Jewish Dimensions in Modern Visual Culture: Antisemitism, Assimilation, Affirmation

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When Daniel Libeskind was named in early 2003 as the master planner in charge of redeveloping the former World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan, most observers saw it as a personal triumph that testified to his newfound status as one of the world’s most respected architects. At the same time, his victory highlighted a phenomenon that was strangely overlooked, but is arguably much broader in significance; namely, the recent rise to prominence of Jews in the western architectural profession.¹

Until recently, Jewish achievements in the field of architecture paled in comparison with those attained by Jews in other cultural fields, such as literature, film, music, and even painting. Although scattered figures like Eric Mendelsohn and Richard Neutra gained recognition as masters of modern architecture in the first half of the century, it has really only been since 1945, and especially since the late 1970s, that Jewish architects have attained notable visibility and prominence as a group. Any survey of contemporary architecture today would be incomplete without mentioning—beyond Libeskind—such Jewish architects as Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier, James Ingo Freed, Eric Owen Moss, Moshe Safdie, Robert A. M. Stern, Stanley Tigerman, and Zvi Hecker, among others.²

It is not merely the Jewish background of these architects that is significant, however. Many of them have been consciously motivated by Jewish concerns and have incorporated Jewish themes in their work, thus making it arguably more “Jewish” in orientation and expression than the work of earlier generations of Jewish architects. To be sure, measuring “Jewishness” in architecture—let alone defining what “Jewish architecture” itself might mean—is fraught with problems.³ Scholars for more than a century have struggled to identify the Jewish qualities of buildings, but they have met with very little success. As a result, the general consensus today is that
a discernibly Jewish form of architecture simply does not exist. The absence of such an architecture has usually been attributed to the Jewish people’s long-standing diasporic existence. Dispersed among diverse countries around the world, the Jews developed an architecture of diversity rather than uniformity. For this reason, some scholars have offered the paradoxical conclusion that Jewish architecture is best defined as the absence of an identifiable style. The general skepticism toward the existence of Jewish architecture is well founded in many ways. But we should hesitate before entirely accepting the claim of the American Jewish architect, Percival Goodman from the early 1960s, that “[if] we look for a ‘Jewish architecture,’ . . . with characteristic themes, spirit, and function, we shall not find it; it is not there to be found.” It may be true that no monolithic “Jewish” style of architecture has emerged since 1945. But the fact that the upsurge in Jewish architectural creativity and productivity shares origins and displays recurring themes permits us to investigate it as a coherent and noteworthy new phenomenon.

In many ways, it is no coincidence that Jewish architects have attained unprecedented success only since 1945: the Jewish architectural productivity of the last generation is, in important ways, part of a complex response to the Holocaust, whose profound impact on Jewish memory and identity has increasingly begun to find architectonic form. Given the profound impact of the Holocaust upon Western culture since 1945, the supposition that the memory of the Nazi genocide has had a significant effect upon postwar Jewish architecture should hardly come as a surprise. In the wake of Theodor Adorno’s famous observation about the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz, countless scholars have explored how novelists, poets, painters, filmmakers, and others have responded to the rupture of the Holocaust in their creative work. Until now, however, scholars have largely ignored the response of architects. To begin to rectify this situation, I compare here how Jewish (as well as certain non-Jewish) architects in the United States and Germany have confronted the Holocaust in their postwar work. In doing so, two different eras quickly become apparent: first, a “modernist” phase lasting from 1945 up through the mid-1970s, in which the Holocaust was largely ignored; and second, a “postmodern” era, lasting from the late 1970s to the present day, in which the Nazi genocide has increasingly been acknowledged. Surveying each of these periods helps to highlight how different generations have wrestled with the Holocaust’s legacy during the postwar era.
Jewish Architecture in the Era of Modernism

In the early decades after 1945, Jewish architecture initially developed in a manner fully consistent with modernism. Most of the architectural activity in these years took place in the United States, where more than one thousand synagogues, Jewish schools, and community centers were built. Far fewer were erected in West Germany, where fewer than twenty new synagogues were built for a drastically reduced Jewish population. The architectural significance of these structures was mixed; while some synagogues were designed by important Jewish and non-Jewish architects — one of the most famous being Frank Lloyd Wright’s Beth Shalom synagogue in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania (1959) — most harbored no avant-garde aspirations and were of only moderate importance. On the whole, Jewish architecture during this period was more generally modern than specifically Jewish. Many synagogues conformed to the pattern of Percival Goodman’s design for the Beth-El congregation in Gary, Indiana (1952–1954), which combined a functionalist structural approach with the inclusion of exterior Jewish ornamentation. Such overt Jewish symbolism was just as often omitted during this era, however, and it is noteworthy that some of the period’s most famous buildings, like Philip Johnson’s 1956 synagogue for the congregation Tifereth Israel in Port Chester, New York, and Minoru Yamasaki’s 1964 North Shore Congregation synagogue in Glencoe, Illinois, gave no signs of being Jewish houses of worship whatsoever.

Given this de-emphasis of Jewish particularity, it is no wonder that the Holocaust was largely ignored by Jewish architects in the United States and Germany. Rather than fundamentally rethink their architectural principles in the wake of the Nazi genocide, American Jewish architects such as Eric Mendelsohn and Percival Goodman, like their German Jewish colleagues Hermann Zvi Guttmann and Helmut Goldschmidt, continued to design in a cool, restrained, and neutral modernist idiom, producing open, light-filled structures expressing hope rather than despair. Jewish architects generally shared the views of Mendelsohn, who in 1947 declared the need to “lift the mind of our people” and design houses “of joy, light, and serene festivity. No more persecution and Jewish misery, no pessimism, but the affirmation of the age of man.”

This general reluctance to confront the Holocaust was rooted in a variety of factors. For one thing, the state of architecture as a discipline during the years of modernist hegemony largely prevented Jewish architects from
dealing with the Holocaust. Since its inception, modern architecture had been hostile to both history and memory. As with the field of art, architecture in the early postwar era strove for a formally abstract language of universal validity and shunned all historical references and expressions of particularism. In such a climate, Jews in the world of arts and letters who attempted to confront such a historically specific event as the Holocaust ran the risk of being branded ethnically specific, parochial, and thus irrelevant. Architecture, moreover, was a field whose members during this period were temperamentally unsuited to confront the horrors of the Nazi genocide. Unlike modernist writers, poets, or painters, modern architects belonged to a discipline that remained supremely confident about modernity and the ability of technology to bring about utopian change. Jewish architects who wanted to remain in the architectural mainstream, therefore, needed to remain focused on the future rather than the past.

The avoidance of the Holocaust by Jewish architects, however, was also rooted in broader psychological and social trends that existed within the postwar Jewish community. Unsurprisingly, there existed a deep Jewish desire for emotional consolation in the wake of the Nazi genocide. This need profoundly informed the work of many Jewish architects. Thus, Hermann Zvi Guttmann concluded that “after all that has happened,” it would be improper to build synagogues with a “grim” atmosphere; instead, it was necessary to provide a “sense of security.” Designing synagogues that incorporated ample light and “exuded a bright modernity” as Helmut Goldschmidt put it, was one way that Jewish architects tried to console their co-religionists. At the same time, it was not only the psychological desire for consolation that explains the avoidance of the Holocaust in early postwar Jewish architecture. It was also a by-product of the social ambitions of postwar Jews—particularly in the United States, whose upwardly mobile Jewish population after 1945 eagerly sought to integrate into the broader American mainstream. It is striking, for example, that the intense early postwar discussion in the United States about creating a new Jewish architecture completely ignored the Holocaust and instead featured telling predictions about how postwar synagogue design would surely be “expressive of America.” It was for different reasons, therefore—German Jews’ desperation for consolation and American Jews’ eagerness for integration—that the Holocaust was avoided in early postwar architecture.

Only in rare instances was the Holocaust acknowledged in modern architecture and then usually in oblique fashion. Hermann Zvi Guttmann
deliberately utilized parabolic forms in his postwar synagogue designs — for example, his Hannover synagogue from 1963 — as a means of reminding human beings in the post-Holocaust world about the “limits of human ambition” and the dangers of “striving…for divine infinity.”

In a more symbolic vein, Percival Goodman incorporated the motif of the burning bush on the exterior of his synagogue for the congregation B’nai Israel in Milburn, New Jersey (1955) to provide an uplifting message of Jewish rebirth after destruction (the bush, like the Jewish people, was burned but not consumed). Finally, in scattered cases, fragments from Nazi-destroyed synagogue were integrated as reminders of the past into postwar structures, as in the postwar Jewish community center on the Fasanenstrasse in Berlin (1961). These exceptions aside, Jewish architecture during this era largely adhered to modernism’s famed hostility to history and memory.

_Jewish Architecture in the Wake of Postmodernism_

With the emergence of the more historically sensitive movement of postmodern architecture after the 1970s, however, Jewish architects suddenly discovered the Holocaust and began to incorporate its legacy into their work. As is well known, the emergence of postmodernism served a liberating function for architecture worldwide by shattering modernist taboos against historical reference. By encouraging the revival of bygone architectural styles, it returned architecture to history — in the process, encouraging architects to become more historically minded. It was predictable, perhaps, that this revival of historical awareness would eventually help lead architects — especially Jewish ones — to rediscover the Holocaust. Indeed, there was an upsurge in Holocaust consciousness throughout the Western world at precisely the same time: the NBC broadcast of the television miniseries _Holocaust_ and the commissioning of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 being two of the more notable examples. Moreover, as the Nazi genocide increasingly became regarded as an event possessing universal significance — as a major rupture in Western civilization and, thus, a harbinger of postmodernity — it lost the parochial associations that had discouraged Jews in the world of arts and letters from confronting it. In addition, it was emotionally easier for architects to explore the Holocaust in their work thirty years after its conclusion than in its immediate aftermath. Confronting such a horrific event, finally, fit the bleak mood of the era — a time that, in stark
contrast to the heady years of the early postwar economic boom, was defined by economic stagnation, a waning faith in progress, and a general disaffection with the modern world. In short, like society in general, architects by the late 1970s were both emotionally better able, as well as psychologically more willing, to explore the dark sides of recent history in their work.

This willingness to confront the Holocaust found its clearest expression in the architectural movement known as deconstructivism. Emerging to great fanfare in the late 1980s, deconstructivism was distinguished not only by its large number of Jewish representatives — Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, and Frank Gehry were widely regarded as among its founding members — but by the deep conviction of some of them that the Holocaust constituted a rupture in the history of Western civilization that required architects to radically rethink the fundamental principles of their profession.22 Eisenman was the chief proponent of this position, arguing that the Nazi genocide had helped inaugurate a new postmodern, posthumanist era that needed to find suitable expression in architectural form.23 Thus, whereas Western architecture had classically been oriented toward stability, “presence,” and purity, architecture after the Holocaust needed to depict instability, “absence,” fragmentation, and loss.24 Only by overturning the time-honored principles of Western architecture, in short, could architects honestly begin to depict the bleak reality of the postmodern, posthumanist, post-Holocaust world.

For years, the deconstructivist agenda remained purely theoretical and restricted to provocative designs on paper, but by the late 1980s and especially during the last decade, it began to find physical expression in a variety of architectural works around the world. Eisenman’s work in these years vividly exhibited deconstructivism’s aesthetics of anxiety in buildings such as his Wexner Center for the Visual Arts in Columbus, Ohio (1988) — which evoked both absence and fragmentation with the resurrected “ghost” tower of the former armory that once stood at the site — and his Nunotani Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan (1992), whose skewed design vividly exuded a sense of instability if not imminent collapse.25 These works, to be sure, bore no overt relationship to the Holocaust, but others did: for example, Eisenman’s 1992 design for the Max Reinhardt House in Berlin (dedicated to the influential German Jewish theater director who was forced into exile by the Nazi regime) and his design for Germany’s recently completed Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (fig. 12.1).26 Even more indebted to the Holocaust than Eisenman’s deconstructivist
buildings are those of Daniel Libeskind. Both the internationally hailed Jewish Museum in Berlin (2001) (fig. 12.2), and his museum to the slain Jewish painter, Felix Nussbaum, in Osnabrück (1998), bore numerous complex references to the Holocaust. The architecture of both of these buildings is strongly narrative in nature and conveys a disquieting message through the use of sharply meandering floor plans, abrupt dead ends, unfinished materials, and symbolic flourishes, such as the Berlin museum’s dominant “void” commemorating the city’s murdered Jews. Libeskind’s deconstructivist inclination to evoke absence and loss was arguably decisive, furthermore, in helping him to win the competition to redevelop the former site.
of the World Trade Center; his design, as is well known, took pains to document the site’s destruction by preserving the scarred slurry wall surrounding it. In short, the movement of deconstructivism is a prime example of how the memory of the Holocaust has directly shaped the new Jewish architectural creativity.
That being said, the question inevitably arises, Why did certain Jewish architects only become sensitized to the Holocaust forty years after its occurrence? The arrival of the historically minded movement of postmodernism and its challenge to modernist hegemony, of course, was crucial in empowering Jewish architects to draw upon the tragedies of recent Jewish history in their work. But their particular personal backgrounds were also important. Daniel Libeskind’s identity as the child of Holocaust survivors (born in 1946), for example, helps explain his long-standing interest in the Nazi genocide and its significance for his architectural practice. By contrast, Jewish architects of an older generation, such as Eisenman and Gehry (born in 1932 and 1929, respectively) became interested in the Holocaust only later in their careers, in keeping with the growing interest in the subject within the society at large. Yet they too have had personal reasons for reconnecting with the Jewish tragedy. Both Eisenman and Gehry have described childhood experiences with antisemitism as related to the radical course of their architectural work. Eisenman has described his entire opposition to the classical architectural tradition as rooted in his sense of being a Jewish “outsider.” And Gehry has famously attributed his recurrent use of the fish motif — seen in his fish lamps of the 1980s, his fish sculpture at the Barcelona Olympics (1992), and the signature metallic “scales” that clad most of his contemporary buildings, such as the Guggenheim museum at Bilbao, Spain (1997) — to antisemitic tauntings experienced as a youth (Gehry, born Goldberg, was made fun of as “Fishhead”). He has also described the “fragile” and “provisional” character of his buildings as a reflection of his insecurity that he has long felt as a Jew in the post-Holocaust world. (In a rare disclosure, Gehry revealed to the German newspaper Die Zeit in 2003 that many of his Polish relatives fell victim to the Nazi genocide.)

Neither Eisenman nor Gehry are affiliated Jews in a traditional sense (both are intermarried and profess to not being religious), but it is clear that their sense of outsidersness, rooted partly in early encounters with antisemitism, helped to lead led them down the path of innovation. That both have recently turned to projects linked to the Holocaust (Eisenman’s involvement with the Berlin Holocaust memorial has already been mentioned; Gehry was recently commissioned to design the new branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem and had also been slated to design the new Museum of the History of the Polish Jews on the site of the old Jewish ghetto in Warsaw until recently quitting) confirms their sense of Jewish identity in the post-Holocaust world.
Beyond the movement of deconstructivism, the memory of the Nazi genocide has been crucial in giving rise to a new subgenre of architecture possessing its own distinctive style: Holocaust museums. Buildings such as James Ingo Freed’s National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (1993), Murphy/Mears Architects’ Houston Holocaust Museum (1996), Kevin Roche’s Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City (1997), and Neumann/Smith and Associates Holocaust Memorial Center in Detroit (2004) have all drawn upon the Holocaust’s horrific history to produce a highly metaphorical and symbolic architecture that is unique in contemporary architectural practice. Among the common design features of these buildings are hexagonal shapes to commemorate the six million Jews killed by the Nazis, the frequent use of materials characteristic of concentration camps, such as brick and steel, the abstract evocation of ominous forms, such as guard towers or smokestacks, and the symbolic use of interpenetrating light and dark space. In their very design, such museums attempt to communicate in symbolic form what their exhibits do in more literal and historical fashion.

Apart from museums, the memory of the Holocaust has even begun to penetrate the design of Jewish communal structures like synagogues and community centers. Until recently, references to the Holocaust had been rare in such buildings, but they have become more visible of late. One of the first was Salomon Korn’s Jewish community center in Frankfurt (1986), which displays a cracked tablet from the Ten Commandments — a gesture recently echoed by the overtly cracked Aron Kodesh in Alfred Jacoby’s new synagogue in Kassel (2000). In a different vein, newly built synagogues, such as Wandel, Hoefer, Lorch and Hirsch’s Neue Synagoge in Dresden (2001) and Busmann and Haberer’s Jewish-Christian Meeting Hall in Wuppertal (1993) have acknowledged the on-site remnants of former synagogues destroyed by the Nazis on Kristallnacht. This trend has also surfaced in the United States, for example, in Herbert S. Newman and Partners Jewish Religious Center, at Williams College, in Williamstown, Massachusetts (1991), which intentionally alludes to Nazi death camps through its multiple chimneys.

Finally, the rediscovery and reincorporation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Polish wooden synagogue architecture in contemporary Jewish structures reflects the ongoing shadow of the Holocaust. This architecture, the closest that European Jews ever came to developing a unique Jewish architectural style, has served as inspiration for recent archi-
tectural projects in the United States, most notably Allen Moore’s National Yiddish Book Center (1997) (fig. 12.3), and synagogues such as M. Louis Goodman’s Temple Israel in Greenfield, Massachusetts (1989) and Norman Jaffe’s Gates of the Grove Synagogue in East Hampton, New York (1990). In one sense, to be sure, this trend simply reflects the postmodern revival of a bygone historical style. Yet it also represents nostalgia for a body of architecture maliciously and nearly entirely destroyed by the Nazis in World War II. This longing was made clear in the recent plan (which has since collapsed) of the modern Orthodox congregation, Beth Israel, in
Berkeley, California to reconstruct from scratch the wooden synagogue of the Polish village of Przedborz, which was destroyed in 1942. In this sense, the resurrection of Polish wooden synagogue architecture represents yet another sign of the Holocaust’s mnemonic legacy.

To be sure, contemporary Jewish architecture does not solely reflect the nightmares of Jewish memory; it also expresses the desire for a positive sense of Jewish identity. In recent years there has emerged a newfound interest among Jewish architects in exploring the concept of “Jewish space” in their designs for various buildings. Peter Eisenman’s 1996 plan for the San Francisco Jewish Museum was driven by this goal, while Daniel Libeskind (who ended up getting the commission for the job, which is now under construction) based his winning design around the affirmative slogan, “l’chaim,” and the specific letters “het” and “yud.” Other designs have similarly been founded upon the Hebrew words for larger Jewish concepts, such as Libeskind’s Danish Jewish Museum (2004), which is predicated upon the idea of “mitzvah,” and Manuel Herz’s design for the new synagogue of Mainz, whose form is based upon the five Hebrew letters that spell “kedusha,” or blessing. Still other works have evoked optimism through specific Jewish symbols, such as Zvi Hecker’s Jewish community center in Duisburg (1999), which is designed in the form of an open book, explicitly echoing the centrality of textual learning in Jewish life. All of these examples demonstrate the vitality of Jewish architecture independent of the influence of the Holocaust.

On balance, the recent rise of what might legitimately be called the “new Jewish architecture” has complex implications for contemporary Jewish life in the Diaspora. On the one hand, it may be seen as a reflection of increasing Jewish assimilation. For centuries, the inability of Jews to find acceptance by, and assimilate fully into, gentile society prevented them from attaining one of the most important preconditions for developing their own style of architecture: a sense of security rooted in sovereignty over space. In the years since 1945, however, these conditions of insecurity have largely disappeared in the United States and Germany with the waning of antisemitism and the increasing acceptance of Jews into mainstream society. Especially as Jews began entering the once restricted field of architecture in greater numbers, moreover, and especially as their sense of security increased, it was probably only a matter of time before they began to exhibit a greater willingness to express a sense of Jewishness in built form.
The new Jewish architecture is thus partly the result of a greater sense of self-confidence rooted in the diminished “outsider” status of Jews.

Nonetheless, this outsider status persists today in light of the Holocaust’s importance in shaping postwar Jewish architecture. As Jewish architects have increasingly begun to wrestle with the catastrophic low point of modern Jewish history in their work, they have continued to underscore an enduring Jewish sense of apartness and vulnerability. Of course, embracing a sense of “outsider” identity has become much more accepted in our contemporary postmodern world, whose celebration of multicultural difference has helped encourage Jews to depict their distinct identity in particularistic architectural form. Paradoxical as it may be, then, the new Jewish architecture seems to be rooted in a mind-set situated between a traumatic past and a self-confident present.

Beyond its relevance to contemporary Jewish identity, the new Jewish architecture also sheds light on the ongoing scholarly discussion about periodizing the evolution of Holocaust memory. Since the appearance of Peter Novick’s controversial *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999), scholars have increasingly begun to explore when exactly the Holocaust assumed such a central place in American (and Western) consciousness. Novick, as is well known, argued that the awareness of the Holocaust has intensified the more the event has receded into the past, asserting that it only gained widespread attention after the late 1960s and early 1970s when it was instrumentally embraced by various Jewish groups to shore up flagging Jewish identity and increase support for Israel. Other scholars, to be sure, have challenged this claim, and some, such as Lawrence Baron, have recently argued that Holocaust consciousness was already highly developed in the United States during the 1950s.

The case of architecture reveals a very different picture. Awareness of the Holocaust within the field of architecture developed long after the eras identified by either Baron or Novick; that is, not until the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, of all the major fields of cultural endeavor—film, literature, art, theater, poetry, among others—architecture has arguably been the last to take note of the Holocaust. As discussed above, factors unique to architecture as a discipline have largely been responsible for this: the most important being that architects were only able to face the historical implications of the Nazi genocide for their profession after they became re-sensitized to history itself following the collapse of modernism and the rise of postmodernism after the late 1970s.
The significance of architecture’s belated recognition of the Holocaust, however, is more difficult to ascertain. It would clearly be absurd to draw larger conclusions about Holocaust memory in general from the particular case of architecture alone. Doing so would engage in the same selective use of evidence that has partly contributed to the scholarly dispute about periodizing the evolution of Holocaust consciousness. Even so, architecture’s exceptional character hardly diminishes its relevance. Its late confrontation with the Holocaust only throws into sharper relief the particular factors that have guided other areas of postwar culture in their own confrontation with the Nazi genocide. In the end, then, the case of architecture offers us the useful methodological lesson that it is only through the adoption of the broadest kind of comparative analytical framework, incorporating all of the arts, that we shall be better able to understand the full extent of the Holocaust’s cultural legacy.

NOTES


2. This list omits Louis Kahn, who gained widespread acclaim only in the 1960s and stands as something of a transitional figure between the prewar modernists like Mendelsohn and the postwar architects who gained recognition after the advent of postmodernism.


6. Very few observers have noted this connection, let alone explored it in sufficient
detail. For an exception, see Betsky, “Building Absence.” This is not to say that other important factors were not involved as well. This essay is solely focused on highlighting the role of Holocaust memory in what is certainly an overdetermined trend.


12. Matthew Baigell has pointed out how Jewish artists similarly avoided the Holocaust in the early postwar years for fear of being branded overparochial; Baigell, Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust, 18–22.

13. Within modern literature, poetry, and art, various figures—Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, George Grosz, to name but a few—had long recognized the dark side of modernity and had confronted it in their creative work.

14. To a degree, some Jewish architects acknowledged the Holocaust precisely by adopting a kind of forward-looking mentality. Thus, the important postwar American Jewish synagogue architect, Percival Goodman, was motivated by the Nazi genocide to switch over from designing secular buildings, like department stores, to synagogues. In the process, he affirmed Jewish renewal after disaster. Taylor Stoehr, “The Goodman Brothers and Communitas,” in Percival Goodman: Architect, Planner, Teacher, Painter (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2001), 43.

15. Gutmann, “Is There a Jewish Art?” 103, 33. Carol Krinsky has similarly argued that after 1945, “an aesthetic emphasizing rationality was appealing to counteract the terrifying madness of the Holocaust”; Synagogues of Europe, 99.

To be sure, this desire for security was also rooted in anxieties about the present, most notably about the danger of nuclear war. Thus, Guttmann added that “in our era in which extermination is a daily occurrence, fear should be kept away from a house of god”; Guttmann, “Is There a Jewish Art,” 47. Percival Goodman also saw synagogue design, like religion in general, as a source of solace during a time in which “our scientists have invented a demon in a little bottle.” Richard Meier, ed., Recent American Synagogue Architecture (New York: Jewish Museum, 1963), 22.


The parabola, which ascends only to crest and then descends, differs from more emphatic linearity of skyscrapers and other vertical structures. Hermann Zvi Guttmann, Vom Tempel zum Gemeindezentrum: Synagogen im Nachkriegsdeutschland (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 11, 61.

The bush was designed by artists Herbert Ferber. Avram Kampf, Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945–1965 (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1966), 79. In this synagogue, the memory of the Holocaust was further acknowledged by the presence of two cornerstones from two Nazi-destroyed synagogues from Mannheim, Germany; Kampf, ibid., 82–84. See also Wong, “Synagogue Art of the 1950s,” 37–43.

This was especially true of theoreticians of postmodernism like Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard. For more, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, eds., Postmodernism and the Holocaust (Amsterdam, 1994), 265–286.


Eisenman affirmed the birth of a posthumanist world as early as 1976 in his famous essay “Post-Functionalism.” Peter Eisenman, “Editorial: Post-Functionalism,” Oppositions (Fall 1976), n.p. By the end of the decade, and especially during the early 1980s, he identified the Holocaust as one of the primary causes of the birth of the posthumanist and postmodern world. See Peter Eisenman, “The Futility of Objects: Decom-


28. It is important to stress that deconstructivism was opposed to postmodernism in many respects, especially to the latter’s nostalgic revival of history. That being said, postmodernism’s rebellion against modernism was crucial for paving the way for deconstructivism.


30. Eisenman noted, “as a Jew and an ‘outsider,’ I have never felt a part of that ‘classical’ world.” *Skyline* (February 1983): 14. Eisenman’s sense of being an outsider was doubtlessly linked to his own experiences of antisemitism growing up in New Jersey. See his remarks to this effect in “Creating a Jewish Sense of Space,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 8 December 1996, p. 51.

31. Calvin Tomkins, “The Maverick,” *New Yorker* (7 July 1997): 41. Gehry’s use of fish symbols has frequently been discussed, though usually in the context of the more humorous story of how his grandmother used to keep live carp in the family bathtub to prepare as gefilte fish. See Daniel Belasco, “Go Fish: The Secret to Architect Frank Gehry’s Genius? Grandma’s Gefilte,” *Jewish Week*, 29 June 2001. Gehry has also described the fish as a symbol of his break with the classical architectural tradition.

32. “Many of my relatives who hailed from Poland,” he declared, “died in the Holocaust. As a Jew…, the thought haunts me that at any moment another Hitler can come along and stick you in the oven…. As you can see,” he concluded, “I have been affected, and so presumably my buildings.” “Häuser zum Abheben,” *Hanno Rauerberg interview with Frank Gehry, Die Zeit*, 3 July 2003.

33. Like Eisenman, Gehry’s Jewishness made him feel something of an outsider in
the architectural profession. Fears of anti-Semitism, indeed, led him to change name from Goldberg; he was afraid that he would not get any work as an architect with an overtly Jewish surname. Not surprisingly, his sense of Jewish identity ever since has been ambivalent. Gehry recently remarked, "I don't believe in religion anymore. I go to a Catholic Church with my wife." "Towering Vision," New York Times Magazine, 1 May 2003, p. 11. At the same time, he has described himself as "a do-gooder Jewish liberal to the core." Paul Goldberger, "The Masterpieces They Call Home," New York Times Magazine, 12 March 1995, p. 44.


35. It has also been controversial at times. Some have criticized the design of the new Detroit museum as too bleak. "Should a Museum Look as Disturbing as What it Portrays?" Wall Street Journal, 8 October 2003, p. 1.


45. Sed-Rajna, Jewish Art, 165.


48. The irony, of course, was that it would not be postmodern architects who took up this task — their embrace of history was far too nostalgic — but rather deconstructivists whose far bleaker historical vision led them to insist on the need to overturn their profession’s fundamental principles.