92.

[2] Björn Krondorfer, "Third-Generation Jews and Germans: History, Memory, and Memorialization," Working Paper 7, *Working Papers of the Volkswagen-Foundation Program in Post-War German History* (American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University; German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.: 1995), 14.

[3] On *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*, see Jane Caplan's review, *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1126-28.

"we suffered too," served as a "major moral argument" for coping with their parents' legacy. Focusing on their own suffering, or the suffering of their parents, "helped them," Bar-On suggests, "to avoid relating to the grief inflicted on the victims of Nazism."[4]

Private, individual memories structure the public, collective memory of the past.[5] German memories of suffering during the Second World War, in which the Germans are themselves cast as victims of Hitler, quickly became an intrinsic part of the collective, public memory upon which German post-war identity was founded. In portraying the Second World War, Berlin's history museums and exhibits must inevitably contend with this public memory. This chapter thus addresses the question: How does public history in Berlin deal with the "tradition" of Germans *as victims* during the Third Reich?[6] To answer this question, I examine how selected museums and exhibits construct narratives which articulate and maintain this discourse of German victimization. In the Conclusion to this thesis, I analyze a specific exhibit which challenges the conventions of German social memory, the infamous *Wehrmachtausstellung* (armed forces exhibit) which arrived in Berlin in 1995.

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[4] Bar-On, "'We Suffered Too'," 80, 90. See also Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[5] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 47.

[6] I use the term "tradition" as Eric Hobsbawn does in his discussion of "invented tradition" ("Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger [Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983]). This is not to suggest that it is falsified or has no basis in historical fact. Allied bombs and Soviet occupiers did inflict great suffering upon the German populace. As Hobsbawn has explained, the "invention of tradition" can be defined as an "attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past"(1). Collective memory tends to map those features of the past which can most easily, shamelessly, and unproblematically be both recalled and articulated in the present. Thus, both intentionally, in an effort to construct a "suitable" past, and inadvertently, as a result of the way memory structures events in retrospect, many Germans have identified themselves as, or associated themselves with, historical victims.

Bitburg History: An Equation of Victims

As perpetrators and resisters, Germans in the Third Reich were accountable for their actions. But what victims share, as Brian Ladd argues, is "a lack of responsibility for their fate."[7] Jane Kramer reiterates this point. "Germans want their past to have happened to them," she says. "They want to have suffered from themselves, the way everybody else suffered from them."[8] Sarah Farmer concurs: "Despite the horror and destruction visited by Germany on the rest of Europe, a sense of victimization plays a fundamental role in [the] understanding of what it is to be German."[9] Such "rhetorics of victimization" were employed by various groups immediately after the war, including the ethnic German expellees from Eastern Europe, German POWs those on the home front and even German soldiers themselves.[10] In the 1980s and 1990s, under Chancellor Kohl, several incidents occurred which seemed to point to a re-emergence of these "war stories." Suddenly, however, these stories became less narratives about German suffering and more a means of establishing the equivalence of German victims and the Germans' victims, thereby diminishing German guilt.[11]

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[7] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 221. Ladd suggests that the concept of "victimhood" actually serves as the "touchstone for [German postwar] identity" (221).

[8] Kramer, *Politics of Memory*, 260.

[9] Farmer, "Symbols," 113. This is especially true for East Germans, who view themselves as having been repeatedly victimized, first by the Nazis, then by the Soviets, and finally by the West Germans after reunification. See Mary Fulbrook "Reckoning with the Past: Heroes, Victims, and Villains in the History of the German Democratic Republic," in *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, ed. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997.

[10] See Robert Moeller, "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (October 1996): 1008-1048.

[11] As Moeller suggests, such appeals to establish this "equivalence of victimhood" are not new. They conform to the patterns of public memory created in the immediate post-war period (1009, 1013, 1044). The roots of the Germans' image of themselves as victims stretch even further back, however, into

Such attempts to "link slayers and slain in a dialectic of victimhood" are examples of what Charles Maier has called "Bitburg history."[12] The Bitburg affair itself was a hugely controversial, public relations debacle that involved President Reagan's 1985 visit to the military cemetery at Bitburg where the graves of forty-seven SS men lay.[13] In a much-criticized speech, Reagan explicitly cast these men as victims of war. Later, as a concession to protests, Kohl and Reagan visited the camp at Bergen-Belsen. "Through their remembrance," Brian Ladd has argued, the politicians "linked, and effectively equated, two groups of victims: concentration camp prisoners and German soldiers."[14] One year later, the *Historikerstreit* erupted. Andreas Hillgruber's *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (*Two Kinds of Downfall: The Destruction of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry*) became one of the central texts in dispute. The book "balances" the extermination of European Jewry against the forced expulsion of ethnic Germans in eastern Europe. It has therefore been attacked for purportedly creating an analogy between Jewish and German victims.

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the Nazi period itself. As Omer Bartov notes, "even while they were murdering Jews in unprecedented numbers, many of the perpetrators perceived themselves as acting in their own defense against their past and potential victimizers" ("Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews and the Holocaust," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 [June 1998]: 784).

[12] Charles Maier, "Immoral Equivalence: Revising the Nazi Past for the Kohl Era," in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston: Boston Press, 1990), 39.

[13] On the Bitburg controversy, see Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986). Jeffrey Herf asks: "If members of the Waffen SS were innocents, then what meaningful distinction could be made between perpetrators of crimes and victims in the Nazi era?" (*Divided Memory*, 351).

[14] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 220.

In 1993, another crisis in commemoration occurred when Chancellor Kohl dedicated the *Neue Wache* (New Guard House) as the central war memorial for the country. The new memorial was dubbed everything from a "wreath dumping place" to "the most visible physical representation of the current revision of German historical memory."[15] Critics castigated Kohl's choice of a Käthe Kollwitz sculpture entitled "Mother and Dead Son."[16] Most controversial of all, however, was and is the inscription inside the memorial: "To the Victims of War and Tyranny." This dedication, Ladd argues, exemplifies Kohl's attempt to create a "single category of victims as an expression of national unity."[17] *All* the dead are to be commemorated: members of the SS killed by Allied bombs along with those they murdered.

Charles Maier believes that part of "history's mission" is "to convey some sort of lived resonance."[18] I suggest that in the museum context, this means a certain fit between what is on display and the remembered experience of those who lived through this period or who inherited memories of it. When this "fit" is lacking or when the exhibited story is not the familiar one, a kind of "distortion" occurs, which can leave visitors feeling "angry

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[15] Ibid., 218; Helga A. Welsh, Andreas Pickel, and Dorothy Rosenberg, "East and West German Identities: United and Divided?" in *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 129.

[16] The choice of the sculpture was criticized from all angles: for using an expression of "private grief" as a "public monument," for trying to establish some kind of continuity in commemoration, "centered on the sacrifice of soldiers," and thus for making the Second World War "a war like any other," and most importantly for its Christian imagery, which excludes Jews. See Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 223; Farmer, "Symbols," 114; Welsh, et al., "East and West," 127; Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany Since 1800* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 204.

[17] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 218. Since the debate first flared, a plaque has been added listing the different "categories" of victims to be memorialized here.

[18] Maier, "Immoral Equivalence," 38.

or defrauded."[19] Museums provide a site for the articulation of memories. The memory of the Nazi past which focuses predominantly or even exclusively on German suffering, on Germans *as victims* of the Second World War, has been fiercely contested.[20] However, acknowledging the very real suffering experienced by the German population during the war remains an important task for museum curators. How then do museums walk the tightrope between acknowledging this aspect of their visitors' remembered experience and engaging in the kind of "Bitburg history" described above? In the following I outline several cases in which objects and architecture are used to uphold a narrative stressing *German* suffering and *German* victimization.

Feminizing the Victim Experience

Käthe Kollwitz completed her small, bronze sculpture, *Two Soldiers' Wives Waiting* (*Zwei wartende Soldatenfrauen*), in 1943.[21] Today it is given pride of place in the

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[19] Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion," 45. Crane defines "distortion" as the "lack of congruity between personal experience and expectation, on the one hand, and the institutional representation of the past on the other." On this fit between visitors' expectations and the actual museum experience, see Peter Jahn, "Zur Darstellung des Krieges gegen die Sowjetunion 1941-1945 in der Dokumentation 'Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941-1945' und im geplanten deutsch-russischen Museum in Berlin Karlshorst: Ein Bericht aus der Ausstellungspraxis," in *Reaktionäre Modernität und Völkermord. Probleme des Umgangs mit der NS-Zeit in Museen, Ausstellungen und Gedenkstätten*, ed. Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Josef Jelich, *Geschichte und Erwachsenenbildung* 2 (1994), 149; Peter Simkins, "Das Imperial War Museum in London und seine Darstellung des Krieges, 1917-1995," in *Der Krieg und seine Museen*, ed. Hans-Martin Hinz (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 29. Museum curators must not only consider the expectations of those visitors who experienced the war first-hand; they must also consider those who inherited these memories of wartime suffering, their children and grandchildren.

[20] Social, public or collective memory cannot thus be reified as something solid or unchanging, without conflict and dissent. It is therefore important to acknowledge the existence of "rival memories" and even different "memory communities." See Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), 107; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 2.

[21] The statue is small, measuring only 23 x 24 x 24.5 cm. It is not an original, having been recast in 1994.

German Historical Museum, as both a work of art and a "message-bearing" object about suffering on the German homefront.[22] The sign beside the statue contextualizes it thus:

> Unheard of suffering, burdens and privation
> was in no way limited to the soldiers at the front.
> ... Nearly every family had reason to remember
> [the] war dead. The bombing war burdened the
> population with additional horrors and losses.
> Käthe Kollwitz sensitively expressed the grief and
> pain of wives and mothers in war. An old and a
> young woman sit by one another, sadly remembering
> the dead. One can read quiet grief and resignation
> in the sculpture: *The women stay behind, the men*
> *are in "men-murdering" war.*

Kollwitz's statue is used metonymically to stand not only for civilian suffering as a whole, but also for "Victim Germany." By its representation of *female* suffering, it also genders this particular discourse: it feminizes it.[23] This "universalization" on the basis of "stereotypically *female* experiences" was part of West German collective memory of the war years and the period immediately following, according to Elizabeth Heinemann.[24] She argues:

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[22] This is Burkhard Asmuss' description of the sculpture (Interview by author, 5 October 1998). This sculpture, a collection of children's war toys, and a large propaganda painting of "wartime sacrifice" constitute the whole of the museum's display on the "home front."

[23] On the "feminization of fascism" in other contemporary museum displays, see Irit Rogoff, "From Ruins to Debris: The Feminization of Fascism in German-History Museums," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Rogoff argues that the "disproportionately high representation of the lives of women" in Germany's history exhibits leads to the feminization of fascism by reversing the "original male aesthetic of the fascist era" (234). This counters my distinct impression that, for Berlin at least, the exhibited history of the Third Reich tends *not* to represent women's lives as fully as those of men. I do not agree with many of Rogoff's arguments, but her essay does provide a fascinating point of departure for examining the gendered nature of museum displays of the Third Reich.

[24] Elizabeth Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 1996): 355.

> Memories of female victimhood … were generalized into stories of German victimhood. … These are references to the activities of women, yet they have come to stand for the experience of the entire wartime generation - at least the portion that had not experienced persecution at the hands of the Nazi regime.[25]

The museum appears to uphold this tradition of "feminizing" the Germans' experience *as victims* under Hitler. Strangely, however, it is done in a way that denies women's own suffering and links it only to that of men. While the museum constitutes the Germans' experience during the war in "female" terms, and represents it through images of women, this same display fails to acknowledge the actual suffering and deaths of German women themselves.[26]

The sculpture is, of course, one of thousands of objects used to display the history of the Third Reich at the DHM. However, it is one of very few used to construct the narrative about the home front experience during the Second World War. Thus, it takes on a special significance both in the display and in my analysis of exhibited history more generally. Like the choice of Kollwitz's *Pieta* for a national memorial at the Neue Wache, the choice of this sculpture could be criticized for its gendered representation of the notion of wartime sacrifice. While this depiction of the sorrow of widows and mothers genuinely captured certain aspects of German women's lives in wartime, it is not an entirely appropriate memorial for a war in which there were many more civilian than

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[25] Ibid., 355. Heinemann argues that this appropriation of women's experiences was sustained by films, novels and other forms of public history.

[26] By "German women" I mean specifically those women who were politically and racially acceptable to the Nazi regime. The previous chapter dealt with the representation of those who were not, but did so by subsuming them under the category of "Holocaust victims" more generally. As far as I know, there has been no work done on the gendered nature of the museal representations of Holocaust victims. Research into the presentation of German women's lives in displays on the Third Reich is still in its infancy.

military deaths.[27] The exhibit text -- "the women stay behind" -- suggests a kind of separation from the "real" front that bombing raids and later, street fighting, made impossible.

Women did not only suffer *as men did*; their experience as victims also *differed* from that of men, a fact highlighted in very few exhibits. One of the most obvious omissions in museal narratives of German suffering during the war is rape. Women's experiences, including rape, were universalized to encompass Germany's experience more generally. The literal rape of German women, particularly by the Red Army, became an oft-used metaphor for "the rape of Germany" by the (Soviet) occupying forces. Heinemann argues that "references to … rapes … permeated the culture" of post-war Germany."[28] However, it was only in a metaphorical sense that rape was actually discussed. Discussion of the actual experiences of female victims remained taboo. This taboo seems to have persisted in the exhibited history of the Third Reich, even for those displays concerned to represent Germans' suffering during the war.[29] Only one exhibit, the permanent display at the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, makes mention of the fact that "many women were the victims of rape." Other exhibits are silent on this matter altogether.

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[27] John Gillis, ed., "Introduction - Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13; Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 223; Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 244.

[28] Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman" 368.

[29] Marlene Epp argues that academic historians in general "have given slight treatment" to "the issue of wartime rape" ("The Memory of Violence: Soviet and East European Mennonite Refugees and Rape in the Second World War." *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 1 [Spring 1997]: 58). Within the Berlin context, see Annemarie Troeger, "Between Rape and Prostitution: Survival Strategies and Chances for Emancipation for Berlin Women after World War II," in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, ed. Judith Friedlander et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

Museum displays such as the German Historical Museum's not only fail to address the dimension and the very nature of the suffering German women experienced, but they also fail fully to represent women's wartime experiences on the home front. Women were more than victims. The outbreak of war provided certain advantages to German women: jobs, a certain degree of domestic freedom, and for the ideologically-committed, an opportunity to play a role in realizing the Nazis' war aims. "Questions of German History" provides a single picture of women in a German factory; the German Historical Museum provides no information on women's day-to-day lives during the war.[30] Generally speaking, few exhibits in Berlin provide any information about women at war.

During a conference on the "representability" of war in the museum, Peter Jahn raised the important point that it is not only a question of how best to depict "war," it is how to depict *this* war, a war that in its "quantitative dimensions" and its complete obliteration of the "dividing line" between soldiers and civilians sets it apart from other wars of the twentieth century.[31] Like war memorials, the museal representation of war was also forced to change after 1945. No longer could soldiers be portrayed as heroes;[32] women no longer only mourned their loss, but became victims of violence themselves. For Jahn, then, the usual displays of "weapons, uniforms, orders and flags" can only "tell

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[30] This dearth is in stark contrast to displays at the Imperial War Museum, London and the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, which provide relatively extensive information on women's wartime experiences both at home and abroad.

[31] Jahn, "Gemeinsam an den Schrecken," 16-17; "Zur Darstellung," 147.

[32] On the "break" in commemorative practice after World War Two, see George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 200; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 228-9.

part of the story."[33] These objects continue, however, to be the primary building blocks out of which Berlin curators construct their narratives about the Second World War. The continued use of these objects leads to a very limited representation of German women's actual experiences during the war, as both victims and as agents.

Gaynor Kavanagh has suggested that women are too often left "staring into the face of exclusion" when they visit a museum.[34] Their experiences are often neglected, marginalized or misrepresented. The fact that the home front experience is symbolized by a statue of two women was not enough to convince some visitors to the DHM that women themselves were being represented. The comments in the visitor book may well be referring to the exhibit as a whole, but such comments are also valid in the context of the display on National Socialism and the war. They read: "If I understand this exhibit correctly, Germany's history consisted of war, uniforms, technology and men"; "HIS STORY as usual … where are the women? … an exhibit 100% from the male perspective

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[33] Jahn, "Gemeinsam an den Schrecken," 18. Renate Mulzer-Grasse argues that museums do not even attempt to depict the "theme" of war. Instead, their displays deal only with "war machines and war accessories." See "Musealisierung des Krieges?" in *Zeitphänomen Musealisierung: Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart und die Konstruktion der Erinnerung*, ed. Wolfgang Zacharias (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1990), 262.

[34] Gaynor Kavanagh, "Looking for Ourselves, Inside and Outside Museums," *Gender & History* 6, no. 3 (1994): 374. On the representation of "women and gender" in museums generally, see Jane R. Glaser and Artemis A. Zenetou, eds., *Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); *Images of Women: Proceedings of the Images of Women - Women and Museums in Australia Conference in Canberra, Australia, October 11-13, 1993* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 1993); Liza Dale, "Museums and Feminist History - A Symbiosis," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* 6 (1989): 100-108; Gaby Porter: "Putting Your House in Order: Representation of Women and Domestic Life," in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1988); Porter, "Partial Truths," in *Museum Languages: Objects and Texts*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991); Porter, "Seeing through Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

of male viewers"; "Above all … [the] objects of everyday life, of women and children … are missing"; "Women are nowhere except as mothers, daughters and wives of men."[35]

Generally speaking, Berlin's museums fail to address the wartime experience in Germany as a gendered process. One notable exception remains the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst. Not only is it the only exhibit to mention explicitly the rape of German women, it also incorporates women into its entire narrative: as soldiers, as prisoners, as forced labourers, as refugees and partisans, as victims, and as resisters, as "ordinary" Germans and Soviets.[36] It provides information both on how their experiences paralleled those of men and how they often differed.

Heinemann notes that the "genuine trauma" of women's wartime experiences in Germany "quickly came to define the 'home front'."[37] The image of the innocent, suffering woman, who in turn stood for all German civilians, also became, Heinemann continues, "especially well-suited for allowing Germans to consider their nation as a whole an innocent victim of war."[38] By displaying Kollwitz's statue, the DHM has chosen an image, which has both a "lived resonance" and a certain "fit" with the collective memories of the German populace. It represents, in fact, a familiar story: "we suffered too."

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[35] Visitor Books, "Images and Objects of German History," DHM, 1994-1996.

[36] The notable omission here is a representation of women in the role of *perpetrators*. Apart from the photographs of women camp guards that appear relatively infrequently, the Berlin exhibits do not address this topic at all.

[37] Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman," 365.

[38] Ibid., 367.

The DHM must not be accused of stressing Germans' suffering at the expense of that of their victims. The Holocaust, as noted above, has its own room; the depiction of the home front is limited to Kollwitz's statue. The above is not as much a critique of the relative space and importance granted to the theme of "Germans as victims," as an attempt to raise questions about how curators incorporate the gendered rhetorics of victimization into museal narratives of the Nazi past. Such questions can only be answered by a more thorough investigation into the "gendered nature of national commemorative practice," particularly in exhibition form, which was outside the purview of this thesis.[39]

Architecture as Story

The most interesting attempts to create an aura of "lived resonance" in Berlin's museums involve less the actual objects on display than the exhibit's architecture or location. Many artifacts in displays on the Nazi past, such as SS uniforms, German weapons, and government documents, tend to symbolize the suffering inflicted *by* the Germans. Curators in Berlin have, in the past, used the architecture or location of an exhibit to construct an alternative narrative to that represented by such objects. They have sought to tell the story of the suffering *of* the Germans.

[39] Gillis, "Introduction," 10. In the same volume, see also Rudy Koshar, "Rebuilding Pasts: Historical Preservation and Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany," 219.

"1.9.39.: An Attempt at Dealing with the Memories of the Second World War"

On September 1, 1989, at 4:45am, 50 years to the minute after Germany began its invasion of Poland, the German Historical Museum opened its first exhibit: "1.9.39: An Attempt at Dealing with the Memories of the Second World War." The exhibit included photographs of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, posters and other propaganda, letters from inmates at Sachsenhausen, minutes from the Wannsee Conference, Nazi uniforms, passports and identity cards, and leaflets from resistance groups such as the White Rose. Visitors heard radio broadcasts of Hitler's and Goebbels' speeches and watched original *Wochenschau* film clips.

Irit Rogoff has suggested that "th[is] display concentrate[s] on images of civilians, primarily women and children behind the lines, and on the domestic sphere as viewed through humble household implements."[40] However, in reading through the visitor books, the general impression seems to be that everyday life for German civilians is left undocumented:

> What would interest me would be how the civilian
> population lived … in the everyday life during the war.
>
> I miss objects about the everyday life of
> the civilian population.
>
> Too much propaganda, posters … why an SS uniform? …
> "normal" people are too little seen.[41]

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[40] Rogoff, "From Ruins to Debris," 242.

[41] Visitor Books, "1.9.39.," DHM, September, 1989. In reading through the guest books I came across a comment by historian Henry Friedlander. He wrote: "The material … amounts to a glorification of war … . The pictures glorifying the Nazi regime are big and imposing; the results of the German crimes small like footnotes" (September 3, 1989).

Again and again the visitors' comments reveal that they feel something is missing: the more familiar "war story" focusing on the experiences, and thereby the suffering, of German civilians at home.

If this narrative is not made explicit through the objects on display, however, it is implicit nonetheless in the location chosen for the exhibit itself, "a dark, damp cellar with the atmosphere of an original air-raid cellar."[42] One review notes that, "the lowly, gloomy cellar produces an ideal ambiance for a period in which people had to spend considerable time in air-raid cellars."[43] Several reviewers praise the authenticity of the location, although some critics and visitors decry it as an attempt to hide or repress the story of the Third Reich by consigning it to a basement.[44] The objects and text construct a history of the Germans as victimizers, but this location emphasizes a story in which Germans become the victims of the war. The location also invites the visitors themselves to identify with the perspective of air-raid victims.[45] The "Topography of Terror" exhibit, which had opened two years earlier, does something similar. By inserting its images and text in and amongst the ruined prison cellars of the Gestapo headquarters, the exhibit

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[42] Gabriele Riedle, "4 Uhr 45: Geschichte in Echtzeit," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 2 September 1989. This was not an actual air-raid cellar, however, but the basement of a former Charlottenburg factory.

[43] Susanne Schreiber, "Emotionale Erinnerungen," *(Berlin) Handelsblatt*, 5 August 1989. In general, visitors seem to find the location appropriate for the subject of the display. For example: "The cellar atmosphere conveys well the gloominess of the period"; "a shiny, glowing chrome-glass-plastic structure would have been unfitting"; "here in this cellar I don't feel the usual 'museum atmosphere,' in some way, it seems to me that the horror this war contained is much clearer."

[44] Martin Kagel criticized the exhibit for the "atmosphere of false authenticity" created by its location ("Was ist das, Krieg?" *zitty*, 19/89, 31). Among the many visitors' comments: "One question is unfortunately not answered. Why just in these cellar rooms?"; "Why is this exhibit in the basement of an old building on a back street?"; "Why in the cellar and not in the open?"

[45] Irit Rogoff argues that it was the exhibit's focus on the "everyday" and its display of "domestic objects" which "constitute[s] [viewers] as victims … of the period of German fascism" ("From Ruins to Debris," 242). I believe that the location plays a far greater role in positioning the visitors as victims.

once again subtly positions the visitor as a victim.[46] Whether a conscious move on the part of the curators or not, I believe that the choice of the cellar as the location for "1.9.39." represents some attempt at "resonance" with the public memory of the time. The air raid cellar was obviously an important part of the civilian war experience, particularly for Berliners. Thus, a certain "fit" is created between what is on display and the remembered experiences of the visitors.

"Life Stages in Germany 1900 - 1993"

In 1993, the DHM hosted "*Lebensstationen in Deutschland 1900-1993*" (Life Stages in Germany 1900-1993). This exhibit, in contrast to "1.9.39.," is very much concerned with depicting the "everyday life" of non-Jewish Germans in their various life stages, from birth to death, from baptism to graduation, from marriages to funerals.[47] Photographs and objects relating to the lives of women abound. The exhibit takes a "from the bottom up" approach to history by turning away from the depiction of great historical events and focusing instead on the lives of "ordinary" Germans.[48] In its explicit focus on the ordinary and the everyday, this exhibit stands somewhat apart from others on German history. Making it even more unusual is its relatively extensive and lavish use of architecture, design, lighting and colour to complement the museal narrative on display.

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[46] Rogoff, "From Ruins to Debris," 236-7; Sylvia Zacharias, "Die essentielle Abstraktheit der Gestapo: Ein neuer Mythos - Anmerkungen zur 'Dokumentation: Topographie des Terrors'," *Vorgänge 95: Zeitschrift für Bürgerrechte und Gesellschaftspolitik* 27, no. 5 (September 1988): 1-2.

[47] Neither the exhibit nor the catalogue makes mention of the fact that the life stages of *Jewish* Germans are totally excluded from this display. This becomes extremely problematic for the display on the Third Reich, which completely omits their experiences.

[48] Barbara Häusler, "Durchlauf mit Notausgängen," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 1 April 1993.

The goal, the designer suggests, is to "explain the individual 'life stages' through the [architectural] design."[49] For the section of the exhibit on "Germany in National Socialism," the designer uses four methods to emphasize that this was a "dangerous period." First, the walls are arranged into the shape of a "half swastika." Secondly, the space is "rather dark"; the objects are not nearly as well illuminated as in the previous and following sections. Thirdly, the exhibit space is made intentionally narrow, almost uncomfortably so. And finally, the entire display is angled, as if on a ramp. By 1945, the visitor had thus ascended out of the Nazi past. However, before leaving this section, there are two steps to climb down "into the "heroes' or mass graves."[50] The curators believe that such an arrangement of the display cases makes the "*Zeitgeist*" of the period more "experience-able" (*erlebbar*) for the visitors.[51] Many reviewers praise the "architectural finesse" of the exhibit, but few comment on how problematic -- and in fact, misleading -- it is.[52]

For a display on the life stages of Jews, Sinti and Roma, or other targets of National Socialist terror during this period, the dark and sinister atmosphere created by

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[49] Rosmarie Beier and Bettina Biedermann, eds., *Lebensstationen in Deutschland 1900 bis 1993. Katalog-und Aufsatzband zur Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 26. März bis 15. Juni 1993 im Zeughaus Berlin* (Gießen: Anabas Verlag, 1993), 314.

[50] Hartmut Boockmann, "Lebensstationen in Deutschland 1900 bis 1993: Ein Muster für historische Ausstellungen und eine mißratene Ausstellungsarchitektur," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 45, no. 1 (January 1994): 43-44; Beier and Biedermann, *Lebensstationen*, 314-16. Boockmann notes that the swastika "fragment" was, in fact, facing the wrong direction (43).

[51] Beier und Biedermann, *Lebensstationen*, 314. On visitors' reactions to the sections on the former FGR and GDR, see Rosmarie Beier, "Deutsch-deutsche Befindlichkeiten: Die Besucherbücher der Ausstellung 'Lebensstationen in Deutschland' als Spiegel der mentalen Lage der Nation," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 46, no. 4 (April 1995): 206-222.

[52] Barbara Häusler, "Durchlauf mit Notausgängen"; J. Merten, "Großes Familienalbum der Generationen," *Berliner Morgenpost*, 28 March 1993. Boockmann is critical of the "failed exhibit

such techniques of presentation may indeed be fitting. However, the message sent by the half-swastika and lowered lighting is not entirely appropriate for the subject of the display, the life stages of "ordinary" Germans. In the accompanying exhibition catalogue, Rosemarie Beier, one of the curators, writes that "the war took away the possibility to complete the stages of a normal life."[53] However, to represent the entire Nazi period for non-Jews as frightening and oppressive, as somehow "abnormal," is, according to DHM historian Burkhard Asmuss, very misleading. It does not represent the period as it had actually been experienced by most Germans. For them, at least prior to the outbreak of war, "*es ging gut*" (it went well).[54] They graduated, acquired jobs, married, and had children. The exhibit itself provides proof of this in the wedding and graduation photographs it displays.

One of the most problematic features of the exhibit is the ramp which leads to the "heroes' or mass graves" at the end of this display. In "1.9.39.," the exhibit's location in a former air-raid cellar implicitly calls upon visitors to empathize with the wartime suffering of the Germans. Here, the use of a ramp, like those in the camps, invites the visitors to identify not with the *Germans* as victims, but with *their* victims. The exhibit thus implicitly makes an analogy to the Jewish experience during the Third Reich, while making no explicit mention of their own "life stages" -- exclusion, humiliation, persecution, deportation and death. The tendency to categorize the Nazi past as dark and frightening may seem an obvious one. However, in this case, it is historically inaccurate.

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architecture". He finds the whole approach too overly didactic and heavy-handed. He asks: "Don't the displayed objects and pictures say enough?" ("Lebensstationen," 44)

[53] Beier and Biedermann, *Lebensstationen*, 11.

The "Life Stages" exhibit, in the words of one reviewer, gives the impression that the "National Socialist chapter" was a "nightmare" that "befell" Germany.[55] The Germans too are portrayed, if not through the objects on display, then through the architecture and lighting, as the victims of Hitler. There is therefore a fit here between the display and the war stories Germans told about themselves after 1945.

Public history does not always conform to such well-established patterns of remembering the war. The *Wehrmachtausstellung*, examined in the Conclusion, provides an instructive example of a case which challenges the accepted stories. However, if museum history is to create the kind of "lived resonance" Maier describes, it must at least partially validate the public, collective memories of some of its visitors, without relativizing those of others. The groups of historical actors discussed in this thesis -- perpetrators, victims and resisters -- are not mutually exclusive. Robert Moeller argues that accounts of this period must therefore "seek to capture the complexities of individual lives and 'mass fates' by exploring how during the Third Reich it was possible both to suffer and to cause suffering in others."[56] If museum history is to educate and inform the

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[54] Asmuss, DHM. Interview by author, 15 October 1998, Berlin.

[55] Sibylle Wirsing, "Das Vaterland und seine Drückebergen," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 31 March 1993.

[56] Moeller, "War Stories," 1048.

public about the Nazi past, it must, like any other form of historiography, separate the "black" from the "white" and examine the "tones of gray" in between.[57]

[57] Asmuss, "Zum Problem,"147.

CHAPTER FIVE

REDEFINING RESISTANCE: THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANS AS RESISTERS TO HITLER

Every year as July 20th approaches, Germany's newspapers begin to carry a now familiar story. Franz Ludwig Stauffenberg, the son of the key figure in the failed 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler's life, attacks the German Resistance Memorial Centre in Berlin. Mr. Stauffenberg alleges that the Centre's permanent exhibit, "Resistance to National Socialism," sullies the name of his father and the other July 20 conspirators by its inclusion of the Communist resisters who later became oppressors themselves in East Germany. "It seems to be a perversion," he said during the weeks preceding the fiftieth anniversary of the plot in 1994, "that [such] persons are presented as heroes of the anti-Nazi resistance."[1] An anonymous editorial in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* concurs, noting that "every thing that July 20th represents, disappears" when these "honourable" men are "forced to appear alongside the founders of the second German dictatorship."[2]

Such vehement criticism of this exhibit in Berlin quickly reveals that museal narratives about "Germans as resisters" are no less fraught with controversy and

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[1] Count Franz-Ludwig von Stauffenberg, as quoted by Carlos Bendana, "Germany: Bomb Plot Divides 'Resistance' Veterans," *Inter Press Service*, 20 July 1994.

[2] "Mißbrauchter 20. Juli," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 June 1994. Criticism of the exhibit, while still evident today, reached a peak in 1994. For articles supporting the inclusion of Communist resisters, see Johannes Tuchel, "Die Erinnerung an den Widerstand 50 Jahre danach," *Die Mahnung* 42, no. 1 (January, 1995): 1; Hans Mommsen, "Ein wenig mehr Toleranz gegenüber dem kommunistischen Widerstand!" *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 15 July 1994. For articles calling for their removal, see Philipp von Boselager, "Sachverhalte der Polemik und ideologischen Debatte geopfert," *Bonner Generalanzeiger*, 1 July 1994. These represent but a tiny sample of the press coverage the issue received in Germany. The conflict was also reported on world-wide. See Robert Tilley, "Hitler Plot Anniversary Marked by Bitter Row," *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 1997.

conflicting interpretations than other aspects of Third Reich historiography.[3] Most academic literature on the representation of resistance to Nazism in Berlin has hitherto focused on the German Resistance Memorial Centre. This is not surprising, as many of the books and articles on the subject have been written by the Centre's director and the director of research, Johannes Tuchel and Peter Steinbach respectively. I discuss the Centre's historiographical interpretation of German resistance as well, addressing both the form of its presentation and, to a greater extent, the very public controversies engendered by its content. These debates reveal the importance that both the German public and its historians attach to the public portrayal of their history. I also probe the representation of resistance at the Köpenick Memorial Centre, a little known *Gedenkstätte* which focuses on Communist and Social Democratic resistance during the "week of blood" in June, 1933. Thus, I address both the depiction of German resistance as it is most broadly defined, and the representation of localized, more politically-motivated opposition.

The "Full Breadth and Great Variety of Resistance": The German Resistance Memorial Centre

The German Resistance Memorial Centre (GDW) is housed in the *Bendlerblock*, the former seat of the military high command where the officers of July 20 plotted their

[3] This chapter focuses on the representation of *non-Jewish* Germans as resisters to Nazism. An analysis of how Berlin's museums depict resistance *by Jews* remains to be completed. On the debates about how Jewish resistance might be defined, see Michael Marrus, "Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 83-110; Roger Gottlieb, "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust," *Social Theory and Practice* 9, no. 1 (1983): 31-49.

coup. The leading conspirators, including Stauffenberg himself, were executed in the courtyard in front. The permanent exhibit contains over 5000 photographs and documents. It is divided into twenty-six *Themenräume* (theme rooms), each devoted to a particular group of resisters. Well-known groups such as the Munich-based *Weiße Rose* (White Rose) and the *Kreisauer Kreis* (Kreisau Circle) appear, as do "youth in opposition" to Hitler and those involved in "resistance in daily life."[4]

One of the most innovative features of the exhibit, and one which distinguishes it from others in Berlin, is its acknowledgment of the varying needs, interests and abilities of its visitors. The director of the Centre recognizes that some visitors will come with background knowledge about the people and events depicted, while some will know little, if anything, about what the exhibit displays. Thus, "the exhibit directs itself toward different visitors" with its well-organized, three-tiered approach to the material.[5]

The first of these "staggered levels of presentations" is the visual display: the portraits of resisters, the examples of National Socialist propaganda, the art work of banned artists and so on. The second "element in the extension [of knowledge]" (*Vertiefungselemente*) is the accompanying wall text, which provides details, often biographical, about the individuals and groups depicted. The visitor is also invited to examine further documents, letters, diary entries and photographs pertaining to each group, which are contained in easily-accessible information drawers. Finally, for the third type of visitor, those with the time and interest to undertake a more thorough tackling of

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[4] On the Red Orchestra, see Hans Coppi, Jürgen Danyel, and Johannes Tuchel, *Die Rote Kapelle im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1994).

special themes, the exhibit offers file folders containing up to 50 illustrations and documents, which situate the interpretation of the objects in their historical context. From the most "superficial" to the most "in-depth," the exhibit can thus be adjusted to suit many kinds of visitors. At each level, however, the intention is the same: to represent "the full breadth and great variety of resistance."[6] It is this all-inclusive stance which continues to provoke controversy and criticism, from both the political Left and the Right.

The German Resistance Memorial Centre provides an exception to the assumption that museum history always and inevitably lags behind its academic counterpart. Here, the museal interpretation has not only kept pace with academic historiography; it has also, I would argue, triggered some of the most fundamental controversies about defining German resistance, at least in a public context.[7] Academic historians have long been researching the story of Germans as resisters. As shall be seen with the *Wehrmachtausstellung* (armed forces exhibit) described in the conclusion, it took a public form of history, in which visual images play key roles, to bring the hitherto more academic discussion to the level of public discourse.[8]

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[5] Johannes Tuchel, "Zur Geschichte und Aufgabe der Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand," in *Aufstand des Gewissens: Miltitärischer Widerstand gegen Hitler und das NS-Regime 1933-1945*, ed. Heinrich Walle (Berlin: Verlag E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1994), 709-711.

[6] Peter Steinbach, "Vermächtnis oder Verfälschung? Erfahrungen mit Ausstellungen zum deutschen Widerstand," in *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen des NS-Regime*, ed. Gerd Ueberschär (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1994), 174.

[7] Peter Steinbach. "Einleitung: Widerstand im Widerstreit - oder: Die Notwendigkeit, Vielfältigkeit auszuhalten," in *Widerstand im Widerstreit: Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Erinnerung der Deutschen*, ed. Peter Steinbach (Munich: Ferdinand Schönigh, 1994), 11.

[8] The controversy over the depiction of resistance at the Memorial Centre was indeed a very public issue. A few days after the fiftieth anniversary, a public debate was held, wherein leading historians were called upon to provide a response to the question Peter Steinbach had raised some years before: "Who belongs to the resistance against Hitler?" (Steinbach, "Wem gehört der Widerstand gegen Hitler?" *Dachauer Hefte* 6, no. 6 [November 1990]: 56-72). The article provides an excellent overview of what

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, resistance in West Germany was equated almost exclusively with the July 20 plot to kill Hitler. In the East, resistance meant the anti-fascist struggle of the Communists.[9] Both definitions were equally limited and misleading and the permanent display, which opened in 1989, was meant to widen such a restricted understanding. The Centre's aim, as Jane Kramer has explained, "was not so much to reinvent the resistance - to make it look bigger than it was, or more prominent, or more pervasive - as to look at how, in a country where so few resisted, certain men and women came to risk their lives ...in defying Hitler."[10] If it was not to reinvent resistance, it was perhaps to redefine it, to include the variety of ways in which Germans opposed the regime.

To redefine resistance in the context of the Third Reich, however, can be especially risky. By broadening the terms of reference for those who opposed Hitler, one risks diluting or diminishing the heroism of the "real" resistance, such as the failed assassination attempt. Certainly some historians have expressed concern that with an expanded definition of resistance, all non-enthusiasm for the Nazi regime will be equated with the heroic acts of opposition.[11] More ominously, one risks obscuring the fact that the

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might be termed the "moral" questions underlying these issues. For an account of that meeting, which drew 450 people and filled the room at Berlin's State Library to capacity, see Malte Lehming, "Der unmoralische Widerstand: Eine Historikerdebatte über den 20. Juli, Kommunisten und Vorbilder," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 23/24 July 1994.

[9] For a brief but comprehensive comparative overview of resistance historiography in the former st and West Germanys, see Johannes Tuchel, "Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus: Einige Thesen Problemen und Ergebnissen der Forschung 50 Jahre danach," in *Frankfurt am Main, Lindenstraße: Gestapozentrale und Widerstand*, ed. Lutz Becht (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1996), 37-52.

[10] Kramer, *Politics of Memory*, 281.

[11] See Ian Kershaw, " 'Widerstand ohne Volk': Dissens und Widerstand im Dritten Reich," in *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Jürgen Schmaedke and Peter Steinbach (Munich: F.A.

vast majority of the German population was comprised of bystanders, if not "willing executioners," as Daniel Goldhagen argues, who not only went along with, but actively supported Nazi policies.[12] In expanding the definition of what constituted resistance to Hitler, the display at the Memorial Centre parallels some of the most recent academic scholarship, which has also begun to focus on varieties of resistance.[13] It also opens itself to the kinds of risks described above.

The display at the GDW can perhaps best be likened to the recently published *Encyclopedia of German Resistance*.[14] On the one hand, each is meant to be as objective an inventory of German resisters as possible, devoid of moral judgment. Such an inventory does not necessarily equate a refusal to say "Heil Hitler" with an attempt on the Führer's life, or the distribution of anti-Nazi leaflets with listening to enemy radio. It does, however, refrain from establishing a clear hierarchy of resisters or ranking their acts of opposition. There was "no better or worse resistance," asserts Peter Steinbach, one of

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Herbig, 1985); Martyn Housden, "Opposition to National Socialism: An Anatomy of Failure?" *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1983): 477-485.

[12] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

[13] This is especially true for the display's incorporation of women as resisters. For a review of the Centre's exhibit on the women involved in the "Red Orchestra" group, see Ronald Bahlberg, "'Ich fürchte mich nicht den Tod': Der 20. Juli und die Anonymität der Frauen im Widerstand," *Bonner General-Anzeiger*, 20 July 1995. The Centre has also published a book on women in the resistance more generally: Christl Wickert, ed., *Frauen gegen die Diktatur - Widerstand und Verfolgung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1995). Many of the most recent academic compilations on German resistance also adopt an approach which examines its "breadth" and "variety." For example, see Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes, eds., *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Michael Geyer and John Boyer, eds., *Resistance Against the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); David Clay Large, ed., *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[14] Wolfgang Benz and Walter H. Pehle, eds., *Encyclopedia of German Resistance to the Nazi Movement*, trans. Lance W. Garmer (New York: Continuum, 1997).

the strongest proponents of an inclusive definition of German resistance.[15] On the other hand, such catalogues, by including all possible types of action in defiance of or in opposition to the regime, make a strong argument: each of these varieties deserves to be included; each counts as part of the full story of German resistance during the Third Reich. The attempt at objectivity and the refusal to judge the resisters, particularly in terms of their postwar careers, enrages critics on the political Right. The argument that all such activity constitutes resistance tends to be questioned more often by those on the Left.

Two photographs stood at the very centre of the controversy that reached a fever pitch during the weeks preceding July 20, 1994, the 50th anniversary of the attempt on Hitler's life. Franz-Ludwig Stauffenberg threatened to boycott the planned ceremony at the *Bendlerblock* if the images were not removed. Peter Steinbach threatened to resign if they were. The photographs which sparked such conflict are of two men who had opposed Hitler as members of the "National Committee - Free Germany" in Moscow, a group of exiled Stalin supporters.[16] Both Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck also went on to hold positions of power in the German Democratic Republic, the second German dictatorship. Their post-war activities, Stauffenberg and many others argue, should have excluded them from the pantheon of the "real" German resistance.[17]

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[15] Peter Steinbach, as quoted by Sibylle Wirsing, "Keine Ruhe vor der Geschichte," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 20 July 1994.

[16] Peter Steinbach, "Teufel Hitler - Beelzebub Stalin? Zur Kontroverse um die Darstellung des Nationalkomitees Freies Deutschland in der ständigen Ausstellung 'Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus' in der Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 42, no. 7 (1994): 651-66.

[17] The inclusion of these men, and others such as Erich Honecker, the last leader of the GDR, is still controversial. See Christian Böhme's recent article, "Pieck und Ulbricht als Reizfiguren," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 15 July 1998.

The historians and the curators at the Memorial Centre disagreed, as do I. The narrative of German resistance to Hitler ends in 1945: "Resistance was resistance," Steinbach has said, independent of ideology or visions of a post-war society.[18] Yet I do not agree that such details are of no consequence at all, as is implied by the almost total lack of information about Ulbricht and Pieck's post-war careers given in the display. The differing aims and intentions of the resisters, their very motives for opposing Hitler, are indeed important. To distinguish among them, however, need not imply a moral judgment.

In 1994, the curators did not give in to Stauffenberg's threats to boycott the festivities for the fiftieth anniversary. The photographs were not removed. However, when I visited the exhibit in 1998, two small, but noteworthy changes had been made. Both Ulbricht and Pieck are now visible only as members of group portraits; their individual photographs have disappeared. This change was seized upon in the press as an attempt to "hide" these figures, while not removing them altogether, a charge Steinbach denied.[19] It is still somewhat unclear as to why the curators made this move. Steinbach may disagree, but I believe that the episode reveals how public history is sometimes forced to yield to public pressure in a way that academic history rarely is.[20]

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[18] Peter Steinbach, "Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus," *Museums Journal* 8, no. 3 (July 1994): 93. If such things *were* truly taken into consideration, some commentators have pointed out, then the plotters themselves scarcely belong, since they had no plans for a democratic, egalitarian Germany, nor were they free from the pervasive anti-Semitism that defined German society at the time. They had also at one time been ardent supporters of Hitler, while men like Ulbricht and Pieck had opposed him from the beginning (Kramer, *Politics of Memory*, 280-281). Jewish groups argue that the question of anti-Semitism among the leading figures of the July plot has been ignored in the debate about resistance (Christof Dipper, "Der 20. Juli und die 'Judenfrage'," *Die Zeit*, no. 27, 1 July 1994).

[19] Götz Ally, "Gruppenbilder vom Widerstand," *Berliner Zeitung*, 18/19 July 1998.

[20] Finding out about the reasons behind certain changes and revisions in museum histories is very difficult for the "outsider," the non-museum professional. Attention is rarely drawn within the exhibit or

Peter Steinbach acknowledges that when certain objects and themes are deemed to be "exhibit worthy" they signal a "great importance" by their very inclusion in a museum display.[21] Stauffenberg and other critics on the Right object on just such grounds: the post-war careers of many Communist resisters, they claimed, make them *un*worthy of exhibiting. Such right-wing critics tend to support cutting a single chapter from this three-dimensional encyclopedia. The most recent critics, however, the members of the liberal Left, argue for a more condensed work altogether. The story of German resistance, they contend, is a very short one indeed. They object, therefore, to the number of groups the curators have subsumed under the broad rubric of resistance, likening it to efforts by historians in the former GDR to inflate the ranks of the Communist struggle to include all East German citizens.[22]

How does one then distinguish between those efforts which had the greatest effect or posed the largest threat to life, and those that were largely ineffectual? I would argue that there is a need for such distinctions, but these differences are overwhelmed by the sheer number of groups included in the GDW's display. Even more confusing is the fact that each group is represented in a similar manner, with approximately equal space

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catalogue itself to what has been altered or why, and unless it is a major revision, rarely will such changes warrant a "new and improved" exhibition review. Anneke de Rudder, a research assistant at Sachsenhausen and now an employee of the German Resistance Memorial Centre, suggests that changes are made on a practical basis. The most faded or damaged sections of an exhibit are the ones that are replaced. This would also, I assume, tend to correspond to the most "outdated" sections in terms of scholarship (Anneke de Rudder, GDW. Interview by author, 12 October 1998, Berlin).

[21] Steinbach, "Vermächtnis," 170.

[22] Jochen Stadt, "Die Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand stellt ein Geschichtsbild, das einer DDR-Geschichtsinterpretation entspricht," *(Berlin) Tagesspiegel*, 5 August 1997; Barbara Junge "Der wahre Widerstand, die wahre DDR," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 8 August 1997. Few commentators on the 1994 debate seem to pick up on the danger the Centre's inclusive concept might pose; however, there is an exception. "That is a lot of resistance for a devoted people," wrote Thomas Kielinger of the display in "Zerstritten über den Widerstand," *Rheinische Merkur*, 24 June 1994.

devoted to each.[23] Workers' resistance is placed alongside that of the conservatives and liberals; resistance in the arts and sciences has its own room, as does the opposition of those in exile. There is no apparent hierarchy -- not in terms of a *morally* better or worse resistance -- but with regard to outcome or intention.

Academic historians sometimes attempt to avoid such problems by using different terms for different activities. For example, historian Claudia Koonz terms Catholic opposition to the "Euthanasia" Campaign "single issue dissent." Others use "non-compliance" or "disobedience" to distinguish between types of oppositional behaviour to the Nazi regime. In the GDW's permanent display, "Resistance to National Socialism," the curators also differentiate between, for example, the German workers, who "resisted" the Nazis, and different youth groups, which "opposed" them. However, no attention is drawn to the explicit reasons for such distinctions. In many cases, it seems less a careful exercise in description than an attempt to avoid endless repetitions of the word "resistance."[24]

It must be remembered how very small the number of resisters to Hitler actually was. The display includes all conceivable examples, from opposition to non-enthusiasm, and even so it still fits within a single floor. In most exhibits, the biographical approach is used metonymically, whereby one person stands for a (usually) much larger group. Johannes Tuchel suggests that this is also the intention of the centre, to explain resistance

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[23] Some rooms in the *Bendlerblock* are indeed larger than others. Certain sections are also more "central," such as the display on the assassination attempt, while others are physically more "marginal." For example, the Red Orchestra is relegated, due to lack of other space, to the hallway. The exhibit was originally criticized for making the Stauffenberg plot the focal point of the display (Kramer, *Politics of Memory*, 281). On the whole, however, the different varieties of resistance are presented in very similar manners, with similar techniques of display.

[24] De Rudder, GDW. Interview by author.

through examples.[25] Naturally, not all who joined the "Edelweiss Pirates" youth groups, listened to enemy radio or deserted the German army are named or pictured. But all the July 20 conspirators are. Nearly every member of the Red Orchestra appears, as do all key figures of the White Rose. Here it is less a case of the one standing for the whole; it *is* the whole story. And this overall context is nowhere emphasized nearly as explicitly as it should be. The tour guides often begin their tours with a reminder about how narrow a segment of German society resisted Hitler in any way, shape or form. The independent visitor is more hard-pressed to find such statements. Had they been included, they would have gone a long way in preventing the accusation that the Centre presents a misleading interpretation of the dimensions of the German resistance.

Having said that, however, the German Resistance Memorial Centre in no way supports the contention that widening a definition of resistance leads inevitably to a picture of mass discontent with the regime. The exhibit does include images of women cheering Hitler's arrival in Austria and children making the "Heil Hitler" salute in the classroom. These are juxtaposed against images of the most extreme suffering of the Jews in the ghettos and the camps. That so few fought Hitler on their behalf is the most tragic part of all in the story of German resistance. Yet the Memorial Centre provides no response to the question of why so few resisted the Nazis.

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[25] Tuchel "Zur Geschichte," 706.

Local History, Political Opposition: The Köpenick Memorial Centre of the "Week of Blood," June, 1933

During the final week of June, 1933, the SA of the Berlin district of Köpenick, supported by the SS and Gestapo units, began a brutal hunt for opponents of the regime: primarily members of the Communist and the Social Democratic parties. They entered the homes of several hundred opponents, men and women, and brought them back to the *Sturmlokale* 15, where they were interrogated and tortured. Five hundred were arrested. At least twenty-two were killed and many others were hospitalized. Seventy people remain unaccounted for. This was Berlin's "week of blood."[26] Today, it is memorialized by a small centre in the district, which pays tribute to those who resisted Nazism in the very rooms and cells in which they were imprisoned and tortured. Many of the exhibits discussed so far raise fundamental problems and display critical weaknesses. This small, often overlooked memorial site in Köpenick gets so much "right". Despite its excellent accounting of the event, the lives of the resisters and the histories of the perpetrators, this site is rarely mentioned by *Gedenkstätte* pedagogues. It is far from the regular tourist routes, and is therefore excluded from museum guides. Few Berliners I spoke to had even heard of it. When I went, I was the only visitor.

The exhibit constructs a chronological narrative of the site, beginning with the history of the prison built between 1899 and 1901, and moves swiftly to the backdrop to the events which occurred in June, 1933. It is a local history, concentrating primarily on

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[26] Claus-Dieter Sprink, *"Gedenkstätte Köpenicker Blutwoche Juni 1933": Eine Dokumentation. Exhibit catalogue* (Berlin: Bezirksamt Köpenick, 1997); Heinrich Wilhelm Wörmann, *Widerstand in Köpenick und Treptow 1933-1945* (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1995), Chapter 2; Anita Kugler, "Als der SA -'Mördersturm' wütete," *(Berlin) Tageszeitung*, 22 June 1993.

the activities and structure of the *Sturmbahn*-15, the group mostly responsible for the terror perpetrated here. Yet it also incorporates this localized description into a larger historical context: details are provided about the structure and membership of the *Sturmabteilung (*SA) in Germany as a whole, the SA in Berlin, and the SA in Köpenick, a city district located in the former East Berlin.

Unlike many of the other exhibits I describe in the first chapter, this one attempts to give at least some picture of what kind of men comprised the approximately sixty members of the *Sturmbahn*-15 as of June 1933. Their average age was 32. Their ranks included fifteen workers and employees, fourteen from the middle class, and thirty-one whose social class could not be determined. The exhibit also documents their party affiliation -- many did not actually belong to the Nazi party -- and their employment record. The individual leaders for each section of the group are named. On its own, this exhibit may not suggest a comprehensive picture: no individual biographies appear, no detailed analysis of reasons for joining the SA is provided. In contrast to the representation of the more "ordinary" men who belonged to Hitler's terror institutions at Wannsee or the Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände, however, this account is detailed indeed.

During the "week of blood," other homes that had been taken over by the SA were also used as "wild concentration camps," where prisoners were taken and tortured. The display includes photographs of each former site of interrogation and murder, with the present day address highlighted. A large wall map pinpoints their location, revealing the extent to which they were spread throughout the residential districts of Köpenick. Hinrich Enderlein notes that, especially in camp memorial centres, the focus is so much on the "inner life" of the site, that no connection is made between what happened there and

outside its gates. This maintains the illusion, he argues, that it was possible for those on the outside not to know.[27] In the Köpenick Memorial Centre, this simple map and photographs of homes used as sites of terror argue that the "week of blood" was far from hidden; it occurred in full view of the residents of Köpenick. Nor does the exhibit ignore the support Hitler won from these residents during the 1933 elections. The display includes an election ballot, which the text then uses as a springboard to discuss the appeal of Hitler across class lines. Köpenick was a largely working-class district, but the curators make clear that many members of the working classes also voted for Hitler.

On the second floor of the former prison building, the individual cells are used to house various sections of the exhibit. One cell is devoted to describing the resisters to Hitler. They included members of the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the "anarcho-syndicalists," and other smaller political parties, Protestants, and Catholics. The display also documents the self-preservation (*Selbstbehauptung*) efforts of the Jewish inhabitants of the district. Individual biographies are used here, as at the German Resistance Memorial Centre, in an exemplary fashion: one stands for the whole. There is no endless depiction of horror as at Wannsee. The individuals are pictured not heroically but humanly. The final cell serves as a *Gedenkraum* (memorial room). A simple plaque there is dedicated "To the Unforgotten Victims of the Köpenick Week of Blood." Thus, the twin aims of *Gedenkstätten*, to commemorate and to educate, are achieved.

The way the exhibit curators choose to depict the actual events of the "week of blood" is commendable. They contrast the portrayal of the event in the National Socialist press with coverage it received in the workers' newspapers. The former describes the

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[27] Enderlein, "Gedenkstätten," 137.

week of blood as a "necessary" action against dangerous "reactionaries." It also focuses on the "sacrifice" of the SA men who died during the "Köpenick tragedy."[28] The report makes no mention of the Communists and Social Democrats the SA killed. Rather than relying on Nazi terminology, this exhibit reveals how such terminology was used to cover up the real meaning of the event. This explicit juxtaposition speaks eloquently by contrast to the exhibit at Wannsee, which fails to draw attention to the Nazis' use of language to hide the truth.

Another cell is devoted to the post-war judicial proceedings against the SA participants. This section of the exhibit also details the history of the site as a memorial centre. The text acknowledges that the current exhibit, which opened in 1993, does represent an attempt to correct the way in which the East German government had instrumentalized the events of June 1933 to construct the narrative of the heroic workers' struggle. Unlike in other revisions of GDR museum historiography, this interpretation is not unequivocally demonized. In fact, the curators at Köpenick intentionally retained some traces of the anti-fascist story so familiar to East Germans. In this, the site not only acts as a memorial to the events of 1933; it also becomes an artifact of historiographical interpretation. Sachsenhausen's exhibit director wants to tear down the old GDR display left on the site, because a memorial centre, he feels, should display the events rather than a previous interpretation of them.[29] This small, relatively sparse display at Köpenick,

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[28] According to the newspaper excerpt on display, one SA man was shot and another "fatally injured" during the arrests.

[29] Morsch, "Sachsenhausen," 56.

however, reveals that it is possible for a memorial centre to do both and to do so extremely effectively.

The German Resistance Memorial Centre, like the Neue Wache, provides a clear example of the difficulties which arise for memorials which are not, as Peter Reichel argues, "group specific."[30] In some senses, the small memorial site in Köpenick has an easier job. There are no Ulbrichts or Piecks among the resisters. Certainly as members of illegal political parties, the victims of the week of blood are easily defined as real resisters. However, these facts should not take away from how well the exhibit constructs its localized history of a certain event during the Third Reich. The visitor comes away with knowledge about the perpetrators, the SA, and those who attempted to resist, through a text that is accessible, but not simplistic. The photographs denote brutality without overwhelming the visitor with images of horror. I would argue that few academic articles could have done a better job of explaining the event in terms the public could understand.

The director of the site, Claus-Dieter Sprink, calls it a "living memorial centre." There are still puzzles to be solved about the week of blood: how many died, who all the victims were, and the names of all the perpetrators involved. Research is still being carried out in order to solve them, and the exhibit will be revised as more questions are answered.[31] Museum exhibits are often criticized for their supposed attempt to depict the definitive version of history, one that has solved all the problems and answered all the

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[30] Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 231.

[31] Jens Tittmann, "Gedenkstätte wird allen Opfern gerecht," *Berliner Morgenpost*, 26 June 1993.

questions. Here again, the exhibit at Köpenick stands out. This is not meant to be the final story. The director recognizes that defining who belongs to the ranks of German resisters continues to be a controversial and emotionally volatile task, one with which the memorial centres in Berlin will also continue to grapple.

CONCLUSION

THE *WEHRMACHTAUSSTELLUNG*

In March, 1995, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research opened the exhibit "*Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht*" ("War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht") in Hamburg. Two months later, the exhibit arrived in Berlin.[1] Since then it has traveled throughout Germany and Austria, continually sparking massive public and political debate.[2] Hannes Heer, one of the exhibit creators, suggests that the riots and protests engendered by the display "have become [so] commonplace ... [that] they are hardly worth mentioning."[3] By mid-1998, over 550,000 people had seen the exhibit in 26 different cities; it will likely continue touring until 2003. As Heer explains,

> These figures mean that it has undoubtedly been *the* contemporary history exhibition in the Federal Republic: the longest-lasting and the most visited. It became one of the most avidly discussed public events on the history of National Socialism ... . Originally a contribution *to* contemporary history, it has long since become an event *in* contemporary history, itself the object of research and investigation.[4]

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[1] In Berlin, the exhibit was installed in the foyer of the Humboldt University between May 6 and June 22, 1995.

[2] There are two very good edited collections of press articles relating to the controversies engendered by the exhibit. See Helmut Donat and Arn Strohmeyer, eds., *Befreiung von der Wehrmacht? Dokumentation der Auseinandersetzung über die Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg - Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944" in Bremen 1996/97*. Bremen: Donat, 1997; Hans-Günther Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung: Dokumentation einer Kontroverse* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997).

[3] Hannes Heer, "The Difficulty of Ending a War: Reactions to the Exhibition 'War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944'," trans. Jane Caplan, *History Workshop Journal* 46 (autumn 1998): 187.

[4] Ibid., 188.

The exhibit has been praised by some for destroying a dangerous myth and accused by others of "want[ing] to rip open old wounds and falsely and one-sidedly indoctrinate the present-day generation."[5] The *Wehrmachtausstellung* (armed forces exhibit), as it soon became known, reveals the degree to which exhibited history of the Nazi past brings together discourses of public memory, politics and national identity. The exhibit remained in Berlin for only two months; however, a more detailed analysis will provide an opportunity to re-examine, in microcosm, many of the themes and problems discussed in earlier chapters.

"Memory," Sigmund Freud has taught us, "is inherently revisionist, an exercise in selective amnesia."[6] The immediate post-war period in Germany has often been characterized as an era of forced forgetting, during which the suppression of memories of the Nazi past became a prerequisite to economic, social and psychological recovery. However, this focus on repression and amnesia obscures how openly and repeatedly certain memories, especially of Germany at war, were recounted and affirmed. "Remembering selectively," Robert Moeller writes, is "not the same as forgetting."[7]

From 1945 onwards, returning German soldiers employed their own rhetorics of victimization: they too had been made to suffer, first by Nazi leaders and then by the Red Army. Not only had they suffered. They also claimed to have fought as had other military

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[5] Ernst Rebentisch, "Thesenpapiere," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 59.

[6] Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds., "Introduction," in *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), 7. On the uses of "social amnesia," see Burke, "History as Social Memory," 108-110.

[7] Moeller, "War Stories," 1013.

organizations, in defense of their homeland.[8] They were "normal" soldiers fighting a "normal" war.[9] Such claims laid the foundation for the myth of the "clean" (*sauber*) and "decent" (*anständig*) *Wehrmacht* (armed forces). [10] This myth had several specific components. It maintained that the German armed forces, even on the Eastern front, kept their distance from Hitler, the National Socialist regime, and its racial ideologies, that soldiers "fulfilled their … duty with decency and honour," and that they were "only informed later" about the atrocities committed by Himmler's *Einsatztruppen* (combat troops).[11]

This narrative was not only perpetuated in Germany by former soldiers. As Omer Bartov suggests, until the 1960s, German and non-German historians alike rarely challenged the picture of the *Wehrmacht* as "a professional organization that had fought a host of enemies with remarkable tenacity and skill and had little in common with the

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[8] Raul Hilberg, "Bitburg as Symbol," in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 21.

[9] Stefan Berger has argued that Germany's desire to cast WWII as a "normal" war forms part of the country's larger "search for normality" today (*The Search for Normality*, 199). Chancellor Kohl's attempt to create a "normal" war memorial at the Neue Wache can also be viewed as exemplifying this "longing" for a "normalized national identity" and for a "normal nation." On the discourse of German "normalcy," see Charles Maier, "The End of Longing: Towards a History of Postwar German National Longing," *Working Paper Series* (Berkeley: Center for German and European Studies, 1996); Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 22; Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 229; Moishe Postone, "After the Holocaust: History and Identity in West Germany," in *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, ed. Kathy Harms, Lutz R. Reuter, and Volker Dürr (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 239; Hans-Georg Betz, "Perplexed Normalcy: German Identity after Unification," in *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, ed. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997).

[10] Peter Burke defines a myth as a "story with a symbolic meaning" ("History as Social Memory," 103). See also Samuel and Thompson, "Introduction," 3.

[11] Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed. *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944 - Ausstellungskatalog*, 1st ed. (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 1996), 7.

criminal policies of the Nazi regime."[12] In Chapter Four I argue that museums in Berlin have had to address the theme of Germans as victims of the Second World War. However, public history exhibits may also challenge the conventions of social memory. Like the historian, the curator can also serve as an official "remembrancer," reminding society of what it might like to forget.[13] The *Wehrmachtausstellung* provides perhaps the most infamous example.

In short, "War of Extermination" seeks to destroy the myth of the "clean" *Wehrmacht*: "Fifty years later it is finally time to say goodbye to these lies and to accept the reality of a great crime," the catalogue reads.[14] This was "no 'normal' war", but a "war of extermination" against Jews, prisoners-of-war, and the civilian population.[15] By focusing on *Wehrmacht* activities in Serbia, during the march to Stalingrad, and in the occupation of White Russia, the exhibit creators aim to document "how far the joyful and voluntary participation in mass murder was spread."[16] The main argument in this exhibit is a simple one: "the Holocaust did not only take place in Auschwitz, in Buchenwald, in Majdanek … but in the areas occupied by the *Wehrmacht*."[17]

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[12] Omer Bartov, "German Soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, Research and Implications," in *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust beyond Memory*, ed. Gulie Ne'eman Arad, *History & Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (fall 1997): 162-163.

[13] Burke, "History as Social Memory," 110.

[14] Hamburger Institut, *Vernichtungskrieg*, 7.

[15] Ibid.; Wolfgang Benz, "Thesenpapiere," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 31-32.

[16] Jan Philipp Reemtsma, "Krieg ist ein Gesellschaftzustand," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 61.

[17] Heer, "The Difficulty," 190.

The exhibit opens with a display designed to show how widely the myth of the "clean" *Wehrmacht* was perpetuated in post-war Germany and how it was transmitted. Among the examples cited are veterans' memoirs, films and popular novels. These, as Robert Moeller has written, "were epic dramas of suffering, inner strength and quiet courage stemming not from ideology but from common decency."[18] As forms of public history, such works helped to shape private memories into a collective memory of the German armed forces experience, a memory that had transformed "perpetrators into victims," according to the exhibit's curators.[19]

This display of film posters and book covers is an effective means of conveying the popular resonance for this image of German soldiers during World War Two. Many critics of the exhibit, however, deny that this myth was ever so widely believed: "Where are the legends? The legend of the 'clean Wehrmacht' doesn't exist, in any case not in the monumental form which the promoters need for their purpose."[20] It is important to acknowledge that younger generations are indeed less inclined to think purely in such dichotomous terms as the "good" *Wehrmacht* versus the "bad" SS. And it would be wrong to suggest that *all* German soldiers upheld the myth and denied the *Wehrmacht's* involvement in committing genocide.[21] Nonetheless, if the exhibit does not break "the

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[18] Moeller, "War Stories," 1032.

[19] Hamburger Institut, *Vernichtungskrieg*, 7.

[20] Günther Gillessen, "Diskussion," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 90.

[21] Former German soldiers continue to play leading roles in campaigning against the exhibition both in Germany and Austria. However, there have been examples of veterans who praised the exhibit's "honesty." See Heer, "The Difficulty," 190-192.

last taboo of the Second World War," it has at least been profoundly disquieting for many people in Germany.[22]

Most analyses of the exhibit become entangled in political controversy and thus neglect its approach, methods and content. The political controversy cannot be ignored, for its very virulence is emblematic of how deeply held the beliefs were that this exhibit proposed to attack. However, many questions have yet to be addressed: What methods does the display employ to make its case? Why and how are these criticized? And finally, why is this exhibit capable of creating the kind of controversy that rarely accompanies written histories of the same subject? It is to these questions that I now turn.

Significantly, public debate about the *Wehrmachtausstellung* often raises questions about how valid the exhibit medium is for interpreting the Nazi past. The curators of the *Wehrmachtausstellung* are regularly attacked both for the *content* and the *form* of their argument. An exhibit is not capable, some suggest, of "giv[ing] insight into the processes and complexity of history"; it results in a "simplified effect and sweeping generalizations" by taking "individual cases" as if "they stand for the whole."[23] Such comments parallel those of academic historians, discussed in the Introduction, who dismiss exhibited history in general as an illegitimate form of historiography.

More critical attention is directed at the content of the exhibit. Philipp Reemtsma claims that it is essentially a "text exhibit," that the "photographic material [is] used only

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[22] Konrad Jarausch, Hinrich C. Seeba and David P. Conradt, "The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany," in *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identity*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 49.

[23] Hans-Ulrich Thamer, "Thesenpapiere," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 74.

to document, illustrate, [and] make graphic" the themes described in written form.[24] However, it is through the power of the image -- the presentation of visual evidence -- and not through the written word that the exhibit ultimately seeks to make its argument and to debunk the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht*. Image after image of atrocity, massacres, and torture confront the visitor. They may be accompanied by documents and letters, but it is the photographs which bear the burden of proof for the German army's crimes. As Omer Bartov has said of the display, "the evidence was there for all to see."[25] Critics suggest that these images "pile up" emotions and make any "critical, intellectual evaluation impossible"; they "incite shock, but they create no clarity."[26] The predominance of horrific, gruesome images does have the potential, as it does at Wannsee and other Berlin displays spotlighting the victims of the Third Reich, to overwhelm visitors, to turn them away, or to make them numb. However, in these other exhibits the countless images of corpses and camps are not needed to show that it "really" happened. They are not there to convince or persuade. By contrast, the curators of the *Wehrmachtausstellung* use the images themselves to substantiate their argument about the role of the German army in the Holocaust: "The photographs prove [it]," writes one Bremen journalist, "normal *Wehrmacht* soldiers were involved."[27]

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[24] Reemtsma cites the comments of some "museum pedagogues" who criticized the exhibit for "too much text" and for making the photographs "too small" (Reemtsma, "Diskussion," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 95).

[25] Bartov, "German Soldiers," 172.

[26] Gillessen, "Diskussion," 88.

[27] Günther Hörbst, "Wehrmachts-Ausstellung: 'Ich habe sie schon gesehen'," *Das Bild*, 13 February 1997.

The sheer number of horrific photographs on display, many taken by the soldiers themselves, may therefore be more indispensable here than at Wannsee or in other German history exhibits in Berlin. However, the result is the same: the victims remain anonymous and de-humanized. Such an extensive reliance on these images of atrocity is capable of distorting our understanding of the genocide. Omer Bartov argues:

> If we see the victims only through the killers' eyes, we become necessarily complicit in their dehumanization; not only do we learn very little about the victims' experience (which was of very little concern to the perpetrators), we also gain only limited knowledge of the perpetrators' own conduct. ... [T]he victims' perspective has generally been eschewed ... by historians of the Wehrmacht ... . As long as we view the soldiers' actions only through their own eyes, we are bound to perceive their victims merely as the products of the "process" we wish to explain rather than protagonists of equal importance and relevance to the historical event we claim to be reconstructing.[28]

Bartov's comments apply to any public history display on the Nazi past. Too often, as is the case with the *Wehrmachtausstellung*, the perpetrators are biographized through images and words, while the victims remain de-individualized and unnamed.

Critics of this exhibit do not, however, tend to be concerned with the photographic material for these reasons.[29] They maintain that the photographs are actually misleading, that they are not well-documented, and in some cases, that they show not the crimes of the German army but of the Soviets.[30] While this alleged "lack of scientific precision" is

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[28] Bartov, "German Soldiers," 176-77.

[29] One historian, in a contribution to the debate on the Internet, links the images to the exhibits argument. He believes that the "sheer number of photographs depicting atrocities in graphic detail creates the impression that many, if not most, soldiers of the Wehrmacht became killers or accomplices" (Jorg Bottger, "Die Geschichtspolitik um die Wehrmachtausstellung in Salzburg," H-German, 24 March 1998).

[30] The debate over the authenticity of the photographs continues. Several historians, including Günther Gillessen, and more recently, Bogdan Musial, have claimed that certain photographs in the display depict not the Jewish victims of the German army, but the Ukrainian victims of the Red Army. The

often mentioned, the most vehement critics object far more to the exhibit's message than to its method.[31] They call it a "sweeping defamation" and a "sentence of ... collective guilt." They view it as an attempt to show not the "crimes of the *Wehrmacht*" but "the members of the *Wehrmacht* as criminals." In short, they claim, it is a "demonization."[32] They also argue that the exhibit does not differentiate between members of the SS and soldiers in the army or between "support" and "direct, active participation."[33]

In spite of such complaints, it is clear that the curators never intended to construct a narrative which defames all eighteen million German soldiers as war criminals. The aims of the exhibit, according to Hannes Heer, are quite explicit: to depict only a "narrow segment of the war" and to focus not on the "individual foot soldier" but instead on the "*Wehrmacht* as an organization," in order to avoid leveling a "blanket indictment" against an entire generation of ex-soldiers.[34] Nevertheless, critics of the exhibit continue to attack it as polemical and destructive: "Its goal," argues the military historian Günther Gillessen, "is not an explanation, but a scandal."[35]

Hamburg Institute has so far refused to remove the photographs in question. There are some rather problematic photographs in the exhibit. Especially so are the images of executions, titled simply "Jews being executed," where the perpetrators themselves are not shown.

[31] Gottfried Greiner, "Thesenpapiere," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 35.

[32] Greiner, 35; Günther Roth, "Thesenpapiere," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 68, 69, 70.

[33] Gillessen, "Diskussion," 87.

[34] Heer, "The Difficulty," 197; *Vernichtungskrieg*, 7.

[35] Günther Gillessen, quoted in Bernd Maier and Bernd Schneider, "Eine Ausstellung darf man nicht überfordern," *Weser-Kurier*, 27 February 1997.

"What's All the Fuss About?"

Omer Bartov contributes his thoughts on the debate in an Internet submission entitled "What's All the Fuss About?" For Bartov, the "most curious aspect" of the debate about this exhibit is that "it has all happened before."[36] He lists examples of historians who have long been making similar arguments about the involvement of the army in the genocide of the Jews. Why then, he wonders, do articles appear every time the exhibit arrives in another city, which claim that "finally, for once and for all, [this exhibit] eradicates the myth that the Wehrmacht in Hitler's 'Reich of the evil' remained an incontestable stronghold of decency, chivalry and honour."[37] Bartov provides the answer himself when he writes that "shock, surprise and anger" arise "whenever some new (or old) evidence *is made public*."[38] Despite the extensive research of academic historians such as Bartov, therefore, the general public still appears relatively unaware of the role played by the German armed forces in the destruction of the Jews -- until the *Wehrmachtausstellung* arrives to shatter old assumptions.

The debate over "War of Extermination" is a fascinating one because it reveals a great discrepancy between the findings of professional historians and the public historical consciousness. It points to a great reluctance on the part of the German public to accept the involvement of regular army soldiers in the Holocaust, even in the face of academic works, themselves "anchored in mass of documentation," which have also sought to

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[36] Omer Bartov, "What's All the Fuss About?", H-German, 6 March 1997.

[37] Theo Sommer, "Nur Hinsehen macht frei," *Die Zeit*, 28 February 1997.

[38] Bartov, "What's All the Fuss About?" (my emphasis)

dispute the myth of the "clean" *Wehrmacht*.[39] Why then does the public remain attached to this myth when historians have provided so much evidence to the contrary? Why does this exhibit challenge this myth so profoundly, when academic historians have failed to do so?

The response to such questions should include an acknowledgment and an understanding of the power of the myth itself. One must take into account how strong the the need still is today for many Germans to view the *Wehrmacht* as an upstanding, decent and indeed "normal" armed force.[40] However, in the context of this thesis, the response must also address a further question: What role does a predominantly *visual* and *public* confrontation with the Nazi past play in destroying old assumptions?

Despite Reemtsma's claims to the contrary, the *Wehrmachtausstellung* was primarily an exhibition of photographs. While the history of the army's involvement in the murder of the Jews had been *written* before, it had perhaps not been *seen* in this manner. It is impossible to overestimate the power of the image in public history. "One could still avoid the expert-historical books about the war of extermination of the *Wehrmacht* that have appeared in the last two decades," writes Hans-Günther Thiele, but "with regard to the pictures of hangings, shootings, burning villages and mountains of

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[39] Bartov, "German Soldiers," 167.

[40] According to Bartov, the *Wehrmacht* "has remained in people's minds the last bastion of honor and respect in the Third Reich. … To say that the Wehrmacht was involved in the Holocaust on every level is equivalent to saying that all Germans were" ("What's All the Fuss About?"). This belief in the *Wehrmacht* as an honourable organization provided a foundation for a postwar national identity. The exhibit is also particularly threatening because the perpetrators it depicts are no longer only "fanatical Nazis or brutally violent criminals" but "relatives [and] people whom [the Germans] love" (Thiele, ed., "Einführung," in *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 11).

corpses, one cannot do that any longer."[41] The visual has become the vernacular of our day. Every medium of representation "makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility."[42] The exhibits on the Third Reich in Berlin continue to present such new orientations for the public, which differ from those presented by written history.

Countless other examples could be cited of cases in which the findings of academic historians became the stuff of wider controversy and debate only when they appeared in public form. Long-standing scholarly arguments about who should and should not be included among the pantheon of resistance fighters, and about what constitutes "resistance" to the Third Reich itself, have exploded in the context of the permanent display at the German Resistance Memorial Centre. Who should be named among the primary victims of the Holocaust becomes a central issue whenever a public memorial is at stake. As part of a museal narrative, photographs, artifacts and other elements of material culture force a very different kind of confrontation with the Nazi past. Exhibits therefore have a "special opportunity and duty," one that as yet has been overlooked by university-based historians.[43]

In recent years, academic historians have begun to recognize the value and influence of non-academic forms of historicizing such as film and even fiction. While millions of visitors continue to learn about Nazism, the Holocaust and World War Two

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[41] Thiele, ed., "Einführung," 13-14.

[42] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 10.

[43] Thamer, "Thesenpapiere," 74.

from museum displays, the exhibit, as a medium for historical representation, remains marginalized in this discourse. By discounting the museum display as a valid form of historiography, historians by and large also fail to acknowledge its central role in shaping --- and challenging -- popular historical consciousness.

In conclusion, I quote Wolfgang Eichwede's response to those who criticize the *Wehrmachtausstellung* for being too painful and for ripping open old wounds. His comments are equally pertinent to all of Berlin's displays on the Third Reich:

> Exhibits like these hurt and must hurt. How can they not hurt, because they remind [one] of so much pain? How can they not tear open wounds, when they document such horrible wounds? Today it is photographs that injure, then it was deeds. The history of a country that has brought so much suffering upon others and upon itself will always have to work through suffering.[44]

The *Wehrmachtausstellung* challenges many of the assumptions about exhibited history described in the introduction to this thesis. It threatens, rather than sustains, the status quo. It can in no way be characterized as a sanitized, nostalgic, or entertaining display. It provides in explicit detail the alternative version of the story that it seeks to represent. As the curators have themselves become well-known figures, this is not an anonymous recounting of past events. It has a voice. The exhibit admittedly has its faults. The gruesome nature of the images does threaten to overwhelm the visitors and the victims are once again represented as the Germans themselves saw and portrayed them. However,

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[44] Wolfgang Eichwede, "Verantwortung und Geschichte: Einleitende Überlegungen," in Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, 77.

despite such faults, "War of Extermination" also reveals the potential that any exhibit has to rework, rethink, and reconstruct the Nazi past.

EPILOGUE

BERLIN'S NEW MUSEUM LANDSCAPE

In January, 1998, the *Museums Journal* invited Jan Kelch, the director of Berlin's *Gemäldegalerie* (Paintings Gallery) to provide an opening address for that month's issue. He writes:

> A year of great changes has begun for Berlin museums. Departures and re-locations, closings and openings, remodeling, renovation and new building are clearing a path to a new museum landscape.[1]

Since I returned from Berlin in November, 1998, the German Historical Museum has closed its doors, to open again in two to three years once the Zeughaus has been extensively renovated. The "Topography of Terror" is also awaiting a new home, a modern structure currently being constructed on its original site. The director of the Sachsenhausen memorial complex has extensive plans to remodel the site: the former GDR museum will be dismantled and new exhibits will be installed. The German Resistance Memorial Centre is in the midst of revising sections of its display. Since November, several temporary exhibits dealing with the Third Reich have also come and gone.

Berlin's museum narratives about the Nazi past are in a state of flux at the current time. They are undergoing physical alterations, in the form of renovations, additions and new buildings. They are also undergoing theoretical revisions which will take into consideration the events of the last decade: the collapse of East Germany, the fall of the

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[1] Jan Kelch, *Museums Journal* 12, no.1 (January 1998): 1.

wall and the subsequent need to come to terms with Germany's second dictatorship. In 1993, James Young wrote that, "as was the case immediately after the war, the arts of memory, monuments and museums, may … seem a little luxurious in the face of national reconstruction."[2] As Berlin continues the process of reconstructing itself as the new German capital, museums and memorials devoted to the Nazi past remain less "luxurious" than absolutely central to the city's changing urban landscape. In her recent history of the city of Berlin, Alexandra Richie writes:

> The legacy of the years 1933 to 1945 still presents enormous problems for Berlin as a whole, and it is not an exaggeration to say that the way in which its citizens face the past will shape both the future of the capital and the very identity of the new Germany. And the rest of the world will be watching.[3]

Berlin's history museums and exhibits will likewise play key roles in Germany's struggle to confront its Nazi past. It is my hope that academic historians will also be watching.

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[2] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 26.

[3] Richie, *Faust's Metropolis*, 878.

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Title of Thesis:

Exhibiting the Nazi Past: Museums, Memory, and Public History in Berlin

Author [redacted]

Kristin Anne Semmens

June 23, 1999

VITA

Surname: Semmens Given Names: Kristin Anne

Place of Birth: Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1997-1999
University of British Columbia	1991-1995

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours)	University of British Columbia	1995

Honours and Awards:

Department of History Award for Excellence, University of Victoria, 1998-1999

Special Departmental Scholarship, University of Victoria, 1998

Department of History Fellowship, University of Victoria, 1997-1999

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Victoria, 1997-1998

J.H. Stewart Reid Medal and Prize, University of British Columbia, 1995

Chancellor's Entrance Scholarship, University of British Columbia, 1991-1995