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Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre

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THE EVENT WE NOW KNOW as the Holocaust has been widely represented in a variety of media, from autobiographical and scholarly books; to literature, photography, and film; to art, music, and museums.<sup>1</sup> There has even been an extensive discussion about whether it can be represented at all: Saul Friedlander has described it as being “at the limits of representation.”<sup>2</sup> Even before the event itself was defined, however, it was being commemorated in monuments and memorials. Today there are many thousands of memorials marking sites of Nazi persecution and mass murder, and dozens more in cities around the world, with additional monuments being erected each year.<sup>3</sup>

In order to investigate how the Holocaust has been memorialized, we must first delimit what we mean by the term. Not until the 1970s did “Holocaust” become the most widely used word to denote the Nazi program to systematically exterminate all Jews; since the 1990s, it has expanded to include Nazi programs to decimate or eradicate other groups as well.<sup>4</sup> In fact, an awareness of Nazi genocide as a program

<sup>1</sup> The works of Lawrence Langer on Holocaust literature and testimony are standard-setting: Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn., 1975); Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, Conn., 1991). See also James E. Young, *Writing and Re-writing the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988). For art, music, and museums, see, for example, Philip Rosen and Nina Apfelbaum, *Bearing Witness: A Resource Guide to Literature, Poetry, Art, Music, and Videos by Holocaust Survivors* (Westport, Conn., 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 3. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel has been one of the most outspoken proponents of the view that the Holocaust cannot be adequately portrayed.

<sup>3</sup> See Ulrike Puvogel, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus: Eine Dokumentation*, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1995). Puvogel’s location indexes list more than 3,000 sites for Germany alone. The equivalent publication for Poland, Council for the Preservation of Monuments to Resistance and Martyrdom, *Scenes of Fighting and Martyrdom Guide: War Years in Poland, 1939–1945* (Warsaw, 1966), lists more than 1,200 sites. Similar books have been compiled for Austria and the Netherlands: Erich Fein, *Die Steine Reden: Gedenkstätten des österreichischen Freiheitskampfes, Mahnmale für die Opfer des Faschismus, eine Dokumentation* (Vienna, 1975); Wim Ramaker, *Sta een Ogenblik Stil . . . : Monumentenboek, 1940–1945* (Kampen, 1980). A front-page *New York Times* article from January 29, 2008, “Germany Confronts Holocaust Legacy Anew,” lists seven major projects in progress for Germany alone.

I do not distinguish rigidly between “monuments” and “memorials,” although the choice of terms can be used to reflect objects that may be more heroic versus those that are more contemplative, as in the Washington Monument versus the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> See Jon Petrie, “The Secular Word ‘Holocaust’: Scholarly Myths, History, and 20th Century Meanings,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 1 (2000): 31–63. See also David Engel, “What Is The Holocaust?” in Gordon Martel, ed., *A Companion to Europe, 1900–1945* (Malden, Mass., 2006), 472–486. Peter Novick discusses the emergence of an awareness of the Holocaust in the United States in *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999), 133–134.

distinct from atrocities committed during World War II developed only during the 1960s. Barbie Zelizer, in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, her groundbreaking 1998 study of early photographs taken at Holocaust sites and the evolution of their uses, notes that at the time and during the 1950s, they were called “World War II ‘atrocity photos.’”<sup>5</sup> Raul Hilberg’s seminal work, beginning with his 1950 M.A. thesis and including his 1955 dissertation, published in 1961, used the term “destruction of the European Jews.” That work, along with such events as the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961–1962, marks a watershed in the recognition of “the Holocaust” as a discrete event.<sup>6</sup>

From the earliest attempts to represent aspects of the Holocaust at the sites where it took place, we can derive some principles that have come to characterize Holocaust memorials as a new genre of commemorative art distinct from older forms: they are addressed to transnational audiences; they often explicitly represent multiple meanings; and they use a new repertoire of symbols, forms, and materials to represent those meanings. By the time they emerged as a distinct genre around 1960, Holocaust memorials tended to be complex experiential spaces, usually going beyond mere documentary markers to include significant didactic accoutrements.

Since the late 1960s, scholars have attempted to catalogue Holocaust memorials, presenting us with a rich array of forms, but usually limiting themselves to typological categorizations with isolated formal interpretations.<sup>7</sup> More recent works offer in-depth historical portrayals of individual memorials but are organized along national lines, interpreting the memorials as artifacts of specific national cultures.<sup>8</sup> James E. Young’s seminal 1993 monograph *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* constitutes the pinnacle of this approach. Young focuses first on selected sites in Germany, Austria, and Poland, the primary countries where the Holocaust was carried out, and then on memorials in Israel and the United States. He does not treat some of the earliest representations of what we now call the Holocaust, planned for Warsaw and New York during the war, until chapters 6 and 11, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2001), 1. See also the excellent study by Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung: Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Raul Hilberg, “The Role of the German Civil Service in the Destruction of the Jews” (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1950); Hilberg, “Prologue to Annihilation: A Study of the Identification, Impoverishment, and Isolation of the Jewish Victims of Nazi Policy” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1955); Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961). For a cogent argument that the Holocaust and World War II are actually inseparably linked, see Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The “Final Solution” in History* (New York, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> For a typological approach, see Adolf Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny* (New York, 1969); and American Jewish Congress, *In Everlasting Remembrance: A Guide to Memorials and Monuments Honoring the Six Million* (New York, 1969). An excellent annotated bibliography of the literature can be found in Sybil Milton and Ira Nowinski, *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials* (Detroit, 1991), 297–315. Many more titles can be found in the “Holocaust: Commemoration and Memorials” section of *Holocaust Remembrance: A Selected Bibliography*, prepared in 2000 by the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, available at <http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/remembrance.html> (accessed September 2007).

<sup>8</sup> See James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Conn., 1993); also Judith Miller, *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust* (New York, 1990); Harold Marcuse, Frank Schimmelfennig, and Jochen Spielmann, *Steine des Anstosses: Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg in Denkmalen, 1945–1985* (Hamburg, 1985). For a more comprehensive survey of Holocaust memorialization in eleven European countries, see my essay “Memories of World War II and the Holocaust in Europe,” in Martel, *A Companion to Europe*, 487–503.

In contrast to such geographic analyses, a synchronic approach can show that knowledge about the scope and nature of the Holocaust spread only gradually to a wider public, which then struggled to find proper expressions of its understandings of the events. It allows us to discern how crucial the agents behind Holocaust memorials and their intended audiences were to the forms those projects ultimately attained. It may seem obvious upon reflection, but it was not so much the events themselves that gave shape to the memorials (although the events did give rise to a specific iconography), but the intentions of those who established them. In fact, some of the core event-sites of the Holocaust, including Babi Yar, Belzec, Chełmno, Sobibor, and Treblinka, were not memorialized at all until the 1960s, when agents and audiences emerged who took an interest in transmitting their memory.

THE INITIAL STAGE of Holocaust memorialization is represented by three monuments: one created in the Majdanek concentration camp in 1943; one conceived for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, even as the rebellion was happening, and subsequently implemented in 1948; and one proposed for New York City in 1944 but not realized until the 1990s. While the first two were intended to be or to represent acts of resistance, the third was an attempt by concerned witnesses to commemorate the enormous suffering and sacrifice of the victims. The next stage in the memorialization of Holocaust events is marked by monuments created in or proposed for concentration camps at or shortly after their liberation. Departing survivors of Buchenwald and Flossenbürg wanted to leave behind some marker of their murdered comrades, while Allied army authorities in Belsen and Dachau felt a need to publicize the colossal desecration of humanity they encountered. Slightly later, states that had fallen victim to Nazi aggression set about preserving the remains of sites of repression as memorials: Poland at Auschwitz, Belgium at Breendonk, and Czechoslovakia at Theresienstadt. Sites of Nazi atrocities that were not preserved during this first phase faced the same problem as non-Holocaust sites such as New York: the physical structures were deteriorating, or were unofficially or officially being dismantled and reused, creating a need to represent what was no longer there. This lack of existing forms forced the memorializers to confront more explicitly the question of what meanings they wished to convey.

The memorial at Dachau, delayed until the early 1950s, illustrates the transition to a new phase in which survivors and states worked together, using international artistic competitions, to work out those meanings and find forms that would convey them. A 1952 competition for Buchenwald, then international competitions in 1953 in London and in 1957 for Auschwitz-Birkenau, completed the transition to a specific iconography of the Holocaust, at the time the term itself and its conception as an event *sui generis* was emerging.<sup>9</sup> The Buchenwald project, although envisioned as an international memorial by the camp survivors, was implemented for a national audience by the East German state as a National Site of Admonition and Commemoration (*Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte*) to represent the “anti-fascist” basis of

<sup>9</sup> Petrie, “The Secular Word ‘Holocaust,’” gives examples of the use of “Holocaust” as the French and English translation of the Hebrew *sho’ah* in Yad Vashem publications beginning in 1955.

its own legitimacy. However, even its socialist realist design reveals the emerging internationalist trend, which became more pronounced by the end of the decade in Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen, which are also in East Germany. An explicitly internationalist avant-garde tradition emerged from the London and Birkenau competitions, which shaped most subsequent major Holocaust memorials.

WHAT MAY BE CONSIDERED the first Holocaust memorial was created in May 1943 by prisoners in the Majdanek concentration camp just outside the city limits of Lublin in eastern Poland.<sup>10</sup> An imprisoned Catholic Polish artist persuaded an SS administrator to permit the “beautification” of his section of the camp with sculptures. Albin Boniecki used concrete to create “Three Eagles”—a group of interlinked birds taking flight—which he set atop a column approximately 2 meters tall, into the base of which prisoners secretly placed a small container of human ash. The camp administrators accepted the monument because they saw the eagles as a Nazi symbol. However, the eagle is also a Polish national symbol, and to the prisoners, the three birds taking to the air symbolized the ultimate freedom of the three imprisoned groups: men, women, and children. Boniecki also created a tortoise, to symbolize resistance through work slowdowns, and a lizard baring its teeth in the direction of the guards at the entrance gate. This first memorial contains two features that would prove to be typical of the genre: the use of symbolic materials, and the creation of new symbols that would be appropriately understood by their target audience. A symbolic language of Holocaust memorials, which distinguishes them from earlier memorial traditions of war-related mass death, emerged gradually over the next two decades.

Symbolic materials include stone from concentration camp quarries, such as the granite in the Mauthausen memorial in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris (1958), and also the marble used in the Jewish memorial in Dachau (1967), which is from the city of Peki'in in Israel, believed to have had continuous Jewish settlement since biblical times. Numerous Holocaust memorials incorporate containers of human ash or “blood-soaked” soil from Nazi camps and sites of mass murder.<sup>11</sup> Religious sym-

<sup>10</sup> See Józef Marszałek, *Majdanek: Konzentrationslager Lublin* (Warsaw, 1984), 153, with unnumbered illustration. On the artist Albin Boniecki, see Rosen and Apfelbaum, *Bearing Witness*, 128. According to <http://polish-online.com/polen/staedte/lublin-museum-majdanek.php> (accessed November 2, 2007), after liberation the sculpture was destroyed by the local populace, who saw it as a symbol of Nazism. If that is true, the present sculpture would be a re-creation, of which I could find no indication in the published literature. See, for example, Detlef Hoffmann, ed., *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge: KZ-Relikte und KZ-Denkmäler, 1945–1995* (Frankfurt, 1997), 10–11, <http://books.google.com/books?id=XWRer88ZksUC>.

*Note:* Not all early Holocaust memorial projects are discussed here. For example, too little is known about a 1944 memorial vision for Auschwitz and Birkenau that is mentioned in Isabelle Engelhardt, *A Topography of Memory: Representations of the Holocaust at Dachau and Buchenwald in Comparison with Auschwitz, Yad Vashem and Washington, DC* (Brussels, 2002), 160–161. Also, the 1959 Ravensbrück memorial discussed below is based on a 1941 design for a monument commemorating the shooting of Soviet commissars. See Susanne Lanwerd, “Skulpturales Gedenken: Die ‘Tragende’ des Bildhauers Will Lammert,” in Insa Eschebach, Sigrid Jacobeit, and Susanne Lanwerd, *Die Sprache des Gedenkens: Zur Geschichte der Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, 1945–1995* (Berlin, 1999), 42–43.

<sup>11</sup> Survivors leaving Buchenwald for their home countries in the spring of 1945 took eighteen urns of human ash with them to create memorials around the world. Some of these urns are in the Central Cemetery in Vienna, the Île de la Cité deportation memorial in Paris, and the Church of the Holy Spirit

bolism, even the use of Jewish symbols, was not common in concentration camp memorials until the 1960s, when the specifically Jewish dimension of the Nazi genocide began to emerge in the public sphere.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the first symbols used at sites of persecution and genocide were taken from iconic features of the Nazi camps: barbed wire and fence posts, smokestacks, and the colored triangle badges that were used to categorize prisoners. Later, more specifically Holocaust-related icons of deportation, such as railroad cars and tracks, and even the sounds of trains, were added to the repertoire of camp memorials.<sup>13</sup> Symbols of victim groups, such as the six-pointed Star of David, a menorah, or the five-pointed communist red star, and, less often, symbols of the perpetrators, including the swastika (usually deformed or broken), help to give Holocaust memorials specificity. More generic symbols of bondage and death, such as chains and urns, are common. Finally, numeric symbolism is frequently employed in Holocaust memorials. The number 6 for the approximately 6 million Jewish victims is most common, but numbers of places (countries) of origin (usually 15–30) or of victims, often with tens or hundreds of thousands of individual elements (as tiles in Paris and Yad Vashem, or names in Prague), can also be found.<sup>14</sup>

Human forms in positions of mourning, solidarity, or resistance are common.



FIGURE 1: Albin Boniecki, “Three Eagles,” on a column erected by prisoners in Majdanek, May 1943; height ca. 2 meters. The original base was said to hide a secret container of human ash. Photo by Ute Wrocklage.

in Copenhagen. With 105 urns and twenty-five additional relics in a crypt, the 1949 Hamburg-Ohlsdorf memorial discussed below has the largest collection. See Harold Marcuse, “Das Gedenken an die Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus, exemplarisch analysiert anhand des Hamburger ‘Denkmals für die Opfer nationalsozialistischer Verfolgung und des Widerstandskampfes’” (M.A. thesis, University of Hamburg, 1985), 59 (citing *Hamburger Volkszeitung*, May 3, 1949), 96–98; available at <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/publications/ma/marcuse1985.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the emergence of international awareness of the Jewish dimension of Nazi mass murder, with references to pertinent literature, see Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001* (Cambridge, 2001), 210–214, 266–267. See also Petrie, “The Secular Word ‘Holocaust,’” 46–48; and Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, pt. 3.

<sup>13</sup> A 1958 design for Birkenau, discussed below, featured a cattle car motif; the 1970 memorial in Dutch Westerbork is a reconstructed section of track; the 1974 Ravensbrück memorial in Amsterdam has a constantly running railway soundtrack. See J. Kruizinga, *Op de Bres voor de Vrijheid: Oorlogs-, Verzets- en Bevrijdingsmonumenten in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1980), 40.

<sup>14</sup> The Paris deportation memorial is discussed below. The memorial in the Pinkas synagogue in Prague (1954–1959) lists the names and vital dates of 77,297 Czech Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

They are universally understandable, and are able to trigger empathy and positive feelings while connoting negative events. Skeletal human forms, widely associated with the camps since the Allied media blitz that accompanied their liberation in the spring of 1945, are less frequently employed, presumably because they do not foster feelings of identification among viewers. Disembodied hands, less graphic but more focused expressions of human emotion, are often found in Holocaust memorials as well.<sup>15</sup>

The need for symbolic representations, however, is predicated on the absence of that which is symbolized. In the early postwar years at many locations, the remnants of the camps themselves were deemed sufficient to represent what had taken place there. Majdanek is again an early example. In July 1944, Majdanek was the first Nazi concentration camp to fall into Allied hands; the following November, the provisional Polish government declared it to be a “memorial site of the martyrdom of the peoples of Poland and other nations.” One reason no additional artistic memorial was erected there until 1970 was the existence of the physical remains. In fact, at most of the former camps, the deterioration (or the intentional destruction) of the structures went hand in hand with initiatives to create a symbolic memorial. At Gross Rosen near Łódź, for example, where much of the camp is still largely intact today, there is no sculptural memorial; instead, only a squat, obelisk-like mausoleum was constructed.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, at Theresienstadt, thirty-five miles northeast of Prague, and in Breendonk, between Brussels and Antwerp, the remains of massive pre-Nazi fortresses serve as the primary memorials.<sup>17</sup>

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See “Pinkas Synagogue: Memorial to the 80,000 Jewish Victims of the Holocaust from Bohemia and Moravia,” <http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/a-ex-pinkas.htm> (accessed November 18, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Ramaker, *Sta een Ogenblik Stil*, has a chapter devoted to Dutch Holocaust memorials using hands as symbols.

<sup>16</sup> The Gross Rosen mausoleum contains a large volume of human ash discovered in the camp, which was liberated on February 14, 1945, with 30,000 unevacuated survivors. It is barely mentioned in the extant literature. For two cursory references, see Council for the Preservation of Monuments to Resistance and Martyrdom, *Scenes of Fighting and Martyrdom Guide*, 324 and ill. 276; and Reinhard Matz, *Die unsichtbaren Lager: Das Verschwinden der Vergangenheit im Gedenken* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1993), 175. In 2007–2008, the Gross Rosen museum’s website offered a more detailed post-war history of the memorial site, but it has since been removed. The current homepage is <http://www.gross-rosen.pl/gb/main.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> On May 6, 1947, the Czech government declared that the “small fortress” section of the Theresienstadt camp, an eighteenth-century fortress, would be preserved as a “memorial site of national suffering.” However, the part of the site associated with the Holocaust, the larger section of the fortress across the river Ohře, where approximately 140,000 Jews had been held and about 33,000 died, was not included in the decree. Today that part of the former Theresienstadt “ghetto” is a residential neighborhood. The imposing architecture of the small fortress, where primarily non-Jewish Czech political prisoners were held, serves as a museum and memorial for the entire complex, and has never been complemented by a central artistic memorial. See Vojtěch Blodig, “Die Gedenkstätte Theresienstadt gestern und heute,” *Dachauer Hefte* 11 (1995): 102–108; also [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internierungslager\\_Theresienstadt\\_\(1945-1948\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internierungslager_Theresienstadt_(1945-1948)) (accessed October 19, 2007 and December 28, 2009), referencing articles in Czech in the *Theresienstädter Blätter* in 1990 and 1996 (the reference to the 1990 issue was removed when the Theresienstadt\_1945-1948 page was renamed in September 2009). Some small memorials and sculptures can be found in the small fortress, including one containing earth from the concentration camps to which the prisoners of the small fortress were transferred. I could not find more specific information about the origins of these memorials. They were likely added after the 1970s, when major improvements to the site were made.

In August 1947, the Belgian parliament passed a bill stipulating that the former SS and SD detention center in the early-twentieth-century fortress at Breendonk, twelve miles south of Antwerp and approximately equidistant from Brussels, would be preserved as a memorial museum. See <http://www>



FIGURE 2: Nathan Rapoport, Monument to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto, 1948; height 23 meters. The heroic socialist realist style reached its peak in the Eastern Bloc with the Buchenwald memorial of 1958. Photo by Aaron Marcuse-Kubitza.

BY FAR THE MOST ELABORATE and important Holocaust memorial conceived during the war was Nathan Rapoport's monument for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It has been comprehensively researched by James Young.<sup>18</sup> Rapoport, a Jewish refugee from Nazi-occupied Poland, had found sanctuary in the Soviet Union, and was working as a state sculptor in Novosibirsk when he heard news of the uprising in April 1943. He had previously sketched a monument to the destruction of Polish and Russian Jewry, a huddled family watching a girl being led away by armed Germans. A year later, he traveled to Moscow to present his first model for a Warsaw Ghetto monument to the Arts Committee, which rejected it as "too narrow in conception, too nationalistic," meaning that it did not conform to the heroic-universalist Stalinist style. (Young writes that the committee considered it "too Jewish.") Unfortunately, we do not know what that monument looked like, but we do know that memorial designs were often rejected in those early years because they were too specific or too graphic—in other words, because their meanings were not acceptable to those in power. When Rapoport was repatriated to Warsaw in early 1946, he presented a revised maquette to the Warsaw Jewish Committee, which, he learned, had already rejected a proposal from a local artist that was described as looking like "two Ha-

.breendonk.be/EN/fort.html (accessed October 19, 2007). A sculptural memorial may have been erected there: a bronze figure of a powerful man, kneeling with his thighs splayed and looking upward, set atop a high brick pedestal, is depicted in Ludo van Eck, *Le livre des camps* (Leuven, 1979), 32. I have been unable to find out more about this sculpture. On the reception of the memorial site, see also <http://www.breendonk.be/EN/memorial.html> (accessed October 19, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 155–184, esp. 159, 164–170. On p. 166, Young writes that Rapoport returned to Novosibirsk in "mid-1943," but from the context he probably means mid-1944. This detailed and richly illustrated chapter was previously published as James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 69–106.



sidim hoeing potatoes.” Rapoport’s new idea was for a large framing monument, approximately 23 meters high and 27 meters wide, with an 11-meter-tall bronze figure of Mordecai Anielewicz, the head of the Jewish Fighting Organization, at the center. The committee immediately accepted the new design, which was approved a year later by the Warsaw Arts Committee as well, under the provision that it be completed for dedication on April 19, 1948, the fifth anniversary of the uprising and less than a year away.

Rapoport went to Paris to cast the figurative parts of the memorial in bronze. Realizing that his socialist realist style was becoming anachronistic, he isolated himself from the contemporary art scene and found Jewish settlers from Palestine to be his models. He located stone for the framing monument in a quarry in Sweden, where large blocks of granite lay ready for delivery. In an ironic twist of history, they had been ordered by Hitler’s favorite sculptor, Arno Breker, for use in a planned victory monument in the Nazi capital, Berlin. The core material beneath the granite inadvertently became symbolic as well. The architect commissioned with building the base had first wanted to clear the rubble of the destroyed ghetto from the site. When this proved impracticable, he poured concrete over the ruins, then encased that core with Breker’s granite slabs. Although in this case unplanned, the incorporation of relics draws on a longstanding memorial tradition that reached a qualitatively new level in Holocaust memorials. The practice had underpinned the legitimacy of Christian reliquaries since medieval times. In addition, spoils or remains of war had historically been taken for use in victory monuments, such as Napoleon’s looting of the Berlin quadriga in 1806, or the incorporation of cannons and munitions in war memorials at least since the U.S. Civil War.<sup>19</sup> Human remains have been incorporated into the tombs of unknown soldiers since World War I.<sup>20</sup> This practice has become a hallmark of Holocaust memorials, which commemorate an occurrence that was both anonymous and spread over a huge geographic area. In Poland, where a once-vibrant Jewish culture had been all but eradicated, monuments crafted from broken Jewish tombstones are common, for example, in Łódź, Łuków, Sandomierz, and Siedlce.<sup>21</sup>

ANOTHER FEATURE TYPICAL of Holocaust memorials for at least the first decade after the war is that they were initiated by Holocaust and concentration camp survivors, or by refugees such as Rapoport who had narrowly escaped the Nazis’ genocidal dragnet. However, they were realized only when they were supported either by the local community or by the governmental authority responsible for the site. The effort

<sup>19</sup> For more examples, see Hans-Rudolf Meier, “Vom Siegeszeichen zum Lüftungsschacht: Spolien als Erinnerungsträger in der Architektur,” in Hans-Rudolf Meier and Marion Wohlleben, eds., *Bauten und Orte als Träger von Erinnerung: Die Erinnerungsdebatte und die Denkmalpflege* (Zurich, 2000), 87–98; Annette Schäfer, “Spolien: Untersuchungen zur Übertragung von Bauteilen und ihr politischer Symbolgehalt am Beispiel von St-Denis, Aachen und Magdeburg” (M.A. thesis, Bamberg, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Ken Inglis, “Grabmäler für unbekannte Soldaten,” in Deutsches Historisches Museum et al., *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit: Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1994), 402–422. See also Linda Granfield, *The Unknown Soldier* (Toronto, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 194–196. These are mentioned but not depicted in Council for the Preservation of Monuments to Resistance and Martyrdom, *Scenes of Fighting and Martyrdom Guide*, 211, 200, 168, 307.



FIGURE 3: A plaque covering soil from concentration camps marks the site of a Holocaust memorial planned for New York City's Riverside Park since 1947. The memorial project was finally realized in 1997, but as a museum in a much more frequented location in Battery Park. Photo by Irene Marcuse, 2008.

to establish a memorial in New York City offers a revealing case study.<sup>22</sup> Since July 1942, a number of public events involving hundreds of thousands of people had been held in New York and other cities around the U.S. to draw attention to the ongoing genocide of Jews in Europe.<sup>23</sup> They culminated in a mass rally on the steps of City Hall on April 19, 1944, the first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, at which Mayor Fiorello La Guardia spoke. At the same time, the refugee poet Julian Tuwim published his call for a “monument to the ignominy of our foes and to the glory of our tortured heroes.”<sup>24</sup> In January 1946, the U.S. National Organization of Polish Jews proposed that an eternal flame be established, dedicated to the “Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Six Million Jews Slain by the Nazis.” It found wide support both from the city administration and from Jews around the world. On October 19, 1947, an inscribed cornerstone was dedicated before a crowd of tens of thousands in Riverside Park near 84th Street. That stone plaque, beneath which a box of soil from concentration camps was interred, bears the text “This is the site for the American memorial to the heroes of the Warsaw ghetto battle April–May 1943 and to the six million Jews of Europe martyred in the cause of human liberty.”

Since the New York project did not receive enough support to be initiated until the 1980s, the designs submitted for it in 1948, 1949, and 1950 indicate that spe-

<sup>22</sup> See Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 287–291. Rochelle Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics behind New York City's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1996), 44–55, offers additional details.

<sup>23</sup> See David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York, 1985), 24–26, 71, 88, 169–170; also Lucia Ruedenberg, “‘Remember 6,000,000’: Civic Commemoration of the Holocaust in New York City” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1994), 22–40.

<sup>24</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 164.

cifically Jewish symbols were problematic in the early memorial iconography of the Holocaust. The 1948 design was a figure by famed New York sculptor Jo Davidson, depicting a muscular, bare-handed fighter with his arms swept back and his chest thrust forward, towering over four figures: a beseeching rabbinical figure, a fighter aiding an injured comrade, and a corpse slumped against the step-like blocks of the pedestal.<sup>25</sup> After it was rejected without comment by the Arts Commission, Columbia University architecture professor Percival Goodman proposed in 1949 that a wall be erected, to measure 36 meters long and 7.6 meters tall, crowned by a menorah on a pedestal nearly 14 meters tall. This design, too, was rejected, ostensibly for its large size, which allegedly would have distracted drivers on the adjacent parkway. We can only speculate that its overt Jewish symbolism played a role in its rejection, as well as in the failure of its biblically themed successor.

In 1951, ground was broken for a design by famed German émigré architect Erich Mendelsohn and renowned Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović. Two black granite tablets, 24.4 meters tall and inscribed with the Ten Commandments, were to be set atop an 8-meter-high wall bearing a central inscription. A perpendicular wall 30 meters in length ran along the side of the plaza, at the front end of which was a giant sculpture of Moses urging “struggling humanity,” depicted as a procession of figures in bas-relief, to fulfill the Ten Commandments. When fundraising efforts stalled after Mendelsohn’s death in 1953, that project, too, was abandoned. Rochelle Saidel suggests that this was because of a lack of support among Jewish organizations in New York, which were wary of antisemitism during that Cold War period.<sup>26</sup>

The subsequent fate of Holocaust memorialization in New York City illustrates how difficult overtly Jewish symbolism remained around the world (with the exception of Israel) until the 1980s. In 1964, two different Jewish groups independently proposed separate designs by Nathan Rapoport, which were again rejected on grounds of “public sensitivity.” One, “Scroll of Fire,” took the form of Torah scrolls 8 meters high that were carved with bas-relief scenes from the Holocaust. It was erected in Israel in 1971.<sup>27</sup> The other depicted Artur Zygelboim immolating himself in London in 1943 to draw attention to the Nazi genocide of the Jews.<sup>28</sup> The Arts Commission described it as “a bronze figure engulfed in thorns and flames, sharply leaning to the front as if about to fall; emerging from the inferno are heads and hands calling to humanity for rescue.”<sup>29</sup> A design for a new location at the tip of Manhattan in Battery Park, commissioned from architect Louis Kahn in 1968, was never realized

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 290; Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember*, 49, 253 n. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember*, 51–55; see also Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 123.

<sup>27</sup> See Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember*, 57–61; Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 200–225. The second scroll of the version erected near Kesalon, Israel, carries scenes depicting the Israeli war of independence.

<sup>28</sup> On Zygelboim, see Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 123; and David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington, Ind., 1999), 138–139. Roskies calls Zygelboim’s grave in the Workmen’s Circle Plot of the Old Mount Carmel Cemetery in Queens, New York, “the first memorial to the Holocaust on American soil.” Saidel, however, gives 1972 as the dedication date of the current monument, a trapezoidal granite tower surmounted by a horizontal disk with a pear-shaped sculptural flame emerging from it; *Never Too Late to Remember*, 61. The Hebrew and English inscription quotes from Zygelboim’s suicide note.

<sup>29</sup> See *New York Times*, June 11, 1965, 1, cited in Wayne Jebian, “The Missing Monument,” *Columbia Journal of American Studies* 1, no. 1 (1995), <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/textarchive/cjas/11/14.html> (accessed November 9, 2007).

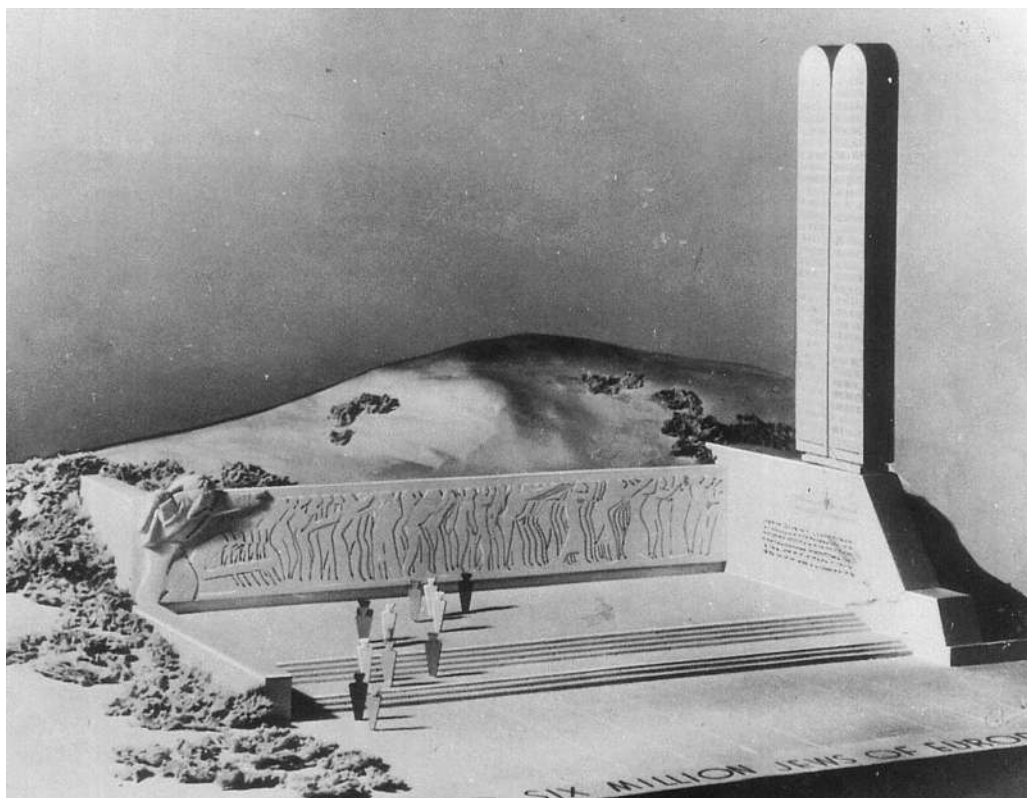


FIGURE 4: Erich Mendelsohn and Ivan Meštrović, design for a Holocaust memorial in Riverside Park, New York City, 1951; planned height ca. 24.4 meters. Prominent Jewish symbolism helped to thwart the realization of this project. Photo from the archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

because of a lack of funding. Consisting of six glass cubes approximately 5 meters high arranged around a seventh cube with an entrance archway, it was to have cost \$1.5 million. Ultimately a six-sided Museum of Jewish Heritage was built at that location. Begun in 1986, it was dedicated in 1997, with a substantial portion of its exhibition devoted to the Holocaust.

THE FIRST POSTWAR ATTEMPTS at memorialization in Europe were initiated by survivors in the camps that had been liberated before the Germans could evacuate them. These early efforts often went on for years before lasting memorials were erected, both because they were hampered by material conditions and because once the survivors dispersed, no other group lobbied for the creation of a memorial: state agencies had not yet found meanings in Nazi atrocities that they wished to represent.

On April 19, 1945, in Buchenwald, just four <sup>\*</sup>days after liberation, a wooden obelisk built by survivors in the camp workshops was erected on the roll-call square.<sup>30</sup> Some 7 to 8 meters tall and culminating in a wooden “fire basin,” it carried the inscription “K.L.B.” (the official Nazi abbreviation of *Konzentrationslager* Buchen-

<sup>30</sup> See Volkhard Knigge, “Buchenwald,” in Hoffmann, *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*, 95–96.

<sup>\*</sup>eight days after!



FIGURE 5: A provisional memorial erected on the Buchenwald roll-call square on April 19, 1945. Classical forms such as pyramids and obelisks were typical of the earliest Holocaust memorials. Photo by Sgt. John T. Poulos, courtesy of the Poulos Family.

wald) and the approximate number of people killed in the camp: 51,000.<sup>31</sup> The convergence of a lobby of Buchenwald survivors and the East German state's interest in using the camp to bolster its legitimacy would lead in 1958 to the creation of one of the largest Holocaust memorial ensembles ever built.<sup>32</sup> four days AFTER Buchenw.

In Bergen-Belsen, liberated four days before Buchenwald, catastrophic health conditions and the need to care for thousands of displaced Jews whose repatriation posed problems delayed the realization of a first memorial for a year.<sup>33</sup> Still, the British army quickly decided to designate the camp as a memorial. A sign was erected in English, with a second sign offering a clumsy German translation—an indication that the British also intended to address a German audience. It read:

This is the site of the infamous Belsen concentration camp, liberated by the British on 15th April 1945. 10,000 unburied dead were found here, another 13,000 have since died. All of them victims of the German New Order in Europe and an example of Nazi Kultur.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Of the 34,375 officially registered dead, approximately 11,000 were Jewish. Including executed prisoners and Soviet prisoners of war, as well as those who were dead upon arrival at the camp and those who died on evacuation marches, the death toll is now estimated to be 65,000 or more. Ironically, this obelisk form was identical to a temporary Nazi memorial created in Graz, Austria, in July 1938 to celebrate that city's naming as "City of the People's Uprising." The city's central statue of the Virgin Mary was covered in an obelisk framework draped in red cloth and crowned by a basin. See Hans Haacke, "Und ihr habt doch gesiegt, 1988," in James Young, ed., *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (New York, 1994), 77–81.

<sup>32</sup> Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, where memorials were begun in the 1960s, and the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, dedicated in 2005, are also among the largest.

<sup>33</sup> According to [http://www.ag-bergen-belsen.de/guided\\_tour.html](http://www.ag-bergen-belsen.de/guided_tour.html) (accessed January 12, 2008), a birchwood "timber cross" erected by (non-Jewish) Polish women after liberation was the first memorial.

<sup>34</sup> A photograph of the sign can be found at [http://isurvived.org/Bergen-Belsen\\_liberation.html](http://isurvived.org/Bergen-Belsen_liberation.html)

In April 1946, some Jewish survivors who were still living in former German army barracks near the site dedicated a square column approximately 2 meters tall, crowned by a block engraved with a small Star of David, which was in turn surmounted by a small stone sphere. On the side of the memorial facing arriving visitors, which is inscribed in Hebrew, an abstract relief depicts a forest of cut-down trees. The traditional form of the memorial indicates that the survivors had not yet derived a specific meaning from the experience that they wished to represent, as the admonition, translated into English on the back of the memorial, indicates—the words “shall remember” are painted red:



FIGURE 6: Jewish memorial erected by survivors in Belsen, 1946; height ca. 2 meters. Like many of the earliest Holocaust memorials, this monument has a very traditional form, but its inscription is unusually specific, naming its creators as well as the victims and perpetrators, and combining them with an emotional appeal. Photo courtesy of Glenn Austerfield.

Israel and the world shall remember / thirty thousand Jews / exterminated in the  
concentration camp / of Bergen-Belsen / at the hands of the murderous Nazis  
EARTH CONCEAL NOT THE BLOOD / SHED ON THEE!  
First anniversary of Liberation / 15th April 1946 / 14th Nissan 5706  
Central Jewish Committee / British Zone.<sup>35</sup>

Later that year or in 1947, the British occupiers had German POWs erect a larger memorial, an obelisk 20 meters tall with a wall 40 meters long. It had to be rebuilt in 1958 because of weather damage.<sup>36</sup> That structure, the closest thing West Germany had to a national Holocaust memorial until the completion of the Dachau memorial site in 1968, was dedicated by West German president Theodor Heuss in April 1952.<sup>37</sup> Now 25 meters tall, the re-created obelisk is accompanied by a 50-meter-long stone wall bearing inscriptions from fourteen of the forty countries whose

(accessed October 19, 2007). The German version of the sign is depicted at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/50/a8378850.shtml>. The sign was erected prior to the 1946 publication of its photograph in Derrick Sington, *Belsen Uncovered* (London, 1946).

<sup>35</sup> For details about the monument's creation, see Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 264, references in 512 n. 10.

<sup>36</sup> The most detailed postwar chronology of the memorial that I have seen is in *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, February 3, 1960.

<sup>37</sup> A translation of Heuss's speech is printed in Roderick Stackelberg and Sally Anne Winkle, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (London, 2002), 401–402. The German origi-



FIGURE 7: Dedicated in Bergen-Belsen in 1952, this stone obelisk is 25 meters tall and stands in front of a 50-meter-long wall with inscriptions from fourteen countries; a Sinti inscription was added in 1982. Memorials at Holocaust sites often name the countries of origin of the victims. Photo by Bonnie M. Harris.

citizens died in the Belsen camp.<sup>38</sup> This may be the first example of what has become a hallmark of Holocaust memorials: individual representations of some or all of the countries whose citizens were killed at the site. Other pre-1960 examples can be found in Flossenbürg, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Sachsenhausen. Mauthausen is perhaps the most noteworthy site exhibiting the national principle; since 1948, twenty national memorials have been erected there on a field outside the former camp walls.<sup>39</sup>

As Buchenwald and Belsen indicate, it took some time after the war for an iconography of symbolic and figurative representation specific to the Holocaust to evolve. Classical forms, such as an obelisk or tall pylon, were used to mark a site as meaningful, but without specifying that meaning. At Belsen, each of the fourteen countries had the opportunity to express its own meaning in an inscription.<sup>40</sup> Other memorials erected in the late 1940s use tall forms that convey no specific meaning—for example, the triangular obelisk 8 to 10 meters tall encircled by three large red stars that was erected by Red Army survivors at the Stukenbrock POW/death camp

nal is available at [http://www.derhistoriker.de/deutsch/05+Rede\\_BP\\_Heuss\\_Einweihung\\_KZ-Gedenkstaette\\_Bergen-Belsen\\_1952.pdf](http://www.derhistoriker.de/deutsch/05+Rede_BP_Heuss_Einweihung_KZ-Gedenkstaette_Bergen-Belsen_1952.pdf) (accessed October 19, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Bischoff, *Das Lager Bergen-Belsen: Dokumente und Bilder mit erläuternden Texten, im Auftrage des Niedersächsischen Ministers des Innern* (Hannover, 1966), 32.

<sup>39</sup> See Bertrand Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen: 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck, 2006). The website of the Mauthausen committee of Austria gives some information about the history of the memorial site: <http://www.mkoe.at/gedenkstaette.asp>. Yad Vashem in Jerusalem exhibits a variation on this theme: on an adjacent field, it displays scaled replicas of memorials from many sites of the Holocaust, including Warsaw and Dachau.

<sup>40</sup> The inscriptions are listed in “Zur Geschichte des Lagers Bergen-Belsen,” <http://www.bergenbelsen.de/pdf/zurgeschichte.pdf>, 6–8 (accessed October 10, 2008); an older html version is still available at the Internet Archive, for example at <http://web.archive.org/web/20071018004923/www.bergenbelsen.de/de/zurgeschichte.htm>.

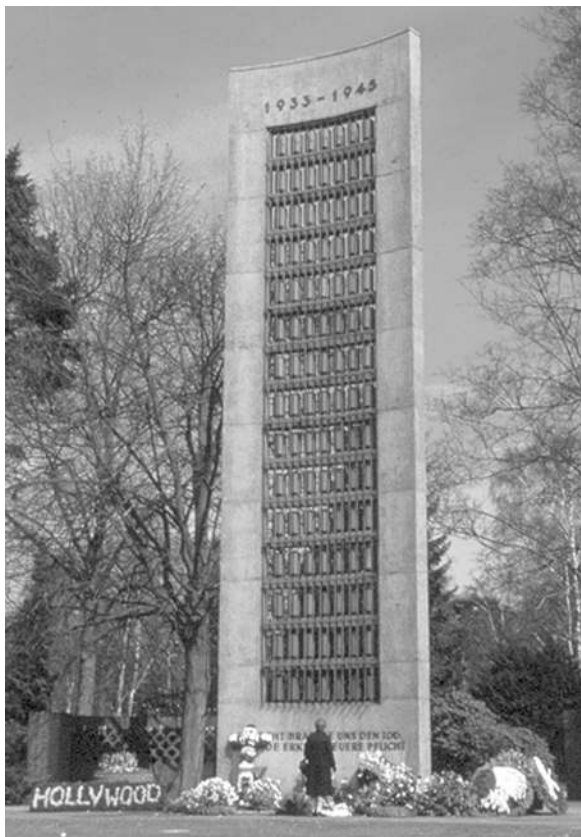


FIGURE 8: This 16-meter-tall memorial in Hamburg-Ohlsdorf, dedicated in 1949, contains 105 urns with ash and soil from Holocaust sites across Europe. Memorials at non-Holocaust sites often contain collections of relics from Holocaust sites to establish their legitimacy and represent the transnational scope of the Holocaust. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

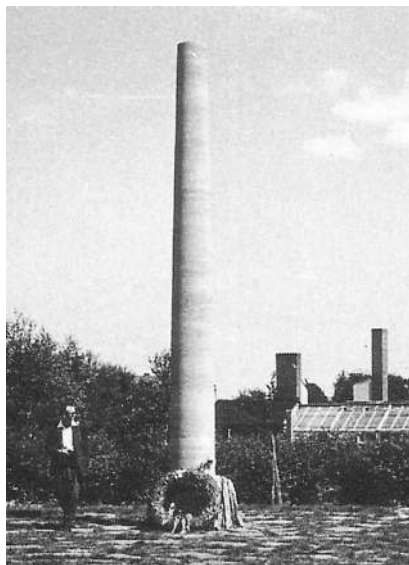


FIGURE 9: The first memorial in Neuenamme, 1953, was erected by the city government to appease demands by survivors for a memorial; height ca. 7.5 meters. Photo by the Buchenwald Collective, from the Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten/Archiv Sachsenhausen.

near Bielefeld in April 1945, or the “needle” constructed by French survivors at the Neue Bremm camp in Saarbrücken, dedicated in 1947, which was later interpreted as resembling a French bayonet.<sup>41</sup>

A revealing example of an early “tall form” used to represent the Holocaust at a site not connected to its implementation was dedicated in the Ohlsdorf Cemetery in Hamburg in 1949. A rectangular reinforced concrete pylon 16 meters tall, it holds 105 red stone urns containing ashes and soil from sites of “National Socialist repression and the resistance struggle” across Europe.<sup>42</sup> This memorial, originally planned for the center of the city by the Association of the Persecutees of National Socialism (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus, or VVN), the largest group of survivors of Nazi persecution, might be considered the first all-encompassing “Holocaust” memorial, since it unites relics from Holocaust sites from Aarhus to Zwickau, including not only core sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and

<sup>41</sup> The memorial for 45,000–50,000 dead at the Stukenbrock camp was dedicated on May 2, 1945. See Volker Pieper, *Die Vergessenen von Stukenbrock: Die Geschichte des Lagers in Stukenbrock-Senne von 1941 bis zur Gegenwart* (Bielefeld, 1988), 44–46, 132–136; also Carsten Seichter, *Nach der Befreiung: Die Nachkriegs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte des Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschafts-Stammlagers “Stalag 326 VI K” Stukenbrock* (Cologne, 2006). On Saarbrücken, see Puvogel, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, 1: 706–707.

<sup>42</sup> See Marcuse, *Das Gedenken an die Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus*, 41–47.



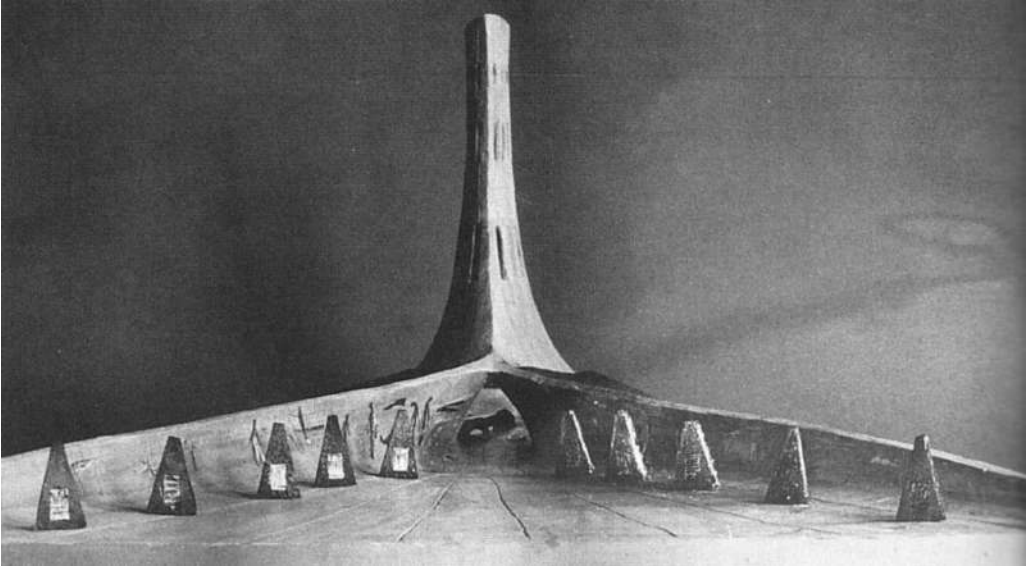


FIGURE 10: Survivors' proposal for an experiential Neuengamme memorial, 1960. The chimney-like tower was to be 18–20 meters tall, the pyramidal pylons 3 meters tall, representing different countries. By the late 1950s, Holocaust memorials were becoming experiential spaces. Photo by Harold Marcuse from print in Hans Schwarz Papers, Forschungsstelle für die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus, Hamburg.

Treblinka, but also sites in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Romania—a remarkable achievement given the material and political situation at that time. Collecting soil from multiple Holocaust sites and/or listing their names as a way to signify the entire event is common in Holocaust memorials not situated at historic locations.<sup>43</sup> It effectively reverses the national principle of enumerating the victims' countries of origin, which is found in the memorials at Holocaust sites themselves.

A few years later, the relatively meaning-neutral tall pylon form of Belsen and Hamburg-Ohlsdorf was adapted once again for the first memorial erected in the Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg. Dedicated in 1953, it was styled as a tapered cylinder approximately 7.5 meters tall. It is sometimes described as resembling a crematorium smokestack, although all main concentration camp crematoria had rectangular chimneys.<sup>44</sup> The inscription read simply "To the Victims 1938–1945." After much lobbying by the international association of Neuengamme survivors, which had proposed a much more elaborate experiential memorial in 1960, this small column was replaced by a considerably taller (27 meters) rectangular pylon marked only by two vertical grooves and three triangular pegs—the shape of the camp badges—on which wreaths could be hung.<sup>45</sup> To appease the survivors, who wanted some

<sup>43</sup> In addition to the collection of soil in New York (1947) mentioned above, Hamburg-Ohlsdorf lists 25 sites; further early examples can be found in Dortmund (1959, with 52 site names), Frankfurt (1964, with 53 site names), and Paris (1956 and 1962, with 13 and 15 site names; see below).

<sup>44</sup> See Ute Wrocklage, "Neuengamme," in Hoffmann, *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*, 174–205, 188–191. I have estimated the height from the 1956 Buchenwald Collective photograph with a man standing next to it in Günter Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument: Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen* (Berlin, 1996), 178.

<sup>45</sup> Their proposed design, the result of a limited competition, was a triangular chimney 18 to 20 meters high surmounting a descending triangular ramp. The ramp was flanked by obelisk-like pylons 3 meters

representation of human suffering, the Hamburg buildings authority allowed them to add an abstract bronze sculpture, larger than life-size (1.85 meters), depicting a fallen, emaciated “deportee” resting only on its knees and shorn head.

The first memorials in the former Flossenbürg concentration camp, near Nuremberg in southern West Germany, also used classical memorial forms as well as symbolic materials and the symbolic incorporation of human remains.<sup>46</sup> After liberation, the camp served briefly as an internment camp, then from fall 1945 to 1948 as a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) displaced persons camp for Catholic Poles who did not want to return to Soviet-dominated Poland. In June 1946, a Committee for Erecting the Monument and Chappel [*sic*] in Concentration Camp Flossenbürg was constituted, including representatives of the refugees in the UNRRA camp, local mayors, and town administrators and businessmen.<sup>47</sup> Although the committee was never able to attain official recognition from the military government or the UN (it unsuccessfully tried to place the site under UN protection), it did succeed in creating

several memorials. Several watchtowers were dismantled, with their bricks then used to build a chapel named “Jesus in Prison” attached to a remaining watchtower. The local newspaper reported that the chapel design was the result of a competition, although no records of other designs have been found. In the “valley of death” leading away from the chapel, human ash from the camp was piled into a large pyramid and planted over with sod. An adjacent “square of nations” was marked by stone plaques bearing the insignia of the nations whose citizens had died in Flossenbürg.<sup>48</sup>



FIGURE 11: The present-day Neuengamme memorial and sculpture, 1965; height 27 meters, with sculpture by Françoise Salmon, 1.85 meters. The city of Hamburg again realized a minimalist design to appease the survivors, who were allowed to contribute the sculpture. Photo from Wikimedia.

tall that were to bear national inscriptions. Belsen was explicitly referenced as a model for the inscriptions.

<sup>46</sup> See Peter Heigl, *Konzentrationslager Flossenbürg in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Regensburg, 1989), 85–100.

<sup>47</sup> “Chappel” was the spelling used in the group’s printed letterhead.

<sup>48</sup> An excellent collection of historical and present-day photographs can be found at <http://www.thirdreichruins.com/flossenburg.htm>. The ash may have come from corpses found in the camp at liberation and cremated before May 1, when that program was stopped. See Heigl, *Konzentrationslager Flossenbürg in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 63, 67.



FIGURE 12: Memorial inscription on the chimney of the Flossenbürg crematorium, ca. 1946. This is one of the earliest cases where the countries of origin of the victims were listed at a Holocaust site. Photo courtesy of the Dachau Memorial Site.

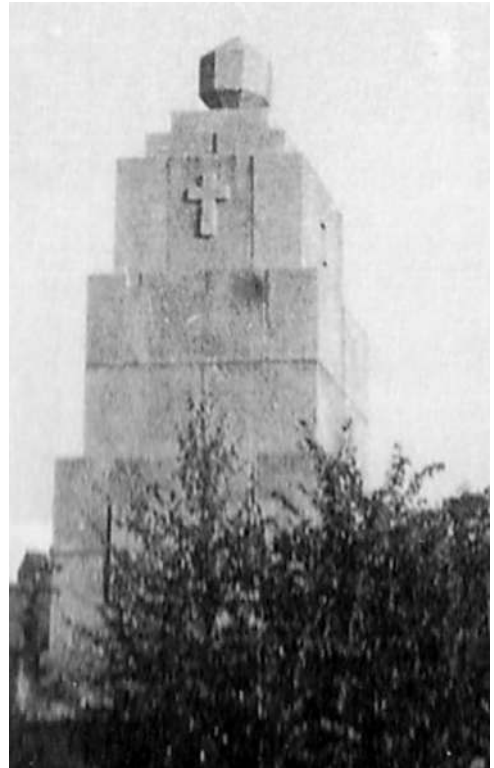


FIGURE 13: The memorial in the town of Flossenbürg, dedicated October 27, 1946; height 10–12 meters. As with the Jewish memorial in Belsen, its form is very traditional. Photo by the Buchenwald Collective, from the Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten/Archiv Sachsenhausen.

On the rectangular brick chimney of the crematorium, under the inscription in Polish and English “1938–1945 / Have been murdered in concentration camp at Flossenbürg,” was a list of eighteen nations (including “Jewish”) followed by the number of deaths for each of those nations as determined by the memorial committee. They were listed in decreasing order, from 26,430 Russians to 2 Americans (soldiers who died during liberation), with the total given at the bottom: 73,296. Again we see the features typical of this early period: an experiential memorial terrain, incorporation of symbolic materials, multinational representation, and classical symbolic forms that signify generic but not specific meaning.

By the summer of 1946, the Flossenbürg memorial committee had also erected a traditional memorial in a cemetery created in the center of Flossenbürg village, where the 141 inmates who died after liberation were buried by order of the U.S. Army. Standing some 10 to 12 meters high and made from local granite, it consists of six block-like “stories” of decreasing size stacked atop each other, the uppermost bearing a cross and crowned by a symbolic urn. Criticized in September 1946 by the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior and the local county governor as “bordering on the unbearable” and “not satisfying the appropriate cultural and aesthetic standards,” this memorial indicates that even right after the war, traditional memorial forms

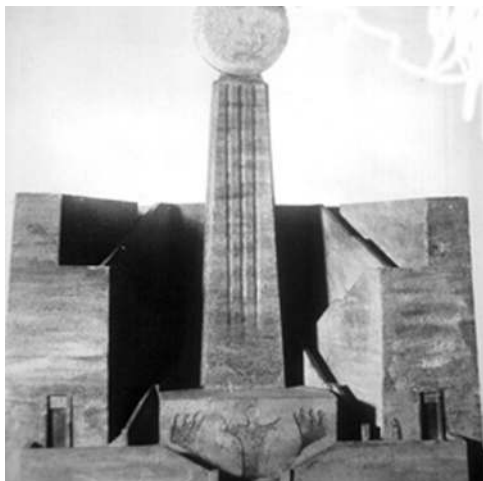


FIGURE 14: Proposal for a 35-meter-tall memorial on the Leiten gravesite near Dachau, November 1945. This massive memorial, to be built from rubble salvaged from Munich, was deemed inappropriate and was never built. Photo by Harold Marcuse from Landratsamt Dachau.

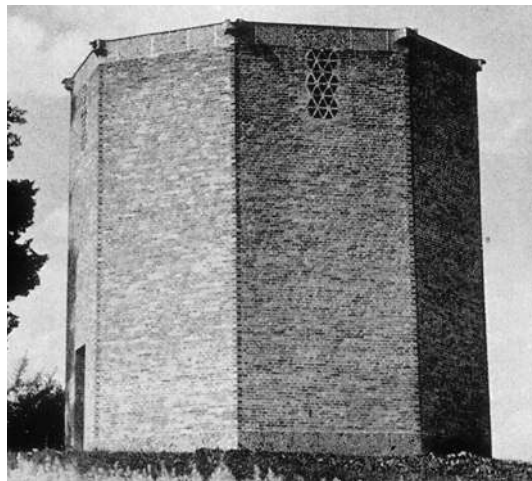


FIGURE 15: The final Leiten memorial, chosen from a competition in 1950, is 10.5 meters high. Inside it are plaques representing 33 countries whose citizens died in Dachau. This dramatically scaled-down version of the original memorial hall idea is enshrouded by trees today. Photo from *Der Baumeister*, 1954.

were already considered inadequate to commemorate the Holocaust.<sup>49</sup> In Flossenbürg camp and village, with human and material remains lending them legitimacy and a remote location away from national and international attention, these traditional memorial forms have persisted unchanged until today.

In Dachau, as in Buchenwald, a provisional memorial was erected shortly after liberation on the roll-call square, where it stood at least until 1946. Catholic Polish survivors, at 9,082 (including more than 1,000 priests) the largest national group in the camp when it was liberated, constructed a wooden altar with a wooden cross approximately 10 meters tall to celebrate their national holiday on May 3.<sup>50</sup> As in Belsen, the occupying military subsequently ordered local civilians to create a more permanent memorial. On June 14, 1945, the Associated Press reported that German civilians under orders from the Allied Military Government would erect two 15-meter-tall columns topped respectively by a cross and a Star of David at the nearby Leiten Hill mass grave.<sup>51</sup> The columns were to be made of stone from the Nazi Party's rally grounds in Nuremberg (a discordant symbolic material perhaps intended to signify the outcome of Nazi hubris), and they were to be completed by August. This plan was dropped in July, however, when it became known that the German designer had been affiliated with the Nazi Party. Another proposal was presented to the public in November, when the model for a gigantic "monument of liberation" was displayed in Dachau's city hall. A pylon crowned by a gold mosaic sun 6 meters in diameter

<sup>49</sup> See Heigl, *Konzentrationslager Flossenbürg in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 90–91.

<sup>50</sup> See Detlef Hoffmann, "Dachau," in Hoffmann, *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*, 51; see also Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, "Memorials for the Dachau Concentration Camps," *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (1998): 21–44, 32. The survivor statistics at liberation are taken from William W. Quinn, *Dachau* (1945), 65, available at <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.Dachau>. The Polish group was followed by 4,258 Russians, 3,918 French, and 2,539 Jews, many of whom were Polish.

<sup>51</sup> For this and the following memorials, see Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 189–194. On the Koelle sculptures, see also Hoffmann, "Dachau," 58–62.

rising above a semicircular base 20 meters tall and 35 meters wide, it was to be constructed from bricks salvaged from the ruins of Munich—a symbolic material that would have linked the civilian suffering to the horrors in the camp. This project came under fire because it was deemed too grandiose. Instead, a memorial competition was conducted from April to September 1946. Twenty-one designs were submitted, but none of them were deemed acceptable.

After those maquettes burned and were lost in a fire at the Ministry of Culture, the project was subsequently “forgotten” (neglected) by local authorities until September 1949, when the accidental excavation of several skeletons near the gravesite provoked international outrage. A hastily conducted design competition in the spring of 1950 yielded 175 submissions, from which a proposal for an octagonal hall 10.5 meters high and 9 meters in diameter was selected. The seals of thirty-three countries whose citizens died in Dachau adorn the inside of the almost windowless basalt building, which was completed in 1952, but which so quickly slipped from the public spotlight that it was never formally dedicated. A journalist’s satirical description of the 175 models from which this one was chosen indicates that grandiose, especially architectonic memorials were generally not considered appropriate representations of the mass murder that at the time was synonymous with the Holocaust. They included, he wrote, “modified churches of every age, Roman forts, Gothic citadels and neo-Germanic colonial forts, . . . shows of strength in *Heimat* style and transparent industrial halls, and even idyllic Biedermeier garden pavilions, constructions reminiscent of the Leipzig Battle of Nations monument, as well as neoclassical theaters and halls of fame.”<sup>52</sup>

If such traditional architectonic memorial halls were seen as inappropriate for Holocaust memorials, realistic figurative memorials presented problems as well. One of the earliest such projects was realized in 1949–1950 in Dachau. This early sculpture was based on a 1946 statuette of two inmates by a German socialist sculptor who had been briefly imprisoned by the Gestapo. Fritz Koelle’s “Inferno,” depicting a clothed inmate supporting and pointing to a naked, emaciated comrade, was published on invitations to a September 1949 commemorative event, with a call for donations so that it could be erected as a memorial. That design, selected by survivor Philipp Auerbach, who headed the Bavarian state authority responsible for Holocaust survivors (then called “racial, religious, and political persecutees”), was intended to stand in front of the Dachau crematorium. It was immediately criticized by other survivors and the military government as being too graphic and accusatory—meanings they did not wish to represent. One Dachau survivor wrote to his French comrades that the sculpture was “universally condemned” because it “immortalized the horrors.” Memories of the Nazi camps were still very vivid at the time, especially amid the plentiful physical remnants, and the sensibilities of survivors and the relatives of the victims had to be considered as well. Soon another design by the same artist was chosen instead: a depiction of a single forlorn-looking inmate, slightly smaller than life-size. It was dedicated in 1950, when the redesign of the Dachau crematorium enclave as a peacefully landscaped park was completed.

A comparison of the two Koelle sculptures reveals some of the formal considerations that still typify Holocaust memorials. The reduction from two figures to one

<sup>52</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 195, after *Münchner Merkur/Dachauer Nachrichten*, May 4, 1950.



FIGURE 16: Fritz Koelle, “Inferno” (1946). This statue was proposed for Dachau in 1948, but was withdrawn because it was too graphic. Photo courtesy of the Dachau Memorial Site.



FIGURE 17: Fritz Koelle’s 1949 statue of an “Unknown Concentration Camp Inmate,” near the Dachau crematorium; height of figure ca. 1.5 meters. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

is typical of memorials in Western Europe, where the anonymity and isolation of individuals caught in the machinery of mass murder tends to be emphasized. The memorials in Western Europe are also far more likely to be abstract than figurative, while in the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc (with the limited exceptions of Poland and Yugoslavia), most memorials are figurative in the style of socialist realism, and they often depict groups of people so as to express solidarity and symbolize anti-fascist resistance as a movement. In the final Dachau design, the graphic skeletal nudity of the original figures is covered by a baggy overcoat and trousers; the accusatory right hand is concealed in a coat pocket. The forwardly thrust head is drawn back and tilted at a slight angle, giving the figure a contemplative cast. The inscription on the pedestal still melds contemplation with accusation, however: “To honor the dead, to admonish the living.”

As the political situation in postwar Europe stabilized and economic conditions improved, the search for memorial forms that would express desired meanings took on much larger dimensions. Memorial competitions held in 1952 for Buchenwald, in 1953 in London for “the unknown political prisoner,” and in 1957 for Auschwitz-Birkenau mark a trend away from realistic, figurative memorials toward abstract figures and forms. The first of these competitions, which resulted in one of the largest

figurative sculptural Holocaust memorials ever completed, was announced by East Germany for Buchenwald in December 1951.

Because so many politically active survivors remained nearby, and because the state took a strong interest in the project, the Buchenwald memorial is the most complex, best-documented, and most thoroughly researched of all the Holocaust memorials erected prior to the 1990s.<sup>53</sup> We do not know how long the wooden obelisk on the roll-call square remained standing, because the Soviet occupation forces that took over the camp on June 4, 1945, kept it off limits while using it as an internment camp for Nazi suspects (and later socialist opponents of the ruling communists as well). Until the Soviets closed their “Special Camp No. 2” in 1950, the focus of memorialization efforts shifted to the other side of the hill, where the Buchenwald SS had created mass graves in natural depressions, but also where a post-liberation cemetery had been laid out near a 43-meter-tall Bismarck tower monument from 1901.<sup>54</sup> The very first memorial proposal, however, was for a “hall of [inter]national community” to be built in the center of the city of Weimar, five miles away.<sup>55</sup> Soil from thirty-six nations was to be buried in front of the windowless black south facade, where a fountain consisting of thirty-six jets merging into one would symbolize the unity of the thirty-six nations whose citizens had been imprisoned in Buchenwald.<sup>56</sup> Although politics and a lack of funding forced abandonment of the plan, this project is an early embodiment of an important feature of Holocaust remembrance in East Germany: the focus was not commemoration of the victims, but a celebration of anti-fascist resistance and international solidarity.

In spite of that setback, Buchenwald survivors continued to lobby for a memorial at the site. In 1949, plans were made to create a memorial grove around the various gravesites near the camp, and to replace the Bismarck tower with a new memorial. When the tower was demolished in May 1949, its proposed replacement was an inverted triangular pyramid 20 meters tall made of concrete.<sup>57</sup> Derived from the triangular badges worn by camp inmates, it bore the inscription “In memory of the dead victims of fascism, as a warning for us and the world.” Its realization was delayed first by material shortages, then by the sudden availability of the camp itself in February 1950, as well as by political differences between the survivors and the East German government. The survivors wanted to preserve more of the camp and emphasize what state representatives called the “funeral aspect” (*Bestattungsgedanke*), as opposed to the “commemorative aspect” (*Erinnerungsgedanke*)—a con-

<sup>53</sup> My portrayal follows Knigge, “Buchenwald.” See also Volkhard Knigge, Jürgen Maria Pietsch, and Thomas A. Seidel, *Versteinertes Gedenken: Das Buchenwalder Mahnmahl von 1958*, 2 vols. (Delitsch, 1997). For a shorter summary including more recent developments, see Puvogel, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, 2: 896–901. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 72–79, has a brief summary that is inaccurate in some details. Other well-researched Holocaust memorials include the Warsaw Ghetto monument (by James Young) and the memorials at Auschwitz (by Jochen Spielmann and several authors in Hoffmann, *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*) and Dachau (by this author). Only the Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe is better documented and researched, with several weighty monographs already published prior to its completion in 2005.

<sup>54</sup> See “Gedenkstätte statt Bismarckturm: Der Bismarckturm in Weimar,” updated January 30, 2006, at <http://www.bismarcktuerme.de/website/ebene4/thue/weimar.html> (accessed October 26, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> The incorrect and presumably inadvertent use of the Nazi term *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) instead of *Völkergemeinschaft* (community of nations) indicates the difficulty in breaking away from Nazi jargon and traditions, as did the form of the first Buchenwald obelisk.

<sup>56</sup> Knigge, “Buchenwald,” 101–102, 104–105.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–108.



FIGURE 18: Aerial view of the 1958 Buchenwald memorial ensemble, one of the largest Holocaust memorials. Photo courtesy of Gedenkstätte Buchenwald.

flict that would also afflict the Birkenau project a decade later.<sup>58</sup> Even after the international competition had been scaled down to an East German competition in December 1951, the state—including Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl personally—continued to work with Fritz Cremer, one of the prizewinners selected in March 1952, until he produced a satisfactorily heroic group of figures.<sup>59</sup> By 1955, the final design had been worked out. It was by far the largest and most elaborate Holocaust-related memorial created at the time, and remained so for decades.

From a parking lot at the top of the hill, a wide, sloping path descends past seven large bas-reliefs, depicting scenes typical of each year in the seven-year history of the camp, to a funnel-shaped ring grave. Then a wide “avenue of nations,” flanked on the right by eighteen massive pylons, each bearing the name of a country and crowned by a large fire basin on a trivet, extends leftward to another funnel-shaped grave. Finally, an ascending broad “stairway of freedom” leads up to Cremer’s monumental sculpture in front of a 55-meter-tall bell tower.<sup>60</sup> The bronze sculpture, representing the motto “Through death and battle to victory,” is composed of eleven archetypal figures approximately 3 meters tall, including “child,” “flag bearer,” “fighter,” “oath taker,” “faller,” “fighter in blanket,” “caller,” “doubter,” and “negativist.” Dedicated in September 1958, it was the first of three major concentration camp memorials erected by East Germany.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, 112, 115–117.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 124–125.

<sup>60</sup> This height is from Milton and Nowinski, *In Fitting Memory*, 190; Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 77, gives the tower’s height as 49 meters (160 feet).





FIGURE 19: The main Buchenwald memorial, 1958, with a tower by the Buchenwald Collective (height 55 meters) and sculpture by Fritz Cremer (height 4 meters). Photo by Eva Wendebourg.

As in Buchenwald, early postwar memorialization attempts at Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen led only to provisional solutions. Not until 1955, when the East German government decided that there was to be an ensemble of three national memorial sites and created a “curatorium” to oversee nationwide fundraising efforts, did concerted efforts to find permanent memorial designs begin. The first to be completed was at Ravensbrück, a concentration camp specifically for female inmates about 60 kilometers northwest of Berlin. In 1948, 1952, and 1954, temporary monuments had already been erected there for commemorative ceremonies: on a base four steps above the ground, a rectangular block approximately 2.5 meters high was crowned by a stone fire basin.<sup>61</sup> The permanent memorial, dedicated in September 1959, was designed by German sculptor Will Lammert, who had lived in Soviet exile from 1934 to 1951.

The main Ravensbrück memorial, which Lammert worked on from 1954 until his death in 1957, is similar to a monument he designed in exile in 1941, in which a female

<sup>61</sup> On the temporary memorials, see Insa Eschebach, “Zur Formensprache der Totenehrung: Ravensbrück in der frühen Nachkriegszeit,” in Eschebach, Jacobeit, and Lanwerd, *Die Sprache des Gedenkens*, 13–39, esp. 25–28. On the 1959 memorial, see Susanne Lanwerd, “Skulpturales Gedenken,” *ibid.*, 39–54, and the memorial site’s page, <http://www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/english/memorial/1959bis1992.htm> (accessed November 2, 2007). See also Puvogel, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, 2: 272; and Milton and Nowinski, *In Fitting Memory*, 158–161.

allegorical figure, “Constitution,” is attached to the front of a high pylon crowned by a fire basin.<sup>62</sup> The memorial, titled “Carrier,” depicts a female prisoner holding the limp body of a dead comrade. The sculpture stands 4.2 meters high and is set atop a rectangular pylon approximately 7 meters tall on a stone platform extending into Schwedt Lake, above the spot where ash from the crematorium was rumored to have been dumped. Two additional sculptural groups, by Lammert and Cremer, were placed at other locations in the memorial site. One consists of two individual women looking out over a communal gravesite planted as a rose garden; the other is a “group of mothers”: three women holding a cloth with an infant on it.<sup>63</sup>

Sachsenhausen, in Oranienburg on the northern outskirts of Berlin, played a key role in the Nazi concentration camp system. Created in 1936 on undeveloped land with a symbolic triangular prisoners’ compound, from 1938 on it housed the central administration of the concentration camp system. After the Soviets turned the camp over to East German authorities in 1950, East German state police were stationed in the SS part of the camp, while the prisoners’ compound fell into disrepair. For a commemoration ceremony in May 1954, most of the former prison barracks were demolished, and police trainees used bricks from the former camp prison to construct a provisional memorial on the roll-call square.<sup>64</sup> In the formal tradition of war memorials, it was composed of a central block approximately 2.7 meters tall, flanked by two blocks around 1.5 meters tall. The central block was adorned by a relief of a Soviet soldier carrying an inmate in his arms, and crowned by a flat triangle standing on its point, bearing the letters VVN, the abbreviation for the German Association of the Persecutees of National Socialism.

<sup>62</sup> Described in Lanwerd, “Skulpturales Gedenken,” 42 n. 8.

<sup>63</sup> The Ravensbrück memorials raise the question of the role of gender in Holocaust memorialization. Ravensbrück, the Nazi concentration camp designated for the imprisonment of women, is one of the few Holocaust memorials outside of Israel to use figures of women. On this question, see Judith Tydor Baumel, “‘Rachel Laments Her Children’: Representations of Women in Israeli Holocaust Memorials,” *Israel Studies* 1, no. 1 (1996): 100–126; Insa Eschebach, Sigrid Jacobeit, and Silke Wenk, eds., *Gedächtnis und Geschlecht: Deutungsmuster in Darstellungen des nationalsozialistischen Genozids* (Frankfurt, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> See Susanne zur Nieden, “Erste Initiativen für Mahnmale in Oranienburg und Sachsenhausen,” in Morsch, *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument*, 125–132, esp. 128–130, with photographs.



FIGURE 20: Will Lammert, Ravensbrück memorial “Carrier,” 1959. This sculpture is 4.2 meters tall and sits atop a 7-meter pedestal. By the late 1950s, the heroic socialist realist style was becoming more abstract. Photo by Harold Marcuse.



FIGURE 21: Provisional memorial in Sachsenhausen, 1954. This memorial, ca. 2.7 meters tall, was built from bricks from the camp prison, which had been demolished by state authorities against the wishes of the survivors. Photo from the Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten/Archiv Sachsenhausen.



FIGURE 22: Sachsenhausen memorial tower; height 35–40 meters, with sculpture by René Graetz, 4–5 meters tall, 1961. The triangular prisoner's badge is the dominant symbol on this triangular pylon with slightly concave sides. Photo by Bonnie M. Harris.

Since most of the barracks had been razed without their knowledge or approval, the Sachsenhausen survivors were forced to come up with a new plan for the entire site.<sup>65</sup> As in Buchenwald, their wish to preserve and rebuild parts of the camp so as to present the daily persecution of the inmates came into conflict with the vision of state planners, who wanted a more heroic memorialization.<sup>66</sup> After the survivors secured approval from the Central Committee of the ruling Socialist Unity Party for the remaining structures to be preserved and integrated into the memorial site, in the summer of 1956 a group of East German architects who had previously submitted designs for Buchenwald toured Holocaust sites in Europe. The documentation they presented in December of that year offers a photographic record of the major Holocaust memorials at that time: Dachau, Flossenbürg, Auschwitz I and Birkenau, Majdanek, Neuengamme, Belsen, Hamburg, and Warsaw.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> My portrayal follows Ulrike Köpp, “Die Studien des Buchenwald-Kollektivs für die Gestaltung der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen 1956,” *ibid.*, 158–163.

<sup>66</sup> The plan favored by the survivors was sketched by Reinhold Linger, a landscape architect who, with Bertolt Brecht and Fritz Cremer, had already submitted a design in the Buchenwald competition. See Ulrike Köpp, “Der Entwurf Reinhold Lingers für die Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen,” *ibid.*, 148–157.

<sup>67</sup> The Buchenwald collective’s report is reprinted *ibid.*, 164–216. It includes two memorials not discussed in this essay (they are not Holocaust memorials in the narrower sense), namely the 1952 memorial by Gerhard Marcks for the 38,000 victims of the 1943 aerial bombing of Hamburg and the monument at the execution site in the Warsaw Citadel.

Although the collective's suggestions contained most of the features of the design that was finally implemented, the demolition of structures on the site continued, much to the dismay of the survivors.<sup>68</sup> As Volkhard Knigge, director of the Buchenwald Memorial site since the 1990s, has written, "The minimization of remains is a prerequisite for the maximization of possibilities for creating new meanings."<sup>69</sup> The memorial site, dedicated in April 1961, turned the entire prisoners' compound into an aesthetic ensemble. A semicircular wall punctured by a network of cruciform holes around bas-reliefs of the end walls of the barracks that formerly bordered that space closed off the former roll-call square opposite the entrance gate. A wide opening in the central axis of the triangular camp allows entering visitors to see the reinforced concrete tower standing 35 to 40 meters high near the apex of the triangle at the opposite corner of the camp perimeter. Triangular in cross-section with slightly concave sides, it is adorned by eighteen red triangular plaques in six rows of three on the top third of each side. In front of the tower on a large block is "Liberation," a sculpture by René Graetz. Standing 4 to 5 meters tall, it depicts a Soviet soldier with his arms draped over the shoulders of two strong inmates standing slightly in front of him. The towering bronze figures are cast in a heroically idealized but realistic style reminiscent of the memorials in Warsaw and Buchenwald. A second memorial sculpture, by Waldemar Grzimek, the sculptor of the bell in the Buchenwald tower, stands among the ruins of the crematorium and execution site at the nearby edge of the prisoners' compound. Only moderately larger than life-size in the more restrained figurative style of the Ravensbrück and Dachau statues, it depicts two inmates, one standing and one bent over, holding a cloth that supports the corpse of a comrade.



FIGURE 23: Waldemar Grzimek, sculpture in the ruins of the Sachsenhausen crematorium, 1961; height ca. 2.2 meters. These more abstract figures contrast with the heroic group on the main Sachsenhausen memorial. Photo courtesy of Scrapbookpages.com.

<sup>68</sup> See Ulrike Köpp, "Die Projektierung der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen und die Diskussionen im Wissenschaftlich-Künstlerischen Beirat beim Ministerium für Kultur," *ibid.*, 217–231.

<sup>69</sup> Volkhard Knigge, "Vom Reden und Schweigen der Steine," in Sigrid Weigel and Birgit Erdle, eds., *Fünfzig Jahre danach: Zur Nachgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (Zurich, 1996), 193–235, 207.

MOST OF THE EARLY Holocaust memorials were derived from either classical monuments (obelisks and towers) or traditional war memorials. Beginning with the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial and continuing with the three great memorial projects in East Germany, socialist countries were developing a heroic, socialist realist style for their Holocaust monuments. (The Soviet war memorial erected in Berlin-Treptow from 1946 to 1949, which depicts a caped soldier standing on a broken swastika, holding a child in one hand and a bare sword in the other, is another classic example of this tradition.)<sup>70</sup> As can be seen in the Ravensbrück sculptures, however, a more abstract figurative tradition was emerging by the late 1950s, and a modernist architectonic tradition was developing as well. It had roots in the internationalist style of the World War I era, embodied, for example, in Vladimir Tatlin's 1920 constructivist proposal for a monument to the Third International, which was never built but sparked much discussion in art circles.<sup>71</sup> Picasso's famed monumental painting *Guernica*, created for the 1937 International Exposition in Paris and inspired by the Nazi aerial bombardment of the Basque capital city, is an example of the use of abstract forms to represent a barbaric massacre of civilians that can be considered a precursor to the Holocaust.<sup>72</sup>

An international sculptural competition for a "monument to the unknown political prisoner," held in London in 1953, can be seen as setting the stage for a new generation of Holocaust memorials in an abstract, avant-garde style. Unprecedented in scope, it comprised a series of national competitions, from which 3,500 submissions from 57 countries were whittled down to 140 that were judged in London. Joan Marter and Robert Burstow have convincingly argued that Cold War considerations played a crucial role in the competition, in that it was intended to establish an artistic style for the capitalist West that was superior to the socialist realism of the Eastern Bloc.<sup>73</sup> Thus, essentially all of the winning designs—none of them from socialist countries, which were not even invited to participate—were highly abstract. None of them were ever implemented (probably in part because of the taint of the competition's implicit anti-totalitarian thrust), but given the magnitude of the artistic event, it is safe to assume that most of the artists who took part in the next major Holocaust memorial competition were aesthetically influenced by those designs.

<sup>70</sup> The English and German Wikipedia pages offer photographs and accurate information about this 12-meter-tall statue. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet\\_War\\_Memorial\\_\(Treptower\\_Park\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_Memorial_(Treptower_Park)) (accessed November 2, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> The Wikipedia page on Tatlin's monument has basic information, illustrations, and references: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatlin's\\_Tower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatlin's_Tower) (accessed November 2, 2007). Two other seminal memorials in this tradition are Walter Gropius's 1922 memorial to those killed in the March 1919 putsch in Weimar, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's 1926 memorial for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Berlin-Lichtenberg. Both were destroyed by the Nazis. See Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, 15, plates 22 and 23.

<sup>72</sup> For basic background, see "Guernica: Testimony of War," in the PBS "Treasures of the World" Series, [http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a\\_nav/guernica\\_nav/main\\_guerfrm.html](http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a_nav/guernica_nav/main_guerfrm.html) (accessed November 2, 2007); or Russell Martin, *Picasso's War: The Destruction of Guernica and the Masterpiece That Changed the World* (New York, 2002). Ossip Zadkine's monument "The Destroyed City" (Rotterdam, 1953) belongs in this tradition. See Johannes Langner, *Ossip Zadkine: Mahnmal für Rotterdam, eine Einführung* (Stuttgart, 1963).

<sup>73</sup> Joan Marter, "The Ascendancy of Abstraction for Public Art: The Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner Competition," *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 28–36; and Robert Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a 'Weapon of the Cold War': Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner," *Oxford Art Journal* 20, no. 1 (1997): 68–80. See also Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, 16–17, plates 46–49.

In Auschwitz, memorial efforts began before the end of the war, but the extant structures in its huge component camps Auschwitz I, Birkenau, and Monowitz were themselves so impressive that the need for symbolic representation was not pressing. In fact, in contrast to East Germany, where most of the concentration camp buildings had been torn down, in Auschwitz the preservation of the remnants was given priority over other memorial schemes from the very beginning. On May 1, 1945, even before Germany's surrender, Poland's provisional government placed "those parts of the concentration camp in Oświęcim that were connected to the immediate destruction of millions of people" under the administration of the Ministry of Culture and Art, which was



FIGURE 24: For the tenth anniversary of liberation in 1955, this traditional so-called urn memorial was erected in Auschwitz-Birkenau; height ca. 3 meters. It contained ashes from other concentration camps. Photo by the Buchenwald Collective, from the Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten/Archiv Sachsenhausen.

also charged with developing a concept for a museum.<sup>74</sup> The ministry approved a formal proposal in February 1946, and by April, camp survivors were working to create a museum, which officially opened in June 1947.<sup>75</sup> In July 1947, the Polish parliament passed a law stipulating that all remaining structures must be preserved. Around 1950, a small memorial wall resembling a Jewish gravestone was erected by private initiative near Birkenau's crematorium II. With no figurative representations, its three-column inscription read in Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew: "In memory of the millions of Jewish martyrs and fighters exterminated in the camp Auschwitz-Birkenau by the National Socialist race murderers, 1940–1945."<sup>76</sup>

The wall was removed when the first official memorial was erected in Birkenau for the tenth anniversary of liberation in 1955. Approximately 3 meters tall, it was a nearly cubical trapezoidal "urn" on a three-tiered plinth, set just beyond the end of the so-called ramp: the flat area between two train tracks where deported Jews had disembarked and were sorted for either immediate murder in the gas chambers or the slower "extermination through work." Little is known about this memorial, except that it contained ashes from other extermination camps.<sup>77</sup> Photographs show a block-like sandstone monument with the outline of a triangle badge engraved into the side facing the back of the camp, and a bas-relief inscription around its base that included the Polish name for Auschwitz: Oświęcim. Although that memorial offered a focal point for commemorative activities, the newly created international orga-

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945–1979* (Athens, Ohio, 2003), 60; unless otherwise noted, the following paragraph is based on 62, 69, 112–114.

<sup>75</sup> On the Auschwitz exhibitions, see Engelhardt, *A Topography of Memory*, 161–165. The dates are conveniently summarized on the Auschwitz museum website: [http://en.auschwitz.org.pl/m/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=226&Itemid=13](http://en.auschwitz.org.pl/m/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=226&Itemid=13) (accessed January 3, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> See Ute Wrocklage, "Auschwitz-Birkenau—Die Rampe," in Hoffmann, *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*, 278–309; and the illustration in Council for the Preservation of Monuments to Resistance and Martyrdom, *Scenes of Fighting and Martyrdom Guide*, ill. 143.

<sup>77</sup> On the 1955 "urn," see Wrocklage, "Auschwitz-Birkenau," 291 n. 46; and Hoffmann, "Introduction," in Hoffmann, *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*, 25.

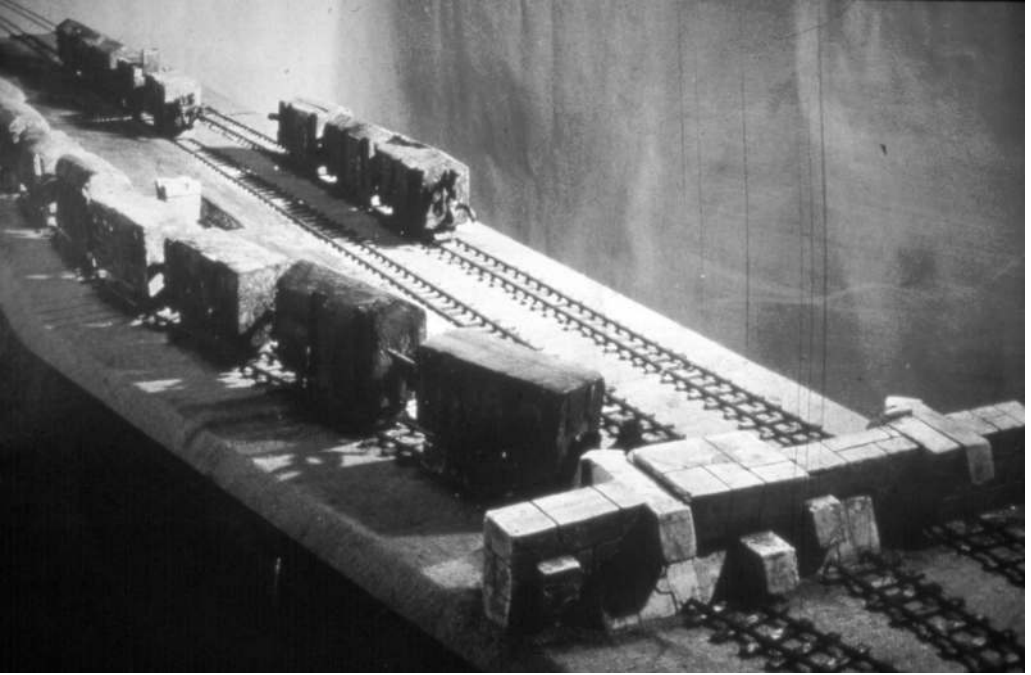


FIGURE 25: Julio Lafuente, Pietro Cascella, and Andrea Cascella, proposal from the first round of the competition for a memorial in Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1958. The railroad symbolism was deemed not comprehensive enough to represent what had taken place in Birkenau. Photo by Jochen Spielmann.

nization of Auschwitz survivors wanted something that would better reflect the camp's meanings to them, of which they may only have had an inchoate idea at that time.

The survivors' association worked out guidelines for a design competition, which were published in 1957. They stipulated that the memorial would stand near the end of the "ramp" where the urn now stood, and that, in accordance with the 1946 law, what was left of the camp could not be altered. British sculptor Henry Moore, a pioneer of abstract modernist sculpture, agreed to chair the selection committee, which met in April 1958 to judge 426 designs submitted by artists from thirty-one countries.<sup>78</sup> Eight finalists were invited to visit the site and refine their designs, which were then judged in Paris in November. The jury did not find any of the designs completely convincing, but they selected the three projects they found most promising and asked those design teams—from Poland, Spain, and Italy—to work together to submit a final proposal. The selection of those three designs, all to varying degrees conceptual and abstract, indicates the difficulty of using human forms to

<sup>78</sup> The most detailed examination of the Auschwitz competition is Jochen Spielmann, "Entwürfe zur Sinnggebung des Sinnlosen: Zu einer Theorie des Denkmals als Manifestation des 'kulturellen Gedächtnisses': Der Wettbewerb für ein Denkmal für Auschwitz" (Ph.D. diss., Free University of Berlin, 1990). Spielmann's analysis is summarized by Hoffmann, "Introduction," in *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge*, 25–30. See also Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, 17–18, plates 68–71; Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Oskar Hansen and the Auschwitz 'Counter Memorial,' 1958–59," *ARTMargins* e-journal, May 20, 2002, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/archive/311-oskar-hansen-and-the-auschwitz-qcountermemorialq-1958-59> (accessed January 3, 2010); and Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 133–143. The Auschwitz state museum offers a timeline of the memorial site at [http://en.auschwitz.org.pl/m/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=226&Itemid=13](http://en.auschwitz.org.pl/m/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=226&Itemid=13) (accessed January 3, 2010).



FIGURE 26: The final Birkenau memorial, erected in 1967. It was the result of several rounds of compromises and reductions. Ultimately, the extensive remnants of the camps have remained the true memorial. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

represent the Holocaust, especially when they would have to compete with extensive architectural remains.

The Polish group proposed a street, 70 meters in width, to be paved with black stones that would symbolically “cancel” the Birkenau camp by obliterating a wide diagonal swath across it, with some features, such as fences and the ruins of the crematoria, remaining to pierce through it. The Italian design carved out a ramp descending from the original unloading “ramp” to an excavated square between the ruins of crematoria II and III, with trench-like corridors extending outward around the perimeters of the two semi-subterranean buildings. This design included groups of sculpted figures at various locations in the camp. Both designs were inadmissible, however, because they altered the remnants of the camp. The Spanish team’s design located twenty-three stylized stone railway cars (one for each of the countries of origin of the victims) on the tracks alongside the ramp, with a massive, irregular stone barrier set across the tracks, symbolically blocking the route to the crematoria farther on. It ultimately was rejected because freight cars did not represent the full range of experiences in the camp.

The three teams agreed to work together to form a synthesis of their ideas, which the jury approved in May 1959 with some modifications. Two years later, the group was asked to reduce their synthesis once more, because it was too costly and still required too many modifications to the camp. The symbolic barring of the camp entry arch and the dug-out passage encircling the crematoria were removed. What remained was a modified version of the irregular block-like barrier, now located directly between the two crematoria. It was flattened into a wide row of abstract “sarcophagi” with a low tower near one end, vaguely reminiscent of a crematorium oven





FIGURE 27: This English-language Birkenau inscription plaque from 1967 is one of 20 plaques in different languages. Typical of the time, it lacks specificity in naming the victims. It also contains an estimated number of deaths that later proved incorrect. Photo by Jochen Spielmann.



FIGURE 28: The revised Birkenau plaques from 1995 are more graphic and specific in naming the audience, perpetrators, and victims. The reduced contrast of the all-bronze plaques, however, makes the inscriptions more difficult to read. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

with a stretcher and chimney, with three highly abstract cubic figures, perhaps evoking a man, woman, and child, standing next to the stretcher. The facade of the tower is topped by four rectangular blocks of smooth black marble forming a square slab with a small red triangle badge cut into its center.<sup>79</sup> A row of twenty plaques in front of the sarcophagi bore an inscription in twenty languages: “Four million people suffered and died here at the hands of the Nazi murderers between the years 1940 and 1945.” In 1995, after consensus was reached that the figure of 4 million was incorrect, these were replaced with new plaques reading:

For ever let this place be a cry of despair and a warning to humanity, where the Nazis murdered about one and a half million men, women, and children, mainly Jews from various countries of Europe. Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1940–1945.

The restatement goes from a minimalist statement of presumed fact (4 million was the accepted number of deaths at Auschwitz at that time, based on the testimony of its last commandant) to an emotional admonition that definitively names the perpetrator and victim groups. The shift to explicit appeals and specific information evidenced by these inscriptions would come to typify the development of the genre of Holocaust memorials in the 1990s.

After the Auschwitz competition in 1958, Holocaust memorialization began to diverge sharply from the traditional forms of war memorials (stelae, towers, realistic statuary) to larger, more expansive, abstract, avant-garde forms.<sup>80</sup> The six prize-

<sup>79</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 139–141, notes that last-minute changes were made only days before the unveiling in 1967: the group of abstract figures was moved from near the top of the tower to the ground in front of it, with the tower now culminating in the polished black marble slab. No explanation has been found for the change.

<sup>80</sup> Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, contains additional examples of more traditional figurative sculptural memorials from the 1950s at Holocaust-related sites, for example at the Ardeatine Caves near Rome (1950, plate 28), Dortmund (1959, plate 29), and Frankfurt (1964, plate 37). Two of



FIGURE 29: Nandor Glid, international memorial at Dachau, proposed in 1959 and dedicated in 1968; height 6.2 meters. This highly abstract sculpture of skeletal shapes forming a barbed-wire fence is set above a descending ramp on its front side, typical of the experiential spaces used in Holocaust memorials since the early 1960s. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

winning entries in a competition held by the international Dachau survivors' organization from January to November 1959 were highly abstract.<sup>81</sup> The survivors' newsletter described them as a tall, winged iron sculpture; a pyramid with 238,000 pipes, symbolizing the number of inmates who had passed through the camp; a massive, crypt-like "descent into hell"; a "very expressive" skeletal humanoid form over a ramp-like base; a crystalline "cathedral" 15 to 18 meters tall; and a slender lattice-work tower of "thorns" standing 35 meters high, with two angular prisms rising to a height of perhaps 10 meters behind it. The design that was ultimately realized in 1968, by Yugoslavian sculptor Nandor Glid, was a modification of his "very expressive" humanoid form: measuring 6 by 16 meters, it was a tangled mass of highly abstract emaciated bodies with angular barbed hands, supported by two fence posts with fragments of stylized barbed wire to suggest human beings entangled in the fencing that surrounded the concentration camps.

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the national memorials erected in Mauthausen in 1958, by Italy and Yugoslavia, illustrate the transition with their combination of traditional stelae and abstract sculptures (plates 74–75). For examples of traditional towers, see plates 80–82.

<sup>81</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 258–260, figs. 58–62.



FIGURE 30: Bertrand Monnet and Lucien Fenaux, memorial in Natzweiler-Struthof, France, 1960; height 40.5 meters. Typical of the emerging genre of Holocaust memorials, this tower is experiential and abstract, with the Holocaust-specific symbolism of a human form going up a smokestack. Photo by Harold Marcuse.



FIGURE 31: G. H. Pingusson, National Memorial for the Martyrs of the Deportation, Île de la Cité, Paris, 1962; view into the crypt lined with 200,000 lighted translucent pebbles. This experiential space in the symbolic heart of France lists the Holocaust sites to which French citizens were deported. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

Memorials erected in France and Poland in the 1960s culminate this trend toward abstract, avant-garde forms.<sup>82</sup> After a relatively traditional Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr was completed in 1956 in Paris—an aboveground cylinder bearing the names of thirteen Holocaust sites, with a marble Star of David in a subterranean room—a national memorial site in the former Natzweiler-Struthof camp in the Alsace was opened in 1960. Its central memorial is an open stone cylinder, 40.5 meters tall, rising in a graceful curve to a point, with a huge sunken relief of a waif-like human form floating on the inside, like smoke rising up a chimney. France’s central Mémorial des Martyrs de La Déportation was dedicated on the tip of the Île de la Cité behind Notre Dame Cathedral in 1962. A narrow stairway descends to a small courtyard with a jaggedly barred opening onto the Seine on one side, and a narrow entry into a geometrically shaped crypt lined with 200,000 backlit quartz pebbles, representing the 200,000 deportees who were French citizens, on the other.<sup>83</sup> Fifteen triangles bearing the names of the primary sites throughout Nazi-

<sup>82</sup> The following memorials are illustrated and described in Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, plates 88, 100–102; and Milton and Nowinski, *In Fitting Memory*, 202–210.

<sup>83</sup> For a collection of images of the Paris deportation memorial, see Anthony McNeill and Leigh Kempner, “Occupied France: Commemorating the Deportation,” <http://new.filter.ac.uk/database/getinsight.php?id=51&seq=211> (accessed September 26, 2008). The memorial’s official website is [http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/enjeux\\_defense/histoire\\_et\\_patrimoine/memoire/monuments/memoriaux/memorial\\_des\\_martyrs\\_de\\_la\\_deportation](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/enjeux_defense/histoire_et_patrimoine/memoire/monuments/memoriaux/memorial_des_martyrs_de_la_deportation) (accessed September 26, 2008).



FIGURE 32: Adam Haupt and Franciszek Duszenko, memorial at Treblinka, 1959/1964. This tower (height ca. 7 meters), set in a symbolic cemetery with more than 17,000 jagged stones, displays overt Jewish symbolism. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

controlled Europe where French citizens were persecuted adorn one of the interior walls, illustrating the “Holocaust principle” of enumerating multiple locations to signify the entire event.

Memorials at the former extermination centers in Poland also illustrate the shift to new forms after the Auschwitz competition. Designed in 1960 and completed in 1964, the memorial for Treblinka consists of a massive 7-meter-tall tower of large granite blocks, cleft down the middle and capped by a rounded, mushroom-like block carved with abstract reliefs and Jewish symbols.<sup>84</sup> It is surrounded by 17,000 loosely spaced jagged stones, evoking a Jewish cemetery, many of which are inscribed with the names of Jewish villages wiped out in the Holocaust. A separate set of larger stones, arranged in a row, bear the names of the countries of origin of the victims of Treblinka, again illustrating the national principle. The other main Polish Holocaust memorial erected in the 1960s was dedicated at Majdanek in September 1969, based on a design by Wiktor Tolkin selected from 130 entries in a competition held in 1967–1968.<sup>85</sup> A huge carved stone block, approximately 15 meters tall, 40

<sup>84</sup> See Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 186–192; Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, plates 2–3, 64–65; and Milton and Nowinski, *In Fitting Memory*, 136–147.

<sup>85</sup> See Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 124–126; Milton and Nowinski, *In Fitting Memory*, 148–152. Chełmno, Stutthof, Sobibor, and Belzec are more remote and less well known. The 4-meter-tall memorial at Chełmno, concrete slabs with bas-reliefs balanced on pyramidal supports, was completed in 1964; see Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, plate 63. Tolkin had previously designed the memorial for Stutthof (about thirty miles east of Gdansk), dedicated in May 1968. See <http://www.inyourpocket.com/poland/gdansk/sightseeing/category/58897-Stutthof.html> (accessed February 8, 2008). The tall sculptural memorial in Sobibor was erected in the 1990s. The Belzec memorial was dedicated in 2004; see <http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/memorials/belzec/index.html> (accessed January 18, 2008).



FIGURE 33: Wiktor Tolkin, memorial in Majdanek, 1969; height ca. 15 meters. As one of the last main Holocaust sites to be memorialized, this sculpture combines the abstract and experiential elements typical of Holocaust memorials by the early 1960s. Photo by Harold Marcuse.

meters wide, and perhaps 5 meters deep, is set upon two supports standing almost 4 meters tall, allowing visitors to pass under it on their way toward a domed open-air mausoleum over a huge mound of human ash at the back of the camp. As in the international memorial in Dachau, a ramp-like path descends to the base of the Majdanek memorial, enabling visitors to experience the massive weight of the sculpture from below. Beginning with the Buchenwald memorial and numerous designs for the Birkenau competition, and continuing with the Île de la Cité in Paris, Treblinka, and Yad Vashem near Jerusalem, such experiential spaces have become a hallmark of major Holocaust memorials, including most recently the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, dedicated in 2005.<sup>86</sup>

THE FIRST HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS stood firmly in the tradition of funerary monuments and war memorials: towers and stelae in classical geometric forms. For figurative sculptures, two traditions emerged: first, expressionistic, heroic realism, especially in the Soviet-influenced Eastern Bloc; and slightly later, a more abstract, avant-garde tradition throughout Europe. One might call the former a Rodin-in-

<sup>86</sup> See the online exhibition “Yad Vashem, 1953–2003,” at [http://www1.yadvashem.org/about\\_yad/jubilee/history\\_Brief.html](http://www1.yadvashem.org/about_yad/jubilee/history_Brief.html), especially the menu item “Commemoration” on that page (accessed January 11, 2008). The core memorial, the 75-meter-square concrete “Hall of Remembrance” (1961), contains an eternal flame, the names of twenty-one Nazi killing sites engraved in the black basalt floor, and a crypt with ashes of victims. See also Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 249–261; and Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, 27, plate 98. For the Berlin memorial, see <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en>, especially <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/history/chronology> (accessed December 9, 2009). The “Garden of Exile” created by Daniel Libeskind in 1999 at the Jewish Museum in Berlin is another experiential space using closely spaced stelae to disorient visitors. See <http://www.juedisches-museum-berlin.de/site/EN/05-About-The-Museum/03-Libeskind-Building/05-Garden-of-Exile/garden-of-exile.php> (accessed September 19, 2008).

spired line, with the latter tradition following sculptors such as Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz. Especially in the early memorials at Holocaust sites, collections of heraldry, inscriptions, or separate monuments contributed by various countries were employed to represent the transnational scope of the Holocaust. Conversely, memorials at non-Holocaust locations often list Holocaust sites or collect soil or relics from those sites with the same intent. The international competition for a memorial for Auschwitz-Birkenau in the late 1950s marks a transition to a wholly new genre of memorial: expansive, complex, avant-garde sculptures that create or incorporate experiential spaces with multiple symbolic elements. Although “the Holocaust” in its specifically Jewish meaning was not a prominent event of public commemoration in the 1950s, the iconography and aesthetic traditions of its later representation did emerge during that decade. In spite of the Cold War–influenced 1953 competition for a “monument to the unknown political prisoner,” we find that the emergence of a new memorial tradition for commemorating the Holocaust transcended the political division of the East-West conflict. Examples in France, Poland, and elsewhere in the 1960s show that the new genre had gained currency around the world by that time.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Additional examples of the emerging new genre of Holocaust memorials not discussed here include the West Park Cemetery in Johannesburg, South Africa (1959; photograph at <http://www.allatsea.co.za/cems/westparkmemorial.htm>), and Philadelphia (1964 by Nathan Rapoport; see <http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/memorials/philadelphiaMem/>). See also the memorials in Pristina and Jasenovac, Yugoslavia (1960 and 1963, respectively), depicted in Rieth, *Monuments to the Victims of Tyranny*, plates 60–61.

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