From Avoidance to Affirmation: 
The Evolution and Functions of 
Holocaust Memorialization in Germany, 
1945-Present 
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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
3. Deportation sites & ghettos
4. 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

Memorials serve the concerns of those who establish them.

Earliest Memorials by Survivors

Buchenwald, April 19, 1945

• Created by survivors

First Memorials: Belsen
April 1945, 1946, 1947/1958, ... 1982

British, Jewish, German, Sinti

[Memorials: Survivors vs. Germans]

Flossenbürg 1946: Camp & Town

Period I: example Dachau
1945 -> 1950
35m vs. 10m

[Period I: Dachau again]
1948 -> 1949
Period I: Dachau, 1950s

1948-65: "Settlement Dachau-East"

Period II: Functional Memory

Buchenwald, 1958

"Site of Admonition & Commemoration"

Period II: East Germany

Ravensbrück 1959, Sachsenhausen 1961

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

Period II: Recovery (West)

Buttenhausen, 1961
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
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 an 9 November 1938

Friedrichstadt, 1985

Opposite this site were once the synagogue, the Jew school and the rabbinate 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

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**Modification**
Hamburg-Dammtor, 1936
1985
1987

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**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?

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**Berlin, 1990**
“the holocaust never happened”
some people say this … donate …

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**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?