

## **A Holocaust Memorial or a Memorial to Germany's Vicarious Trauma?**

*Mark Callaghan*

### **Abstract**

This paper concentrates on the issue of creating a unitary memory for a country's heinous past and the complexities of vicarious trauma for both artists and the public alike. As the medical definition of trauma refers not to the injury inflicted but to the blow that inflicted it, not to the state of mind that ensues but to the event that provoked it, my research asks whether designs for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial Competition were more concerned with the blow and the event rather than the injury itself. It is my contention that Peter Eisenman's winning design does not represent the injury but instead aims to cause the visitor to feel disorientated and is therefore a reflection on the nature of death in the Final Solution – the blow and the event. According to Cathy Caruth traumatic events return to us even though we are vicarious witnesses because trauma itself cannot be fully understood, despite so many artistic attempts to do so. We should therefore consider the affects of trauma-related art, as we may appreciate why Eisenman's design was favoured in the face of so many compelling proposals.

Along with analysis of Eisenman's winning blueprint, this paper also examines vicarious trauma in relation to two further submissions for the competition, both of which were leading contenders for selection: Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's *Bus Stop!* and Daniel Libeskind's *Stone Breath*. Through perusal of these designs we can see further support for the argument that post-reunification Germany was drawn to proposals that expressed their own trauma, a vicarious one

**Key Words:** vicarious, empathy, abstraction, memory, representation, innovative, individual, collective.

From 1994-1997 The Berlin Holocaust Memorial Competition received more than 500 proposals from an international field of artists and architects. Designs ran the gamut of taste and aesthetic sensibilities, from the kitsch to the controversial, from the clichéd to the innovative. The winning submission – Peter Eisenman's undulating labyrinthine field of concrete stelae (Image 1) – came to represent Germany's aesthetic choice for the issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – the German appellation for coming to terms with the past.<sup>1</sup> Eisenman's design, officially titled *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, was selected due to its lack of symbolism, its determination to be non-prescriptive, and as a result, the hope that visitors would interpret the memorial with complete objectivity.<sup>2</sup>

The expanse of grey blocks is close to the Brandenburg Gate, is within sight of the Reichstag, is overlooked by the revived Potsdamer Platz, and is just a hundred metres from the location of the *Fuhrer Bunker*. This means that a memorial selected primarily for being non-representational occupies a five-acre plot of Berlin that is highly symbolic of Germany's temporality, as it succeeds in adding, with notable permanency, a new monumental figure to the city's landscape; one that seems to complete an axis of icons representing Germany's Prussian dynastic history, the country's shameful period of fascism, its confident postmodernist regeneration programme, and now its reunified and self-reflexive present.<sup>3</sup> Thus in the very centre of the new Berlin, there is a national memorial to German crimes against humanity, that ultimate rupture of Western civilization which has come to be seen by some as emblematic of the twentieth-century as a whole, a curse on the house of modernity that we now inhabit with enormous trepidation.<sup>4</sup>



**Image 1:** Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Berlin.

© 2013 Inter-Disciplinary Press. Image courtesy of Mark Callaghan.

The project to build a national Holocaust memorial coincided with debates concerning reunification, German national identity, the question of assigning guilt, generational differences (that became highlighted by these same debates), and the inescapable issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which in many respects is the idiom under which all such discourses belong.<sup>5</sup> What I wish to focus on, however, is a commonality between the majority of artists, competition jurors, politicians, and the public too: that they were the *Nachgeborenen* (the later born), the post-war generations who did not experience the Second World War and were faced with the continuing problem of being vicarious witnesses to the fascist era. By looking at three of the competition's most popular submissions, I posit that Germans sought, perhaps unconsciously, for a memorial that relates more to their state of vicarious trauma than a drive to commemorate the murder of six million Jews; crimes committed by their forebears that remain incomprehensible. As the Holocaust was an event some five decades hence, I argue that Germans could only see the atrocities from this distance and so favoured proposals that expressed their own trauma, a vicarious one – a history that repeats what they cannot grasp and one that is ungraspable even to those who experienced events at first hand; the remnants of a history that Susannah Radstone describes as the 'traceless traces' of memory.<sup>6</sup>

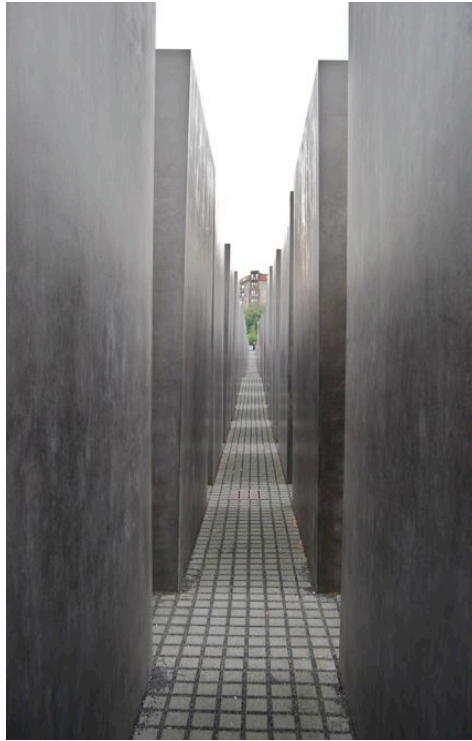
Given that the following case studies are aesthetically dissimilar, we should ask what caused them to be amongst the most popular with the *Nachgeborenen*? Do we expect the vicarious witness to be affected viscerally, emotionally, as a primary function of the artwork, rather than understanding the events or even the artwork that has led to this response? Was the eventual selection of Eisenman's design a reflection of this expectation? Though non-experiential designs were also short-listed for the Berlin competition, the three case studies appraised in this paper suggest a tendency for Germans to draw closer to the Jewish experience of Nazi Germany by preferring concepts that would relate to Jewish trauma whilst also exemplifying the inaccessibility of those same feelings.

Before addressing these questions further, one could argue that vicarious trauma is not only evidenced by Germany's need to build a national Holocaust memorial, but also by a competition that began with opaque precepts and was at one point disbanded due to lack of consensus: a process that tried, often in vain, to assuage multiple interest groups, and included jury members who did not feel qualified to make judgements on aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> An increasingly complex and disjointed process is perhaps appropriate for a nation trying to address its difficult past, a nation still dealing with the affects of its Nazi heritage. Furthermore, whilst *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* might sound like a clear dedication to the victims, there was no accord concerning its patronage, with some protagonists claiming the memorial was for Germans; others believing it had a European dimension, and others seeing the memorial as having an international scope.<sup>8</sup> However, whether the patron is singular, multiple, or still contested, the

memorial is primarily for the vicarious witness, for those who did not experience the Nazi era at first hand, for those who approach the Holocaust through the experiences of others. Though Germany was the perpetrator of the Holocaust, one might argue that the victims include post-war generation Germans – the *Nachgeborenen* – who continue to deal with the resonating affects of a legacy that must always haunt them. Seen through the lens of contemporary memory culture and trauma theory, the Berlin Holocaust Memorial Competition provides a significant insight into vicarious trauma and how it can be understood.

The medical definition of trauma refers not to the injury inflicted but to the blow that inflicted it, not to the state of mind that ensues but to the event that provoked it.<sup>9</sup> Here we might read Eisenman's design as being more a representation of the blow and the event than the injury itself. His design does not, for instance, represent the loss of life, or any suggestion of a relationship between the field of stelae and genocide, but instead aims, with varying results, to cause the visitor to feel claustrophobic due to the close proximity of the blocks, and increasingly disorientated as the viewer walks between the pillars, becoming submerged as the ground descends and the stelae rise (Image: 2). Eisenman wanted this intimidating encounter to transmit an aspect of the Jewish experience. The memorial was designed to reflect a state of anxiety and confusion, as an insight into the experience of others. A specific type of stone was even selected in order to create an echo of people's footsteps; an effect intended to remind the spectator of the approaching sound of Jackboots.<sup>10</sup> The design can therefore present visitors with intense and varied stimuli to hearing, touch and kinesthesia. These physical feelings are intended to stimulate emotions; a pathway to feeling the purpose of the memorial rather than thinking it.<sup>11</sup>

With these experiential purposes in mind, I argue that Eisenman's model relates to Cathy Caruth's assertion that the enigmatic core of trauma is the delay or incompleteness of knowing, that the traumatised carry an impossible history with them, or they become themselves symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess.<sup>12</sup> If the Jewish experience cannot be fully known even to those who lived through the Holocaust, then the selection of Eisenman's design becomes symptomatic of Germany's everlasting position, that the *Nachgeborenen* are trying to comprehend vicariously what even the witnesses could not recall due to this same incompleteness of knowing. Eisenman's experiential rendering thus provides an insight into the Jewish plight but also something that is suitably incommensurate to their suffering and is unreachable.



**Image 2:** Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Berlin.  
© 2013 Inter-Disciplinary Press. Image courtesy of Mark Callaghan.

Caruth writes that trauma is a 'response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated thoughts or behaviours'.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, traumatic events, such as the Holocaust, return to us even though we are vicarious witnesses. Trauma itself cannot be fully understood, despite so many artistic attempts to do so. The predominant view is that massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporally destroyed. It is an encounter that is inaccessible to understanding and imagery.<sup>14</sup> Whilst this theory suggests, in an Adornean sense, that art is redundant after Auschwitz, the Berlin competition was overwhelmed with abstract proposals, with some artists believing abstraction was the only genre suitable for the subject; the nearest we may find to Adorno's famous aporia.<sup>15</sup> Like all abstract art, Eisenman's design does not try to reproduce the world by depicting empirical reality, but instead tries to push culture forward by resisting the paradigm of Holocaust iconography and semiotics, thus being

innovative and arguably Delphic as a result. A key difference, however, between Eisenman's proposal and the scores of other abstract designs submitted to the competition, is that Eisenman aspired to produce an effect; not as opposed to or distinct from thought, but as the means by which a kind of understanding is produced.<sup>16</sup> To underscore this point, we should be mindful that whilst in front of abstract artworks, the lack of a depicted image tends to heighten our awareness of materials, of compositional (or anti-compositional) structures, of the process of looking itself.<sup>17</sup> *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* emphasises these conditions by being interactive, as one is encouraged to walk within the memorial's channels of blocks rather than being expected to observe the memorial only from a distance, just as a viewer would when perusing a conventional monument. Eisenman, however, does not try to represent the Holocaust by imagery, or entirely by abstraction, but instead by way of an experience, an experience that is of course disproportionate to the reality of Jewish suffering but is nonetheless one that relates to trauma – the blow and the event.

The experiential features combine to make Eisenman's design more than a passive viewing experience. Instead, true to its subject, the memorial becomes a striking and incomprehensible event, designed to be ungraspable and recondite; an encounter not only with the original trauma, which becomes possible because that initial trauma remains equally incomplete, but also, perhaps unwittingly, because of Germany's vicarious position. The memorial still defies narrative construction and exceeds comprehension, which is how Marianne Hirsch defines the post-memory experience of the *Nachgeborenen*, something that happened in the past with effects that continue into the present, experiences that they remember only by images and behaviours among which they grew up.<sup>18</sup>

However, despite being non-representational, Eisenman's design can result in didacticism, particularly if one's time in the field of blocks relates to the objectives of the aforementioned acoustic and experiential features and is understood as relating to the Jewish experience. This wider approach to thinking and representation can be contextualised by considering the cultural background to the Berlin Holocaust Memorial Competition, an initiative that was proposed against a backdrop of both leftfield and mainstream Holocaust culture, including award-winning films such as *Schindler's List* and popular documentaries that evidenced graphic images of the Shoah. Ann Kaplan describes such productions as:

Placing the viewer in the position of being vicariously traumatised with potentially negative results, as on the one hand the effect may be negative if the impact is so great that the viewer turns away from images instead of learning through them. Whilst on the other hand, a degree of vicarious trauma may shock a viewer into wanting to know more and perhaps to do something about what they have seen.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the memorial's abstraction, combined with its experiential constituents, Eisenman's design both circumvents and relates to Kaplan's assertion regarding visual representation, as the memorial is devoid of iconic visual triggers (or representational imagery of any kind, for that matter), whilst still having the capacity to shock viewers due to its potentially disorientating effects, which could prompt further enquiries regarding the Jewish experience of Nazi Germany. Instead of being represented with an appalling image, *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* attests to the possibilities of vicarious trauma but without the arguably instructional and overt illustrations found in numerous Holocaust-related artworks, regardless of genre, independent of genus.

Eisenman's design only becomes graphic if one uses one's imagination and draws upon a personal stockpile of Holocaust imagery accumulated by encountering the work of other artists, writers, photographers, sculptors, and film-makers. So an insight into the Jewish experience is attainable through the experiential effects of Eisenman's work – specifically a sensation of fear or confusion – that can be further supported by our visual knowledge of the Holocaust via more conventional art-forms, such as Margaret Bourke-White's photographs of stacked corpses at Buchenwald, scenes from *Schindler's List*, or with regard to memorials, Kenneth Treister's *Holocaust Memorial of the Greater Miami Jewish Foundation*, Miami Beach, unveiled in 1990, with its gargantuan outstretched arm towering over the rubble of a punctured landscape, with the explicit forms of agonised figures joined together as one tortured mass to create the erect limb.

Nevertheless, despite this apparent dependency on the visual history of the Holocaust, I posit that experience-based memorials can produce a more memorable way of remembering – a more active rather than passive role, where one is more likely to feel involved, not only in a connection with the past, but through a bodily experience with the artwork itself; physiological feelings stimulated by the design's architectural features.

Furthermore, as Jill Bennett reminds us, the argument that trauma resists representation has continued to be made at different times in relation both to psychological process and to aesthetics.<sup>20</sup> Yet, despite this continued query against the possibility of visually registering trauma, Germany was determined to explore and represent its vicarious trauma with the three sponsoring groups (the Federal Republic of Germany, the citizens' action group *Förderkreis* and the State of Berlin) steadfastly pursuing the creation of a national memorial that would be an open examination of the nation and its difficult past. As the 1994 Competition press release states:

It is not too late for a monument because the obligation to deliberate and to have a confrontation with historical responsibility for the crimes of the National Socialist Germany is imposed upon us Germans and will not pass away. So it is vital for us to carry the

burden of knowledge, to express regret and sorrow as well as benefit from the realization of the past lessons for the present and future (...)  
The object of this competition is of course difficult because it is not about getting rid of duty and we are not trying to draw a line under the past.<sup>21</sup>

The jury's assessment criterion also reveals that the panel anticipated designs that would relate to vicariousness whilst also drawing emotions from the viewer:

An essential element of a design is the choice of the means to capture the emotions of people. It is to be noted whether 'reality-based' or symbolic actions are supposed to be 'vicariously' activated or if information and contemplation are placed in a balanced relationship.<sup>22</sup>

The resolve to pursue the creation of a national Holocaust memorial demonstrates Germany's self-effacing post-unification attitude by way of its apparent drive to commemorate the Nazi era. Some scholars, however, might see this production as relating more to the idea of closure than creation, more an illustration of resisting *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* than embracing it. As Marita Sturken states, the concept of what is ostensibly a 'screen memory', is particularly useful in thinking about how a culture remembers, as in contemporary culture, memory is produced through photographic images, cinema, and television. Sturken believes that these mnemonic aids are also screens, actively blocking out other memories that are more difficult to represent.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that the creation of a Holocaust artwork, let alone a large, centrally located memorial, might come to represent an entity that is both an exploration and expression of atrocities whilst also being a self-censoring barrier to aspects of the past that are too disturbing. In this analysis, then, the selection of Eisenman's design, with its lack of symbolism and only one title sign on the entire five acre site, suggests that Germany commissioned a Holocaust memorial that is a duality of commemoration and censorship.

Whilst this point might stand, it is equally important to note that Eisenman's field of blocks does not qualify as a 'screen memory' per se, as there is no attempt to convey the Holocaust through overt representation. Though some visitors misunderstand the memorial, those that appreciate Eisenman's concept will draw close to the emotional effects that stark renderings often produce. The difference, however, is that these emotions will be based on their own sense of disorientation whilst walking within the field of blocks rather than the kind of contemporary visual triggers that Sturken refers to. To date, however, theorists of trauma and memory have paid relatively little attention to visual art. Yet the ways in which an artwork might evoke immediately affective experiences suggests the possibility –



for both artist and viewer – of ‘being a spectator of one’s own feelings’, a point evidenced by the reception of Eisenman’s design. This is not to argue that, through such a process, trauma enters the realm of representation. Rather than reducing itself to a form of representation, such imagery serves to register subjective processes that exceed our capacity to ‘represent’ them.<sup>24</sup> The extent to which the memorial is a ‘screen memory’ does, however, return to the analysis when one considers the aforementioned reliance on the visual history of the Holocaust, and how, without images of the atrocities, Eisenman’s abstract design might be a gateway to our memories of the Holocaust accumulated through contemporary culture. Eisenman’s rows of concrete stelae therefore qualify as a national monument that both hinders and encourages representation of Germany’s difficult past.

Whilst an engagement with Eisenman’s brooding blocks can transform a passive participant into an active explorer of meaning, or perhaps even epiphany, the notion of creating an architectural experience as a simulacrum of Holocaust experiences does, however, fail to connect with some visitors, as the design often activates playful responses rather than the reflective and the fearful that Eisenman conceived of. It is, for instance, not unusual to see people leaping from block to block, or hiding from friends amongst the maze. However, in some respects, had Eisenman’s original intentions for the design succeeded in captivating more visitors, it would have been arguably more inappropriate than the sight of such levity, as even the most uncomfortable of spaces would be incommensurate to the suffering experienced by the victims of the Holocaust. Either way, both responses are at risk of trivializing the horrific events. Eisenman does recognise that ‘the enormity and horrors of the Holocaust are such that any attempt to represent it by traditional means is inevitably inadequate’.<sup>25</sup> His memorial thus neither has a focal point, nor images of suffering, nor symbols of hope; but nor does it suggest that the field is a perfect solution. Anyone who would argue such a point has overlooked the memorial’s full reception. Additionally, if we consider issues of vicarious traumatising through the work of Joshua Hirsch and Janet Walker, we can appreciate that it is the endeavour to portray collective trauma that is of value rather than a concentration on binary notions of success and failure. Hirsch, for instance, is like Kaplan, in that he is interested in the impact of trauma films on spectators, particularly by the attempt to reproduce for the spectator an experience of once again seeing the unthinkable.<sup>26</sup> He argues for films that at least attempt to discover a form adequate for collective trauma, and perhaps it is the *attempt* that we should acknowledge when analysing Eisenman’s model for Germany’s national Holocaust memorial, along with the significance of its selection by the *Nachgeborenen*.

Eisenman’s blueprint for the memorial site was not, however, the only proposal to offer experiential encounters with the past. One of the most popular designs amongst the German public, media, and Jewish community, Renata Stih and

Frieder Schnock's, *Bus Stop!* (Image: 3), would see red buses depart from the memorial site at regular intervals, taking visitors to the former concentration camps of Germany and Poland, meaning buses would be illuminated with the destination signs of Dachau, Ravensbruck, Buchenwald, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz.<sup>27</sup>

This would not only create an itinerant memorial referencing the transportation of Jews, but also a protean social sculpture following, to some extent, the geographical reach of the Nazi extermination program. As trauma is contained not in an event as such but in the way this event is experienced, sites such as Auschwitz become much more than physical settings of tragedies: they emerge as spaces, where events are experienced and re-experienced across time, full of visual and sensory triggers, capable of eliciting a whole palette of emotions.<sup>28</sup> So had this idea been commissioned, the new Berlin memorial would have axiomatic links to the places where genocide occurred, meaning this version of *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* would have engaged with the indelible experience of being at the source of trauma, in the places where trauma was conceived and vicarious trauma transmitted.<sup>29</sup>



**Image 3:** Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's *Bus Stop!* proposal. © Stih and Schnock, Berlin/ARS, NYC/VG BildKunst Bonn/Berlin.

Image courtesy of Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock.

In Alison Landsberg's essay 'Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy', she conceives of Holocaust museums (and by extension concentration camp memorial sites) as 'transferential spaces' where people enter into experiential relationships with events they did not experience, thereby gaining access to 'sensually immersed knowledges, knowledges which would be difficult to acquire by purely cognitive means'.<sup>30</sup> This is supported by Harold Marcuse who writes that:

The use of the memorial site exclusively for cognitive learning, without attention to emotional aspects of a visit, is not apt to promote the kind of learning that teachers want to take place at a memorial site (...) memorial sites should draw on their unique strength, namely the emotional appeal of a genuine historical site with authentic remains, and leave most of the intellectual learning for other, more suitable situations.<sup>31</sup>

Marcuse supports the idea that experiencing Holocaust memorials is not contingent on cognition and that encounters with such mnemonic sites can, and arguable should, include sensations of fear, empathy, sadness, and bewilderment. Though Eisenman's scheme is devoid of artefacts, an emotional connection to the Holocaust is possible through the design's aforementioned strategies of intimidation. Stih and Schnock's *Bus Stop!* is, however, a more direct, less ambiguous creation, that also elevates the values of emotional encounters with Holocaust-related sites and memorials; that this is intrinsic for the vicarious witness, not because such experiences can mirror that of the victim, but rather that incomprehension is essential to understanding the Jewish experience because it can never be grasped.

Furthermore, at memorial sites such as Sachsenhausen, the ruins of crematoria, and the heaps of personal effects displayed in the museum spaces, can cause empathetic identification with the victims. Empathy, especially as it is constructed out of mimesis, is not an emotional self-pitying identification with victims, but a way of both feeling for, while different from, the subject of enquiry.<sup>32</sup> The popularity of a concept where mimesis was intrinsic to its values suggests that reunified Germans were not drawn exclusively to abstract forms such as Eisenman's, but rather to concepts that were experiential regardless of genus, independent of designation or whatever category we might assign them. This concept of empathetic identification, which is essential to current modes of Holocaust pedagogy, can have a transformational impact on visitors.<sup>33</sup> In the example of Claude Lanzmann's documentary, *Shoah*, Dominick La Capra believes that empathetic identification with people and places enabled Lanzmann to feel that he was reliving – indeed suffering through – a past he had never in fact lived.<sup>34</sup> The aforementioned artefacts to which *Bus Stop's!* spectators would be transported to, continue to provide a representation of reality, thus allowing us to suffer through, as Lanzmann does, a past that was not ours.<sup>35</sup>

When it comes to routine practices of memory, experience-based ideas, such as *Bus Stop!*, seek to circumvent what is seen as routinized or false practices of memory because they present a form of memory that is more tangible, tactile, and authentic in the sense that the visitor emotionally and physically participates in the memory.<sup>36</sup> As Karen Till elucidates, *Bus Stop!* encourages personal memory work through bodies moving through multiple space-times. The everyday spaces of the

city, the moving buses, and the people moving through those spaces in the buses, the conversations in the buses – these movements, these becomings, *are* the memorial.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, *Bus Stop!* is a process not an answer, reflecting the Counter-monument tenet of creating mnemonic concepts that are a more memorable way of remembering, due, in this example, by the participation required on the part of the viewer and the time the viewer must dedicate in order to complete the process of remembrance. As Stih and Schnock's official submission explains: 'Details, nuances, unexpected images and encounters turn the approach to memory sites into a formative experience. You take your time and you give it to the dead. For going to a former concentration camp is no simple day trip: it requires preparation in order to be able to stand the shock of comprehension'.<sup>38</sup> So like Eisenman's model, *Bus Stop!* would be participatory, innovative, and would, in contrasting ways, engage with Germany's vicarious trauma, in this case by imitating, albeit in a benign way, the deportations, the enforced movement of people and the restrictions that accumulated until all freedom was eroded to nothing.<sup>39</sup>

To cite a further example from the Berlin competition, I posit that trauma can be expressed in pioneering ways that attempt to negotiate the problem of incomplete memory whilst still relating to the poignancy of the past, of the absence of a destroyed section of society. Daniel Libeskind's, *Stone-Breath*, which reached the semi-final of the competition, evokes a spectacular vision of irreparability, irredeemable voids, and a wounded landscape, with its great broken wall, and its architectonic interpenetration of Berlin history that would have contextualised the memorial site.<sup>40</sup> Libeskind's design, which resembled the scarred walls of his plan for *The Jewish Museum*, also in Berlin, would have created a representation of trauma, not in a psychoanalytical sense, but rather in a material sense.<sup>41</sup> As Libeskind explains:

I have read a number of texts, which illuminate the problem of trauma from the psychoanalytical perspective, but I believe that when one actually enters the space of that trauma, the space of the city, the trauma cannot be interpreted simply. That is the difference between talking about the problem and being in it. In a literary context, one can interpret trauma, one can cope with it in different linguistic settings. But no interpretation can eliminate the materiality, opacity, and thickness of the experience of walking, looking, touching, feeling where one is.<sup>42</sup>

Libeskind's design appears to fall between Eisenman's concept and Stih and Schnock's due to Libeskind's wish to create a site specific, tactile experience,

whilst believing this could be achieved at a new site rather than one linked to the original places of murder. Libeskind's much-admired proposal would have delivered trauma in an architectural language right to the centre of Berlin. Though potentially esoteric, the broken wall, voids and wounded backdrop, would represent a country with permanent scars that wishes to move on whilst being fixated with its past. Like Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, the angel of history directs our gaze and thinking toward that which seems irredeemably lost, yet something that continues to haunt and torment our existence, something that can be read here as a metaphor for Germany's post-war situation.

The popularity of these three aesthetically divergent proposals suggests that Germans identified with the intended effects of trauma-related art. Whether the vicarious experience of trauma is comparable to an actual experience of trauma is questionable, but it is important to observe that in many regards the viewer can go through a similar experience and thereby a mediated or artificial encounter of trauma or terror.<sup>43</sup> Should one, for instance, relate the acoustic effects of Eisenman's design – the echo of Jackboots – then one may have a closer relationship with someone else's distressing past. Whereas with *Bus Stop!* the viewer would have a more direct, tangible, and site specific appreciation of Jewish suffering. Moreover, such concepts can be transformative by inviting spectators to at once be there emotionally but also to keep a cognitive distance and awareness denied to the victim by the traumatic process.<sup>44</sup>

Trauma is a special form of memory; the traumatic experience has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions – terror, fear, shock, and above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. Only the sensation sector of the brain is active during trauma. The meaning-making faculty – rational thought and cognitive processing, namely, the cerebral cortex – remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. Since the experience has not been given meaning, the subject is continually haunted by it in dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations.<sup>45</sup> Germany's pursuit of a national Holocaust memorial led to the selection of a design – Eisenman's – that mirrored these effects and saw the most popular design amongst the German media and public – Stih and Schnock's *Bus Stop!* – also relate to a replication of emotions where the experiential supercedes the traditional focus on the visual entity of an artwork; where the primary function of the artwork is for one to be affected viscerally, emotionally, not by the visual entity alone, but by an insight into the origins of trauma that remain appropriately inaccessible, thereby replicating the original outcome of trauma, though not the conditions from which it emanates. I would therefore argue that these proposals received notable encomium because they are not part of the broad cultural storehouse of pre-established forms, but instead allow the spectator to be present emotionally whilst also keeping a cognitive distance that does not sanitise the traumatic traces. 1990's Germans – the *Nachgeborenen* – seemed to favour ideas that placed the vicarious witness in the position of the original

victims' trauma, providing a sense of terror, fear, and shock, with designs that simultaneously gesture both to the existence of deep, inarticulable vicarious trauma and their own incapacity or unconscious unwillingness to deliver it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The decision-making process was not entirely democratic and transparent, with the public and media playing a seemingly ancillary role to the jurors and politicians. Public opinion was, for instance, strongly in favour of Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's *Bus Stop!*, yet their proposal failed to make the 1995 shortlist of finalists, whilst an unpopular design by Christine Jakob-Marks was unveiled as the winner only to be rejected due to upsetting Jewish sensibilities. It is, however, worth noting that it would be very unusual, if not unprecedented, for a memorial to be commissioned by way of a public vote, so despite the aforementioned contradictions it should be noted that the commissioners and politicians were, to a large extent, following the paradigm for the creation of public artworks. We should also be conscious that the process of establishing this memorial was in fact unusual, with three official sponsors overseeing the project - the Memorial Association, the Cite-State (Land) Berlin, and the Federal Public, meaning that, perhaps for the first time ever, a private citizen initiative was an official sponsor of a state or federally funded cultural project.

<sup>2</sup> Professor James Young, the spokesperson for the 1997 Findungskommission, confirmed these primary reasons for Eisenman's selection. Interview, March 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The memorial occupies an area of Berlin that was once the gardens between Hitler's office and that of his architect Albert Speer. More sinisterly though, the north west corner of the memorial site was formerly the location of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels's bunker, where, on 1 May 1945, in order to avoid capture by the on-coming Red Army, he and his wife Magda committed suicide shortly after she had poisoned her six children with cyanide capsules as they slept. Beevor, Anthony Beevor. *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*. (London: Penguin, 2007), 380.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Standord, CT: Stanford University Press, 2003), 81.

<sup>5</sup> Most prominent was the 1998 debate between Ignatz Bubis, leader of Germany's Jewish community, and writer and political activist, Martin Wasler, along with the extraordinary impact of Daniel Goldhagen's 1996 book, 'Hitler's Willing Executioners', where Goldhagen posits that 'ordinary Germans', with their eliminationist anti-Semitic tendencies, were responsible for the atrocities rather than Nazi policies. Geoff Eley, *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism – Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 2000), 53.

<sup>6</sup> Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics', in *Other People's Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*, eds. Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Project instigators Lea Rosh and Eberhard Jäckel did not feel qualified to judge on aesthetics yet played a significant role in the selection process.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Thierse, Speaker of Parliament, declared that the memorial was 'not solely for Jews but to help Germany confront a chapter of its history', (Ruth. A. Starkman. *Transformations of the New Germany: Studies in European History*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, 237), whilst project instigator Lea Rosh saw the memorial as being 'erected by the perpetrators to their dead victims' (William, J.V. Neill. *Urban Planning and Cultural Identity*. London: Routledge, 2004), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 184.

<sup>10</sup> In my interview with Peter Eisenman, the architect also said he, 'wanted a physical experience in the present tense because it would be so different to what one would have elsewhere. We wanted the Germans to see the Holocaust as everyday life'. He also elaborated on the acoustics, and how the undulating ground adds to this effect, as with a flat surface much of the echo would be lost (interview, March 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Dori Laub in Ann. E. Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 160.

<sup>15</sup> Simon Ungers, whose design was a leading contender for the 1994 competition, did not believe the Holocaust could be represented by any means others than abstraction (interview with Sophia Ungers, December 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Approximately 70% of the 547 submitted designs were abstract.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Godfrey. *Abstraction and the Holocaust*. (New York: Yale University Press. 2007), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ann. E. Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Jill Bennett. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (San Francisco: Stanford University Press. 2005), 28.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted from the Press Release. 'The National Holocaust Monument is a long time overdue' (*Das Nationale Holocaust-Denkmal ist längst überfällig*) 5.5.1994.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted from the Minutes of the jury's first meeting. 15.3.1995.

<sup>23</sup> Marita Sturken. *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press. 2007), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Jill Bennett. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (San Francisco: Stanford University Press. 2005), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Godfrey. *Abstraction and the Holocaust*. (New York: Yale University Press. 2007), 253.

<sup>26</sup> Ann. E. Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Despite its unconventional, arguably non-conformist approach, *Bus Stop!* was the most popular design with the German public, and was also ranked eleventh out of the 528 proposals by the first jury (Gunter Schlusche. *Der Denkmalstreit - das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das 'Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas' Eine Dokumentation (The Monument's Disputes: The Debate around 'The Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe' – A Documentation)*. Berlin: Philo, 1999, 86). The concept was also supported by Amnon Barzel, former chair of the Council of Jews in Germany, who said that regardless of the memorial competition's outcome, *Bus Stop!* should be built in Berlin. Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 180.

<sup>30</sup> Alison Landsberg. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>31</sup> Harold Marcuse. *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*. (London: Cambridge University Press. 2008), 391.

<sup>32</sup> Alison Landsberg. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>33</sup> David Bathrick, Prager, David, David, Brad and Richardson, D. Michael D. *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*. (Rochester: Camden House, 2012), 76.

<sup>34</sup> Dominick La Capra, *History & Memory after Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Despite the apparent merits of empathetic identification (primarily, emotional and visceral appeal), it is, as La Capra posits, difficult to see how one may be



empathetic without intrusively arrogating to oneself the victim's experience or undergoing (consciously or not) surrogate victimage, a point we should be mindful of when evaluating the values of empathy (Dominick La Capra, *History & Memory after Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 182.

<sup>36</sup> Kirsten Harjes, 'Stumbling Stones: Holocaust Memorials, National Identity, and Democratic Inclusion in Berlin', *German Politics and Society* 23.1 (Spring 2005): 5.

<sup>37</sup> Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 182.

<sup>38</sup> [www.stih-schnock.de](http://www.stih-schnock.de)

<sup>39</sup> Despite receiving favourable reviews, *Bus Stop!* was ultimately rejected by the jury because several members of the jury felt there was a lack of consideration towards the parameters of the competition's advertisement and, also, the feasibility of the concept in principle has been questioned. Document outlining the jury's assessment of *Bus Stop!*, March, 1995 (Gunter Schlusche. *Der Denkmalstreit - das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das 'Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas' Eine Dokumentation (The Monument's Disputes: The Debate around 'The Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe' - A Documentation)*. Berlin: Philo, 1999, 286).

<sup>40</sup> Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobwitz, *Image & Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust. Representation & The Holocaust*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>41</sup> According to jury member, James Young, *Stone-Breath* was ultimately rejected because it could be confused with a remnant of the Berlin Wall and also because it was too similar in appearance to Libeskind's already celebrated Jewish Museum, also in Berlin.

<sup>42</sup> Hornstein and Jacobwitz, *Image & Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust. Representation & The Holocaust*, 45.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Carter, *Hiroshima mon amour: The Art of Vicarious Trauma*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ann Kaplan makes a similar point regarding cinema where the viewer is allowed to enter the victim's experience through a work's narration.

<sup>45</sup> Bessel Van der Kolk, *Psychological Trauma* (Boston: American Psych Press, January, 1987), 167.

## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Sources:**

Interview with Peter Eisenman, conducted by Mark Callaghan on 17 March 2011.

Interview with Professor James Young, conducted by Mark Callaghan on 31 March 2011.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Bathrick, David, David Prager, Brad David and Michael D. Richardson. *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*. Rochester: Camden House, 2012.

Beevor, Anthony. *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*. London: Penguin, 2007.

Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Carter, Daniel. *Hiroshima mon amour: The Art of Vicarious Trauma*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010.

Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Eley, Geoff. *The Goldhagen Effect. History, Memory, Nazism – Facing the German Past*. Publisher's City Missing: The University of Michigan, 2000.

Erikson, Kai. *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters*. London, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.

Godfrey, Mark. *Abstraction and the Holocaust*. New York: Yale University Press, 2007.

Harjes, Kirsten. 'Stumbling Stones: Holocaust Memorials, National Identity, and Democratic Inclusion in Berlin'. *German Politics and Society* 23.1 (Spring 2005): 138-151.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Hornstein, Shelley and Florence Jacobwitz. *Image & Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust. Representation & The Holocaust*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003.

Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Kaplan, Ann. E. *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

La Capra, Dominick. *History & Memory after Auschwitz*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Landsberg, Alison. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Marcuse, Harold. *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Neill, William J. V. *Urban Planning and Cultural Identity*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Radstone, Susannah. 'Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics'. In *Other People's Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*, edited by Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag, 9-29. London: Peter Lang, 2011.

Schlusche, Gunter. *Der Denkmalstreit - das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das 'Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas' Eine Dokumentation (The Monument's Disputes: The Debate around 'The Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe' – A Documentation)*. Berlin: Philo, 1999.

Starkman, Ruth. A. *Transformations of the New Germany: Studies in European History*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006.

Sturken, Marita. *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007.

Till, Karen. *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2005.

Tumarkin, Maria. *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *Psychological Trauma*. Boston: American Physic Press, January, 1987.

[www.stih-schnock.de](http://www.stih-schnock.de)

**Mark Callaghan**'s main area of research and teaching is contemporary memory culture. His Ph.D thesis at Birkbeck College, University of London, concerns the Berlin Holocaust Memorial Competition, perusing issues of national identity, Jewish sensibilities, trauma theory, and artsitic representations of genocide. Mark is also a graduate of the University of Manchester and Oxford University.