

Memory, Countermemory, and the End of the Monument

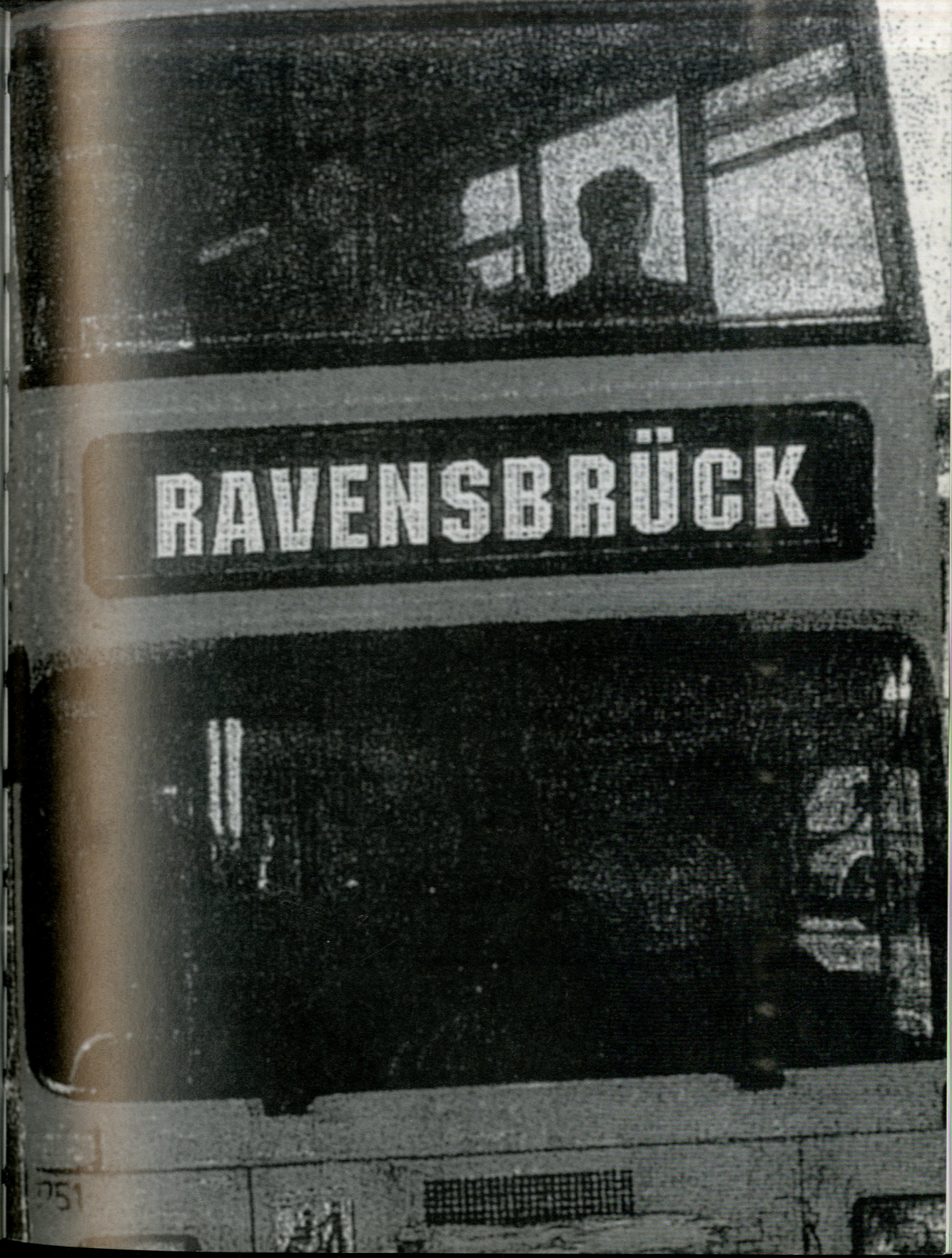
*Horst Hoheisel, Micha Ullman, Rachel Whiteread,
and Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock*

"The sunken fountain is not the memorial at all. It is only history turned into a pedestal, an invitation to passersby who stand upon it to search for the memorial in their own heads. For only there is the memorial to be found."

—Horst Hoheisel, "Rathaus Platz Wunde"

AMONG THE HUNDREDS OF SUBMISSIONS IN the 1995 competition for a German national "memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe," one seemed an especially uncanny embodiment of the impossible questions at the heart of Germany's memorial process. Artist Horst Hoheisel, already well known for his negative-form monument in Kassel, proposed a simple, if provocative antisolution to the memorial competition: blow up the Brandenburger Tor, grind its stone into dust, sprinkle the remains over its former site, and cover the entire memorial area with granite plates. How better to remember a destroyed people than by a destroyed monument?

Rather than commemorating the destruction of a people with the construction of yet another edifice, Hoheisel would mark one destruction with another destruction. Rather than filling in the void left by a murdered people with a positive form, the artist would carve out an empty space in Berlin by which to recall a now absent people. Rather than concretizing and thereby displacing the memory of Europe's murdered Jews, the artist would open a place in the landscape to be filled with the memory of those who come to remember Europe's murdered Jews. A landmark





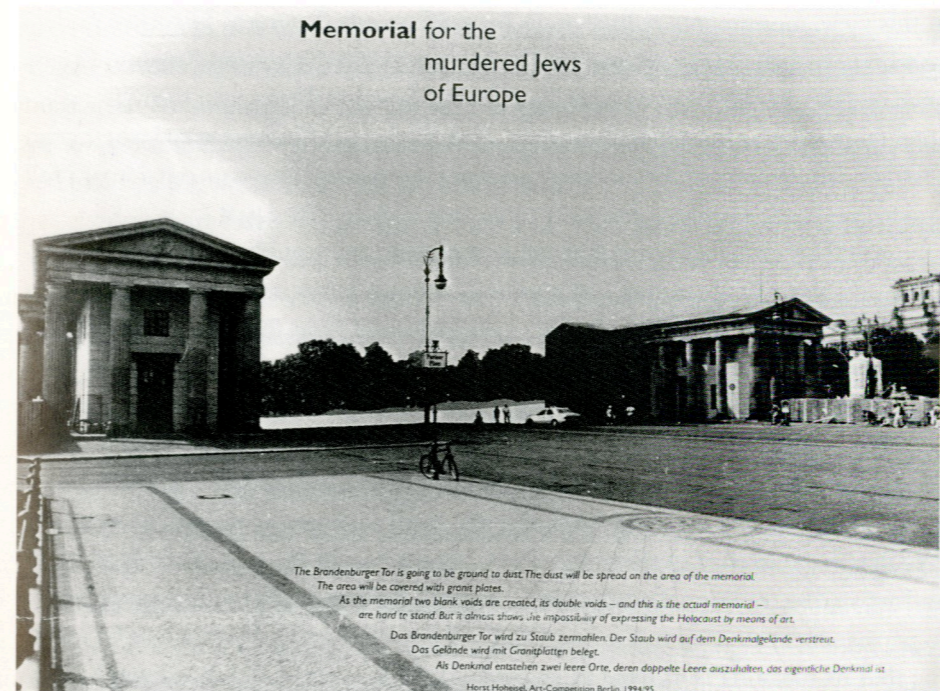
Horst Hoheisel, Blow Up the Brandenburger Tor. Proposal for the 1995 competition for "Berlin's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe."

celebrating Prussian might and crowned by a chariot-borne Quadriga, the Roman goddess of peace, would be demolished to make room for the memory of Jewish victims of German might and peacelessness. In fact, perhaps no single emblem better represents the conflicted, self-abnegating motives for memory in Germany today than the vanishing monument.¹

Of course, such a memorial undoing will never be sanctioned by the German government, and this, too, is part of the artist's point. Hoheisel's proposed destruction of the Brandenburg Gate participates in the competition for a national Holocaust memorial, even as its radicalism precludes the possibility of its execution. At least part of its polemic, therefore, is directed against actually building any winning design, against ever finishing the monument at all. Here he seems to suggest that the surest engagement with Holocaust memory in Germany may actually lie in its perpetual irresolution, that only an unfinished memorial process can guarantee the life of memory. For it may be the *finished* monument that completes memory itself, puts a cap on memory-work, and draws a bottom line underneath an era that must always haunt Germany. Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany than any single "final solution" to Germany's memorial problem.²

Like other cultural and aesthetic forms in Europe and North America, the

monument—in both idea and practice—has undergone a radical transformation over the course of the twentieth century. As intersection between public art and political memory, the monument has necessarily reflected the aesthetic and political revolutions, as well as the wider crises of representation, following all of the century's major upheavals—including both World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, the rise and fall of communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites. In every case, the monument reflects both its sociohistorical and its aesthetic context: artists working in eras of cubism, expressionism, socialist realism, earthworks, minimalism, or conceptual art remain answerable to the needs of both art and official history. The result has been a metamorphosis of the monument from the heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons of the late nineteenth century celebrating national ideals and triumphs to the antiheroic, often ironic, and self-effacing conceptual installations that mark the national ambivalence and uncertainty of late twentieth-century postmodernism.



Horst Hoheisel, Blow Up the Brandenburger Tor. Proposal for the 1995 competition for "Berlin's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe."

In fact, the monument as both institution and concept had already come under withering attack well before the turn of the century. "Away with the monuments!" Friedrich Nietzsche declared in his blistering attack on a nineteenth-century German historicism that oppressed the living with stultified versions of the past, what Nietzsche called "monumental history."³ To which, a chorus of artists and cultural historians have since added their voices. "The notion of a modern monument is veritably a contradiction in terms," Lewis Mumford wrote in the 1930s. "If it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument."⁴ Believing that modern architecture invites the perpetuation of life itself, encourages renewal and change, and scorns the illusion of permanence, Mumford wrote, "Stone gives a false sense of continuity, a deceptive assurance of life."⁵ Indeed, he went on to suggest that traditionally it seems to have been the least effectual of regimes that chose to compensate their paucity of achievement in self-aggrandizing stone and mortar.

More recently, the German historian Martin Broszat suggested that in their references to history, monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether beneath layers of national myth and explanation. As cultural reifications, in this view, monuments reduce or, in Broszat's words, "coarsen" historical understanding as much as they generate it.⁶ In another vein, art historian Rosalind Krauss finds that the modernist period produces monuments unable to refer to anything beyond themselves as pure marker or base. After Krauss, critics have asked whether an abstract, self-referential monument can ever commemorate events outside of itself or whether it only motions endlessly to its own gesture to the past.⁷

Still others have argued that rather than preserving public memory, the monument displaces it altogether, supplanting a community's memory-work with its own material form. "The less memory is experienced from the inside," Pierre Nora warns, "the more it exists through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs."⁸ In fact, Andreas Huyssen has even suggested that in a contemporary age of mass memory production and consumption, there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialization of the past and its contemplation and study.⁹

It is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In the eyes of modern critics and artists, the traditional monument's essential stiffness and grandiose pretensions to permanence thus doom it to an archaic, premodern status. Even worse, by insisting that its meaning is as fixed as its place in the landscape, the monument seems oblivious to the essential mutability in all cultural artifacts, the ways the significance

in all art evolves over time. In this way, monuments have long sought to provide a naturalizing locus for memory, in which a state's triumphs and martyrs, its ideals and founding myths are cast as naturally true as the landscape in which they stand. These are the monument's sustaining illusions, the principles of its seeming longevity and power. But in fact, as several generations of artists—modern and postmodern alike—have made scathingly clear, neither the monument nor its meaning is everlasting. Both a monument and its significance are constructed in particular times and places, contingent on the political, historical, and aesthetic realities of the moment.

The early modernist ambivalence toward the monument hardened into outright hostility in the wake of World War I. Both artists and some governments shared a general distaste for the ways the monument seemed formally to recapitulate the archaic values of a past world now discredited by the slaughter of the war. A new generation of cubists and expressionists, in particular, rejected traditional mimetic and heroic evocations of events, contending that any such remembrance would elevate and mythologize events. In their view, yet another classically proportioned Prometheus would have falsely glorified and thereby redeemed the horrible suffering they were called upon to mourn. The traditional aim of war monuments had been to valorize the suffering in such a way as to justify, even redeem, it historically. But for these artists, such monuments would have been tantamount to betraying not only their experience of the Great War but also their new reasons for art's existence after the war: to challenge the world's realities, not affirm them.

As Albert Elsen has noted, modern and avant-garde sculptors between the wars in Europe were thus rarely invited to commemorate either the victories or losses, battles or war dead of World War I.¹⁰ And if figurative statuary were demanded of them, then only antiheroic figures would do, as exemplified in the pathetic heroes of German sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbrück's *Fallen Man* and *Seated Youth* (both 1917). As true to the artists' interwar vision as such work may have been, however, neither public nor state seemed ready to abide memorial edifices built on foundations of doubt instead of valor. The pathetic hero was thus condemned by emerging totalitarian regimes in Germany and Russia as defeatist for seeming to embody all that was worth forgetting—not remembering—in the war. Moreover, between the Nazi abhorrence of abstract art—or what it called *entartete Kunst* (decadent art)—and the officially mandated socialist realism of the Soviet Union, the traditional figurative monument even enjoyed something of a revival in totalitarian societies. Indeed, only the figurative statuary of officially sanctioned artists, like Germany's Arno Breker, or styles like

the Soviet Union's socialist realism, could be trusted to embody the Nazi ideals of "Aryan race" or the Communist Party's vision of a heroic proletariat. In its consort with two of this century's most egregiously totalitarian regimes, the monument's credibility as public art was thus eroded further still.

Fifty-five years after the defeat of the Nazi regime, contemporary artists in Germany still have difficulty separating the monument there from its fascist past. German memory-artists are heirs to a double-edged postwar legacy: a deep distrust of monumental forms in light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis and a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the killers through memory.¹¹ In their eyes, the didactic logic of monuments—their demagogical rigidity and certainty of history—continues to recall too closely traits associated with fascism itself. How else would totalitarian regimes commemorate themselves except through totalitarian art like the monument? Conversely, how better to celebrate the fall of totalitarian regimes than by celebrating the fall of their monuments? A monument against fascism, therefore, would have to be monument against itself: against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate—and finally, against the authoritarian propensity in monumental spaces that reduces viewers to passive spectators.

As I have suggested in the Introduction, one of the most intriguing results of Germany's memorial conundrum has been the advent of what I would call its "countermonuments": memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument. For a new generation of German artists, the possibility that memory of events so grave might be reduced to exhibitions of public artistry or cheap pathos remains intolerable. They contemptuously reject the traditional forms and reasons for public memorial art, those spaces that either console viewers or redeem such tragic events, or indulge in a facile kind of *Wiedergutmachung* or purport to mend the memory of a murdered people. Instead of searing memory into public consciousness, they fear, conventional memorials seal memory off from awareness altogether; instead of embodying memory, they find that memorials may only displace memory. These artists fear rightly that to the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. They believe, in effect, that the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them.

In the pages that follow, I would like both to recall a couple of the countermonuments I have discussed at much greater length elsewhere and to add several

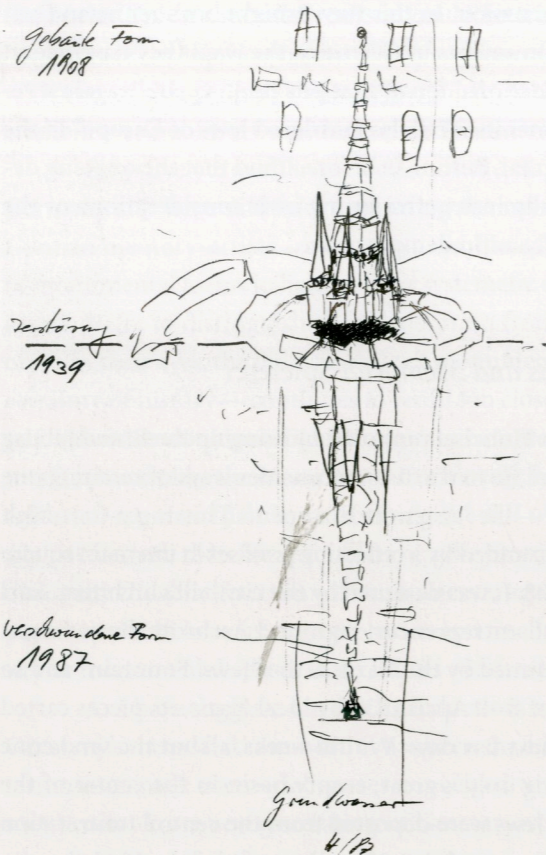
more recent installations to the discussion. In this way, I might both refine and adumbrate the concept of countermonuments in Germany, the ways they have begun to constitute something akin to a "national form" that pits itself squarely against recent attempts to build a national "memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe" in the center of the country's reunited capital, Berlin. As before, I find that the ongoing debate in Germany has been especially instructive in my own considerations of the monument's future in this decidedly antiredemptory age.

Horst Hoheisel's Negative Forms and Memorial Spielerei

Some ten years before Horst Hoheisel proposed blowing up the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, the city of Kassel had invited artists to consider ways of rescuing one of its own destroyed monuments—the "Aschrott Brunnen." This forty-foot-high neo-Gothic pyramid fountain, surrounded by a reflecting pool set in the main square in front of city hall, was built in 1908. It was designed by the city hall's architect, Karl Roth, and funded by a local Jewish entrepreneur, Sigmund Aschrott. But as a gift from a Jew to the city, it was condemned by the Nazis as the "Jews' Fountain" and so was demolished during the night of 8–9 April 1939 by local Nazis, its pieces carted away by city work crews over the next few days. Within weeks, all but the sandstone base had been cleared away, leaving only a great, empty basin in the center of the square. Two years later, 463 Kassel Jews were deported from the central train station to Riga, followed in the next year by another 3,000, all murdered. In 1943 the city filled in the fountain's basin with soil and planted it over in flowers; local burghers then dubbed it "Aschrott's Grave."

During the growing prosperity of the 1960s, the town turned Aschrott's Grave back into a fountain, sans pyramid. But by then, only a few of the city's old-timers could recall that its name had ever been Aschrott's anything. When asked what had happened to the original fountain, they replied that to their best recollection, it had been destroyed by English bombers during the war. In response to this kind of fading memory, the Society for the Rescue of Historical Monuments proposed in 1984 that some form of the fountain and its history be restored—and that it recall all the founders of the city, especially Sigmund Aschrott.

In his proposal for "restoration," Horst Hoheisel decided that neither a preservation of its remnants nor its mere reconstruction would do. For Hoheisel, even the



„Platz – Wunde Aschrottbrunnen“

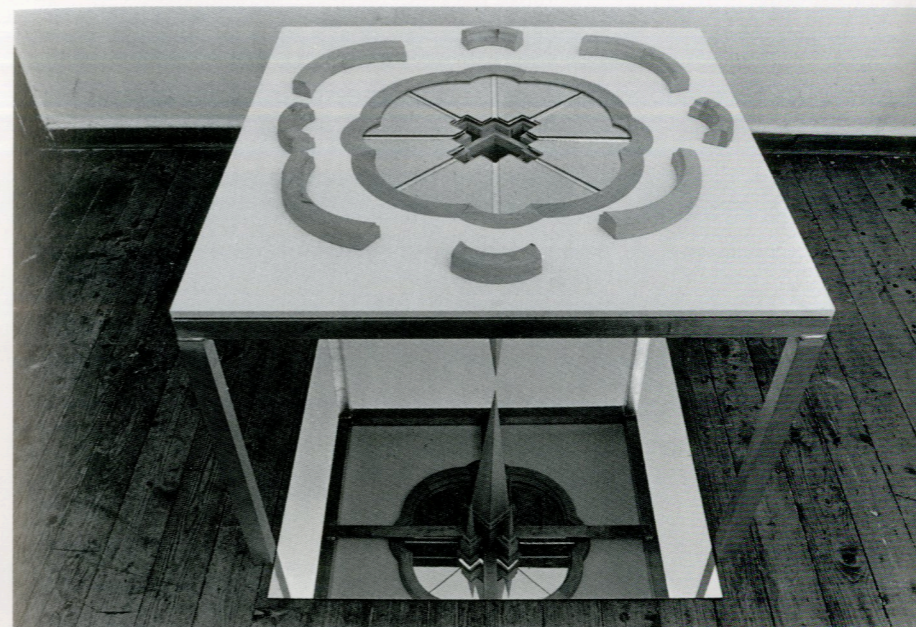
Horst Hoheisel, artist's sketch of the Aschrott-Brunnen Memorial, Kassel, 1987.

fragment was a decorative lie, suggesting itself as the remnant of a destruction no one knew much about. Its pure reconstruction would have been no less offensive: not only would self-congratulatory overtones of Wiedergutmachung betray an irreparable violence, but the artist feared that a reconstructed fountain would only encourage the public to forget what had happened to the original. In the best tradition of the countermonument, therefore, Hoheisel proposed a “negative-form” monument to mark what had once been the Aschrott Fountain in Kassel’s City Hall Square.

On being awarded the project, Hoheisel described both the concept and the form underlying his negative-form monument:

I have designed the new fountain as a mirror image of the old one, sunk beneath the old place in order to rescue the history of this place as a wound and as an open question, to penetrate the consciousness of the Kassel citizens so that such things never happen again.

That’s why I rebuilt the fountain sculpture as a hollow concrete form after the old plans and for a few weeks displayed it as a resurrected shape at City Hall Square before sinking it, mirror-like,



Horst Hoheisel, model for the Aschrott-Brunnen Memorial, Kassel, 1987.

12 meters deep into the ground water.

The pyramid will be turned into a funnel into whose darkness water runs down. From the “architektonischen Spielerei,” as City Hall architect Karl Roth called his fountain, a hole emerges which deep down in the water creates an image reflecting back the entire shape of the fountain.¹²

How does one remember an absence? In this case, by reproducing it. Quite literally, the negative space of the absent monument now constitutes its phantom shape in the ground. The very absence of the monument is now preserved in its precisely duplicated negative space. In this way, the monument’s reconstruction remains as illusory as memory itself, a reflection on dark waters, a phantasmagoric play of light and image. Taken a step further, Hoheisel’s inverted pyramid might also combine with the remembered shape of its predecessor to form the two interlocking triangles of the Jewish star—present only in the memory of its absence.

In his conceptual formulations, Hoheisel invokes the play of other, darker associations as well, linking the monument to both the town’s Jewish past and a tradi-

tional anti-Semitic libel. "The tip of the sculpture points like a thorn down into the water," the artist writes. "Through coming into touch with the ground water, the history of the Aschrott Fountain continues not over but under the city." As an emblem of the Holocaust, the history of the Aschrott Fountain becomes the subterranean history of the city. In Hoheisel's figure, the groundwater of German history may well be poisoned—not by the Jews but by the Germans themselves in their murder of the Jews. By sinking his inverted pyramid into the depths in this way, Hoheisel means to tap this very history. "From the depth of the place," he says, "I have attempted to bring the history of the Aschrott Fountain back up to the surface."

Of course, on a visit to City Hall Square in Kassel, none of this is immediately evident. During construction, before being lowered upside down into the ground, the starkly white negative-form sat upright in the square, a ghostly reminder of the original, now absent monument. Where there had been an almost forgotten fountain, there is now a bronze tablet with the fountain's image and an inscription detailing what had been there and why it was lost. As we enter the square, we watch as water fills narrow canals at our feet before rushing into a great underground hollow, which grows louder and louder until we finally stand over the "Aschrott-Brunnen." Only the sound of gushing water suggests the depth of an otherwise invisible memorial, an inverted palimpsest that demands the visitor's reflection. Through an iron grate and thick glass windows we peer into the depths. "With the running water," Hoheisel suggests, "our thoughts can be drawn into the depths of history, and there perhaps we will encounter feelings of loss, of a disturbed place, of lost form."

In fact, as the only standing figures on this flat square, our thoughts rooted



Horst Hoheisel, negative-form, Aschrott-Brunnen Monument, Kassel, 1987.

in the rushing fountain beneath our feet, we realize that we have become the memorial. "The sunken fountain is not the memorial at all," Hoheisel says. "It is only history turned into a pedestal, an invitation to passersby who stand upon it to search for the memorial in their own heads. For only there is the memorial to be found." Hoheisel has left



Neo-Nazis demonstrate at the Aschrott-Brunnen Monument, Kassel, 1997.



Horst Hoheisel, *Denk-Stein-Sammlung*
Memorial Project, Kassel, 1988–1995.

nothing but the visitors themselves standing in remembrance, left to look inward for memory.

Neo-Nazi demonstrators protesting an exhibition critical of the Wehrmacht when it came to Kassel in June 1998 were granted permis-

sion by the mayor to hold their protest in the Aschrott-Brunnen plaza, in front of Kassel's city hall. Here they stood atop the original fountain's foundation stones that had been salvaged by Hoheisel to mark the perimeter of the original fountain. Skin-headed and tattooed, wearing black shirts and fatigues, the neo-Nazis waved black flags and taunted a crowd of counter-protesters who had assembled outside police barricades surrounding the neo-Nazis. In a press release, Hoheisel recounted the history of the site, from the donation of the fountain to Kassel by Sigmund Aschrott, to its demolition at the hands of the Nazis in April 1939, to the memorial's dedication in 1987, and finally to the neo-Nazis' demonstration there in June 1998. For Hoheisel, the neo-Nazis' "reclamation" of the site, their triumphal striding atop the ruins of the fountain that their predecessors had destroyed in 1939, seemed to bear out his dark hope that this would become a negative center of gravity around which all memory—wanted and unwanted—would now congeal.

By this time, Hoheisel had initiated several other memorial projects, including another in Kassel. One more pedagogically inclined project turned to the next generation. With permission from local public schools, the artist visited the classrooms of Kassel with a book, a stone, and a piece of paper. The book was a copy of *Namen und Schicksale der Juden Kassels* (The names and fates of Kassel's Jews), a memorial book for Kassel's destroyed Jewish community. In his classroom visits, Hoheisel told students the story of Kassel's vanished Jews, how they had once thrived there, lived in the very houses where these schoolchildren now lived, how they had sat at these same classroom desks. He then asked all the children who knew any Jews to raise their hands. When no hands appeared, Hoheisel would read the story of one of Kassel's deported Jews from his memory book. At the end of his reading, Hoheisel

invited each student to research the life of one of Kassel's deported Jews: where they had lived and how, who were their families, how old they were, what they had looked like. He asked them to visit formerly Jewish neighborhoods and get to know the German neighbors of Kassel's deported Jews.

After this, students were asked to write short narratives describing the lives and deaths of their subjects, wrap these narratives around cobblestones, and deposit them in one of the archival bins the artist had provided at every school. After several dozen such classroom visits, the bins had begun to overflow and new ones were furnished. In time, all of these bins were transported to Kassel's Hauptbahnhof, where they were stacked on the rail platform whence Kassel's Jews were deported. It is now a permanent installation, what the artist calls his *Denk-Stein Sammlung* (memorial stone archive).

This memorial cairn—a witness-pile of stones—marks both the site of deportation and the community's education about its murdered Jews, their absence now marked by the evolving memorial. Combining narrative and stone in this way,



Horst Hoheisel, *Denk-Stein-Sammlung* Memorial Project, installed at train station, Kassel, 1988–1995.



Temporary memorial at Buchenwald built by former inmates, May 1945.

the artist and students have thus adopted the most Jewish of memorial forms as their own—thereby enlarging their memorial lexicon to include that of the absent people they would now recall. After all, only they are now left to write the epitaph of the missing Jews, known and emblemized primarily by the void they have left behind.

Similarly, when invited by the director of the Buchenwald Museum, Volkhard Knigge, shortly after its postreunification revisions to memorialize the first monument to liberation erected by the camp's former inmates



Horst Hoheisel, "Warm memorial" to commemorate the former inmates' memorial at Buchenwald, 1995.

in April 1945, Hoheisel proposed not a resurrection of the original monument but a "living" alternative. In collaboration with architect Andreas Knitz, the artist designed a concrete slab with the names of fifty-one national groups victimized here and engraved with the initials K.L.B. (Konzentrationslager Buchenwald) that had marked the prisoners' original wooden memorial obelisk. And as that obelisk had been constructed out of the pieces of barracks torn down by their former inmates—that is, enlivened by the prisoners' own hands—Hoheisel built into his memorial slab of concrete a radiant heating system to bring it to a constant 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit (36.5 degrees Celsius) that might suggest the body heat of those whose memory it would now enshrine. Visitors almost always kneel to touch the slab, something they would not do if it were cold stone, and they are touched in turn by the human warmth embodied here. Dedicated in April 1995, on the fiftieth anniversary of the prisoners' own memorial (which lasted only two months), this warm memorial reminds visitors of the memory of actual victims that has preceded their own, subsequent memory of this time. In winter, with snow covering the rest of the ground, this slab is always clear, an all-season marker for the site of the prisoners' original attempt to commemorate the crimes against them.



Horst Hoheisel, "Warm memorial" at Buchenwald, detail, 1995.



Horst Hoheisel and Henning Langenheim, "Arbeit macht frei" projection onto the Brandenburger Tor, 27 January 1996.

Christian Boltanski, Micha Ullman, Rachel Whiteread

While taking a walk in Berlin's former Jewish Quarter, the artist Christian Boltanski found himself drawn curiously to the occasional gaps and vacant lots between buildings. On inquiring, he found that the building at Grosse Hamburgerstrasse 15 and 16 had been destroyed by Allied bombings in 1945 and never rebuilt. In a project he mounted for the exhibition *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit* in October 1990 called *Missing House*, the artist thus set to work retracing all the lives of people who had lived in this "missing house" between 1930 and 1945—both the Jewish Germans who had been deported and the non-Jewish Germans who had been given their homes.¹³

Boltanski found family photographs and letters, children's drawings, rationing tickets, and other fragments of these lives, photocopied them, and put them all together with maps of the neighborhood in archival boxes. At this point, he had

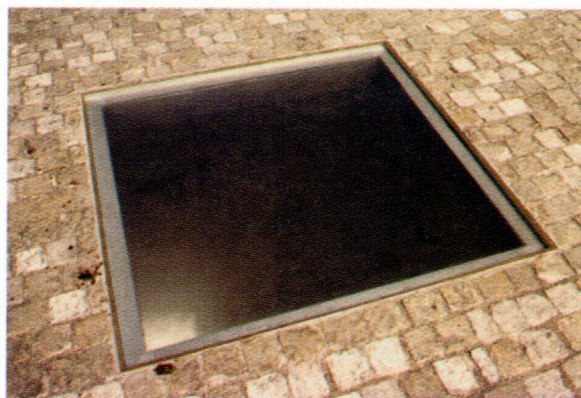
nameplates hung on the white-plastered wall of the building next door to identify the now missing inhabitants, Jews and non-Jews—leaving the lot empty. The *Missing House* project became emblematic for Boltanski of the missing Jews who had once inhabited it; as its void invited him to fill it with memory, he hoped it would incite others to memory as well.

In two other installations, one realized and the other as yet only proposed, artists Micha Ullman and Rachel Whiteread have also turned to both bookish themes and negative spaces in order to represent the void left behind by the "people of the book." To commemorate the infamous Nazi book-burning of 10 May 1933, the city of Berlin invited Micha Ullman, an Israeli-born conceptual and installation artist, to design a monument for Berlin's Bebelplatz. Today the cobblestone expanse of the Bebelplatz is still empty of all forms except for the figures of people who stand there and peer down through a ground-level window into the ghostly white, underground room of empty bookshelves Ullman has installed. A steel tablet set into the stones simply recalls that this was the site of some of the most notorious book-burnings and quotes Heinrich Heine's famously prescient words, "Where books are burned, so one day will people be burned as well." But the shelves are still empty, unreplenished, and it is the absence of both people and books that is marked here in yet one more empty memorial pocket.

Indeed, the English sculptor Rachel Whiteread has proposed casting the very spaces between and around books as the memorial figure by which Austria's missing Jews would be recalled in Vienna's Judenplatz. In a competition initiated by Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal in 1996, a distinguished jury of experts appointed by the city chose a brilliant, if abstract and controversial, design by the Turner Award-winning British artist Rachel Whiteread. Her winning proposal for Vienna's official Holocaust memorial—the positive cast of the space around books in an anonymous library, the interior turned inside-out—thus extends her sculptural predilection for solidifying the spaces over, under, and around everyday objects, even as it makes the book itself her central memorial motif. But even here, it is not the book per se that constitutes her now displaced object of memory but the literal space between the book and us. For as others have already noted, Whiteread's work since 1988 has made brilliantly palpable the notion that materiality can also be an index of absence: whether it is the ghostly apparition of the filled-in space of a now demolished row house in London (*House* launched Whiteread to international prominence) or the proposed cast of the empty space between the book leaves and the wall in a full-size library, Whiteread makes the absence of an original object her work's defining pre-

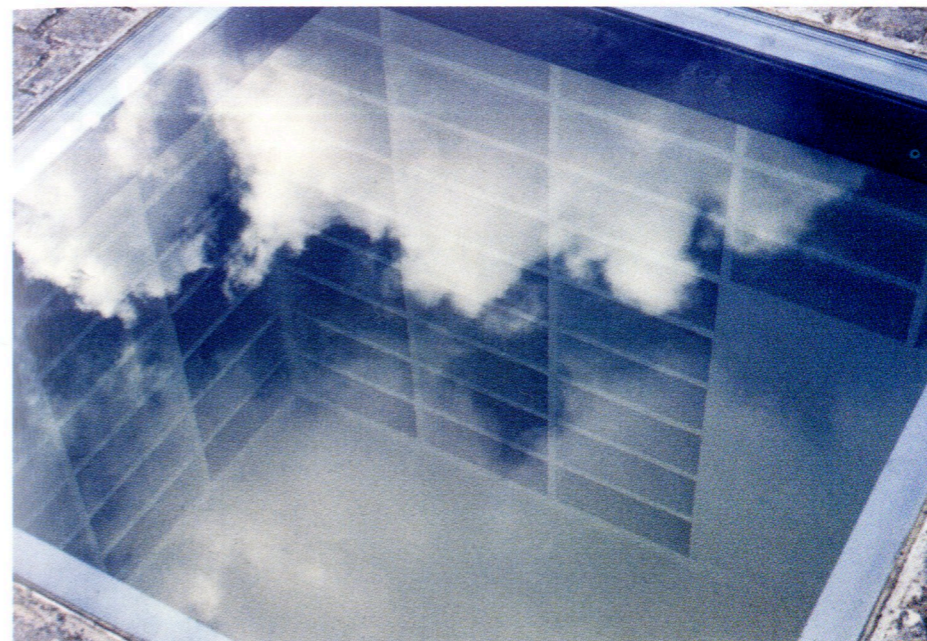


Above, below, and facing page: Micha Ullman, "Bibliothek" memorial to the Nazi book-burnings, Bebelplatz, Berlin, 1996.



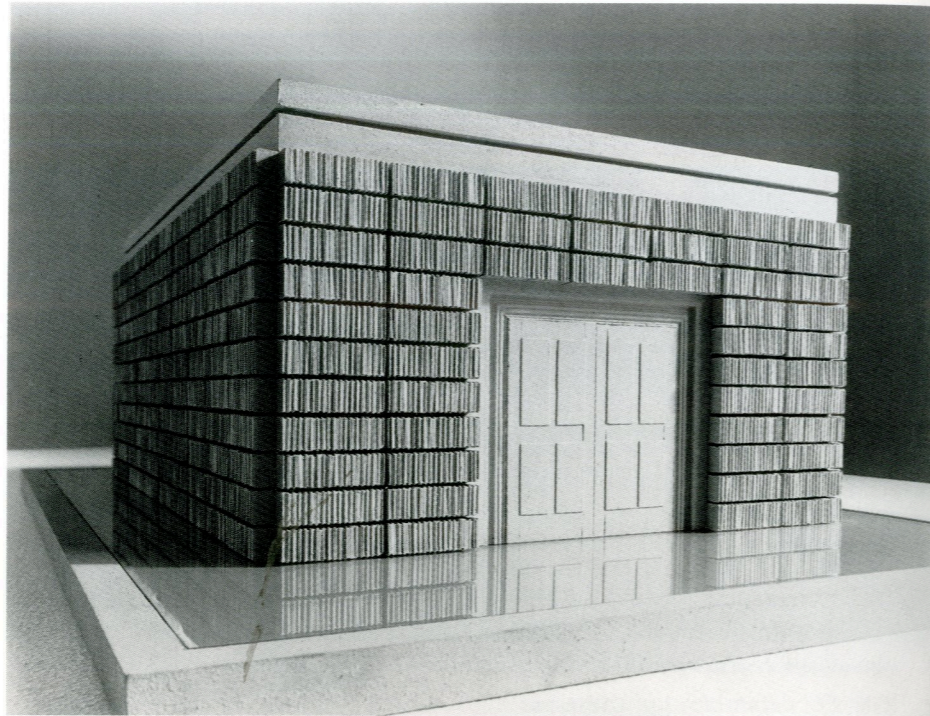
occupation.¹⁴ Like other artists of her generation, Rachel Whiteread is concerned less with the Holocaust's images of destruction and more with the terrible void this destruction left behind.

Given this thematic edge in her work, it is not surprising that Whiteread was one of nine artists and architects initially invited to submit proposals for a Holocaust memorial in Vienna. Other invitees included the Russian installation artist Ilya Kabakov, Israeli architect Zvi Hecker, and the American architect Peter Eisenman. As proposed, Whiteread's cast of a library turned inside-out measures approximately 33 feet by 23 feet, is 13 feet high, and resembles a solid white cube. Its outer surface would consist entirely of the roughly textured negative space next to the edges of book leaves. On the front wall facing onto the square there would be a double-wing door, also cast inside out and inaccessible. In its formalization of absence on one hand and of books on the other, it found an enthusiastic reception among a jury looking for a design that "would combine dignity with reserve and spark an aesthetic dialogue with the past in a place that is replete with history."¹⁵



Despite the jury's unanimous decision to award Whiteread's design first place and to begin its realization immediately, the aesthetic dialogue it very successfully sparked in this place so "replete with history" eventually paralyzed the entire memorial process.

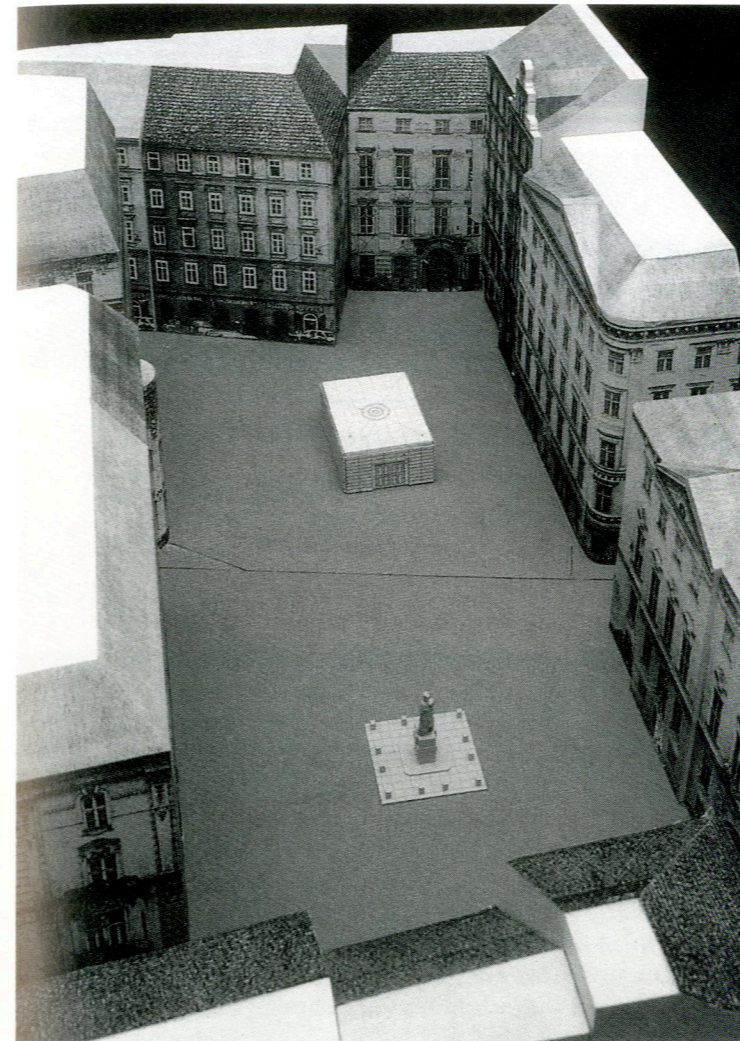
For like many such sites in Vienna, the Judenplatz was layered with the invisible memory of numerous anti-Semitic persecutions—a synagogue was torched here in a pogrom in 1421, and hundreds of Jews died in the autos-da-fé that followed. Though Whiteread's design had left room at the site for a window into the archaeological excavation of this buried past, the shopkeepers on the Judenplatz preferred that these digs into an ancient past also be left to stand for the more recent murder of Austrian Jews as well. And although their anti-Whiteread petition of two thousand names refers only to the lost parking and potential for lost revenue they fear this "giant colossus" will cause, they may also have feared the loss of their own Christian memory of this past. For to date, the sole memorial to this medieval massacre was to be found in a Catholic mural and inscription on a baroque facade overlooking the site of the lost synagogue. Alongside an image of Christ being baptized in the River Jordan, an inscription in Latin reads: "The flame of hate arose in 1421, raged through the entire city, and punished the terrible crimes of the Hebrew dogs."



Rachel Whiteread, scale model of the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna, 1997.

In the end, the reintroduction into this square of a specifically Jewish narrative may have been just as undesirable for the local Viennese as the loss of parking places.

In fact, unlike Germany's near obsession with its Nazi past, Austria's relation to its wartime past has remained decorously submerged, politely out of sight. Austria was a country that had (with the tacit encouragement of its American and Soviet occupiers) practically founded itself on the self-serving myth that it was Hitler's first victim. That some 50 percent of the Nazi S.S. was composed of Austrians or that Hitler himself was Austrian-born was never denied. But these facts also never found a place in Austria's carefully constructed postwar persona. In a city that seemed to have little national reason for remembering the murder of its Jews, the entire memorial project was soon engulfed by aesthetic and political *Sturm und Drang*, and the vociferous arguments against the winning design brought the process to a halt. Maligned and demoralized, Whiteread soon lost her stomach for the



Rachel Whiteread, model for the Judenplatz with inserted Holocaust Memorial, Vienna, 1997.

fight and was resigned, she told me, to the likelihood that her memorial would never be built.

But then suddenly, in early 1998, the city of Vienna announced that a compromise had been found that would allow Whiteread's memorial to be built after all. By moving the great cube three feet within the plaza itself, the city found that there would be room for both the excavations of the pogrom of 1421 and the new memo-

rial to Vienna's more recently murdered Jews. Nonetheless, the debate in Austria has remained curiously displaced and sublimated. Lost in the discussion were the words one of the jurors and a curator at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Robert Storrs, had used to describe what made Whiteread's work so appropriate in the first place. "Rather than a tomb or cenotaph," Storrs wrote,

Whiteread's work is the solid shape of an intangible absence—of a gap in a nation's identity, and a hollow at a city's heart. Using an aesthetic language that speaks simultaneously to tradition and to the future, Whiteread in this way respectfully symbolizes a world whose irrevocable disappearance can never be wholly grasped by those who did not experience it, but whose most lasting monuments are the books written by Austrian Jews before, during and in the aftermath of the catastrophe brought down on them.



Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, *Memorial to the Deported Jewish Citizens of the Bayerische Viertel, Bayerische Platz, Berlin, 1993.*



Juden dürfen am
Bayerischen Platz nur
die gelb markierten
Sitzbänke benutzen.

Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, "At the Bayerische Platz, Jews may sit only on yellow park benches." Part of the memorial installation at the Bayerische Platz, Berlin, 1993.

Rather than monumentalizing only the moment of destruction itself, Whiteread's design would recall that which made the "people of the book" a people: their shared relationship to the past through the book. For it was this shared relationship to a remembered past through the book that bound Jews together, and it was the book that provided the site for this relationship.

Though Whiteread is not Jewish, she has—in good Jewish fashion—cast not a human form but a sign of

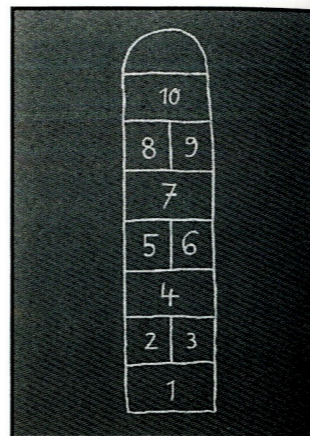
humanity, gesturing silently to the acts of reading, writing, and memory that had once constituted this people as a people. If it is really true that Vienna has chosen to go ahead with Whiteread's allusive and rigorously intellectual design, then the city and its Jewish community must both be congratulated: the Jewish community for the courage and audacity of its aesthetic convictions, and the city for finally bringing boldly to the surface its previously subterranean shame.

Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock

As did the American artist Shimon Attie during his stay in Berlin, the Berlin artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock find their city essentially haunted by its own lying beauty, its most placid and charming neighborhoods seemingly oblivious to the all-too-orderly destruction of its Jewish community during the war. Tree-lined and with its nineteenth-century buildings relatively unscathed by Allied bombs

Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, *Memorial to the Deported Jewish Citizens of the Bayerische Viertel, Bayerische Platz, Berlin, 1993.*

Arischen und nichtarischen Kindern wird das Spielen miteinander untersagt.



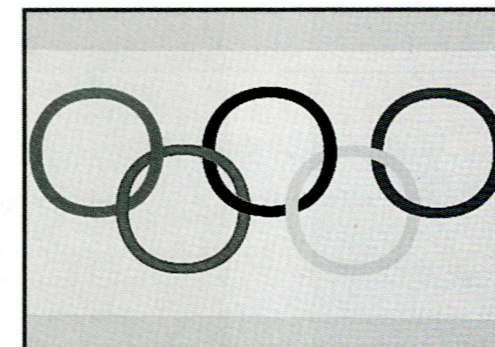
during the war, the Bayerische Viertel (Bavarian Quarter) of Berlin's Schöneberg district is particularly peaceful these days and off the tourist track. It had also been home to some sixteen thousand German Jews before the war, many of them professional and well-to-do, including at different times Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt. But with nary a sign of the war's destruction in evidence, nothing in the neighborhood after the war pointed to the absence of its escaped, deported, and murdered Jewish denizens.

Haunted precisely by this absence of signs, and skeptical of the traditional memorial's tendency to gather what they thought should be pervasive memory into a single spot, Stih and Schnock won a competition in 1993 for a memorial to the neighborhood's murdered Jews with a proposal to mount eighty signposts on the corners, streets, and sidewalks in and around the Bayerische Platz. Each would include a simple image of an everyday object on one side and a short text on the other, excerpted from Germany's anti-Jewish laws of the 1930s and 1940s. On one side of such a sign, pedestrians would see, for example, a hand-drawn sidewalk hopscotch pattern, and on the other its accompanying text: "Ärischen und nichtärtschen Kindern wird das Spielen miteinander untersagt" (1938; Aryan and non-Aryan children are not allowed to play together). Or a simple red park bench on a green lawn: "Juden dürfen am Bayerischen Platz nur die gelb markierten Sitzbänke benutzen" (1939; On the Bavarian Place, Jews may sit only on yellow park benches). Or a pair of swimtrunks: "Berliner Bademanstalten und Schwimmbäder dürfen von Juden nicht betreten werden" (3.12.1938; Baths and swimming pools in Berlin are closed to Jews). A black-and-white rotary telephone dial: "Telefonan-

schlusse von Juden werden von der Post gekündigt" (29.7. 1940; Telephone lines to Jewish households will be cut off).¹⁷

With the approval of the Berlin Senate, which had sponsored the memorial competition, the artists put their signs up on lampposts throughout the quarter without announcement, provoking a flurry of complaints and calls to the police that neo-Nazis had invaded the neighborhood with anti-Semitic signs. Thus reassured that the public had taken notice, the artists pointed out that these same laws had been posted and announced no less publicly at the time—but had provoked no such response by Germans then. At least part of the artists' point was that the laws then were no less public than the memory of them was now. Indeed, one sign with the image of a file even reminds local residents that "all files dealing with anti-Semitic activities [were] to be destroyed" (16.2.1945); and another image of interlocking Olympic rings recalls that "anti-Semitic signs in Berlin [were] temporarily removed for the 1936 Olympic Games." That is, for the artists, even the absence of signs was an extension of the crime itself. Stih and Schnock recognize here that the Nazi persecution of the Jews was designed to be, after all, a self-consuming Holocaust, a self-effacing crime.

The only "signs" of Jewish life in this once Jewish neighborhood are now the posted laws that paved the way for the Jews' deportation and murder. As part of the cityscape, these images and texts would "infiltrate the daily lives of Berliners," Stih has explained, no less than the publicly posted laws curtailed the daily lives of Jews between 1933 and 1945. And by posting these signs separately, forcing pedestrians to happen



Die in Berlin aufgestellten judenfeindlichen Schilder werden 1936 während der Olympischen Spiele vorübergehend entfernt.

Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, *Memorial to the Deported Jewish Citizens of the Bayerische Viertel, Bayerische Platz, Berlin, 1993.*

can't help but become part of the pornographic culture he proposes to be exploring ("Hardly Child's Play").

13. For an elaboration of the ways women's corpses, in particular, have been represented as emblematic in our culture, see Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*.
14. Sontag, *On Photography*, 11–12.
15. These images are available for viewing in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives, WIS nos. 136–138.
16. *Hitler Moves East*, 8.
17. From interview with Woodward in *David Levinthal*, 153.
18. Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism*, 19.

CHAPTER THREE Sites Unseen

1. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 19.
2. Attie, "Writing on the Wall Project," 9.
3. Ibid.
4. Attie quoted in Axelrod, "Time Exposures," 40.
5. Attie quoted in Chazan, "Ghosts of the Ghettos."
6. As related by the artist to the author in an interview. The exchange is also described by Attie in *Writing on the Wall*, 12.
7. Michael André Bernstein, "Shimon Attie," 6.
8. As quoted from a handbill supplied to the author, courtesy of the artist (my translation).
9. See, for example, Ido de Haan's work in Holland, a preview of which I received in a copy of "Invention of a National Trauma," a paper delivered at "Memory and the Second World War," the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation, Amsterdam, 27 April 1995.
10. For more in this vein, see Young, "Anne Frank House," 131–137.
11. As described by Attie in an unpublished project description for "Walk of Fame," provided to the author.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. As described in Palowski, "Retracing Schindler's List," a travel booklet published by Kraków's Ministry of Tourism.
15. Protzman, "Artist Projects a Ghostly Past," 10.
16. Attie, project description for "Walk of Fame."

CHAPTER FOUR Memory, Countermemory, and the End of the Monument

1. Here I elaborate and expand on themes I first explored in "Counter-Monument," 267–296. Also see Young, *Texture of Memory*, 27–48.
2. For a record of this competition, see *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*. For a col-

lection of essays arguing against building this monument, see *Der Wettbewerb für das "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas."*

On his proposal to blow up the *Brandenburger Tor*, see Hoheisel, "Aschrottbrunnen—Denk-Stein-Sammlung—Brandenburger Tor," 253–266.

3. Nietzsche, *Use and Abuse of History*, 14–17.
4. Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, 438.
5. *Ibid.*, 434.
6. Broszat, "Plea for Historicization," 129.
7. Krauss, *Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 280.
8. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 13.
9. Huyssen, "Monument in a Post-Modern Age," 11. Also see Huyssen's elaboration of this essay in his *Twilight Memories*, 249–260.
10. Elsen, *Modern European Sculpture*, 122–125.
11. For elaboration of this theme, see Winzen, "Need for Public Representation," 309–314.
12. From Hoheisel, "Rathaus-Platz-Wunde." Subsequent quotations from Hoheisel on this memorial are drawn from this booklet.
13. See Fischer and Glameier, eds., *Missing House*.
14. See Bradley, ed., *Rachel Whiteread*, 8. Other essays in this exhibition catalogue for the retrospective of Rachel Whiteread's work at the Tate-Liverpool Gallery by Stuart Morgan, Bartomeu Mari, Rosalind Krauss, and Michael Tarantino also explore various aspects of the sculptor's gift for making absence present.
15. *Judenplatz Wien 1996*, 94.
16. *Ibid.*, 109.
17. See Stih and Schnock, *Arbeitsbuch für ein Denkmal in Berlin*.
18. Stih and Schnock, *Bus Stop Fahrplan*, 6.
19. *Ibid.*, 9.
20. Nicolai, "Bus Stop—The Non-Monument," unpaginated brochure on the project published by Stih and Schnock.

CHAPTER FIVE Memory Against Itself in Germany Today

1. As quoted in Lichtenstein and Wajeman's interview, "Jochen Gerz," E-3.
2. In Gerz's difficult-to-translate words,

"Ihr Vorhandensein ist der Beweis ihrer Unverfanglichkeit. Die im Museum Dachau reproduzierten—hier nicht aufgenommen—Beschriftungen aus dem KZ Dachau zeigen, dass die gleiche Funktion den Schriftzeichen eigen ist, im Museum und im KZ. Sie sind das Medium, das beide möglich macht.

"Latent beinhaltet die Beschriftung im KZ Dachau das Museum Dachau und die im Museum das KZ. Sie selbst ist das Dachau-Projekt." From text panel for "EXIT / Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt," Neuer Berliner Kunstverein e.V. Zusammenarbeit mit dem Berliner Kunstlerprogramm des DAAD und den Berliner Festspielen, 1975.
3. This project was reinstalled as part of the mammoth exhibition at the Martin Gropius Bau