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# Book Review: Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witnessing Era edited by Diana Popescu and Tanja Schult

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This volume features eighteen theoretically informed essays written mostly by younger European scholars who participated in the international conference, „Holocaust Memory Revisited,“ in Uppsala, Sweden in March of 2013.<sup>1</sup> As is true of many volumes published on the heels of academic conferences, the essays span a wide range of topics and relate to one another on an inconsistent basis. They all ostensibly address the relevance of the imagination in representing the Holocaust, exploring the relationship through different literary texts, films, comics, artworks, and memorials. The larger conclusion that they arrive at is that a larger shift is underway from first-hand memory to mediated memory. This conclusion will not come as a surprise to specialists in the field of Holocaust studies, but scholars will benefit from the individual insights that can be found in the case studies.

Given the impossibility of providing an in-depth discussion of the volume's eighteen essays, it is easiest to describe how they are thematically organized and analytically focused. The first group of essays deals with the aesthetics of Holocaust commemoration. Ernst van Alphen discusses what he describes as the increasingly popular „archival mode“ of commemorating the Holocaust through lists, discussing examples such as Yad Vashem's Hall of Names and the obsessive work of artist Christian Boltanski, to suggest that lists limit the Holocaust's unimaginability. Jacob Lund discusses how the commemorative installations of Esther Shalev-Gerz, particularly *Between Listening and Telling* (2005)<sup>2</sup>, address the methods of memory transmission and show how video footage of survivors' silences and gestures filmed during their testimonies reflect the struggle to find adequate words to represent the Nazi genocide. James E. Young once again surveys the history of counter-monuments in Israel and Germany, explor-

ing how Shalev-Gerz's *Between Listening and Telling* thematizes the deep memory of Holocaust survivors, which may be irretrievably gone once they pass away for good. Imke Girßmann respectively compares the centralized and decentralized memory cultures of Berlin and Munich, examining the concentration of memorials in the heart of the national capital alongside the Bavarian metropolis's recent approval of Michaela Melián's web-based application, *Memory Loops*, which created 300 audio tracks linked to important urban sites from the Nazi era.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Tracy Jean Rosenberg explores the blurring of sacred and profane space in Berlin's Holocaust memorial landscape, showing how Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* and Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe bring the Nazi genocide into everyday German public space.

The second group of essays deals with sites of Holocaust memory and representation. Tim Cole addresses the topic of Holocaust tourism, showing, among other things, that while contemporary guidebooks describe Auschwitz as a place where visitors can encounter the „reality“ of the Holocaust, the reality that contemporary visitors – including survivors – encounter is, in fact, considerably less than wholly authentic, given changes to the camp during and since the war. Tanja Schult examines the works of artists, Patrick Nilsson, Aleksandra Kucharska, and Mikolaj Grynberg, and shows how their uncertainty about the task of representation contrasts with the moral certainty of official modes of remembrance. Jan Borowicz explores the fictional theme of Holocaust zombies in such works as Igor Ostachowicz's 2012 novel, *Night of the Living Jews*, to show how Polish society's failure to mourn Jewish Holocaust victims transforms them into the undead dead. Erica Lehrer and Magdalena Waligórska examine Jewish-organized counter-marches to the official Is-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the conference report by Hampus Östh Gustafsson, in: H-Soz-Kult, May 28, 2013, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-4832>> (15.11.2015).

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.shalev-gerz.net/?portfolio=between-listening-and-telling>> (15.11.2015).

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.memoryloops.net/en#!/start/>> (15.11.2015).

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raeli youth pilgrimages held in Warsaw's Muranow neighborhood as a method of making the task of commemoration less exclusive and accusatory, thereby enabling ordinary Poles to take part in remembrance activities. Finally, Ceri Eldin examines how the Swedish artist Felice Hapetzeder's video installation, *The Limits of Forgiveness*, poses questions, but provides no answers, about how and whether family connections to the Nazi era can be forgiven.<sup>4</sup>

The third group of essays deals with the aesthetics of Holocaust film and literature. Hampus Östh Gustafsson discusses how novels by writers such as Bodil Malmsten employ Auschwitz as a universal signifier and contend with the theoretical reflections of Theodor W. Adorno about post-Auschwitz cultural creativity. Elizabeth M. Ward examines how the aesthetics of Uwe Boll's film, *Auschwitz* (2011), contrasts with more mainstream cinematic works, such as *Schindler's List* (1994), by evading questions of perpetrator motivation and by making flawed claims to authenticity. Ingrid Lewis examines the portrayal of ordinary female perpetrators in the films, *The Reader* (2008) and *Downfall* (2004), showing how the perpetrators' relatively normal descent into criminality allows viewers to relate the Holocaust to contemporary problems and dilemmas. Finally, Christine Gundermann takes a critical look at Holocaust-themed graphic novels, such as Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* (2004) and Eric Heuvel's *The Search* (2009), depicting the contradiction between their effort to import educational lessons and their de facto reproduction of national myths.

The final group of essays deals with public debates and EU policy regarding Holocaust commemoration. Christian Karner examines the relationship of Austria's present-day Jewish community to the Holocaust, as seen in works of literature and debates about circumcision, arguing that Jewish memory is a form of subaltern memory. Kristin Wagrell casts a critical eye on the Swedish Living History Forum's left-leaning politicization of Holocaust memory for the purpose of public relations. And Larissa Allwork discusses the Stockholm International Forum's well-known Declaration about Holocaust education (2000)

as a crucial step towards establishing Holocaust memory as part of Europe's civil religion.

Aside from scattered translation gaffes and awkward stylistic formulations, the essays are generally well written and informative. Those interested in high theory will be particularly pleased with the essay's interdisciplinary application of theoretical concepts to key questions of Holocaust representation. The volume does not feature a conclusion and thus refrains from tying together the various contributions into a larger thesis about where we stand in the evolution of cultural memory. But it directs attention to little known cultural works and therefore performs a useful function for interested readers.

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<sup>4</sup> <<http://hapetzeder.com/lof.html>> (15.11.2015).