

From Avoidance to Affirmation: The Evolution and Functions of Holocaust Memorialization in Germany, 1945-Present

by
Prof. Harold Marcuse
Department of History,
University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

Conference:
"The German Memory Landscape of the Holocaust and WWII"

Bucerius Institute
Haifa Center for German and European Studies

November 17, 2010

Best-known Holocaust Memorials

- What Holocaust memorials come to mind?
 - Where are they? (*also location within a city*)
 - What shapes & symbols do they have?
 - What functions do they fulfill?
(What messages do they convey?)



[What is a "Holocaust memorial"?)

- How do you determine that?
 - Depends on definition of "the Holocaust"
- Narrow definition:
"the mass murder of Jews [and others] under the German Nazi regime from 1941 until 1945"
 - "A memorial commemorating the Holocaust"
- However:
Began to be understood as "an event" between
 - Eichmann trial in 1961, and
 - TV-miniseries "Holocaust" in 1978
- Prior: memorials for "Holocaust-related events"
(for example Kristallnacht deportations)

[History vs. Memory]

Historical sites:

1. Synagogues, schools, Jewish cemeteries
2. Concentration camps
2. Deportation sites & ghettos
2. Massacre sites, extermination camps

Locations of memorials

1. Sites of former Jewish life
2. Sites of persecution
3. Present-day Jewish communities
4. Public spaces

Q: When are memorials established?

A: When people have an agenda.

Main Principle of Memorials

Relate *not* to past events, but present concerns



Gardelegen, northeastern Germany, April 1945 and 1971

Memorials serve concerns of makers



Earliest Memorials by Survivors

Buchenwald,
April 19, 1945



- Created by survivors

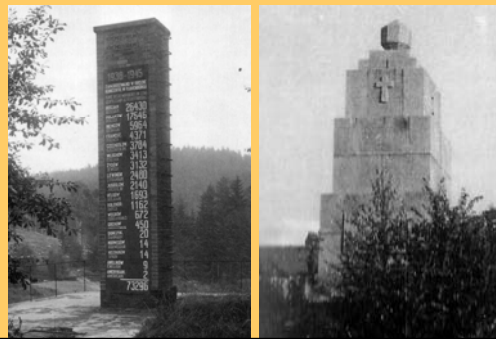
First Memorials: Belsen

April 1945, 1946, 1947/1958, ... 1982



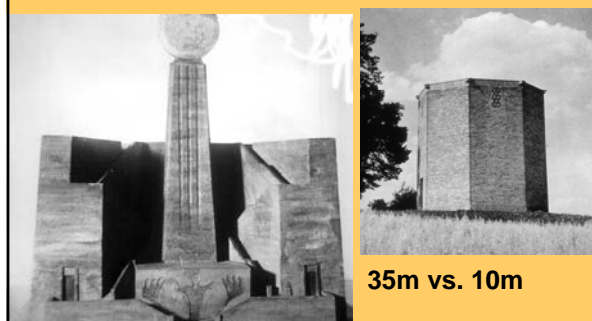
[Memorials: Survivors vs. Germans]

Flossenbürg 1946: Camp & Town



Period I: example Dachau

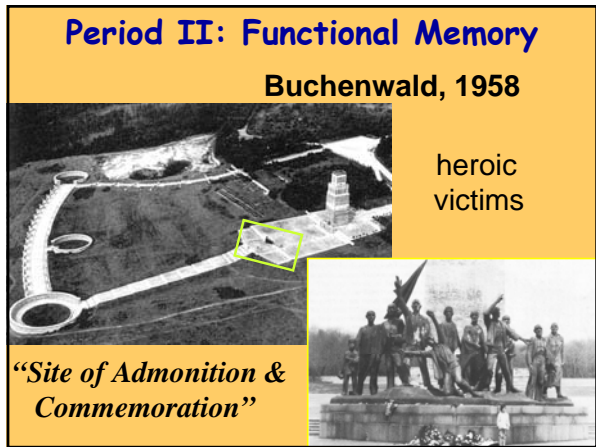
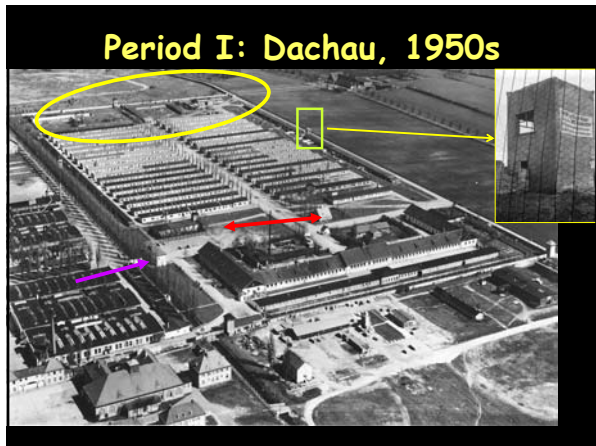
1945 -> 1950



[Period I: Dachau again]

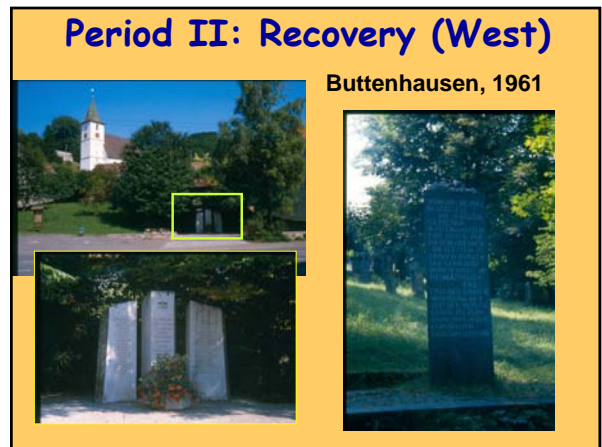
1948 -> 1949





Periods so far

- 0. Earliest: survivors search for meaning
- I. Avoidance: West Germans minimize
- II. Recovery:
 - a. East Germany: heroic victims
 - b. West Germany: victims



Recovery, Frankfurt (West)

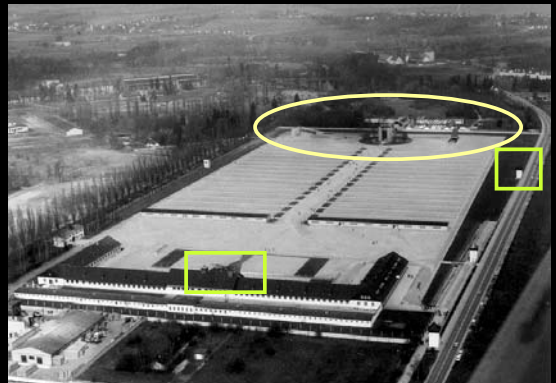
Frankfurt, 1964



St. Paul's church
Why 1964?



Recovery: Dachau, 1960-68



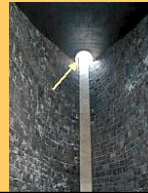
Dachau Catholic: 1960, 1964:



"Mortal Agony
of Christ"



Dachau Jewish, 1967



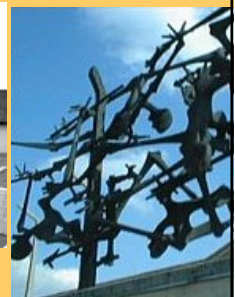
Dachau Protestant, 1967



Fortress-like,
austere;
A welcoming
ramp?



Dachau International Memorial, (1959), 1968



Freiburg: 1964 -> 1986

Here stood the synagogue
The house of God of the Jewish community of our city was wantonly destroyed on 9 November 1938

Freiburg: 1870 - 1938

Memorials have to do with their makers ...

... not with the events they are dedicated to

The 1980s: A new period?

Papenburg, 1979

Here stood the synagogue
The house of God of the Jewish community of our city was wantonly destroyed on 9 November 1938

Friedrichstadt, 1985

Opposite this site were once the synagogue, the Jew school and the rabbinat of the Jewish community Friedrichstadt

[Friedrichstadt Cemetery]

Gravestones found in the Treene river

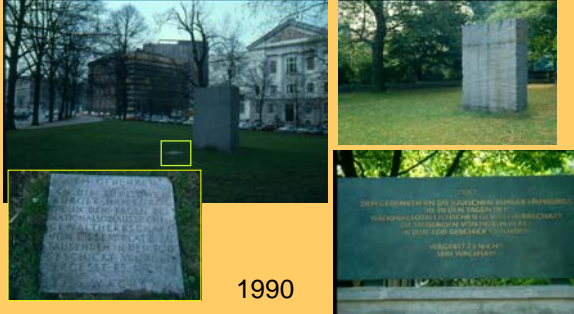
In memory of the dead who are buried in the old cemetery of the Jewish community of Friedrichstadt

Something new is happening

Hechingen, 1983-6 **Baisingen, 1985**

Deportation Site, 1983 / 1990

Hamburg—Moorweide (Masonic lodge), 1983



1990

Modification

Hamburg-Dammtor, 1936



1985

1987



Holocaust Memorialization in Germany

How have the functions changed over time?

0. Survivors remember and mourn
1. Germans avoid, ignore, remove
2. Recover & functionalize (1960s)
3. Admit and mourn – celebrate?

Berlin, 1990



“the holocaust never happened”
some people say this ... donate ...

Berlin 'Murdered Jews,' 2005



Four Phases & Functions

0. Earliest: survivors search for meaning
1. 1950s:
Avoidance: West Germans minimize
2. 1960s (& 1970s) Recovery:
East Germany: heroic victims
West Germany: victims (like us)
3. 1980s:
Admitting & mourning a loss of culture
 - Is this uniform and complete?