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THE MONUMENT:

The Shoah and German Memory

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

City University London
Department of Arts Policy and Management

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Wrong life cannot be lived rightly.
Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

What is it called, your country,
Behind the mountain, behind the year?
Paul Celan, *Es ist alles anders*

In those areas that we are working in, cognition exists only flash-like.
The text is the long rumbling thunder.
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades-Project*

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Declaration

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Abstract

The aim of this research project is to analyse forms of remembrance and memory of the Shoah in Germany in its and their political and cultural formations. The underlying question driving the research project is Adorno's famous essay 'What does it mean: coming-to-terms with the past?'¹. The thesis deals with historical-philosophical reflections and the historical-literary perspective on the complex process of remembering the Shoah in Germany and its monumental manifestations in the form of the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The research project sets out to critique and analyse a body of artistic, literary and philosophical works that engage with the problematics of remembering and re-presenting the Shoah. It explores these critical questions against the backdrop of the changed social and historical conditions of the re-united Germany and makes reference to the debates of the 1990s, the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin and the wider context of post-Holocaust discourse.

The first chapter delivers an exegetical reading of Walter Benjamin's texts in order to open up new interpretative perspectives for an understanding of the issues at stake. Benjamin's notions of 'history' and 'memory' serve as ideas for a comparative analysis of the problematics of memory in the country of the perpetrators and for the possibilities of future memory.

The second chapter discusses the decision-making process for a national, central 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' in Berlin; it explores the winning designs of the competition and their respective implications on what constitutes the memory of the Shoah in Germany. The decision for a central memorial and the implications of the chosen design are measured against the backdrop of the debates of the 1990s and the politics of a re-united Germany.

The third chapter discusses the different attempts of literary and (historical-)philosophical reflection on the occurrence of the Shoah in the writings of Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers and Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich. The chapter questions the political positioning and action of the author Martin Walser, as a representative of the generation of perpetrators, to the process of working-through and coming-to-terms. It critically examines Walser's speech of October 1998 and places the speech in the historical context of coming-to-terms in post-war Germany.

The thesis demonstrates that the choice of design for the planned Holocaust Memorial correlates with the status of politics in the united Germany. It is argued here that the focus on what it is that needs to be worked through and come to terms with, has shifted during the post-Holocaust discourse. The thesis demonstrates that the questions at stake in the most recent debates are the workings-through of a younger generation that confronts part of a horrifying family history. The thesis argues for the necessity of memory and remembrance in the future.

¹ ADORNO, Theodor W., 1997. 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?'. »Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse«: Ein philosophisches Lesebuch (Leipzig: Suhrkamp)

Introduction

Introduction

The aim of my research project is to analyse forms of remembrance and memory of the Shoah in Germany in its political and cultural formations. The post-Holocaust discourse in Germany appears to be strongly focused on the historical-philosophical and political perspective and, at times, is even ideologically motivated. The starting point of this research project is the fierce and passionate debates that Germany witnessed shortly before the turn of the millennium in the 1990s. In more or less regular intervals since the end of the National Socialist Regime, (West) Germany has led intense and passionate debates about the nation's self-understanding, self-esteem and its relation to its own past; from the process of de-Nazification and the Nuremberg Trials (1945/46) to the Auschwitz Trial (1963-1965) and the debates on the statues of limitations (1960); from the reparation payments treaty and the Historian Dispute (1986) to the compensation of forced labour, the recent controversy around the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin and the Walser-Bubis Debate. In its representation and remembrance of the Holocaust, Germany struggles to define its own strategies of memory in view of its role as the perpetrating nation; it fails to reflect upon its own involvement as perpetrator. However, the educational aspect of remembering the Shoah for the sake of future generations is often stressed.

After the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989 and the dramatic and rapid re-unification in 1990, the problematics of a new national identity against the backdrop of the double history of National Socialism and the

GDR state were addressed in lengthy debates. In the debate on the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (since 1989), in the film 'Schindler's List', in the 'Goldhagen-Controversy' (1996), in the 'Wehrmacht'-Exhibition (since 1995), and in the negotiations on the compensation of National Socialist slave labour (since 1998), the thematic of National Socialist crimes – the persecution and extermination of European Jewry - was the centre of public and political attention throughout the 1990s. Berlin became the new-old capital. The ongoing debates on the purpose and meaning of the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin seemed to culminate in the national debate that was initiated by the author Martin Walser in 1998. Given the latest and most recent debates, the concepts of memory and history in the 'country of perpetrators' seem to be unchangingly problematic.

The underlying question that is driving the research project is Adorno's famous essay 'What does it mean: coming-to-terms with the past?'². My thesis argues that the process of memory and coming-to-terms with the National Socialist past and its atrocities in Germany always seems to be a highly political and moral issue which, at the same time, strictly avoids any implications of critically questioning and working-through.

When, in 1946, Karl Jaspers engaged with the question of guilt, he assessed that the spiritual and political situation fostered 'the temptation to evade this question':

We live in distress - large parts of our population are in so great, such acute distress that they seem to have become insensitive to such discussions. Their interest is in anything that would relieve distress, that would give them work and bread, shelter and warmth. The horizon has shrunk. People do not like to hear of guilt, of the past; world history is not their concern. They simply do not want to suffer any more; they want to get out of this misery, to live but not

² Adorno, Theodor W., 1997. 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?'. »Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse«: Ein philosophisches Lesebuch (Leipzig: Suhrkamp)

think. There is a feeling as though after such fearful suffering one had to be rewarded, as it were, or at least comforted, but not burdened with guilt on top of it all.³

I am aware of my personal investment in the research question. It is precisely this personal investment that drives part of the research questions: what precisely is it that Germany remembers of National Socialism? What is remembered in relation to the planned Holocaust Memorial? Where does the future of memory in Germany lie? How does the second generation and their children remember⁴? Do we have to remember at all?

First and second generation of and/or after what? This terminology in itself makes clear that there is a link, beyond the inability to remember, between later generations of Germans to the crimes committed by their National Socialist German parents and grandparents. For this reason, I argue that there is a necessity - also for later generations with no direct biographical involvement - to work through and to come to terms with the past – or better, to accept the process of incomplete memory. For the first and second generation of Germans after the Shoah, after their parents and grandparents acted as perpetrators and onlookers to the ‘Final Solution’, the necessity to remember and to work through is as powerful as it was and/or is for the generation actively involved. However, the focus on what it is that needs to be worked through and come to terms with, has shifted.

Over years and decades, the continuous presence of the past often made the political presence fade away. As I will argue, the consciousness of the past continued to have its effects even after 1989, the year of the re-unification. When the Wall came down and the re-unification became the predominant

³ Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York. Fordham University Press), p. 21

⁴ I am going to refer to the generation that was born in the 1940s as the first generation; to their children – my generation – I will refer to as the second generation.

theme of the election, I was alarmed. The first time that I wandered through the re-united Berlin will remain in my memory for ever; because, at that moment, I discovered that part of the past had become accessible. Of course, I rejoiced with the GDR citizens for their newly acclaimed freedom. Yet, at the same time, the slogans “Wir sind ein Volk!” (We are one people!) that accompanied the peaceful protest movement, led by the churches in the former GDR, and Germany’s new, enlarged borders could only foster uneasiness and resistance in me; it made me deeply sceptical for the very reasons that Howard Caygill describes:

The German Revolution was both a return and a new start, a settlement with the past and a promise for the future captured in the image of a handshake extended across the ruins of the Berlin wall.⁵

I could not watch these pictures without mentally forming a link with the past; feelings of utter powerlessness and consciousness of the past dominated. The signs of increasing right-wing radicalism – which are happening by no means only in the former GDR – frighten me.

More than ten years have past since the re-unification, during which time Germany has witnessed heated public debates, fuelled by extensive media coverage, on its relation to its past and its new self-understanding as a re-united nation. It has taken more than a decade to come to a conclusive decision on the plans for a ‘central national Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe’. To me, life with the memory of the Shoah is a balancing act; it is the awareness of the present in light of the past. To live the memory, to live with the memory of the deeds committed, resembles the attempt to position oneself precariously in relation to past and future. The one who looks back, makes slow progress. My

⁵ Caygill, Howard, 1997. The German handshake. Steyn, Juliet (ed.), 1997. *Other than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 145

thesis argues that the choice of design for the planned Memorial correlates to the status of politics in the united Germany because, with the re-unification, the motion and the position of looking back - of facing the past - has been lost.

For me it was more easily possible to approach and address these intrinsically complex issues from a 'safe distance' – the knowledge of a geographical separation between Germany and Great Britain and the indulgence of writing in a language that is not my mother tongue. In many ways this research project re-presents part of an ongoing search for identity, my own identity and that of a generation who grew up in the shadow of their parents and grandparents suppressed memories and denial of responsibility and of their parent's utter rejection of the past as a means of demarcation. The questions at stake are the workings-through of a younger generation that confronts part of a horrifying family history.

At the turn of the millennium, Germany is no longer the land of the "Germans" in any sociological or psychological, let alone ethnic or cultural sense. The question is whether it ever has been. Germany's status as one of Europe's main countries of immigration allows for various different ethnic identities within the present German society. The discourses of coming-to-terms and working-through the 'double' history of the German past cannot be unified, as the most recent debates have made clear. The discourses are shaped through the different identities of the participants of the debates. The effects of the re-unification of the two German states onto the social, economic and psychological conditions of the "German" society are manifold and divergent. Contrasting positions necessarily have to arise from the sociological, historical and political division into the two German states, the former GDR and FRG. The Western German political left-right thinking plays an important role in the ongoing discourse of coming-to-terms. Equally important are the divergent

position that arise from the biographical conflict of generations and from the different ethnic points of view. Despite these arguments, I believe that we not only had the political 'Wende' in the form of the re-unification of the two states but that we can also witness a change in the public approaches of working-through the National Socialist past in relation to a critical discourse.⁶

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In the preface to her book 'Judaism and Modernity', Gillian Rose writes: 'If I knew who or what I were, I would not write; I write out of these moments of anguish which are nameless and I am able to write only where the tradition can offer me a discipline, a means, to articulate and explore that anguish.'⁷ Because of my undeniable personal and emotional involvement in the research question, it was of paramount importance to constantly re-think and re-examine my methodological and scientific approaches in order to avoid self-indulgence but to promote self-reflexivity. It meant that I needed to question my perceptions and awareness which might have been established and pre-set a priori. The use of methodology, the scientific apparatus, provides the only possibility of approaching the subject from a view point that reaches beyond the subjective.

The research project set out to critique, explore, analyse and evaluate a body of artistic, literary and philosophical works that engage in 'thinking the

⁶ In the common, daily usage of language, the re-unification of the two German states is simply called 'die Wende', 'the change' of the social and political pre-conditions.

⁷ Rose, Gillian, 1993. *Judaism and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. ix

questions of the Shoah'⁸ in order to establish their cultural context and place the works in a theoretical and historical framework. The object of my study is the question: how does Germany today 'think the questions of the Shoah'? Furthermore, what constitutes (the necessity of) remembrance of the occurrence of the Shoah in Germany, the country of the perpetrators, now, more than half a century later, when the generation of witnesses is slowly disappearing? I will explore these critical questions against the backdrop of changed social and historical conditions caused by the re-unification and with reference to the debates of the 1990s and the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. Literary and philosophical texts, artistic products in the monumental form and media texts are used to drive the research question.

I will establish my own personal critical response to the issues at stake in the German memory process by providing a critical and analytical report of the debates. I will further relate my responses to the theoretical framework of 'critical theory', thus integrating the historical, the cultural and the political as well as the textual and artistic area. My thesis closely investigates the dialogue between the historical change of the political parameters in Germany and the texts that represent it. It is an historically critical investigation into the relationship between the creation of texts and works of art and the historical moment, against the backdrop of contemporary German politics on the issues at stake.

The thesis uses texts and the work of art, in the form of the monument, to explore, argue and debate the possibilities of remembering the Shoah in the country of the perpetrators. My own readings of the issues at stake are informed by a dialogue with the writings and ideas of critical thinking. Theodor W. Adorno's question of what constitutes a coming-to-terms with the past is the underlying question of the thesis and is thus systematically explored through the

⁸ I loosely 'borrowed' this phrase from Andrew Benjamin (Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism* (London: Routledge)); see chapter I of this thesis

different texts. The title of the thesis 'The Monument: The Shoah and German Memory' alludes to the dialectical position by which the process of memory and the representation of the remembered event are identified. I am arguing for the necessity of a process of memory in Germany that reaches beyond biographical borders. The ephemeral of the monumental stands in direct opposition to the eternity with which we need to reflect upon the questions of the Shoah.

The first chapter delivers an exegetical reading of Walter Benjamin's texts in order to open up new interpretative perspectives for an understanding of the issues at stake. For my re-reading of Benjamin I have used the complete German volumes of his writings; the translations are mine, unless otherwise stated. Benjamin's concept of history and memory is examined for its appropriateness and validity for a future possibility of the process of memory in Germany. The philosophical writings of Andrew Benjamin, Howard Caygill and Gillian Rose inform my re-reading of Walter Benjamin's writings and guide my research question into the relation between history and memory. I argue that Walter Benjamin's concept of true remembering (*Eingedenken*) could generate new perspectives for future generations in the discourse of coming-to-terms with the National Socialist past.

The second chapter records and narrates the process of the competition for a 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' and the decision making process that led to a Parliamentary vote on the two winning designs. Taking a selection of quotations from the extensive media coverage, the chapter discusses the two winning designs and their respective implications on what constitutes the state of the memory of the Shoah in Germany against the backdrop of the politics of a re-united Germany. It compares and contrasts the (im)possibilities of representation of the chosen designs and defines its implications for the future generations' engagement with the question of what constitutes memory. The chapter explores the question 'what does it mean:

coming-to-terms with the past?' and what this entails for the second and future generations. The decision for a central memorial and the implications of the chosen design are examined with regard to the political situation of Germany's re-unification and the debates of the 1990s. Here the critical and theoretical approaches of Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas inform my analysis of the (im)possibility of public memory in the form of the monumental.

The third chapter uses texts as examples of contextualised products which form part of the German cultural discussion of coming-to-terms. I have selected quotations from the writings of Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich and Sigmund Freud to compare with my interpretation of the political implications of Martin Walser's speech in relation to the issues at stake. The chapter establishes how far the literary and/or philosophical thinking of Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers and the Mitscherlichs were points of reference for public and political debates on the German self-understanding after the Holocaust and how far public debates have appropriated the thoughts and writings of those authors and philosophers. I discuss the changing experiences of memory and the changing process of memory in Germany by examining how their writings engage with the explorations of the concepts of 'guilt', 'shame', 'trauma', 'conscience', 'mourning' and 'identity'. The chapter questions the political positioning and action of the author Martin Walser, as a representative of the generation of perpetrators, to the process of working-through and coming-to-terms. It critically examines Walser's speech of October 1998 and places the speech in the historical context of coming-to-terms in post-war Germany.

This work is as much about the problematics of remembering the Shoah in Germany, the country of the perpetrators, as it is the attempt of the second generation to testify to the complexity of questions that arise from the process of

memory in Germany. Above all, this work testifies to the problematics of identity – as a nation and personally - that are at stake in the German process of memory. With Walter Benjamin's *Angel of History* and against the course of history, I write in the hope that the process of memory, of thinking the questions of the Shoah, will enable humanity 'to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen'.⁹

⁹ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 365

Prologue

When in 1996 the first competition failed to produce an acceptable design for a 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' the 'Auslober'¹⁰ decided to appoint a 'Findungskommission'¹¹ of experts to design and run another, limited competition. Its aim was an 'explicit, well-defined and rigorously non-partisan procedure'¹², extending the initial competition. Twenty-five internationally renowned artists and architects were invited, nearly all agreed to participate, and nineteen eventually submitted their designs in October 1997. This very public procedure again was vigorously debated in the German press. In their invitation to the competition, James Young writes, the 'Findungskommission' described a 'concept of memorialisation' that 'took into account: a clear definition of the Holocaust and its significance; Nazi Germany's role as perpetrator; current reunified Germany's role as rememberer; the contemporary generation's relationship to Holocaust memory; and the aesthetic debate'¹³ with regard to the planned memorial itself.

¹⁰ The 'Auslober' is the commissioning and executing body composed of members of the Bundestag (Parliament), the Berlin Senate and the Citizen's Committee (founded by the publicist Lea Rosh - Förderkreis).

¹¹ 'Findungskommission' is the committee that was granted the power of decision by the initiators of the second competition (the City of Berlin, the citizen's initiative and the Federal Government) to find the most appropriate design for the memorial. Its five members were Professors Dr. James E. Young, Professor Dr. Christoph Stölzl (who later became Berlin's Minister of Culture), Professor Josef Paul Kleihues, Professor Dr. Werner Hofmann and Professor Dr. Dieter Ronte

¹² *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Gesellschaftliche Diskussion und parlamentarisches Verfahren*, 1999 (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit), p. 168

¹³ Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press), p. 197

Germany is faced with the sheer impossible task to remember the deeds it committed; the motives of remembrance are complex and often self-renouncing. Remembering the Shoah in Israel became part of the state's *raison d'être* and its founding myths. In its remembrance process Germany has to address its role as perpetrators; it cannot fall back onto any experience as victim or resistance fighter. Many of the more recent monuments in Germany dealing with National Socialism and the Holocaust¹⁴ have sought to address Germany's ambivalent and self-indicting process of remembrance.

What, however, does that mean for the artist who might be asking himself/herself these questions and who is faced with the complexity of issues? How can a memorial address the tension and dilemma of the German remembrance process where memory is suppressed and as such marks and disables a working-through and coming-to-terms? In view of the questions at stake I will examine the criteria according to which the committee of five 'experts' judged and decided on the 'appropriate' memorial design. How does one weigh the artistic concept against the Germany remembrance process? What are the possibilities and promises of contemporary aesthetics in view of the issues at stake? James Young seemed concerned about the responsibility of the 'Findungskommission' towards the public at large when he queried whether a formal, conceptual and ethical justification of one proposal by the body of experts would mean that mean the public might accept it.¹⁵

¹⁴ There is the Baroque fountain in Kassel, which was given to the town by a wealthy Jewish citizen. Destroyed by the Nazis, a German artist recollected the remaining pieces, reconstructed the fountain to submerge it upside down into the earth. All you can see now, when crossing the market place, is the star-shaped foundation of the fountain. Or, for example, the steel column in Hamburg-Harburg: year-by-year, centimetre-by-centimetre this column slowly disappears into the earth. A generation of German artists has turned their scepticism of the monument into a radical 'counter-monumentality' (Young, 2000, p. 96).

¹⁵ Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press), p. 199

Finally, at the end of 1997, the five members of the 'Findungskommission' agreed on the two strongest designs: Gesine Weinmiller and Peter Eisenman/Richard Serra - two proposals which, 'though equally works of terrible beauty, complexity, and deep intelligence'¹⁶, have powers of persuasion that are based on very different concepts. The 'Findungskommission' presented the public and the 'Auslober' with two winning designs, which, according to their statement, would fulfil the difficult task the Holocaust memorial is meant to perform.

Weinmiller's memorial design (see Figures 9 & 10) works with the concept of silence and serenity; it has the spirit of fleeting presence and retained and cautious responses. It is a design by a young German who belongs to that generation who has to bear the memory and shame of an event for which they themselves cannot be made responsible.

The Serra/Eisenman design is by two well-known Americans; a collaboration of artist and architect. Their design, massive in scale, resulted in something James Young describes as 'audacious, surprising and dangerously imagined form'¹⁷ (see Figures 3, 4 & 5).

The 'Findungskommission' strongly recommended both designs to the 'Auslober'. What would the final decision of one over the other mean? Does it have any implication? We have to bear in mind that what follows in the second chapter of my thesis will be a discussion of architectural models. My reading of possible expressions and re-presentations of the different models is essentially based on the architect's rationale - and my imagination. The reality, their real experience, might be very different.

¹⁶ Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 203

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 203

I. The Angel's Gaze: Moment and Eternity

Benjamin perceives both history and the historical-philosophical as notions that entail a theological perspective. His theory of history and memory is profoundly influenced by the aspects of redemption, hope and the Messianic. It is their implication for our understanding of the past and its affirmation in the monumental that I shall explore in this chapter.

The momentum of the traumatic destruction of the world and the inadequacy, if not impossibility of experience, at the centre of Benjamin's writing and thought validates an exegetical reading of Benjamin's theories and their applicability to contemporary issues and debates, in particular in view of the problems and discussions raised around the experience of the Shoah in Germany and its attempt to come to terms with it¹⁸. Benjamin's writings try to tackle the problem of the possibility and/or impossibility of experience and of its destruction. Although Benjamin did not see the end of the war and his writing was not exclusively targeted at defining and thus overcoming Fascism, his thought holds valuable insight for an investigation into theoretical concepts of memory and history, as Andrew Benjamin has argued: 'In the case of Benjamin

¹⁸ The word 'Holocaust' comes from the Greek Bible (Septuaginta) and means a burnt offering. It denotes the offerings that were made at that time in the Temple of Jerusalem. The sacrificial lamb (animal) as a whole was burnt. When Jews refer to the monstrous nature of Auschwitz they use the terminus 'Shoah'; it means extermination. Professor Richard Schröder is adamant that 'we Germans, from whose midst the perpetrators came, are not entitled to this metaphor'. (Schröder, Richard, 1999. So nicht! Ein fauler Kompromiß über das Mahnmal bahnt sich an. *Die Zeit*, 21 January 1999) If we do not even know how to refer to the deeds that were committed in our name, from German citizens, how are we supposed to talk about it, let alone work through it and come to terms with it? Throughout the text I am using the word Shoah. However, the word Holocaust is more widely spread and exclusively used in the German press when issues of the memorial and remembrance were argued and discussed. Henceforth, I shall continue to refer to the planned memorial as the 'Holocaust Memorial/Monument'.

there could have been no explicit reference and yet the problem itself is raised within the actual formulation of another attempt to link the present and the past.¹⁹

However, the task of this chapter is not to provide a commentary on Walter Benjamin's work, but to employ certain aspects of his work and thinking in order to hold onto the general in the particular. Benjamin's thinking provides valuable insight for the complexity of issues of 'coming-to-terms' in Germany that are at stake in the remembrance process in general and the planned memorial in particular. It is the status of history as such, as an object and method of investigation, that was the focus of attention in Benjamin's profound study – the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. This chapter will closely study, analyse and interpret Benjamin's observations of the eschatological and theological within his concept of history, in order to re-think his actuality regarding the matters of remembering the Shoah in Germany *now*. Critical of all knowledge – that much is implied in the preface to *The Origin of the German Mourning Play* entitled 'Erkenntniskritische Vorrede' ('Epistemo-critical Prologue') and in a chapter of his *Arcades Project* (the vast bundle of notes, entitled *Das Passagenwerk*) with the title 'Epistemological' -, Benjamin offers a form of enlightening interpretation that does not take knowledge and understanding for granted. Benjamin employs the term 'historio-philosophical' in order to point to the interpretative aspect of his perception of the historical.

Howard Caygill points out that Benjamin did not intend these theses *On the Philosophy of History* to be published because Benjamin apparently feared that 'the connections they make between theology and historical materialism will

¹⁹ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate: Walter Benjamin's 'Fate and Character'. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*, Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 149

be misunderstood'.²⁰ Bearing in mind Caygill's cautionary remarks, nonetheless, I shall proceed to discuss the possibility of a theological perspective within Benjamin's notion of the historical. I am going to employ my reading of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' to open up possible ways of memory and remembering whereby one is placed – the individual and the entity of the nation – in relation to the past, the present and the future.

1. Waiting for the Angel of History: the Benjaminian Concept of History

A. Catastrophe, Progress and Repetition

Benjamin wrote his theses *On the Concept of History*²¹ in exile in 1940.

His IX. thesis is based on a painting, as Benjamin himself explains:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is

²⁰ Caygill, Howard, Coles, Alex & Klimowsky, Andrzej, 2000. *Introducing Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd.), p. 167

²¹ The German title is *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Instead of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, I prefer the more literal translation of *On the Concept of History*.

turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.²²

Numerous interpretations of Klee's painting, Scholem's poem and Benjamin's text have been written²³. There is one aspect that I would like to discuss further concerning the gaze of the angel: *His face is turned toward the past*. For us who historically and biographically consider the past as something that is behind us and the future as something that lies ahead, the angel seems to have turned its head. The meaning of past and future in the Hebrew

²² Benjamin, Walter, 1999. *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico), p. 249

²³ Bolz, Norbert W. & Faber, Richard (eds.), 1985. *Walter Benjamin: Profane Erleuchtung und rettende Kritik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann); Brumlik, Micha, Funke, Hajo & Rensmann, Lars, 2000. *Umkämpftes Vergessen: Walser-Debatte, Holocaust-Mahnmal und neuere deutsche Geschichtspolitik* (Berlin: Verlag Das Arabische Buch); Caygill, Howard, 1998. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge); Emmerich, Wolfgang, 1977. 'Massenfaschismus' und die Rolle des Ästhetischen: Faschismustheorie bei Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht. in Winkler, Lutz (ed.), 1977. *Antifaschistische Literatur: Programme, Autoren, Werke*, 3 vols. (Kronberg: Scriptor Verlag); Ferris, David S., 1996. *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Jennings, Michael William, 1987. *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); Knoche, Stefan, 2000. *Benjamin – Heidegger: Über Gewalt – Die Politisierung der Kunst* (Wien: Turia+Kant); Krückeberg, Edzard, 1981. *Der Begriff des Erzählens im 20. Jahrhundert: Zu den Theorien Benjamins, Adornos und Lukács* (Bonn: Bouvier); Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), 1998. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart); MOSES, Stephane, 1994. *Der Engel der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag); Nagele, Rainer, 1988. *Benjamin's Ground: New Readings of Walter Benjamin* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press); Opitz, Michael & Wizisla, Erdmut, 1992. *Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin* (Leipzig: Reclam); Rose, Gillian, 1994. *Judaism & Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell); SMITH, Gary (ed.), 1988. *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT); Tiedemann, Rolf, 1983. *Dialektik im Stillstand: Versuch zum Spätwerk Walter Benjamins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp); Valentin, Joachim & WENDEL, Saskia, 2000. *Jüdische Traditionen in der Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft); Weigel, Sigrid, 1997. *Enstellte Ähnlichkeit: Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise* (Frankfurt: Fischer); Wolin, Richard, 1994. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press) Zuckermann, Moshe, 1999. *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie* (Berlin: Philo)

terminology resembles exactly the angel's gaze. In the Hebrew-Jewish tradition and language, this gaze is the appropriate posture, which one has to position oneself into, in relation to past and future. The Hebrew language imaginatively expresses that the past is in front of our eyes (lifnei), whereas the future lies behind our back ('aharit).²⁴ If Benjamin's angel derived from the Hebrew Bible, it did not have to turn around.

Benjamin knew the past could never be recaptured 'the way it really was' (VI. Thesis)²⁵. History does not appear as a logical sequence of events. To Benjamin, history is an expanse of rubble, a conglomeration of occurrences. "The past" cannot be captured in the notion of ever changing time(s). On the contrary the past erupts and resonates as a disturbing event: 'It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.' (VI. Thesis)²⁶. Benjamin piles event upon event, occurrence upon occurrence to a single catastrophe; there is no causal or consecutive connection of a chain of events. The angel of history directs our gaze and thinking towards that which seems irredeemably lost, yet something that continues to haunt and torment our existence. To translate and interpret the past - not 'how things really were' but how we choose to remember²⁷ - may well be its betrayal but, more importantly, I would like to argue it shows a readiness to engage with the past. As we will see from the analysis of the German landscape of both lack and fear of memory, the

²⁴ For a more profound explanation of the specificities in the Hebrew language, especially in relation to the meaning and combination of certain prepositions and nouns that take the meaning of in front and behind, see Jürgen Ebach, 'Der Blick des Engels' in BOLZ, Norbert W. & FABER; Richard (eds.), 1985. *Walter Benjamin: Profane Erleuchtung und rettende Kritik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann)

²⁵ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

²⁶ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

²⁷ The Lipstadt/Irving trial has clearly shown again that there cannot be such a thing as "objective" writing on history. See also Robert Eaglestone's essay on Postmodernism, Holocaust and the Lipstadt/Irving trial.

readiness to engage with the past, the patience to wait for the 'flash' have to make us accept the findings as well.

As the Angel of History is propelled backwards – blinded to that which might come - into the future, we have to acknowledge that the past is not given and the future is not predictable:

We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb, who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogenous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.²⁸

Benjamin's Angelus Novus is a figure beyond despair and hope – it is sent by God.

In his annotation to the theses *On the Concept of History* Benjamin distinguishes 'Historicism' from 'historical materialism'. He demands a notion of history 'which has freed itself from the scheme of progression in an empty and homogeneous time', a notion that 'shakes the three most important positions of Historicism'²⁹ (GS I, 3, p. 1240). Benjamin names the following as main principles of 'historicism': the idea of a universal history; the notion that history is something that can be narrated; and finally - and the third position, according to Benjamin, is the strongest and the most difficult to attack - 'empathy with the victor' (see also VII. Thesis on the Philosophy of History). The statement of the impossibility of history's narration is a more difficult matter. Benjamin asks us to accept the 'liquidation of the epic element like Marx has done it in "The Capital"'.

²⁸ Annex B to Theses: *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 255

²⁹ Benjamin, Walter, 1997. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I, 3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 1240; hereafter cited as GS

History calls for 'a far-stretching theory framework of steel' (GS I, 3, p. 1241). The theoretical outline of work under the power of the capital pays more tribute to the interests of humanity than those monumental and elaborate works of historicism: 'It is more difficult to honour the memory of the nameless than that of the famous' (GS I, 3, p. 1241).

We have nurtured the belief that our existence is subjected to history and mortality. We have discovered the need to try to make some sense of the crisis and fragility of human existence. Concepts like 'truth' and 'knowledge' - with all their instability and insecurity - function to provide a link between two historical events. To accept and to acknowledge the termination of a past moment, will enable an interpretation of that very moment and of ourselves in the present. How do we perceive ourselves in the light of a particular moment or passage in time and history? What are the consequences, if there are any, for our very existence in the present?

Knowledge figures as a profane conception of experience, a conception that is far removed from the absolute. As such it is not invalid, but inferior since it cannot reach the ultimate desire of authentic cognition. To Benjamin, the concept of transcendent, pure and philosophical knowledge lies in the idea of God:

Thus the task of the coming philosophy can be understood as the discovery or creation of the very concept of knowledge which, by relating the concept of experience exclusively to the transcendental consciousness, renders logically possible not only mechanical but also religious experience. Which is not to say that knowledge renders God possible, but certainly that it first of all makes the experience and doctrine of God possible.³⁰

³⁰ „So läßt sich die Aufgabe der kommenden Philosophie fassen als die Auffindung oder Schaffung desjenigen Erkenntnisbegriffes der, indem er zugleich auch den Erfahrungsbegriff ausschließlich auf das transzendente Bewußtsein bezieht, nicht alleine mechanische sondern auch religiöse Erfahrung logisch ermöglicht. Damit soll durchaus nicht gesagt sein, daß die

The theologian Paul Tillich famously described God 'as the Lord of time who surmounts the gods of space'³¹. Traditional historicism, one could argue, is inclined to serve those 'gods of space'. Rarely are the different special rooms of history intertwined with each other. On the contrary, they are joined into a 'chain of events'. But Benjamin's Angel of History sees a pile of debris, a pile of different spaces. To worship those 'gods of space' bears the danger that in extreme cases the past event is dismissed as detail and thus worthy of forgetting.

The motto to the IX. thesis *On the Concept of History* is taken from a poem by Gershom Scholem. Scholem here interprets the Klee painting (already in Benjamin's possession) in a highly theological manner. Benjamin chose the fifth verse (out of seven) in which the allusion to the sphere outside of Paradise is discernible, where the Angel wishes to return to the Paradise:

My wing is ready for flight,
I would like to turn back.
If I stayed timeless time,
I would have little luck.³²

Benjamin's thesis, however, stresses the impossibility of such a return. From Paradise the storm of Messianism is blowing. The Angel is propelled, his wings wide open, into the future in which all debris of historical catastrophe enters the sphere which surrounds the Angel. I doubt that Benjamin, who introduces the concepts of the Messianic, creation and redemption into his

Erkenntnis Gott, wohl aber durchaus, daß sie die Erfahrung und Lehre von ihm allererst ermöglicht.' GS II, 1, p. 164

³¹ quoted after Friedlander, Albert, 1988. Zachor – Gedenke!. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88, p. 378

³² *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 249

thinking and writing, falls back onto an atheological description in the form of the Rilkean allusion to angels in his Duinese Elegies. These concepts cannot be introduced and thought through without acknowledging and recognising God as the subject of the action.

Benjamin knew of Fascism in Germany, what was happening in Nazi Germany, and he had knowledge of the atrocities that the Nazis had committed, of humanity's catastrophe according to Theodor W. Adorno.³³ What is the point, what is Benjamin's intention when he speaks of the Messianic fulfilment of history? Why does he even ask the question of the revelation of God in a time that God has obviously rejected?

If the path of progress led into the experience of history's catastrophe, would it then not make more sense to do without a concept of history? Benjamin rejects the notion and tendency to relinquish or give away the concept of history in the crisis of progress. Benjamin understands updating, not progress, as the fundamental concept of 'historical materialism' (GS V, 1, p. 576/7).

He formulates a concept of history in which the essential character of history consists of those events which, again and again, blast open its continuum. Present, then, is no longer a transition but standstill of time. The past, of which traditional historicism claims it would stand still, flits by, depending on the moment in which recognition sets in. The dualism of revelation and world is decisive for Benjamin's thinking.

Theology, brimmed with worldly experiences as an instrument to understand the world, can never be a lesson; it will always be a passionate option and not an intellectual establishment of theological theorems:

³³ Adorno, Theodor W., 1997. Zu einem neuen kategorischen Imperative: Erziehung nach Auschwitz. In »Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse«: Ein philosophisches Lesebuch (Leipzig: Suhrkamp), p. 63

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.³⁴

Benjamin's little, ugly hunch-back, hiding from our perception, is the theological dimension of our existence; and the historical materialist in his quest for truth can truly only be guided by theology. Only then can we mark out the hope of a turning point hidden behind the apparent infinity of the emptiness of hope. It is exactly this duality between infinite and unfulfilled historical time and fulfilled messianic time that informs Benjamin's thinking. The dialectic between the extreme contradictions is already given away if mediation is anticipated. What is involved here is an effort of restoration or of reinstatement - but one that can never be finished or fulfilled, especially in the light of the moment, which as a form, freezes. To speak of catastrophe becomes the expression for the great need of redemption. The simultaneous occurrence of theology and materialism is possible but both need to remain faithful to their matters and ought to be strictly differentiated, according to Benjamin - so that it all becomes one big game of chess.

We have to get hold of memory as it flashes up in the moment of danger; historical re-cognition, to speak with Benjamin, is realised as a shock when discovering the tense constellation of time. This process of re-cognition has its vanishing point always in the Now, the *Jetzt-Zeit*. According to Benjamin the image of the past which the observer brings home to himself, enters in the

³⁴ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 245

'moment of its recognisability' into a constellation with present and future. His concept of the 'Jetzt-Zeit' (the Now) hopes that the continuum of time might be present, provided that it 'flashes up' as that which it was and as that which it could be as the decisive turning point of messianic redemption. The structure of the 'Jetzt-Zeit' is the pre-condition that the one who actively remembers can fall back onto the past in such a way that the very past comes through into the present as not (yet) final and conclusive. At the same time, however, Benjamin asserts that only in the revelation of the eschatological Now in the past, in the revelation of its lost possibilities, its transformation and salvation, lies the possibility of a history and historicism which does not exclusively present the 'empathy with the victor'.

Important to his concept and new interpretation is the term 'understanding' (Verstehen). 'Understanding' no longer has the meaning of empathy which opens up the text for interpretation. This concept of understanding works only by way of re-living the past:

Spiritual »understanding« fundamentally has to be grasped as a re-living of the understood and, thus, that which was recognised in the analysis of »re-living of works«, of »fame«, is to be regarded as the basis of history as such. (GS V, 1, p. 574/5)³⁵

The Benjaminian form of 're-living' is not to be read as a deficient form of life. On the contrary, 're-living' in the Benjaminian sense means that in the event of fulfilment and completion, past and present enter a state of communication:

³⁵ ,Geschichtliches »Verstehen« ist grundsätzlich als ein Nachleben des Verstandenen zu fassen und daher ist dasjenige was in der Analyse des »Nachlebens der Werke«, des »Ruhmes« erkannt wurde, als die Grundlage der Geschichte überhaupt zu betrachten.' GS V, 1, p. 574/5

It is not that the past sheds its light onto the present or that the present sheds its light onto the past, but a picture is when the past merges with the present flash-like into a constellation. In other words: a picture is dialectic at a standstill. (GS V, 1, p. 578)³⁶

Benjamin demands of history that it illuminates the relation between past and present buried in the individual and collective unconsciousness. The moment of waking-up becomes characteristic for his interpretation and *modus operandi* of history:

Should awakening be the synthesis of the thesis of dream-consciousness and the anti-thesis of wake-consciousness? Then the moment of awakening would be identical with the »Now of Recognisability« in which the things put on their true – surrealistic – expression. (GS V, 1, p. 579)³⁷

'This storm is what we call progress'³⁸ – instead of the inspiring, fresh wind of history we are faced with a storm which 'irresistibly propels us into the future'. One thing without any doubt is obvious: a return is not possible. The Lost Paradise is remembered only in all too sentimental a reminiscence, like childhood memories. To outgrow it, however, means incarnation. The Angelus Novus' concept of progress does not grant the fulfilment³⁹ of the history of progress. The term 'progress' is founded in the idea of catastrophe. In *Zentralpark* Benjamin writes that 'it goes on like this, is the catastrophe' (GS I, 2,

³⁶ 'Nicht so ist es, daß das Vergangene sein Licht auf das Gegenwärtige oder das Gegenwärtige sein Licht auf das Vergangene wirft, sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt. Mit anderen Worten: Bild ist Dialektik im Stillstand.' GS V, 1, p. 578

³⁷ 'Sollten Erwachen die Synthesis sein aus der Thesis des Traumbewußtseins und der Antithesis des Wachbewußtsein? Dann wäre der Moment des Erwachens identisch mit dem »Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit«, in dem die Dinge ihre wahre – surrealistische – Miene aufsetzten.' GS V, 1, p. 579

³⁸ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 249

³⁹ Erfüllung – the achievement, completion, conclusion, fulfilment; to come true

p. 683). It is not the imminent but the currently given. Hope solely lies in its demolition and break-off. Only after the break-off of the history of catastrophes, something might be possible that correlates to the beginning in the term *Ursprung*. Benjamin understands 'Ur-Sprung' (*Hervorgehen*: evolving, producing) not as a leap backwards; on the contrary, it is a leap into a world that flashes up fragmentally in the pictures of triumphant life - behind the inevitable catastrophe, behind life under not-alienated conditions.

But can we honestly conclude from such hope to the fulfilment of history, from where all suffering was purposely endured and all sacrifices were made for justified causes? Against the separation of violence and salvation, of history of suppression and history of liberation, of liberty and order, Benjamin insists on the oneness of violence and salvation, of culture and barbarity.

In the annotations to the *Arcades Project* Benjamin gives a definition of what he conceives as 'history's fundamental concepts': 'catastrophe – to have missed the opportunity; critical moment – the status quo threatens to be preserved; progress – the first revolutionary measure'. (GS V, 1, p. 593)⁴⁰ These are the keywords for Benjamin's methodological concept of history as such; it thematises in its core a philosophy of history which marks itself clearly with the certainty of secularised apocalypse. It is a certainty, however, that succeeds – fully aware of culture's decline in the sense of rendering the concepts of value meaningless – in doubting itself, yet at the same time in providing hope through the utopia of the changeability of the world. This utopia of changeability breaks into the open, is eschatologically motivated and materialistic-historically intended. Catastrophes are not the eventful occurrence of the future, they are the conditioning state of the Now: the term 'progress' is founded in the idea of

⁴⁰ 'Definitionen historischer Grundbegriffe: Die Katastrophe – die Gelegenheit verpaßt haben; der kritische Augenblick – der status quo droht erhalten zu bleiben; der Fortschritt – die erste revolutionäre Maßnahme.' GS V, 1, p. 593

catastrophe. In *Zentralpark* Benjamin writes that 'it goes on like this, is the catastrophe' (GS I, 2, p. 683, also GS V, 1, p. 592). It is not the imminent but the currently given. The insidious remaining of the same, the un-alterability, the inner chaos of a constantly-the-same – that it could stay or remain like this, is the most oppressive momentum of history: 'The concept of progress has to be sustained in the idea of catastrophe.' (GS V, 1, p. 592)⁴¹ Benjamin drafts a highly charged dialectical concept of catastrophe and progress: how can catastrophe sustain and underpin progress in realistic and conceptual terms? The Now functions as the explosive force which breaks open and interrupts the homogeneous epochs of history in order to arouse suspicions. The Now becomes the meter against which the catastrophes become to be calculated; the Now opposes the continuity of history as it dialectically guarantees history. In the Benjaminian Now, a thinking about history is wretched which cannot be anything other than a chronological guiding into the future.

The belief in progress, in the infinite perfectibility – an infinite task within morality – and the conception of eternal recurrence are complementary. They are indissoluble antinomies in the light of which the dialectical concept of historical time has to be developed. In opposition to it, the notion of eternal recurrence appears as the »feeble rationalism«, as what faith in progress has become disrepute, and the latter belonging to the mythical mode of thinking as well as the notion of eternal recurrence. (GS V, 1, p. 178)⁴²

⁴¹ 'Der Begriff des Fortschritts ist in der Idee der Katastrophe zu fundieren.' GS V, 1, p. 592

⁴² 'Der Glaube an den Fortschritt, an eine unendliche Perfektibilität – eine unendliche Aufgabe in der Moral – und die Vorstellung von der ewigen Wiederkehr sind komplementär. Es sind die unauflösbaren Antinomien, angesichts deren der dialektische Begriff der historischen Zeit zu entwickeln ist. Ihm gegenüber erscheint die Vorstellung von der ewigen Wiederkehr als eben der »platte Rationalismus« als der der Fortschrittsglaube verrufen ist und dieser letztere der mythischen Denkweise ebenso angehörend wie die Vorstellung von der ewigen Wiederkehr.' GS V, 1, p. 178

That the progress recurs ever and ever again, therein lies the true catastrophe - that the catastrophe continues, that no end seems foreseeable, that no cultural forces seem visible which could terminate the terrible events. The futility of a change lies within its character because 'the essence of mythical events is recurrence. It has been inscribed with futility as a hidden figure.' (GS V, 1, p. 178). Hope is there which denies itself superficial optimism and therefore enables a future. To tackle the given problematics Benjamin chose, as in his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The Origin of the German Mourning Play*), a period which counts as a time of decline (*Verfallszeit*): the Nineteenth Century. His *Arcades Project* pursues one purpose: 'the overcoming of the concept of »progress« and of the concept of »declining time« are only two sides of one and the same thing.'⁴³ (GS V, 1, p. 575) Benjamin's thinking seeks to overcome these concepts which belong to a historicism that lacks self-reflexivity and self-critique.

B. A Theological Dimension: The Messianic

Irving Wolfarth asks the Benjamin student of today to 'blot out' theology in order to find ways through his work.⁴⁴ And Howard Caygill asserts that 'it is not essential to Benjamin's concept of experience that the intimations of the future be figured Messianically, and indeed to do so in a superficial way compromises

⁴³ 'Die Überwindung des Begriffes des »Fortschritts« und des Begriffes der »Verfallszeit« sind nur zwei Seiten ein und derselben Sache.' N2, 5 - GS V, 1, p. 575

⁴⁴ Wolfarth, Irving, 1998. *The Measure of the Possible, the Weight of the Real and the Heat of the Moment: Benjamin's Actuality Today*. In Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), 1998. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 20

its rigour.⁴⁵ I consider the theological an important dimension within Benjamin's thinking that attests to the actuality of his work for the process of mourning in Germany now.

In a letter to Max Rychner of 7 March 1932, Benjamin asserts the importance of religion and theology for his thinking:

And if I have to declare it in one word: I have never been able to research and think differently as in a, if I may say so, theological way of thinking/meaning – namely in accordance with the talmudic doctrine of the forty-nine stages of meaning of every passage in the Torah.⁴⁶

In my view it is the theological aspect of Benjamin's work that holds valuable clues for our quest of understanding and coming to terms with the catastrophic past.

In his annotations to the theses *On the Concept of History*, Benjamin takes up a general approach where theology functions as some kind of pre-stage. At the end always stands the true, pure thought. Benjamin uses the image of a piece of blotting paper to explain his relation to theology and religious aspects:

My thinking is to theology as the piece of blotting paper to the ink. It has become saturated with it. If the piece of blotting paper was to

⁴⁵ Caygill, Howard, 1998. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge), p. 149

⁴⁶ „Und wenn ich es in einem Wort aussprechen soll: ich habe nie anders forschen und denken können als in einem, wenn ich so sagen darf, theologischen Sinn – nämlich in Gemäßheit der talmudischen Lehre von den neunundvierzig Sinnstufen jeder Thorastelle.“ Scholem, Gershom & Adorno, Theodor W. (eds.), 1966. *Walter Benjamin: Briefe*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Fischer), p. 524, quoted after Ullmann, Wolfgang, 1992. *Walter Benjamin und die jüdische Theologie. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin* (Leipzig: Reclam), p. 117

decide, nothing would remain that was written. (GS I, 3, p. 1235 & GS V, 1, p. 588)⁴⁷

'Theology is taken up and should – in his view - be erased in the process of absorption', writes Jürgen Ebach, expert in studies of the Old Testament⁴⁸. The imprints of the words on the piece of blotting paper certainly have lost much of their 'clarity'; the contours of the signs become blurred. The piece of blotting paper itself is rough, not even; as the bearer of the words it reveals the cracks and breaks. Jürgen Ebach points out that the image of the saturated blotting paper refers to another image: the mirrored writing. Not only does the blotting paper suck up the ink, it also takes on the written words, yet in its mirrored form. For Benjamin, theology, once erased, can be preserved only in the mirrored writing of the blotting paper and its salvation might only be possible in this form. Thinking wants to swallow up theology, so that nothing remains. Thinking erases theology; yet in this extinction lies its salvation, if not redemption. The idea to erase that which is written comes close to the notion of its redemption and salvation; that it is its only solution, according to Benjamin, I shall now explain.

I think Benjamin's remark on theology and thinking is important and needs to be looked at in more detail. In order to understand Benjamin's writing we need to know something about theology, as Jürgen Ebach claims⁴⁹. But how are Benjamin's texts to be interpreted in the light of the (Hebrew) Bible? Is there an implication that Benjamin's writing could serve as a interpretation of many aspects of our lives, including religion? In his essay "Der Blick des Engels"

⁴⁷ 'Mein Denken verhält sich zur Theologie wie das Löschblatt zur Tinte. Es ist ganz von ihr vollgesogen. Ginge es aber nach dem Löschblatt, so würde nichts was geschrieben ist, übrigbleiben'. GS I,3, p. 1235

⁴⁸ Jürgen Ebach, 'Der Blick des Engels' in BOLZ, Norbert W. & FABER; Richard (eds.), 1985. *Walter Benjamin: Profane Erleuchtung und rettende Kritik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann), p. 57

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 59

Jürgen Ebach interprets some texts of the Old Testament (Book of Job; Paradise Narration) through Benjamin's texts. In the following I attempt a reversal of that reading: the implications of the Book of Job for Benjamin's notion of history as manifested in the figure of his *Angel of History*.

Perhaps the 'critical' historian has to follow the gaze of the angel – a line of sight and viewpoint which preserves because it becomes saturated, if not soaked, with history in the process of erasing it. Only then does the historian become 'the prophet who is turned backwards' (GS I,3, p. 1235), the prophet who 'turns his back on his own time; his visionary powers are sparked off by the height of earlier events that retain the past'⁵⁰. (GS I, 3, p. 1235)

While eating from the Tree of Knowledge, while eating the forbidden fruits, humanity, itself, decides about the rules of life. It is here, in violating the commandment, that humanity recognises 'good' and 'bad'. For Benjamin it is the moment through which the 'real', 'true' history becomes ascertainable and can be experienced. God's initial beholding is substituted by the subjective judgement of good and evil. Humanity becomes autonomous in so far as it decides for itself. Expulsion from Paradise is not God's punishment for the deeds committed; it is the consequence intrinsic to the deed. The ability to recognise 'good' and 'bad' takes humanity away from Paradise.

Benjamin's Angel wants to stay to pay witness to the fulfilment of the hope that the universal history of suffering may be redeemed. Can we still assume that there is a connection between a human's deeds and actions and his welfare and happiness? Can we still assume that our hope is valid? May it

⁵⁰ ... der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet. Er kehrt der eigenen Zeit den Rücken; sein Seherblick entzündet sich an den ins Vergangene verdämmenden Gipfeln der früheren Ereignisse. GS I, 3, p. 1235

be that the good man can enjoy the fruits of his deeds? 'O earth cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place' (Job 16,18)⁵¹. Does history not teach us to draw reversed conclusions from a connection of deed and happiness?

Jürgen Ebach points out that the hope that the deed of a man bears consequences according to the deed, allows for the thought 'that the sufferer must be the culprit and that the triumphant murderer cannot be a murderer'⁵². If we look at Germany's post-war history, success most certainly seems to have become the standard for such ethics. The biblical context of deed and consequence (intrinsic to the deed) describes the irreversible history of culture and civilisation. The deeply pessimistic understanding of the biblical narrator is based on his negative experience; the intention of humanity to use its ability to foster life stands in opposition to the consequences of its deeds.

However, the Book of Job does not criticise this frame of reference between deed and consequence. Rather, it criticises the reversal of conclusions drawn from this frame of reference and the transfer into a doctrine, an ideology. Job experiences God as a 'violent criminal' and as a saviour. Jürgen Ebach claims that 'the Book of Job refuses a solution which would make the separation of violence and salvation possible; it also refuses to reconcile on a higher level that which, on the earthly level, can only be understood only as a contradiction'⁵³. The world is full of events, moments and circumstances that seem random and withdraw themselves from human understanding. The Book of Job does not give an answer for the reason, the purpose or the necessity of Job's suffering. Hope exists so that, at the end, everything that seemed purposeless and pointless can causally or finally be explained.

⁵¹ 'Ach Erde bedecke mein Blut nicht, und mein Schreien finde keine Ruhestatt!' (Hiob 16,18).

⁵² Jürgen Ebach, 'Der Blick des Engels' in BOLZ, Norbert W. & FABER, Richard (eds.), 1985. *Walter Benjamin: Profane Erleuchtung und rettende Kritik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann), p. 74

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 76/7

It is the end, the breaking-off of the universal history of suffering, which is the history of mankind, that Benjamin's Angel of History would like to oversee. To Benjamin the Messiah is not only the conqueror of the Anti-Christ; it figures in relation to redemption and the Judgement Day. At the same time, Benjamin forms a link to the directly political actions of revolutionary classes:

A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognises the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. (XVII. Thesis)⁵⁴

and

But classless society is not to be drafted as the end of an historical development ... The term of classless society needs to be given back its true Messianic appearance, specifically in the interest of the revolutionary politics of the proletariat itself. (GS I, 3, p. 1232)

To Benjamin it seems important to hold onto the dialectical opposition of the concepts of theological Messianism and directly political Marxism. Jürgen Ebach stresses that Benjamin offers an 'explosive linking' of theology and Marxism 'in which theology is endowed with the task of stripping materialism of all pseudo-theological attitudes and of making it political again; materialism, on the other hand, is meant to refer theology back to its theme of redemption'⁵⁵.

Benjamin, against certain trains of thought in Marxism or Theology, decisively rejects the notion of a fulfilment of history:

In truth there is not one moment which does not carry its revolutionary chance with it – it only wants to be defined as a specific one, namely as the chance of a totally new solution in the face of a totally new task. To the revolutionary thinker the

⁵⁴ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 254

⁵⁵ Jürgen Ebach, 'Der Blick des Engels' in BOLZ, Norbert W. & FABER, Richard (eds.), 1985. *Walter Benjamin: Profane Erleuchtung und rettende Kritik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann), p. 83

characteristic revolutionary chance of any historical moment confirms itself out of the political situation. But no less does it confirm itself to him through the key power of this moment over a specific, up until then closed apartment of the past. The admission to this apartment strictly coincides with the political action; and it is this admission through which it reveals itself – how ever devastating – as Messianic. (Classless society is not the final task of progress in history but its so often failed, finally contrived interruption.)⁵⁶ (GS I, 3, p. 1231)

Benjamin asserts that history 'needs to be brushed against the grain' (VII. Theses)⁵⁷; the 'culture of epistemological abilities' which Benjamin demands may, however, not be understood as a purely epistemological history that insists in itself:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour* – and that day is Judgement Day. (III. Theses)⁵⁸

Benjamin's concept of experience includes an artistic and religious dimension. It is this 'the concept of experience itself that, as Caygill states,

⁵⁶ ,In Wirklichkeit gibt es nicht einen Augenblick, der seine revolutionäre Chance nicht mit sich führte – sie will nur als eine spezifische definiert sein, nämlich als Chance einer ganz neuen Lösung im Angesicht einer ganz neuen Aufgabe. Dem revolutionären Denker bestätigt sich die eigentümliche revolutionäre Chance jedes geschichtlichen Augenblicks aus der politischen Situation heraus. Aber sie bestätigt sich ihm nicht minder durch die Schlüsselgewalt dieses Augenblicks über ein ganz bestimmtes, bis dahin verschlossenes Gemach der Vergangenheit. Der Eintritt in diese Gemach fällt mit der politischen Aktion strikt zusammen; und er ist es, durch den sie sich, wie vernichtend immer, als eine messianische zu erkennen gibt. (Die klassenlose Gesellschaft ist nicht das Endziel des Fortschritts in der Geschichte sondern dessen so oft mißglückte, endlich bewerkstelligte Unterbrechung.)' GS I,3, p. 1231

⁵⁷ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 248

⁵⁸ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 246

necessarily exceeds philosophy, and puts into question the relationship between philosophical reflection and its object'⁵⁹. By including the experience of the absolute, Benjamin opens the dimension of experience to reach beyond, thus creating a metaphysics of experience. It is Benjamin's concentration on precisely the 'complexity of intuition', as Caygill remarks, 'on things seen over those of understanding'⁶⁰. To Benjamin, the modern destruction of experience is manifest in the collapse of *Erfahrung* into the *Erlebnis*, of the experience into the lived instant. Benjamin is insinuating a traumatic destruction of the world as an object capable of being experienced. In *Erfahrung und Armut* (Experience and Destitution), Benjamin describes the soldier returning from the war and his suffering of the destruction of meaningful experience. For Benjamin, the soldier's suffering is only a more drastic account of what every individual of modern society has to encounter daily: the ultimate loss and transformation of experience – the 'destruction of experience as tradition'⁶¹. The problem of modernity seems to become a problem of experience for Benjamin. Only critique and criticism permit us to experience the destruction of experience – it must translate the occurrences and events of the world as *Erlebnisse* into becoming *Erfahrungen*. The loss of experience, however, involves the need to recover possible experiences of the past:

Whatever is excluded from the time of the present – whether this be past or future – announces itself obliquely in the form of distortion and exclusion ...⁶²

⁵⁹ Caygill, Howard, 1998. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge), p. xiv

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. xiv

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 31

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 7

Benjamin's conception of theoretical experience resembles the discontinuous time (or space), which, however, is implied indirectly by means of distortion and deformation within the presently projected time. The importance of eschatology for Benjamin's thinking becomes apparent in his construction of discontinuous time, of temporal experience. Benjamin interrogates modernity as a sense of lost experience through experiencing the loss of experience. It marks an attempt to recognise experiences that are discontinuous from the present – absent, because excluded, as well as present for potential experience, which is implied by and yet lost to this present.

The Messianic theme running through Benjamin's entire thinking is placed in relation to the likely, hopeful momentum of redemption⁶³. Like Benjamin, Caygill dedicates the closing words of his book 'The Colour of Experience' to the theme of the Messianic. He identifies the importance of eschatological thinking but asserts that the Messianic has often been over-interpreted. The Angelus Novus bears witness to the ruination, according to Caygill, in expectation of a new promise or law. I would like to argue that Benjamin insists on the impossibility of knowing redemption, yet he insists on the hope for the approaching redeemer who then would restore what was lost and mend what was broken. When Caygill claims that Benjamin makes the speculative immanent to his temporal experience, not enough attention is paid to the importance of the Messianic interpretation of Benjamin's writing. Most certainly the closing words of *On the Concept of History* point to an eschatological interpretation, and the distinctive feature of Benjamin's thinking is the highly theological influence: 'For every second of time was the straight gate through

⁶³ Caygill identifies the Messianic thematic of Benjamin's writing as particular dogmatic that arises almost always out of the 'problem' of redemption (Caygill, 1998. p. 149). In my understanding, it is precisely this dialectical tension of identification of catastrophic world history and its possible, if not likely, salvation through the redeeming Messiah that marks the actuality of Benjamin's theory. It is the Either/Or that comes close to a mediation.

which the Messiah might enter.'⁶⁴ Benjamin asserts the importance of hope and reconciliation in the divine sense at the end of his interpretation of *Goethe's Elective Affinities*:

This most paradoxical, most fleeting hope at last emerges out of the appearance of reconciliation, in the same way that when the sun wanes, the evening star arises in the twilight which outlives the night ... All hope is based in this most humble, also the richest hope only can come from it. Thus, in the end, hope justifies the appearance of reconciliation and Plato's statement that it is absurd to wish for the appearance of the good suffers its only exemption. Because the appearance of reconciliation may, if not must be intended: it alone is the home to the most extreme hope. ... To the certainty of blessing which in the novella the lovers carry home, the hope for redemption answers which we cherish for all the dead ... Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.' (GS I, 1, p. 200/201)⁶⁵

- it is the hope for the dead. Benjamin here most clearly demonstrates possibilities for 'meaning', for life's purpose that by far exceed mere attempts of explaining experience. Benjamin implies an ideal of Messianic wakefulness in view of the catastrophe: it is the duality between the historical time, which is unfulfilled and infinite, and the Messianic time.⁶⁶ As Caygill affirms, 'it is the

⁶⁴ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 255

⁶⁵ 'Jene paradoxeste, flüchtigste Hoffnung taucht zuletzt aus dem Schein der Versöhnung, wie im Maß, da die Sonne verlischt, im Dämmer der Abendstern aufgeht, der die Nacht überdauert ... Und auf solchem geringsten beruht alle Hoffnung, auch die reichste kommt nur aus ihm. So rechtfertigt am Ende die Hoffnung den Schein der Versöhnung und der Satz des Platon, widersinnig sei es, den Schein des Guten zu wollen, erleidet seine einzige Ausnahme. Denn der Schein der Versöhnung darf, ja er soll gewollt werden: er allein ist das Haus der äußersten Hoffnung ... der Gewißheit des Segens, den in der Novelle die Liebenden heimtragen, erwidert die Hoffnung auf Erlösung, die wir für alle Toten hegen ... Nur um der Hoffnungslosen willen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben.' GS I, 1, p. 200/201

⁶⁶ s. also Weigel, Sigrid, 1996. *Body- and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (London: Routledge)

experience of the absolute'.⁶⁷ He however continues to confirm that it could not be hope where the break-off would be redemptive; it is the 'rather paradoxical hope for the hopeless'. This Messianic aspect, this paradox that there is hope for the forsaken ones, is precisely the dialectic in Benjamin's thought.

B.a. A Detour on the Lutheran/Protestant 'Rechtfertigungslehre': Justification by Faith Alone

Gillian Rose in her essay *Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism*⁶⁸ argues that it is precisely the Protestant Lutheran ethic of 'justification by faith alone', with its worldly aestheticism, that leads to the loss of salvation; and has its consequent outcome in the violent spirit of Fascism⁶⁹. An unintended consequence of the Protestant ethic is its *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness), Rose states, which legitimised one's worldly vocation, demonstrating but never earning salvation. The Protestant form of inwardness correlates with the transition from the Reformation's form of asceticism to the artificiality and aesthetics of the Baroque era: 'They are also correlated with the transition from

⁶⁷ Caygill, Howard, 1998. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge), p. 51

⁶⁸ Rose, Gillian, 1993, *Judaism & Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell); see also in Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), 1998. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart)

⁶⁹ The theory to link the Reformation and Luther to the emergence of Fascism and the Third Reich is not new. The theory that Germany went down a "Special Path" (Sonderweg) – as opposed to the other European enlightened states - into the Third Reich, however, bears its problems, if only to exculpate the German state and its citizens from any kind of active involvement because they were "predestined" to go along that path of history.

the end of politics in the spirit of capitalism to aestheticised politics in the spirit of Fascism.⁷⁰

In a section of the *Trauerspiel* under the heading 'Doctrine of Salvation' (Rechtfertigungslehre) Benjamin writes:

The great German dramatists of the Baroque were Lutherans. While in the last decades of the counter-reformative restoration, Catholicism, with its entire strength, penetrated the profane life; Lutheranism was positioned antinomic to every day life. The rigorous morality of bourgeois life-style which it taught was opposed by its turning away from the »good deeds«. In denying them the specific spiritual miracle effect, by referring the soul to the mercy of the belief and by making the world-stately realm to a trial of an only indirect religious life, meant, for the demonstration of bourgeois virtues, it had established in the people the strict obligation of duties but in the great the melancholy.' (GS I, 1, p. 317)⁷¹

Both Benjamin and Gillian Rose have not taken into account that, in Lutheran Protestantism, the question of justification by faith has never become an ethical question: The ethical context of deed and consequence, the connection of the perpetrator to his deed, has never lost its validity; it remains in force: It refers 'the soul to the mercy of one's belief'. Whereas Catholicism penetrates the profane life, the Lutheran belief takes away all of its strength and

⁷⁰ Rose, Gillian, 1998. Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*, Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 88

⁷¹ 'Die großen deutschen Dramatiker des Barock waren Lutheraner. Während in den letzten Jahrzehnten der gegenreformatorischen Restauration der Katholizismus mit der gesammelten Macht seiner Disziplin das profane Leben durchdrang, hatte von jeher das Luthertum antinomisch zum Alltag gestanden. Der rigorosen Sittlichkeit der bürgerlichen Lebensführung, die es lehrte, stand seine Abkehr von den »guten Werken« gegenüber. Indem es die besondere geistliche Wunderwirkung diesen absprach, die Seele auf die Gnade des Glaubens verwies und weltlich-staatlichen Bereich zur Probstatt eines religiös nur mittelbaren, zum Ausweis bürgerlicher Tugenden bestimmten Lebens machte, hat es im Volke zwar den strengen Pflichtgehorsam angesiedelt, in seinen großen aber den Trübsinn.' GS I, 1, p. 317

power; gloominess sets in and finally melancholia, Benjamin maintains. 'Justification by faith alone' does not justify any unscrupulous action; the Lutheran doctrine of salvation does not separate signification from salvation. The instrumental rationalisation of the world is more a product of progressive science than an outcome of loss of salvation.

C. Hope for Redemption and Salvation

In his interpretation of the Baroque age and its use of the Allegoria (*Trauerspiel*), Benjamin describes the turning from melancholy into hope, from break-off as destruction into break-off as redemption, from desperation into consolation. The prohibition to depict denies the representation of a positive conception of hope, salvation and consolation. Until the end it refers to the absorption into melancholia, destruction and desperation:

This time of hell becomes secularised in the room and that world which surrendered and gave itself to the deepest spirit of Satan, is that of God. In God's world the allegorist awakes. ... Therewith the allegory looses everything that belonged to her as the most characteristic: the secret, privileged knowledge, the tyranny in the realm of dead things, the supposed infinity of the emptiness of hope. All this scatters with one complete turning, in which the allegorical immersion has to vacate the last phantasmagoria of the objective and in which it finds itself, now solely thrown back on its own resources, not playfully in the material world but seriously in heaven. This precisely is the nature of melancholic immersion that her last resources, in which it believes to be the most assured of the depraved, turn into allegories; that they fill and deny the void, in which they portray themselves; as at the end the intention not

faithfully endures in the sight of the mortal remains but unfaithfully jumps across to the resurrection'⁷². (GS I, 1, p. 406)

In this Benjaminian notion of redemption, redemption figures not as fulfilment and culmination of the history of progress but as its break-off. It cannot function as the meaning of the totality of history, only as its end. For Benjamin's thinking, the confrontation between the notion of history's fulfilment as the completion of a development - with the Messianic notion of end, of breaking-off, of standstill - is decisive. It is the notion of breaking-off which predominates the idea of history's meaning. The need for redemption in light of the human catastrophe seems so immense that 'the question of the reality and unreality of redemption itself hardly matters'⁷³.

What if the enlightening concept of the gradual victory of religion over reason remained illusion? What would the position of the Now be in humanity's history of religion? Benjamin's theses *On the Concept of History* fight against despair by thoroughly destroying the illusion of linear and natural progress only to recognise the past in such a way that its contents become prophecies of and for the future. Theology is not understood as a means to legitimise or to differentiate political action, but newly to grasp the concept of revelation as a

⁷² 'Denn auch diese Zeit der Hölle wird im Raume säkularisiert und jene Welt, die sich dem tiefen Geist des Satan preisgab und verriet, ist Gottes. In Gottes Welt erwacht der Allegoriker. ... Damit freilich geht der Allegorie alles verloren, was ihr als Eigenstes zugehörte: das geheime, privilegierte Wissen, die Willkürherrschaft im Bereich der toten Dinge, die vermeintliche Unendlichkeit der Hoffnungsleere. All das zerstiebt mit jenem *einen* Umschwung, in dem die allegorische Versenkung die letzte Phantasmagorie des Objektiven räumen muß und, gänzlich auf sich selbst gestellt, nicht mehr spielerisch in erdhafter Dingwelt sondern ernsthaft unterm Himmel sich wiederfindet. Das eben ist das Wesen melancholischer Versenkung, daß ihre letzten Gegenstände, in denen des Verworfenen sie am vollständigsten sich zu versichern glaubt, in Allegorien umschlagen, daß sie das Nichts, in dem sie sich darstellen, erfüllen und verleugnen, so wie die Intention zuletzt im Anblick der Gebeine nicht treu verharret, sondern zur Auferstehung treulos überspringt.' GS I,1, p.406

⁷³ Adorno, Theodor, 2000. *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso), p. 247

purely theological one, to re-develop a language that combines life and judgement. Benjamin demands of his reader more than the enlightened understanding of the realm of God as a purely symbolic expression of final victory of good over evil. The Messianic redemption has to be understood in a strict theological context as something beyond a moral concept of finality and conclusion: '*Trauerspiel*' – and I would like to argue with Rose that Benjamin's entire *oeuvre*

in its extreme allegorical forms demands a theological understanding not an aesthetic one, but this theology would be a dynamic theology of history, not "a guaranteed economics of salvation"⁷⁴.

'By dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward the sun which is rising in the sky of history' (IV. Theses)⁷⁵. This is Benjamin's precondition to the idea of the realm of God in which the past turns towards the sun, which is rising in the sky of history. In yet another of his allegorical pictures Benjamin gives us the precondition for the coming of God's realm: only if the clouds of the epoch's self-consciousness have parted can the Messianic sun shine. In the *Theological-Political Fragment* Benjamin had claimed the profane could not be a category of the Messianic realm, only of its most silent coming. Now, in the theses *On the Concept of History*, Benjamin puts the profane into concrete terms of historical struggle, the struggle of the classes for raw and material things, which in their rawness and materiality become essential. Here, the thinking about the Messianic realm becomes concrete: it is the realm of the one who not only comes as the redeemer but also 'as the subduer of Antichrist',

⁷⁴ Rose, Gillian, 1998. Walter Benjamin – Out of the Source of Modern Judaism. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 98; Rose quotes from the '*Trauerspiel*', GS I,

⁷⁵ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 246

as the subduer of the one from whose powers of deception not even the dead will be safe (VI. Thesis).

History cannot relate itself to the Messianic; God's realm is not its immanent end. The relation of history to the Messianic can only be established by the Messiah. The order of the profane and God's realm have to be understood as profoundly different entities. Benjamin radically distinguishes not only the realm of God and the world but emphatically marks out the asymmetry in their radical difference. The Messiah's action is the condition for a possible relation of the two; it can neither be anticipated in humanity's fortunate moments nor in its end. The absence of Messianic force in history is totalised in the complete a-historicity of the Messianic.

'In Fortune all earthly things strive for their end, but only in fortune it is destined to find its end'⁷⁶ (GS II, 1, p. 204). Only with the destruction of the profane could the profane actually promote the coming of the Messianic realm. If, however, the order of the profane is restored solely in the idea of fortune, the coming of the Messianic realm can be established only in its end, which the profane desire for happiness was aiming at right from the beginning. Then, so Benjamin maintains, politics of nihilism and the destruction of fortune do not count as categories of the realm but one of 'its most silent approach'⁷⁷ (GS II, 1, p. 204) – drowned out only by the storm which is blowing away the Angel.

Would the Messianic fulfilment or completion of history only be possible in a thorough break from the world, thus provoked and made possible by the destruction of the world? Can redemption be seen as destruction of history and thus as restitution of pure spirit? Spirit is only restored through the destruction of

⁷⁶ 'Denn im Glück erstrebt alles Irdische seinen Untergang, nur im Glück aber ist ihm der Untergang zu finden bestimmt.' *Theologisch-Politisches Fragment*, GS II, 1, p. 204

⁷⁷ 'seines leisesten Nahens': GS II, 1, p. 204

world and life; suffering is terminated through the extinction of life and not through its curing or through the restitution of spiritual and physical integrity. Where is the indepictable, transcendent God? The God of creation who saw at the end of his work that his creation was good?

What remains is the provocative awareness that every Future marks a work of destruction of the past and that it, at the same time, places the code of inner dissolubility within the present. In historical moments of existential danger, this remembering, this state of awareness, breaks open and flashes up as salvation, as redemption. Should the moment be missed, history would sink into the irretrievability, and the present would loose itself in stagnation, domination and power. Catastrophes make history collapse into constantly new orders with all the elements of chance, exteriority and inaccuracies. Like the Benjaminian kaleidoscope, where everything changes with every turning - the images full of facets are differently composed - history collapses into constantly different formations and images: 'History disintegrates into images, not stories.' (GS V, 1, p. 596)⁷⁸. The concept of catastrophe, like the kaleidoscope, is the mirror of the dominating ideas of order and structure. Its destruction, the kaleidoscope's destruction, would be the first revolutionary action (see 'Zentralpark' in GS I, 2).

Only the radical separation of the realm of God from history makes an understanding possible where the world's destruction can be read as redemption. Suffering in the world will be removed through the elimination of life, not through a curing salvation. Ultimately, Benjamin's understanding of the Creation is positive and gives an affirmation to humanity's claim to happiness – the nihilistic mediation of God and world in the world's destruction is moved towards the Messianic intervention in the break-off of its catastrophic progress. Any interruption of the catastrophe implies the possibility of salvation:

⁷⁸ 'Geschichte zerfällt in Bilder, nicht in Geschichten.' GS V, 1, p. 596

'like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.'⁷⁹

– like the

'conception of the present as the 'time of now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time'⁸⁰.

The difference between the recalled past and the 'past charged with the time of the now'⁸¹ (XIV. Thesis) was decisive for Benjamin's thinking. The 'today', the 'now', which in the constructions of the history of the empty homogeneous time is always reduced and minimised to the already vanished point, becomes, in the Messianic history, the at-any-time-possible moment in which 'Eingedenken'⁸², political action and breaking-off of the continuum coincide as redemption.

History's Angel is bestowed with ultimate melancholia, contemplating the destruction of the world – and he only came to announce the silent approach of the Messiah. He wants to stay to awaken the dead, to make whole that which has been smashed; but he cannot. Upon the realisation of his inability and impossible task, shock and melancholia set in and are reflected in the Angel's face - that is what the expression of his gaze means: shock, horror and despair upon what he sees; the wish, the longing to interfere, to change the course of history; the despair and pain upon the realisation of the impossibility of such a task. The Angel cannot remain, and the further away the storm blows him, the more his eyes widen in horror. The Angel resembles another Benjaminian image; like the Baudelairian onlooker Benjamin's Angel of History cannot

⁷⁹ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 246

⁸⁰ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 255

⁸¹ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 253

⁸² The term 'Eingedenken' is difficult to translate; 'Eingedenken' is more of a concept of action, of active remembering, so I decided to work mainly with the German word.

interfere, he becomes an utterly helpless witness painfully enduring the sight of death and destruction. The Angel cannot redeem, for history's victims have no redeemer in this world. However, Benjamin's Angel, sent by God and attesting to humanity, bears witness and hope to the redeemer's silent approach– and in the space of his mission the Angel is good.

The disappearance of the history of the sufferer and of the oppressed in history's laws is a triumph over the victims. Benjamin's Angel embodies the protest against any kind of triumph over the victims. Hope is there but not for the fulfilment, but for the breaking-off of the history of suffering. It can never be hoped that the suffering fulfilled any purpose or meaning or might prove to, but that it comes to an end. At the end of the Book of Job the purpose or meaning of Job's suffering is not unfolded, only its end. It recounts the end of this one suffering; therewith partially, in concrete utopian terms, it describes that all suffering might come to an end. Benjamin clearly defines theology's role as hope and longing, very much so in the sense of Horkheimer's understanding of theology as 'expression of a longing, a longing that the murderer might not be triumphant over the innocent victim'⁸³.

⁸³ „Ausdruck einer Sehnsucht, einer Sehnsucht danach, daß der Mörder nicht über das unschuldige Opfer triumphieren möge.“ Horkheimer, Max, 1970. *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag), p. 62

2. *Eingedenken: the Memory of the Nameless*

A. Deserted and Betrayed by Memory

In his *Aufzeichnungen und Materialien* (Notes and Details) on the *Passagenwerk* (Arcades Project) Benjamin resumes the question of the incompleteness of history, which Max Horkheimer had propounded to him in a letter of 16th March 1937:

The statement of incompleteness is idealistic if the completeness is not included in it. Past injustice happened and is finished. The stroked dead really are dead ... If we take the incompleteness seriously we have to believe in the Last Judgement ... Perhaps there is, in relation to the incompleteness, a difference between the positive and the negative so that only injustice, terror, the sufferings of the past are irreparable. Fulfilled justice, happiness – these works relate differently towards time because their positive character is widely negated through its transience. At first this applies to the individual being in which not fortune but misfortune is sealed through death.

Benjamin then continues with his refutation of Horkheimer's theory:

The corrective of these trains of thought lies in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and no less a form of 'Eingedenken' (mindful remembering). What science has »proven«, 'Eingedenken' can modify. 'Eingedenken' can make the unfinished (happiness) into something finished, and the finished (suffering) into something unfinished. That is theology; but what we experience in 'Eingedenken' prevents us from understanding history in a fundamentally atheological manner, just as it excludes its being written in purely theological concepts.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ ,Über die Frage der Unabgeschlossenheit der Geschichte Brief von Horkheimer vom 16 März 1937: "Die Feststellung der Unabgeschlossenheit ist idealistisch, wenn die Abgeschlossenheit nicht in ihr aufgenommen ist. Das vergangene Unrecht ist geschehen und abgeschlossen. Die

Benjamin's concept of 'Eingedenken' needs to be seen and read as a Messianic sign against the context of anti-enlightened barbarism. 'Eingedenken' directs the view onto history in which its continuous horrors and a concept of the present as 'Jetzt-Zeit' are combined equally, because 'fragments of the Messianic are sprinkled in'⁸⁵. For Benjamin there can be no such thing as 'progress' in relation to historical time; he asserts its possible abolition in the sign of the Messiah who 'every second could be entering through this small gate'⁸⁶. Within the momentum of 'Eingedenken' the event of the Messiah's coming and his actions are never part of knowledge. Benjamin's concept of 'Eingedenken', in its manner towards history, is identical to the direction of the coming Messiah, Ottmar John confirms.⁸⁷ The universal concept of happiness asserts everybody's – including the dead's – entitlement to redemption in the

Erschlagenen sind wirklich erschlagen ... Nimmt man die Unabgeschlossenheit ganz ernst, so muß man das jüngste Gericht glauben ... Vielleicht besteht in Beziehung auf die Unabgeschlossenheit ein Unterschied zwischen dem Positiven und dem Negativen, so daß nur das Unrecht, der Schrecken, die Schmerzen der Vergangenheit irreparabel sind. Die geübte Gerechtigkeit, die Freuden, die Werke verhalten sich anders zur Zeit, denn ihr positiver Charakter wird durch die Vergänglichkeit weitgehend negiert. Dies gilt zunächst im individuellen Dasein, in welchem nicht das Glück, sondern das Unglück durch den Tod besiegelt wird." Das Korrektiv dieser Gedankengänge liegt in der Überlegung, daß die Geschichte nicht alleine eine Wissenschaft sondern nicht minder eine Form des Eingedenkens ist. Was die Wissenschaft »festgestellt« hat, kann das Eingedenken modifizieren. Das Eingedenken kann das Unabgeschlossene (das Glück) zu einem Abgeschlossenen und das Abgeschlossene (das Leid) zu einem Unabgeschlossenen machen. Das ist Theologie; aber im Eingedenken machen wir eine Erfahrung, die uns verbietet, die Geschichte grundsätzlich atheologisch zu begreifen, so wenig wir sie in unmittelbar theologischen Begriffen zu schreiben versuchen dürfen.' GS V, 1, p. 588/9

⁸⁵ *Illuminations*, 1999. p. 255

⁸⁶ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 255

⁸⁷ John, Ottmar, 2000. Walter Benjamin: Zwischen Gnosis und Messianismus. In Valentin, Joachim & Wendel, Saskia (eds.), 2000. *Jüdische Tradition in der Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p. 67

reflecting action of 'Eingedenken'. In view of the suppressed past, this universal concept of happiness holds onto the entitlement of redemption, but the concept remains an abstract one. In the 'Eingedenken', understanding is directed towards the very place where happiness will happen in the form of universal salvation: in the life of the unhappy and of those destroyed through human deed and guilt. The hope that is effective in the Benjaminian concept of 'Eingedenken' is given to the hopeless.

Ernst Bloch's remarkable characterisation of the term 'forgetting' shows a close and significant immanence to the Benjaminian theory:

If remembering (Erinnerung) presupposes that something has been forgotten, forgetting altogether marks the failure where and against which remembering and hope as reflection ultimately meet. As far as the failure of forgetting is concerned, remembering appears as admonition and hope as Eingedenken [mindful remembering]; both are united in utopia in relation to consciousness and knowledge of a refraining, of a not-done, of a to-be-done. Forgetting is not the antithesis of remembering, since remembering's antithesis would be a total failure, one where nothing is affected, where no admonition has its place, to which no way of reflection can lead. For the same reason forgetting is also no antithesis to hopeful 'Eingedenken'. Rather, forgetting is a modus of remembering as well as 'Eingedenken'; it is that very deficiency which in memory is called desertion, and in 'Eingedenken' is called betrayal. Thus forgetting is lack of faithfulness and not a faithfulness against something that has waned/ceased to exist, but against something that is not settled. Forgetting of such utopian standing becomes apparent within remembering - if it is made objective, if it is shown at objects - as the horror of admonition not to have dealt with, not to be taken up, not to be picked up along the road: in this executed remembering of catching up, everything decayed then appears like a deserted lover, every sea devil so to speak as a severe sin of omission. Forgetting within remembering could also want to communicate itself to the primeval beginning of the Nothing in such a way that in it there exists a crime that has never been reflected on, that has never been put right, and after which the whole world, that has

formed since then, is penetrated by it, a dungeons which is unbroken until reflection succeeds.⁸⁸

Bloch clearly marks out that forgetting, remembering and hope ultimately meet. Within forgetting, remembrance is there to make us aware and to warn us; hope stands for the 'Eingedenken' of the dead. Forgetting is the very desertion and betrayal of the history of the sufferer and the deed. Forgetting as part of our memory marks the betrayal of that which has not been settled, of that which has not been reflected on. This is a very important aspect of Bloch's and Benjamin's thought which has relevance to the current problems of working-through and coming-to-terms in Germany: there are no ways to make good and atone the indescribable suffering, pain, torture and death that has been inflicted on others during the historical event which is known to us now as the Shoah. We tend to suppress such negative experiences, especially if we have no direct

⁸⁸ Bloch, Ernst, 1977. *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie*, Gesamtausgabe XIII (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 282: 'Wenn Erinnerung voraussetzt, daß etwas vergessen worden ist, so ist Vergessen insgesamt die Unterlassung, woran und wogegen Erinnern und Hoffen als *Besinnung* sich letztthin begegnen. Vom Ausfall Vergessen her erscheint Erinnerung als *Mahnung*, Hoffnung als *Eingedenken*; beides ist im Gewissens-, Wissensbezug auf ein Unterlassen, Unbesorgtes, zu Besorgendes utopisch geeint. Das Vergessen ist kein Gegenteil des Erinnerns, denn dessen Gegenteil wäre vollkommener Ausfall, einer, an dem gar nichts betrifft, an dem keine Mahnung statthat, zu dem überhaupt kein besinnender Weg führen kann. Das Vergessen ist aus gleichem Grund auch kein Gegenteil des Hoffnungs-Eingedenkens, vielmehr: Vergessen ist ein Modus der Erinnerung wie des Eingedenkens, ist jenes Defizien, das im Gedächtnis Verlassen, im Eingedenken Verrat heißt. Vergessen ist also Mangel an Treue und wieder nicht einer Treue gegen Erloschenes, sondern gegen Unabgegoltenes. Vergessen diese utopischen Rangs macht sich in der Erinnerung, wenn es objektiviert, an Objekten erscheint, als ein Grauen der Mahnung kenntlich, nicht besorgt, nicht mitgenommen, nicht am Weg aufgehoben worden zu sein: jedes Verrottete sieht in dieser mitvollzogenen Aufholens-Erinnerung dann aus wie eine verlassene Geliebte, jeder Seeteufel sozusagen wie eine schwere Unterlassungssünde. Vergessen in der Erinnerung kann sogar auf den Uranfang des Nichts ausstrahlen wollen, dergestalt daß darin ein nicht zur Besinnung gebrachtes, nicht gutgemachtes – Verbrechen vorliegt, wonach die gesamte seitdem gewordene Welt davon durchdrungen und ein bis zur gelingenden Besinnung unaufgebrochener Kerker.'

biographical experience but only 'know' of it. It takes the conscious attempt and action to reach beyond death and murder to remember, as the theologian Helmut Peukert confirms:

Communicative action as remembering solidarity with the innocently murdered, then seems a statement of reality which saves the other, who acted historically, from extermination (through forgetting).⁸⁹

The idea of abolishing all suffering seems a twisted and distorted notion in view of past and present historical events. However, in view of Benjamin's notion of history it can only be wrong to accept that suffering unalterably belongs to the existence of humanity. Like the Book of Job, Benjamin rejects any false reconciliation; there can be no legitimising of suffering, no reason, no necessity and no purpose of it. Only constant admonition and reflection will open up the incarcerated and suppressed memory and will give way to hope of a possible break-off of all suffering:

Like the cleansing storm before a clap of thunder, God's wrath roars in the storm of forgiveness through history to sweep along everything that should be consumed forever in the lightning of the divine weather. What is said in this picture ought to be clearly expressible in concepts: the significance of time in the economy of the moral world, in which it not merely effaces the traces of the misdeed (Untat), but also through its duration – and beyond all

⁸⁹ Helmut Peukert in Körner, Klaus, 1992. *Verlorenes nur was uns bleibt. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin* (Leipzig: Reclam), p. 149: Kommunikatives Handeln in erinnernder Solidarität mit den unschuldig Vernichteten erschiene dann als die Behauptung einer Wirklichkeit, die den anderen als den, der geschichtlich gehandelt hat, vor der Vernichtung (durch Vergessen) bewahrt.

remembering and forgetting – leads in a most mysterious manner to forgiveness, although never to reconciliation. (GS VI, p. 98)⁹⁰

For Benjamin, the spatial continuum of time always entails a moral dimension. It is important that an effort or attempt is made to encourage restoration and reinstatement; yet the very effort can never find its end or fulfilment. What if God's storm of forgiveness is blowing so hard that the bearer of his news, the Angelus Novus, cannot stay? What if his herald, upon viewing the human catastrophe, is so shocked that he forgets to close his wings so that the Messianic news does not reach humanity?

Ernst Bloch asked infinitely more of the concept of 'Eingedenken' than mere remembering. History, he claims,

cannot be evoked by memory alone, unless the categories of relations of effectiveness and inner-historical values are joined by the continuation of life, the state where finally one self and the entity is affected, the truest "reprint", the productive scheme of 'Eingedenken'. ... The dead return - in the new doing as well as in the newly announced context - and understood history, which is subjected to continuous revolutionary concepts, made into a legend and investigated, never loses its function in its wealth of witness in relation to revolution and apocalypse. It is a hard, dangerous journey, a suffering, a wandering, an erring, a quest for the hidden 'Heimat', full of tragic disruption all the way through;

⁹⁰ 'Wie der reinigende Orkan vor dem Gewitter dahinzieht, so braust Gottes Zorn im Sturm der Vergebung durch die Geschichte, um alles dahinzufegen, was in den Blitzen des göttlichen Wetters auf immer verzehrt werden müßte. Was in diesem Bild gesagt ist, muß sich klar und deutlich in Begriffe fassen lassen: die Bedeutung der Zeit in der Ökonomie der moralischen Welt, in welcher sie nicht allein die Spuren der Untat auslöscht, sondern auch in ihrer ganzen Dauer – jenseits allen Gedenkens und Vergessens – auf ganz geheimnisvolle Art zur Vergebung hilft, wenn auch nie zur Versöhnung.' GS VI, p. 98

boiling, broken with cracks, eruptions, lonely promises, discontinuously loaded with the conscience of light.⁹¹

The Angel of History wants to 'awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed' (IX. Thesis). Would that not imply the end? Only the one who remembers has the gift to arouse the spark of hope that is imbued with the idea not to let the victor destroy the memory of the dead, their continuity of life in the 'Eingedenken'. What are we to do when the loneliness between the graves, in the midst of the overpowering anonymous dead, becomes unbearable? Not at any moment do I wish to imply that Benjamin asserts that history can be written in purely theological terms. Theology is part of historical re-cognition, but it is theology which turns the un-finished state of happiness, in the process of

⁹¹ Bloch, Ernst, 1977. *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*, Gesamtausgabe II (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 14: 'Folglich ist die Geschichte mit Erinnerung allein nicht heraufzubringen, gesellt sich zu den Kategorien der Wirksamkeits- oder noch innerhistorischen Wertbeziehung nicht auch noch das Weiterleben, das schließliche Selbst- und Allbetroffensein, der eigentlichste „Neudruck“, das produktive Schema des Eingedenkens hinzu: als unbetrügliches, essentielles Gewissen für all das Ungeschehene, uns ewig Gemeinte, Unbetretene, geschichtsphilosophisch wohl zu Betretende im bereits Geschehenen, im sinnlos-sinnvollen Gemenge, in der wirren Durchkreuzungs- und paradoxen Führungssumme unseres Schicksals. Die Toten kehren, wie im neuen Tun, so im neuanzeigenden Sinnzusammenhang wieder, und begriffene Geschichte, gestellt unter die fortwirkenden revolutionären Begriffe, zur Legende getrieben und durcherleuchtet, wird unverlorene Funktion in ihrer auf Revolution und Apokalypse bezogenen Zeugenfülle. Sie ist ... harte, gefährdete Fahrt, ein Leiden, Wandern, Irren, Suchen nach der verborgenen Heimat; voll tragischer Durchstörung, kochend, geborsten von Sprüngen, Ausbrüchen, einsamen Versprechungen, diskontinuierlich geladen mit dem Gewissen des Lichts.' – The concept of 'Heimat' bears its problematic. Edgar Reitz' successful film 'Heimat' (shown on German TV autumn 1984) consciously investigates that concept, perhaps only to make aware of what is lost or what changes it had undergone. The author Peter Weiss in search for the place where his autobiography could have started, retrospectively realised that all the places he visited 'become blind spots and only one place ... remained ... it is the place for which I was destined but which I could escape'. Auschwitz is understood as the anti-place par excellence; here it is understood as the negation of the possibility of 'Heimat'. quoted after Körner, Klaus, 1992. *Verlorenes nur was uns bleibt. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin* (Leipzig: Reclam), p. 151

'Eingedenken', into something finished, and the finished state of suffering into something which has not finished. In some ways, Benjamin's work is describing is the dimension of human recognition and recognisability.

In his Annotations to the Arcades Project, Benjamin writes:

All historical knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) can be represented by the image of a pair of scales where one pan is weighed down by the past, the other by knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) of the present. While the facts assembled in the former can never be too numerous or too insignificant, the latter may, however, contain only a few heavy, massive weights. (GS V, 1. 585)⁹²

The image of the scales does suggest a balance between historicism and the task of the materialist historian. They are the scales of justice: historical justice to the past and political justice to the present, as Irving Wolfarth suggests⁹³. Benjamin employs the image – the allegory – to remind the historical materialist that he not only needs to employ the service of theology (as his first thesis suggest), but he also must make use of some forms of historicism.

Historicism is necessary in so far as it accumulates obligatory data. But in his entire writings, one can detect Benjamin's criticality towards *Erkenntnis*, what knowledge is, what exactly it is that we know, what in the relation to (the sheer horror of) the actual event Shoah we can know, what we can know if we are not directly biographically involved. For my research into the relation of memory and history in current German consciousness, Benjamin's writings become important

⁹² 'Jede geschichtliche Erkenntnis läßt sich im Bild eine Waage, die entsteht, vergegenwärtigen und deren eine Schale mit dem Gewesenen, deren andere mit der Erkenntnis der Gegenwart belastet ist. Während auf der ersten die Tatsachen nicht unscheinbar und nicht zahlreich genug versammelt sein können, dürfen auf der zweiten nur einige schwere, massive Gewichte liegen'. GS V, 1, p. 585

⁹³ Wolfarth, Irving, 1998. The Measure of the Possible, the Weight of the Real and the Heat of the Moment: Benjamin's Actuality Today. In Marcus, Laura and Nead, Lynda (eds.), 1998. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 24 f.

in so far as they allow a conclusive examination of the possibilities and impossibilities of knowledge which, at the same time, never lose sight of the 'project of remembrance' – the 'Eingedenken'. It is this 'Eingedenken' that the third generation after the Shoah in Germany needs to hold onto because only in it lies 'hope for the sake of the hopeless'. In his last sentence of his theses *On the Concept of History*, Benjamin explicitly marks out the one condition that 'Eingedenken' has: he qualifies 'Eingedenken' as a specific mode of expectation of the Messianic realm, of the most silent approach of the Messiah.

B. Mourning and Guilt: Benjamin qua Benjamin⁹⁴

As I will develop in the following chapters, the matters of mourning and guilt are of primary importance for the question of remembering the Shoah in Germany today. In his essay *Fate and Character*, Benjamin marks out the inter-relation between fate and character, the context of guilt in relation to happiness and suffering. Andrew Benjamin closely examines the Benjaminian concept of guilt and fate in order to think through the occurrence of the Shoah – its character - and its implications for the enduring problem of coming-to-terms with the very event. Thinking the event of the Shoah thus becomes a philosophical demand.

'Is happiness, like without any doubt suffering, a constituting category of fate?', Walter Benjamin asks in 'Fate and Character' and he continues by stating that 'it is the happiness which releases the happy from the chain of fates and

⁹⁴ To distinguish the one Benjamin from the other Benjamin, I shall refer to Walter Benjamin as Benjamin and Andrew Benjamin using his full name.

from the net of its own' (GS II, 1, p. 174)⁹⁵. Benjamin makes clear that there can be only a connection between fate and guilt. Happiness is a different concern. Because happiness 'releases from the chain of fates', there can be no connection between the two. That itself places innocence outside the concept of fate:

It is essential to look for a different area [other than religion] in which nothing but suffering and guilt are valid, a scale on which bliss and innocence are considered too light and float up. This scale is the scale of justice. (GS II, 1, p. 174)⁹⁶

The laws of fate, Benjamin claims, are misfortune and guilt; law makes these into matters of the individual. It was in tragedy, as Benjamin asserts that the demonic fate is breached (GS II, 1, p. 174/5).

'Eingedenken' as an expectation thus demands a differentiation from, but also a context with, fortune-telling. Fortune-telling and 'Eingedenken' have in common that, in both, time is not understood as homogeneous and empty but eventful. But 'the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future'⁹⁷. The one who visited the soothsayer 'abdicated in favour of the guilty life within him.' (GS II, 1, p. 176). Benjamin insists that the 'context of guilt' is '*uneigentlich* (uncharacteristically) temporal' and thus 'different from the time of redemption, or of music, or of truth'. In Benjamin's understanding, fate places deed and its inherent consequence into the context of a guilty person. Fate is part of human

⁹⁵ 'Ist das Glück, so wie ohne Zweifel das Unglück, eine konstitutive Kategorie für das Schicksal?' – 'Das Glück ist es vielmehr, welches den Glücklichen aus der Verkettung der Schicksale und aus dem Netz des eigenen herauslöst.' GS II, 1, p. 174

⁹⁶ 'Es gilt also ein anderes Gebiet zu suchen, in welchem einzig und allein Unglück und Schuld gelten, eine Waage, auf der Seligkeit und Unschuld zu leicht befunden werden und nach oben schweben. Diese Waage ist die Waage des Rechts.' GS II, 1, p. 174

⁹⁷ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 255

ontology – historically and temporally. Benjamin claims that there is no relation between the concept of fate and the concept of innocence:

Fate shows itself in the contemplation of life as a condemned one, basically as one that was condemned first and as a result became guilty. Goethe sums up the two phases in the following words: "You let the poor man become guilty". Law does not impose punishment but guilt. Fate is the guilt context of the living. This corresponds to the natural condition of the living, to the totally disintegrated illusion from which the human is so transposed that he could never totally immerse in it but under its powers could remain invisible only in his best part. (GS II, 1, p. 175)⁹⁸

It is the illusion of continuity and myth that holds its power over the 'natural condition of the living'. Sheer life within the human takes part in natural guilt and suffering by virtue of illusion (GS II, 1, p. 175). Andrew Benjamin understands this introduction of illusion as the turning-point of experience and repetition:

Illusion here can be understood as the forgetful turning away from happiness where experience becomes no more than the re-experience of the already experienced. It is important to note that what is at stake here is a particular construal of repetition – one in which forgetting may come to play a constitutive role.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ „Das Schicksal zeigt sich also in der Betrachtung eines Lebens als eines Verurteilten, im Grunde als eines, das erst verurteilt und darauf schuldig wurde. Wie denn Goethe diese beiden Phasen in den Worten zusammenfaßt: „Ihr laßt den Armen schuldig werden“. Das Recht verurteilt nicht zur Strafe, sondern zur Schuld. Schicksal ist der Schuldzusammenhang des Lebendigen. Dieser entspricht der natürlichen Verfassung des Lebendigen, jenem noch nicht restlos aufgelösten Schein, dem der Mensch so entrückt ist, daß er niemals ganz in ihn eintauchen, sondern unter seiner Herrschaft nur in seinem besten Teil unsichtbar bleiben konnte.' GS II, 1, p. 175

⁹⁹ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate: Walter Benjamin's 'Fate and Character'. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*, Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 142

According to Benjamin, the soothsayers allow for a contemporaneity of times but that could only be 'a dependent time which relies on the time of a higher, less natural life like that of a parasite' (GS II, 1, p. 176). It is at such a moment, as Andrew Benjamin observes, that the future could be brought into the present; but although present, the future could never be co-present. From Benjamin's fortune-teller we learn that one time can be made contemporary with another – this is why the future constantly exists on a 'higher, less natural' level. Only here could the Messiah most silently approach, opening the small garden gate to a new, different spatial time behind the contours of our garden.

Fate is the 'guilt context of the living'. Fate is not owned by a single human, Benjamin claims: 'Basically it is not the human being who owns fate, but the subject of fate is undeterminable' (GS II, 1, p. 175). It is, however, precisely this concept of fate that becomes important for the project of memory in Germany:

Guilt appears in its being forgotten; in its being that which emerges in its transcendence by the work of character. What this means is that guilt is not part of either history or temporality as merely given, a posited provision. It is rather, and more emphatically that guilt is the expression of a history and a temporality.¹⁰⁰

But, as we have seen above, guilt appears in its 'Uneigentlichkeit' – inauthentic temporality - as Andrew Benjamin notes. This time (of fate) can be made contemporary, at any moment, with another time. However, this time has no present; and past and future it knows only in characteristic modifications (GS II, 1, p. 176). It is not the fortune-teller's status that gives them access to the future. The 'less natural life', as the continuity of history, makes the Messianic time a constant possibility. The fortune-tellers make predictions within the life of fate as the continuity of history. The future exists on a different level and is

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 145

radically different to the present. The present is marked by a persistent continuity. It is the work of mindful remembrance ('Eingedenken') that makes an approach to the future and the past possible. Only 'Eingedenken' can fulfil the task of thinking a relation between present, past and future.

Thus, Andrew Benjamin reopens the question of remembering, its demand for the present and its implications for the future in relation to the Shoah. What are the implications of Benjamin's concept of fate and guilt in relation to the memory process in Germany? Andrew Benjamin confirms the importance of such a connection in relation to the question of remembering and thinking the Shoah:

In sum it is that remembering, perhaps uniquely, is linked to disruption. Here the larger question will be the remembering of that whose disruption precludes any simple reiteration of continuity. It is only refusal – which will work as a type of forgetting – coupled to actual forgetting, that will allow the effect of the Shoah to be effaced. As its effect would involve thought and thus the possibility of thinking, refusal and forgetting would combine in sustaining continuity's reiteration. The disruption, the break up of that seamless present, is to be undertaken in order that it be remembered and therefore that the Shoah's consequences for thinking come to work through the demand that it be thought. As such memory and work will be part of that which constitutes the present. Part of tracking this movement demands holding together both the necessity of the task as well as that which makes it possible. The latter is the necessity yet complex interrelation between thinking and remembering.¹⁰¹

Andrew Benjamin is linking the Benjaminian form of remembrance and mindfulness to vigilance and as such it takes on a political, even ethical dimension; remembrance is no longer constituted of a simple form of memory. Paul Klee has painted another angel: the Angel of Vigilance who, like Gillian Rose's Angelus Dubiosus, watches the viewer, stares at us with wide open,

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 146

empty or hollow eyes. Unlike Gillian Rose's angel, however, the Angel of Vigilance does not 'hide' behind enfolded wings. Like the Angel of History, the Angel of Vigilance attests to humanity, bears witness, and is sent by God; there is no desperate or forced clasping of wings; the Angel of Vigilance stays with humanity, endorsed with the same inability to amend and to awaken the dead; it helplessly watches and consoles, yet is prepared to watch and make sure 'that Auschwitz¹⁰² will not repeat itself, that nothing similar will happen.'¹⁰³

In *Other than Identity*, Juliet Steyn observes that

the ghosts of the past and the future haunt every present. It is only in traces and ruins of some other possible reality that we can perhaps escape the totalitarian power of the whole. Those that do not remember are compelled to repeat. Remembering enables a going-beyond (in so far as a going-beyond necessitates a working through, a repetition).¹⁰⁴

In relation to the Shoah repetition involves a continuity that works beyond the confines of mourning. Only vigilance can distance the necessity of mourning, of loss and absorption, thus working against the act of forgetting that would be put in place by absorption.

¹⁰² Lyotard points to the problematics of "Auschwitz" as a sign for something that cannot be determined, when he writes: 'The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be ... The silence that surrounds the phrase, *Auschwitz was the extermination camp* is ... the sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined ... The indetermination of meanings left in abeyance, the extermination of what would allow them to be determined, the shadow of negotiation hollowing out reality to the point of making it dissipate, in a word, the wrong done to the victims that condemns them to silence – it is this ... which calls upon unknown phrases to link onto the name of Auschwitz.' Lyotard, Jean-François, 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 13/4

¹⁰³ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 365

¹⁰⁴ Steyn, Juliet (ed.), 1997. *Other than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 2

Mindful remembrance, so Andrew Benjamin suggests, frees hope which, so far, had been aligned with either mourning or melancholia. For that reason I would like to argue with Andrew Benjamin that the planned memorial in Germany could reflect memory in one form or the other. It might even show a form of mourning. However, the temporality of the monument and the finality of mourning stand in direct opposition to the 'eternity of remembrance' I am proposing, as Andrew Benjamin observes:

The major problem with the structure of mourning is the simple implausibility of the argument for an infinite mourning. Linking mourning to the infinite rids mourning of whatever specificity it may have.¹⁰⁵

As will become clear from a reading of the writings of Freud and the Mitscherlichs in the concluding chapter of this thesis, mourning in relation to the Shoah is a necessity. Andrew Benjamin affirms that this necessity involves holding on to mourning's pathos, the feeling of sympathy for suffering and pain. Yet mourning cannot be reduced to the state of pathos as such; pathos is one possibility which has to be kept alive. True mourning resembles some kind of mindfulness and remembrance as it involves the act of participation. Mourning is the precondition for the relation of distance and space; only this gap over the abyss allows for the necessity to negotiate the ineliminable presence. Mourning as a means of thinking the questions of the Shoah marks

a participation that affirms not only the presence of relation but its necessary irreducibility; opened as marking the continual opening of the site of vigilance.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate, p. 154, footnote

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 147

What Andrew Benjamin is describing here is the endless state of mourning over the abyss of time and space. In relation to the Shoah, mourning, first of all, is necessary; a priori it prevents mediation and resolution; and only because such accommodation is eliminated, an affirmed distance is allowed for; only within this space and distance is room given to negotiate. Mourning no longer finds itself in a position of delimitations; rather, it affirms the irreducibility of distance. This irreducibility, the distance as such, places a new emphasis on the relation of mourning and vigilance:

The shift in the register of mourning means that while it is not the direct consequence of vigilance – in the strict sense that it would only be possible and therefore only allowed because of the presence of vigilance – the same maintained opening must be sustained in each. Giving way to remembrance, memory causes the former to emerge as an insistent question. The necessity of remembering is never in question.¹⁰⁷

Andrew Benjamin's reading of Benjamin does not allow for answers or explanations of the inadequacy of the world, of reasons for suffering, pain and death. Andrew Benjamin only affirms the theological aspects of Benjamin's concept of history in his statement of hope. The impossibility of remembrance's finality in relation to the Shoah - its enduring presence - makes hope in relation to it possible. I would go so far as to claim that it is hope which fosters the enduring necessity and need to remember. Mourning in the presence of vigilance will be a form of active – 'affirmative' – remembering and

in the absence of its self-enclosing finality maintains hope in the present since hope will have become linked to securing remembrance; securing in and as part of the present. Hope will be

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism* (London: Routledge), p. 68/9

inevitably connected therefore to the maintained presence of the possibility of present remembrance.¹⁰⁸

However, as Andrew Benjamin insists, there is no connection - and there never can be a connection - between Shoah and hope. Hope exists but only in relation to the Shoah. Hope is 'sustained by the affirmed sundering of continuity'¹⁰⁹. The necessity to think the Shoah, its necessary remembrance, relates to hope; and it is this hope that makes a future possible. The hope for redemption is possible because, as we have seen, in this world the victims have no redeemer – hope is there for 'its silent approach, every second of time through the straight gate':

Hope is sustained by the affirmed sundering of continuity. The Shoah, however, in forcing the thinking of that which works beyond the confines of an inclusive and therefore predictive history, and thus eschewing continuity, is not hope. What after all would be continuous with the Shoah? Within what universal would it form a part, even diremptively? Hope exists in relation to the Shoah. What this entails is that, in its having to be thought, the consequence of that demand is the possibility of thinking hope.¹¹⁰

'Present hope' affirms an incompleteness. Only the break-off of universal history incorporates the hopeful implementation of its redemption, Benjamin claims. With the Shoah there can be no continuity; continuity lies in its uninterrupted demand of having to be thought. For Andrew Benjamin, the Shoah's occurrence renders invalid any plain formulations of historicism and thus enforces a constant re-working – therein lies the possibility of thinking hope. Within this category of hope, time is put on hold – it flashes up in the

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate, p. 147

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 148

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 148

moment of danger. Here, according to Andrew Benjamin, hope is given an ontological dimension:

Reworking hope such that what is central is the hold of time and its interarticulated mode of being entails that its presentation no longer has an automatic and unequivocal ethical or moral dimension, one which would, by its very nature, necessitate approval.¹¹¹

What causes some of the problematics is the fact that the occurrence of the Shoah needs to be thought in the first place: 'The difficulty is thinking its specific impossible possibility.'¹¹² This demand is still met with disapproval and rejection in Germany. I am not at all convinced that in Germany the fear prevails that the past as a *pars pro toto* might be forgotten, as Gidon Reuveni asserts¹¹³. More importantly, I think, in the current debates seems to be a focus on the question of what exactly it is that is remembered or forgotten. As we have seen, such a refusal to engage in the thinking of the questions of the Shoah comes close to its rejection and denial. Benjamin's theory on historical time and 'Eingedenken' allows for reworking of past events by relieving time of any soothsaying. To remember in the Benjaminian notion means to position 'Eingedenken' in an association of distance. The continuity of mindful remembrance – Andrew Benjamin's present remembrance - holds on to the possibility of recognition of truth, of the abolition of historical time in the Messiah's silent approach – a remembrance charged with vigilance. Here remembrance can be linked to hope. Intrinsic to the 'Eingedenken', however, is that it is open; there can be no momentum of closure.

¹¹¹ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope*, p. 69

¹¹² Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate, p. 153

¹¹³ Reuveni, Gideon, 1998. Zukunft ohne Vergangenheit!? Geschichte und nationale Identität in Deutschland und Israel. *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 3, 1998, p. 221

Andrew Benjamin demands a connection of thought and thinking to the Shoah, which seems problematic in so far as the Shoah seems to be standing at every possible limit, if not beyond¹¹⁴. But precisely because historicism seems to be without any valid foundation, we need ways and modes of thinking, and a re-working of the occurrence of the Shoah. Otherwise we could be caught up in the dangers of rendering the singularity¹¹⁵ of the Holocaust absolute:

The trap of the absolute is exposed by the necessary presence of the relation of non-relation. Furthermore, pure singularity, because of the relation between positing and existing, will always lend itself to occlusion or absorption. The problem of absorption that threatens is more complex than it seems. Not only is there the necessity of maintaining a remembering excluding absorption – there is also the real possibility that it is the faithful who may forget.¹¹⁶

What are the implications for a memory process in the country of perpetrators if indeed the limits are reached or even transgressed? What could be said then? The philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, in his book *The Differend*, sees Auschwitz as the end of all historical process and reason when he argues that, looking from today, one could sense that some great, massive disaster had struck but that it was so distant and foreign that no one can adequately articulate it¹¹⁷. In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno writes that 'after Auschwitz there is no

¹¹⁴ See for example: Saul Friedlander (ed.), 1992. *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press)

¹¹⁵ The Shoah might show similarity to other historical events in as far as it 'demands knowledge', data can be applied and concluded. It is, nevertheless, radically dissimilar, as Andrew Benjamin remarks because 'the question of its prediction; its being the work of fate; its having been known in advance reduces it to the status of a moment in historical time; a flicker in the passage of continuity.' Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. *Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate*, p. 153

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 149

¹¹⁷ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 56

word tinged from on high, not even a theological one, that has any right unless it underwent a transformation.'¹¹⁸

It is the silence that the crimes of Auschwitz have imposed on traditional historicism, the un-presentability of its occurrence and the impossibility of comprehension and cognition that make Benjamin's concept of history a possibility.

¹¹⁸ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 367

3. Representing the Un-Known: the Monument

What are the conditions for re-cognition and remembering? Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' extensively discusses the abolition of autonomous art. This secular cult of beauty developed during the Renaissance to prevail only for the next three hundred years (*Illuminations*, p. 217). When art was separated from its basis in cult (through mechanical reproduction), the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever (*Illuminations*, p. 220). His thesis that art escaped the realm of beautiful appearance, Benjamin explains with the changed status of the work of art and its altered reception. The period of singularity and duration is typical for the autonomous work of art. Fleeting time and repetition - instead of singularity - shatters the aura and creates the 'sense for the similar in the world'. Aura is identified as 'unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be' (*Illuminations*, p. 216). With the shattering of 'aura', the symbolic structure of the work of art shifts such that the sphere decays and is not only released from the material process of learning and experience but is also opposed to it.

The philosopher Jürgen Habermas identifies a 'redemptive criticism' in Benjamin's writings that employs a self-understanding method:

His [Benjamin's] criticism of art relates to its objects conservatively, whether it is a question of the baroque Trauerspiel, Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, or Soviet film of the early twenties. It aims at the "mortification of the works"; however, criticism effects the mortification of the work of art only in order to

transpose that which is worthy to be known from the medium of beauty to the medium of truth – and thereby to rescue it.¹¹⁹

At stake here is the same 'metaphysic of redemption' Benjamin has been elaborating on in his theses *On the Concept of History*. This impulse to be rescued, to be saved that we have also encountered informs Benjamin's historio-philosophical theses. The continuum of history consists of the permanence of the unbearable - progress is the eternal recurrence of catastrophe. Benjamin's criticism intends to destroy the work of art only to transpose it from the medium of beauty to the medium of truth - and thereby to save it. The work of art as an autonomous, independent entity is degraded by the philosophical insight of the criticism; the historian Richard Wolin claims that the 'dead', historical, 'material content' of the work is negotiated until the connection to redemption is brought into the open through its true content:

Works of art are objects that originate in a determinate, fleeting moment in time but transcended that limited, historical point of origin in order to reveal something supra-historical: the image of truth.¹²⁰

The historical relation of the work of art is marked by a duality where final and ultimate recognition or understanding cannot be known, where a momentum beyond experience sets in:

¹¹⁹ ,Seine Kunstkritik verhält sich zu ihren Gegenständen konservativ, gleichviel ob es sich ums barocke Trauerspiel, um Goethes Wahlverwandschaften, Baudelaires *Fleurs du Mal* oder den sowjetrussischen Film der frühen zwanziger Jahre handelt; sie zielt zwar auf »die Mortification der Werke« (Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels), aber die Kritik übt am Kunstwerk eine Abtötung nur, um das Wissenswürdige aus dem Medium des Schönen ins Medium des Wahren zu transportieren – und dadurch zu retten.' Habermas, Jürgen, 1997. *Bewußtmachende oder rettende Kritik: Die Aktualität Walter Benjamins. Politik, Kunst, Religion* (Stuttgart: Reclam), p. 57

¹²⁰ Wolin, 1994, p. 30

The Schein des Scheinlosen, the appearance of that which cannot appear, the emergence of something infinite, the truth, from something that is man-made and finite, a work of art.¹²¹

If, however, rescue in form of critique fails to appear and consequently forgetting sets in, Benjamin explains that the enemy who threatens the dead as well as the living, has remained the same: it is the domination of myth and fate. We can wrest only fragments of experience from fate, from the continuum of empty, homogeneous time for the actuality of the Now. But Benjamin asserts that these fragments - the debris - form the decisive part of that vanishing tradition and history. In the part entitled 'Epistemological' of his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin observes that art and its historical relation follow a similar pattern:

In every true work of art there is the place from which it blows on the one who immerses himself in it, chillingly like the wind of an approaching morning. From this follows that art which has often been understood as refractive towards any relation of progress, can serve as its true definition. Progress is not at home in the continuity of the course of time but in its interferences: there where the true New makes itself felt for the first time with the sobriety of the morning.¹²² (GS V, 1, p. 593)

In view of the escalating danger, for Benjamin the programme of aesthetic had been rendered useless that sought to ensure opposition to Fascism by viewing the social reality that Fascism creates as a work of art. Redemption, which has its source solely in the reflection of suppression, hands the viewer over to that from where redemption is supposed to redeem.

¹²¹ Wolin, 1994, p. 30

¹²² 'In jedem wahren Kunstwerk gibt es die Stelle, an der es den, der sich dareinversetzt, kühl wie der Wind einer kommenden Frühe anweht. Daraus ergibt sich, daß die Kunst, die man oft als refraktär gegen jede Beziehung zum Fortschritt ansah, dessen echter Bestimmung dienen kann. Fortschritt ist nicht in der Kontinuität des Zeitverlaufs sondern in seinen Interferenzen zu Hause: dort wo ein wahrhaft Neues zum ersten Mal mit der Nüchternheit der Frühe sich fühlbar macht.' GS V, 1, p. 593

In his V. Theses *On the Concept of History*, Walter Benjamin draws a picture of the constellation between present and past that is important for our investigations into the questions of remembering the Shoah:

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again ... For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.¹²³

The danger lies in the disappearance of the Shoah from the landscape of memory and remembrance, that forgetting sets in. But what form of representation can remembrance have? How do we remember when there are no witnesses any more, nobody to testify? How should this form of remembrance be presented? What are the specificities – if there are any - of memory and remembrance in the German project? How do we keep hold of that image? How do we recognise it in the first place? Now it is important to investigate how far one can re-present the image of the past as something present. What present constellations allow for the 'image of the past' to be 'recognised' as part of the present? What role do time and memory play to allow for the images to be recognised? 'Mindful remembrance' is linked to vigilance; as such it is more than mere memory because it takes on the political and ethical dimensions that concern the present. We have seen that, in relation to the Shoah, thinking must continue as a re-working of memory - a repetition within memory linked to vigilance.

Andrew Benjamin's concepts of 'present hope' places some importance on the relationship of remembrance and knowledge, the relation between epistemology and memory. For the context of the thesis, I will explore some of

¹²³ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

the problems that arise from the questions of what can be known. What does memory know? The possibilities of knowledge will inevitably reach a limit, they are finite. Representation, the work of art and language, re-presents the limits of knowledge but, at the same time, opens up the limits within which knowledge is confined. The question regarding the knowledge of what took place concerns the representation of what is known; Andrew Benjamin confirms: 'Representation represents the known'.¹²⁴ Within art, the question of representing the known or un-known is paramount: it is the understanding and conception of the event that comes to be re-presented and thus to be the representation. Because it is art that, according to Benjamin, will come to transcend and, in transcending it, will redeem the fallen world.

'There are neither monuments for, nor ones marking out, what shall henceforth be called present remembrance.'¹²⁵ How do we remember correctly? What role does the ontological category of Benjamin's affirmation of hope play in relation to presenting remembered things? For Andrew Benjamin 'the extent to which tradition already contains the resources to deal with any subsequent occurrence' is to be discussed'¹²⁶. Does the 'German' tradition contain any resources to deal with the occurrence of the Shoah? What would they be? What if this very 'tradition' allowed for the occurrence in the first place, as it has often been argued? What are the implications for its remembrance if the occurrence essentially was implemented by the very culture and tradition that tries to 'remember' and to 'come to terms' now?

There would be a monument but not one that demanded its own thinking. Monuments will never be sufficient for remembrance. In

¹²⁴ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate: Walter Benjamin's 'Fate and Character'. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 136

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 148

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 155, footnote 14

general terms the problem of tradition and its relation to memory (accepting the initial generality of these terms), as it pertains to both philosophy and theology, emerges at this precise point.¹²⁷

What is at stake is the (im)possibility of a relation between representation and remembrance. The present, as it is given in the relation to the past, is the decisive component for the form remembrance takes on. Yet, the link between past and present itself is not given; it has to be established through the abolition of all continuous thought of time. Benjamin clearly demands the active engagement of 'Eingedenken'. There is a relation between the limits of representation and active practices of remembrance. How then could we do justice to Baudrillard's claim that 'what haunts the system is the symbolic demand'¹²⁸?

Despite more than fifty years of post-war history that seem to prove the opposite, I would like to stress the possibilities of memory and remembering in the active form of 'Eingedenken' for a country of perpetrators. At stake is a concept of knowledge, a link between the epistemological and memory, as Andrew Benjamin points out when asking the question: 'What does memory know?'¹²⁹. Knowledge and, with it, language - as knowledge's representation - will always reach a limit. It is representation that could establish or open up such a limit. Andrew Benjamin asserts that to know what happened always engages the question of how to present that which we know: 'Representation presents the known'¹³⁰.

Art - in its various forms - might re-present part of the process of 'Eingedenken'; problematic, of course, are its limits of re-presentation. The question of art's possibility and power of representation in the era of mass death

¹²⁷ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope*, p. 70

¹²⁸ Baudrillard, J., 1975. *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos), p. 147

¹²⁹ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. *Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate*, p. 135

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 136

cannot be ignored: 'Could a sculpture entail the Shoah?'¹³¹. We must also consider the temporal and spatial presence of such a sculpture. In many ways art archives history, but, perhaps in art, the nameless dead from history may return - full of experience to tell their story. To start the search for the future in artistic terms means to give in to fear and mourning, to desperation and promise; and to open the path for hope as a quote from the past which is inherent in the future¹³².

It is worth noting that such a demand to remember will be met by a complexity of responses. As we have seen from the reactions to the various designs of the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, the different reactions carry within them the index of complex religious, philosophical and political traditions. To speak of a 'national memory' that was going to be re-presented in the memorial, means to take into account the complexity of memory handed down through the various traditions. Andrew Benjamin makes clear that in relation to the Shoah there can be no necessary link between remembrance and representation or the monumental; the problematics lie in the acceptance of an absence of such a necessary link. There can be no such link because, as established above, there is no foundation on which to base that which becomes represented. Andrew Benjamin insists that the occurrence of the Shoah needs to be thought in the first place:

what will always have to be retained is the question of it as an occurrence for thinking. Remembrance is inscribed therefore in the very process of which its own formulation ... forms a part. It is

¹³¹ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope*, p. 104 + 112

¹³² Rachel Whiteread claimed to have struggled with similar feelings and emotions during the competition for the Holocaust Memorial in Vienna and the subsequent erection of her design, *Observer* 29 October 2000.

precisely the impossibility of an outside that implicates philosophy in the practise in which it takes place.¹³³

The image of the past that becomes to be recognised in the present as part of it will always be more than mere memory. The occurrence of the Shoah demands a remembrance. Benjamin's writing is of paramount importance as it tries to incorporate the philosophical, the political and the theological in order to achieve an all-inclusive historical picture. This mode of thinking history and thus thinking the questions of the Shoah is opened up through his writings.

We view a façade, a spectacle, a canvas, a screen, in whose glance the baroque reflects upon itself. Caught in history, guaranteed by nothing but its own death, this sensibility extracts a sense of being from a continual dialogue with its limits. Its purpose lies within itself: the erotics of the gesture, the designed frustration of form and function that supplements and subverts the closure of logos and makes of language an event whose artificial, historical, truth echoes throughout the grammar of the baroque.¹³⁴

It is in the Benjaminian Baroque, Chambers argues, that the past time is observed and identified and thus preserved for the present. In its recognition of life and death, of temporality and mortality, the Baroque marked out the limits of the two different worlds. Benjamin exerts that only through the 'melancholia' is a connection between these two extremes possible: the fusion of the rational and the un-representable. If, as it was argued above, the Shoah stands at every possible limit - the limits of understanding, representation, the very limit of the rational – would that not mean that we had to re-introduce the melancholic into our existence? What would the implications be if we accepted and lived with the *Melancholia* Benjamin discovered in the Baroque?

¹³³ Benjamin, Andrew, 1998. Shoah, Remembrance and the Abeyance of Fate, p. 150

¹³⁴ Chambers, Iain, 1998. History, The Baroque and the Judgements of the Angels. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 173

According to Benjamin, the Baroque was able to 'release a tragic vision of the world' and thus redeemed the truth of human existence, mortality and suffering. In naming the past and recovering it for the present, in its mindful remembrance (*Eingedenken*), the Baroque mourned that which seemed forever lost but simultaneously celebrated the *Now* (*Jetzt*). Along the lines of life and death, along the borders of two different worlds, certainties are re-formed and reversed.

In his essay *History, the Baroque and the Judgements of the Angels*, Iain Chambers draws a comparison between the different architectural and musical creation of the Baroque age:

A (sombre) dissonance hovering over the formless abyss that lies at the bottom of being, pulls us down through the sound to release a tragic vision of the world and a (musical) redemption of the truth.¹³⁵

In his view, the seemingly frivolous ornamentations and embellishments of Baroque music – as of all Baroque art – are its necessary foundations, the 'essential point towards which the work strives'¹³⁶. It is the very embellishment, in the creation of dissonances and frivolous disorder, that fosters an infinite sense of loss: the notion of resolution in the sheer endless embellishments seems to destroy any symbolic form and function. In the midst of decay and ruin we are faced with the incomprehensible and the infinite. Chambers argues that Benjamin recognises, in the Baroque's artistic creation, humanity's insatiable desire for transcendence, for fulfilment - for the ultimate, metaphysical truth. It could be argued that in relation to thinking the Shoah there is precisely this longing for metaphysical, mightiest truth, that informs all thinking of the Shoah

¹³⁵ Chambers, Iain, 1998. *History, The Baroque and the Judgements of the Angels. The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 174

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 174

until today. The planned Holocaust memorial in Berlin might be perceived as 'a dissonance' over Germany's – and humanity's - abyss of being. For how long can such a 'dissonance' be taken in, be 'listened' to? The musically trained ear would long for its resolution.

Benjamin discovers, in the Baroque's artistic creations, the refusal to acknowledge the given and the persistence of its order; the Baroque addresses humanity's mortality and its inaccessibility to ultimate truth: in the artistic display of the Baroque Benjamin finds the reason to transcend life as a mere appearance, to accept the transient moment of being.

From that very moment on, when Germany claimed and considered itself to be caught in its own history, to be subjected to the very changes of historical uncertainties, Germany discovered a terrible freedom. Even in post-war Germany now, the silence of the untranslatable was (and is) forced to bear witness to the dangers of amnesia. The awareness of temporal limits could open up a space that returns to inhabit our present. The Baroque's refusal to give up that which is lost, the perpetual mourning which continues across the 'abyss of time' raises questions and creates an opening - the very crack in the essence of our knowledge.

In the preface to *The Origin of the German Mourning Play*, Benjamin addresses the problematics of *Darstellung* (re-presentation); how to present something which is not given, such as, historical truth. For Benjamin it is clear a priori that the ultimate truth eludes our knowledge; it is not accessible to us. In some ways, presentation is the attempt to find truth for something that cannot be sought. For that reason, something that cannot be communicated - not mediated - is presented in the re-presentation. To present something involves using a language that, according to Benjamin, never ceases to communicate.

Truth can never be our personal property; it is not restricted to our intentions. Speaking with and through Benjamin, truth is something that both

grants and escapes us - it is discontinuous. The ephemeral past, apparently lost forever, returns to create a new understanding of the immediate present in order to open a path towards the future. The newly created space in the language and time makes another history possible and with it an alternative future which means that each historical moment reveals a new opening of possibilities not yet taken. Historical time thus permits and demands a re-membering. His theses *On the Concept of History* represent a process of remembering, bridging the past with present sense of loss, mourning and vigilance. Perhaps Jürgen Ebach is right when he demands that we need to learn about the possibilities of narrating suffering, pain, torture and humiliation and their termination without forcing causality and purpose onto it; because the price we would be paying for such legitimising, for enforcing such a framework of causality, necessity and purpose is, according to Benjamin, the price of deception and fraud. Perhaps we need to accept that 'mindful remembrance' and mourning might leave us hovering over the abyss - like the Baroque's dissonance – of dialectical uncertainties where a resolution is not possible.

'Artifice, as sublime meaning for and on behalf of the underlying, implicit non-being, replaces the ephemeral'¹³⁷, Julia Kristeva claims. With the fall from God's grace and the expulsion from Paradise, a profound sense of loss befell humanity; the loss of ultimate truth. In a world of incomprehensible and infinite disorder the desire for transcendence, for knowledge of the ultimate (metaphysical) truth becomes paramount. Chambers states that, for Benjamin, only the Baroque, with its ornamentation and embellishments, was able to acknowledge the absurdity of such desire:

¹³⁷ Kristeva, Julia, 1989. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 99

the acknowledgement of the image in and for itself, of the temporal construct of the artifice, of the simulacrum, 'implies the closure of metaphysics and the complete acceptance of the historical world'.¹³⁸

Benjamin claims that there are no answers to these questions; they cannot be answered even if we want them to be. He points to 'a world's condition in which these questions have no place because their answers, far from providing explanations, lift them away'¹³⁹.

Kafka in his poetry, Benjamin explains, never tried to make a virtue of the necessity to provide answers. Instead, Kafka aimed for a redeeming conclusion. The little hunchback Odradek is, according to Benjamin, the form of disfigurement and distortion which things in need of 'Eingedenken' take on:

The strangest bastard which the prehistoric world has begotten with guilt in Kafka is Odradek ... Odradek is the form which things assume in oblivion. They are distorted ... These Kafka figures are connected by a long series of figures with the prototype of distortion, the hunchback ... In the Penal Colony those in power use an archaic apparatus which engraves letters with curlicues on the backs of guilty men, multiplying the stabs and piling up the ornaments to the point where the back of the guilty man becomes clairvoyant and is able to decipher the writing from which he must derive the nature of his unknown guilt. It is the back on which this is incumbent. It was always this way with Kafka. Compare this early diary entry: 'In order to be as heavy as possible, which I believe to be an aid to falling asleep, I had crossed my arms and put my hands on my shoulders, so that I lay there like a soldier with his pack.' Quite palpably, being loaded down is here equated with forgetting, the forgetting of a sleeping man. The same symbol occurs in the folk song 'The Little Hunchback'. This little man is at home in distorted life; he will disappear with the coming of the Messiah, of whom a great rabbi once said that he did not wish to change the world by force, but only make a slight adjustment.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Chambers, Iain, 1998. History, The Baroque and the Judgements of the Angels. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 176/7

¹³⁹ Scholem, Gershom & Adorno, Theodor W. (eds.), 1966. Walter Benjamin: *Briefe*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Fischer), p. 614

¹⁴⁰ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 129/30, GS II, 2, p. 431/2

- the little hunchback as the inmate of distorted life. Benjamin says of Kafka that he is stirring in the depths which neither mythic premonition or theology have ever entered into. But for this Benjamin delivers a theologically well-founded reason: 'No other writer has obeyed the commandment 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image' so faithfully.'¹⁴¹

It is the theological dimension, deprived of public recognition, that Benjamin credits with the power to distinguish times so that past, present and future are not empty homogeneous dimensions but characteristic of certain events. Decisive here, however, is the Jewish character of Benjamin's theological thinking: Benjamin validates for history and in history the biblical prohibition to depict. No idea is permitted to take the place of the real, the true constellation of the epoch – last of all the idea of progress. It cannot know of any completion other than fulfilment that inspires and shines on all past times.

'Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.' (GS I, 1, p. 200/201) – we cannot abandon hope even if or exactly because it is not yet fulfilled. Reality and allegory are two different categories which, nevertheless, are accompanied by each other. The Benjaminian category of Messianic expectation has to be understood as 'reality' and, at the same time, it should be read allegorically. Benjamin's praise of Kafka's work evokes some of the problematics of the Holocaust Memorial:

In the mirror which the prehistoric world held before him in the form of guilt he merely saw the future emerging in the form of judgement. Kafka, however, did not say what it was like. Was it not the Last Judgement? Does it not turn the judge into the defendant? Is it not the punishment? Kafka gave no answer. Did he expect anything of this punishment? Or was he not rather concerned to postpone it? In the stories which Kafka left us, narrative art regains

¹⁴¹ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 125

the significance it had in the mouth of Scheherazade: to postpone the future.¹⁴²

The apocalyptic and messianic expectation has to turn towards its realisation if it wants to be more than mere ideology and not serve as prevarication. At the same time it has to fight against any apparently occurring fulfilment which means to reveal the Non-Realisation, as long as there is no new world and all tears are wiped away.

But without having his house ready, without having something to fall back on, he cannot leave – this the Bible also realised ...

Benjamin then continues by explaining:

This Abraham appears 'with the promptness of a waiter.' Kafka could understand things only in the form of a gestus, and this gestus which he did not understand constitutes the cloudy part of the parables. Kafka's writings emanate from it. The way he withheld them is well known. His testament orders their destruction. This document, which no one interested in Kafka can disregard, says that the writings did not satisfy the author, that he regarded his efforts as failures, that he counted himself among those who were bound to fail. He did fail in his grandiose attempt to convert poetry into doctrine, to turn it into a parable and restore to it that stability and unpretentiousness which, in the face of reason, seemed to him to be the only appropriate thing for it. No other writer has obeyed the commandment 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image' so faithfully.¹⁴³

The prohibition to depict does not allow for any re-presentation and projection; more importantly, it forbids the worship of them as if they were God. In his essay 'Messianismus und Utopie' Jürgen Ebach writes that 'those who make their own products – whether they are materialistic, though or hoped for –

¹⁴² *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 124/5

¹⁴³ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 125

into their god and serve them, make themselves slaves to their own creation. This also happens if a utopia as a design of 'true life' takes up the domination over 'real life' and begins to form it according to its own image'¹⁴⁴. However, images are necessary especially in the context of the problematics of remembrance. The danger lies within the very claim that image and event are the same or even identical. Ebach continues by explaining that image and event cannot be separated, but that between re-presentation and fact is a strict differentiation. No re-presentation can claim totality for itself. Re-presentation and event both belong to the realm of the true and real.

Benjamin's criticism identifies in the desire for modernisation of the forms of life driven by the forces of production, the compulsive mythical urge of repetition (an urge that gets nonetheless established in a capitalistic society) – the always same within the constantly new. His criticism aims at a salvation of the past which is burdened with the time of Now; it ascertains the moment in which artistic sensibility puts on hold destiny which is disguised as progress and which encodes utopic experiences in the dialectical image – the new in the constantly same.

Benjamin asked cultural criticism to shift the beautiful into the medium of truth where 'truth is not disclosure which destroys the secret but revelation which does justice to it'¹⁴⁵ (GS I, 1, p. 211). The beautiful appearance as the necessary frame becomes replaced by the concept of aura which, in the state of decay and crumbling, reveals the secret of complex experience:

The experience of aura lies in the transference of a form of reaction common in human society to the relation of the

¹⁴⁴ Ebach, Jürgen, 2000. Messianismus und Utopie. *Kirche und Israel*, 1.00/2000, p. 83

¹⁴⁵ 'Und nur dieser kann es bezeugen, daß Wahrheit nicht Enthüllung ist, die das Geheimnis vernichtet, sondern Offenbarung, die ihm gerecht werden wird.' GS I, 1, p. 211

amorphous or of nature to man. The one who is looked at, or the one who believes he is looked at, opens his eyes [den Blick aufschlagen]. To experience the aura of an appearance, he has to invest in it so that the returns are empowered with the ability to open up his eyes.¹⁴⁶ (GS I, 2, p. 646/7)

'Aura' names the inde pictable portrayal of distance and separation. Aura's historical aspects are its decline and fall, which form part of its state of being. Aura is the 'unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be' (*Illuminations*, p. 216). It can never fully disappear despite its fading away, perishing and decline. From the very beginning, aura is identified by an irreducible element of 'taking leave', of departing and separation. However, aura returns, ready to avenge, in precisely those forms of art which Benjamin considered most hostile to it, where he, nevertheless, clearly identified its re-appearance: the film. It is aura's ability to demarcate itself which makes a return in the age of technical reproduction possible.

On the basis of the aura Benjamin develops the emphatic concepts of an experience (*Erfahrung*). With the abolition of autonomous art and the decay of the aura, access to the work of art disappears along with its cult-like distance to the viewer and also the contemplation of lonely enjoyment. However, the experience, which the cracking frame of the aura releases, was already included in the aura's experience: the metamorphosis of the object into the *Gegenüber* – the one opposite, the one facing and looking at us. In such a structure the appearing character withdraws from the distance-less grasp of the immediate. Benjamin aims at a condition in which the experience of happiness has become

¹⁴⁶ „Die Erfahrung der Aura beruht also auf der Übertragung einer in der menschlichen Gesellschaft geläufigen Reaktionsform auf das Verhältnis des Unbelebten oder der Natur zum Menschen. Der Angesehene oder angesehen sich Glaubende schlägt den Blick auf. Die Aura einer Erscheinung erfahren, heißt, sie mit dem Vermögen beehren, den Blick aufzuschlagen.“ (GS I, 2, p. 646/7)

public and common. Art's de-ritualising also risks the work of art surrendering its content of experience together with its aura, thus taking on the status of banality.

Benjamin's art theory is a theory of experience, as the title of Howards Caygill's book is suggesting¹⁴⁷. The experience of aura has burst open the auratic frame in the form of profane inspiration. Aura does not owe itself to an analysis which brings to light suppressed events, reflection is not capable of such a thing. It is gained through a re-establishment of semantics which is released, and at the same time kept, in the Messianism of great art.

In 1987 the French politician, Jean-Marie Le Pen, claimed that he had asked himself quite a number of questions:

I am not saying that the gas chambers did not exist. Personally I was unable to see them. Questions regarding this issue I have not studied specifically. However, I understand this as a detail in the history of the Second World War. ... Do you want to force me to say that this is the revealed truth which everybody has to believe in? That this is a moral duty? I claim that historians are still debating these questions.¹⁴⁸

To engage with and acknowledge the occurrence of the event of the Shoah is not a question of belief. But with regard to the occurrence of the Shoah a certain absoluteness and singularity is reached – it is not debateable.¹⁴⁹ It becomes dangerous if historical facts are dismissed as belief or myth; it meant

¹⁴⁷ see CAYGILL, Howard, 1998. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge) - What are Eisenman's and Serra's "experience" of the Shoah? Would one be able to read their "experiences" in their work of art?

¹⁴⁸ At the time of writing, Spring 2002, Le Pen was running for the office of President of State in France. Quoted after Friedlander, Albert, 1988. *Zachor – Gedenke!*. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88

¹⁴⁹ The Lipstadt/Irving trial was yet another case where it became clear that Holocaust denial is still very much a problem. See also Robert Eaglestone's book on Postmodernism, Holocaust and the Lipstadt/Irving trial.

that myth was disguised as reason, a pseudo-science wherefrom memory only can retreat, as Albert Friedlander claims¹⁵⁰. Friedlander continues by explaining that one cannot put aside the evil, the terrible and describe it as a 'detail' within personal and/or universal history – a detail which one might not be able to 'remember fully and correctly'. If it cannot be remembered to the full extent, if it cannot be written historically and described with all its facets, why should I believe it? Why should I engage with it, the German author Martin Walser demands to know.

Those who forget, who refuse to walk the path into the past in order to build a basis for their own existence, are not free but caught in the space of their own existence. In his theses *On the Concept of History* Benjamin is clear about the role of memory in relation to historical understanding: 'For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably'¹⁵¹.

Remembrance and memory are part of Jewish existence¹⁵². The biblical man and the Jew under the spell of his prayers cannot abandon memory or remembrance. Every Jewish celebration in the Bible is an invitation to remember, to re-live the historical event. One day in particular is dedicated most clearly to human remembrance¹⁵³: *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year and the day of remembrance, *yom-ha-zikaron*. Since early days this is a day of reflection and repentance, concerned with the individual and his relation to God and to his fellow men. The Creation, as an important event for humanity, is

¹⁵⁰ Friedlander, Albert, 1988. Zachor – Gedenke!. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88, p. 379

¹⁵¹ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

¹⁵² What role the occurrence of the Shoah had in relation to the self-understanding of the newly founded state Israel cannot be answered here.

¹⁵³ As opposed to God's memory: God remembers and judges the people, he remembers their deeds and brings past in relation to the future.

celebrated and remembered here. Through remembrance this event is recalled and brought back into one's own life. Humanity, through its past, is decided on for the future. Friedlander reminds us that the word "sachor" (remember!) admonishes not only the religious Jew to remember the singularity of Auschwitz but refers to 'a duty to remember the six million continuously as an essential component of their own life'¹⁵⁴.

This remembrance confirms Jewish existence; at the same time it also recalls the fact that at any time they were attacked by enemies but were rescued by God. To Gillian Rose, however, these politics of remembrance (sachor) and memory in Judaism are ambiguous:

The ancient commandment of remembrance, the annual renewal of awareness of the exilic condition and of the redemption, has the consequence of devaluing historiographical discernment in different times and places. It encourages eschatological repetition in the place of political judgement. But, for Benjamin, all political judgement is melancholic and violent.¹⁵⁵

She then continues and reminds us that, for Benjamin, the political is violent and melancholic. In Benjamin's work the Jewish commandment to remember points to a Messianic dimension of the future.

The Jewish calendar celebrates the Sabbath Sachor - the Sabbath of Remembrance, the introduction to the feast of Purim – once a year. Purim celebrates the victory over those who wanted to destroy Israel; it remembers a 'pogrom-final-solution program'¹⁵⁶ in biblical times: Lo tishkach: Do not forget!

¹⁵⁴ Friedlander, Albert, 1988. Zachor – Gedenke!. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88, p. 380

¹⁵⁵ Rose, Gillian, 1994. *Judaism & Modernity*, p. 207

¹⁵⁶ Friedlander, Albert, 1988. Zachor – Gedenke!. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88, p. 384

(Deut. 25, 17 ff)¹⁵⁷. History is lived and re-lived. Remember what happened! - *Sachor* is part of Jewish historical understanding. Gillian Rose points out that this special Sabbath of Remembrance is celebrated only once a year, because 'it is soul-destroying and destructive'. What is not to be forgotten, she claims, is that it offers 'rest from one's enemies'.¹⁵⁸

To seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger ... The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receiver ... In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it ... Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.¹⁵⁹

How can we historically – not to mention, from the Christian view point, religiously – contemplate remembrance and memory of the Holocaust? Albert Friedlander identifies the difficulties in understanding the meaning of the word "sachor": 'to remember, to say, to name, to call, to swear, to report, or: to confess one's sins.'¹⁶⁰ Also, for Charles Maier the only valid reparation in relation to the Holocaust could be a 'confessional memory'¹⁶¹.

The question that is of interest for this research and informs part of my reading of Benjamin's theory on memory is whether the occurrence of Auschwitz and the memory of it poses a problem too overwhelming and too daunting to

¹⁵⁷ Friedlander, Albert, 1988. *Zachor – Gedenke!*. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88, p. 384

¹⁵⁸ Rose, Gillian, 1998. Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*, Marcus, Laura & Nead, Lynda (eds.), (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p. 109

¹⁵⁹ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

¹⁶⁰ Friedlander, Albert, 1988. *Zachor – Gedenke!*. *Evangelische Theologie*, 48th year, 5/88, p. 378

¹⁶¹ Maier, Charles S., 1997. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), p. 160

speak of hope, let alone freedom and rescue. The memory, the act of remembrance, is supported by rites and symbols during the Jewish celebrations, memory revives and, thus, memory functions as a medium of liberation and freedom. In a way, the rites and symbols bring the reality of memory within the human senses of experience. This concept of memory and remembrance links the current present and the irretrievable past. The memory of the past brings with it the reassurance of the future, that the future is guaranteed:

Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption.¹⁶²

Swept backwards into the future, whirled around a sheer infinite load of humankind's disastrous history, Benjamin's Angel must witness to testify. He cannot stay to amend. Benjamin knew not the momentum of atonement or forgiveness on earth because it would incorporate the moment of forgetting. Though the Angel is sent by God, he himself cannot forgive. Rescue from and hope for our worldly history lies for Benjamin solely in the silent approach of the Messiah and the break-off through divine intervention. It is the dialectical image 'which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised'¹⁶³, the tension between lost and recovered times, informs Benjamin's hope for redemption. Within Benjamin's writing it is the momentum of remembrance, the reiterated memory of past events with their temporal index, their re-collection as flashing images in the time of Now, the Angel's gaze onto humanity's wretched history which enables hope and the certainty of future.

There can be no such thing as a moral duty to "believe in Auschwitz"; in order to find certainty for the future – especially as the nation of perpetrators

¹⁶² *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 245

¹⁶³ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

with a distinct plan to build a Holocaust memorial – Benjamin's theory on memory in relation to historical events can teach us how to live with the inheritance of such a horrific past under the gaze of God, a gaze which needs to be returned in the form of remembrance.

'What is must be changeable if it is not to be all', Adorno postulated in the *Negative Dialectics*.¹⁶⁴ Also, the reverse should be true: Only if that which is, is not all, can that, which is, be changed. Adorno insists on the difference between current reality and totality because that which is, is being denied to be the solely possible. If that which is, was all, the current present would become eternity and thus totality. Memory, remembering in the understanding of Benjamin's *Eingedenken* holds on to the notion that that which is, cannot be all. And hope holds on to the conviction that for the future's sake that which is, is not all. The holding on to the difference between that which is and that which was, which could be and will be formulates the difference between claim and reality – and therein lies the historical origin (Ursprung) of Messianic hope. Expectation and hope cannot be the same. The more the expectation becomes dashed, the more it mutates into hope. The dissimilarity between ideal and reality, between claim and reality generates expectation and hope. The claim is clung on to in its prolongation into the future. What, so far, has not been fulfilled, is expected to be accomplished by the coming Messianic force. This will take up the former history and will break with it. The expected and hoped for fulfilment is at the same time the expected breaking off. Idealised memory and utopian hope together dispute the present where that which is, is all. It is strict negativity which solely allows for the possibility of change, as Adorno confirms in his *Minima Moralia*:

¹⁶⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., 1998. *Negative Dialektik: Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*, Gesammelte Schriften VI (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p. 391; Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 398

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and cervices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the Messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of the opposite.¹⁶⁵

However, the danger lies in the possibility that hope might change into escapism, that the holding on to the possibility of changing the world changes into withdrawal from the world, that comfort becomes prevarication and utopia becomes illusion. How do we determine reality? Is reality the whole truth? What if the hope for the coming becomes such pure habit that the possibility of having arrived is nearly excluded? Without giving away reality, expectation and reality have to be reversed and (inter)changed. The expected becomes that which has to be assumed; so-called reality takes its place at the edge of the just-about-possible: 'That it goes on like this, is the catastrophe' (GS I, 2, p. 683). In this statement Benjamin's absolute and ultimate holding on to apocalyptic, Messianic expectation becomes clear against any perennial preservation of current affairs and against any myth of progress: 'Salvation holds on to the small crack within the continuous catastrophe' (GS I, 2, p. 683).

If monuments were built to commemorate the heroic deeds of a people or its victorious rulers, and to display a feeling of gratitude for having been spared

¹⁶⁵ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso), p. 247

a catastrophe or having survived it¹⁶⁶, then I am not aware of any memorial admonishingly reminding a nation of its historical deed and guilt. Monuments, as public display of historical triumph, were built for celebratory purposes, pomp and vanity. Long ago there were monuments of atonement by virtue of which the perpetrators had to beg pardon in the theological sense; or there were monuments of shame and guilt built to punish the perpetrators. The common denominator usually is that they were enforced onto the perpetrators by the respective victor or conqueror and that they were not built of the perpetrators' own volition. With a national Holocaust memorial in Germany, the country of the perpetrators, the stakes are high, as Jürgen Habermas reminds us:

Founders are those citizens who find themselves as the immediate heirs to a culture where this was possible - in a relation to traditions which they share with the perpetrators' generation. With their memorial they establish a reference to the perpetrators, to the victims and to their descendants.¹⁶⁷

The national memorial - a memorial which indicts the past crimes of National Socialism - is to be measured against the German political identity as a Federal Republic. Can a national memorial fulfil the task of making the murderous deeds, German deeds, between 1933 and 1945, part of a national 'responsibility'? Does a consciousness of responsibility exist? As I have tried to

¹⁶⁶ s. Introduction to *Mythen der Nationen: Ein Europäisches Panorama*, Exhibition Catalogue, Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin (Berlin, 1998) The chapter dealing with Germany and Germany's possible history as a nation starts by exploring cornerstones of Germanic/Teutonic history (whether those, however, function as cornerstones of the history of the Federal Republic, I cannot answer here): the battle in the Teutoburg Forest (9 AD), the death of the Emperor Friederich I. in 1190 AD, Luther (1520) and the Emperor's proclamation in 1871.

¹⁶⁷ Stifter sind diejenigen Bürger, die sich als die unmittelbaren Erben einer Kultur, in der das möglich war, vorfinden - in einem Traditionszusammenhang, den sie mit der Tätergeneration teilen. Mit ihrem Denkmal stellen sie gleichzeitig einen Bezug zu den Tätern, zu den Opfern und zu deren Nachkommen her. Habermas, Jürgen, *Die Zeit*, 1 April 1999

identify in the previous sections, with regard to Germany's political identity the murderous past constituted and still constitutes (part of) the identity-forming process, if only subconsciously.

As citizens of the country we do take an interest in the darkest chapter of our history, Habermas hopes, especially in regard to a critical ascertainment of our own political identity. But as we have seen in the previous chapters, the memory of the guilt, the remembrance of the deeds was only marginally instrumental in forming current German identity; it could not have been fully instrumental since the process of working-through - of mourning linked to mindful remembering and vigilance - has hardly been given a chance. Yet, Jeffrey Herf is not the only one to claim that the remembrance of the genocide is undoubtedly linked to the political self-communication of the contemporary generation, especially as expressed by the political party currently in power which

more than any other has courageously been fighting to relate national honour, decency and self-consciousness in the post-Nazi Germany to a raised remembrance of the Holocaust.¹⁶⁸

What are the motives behind the planned Holocaust memorial in Germany? Is it the 'moral obligation' to remember the post-war generation sees itself burdened with? Is it the nation's and/or government's need for 'atonement'? Or is it plainly a display of vanity? Vanity, in the sense of self-justification that the sons and daughters of the perpetrators feel the need to provide the public - national and international - with a recognised display of 'political correctness'; vanity in the sense that the current generation in power

¹⁶⁸ Eine Partei, 'die mehr als jede andere tapfer dafür gekämpft hat, nationale Ehre, Anstand und Selbstbewußtsein im Deutschland nach der Nazizeit mit einem herausgehobenen Gedenken an den Holocaust zu verbinden'. Jeffrey Herf, Traditionsbruch, *Die Zeit*, 13 August 1998

needs to prove that it took more than fifty years, the German re-unification and a new generation to remember 'correctly'. I am inclined to believe that there is a double edge to the memorial and memory process in Germany. I am not disputing that there might be a genuine deep felt necessity to 'remember' the Shoah, the unutterable, horrible crime committed in the name of and by the Germans. The necessity to think the questions of the Shoah, of which mindful remembrance is part, were established above. To remember one's own guilt and deed is understood as an impossible task, as I have established in the concluding chapter. I would like to argue that the planned memorial marks a post-war generation's 'vanity', a longing to be remembered for the future as the generation who has not forgotten, who was prepared to take on the burden of their parents' deed, and who accepted the moral obligation - a generation prepared to 'face the past'. Even if the moving spirit behind the memorial plans seem not as much a genuine wish to remember the "pile of historical debris" as it seems to be a generations need to be itself remembered for its conscious, morally righteous differentiation and demarcation from what was before, it does not render the planned memorial superfluous. It is the political, social, and perhaps even theological response to the demand that the questions of the Shoah had to be thought. As such, the national memorial is - to speak with and through Benjamin - the re-presenting part of mindful remembrance ('Eingedenken'). No doubt, on its own, representation is not enough, but linked to vigilance and mourning it will enable the work of remembrance.

II. The Haunting Sense of Beauty

This chapter will be looking at the (im)possibilities of memory in relation to the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The development process of the memorial will be examined from the first idea and proposal through to the chosen design, and from the first (failed) competition through to the parliamentary debate that voted for the current design. The chapter discusses the possibilities and impossibilities of the two winning designs that the 'Findungskommission' decided on, and the two proposals that were finally put before Parliament.

Underlying the examination is the prevailing question that Andrew Benjamin asked: 'Could a sculpture entail the Shoah?'¹⁶⁹ The possibilities and impossibilities of the various designs, the scopes of artistic creativity and expressiveness in view of the Shoah are examined. The implications of dedication and inscription are placed against the possibilities of language and its limits. The plans of a national 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' are discussed in view of the complexity of issues at stake in the German remembrance process that have filtered through from the readings in the first chapter. The monument and the accompanying debates provide valuable information and insight into the historical conscience and social consciousness of current German society at large and well document the history of reception of the re-presented historical event. We will be looking at the usefulness of the monument/memorial as a tool for the building and stabilisation of historical constructs. The choice of the monument's site and the scale of the design are considered against the importance of the event that comes to be re-presented.

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope* (London: Routledge), p. 104

Likewise, any inscription and textual dedication will lend interpretation to the past event that is being remembered.

When examining the artistic design and the metaphors and symbols used, the question of condensation in analytical terms and elevation of history through monuments will be discussed. Those groups which erect monuments are driven by very different motives and are warranted with different instruments of political, financial and social powers. So the political and social agendas and motives that drive the decision-making process are part of what might constitute 'national memory'.

Extensive media coverage for over a decade has created a huge public interest and awareness in what is known generally as the 'Holocaust-Mahnmal'¹⁷⁰. In the German language there are two different expressions to describe such a monument: Denk-mal and Mahn-mal. A 'Mal' is a sign or symbol that marks something, anything. The 'Denk-mal' is a sign which invites or requests the onlooker to 'think', to recollect, and to remember; it takes the meaning of a monument. The 'Mahn-mal', on the other hand, reminds, warns and admonishes. The German word 'mahnen' means to remember a guilt and to demand a redemption of this guilt. A 'zentrales nationales Mahnmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas' is a 'central, national memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe': Mahnmal is translated as memorial - thus a memorial erected as a warning, an admonition to future generations. The choice of the medium of the Mahn-mal rather than the Denk-mal seems intentional and can well be interpreted as a political statement for the form of remembrance that was aimed for.

¹⁷⁰ The terminus 'Holocaust-Denkmal' or 'Holocaust-Mahnmal' was used in the debates and became generally accepted. I will continue using the terminus although its contextual point of reference to the planned 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' is far from precise. In the following I shall be referring to the concepts of 'Holocaust-Denkmal' and 'Holocaust-Mahnmal' synonymously.

Against the backdrop of German re-unification, over the course of two competitions, endless public discussions, academic debates and numerous citizen's initiatives, the notion of what constitutes national memory in the country that accepted responsibility for its father's deeds is by no means clear - if anything, it has rendered the process of identification, mourning, remembering and re-presentation ever more complicated for future generations.

For a long time the question of the possibility of expression and depiction of the Shoah was at the centre of the debates around national memory and the planned 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe'. The inadequacy, the breaking down, the surrender of language, art and science in view of the Shoah seemed the central problem. The problematics of representation, inherent in the various forms of language and art, have to be positioned against the politically motivated attempt of creating the entity of a national memory. The representability of the Shoah as such was questioned. Since conscious remembering was assumed a priori it seemed only too natural to refer to the 'unsayable' until the 'unutterable' became the alibi for many not to engage at all.

As the readings of the concluding chapter will show and with regard to future memory, a decisive change within our working-through of the past, a transposition in the possible ways of coming to terms is needed. No longer is the ability to express and to communicate the experience of the Shoah alone being questioned; in addition to that, we also have to reflect upon the forms of representation, its pre-requisites and consequences. Memories are complex matters, especially with regard to communal or national memories, as David Carroll notes in his foreword to Lyotard's 'Heidegger and "the jews"':

Memory itself guarantees nothing; it all depends on what kind of memory and how, within memory, one goes about combating the revenge the memory of injustice often calls for.¹⁷¹

The involvement of the different Federal Governments in matters of the Holocaust Memorial seems to be indicating an assumption of a national memory.

How, more than fifty years later in Germany - the country of the perpetrators -, can any memorial remind us of the genocide and the crimes of the Nazis and thus invoke the indelible guilt? Can the monstrous nature of the Holocaust be symbolised at all? Are six million murdered Jews 'reificatory'? Taking into consideration the dimensions of the historical event and its immanent impossibility for conclusion, any concept and aesthetic possibility of reflection must fail. General suspicion is mixed with the fear that the future generation will lack any *understanding* of this memorial.

The chapter does not attempt a complete presentation of the debates and of planning procedures of the memorial since these have been documented already in detail¹⁷². This chapter attempts an interpretation of the processes at

¹⁷¹ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1997. *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. ix

¹⁷² see Perspektive Berlin (ed.), 1995. *Für ein Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin: Dokumente einer Auseinandersetzung* (Berlin); Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen (ed.), 1995. *Künstlerischer Wettbewerb „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“* (Berlin); Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur (ed.), 1997. *Colloquium „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“: Dokumentation* (Berlin); Cullen, Michel S., 1999. *Das Holocaust- Mahnmal: Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Zürich: Pendo-Verlag); Rosh, Lea, 1999. *„Die Juden, das sind doch die anderen“: Der Streit um ein deutsches Denkmal* (Berlin: Philo); Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Sefrens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo); Kalbe, Riki & Zuckermann, Moshe (eds.), 2000. *Ein Grundstück in der Mitte: Das Gelände des künftigen Holocaust-Mahnmals in Wort und Bild* (Göttingen: Wallstein) et. al.

work based on a systematic analysis of Germany's major daily newspaper: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), *Frankfurter Rundschau* (FR), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (NZZ), *Tagesspiegel* (Tsp) and *tageszeitung* (taz); the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* and the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*. The choice of quotes is a sample and does not claim completeness.

More than 10 years ago, shortly before the fall of the Berlin wall, the Berlin journalist Lea Rosh called for a central, national memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. In October 1993 Helmut Kohl's government set aside a 20,000 sq. m site in the centre of Berlin. 2,000 artists and architects participated in the first competition in 1994. In June 1995 chancellor Helmut Kohl vetoed the winning design of a huge gravestone bearing the names of all known Jewish victims of the Holocaust (see Figure 2). After a second competition in 1997, open only to invited architects and artists, Peter Eisenman's original design (see Figures 3, 4 & 5) found support but Kohl requested a 'smaller, greener version' of it (to become known as Eisenman II, see Figure 6). After Gerhard Schröder was elected chancellor in Autumn 1998, the plan stalled and at the request of the new State Minister for Culture and Media Matters, Mr Naumann, who initially opposed the memorial, Mr Eisenman modified his design yet again, reducing its size and incorporating an information centre and a museum (Eisenman III, see Figure 7 & 8)¹⁷³. It involved a smaller field of gravestones (the reduced version of Eisenman II) and a large complex called 'House of Remembering' which was to consist of a documentation centre, a museum, a research establishment and a library. In October 1998, set off by Martin Walser's (in)famous speech attacking the planned memorial, a fierce debate about Germany's attitude to its post-war

¹⁷³ Henceforth, I shall refer to the different Serra/Eisenman-designs by their numerical indication.

history and its visions on the 'Berlin Republic'¹⁷⁴ started out where the entire nation, spurred on by the incredible media coverage, became involved in the questions of remembering and re-presenting National Socialism and its deeds in Germany.

Due to public and media pressure the decision on the memorial's design and form, on its site and place in the new 'Berlin Republic' was put into the hands of the Parliament. On June 25, 1999, the German Parliament (Bundestag) decided to erect a central national memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the centre of Berlin. With the move of the seat of the Federal Government from Bonn to the new capital Berlin, the new government set out to re-invent the old-new 'Berlin Republic'. Thus, after more than ten years of discussions and heated debates, a quick decision on the memorial question was sought before the move of the Parliament from Bonn to Berlin. The Bundestag voted for a design by the New York architect Peter Eisenman which was widely known as Eisenman II: a field of 2,700¹⁷⁵ concrete columns enlarged by an information centre (whose content has not yet been defined) to be built on five acres in the former no-man's land next to the Brandenburg Gate in the centre of Berlin. The costs are expected not to exceed the budget of 15m German Mark

¹⁷⁴ 'Berlin Republic' as euphemism means the united Germany with its capital Berlin. 'Berlin Republic' as such is a derogatory term, coined by the media when referring to governmental decisions regarding the Federal Republic's representation via its new capital.

¹⁷⁵ The sources come up with different numbers of columns for the reduced Eisenman design; some mention 2600 pillars, others 2700. Young even speaks of a reduction 'from forty-two hundred to three thousand'. See Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 210

(ca. £ 5.2m) and are to be paid for by the patrons, the Federal Government and the city of Berlin¹⁷⁶.

The cultural committee of the Parliament submitted only two designs for the parliament to vote on in June 1999: Eisenman II and the proposal by the theologian Prof. Dr. Richard Schröder. The proposal of the then state minister of culture, Michael Naumann, the so-called Eisenman III, was ruled out and not put before parliament. The memorial design accepted by the majority of members of the parliament was widely seen as a compromise between the two designs.

Motions for different solutions to the debate were put forward. 115 deputies were supporting the proposal not to build a memorial at all, but to offer, instead, better financial support to the already existing monuments: the commemorative site 'Topography of Terror' (Topographie des Terrors), the Gestapo Headquarters, and the 'Wannsee Villa' where the decision on the 'Final Solution' was taken; the site 'Bendler Block' remembering the resistance under the National Socialists; the former concentration camp and now a commemorative site, Oranienburg/Sachsenhausen; the Jewish Museum with the new annex by Daniel Libeskind. 161 members of parliament opted for the design of a field of concrete blocks without any information centre.

The debate was further complicated when the Berlin theologian Prof. Dr. Richard Schröder put forward an alternative proposal for a memorial with the inscription of the biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill" - in Martin Buber's translation "Thou shalt not murder" - in various languages, including Hebrew. 188 members of parliament were in favour of this proposal.

¹⁷⁶ On 25 June 1999 in the vote on the fundamental principle a majority of 439 members of the parliament (out of 669 deputies) decided in favour of a memorial in general. 314 voted for the Eisenman design. 209 were against it and preferred a different solution or were against a central memorial all together – parliamentary minutes. ⁶

This chapter looks at the implications of the chosen medium of the monument, at implicit and explicit forms and theories of memory in the monumental form of re-presenting the Shoah. I wish to identify the demand for recognition of the limits of the form of the memorial in particular. Against the backdrop of the changing political parameters of a re-united Germany, we need to thematise the chances and possibilities of these very limits and to address anew the question of 'What does it mean: coming-to-terms with the past?' when the generations to come will have no biographical links to the event that is being re-presented.

1. The Architects of National Memory – The Problematics of Intentionality

In the following I will name the various views expressed and positions taken in the memorial discussions. It has become clear that these were approached by contrary premises that were not sufficiently elaborated. Never, however, was a project of memory, as such, questioned. Questions arise - and will keep arising even after the memorial is finished - over the content of such memory: what can 'memory', in the 'country of perpetrators', consist of? The terminus 'country of perpetrators' or even 'nation of perpetrators' bears its problematics when attempting to justify the necessity of mourning and remembrance today. Exclusively to link mourning to guilt would mean to exclude the possibility of an all-embracing mourning that works beyond the confinement of groups and time. Beyond the particular remembrances and memories of different groups, it should be possible - especially for future memories - for all people to mourn together such an elementary loss. For Germans that means that historical mourning has to address the responsibility for the deeds that present a continuous part of their own – if not biographical - history. But as Andrew Benjamin asserts:

A fundamental part of mourning is the proximity of the loved object. It must be familiar, almost in every detail. It must be known, almost absolutely. What is known has to do with a body, one that touches, was touched, but now no longer reaches out; a mouth that opened, but now is silent; a body that was animated and is animated no longer. It is almost as though knowing both states of animation - from the quick to the dead - is essential for mourning. While the life in question may have been fantasmatic it could always be contrasted to death, to its own death, to its own having died. Here,

knowledge is essential. Its link to mourning is inescapable, as is mourning's dependence on the structure of knowledge.¹⁷⁷

That these questions have still not found answers is part of the ongoing remembrance process that will keep the questions of thinking the Shoah open - open to future repetition in the form of remembrance and representation.

Habermas claims, 'the ceremonial act which tries to find expression here, there is no better medium than art whose unwieldy taciturnity protects best of all from embarrassment and playing down.'¹⁷⁸ For Raul Hilberg the building of the memorial has to be a work of art but for a very different reason: 'like any building which is important to society. Of what does the building/design remind you if it is seen later? That is the central question which needs to be answered.'¹⁷⁹

Aesthetic discourses are not led with the expectation of a definite perspective onto the work of art in question because it would render it to the lost. One characteristic of modern art is its neediness for commentary. It needs translation, explanation and interpretation - a constant re-working - and only in that form is it possible as a memorial. The work of art does not accept any interpretative reading as authentic - it is far ahead of any attempt to explain. Any well-meant attempt to confine the work of art is crushed since the work of art annexes what was meant to limit: the work of art absorbs the commentaries in order to remain in need of commentary and examination. The question of the aesthetic presentation will remain controversial for good and valid reasons.

¹⁷⁷ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism* (London: Routledge), p. 20/21

¹⁷⁸ 'Aber für den Akt, der hier seinen symbolischen Ausdruck sucht, gibt es kein besseres Medium als das der bildenden Kunst, deren spröde Verslossenheit noch am ehesten vor Peinlichkeiten und Verharmlosung bewahrt'. Habermas, *Der Zeigefinger: Die Deutschen und ihr Denkmal*. *Die Zeit* (1 April 1999)

¹⁷⁹ '... wie jedes Gebäude, das für eine Gesellschaft wichtig ist. An was erinnert der Bau, wenn man ihn später sieht? Das ist die zentrale Frage, die beantwortet werden muß'. Raul Hilberg, *Tagesspiegel*, 23 April 1999

The question why a national monument to the 'Murdered Jews of Europe' should be erected in Berlin has its answers in the political, cultural and historical context. The idea of a memorial as such bears finality and conclusion; both are qua definition not appropriate to the process of mourning and remembering. So the form of a memorial as such bears its problematics in view of the issues at stake. Is the use of a monument the appropriate and correct way to approach the German process of remembering? Without any doubt, the attempts of the commemorative places, of exhibitions and of research institutions to come to terms and to work through, are invaluable. Their work is necessarily decentralised and oriented towards the historical site, on the one hand, and the formations of contemporary society on the other. The art historian James Young confirmed that it was better to have 'thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany than a final solution to Germany's Holocaust memorial problem. Instead of a fixed icon for Holocaust memory in Germany, the debate itself - perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions - might now be enshrined'¹⁸⁰. Young has given a chapter in his recent book the title 'Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem - and Mine', where he tells the story of the decision-making process on the memorial and his own involvement.

In fact, deliberations and considerations have gone far beyond the polemical debate over whether there should be a monument or not. The issues themselves have been discussed openly and vigorously for years in the press and in conferences. By now it seems that the general public and intellectual consensus have gathered around the profound need for a national 'Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe'.

¹⁸⁰ Deutscher Bundestag, Bonn 1999, p. 166; see also Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press)

The question whether this should be a memorial or a didactic space of learning has been addressed at length¹⁸¹. I believe that Germany has a crucial need for a permanent monument in addition to the many interpretative and educational institutions already in place. Jürgen Habermas wants the monument to signify that 'the memory of the Holocaust remains a constitutive feature of the ethico-political self-understanding of the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany' (Habermas, *Die Zeit*, 1999). According to Habermas it is in 'modern art' with its multi-facets, open and pluralistic readings that a work can fulfil these demands.

Ideally the memorial should reflect the present generation's cautious attempts to remember. Such a memorial site does not relieve the government from the political and financial responsibility it bears with regard to the various other memorial and pedagogical sites around the country. To ignore these sites of destruction would mean to ignore Germany's history. Ways and possibilities need to be found to use the memorial as a deliberate act of remembrance, a strong statement that memory must be created for the next generation, not only preserved, so that it is dynamic and not static and ossified. In this way the memorial works as part of an active remembrance process. What kind of memory this is does not depend on the fact that there is a national memorial, and neither does it depend on its form, nor its site or place. The meaning of the memorial's content needs to be filled with the ever-changing form of memory according to the generation in question. As such the memorial is not a purely symbolic gesture and does not completely block out history and memory from consciousness. It remains to be proven whether the chosen memorial design can actually express the problematics and impossibilities of the German remembering process.

¹⁸¹ see footnote 23

Perhaps Germany's memorial dilemma is essentially irresolvable. How does a nation of former perpetrators mourn its victims? How does a divided nation reunite itself on the memory of its crimes? Since no other nation has ever attempted to reunite itself by founding its *raison d'être* on the memory of its crimes or by commemorating its crimes in the topographical centre of its old and new capital, it cannot come as a surprise that the process itself would be inherent with difficulties.

Profound suspicion and mistrust concerning the monument was expressed in the fear that such a monument would recall aspects too closely associated with fascism itself and in the scepticism, that such a monument reminded one of 'commissioned art' (Auftragskunst) after Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini. Totalitarian regimes commemorate their achievements through art like monuments of self-aggrandizing delusions of eternal truth and permanence and authoritarian tendency to reduce the viewer to a passive spectator. How then is it possible to remember the victims of fascism in an art form like the monument? Can the doubts about the usefulness and ability of memorials as such be made visible in the chosen memorial design?

The recent debates have been enlightening, informative and insightful; yet, at the same time, the changed political parameters and the current political climate seem to have given rise to a strong Neo-Nazi movement, whose ideology aims at forgetting and denying the Nazi crimes. I agree with James Young who claims that the debates have created plenty of 'shame' in Germany; not so much shame about the crimes committed more than fifty years ago, but shame about an undignified and tasteless argument. Young further argues that academic preoccupation with the fascinating issues of the memorialising process at stake might keep the argument going. However, it also creates a certain indifference towards the memory of the mass murder of Jews and the void it left behind. James Young asks whether we really want the reunited

'Germany to return its capital to Berlin *without* publicly and visibly acknowledging what had happened the last time Germany was governed from Berlin'¹⁸². Berlin is and has been a mere construction site for the last 10 years: With all these new buildings 'could there really be no space left for public memory of the victims' of Germany's Nazi regime?'¹⁸³

But can such a memorial really remind and admonish the Germans and the world of the crimes committed, of the terrible deed of nearly erasing the Jewish culture from the German cultural landscape and consciousness? James Young remarks that

the problem was that in voiding itself of Jews, Germany had forever voided itself of the capacity for a normal, healthy response to Jews and their ideas. Instead, it was all a tortured bending over backwards, biting one's tongue, wondering what "they" really thought of Germans. It is a terrible, yet unavoidable consequence of the Holocaust itself, this Jewish aphasia, a legacy of mass murder. Thus, I began to grasp just this need for a foreigner and a Jew on the Findungskommission. Without a Jewish eye to save it from egregiously misguided judgements (like the winner of the first competition), anything was possible.' ¹⁸⁴

The murdered Jews can answer to this political gesture, however courageous and difficult, only with a massive silence. The burden of response does fall on living Germans and future generations - and 'a foreigner and a Jew on the Findungskommission'. Will it enable the visitor to address the void left behind by this destruction? Will it point out to the visitor its own responsibility for memory itself?

¹⁸² Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 195

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 195/196

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 196

A. What is Implied by the Form of a Memorial?

Remembrances and memories can be and have been expressed in different forms of re-presentations, e.g. the eyewitness account, the novel, the work of art, the monument, the film but also historical and philosophical discussions. In the context of the planned memorial in Germany we not only have to examine the possibilities of re-presentation and expression but also the form of re-presentation. What valid criteria should be used to judge the different memorial proposals? Should there be an abstract memorial without inscription? Is there going to be a monument to remember the victims or is it going to be an admonishing memorial?

Any monument will deliver and will function as an interpretation of, and provide information about, the event it comes to represent. In many ways it aims to achieve identification with one group while at the same time aiming to gain legitimacy for a certain concept and opinion. The decision for a national memorial represents the current state of public affairs of German political self-understanding and tries to project these into the future. I can identify two major aspects of reaction to the monument: there could be the affirmative form of reception in forms of rituals of either public commemorative celebrations or the laying of a wreath; or the memorial could be rejected as such and subjected to commentary in the form of spraying, painting or dismantling. How and in what form is the general public going to accept - visit - the memorial, only time will show. The concluding chapter of the thesis is looking at the possibilities of future memory of the Shoah. An important aspect of the remembrance process is its representation in public rituals¹⁸⁵; it remains to be proven that the non-ritual

¹⁸⁵ For a profound examination of the ritualising aspects of the memory process see Frevert, Ute & Assman, Aleida, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit* (Suttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt)

reception, which could be its purely artistic reception, of the monument inevitably leads to the forgetting of the monument as such and with it the forgetting of the event it came to represent. In a monument the past becomes static; the monument is a static interpretation of the past. Thus can it present a message adequate to the complex systems and sets of questions at stake? The re-reading of Walter Benjamin opened up the various possibilities of asking the questions of the Shoah thus initiating a constant re-petition in the form of remembering.

In the sphere of mass murder, what is a monument? If it was the stony attempt to fix a binding notion of history and to transfer it on to the collective and into the future, what purpose does such a form of remembrance serve? Can a notion of history that has been made visual and thus presents a certain political understanding, be of eternal duration? Many aspects are decisive in order for a memorial to be received by the public in general: the choice of site and dedication are important factors. The 'Mahnmal' (memorial) is erected to admonish, to warn, to remember a past event, the repetition of which needs to be prevented.

B. Jürgen Habermas: the Problem of German Self-Conception and Dedication of the Memorial

The current social and political climate in Germany questions and challenges the claim for a national German memory after the Shoah. The Historians Dispute in 1986 argued for a 'discontinued' past. Such a claim, however, can only mean a rejection of the past - only to find oneself confronted with 'a past that will not pass' (Historian's Dispute). In an article for 'Die Zeit', the philosopher Jürgen Habermas discusses the issues of German self-

understanding in view of its National Socialist past and with regard to the memorial plans¹⁸⁶. According to Habermas, the break in the continuation of our leading tradition is the condition for Germany's regained self-respect. Habermas recognises a unique chance in the history of the Federal Republic where a parliamentary vote on the planned memorial could act as 'a sign for the reformed collective identity of the Germans projecting far into the future'.

More than half a century later guilt and shame - or the rejection of the two - still mark the moral imperative when addressing the questions of the memory of the Holocaust. In what way can this be symbolically expressed in the name of the entire German nation? Whether there is a link between representative culture of memory and the memorial's design needs to be investigated along with the question of how far the memorial can fulfil the function of continuous enlightenment and political self-questioning. Admittedly, the boundaries between exoneration, intoxicated with sentiments and emotions and moral intellectual responsibility, are obscured. The impossibility of finding an aesthetically and politically convincing consensus until today marks the ongoing debate.

The invitation to participate in the first competition in 1994 set the following criteria:

Contemporary artistic force should combine symbiotically the change of direction in mourning, distress and respect with the reflection in shame and guilt. Cognition should be able to arise, also for future life in peace, freedom, equality and tolerance.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Habermas, Jürgen, 1999. Der Zeigefinger: Die Deutschen und ihr Denkmal. *Die Zeit*, 1. April 1999, p. 42 ff.

¹⁸⁷ *Heutige künstlerische Kraft soll die Hinwendung in Trauer, Erschütterung und Achtung symbiotisch verbinden mit der Besinnung in Scham und Schuld. Erkenntnis soll erwachsen können, auch für künftiges Leben in Frieden, Freiheit, Gleichheit und Toleranz.* (Öffentliche Ausschreibung, 1994) see Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Sefrens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo)

The initiators of the memorial plans are asking for primarily private emotions to be transformed by an artistic design into something universal. The difficulty that arises is that 'emotions' are not set off in the same way with everybody. The inclusivity of the general memorial struggles on the borderline between private and public, between individual and universal, between warning off and reflection, between ambiguity and contradiction. Can a single building or work of art evoke and trigger off so many, and at the same time, universally orientated emotions? Do forms of expression exist which have the same solemn and monumental affect on every human being, which make us pause and think? It is pretentious to claim that a piece of art is not ambiguous, that its content is never contradictory. All-inclusive general monuments for the moral self-discovery of a nation are rare, if they exist at all. According to those responsible, the task that the not-yet-erected-memorial is burdened with is to provoke apprehensiveness but to fascinate at the same time.

Out of more or less contingent causes Germany was plunged into a decade of public controversy which touched on the political self-understanding as a nation. The society's notion of what it is and what it wants to be seems to be threatened. In Germany, most recently the occasions have multiplied: the Wehrmacht-Exhibition; the Goldhagen-Debate¹⁸⁸; and the knowledge of the involvement of banks and large companies in the Nazi extermination practises. Despite increasing virulence, from the start the discussions have concentrated on the one question, as Jürgen Habermas points out:

Do we, who stand as citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany in the political, legal and cultural succession of the state and

¹⁸⁸ The thesis' concluding chapter places the event of the 'Wehrmacht'-Exhibition and of the controversy that Daniel J. Goldhagen's book 'Hitler's Willing Executioners' prompted in relation to the debate that followed Martin Walser's speech.

society of the generation of perpetrators, accept the historical liability for the consequences of their deeds? Do we make the self-critical remembering of "Auschwitz" - the reflection on the events connected with that name still kept alive - explicitly part of our political self-understanding? Do we accept the worrying political responsibility as an element of a broken national identity which for the 'later-born' arises from the break with civilisation committed, supported and tolerated by the Germans?¹⁸⁹

It has been argued that the memorial is not needed and is, indeed, superfluous, since, not far from the allocated area, another monument to commemorate the 'Victims of War and Tyranny', the 'Neue Wache'¹⁹⁰, already exists. The simultaneous dedication of the 'Neue Wache' to victims of war and persecution bears an intolerable abstraction¹⁹¹. The danger lies in the fact that the crimes of persecution are hidden behind the victims of war. The dispute

¹⁸⁹ „Übernehmen wir, die wir als Bürger der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der politisch-rechtlichen und kulturellen Nachfolge des Staates und der Gesellschaft der "Tätergeneration" stehen, eine historische Haftung für die Konsequenzen ihrer Tat? Machen wir die selbstkritische Erinnerung an "Auschwitz" - die wachgehaltene Reflektion auf das mit dem Namen verbundene Geschehen - explizit zum Bestandteil unseres politischen Selbstverständnisses? Akzeptieren wir die beunruhigende Verantwortung, die den später Geborenen aus dem von Deutschen verübten, unterstützten und geduldeten Zivilisationsbruch erwächst, als Element einer gebrochenen nationalen Identität?" Habermas, Jürgen, 1999. *Die Zeit*, 1. April 1999

¹⁹⁰ The 'Neue Wache', build by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1816-1818) for the Prussian King, functioned as a guardhouse until 1918. In the Weimar Republic it became a monument for the soldiers killed in action of WWI. Hitler annually placed a wreath on "(Heroes') Remembrance Day" (Heldengedenktage). The GDR dedicated the 'Neue Wache' 1960 to the 'victims of Fascism and Militarism'. On 27 January 1993, the Parliament decided to reconstruct the Schinkel building in the converted form of 1931. A copy of the statue by Käthe Kollwitz 'Mother with dead Son' (1937), four times bigger than the original, was placed inside and the monument was dedicated to the 'Victims of War and Tyranny'.

¹⁹¹ see also Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Sefrens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo); Kirsch, Jan-Holger, 2001. Trauer und historische Erinnerung in der Berliner Republik. In Liebsch, Burkhard & Rüsen, Jörn (eds.), *Trauer und Geschichte* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag), p. 339-374

arose over the question of whether to dedicate the planned memorial to the Jews only or to all groups of victims. Jürgen Habermas points out that:

in our memory we cannot again sort the victims according to those points of view, according to which they were selected by the henchmen and subjected to differentiated torments.¹⁹²

Does the exclusive reference to the murdered Jews ignore the sacrifice of the other group of victims? On the one hand such an exclusive dedication becomes problematic because it could indeed implicate an injustice to the gypsies, the homosexuals, the politically persecuted, the mentally ill, the deserters etc. to name just a few. Has Parliament missed the historical chance to dedicate the memorial to all groups of victims? Later decisions on further memorials might indeed lessen the importance of the monument in question and the content it is to represent. Interestingly enough, the 'Neue Wache' was dedicated long before a decision on a national Holocaust Memorial could be reached.

However, as Jürgen Habermas rightly points out, we may not ignore the elements that explain why "Auschwitz" has so overwhelmingly been connected to the Holocaust of the European Jews:

The moral intuition to which the universalists righteously appeal, clashes with another, if one wants ethical intuition in relation to the own collective. If we were to leave aside the special relevance of the Jews for the social and cultural life of the Germans, the historically momentous, very specific proximity and distance of the two different poles, would we not again be guilty of false abstractions?¹⁹³

¹⁹² 'Wir dürfen die Opfer im Gedenken nicht noch einmal nach Gesichtspunkten sortieren, nach denen sie von den Schergen selektiert und abgestuften Qualen unterworfen worden sind.' Habermas, Jürgen, 1999. *Die Zeit*, 1. April 1999

¹⁹³ 'Die moralische Intuition, an die die Universalisten mit Recht appellieren, kreuzt sich mit einer anderen, wenn man will ethischen, auf das eigene Kollektiv bezogenen Intuition. Wenn wir von

Had the Germans not perceived the Jews with a different and special relevance, the motivation for the murderous deeds would have been missing. A difference in the treatment of victims, who, in the end, all shared in the same fate, can not morally be justified whether in the artistic form of remembering or in any other way. To disregard the special significance the Nazis had attributed to the Jews would lessen the fatality of this anti-Semitic differentiation and exclusion. An understanding of such fatal differentiation and exclusion must be built into the self-critical memory.

We are, nevertheless, left with the question of whether the 'country of perpetrators' could possibly restrict itself to remember 'only' the murdered Jews, thus excluding all the other victims. With the erection of one memorial the danger of believing that all "duties" of mourning and remembering have been met, and that the task of mourning has been rendered obsolete, should not be underestimated. Where do we place the other murdered in our space of remembering - the other millions who likewise were gassed, slain, shot or killed in any other way? Are they meant to be spared from the official national act of mourning? Does the parliament's decision on the exclusive dedication to the 'murdered Jews of Europe' entail a moral and political commitment to remember the other groups of victims in other memorials? Salomon Korn believes that the German nation has given away the unique chance of an all-including dedication:

Even if Germany was to build next to the 'memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' further memorials for the other group of victims, at the end there will be lack of the central memorial with

der besonderen Relevanz der Juden für das gesellschaftliche und kulturelle Leben der Deutschen, von der historisch folgereichen, ganz spezifischen Nähe und Ferne der beiden ungleichen Pole absehen würden, machten wir uns dann nicht wiederum einer falschen Abstraktion schuldig?' Habermas, *ibid.*

which the National Socialist crimes are remembered not by way of instalments but as a whole.¹⁹⁴

There are many and striking arguments to call special attention to the extermination of the European Jews by emphasising its uniqueness. It is crucial not to 'continue' the selective process deadly relevant for the Nazis. Nevertheless, there is an understanding of the outstanding social and cultural role of the Jews for the Germans that does not neutralise the irrefutable moral precept of equal respect when remembering all victims.

"Auschwitz" has become the synonym for mass murder. Perhaps this is an inadequate association since it diverts or even removes the cruel reality of other places of NS mass murder from our attention. Today the name "Auschwitz" is used almost interchangeably with the later adopted term "Holocaust". As a pars pro toto it means the complex process of extermination on the whole: 'The term "Holocaust" has become nothing less than the universal instrument against which any discourse about crime and justice is measured.'¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ „Denn selbst wenn Deutschland neben dem 'Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas' in Zukunft für all übrigen Opfergruppen Denkmäler errichten sollte, so wird am Ende doch das zentrale Mahnmal fehlen, in dem der nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen nicht ratenweise, sondern in ihrer Gesamtheit gedacht wird'. S. Korn in R. Koselleck, Die Widmung, *FAZ*, 3 March 1999

¹⁹⁵ Andreas Huyssen, 1999. Der Holocaust lehrt keine Hoffnung, *Tagesspiegel*, 20 April 1999

C. Who is Erecting the Memorial for Whom?

The German parliament decided in principle on the memorial's purpose, name, place, and form. The procedure is often regarded as devalued for its supposed lack of democratic legitimacy. What makes a monument/memorial "legitimate"? Is it public acceptance that decides on the legitimacy as Michael Berenbaum, now director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, claims?¹⁹⁶

The Memorial Museum Yad Vashem in Israel keeps the memory of all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust alive. In many other countries Jewish and non-Jewish descendants of victims of the Nazi terror have created places of remembrance. In Amsterdam, for example, the memories of the murdered homosexuals and the gassed gypsies are kept alive through impressive monuments. There are various memorials to remember the murdered Polish, Russians, Serbs, Greeks, Italians, Belgians, French, Danish and Norwegians. They all implore – more or less successfully - a lasting rejection of all genocide, as James Young convincingly argues.¹⁹⁷

A memorial that might just as well be in Jerusalem, London or Washington has missed its goal. The remembrance in the country of the perpetrators and victims must be different to the remembrance in the countries of those who escaped and survived. Foremost and in contrast to various memorials and monuments in the whole world, erected by the descendants of the Nazi victims, the German national memorial needs to remember the perpetrators and their deed. Having accepted the political liability and, in a moral sense, also the guilt, a memorial erected by the perpetrators' nation does remember something different (unless the perpetrators slip into the role of the

¹⁹⁶ *Tagesspiegel*, 20 April 1999

¹⁹⁷ see Young, James E., 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press)

victim). The German role as perpetrator - and as descendant of the generation of perpetrators - must be visualised if the monument was to gain legitimacy; if anything 'Auschwitz' has taught us to protect human dignity regardless of all criteria of distinction or discrimination. The national memorial must visualise or re-present something that keeps the heterogeneity of perpetrator- and victim-memory alive. At stake here is the attempt to re-present memories that are mutually exclusive.

The past naturally separates the descendants of the perpetrators from those of the victims. Only if one convincingly assumes liability for deeds and circumstances, a mutual coexistence could become a possibility. The problem for the later German generations lies in the conflict of interests between grief for the victims, the sheer horror when confronted with the horrors and the love for their own (grand)parents as the past fifty years of German post-war memory have shown.

An exclusive concentration on that which deed and perpetrator mean to us - the current generation - would undermine the moral core of compassion for the victims. The moral impulse to remember must not be relativised in the context of self-ascertainment: 'the value of the weak, even futile strength of anamnestic solidarity will definitely be lost if the self-reference narcissistically becomes independent - and the memorial becomes a "monument of disgrace".'¹⁹⁸ It is very idealistic of Habermas to believe that the memorial will not be built to fulfil the expectations that other groups of interest or nations might have of the Germans:

Those who see Auschwitz as "our shame" are interested in the impressions the others have of us, not in the image that the

¹⁹⁸ 'Der Wert der schwachen, ja vergeblichen Kraft anamnetischer Solidarität geht erst recht verloren, wenn sich der Selbstbezug narzißtisch verselbstständigt - und das Denkmal zum "Schandmal" wird'. Habermas, *Die Zeit*, 1 April 1999

citizens of the Federal Republic form themselves in retrospect to the break of civilisation in order to be able to face and respect themselves.¹⁹⁹

The cultural memory of a nation should not be confused with 'private', individual remembering. I would like to argue that it demands some kind of symbolic reification. The discursive mediums of historical writing, literature and teaching are not sufficient for the continuation of remembrance. According to Habermas, the German cultural nation only developed a convincing attachment to universalistic constitutional principles after and through Auschwitz. However, Habermas is adamant that the 'ramp of Auschwitz' should not become the focus of our attention in such a way that the cultural memory is blocked and does not reach beyond the Nazi period:

But any reasonable historical reflection upon Auschwitz should and cannot fix the gaze of the citizens (and it is their political self-understanding which is at stake here, not the historical research!) onto "the one" which takes no account of the other.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ 'Wer Auschwitz für "unsere Schande" hält, ist an dem Bild interessiert, das andere von uns haben, nicht an dem Bild, das die Bürger der Bundesrepublik im Rückblick auf den Zivilisationsbruch von sich ausbilden, um sich selbst ins Gesicht sehen und gegenseitig achten zu können'. Habermas, *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ 'Aber der historische Rückbezug auf Auschwitz soll und kann den Blick der Bürger (und nur um deren politisches Selbstverständnis geht es, nicht um die historische Forschung!) nicht auf "das eine" fixieren, das alles andere ausblendet'. Habermas, *ibid.*

D. Memory in 'No-Man's Land': The Site of the Memorial versus The Site of Remembrance

Remembrance is the recollection of things past. What happens to the place that is chosen as the site of future institutionalised remembrance, a site that in its immediate history was the garden of Hitler's Ministries and the bare strip of land that divided the East from the West? The immense dimensions, as well as the positioning of the site in the centre of the capital, imbue the memorial project with 'national' importance and symbolism.

Long before the monument is erected the place loses its innocence: Martin Walser might have expressed what many have felt when he spoke of the 'monumentalisation of disgrace' and the 'concreting of the centre of the capital with a nightmare the size of a football pitch'²⁰¹. Complementary to this stands Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's trivialising postulate of a site, which the Germans 'enjoy to visit'²⁰². The site loses its neutrality through such ideological insistence. In the very centre of the re-united Berlin no site can be neutral a priori. The ideological discussions and insistence will have given indications for the political climate of German 'coming-to-terms' demanding either 'normalisation' or the infamous 'clean break'. Thus the locality and size of the site can never remain indifferent. That, which is to be remembered, is of such universal importance that questions regarding the general possibility of 'adequate' representation and ideologically influenced fears emerge, whether

²⁰¹ Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998 – 'Experiences while creating a Sunday Speech'

²⁰² Kalbe, Riki & Zuckermann, Moshe (eds.), 2000. *Ein Grundstück in der Mitte: Das Gelände des künftigen Holocaust-Mahnmals in Wort und Bild* (Göttingen: Wallstein); see also Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Sefrens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo)

such a 'monumentalisation of disgrace' would have to be present in the very centre of a capital, which is rebuilding its new republic on past events and old memories.

Benjamin claimed that the materiality of the Parisian Arcades stood for and manifested the hell, which interweaved the Nineteenth Century. Moshe Zuckermann concludes that a symbolic allocation of meaning cannot suffice but that we have to decode the material and historical as well. The chosen location is rich in history and materiality. What are the consequences for the abstract, symbolic dimension of the site?

No-Man's Land (or Death-Strip) was the name for the area between West and East, the empty strip of land preceding the Wall from the West. In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno has a sub-chapter entitled 'No Man's Land'. Discussing the ontological thinkings of Heidegger in particular and in German idealism of Fichte and Schelling, Adorno here examines the understanding of 'the judgement that history passed on the identity thesis'²⁰³ by Heidegger and Husserl. Adorno writes:

Being is the contraction of essence. Ontology's own consistency takes it to a no man's land. It must eliminate each a posteriori; it is not supposed to be logic either, in the sense of a doctrine of thought and a particular discipline; each thinking step would necessarily take ontology beyond the only point where it may hope to be sufficient unto itself. In the end, there is hardly anything it would dare aver longer, not even about Being. What shows in this ontology is not so much mystical meditation as the distress of a thinking that seeks its otherness and cannot make a move without fearing to lose what it claims. Tendentially, philosophy becomes a ritualistic posture. Yet there is truth stirring in the posture as well: the truth of philosophy falling silent.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 77

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 78

The problematic Adorno conceives in the ontological thought of Heidegger is the attempt to seek otherness but out of fear of losing self-identity, thinking becomes ritualised and thus silent: 'Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death'²⁰⁵. What happened in Auschwitz involved the collapse of all previously gained civilisation. For Adorno, it also meant the withdrawal of inner meaning of philosophy. Philosophy had to fail in understanding the 'occurrence of Auschwitz' – the 'break of civilisation'. Thus philosophy had to engage in thinking its own abolition. History forced upon philosophy the necessity to correct its axioms. However, the impossibility of philosophy after Auschwitz again necessitated a philosophy that would not tire of fighting against the conscious refusal of memory.

Adorno had made poetry the paradigm of a culture that, in opposition to the barbarity of Auschwitz, was utterly helpless and powerless.

The following criteria were used in deciding on the site:

- conceptual and historical aspects which give reason for or against the site
- features and structure of the site, like for example size, aligning, building, plants, trees etc.
- elements of the surrounding area which could influence the meaning of the site and its usage
- getting to the site (already existing/planned connections)
- urban contact of the site with regard to town-planning
- availability (property, opposing town-plans etc.)

According to these criteria of evaluation the sites Ministergärten (Ministers' Gardens), Tiergarten (Goethe-Monument), Platz der Republik,

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 362

Bebelplatz, Marx-Engels-Forum, Topography of Terror, former Jewish Cemetery (Große Hamburger Straße) were considered.

The chosen site of the Minister's Gardens, the terrain through which the wall ran, has often been criticized for its enormous size. Regarding the issues at stake, I consider the location perfectly situated in the heart of the centre of the old-new capital, thus very much part of the national memorial landscape where it is connecting the Reichstag, Brandenburg Gate, Unter den Linden, Potsdamer Platz, Tiergarten et al.

The question of the 'correct' choice of site of the monument touches onto some of the issues regarding the meaning and content of the monument. The majority of the Germans saw themselves as 'victims of National Socialism' - the placarding of the absolute evil in the form of the Nazis, the Other. Perhaps it is the temporal distance of more than half a century that allows a change in this 'defence mechanism' of many Germans. The site and its urban context become important. In that sense, a confrontation between the monument and other symbols of German history makes its focus on perpetrator and deed unmistakably clear and thus connects it to German present and future.

The Shoah as an event is so monstrous that no representation seemed to be adequate enough, no memorial site central enough. Within the context of defining a site for future commemoration, the new meaning allocated to the chosen site is decisive. Perhaps Moshe Zuckerman is right when he claims that from the moment of decision about its future definition, the 'no-man's land' became imbued with historically symbolic values and meanings. Although the location itself has a history of its own - from Nazi Germany to a topographical position in the post-war West-East conflict - with the new dedication the site has been re-interpreted and given a new importance and responsibility.

2. Aesthetic Transformation – Some Problematics of Representation

The recent disputes regarding the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin have centred around the question of whether such a memorial would be a sign of 'shame' or a symbol of historical responsibility. In the idea of the planned Memorial, erected precisely at the chosen location, the essential motives of more than fifty years of public workings-through are concentrated. The motives are historio-philosophical, theological, moral and aesthetic ones. At least three dimensions are part of the public debates: Is a central memorial actually needed? Ought such a memorial be dedicated exclusively to the murdered Jews of Europe? Does the chosen memorial design fulfil the idealistic criteria and notions?

Every individual who attempts to explain and interpret has a theoretical premise. Any discussion of or any speaking about, any re-presentation of the Shoah carries with it the index of possible disappearance within the representation itself. A central motive for every place of admonition is the fear of forgetting, as Imre Kertész justly pointed out: 'From the first moment the Holocaust carried the dreadful fear: the fear of forgetting.'²⁰⁶ The 1990s in Germany with its furious and heated debates on German self-understanding in the shadow of the Shoah have proven that the fear is still very much present.

To remain a persistent part of memory means that the memorial needs to incorporate a constant factor of interruption and irritation to disturb indifference. The memorial is conceptualised by contemporary interests of memory. If it was to sustain its validity beyond the now it would be subjected to changes,

²⁰⁶ Kertész, Imre, 1994. Der Holocaust als Kultur. *Sinn und Form*, 46, vol. 4, p. 562

modifications and transformations. The phase of transition from 'communicative memory', based on personal experience of history, to a 'cultural memory' is marked by the challenge to find a form of culture that helps forming and shaping an identity of memory and that does not run counter to such an attempt. Only 'modern', contemporary art with its long reputation for the provocative can break open the empty and stereotyped agreements of remembering. The artistic medium with its openness and self-reflexivity, even autonomy, can put the edge onto the political intentions behind the memorial and work as an intensive communicator by aiming beyond the political.

First of all, we have to unravel the various levels that are at work in the German discussions. An early concern about the possibility of art after Auschwitz was voiced by Adorno in the 1950s when he said that to write poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric²⁰⁷. He meant nothing less than that the possibilities of re-presentation in the times of mass annihilation are limited and subjected to constant re-working. Can there be aesthetics after Auschwitz? What inscription has Auschwitz left on aesthetic representations and imagination? The debates surrounding the planned Holocaust memorial in Berlin have shown that this question still stands with the same validity since it was posed originally by Adorno. However, it is generally accepted that there have been few forms of artistic creation that have proven that art after Auschwitz does not disappear in false metaphysics (arguably Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* and Rachel Whiteread's Memorial for Vienna for example).

The second problem, the debates in Germany have been struggling with, is the question of the possibility of re-presenting the Shoah, which as such ties in with Adorno's dictum. This is what Andrew Benjamin's question meant when

²⁰⁷ Adorno, Theodor W., 1951. *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*. in Petra Kiedaisch (ed.), 1998. *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter* (Stuttgart: Reclam), p. 49

he asked whether sculpture could entail the Shoah²⁰⁸. How far can Auschwitz be inscribed onto aesthetic representation and imagination? In many ways the memorial will fulfil functions of compensation for guilt of the crimes of the Shoah. Whether the monumentality of the chosen design is evoking references to National Socialist architecture or not, ties in with the question of what can be re-presented and where the perpetrators' memory or memories lie. As the examination of the Walser-Bubis controversy will make clear, the necessarily and essentially frayed discussions around the questions of remembrance are diametrically opposed and thus can never be bundled up and tied down in one monument. As we shall see in detail in the third chapter, the political emphasis on the monumental form of remembrance needs to be acknowledged but such re-presentations form an essential part of the complex process of remembrance and 'coming-to-terms'.

On a third level, we have to address the question of what it is that comes to be re-presented. The manifold expressions of interest and power are inherent to the German process of erecting a national memorial to their deeds. So Sybil Milton is right to argue that the whole memorial process, in many ways, qualifies as 'a reflection of national culture, political ideology, artistic merit'²⁰⁹. The Berlin memorial is set against a tight political and geographical background: we are confronted with an attempt to create a symbolic re-presentation of past national crimes - an allegory in the Benjaminian understanding, as discussed in the first chapter. In its essence, I would like to argue that the chosen memorial design is fundamentally self-serving, full of nationalistic representations and public expectations. A true chance to engage future generations with the problematics at stake in the Germany's remembering process has been missed. More than

²⁰⁸ Benjamin, Andrew, 1997. *Present Hope* (London: Routledge), p. 104

²⁰⁹ Milton, Sybil, 1991. *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), p. 7

fifty years after the Shoah, Germany finally decides to erect a memorial. Necessarily all the questions of 'for whom?', and 'what is going to be remembered?' need to be asked. The whole process, however, is nothing less than the prolongation of the 'alibi' of the first generation who claimed that they had received the 'mercy of late birth' ('Gnade der späten Geburt' coined by Helmut Kohl), and therefore that they had no responsibilities for the crimes committed and also no need to remember because the sheer horror was too overwhelming.

Involved in the competition for the planned memorial in Berlin was yet another later generation who had no biographical links with the historical event of the Shoah. Their designs not only engaged with the problematics and limits of representation, they also worked-through the 'trauma' of the first generation. It is this generation that takes up Lyotard's concern to create a language that finds and establishes links with Auschwitz without evoking it.

In the debate surrounding the instrumentalisation of the Shoah various interests are connected with the politics of remembrance. Jean-François Lyotard thus reminds us that attention needs to be paid to the knowledge that any form of shaping memory at the same time means an interpretation of that which comes to be memorised:

Here to fight against forgetting means to fight to remember that one forgets as soon as one believes, draws conclusions and holds for certain. It means to fight against forgetting the precariousness of what has been established, of the re-established past; it is a fight for the sickness whose recovery is simulated.²¹⁰

The question of authenticity in relation to the aesthetic re-presentation cannot be inappropriate. For later generations the Holocaust is an event that is

²¹⁰ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1997. *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 10

mediated, not least through mass media. Any discourse about Holocaust remembrance moves around 'right' and 'wrong' forms of cultural re-presentation, around 'appropriate' remembrance and 'correct' interpretation of the past. Lyotard understands Auschwitz as a model: 'the experience of a language which gives support to the speculative discourse.'²¹¹

Lyotard claims that one could no longer speak of 'experience' and that it thus becomes essential to 're-establish the unthinkability of Auschwitz'. A language needs to be found, which without evoking 'Auschwitz', ties and establishes links with it. Yet, past Auschwitz, these rules for the association of language after Auschwitz have to be newly constructed. To Lyotard it is clear that 'after Auschwitz' no subject remains which could claim to name itself by naming the very experience. What does Lyotard's and Adorno's post-Auschwitz philosophy entail for the possibilities of re-presentation in art?

Both Lyotard and Adorno have made clear that within the philosophical context it is possible to arouse, address and name the experience of limits. Within the philosophical Lyotard has made a cultural-political concept of representation or prohibition to depict possible. The recent debates in Germany have proven that the claim of the un-representability of the Holocaust is as much part of the ongoing dispute as the quest for narrative and figurative solutions are.

Lyotard's writing is concerned with the authenticity of the concepts of representation; it is the power of expression that Lyotard seeks formulated in those sentences after and linked with Auschwitz. For Jean Améry the experience of Auschwitz can be communicated but never shared and mediated; the extinction of spirit and civilisation that the inmates suffered through sheer

²¹¹ Lyotard, Jean-François, ?. *Streitgespräche oder Sprechen nach Auschwitz* (Bremen: ?), p. 14 - from *Les fuis de L'homme. A partir du travail de Jaques Derrida* (Paris, 1981)

physical terror cannot be parted with. He protests that there can never be a rhetoric or allegory of experience:

The pain was that that it was. There is no more to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as indescribable. They mark the limit of linguistic powers of communication. Who wanted to im-part his bodily pain, would be doomed to inflict it and thus to become a torturer himself.²¹²

Lyotard sees the reason for the authenticity of Améry's text in the 'break of speculation'. This experience of suffering and torture that the own body was subjected to, Lyotard calls the pathos of the *primary*, and this can never be disputed. Re-presentations of the Holocaust of those who were born later can only then gain authenticity if they closely 'study' the experience of the Shoah. Problematic for the concept of re-presentation is that 'Auschwitz' as a direct, *primary* experience does not exist. Thus the *secondary* thematises the plurality of experiences, of artistic creation and mediated and narrated experiences.

Contemporary artistic creations often work around the limits of representation of witness testimony of the Shoah and later generations' re-

²¹² „Der Schmerz war der, der er war. Darüber hinaus ist nichts zu sagen. Gefühlsqualitäten sind so unvergleichbar wie unbeschreibbar. Sie markieren die Grenze sprachlichen Mitteilungsvermögens. Wer seinen Körperschmerz mit-teilen wollte, wäre darauf gestellt, ihn zuzufügen und damit selbst zum Folterknecht zu werden'. Améry, Jean, 1997. *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), p. 63

presentation or imagining of the testified²¹³. All possible, thinkable links with Auschwitz in words, sentences or images have to be of such substance that they do not surmount Auschwitz as the 'in-associable' but that they allow it to stand as the un-removable traumatic experience. Memory has to be deprived of its subjective and medial condition and of its random appearance in order to regain a form of the remembrance.

Lanzmann's film itself is clear about the limits of the different media of representation: for him the limit of representation as such is no longer of concern. The film brings into question the various ways and methods of representation employed by later generations of artists, writers and politicians.

Most of all, the film succeeds in questioning perspective as such, by asking: 'With whose gaze am I looking?'. The 'trauma' of the generation of perpetrators continues to have a lasting effect on the constant attempts of re-presenting, of creating the 'impossible links' with Auschwitz. Despite and in opposition to universalistic claims, the condition of the *secondary* demands

²¹³ Manuel Köppen and Klaus Scherpe convincingly argue that Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) gains *authenticity* through a radicalisation of the 'prohibition to depict'. Lanzmann does not allow for a 're-produced' similarity with the actual events and facts. Lanzmann visits the places of destruction; he takes his witnesses (victims, perpetrators and bystanders) back to the actual places. The only form of re-production and re-presentation Lanzmann allows is the speech, the remembering words of the witnesses: 'He directs the speeches of his witnesses to fill the space of memory of his film; not with images but with sentences, statements, gestures and facial expression that mark that which is absent ... Lanzmann not only makes his witnesses remember, he asks them to react, to embody, to recreate as bodily and linguistic scenes. Mimesis, with its quality to work in the present, takes the part of the rejected illusionism of the representation: the mimetic quality of the play, the reactivation of sensory and magic relation to the things and events which cannot or no longer be formulated using language.' (Köppen, Manuel and Scherpe, Klaus R. (eds.), 1997. *Bilder des Holocaust* (Köln: Böhlau), p. 3/4). See Benjamin, Walter, 1991. *Über das mimetische Vermögen*. GS II, 1

various and specific re-presentations so that Auschwitz does not become a 'terrifying cliché', the 'para-sign'²¹⁴.

In the German process of remembrance, the generation of perpetrating and on-looking witnesses is silent. How will we 'distinguish' works of representation and works of 'experience'? How do we tell apart works by those who had borne witness and not only by the first or second generation of the survivors? In various attempts of re-presentation Manuel Köppen and Klaus Scherpe discover 'methods of profanisation' which are employed in order to liberate 'the complexity of Auschwitz' from its 'symbolic burden of meaning'²¹⁵. Perhaps we have come as close as possible to a way of remembering in which the trauma of Auschwitz continues to have a lasting influence as an emotional sign of the very self and individual ability to remember and to experience.

In the long process of addressing and working-through the Nazi crimes in Germany, identification with the victims seem to have been the culturally accepted form of remembrance. Much more problematic is the identification with the perpetrators; but in a country of perpetrators that aims at erecting a 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' memory and remembering needs to address the social conditions that made Auschwitz possible.

The anti-monument movement in Germany questions the possibility of representation, and fiercely rejects a language of symbols and meaning. What seemed not re-presentable, became something that was not able to be experienced and thus a challenge for the (artistic) creation process.

For images to become 'experiences', a twofold 'link' is possible and thinkable, according to Manuel Köppen and Klaus Scherpe. First, there are those attempts to depict that

²¹⁴ Köppen, Manuel and Scherpe, Klaus R. (eds.), 1997. *Bilder des Holocaust* (Köln: Böhlau), p. 4

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5

in the remote discourses or arbitrary daily actions, in the cultural patchwork, re-create the trauma affectively, thus negating the officially valid Holocaust memory culture. ... on the other hand attempts to depict which connect to the anonymous code number of the camp inmates: the common usage of letters and numbers, the "extension of the system" which was Auschwitz (Lyotard). Auschwitz, thought as the climax of modernity and as the break of civilisation, makes the subjective experiences and individual sentences disappear.²¹⁶

In many ways re-presentations and attempts to depict are part of the process of coming-to-terms; they work against forgetting, against the loss of experience in order to find a connection with the not-experienced, but yet radically felt past.

With the planned memorial in Berlin, the question of re-presentation still very much ties in with the question of the authentic, true experience. In Berlin a search had begun yet again for appropriate forms that could communicate and re-present the event or the impossibility and in-authenticity of re-presentation as the only possible approximation. As my reading of the design of Gesine Weinmiller (architect) will make clear, later generations feel a radical presence of the Shoah and consider the very presence of the Shoah as part of their reality of life from where they then claim truth for their artistic creations. Here the event 'Holocaust' is always true as a 'quote' and as thus questions the symbolism and meaning the images have been charged with in the process of their reproduction.

The later generation of artists acknowledge some kind of 'in-authenticity' in their work that symbolically refers to something they cannot bear witness. Here the past is only present in the form of quotes and references, as Lyotard writes:

²¹⁶ Köppen, Manuel and Scherpe, Klaus R. (eds.), 1997. *Bilder des Holocaust* (Köln: Böhlau), p. 6/7

a past located this side of the forgotten, much closer to the present moment than any past, at the same time it is incapable of being solicited by voluntary and conscious memory - a past Deleuze says that is not past but always there ... But this slaughter pretends to be without memory, without trace, and through this testifies again to what it slaughters: that there is the unthinkable, time lost yet always there, a revelation that never reveals itself but remains there, a misery.²¹⁷

How can words reveal to us what the actual moment must have been to the witness? What remains can never be a conventional memory because conventional memory cannot 'remember' the forgotten moment, can never be the memory of the not remembered. Art after the Holocaust forms an aesthetic of the memory of the forgotten: 'What art can do is bear witness not to the sublime, but to this aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it.'²¹⁸ In the inability to help and in the phases of anguish lies the melancholic truth, with which the survivors especially must continue to live, and we all must continue to approach the event we call 'Shoah'. If 'Holocaust' art, or art after the 'Holocaust' was concerned with finding any form of aesthetic after Auschwitz, Lyotard claims that we must be content with an 'anaesthetic'.

In the art works of later generations the presence is characterised as 'homelessness' - 'homelessness' as the ambiguity of being historical. For Walter Benjamin the strength of the *Trauerspiel* lies in its use of the allegory which reintroduces the image. On the one hand he describes 'beauty' as being caught in the ruins or fragments (of time) where it is given the appearance of something eternal within the particular - the transfiguration into permanence; on the other

²¹⁷ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1997. *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 12 & 23

²¹⁸ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1997. *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 47

hand, he considers the image of beauty which to him, in its transience, stands in a dialectical relationship to permanence:

Truth never forms a relation and, in particular, no intentional relation. The object of recognition as defined in the concept's intention is not truth. Truth is an intentionless being, which is formed by ideas. The conduct appropriate to it therefore is not the thinking within the recognition but a dealing with it and disappearing. Truth is the death of intention. The fable of a veiled picture, of Sais, could mean precisely this: with its revelation the one collapses who thought to ascertain the truth. It is not the enigmatic horridness of the matter which brings this about but the nature of truth in front of which also the purest fire of a search goes out as if under water.²¹⁹

The world can only be held as a whole when considered with the melancholic gaze of the Benjaminian Angel of History. Only then the fleeting, transient moment of history becomes eternal - however, Lyotard kills Benjamin's Angel ... :

As I said, the hatred directed towards "the jews", as old as their "history", seems to have been appeased in Europe by their conversion, expulsion, extermination. It has gone much too far. Too far, precisely, to be forgotten. The Jews murdered en masse are, absent, more present than present. They remain "the jews".²²⁰

²¹⁹ ,Wahrheit tritt nie in Relation und insbesondere in keine intentionale. Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis als ein in der Begriffsintention bestimmter ist nicht die Wahrheit. Die Wahrheit ist ein aus Ideen gebildetes intentionsloses Sein. Das ihr gemäße Verhalten ist demnach nicht ein Meinen im Erkennen, sondern ein in sie Eingehen und Verschwinden. Die Wahrheit ist der Tod der Intention. Eben das kann ja die Fabel von einem verschleierte Bild, zu Sais, besagen, mit dessen Enthüllung zusammenbricht, wer die Wahrheit zu erfragen gedachte. Nicht eine rätselhafte Gräßlichkeit des Sachverhalts ist's, die das bewirkt, sondern die Natur der Wahrheit, vor welcher auch das reinste Feuer des Suchens wie unter Wassern verlischt'. ,Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels', GS I, 1, p. 216

²²⁰ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1997. *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 39

The symbolism of the 'Holocaust' is present in the arts, yet at the same time this symbolism asks us to search for signs and wants us to keep the memory alive through our examination and experience of the material, body and space. It is the challenge of the work of art to call for remembrance and memory while at the same time representing this very memory in the memorials of the Shoah. Is the memorial the politically shaped appeal of remembrance? Perhaps part of the problematics of monumental re-presentation lies in the fact that that, which ought to be remembered over, is handed over to the forgotten.

However, I do not need to point out here that memory and remembrance cannot be taken for granted. Remembrances are vital and necessary for our understanding of the event, especially for those who have no biographical links. Primo Levi, who was captured as a member of the Italian anti-Fascist resistance and reported to Auschwitz, described his experiences in works like, for example, 'The Drowned and the Saved'. He reminds us that those who survived question their own memories:

I must repeat - we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. ... We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the 'Muslims', the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have general significance.²²¹

The true, complete witness to the horrors of Auschwitz is surrounded by silence, is mute, and cannot make itself understood. Primo Levi reminds us of this 'uncomfortable notion'. He, whose writings belong to the most exceptional

²²¹ Levi, Primo, 2000. *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus), p. 63/64

accounts of re-presenting the 'questions of the Shoah'²²², claims not to have been able to bear witness. What does that entail for the problematics at stake at the German memorial process? Primo Levi engaged with a constant re-thinking of the questions of the Shoah to show the very limits of each of its re-presentations. Levi asserts that there can be no true re-presentation of the events.

The same must apply to the perpetrators bearing witness: whatever the memorial in Berlin stands for, 'it must be changeable if it is not to be all'²²³. To remember means to interpret the past; any past thus becomes a construction of the present, a present's construction. Memory cannot be a static place of storage or for that matter an archive; within the context of a social and public frame it functions as a dynamic force. The occurrence of the Shoah not only questions customised forms of remembrance, it also makes the necessity to remember a central issue.

Despite lengthy debates and arguments, no definition for appropriate memorial art for public sites could be agreed on. At stake here is the complexity of memories that come to be re-presented - the dialectic of remembrance that cannot be mediated but, for that reason, may never be forgotten or brushed aside. How can one possibly represent the Holocaust accommodating the different starting points? To interpret a certain moment in history in monumental form means not only to refer back to the event but also to read that very event in the light of current political and social circumstances. Those who are still alive and those born later who have no biographical connection to the event in question, erect the memorial. In essence they decide on the interpretation of

²²² I have borrowed this phrase from Andrew Benjamin (Present Hope). It refers to the complexity of issues at stake in the process of remembering and coming-to-terms with the Shoah. I have elucidated and explained the importance of this phrase in relation to the issues concerned in the first chapter.

²²³ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 398

mass murder and death. It is an attempt to remember the dead who did not die a natural death but who were murdered in large numbers. For whom is the memorial going to be erected, though? The claim to be speaking for the dead has to validity because the murdered have no power over the interpretation and those who interpret. The dilemma in the Berlin memorial is multi-layered. More than fifty years after the Shoah, the Germans are still not able to articulate what constitutes their national memory.

How is it possible to symbolise that which enlightened humanity scattered to such an extent that one felt compelled to introduce the term of 'break in civilisation' (Zivilisationsbruch), as Moshe Zuckermann asks? The centrality of debates over the years, the Holocaust Memorial ratified by the German Parliament, mark a 'qualitative leap', claims Moshe Zuckermann²²⁴; but is this really the leap over the 'break of civilisation'?

The evaluation of the aesthetic (and didactic) effectiveness of the monument is usually measured by subjective criteria because, primarily, memory is a very personal possession. In the case of the Berlin memorial the sheer impossible task is not to commemorate suffering experienced but to commemorate suffering caused, to admonish the deed and not to fall back onto the escape mechanism of joining the victims. To build a national reminder for a national deed that is utterly unbearable, demands a political climate of courage and balance.

The traditional conventions to mourn the heroes and victims of war cannot be appropriate rituals or symbols to mourn the mass murdered. In addition to the absence of a commonly accepted definition of how to present the Shoah, such lack of conventions delivers fertile grounds for discussions; thus keeping the site of remembrance open. A commonly agreed style or convention

²²⁴ Kalbe, Riki & Zuckermann, Moshe (eds.), 2000. *Ein Grundstück in der Mitte: Das Gelände des künftigen Holocaust-Mahnmals in Wort und Bild* (Göttingen: Wallstein)

to mourn the mass murdered of the Nazi regime would confine the event and render it forgotten. More than fifty years later, at the threshold when most survivors and eye-witnesses will have gone soon, when remembering is left to second and third generations, there is no common denominator to remember - worse, it is disconcerting that there is no mutual agreement to remember in the first place. We still are not able to express or articulate our expectations of what this 'memory' should consist. Inherent to the questions of re-presenting the Shoah is the complexity of attempts to imagine and the necessary lack of a norm. For Jean Améry the experience of Auschwitz has led to 'utter collapse of the aesthetic of the idea of death'²²⁵.

In her essay 'The Aesthetic Transformation of the Image of the Unimaginable', Gertrud Koch argues that the attempt to imagine aesthetically the persecution and annihilation of Europe's Jewish population can only be misguided, a delusion. Historically the limits of imagination in social terms have long been delineated. Gertrud Koch asserts that the hope for an aesthetic norm of re-presentation from an object that itself is an 'event at the limits'²²⁶ is 'authoritarian'. She insists that we need to investigate how this very limit is reflected in the work of art itself:

However, the irreducible condition of the aesthetic is the pleasure contained even in the most resistant work of art. ... A pleasure culled from transformation into the imaginary that enable distance, the coldness of contemplation.²²⁷

²²⁵ Améry, Jean, 1997. *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), p. 39

²²⁶ Friedlander, Saul (ed.), 1992. *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), p. 3

²²⁷ Koch, Gertrud, 1989. *The Aesthetic Transformation of the Image of the Unimaginable: Notes on Claude Lanzmann's Shoah*. *October* 48, p. 20

Koch confirms that 'the imaginary is the presence of an absence that is located outside the spatio-temporal continuum of the image'. The representability of the annihilation is not the issue, because what cannot be imagined cannot be re-presented. Can there be an aesthetic transformation of the image of the unimaginable?

Sybil Milton argues that

at locations where no substantial ruins remain, such as the Warsaw ghetto or the Treblinka killing centre, the role of the sculpture and landscape architect is essential to the symbolic representation of mass murder. ... Sculptors, architects, and landscape designers had to find individual and collective symbols that would facilitate an understanding of the past in order to represent it for the present and for the future. Memorials for the Holocaust thus had to be designed as special places separated from the flow of everyday life while simultaneously communicating emotion and instruction.²²⁸

There can be no individual and collective symbols, least of all will they facilitate an understanding of the past. At stake here is the possibility of re-presenting the insurmountable contradiction between that which has proven to be socially possible and that what can be humanly imagined:

The earthquake of Lisbon sufficed to cure Voltaire of the theodicy of Leibniz, and the visible disaster of the first nature was insignificant in comparison with the second, social one, which defies human imagination as it distils a real hell from human evil. Our metaphysical faculty is paralysed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience.²²⁹

²²⁸ Milton, Sybil, 1991. *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), p. 8 & 9

²²⁹ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 361/362

Only this very presence of an absence within the imagination of the past makes an image of the unimaginable possible if the flashes of the past are accepted as present's concerns.

James Young identifies the importance of balancing the needs of the public against the demands of contemporary art and, at the same time, ensure governmental approval: What does the German public need? Who could possible tell them what they need and not be authoritarian? What does contemporary art demand? Why would it be important to ensure governmental approval? How is governmental approval ensured? Young quotes Henry Moore, who as the chairman of the competition launched by the International Committee of Auschwitz for a monument for official commemorations and ceremonies, announced the following decision:

The choice of a monument to commemorate Auschwitz has not been an easy task. Essentially, what has been attempted has been the creation - or, in the case of the jury, the choice - of a monument to crime and ugliness, to murder and to horror. The crime was of such stupendous proportions that any work of art must be of an appropriate scale. But, apart from this, is it in fact possible to create a work of art that can express the emotions engendered by Auschwitz? It is in my conviction that a very great sculptor - a new Michelangelo or a new Rodin - might have achieved this. The odds against such a design turning up among the many maquettes submitted were always enormous. And none did. Nor were any of the purely architectural ... projects fully satisfactory. There were, in the end, three projects, all of which were judged good, but none of which was considered entirely adequate. The jury considered that its primary task was not to award a prize, to decide which of these three was the best, but rather to ensure that the finest possible monument to be built at Auschwitz.²³⁰

²³⁰ Young, James E., 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 135

Moore seems to suggest that there could be an appropriate iconographic and aesthetic tradition that could be applied to such a memorial. Such creations could naturally only be attempted by canonised artistic geniuses. By leaving such a creation to the fateful appearance of a genius, Moore focuses on the artistic challenge of the project. Thinking the questions of the Shoah, however, is an ongoing task. The problem here is that Moore renders any criteria useless because he falls back onto the Romantic's notion of a genius - and thus moves dangerously close to a National Socialist vision, as I now explain.

The Austrian sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka chose a spectacular event to re-tell history in his monument 'Cap Arcona'. On 3 May 1945, 7500 prisoners, mainly inmates of the concentration camp Neuengamme, were crammed onto a boat and shipped onto the Baltic Sea. Still in the bay of Lübeck the boat was bombed by the British; those who survived and managed to swim ashore were shot dead by the Nazis on the beach. Hrdlicka carves human bodies and torsos into marble; they are plunged into each other by the roaring sea, which buries everything. Hrdlicka claims that his work deals with the experiences of the Shoah and the Second World War. He aims to represent in his artistic creation 'the horror of the individual, that which people honestly experienced'²³¹.

Hrdlicka aims at representing the personal dimension of the catastrophe, the 'personal dismay'. Hrdlicka vehemently opposes the concept of the anti-monuments. Hrdlicka understands his art as a provocation that is more than mere decoration: 'Truly significant art - in contrast to the decorations of the abstract and serial art of today - faces the actual/real.'²³² Simon Wiesenthal fiercely rejects Hrdlicka's 'Memorial against War and Fascism' on Albertina-Place in Vienna for its depiction of a Jew scrubbing the street and remarks that

²³¹ quoted after Werner, Gabriele, 1988. Welche Realität meint das Reale? Zu Alfred Hrdlickas Gedenkmal in Hamburg. *Kritische Berichte*, 3/1988, p. 57

²³² Werner quoting Schubert, *ibid.*

'his memorial and the 'Jewish additions' of the street-scrubbing Jew could for the majority of the Jews not present an adequate monument for the greatest crime of this century - the Holocaust'²³³.

Through the aestheticisation of chaos, violence and destruction Hrdlicka claims truth and credibility. However, that which he assumes as 'realistic', is concentrated in the portrayal of the victims.²³⁴ Gabriele Werner sees in such a discourse a ridiculing of the experience of National Socialism. She claims that Hrdlicka's art plays in to the hands of an historicism that provides a theory of Fascism as a fateful apocalypse and does not mention the well-planned politics of destruction of the Third Reich's ideology.²³⁵ Hrdlicka claims to rescue individuality - if not the individual experience! - which he understands to be extinguished through the typified monument. James young writes that Hrdlicka's

'real achievement was merely the unveiling of sore feelings, repressed memories, anger, and controversy. Painfully and self-consciously wrought, his monument belongs wholly to those who want to remember without drawing too much attention to their memory-art. Instead of relieving past trauma, memory becomes its own trauma, perpetually deferred.'²³⁶

Hrdlicka's attempt to artistically juxtapose the individual experience, the 'horror of the individual', with the industrialised mass murder of the Nazis is problematic because it refers to the emotional. Gabriele Werner is right when

²³³ Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.), 2000. *Projekt: Judenplatz Wien* (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 9

²³⁴ The transfiguration of suffering is part of Christian iconography an art. There is no such thing in the Jewish tradition. There can be no transfiguring interpretation of the Shoah, no symbolic expression or meaning-saving 'glorification' of Jewish suffering whose sole purpose is to stir emotion.

²³⁵ Werner, Gabriele, 1988. Welche Realität meint das Reale? Zu Alfred Hrdlickas Gedenkmal in Hamburg. *Kritische Berichte*, 3/1988, p. 57ff.

²³⁶ Young, James E., 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press), p. 112

she claims that Hrdlicka's art can never be anything other than an abstraction with regard to the millions it names. On the contrary, I am convinced that the figurative, the kind of art Hrdlicka stands for, could never achieve the impossible: to aesthetically and artistically re-present the event and to communicate an understanding of that which happened.

To face the real artistically and aesthetically - especially in terms of monumental art - does not mean to rely on the figurative. Gabriele Werner mentions that to Hrdlicka only the principle of creation with an emphasis on technicality and craftsmanship seems important: 'Truly significant art - in contrast to the decorations of abstract and serial art of today - faces the real(istic).' Only this art that faces 'reality' is granted a future - thus excluding a broad spectrum of art:

Everything that Breker created is empty like the paintings of a Mondrian or Newmann ... He thus remains a forerunner of Minimal Art without conforming totally. His Reich's-motorway-kilometre-thinking, in Viennese dialect 'the empty kilometre', becomes established in nearly all common trends in art intensified after the war: monochrome painting, Op Art, Hard Edge etc. Everything infinitely repeatable, serial, as if cut out from one piece, paintings by the metre ... Meanwhile many -isms have registered and de-registered; what distinguished them without exception is the possibility of their imitation, similar to an industrial product. Flooding the market for a short term, production and interpretation march in rank and file.²³⁷

Hrdlicka asserts that the presence and future of his creation lies in its difference to the Avant-garde . He, as well as Moore, does nothing less than re-formulate an artist's image as a creating genius whose creations are arguably autonomous. The justification of Hrdlicka's works of art reads as nothing less than Goebbels' propaganda:

²³⁷ Hrdlicka, Alfred, 1984. Die Ästhetik des automatischen Faschismus. *Schaustellungen: Bekenntnisse in Wort und Bild* (München), p. 110; s. also Werner, p. 62/3

According to his nature the artist works with his heart and not through logic. And it is therefore his grandest and greatest virtue to remain naive and simple. His appeal is, therefore, generally not addressed to the small ruling class of national intellectualism - the artist's appeal generally regards the entire nation. As he comes from the people so he speaks for the people. He is, so to speak, the appointed spokesman of the national people's soul.

For this reason, art, for the person who practises and enjoys it, is something holy and obliging. It does not spare those who engage themselves in its service. One must serve it completely or better not at all. And to be inspired by it means fate and vocation. Only to a few does it grant a life free of trouble and anxieties. The others, though, the many, have to serve it and have to suffer for it. And still they can never free themselves of it: it (art) is the very demoniac urge within these human beings. It helps them feel, foresee, sense and create and elevates them into higher spheres from which most others are excluded. A people, however, recognises in its art the deepest and greatest expression of its nature. It is not true that art, as such, is international. Its effects can be international. Its roots lie within the *Volkstum* and therefore within the nation.²³⁸

But the questions of a relation between the aesthetic and the Shoah remain, when Habermas claims that 'only a memorial can testify the will and the message of its founders. And only art that does not compromise provides the appropriate language for such an undertaking'.²³⁹ The question remains of whether art, in the form of a monument/memorial, is capable of portraying the questions of the Shoah aesthetically. When does art 'compromise'? More importantly, what does a compromise in relation to the subject matter mean? As it has already been established there cannot be a commonly shared context wherein traditional symbolic forms of expression and ritual practises could generate a collective force without rationalising: 'The effect of a memorial that

²³⁸ Dr. Joseph Goebbels at the 'Festival of the Reich's Theatre' in Düsseldorf on 14 June 1937, British Library/National Sound Archive T1133OWR (starting ICL00 66313)

²³⁹ 'Nur ein Denkmal kann den Willen und die Botschaft seiner Stifter bezeugen. Und nur eine kompromißlose Kunst bietet dafür die geeignete Sprache'. Habermas, *Die Zeit*, 1 April 1999

does not fail aesthetically, today always lives off the wavering reservoir of those reasons which have lead to its erection.'²⁴⁰

In his essay 'The Author as Producer', Benjamin considers the problem of form and content and their importance and co-dependence:

I would like to demonstrate to you that the tendency of poetry can only then be politically correct if it is correct literally. That means, that a politically correct tendency includes a literary tendency. And - to add to this - this literary tendency that implicitly or explicitly is contained in any correct political tendency - this literary tendency and nothing else makes out the quality of the work. Thus, the *correct* political tendency of a work includes its literary quality because it includes its literary *tendency*.²⁴¹

We need to examine to what extent the form of a work of art in its monumental form is static and what meaning it could have for future societies (if different). Benjamin's concept of art implies that 'effective' art works against finality, but it is a concept that does not necessarily fall back onto 'traditional' or even figurative artistic media. Art that takes a clear political stand - thus facing the 'real', true and correct - provokes. To face the 'real' within the medium of art also and ever more so means to face that which is not depictable, which cannot be re-presented. What is more 'real' than the historical event of the Holocaust?

²⁴⁰ „Die Wirkung eines Denkmals, das ästhetisch nicht mißlingt, zehrt heute immer auch vom schwankenden Reservoir der Gründe, die zu seiner Errichtung geführt haben'. Habermas, *ibid.*

²⁴¹ „Zeigen möchte ich Ihnen, daß die Tendenz einer Dichtung politisch nur stimmen kann, wenn sie auch literarisch stimmt. Das heißt, daß die politisch richtige Tendenz eine literarische Tendenz einschließt. Und, um das gleich hinzuzufügen: diese literarische Tendenz, die implicit oder explicit in jeder *richtigen* politischen Tendenz enthalten ist – die und nichts anderes macht die Qualität des Werks. *Darum* also schließt die richtige politische Tendenz eines Werkes seine literarische Qualität ein, weil sie seine literarische *Tendenz* einschließt'. – Benjamin's emphasis. „Der Autor als Produzent', GS, II, 2, p. 684/5

Art that wishes to intervene has to consider seriously that the 'real' and 'true' can exist in abstract forms, unclarity and unvividness of the concrete. Otherwise, as Gabriele Werner points out, its methods and technique would be banal and anachronistic in relation to the technical and logistic systems of those using violence and terror²⁴². Only by working-through and coming-to-terms with the event is a future possible. Like Benjamin's Angel, who is a witness to the 'real', 'true' destruction, we are faced with a history that caused the utter disintegration of values. In the willingness to endure such disintegration (also in artistic terms), in the continued gaze upon the destruction lies the possibility of re-presentation.

Throughout the debates in Germany, there seems to have been a latent distrust at work regarding the complex language of contemporary art, especially with regard to art after the Shoah. At moments the questions of the aesthetic dimensions had counter-productive effects on the debate itself. The debate was superimposed with innumerable other discussions where the work of art was only marginally present: 'Art is a question of taste - it is idle to discuss it. But will this abstract work of art be understood by the people?', Ariel Muzicant wrote in 1997 with view to the planned memorial in Vienna.²⁴³

What has to be 'understood'? Is it the actual facts of the historical event or the intentional message, expression and implications behind the design(er) and the commissioner? Contemporary memorial art seems to face a profound antinomy: between its function as a reminding memorial and its claim as an art form. A national monument has to generate and give rise to some kind of

²⁴² Werner, Gabriele, 1988. Welche Realität meint das Reale? Zu Alfred Hrdlickas Gedenkmal in Hamburg. *Kritische Berichte*, 3/1988, p. 63

²⁴³ Ariel Muzicant was then vice-president of the Israeli Cultural Community in Vienna. Muzicant, Ariel, 1997. Rasch entschieden. *Wiener Journal*, Oct. 1997, p. 12

communal or communicative appeal if it is intended to re-present more than a sign of indulgence or a sedative for the conscience. It has to implore commemorative activities whether in the form of pathos or antipathos, austerity or emphasis, whether as a simple piece of 'popular art' or as a piece of unwieldy conceptual art. In any case its aesthetic dimension cannot be ignored or argued away. As such it holds clues to the contemporary surroundings where the political and intellectual concept of remembrance is expressed in the aesthetic dimension.

The concept of 'aestheticisation' played an important role in the on-going debate, suggesting, in itself, a trivialisation of the horrors, a playing down of history, thus giving voice to the fear that through the 'aestheticisation' the horrors could be disposed of. However, the assumption that any aesthetic form can satisfy a representation 'adequate' to the horror is fraught. On the other hand, I would like to argue that it is only artistic creation that can permanently represent the affects that accompany mourning and horror. The 'quality' of the memorial needs to be judged by its representation of uncertainty and loss of valid experiences; only then might it be able to counter the danger of memorial kitsch.

A well-meaning duty to remember cannot be enough when these two extreme positions meet: during the course of the intense public debate it has been argued that 'the discussions around the memorial's erection would be the true monument'²⁴⁴. Implied is a demand for conclusion, and an explicit claim that an actual building seems questionable and that the quest for an adequate aesthetic solution seems pointless, as Reinhart Koselleck argued: 'once the

²⁴⁴ Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 193

debate is visualised, it brings about a sealing conclusion'²⁴⁵. Both positions grant language certain powers; on the one hand, language is granted a productive power while, however, the language of the image is rejected; on the other hand, language appears as medium that obscures and hides. Any kind of social consensus, however, in relation to the horrors of the National Socialist regime and society's involvement in the guilt complex has to be questioned fundamentally. Intrinsic to every memorial process is the suspicion of symbolic exoneration.

But is there really more clarity in the written word than in the untouchable language of art? The British sculptress, Rachel Whiteread remarks that

having read extensively about the Holocaust it struck me that it is really a subject beyond comprehension and that any attempts at "explaining" it are doomed to fail. If art – and sculpture – is expression by other, non-verbal means, then it is a good way of overcoming this verbal deadlock. ... In addition to the symbolism of the sculpture there is, of course, the added symbolism of the location.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Kos, Wolfgang, 2000. Erinnerungspolitik und Ästhetik. *Projekt: Judenplatz Wien*, Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.) (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 77

²⁴⁶ Rachel Whiteread in *Judenplatz Wien 1996 – Competition: Monument and Memorial Site dedicated to the Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime in Austria 1938 – 1945* (Wien: Folio), p. 85. The Austrian procedures of building a Memorial to Austria's murdered Jews seems to have been equally complicated and controversial as the German process. In December 1994, Simon Wiesenthal pointed out that the city of Vienna still had no adequate memorial that remembered the murdered Jews of Vienna and Austria. The city's major, Peter Häuple, agrees to erect a memorial on the Judenplatz. In the autumn of 1995, an international jury, chaired by the Austrian architect, Hans Hollein, decided on the competition details and invited nine architects and artists to participate. On 25 January 1996, Rachel Whiteread is announced as the competition's winner. In June 1996 a major controversy starts; it was argued that the discovery and excavation of the medieval synagogue would make a better memorial. Simon Wiesenthal defends the competition's chosen memorial concept and the planned site. In September of the same year, the planned memorial becomes an election theme. Only on 25th October 2000 are the memorial finally unveiled and the museum and the archaeological site opened.

The mistrust against the image is not directly opposed by a similar prejudice against the manipulative potential of language. The lengthy discourse fails to recognise the dangers of pathos, kitsch and linguistic stereotypes.

During the long controversies it was argued that there was no 'common ground' anymore, no commonly recognised aesthetic rules and conventions. The dialectic at work here between presence and absence, between remembrance and forgetting cannot be solved by an objective, universally valid demand which could re-present the challenge at hand. On what concept of memorial or monumental art are we supposed to fall back onto? Are we to judge the memorial by the concrete and personal (work)experience of the artist? Does art's predicament and dictate rival the public need or has art disqualified itself for political-ethical concerns because of its self-reflexivity? Wolfgang Kos seems to be implying the latter:

The example [Whiteread in Vienna] shows that in a public monument the agenda of art clearly reaches beyond the design. Artists become curators and mediators of their own ideas, they have to prove themselves in a public process - be it with uncompromising precipitousness or with elastic pragmatism. The quality of the memorial can also be measured against the sovereignty with which they are acting this role.²⁴⁷

If there are no figurative conventions of monumental rhetoric, yet the communicative potential of contemporary art has been recognised, what kind of meaning could be ascribed to the metaphorical? Should it be to evoke horror but not to depict it? The text for the competition in Vienna mentions a reservation for a figurative solution which was also argued by Simon Wiesenthal: 'a figurative portrayal cannot be taken into account' - and Hans Hollein, the president of the jury, argued that it was 'appropriate to aim for a non-figurative form of

²⁴⁷ Kos, Wolfgang, 2000. Erinnerungspolitik und Ästhetik. *Projekt: Judenplatz Wien*, Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.) (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 80

expression in view of the difficulty to re-present the indescribable event.²⁴⁸ With the example of Vienna at hand why does Berlin not seem to be able to avoid the glut of well-meaning art of symbolism?²⁴⁹ The question of context seems explosive, yet banal within a public art filled with moral intentions.

The counter-monument group's concept questions the true premises of the existence of figurative solutions. The creating artist convincingly proposes a moral duty to remember. Monumental reification is rejected and the project in itself becomes ephemeral. Yet can the planned memorial in Berlin display some of the Benjaminian auratic robustness to the changes of memory?

The current discussions in the countries of perpetrators regarding liability and responsibility are part of the process of working-through and coming-to-terms; regardless of feelings of shame and guilt, the last decade in Germany has proven that there is an increasing will and need to remember. The impossibility to let go, the not wanting to let go, the not being able to forget, points to the fact that, around the sign 'Auschwitz', 'something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined'²⁵⁰. I have often wondered what a society without memory would be like; to Adorno it would have been a 'terrible vision of a society without memory'. Memory is not instructed

²⁴⁸ see Kos, Wolfgang, 2000. *Erinnerungspolitik und Ästhetik. Projekt: Judenplatz Wien*, Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.) (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 80; Heinrich Heine said that for the Jews the Torah resembles a 'portative fatherland' (see Assmann, Jan, 2000. *Das Volk des Buches. Projekt: Judenplatz Wien*, Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.) (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 101). The exiled Jew could inhabit the spiritual realm of the Book to keep the memory of Jerusalem alive during the Babylonian Exile.

²⁴⁹ During the course of my research in Berlin I was so fortunate to be permitted to look at 'private', non-public correspondences of politicians who themselves had voiced an opinion on the memorial design during the parliamentary debates. The amount of response to their public statement by 'well-meaning' citizens was overwhelming – and dauntingly naïve, full of pathos and symbolism, beyond kitsch.

²⁵⁰ Lyotard, Jean-François, 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 13/4

from above, although the erection of a national monument and public ceremonies could imply as much. Memory can not be heteronomous, and is not reference to the gaze of the other on-looking countries, as Jan Assmann argues: 'Memory comes from within, from a longing to know and to hold onto'.²⁵¹ The German term 'Erinnerung' (memory) wants to internalise something (innen), it wants to bring something back to the conscience. As Lyotard says 'Erinnerung' is 'the memory that interiorizes'²⁵².

How can a monument re-present and re-store that which is supposed to be within our own conscience? Assmann makes clear that there is yet another dimension to the concept of memory. Memory also demands an outside world and support, places of memory where memorable events took place and unforgettable people lived, as Jan Assmann claims: 'Man will das, woran man sich erinnert, vor Augen haben. - That which one remembers one wants before one's eyes.'²⁵³

The following explanations on the slight difference in concepts of remembering and memory in the various languages, I have borrowed from Jan Assmann. The English term 'to remember' is based on the notion that something broken and torn, something dis-membered needs to be restored, to 'recollect' scattered and dispersed debris. Assmann notes that if 'Erinnerung' wants 'to retrieve the outer into the inner world of the heart and the conscience, remembering and recollection focuses on the gathering and unification of the scattered pieces of the past'. 'Erinnerung' is the action of a remembering subject, whereas remembering and recollection concerns the remembered past

²⁵¹ Assmann, Jan, 2000. *Das Volk des Buches. Projekt: Judenplatz Wien*, Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.) (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 98/9

²⁵² Lyotard, Jean-François, 1997. *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 29

²⁵³ Assmann, Jan, 2000. *Das Volk des Buches. Projekt: Judenplatz Wien*, Wiesenthal, Simon (ed.) (Wien: Paul Zsolnay), p. 99

and thus the dead. A society that remembers often searches for the one concluding and all-explaining picture that re-assembles the debris of the past.

The passive character of memory, Jan Assmann asserts, is expressed in the French term '*se souvenir*'. This type of remembrance is a central momentum in the virulent memory of the Holocaust. This past often afflicts itself upon us; it strikes and torments us because it is entirely independent of all subjective attempts to remember. This part of memory lies deeply hidden, beyond all understanding and coming-to-terms. To this kind of memory we cannot react with suppression and silence – it will come back to haunt us if not addressed and internalised.

The process of remembering is a dynamic one. Jan Assmann has made clear that when we speak about memory all these concepts are part - often subconsciously – of the complex process. He continues by arguing that in order to remember the disposed of, the alienated, and in order to recollect the dispersed and to evoke that which urges from the subconscious, we need signs.

The planned memorial in Berlin could be such a sign - the sign of the 'never again' that will help us to remember 'so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen'.²⁵⁴ This hope we may never renounce because it makes a future possible that links past, present and future through the constant attempt of remembering.

When Germany's former President of State, Richard von Weizsäcker, famously delivered his speech to the fortieth anniversary of the end of war on 8th Mai 1985, he was the first to speak of 'remembrance as the secret of redemption'. The memorial site Yad Vashem in Israel, until recently²⁵⁵, used to

²⁵⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 365

²⁵⁵ On a later visit to Yad Vashem in Spring 2000, the plaque had been removed and we found it on a pile of debris and rubbish in the corner of the room in the dust.

exhibit a plaque with a text by Baal Shem Tov, the founder and first leader of Hasidism (1700-1760), in its 'Hall of Remembrance':

Forgetfulness leads to exile,
Remembrance is the secret of Redemption.

The Hebrew text, so Prof. Dr. Rolf Rendtorff explained, is constructed around a chiasmus: at the beginning of the first line stands the *Gôlāh*, the exile. The second line ends with the word *G^oʿûllāh*, 'redemption'. Between the two concepts exists a clear dissonance which is not expressed in the English version. At the beginning stands the exile, not the forgetting. Thus a more accurate translation would be:

The exile is prolonged through forgetting,
Remembrance is the secret of Redemption.²⁵⁶

One thing here needs to be addressed clearly: to use this sentence – often only the second part is quoted - in connection with the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin is utterly inappropriate. The memory of the victims will redeem nobody; the remembrance of Auschwitz cannot redeem anybody. As the reading of Walter Benjamin's text have shown, redemption can only figure as a category of hope, in relation to 'mindful remembrance'.

The text of Baal Shem Tov is concerned with the religious remembering of the Holy Land and the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, the redemption of the soul that is separated from God and becomes aware of that separation.

I would like to argue that Germany (also the united Germany) has built a basis for national self-esteem on an ambivalent pride in its present as the utter rejection of the past. The remembrance of its horrific past is hugely self-serving

²⁵⁶ A copy of the letter from Prof. Dr. Rolf Rendtorff to Prof. Dr. Richard Schröder explaining the text is in my possession.

in so far as its desire to form a national identity is based on a strict opposition to its past. In the shadow of the Shoah any notion of identity within the nation of perpetrators is uniquely problematic.

If, for decades, the protection of memory was not the first priority of the political parties, its presence now within the political and historical consciousness is essentially created and intended to propagate the 'new' and 'other' Germany. The German population has to engage in a seemingly never-ending process of soul-searching without any hope of an eventual resolution.

How does a nation live with the impossibility to master? To redeem its past back from history seems its constant task. With the construction of a (national) work of art an important attempt is made to close down some questions, to provide some answers. It is not why did it happen or how did it happen, it is an attempt to provide an answer to the question: how do we come to terms with it? What does coming-to-terms with it mean and entail for us and the future generations?

To remember in Germany also means to be able to form a solidarity with the historical victims for their own sakes, as Walter Benjamin reminds us in his second thesis 'On the Concept of History':

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is refereed to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and present ones. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that precede us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.²⁵⁷

To remember the victims in the country of perpetrators means to form a respectful link to the historical victim, and to reserve them the space within the community. The Berlin Memorial also needs to be a sign of public respect for the

²⁵⁷ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 245/6

victims of mass extermination. This respect is shown by the current German nation, a community that themselves is not guilty but stands in family and/or political relation to the perpetrators. The acceptance of responsibility is based in the understanding of being placed in a moral-political context.

Other sites of remembrance fulfil different criteria. The places of deeds - for example, the 'Topography of Terror', the Wannsee-Villa or the former concentration camp Sachsenhausen - are also places of remembrance but, primarily, they address the questions of working-through and coming-to-terms. Memorials that remember the unpleasant are rare. Public memory in Germany has to refer to that which unites all German citizens; it has to admonish the later born Germans - and the rest of the world - of what Germans did to German citizens - of that which is utterly unimaginable.

3. Indication of the Symbolic – Lack of the Obvious: the Designs

A. Weinmiller's 'Metamorphosis of Immersion'

In Gesine Weinmiller's memorial design (see Figures 9 & 10) one descends into memory. The sloping field is enclosed on three sides. Between 18 wall-like blocks of sandstone that seem to be scattered randomly in the field, one descends further into the depths of the unknown. While descending, the surrounding scenery of buildings and the noises of the city slowly go down, possibly disappear completely, and the horizon rises the further one descends. Through the broken wall one steps onto some stairs that lead back to the surface from where we began our decent.

Here, on top of the stairs, looking backwards over the randomly scattered wall-like blocks - the pile of debris - the most striking and powerful encounter happens: at this point the blocks join together in a distorted perspective of an abstract star of David, only to fall apart immediately again as soon as one moves beyond that point - 'it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.'²⁵⁸ In a perspective illusion the remembrance of the historical event flashes up to make the past part of our present. In the power of the memory of the individual visitor the void is closed for seconds, only to reveal again the real, carved out void at the heart of Germany's capital Berlin.

The slabs can mediate a feeling of barbaric destruction standing almost unconnected, seeming, at first, randomly scattered. While they allow an association of threat, they equally point to refuge and shelter of some sort. One

²⁵⁸ Benjamin, Walter, 1999. *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico), p. 249

can still look back onto the field of a carved out void and from a certain angle the field of destruction becomes, in a very abstract way, a unity again, not sharp, blurred contours and obscured outlines but an illusion, yet a brief terrifying moment in time where one could come as close as humanly possible to understanding, where the whole truth, the sheer horrifying truth of the elusive past seems to be falling into place. Here one could come close to 'the true picture of the past' as it 'flits by', as Walter Benjamin reminds us:

The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again. ... To articulate the past historically ... means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.²⁵⁹

According to the artist's rationale²⁶⁰, submitted to the committee, the 18 blocks of stone represent 'life' (chai) in Hebrew numerical symbolism. The walls are rough and coarse, joined together loosely so that in the joints grass and moss can grow. The coarseness of the walls shows the joints of construction. James Young writes that 'the stacking of large blocks recalled the first monument in Genesis, a Sa'adutha, or witness-pile of stones, a memorial cairn; the rough texture and cut of the stones visually echoed the stones of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the ruin of the Temple's destruction'.²⁶¹

The rough texture and form of the stones are reminiscent of ruins. The gravel one is walking on transforms the steps into sounds and into footprints that are remain behind. On the front wall one might pause. Visitors may put candles down for their own private memory. On official occasions the wreath may be put

²⁵⁹ *Illuminations*, p. 247

²⁶⁰ see Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Sefrens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 889

²⁶¹ Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 204

down here. An inscription is planned for the front. Weinmiller does not see this inscription as part of her area of responsibility; yet, she suggested a 'pragmatic' text, nothing poetic, but rather a 'description of the facts'²⁶². The descent into the memorial space could mark a counter-movement to the possible rise of memory.

In an interview with the *Tageszeitung* from 8 December 1997, Gesine Weinmiller voiced her concept of remembrance that is built upon individual moments²⁶³. She insists that memory and remembering, in the first place, are something highly private, which grows within the individual. It is her intention that the visitor moves away from the roaring hectic life of a city in order to be immersed, and wrapped up in the memorial where one experiences the loss of horizon, even the loss of impressions.

For Weinmiller there exists a certain order in which the memorial becomes accessible: one can observe it from the outside, one enters, and at the end one comes to the wall of remembrance. The visitor is walking down towards and into his memory, listening to one's own footsteps and movements on the pebbles - the process of remembering made into a physical movement.

Weinmiller's site is part of the town but at the same time it is separated from it. Gesine Weinmiller asserts that architectural elements were necessary to blend out outer, alien, any unrelated appearances that could distract. The traffic noise should be faded away if the memorial was to be erected at this site. She insists that in relation to one's own impressions perhaps a constant background noise would interfere less whereas the continuous stopping and starting of the traffic would render a remembering impossible. For that reason, her design does not intend the memorial to be on level ground. It is designed to create a place of quietness, a place where one needs to take a deep breath and then immerse oneself in the unexpectedness of memory. However, she attaches great value to

²⁶² *Die Tageszeitung*, 8 December 1997

²⁶³ Weinmiller, *Die Tageszeitung*, 8 December 1997

the fact that her design connects to the now. It is in the vicinity of the Brandenburg Gate, the Potsdam Place, and the Reichstag. At the end one ascends through the wall of remembrance upstairs, back into the hectic city life - caught in 'the storm' that 'irresistibly propels into the future'²⁶⁴ -, where, so often, there seems to be no space for memory.

According to Gesine Weinmiller²⁶⁵, her design revolves around the following three elements: she does not want to leave the viewer in despair. The visitor should attempt to internalise the terrible event through remembering. Thereby no new images should be presented. Gesine Weinmiller asks the viewer to 'live' through the motives that the viewer has already internalised. Her work does not seek to compensate for the Shoah in architecture; the beautiful illusion dissolves as soon as it is created. Because her aesthetic stylisation is an illusion it does not leap into idealisations. Her artistic creation is essentially imagination; her illusive re-presentation claims autonomy over its own project by transcending it and thus allowing for the mute, speechless to reappear. The strongest and most persuasive part of her design is the magical moment where the visitor

grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.²⁶⁶

Gesine Weinmiller was criticised precisely for the aesthetic 'beauty' of her design; the design itself was too 'harmless', it was lacking the aggression of the

²⁶⁴ *Illuminations*, p. 249

²⁶⁵ see Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit – das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ – eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo),

²⁶⁶ *Illuminations*, p. 255

Serra/Eisenman conception. The 'affect–calming solemnity' would be inappropriate.²⁶⁷ Weinmiller did not want the 'pleasant' aspects of her site to be read as 'considerate treatment'. On the contrary, she asserts that one would need a peaceful and quiet place for the terrors of history to reach one, to be approachable by the memory of such events. The memorial needs to ascertain its place standing in dialectic with the urban situation and city life.

Gesine Weinmiller is adamant that the memorial cannot fulfil didactic purposes. That would be the task of the neighbouring institutions such as the 'Topography of Terror', 'The Jewish Museum', 'History of German Resistance', and the memorial sites of the former concentration camps. Neither does her design attempt to deliver an answer or an explanation; accordingly a reduction to a common denominator of aesthetic representation is not possible²⁶⁸. She offers a space where one can work-through and try to come-to-terms with one's past, but she does not provide answers. A memorial cannot have any reconciliatory purposes; it cannot be the place where Jews and non-Jews meet by chance and shake hands, Weinmiller asserts. This would depend entirely on a private initiative.

'In principle architecture is innocent', Weinmiller said and subsequently tried to defend her audacious statement when she was invited to present her design to the committee and the public²⁶⁹. Gesine Weinmiller was asked, in front of cameras and descendants of the victims, to justify how she could create a

²⁶⁷ see *Der Tagesspiegel*, 25 January 1998, *Die Tageszeitung*, 26 January 1998, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 January 1998, *Berliner Zeitung*, 26 January 1998; most of the mentioned articles are also published in Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit – das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ – eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 1000

²⁶⁸ Müller-Wirth, Moritz, 1998. „Die Macht meiner Häuser“: Gesine Weinmiller, Shooting-Star der Architektenszene, agiert oft kontrovers, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1998

²⁶⁹ *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1998

design for a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe only on her own biographical experiences²⁷⁰.

It is, as Moritz Müller–Wirth writes in the *Tagesspiegel*, ‘the momentum of her own insecurity [in regard to the questions at stake] that contribute to the understanding of her memorial design’.²⁷¹ It is this momentum of most intimate truth that makes her design most persuasive: the openly admitted concern of a generation that has no biographical connections and yet is confronted with this urgent need to remember. She admits to the existence of an absence, to the insecurity of not knowing what it is; but her memorial design transcends and thus re–presents this difference between the unimaginable presence of the annihilation and that which is humanly or aesthetically imaginable. The uniqueness of her design lies in the fact that she does not attempt to answer questions that have arisen from the occurrence of the Shoah as such. The strength of her project ultimately is based on the understanding that, to address current questions, to address matters of the Now, to confront the present momentum, can never avoid the continuous insistence of the Shoah. It is the insecurity of not knowing, of not being familiar with every detail, the impossibility of such task that she is aware of and makes part of her project while, at the same time, opening a space for remembrance and mourning.

In her own explanation, it is essential to ‘boil down one’s own thoughts so much that one reaches the essence of the project’.²⁷² She is asking the question of the relation between knowledge and remembrance, especially with regard to the generations to come, whose ‘knowledge’ is passed on via information and

²⁷⁰ She claimed that impressions from school and encounters with a rabbi friend in Amsterdam had predominantly shaped her access to the complex thematic of the Holocaust and helped her to come-to-terms with it as a later born generation.

²⁷¹ Müller-Wirth, Moritz, 1998. „Die Macht meiner Häuser“: Gesine Weinmiller, Shooting-Star der Architektenszene, agiert oft kontrovers, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1998

²⁷² *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1998

sources that have been handed down: 'I would like to mediate the memorable form of the Holocaust. Perhaps, I and my children will not need the monument but future generations will in any case.'²⁷³ Gesine Weinmiller has noted the presence of a problem and it is the question of how to continue after the Holocaust, how to remember it if there is no one left to bear witness. It is the presence of that problem that informs her work.

Gesine Weinmiller was thirty-four years old when she took part in the competition, Müller Wirth describes her as 'some kind of shooting star in the German architectural scene'.²⁷⁴ She had already become second in the competition for the alteration of the Reichstag; she won the commission for the rebuilding of the governmental villa of the president of parliament; the federal industrial tribunal in Erfurt is also her design. However, she became well-known through her participation in the competition.

The slabs re-present an image of the distorted star of David. The image is never visually sharp which, to me, makes it profoundly ungraspable; its truth remains unknown to most of us. The walls on the ground reminds me of wailing walls but Weinmiller claims that such a religious reference is not intended. The walls are scattered in the area. As a design it neither provokes fear nor is it too 'monumental'. Only after having moved down onto the sloping site and arriving at the lower end, does one notice how much taller (7m) the 'single', comparatively 'small' walls at the upper end have become. It is this feeling of presence which Gesine Weinmiller calls '*metamorphosis of immersion*'; this metamorphosis is more important than images one has seen before²⁷⁵.

²⁷³ 'Ich möchte die herausragende Form des Holocaust vermitteln. Vielleicht brauchen ich und meine Kinder kein Denkmal, aber die nachfolgenden Generationen auf jeden Fall.' *Die Tageszeitung*, 26 January 1998

²⁷⁴ Müller-Wirth, Moritz, 1998. „Die Macht meiner Häuser“: Gesine Weinmiller, Shooting-Star der Architektenszene, agiert oft kontrovers, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1998

²⁷⁵ *Die Tageszeitung*, 8 December 1997

For Weinmiller the size of the site is an advantage; this vast area is taken from the city - a part of the city is 'missing' in terms of urban planning – representing the very part that was taken from our society through the Holocaust. The emptiness that remains from the loss of many people is made obvious by choosing such a prominent location. From the distance one would not be able to see much of the Weinmiller design: the Reichstag, the Brandenburg Gate, the American Embassy, a void, the Representation of the Counties, and Potsdam Place.

In the debates concerns repeatedly were voiced about the enormous size of the site. Weinmiller does not consider this problematic: 'I think that this is one of the reasons why architects cope far better with such a task than artists: after all, we do not do anything else but deal with space, be it in size, height or proportion.'²⁷⁶ It is her architecture that is capable of shaping public space and memory aesthetically by transcending the insurmountable difference between the historically and socially possible and the humanly unimaginable. Maybe this memorial comes as close to achieving the impossible task of memorialisation as humanly possible.

B. Serra/Eisenman's Cemetery-Like Monumentality

Their original design (see Figures 3, 4 & 5) claims to be challenging the idea that it could be possible to depict the mass murder with emblems of individual mourning: 'Whoever wants to ... free forms from the memory of their prior meanings and use them anew must work precisely against theses

²⁷⁶ *Die Tageszeitung*, 8 December 1997

associations.²⁷⁷ Eisenman and Serra created a new, overwhelming space that formally echoes a cemetery motive whereby the form of such a cemetery is magnified and exaggerated so that it is turned against itself. The 4000 pillars form a waving field of gravestones, ½ to 5m tall, and 92cm removed from each other. The land sways and moves between the pillars so that each one is some 3° off the vertical. The visitor has to find his or her own path between the pillars of memory. (see Figure 5)

This is what Eisenman calls its *Unheimlichkeit* (eeriness)²⁷⁸; a sense of unease is generated in such a field, as we are urged to find our way in and out of memory. Unlike the Weinmiller design, the scale of this installation will hardly allow an over-all perspective from the ground. The visitors need to enter the memorial space and live through their experience. Because there are multiple entrances and exits through which the visitor can approach the site of memory, it is a memorial without a narrative beginning, middle and end, thus creating a sense of incompleteness. In their multiple and variegated sizes, the pillars are both individuated and collected: the very idea of 'collective memory' is broken down here and replaced with collected memories.

Over time the Eisenman/Serra design gathered the force of consensus²⁷⁹ among commissioners, the Chancellor's office (Helmut Kohl) and the public at

²⁷⁷ Kücker, Wilhelm, 1982. Abschied von der Architektur-Moderne?. *Der Architekt*, No. 2, 1982, p. 64

²⁷⁸ Young translates 'Unheimlichkeit' with 'uncanniness'. I think 'eeriness' is the more appropriate expression since it implies the feeling of mystery and fear that the German word 'unheimlich' carries. Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 206

²⁷⁹ Unfortunately, I was not able to find out why, suddenly, the consensus gathered around the Eisenman/Serra design. Young claims that the consensus was far from 'unanimous'. He implies that it was reached because of political pressure. See Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 208 - The implication that one very powerful German politician, the Chancellor Helmut Kohl, could just voice his preferences and that would decide on the winning

large²⁸⁰, as the most powerful and appropriate of the four announced finalists²⁸¹. In January 1998, Eisenman and Serra were asked by Chancellor Helmut Kohl to introduce a few changes to their model. As a result of such suggestions, Richard Serra withdrew from the project, insisting that changes would be a threat to his work's internal logic and integrity, and that the project would, effectively, no longer be his work.

Kohl requested that both the size of the individual pillars and their number be reduced and the area intended for public commemoration be enlarged. As a result, the number of pillars decreased to around 2700, and the height of the lowest pillar was raised to approximately half a meter tall. At the same time, a row of evergreen trees was introduced; this has the effect of demarcating the space from the rest of the city, as well as integrating it by connecting it visually with the Tiergarten on the west side; a design known as Eisenman II (see Figure 6).

In the summer of 1998, national elections were looming but deadlines for the Chancellor's announced decision on the design passed without comment. In

design, ridicules the democratic principle of the deciding body and renders the whole competition useless. Gesine Weinmiller daringly designed the psychological status at stake in the German remembrance process by tentatively approaching aesthetically the unimaginable. Helmut Kohl, who only a few years earlier had coined the phrase of the 'Gnade der späten Geburt' (mercy of late birth - implying that his generation was born too late to have anything to do with National Socialism and thus did not need to engage with it further), may have felt some confirmation of his politics and belief through the Eisenman/Serra design. Kohl was not the only one for whom the insistence on the sheer monstrosity of the event, which lies far beyond human imagination, functioned as an alibi not to engage and work-through at all.

²⁸⁰ It is difficult to use a term like 'the public'. I suppose, here I am referring to the views of the public as expressed in reports, commentaries and suggestions by journalists and others in the media whose views might not necessarily be those of the public as a whole.

²⁸¹ To the designs by Weinmiller and Eisenman/Serra recommended by the Findungskommission, the memorial's organisers (Auslober) added the works of Jochen Gerz (Warum?) and Daniel Libeskind (Stone-Breath) in order to keep the debates and choices as open as possible.

the heated debates over the 'correct' design it soon became clear that, as an electoral issue, the memorial would only ruin any politician who actually had an opinion on it. So the final decision was deferred until after the election date of 23rd September. With the victory of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) - the party with a strong tradition of remembrance, the party of Willi Brandt - one might have expected changes in the memorial debate with a sincere statement on the process of memorialisation. Throughout the election and after, Culture Minister Michael Naumann's²⁸² opposition to the winning design and his repeated suggestions for alternatives or alterations brought along huge confusion. Naumann wished for an 'interpretative, library and research centre' to be added. When asked by Mr. Naumann, Eisenman presented yet another model with a possible archive and library complex. This design has widely become known as Eisenman III (see Figures 7 & 8). However, after long discussions and debates, it was agreed that, only after the Bundestag took a vote on the Eisenman II design and approved it, would the 'Auslober' consider a proposal to add a library and research centre. In June 1999, the Parliament voted to erect the Eisenman II design as a 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe'.²⁸³ Nothing has happened since.

This design does not represent both the scale of destruction and the void left behind as demanded by the invitation to the competition. Neither does it allude to the monumentality of Nazi architecture. The design's inability to take up

²⁸² This is Germany's first State Minister of Culture since the Third Reich, admittedly without any constitutional rights yet. To this day, cultural matters (including educational ones) are still dealt with by the Länder, not the state.

²⁸³ As expected, not much has happened since then. Berlin's own bank went bankrupt. As a consequence, the city of Berlin is now insolvent and can no longer pay its institutions, least of all in the cultural sector. However, with a delay of only one year, the foundation stone to the 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe' was finally laid in January 2001. And there is still this huge, gaping hole in the centre of Germany's old-new capital Berlin...

the past as a concern of the present will render future generation's preoccupation with memory difficult, if not impossible.

Richard Serra takes part in the ongoing debate of whether a work of art is capable of expressing, adequately, the tragedy and extent of the Shoah. Rather than approaching the subject from an artistic viewpoint, he engages in the ideological examination of what has to happen in Germany; he understands that 'the context always rubs off on to the content of what one is doing, and that there is nothing with regard to the called-upon content that would be as strong as the camps themselves'.²⁸⁴ If Peter Eisenman's work has its origin in an image of the Jewish cemetery in Prague and is thus trying to evoke a certain content, Serra's work is neither based on the attempt to arouse feelings nor does it refer to an image: 'I usually start with the site and try to find out what kind of sculpture might be necessary but I do not start with an image or a preconception of how to evoke feelings.'²⁸⁵ Serra reminds us that historical or political art or monuments were never part of his work. Despite having worked on the project for months, if not years, Serra considers it impossible to design an iconography for the collective annihilation of people.

Serra claims to have left the team purely for artistic reasons. He claims that his problems arose from the fact that Eisenman's design is based on a minimalist principle in order to become a post-modern monument:

He [Eisenman] used works by Donald Judd, Carl Andre or me like a pastiche for the content and feeling the memorial was to express.

²⁸⁴ Serra, Richard, 1998. *Zum Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin* – archival manuscript (Kunsthalle Hamburg: Reden über Kunst)

²⁸⁵ Serra, Richard, 1998. *Zum Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin* – archival manuscript (Kunsthalle Hamburg: Reden über Kunst), p. 3

At that point I had to get out, because I have no intention to plagiarise or to parody my own, abstract work.²⁸⁶

Serra insists on a stark contrast between monument and abstract sculpture. In his definition monuments are static; they represent time, place or event. His memorial design revolves around time and present, premonition and memory. Only art can work as the catalyst for a rethinking. Their iconography for the Nazi genocide was based on the structures and principles of minimalism:

it became an eclectic torso, and that was one of the reasons why I left. I do not know what could be suitable for this iconography. I do not think that pictorial quality or illustration would be capable. I do not believe that figuration could do it.²⁸⁷

The more Richard Serra protested against the political monopolisation of his art, the more Peter Eisenman seemed to be willing to comply with certain political demands. To what extent, however, is art in public spaces politically influenced? With Gesine Weinmiller's design it becomes obvious that the work has to assert its position and space next to the everyday life of a European capital and its governmental district. The work has to assert its place within the reality of life, it has to resist the ideological framework of politics and set itself in juxtaposition to it. Serra understands such political or ideological framework as 'some kind of cultural catalyst'. In Peter Eisenman's notion, however, the memorial design does neither remember the victims nor the deeds of the perpetrators:

²⁸⁶ Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit – das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ – eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 1169; see also Serra, Richard, 1998. *Zum Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin* – archival manuscript (Kunsthalle Hamburg: Reden über Kunst)

²⁸⁷ Serra, Richard, 1998. *Zum Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin* – archival manuscript (Kunsthalle Hamburg: Reden über Kunst), p. 4

It [the memorial] does not pose these questions. It does not condemn. Those who understand themselves as victim or perpetrator can feel whatever they want. ... The memorial calls guilt into question, it does not project guilt forward.²⁸⁸

Serra mentions the German 'left', starting with Günter Grass, and its claim that no symbol or sign can deal with the guilt that people feel. To him they are pleading 'their guilt' as an excuse, something they do not want to be reminded of:

I do not believe that the Germans really want this memorial. In my view there exists a certain political correctness, especially with the left, which says: 'We ought to build the memorial'. But if you analyse their arguments, like those from Günter Grass, they do not express anything else but that there cannot be a symbol that can express the guilt, and the guilt needed to be expressed. Thus I believe, the left ultimately does not want the memorial because it does not want to be remembered of its guilt. ... Kohl used the whole thing as a political football, he did not mind whether the one or the other design comes to be realised, he only thought of the headlines. If the project helps him politically, he takes part in it. That he did not want to stand by the plan to build it last January or Spring, is grounded in his fear to alienate the entire right. And so he could give it back to major Diepgen who did not want to build it anyhow. ... I think the big problem of this monument is that stretches along the grounds of four blocks of houses and that it contains 4000 single elements, that it became a terrifying place and a possibly critical statement. Having said that I do not want to take anything away from the necessity to build the monument, but I believe that the psyche of the Germans does not want to be confronted with it everyday.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Peter Eisenman – Interview in *Die Zeit*, 10 December 1998

²⁸⁹ Serra, Richard, 1998. *Zum Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin* – archival manuscript (Kunsthalle Hamburg: Reden über Kunst), p. 2/3; also Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit - das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ - eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 1169

He, however maintains that no sign, symbol or monument has to deal with 'their guilt'. For Serra the unmodified memorial would deliver a critical statement and this he sees as problematic.

Peter Eisenman speaks of a dual interpretation of his design that, initially, seemed peaceful and quiet: 'Perhaps like the beginning of the National Socialist movement in the eyes of many Jews.'²⁹⁰ For him, the so-called failure of art in the context of the Shoah does not mean that there is no possibility of political criticism. He is less concerned with the aesthetic re-living (Erlebnis) than with a critical, understood and immediate experience (Erfahrung). In his memorial design spirit and body, which have been separated by our media society, get in contact again; here, in the space of the design, the body will be able to feel something. Eisenman understands the memorial as a spiritual place where the question 'why did this happen?' is posed. He claims that the memorial sites of former concentration camps deal with the 'how' and 'what', but that they do not ask 'why'. His design, on the other hand, would be posing the question of 'why'.

Habermas makes clear that we have to accept the design towards which the political discussions have been running since there is no clear and better alternative. At the same time, he lets us know that the Eisenman II is not his first choice. He even goes so far as to imply that the choice of a Jewish American architect could be seen as the board's imperceptible evasion of a responsibility which the Germans have to 'come to terms with' alone, a responsibility they have to bear themselves²⁹¹. It is the 'unobtrusive pathos of the negative' of the Eisenman design that finds Habermas' approval.

For Peter Iden the field of pillars, however, is determined by an openness with which only art can react facing reality. Depending on the point of the perspective, the pillars form a conceptual framework, an alternating set of

²⁹⁰ Peter Eisenman - Interview in *Die Zeit*, 10 December 1998

²⁹¹ Habermas, Jürgen, 1999. *Die Zeit*, 1. April 1999

patterns; Iden finds this set-up of pillars corresponding with the structural process of memory:

But who proceeds into the small corridors inside the field will learn between the masses of stélæ of the experience of sudden, continuously increasing loneliness and will have to endure it. It also means: he is risking his identity – like any individual or collective remembering necessarily questions the identity of the subject, the group or the society; on the other hand, it drags the past into the openness where it had once been as the present.²⁹²

The original design implied a certain sense of physical danger because of the sheer scale and form of its design suggesting 'something more than a mere figure of threatening memory'²⁹³. Monumental buildings and works of art could mirror something of the aesthetic of the Sublime; however, in the case of the Eisenman design, the monumental not necessarily places it in relation to the unimaginable of the mass extermination of the European Jews. The sheer monumentality and overwhelming dimensions might draw similarities with the problematics of the remembrance process. For me, that is also the problematic of the design, whether intentional or not. The event is so unimaginable, so impossible that the design does not even imply the limits of aesthetics and imagination, let alone pose the question 'why'. The attempt to create an aesthetic illusion of the unimaginable cannot surpass the real - that which was socially and historically possible but which cannot be understood in human

²⁹² ,Wer sich aber auf die schmalen Gänge innerhalb des Feldes begibt, wird zwischen den Massen der Steine die Erfahrung plötzlicher, dann zunehmender Einsamkeit machen und aushalten müssen. Das heißt auch: Er riskiert seine Identität - wie jedes individuelle oder kollektive Erinnern die Identität des Subjekt, einer Gruppe oder einer Gesellschaft notwendig in Zweifel, das Vergangene abermals ins Offene zieht, das es als Gegenwart einmal war'. Peter Iden, *Wider die falsche Versöhnung*, *FR*, 26 June 1999

²⁹³ Young, James E., 2000. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 207

terms. The mere dimensions and use of form and symbols do not acknowledge the limits at stake.

The boundary between the historically possible and the unimaginable are violated through an aesthetic depiction that does not acknowledge the very presence of an absence in human imagination. The horror or fear that one might experience when lost in the maze of individual remembrances and memories (all the individual pillars taken together form the collection of memories, e.g. collective memory) does not make the past part of the present.

C. The Schröder Proposal

The Berlin theologian Richard Schröder suggested that a simple tablet be installed in one of the memorial designs with the inscription of the biblical Commandment *"Thou shalt not kill!"*. It should be written in Classical Hebrew letters, the originating language of the Commandments. For the admonition to be understood it needed to be written clearly in German and several other languages (all languages spoken by the victims) to show the European dimension of the Holocaust. Schröder suggested to use Martin Buber's translation of *"Thou shalt not murder!"* since the Hebrew and German language differentiate between killing and murder.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Schröder's reasoning is that 2500 years ago when the Hebrew autograph originated there was not yet a legal definition of the different offences of killing. He argues that the equivalent word in Hebrew means a killing outside the law - never was it applied to the killing in wars and the death penalty. For that reason the translated inscription should say 'murder'. The prohibition to murder is indisputably the core of any prohibition to kill. Furthermore, it is correct to say that the prohibition to murder cannot be the only prohibition to kill. However, Schröder bemoans that the ability to differentiate is lost, that we carelessly equate killing and murder for the sake of provocation. A murder is committed if an innocent, defenceless human being is insidiously and

The striking simplicity of the idea, however, has got a twist to it on which some subsequent misunderstandings have been based. The 'prohibition to murder' is indeed unoriginal and simple. However, human history has given ample proof that despite the simplicity of its demand we need to be reminded of it.

Why use Hebrew letters? Could that not be (mis)understood as ridiculing the victims? Schröder rightly asked that consideration be made for the fact that in their everyday lives the victims have hardly spoken Hebrew but German, Polish, Yiddish etc. Since the Third Century classical Hebrew has not been spoken but has only remained as the holy language of the sacred writings of Judaism - similar to the role Latin played in the Catholic Church up until the Second Vatican Council. Zionism, when claiming the national homeland for the Jews, developed the new Hebrew language. With the foundation of the State of Israel - as such an indirect result of the persecution of the Jews in Europe - New Hebrew became the official language.

Professor Schröder insists that 'the prohibition to murder in the Classical Hebrew language is meant as a reference for the fundamental contribution of the Israeli-Jewish tradition to the culture of Europe'.²⁹⁵ Israeli-Jewish contributions to European culture have been abandoned from our collective

cruelly killed. A murder needs to be set apart from other punishable and reprehensible offences of killing like manslaughter in a fight or by culpable negligence (e.g. drunk driving). A murder needs to be set apart also from those cases where the killing of a human being not only is unpunished but also morally necessary. Schröder gives the example of a policeman who kills somebody because he can in no other way prevent that person from committing a murder. In this case the policeman was shooting in defence and not committing a murder. In failing to act we make ourselves culpable in a moral sense because we are no less responsible for our failure to act than we are for our deeds.

²⁹⁵ 'Das Mordverbot in althebräischer Sprache soll eine Referenz sein an den fundamentalen Beitrag der israelisch-jüdischen Tradition für die Kultur Europas'. Richard Schröder, *Die Zeit, Verbietet das Morden!*, 29 April 1999

memory. Together with the Jewish people the Nazis also wanted to extinguish the Jewish culture in Europe. Schröder counters the argument that the Hebrew letters would make the commandment an appeal to the victims by drawing the readers attention to the Latin inscriptions at classical buildings: 'In reality they [Latin inscriptions] are a reference of classicism to the cultural inheritance of the antique Rome.'²⁹⁶ Christians do not have their "own" ten commandments; they share them with the Jews. Schröder claims that the Hebrew letters were intended to give prominence to the Jewish victims without explicitly excluding other victims of the Nazi persecution.

Not only did the Nazis no respect for this commandment, they systematically abused it. To quote one of the ten commandments from the Decalogue, from the Hebrew Bible, an European autograph pays reference to the fundamental contribution of the Jewish people to European culture, to its moral as well as legal culture. For Jews and Christians the commandment is God's commandment. For those who do not believe in God it will be a commandment of reason – something humanity has ascribed to.

Nonetheless, the inscription "Thou shalt not murder!" is faced with the same problem of not including the 'sinners of omission', those who would claim later that they personally did not feel demonic, that at best they felt 'seduced' – and now were burdened with the history. But is the word, in this case an inscription, really more precise in its message, more expressive, more durable than the artistic design? Is language less prone to give in to the changes of the time, less easily influenced by the changes of the Zeitgeist? Can words really make explicit the intention behind the memorial?

The remembrance of the fates of individual victims can never be the task of a national, public monument or memorial. The emphatic remembrance of

²⁹⁶ „In Wahrheit sind sie (lateinische Inschriften) eine Referenz des Klassizismus an das kulturelle Erbe des antiken Roms'. Richard Schröder, *ibid.*

individual fates is passed on through biographies, films and encounters with witnesses. When claiming that 'in the deep compassion for the victims the German responsibility disappears', Schröder points to the long and suppressing struggle of remembrance in Germany. The National Socialists knew about the commandments, they knew about the 'prohibition to kill and murder'. Yet this did not prevent the almost total extermination of European Jewry 'and because this was possible to such an extent, it is necessary to remember the 'prohibition to murder' in Germany, in a public place, in the centre of the capital, close to the parliament and government'²⁹⁷.

A memorial that symbolises and can easily be associated with a graveyard - what else if not gravestones are stelae - is out of place:

The place does not exist where the victims have been buried. They were burned to death, the ashes were "disposed" of. Graveyard-compensation for the victims is not imperative but rather the admonition to the later-born Germans.²⁹⁸

The historian Raul Hilberg considers the admonition of the commandment unnecessary and pointless: 'The sentence "Thou shalt not murder" is in this context one about the German past. Nobody is fearing nowadays that the Germans would kill another people.'²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ 'Und weil das in diesem Umfang möglich war, ist es angezeigt, das Mordverbot in Deutschland im öffentlichen Raum, im Zentrum der Hauptstadt und nahe bei Parlament und Regierung zu erinnern'. Richard Schröder, *Die Zeit*, *Verbietet das Morden!*, 29 April 1999

²⁹⁸ 'Es gibt den Ort nicht, da die Opfer begraben wurden. Sie wurden verbrannt, die Asche "entsorgt". Nicht Friedhofersatz für die Opfer ist geboten, sondern eine Mahnung an die nachgeborenen Deutschen'. Richard Schröder, *FAZ*, *Du sollst nicht töten*, 22 March 1999

²⁹⁹ 'Der Satz "Du sollst nicht morden" ist in diesem Zusammenhang einer über die deutsche Vergangenheit. Heutzutage fürchtet keiner, daß die Deutschen wieder ein Volk ermorden werden'. Raul Hilberg, *Tagesspiegel*, 23 April 1999

Andreas Nachama, chairman of the Jewish community in Berlin, welcomed the debate initiated by Schröder. He expresses sincere concern that the Hebrew quotation of the commandment would be understood solely by theologians and the victims and thus be pure graphic decoration for the broad majority of visitors. Nachama asks the German version of the commandment to be placed in the more prominent position of the inscription: 'After all, the structures for the industrial murder of the European Jews was written in the language of Luther, Goethe and Schiller but not Hebrew.'³⁰⁰

Perhaps Schröder's proposal takes a certain knowledge of theology and history for granted. But he cannot be accused of reproaching the victims for the prohibition to murder. The fundamental cultural contribution of the Israeli-Jewish tradition to Europe should be remembered, especially in view of the National Socialist attempt not only to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe as such but also their culture and tradition. According to Hermann Rauschning, Hitler had the vision to free humanity from the demonic curse of the Decalogue: 'Ah, the god of the desert, this insane, moronic, vengeful Asian tyrant with his power to make laws! This whip of a slave-owner! This diabolic "Thou shalt, Thou shalt!" And then this stupid "Thou shalt not!" This has to disappear from our blood, this curse from the Mount Sinai.'³⁰¹ Hitler wanted to wipe out any Jewish cultural contribution. The Biblical commandment is the first categorically, unconditionally formulated prohibition to murder of any history. Hebrew language is not only

³⁰⁰ 'Schließlich waren die Baupläne für den industriellen Mord an den europäischen Juden in der Sprache Luthers, Goethes und Schillers, nicht aber im Hebräischen verfaßt'. Andreas Nachama, Tagesspiegel, *Sinn und Spruch*, 8 April 1999

³⁰¹ 'Ah, der Wüstengott, dieser verrückte, stupide, rachsüchtige asiatische Despot mit seiner Macht, Gesetze zu machen! Diese Peitsche eines Sklavenhalters! Dieses teuflische "Du sollst, du sollst!", und dann dieses törichte "Du sollst nicht!" Das muß endlich aus unserem Blut verschwinde, dieser Fluch vom Berge Sinai'. Hermann Rauschning - see Richard Schröder, *Die Zeit, Verbietet das Morden!*, 29 April 1999, and Sibylle Tönnies, *Das Töten soll einmal ganz aufhören*, *Berliner Zeitung*, 25 March 1999

(and not in the first place) the language of the victims; it is also a world language. To inscribe the words of the commandment "Thou shalt not murder!" does not only include all the victims, but it also pays a particular and appropriate reference to the Jewish victims since they are attributed to the Mosaic God.

Does the general formulation of the commandment detract from the uniqueness of the Holocaust? Habermas considers the sentence 'Thou shalt not murder!' to be universally applicable and sees the 'unsparingly specific meaning of the unimaginable disappear if the commandment was repeated in Hebrew and the other languages of the murdered'.³⁰²

Perhaps it is true that we will have to live with the violation of the Biblical commandment as long as humanity exists. Since (and before) the Second World War and its innumerable victims, no era of peace has ever commenced. The Middle East, Vietnam, Rwanda, Iran/Iraq, Kosovo - they have all paid their bloody contribution to history, as if Auschwitz and its perpetual admonition to humanity never existed. The prohibition to murder is a universally valid declaration to humanity. For the Germans, God's commandment will be an admonition and a reminder of the vital Jewish contribution to European culture.

D. Naumann's 'House of Remembrance'

For Naumann, Germany's newly appointed minister of culture, the most fundamental problem of social remembrance lies in the fact that individual memory, relying on direct or passed-on experiences, and stately manifestations of history can not easily be brought together:

³⁰² Habermas, Jürgen, 1999. *Die Zeit*, 1. April 1999

On the contrary, in its stony reification in the memorial social mourning of the murdered seems to appear, as it were, officially. But at the same time the aesthetic, "official" remembrance threatens to fail in front of the artistically non-presentable event of the genocide of the Jews.³⁰³

Social anamnesis needs interpretation but that this may not necessarily be applied by academic standards, recent films, like the highly acclaimed 'Schindler's List', have shown. There can never be a prohibition to remember. But will such aesthetic withdrawal precisely in its a priori-implied failure, end society's remembering in favour of ritualised remembering? Does a memorial - at least symbolically - not bring to an end the process of remembering with a socially accepted, artistic gesture?

Narrative forms of anamnestic self-regulation in rites and myths, in stories, laws and sanctions could be understood as the generalisation of articulated individual experiences. In contrast to Habermas, Naumann claims that national and historical consciousness are a derivative term of private, individual and consequently subjective attention to the past:

In this respect the "self-understanding" of a society is the concept of a compact or differentiating source of continuing, sometimes enlightening, more often however obscuring, sometimes regulating, more often confusing, religious, mythographical, philosophical, poetic, artistic, scientific and always political reflections on its right order in the present and history.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ ,Im Gegenteil, in ihrer steinernen Verdinglichung im Denkmal scheint zwar gesellschaftliche Trauer um die Ermordeten gleichsam offiziell. Gleichzeitig aber droht das ästhetische, "amtliche" Gedenken vor dem künstlerisch undarstellbaren Ereignis des Völkermordes an Europas Juden zu scheitern'. Naumann, FAZ, 1 April 1999

³⁰⁴ ,Das "Selbstverständnis" einer Gesellschaft ist insofern der Begriff eines kompakten oder differenzierten Ablaufs kontinuierlicher, manchmal erhellender, öfter verdunkelnder, manchmal regulierender, öfter verwirrender religiöser, mythographischer, philosophischer, poetischer, artistischer, wissenschaftlicher und immer auch politischer Reflexionen über ihre richtige Ordnung in der Gegenwart und in der Geschichte'. Naumann, FAZ, *Blick in die Tiefe der Täterschaft*, 1 April 1999

From the point of strict phenomenology, a society on the whole does not remember; every process of remembrance is a subjective process of individual consciousness. Therefore, every society is in a latent state of self-oblivion.

For that very reason, Naumann preferred a 'cognitive, enlightening' approach to the Shoah, which resulted in the design 'Eisenman III': the combination of memorial (smaller field of pillars), the Leo-Baeck-Institute, Spielberg's Video Archive and the 'Genocide Watch Institute'³⁰⁵. According to Naumann's idea, visitors would find, next to the appeal 'Never again!', emotional and rational access to the question which in its intensity is still unanswered: how could that have happened? how was it possible?

America, perhaps, has set the standards regarding museums' didactic, but the 'House of Remembrance' would have to develop its own perspective according to German history - regardless of Jerusalem and Washington, but with those in mind. Are these 'active aspects'³⁰⁶ really the only possible solution to avoid the danger of "covering", of the premature closure of a chapter in German history that many still find hard to 'come to terms with'? Michael Berenbaum calls the additions to the memorial 'utopian dreams of reconciliation'³⁰⁷.

Naumann's 'House of Remembrance' cannot possibly give the definitive, final perspective on the Eisenman design. Art is limitless as long as it is understood universalistic; at the same time, however, it is limited provided it is understood historically. Following Adorno's dictum, a prohibition of depiction should have been imposed on the project of the Holocaust memorial. Are the crimes against the European Jews accessible through any kind of depicted

³⁰⁵ Supposedly a research institute that can give advanced warning on further possible genocide. So far, it is a one-man enterprise in Bremen.

³⁰⁶ "Lebendes Museum" – living museum, Raul Hilberg on the Washington Museum, *Tagesspiegel*, 23 April 1999

³⁰⁷ *Tagesspiegel*, 20 April 1999

reification? For Adorno, in art the non-conciliatory reality can no longer tolerate appeasement with the object. Artistic modernity has very much followed this dictum. Art's intention can no longer be to create the essential totality - as little as any other interpretation of the world. Only an art form will be secured that does not fix and arrange its own interpretation and validation for the future. Does not the object, the Holocaust Memorial, forbid any other thought?

In a letter to Eisenman, the philosopher Habermas implored the architect not to be tempted to amend his design:

I hope that you are vaguely familiar with my name ... I am writing to you with regard to your meeting with Mr Michael Naumann, December 19, in Berlin and would like to ask you not to give in to any alternative that might be offered to you. You are anyway well aware of the simple argument against Mr Naumann's proposal to replace a lasting monument by some sort of institution for historical instruction: Such a place can tacitly [be] turned into something else, once the climate shifts. Just now we envisage the devastating mental consequences of the debate between Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis. It is for the first time that representation of the political and intellectual elite of this country bring to the fore a dangerous opposition between German/German and German/Jewish citizens. ... I am deeply convinced that we, now more than ever, need exactly the kind of monument that you and Serra designed. The monument should be a sign that the memory of the Holocaust remains a constitutive feature of the ethico-political self-understanding of the citizens of the Federal Republic. ...— a week before the Parliament in Bonn will debate the issue under the tense attention of the nation. ... In this context it is, however, of decisive importance that the author of this project does not show the least sign of hesitance in the last minute.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Letter from Jürgen Habermas to Peter Eisenman, 16 December 1998, published in Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit – das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ – eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 1185

Peter Eisenman did not seem to have received the letter; his ability to change and adjust his design to the given political demand is incredible, yet it raises questions about the 'genuineness' and 'originality' of the design.

III. 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?'³⁰⁹ - Questions of Identity and Coming-to-Terms in Post-War Germany

The previous chapter looked at the implications of the chosen medium of the monument and at implicit and explicit forms and theories of memory in the monumental form of re-presenting the Shoah. The concluding chapter will examine various literary forms of remembrance and attempts of coming-to-terms in post-war Germany. It tries to identify their importance and implications for the historical–philosophical. By identifying the limits that the writings of Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Theodor W. Adorno, Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich and Thomas Mann emphasised, I wish to establish the demand for recognition of the limits of the form of the memorial in particular. Against the backdrop of the changing political parameters of a re-united Germany, we need to thematise the chances and possibilities of these very limits and to address anew the question of 'What does it mean: coming-to-terms with the past?' when the generations to come will have no biographical links to the event that is being re-presented.

This chapter maps out the issues and problematics at stake in the major debates of working-through and coming-to-terms with the National Socialist murderous past that the 1990s in Germany witnessed. I will approach the problematics of the German history of memory in two different ways: I will examine the different memory formations of the individual on the one side and the collective culture on the other, where the role of the individual, its status of generation, the role of winner or loser, victim and perpetrator and the role of the

³⁰⁹ 'What does it mean: coming-to-terms with the past?' – Essay by Adorno (1959) in Adorno, Theodor W., 1997. *„Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse“: Ein philosophisches Lesebuch* (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Suhrkamp), pp. 31-47

media are equally decisive factors. Further, I will introduce the implications and norms of a culture of shame and disgrace and discuss their meaning and relevance with regard to the reinforcement or rejection of memory.

The centre of such analysis will be the author's, Martin Walser's, speech at the 'Peace Prize of the German Book Trade' in October 1998 and the subsequent dispute between the author and Ignatz Bubis, the chairman of the Council of German Jews and a Shoah survivor. I do not intend to deliver further arguments for those on either side of the dispute or, indeed, try to mediate for it is this dialectical position which we have to come to accept in view of the complex memory process. Such undertaking is indeed only possible if the debate is placed in the broader context of the German history of memory and forgetting which can be traced back to the end of World War II, the so-called 'Stunde Null' (Zero Hour) - 8 May 1945. In the process of the an analysis I will be examining such catch phrases from Walser's speech as 'bottom line', 'normalisation', 'positive/negative nationalism', 'moral club', 'instrumentalisation', 'ritualisation', '(collective) guilt', 'conscience', 'shame', and 'disgrace'.

In the following text I examine the different perspectives of post-war German memory in order to reconstruct the motivation behind Walser's speech and the dispute between Walser and Bubis. Therefore it is necessary to re-examine and re-define certain notions of what determines history, past and present, what memory is and what form it takes. For this purpose I shall be looking at major sources of post-war attempts to 'come to terms' in the writings of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers and Thomas Mann.

1. West German³¹⁰ Politics of 'Coming-to-Terms' with the National Socialist Past

In 1990, at the 'Frankfurt Lectures of Poetic', the German author Günter Grass considered the possibilities of 'Writing after Auschwitz'³¹¹. He concludes his lecture by confronting the efforts of German re-unification with the occurrence of Auschwitz:

Against any trend of opinion, any trend that is intensified by public opinion which had been stirred up, against the purchasing power of West German economy - for hard (West) German Mark even the reunification is available -, yes, also against a right of self-determination to which other people are entitled unrestrictedly, against all this speaks Auschwitz; because one of the prerequisites for the horrible - next to other older driving forces - was a strong, unified Germany. Not Prussia, not Bavaria, not even Austria, could have, by themselves, developed and executed the methods and the willpower of the organised genocide; it had to be the whole Germany. We all have reason to fear ourselves as a unit that is able to act. Nothing, no patriotism, however idyllicly coloured, and no assertion of a later willingness can relativise, or even merrily supersede, the experience which we have made as perpetrators and which the victims have made with us as the united Germans. We cannot get around Auschwitz. We should not attempt - however strong the urge - such an act of violence; because Auschwitz belongs to us, because it is an eternal stigma of our history and because - as a gain! - Auschwitz has made an awareness possible that could say: finally, now we know ourselves.³¹²

³¹⁰ Predominantly, I will be studying the West German situation. To compare those findings with the situation in East Germany would burst the thesis' frame of reference.

³¹¹ Grass, Günter, 1990. Schreiben nach Auschwitz. in Petra Kiedaisch (ed.), 1998. *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, (Stuttgart: Reclam), pp. 139-144

³¹² Gegen jeden aus Stimmung, durch Stimmungsmache forcierten Trend, gegen die Kaufkraft der westdeutschen Wirtschaft – für harte DM ist sogar Einheit zu haben -, ja, auch gegen ein Selbstbestimmungsrecht, das anderen Völkern ungeteilt zusteht, gegen all das spricht Auschwitz, weil eine der Voraussetzungen für das Ungeheure, neben anderen Triebkräften, ein starkes, das geeinte Deutschland gewesen ist. Nicht Preußen, nicht Bayern, selbst Österreich nicht, hätten, einzig aus sich heraus, die Methode und den Willen des organisierten

The 'Wende' in 1989-90 radically transformed the existing order; the change of the political order had a profound effect on the self-understanding of the German people in its relation to its present, future and past

It has long been argued that the working-through and engagement with the National Socialist past is more and more motivated by intellectual and scientific approaches and the Germans' relation to power could be less and less characterised by its rigid and paralysed view of Auschwitz³¹³. Nicolas Berg mentions that possibly only an identity freed of the burden of its past would correspond to Germany's increasing significance as a politically and economically powerful nation after the re-unification through an appropriate execution of its newly claimed powers³¹⁴. 'Normalisation' of its own relation to the past while holding onto the crucial experience of Auschwitz, Berg considers impossible. Yet, in my view, these are the very issues that have been informing and structuring the debates of the 1990s regarding the treatment of the Shoah in present attempts to remember. Berg wonders whether the Germans' relation to the Shoah will be increasingly of an intellectual and scientific nature. He continues by asking how, if that was the case, then could the event be

Völkermordes entwickeln und vollstrecken können; das ganze Deutschland mußte es sein. Allen Grund haben wir, uns vor uns als handlungsfähige Einheit zu fürchten. Nichts, kein noch so idyllisch koloriertes Nationalgefühl, auch keine Beteuerung nachgeborener Gutwilligkeit können diese Erfahrungen, die wir als Täter, die Opfer mit uns als geeinte Deutsche gemacht haben, relativieren oder gar leichtfertig aufheben. Wir kommen an Auschwitz nicht vorbei. Wir sollten, sosehr es uns drängt, einen solchen Gewaltakt auch nicht versuchen, weil Auschwitz zu uns gehört, bleibendes Brandmal unserer Geschichte ist und – als Gewinn! – eine Einsicht möglich gemacht hat, die heißen könnte: jetzt endlich kennen wir uns. *ibid.*, p. 143

³¹³ Frei, Norbert & Steinbacher, Sybille (eds.), 2001. *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag), p. 105 f.

³¹⁴ Berg, Nicolas, 2001. Der Holocaust in der Geschichtswissenschaft. in Frei, Norbert & Steinbacher, Sybille (eds.), 2001. *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag), p. 106

maintained in the focus of our own historical picture? In the following text, I argue that with the 'Wende' in 1989/90 memory has increased and the attempts of working-through have intensified. Whether, however, the '(process of) mourning' has turned into what Berg calls 'a remembering culture of mourning', remains to be proven.

West German post-war history and its attitude towards the second German state can roughly be marked by three different stages: when in the 1950s the increasing East-West differentiation of the Cold War left hardly any hope for reunification, the West German government under Konrad Adenauer (CDU) opted for an alliance with the Western hemisphere. In 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany was 'provisionally' founded. The new republic took pride in its fundamentally democratic foundations (Grundgesetz) and categorically considered its political status of anti-Nazi nature. As a consequence the past crimes were not addressed and no attempts to 'work through' were initiated; the German government's lack of willingness to de-nazify resulted in the curious phenomenon that many former Nazis could continue their life unimpeded.

In December 1966 the Adenauer era ended with a 'broad coalition' government between CDU and SPD. Through chancellor Willi Brand's initiative, the Federal Republic embarked on the so-called 'Ostpolitik' which finally resulted in the acceptance of the GDR as a sovereign state.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the new, united Federal Republic of Germany is struggling to 'create' a German national identity; the problematics of which lie in the double history of National Socialism and the GDR regime of the two German states.

The German past with its demand for memory, with its questions of guilt and atonement, have long been of interest for artists trying to address the issues at stake. Equally important to me seems the question: to what extent has art,

writing or philosophy influenced and shaped the subsequent decades of political attempts of dealing with the National Socialist past?

The newly founded Federal Republic of Germany understood itself as the successor state of the National Socialist Germany. With the 'Reparation Treaty' (Wiedergutmachung) in 1953 the Federal Republic signalled a Western German willingness to assume general responsibility for the National Socialist crimes against the Jews, committed in the name of the Germans. 'Wiedergutmachung' was the absurd phrase for seeking to make amends. Politically and symbolically, the Treaty is in so far significant as Konrad Adenauer believed to be making 'things good again'. But in 'return' Germany regained national strength and international respect. The 1960s were witness to fierce public debates regarding the statute of limitation (Verjährung) on Nazi crimes³¹⁵. At the same time, a growing number of memoirs was published. Concurrently, artists and academics began to address the silenced past in their search for possible answers.

Adolf Eichman was brought to trial in Jerusalem in 1961. The trial was broadcast on TV both in Europe and the United States of America. In 1964-65 the Auschwitz trial was held in Frankfurt. Extensive media coverage of the trial reached the Western German population at the same time as Rolf Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* and the social-critical theatre of Peter Weiss. But simultaneously, the 'clean' Hollywood version of 'The Diary of Anne Frank' (1959) or 'Judgement of Nuremberg' (1961) reached a wide audience. In addition, a growing body of memoirs and histories was published. Reinforced by the trends in theatre, film and publishing, the scholarly interest began to rise; conferences, museums and exhibitions were to follow.

Aleida Assmann, Professor of Literary Studies, identifies different key stages of the history of the remembrance process of the Federal Republic of Germany, each of which correspond to a certain phase of political

³¹⁵ It was finally abolished only in 1979.

stabilisation³¹⁶. From 1945 to 1955 Germany was occupied by the Allies. While the Western German State was predominantly busy founding a new republic (1949) to regain the status of 'normality' within the world community, the Allies took it on themselves to de-nazify the Germans, and to address the question of guilt; in short, to set the process of working-through and coming-to-terms in motion. The years 1955 to 1989 were characterised by the existence of two German states and their individual approaches to coming-to-terms with a mutual past. Although Germany was no longer an occupation zone, the division of the two German states was the clear sign that this country was not a 'normal' one. The year of the re-unification in 1989 opened the so-far last phase in the memory process. It brought with it a transition of the concepts: 'normalisation' became the catch phrase and now came to mean 're-nationalisation', as Aleide Assmann claims³¹⁷. For the first time, the head of state and the government had no immediate personal connection with the Nazi period and belonged to the so-called post-war generation. The post-unification period witnessed an enormous boom in memorial activities despite the gradual disappearance of the generation of victims and perpetrators.

In 1986 the 'Historian's Dispute' re-opened the debates on the self-conception of the German Republic in view of the past; the debates should last for over a decade. The 'Historian's Dispute' began on the question of whether the Shoah could be equated with the crimes of other nations and/or people, including other genocides³¹⁸. The philosopher of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen

³¹⁶ See Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), pp. 59-69

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 63

³¹⁸ Ronald Reagan, before his visit to Bitburg with the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1985, had already expressed his view that 'the German soldiers on the Eastern front were noble

Habermas, then claimed that such an argument would relieve the Germans of their historical burden and duty. He reproached the conservative historians for a playing down of the Third Reich, its deeds, events and philosophy.

In 1993, the German author Botho Strauß publicly reproached the 'post-war intelligence' for their views on German history, because in his understanding they only recognised 'the badness of current affairs'. Strauß opposed the 'guardians of conscience', the 'inhibiting German self-hatred', and the left-liberal conformism with its 'vocabulary of outrage' that always blamed society. Strauß castigated 'the critically enlightened who had no sense for the undoing', for the tragic and fatal that inhabits history³¹⁹.

In 1994, Spielberg's film 'Schindler's List' saw record numbers of cinema visitors. The following year, 1995, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of many concentration camps and the fiftieth anniversary of the end of war which, especially in Germany, was commemorated in numerous Days of Remembrance. The diaries of the Jew, Victor Klemperer, were published and quickly heading the bestseller list for months in Germany. Klemperer meticulously described the (his) 'every day' life of Jews during the Third Reich in Dresden.

In 1996, Daniel J. Goldhagen's book 'Hitler's Willing Executioners' caused new excitement. Although not yet published in Germany, the Germans fiercely debated and rejected his thesis of the 'eliminator Anti-Semitism' of the ordinary

defenders of the last bastion of Western civilisation against the Asiatic hordes of the Red Army and that German civilians at home were the innocent and unwilling subjects of a faceless 'fascist dictatorship' which no one appears to have supported and for which no one was responsible.' s. Fulbrook, Mary, 1999. *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press) These words from the president of the United States of America in conjunction with the visit to the war cemetery in Bitburg where members of the Waffen-SS were buried, had already provoked enormous public attention and controversy.

³¹⁹ see also Weck, Roger de, 1999. Der Kulturkampf: Günter Grass, Jürgen Habermas – und ihre Widersacher. *Die Zeit* No. 41, 1999

Germans. In its essence Goldhagen's thesis claimed that not only the leading Nazis, but most of all, the 'ordinary Germans', were to be blamed for the Shoah because their hatred of Jews was deadly different to the Anti-Semitism of the neighbouring nations. In March 1997, Goldhagen was awarded the 'Prize of Democracy of the "Blätter für deutsche und internationale Demokratie"' (Papers for German and International Democracy).

On the initiative of Germany's President of State, Roman Herzog, an official Day of Commemoration for the victims of National Socialism was instituted in 1996. In a remarkable speech in Parliament for the Day of Remembrance on 27 January 1997, Herzog ascertained that a lasting form of remembering Auschwitz had not yet been found³²⁰.

In 1997 the exhibition "War of Destruction: The Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941-1944"³²¹ generated yet another major public controversy. Nicolas Berg mentions that the exhibition beat all record numbers of visitors and that for the opening in Frankfurt on 13 April police protection was necessary. The exhibition – controversially, and scholarly, not always correct, as various reactions have shown³²² – revealed the involvement and collaboration of the German army in the vast machinery of destruction that rolled along the Eastern Front. Until then the 'Wehrmacht' had been given the status of innocence regarding the genocidal

³²⁰ Rutz, Michael (ed.), 1999. *Roman Herzog: Die Zukunft der Erinnerung – Wegmarken deutscher Geschichte* (Stuttgart: ?); see also Berg, Nicolas, 2001. Der Holocaust in der Geschichtswissenschaft. in Frei, Norbert & Steinbacher, Sybille (eds.), 2001. *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag), p. 107

³²¹ Wehrmacht were the German armed forces.

³²² See also Heer, Hannes & Naumann, Klaus (eds.), 1995. *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der deutschen Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg); Berg, Nicolas, 2001. Der Holocaust in der Geschichtswissenschaft. in Frei, Norbert & Steinbacher, Sybille (eds.), 2001. *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag), p. 103 - 126

aspects, involved "only" in matters of traditional and pure conduct of war and warfare.

Two years later, in 1998 the German author Martin Walser was awarded the 'Peace Prize of the German Book Trade' and subsequently gave his (in)famous speech in the St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt. Walser's speech defies 'public acts of conscience', the 'instrumentalisation of our shame for contemporary purposes', and the 'threatening routine of accusations' in the media³²³. 'Auschwitz-Club' and 'latent anti-Semitism' were the all-covering catchphrases of the public controversy that followed between Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis, the chairmen of the Council of German Jews and a Shoah survivor; in their exchanges they sought for 'a new language of memory'³²⁴.

Against the backdrop of this history, over the course of more than 10 years, the German public has been discussing the purpose and meaning, form and content of the planned Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The issues at stake have been discussed and are still being discussed – despite a parliamentary decision - with an extraordinary media, scholarly and public involvement³²⁵. At times the debates themselves reach obsessive proportions as their participants seek recognition as members of a 'normal' nation or argue that this past should never be 'normalised' and hence 'relativised'. All of the public reactions are indicative of the tremendous interest in the issue of German history and memory.

³²³ Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998 – 'Experiences while creating a Sunday Speech'

³²⁴ 'Wir brauchen eine neue Sprache für die Erinnerung' – Das Treffen von Ignatz Bubis und Martin Walser. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 December 1998 – 'We need a new language for remembering'.

³²⁵ See the chapter on the planned Holocaust-Memorial in Berlin. See also Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Sefrens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo)

To be able to comprehend the positions of Bubis and Walser means to reconstruct the history of memory in Germany after World War II and, more importantly, it means to learn, to accept and to live with the tension between the dialectical positions of their individual arguments and memories. As we shall see, Martin Walser's speech was a reaction to the complex German history of remembering that followed World War II.³²⁶

Martin Walser's speech is important in so far that he managed the nearly impossible: he claimed to be listening to and expressing his "inner" voice; yet, this 'personal opinion' became the medium of a 'common need for expression' (allgemeines Ausdrucksbedürfnis), which, as he does not fail to point out, is evident from all the thousands of letters that he had received³²⁷. The importance of the event lies not in the speech itself - which ought to be placed in the category of demagogical and rhetorical masterpieces – but in the broad resonance that it provoked, be it a critical reply or an approving agreement. This phenomenon of collective resonance of attacks and/or declarations of sympathy needs to be closely analysed so that the debate as a whole can be placed in the context of 'coming-to-terms' with the National Socialist past, in the context of Germany's history of remembering.

³²⁶ Only the latter part of this history of memory actually comprises the extension of my life history. Parental and extended family conditions, however, have clearly laid open the ambivalences and inner conflicts of this history. Yet, to be part of a history does not necessarily give the overall perspective.

³²⁷ 'Wir brauchen eine neue Sprache für die Erinnerung' – Das Treffen von Ignatz Bubis und Martin Walser. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 December 1998. 'We are looking for a language of memory that does not yet exist'. That this language will never exist and ought never to exist, seems not to have crossed anyone's mind: On the contrary, memory is coded in many different languages, in the languages of art and literature, film and media, museums, monuments, buildings, commemorative places and archives. With all its monumentality, the planned Holocaust memorial will only be 'one language' under many. Thus the question of the form of its design seems to be far less important than the question of how many different 'languages' of memory we keep alive and open towards each other.

2. The Literary Aestheticisation of the German 'Trauma': Thomas Mann and his 'Doctor Faustus'

In view of the horrors of the Shoah, the Third Reich and World War II, Thomas Mann wrote his last novel 'Doktor Faustus' (1947) while living in exile in America. Mann's fascination with what he conceives to be 'German', what he understands as 'Germanness' is manifested in this novel: 'I have never felt as a deserter of Germanness and of the German fate, at the least in that time when I was writing the Faustus-Novel'.³²⁸ Perhaps the novel essentially addresses the questions of the relation of fascism and art but, on a different level, Mann's protagonist also has to face the problematics of the relation between aesthetics (his art, his masterpiece) and guilt (his knowledge of how he got the 'inspiration' and at what cost).

Towards the end of the novel Mann describes in detail a scene where the Allied forces lead the neighbouring German population through the liberated camps of Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald. Aleida Assmann claims that Mann's description 'entails all the core elements' of what might be conceived as the German 'trauma': "the claims that no-one knew anything; the question of complicity and share of the responsibility and blame; the unwilling recognition and awareness of the horrors committed; the worldwide moral control; the involuntary negative collective identification; the devaluation of perceived German traditions; and the new concept of the Germans as outsiders and

³²⁸ 'Ich habe mich nie als Deserteur vom Deutschtum und vom deutschen Schicksal gefühlt, am wenigsten in der Zeit, als ich an dem Faustus-Roman schrieb.' Thomas Mann, 1992. *Selbstkommentare: 'Doktor Faustus' - 'Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus'*, H. Wysling (ed.), (Frankfurt: Fischer), p. 117

deserted people”³²⁹. In view of the German capitulation, Mann lets his novel’s narrator utter the following words:

A transatlantic general has forced the population of Weimar to file past the crematories of the neighbouring concentration-camp. He declared that these citizens – who had gone in apparent righteousness about their daily concerns and sought to know nothing, although the wind brought to their noses the stench of burning human flesh – he declared that they too were guilty of the abominations on which he forced them now to turn their eyes. Was that unjust? Let them look, I look with them. In spirit I let myself be shouldered in their dazed or shuddering ranks. Germany had become a thick-walled underground torture-chamber, converted into one by a profligate dictatorship vowed to nihilism from its beginnings on. Now the torture-chamber has been broken open, open lies our shame before the eyes of the world. Foreign commissions inspect those incredible photographs everywhere displayed, and tell their countrymen that what they have seen surpasses in horribleness anything the human imagination can conceive. I say our shame. For is it mere hypochondria to say to oneself that everything German, even the German mind and spirit, German thought, the German Word, is involved in this scandalous exposure and made subject to the same distrust? Is the sense of guilt quite morbid which makes one ask oneself the question how Germany, whatever her future manifestations, can ever presume to open her mouth in human affairs? Let us call them the sinister possibilities of human nature in general that here come to light. German human beings, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of them it is, who have perpetrated what humanity shudders at; and all that is German now stands forth as an abomination and a warning. How will it be to belong to a land whose history witnesses this hideous default; a land self-maddened, psychologically burnt-out, which quite understandably despairs of governing itself and thinks it for the best that it become a colony of foreign powers; a nation that will have to live shut in like the ghetto Jews, because a frightfully swollen hatred round all its borders will not permit it to emerge; a nation that cannot show its face outside?³³⁰

The exile, Thomas Mann describes the views, the on-looking eyes; he continuously talks of ‘shame’. But Mann considers himself part of this nation that

³²⁹ Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), p. 119

³³⁰ Mann, Thomas, 1996. *Doctor Faustus* (London: Minerva), p. 481/2

has brought such evil into the world. Mann's narrator even compares the German people, who have lost all of their honour, with the Eastern European 'Jewry of the Ghettos'. Such comparison seems strange and blatantly inappropriate, as Aleida Assmann rightly points out, "given the fact that, at the point of writing, those Jews no longer existed because they had fallen victim to the Germans' massive machinery of destruction".³³¹ Yet, Mann does not write of 'guilt'.

Mann describes the overwhelmingly passive behaviour of the Germans. Aleida Assmann continues by explaining that the collective subject of the Germans as such does not cast an eye because it chose not to watch and to know, but then it is forced to look. It is being pushed along the enormous piles of corpses and declared guilty.³³² Mann insists on the collectively responsible German nation; he does not draw the line between Hitler's murdering elite on the one hand and the German people on the other.

In her book 'Eichmann in Jerusalem', Hannah Arendt correctly defines (in passing) the concept of 'inner emigration' with great cynicism as such:

The so-called "inner emigration" in Germany – those people who frequently had held positions, even high ones, in the Third Reich and who, after the end of the war, told themselves and the world at

³³¹ Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), p. 119

³³² Rightly Aleida Assmann draws our attention to Thomas Mann's exile-situation and the country he was living in. She also refers to Mann's deep admiration for president Roosevelt who saw in the German Fascist State America's most important enemy. See Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH). Thomas Mann strongly disagreed with those who insisted on a dividing line between the Hitler-Regime on the one hand and the normal German population on the other. After the war, when he was invited to return to Germany, Mann famously made clear that he could not support the notion of 'inner emigration', e.g. the claim to an uncorrupted core of German tradition ('*Deutschland und die Deutschen*' – speech to the congress in Washington, May 1945)

large that they had always been “inwardly opposed” to the regime. The question here is not whether or not they are telling the truth; the point is, rather, that no secret in the secret-ridden atmosphere of the Hitler regime was better kept than such “inward opposition”. This was almost a matter of course under the conditions of Nazi terror; as a rather well-known “inner emigrant”, who certainly believed in his own sincerity, once told me, they had to appear “outwardly” even more like Nazis than ordinary Germans did, in order to keep their secret. ... Hence, the only possible way to live in the Third Reich and not to act as a Nazi was not to appear at all. ... In recent years, the slogan of the “inner emigration” has become a sort of a joke. The sinister Dr. Otto Bradfisch, former member of the Einsatzgruppen, who presided over the killing of at least fifteen thousand people, told a German court that he had always been “inwardly opposed” to what he was doing. Perhaps the death of fifteen thousand people was necessary to provide him with an alibi in the eyes of the “true Nazis”.³³³

Although the collective of all Germans might be guilty, the individual most certainly never seems to be. What good is a collective feeling of shame if the individual is completely free of it? Hannah Arendt mentions certain key reactions of the Germans to the re-surfacing of their past, to the confrontation with their immediate past:

There is no doubt that the Eichmann trial had its most far-reaching consequences in Germany. The attitude of the German people towards their past, which all experts on the German question had puzzled over for fifteen years, could hardly have been more clearly demonstrated: they themselves did not much care one way or the other, and did not particularly mind the presence of murderers at large in the country, since none of them were likely to commit murder of their own free will; however, if world opinion – or rather, what the Germans call *das Ausland*, collecting all countries outside Germany into a singular noun – became obstinate and demanded that these people be punished, they were perfectly willing to oblige, at least up to a point.³³⁴

³³³ Arendt, Hannah, 1992. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin), p. 126/7

³³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 16/7

Germany needed the help from outside to face its own crimes for which the entire people then felt the shame (of being discovered?) but no guilt; to work through the deeds or even come to terms with them, was a totally different matter – to say the least, it raises questions of identity - and which, as we shall see, is still very much a process of the present regardless of age or generation.

Thomas Mann was not prepared to be consoled by the thought of a 'hidden', 'better' Germany. Instead he assumed the perspective of the collective and counts himself as part of the collectively condemned. As we all know, history has proven Mann wrong; the (West) Germans did not have to live in isolation. In the years of the 'Wirtschaftswunder' the Federal Republic soon prospered economically. Not only the 'Reparation Treaty' brought the Federal Republic the sought-after political integration into the Western system of alliance. By assuming general responsibility for the Nazi crimes and by literally 'paying' for it, the Federal Republic was able to create an aura of exoneration and innocence. Meanwhile the recent crimes seemed to disappear into the background of an obscured past and history. German Fascism no longer needed to be fought against as, soon after the war, the prime enemy of the state became Communism. The result of the state's willingness to 'take on the burden of the past' was a feeling of collective shame; it is curious to see, however, that there never was a collective admission of guilt. The acceptance of responsibility thus left its marks on the political self-understanding of the Federal Republic.

In the above quoted text, Thomas Mann gives a detailed description of the political and socio-psychological situation immediately following the war. When, in the 1950s, the Nuremberg Trials (amongst others) brought public attention to the horrific details of the Nazi Regime, the Germans had to be made to look; they had to learn to look again – in many ways, it was a re-discovery of the past that went from one suppression into a new suppression. Perhaps it is intrinsic to the event of the Shoah that a confrontation with the horrors will

always (regardless of age or generation) result in shock. This, however, cannot function as an excuse to forget, or to engage with the horrors and not to place the renewed knowledge into a broader framework of understanding.

In the concluding part of her book 'Eichmann in Jerusalem', Hannah Arendt harshly comments on the excessive and essentially self-serving expression of guilt among the younger generation:

Martin Buber called the execution a "mistake of historical dimension", as it might "serve to expiate the guilt felt by many young persons in Germany" – an argument that oddly echoed Eichmann's own ideas on the matter, though Buber hardly knew that he wanted to hang himself in public in order to lift the burden of guilt from the shoulders of German youngsters. (It is strange that Buber, a man not only of eminence but of very great intelligence should not see how spurious these much publicised guilt feelings necessarily are. It is quite gratifying to feel guilty if you haven't done anything wrong: how noble! Whereas it is rather hard and certainly depressing to admit guilt and to repent. The youth of Germany is surrounded, on all sides and in all walks of life, by men in positions of authority and in public office who are very guilty indeed but who feel nothing of the sort. The normal reaction to this state of affair should be indignation, but indignation would be quite risky – not in danger to life and limb but definitely a handicap in career. Those young German men and women who every once in a while – on the occasion of all the Diary of Anne Frank hubbub and of the Eichmann trial – treat us to hysterical outbreaks of guilt feelings are not staggering under the burden of the past, their father's guilt; rather, they are trying to escape from the pressure of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality).³³⁵

Arendt's observations are intriguing in view of the problematics at stake. How, on the other hand, is a generation that, biographically, could not have been involved, supposed to come to terms with a past that their parents denied?

In his essay 'Germany and the Germans', Thomas Mann asserts that it was impossible to differentiate the 'good' from the 'evil' Germany because the one was inseparably bound to the other. He was convinced that the 'evil' was at

³³⁵ Arendt, Hannah, 1992. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin), p. 251

the same time the 'good', the 'good' Germany gone astray, heading for disaster and doomed for destruction: 'A completely undignified power had made Germany into a thick-walled chamber of torture'. The Germans could not be guilty; 'a power' had taken control of them; 'a completely undignified power' had made them do all this. Mann manages his ambivalent attitude towards Germany by presenting Germany and 'Germanness' as something fraught with the tragic and the deeply demonic, by ascribing it to the mythical figure of his '*Doktor Faustus*'.

If the Nazi genocide was carried out, as Hannah Arendt suggested in her book on Adolf Eichmann, by a morally absolute indifferent sense of duty, then it has to be kept in our memories. Thomas Mann never distanced himself from the German nation as such; neither did he attempt to justify its actions (which again might make him fall under the same category Arendt is describing). For future memory - and in particular for future generations who will have no biographical connections and no witnesses to turn to – it is important to address the question of how to surpass this feeling of guilt, the status of being guilty?

The principle subject of Mann's novel is the musician, Adrian Leverkühn, whose lifestory is told by his friend, Serenus Zeitblom. Adrian Leverkühn's biography in many ways corresponds to the time of National Socialism in Germany and the extermination of European Jewry³³⁶. Adrian Leverkühn dies

³³⁶ The correspondence of the novel's events with German history has been widely discussed. For a thorough examination see R. Wolff (ed.), 1983. *Thomas Manns Dr. Faustus und die Wirkung*, vol. 1 + 2 (Bonn); L. Voss, 1975. *Die Entstehung von Thomas Manns Roman ,Doktor Faustus'* (Tübingen); V. Hansen (ed.), 1993. *Thomas Mann: Romane und Erzählungen* (Stuttgart); L. Lambrecht (ed.), 1994. *Geschichtliche Welt und menschliches Wesen: Beiträge zum Bedenken der conditio humana in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Berlin); A. Stephan & H. Wagner (eds.), 1985. *Schreiben im Exil: Zur Aesthetik der deutschen Exilliteratur 1933-1945* (Bonn); H. G. Rötzer (ed.), 1993. *themen•texte•interpretationen: der deutsche roman nach 1945* (Bamberg); E. Heftrich, P-P. Schneider & H. Wißkirchen (eds.), 1994. *Heinrich und Thomas Mann: Ihr Leben und Werk in Text und Bild*, Exh. Cat. Heinrich-and-Thomas-Mann-

before the genocide begins. Gradually Leverkühn realises that music has reached a dead end in his century. His dislike of emotional warmth is exposed in his aversion to any music that presents itself as a spontaneous outpouring of feeling. However, before he can resolve the crisis of modern art with his masterpieces, Adrian Leverkühn must receive an infusion - something 'corresponding to the 'inspiration' he despises - from a mysterious, deadly source. So Adrian Leverkühn forms a pact with the devil. The terms of the pact dictate that Leverkühn's soul is forfeited and that, during his lifetime, he is forbidden to love anyone. Leverkühn's equivalent to Faust's pact with the devil is his liaison with the prostitute Esmeralda. Disregarding her warnings and well-meant threats that she is infected with syphilis, Leverkühn takes his pleasure with her. Leverkühn's last love and emotional relationship with the five-year-old boy Echo results in a disastrous end, as Echo dies of a terrifying illness. A visibly broken man, unable to conceal his disease, Leverkühn composes his last and greatest work *Dr. Fausti Weheklag* (The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus). In 1930, having invited his friends to listen to extracts from it, Leverkühn delivers a personal confession and reveals his diabolic associations. At this point he collapses; the last ten years of his life are spent in a state of insanity, and, eventually, paralysis. Zeitblom visits him in 1939 - 'after the conquest of Poland' - at which point all traces of his former brilliance have disappeared from Adrian Leverkühn. Serenus Zeitblom concludes his narration imploring the Almighty to have mercy on his friend and his country:

Germany, the hectic on her cheek, was reeling then at the height of her dissolute triumphs, about to gain the whole world by virtue of the one pact she was minded to keep, which she had signed with her blood. Today, clung round by demons, a hand over one eye, with the other staring into horrors, down she flings from despair to

despair. When will she reach the bottom of the abyss? When, out of uttermost hopelessness – a miracle beyond the power of belief – will the light of hope dawn? A lonely man folds his hands and speaks: 'God be merciful to thy poor soul, my friend, my Fatherland'.³³⁷

Adrian Leverkühn's final masterpiece – art in its absolute form – addresses the philosophical relation between artistic representation and its relation to evil and horror. As Paul Eisenstein suggests, in Leverkühn's creation 'symbolisation itself is pushed to the brink of horror'³³⁸. The diabolic association and pact allows for the individual perspective to be de-limited; it allows for the particular to become universal. Like the population at Buchenwald, Adrian Leverkühn reaches the point where he is faced with the choice for eternal damnation or mercy.

'For is it mere hypochondria to say to oneself that everything German ... is involved in this scandalous exposure? Is the sense of guilt quite morbid which makes one ask oneself the question how Germany ... can ever presume to open her mouth in human affairs?'³³⁹ German post-war history - Germany's rapid economic growth, its political stability, its strong integration into the Western system of alliance - has shown that Germany seemed far from eternal damnation. Nevertheless, the question of guilt remains problematic for the novel's narrator; at stake here for Thomas Mann is the very possibility of mercy (or damnation) in the context of a sheer incredible catastrophe that seems to shatter the very foundations for such a demand. Serenus Zeitblom's plea for mercy for his friend allows him to continue his friendship and admiration (beyond Leverkühn's death), a friendship that Leverkühn's association with the devil would otherwise have forbidden. Thomas Mann, through his narrator Zeitblom,

³³⁷ Mann, Thomas, 1996. *Doctor Faustus* (London: Minerva), p. 510

³³⁸ Eisenstein, Paul, 1997. Leverkühn as Witness: The Holocaust in Thomas Mann's 'Doktor Faustus'. *The German Quarterly*, 70, 4, p. 327

³³⁹ Mann, Thomas, 1996. *Doctor Faustus* (London: Minerva), p. 481/2

joins the population of Buchenwald who are being led through the liberated concentration camp. Because he 'never felt as a deserter of Germanness and of the German fate', because he needed to retain his love for the very 'culture' he embraced, Zeitblom's plea for mercy becomes Mann's plea.

By associating Leverkühn's life with German National Socialism, Mann forms a link between symbolic representation and the real. Leverkühn's final work claims totality in the form of a masterpiece. It testifies to the horrors of the world and, as such, it attempts the symbolisation of the un-presentable. By allowing for the idea of the total, all-inclusive work of art in Adrian Leverkühn's masterpiece, Mann recognised the fundamental imbalance and impasse between the historical, the real on one side and symbolic re-presentation of it on the other. Leverkühn's masterpiece went beyond the limit that prevents a total account, that necessitates the proliferation of more narratives of the horrors. The particularity of Leverkühn's representation can no longer be measured by what it eludes; it demands totality and does not acknowledge the particular.

For Mann, it was not a question of guilt or blame, not even a question of collective guiltiness; Thomas Mann felt the same shame and guilt upon hearing about and seeing the atrocities. The "General's" declaration that the German population was guilty for the crimes they were now looking at, finds Mann's full approval – and he joins his countrymen from his exile when they are filing past the indescribable horrors. Guilt in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* functions as a unifying principle.

3. The Question of Guilt: Conscience, Morals and Judgement

"The notion of collective guilt relates to the idea that, under Hitler, the entire German nation became guilty", Aleida Assmann writes: "'Collective guilt' is the anti-thesis to the idea of the 'exclusive guilt' of the Führer alone who had seized the power in Germany and who had subsequently subjugated the entire people with his criminal clique"³⁴⁰. The search for a definition of 'guilt' in the context of the German past ties in with the questions of who was responsible and why did they do it. The psycho-analysts, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich emphasised that

the murder of a million defencelessly persecuted is composed of many culpable decisions and actions of individuals and can thus by no means be blamed on the superior, let alone the Führer himself.³⁴¹

In 1996 Daniel Jonah Goldhagen renewed that idea of the collective guilt of all Germans by indicting the whole German people with a charge of an alleged anti-Semitic tradition over centuries; he, however, restricts his accusations to the generation in question. Aleida Assmann mentions a 'long awaited "transformation"' after the war that 'seems to have happened here

³⁴⁰ Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), p. 83/4

³⁴¹ Mitscherlich, Alexander und Margarete, 1998. *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: Piper)

paradigmatically: after the generation of collectively guilty Germans, there came a post-war generation of collectively non-guilty Germans'.³⁴²

When Goldhagen was honoured with the 'Prize of Democracy 1997', Habermas was asked to give the eulogy³⁴³. In his speech 'Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie' ('On the public use of Historia') the philosopher explained what he thought Goldhagen's real achievement was:

What part we ascribe to people in historical retrospect, what part to circumstances, where we draw the line between freedom and constraint, guilt and innocence, also depends on the preconception with which we approach the event. The hermeneutical willingness to recognise the true extent of responsibility and knowledge varies according to our understanding of freedom – how we assess ourselves as responsible people and how much we expect from ourselves as politically acting people. With questions of ethical-political self-understanding this pre-conception itself is under discussion. How we see in historical retrospect guilt and innocence ascribed, also mirrors the norm according to which we are willing to respect each other as citizens of this republic. ... And here lies Goldhagen's true contribution. He does not direct his gaze at implied anthropological universalisms, not at conformities to laws to which presumptively all people are subjected. Those may, as the comparative genocide research claims, explain a part of the unutterable. Goldhagen's explanation, however, relates to specific traditions and mentalities, to ways of thinking and perceiving of a certain cultural context. It does not relate to the unalterable, to which we have to resign, but to factors which can be changed through a transition of consciousness – and which have since then changed also through the political enlightenment. The anthropological pessimism which here in this country is in league

³⁴² Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), p. 301 footnote 84

³⁴³ The 'Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik' (Pages for German and International Politics), a forum for current and fundamental questions of dispute, awarded the 'Prize of Democracy 1997' to Daniel Goldhagen for his book 'Hitler's Willing Executioners' on the grounds that Goldhagen 'had given the public conscience of the Republic essential new impulses on the basis of the forcefulness and moral power of his presentation'. See Habermas, Jürgen 1997. Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch von Historie. *Die Zeit* No.12, 1997

with a fatalistic historicism, is more likely part of the problem whose solution it pretends to provide.³⁴⁴

To comprehend the event as permanent, diminishes the free man and fails to recognise his ability to act and to learn. After the war, political enlightenment has transformed the German consciousness so that now in the retrospect ascription of guilt and innocence, our conception of freedom becomes apparent, according to Habermas.

The German philosopher and existentialist Karl Jaspers³⁴⁵ was one of the first to face the question of guilt. His book *'The Question of Guilt: On the Political*

³⁴⁴ „Welche Anteile wir im historischen Rückblick den Personen, welche den Umständen zuschreiben, wo wir die Grenzen zwischen Freiheit und Zwang, Schuld und Entschuldigung ziehen, hängt auch von einem Vorverständnis ab, mit dem wir an das Geschehen herantreten. Die hermeneutische Bereitschaft, den wahren Umfang von Verantwortung und Mitwissen anzuerkennen, variiert mit unserem Verständnis von Freiheit – wie wir uns als verantwortliche Personen einschätzen und wie viel wir uns selbst als politisch Handelnden zumuten. Mit Fragen der ethisch-politischen Selbstverständigung steht diese Vorverständnis selbst zur Diskussion. Wie wir Schuld und Unschuld im historischen Rückblick verteilt sehen, spiegelt *auch* die Normen, nach denen wir uns gegenseitig als Bürger dieser Republik zu achten willens sind. ... Hier sehe ich Goldagens eigentliches Verdienst. Er richtet den Blick nicht auf unterstellte anthropologische Universalien, nicht auf Gesetzmäßigkeiten, denen präsumtiv alle Menschen unterworfen sind. Die mögen, wie die vergleichende Genozidforschung behauptet, auch einen Teil des Unsäglichen erklären. Goldhagens Erklärung bezieht sich jedoch auf spezifische Überlieferungen und Mentalitäten, auf Denk- und Wahrnehmungsweisen eines bestimmten kulturellen Kontextes. Sie bezieht sich nicht auf ein Unveränderliches, in das wir uns zu schicken haben, sondern auf Faktoren, die durch einen Bewußtseinswandel verändert werden können – und die sich inzwischen auch durch politische Aufklärung verändert haben. Der anthropologische Pessimismus, der hierzulande mit einem fatalistischen Historismus im Bunde steht, ist eher Teil des Problems, dessen Lösung er zu liefern vorgibt.“ Habermas, Jürgen 1997. Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch von Historie. *Die Zeit* No.12, 1997

³⁴⁵ Jaspers, who studied medicine and trained in psychiatry and pathology, became professor for psychiatry at the University of Heidelberg in 1916 and, from 1921 onwards, was Professor of Philosophy until he was removed from his post by the Nazis in 1937. Despite his open criticism of National Socialist ideology and his wife's Jewish descent, they remained in Nazi Germany. In 1945, he was reinstated in his post as Professor of Philosophy in Heidelberg.

Liability of Germany was first published in 1946.³⁴⁶ It is an unsparing attempt to think through the issues at stake: horror and shame transform into helplessness, silence and anger. It is possibly the first answer to the idea of a collective German guilt. Jaspers differentiated between four concepts of guilt: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical guilt. For Jaspers, these distinctions are based on the extent of one's participation. Each of Jasper's four categories require complete and utter truthfulness before the respective 'courts': a legitimate court (as, for example, set up by the Allies), one's own conscience, and God.

The individual is liable for any criminal guilt, for any violation of the law of his country or international law³⁴⁷ and can be held responsible before a court of approved jurisdiction. Moral and metaphysical guilt assume the loneliness, freedom and complete truthfulness of the individual. Moral guilt demands an examination of one's own conscience and asks that before one's own conscience one must bear responsibility of one's own deed. Morally guilty people should seek repentance and aim for the transformation of inner convictions. This conscience demands that one faces these responsibilities if one's past is indeed burdened with moral guilt. Metaphysical guilt is related to God. Guilt in the metaphysical sense, Jaspers explains, arises from a status of 'solidarity among men as human beings' where each needs to accept a 'co-responsibility' for 'every wrong and every injustice in the world'.³⁴⁸ It is the guilt, Jaspers asserts, that the survivors often feel for having survived, a responsibility towards those who did not survive, those who suffered and died. It is also the

³⁴⁶ This is my translation of the German title - Jaspers, Karl, 1996. *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands* (München: Piper). In English the book is published under the title - Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press)

³⁴⁷ Jaspers argued that Eichmann should not be tried in Israel but should be put before an international tribunal since the Nazi murders were crimes against humanity.

³⁴⁸ Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p.

feeling of guilt that the innocent bears for having been present or having known about the deed committed. It is the feeling of co-responsibility for having been an on-looker - for having chosen not to act.

Jaspers' differentiation into political and metaphysical guilt to me remain crucially important for the issues at stake - for the question of remembering the National Socialist past for generations that will have no biographical connection. Political guilt exists as the collective responsibility of all citizens for the crimes that were committed in the name of their state. It applies to the citizens of the modern state where no individual can be a-political. One does not assume the status of being guilty as an individual but as the collective of a nation - and that includes co-responsibility. It deals with the question of participation in matters of the state (e.g. elections already make you responsible because one has the choice of whether to vote and what to vote for). Punishments that follow political guilt could come in the form of restricted political powers, the imposition of reparations, de-Nazification or compensation, and are to be carried by the entire nation.

Jaspers insists on nobody being excluded from the clarification of the question of guilt; only then can the Germans free themselves from the status of 'political dictatorship' and reach 'political freedom':

for only consciousness of guilt leads to the consciousness of solidarity and co-responsibility without which there can be no liberty. Political liberty begins with the majority of individuals in a people feeling jointly liable for the politics of their community. It begins when the individual not merely covets and chides, when he demands of himself, rather, to see reality and not to act upon faith – misplaced in politics – in an earthly paradise failing of realisation only because of the others' stupidity and ill-will.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p. 114/5

Jaspers has made clear that we indeed have to work with the concept of 'co-responsibility'. Jasper's differentiation of the guilt concept allows for a status of collective responsibility that does not speak the entity of all Germans universally guilty. With regard to the question of guilt it is not the national status that binds and unites the Germans but their liability and responsibility as citizens for the crimes that have been committed in history:

The destruction of any decent, truthful German polity must have its roots also in modes of conduct of the majority of the German people. A people answer for its polity. Every German is made to share the blame for the crimes committed by the Reich. We are collectively liable. The question is in what sense each of us must feel co-responsible.³⁵⁰

By introducing the term of political guilt, Jaspers substitutes the concept of collective guilt through collective responsibility. At the same time Jaspers asks us to remember that there is no a-political area for a citizen in a state. He further reminds us not to treat the concepts of guilt as non-committal issues but to accept the collective political guilt also individually. But – and this is the crucial dilemma – the Germans needed to accept their liability and responsibility not because of pressure from outside but because of an inner willingness.

Chapter B of Jasper's '*Die Schuldfrage*' is subtitled 'The German Questions'. Here Jaspers embarks on the questions and experiences that have led him to consider the problematics of posing the very question of guilt:

The guilt question received its universal impact from the charges brought against us Germans by the victors and the world. In the summer of 1945, when in all towns and villages the posters hung with the pictures and stories from Belsen and the crucial statement, "You are the guilty!", conscience grew uneasy, horror gripped many who had indeed not known this, and something rebelled: who indicts me there? No signature, no authority – the poster came

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 55

as though from empty space. It is only human that the accused, whether justly or unjustly charged, tries to defend himself. ... This time the war-guilt question, in the foreground after 1918, is very clear. The war was unleashed by Hitler Germany. Germany is guilty of the war through its regime, which started the war at its own chosen moment, while none of the rest wanted it. Today, however, "You are the guilty" means much more than war guilt. That poster has by now been almost forgotten. But what we learnt from it has remained: first, the reality of a world opinion which condemns us as a nation – and second, our own concern.³⁵¹

After years of looking-away, of 'ignoring' what went on around them, the Germans were now abruptly forced to observe and to look - thus Germany's guilt and shame were presented to the entire world. With the posters the Allies aimed and hoped to implement a collective memory of guilt and remorse. If, however, they were intended for a speedy and complete transformation of (German) identity, Jaspers' account proves their intentionality wrong. The Germans did not see the crimes committed, the horrors of the Shoah, as part of their own life experience; instead they were understood and remembered

³⁵¹ „Die Schuldfrage hat ihre Wucht bekommen durch die Anklage seitens der Sieger und der gesamten Welt gegen uns Deutsche. Als im Sommer 1945 die Plakate in den Städten und Dörfern hingen mit den Bildern und Berichten aus Belsen und dem entscheidenden Satz: Das ist eure Schuld!, da bemächtigte sich eine Unruhe der Gewissen, da erfasste ein Entsetzen viele, die das in der Tat nicht gewusst hatten, und da bäumte sich etwas auf: Wer klagt mich an? Keine Unterschrift, keine Behörde, das Plakat kam wie aus dem leeren Raum. ... Die Kriegsschuldfrage ist diesmal klar. Der Krieg ist durch Hitlerdeutschland entfesselt worden. Deutschland hat die Kriegsschuld durch sein Regime, das in dem von ihm gewählten Augenblick den Krieg angefangen hat, während alle anderen nicht wollten. „Das ist eure Schuld!“ besagt aber heute viel mehr als Kriegsschuld. Jenes Plakat ist schon vergessen. Was dort von uns erfahren wurde, ist jedoch geblieben: erstens die Realität einer Weltmeinung, die uns als gesamtes Volk verurteilt – und zweitens die eigenen Betroffenheit.“ Jaspers, Karl, 1996. *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands* (München: Piper), p. 29/30; Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p. 41/2

independently as 'artificial memories', as Aleida Assmann points out³⁵². She then continues that 'in retrospect one agrees that the therapy had not led to a spontaneous healing'.³⁵³ 'Healing' is a difficult concept within the attempts of working-through and coming-to-terms in post-war Germany. Aleida Assmann explains that the 'shock-therapy' of confronting the Germans with their guilt did not have the expected and hoped-for effect of a guilty conscience, which might have led the Germans to a 'new' and thus 'better' German identity. She notes that the 'wounds' the Germans suffer from are not the wounds of a guilty conscience. These psychological wounds that would not heal to bring the longed-for transformation are the distress of a shameful conscience and they are still very much open, as we have seen in Martin Walser's reaction. It is precisely this momentum of shameful distress that blocks itself from a possible transformation, from a genuine working-through and coming-to-terms. It is this momentum that Aleida Assmann calls the German 'trauma'³⁵⁴.

The transition from the Nazi German to post-war German society seems to be explicable only as an 'abrupt' shift: Goldhagen speaks of a guilty generation of Germans that suddenly is followed by an innocent generation. Jaspers and Mann describe a powerful, omnipotent Germany that at of a sudden is confronted its own powerlessness. Over 'the world opinion that accuses the entire nation' the nation bonds anew; not on the grounds of a positive self-attitude, however, but as a collective of perpetrators united in a communal guilt. For Thomas Mann the new German identity could only be based in a collective

³⁵² Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH), p. 126

³⁵³ 'Im Rückblick ist man sich heute einig, daß die Therapie nicht zu einer Spontanheilung geführt hat.' *ibid.*, p. 126

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 126. At this point, it is probably also worth noting that neither Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich nor Martin Walser ever speak of 'trauma'.

feeling of shame. Jaspers on the other hand writes against a form of a collective identity based in the traumatic experience of shame. In his philosophical reasoning Jaspers argues for a highly differentiated concept of guilt. Guilt is there but it can not function as a unifying principle. Jaspers knew that the scene Mann is describing would lead to the collective experience of shame and humiliation which, in turn, would prevent any honest attempts of addressing the issues. Jaspers is adamant that 'to hold liable does not mean to hold morally guilty' but he insists that 'every German asks himself: how am I guilty?'³⁵⁵.

The reality of Walser's speech has proven Jaspers right: 'That poster has by now been almost forgotten. But what we learnt from it has remained.' - and it remains to this day. What is at stake here, according to Assmann, is the problem of the paradox linking 'forgetting' and 'remembering' that forms the experience of a trauma.

My interpretation of the recent events is informed by the socio-philosophical writings of the last century. I cannot speak with the knowledge of a psychologist but I struggle to find a plausible answer to this paradox: the Allies made the Germans look at the crimes and horrors committed by them and in their nation's name. As Karl Jaspers warned in 1946 and Aleida Assmann points out, this 'therapy' was hardly successful because the Germans failed to make the connection between their own private biographical experiences and the pictures they were presented with. As a result, vehement repulsion put a stop to any attempts of working-through or even coming-to-terms with the ambivalence of self-experience and actual past events.

³⁵⁵ Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p. 55 + 57

4. Mourning and History - Memory and Melancholy: 'The Inability to Mourn'

In their book 'The Inability to Mourn'³⁵⁶, first published in 1967, two years after the Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt (December 1963 to August 1965), Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich concern themselves with the phenomenon of suppression within the society of the Federal Republic of Germany. Their socio-psychological research was targeted at a German collective psyche; their observations of a collective rejection of guilt were the starting-point for their contemplations of a 'working-through' the past. In their view there was a determined connection between the prevailing political and social immobility and provincialism on the one hand and the persistent repulsion and fending off of memory on the other, in particular the banning of an emotional participation in the very events of the past that were now denied. They diagnosed a collective neurosis, which derived from subconscious and suppressed wishes. They connected the inability to mourn to a not-worked-through libidinal attachment to Hitler, which, after the capitulation, had led to a psychological numbness. Consequently, the Mitscherlichs explained the inability to mourn the loss of the 'beloved' Führer Adolf Hitler as the morbid pathological state of melancholy:

When mourning a lost object, we try to emulate also the ideals of the person that was taken from us. Only slowly, with the end of the process of grieving, are new powers for object occupation, new identifications, new attentions of love and interests released. It is different though for a mourning if the object was loved on a narcissistic basis. Their loss is always associated with a loss of self-esteem. The loss of the object causes a psychological loss of energy; it leads to a "grandiose impoverishment of the ego". Within this mourning of a lost object there is no pain, but rather grief over

³⁵⁶ Mitscherlich, Alexander und Margarete, 1998. *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: Piper)

oneself and a distinctive ambivalence of feeling towards the self-hatred of melancholy. But the pain is always characterised as one that does not mean the end of a relationship, but one that concerns the partial loss of the self as if it was amputated. The lament of mourning over the lost object is opposed by a melancholic self-accusation. The self-tearing apart of melancholy is in its essence an accusation of the object which has afflicted such a loss on its own self.³⁵⁷

Through their writings and therapeutical attempts the Mitscherlichs hoped to make the necessity to mourn and to remember more accessible to a society that was marked to maintain its self-esteem through a communal psychological strain and effort.

In his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia'³⁵⁸, published in 1917, Sigmund Freud sets out to explain how mourning happens within the subject and how it tries to be different from melancholy. It is his explanation of structure and cause of melancholy that was of interest to the Mitscherlichs. Freud delivers a description of mourning in order to explain the normal behaviour, only to

³⁵⁷ ,In der Trauer um ein verlorenes Objekt versuchen wir, auch den Idealen des Menschen, der uns genommen wurde, nachzueifern. Erst langsam, mit dem Ende der Trauerarbeit, werden Kräfte für neue Objektbesetzungen, neue Identifizierungen, neue Liebes- und Interessenszuwendungen frei. Anders in der Trauer, wenn das Objekt auf narzißtischer Basis geliebt wurde. Mit seinem Verlust ist stets ein Verlust an Selbstwert verbunden. Der Objektverlust bewirkt einen psychischen Energieverlust, führt zu einer „großartigen Ich-Verarmung“. Es kommt nicht zum Schmerz in der Trauer um das verlorene Objekt, sondern zur Trauer über einen selbst und in der Verbindung mit ausgeprägter Gefühlsambivalenz zum Selbsthaß der Melancholie. Immer aber ist der Schmerz dadurch charakterisiert, daß er nicht das Ende der Beziehung meint, sondern daß er einen Teilverlust des Selbst betrifft, als sei es amputiert worden. Der Trauerklage um das verlorene Objekt steht die melancholische Selbstanklage gegenüber. Die Selbstzerfleischung der Melancholie ist im Grunde eine Anklage gegen das Objekt, das dem eigenen Selbst einen solchen Verlust zugefügt hat.' Mitscherlich, Alexander und Margarete, 1998. *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: Piper), p. 78/9

³⁵⁸ Freud, Sigmund, 2001. On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XIV (London: Vintage)

differentiate it from the neurotic. Mourning, accordingly, is a feeling that is unavoidable and therefore necessary. We can be working with that feeling, we can work through it:

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.³⁵⁹

He then continues to differentiate the normal, universal condition of mourning from that which he calls melancholy:

In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. It is also well worth notice that, although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment. We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful.³⁶⁰

Not only is mourning the usual reaction to the death of the beloved person, more so it is the necessary reaction; the lack of mourning might thus be explained as the morbid state of melancholy:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity of love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Freud, Sigmund, 2001. 'Mourning and Melancholia'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XIV (London: Vintage), p. 243

³⁶⁰ Freud, Sigmund, 2001. 'Mourning and Melancholia'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XIV (London: Vintage), p. 243/4

³⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 244

Freud continues to explain, that mourning has the same characteristics as melancholy, with the exception that 'the disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning'³⁶². Mourning is caused by the loss of a beloved person or something that had taken his place; in a certain way, mourning thematises our relation to the lost object. The mournful self has to process and work through the loss; through such a relation to the loss the mournful self addresses and works through itself. Freud asserts that within the melancholic the "impoverishment of the ego" takes place:

In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.³⁶³

Freud defines a concept of mourning in the cultural context wherefrom he then differentiates the concept of depression. Detlef Hoffmann claims that, for that reason, 'many cultures have provided rituals for the mournful which allow for seclusion yet prevent lapses into depression'³⁶⁴.

A process of mourning is necessary so that we can dissolve the energies of attachment, necessitate the withdrawal of the libido from the object and give time for self-rearrangement; all these are painful processes because losing somebody is painful. On the question of mourning within history, the concept of mourning in psychoanalysis serves as an important paradigm because Freud's concept of the 'process of mourning' has shaped later approaches and describes the active psychological effort of a successful process of mourning. His description of the process of mourning bears valuable insight for our analysis of the German mourning process:

³⁶² *ibid.*, p. 244

³⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 246

³⁶⁴ Hoffmann, Detlef, 2001. *Bilder der Trauer – Bilder des Traumas*. Liebsch, Burkhard & Rüsen, Jörn (eds.), 2001. *Trauer und Geschichte* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag), 206

In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist? I do not think there is anything far-fetched in presenting it in the following way. Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition – it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.³⁶⁵

Freud refers to the principle of or respect for reality as the basis of every mourning. Not only does separation in its most extreme form of death need to be recognised, the mourner has to accept the loss despite the immense pain suffered. This process ‘physically prolongs the existence of the lost object’.³⁶⁶

How do we then encounter the paradox of the German remembrance process? How can we reaffirm the past, yet at the same time relieve it of all powers? Mourning in psychoanalytical terms allows us to look at an important model for mourning within the conscience of history. Important here is the historio-philosophical notion that the process of mourning gives back to the past a future, e.g. it leads from a fixation onto the past into a future opening. Mournful remembrance of traumatic events could be understood as dealing with the pure

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 244/5

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 245

facts of the past. On the other hand, the remembering-mourning process could orientate itself towards the ambiguities of the past. The latter form produces a creative remembering process of mourning; in retrospect potential meanings of subliminal alternatives could be tracked down, which were present – if only latently - in the past.

How do we relate the dead who have had no mourners for over fifty years? How do we approach the history of remembrance in Germany that, like historicism, took into account all and everybody but denied any form of interpretative concentration? The past event of the Shoah, the Third Reich, its ideology and politics, is still and always will be a 'black hole', there will always be 'some things which have yet to be said'.³⁶⁷ Yet this 'black hole' is the reason for the continuous stream of on-lookers, for their attention and interpretation. It seems that incredible detail of what went on inside this 'black hole' is recorded and 'known' today (from the historian's viewpoint). Nevertheless, it is with much difficulty that the great love of one's fatherland can be seen as compatible with the chaos of these recorded phenomena. Mourning seems to be rendered obsolete. The realistic view is no longer aimed at the dead but at the mourners.

So that memory can be handed down, it not only needs to be communicable but it also needs to be stabilized. Stabilization can be achieved through storage of material facts but also through forms of practise. Rituals are such forms of practise that preserve memory through forms of communication. A culture without such rituals is unthinkable. Religious rites, for example, especially those regarding death and dying, are often older than written records, or the constant change of ways of greetings. All these rituals are pillars of support, models of structure which we cannot renounce, and which, however, always need to be filled anew with life.

³⁶⁷ Steyn, Juliet, 1999. *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (London: Cassell), p. 185/6

With the risk of stating the obvious, I want to warn against an all too simplistic use of the conception of a victim. Victims and perpetrators are not the same. Aleida Assmann points out that this is immediately recognisable if one considers the counter concept: 'the opposite of a loser is a winner; the opposite of a victim is the perpetrator. Every category has got its own specific form of remembrance. While a loser participated in actions of war, for the victim there is no such premise based on the very principle of reciprocity'.³⁶⁸ As the reading of Mann and Jaspers has made clear, for the Germans the traumatic experience of a victim-status created some kind of negative identity. The unwillingness and inability to address the past is reflected in the collective memory. The victim's memory has a lot in common with the loser's memory, Aleida Assmann writes. Karl Jaspers feared that the German attempt to address the issues at stake would be marked by resentment and hostility, that guilt and shame would be covered by silence. The remembering process in Germany is a long and complex one, never stable and continuous; it erupts at unforeseeable moments. For the perpetrators it is easier and more comfortable to fend-off and repulse any memory. The process of active suppression and wilful forgetting results in the phenomenon that we hardly have any perpetrator memory whereas there are numerous examples for remembrances of victims. It is difficult to remember one's own guilt but it is essential so 'that the murderer might not be triumphant over the innocent victim'³⁶⁹.

The longing to draw the bottom line, and the urge to forget, have been unfolded in detail by the Mitscherlichs. They drew our attention to the conflict between the victim's and the perpetrator's memory, and to the striking

³⁶⁸ Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH), p. 44

³⁶⁹ Horkheimer, Max, 1970. *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag), p. 62

discrepancy between the two. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich remind us that it is an illusion to believe that guilt can historically be eliminated through denial:

The hope that the post-war period may be brought to an end, which has been expressed repeatedly by leading German politicians, must prove a fallacy, for the very reason that we alone do not decide when it is sufficient to draw conclusions from a past which has exterminated the lives and fates of such a huge number of people. Supporters of the illness theory of a dictatorship are quickly ready with a parting from that which lies behind us. There exists, however, a world wide public that by no means has forgotten or is prepared to forget what happened during the Third Reich in Germany. We had the opportunity to see that it was only the pressure of opinion from outside Germany that forced us to conduct juridical proceedings against Nazi perpetrators, to extend the limitation period or to reconstruct the sequence of mass crimes. Because of this difference between our own limited ability to remember and the, by no means, paralysed [ability to remember] of our former enemies and victims are we forced to keep up our psychological defence position under continuous expenditure of energy.³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ „Die Hoffnung, die Nachkriegszeit sei abgeschlossen, was wiederholt von führenden deutschen Politikern geäußert wurde, muß sich deshalb als Irrtum erweisen, weil nicht wir alleine bestimmen, wann es genug ist, Folgerungen aus einer Vergangenheit zu ziehen, die Leben und Glück einer so großen Zahl von Menschen vernichtet hat. Die Anhänger der Krankheitstheorie der Diktatur sind da rasch mit einem Abschied von dem, was hinter uns liegt, bei der Hand. Es besteht jedoch eine Weltöffentlichkeit, die keineswegs das, was im Dritten Reich sich zugetragen hat, vergessen hat noch zu vergessen bereit ist. Wir hatten Gelegenheit zu beobachten, wie es nur der Druck der Meinung außerhalb Deutschlands war, der uns zwang, Rechtsverfahren gegen Nazitäter durchzuführen, die Verjährungsfrist zu verlängern oder den Hergang von Massenverbrechen zu rekonstruieren. Wegen dieser Differenz zwischen unserer eigenen eingeschränkten Erinnerungsfähigkeit und der keineswegs behinderten unserer ehemaligen Kriegsgegner und Opfer sind wir gezwungen, unsere psychischen Abwehrpositionen unter fortwährendem Energieaufwand aufrechtzuerhalten.“ Mitscherlich, Alexander und Margarete, 1998. *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: Piper), p. 41/2

Post-war German attempts to work through and to come to terms were rendered impossible by a collective silence and suppression. The perpetrator's attempts at remembering can hardly fall back onto public rituals and symbols. Aleida Assmann points to the ambivalence of the German word 'Opfer' which incorporates both concepts of 'sacrifice' and 'victim'. The own personal experiences of war and destruction could not be reconciled with the traumatic experiences and remembrances of the concentration camp victims. In his 'Minima Moralia', Adorno writes, 'wrong life cannot be lived rightly'³⁷¹. In my understanding, the still-prevailing problem of the German remembrance process is the inability to differentiate the honorary loser's memory from the traumatic memory of the perpetrators.

Walter Benjamin has given us a picture of historical mourning in the form of an allegory; it is his Angel of History from the theses 'On the Concept of History'. The Angel flies against time, carried by the wish to heal history, to piece together the debris and to awaken the dead. The Angel throws himself against the storm of progress and thus opens the continuum of history because, for him, the work of the past is not closed.

³⁷¹ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso)

5. Thematising more recent Problems of Coming-to-Terms: Martin Walser and the Quest for Identity and Normality

Why do we assume that there is such a thing as identity, let alone national identity? Why do we take for granted that there is an identity that persists over time, that can be defined, that is independent of changes in attitude and appearances? The discussions around the German question of identity now are unique in so far as they involve a double history of coming-to-terms with the Nazi regime and - as a direct result of that - a coming-to-terms with a post-war division into two states and now the re-unification of the two states. How else could one explain the vehement debates on the 'German character' and 'German identity' in post-war Germany? The debates have shown that, in view of the NS crimes, any notion of national German identity has proven and will prove to be problematic. In Thomas Mann's 'Doktor Faustus' the very attributes and qualities of 'Germanness', as manifested in the heroes' art, become a question of ontology.

Each German state began to establish its own new identity; for both states it was politically important to clearly mark a new beginning by opposing the mutual past and by positioning the own political identity in strict opposition to the other state and thus political order. Because of its integration into the Eastern hemisphere the German Democratic Republic (East) defined its new nationalistic role in terms of a 'socialist state of workers and farmers'. Naturally, it considered itself the real 'anti-fascist state'. The Federal Republic of Germany (West) struggled to define its national identity in view of the past. In many ways, I suppose, the Federal Republic's political situation allowed for the possibility of addressing any notion of national identity. In the West the new constitution was highly regarded (Habermas); yet even after the opening of the 'Ostpolitik' and

formal recognition of the GDR, the Federal government continued to promote its vision of two states within one German nation. In her book 'German National Identity after the Holocaust' Mary Fulbrook claims that 'the Germans on both sides of the wall had a strong sense of who they were: who was included, who excluded', that it was a 'curious combination of perpetual penance and a sense of superiority – of constant self-consciousness in the eyes of each other and the world', that they wanted 'to carry the burden of the past alone'.³⁷²

From mid October 1998, 10 years after the reunification, Germany's major newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations discussed the possibilities and impossibilities of public(ly imposed) memory at length. At the turn of the century/millennium, the Germany turned back to their past. The Walser-Bubis debate, provoked by Walser's speech for the 'Peace Prize of the German Book Trade', forms part of a German history of memory, which seems to be erupting with more or less regularity. In Western post-war attempts of working-through and coming-to-terms many memorials and other commemorative places (Gedenkstätten) and public institutions were established in order to promote and aid continuous historical research and the work of remembrance. With the event of Walser's speech on 11 October 1998 public excitement surrounding the history of memory and remembrance found a new.

Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis are both witness to the history and its memory that came to be discussed yet again. The enormous media coverage of their debate reached a wide German audience. Towards the end of the year 1998, interest in the debate subsided. The Historian's Dispute of 1986 was a major scholarly debate whereas in 1998 two private individuals openly discussed the problematics of memory. Yet due to their individual biographical positions their memories were diametrically opposed. The author Martin Walser

³⁷² Fulbrook, Mary, 1999. *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 179

is a prominent representative of the German generation of perpetrators; Ignatz Bubis was a survivor of the Shoah in which he had lost the major part of his family. Both expressed their personal experiences and memories; even after more than fifty years and given their absolutely incompatible experiences, their dispute was fierce. Not for long can such voices be heard. Ignatz Bubis' death shortly afterwards made his voice fall silent thus, as Aleida Assmann asserts, lending 'the character of legacy to his intervention in the debate'³⁷³. To this generation also belonged the majority of those who intervened in the dispute and took part in the discussions, for example Klaus von Dohnanyi from a family of famous members of the resistance, and Walter Jens, professor of rhetoric at the University of Tübingen.

The huge resonance and public interest in the debate further points to the fact that the two individuals were addressing and expressing issues that still need to be answered. My generation, and possibly the generation of my parents, no longer speak from the fund of personal experiences and memories, but rely on a fund of knowledge and ideas that have been communicated. The experiences and thus the positions of victims and non-victim of the National Socialist State in the memory debate are in stark contrast.

The debate set into motion by Martin Walser's speech in October 1998 was nothing less than a debate about the possibilities and impossibilities of public memory. Apparently, for Walser, it was not easy to interfere in questions of conscience and at the same time avoid the impression that one considered oneself better than those one was criticising. He simply 'cannot' believe those 'pain-creating sentences' of the radical critics because they are meant to 'hurt', and the critics think it is what 'we' (the Germans, according to Walser) deserve.

³⁷³ Assmann, Aleida & Frevert, Ute, 1999. *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH), p. 23

All this also applies to the German memory of the Shoah, when Walser claims that

no man who is to be taken seriously denies Auschwitz; no man with a sound mind quibbles about the horrifyingness of Auschwitz; when, however, I am confronted with this past in the media on a daily basis, I notice that within me something fights against this permanent presentation of our shame. Instead of being grateful for the constant presentation of our shame I begin to look away. I want to understand why the past is presented in this decade as never before. When I notice that something within me fights against this, I try to tap the reproach of our shame for a motive, and I am nearly glad when I believe that I have discovered that more frequently the motive no longer is remembrance, the not-permitting-to-forget, but the instrumentalisation of our shame to contemporary purposes.³⁷⁴

Walser claims to be happy when he believes he has discovered that the attempt to remember is no longer of predominant importance but that 'our shame' becomes instrumentalised for immediate purposes. In Walser's understanding, 'Auschwitz' is particularly ill-suited to play the role that it was given by those critics:

Auschwitz is not suitable to become a threatening routine, to be used at any time as a medium of intimidation or a moral club or only as a ritual exercise. What comes into being through such ritualising has the quality of a 'lip prayer' (empty talk). But what is

³⁷⁴ „Kein ernstzunehmender Mensch leugnet Auschwitz; kein noch zurechnungsfähiger Mensch deutelt an der Grauenhaftigkeit von Auschwitz herum; wenn mir aber jeden Tag in den Medien diese Vergangenheit vorgehalten wird, merke ich, daß sich etwas gegen diese Dauerpräsentation unserer Schande wehrt. Anstatt dankbar zu sein für die unaufhörliche Präsentation unserer Schande, fange ich an wegzuschauen. Ich möchte verstehen, warum in diesem Jahrzehnt die Vergangenheit präsentiert wird wie noch nie zuvor. Wenn ich merke, daß sich bei mir etwas dagegen wehrt, versuche ich, die Vorhaltungen unserer Schande auf Motive hin abzuhören, und bin fast froh, wenn ich glaube, entdecken zu können, daß öfter nicht mehr das Gedenken, das Nichtvergessendürfen das Motiv ist, sondern die Instrumentalisierung unserer Schande zu gegenwärtigen Zwecken.' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

one suspected of, if one said the Germans now were a normal people, an ordinary society?³⁷⁵

Walser wants the old-new Berlin Republic to turn around to face the future. Relieved of the burden of such a horrific past, we can dispose of all attempts of working-through the still overwhelmingly powerful past. The place where all working-through should take place is, according to Walser, the individual conscience. Walser demands nothing less than the end of public working-through and coming-to-terms with the Shoah in Germany. What, however, is normal or normality to Walser in view of the German history? The concept of the 'normal' always entails a differentiation from the abnormal, the different, the Other.

In 1979, Walser writes in 'On the Spiritual Situation of the Time':

a purely worldly, a liberal society that flees the religious and generally everything that exceeds the ego, can only suppress Auschwitz. Where the ego becomes the predominant, guilt can only be suppressed. Absorbing, keeping and bearing one can only do together.³⁷⁶

The planned 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' in the centre of the capital of the newly united Germany tries the perhaps impossible: by

³⁷⁵ „Auschwitz eignet sich nicht dafür, Drohroutine zu werden, jederzeit einsetzbares Einschüchterungsmittel oder Moralkeule oder auch nur Pflichtübung. Was durch solche Ritualisierung zustande kommt, ist von der Qualität Lippengebets. Aber in welchen Verdacht gerät man, wenn man sagt, die Deutschen seien jetzt ein normales Volk, eine gewöhnliche Gesellschaft?' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

³⁷⁶ „Eine rein weltliche, eine liberale, eine vom religiösen, eine überhaupt von allem Ich-Überschreitenden fliehende Gesellschaft kann Auschwitz nur verdrängen. Wo Ich das höchste ist, kann man Schuld nur verdrängen. Aufnehmen, behalten und tragen kann man nur miteinander.' Martin Walser, 1979. *Zur geistigen Situation der Zeit*. Quoted after Brumlik, Micha, 1999. Vom Alptraum des nationalen Glücks. in Schirmacher, Frank (ed.), 1999. *Die Walse-Bubis-Debatte: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 49

addressing on a different level the possibilities of a (national) memory. Walser's determination to get over guilt and conscience far exceeds the individual sphere. As Jaspers' definition has made clear, guilt is a concept that works on four different levels. If guilt truly was unjustifiably personal and individual, Walser (and his generation) cannot be guilty of the crimes of National Socialism. However, guilt is not the issue for Walser, he concerns himself with the 'constant presentation of our shame'. Walser speaks of the planned memorial as

the concreting of the centre of the capital with a football-pitch sized nightmare. The monumentalisation of shame.³⁷⁷

In 1965, Walser published an essay on the Auschwitz Trials which he had attended to observe; he wrote about a suspicion that the conditions that made 'Auschwitz' possible were not yet overcome and that humanity could 'hit upon the idea' again:

But if people and state were at all meaningful concepts for the political, then everything that happens, is presupposed by this collective. Then no deed is any longer subjective. Then Auschwitz is a pan-German matter. Then everybody belongs to some part of the cause of Auschwitz.³⁷⁸

Frank Schirrmacher, who held the eulogy on Walser at the Peace Prize ceremony, claims that it is one of the easiest things of the 'talk about Germany'

³⁷⁷ 'Die Betonierung des Zentrums der Hauptstadt mit einem fußballfeldgroßen Alptraum. Der Monumentalisierung der Schande.' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

³⁷⁸ 'Wenn aber Volk und Staat überhaupt noch sinnvolle Bezeichnungen sind für ein Politisches ... dann ist alles, was geschieht, durch diese Kollektive bedingt ... Dann ist keine Tat mehr bloß subjektiv. Dann ist Auschwitz eine großdeutsche Sache. Dann gehört jeder zu irgendeinem Teil zu der Ursache von Auschwitz.' Quoted after Schirrmacher, Frank (ed.), 1999. *Die Walse-Bubis-Debatte: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 26

to condemn the crimes that the Nazi Regime committed. Germany is re-united, a prosperous and powerful nation; yet in its quest for the future it does not dare to face the past. Walser is representative of the generation which knows about the catastrophe of the Twentieth century. Schirmacher believes that only 'stories can make us understand how misfortune and crime can grow around one without one noticing',

how a landlord's son from Wasserburg could find his identity and his language in Hitler's Germany and not know anything of dictatorship and democracy, of the extent of the spreading crime, of the inexorable decline in ruins, of Federal Republic and GDR.³⁷⁹

Schirmacher claims that to Walser his biographical experience seems indeed not compatible with representations of the German past. But that his life and biography are in one way or another in a timely connection with Auschwitz seems to have no implications for Walser. Walser's lamentation about the difficulties to be a German, a conscientious, mindful German of the generation of perpetrators can only mean to trivialise the committed crimes.

The concepts of acknowledging and fending-off, of working-through and lack of engagement, of memory and forgetting are laid open in Walser's speech and he admitted to a personal impossibility of engaging with the continuous problem of the presence of Auschwitz. At his 'Peace Prize' speech Martin Walser refused to give a 'Sunday speech' in the form of a 'critical sermon', he had no intention of reading the Riot Act. The first 'emotion' he was overcome with, when contemplating the content of the speech, was that

³⁷⁹ 'Wie ein Wasserburger Gastwirtssohn in Hitlers Deutschland zu seiner Identität und seiner Sprache finden konnte und nichts weiß von Diktatur und Demokratie, von dem Ausmaß des umgehenden Verbrechens, dem unaufhaltsamen Untergang in Ruinen, von Bundesrepublik und DDR ...' Schirmacher, Frank (ed.), 1999. *Die Walse-Bubis-Debatte: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), p. 29

he would say nice things for 20 or 30 minutes, agreeable things, invigorating things, things appropriate to a Peace Prize. For example, praising trees that he has become acquainted with over a long period of time by watching them unintentionally. To speak about trees is no longer a crime, because so many are diseased. He could also appear as an expert on sunsets and he could express how the sun, when it is setting over the sea, tends to appear exaggerated. 25 minutes of nice things – whether one managed to wrest this from or caress it out of language, 25 minutes or even 30 minutes of nice things, then one would be worn out. A Sunday-speaker's desk, St. Paul's Church [in Frankfurt], the most public public, media presence, and then something nice! No, without any outside help it became clear to the one who was chosen for the prize, that that should not be. But when it was explicitly said to him that it was expected of him to hold a critical Sunday speech, his soul, thirsting for freedom, fought once again within him. Of the fact that I would have to defend my pot-pourri of nice things, I was aware. At best with confessions as: I close my mind to evil in whose remedying I cannot be involved; I had to learn to look away; I have several corners of refuge into which my view immediately flees when the screen presents the world to me as an unbearable one. I should think my reaction was relative. The unbearable I do not have to be able to bear. I am also trained in the art of thinking something away, of making something not to be there. I cannot participate in the disqualification of suppression. Freud advises us to substitute condemnation for suppression. But as far as I understand, his enlightening work is not directed at the behaviour of man as fellow man but at the one who has a shaken, compulsive desire (Tribschicksal). I would not make it through the day, least the night, without looking away and thinking away. I am also not of the opinion that everything has to be atoned for. In a world where everything had to be atoned for I could not live.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ „Er wird fünfundzwanzig oder gar dreißig Minuten lang nur Schönes sagen, das heißt Wohltuendes, Belebendes, Friedenspreismäßiges. Zum Beispiel Bäume rühmen, die er durch absichtsloses Anschauen seit langem kennt. Und gleich der Rechtfertigungszwang: Über Bäume zu reden ist kein Verbrechen mehr, weil inzwischen so viele von ihnen krank sind. Er könnte auch als Sonnenuntergangsexperte auftreten und mitteilen, daß die Sonne, wenn sie am Wasser untergeht, zu Übertreibungen neigt. Fünfundzwanzig Minuten Schönes – selbst wenn du das der Sprache abtrotzen oder aus ihr herauszärteln könntest, fünfundzwanzig oder gar dreißig Minuten Schönes -, dann bist du erledigt. Ein Sonntagsrednerpult, Paulskirche, öffentlichste Öffentlichkeit, Medienpräsenz, und dann etwas Schönes! Nein, das war dem für den Preis Ausgesuchten schon ohne alle Hilfe von außen klargeworden, das durfte nicht sein. Aber als er dann so deutlich gesagt kriegte, daß von ihm erwartet werde, die kritische Sonntagsrede zu

Walser's speech has made it clear that Jaspers' quest for 'inner willingness to accept responsibility' for a political heritage has not, in more than fifty years, found its way into the nation's consciousness. Through his writings, Jasper hoped to transform an apolitical society into a political culture that is characterised by the free acceptance of the individual's responsibility for the collective. Walser wants his privacy of thought; he wants to remain alone with his conscience. The individual level on which Walser is prepared to confront and work through his memory would have, at the most, a partial resemblance to Jaspers' concept of moral guilt. It is Jaspers' demand to work through the guilt-ridden past on an individual level, and at the same time, to be more than aware of its collective implications – it is precisely the momentum of reaching beyond the individual that Walser underestimated when he addressed his audience.

So where is Walser's conscience? Given Jaspers' definition it is not enough to postulate that 'no serious human being denies Auschwitz', or that 'no sound mind would quibble about the horrors of Auschwitz', or that no-one would wish to evade the problem of the continuing presence of Auschwitz by attacking those who aim at a 'continuous presentation of our shame'. A conscience that is

halten, wehrte sich in ihm die freiheitsdurstige Seele noch einmal. Daß ich mein Potpourri des Schönen hätte rechtfertigen müssen, war mir schon klar. Am besten mit solchen Geständnissen: Ich verschließe mich Übeln, an deren Behebung ich nicht mitwirken kann. Ich habe lernen müssen wegzuschauen. Ich habe mehrere Zufluchtswinkel, in die sich mein Blick sofort flüchtet, wenn mir der Bildschirm die Welt als eine unerträgliche vorführt. Ich finde, meine Reaktion sei verhältnismäßig. Unerträgliches muß ich nicht ertragen können. Auch im Wegdenken bin ich geübt. An der Disqualifizierung des Verdrängens kann ich mich nicht beteiligen. Freud rät, Verdrängen durch Verurteilung zu ersetzen. Aber soweit ich sehe, gilt seine Aufklärungsarbeit nicht dem Verhalten des Menschen als Zeitgenossen, sondern dem vom eigenen Tribschicksal Geschüttelten. Ich käme ohne Wegschauen und Wegdenken nicht durch den Tag und schon gar nicht durch die Nacht. Ich bin auch nicht der Ansicht, daß alles gesühnt werden muß. In einer Welt, in der alles gesühnt werden müsste, könnte ich nicht leben.' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

retreating into the private sphere does not have to meet the public. As we have seen above, such conscience addresses the question of guilt never on a 'political' level. To Moshe Zuckermann it is deeply alarming because of its disposing and compensating functions, because it will not disturb the 'public peace'. Moshe Zuckermann points out that

a conscience which troubles the individual personally for objectively committed crimes, but which does not objectify itself in so far as it makes the actual torment into a subject of a controversy reaching beyond the personal – thus by force public – such a conscience holds something ideological.³⁸¹

The National Socialist crimes, the murder of the European Jewry exceed the private sphere by far - most definitely the private conscience of a German who belongs to the generation of perpetrators. This is a crime against humanity committed in the collective name of Germany; on a political level, also Walser has to accept a co-responsibility which needs to be addressed in collective attempts of coming-to-terms and remembering.

From mid-October 1998, Germany's major newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations discussed at length the possibilities and impossibilities of public(ly imposed) memory. In that discussion the phrase of 'collective guilt' came to play, yet again, an important role. Although the principle seems so clear, more than half a century after the end of the war any allocation of responsibility and guilt were proven yet again to be all but simple.

Jaspers demands that 'we must restore the readiness to think'³⁸² and that 'we talk aloud to each other'³⁸³. According to Jaspers, it is silence 'to which we

³⁸¹ Zuckermann, Moshe, 1999. *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie* (Berlin: Philo), p. 16

³⁸² Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p.

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³⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 7

incline and which constitute(s) our great danger' for 'it becomes self-deception'³⁸⁴. Walser emphasises the private, personal conscience:

A good conscience is none. With one's conscience one is alone. Public acts of conscience for that reason are in danger of becoming symbolic. And nothing is more alien to the conscience than symbolism, how ever well meant. This "continuous retreat into oneself", cannot be re-presented. It has to remain "inner loneliness".³⁸⁵

Walser stresses the importance of freedom for his inner conscience. A fine balance between personal and public acts of memory and addressing the issues at stake is needed so that the private, individual is not permitted to hide behind the judgement of its own safe conscience. Why does Walser so urgently insist that with the re-unification Germany had fulfilled its 'duty' of remembrance?

Walser cannot believe the reports of a serious newspaper that sausage-stands are set up in front of burning hostels of asylum seekers; it is beyond his imagination that 'one can hear hostile things about foreigners at drinking and pub meetings'. In Walser we find the very phenomenon Jaspers feared and warned against: self-deception and evasion. Yet Walser claims to be addressing the 'politics of conscience of this epoch'. The imbalance of the re-unification

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.10/11

³⁸⁵ 'Ein gutes Gewissen ist keins. Mit seinem Gewissen ist jeder allein. Öffentliche Gewissensakte sind deshalb in Gefahr symbolisch zu werden. Und nichts ist dem Gewissen fremder als Symbolik, wie gut sie auch gemeint sei. Diese „durchgängige Zurückgezogenheit in sich selbst“ ist nicht repräsentierbar. Sie muß „innerliche Einsamkeit“ bleiben.' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

treaty seemed to stir Walser's conscience; he asks for the 'idealist Rupp'³⁸⁶ to be pardoned.

Everybody knows our historical burden, the eternal shame, there is not one day when we are not blamed for it. ... My nothing-less-than trivial reaction to such pain-creating sentences: I hope that what is said so bluntly is not true. And to completely expose myself: quite simply I cannot believe these pain-creating sentences, which I can neither support nor deny. It goes, so to speak, beyond my moral-political fantasy to believe that what is being said is true. To me comes this un-provable premonition: those who come up with these sentences want to hurt us, because they think we deserve it. They probably want to hurt themselves as well. But also us. All. With one exception: all Germans.³⁸⁷

Why has the last decade - more than ever before - been so concerned with the re-presentations of the past? Walser wants to know what the motivation behind the constant reproaches with shame are. Private conscience is acceptable but the recognition of a co-responsibility for a committed crime is unbearable. Walser knows that the reported and televised atrocities and horrors are indeed true and real. But to speak of it is unbearable for him; Walser learnt 'not to look'. Despite all assertion of a private conscience, Walser knows that

³⁸⁶ Rainer Rupp was found guilty of espionage for the GDR after the re-unification and sent to prison for 12 years despite an agreement in the unification-treaty to exempt spies of both sides from persecution. But in 1992, a law was passed in parliament which declared the West spies exempt from punishment and rendered the Eastern spies free to criminal prosecution.

³⁸⁷ „Jeder kennt unsere geschichtliche Last, die unvergängliche Schande, kein Tag, an dem sie uns nicht vorgehalten wird. ... Meine nichts als triviale Reaktion auf solche schmerzhaften Sätze: Hoffentlich stimmt's nicht, was uns da so kraß gesagt wird. Und um mich vollends zu entblößen: Ich kann diese Schmerz erzeugenden Sätze, die ich weder unterstützen noch bestreiten kann, einfach nicht glauben. Es geht sozusagen über meine moralisch-politische Phantasie hinaus, das, was da gesagt wird, für wahr zu halten. Bei mir stellt sich eine unbeweisbare Ahnung ein: Die, die mit solchen Sätzen auftreten, wollen uns weh tun, weil sie finden, wir haben das verdient. Wahrscheinlich wollen sie auch sich selber verletzen. Aber uns auch. Alle. Eine Einschränkung: alle Deutschen.' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

there are different (moral) concepts and values at stake that far exceed the individual sphere: he wants to be allowed to look away.

It is as if fifty years of history never took place. Yet, the repulsion and fending-off of all accusations of guilt seem to have undergone a transformation. When Walser claims to have learned 'to look away ... when the screen presents the world ... as an unbearable one', when he claims that the unbearable he did 'not have to be able to bear', when he states that he could not 'participate in the disqualification of suppression', he falls back onto the very pattern that Jaspers had warned of: the repulsion of the guilt-accusation. The emphasis has shifted ever so slightly, however: prevailing now is the repulsion of the accusation of an incorrect and insubstantial memory process and working-through.

The monstrous and horrific is unbearable but that cannot mean that one can pass over the unbearable with silence, that we no longer have to believe the 'pain-creating' words. At stake here is no longer the ability to comprehend the incomprehensible, the unutterable; for Walser the possibility and the constant threat of a relapse into barbarism do not exist and they do not have to be overcome. Moshe Zuckermann leaves us to consider the following questions: 'What were we to do if the unbearable became the real, and not just intellectual manipulation? What if the criticism manifested itself to be true anguish and not an attempt 'to hurt us'? What if we really deserved to be criticised because we 'learnt' to 'look away'? What if looking-away has become the accepted ideology?'³⁸⁸

Walser does not want to watch the horrors he is presented with. Only for a short time Jaspers allows for 'a proudly silent bearing' as 'a justified mask, to catch one's breath and clear one's head behind it'³⁸⁹ At some point,

³⁸⁸ Zuckermann, Moshe, 1999. *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie* (Berlin: Philo), p. 14/15

³⁸⁹ Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p.

overwhelmed by the powerful images of war and terror, we have all looked away. But where would it leave us were we simply to follow Walser's presentiment, the suspicion 'that everything is much nicer as it is spoken about. Everything is more beautiful than one can say so far.'³⁹⁰?

More than thirty years before Walser, Adorno reflected on the dialectical status of culture after Auschwitz in his '*Negative Dialectics*':

Whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be. Not even silence gets us out of the circle. In silence we simply use the state of objective truth to rationalise our subjective incapacity, once more degrading truth into a lie.³⁹¹

We need to remember the victims 'in their status of being victims', Moshe Zuckermann demands.³⁹² By addressing and working-through the issues at stake, through constant reiteration of the questions, we work against the circumstances which create and allow for victims. This is what Adorno meant when he famously asked the question '*What does it mean: "coming-to-terms" with the past?*':

A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.³⁹³

Adorno here presumes that the social conditions that made Auschwitz possible are by no means overcome and that a relapse into barbarism is

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*

³⁹¹ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 367

³⁹² *ibid.*, p. 14

³⁹³ Adorno, Theodor W., 2000. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge), p. 365

historically and socially not overcome. The continuous working-through of this constant threat becomes the categorical imperative because a tendency to relapse into barbarism has to be understood not as something utterly alien to humanity but as something utterly familiar and intimate – that can be nurtured under captivity and under certain historical and political conditions. To speak with Adorno's categorical imperative and against Walser's attempt to fend-off public memory processes, I believe, with Jaspers, that it is essential for us - being collectively liable - to remember.

Walser's contribution to the ongoing debate will not help future generations to surmount the problem of remembering the deed and to mourn the dead. How are we going to approach the problematic paradox of forgetting and remembering now? How are we to remember if there is no 'true' memory left? What do we remember then? Will we encounter a massive de-politicisation of the event and its historical context, as some historians want us to believe?³⁹⁴ Is something remembered that stands isolated and erratic as a horrific event in history?³⁹⁵

Walser talks about the 'banality of good'; he invents an abundance of combat words and slogans from 'moral weapon', at 'moral gunpoint' to 'soldiers of opinion'. Walser's demand for 'normality' entails a notion of the conscience where subjective self-awareness becomes the criterion for truth:

'Within each of us a decision is made to participate in the memory of Auschwitz. The conscience is free, or it is none.'³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Frei, Norbert & Steinbacher, Sybille (eds.), 2001. *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag) et. al.

³⁹⁵ The Federal Government justified its intervention in the Kosovo with a referral to 'Auschwitz'.

³⁹⁶ 'In jedem von uns entscheidet sich, wie er an der Erinnerung an Auschwitz teilnehmen kann. Das Gewissen ist frei, oder es ist keins.' Walser, Martin, 1998. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 October 1998

Hannah Arendt reminds us that such a notion must be utterly inadequate if those who remember Auschwitz as perpetrators do not have a bad conscience. It is precisely then that the subjective, guilt-ridden conscience comes close to the Jaspers' criteria of self-deception and evasion.

Walser's speech was met with general approval by his German audience. Ignatz Bubis accused him of 'spiritual arson' and of wanting to sanction the suppression intellectually³⁹⁷. In the public dispute that followed, Martin Walser claimed that he himself had long been working through and attempting to come to terms with the issues at stake before Bubis turned to them. Bubis replied that he

could not have lived. I could not have gone on living had I engaged myself with it earlier.³⁹⁸

There can never be a symmetry between the suppressed memories of the generation of perpetrators and their attempts of coming-to-terms and the haunting memories of the survivors. What is at stake here is ultimately irreconcilable. Germany's national attempts of coming-to-terms need to address and admonish the deed; Walser had no right to question Bubis' attempts of remembering. Any attempts of thinking and working-through the questions of the Shoah cannot be easy. To address the role and the involvement of the perpetrators and the perpetrating nation will demand 'full frankness and honesty', as Jaspers insists.³⁹⁹ The victims' memories are something intrinsically

³⁹⁷ Geistige Brandstiftung: Bubis wendet sich gegen Walser. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 November 1998

³⁹⁸ 'Ich hätte nicht leben können. Ich hätte nicht weiterleben könne, wenn ich mich damit früher beschäftigt hätte.' Walser, Martin & Bubis, Ignatz, 1998. Wir brauchen eine neue Sprache für die Erinnerung. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 290, 14 December 1998

³⁹⁹ Jaspers, Karl, 2001. *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press), p.

different; the personal experience of terror, death and destruction needs to find its own very different way of coming-to-terms. Walser's and Bubis' debate, however, has clearly marked the problematics of a communication between the victims and the generation of perpetrators. As such Walser's and Bubis' dispute contributed to the debate on the (im)possibilities of public memory.

Klaus von Dohnanyi, politician, essentially sanctioned Walser's speech by arguing that Bubis might have misunderstood Walser. Dohnanyi writes:

Certainly the Jewish citizens in Germany would have to ask themselves whether they would have acted so much more courageously than most of the other Germans, if, after 1933, "only" the handicapped, the homosexuals or the gypsies were deported to the extermination camps. Everyone should attempt to answer this question honestly for oneself.⁴⁰⁰

How could Dohnanyi possibly ask the survivor to 'sympathise' with his perpetrator? Moshe Zuckermann demands to know what could possibly be achieved if the victim was to be transported into the status of the perpetrator?⁴⁰¹ What would I have done? - Dohnanyi's question can quite simply not be answered. The Germans, the generation of perpetrators, Dohnanyi's claims, 'we are all vulnerable'⁴⁰². Where are the Germans hurt and wounded? In their pride? To be addressing the question of guilt is painful; and it creates plenty of shame.

⁴⁰⁰ „Allerdings müßten sich natürlich auch die jüdischen Bürger in Deutschland fragen, ob sie sich so sehr viel tapferer als die meisten anderen Deutschen verhalten hätten, wenn nach 1933 „nur“ die Behinderten, die Homosexuellen oder die Roma in die Vernichtungslager geschleppt worden wären. Ein jeder sollte versuchen, diese Frage für sich selbst ehrlich zu beantworten.' Dohnanyi, Klaus, 1998. Eine Friedensrede: Martin Walsers notwendige Klage. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 November 1998

⁴⁰¹ Zuckermann, Moshe, 1999. Gedenken und Kulturindustrie (Berlin: Philo), p. 26

⁴⁰² Dohnanyi, Klaus, 1998. Wir sind alle verletzbar. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 November 1998

But to demand of the survivor to understand this 'vulnerability' would trivialise the victim's experience and ask for the sheer impossible.

Ultimately both Walser and Bubis have been expressing their personal reactions to the problematics of remembering. However, what makes their dispute important are the resonances and the public reactions with which their arguments were met. Their dispute achieved historical significance because it was held at a moment of radical change: the generation of victims and perpetrators was slowly beginning to disappear and both were prominent representatives of that generation; Berlin had just become the old and new capital of the re-united Germany; and, after more than 20 years, a new political discourse began to emerge with the new coalition government of SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. The new political constellations also indicated a re-formulation of the conventional discourse of 'coming-to-terms' with the past. What is intriguing is the fact that the first generation, who had initiated the fierce debates and confrontations in the late 1960s and in the beginnings of the 1970s and who had just found their way into the government, was 'conspicuously silent', as Moshe Zuckermann asserts⁴⁰³. The public debate, initiated by Walser and Bubis, was essentially a discourse between the generation of perpetrators (the grandparents) and the second generation (the grandchildren). The former rebellious generation was now in power and could have been largely responsible for the re-shaping of the new discourse and the re-thinking of the questions of the Shoah in Germany. The biological line is ultimately coming closer which might explain in parts the explosive nature and the vehement confrontation between the representatives of the Walser and Bubis generation. The first generation's attitude of restraint I can only explain as an attempt to establish a silence and 'to draw the bottom line' (Schlußstrich).

⁴⁰³ Zuckermann, Moshe, 1999. Gedenken und Kulturindustrie (Berlin: Philo), p. 26

Epilogue

In 'What does it mean: coming-to-terms with the past?', Adorno concludes that the past can only be mastered when 'its causes in the present are overcome'⁴⁰⁴. Adorno always insisted that the categorical imperative of post-Auschwitz society is to prevent the recurrence of Auschwitz. By transforming the present, the past could be redeemed through a constant and symbolic displacement of the past into the present. Perhaps it is the paradigm of the uniqueness of the Shoah that guarantees its memory and that, thus, enables the memory of the historically true and concrete. It is precisely this absolute position that, at the same time, demands the institution of a continual, adequate thinking in order to prevent its possible recurrence. Absolutely indispensable is the thinking of the questions of the Shoah. However painful and shame-creating it might seem, to keep alive any feeling of 'eternal guilt', Walser ultimately asked for the work of remembrance to be stalled.

The complex process of regaining a German identity has been inscribed in the post-Holocaust discourse in Germany. Walser demanded 'normality', he needed to say that the Germans are a normal society now. That Germany 'is someone' again is sufficiently manifested in its current political and economic powers and strength. Especially since the re-unification, Germans seem to stress a positive feeling of a new-old nationalism. It is disconcerting to discover that a nation that committed such terrible crimes only such a short time ago, could quickly gain so much power, strength and international recognition. The recent debates have made clear that Germany's new political constellations seem to be incompatible with the continuous awareness of past guilt and

⁴⁰⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., 1997. 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?'. »Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse«: *Ein philosophisches Lesebuch* (Leipzig: Suhrkamp)

shame. What does 'normal' mean? Moreover, what does 'normality' mean for a country that is responsible for the Shoah? What can one conclude from the fact that Germany discussed the object of the Holocaust Memorial for over a decade but moved to Berlin and into the 'Reichstag' without much hesitation?⁴⁰⁵

But as the most recent debates in Germany have proved, the more often the status of 'normality' is praised, the more apparent it becomes that something utterly insurmountable is prevailing. During the Historian's Dispute in 1986, the phrase of 'the past that did not want to pass' was coined. In the late 1990s, this was followed by a looking-away from the unpleasant representations of that very past. Moshe Zuckermann reminds us that the state of the world is worrying, so vigilance is important and essential.

Martin Walser claimed that he and the German people had 'suffered' enough; the Germans had atoned for their past and with the German reunification the phase of atonement was now over. Walser describes the design for the Holocaust Memorial as 'the constant representation of our shame' or 'the concreting of the centre of the capital with a football-pitch sized nightmare' or 'the monumentalisation of shame'. Subliminally, however, Walser recognises that there is something that needs to be remembered, that needs to be addressed and worked through. It is alarming that Walser (or anybody) can say these things publicly and that his arguments find such a strong resonance. For this reason the memorial needs to be built; it needs to admonish – the nation and humanity in general - permanently and to point to the fact the past can only be mastered when 'its causes in the present are overcome'⁴⁰⁶.

Perhaps intrinsic to every memorial process is the suspicion of symbolic exoneration. During the lengthy discussions on the (im)possibilities of the

⁴⁰⁵ Zuckermann, Moshe, 1999. *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie* (Berlin: Philo), p. 126

⁴⁰⁶ Adorno, Theodor W., 1997. 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?'. »Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse«: *Ein philosophisches Lesebuch* (Leipzig: Suhrkamp)

planned Holocaust Memorial, the major concerns were named as follows: the Holocaust Memorial as such implied a demand for a conclusion to the workings-through and the attempts of coming-to-terms; it was explicitly claimed that the quest for an adequately aesthetic solution seemed pointless and therefore, that the actual erection of a monument seemed questionable. As the debate between Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis has made clear, in the country of perpetrators where the 'inability to mourn' seems to have stalled on the process of memory as such, any kind of social consensus in relation to the horrors of the National Socialist regime and society's involvement in the guilt complex has to be questioned fundamentally. Any re-presentation of memory needs to keep the duality and complexity of such remembering process alive. The abyss between the memories of the respective perspectives of victim and perpetrator cannot be bridged.

The erection of a national monument and public ceremonies could imply the instruction and institution of politically shaped memory. But as the last decade has proven, there is an increasing will and need to remember. Even after more than half a century, any notion of identity within the German nation is uniquely problematic. As I have argued, the re-united Germany has formed its basis of national self-esteem on an ambivalent pride in its present as the utter rejection of the past. The remembrance of its horrific past is hugely self-serving in so far as its desire to form a national identity is based on a strict opposition to its past. Out of this understanding grew the important decision for the erection of a national 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe'. Only within this frame of reference was the decision for the Eisenman design over the Weinmiller project possible.

The erection of a (national) work of art is perhaps an important attempt to address some of the questions, and possibly to provide some answers. The decision for such a national memorial is an attempt to address the problematic

of coming-to-terms with the event of the Shoah and the nation's involvement as perpetrators. For that reason, memory beyond the biographical limits is essential in the country of the perpetrators. The Holocaust Memorial on its own cannot achieve memory; it is not a memory-forming entity. Only a concrete admonishing remembrance of the deeds can achieve a linking of memory with vigilance. No aesthetic form can fulfil the function of remembering independently of and be unaffected by the knowledge of that which is to be remembered. Knowledge, as it is manifested in libraries, archives and research institutes, remains a vital contributing factor to the remembrance process. However, it does not necessarily demand the combination of a memorial and a research centre. The growing 'Holocaust Industry'⁴⁰⁷, as, for example, in the form of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, seems to shift the emphasis onto the particular and the individual remembrance. Perhaps such forms of remembering that aim in general at the particular, will become the focus for future forms of remembering, when the generations of victims and perpetrators will no longer be there. As the discussion of the various designs for a 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' has shown, in principle there can be a re-presentation of that which is and needs to be remembered. The perspective can never be universal but a form of remembrance can be possible that leads beyond the particular. For that reason, I want to stress the importance of a central, national 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' in Germany because it provides the politically necessary space for a collective statement of memory that does not have to be static or ephemeral.

To remember the Shoah in Germany also means to be able to form a solidarity with the historical victims for their own sakes, as Walter Benjamin reminds us in his second thesis 'On the Concept of History':

⁴⁰⁷ see for example Surmann, Rolf (ed.), 2001. *Das Finkelstein-Alibi: »Holocaust-Industrie« und Tätergesellschaft* (Köln: PapyRossa)

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and present ones. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that precedes us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.⁴⁰⁸

Adorno's categorical imperative demands a memory of the victims in the country of perpetrators by forming a respectful link to the historical victim⁴⁰⁹. This respect is shown by the current German nation, a community that itself is not guilty but has a blood and/or political relation to the perpetrators. The acceptance of responsibility is based on the understanding of the moral-political context.

Benjamin writes in his sixth thesis 'On the Concept of History':

The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.⁴¹⁰

Benjamin's hope, I think, can ultimately only be explained and understood in theological terms: 'the past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption.'⁴¹¹ Redemption does not figure in consequence, not in the final fulfilment and not as a result of worldly history, but as the abrupt break-off of the catastrophic world history. Benjamin's concept of 'Eingedenken', rather

⁴⁰⁸ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 245/6

⁴⁰⁹ There is one design in Berlin which overwhelmingly acknowledges the void left behind by the annihilation of the European Jews: Daniel Libeskind's annex to the Jewish museum. What is so phenomenal about this building is, that in its construction it convincingly and overpoweringly addresses the emptiness, the void left behind.

⁴¹⁰ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 247

⁴¹¹ *Illuminations*, 1999, p. 245

than 'Erkenntnis' (cognition/knowledge), provides the most necessary inner context of past, present and future, especially with regard to the problematic German memory process. The Benjaminian concept of 'Eingedenken' offers the German attempts at remembering the possibility of working-through and coming-to-terms with their role as perpetrators in history; then it becomes the concern of the present and remains an obligation for the future. Regarding the present political statement of a national 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe', it is its own past which Germany, the country of the perpetrators, needs to recognise when contemplating the future of a re-united state.

The hope that we have to hold onto is the 'expression of a longing, a longing that the murderer might not be triumphant over the innocent victim'⁴¹². Germany's powers are fully restored; it is a strong, prosperous, re-united and internationally recognised country. How much more 'normality' could possibly be asked for in view of the crimes that were committed in its name just over half a century ago?

However, it is in Gesine Weinmiller's design for the 'Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe' that the notion of 'Eingedenken' in the Benjaminian understanding could find its re-presentation. Gesine Weinmiller's design alludes to the same perspective with which Benjamin's Angel of History looks upon history. The Angel of History flies against time, carried by the wish to heal history, to pace together the debris, to waken the dead. It is the Angel's aesthetic project to remove all debris from this world. To me, the Angel of History resembles Benjamin's mourning historiographer who opens up the 'continuum of history' because 'the work of the past for him is not closed'⁴¹³. The

⁴¹² 'Ausdruck einer Sehnsucht, einer Sehnsucht danach, daß der Mörder nicht über das unschuldige Opfer triumphieren möge.' Horkheimer, Max, 1970. *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag), p. 62

⁴¹³ 'Das Werk der Vergangenheit ist ihm nicht abgeschlossen.' GS II, 2, p. 477

Angel surmounts the 'inability to mourn' through a continuous effort of bearing witness; he recognises humanity's catastrophe and yet, the Angel allows for a past connection with a changed present and an open future. In the Angel's gaze lies the hope for redemption of the victims and as such it is a promise to the viewer.

As a visitor to Gesine Weinmiller's memorial site, we are, like the Angel of History, overlooking a field of ruins. Like the Angel of History, we cannot mend, we cannot heal, we have to stare in shock and horror. Only from a certain viewpoint, from a definite angle, only in a certain constellation the field of destruction becomes, in a very abstract way, a unity (again). The contours are blurred and the outlines obscured. Yet in this illusive, brief terrifying moment in time one comes as close as humanly possible to understanding. Here is where the whole truth, the sheer horrifying truth of the elusive past, seems to be falling into place. Flash-like, it all falls together into the overall picture, as Walter Benjamin reminds us:

The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again. ... To articulate the past historically ... means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.⁴¹⁴

- and the flash of the past becomes a present concern. Juliet Steyn, interpreting the poem 'Speak, You Also' by Paul Celan, draws the conclusion that

the poem offers no consolation, simply the recognition that there are some things which have yet to be said.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ *Illuminations*, p. 247

⁴¹⁵ Steyn, Juliet, 1999. *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (London: Cassell), p. 185/6

Gesine Weinmiller's Holocaust Memorial design does not know of consolation; it bears witness to the impossibility, yet necessity to bear witness; it does not provide answers but points out that 'there are some things which have yet to be said'. Her design re-presents and challenges the dialectic at work here between presence and absence, between remembrance and forgetting. It offers a deep insight into the human character by exposing its profound and despairing vulnerability. As such, it is a monument of and to the future.

Figure 2: Winning design of the first competition by Christine Jackob-Marks

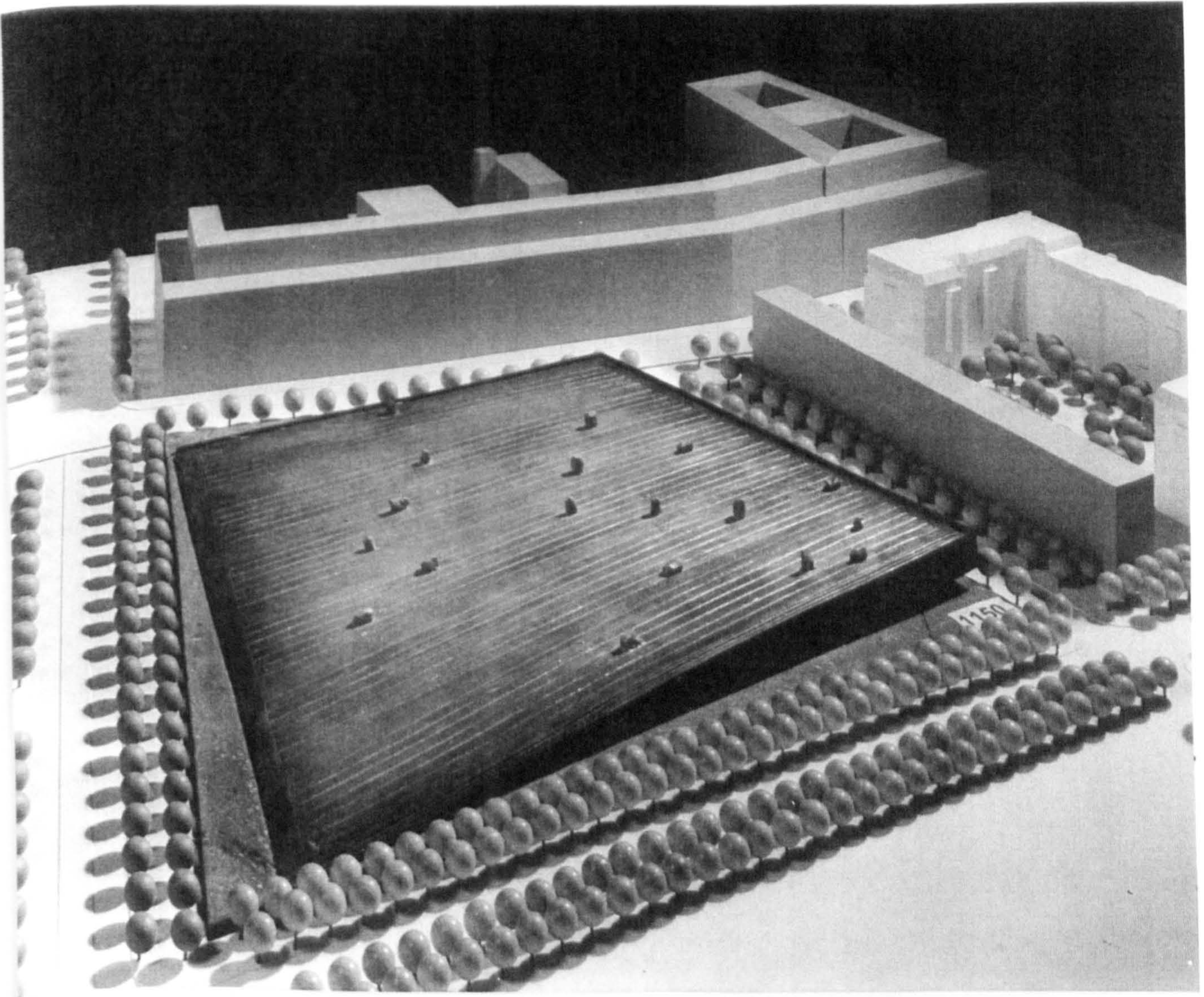


Image taken from HEIMROD, Ute, SCHLUSCHE, Günter & SEFRENS, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 275

Figure 3: Eisenman I – original design for the competition by Peter Eisenman, Architect, and Richard Serra, Artist.

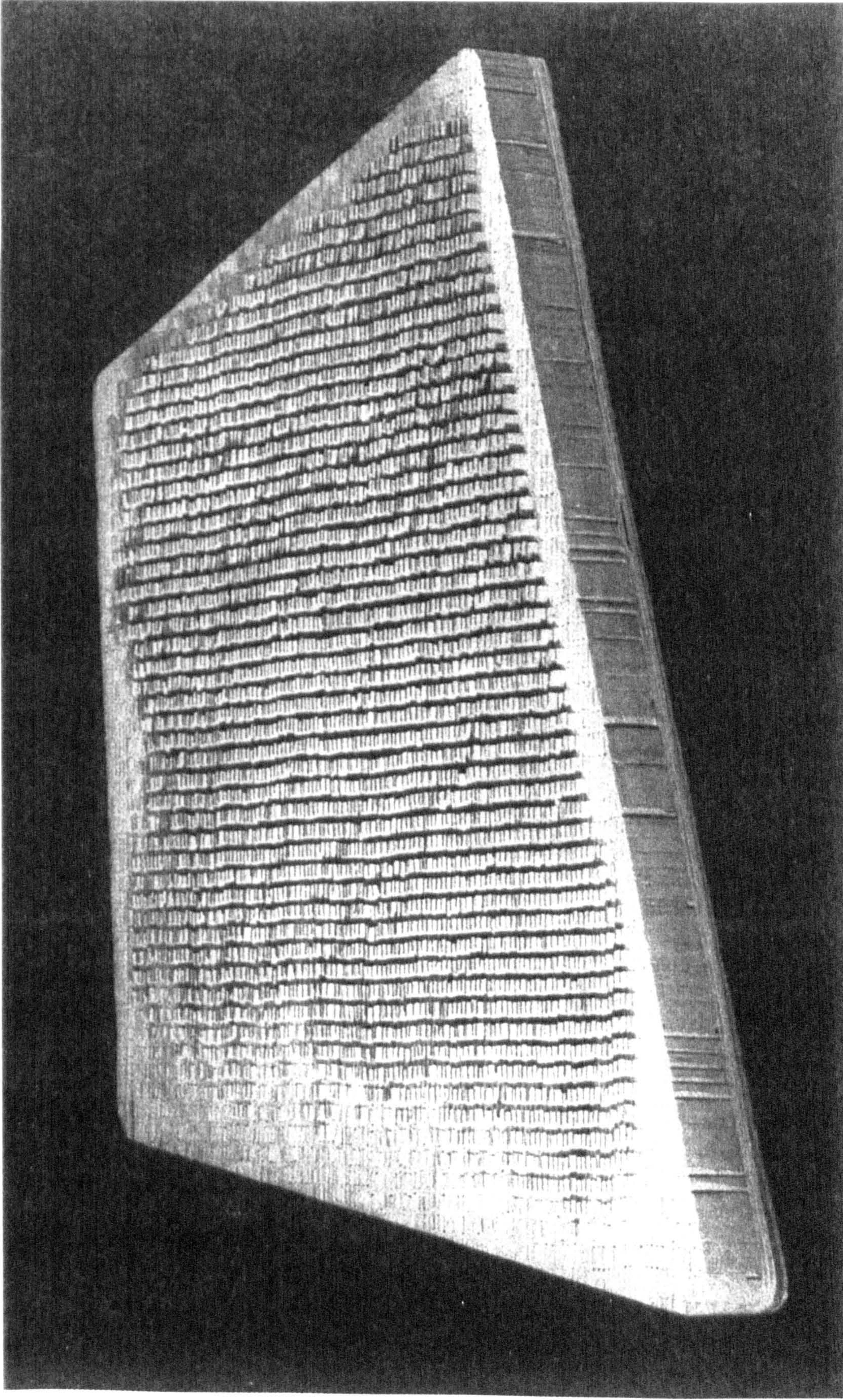
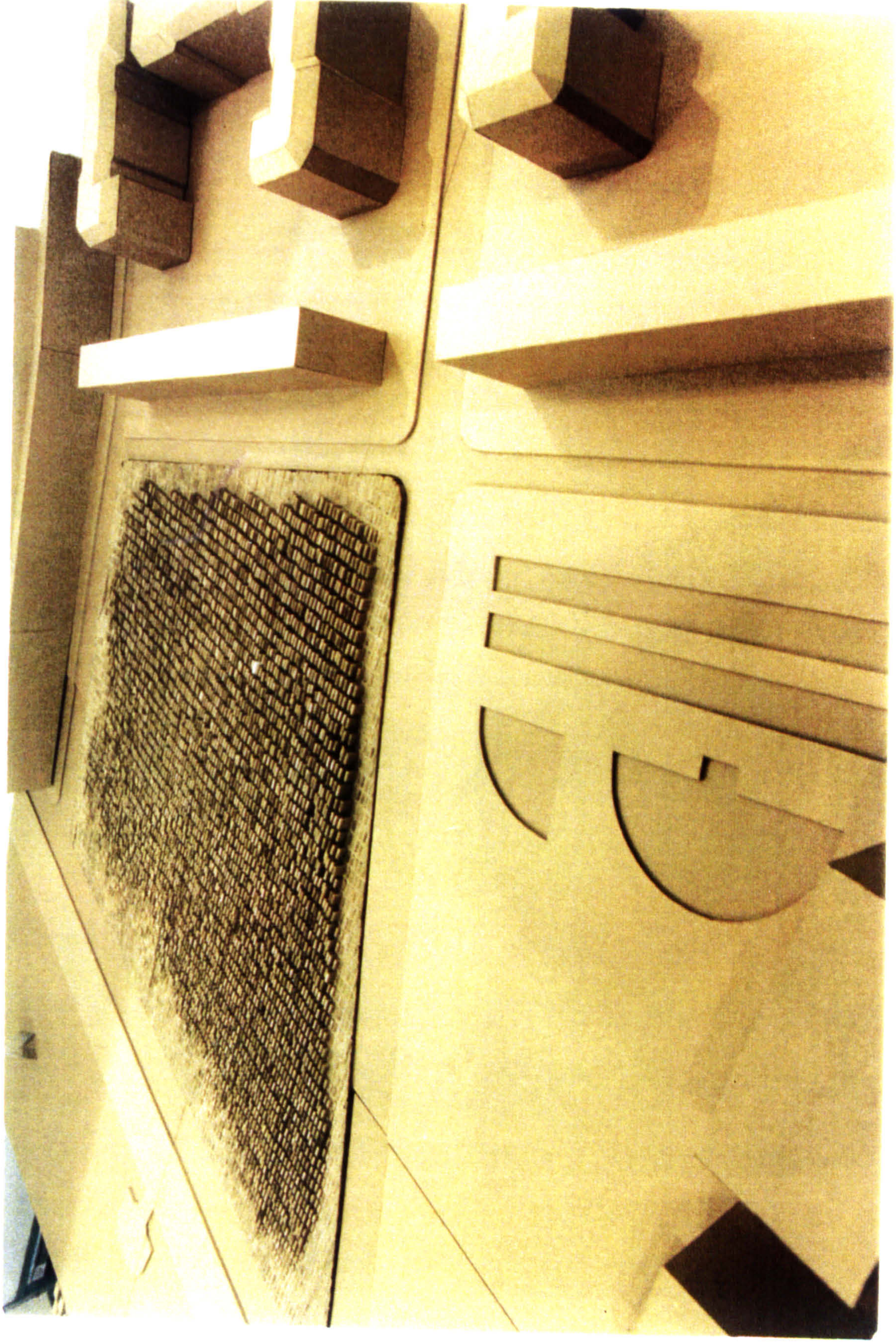


Image taken from HEIMROD, Ute, SCHLUSCHE, Günter & SEFRENS, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit. Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 881

Figure 4: Eisenman I – original design for the competition



Photograph by Lautenschläger; with kind permission of the Berliner Verlag GmbH.

Figure 5: Eisenman I – original design for the competition by Peter Eisenman, Architect, and Richard Serra, Artist.



Photograph by Lautenschläger; with kind permission of the Berliner Verlag GmbH.

Figure 6: Eisenman II

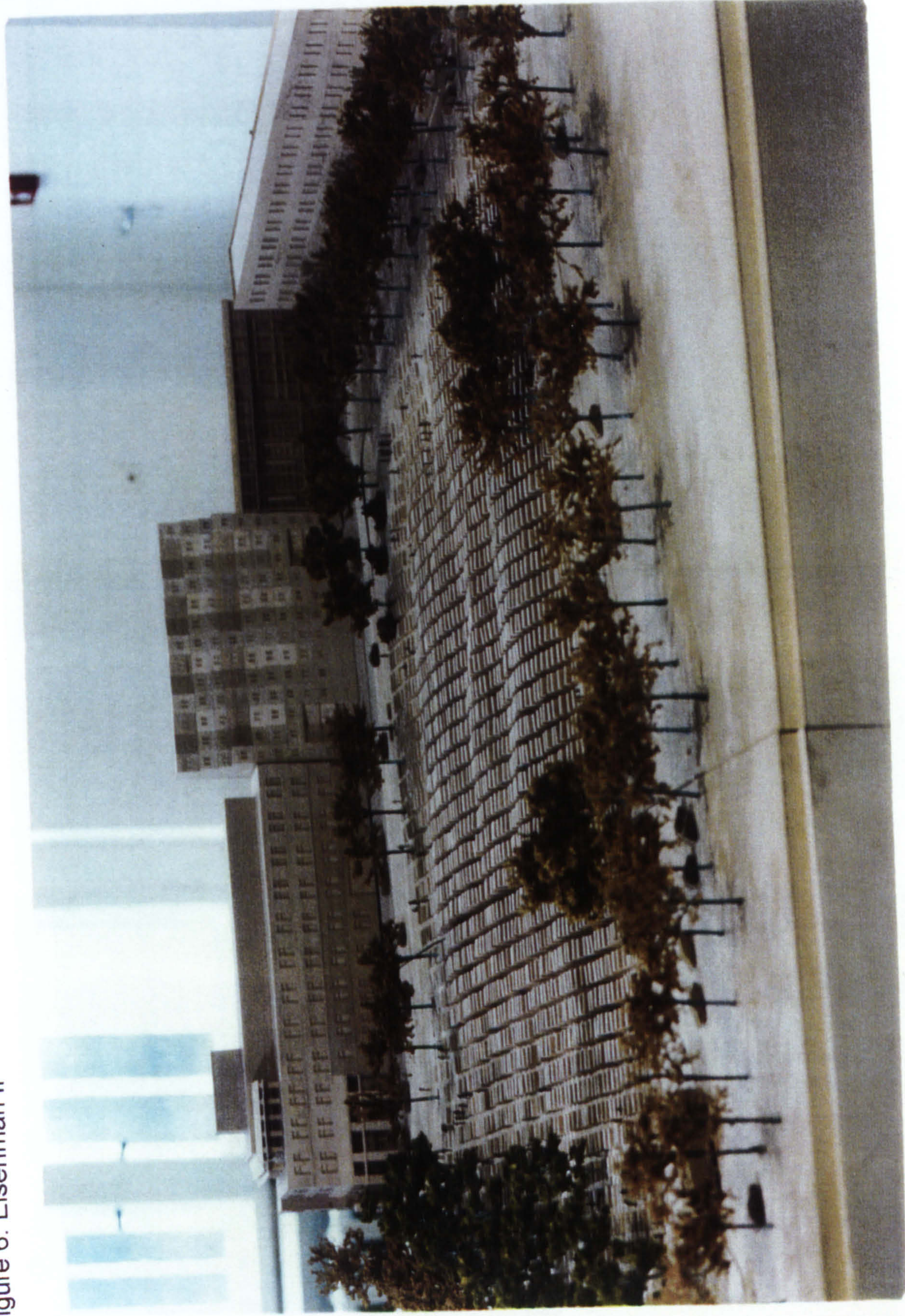


Figure 7: Eisenman III: Model of the 'House of Remembrance' by Peter Eisenman

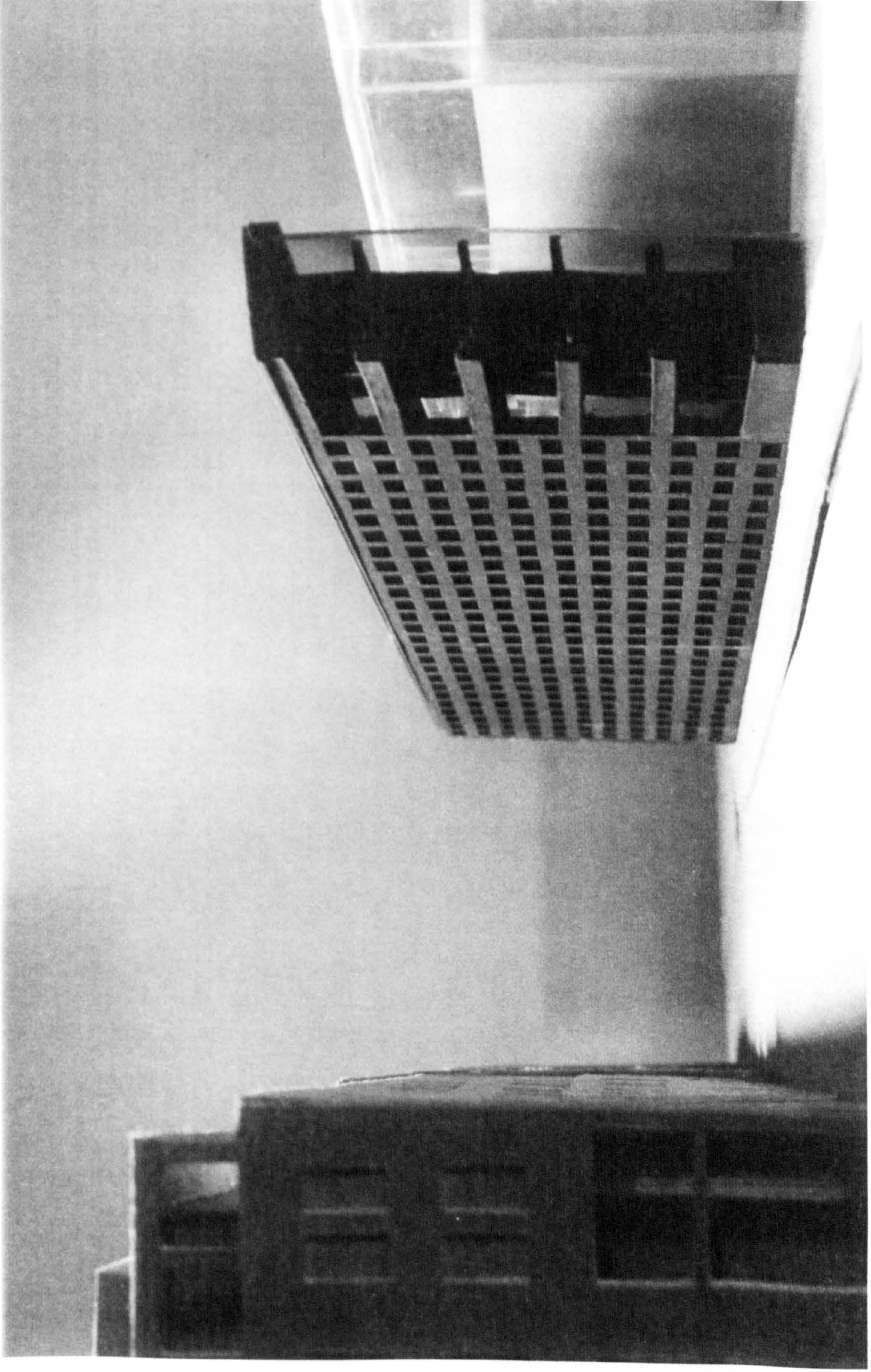


Image taken from HEIMROD, Ute, SCHLUSCHE, Günter & SEFRENS, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit: Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 1200

Figure 8: Eisenman III: Model of the 'House of Remembrance' and modified Memorial-Design by Peter Eisenman

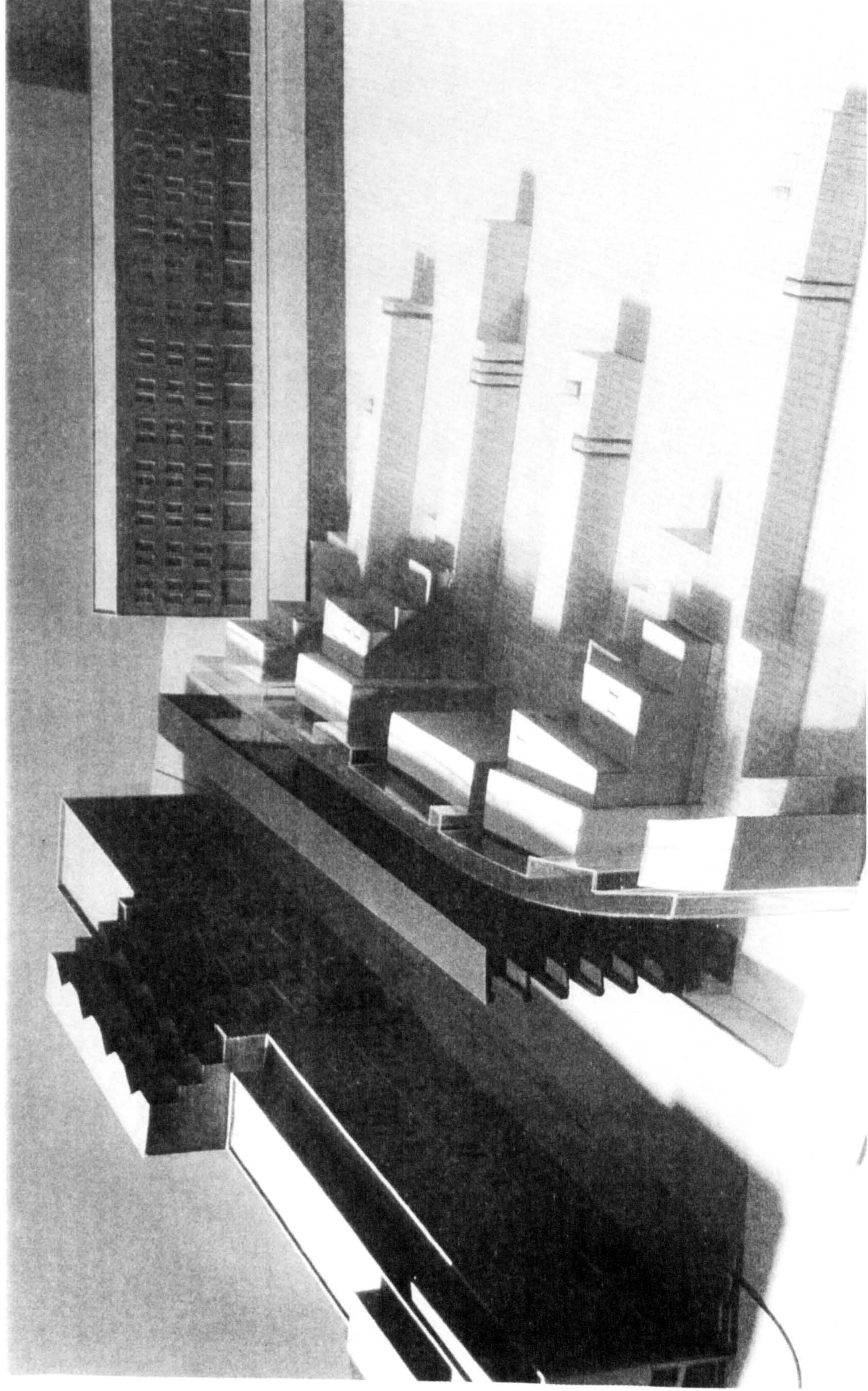


Figure 9: Gesine Weinmiller, Architect – original design for the competition

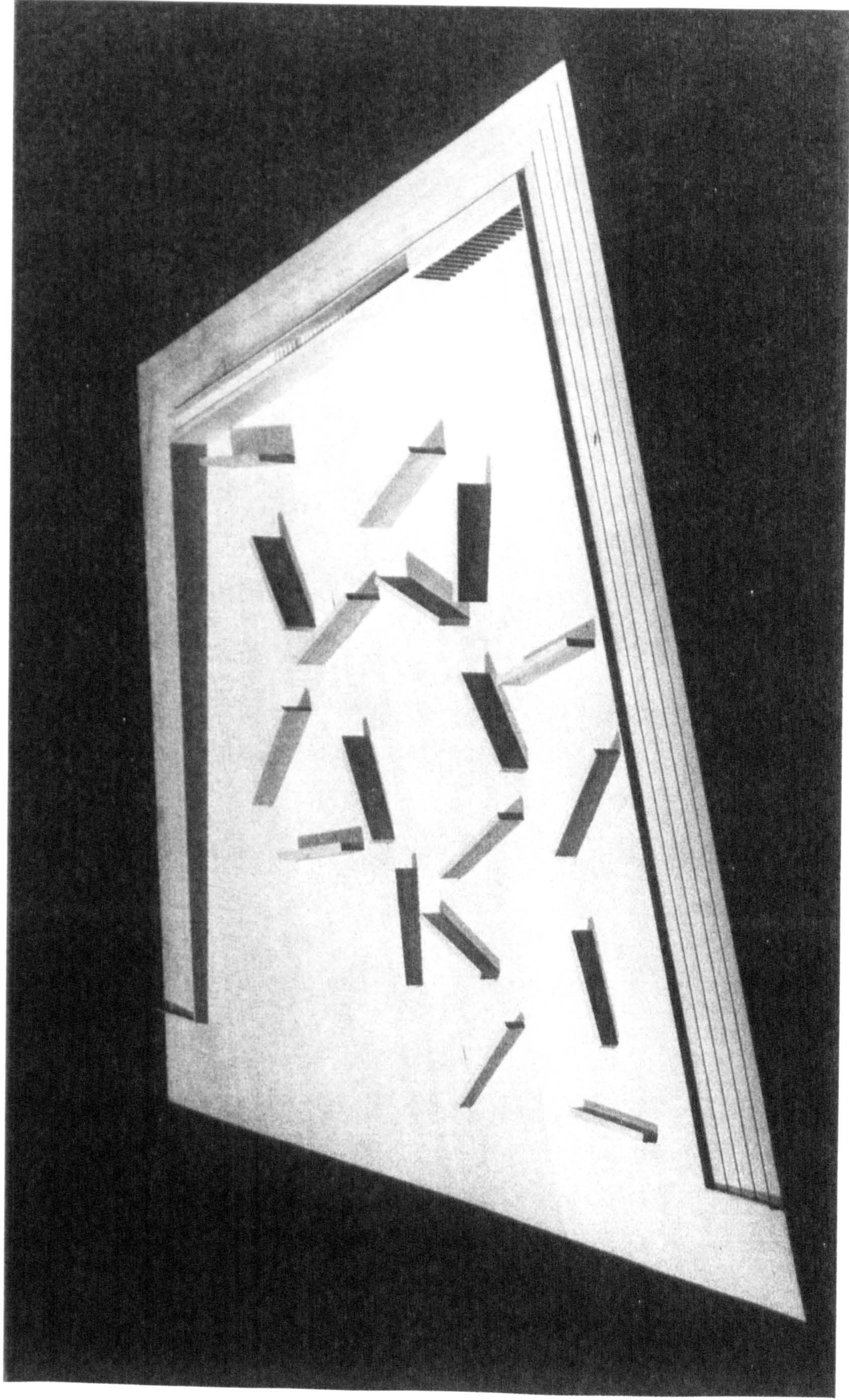
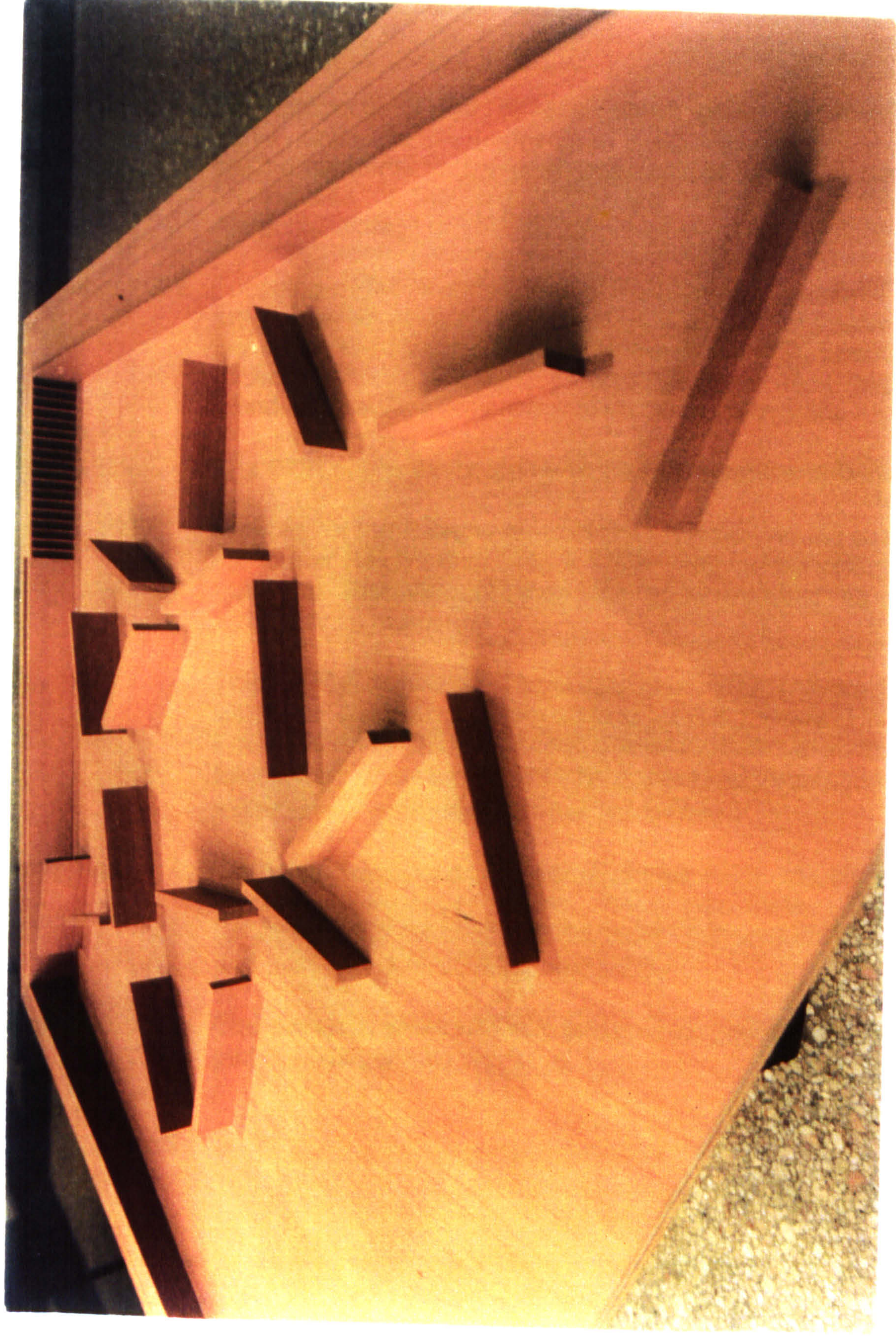


Image taken from HEIMROD, Ute, SCHLUSCHE, Günter & SEFRENS, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Das Denkmal? Der Denkmalstreit. Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo), p. 889

Figure 10: Gesine Weinmiller, Architect – original design for the competition



Photograph by Lautenschläger, with kind permission of the Berliner Verlag GmbH.

Chronology⁴¹⁶

- 30 January 1989 First proposal of the citizens' action group 'Perspektive Berlin', under the chairmanship of the publicist Lea Rosh, to erect a memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin on the site of the former Gestapo headquarters Prinz-Albrecht-Palais.
- 7 November 1989 Founding of the 'Patrons for the Erection of a Memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe', under the chairmanship of Lea Rosh and Edzard Reuter (Daimler-Benz AG), Eberhard Jäckel (historian), Siegfried Lenz (author), Kurt Masur (conductor) et al. as members of the board of trustees.
- 10 Nov. 1989 The GDR opens the borders to West Germany and Berlin.
- Jan./Feb. 1990 Proposal of the Patrons to erect the memorial on the site of the former Reich's chancellor's office in the centre of Berlin, after the Prinz-Albrecht-site had been rejected as not suitable for a memorial.
- 5 May 1990 The Foreign Ministers of both German states and the four victorious powers of World War II (U.S.A., Soviet Union, France and Great Britain) – the 'Two plus Four Talks' - meet for their first conference to discuss the political implications of a German re-unification for other countries.
- 18 May 1990 Theo Waigel, Minister of Finance for the FRG, and his East German colleague sign the Inter-State Treaty (Staatsvertrag) between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.
- 1 July 1990 The currency, economic and social union between the FRG and the GDR comes into force.
- 17 July 1990 The 'Two plus Four Talks' of the foreign ministers in Paris guarantee the West boarder of Poland.

⁴¹⁶ See also *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Gesellschaftliche Diskussion und parlamentarisches Verfahren*, 1999 (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit), pp. 21 ff. and Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit – das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo Verlag), pp. 27 ff.

23 August 1990	The GDR Volkskammer (People's Chamber) decides to accede to the legislative of the FRG on 3 October.
3 October 1990	The GDR joins the FRG. The separation of both states comes to an end after 41 years.
4 October 1990	First joint sitting of the Bundestag (Parliament) with East and West German members of parliament.
14 Nov. 1990	The German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and his Polish colleague sign a treaty that establishes the Oder-Neisse Line as the Polish West boarder.
2 December 1990	The CDU/CSU/FDP coalition wins the first general elections in the united Germany.
25 February 1991	The Warsaw Pact is dissolved.
20 June 1991	The German Parliament decides on Berlin as future seat of government.
5 September 1991	Berlin's mayor Walter Momper gives the central council of the German Sinti and Roma the assurance that when deciding on a monument to the victims of the Holocaust Jews, Sinti and Roma will equally be taken into account. In March the Council of Sinti and Roma had already made a petition at the Senate of Berlin for a memorial and a site of commemoration for the murdered Sinti and Roma.
October 1991	Opening of the memorial 'Station Grunewald' by Karol Broniatowsky (Berlin-Wilmersdorf).
January 1992	Founding of the foundation 'Topography of Terror' (Prinz-Albrecht-Site) to impart the 'historical experience of National Socialism to future generations' ⁴¹⁷ .
20 January 1992	Inauguration of the commemoration and educational site 'House of the Wannsee-Conference' (Berlin-Zehlendorf).
24 April 1992	Agreement between the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Senate's Administration for Cultural Matters and the Patrons on the erection of 'a monument for the murdered

⁴¹⁷ Heimrod, Ute, Schlusche, Günter & Seferens, Horst (eds.), 1999. *Der Denkmalstreit – das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo Verlag), p. 29

Jews of Europe' and on its site of the former Reich's chancellery.

- May 1992 Escalation of the public dispute between the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Central Council of Jews in Germany after the press had reported that the Federal Government, Berlin and the Patrons had agreed on an exclusive dedication of the monument to the Jewish victims of National Socialism.
- July 1992 The Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Senate's Administration for Cultural Matters agree to erect two separate monuments for the Jewish victims of National Socialism and for the victims of the Sinti and Roma.
- September 1992 Arson attack on one of the barracks of the former concentration camp Saschenhausen (Oranienburg).
- 20 Sept. 1992 Ignatz Bubis is elected as chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Germany.
- 13 October 1992 The Berlin Senate decides on the erection of a memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe and on the erection of an independent memorial for the murdered Sinti and Roma on a different site.
- June 1993 Opening of the several-part monument 'Places of Remembrance in the Bavarian Quarters' by Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock (Berlin-Schöneberg)
- 14 November 1993 Re-dedication of the 'Neue Wache' (New Guardhouse, Berlin centre) into the central site of commemoration of the Federal Republic of Germany for the victims of war and tyranny (enlarged replica of the sculpture 'Mother with dead Son' by Käthe Kollwitz). After public controversies a plaque is added to the dedication naming the various groups of victims who should be commemorated.
- 22 March 1994 Steven Spielberg's film 'Schindler's List' is awarded 7 Oscars and becomes the most successful film of the year.
- April 1994 The announcement of the first open artistic competition for the presentation of a memorial; the prize is to be offered by the Federal Republic of Germany, the city (Land) Berlin and the Patrons.
- May 1994 Opening of the memorial of the concentration camp Sonnenallee by Norbert Radermacher (Berlin-Neukölln)

- 8 September 1994 The Allies leave Berlin; the official presence of the three Western powers (U.S.A., France and Great Britain) since 1945 comes to an end.
- 16 October 1994 With the narrowest of victories at the general elections Chancellor Helmut Kohl secures yet another term in office.
- 3 December 1994 Opening of the concentration camp Columbia-House by Georg Seibert (Berlin-Tempelhof).
- March 1995 Opening of the Exhibition "War of Destruction: The Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941-1944"
- 15/16 March 1995 The competition produces two first prizes: Simon Ungers (Köln/New York) and the design of Jakob-Marks/Rolfe (Berlin)— a tilted, sloping slab onto which the names of all known murdered Jews should be engraved – favoured by the federal state Berlin and the patrons. The Federal Government and the Chairman of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, Ignatz Bubis, express strong reservations. The panel's decision provokes strong public criticism.
- 20 March 1995 Opening of the memorial for the commemoration of the book burning of 10 May 1933 by Micha Ullman on Bebelplatz (Berlin, centre).
- 8 June 1995 Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, favours the design of Simon Ungers and declares himself against the award-winning design of Jakob-Marks.
- 25 June 1995 After a controversial public discussion the three clients vote for the realisation of the Jakob-Marks's design.
- 26 June 1995 The 'Initiative Gay's Monument' presents the memorandum 'To remember the homosexual victims of National Socialism'; they demand their own monument for the group of victims.
- 30 June 1995 The Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl declares himself against the realisation of the Jakob-Marks's design. The Federal Government issues the following statement: *'The Federal Government supports the erection of a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. The Federal Government is in favour of a location in Berlin and establishes a plot of land for a memorial. It makes the planned contribution to the costs. However, the Federal Government does not support the design of Ms Jakob-Marks which is intended in the discussions. It thinks it necessary to continue the discussion about the design of the*

memorial with the claim of reaching a broad consensus of all involved.⁴¹⁸

- 18 October 1995 Unveiling of the sculpture 'Women's Protest in the Rosenstraße' by Ingeborg Hunzinger (Berlin, centre).
- 22 October 1995 The elections to the chamber of deputies lead to the formation of a coalition between the CDU and the SPD for the setting up of the Berlin Senate (Mayor Eberhard Diepgen).
- 14 January 1996 In a speech before the German Parliament Israel's President of State, Ezer Weizmann, remembers the extermination of the European Jews by the Nazi Regime.
- 27 January 1996 Initiated by the President of State, Roman Herzog, on the occasion of the anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp of Auschwitz, for the first time in Germany a 'Memorial Day for the Victims of National Socialism' is observed.
- 9 May 1996 The plenary meeting of the Parliament for the first time addresses in its debates the issue of a 'memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe'. Parliamentary debate over a motion put forward by the Social Democrats and the Green Party as to whether the Parliament should be involved in the debates surrounding the memorial; motions are forwarded to the Ältestenrat (all-party parliamentary committee assisting the President of the Bundestag) which then forms an 'informal committee'.
- November 1996 To consolidate the budget, the Berlin Senate decides to postpone the building of the exhibition and documentation centre of the foundation 'Topography of Terror' until after 2000. The decision is rescinded after massive protests.
- Jan. to April 1997 Colloquiums in Berlin with controversial debates on the design and location of the memorial:
- 10 January: Why does Germany need the memorial?

⁴¹⁸ ;Die Bundesregierung ist für die Errichtung eines Denkmals in Berlin für die ermordeten Juden Europas. Die Bundesregierung ist für den Standort in Berlin und stellt dort ein Grundstück zur Verfügung. Sie leistet den vorgesehenen Kostenbeitrag. Die Bundesregierung unterstützt aber nicht das in der Diskussion vorgesehene Modell von Frau Jakob-Marks. Sie hält es für erforderlich, die Diskussion über die Gestaltung des Mahnmals fortzuführen mit dem Ziel, einen breiten Konsens aller Beteiligten zu erreichen.' *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Gesellschaftliche Diskussion und parlamentarisches Verfahren*, 1999, p. 21

	• 14 February: The location – its historical and political context, its future integration into the area. • 11 April: Typology and Iconography of the monument.
March 1997	Daniel J. Goldhagen is awarded the 'Prize of Democracy'.
18 April 1997	As a result of the colloquiums the following was decided: • The monument would be built; the digging of the first turf would be, at the latest, on 27 January 1999. • The building costs remain unchanged at 15m. German Mark. • The responsible administration would again inspect the three most favourite potential sites for their suitability ('Ministergärten'; ground between Reichstag and the 'House of the Cultures of the World'; area close to the Foundation 'Topography of Terror'). • The competition should be closed, the presented designs should not be built. The commission is to organise a second level of the competition.
17 June 1997	The three clients agree to a so-called procedure of selection with a new competition and to the implementation of a so-called 'Findungskommission' (body of experts responsible for the finding of participants). On the recommendation of the commission, the nine best contestants of the first competition and 16 other domestic and foreign artists were invited to present new designs; 18 of the invited promise their participation.
20 June 1997	Opening of the monument 'Arcades' at the site of the former synagogue in the Lindenstraße (Berlin-Kreuzberg) by Zvi Hecker, Micha Ullman and Eyal Weizman.
31 October 1997	First meeting of the 'Beurteilungskommission' (assessment commission) in Berlin where the submitted designs were presented by the 'Findungskommission'; from the 19 submitted designs, 8 were short-listed. The artists or architects were asked to present their designs to the assessment commission.
14/15 Nov. 1997	Second meeting of the assessment commission, 4 designs are taken into the selection of designs that could be realised: • Peter Eisenman/Richard Serra – suggested by the 'Findungskommission'. • Jochen Gerz – favoured by the Patrons. • Daniel Libeskind – favoured by the Federal Government and the County Berlin.

- Gesine Weinmiller – suggested by the 'Findungskommission'.

From Nov. 1997	Vivid debates in the media about the designs and the meaning and point of the monument in general.
26 January 1998	The preparations and clearance of the land planned as the memorial site, reveal remains of an air-raid shelter which belonged to the former villa of Joseph Goebbels, the National Socialist minister for propaganda.
27 January 1998	Unveiling of the memorial 'Platform 17' by the architects Nicolaus Hirsch, Wolfgang Lorch and Andrea Wandel at the station Grunewald to commemorate the Jews of Berlin who were transported to the death camps by the German Reichsbahn from here.
16 February 1998	Berlin's Mayor, Eberhard Diepgen, argues for a postponement since the current designs were ' <i>intellectually and emotionally not convincing</i> '. ⁴¹⁹ Diepgen declares himself against further memorials to other groups of victims; the centre of Berlin should not turn into a 'Mahnmeile' (a collection of memorials the public can stroll along).
Spring 1998	The Chancellor of the Federal Republic, Helmut Kohl, on the other hand argues for a speedy erection of a memorial and evidently favours the Eisenman/Serra design which is to be amended (became widely known as Eisenman II).
22 May 1998	Meeting between Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Richard Serra and Peter Eisenman about their design and the specificities of the amendments.
2 June 1998	The artist Richard Serra withdraws from the competition for ' <i>personal and professional reasons</i> '. ⁴²⁰
17 July 1998	The United Nations decide on the foundation of an International Court of Justice that is supposed to prosecute genocide and crimes against humanity in the whole world.

⁴¹⁹ *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Gesellschaftliche Diskussion und parlamentarisches Verfahren*, 1999 (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit), p. 23

⁴²⁰ *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Gesellschaftliche Diskussion und parlamentarisches Verfahren*, 1999 (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit), p. 23

21 July 1998	The designated representative in cultural matters of the SPD, Michael Naumann, declares to renounce the memorial all together.
4 August 1998	The artist Jochen Gerz withdraws from further proceedings.
24 August 1998	Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Berlin's Mayor, Diepgen, agree that before the General Election at 27 September 1998 no decision regarding the memorial should be made.
27 Sept. 1998	In the general election for the 14th German Parliament, the coalition of CDU and FDP, which had been in power for the last 16 years, is not re-elected. Winner is the SPD which under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder goes into coalition with the Bündnis 90/Die Grüne.
11 October 1998	At the award of the 'Peace Prize of the German Book Trade' the author Martin Walser expresses strong criticism against the planned memorial. His speech prompted a huge major public controversy over the nature of public memory of the National Socialist past and the crimes committed. Ignatz Bubis accuses Walser of 'spiritual arson'.
22 October 1998	Coalition agreement between the Social Democratic Party and the Alliance 90/Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen): <i>'The Federal Government will take part in the broad and open discussion within society about the monument to the murdered Jews of Europe. The monument at the intended location will be decided on by the parliament.'</i> ⁴²¹
10 Nov. 1998	In the government statement Chancellor Schröder says that the decision on the monument will not be an executive one but – with consideration to the broad public debate – will be decided by the Parliament.
13 Nov. 1998	Constitution of the committee for culture and media of the parliament which takes on the overall control of issues around the monument.
18 Nov. 1998	Second meeting of the parliamentary committee for culture and media: the government's representative for cultural and media matters, Dr Naumann, addresses the possibilities of enlarging the monument project with educative elements.

⁴²¹ *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Gesellschaftliche Diskussion und parlamentarisches Verfahren*, 1999 (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit), p. 24

24 Nov. 1998	Berlin Mayor, Eberhard Diepgen, rejects the Eisenman design.
14 Dec. 1998	In a press conference, the government's representative in cultural and media matters, Michael Naumann, announces that he plans a completely re-designed Holocaust memorial for Berlin which consists of a museum, a library and research centre.
17/19 Jan. 1999	The concept developed together with the architect Peter Eisenman (now known as Eisenman III) is presented to the public. Cost of realisation is estimated at a minimum of 150m German Mark. Start of an intensive public debate on alternative contextual concept and legal issues with regard to the second, still ongoing competition.
20 January 1999	First meeting between the President of the Parliament, the chairmen of the parties represented in parliament, the Minister of State in cultural and media matters, Dr Naumann, and the chairman of the committee for culture and media about further procedures. The President of the Parliament asks for the legal issues to be clarified by the end of February 1999.
21 January 1999	Presentation of the four designs of the second level of competition and the concept Eisenman III.
24 January 1999	Opening of the new building for the Jewish Museum in the Lindenstraße by Daniel Libeskind still without exhibits.
27 January 1999	At the ceremony for the Memorial Day for the victims of National Socialism in Parliament, the President of State, Roman Herzog, demands a speedy decision from the monument dispute.
8 February 1999	Representatives of commemorative sites in Berlin and Brandenburg criticise, unanimously, the Naumann's 'combination model'.
16 March 1999	A vote in the Berlin Senate on the memorial decides with the majority of the CDU that the current procedure of competition should be stopped for the moment.
20 April 1999	Public session of the committee for culture and media in Berlin in the form of talks with directors and representatives of places of remembrance on the integration of the monument into the landscape of places of remembrance.

May 1999	Six group motions are put forward to the Parliament; one resents the realisation of the monument, another wants the decision to be handed over to the government.
2 June 1999	The committee for culture and media calls upon the Federal Government with the support of the Social Democrats, the Alliance 90/ The Greens and the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) to declare the competition procedure to be finished. The Minister of State, Dr Naumann, follows the recommendation by writing to the other parties involved and artists on 8 June 1999.
25 June 1999	Parliamentary debate and vote on the memorial.
30 Sept. 1999	The author Günter Grass is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

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