

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

History Theses

Department of History

5-12-2005

The Politics of Memory in the Jüdisches Museum Berlin, 1999-2004: Curatorial Strategies, Exhibition Spaces, and the German-Jewish Past

Brian J. Miller

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/history_theses

Recommended Citation

Miller, Brian J., "The Politics of Memory in the Jüdisches Museum Berlin, 1999-2004: Curatorial Strategies, Exhibition Spaces, and the German-Jewish Past." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2005. doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1059608>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN THE JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN, 1999-2004:
CURATORIAL STRATEGIES, EXHIBITION SPACES, AND THE GERMAN-JEWISH PAST

by

Brian Joseph Miller

Under the Direction of Joseph B. Perry

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores representations of the Holocaust in the Jewish Museum Berlin and the impact of commercialism on representational choices. Daniel Libeskind's bold architectural design, which ultimately became the Jewish Museum Berlin, is in many ways a Holocaust memorial. By exploring curatorial strategies in regards to exhibition design and content, this thesis analyzes the debates within the Jewish Museum Berlin over the *appropriate* manner to represent the Holocaust to the museum-going public in contemporary Germany. This thesis argues that commercialism and the prospects of commercial viability played a significant role in curatorial decisions concerning exhibition narrative. Germany leads the world in acknowledging and exploring their past social crimes but, this thesis argues, an important opportunity for atonement was lost when the administration of the Jewish Museum Berlin privileged commercial success over the presentation of more difficult and uncomfortable, yet socially necessary, representations of the horror of the Holocaust.

INDEX WORDS: Jewish Museum Berlin, Curatorial strategies, Holocaust, Commercialism, Memory studies, Museological practices and pedagogy, Commemoration practices, Visitor marketing research

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN THE JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN, 1999-2004:
CURATORIAL STRATEGIES, EXHIBITION SPACES, AND THE GERMAN-JEWISH PAST

by

BRIAN JOSEPH MILLER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Georgia State University

2005

Copyright by
Brian Joseph Miller
2005

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN THE JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN, 1999-2004:
CURATORIAL STRATEGIES, EXHIBITION SPACES, AND THE GERMAN-JEWISH PAST

by

BRIAN J. MILLER

Major Professor:
Committee:

Joseph B. Perry
Jared Poley
Hugh D. Hudson, Jr.

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2005

Acknowledgments

Without the guidance and generous assistance of Dr. Joseph Perry this project would not have been possible. His suggestions, editing and insightful thoughts on this thesis have been invaluable. I also want to thank Dr. Jared Poley who gave me the initial spark of an idea that eventually became this thesis. Fellow graduate students Hal Hansen, Kevin Goldberg, Casey Cater, Florian Schwieger and the other participants in the German Studies Writing Seminar were always ready to read my drafts and discuss ideas as I worked through my thoughts during this project. Thank you all.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Nigel Cox, Christiane Birkert and the entire staff of the Jewish Museum Berlin who opened their doors to me and allowed me access to museum records.

I want to thank my entire family, the Millers, the Boyds, the Biesmeyers and the Burgers who I could always turn to for a smile when I was feeling overwhelmed. I have also been fortunate to have an understanding co-worker and friend in Tricia Rackliffe who patiently gave me the time I needed to research and write this thesis. Thank you Tricia. My parents, Robin and Marty Miller, who have always encouraged me to follow my dreams, deserve and have my deepest love and respect. It is to you that I dedicate this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTERS:	
1. A Formative Strategy for the Investigation of Memory Construction in the Jewish Museum Berlin	10
Towards a Model of System and Practice	11
Texts of Memory: Framing the Holocaust	17
Sites of Memory: Constructing Holocaust Representations	22
2. A Market-Driven Exhibition: Holocaust Fatigue and the Use of Visitor Market Research in the Jewish Museum Berlin	29
Stranger, Guest or Client: Conceptions of Museum Visitation	32
History of Visitor Marketing Research in Germany	35
Visitor Marketing Research: the JMB Example	42
3. The Commercialization of a Museum: Branding and Exhibition Strategies in the Jewish Museum Berlin	57
Shifting Operation Strategies in the Jewish Museum Berlin	60
Branding in the Jewish Museum Berlin	65
Exhibition Development in the Jewish Museum Berlin:	
The Underground Axis System	69
Exhibition Development in the Jewish Museum Berlin:	
Two Millennia of German-Jewish History	75
CONCLUSION	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	89

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AvS	Arbeitsgemeinschaft verfolgter Sozialdemokraten, SPD organization of former persecutees
BVN	Bund der Verfolgten des Naziregimes, CDU/CSU organization of former persecutees
CDU	German Christian Democratic Union
CSU	German Christian Socialist Union
HdG	Haus der Geschichte, museum of German history in Bonn
JMB	Jüdisches Museum Berlin, museum of German-Jewish history in Berlin
KPD	German Communist Party
SPD	German Social Democratic Party
VVN	Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes, West German association of former persecutees

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Model of Daniel Libeskind's submitted plan to the 1989 architectural competition	4
2. Aerial view of the Jewish Museum Berlin	5
3. Example of 2002 advertising campaign for the Jewish Museum Berlin	29
4. 1999 standardized visitor marketing research questionnaire	44
5. 2000 standardized visitor marketing research questionnaire	47
6. Map of the Jewish Museum Berlin's exhibition areas	71
7. Example of false wall construction at the Jewish Museum Berlin.....	76
8. Another example of false wall construction at the Jewish Museum Berlin.....	80

-Introduction-

If one reviews the history of the debate on the Jewish Museum's collecting and educational mission, its inventory and aspired presentation and its links with city history in general, one constant stands out: the debate on the concept for the future museum moves within the framework of a fundamental and per se unsolvable conflict which cannot be resolved, but at most portrayed within a museum concept. The conflict revolves around the possibilities of and the limits to integration of Judeo-German culture into general German cultural history after the Holocaust.

- Martina Weinland and Kurt Winkler.¹

Heinz Galinski, founder of the *Society for a Jewish Museum*, stated in 1983 that "I am sure that the politicians and town planners are aware of the importance of the Jewish department for Berlin, especially for a city in which the systematic extermination of the Jews once found its starting point."² This Jewish department, contained within a museum of Berlin city history, ultimately became the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) about a decade later. This thesis explores the formative period of exhibition development in the Jewish Museum Berlin beginning in 1999 and continuing through its public opening in September of 2001. During this time, the JMB's administration debated the conceptions of the museum and of its exhibition content. The curators of the JMB utilized corporate business practices to inform their decision of *appropriate* exhibitional content. I argue that the goal of commercial success informed and influenced the ultimate decisions over the museum's exhibitional messages. The curators were in a position to create and control the messages emanating from the JMB's realized exhibitional content. In chapter one, I develop a theoretical framework to analyze the competition over the privilege to present official representations. Chapter two develops *how* they created this discourse. I present

¹ Martina Weinland and Kurt Winkler, Ein Dokumentation: Das Jüdische Museum Im Stadtmuseum (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung Beuermann GmbH, 1997), 53-54.

² Landespressdienst Berlin. Aktuelles der Woche. 10.2.1983. Cited in in Ein Dokumentation: Das Jüdische Museum Im Stadtmuseum, 162.

the processes and uses of visitor marketing research that informed the curators' choices of evidence and artifacts that became the exhibitional content at the JMB.

In chapter 3, I explore *why* they ultimately chose one representation over another. In the pursuit of commercial success, the JMB's curatorial staff developed a corporate museum brand and tailored their exhibition to what they perceived would elicit high visitor satisfaction among the museum-going public. I argue that while the curatorial message of the current exhibition in the JMB does deal with important aspects of German-Jewish history, the privileging of a visitor-friendly message driven by the prospect of commercial success over the representation of histories both difficult and necessary – in this case the Holocaust – diminished an opportunity for potential reconciliation and atonement in contemporary Germany.

The erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 relegated the former Berlin City Museum, the *Märkische Museum*, to East Germany. West Berliners, upset with their cultural loss, subsequently began proceedings to bring a new city museum to West Berlin. Through the efforts of the *Association for the Friends and Sponsors of the Berlin Museum*, an eighteenth century Baroque-style building originally designed by Phillip Gerlach in 1735 and rebuilt after the war which was located at 14 *Lindenstrasse* in the Kreutzburg District, became the new Berlin City Museum in 1969.³ Soon after, control of the museum shifted to the Land Berlin and was thereafter known as the State Museum of Berlin. One of the central tenets of the *Association for the Friends and Sponsors of the Berlin Museum* and the *Society for a Jewish Museum*, which formed in 1975, was to demonstrate through the museum's exhibitional content the centrality of the role of Jewish history in the larger history of Berlin. This history, these groups demanded, should not be

³ Weinland, 13.

isolated but contained within the new Berlin city museum, as a department, to suggest the interconnected nature of their respective histories.

The logic of integration originated from a desire to counter the intended eradication, both literally and figuratively, of Jews and the memory of Jewish contributions to German society by the Nazi regime. Galinski further stated “close association with the Berlin Museum in the shape of one of its departments protects the Jewish Museum from isolation and conveys an interwoven relationship with the whole of Berlin cultural history.”⁴ The Senator for Culture in Berlin, Volker Hasserman, reaffirmed this commitment in 1987, stating “we must make it quite clear that the creators and the products of this culture were not something ‘exotic’, not something alienated from the city and its cultural life, but that they were and are a part of its history.”⁵ This conception of integration, known as the integrative model, dominated the planning of the museum and its exhibition content until a startling event occurred in April 1989: the acceptance of the architectural design by Daniel Libeskind for the extension to the State Museum of Berlin.

Plans for an extension to the limited exhibition space in the Lindenstrasse building to create sufficient space for a Jewish department dominated discussions over the future of the museum in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988, museum officials announced an architectural competition for the design of the extension and in June of 1989 the jury met to announce the winner. The jurors overwhelmingly awarded the grand prize results to design 1021 by then unknown, academic architect Daniel Libeskind. However, as Weinland and Winkler suggest,

⁴ *Berlinische Notizen*, Nr. ½, 1975, pp.7-12. Cited in Ein Dokumentation: Das Jüdische Museum Im Stadtmuseum, 17.

⁵ *Berlinische Notizen*, Nr. 4, 1987, p. 120 f. Cited in Ein Dokumentation: Das Jüdische Museum Im Stadtmuseum, 32.

“the jury was aware right from the beginning that the design involved a conceptual reinterpretation of the original plan.”⁶ Libeskind’s bold architectural design was in many ways

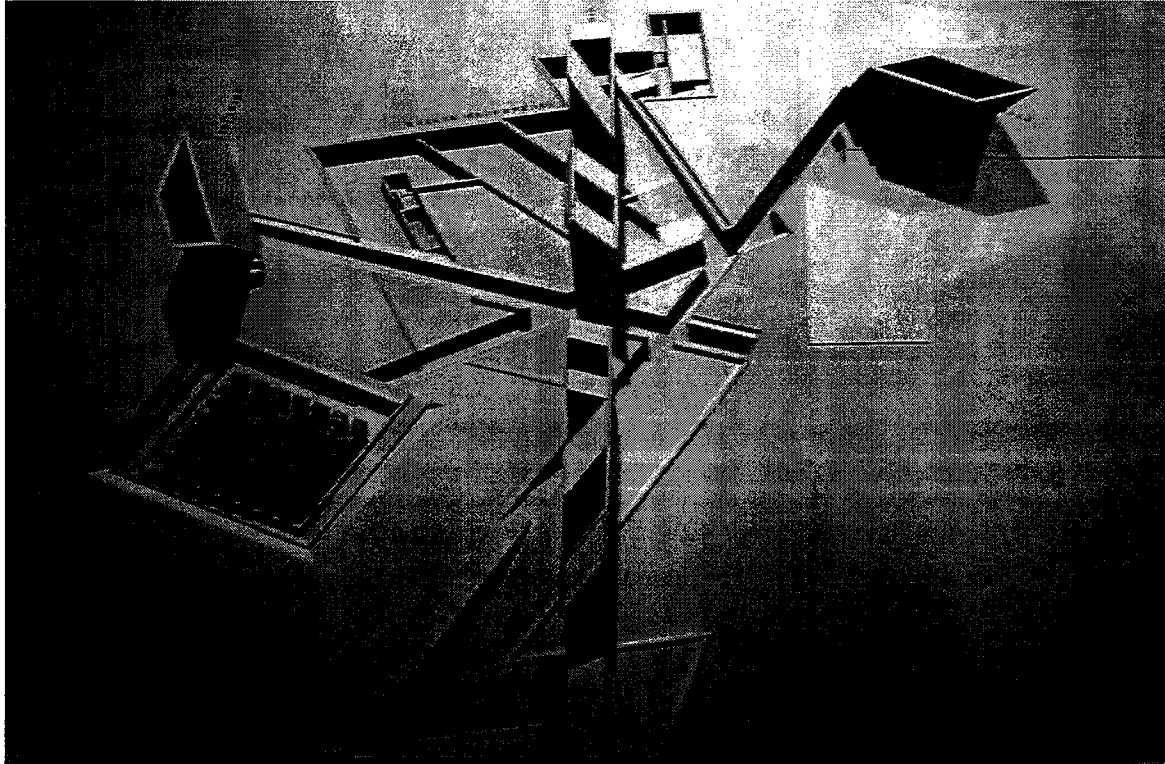


Figure 1. Model of Libeskind’s submitted plan to the 1989 architectural competition on display in the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photograph by author.

a Holocaust memorial (See Figure 1). The zigzagging lines composing the conceived building represented, according to the architect, a fractured Star of David reconstructed with lines of continuity, exile, and Holocaust. Driving these ideas, for Libeskind, were three primary tenets:

First, the impossibility of understanding the history of Berlin without understanding the enormous intellectual, economic, and cultural contribution made by its Jewish citizens.

⁶ Weinland, 40. The judges were Hans Görler (Secretary in the Senate Administration for Building and Housing), Hanns Kirchner (State Secretary in the Senate Administration for Cultural Affairs), Karl-Heinz Wuthe (Section Chief in the Senate Administration for City Planning and Environmental Protection), Günter König (District Mayor of Kreuzberg), Rolf Bothe (Director of the Berlin Museum), Edward van Voolen (Curator of the Joods Historisch Museum Amsterdam), and Heinz Galinski (Chairman of the Berlin Jewish Community) as reported in Ein Stadtmuseum, 80.

Second, the necessity to integrate physically and spiritually the meaning of the Holocaust into the consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin. Third, that only through the acknowledgment and incorporation of this erasure and void in Jewish life in Berlin, can the history of Berlin and Europe have a human future.⁷

This extension, which under the original plan was to house a Jewish department along with other non-related exhibitional content on the history of Berlin, now seemed incapable of representing a general history of Berlin that included Jewish history within it. The jury's acceptance of the Libeskind design seemingly rejected the conception of an integrated history, long expressed as vital to museum planners throughout the preceding decades. The history of Judaism and the Holocaust became the dominant theme expressed in the architecture.



Figure 2. Aerial view of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photo courtesy of the Jewish Museum Berlin

⁷ Daniel Libeskind, The Space of Encounter, (New York: Universe Publishing, 2000), 23.

Construction began in 1993 and the building was completed in 1999 (See Figure 2).

Throughout the period of construction conceptions of how to use the building shifted, due to the Libeskind design, to utilizing the museum as a defacto Holocaust monument and as a site of potential German atonement. This is not, however, how the JMB's administration ultimately presented the museum and its exhibition to the public when the extension officially opened in 2001.

In early 2000, the director of the museum, W. Michael Blumenthal was unhappy with the focus on the Holocaust and atonement promoted by the curatorial staff led by Thomas Freudenheim. Blumenthal replaced the leadership of museum's curatorial staff with Ken Gorbey and Nigel Cox, curators of the popular and commercially successful TePaPa Museum in New Zealand. This change represented a fundamental shift in the conception of the museum's mission. The message of the museum shifted from a site of potential German atonement to a variant of the earlier conception of the integrative model. Embracing once again this earlier conception of museum space was at odds with the dramatic architecture of the building. The Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff was faced with the problem of developing an exhibition strategy to express the integrative model within a building whose design promoted a vision of rupture as much as it suggested integration. I trace the complicated path towards embracing this paradoxical conception of space by exploring the varied intentions within the groups that sought to control the discourse of how the history and memory of Judaism would be best represented in contemporary German society.

Chapter one presents a theoretical framework to engage and contextualize these processes of exhibitional strategy and illustrates the importance of considering disseminated messages as

constructs created with a specific intent. I ground this theoretical framework, based on Foucault's conceptions of power structures, in a historiographical consideration of the current state of memory studies and contemporary scholars' conceptions of identity construction. Who controls the shape of a memory's creation, what is included or not, and what is to be remembered or forgotten are points of great contention defined by ideological, cultural, and political positions within a given society. Museum curators possess an elevated position of power in a society in their ability to control and create various exhibitional messages. How and why curators privilege one conception over another is vital to understanding the constructed processes of memory creation.

In chapters two and three, I explore the *how* and *why*. Chapter two presents a brief history of visitor marketing research and how the JMB's current curatorial staff employed visitor marketing research to determine the expectations and sensibilities of potential museum visitors. They used this research to determine what representations of German-Jewish history the museum-going public would popularly embrace. Through a number of visitor marketing research projects, the curators determined that the potential visitor was experiencing so-called "Holocaust fatigue" and was not likely to visit a museum that focused on the Holocaust. Respondents to a variety of surveys prepared in 1999 and 2000 indicated that Germans were tired of having a finger pointed at them over the memory of the Holocaust. The Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff used this information to create representations within the JMB's exhibitional content that diminished the perpetrator's role in the Holocaust.

Chapter three explores the choices of one representation over another. Prior to the arrival of Gorbey and Cox, curators at the JMB were preparing exhibitional content that sought to

address directly the role of perpetrators in the Holocaust. The purpose of this exhibitional content was to present a forum for German reconciliation and atonement. The evidence – exhibition planning reports prepared by the earlier curatorial staff and the succeeding reports and plans of the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff – indicates that the original exhibitional message changed. I analyze the underlying motives for this shift. The Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff were concerned with the prospect of commercial success, and they intentionally muted what they perceived as unpalatable messages about the Holocaust within exhibition displays designed to promote a positive visitor experience.

The manner in which those in control of the discourse represent the memory of the Holocaust in contemporary German society has vital implications. As I present in chapter one and demonstrate in chapters two and three, this discourse is most often influenced by ideological and economic intentions. However, the ramifications for a society that seeks to come to terms with its genocidal past suggests that the manner in which the various power brokers in society represent this memory should be subject to careful consideration. The acceptance of the Libeskind design in 1989 created an insurmountable impasse to the representation of the German-Jewish past in terms other than one overshadowed by the Holocaust in the current Jewish Museum Berlin. A neutral design would have allowed the successful construction of representations that utilized the earlier conceived integrative model. But the jury did choose the Libeskind design and the exhibition space eventually created within the *Libeskindbau* does a disservice to the representation of Holocaust memory in contemporary Germany. Germany leads the world in acknowledging and exploring their past social crimes but, I suggest, an important opportunity for atonement was lost when the current curatorial staff privileged commercial

success over the presentation of more difficult and uncomfortable, yet socially necessary, representations of the horror of the Holocaust.

-Chapter 1-

A Formative Strategy for the Investigation of Memory Construction in the Jewish Museum Berlin

This chapter explores the current historiographical trends in the study of Holocaust memorials and museums and the impact that this thinking has on the way we understand the continual presentation and re-presentation of the Holocaust. The Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) is not an *authentic* Holocaust site per se but is, I argue, a Holocaust memorial due to the dramatic representations of Daniel Libeskind's architecture. Libeskind's design creates an emotional experience similar to those evoked by sites more traditionally associated with the Holocaust such as concentration camps, extermination camps or SS headquarters. Exploring the history of the creation of the JMB illustrates the constructed nature of Holocaust remembrance in contemporary Germany. Different groups desired control of what they perceived as the correct ideological discourse sought to represent the past in a manner that adhered to their present views. Scholars of cultural studies have struggled to excavate this process of representation in society and have developed modes of thought to illustrate this self-interested process.

I present this intellectual history to contextualize my analysis of the exhibitional development in the JMB that I develop in the next two chapters. I begin this chapter with a discussion of a "system and practice model" that suggests an overarching model of interaction within a society between the creators and the consumers of discourse. While historians have primarily focused on the process of reception in the past several decades, my analysis focuses on and seeks to nuance the competitive process between those seeking the right to be purveyors of the official discourse within museums. I illustrate how authors and other individuals in a

position of power construct frames of understanding to represent a history in one context and how this history is then re-represented in a subsequent and altered context. I proceed with a brief exploration of the vast field of memory studies and the processes of identity construction, informed by the political, social and cultural present, that guide the process of memory and its public representation. Throughout this chapter, I present several detailed examples using a model of system and practice, and suggest where a more detailed use of this model would better explain the creation of a memory system within a given society. I demonstrate the applicability of this model to my investigation of the process of creation of the exhibitional content within the JMB.

Towards a Model of System and Practice

Historians of culture and memory have long struggled to understand the relations between the individual and society, and my thinking on this issue is deeply indebted to historian William Sewell's formulation of what he calls the "system and practice model" in his seminal essay "Concepts of Culture."¹ Sewell's model, heavily indebted to Foucault's conceptions of power, deconstructs social interactions to illustrate how groups in a position of power transmit their conception of proper modes of behavior, including social, political, economic and cultural behaviors, to society at large.² Scholars of cultural studies, following Foucault, argue that the transmission of accepted norms constructs power relations and works through discourse. The

¹ William H. Sewell, "Concept(s) of Culture," in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., Beyond the Cultural Turn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

² For an excellent primer on Michel Foucault's conceptions of power see James D. Faubion, Michel Foucault: Power - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. (New York: The New Press, 2000).

public receives this transmitted discourse and then engages in the process of either acknowledging, accepting, and adhering to the proffered message of *appropriate* behavior, or by rejecting, subverting or altering the communicated message. The public's reactions, both individually and collectively, either reaffirm and strengthen the official discourse or subvert, weaken, and, through the process of repeated interaction, alter the discourse.³

The bulk of current academic offerings that employ this or a similar theoretical model of cultural exchange between elites and popular classes illustrate the functioning of society and focus on the practices utilized by the public that either reinforce or subvert the proffered discourse. In this thesis, I reverse this focus and seek instead to illuminate the competition between curators vying for control of message in Holocaust exhibits. Fully granting that this formulated discourse is subject to significant alteration once presented to the public, I suggest that a fuller understanding of the process of creating discourse, as exemplified in the JMB, is imperative to a balanced understanding of this model of system and practice. The commonly perceived facelessness of the hegemonic whole or power structure masks a hotly contested terrain.

While recognizing the importance of agency and reception, this work focuses on the other portion of this system to demonstrate that it is a vital component of understanding how a power structure employs representations of the past to achieve a contemporary purpose. I use the term power structure, here, to signify the hegemonic bureaucratic, governmental and/or social groups that seek to control official discourse. The various decisions within the exhibitional genesis in

³ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*. (Routledge: New York, 1989). See particularly his discussion of the *Jeaning in America* in chapter 1 for an introduction to the role of agency in societal interactions.

the JMB demonstrate that the meaning and memory of Judaism in Berlin and Germany were – and continue to be – a process by which the polyphonic course of appropriate representations were narrowed down to a single, official, monologue. An explorations of evolving memory structures must include a discussion of the bureaucratic forces that promote or attempt to limit its construction.

What is at stake, ultimately, for groups seeking to control *official discourse* is the privilege to articulate contemporary identity. This process has significant ramifications for the study of representations of the Holocaust. According to John Gillis, memory and identity are “inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving particular ideological positions.”⁴ Gillis maintains that the act of remembering or memory work, as he terms it, is the method by which identities are born and also, importantly, how they are maintained and created anew through the strength of a particular power structure’s discourse. As various thinkers exposed collective memory for the constructed process that it is, “identity has [also] undergone a denaturalization process, with scholars from a wide variety of fields agreeing that it is subjective and constructed.”⁵ Memory is not static and identities created from memory are correspondingly fluid as well. Memories are subject to a continual revising to suit current identity and sensibilities and museum curators play an important role in how identities are revised and represented to the public. The method by which a time or place is represented is quite often an arena for serious contests between the groups who would benefit when one representation was privileged over another. Memory

⁴ John R. Gillis, ed., Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.

⁵ Gillis, 16.

studies, in general, explore the connection between how a society remembers its past and the sensibilities of the present. Aby Warburg suggests that to illuminate this constructed narrative, we need “to reconstruct the connection between artistic representations and the social experiences, taste, and mentality of a specific society.”⁶ Jonathan Huener argues in a recent study on the politics of commemoration at post-1945 Auschwitz that presentism guides memory conveyed at a site of commemoration. Indebted to Maurice Halbwachs’ social frameworks of memory,⁷ Huener states “the past is reshaped to suit the needs of the present, its images helping legitimize the needs of the current social order.”⁸ Klaus Neumann’s work in memory, as it manifests itself in monument construction, adds to Huener’s claim of presentism and provides additional points critical in analyzing the formation of power structures, their resulting discourse, and their inherent connections to desired identity formation. Neumann’s *Shifting Memories* is a collection of local German histories that explore the seemingly silent histories that precede actual manifestations of public Holocaust memory. These histories of various power groups’ intentions “often stretch out over many years, but rarely do they leave discernable traces. In fact, these histories seem prone to a collective amnesia.”⁹ A competition that fails to result in a winning image, a lack of funding, or any variety of events that are included in the history of an eventually

⁶ Aby Warburg cited in Alon Confino, “AHR Forum: Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” American Historical Review, December 1997, 1391.

⁷ See Maurice Halbwachs, On Collected Memory, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁸ Jonathan Huener, Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), 24.

⁹ Klaus Neumann, Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 2.

manifested, or for that matter, unmanifested, site of memory holds the key to exploring how an intended message develops from contemporary concerns. In addition, Neumann also explores, in a series of case studies of small towns in Germany, how “local discourse about the Nazi past [is] linked to other public discussions about the town’s image.”¹⁰ How official representations can be contained within and guided by a larger discourse concerned with contemporary issues suggests the contested nature of the present and its connections to representations of the past. Neumann’s critical examination does not reject agency but, rather, explores the initial path of construction of intention that is then later subject to alteration through various methods of reception. This method of critical examination of the formative strategies of representations is critical to my exploration of the course of development of the exhibitional content at the JMB.

A brief look at the utilization of agency by cultural studies scholars seeking to understand the workings of a society suggests, indirectly, the vital importance of not losing sight of the contested inner workings of a power structure. Alon Confino, in a 1997 *American Historical Review* Forum, charges that the historiographical state of memory studies is subject to “political reductionism and functionalism.”¹¹ This results from a tendency to view memory as a construction of the relationship of power from the top down; unconsciously, or consciously, memory viewed through the lens of political usage “becomes an illustrative reflection of political development and often is relativized to ideology.”¹² At issue, for Confino, is the need to explore reception in the construction of memory studies. Representations of the past are sterile and

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹¹ Confino, 1395.

¹² Ibid., 1393.

biased without an examination of reactions to transmission and diffusion. Confino's attention toward reception is vital but if we examine his words carefully, the critical reader will infer that the system to which he refers is somehow foundational and uncomplicated by inner struggle. The reactions to transmitted discourse or official representations demand full and critical examination to understand the meanings of a representation. However, the intentions of officials in control of structures of transmission should also be deconstructed to illuminate the fluid contested nature of power.

Jan Assmann illuminates the conjoined and inseparable value of system and agency when he suggests "the specific character that a person derives from belonging to a distinct society and culture is not seen to maintain itself for generations as a result of phylogenetic evolution, but rather as a result of socialization and customs" as constructed within an interacting framework of practice and system.¹³ From this we might infer that the specific socialization and customs of reunified Berlin, for the example currently explored in this thesis, created the context within which the decision to develop this new intention of how those in power *should* present the message of the JMB to the public.

The critical thinker must engage and deconstruct the intended construction of memory to illuminate its inherent contemporary political and ideological agendas. As Klaus Neumann utilizes this method to examine the "discourses about the intended or visible public effects of memorials" so too does my investigation of the competition for authorship of the JMB's

¹³ Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (spring/summer 1995), 125. Originally published in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt/Main: Suhramp, 1988).

exhibitional content.¹⁴ This attention to the role of transmitted discourse within a society engaging in the creation of its public memory illuminates the complexities within the formative strategies of the power structures that compete for the privilege to exhibit the official representation of a past.

Texts of Memory: Framing the Holocaust

This section discusses the textual creation of memory both in terms of literary works and physical edifices that act as frames of meaning that can help explicate the process of memory creation in the JMB. The treatment of physical manifestations as a text to be decoded is in keeping with the practice of semiotics that fundamentally informs post-modern studies. James Young is a useful guide to the issue of Holocaust representation and the political and discursive pitfalls of Holocaust commemoration. His body of work succinctly illustrates many of the most salient aspects of how memory is negotiated between purveyors of power and their intended recipients and ultimately realized within constructed texts.¹⁵ An examination of Young's work provides a model for analysis and criticism, a method useful for critical examination of commemoration practices at the JMB.

Young's Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of

¹⁴ Neumann, 24.

¹⁵ While I focus on the work of James E. Young in this section, a number of authors have presented important information on this subject. See especially: Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, eds. Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust. (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2002). Ernst van Alphen. Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997). Berel Lang. Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics. (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). Barbie Zelizer, ed. Visual Culture and the Holocaust. (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2001).

Interpretation is concerned with representations of the Holocaust “by victims in diaries, by survivors in memoirs, by historians and philosophers in their investigative works, and even by our communities in contemporary Jewish liturgy and days of remembrance.”¹⁶ Young also analyzes various Holocaust monuments as the physical representations of memories. Young asserts that:

sustaining the notion of these interpretations' agency in events, the contemporary critic can assert both the historicity of events and the crucial role interpretation played in the events themselves. This is not to deny the historical facts of the Holocaust outside of their narrative framing, but only to emphasize the difficulty of interpreting, expressing, and acting on these facts outside of the ways we frame them.¹⁷

Young's conscious regard for the context of the constructed frame of understanding promotes a dispassionate understanding of the mediated constructions both within power structures and in the methods of interpretations by the public. For Young, this demands “a deep knowledge of events and an awareness of how this knowledge is gained.”¹⁸ Likewise, Young acknowledges that “like other histories, Holocaust literary history is constructed in such a way as inevitably to select and omit particular authors and works.”¹⁹ This acknowledgment is instructive but he is speaking to the inclusion or omission of primary facts not to how the memories of primary facts are subject to inclusion or exclusion based upon the context of a particular power structure. Seeking the blurred histories, as Confino suggests, the critical investigator “should look for

¹⁶ James Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), Preface.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., Preface.

¹⁹ Ibid., 190.

memory where it is implied rather than said, blurred rather than clear.”²⁰ This is the product of the struggle for primacy of a message within power structures and further illuminates how presentism informs the contemporary constructed images of a past. As we will see in chapter 2 and 3, such presentism played a central role in the creation of the JMB’s exhibitional content.

Investigators of a memory system must acknowledge their subjectivity within an inquiry to achieve a more objective position. Young explicates this subjective acknowledgment with the statement that “in attempting to formulate a critical metalanguage with which to interpret both events of the Holocaust and the literature in which events are subsumed, perhaps the only aspect of our inquiry to transcend our projections of mind onto events is the awareness of these projections.”²¹ This attention to the subjective choice of evidence to demonstrate the agency of individuals as they shape a memory system is laudatory, and well informed, but must also include an exploration of the power structure that created the initial representation. In the case of the exhibitional genesis at the JMB, the created representations illuminate the ideological position of the curators and an examination of their created representations should be the starting point for an investigation of this particular memory system.

A consideration of the role of power structures in the dissemination of written Holocaust texts is largely absent in Young’s work. An example of how this would enhance his investigation is an examination of the variety of influences upon publishing practices. The decision of what is and is not publishable and the varying contexts that promote or inhibit the physical creation and distribution of Holocaust texts, ultimately informed I would suggest by

²⁰ Confino, 1395.

²¹ Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, 190.

commercial concerns, is imperative in considering this salient example of a memory system. The inverse of Confino's warning, privileging the conception of a static system over practice that informs social and political history, is equally important.

In his subsequent text, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Young interjects himself into the text as an actor interacting with a variety of Holocaust memorials throughout Germany, Poland, Israel, and the United States. This is an explicit acknowledgment of the subjective role that the author plays in interpreting Holocaust texts, a method central to my own work on the JMB – a building that affects people in a visceral way as an evocation of Jewish life. The curators of the JMB are also subjective actors within the creation of their exhibitional content and their perception of appropriate exhibitional messages informs their creations. Young's explorations are guided by the important consideration that "the motives of memory are never pure" and are ultimately constructed to promote a particular vision of self or group identity.²² The rewriting of the history of concentration camps in Poland which are now being stripped of their "previous Marxist undergirding" suggests the presence of motive and intention in the messages of the camps representation.²³ Under Soviet control, the official messages of the camp portrayed most of the Holocaust activities in Poland as capitalism run amok. This illustrates the political and ideological function that memory possesses. Young also explores how sites of memory can often be sites of transgression, used otherwise than for which

²² James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 2.

²³ Ibid., 150. Jonathan Huener's previously cited text on the politics of commemoration at Auschwitz also historicizes the construction of memory through political and ideological guided assumptions. See in particular chapter 4, "The Restoration of a Commemorative Idiom."

they were originally intended. That of course begs the question of who set up the site originally and for what purpose and to what end. This consideration needs further illumination in the study of memory systems. While “new generations visit memorials under new circumstances and invest them with new meanings” understanding the process of the origins of the physical manifestations would enhance an understanding of the context under which alterations occur.²⁴

Young calls for the historicization of memory and history and indicts histories that present, as Gillis puts it, “the past in monumental terms, endorsing the state-sponsored monumentalism that characterized democratic and authoritarian regimes during the period from 1870 to 1945.”²⁵ To accomplish this task, Young uses, as evidence, the role of artists as they create monuments and counter-monuments to the memory of the Holocaust. He explores the motivations, both ideological and practical, that informed the a creation. From this point, Young explores how the public subsequently interacts with the memorial text to reinforce or alter the artist’s conception, driven by ideological influences within the artist’s context and the power structure within which he or she operates. I argue, however, that exploring more closely the roles that artists assume in their interactions with a power structure and the manner in which this informs the ultimate manifestations of their projects would lay bare the inner-contested nature of groups that initiate, with ideological intention, the creation of a particular represented memory.

In his 2000 analysis entitled “Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin: The Uncanny Arts of Memorial Architecture,” Young explores the creation of the JMB through the use of a

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁵ Gillis, 427.

Freudian understanding of the uncanny.²⁶ Adding this further category of psychoanalytic method to his mode of exploration is profitable in analyzing memory construction. Pieter Borghart and Christophe Madelein illuminate Freud's notion of the uncanny with the statement "experiences of the uncanny in everyday life are related to estranging circumstances that seems to stimulate a certain sense of fear in the unconscious."²⁷ It is a short road to understanding that this psychological fear of a disregarded and intentionally placed subterranean past plays an important role in constructing memories within political, social, and cultural institutions that commemorate the Holocaust. Young's use of this category of analysis further supports my contention that the Jewish Museum Berlin is best understood within the context of a Holocaust memorial.

Sites of Memory: Constructing Holocaust Representations

In this section, I present a number of examples of concentration camp commemoration practices to explicate my method of investigating the multiple authorships of the exhibitional content within the Jewish Museum Berlin. These examples demonstrate the cross pollination between different groups, in this case the bureaucratic government and the survivor groups that were united, in a discordant way, as a power structure able to control the messages of official discourse at sites of Holocaust remembrance. While the JMB is definably not an authentic site of Holocaust commemoration, the architecture of Daniel Libeskind makes interaction with the museum an emotional experience much like the emotion evoked by the power of authenticity of

²⁶ James Young. At Memory's Edge : After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

²⁷ Pieter Borghart and Christophe Madelein, "The Return of the Key: The Uncanny in the Fantastic," Image and Narrative, January 2003.

the camps. This architectural intention cannot and is not divorced from the manner in which the museum's exhibitional content presents its messages to the visitor. While not deriving its emotional power from its function as a camp, the site of the facility, Kreuzberg district, Berlin, is authentic if considered in the terms of Berlin being the bureaucratic center of the Holocaust.

Harold Marcuse's work on the history of commemorations at the Dachau concentration camp demonstrates the importance of examining the diversity of intentions that exist within groups seeking to create official representations.²⁸ Marcuse identifies certain myths that fundamentally shaped the form in which the bureaucratic power structure engaged with the past. To demonstrate the complications of intention, Marcuse argues that the various concentration camp survivors' groups held a moral position of power within discussions of representations at the camps. I choose to differentiate these survivor organizations from those that react to a representation because of their ability to manipulate intention of the initially presented message. This power emanates from a position of moral authority. Marcuse also explores the power of an international gaze directed toward Germans as a means of powerful discourse that also held the ability to alter the originally intended myths of ignorance, victimization, and resistance. To add a further level of complication, the heterogeneous survivor groups competed as well. I proceed now with a few salient examples in Marcuse's text that demonstrate how these interacting groups, ideas, and myths manifested and mutated intention. This contested process of creating appropriate official representation relates directly and illuminates the creation of appropriate exhibitional content in the JMB.

²⁸ Harold. Marcuse, Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1399-2001 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001). See section two (pps. 73-181) for a salient discussion of these formative myths and their inversions.

Survivor organizations initiated, in one form or another, all concentration camp memorials in Germany, and were important to the creation of the JMB as well. These survivor groups were extremely heterogeneous in character and ranged from “high-ranking foreign politicians and leading religious officials, to Communist and Social Democratic functionaries, to members of foreign resistance networks and religious sects, to so-called ‘asocials’, prostitutes, and homosexuals, and finally to Jews at the rock bottom of the Nazi-imposed camp hierarchy.”²⁹ That these groups were able to align themselves in altering fashions and to inject their often paradoxical intentions throughout the succeeding decades demonstrates the logic of inclusion in the power structure that created the meanings for consumption by the visitors to the different sites of the Holocaust. According to Marcuse “[v]arious traces of both the survivors’ varying visions and the Germans’ mythic images [ignorance, victimization, and resistance] are visible in the memorial site [Dachau] today.”³⁰ The case of the first survivors’ organization at Dachau, the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* (VVN) or the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime illuminates the use of ideology as a tool of negotiation for supremacy in control of official discourse. This original group included high profile members of the German Communist Party (KPD) who supported reunification of the four zones and rejected plans for the remilitarization of the West. Groups sponsored by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Christian Democratic Union Bavarian (CDU), and the Christian Socialist Union (CSU) replaced the VVN as the leading survivor organization, after the federal government outlawed the KPD in 1949. The SPD sponsored the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft verfolgter Sozialdemokraten* (AvS)

²⁹ Ibid, 187.

³⁰ Ibid.

and the CDU and CSU sponsored the *Bund der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* (BVN). These groups helped create an anticommunist political climate, disenfranchise the discourse of the VVN, and replaced it with their particular voices of authority. Further, in September of 1950, the German national government decreed that members of the VVN could not hold a place of employment within the state. This use of ideology to gain power had, perhaps obviously, dramatic consequences in the presentations of memory at the camp.

Another example that illuminates the competition within power structures seeking the right to represent a remembered past is the so-called Leiten affair that erupted in 1949 in Bavaria. An industrial sand excavation company accidentally unearthed a previously forgotten mass grave in the area of the Dachau camp. The governmental authorities, both local and national, initially choose to ignore this discovery until pressured by an international gaze. Signs at the 1949 grave area stated “Entry Prohibited – infested area,” and “No trespassing – danger of infection” without any further signs or memorials indicating the significance of the cemetery.³¹ The French government sent an official inquiry to the German national government to ask why “the Germans were not treating graves of foreigners on German soil with proper respect.”³² Three angry delegations followed over the next several months with accompanying attention in foreign presses, including American publications. Chancellor Erhard called an emergency cabinet meeting to remedy the situation and hastily planned a monument for the site. In April 1950, the German government held a ceremony at the site with foreign dignitaries and unveiled a

³¹ Ibid., 145.

³² Ibid., 144.

monument. Once, however, the international gaze shifted, Bavarian authorities disassembled the monument later that same year. The requirement to perform in an anticipated manner dictated the actions of the German power structure. This conscious disregard to perform in an appropriate manner after the pressures of an international gaze had shifted has experienced fundamental alterations in the decades following this incident. Recognizing that Germany needed to commemorate the Holocaust in some way, and mindful of how the international gaze had forced a long-forgotten grave at Dachau to be memorialized, the JMB provided Germans a chance at international reconciliation and atonement. In the formation of the exhibition content of the Jewish Museum Berlin, I argue that the various German power structures digested and internalized the international gaze and that it is now an integral component that informs the geology of intention.

Karen Till's investigation of the site of the so-called *Gestapo Terrain* in Berlin presents another example of the centrality of exploring the intentions of various groups that seek to control a representation of memory.³³ Till explores the actions of local workshop groups that acted in defiance of the Berlin city government. Till's narrative considers both parties, activists and officials, and the desires that drove each's actions. The *Active Museum Coalition*, a local activist organization, unhappy with official plans to commemorate the site of the former Gestapo headquarters in Berlin by sealing the site with metal plates, organized a demonstration in 1985 to literally dig up the history that lay beneath the ground. *Operation Let's Dig* was a transgressive act confronting and dismissing the ruling discourse of how this site should be memorialized.

³³ Karen E. Till, Place and the Politics of Memory: A Geo-Ethnography of Museums and Memorials in Berlin. PhD diss. submitted to University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996.

According to Till, after the “unearthing of history” the site became intrinsic to the conception and literal creation of a collected memory. Till presents this conception of a collected memory system under the joint context of the power structure of the Berlin government and the responding or initiating actions of activists. Till provides a discussion of the potentiality of decisions within both groups, although these groups should not be understood as tightly defined, that demonstrates the interconnected nature of memory system construction. Official attempts to shape the form of the memorial, or as I would term the intention of the power structure, met with the reaction of local activists and resulted in a new modified cultural perception of the site. Using the system and practice model to analyze this process of negotiation better illuminates the process of memory within a given society. As James Young states “the process remind[s] all that no memorial is ever-lasting: each is shaped and understood in the context of its time and place, its meaning contingent on political realities.”³⁴ Exploration of the political, social and the cultural conceptions that inform and guide a power group’s intentions reveals these political realities.

Conclusion

The control of memory, like the fabrication of identity, is shaped by ideological, cultural, and political positions within a given society. Sewell’s model of system and practice presented in this chapter suggests a valid pathway to exploring these important questions. It is vital, when employing this model, to balance a consideration of public influences with the struggles within

³⁴ Young, The Texture of Memory, 154.

official groups that seek to control the representation of a particular memory. Explorations of evolving memory structures must include a discussion of the bureaucratic forces that promote or attempt to limit their construction. The debate over the proper presentation of memory must be examined from multiple perspectives, not only acts that mutate an official discourse but also the evolution that allowed an official discourse to gain its privileged position. Jan Assmann states that through an examination of “its cultural heritage[,] a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory [sic] appropriation tells us much more about the constitutions and tendencies of a society.”³⁵ It is through this critical self awareness that the ongoing active negotiations that constitute memory system construction reveal important aspects of a given contemporary society. James Young suggests “the best memorial to the fascist era and its victims in Germany today may not be a single memorial at all but only the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end.”³⁶ Employing this model of system and practice to illuminate these debates rewards the investigator with a deeper understanding of societal interaction. The various decisions over appropriate exhibitional content within the Jewish Museum Berlin promotes a deeper consideration of how and to what purpose the Holocaust is represented in contemporary German society.

³⁵ Assmann, 133.

³⁶ Young, The Texture of Memory, 81.

-Chapter 2-

A Market-Driven Exhibition: Holocaust Fatigue and the Use of Visitor Market Research in the Jewish Museum Berlin

The 2002 advertising campaign for the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) declared *Nicht das, was*



Figure 3. Example of 2002 Jewish Museum Berlin advertising campaign. Courtesy of *Scholz and Friends Berlin*.

Sie erwarten, (It is not what you expect). Cilly Kugelman, current program director at the JMB, states “we wanted to indicate if you [the visitor] expect this museum to be a museum that would focus entirely on [the National Socialist era and mass murder] and on anti-Semitism and that we will tell you that, ‘you the German visitor, comes from a society that executed this mass murder’ . . . it is not what you expect.”¹ *Scholz & Friend*

Berlin, designer of the campaign and one of the top ten marketing firms in Germany whose clients

also include Coca-Cola, Daimler Chrysler AG, AOL Germany, and the *Berliner Zeitung*,

presented a series of contradictory images to publicize the opening of the JMB. In one, a shovel digging in the ground unearths a cake rather than the expected dirt (See Figure 3). In others, a caterpillar emerges from a tube of toothpaste, a chick from a chocolate egg, a split coconut

¹ Cilly Kugelman, interview by Brian Miller at JMB, January 2004.

contains an orange, and the interior of a recently felled tree is composed of salami rather than wood. These images, like the exhibitional content of the JMB, were presumably meant to surprise the viewer. The use of a mainstream advertising company by a museum to market itself was also novel in Germany.

The JMB is unique in how it prepared and presented itself and its accompanying message to the public. The JMB employed commercial practices found in the corporate marketplace instead of more traditional pedagogical methods. One important example – the subject of this chapter – is the use of visitor marketing research, which the curatorial staff of the JMB utilized to determine the sensibilities of their potential visitors and to alter their exhibition content to promote high visitor satisfaction. The synthesized results of the visitor marketing research reports informed the decision of the present curatorial staff of the JMB to modify its exhibitional content, the history of Jews in Germany, to diminish images of victims and perpetrators in favor of messages focused on the actions of Jews in control of their lives.

There is a growing literature on the importance of agency in understanding history and I agree this is a vital component to a balanced evaluation of a historical past. Yet the evidence demonstrates that the curatorial staff employed this method with commercial intentions to create more palatable images of a troubled past. The process of marketing a museum and its exhibitional contents, in a corporate sense, can influence the pedagogical responsibility of a museum to its detriment. The case under examination is singular because of its subject matter and the inherent role of social responsibility that the museum possesses in educating contemporary Germany about its genocidal past. The JMB's current curatorial staff, after their marketing department determined that the museum-going public was not likely to exhibit "high

visitor satisfaction” with uncomfortable images of Germany’s past, modified the content of their exhibitions to improve the reception of the JMB in the museum-going public. While addressing the wants and desires of visitors is a laudable activity in theory, in the case of a museum that specifically deals with a troubled history this method of showing only what the public wants diminishes pedagogical responsibility in favor of financially successful marketing practices. As the tag line for their first advertising campaign clearly demonstrates, the JMB administration took seriously the information gained from three years of advance visitor marketing research. The administration viewed these reports and perceived from the potential visitor responses that the museum-going public was tired of the representations of the Jewish experience that had victimization at their core. Germans, the research found, experienced what was called “Holocaust fatigue” suggesting that a museum dedicated to explaining that history would be doomed to fail.

This chapter traces the history of the use of visitor marketing research in German museums. I present the broad landscape of this history to contextualize the environment within which the curatorial staff of the JMB ultimately made their decisions on appropriate exhibitional content. Beginning with a brief discussion on the evolution of the appropriate conception of museum visitors, I proceed with a discussion of the origins of visitor marketing research in the Wilhelmine era with the birth of the *Heimat* museum. I explore its use during the Nazi period, its ties to the educational policies of 1970s West German, and the increasingly commercial and recent uses in the *Haus der Geschichte* (HdG) of Bonn and the Jewish Museum Berlin. Next, I present a detailed analysis of the procedures of visitor marketing research in the JMB and the process of synthesizing and the subsequent utilization of the research findings. The curatorial

use of visitor marketing research in the JMB is a clear example of the advent of commercial practices in contemporary museums and my analysis illustrates some of the pedagogical tensions that confront present-day museum professionals as they seek to represent responsibly the past while seeking to engage a mass audience.

Stranger, Guest, or Client: Conceptions of Museum Visitation

With respect to programs of museum visitation, there are three basic modes of institutional development in contemporary museology. Museum visitors are alternately perceived as strangers, guests, or clients. These three modes are not necessarily exclusive but generally are a product of an evolutionary perception of the role of museum visitation within museum practices. Competition between institutional perceptions of visitation still occurs, particularly between guest and client. It is during the advent of museum visitor as client that the Jewish Museum Berlin entered the cultural landscape of museums in Germany. Understanding the antecedent museum culture in Germany is imperative to grasp how the culture of museum practices and contemporary financial requirements informed the unique practices of visitor marketing research within the JMB.

The visitor as stranger model is a mode that evolved exclusively from a research-based museum. Zahava Doering suggest this mode or “attitude arises when the museum believes that its primary responsibility is to the collection and not to the public.”² This mode was most

² Zahava D. Doering, “Strangers, Guests or Clients: Visitor Experiences in Museums,” conference paper presented at *Managing the Arts: Performance, Financing, Service*, Weimar, Germany, March 1999, ii. Full text available from Institutional Studies Office of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. A revised version of this paper also appeared under the same title in *Curator: The Museum Journal* 42, no. 2 (1999). My quotations refer to the conference paper.

dominant prior to the mid-19th century, when programs for mass visitation developed from the various social reforms in Western societies. This method of exhibition centers on the perceived pure discipline of a collection where museum curators gather items for the sake of scholarly edification. The role of pedagogy is limited to a small group of professionals who assume a hierarchal position of power in determining the course of the collection and its societal implications. This mode of collection disregards the role of mass visitation but, according to Barry and Gail Lord, select professionals perceive this as a worthy method because it generally advances the knowledge of a specified field.³ This is the prevailing attitude of an exclusively research-oriented institution and while this mode has diminished within the contemporary landscape of museums, it is still part of the culture of more traditional facilities.

The conception of visitor as guest occurs when the museum assumes a pedagogical role in society. Museums incorporate an instructional sense of mission in their modes of exhibitional content and display. Increased attention to educational activities and displays originate from this new sense of mission.⁴ This mode emerged in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s when museum professionals were directed by local and federal governmental agencies to help educate the masses.⁵ This is the most common mode in contemporary museums but in recent decades the corporate model of the visitor as client has challenged the model of visitor as guest. This third mode, the visitor as client or customer, is an institutional perception that arises from an

³ Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord, eds. , The Manuel of Museum Exhibitions (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002), 27-28.

⁴ Doering, 1.

⁵ Volker Kirchberg, "Visitor Studies in Germany: Past, Present, and Potential," Visitor Studies Today! 3, no. 1 (2000): 5.

acknowledgment of market forces and a belief that the museum must now compete for public interest or attention. The museum interprets this interest, through market research, and models their exhibitional content to attract the gaze of a public increasingly inundated by a consumer culture.⁶ Corporate management principles are increasingly utilized by institutions as they seek to reassert their position within a consumer society. Doering suggests:

In this attitude the museum feels *accountable* to the visitor. The visitor is no longer subordinate to the museum. The museum no longer seeks to impose the visit experience that it deems most appropriate. Rather the institution acknowledges that visitors, like clients, have needs, expectations and wants that the museum is obligated to understand and meet.⁷

The inquiry into the best method to draw the visitors' gaze if conjoined to an existing pedagogical mission can successfully enhance a museums visitorship and its role in broadcasting an educational agenda.

If, however, the end product of visitor marketing research indicates that a vital component of a given educational message is distasteful to potential visitors and, from this information, a museum's curators consciously move away from these certain aspects in their exhibitional messages, what does this suggest about the authority and educational role of museums in contemporary society? In the example currently under investigation, the JMB interpreted from visitor marketing research the expectations and desires of the potential museum-going public and determined that their financial success was predicated upon providing messages that would not alienate their clients. This method of conceiving visitor as client or customer, while applicable

⁶ Lord, 28.

⁷ Doering, 1.

when a company seeks to market a brand of toothpaste to its greatest potential success, negates important pedagogical responsibility, particularly in a society seeking to come to terms with its role in the largest organized genocide of the 20th century.

History of Visitor Marketing Research in Germany

The origins of visitor marketing research or audience research, as it was generally called until the mid-1990s, stem from the beginning of this century and coincide with the shift in the institutional perception of visitor from stranger to guest. My inclusion of the term marketing as it is used in the now commonly accepted term visitor marketing research is somewhat misleading as the marketing component of these tests is a relatively recent phenomenon. Surveys conducted in the early part of the century through the 1980s were oriented more towards an evaluation of the general composition of museum visitors. The idea of conducting *service tests* designed to seek tangible improvements in the relationships between visitors and museological institutions that increasingly perceived the visitor as a client or sovereign customer is relatively new and more succinctly utilizes the corporate practice of marketing.⁸ This shift in tactic within these tests is directly related to the institutional perception of museum visitor as client or customer and has led to what Volker Kirchberg calls the “increased significance of marketing in museums and awareness of the need to provide a wholesome satisfactory consumption experience in and around the museum for the visitor.”⁹ For the sake of clarity, I will use the term visitor marketing research for this museum practice but the reader should be aware of the early absence and

⁸ Kirchberg, “Visitor Studies in Germany,” 9.

⁹ Ibid.

subsequent evolution towards the inclusion of marketing principles within these tests. A general history of visitor marketing research or audience research in Germany follows below, and while I suggest that marketing as a leading principle in these tests does not definitively dominate until the 1990s, clear antecedents may be gleaned from these earlier programs.

In Germany, the initial use of visitor marketing research is disputed. According to Volker Kirchberg, the first test was conducted in 1911-1912 by sociologist Else Biram-Bodenheimer. This was a broad examination of the cultural practices of residents in the city of Mannheim and the role of the local art museum as an educational tool for its citizens. This test was initiated by a local Social Democratic organization, the *Freier Bund*, and illustrates the early beginnings of a focus on the educational role of museums in society.¹⁰ According to Keith Allen, the first use of visitor marketing research dates from the 1890s and was associated with the explosion of *Heimat* museums in Germany. 371 *Heimat* museums opened between 1890 and 1918.¹¹ Celia Applegate, in her study on the German idea of *Heimat* quotes a 1914 lecture by philologist Albert Becker, an avid supporter of the *Heimat* museum, to stress the growing role of *Heimat* in the conceptions of nation and identity. For Becker, the *Heimat* museum was a

people's school . . . open to everyman . . . [O]ur museums, for a long time places only of pure learning, have become places for the people's education . . . from creations of a private, aristocratic type, our museums today have

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹¹ Keith Allen, "Towards a Transatlantic History of the Museum Visit," from the AICGS/German-American Dialogue Working Series Papers, a publication of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 2002, 4.

become *volkstümlich*, democratic institutions.¹²

Curators of *Heimat* museums stressed locality in their collections and “embraced extraordinary initiatives to ensure attendance.”¹³ One of these *extraordinary initiatives* was to actively seek out audience reaction to what a museum collected. The larger more established museums were aware of these early *Heimat* museums and their practices through conferences and journal articles in the early 1900s. Somewhat grudgingly larger mainstream museums increasingly utilized these practices in the Weimar Republic and even the early Nazi period. In September of 1933, the fascist *German Museum Association* issued a questionnaire to 161 directors of Germany’s art and cultural museums. Among the questions asked:

- What education initiatives have been introduced in recent years?
- How is the relationship between art and life cultivated outside of the museum?
- In what respect is your museum a local museum (*heimatlich bedingt*), and if yes, in what ways?
- Provide details of the exhibition work in your museum.
- Which special initiatives would you say might be most effective in integrating museums in the life of the National Socialist state? Which of these do you feel you could implement in your own museum?
- In what form and to what extent should the leadership principle (*Führerprinzip*) be applied to museums?¹⁴

Surprising as this study might seem, it illustrates the incorporation of visitor marketing research in the institutional conscious of museums at this time. Appealing to mass audiences, albeit a racially select audience, was a strong component throughout the National Socialist period and

¹² Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 93. For an excellent account of the role of Heimat in identity formation in early 20th century Germany see especially Chapter 3: *The Heimat Movement*.

¹³ Allen., 4-5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

included a consideration of how museums might best engage the potential visitor.¹⁵ As the country moved towards war and in its immediate aftermath, German museum pedagogical activities, including visitor marketing research, largely subsided for several decades. The institutional use of visitor marketing research made a strong reappearance in the latter half of the 1960s.

The Nuremberg *Germanisches* Museum conducted the first organized post-war visitor study in 1964.¹⁶ The U.S. museum community, long considered a leading expert in visitor marketing research, provided models for this and other early surveys in the re-emerging use of visitor marketing research in West Germany. This particular study borrowed questions from a 1962 visitor study at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.¹⁷ The final question in this survey is particularly telling within the scope of this thesis: “In your opinion, should the museum adjust to the needs of a mass public, or do you expect to find here a place of peace and contemplation?”¹⁸ With the phrase *adjusting to the needs of a mass public*, we see an early example of a museum willing to contemplate the adjustment of its exhibitional content to whims of a mass consuming public. Even with this clear example of early reliance on U.S. methods of visitor marketing research, West German programs of visitor marketing research vary significantly from the research conducted in the United States.

Prominent German sociologists Hans-Joachim Klein and Heiner Treinen led the

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶ Kirchberg, “Visitor Studies in Germany,” 4.

¹⁷ Allen, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid.

development of a unique German variant of these practices.¹⁹ In Germany, visitor marketing research was (and is) primarily conducted through state sponsored university programs as compared to in-house programs in U.S. museums. The Sociological Institute at the University of Karlsruhe and the Institute for Museum Studies at the State Museums of Berlin were (and are) the leaders of this variant of visitor marketing research in Germany where the West German state, and its agendas, influenced the role and procedures of visitor marketing research in Germany. Volker Kirchberg reports:

A triggering event in [West] Germany to start visitor studies in the 1970's . . . was the political announcement by new social democratic governments on federal, state and local levels of a dramatic future 'lack of educational skills' in this decade. Museums were requested to help educate the masses. Therefore, the function of museums as educating institutions with an emphasis on cultural justice and with a link to social and political present steered the contents and interpretations of most surveys.²⁰

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the ideological impetus of audience research in Germany, again conducted through state sponsorship, was to evaluate the museum's ability to educate the public and to explore means to enhance this pedagogical function within the nation's museums. This function of visitor marketing research, utilized to inform and enhance educational policies within museums, dominated in Germany until the ground-breaking (for Germany) methods of exhibitional development of the *Haus der Geschichte*.

The *Haus der Geschichte* (HdG) was the first museum in Germany to use marketing to influence its exhibition construction. The HdG, a museum of contemporary history of West

¹⁹ See especially Hans-Joachim Klein, Museum und Öffentlichkeit: Fakten und Daten, Motive und Barrieren: Berliner Schriften zur Museumskunde (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1981).

²⁰ Kirchberg, "Visitor Studies in Germany," 5.

Germany located in Bonn, opened in 1994. Curators of the HdG developed six pilot exhibitions that traveled throughout West German in the six years prior to the museum's formal opening. An integral component of these traveling exhibitions was a series of evaluative studies conducted to determine the positive/negative impact of the exhibition content on the public. These tests went beyond evaluating the pedagogical abilities of the exhibitions and sought to determine and make judgements about what would entice a potential museum visitor. While increasingly common in the U.S. and other Western countries, this, again, was the first deliberate use of marketing, in the corporate sense of testing a product to promote its most favorable reception, in Germany. Equally important to this new use of visitor marketing research, many German museums were released in 1993 from the varied requirements of adhering to a public accounting system and increasingly possessed legal and economic autonomy. According to Kirchberg,

In the past bureaucratic accounting system, there was no incentive to increase revenues through entrance fees, for example, or from museum shops, because all revenues had to be channeled back into the municipal budget. [This signaled] the *commercialization* of museums, through the maintenance of their own revenue-generating offerings . . . For the economic survival of these museums it became essential to examine potential visitors as customers and revenue sources.²¹

This new-found economic freedom also meant significantly reduced government subsidies. The need to generate funding for a museum's continued existence pushed the *marketing* in visitor marketing research to new heights. As S. E. Weil puts it, the museum was "transformed from one of mastery to one of service."²² It is at this historical moment that the Jewish Museum Berlin

²¹ Ibid., 8.

²² S.E. Weil, "The Museum Made Public," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16, no. 3 (1997): 257. Quoted within Doering's "Strangers, Guests or Clients: Visitor Experiences in Museums."

entered the cultural landscape of museums in Germany.

The visitor marketing research practices utilized by the *Haus der Geschichte* informed JMB practices. The HdG was used as a model by the curatorial staff of the JMB and, after consultation with the HdG, the JMB even chose the same design firm, Würth and Winderall of Munich, to construct their exhibition displays. Nigel Cox, head of exhibitions and education at the JMB states:

I made a careful look at the *Haus der Geschichte* because we knew from outside that it was probably, roughly, in the area of the type of museum that we wanted to make: a museum that had been successful with a very broad audience, that was visitor focused and used visitor and market research.²³

Despite this clear association with the methods of the HdG, the JMB is, however, unique: as Berlin's attempt to deal with the sorry past of Nazi Germany and the Jews, the stakes were considerable higher.

Beyond the startling architecture of Daniel Libeskind, the JMB is singular within German museum culture because they were the first (and still the only) museum in Germany to maintain a full-time staff for the purpose of visitor marketing research.²⁴ The HdG utilized temporary consultants to conduct their visitor marketing research, as did the JMB from 1998 to 2000, but the JMB administration choose in 2000 to create a full-time department dedicated to exploring the public's perception and interaction with the museum. Even with the ground-breaking visitor research conducted by HdG, visitor marketing research was still largely unknown in the

²³ Nigel Cox, interview by Brian Miller, January 2004.

²⁴ Ibid.

mainstream museum culture of Germany. Nigel Cox remarked to a visitor marketing research consultant at the JMB “there are very few visitor focused museums in this country. The concept of doing visitor research is a new one for museums here. It’s not unknown, but has not been widely accepted. This is the landscape we come into.”²⁵ This narrative now proceeds to explore the specific example of visitor marketing practices within the JMB.

Visitor Marketing Research: the JMB Example

This section proceeds with an examination of the methods used to prepare the JMB visitor market research reports. It concludes with an analysis of how this research influenced the creation and alteration of exhibitional content in the Jewish Museum Berlin. The history of visitor marketing research in the JMB can generally be divided into two distinct groups, those prepared by Dr. Volker Kirchberg, a consultant to the JMB from 1998 to 2000, and those prepared by the permanent visitor marketing research department headed by Christiane Birkert. The pre-opening reports from 1998 to May 2000 were conducted and composed by Kirchberg, currently a faculty member in the cultural studies department at the University of Lüneburg. From December 2000 to the JMB’s formal opening in September 2001, pre-opening reports were conducted by Birkert, current head of visitor marketing research at the Jewish Museum Berlin. Birkert currently authors the post-opening reports. The topics covered in these successive reports range from the historical knowledge of potential visitors to the JMB, expectations and thoughts

²⁵ Email communication from Nigel Cox to C. Lee. Undated but written in advance of Lee’s consulting trip to the JMB in 2000. A copy of this email currently exists within the personal papers of Nigel Cox, Curator and Director of Exhibitions and Education at the Jüdisches Museum Berlin. Most of the primary material presented in this thesis is from a collection of notebooks and loose papers created and catalogued by Nigel Cox during the formative period of the exhibition construction. This collection of materials, currently housed in Mr. Cox’s office at the Jüdisches Museum Berlin will hereafter be designated as Cox Personal Papers - Jüdisches Museum Berlin (CPP-JMB).

towards a Jewish museum in Berlin, evaluations of text and text fonts, legibility test of fonts for screen presentation, and visitor flow tests (dealing with the placement and procedures of the coatroom, ease of elevator use, wayfinding, etc.).²⁶ For the purposes of this thesis, I focus on the themes of potential visitor's thoughts and expectations of the museum and even more narrowly on perceptions of the Holocaust by respondents. While these did not make up a majority of the responses, I focus on these responses to illuminate how the JMB curatorial staff utilized this particular information to create what they considered appropriate exhibitional content messages. In the interest of context, I include some other aspects of tests conducted, specifically the *Geschichtswissen potentieller Besucher des JMB* (Historical Knowledge of the Potential JMB Visitor) test but altogether ignore tests conducted with the expressed purpose of determining successful wayfinding and the like.²⁷

The first visitor marketing research test conducted on behalf of the JMB occurred between May and December 1999. A one page standardized questionnaire (see Figure 4) was distributed in the entrance hall of the JMB to visitors of the empty building. This test, entitled *Die Besucher des JMB* (Visitors of the JMB), produced 2,287 responses. The summary report, authored by Dr. Kirchberg, suggests a number of points regarding the Holocaust that I argue were later used as interpretive evidence in determinations regarding exhibition content. First:

The survey indicated that visitors' familiarity with Judaism or Jewish history influenced their expectations and desires for the future exhibitions of the JMB.

²⁶ Christiane Birkert, "Summary of Visitor Research and Evaluation at the Jewish Museum Berlin," internal document of the Visitor and Marketing Research Department at the JMB. Christiane Birkert forwarded this document to me in advance of my January 2004 archival trip to the JMB.

²⁷ I heartily acknowledge that this seemingly pedantic focus on font size and coatroom procedures provides invaluable information to the expeditious running of a facility.



JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN

Please help us plan for future programs by filling out this page and returning it to a staff member.
Circle the number next to your answer. Thank you.

1. Where do you live? [Circle one and write your postal code on line.]

- 1 Berlin, postal code: _____
- 2 State of Brandenburg, postal code: _____
- 3 Elsewhere in Germany, postal code: _____
- 4 Other, country: _____

2. Before today, have you ever visited the Jewish Museum in Berlin?

- 1 Never
- 2 1 time
- 3 2 or more times

3. How did you find out about this tour?

[Circle all that apply and write names, if needed.]

- 1 Friends
- 2 Daily newspaper: _____
- 3 Weekly magazine or newspaper: _____
- 4 Radio, station: _____
- 5 TV, station: _____
- 6 City guide brochure: _____

4. Before today, have you visited other museums or historical sites exhibiting Jewish history or culture?

- 1 No
- 2 Yes. Name of most recent museum:
Museum: _____
- 3 Yes. Name of most recent historical site:
Site: _____

5. Which of these subjects are familiar to you?
[Circle all that you can talk about to a young person.]

- 01 Israel
- 02 traditional or ceremonial Jewish art
- 03 contemporary Jewish art
- 04 Jewish-German history in general
- 05 The Holocaust
- 06 Jewish religion
- 07 Jewish traditional life
- 08 Jewish contemporary life in Germany
- 09 Jews in other countries
- 10 Jews in pre-1933 Berlin

6. Which ones would attract your interest in an exhibition? [Circle all that apply.]

- 01 Israel
- 02 traditional or ceremonial Jewish art
- 03 contemporary Jewish art
- 04 Jewish-German history in general
- 05 The Holocaust
- 06 Jewish religion
- 07 Jewish traditional life
- 08 Jewish contemporary life in Germany
- 09 Jews in other countries
- 10 Jews in pre-1933 Berlin

7. In planning our exhibition on Jewry in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany, here is a list of some things we're thinking of including. Which three would you most like to see?

- 01 information about Jewish-German mutual influences
- 02 dioramas of Berlin synagogues
- 03 old films and photographs about past Jewish life
- 04 videos and recordings about Jewish life
- 05 biographies of famous Jews
- 06 family histories
- 07 religious, ceremonial objects
- 08 architecture of the Libeskind building
- 09 only authentic, original documents
- 10 also replicas of documents, exhibits

8. What is your age? _____ (years).

9. Who are you here with today? [Circle one.]

- 1 One other adult
- 2 Several adults
- 3 Child(ren)
- 4 Adult(s) and child(ren)
- 5 Alone

10. Are you: 1 Female 2 Male ?

11. What is the highest level of education you have completed? [Circle one.]

- 1 High School or Less
- 2 High School Graduate
- 3 Some College/ Technical School Degree
- 4 University Graduate

12. Date of today: Day _____ Month _____

THANK YOU.

Figure 4. 1999 standardized visitor marketing research questionnaire

Visitors were least well-informed about the topics “German-Jewish history”, “Jewish religion”, “traditional and contemporary Jewish life in Germany”, but at the same time were most interested in seeing these topics presented in future exhibitions. As regards the Holocaust, [a] negative correlation between interest and prior knowledge was particularly in evidence: nine out of ten visitors claimed to be well informed about the Holocaust, but only four out of ten visitors were especially interested in seeing this topic presented in the museum. Visitors expressed most interest in future exhibition topics that covered German-Jewish history from the past through the present, as well as the general theme of German-Jewish history and contemporary Jewish life in Germany. Interest in the Holocaust fell below average among the other listed themes.²⁸

And:

Unaccompanied visitors are often more interested in the Holocaust than visitors who come in pairs or with children. . . . Berliners, much more so than other Germans, have a particular interest in the depiction of Jewish life before 1933. International visitors are much more interested in the Holocaust than German visitors, but less interested in contemporary Jewish life in Germany.²⁹

Kirchberg suggests that from these details, the JMB’s curators, who were made aware of these results “before they made conclusive and permanent decisions about the size and scope of the exhibition to help them implement results of this [and subsequent studies] in the creation of exhibition,”³⁰ were able to make initial determinations of visitors perceptions of the Holocaust. Visitors were far less interested in the Holocaust than other aspects of German-Jewish history. The curatorial staff, with this information in-hand, made decisions on exhibitional content that ultimately shifted or modified the museum’s focus from messages of the Holocaust to other aspects of German-Jewish history.

²⁸ Volker Kirchberg, “Summary,” Basica Forschungsinstitut, 6. (CPP-JMB).

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Volker Kirchberg, “Repository of Memories or Catalyst of Illumination? Attitudes and Expectations Towards the Jewish Museum Among Generations and Classes.” Lecture manuscript presented at the William Paterson University Seminar on Genocide and Holocaust at William Paterson University, New Jersey, April 4, 2004 , 2.

Kirchberg conducted two studies, *Das Geschichtswissen potentieller Besucher des JMB* (Historical Knowledge of the Potential JMB Visitor) and *Gedanken zu und Erwartungen an ein jüdisches Museum* (Thoughts and Expectations about a Jewish Museum), in January 2000. The first was a one page standardized questionnaire (see Figure 5) distributed at the Reichstag dome (a popular tourist destination), the Altes Museum, and the Hamburger Bahnhof (both art museums) that garnered 917 total responses. The purpose of this test was to determine a base level of historical knowledge for potential visitors.

The exhibition designers had expressed concern over how much prior knowledge of German and German-Jewish history they could presuppose in the museum's visitors, since their background, or lack of it, would effect their comprehension of exhibition objects, texts and narrative. Thus a better understanding of the Museum's potential visitor demographic, including both its 'core' visitor groups as well as those it would like to attract, was deemed necessary for the success of the future exhibitions.³¹

Many of the questions were identical to questions used in national surveys to compare the responses of this test with national averages.³² The test questions dealt with five semi-distinct areas of German history, Liberalism and Reaction, World War II and the Post-War Period, Early German history, Judaism, and the four historical occurrences on November 9th throughout the 20th century (1918 - abdication of the Kaiser, 1923 - Hitler's failed putsch, 1938 - *Kristallnacht*, and 1989 - fall of the Berlin Wall).³³ Generally it was determined that the historical knowledge

³¹ Volker Kirchberg, "Summary", Basica Forschungsinstitut - Geschichtswissen potentieller Besucher February, 2000, 3. (CPP-JMB).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.



UMFRAGE ZUR GESCHICHTE – JÜDISCHES MUSEUM BERLIN

Wir führen zur Zeit eine Umfrage für das neue Jüdische Museum und den Museumspädagogischen Dienst Berlin durch. Würden sie uns bitte diese wenigen Fragen zur Geschichte Deutschlands beantworten? Diese Umfrage ist anonym. Sie unterstützen uns bei der besucherfreundlichen Planung des Museums. Danke!

BEFRAGUNGSORT: _____

FALLNUMMER: _____

1. Wo wohnen Sie? (Int.: Wenn Berliner:
„Nennen Sie uns bitte Ihre Postleitzahl.“)

- 1 in Berlin, PLZ = _____
- 2 in Deutschland, Bundesland: _____
- 3 außerhalb Deutschlands, Land = _____

2. Erinnern Sie sich zufällig, wie der erste deutsche Bundeskanzler nach dem Kriege hieß?

- 1 richtige Antwort
- 2 nicht richtige Antwort
- 3 weiß nicht, keine Antwort

3. Wissen Sie zufällig, was am 20. Juli 1944 geschehen ist, was sich da ereignet hat?

- 1 richtige Antwort
- 2 vage, nicht falsche Angaben
- 3 falsche Angaben
- 4 weiß nicht, keine Antwort

4. In den letzten 100 Jahren fand in Deutschland am 9. November mehrmals Geschichte statt. Wissen Sie vielleicht, in welchen Jahren dies war? (Int.: Weiß nicht=leere Zeile)

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Jahr: | genanntes Ereignis: |
| 19 ____ | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19 ____ | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19 ____ | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19 ____ | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Wissen Sie zufällig, um welche Zeit Karl der Große gelebt hat, ungefähr?

- 1 richtige Antwort
- 2 vage, aber nicht falsche Angaben
- 3 falsche Angaben
- 4 weiß nicht, keine Antwort

6. Wissen Sie zufällig, was in den folgenden Jahren passierte, das für Deutschland und die Juden in Deutschland bedeutend war?

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Jahr: | gegebene Antwort: (Int.: Weiß nicht=leere Zeile) |
| 1671 | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1812 | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1848 | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1871 | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1933 | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1938 | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. Wissen Sie zufällig, wer die folgenden Personen sind? (Int.: Weiß nicht=leere Zeile)

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Person: | gegebene Antwort: |
| Ignatz Bubis | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Moses Mendelssohn | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Heinrich Heine | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rosa Luxemburg | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. Was würden Sie schätzen, wie viele Juden leben zur Zeit in Deutschland?
genannter Schätzwert: _____

9. Wissen Sie zufällig, was die folgenden Begriffe bedeuten? (Int.: Weiß nicht=leere Zeile)

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Begriff: | gegebene Antwort: |
| Schabbat | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Koscher | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Zionismus | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Schoa | richtig: <input type="checkbox"/> vage: <input type="checkbox"/> falsch: <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Warum wurde als Holocaust-Gedenktag der 27. Januar ausgewählt?

- 1 richtige Antwort
- 2 vage, nicht falsche Angaben
- 3 nicht richtige Angabe
- 4 weiß nicht, keine Antwort

11. Haben Sie schon mal von der infoline des Museumspädagogischen Dienstes Berlin gehört?

(Int.: Nur eine Antwort eingeben; wenn Antwort = Code 3 (ja, schon genutzt) dann weiter mit 11a.)

- 1 nein
- 2 ja, ich habe davon gehört
- 3 ja, ich habe die infoline schon genutzt

11a. Wie beurteilen Sie die inhaltliche Qualität der infoline?

sehr gut: ☐ gut: ☐ zufriedenstellend: ☐ schlecht: ☐

11b. Wie beurteilen Sie die Freundlichkeit der infoline-Mitarbeiter?

sehr gut: ☐ gut: ☐ zufriedenstellend: ☐ schlecht: ☐

12. Was ist Ihr Geburtsjahr? 19 ____

13. Welchen höchsten Bildungsabschluß haben Sie? (Bitte nur eine Antwort eingeben.)

- 1 bis einschließlich Volksschulabschluß
- 2 Mittlere Reife
- 3 Abitur
- 4 Universitätsabschluß

14. Geschlecht 1 weiblich 2 männlich

Figure 5. 2000 standardized visitor marketing research questionnaire

of the sampled Berlin museum visitors was much higher than the national average and that, unsurprisingly, education and age played a determining role in the respondents' ability to answer the questions correctly. Per Kirchberg, the author of this report:

The only anomalous result [was] the estimation of the number of Jews living in Germany today. [Only 25% of the respondents correctly estimated correct number of 50-100,000] The visitors to these three museums were no more accurate than the average answers collected by Forsa [the standard national survey used by Kirchberg to compare responses]. This can be explained if we presume that the ability to gauge the number of Jews in Germany, or their influence (which goes hand in hand with estimations of size), is independent of education, socioeconomic background, etc.³⁴

This lack of knowledge of the size of the Jewish community and the question of their "influence" in present-day Germany suggests the presence of a latent or lingering anti-Semitism among the German population. The curatorial decision to present exhibitional information to educate the public on this topic is understandable and even admirable.

The second of the January 2000 tests, *Gedanken zu und Erwartungen an ein jüdisches Museum*, was developed from 358 ten-to-fifteen minute tape recorded interviews with prepared question guidelines.³⁵ This test occurred at the same locations as the first with the addition of the JMB as a fourth interview location. This interview material was later reviewed and re-analyzed by Christiane Birkert and informed her reports, to be discussed in detail below, on *Cliches and (Mis)conceptions on Judaism*, and *Key Questions of Visitor Interest*.³⁶ The objectives of this test were three-fold: to determine previous experience with a Jewish museum or historical site, gauge

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

³⁵ Birkert's records indicate 358 but Kirchberg records indicate 384 in "Repository of Memories."

³⁶ Birkert, "Summary of Visitor Research and Evaluation at the Jewish Museum Berlin."

expectations of a Jewish museum in Berlin, and to sample “general thoughts about the topic of Jews in Germany.”³⁷ I will analyze each of these stated objectives and their responses separately.

The first question of the interview was “*What thoughts did you have when you visited a Jewish museum or a Jewish historical site?*” Of the total respondents, 83% indicated they had been to a Jewish museum or historical site.³⁸ Within this group:

40% of all responses about experiences of past visits to Jewish museums and historical sites can be categorized under ‘negative feelings’, 19% specifically mention Holocaust-related issues as basis of past experiences. 21% remember topics related to Jewish culture and religion. 10% remember personal and emotional issues, whereas 6% linked positive feelings with these past visits. 4% do not recall any memory of their past visit(s).³⁹

One of the more dramatic respondents to this question remembered, from a visit to a Holocaust museum “that there were *lots of places to sit and lay down offered*, and lots of people made use of these and also *had a great need for it . . .*”⁴⁰ This is the sort of visitor interaction that the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff expressly sought to avoid. The linkage between responses to this question and subsequent exhibition development is clear with the inclusion of the above stated findings in the document *Thoughts Towards Branding from Qualitative Research*. In this JMB prepared report the following issues are presented as important points for consideration in exhibition and branding development:

³⁷ “Thoughts on Study no. 3: Expectations and Thoughts on a Jewish Museum in Berlin,” (CPP-JMB)

³⁸ “Thoughts on Study no.3.”

³⁹ Kirchberg, “Repository of Memories,” 7.

⁴⁰ “Thoughts on Study no. 3.” (italics in original).

- 1.) Over 40% of all respondents has 'negative feelings towards previously visited Jewish museums and sites - guilt, shame, loss, bewilderment. . . .
- 4.) When asked about the expectations of the JMB, most said they 'expect to learn about Jewish culture'. There was some strain re (sic) this subject - as though they had to force themselves. This may be related to 1. Above.
- 5.) The subject of the Holocaust has a low priority in the subjects of the museum.⁴¹

The curators did not want the average visitor to the JMB have a negative feeling after a visit.

The next question in this January 2000 audience research survey suggested the tone and direction of the subsequent exhibition.

The second question posed to the respondents was "*What are your expectations about visiting a Jewish museum here in Berlin? What should the museum show?*"⁴² 42% wanted to learn about Jewish culture and religion, 23% about German-Jewish history (without a specific focus on or limited to the Holocaust), 17% sought further information about the Holocaust, and 7% expected to learn about contemporary Jewish life.⁴³ Kirchberg questions the relatively low expectation for exhibitions dealing with the Holocaust and Nazi period. Especially, as he states, "in view of the public discussion of this museum (as a 'Holocaust' museum) during the construction and the phase when empty but accessible this . . . number is remarkably low."⁴⁴

Kirchberg posits a logic later central to the decision-making of the Gorbey and Cox curatorial

⁴¹ "Thoughts Towards Branding from Qualitative Research," CPP-JMB.

⁴² Kirchberg, "Repository of Memories," 12.

⁴³ "Thoughts on Study no. 3," (CPP-JMB). Kirchberg's "Repository of Memories" sites the statistical breakdown as 35%, 30%, 18%, 7% with the addition of a 10% group who "wish to experience a spectacular design that match the famous architecture," 12. I am unsure as to the reason for this statistical disagreement as Kirchberg was the author of the report presented to JMB from which the synthesized report "Thoughts on Study no. 3" was generated.

⁴⁴ Kirchberg, "Repository of Memories," 12.

staff in reference to exhibition content. He suggests that the respondents who expressed a feeling of over-saturation of the themes of the Holocaust represented a general trend in Germany. The language used later by the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff was “Holocaust fatigue.”

The third question asked in this oral survey was “What do you primarily think of, when people talk about Jews in Germany?”⁴⁵ 32% of the respondents referred directly to the Holocaust, 25% on positive aspects of a redeveloping culture, 18% on past contributions of Jews and the cultural loss of the 20th century, and 11% of current anti-Semitic activities in Germany.⁴⁶ Kirchberg notes that a portion of the respondents who referred to the memory of the Holocaust as their first thought “express being uncomfortable to be confronted with this topic (again?)” and criticize the dominant presence of the Holocaust in contemporary German discourse.⁴⁷ In a study conducted in Cologne later the same year, *Meinungen und Verhaltensweisen von typischen Nichtbesuchern von Museen* (Opinions of Typical Non-Museum Visitors), one focus group professed to have little interest in visiting a museum for a similar reason. They stated “a bad conscience is again and again encountered . . . I don’t want anything to do with it.”⁴⁸ The feeling of being made to feel guilty “again and again” and that this past was somehow separate from their present further suggests the guiding principle of “Holocaust fatigue” that the curatorial staff later used to direct their exhibitional messages. The curatorial staff perceived the public as experiencing this particular form of fatigue and the associated feelings of guilt and shifted the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸ “Some Replies from Study # 4,” (CPP-JMB). [translated]

focus of the museum's messages to other aspects of German-Jewish history.

Christiane Birkert was hired to head the full-time visitor marketing research arm on the JMB in September of 2000.⁴⁹ As indicated earlier, this was the first such permanent appointment in Germany. Aided by temporary consultant Eva C. Lee-Fitzgerald, who had conducted visitor marketing research for Gorbey and Cox in New Zealand's TePaPa museum, Birkert began preparing a series of reports synthesized from the findings of Kirchberg's earlier work. I present a number of these findings reports in detail to examine two salient points: first, what was culled or deemed important from the early visitor marketing reports and, secondly, what the new visitor marketing research department of the JMB viewed as the appropriate response or message to be conveyed within the museum's exhibitional content. The inclusion of many of these propositions in the final exhibitional content intimates that these suggestions met with approval from the curatorial staff and accurately represented the values and mission of the museum.

The first findings report produced in October of 2000 explores the "cliches and (mis)conceptions on Judaism" by those interviewed in the January 2000 research project.

Among the interviewees, Birkert found voices that saw Jews as perpetual victims.

- . . . thinking about Jews is combined with sort of having pity for them, sympathy or something like that. (75)
- Always victims. They shouldn't insist on being victims . . . all this whining. That does not do anything.(11)
- . . . Everywhere you look, Jews have their fate or have experienced it that way. (16)

⁴⁹ Volker Kirchberg applied for the permanent job but was not hired.

- . . . I know, that they are people, who are much coined by history, by all that has been done to them throughout the centuries.(8) [sic]⁵⁰

In response to these voices, Birkert suggested that the museum portray “active resistance, courage, [and] standing up for rights throughout the exhibition.”⁵¹ This is a seemingly logical and appropriate response. However, there were many circumstances where active resistance was futile, which Birkert later makes note of but in the final exhibition the idea of active resistance or agency of Jews seems to be almost inappropriately dominant in its portrayal. My point is one of nuance, because of course the agency of Jews in Nazi Germany deserves a place in this historical explication – but not at the relative absence of the almost crushing weight of actions perpetrated against the Jews. Removing or minimizing the perpetrators from the visual narrative of the exhibition to assuage the perceived “Holocaust fatigue” of the non-Jewish German museum visitor does not accurately portray a history vitally important to contemporary Germans.

This relative absence is confirmed by respondents to the *Post Opening Evaluation Report* conducted by Christiane Birkert in November 2001. In this report, 55% stated there was “not enough” about the tensions between Jews and non-Jews.⁵² Some of the responses include:

- There is only few of the conflicts between Jewish and German Culture and everyday life - only partly there [sic]. It is not the German-Jewish History that is shown, but the history of Jews in Germany.
- It needs more and more detailed examples from everyday life.
- Shows Jewish life in Germany. Could be more on relation between Jews and

⁵⁰ “Visitor and Market Research at the JMB October 2000,” (CPP-JMB). The numbers in parentheses after each response is the anonymous number assigned to each interviewee in the January 2000 study “Thoughts and Expectations Towards a Jewish Museum.”

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Post Opening Evaluation Report,” 28. (CPP-JMB).

non-Jews.

- In a slightly uneasy way I felt impressed by objects showing examples of anti-Semitism.⁵³

This final comment by a visitor to the museum in the Fall of 2001 is particularly telling. Why would a visitor be *impressed* when he or she saw examples of anti-Semitism in the JMB exhibition? I suggest because of the rareness of the such items in the current exhibition. This rareness is suggestive of the representations curators chose to use in portraying Jewish-German history.

In the findings report *Key Questions of Visitor Interest*, one of the subsections explores relationships between Jews and non-Jewish Germans in present-day Germany as perceived by the January 2000 respondents. Some of the responses include:

- Well, between Jews and Germans exists a torn relationship, there is this big wound, which still is bleeding and gets torn open again and again, now you also find animosity amongst young Germans, they do not understand and they cannot understand, what happened back then and still they have to feel guilty, because it is always said, we Germans, we Germans, we Germans. This I believe is a big problem. (8)
- . . . you always get to see the head of the *Zentralrat der Juden*, when somewhere . . . something happens . . . then he goes there . . . looks at it . . . and then again I see that finger pointing at us. . . (49) [sic]⁵⁴

From these and other responses, Birkert suggest “the interviewees tell about awareness of communication problems between Jews and non-Jews in Germany. Expectations are that the JMB will address these and also will be a forum for dialogues without taboos.”⁵⁵ She also

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Visitor and Market Research at the JMB October 2000,” (CPP-JMB).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

suggests that often the language used to discuss these issues is “still trapped in terminology and description that is coined from anti-Semitism” and suggests the curators “look for situations where misconceptions can be addressed without pointing fingers.”⁵⁶ The finger pointing trope figured significantly in how the curatorial staff chose to proceed with the construction of their exhibitional content. I posit that this reference and the many others that exist in the pre-opening reports clearly spoke to the curatorial staff and that they considered any display containing this sort of imagery would be negatively received. In choosing to diminish this method the JMB curatorial staff accomplished a positive pedagogical end by drawing in those that would have been alienated but, by focusing excessively on the agency of Jews to fill the space now left empty, did a disservice to a balanced treatment of Holocaust memory, a treatment demanded by the exhibition’s display within the *Libeskindbau*.

Conclusion

The Jewish Museum Berlin is unique among contemporary museums in Germany. In regards to the processes for determining the appropriate messages of the museum’s exhibitional content and the manner in which they present this message, the JMB utilized commercial practices more often found in the corporate marketplace. The JMB’s curatorial staff constructed an elaborate visitor marketing research program, which continues today, to determine the sensibilities of the potential museum-going public. This research informed the construction of exhibitional content that, the curator’s anticipated, would elicit a popular and lucrative response from potential museum-goers. The role of pedagogy that informed the mid-20th century notion

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of museum visitor as guest, discussed in the initial section of this chapter, is not absent from the JMB's curatorial staff's deliberations over exhibitional content. However, the present curatorial staff's intense focus on commercial viability precluded them from viewing the results of the visitor marketing research as indicating, however unpopular and potentially challenging to commercial success, the need to present exhibitional content that gave a more pronounced forum for grappling with the role of perpetrator in the Holocaust and atonement within German society. The JMB's curatorial staff determined not to give the public what they expected, as indicated in the JMB's 2002 advertising campaign, but perhaps what the museum-going public expected, presented in a balanced forum to engage and challenge, would have provided an important site for atonement in contemporary Germany.

-Chapter 3-

The Commercialization of a Museum: Branding and Exhibition Strategies in the Jüdisches Museum Berlin

Entering the lower levels of the famous *Libeskindbau* that houses Berlin's museum of Jewish history, the visitor comes across a set of vitrines containing a variety of everyday objects that tell tales of Jewish struggles, exile, and death during the Holocaust. This compelling display of personal items that give a voice to the German-Jewish experience during the *Shoah*, however, did not represent the original idea of the earlier administration of curators at the Jüdisches Museum in Berlin (JMB). In earlier conceptions, prior to descent into the underground portion of the museum, visitors confronted a series of framed images of individuals who experienced the Holocaust either as a survivor or as victim. Once underground, however, the vitrines would contain abstract media. Showcases would be filled with soil, others lined with dark foil, and a portion of the walls made to resemble the waves made by a ship in exile. The curators intentionally cast the tone of the exhibition as abstract and uncomfortable and called for an abstract use of exhibit space to create a "confusion of consciousness . . . to produce a diffuse feeling of helplessness."¹ The subsequent and current exhibition design team chose to replace these abstract images of horror with exhibits designed to evoke a sentimental response that empathized with the Jewish victims and their actions rather than the terror of uncontrollable events.

¹ "Report: The Axis System in the Lower Ground Level," Jüdisches Museum Berlin, March 2000, 14. This report was prepared for internal distribution at the Jüdisches Museum Berlin. (CPP-JMB).

As this example suggests, a conflicted process of negotiation surrounded the development and organization of the JMB. Well-publicized debates raged from the architecture of the famous *Libeskindbau* to exhibit content to questions about the dominant goals of and even the necessity for the museum. As this chapter shows, decisions on the appropriate representation of German Jewish history were subject to intense debates within the administration of the JMB itself. In pursuit of commercial success, the administration of the JMB hired a second curatorial staff in the spring of 2000 that reversed the ideological direction of the first staff and intentionally muted what they saw as unpalatable messages about the Holocaust within exhibition displays designed to promote a more positive visitor experience.

The shift in exhibition development in the JMB illustrates a larger shift in the work of museum professionals that connects the museum to larger issues about the role and function of museums in the 21st century. Over the second half of the 20th century museum professionals have become increasingly self aware and critical of the museum's position of power within society.² Contemporary museum professionals now attempt to design exhibit space that promotes public inquiry and interaction rather than a blind acceptance of curatorial intentions. However, mass public appeal, manifested in the form of commercial viability, is now a dominant indicator of a successful museum exhibition. With this in mind, museum professionals increasingly develop exhibitions that they anticipate will be positively received by the museum going public. This movement promotes the development of exhibition voices that are perceived to speak to the

² See Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) for an analysis of this trend in academia.

wants and desires of the potential museum-goer. Museum administrators' desire for commercial success drives this process of exhibition development, which ultimately privileges popular voices to the detriment of other potentially important messages.

This chapter examines this process in two main fields: the shift in organization and operation strategies of the JMB and the shift in message and adoption of a museum brand. It begins with an analysis of the replacement of the first staff, which embodies this shift in changing museum organization and management styles. In terms of Holocaust memory representation, the new curators at the JMB chose to move away from uncomfortable Holocaust representations in pursuit of financial success. I then take up the issue of museum "branding", a corporate device used to solidify and promote a desired positive image, and how this branding came to dominate and speak within the exhibition content. Under the influence of commercialism, the exhibition strategy followed by the second curatorial staff at the JMB centered on a brand that did not focus on the Holocaust, in an effort to entice and satisfy the potential museum visitor.³ The chapter concludes with a discussion of exhibition development in the underground axes of the museum, where concrete exhibits replaced abstract messages and how, in the upper levels of the museum, the dramatic architecture was intentionally muted through false wall construction to create a fixed exhibition space more congenial to a traditional

³ While my argument centers on an example of a museum moving away from Holocaust representations to promote commercial success there is also an extensive literature on how representations of the Holocaust are sold. Issues raised in this literature are pertinent to my overarching analysis of how the Holocaust is subject to evolving representations in contemporary society. See especially Harold Marcuse, Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Tim Cole, Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler – How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold (New York: Routledge, 1999).

museum and message. The evolution of the Jewish Museum in Berlin provides a unique but telling example of the increasing role that commercialism plays in evolving representations of the Holocaust in contemporary German society.

Shifting Operation Strategies in the Jewish Museum Berlin

The change in museum staff in the spring of 2000 at the JMB indicated a methodological shift in the creation of exhibition messages predicated on a desire for commercial success. Michael Blumenthal, the Project Director of the museum since late 1997, was unhappy with the conception of German Jewish history offered by the first curatorial staff and their inability to manufacture an appropriate exhibition in a timely fashion. Driven by a desire to create a museum popular to the average going public, Blumenthal rejected the conception of the site as one of German atonement for the Holocaust and sought a curatorial change that would produce a commercially viable museum. Blumenthal, who led the project from a city-funded to a federal-funded project, initially assembled a staff to create the permanent exhibition led by Deputy Director Tom Freudenheim and exhibition researcher Thomas Friedrich. The first curatorial staff saw the potential of the *Libeskindbau* as a Holocaust monument providing a potentially unique moment of German atonement. This conception of museum space, fueled by the architectural language of Daniel Libeskind's museum extension, created an obstacle to the intended development of an exhibition dedicated to a more general history of German Jews. This impasse led to delays in the opening of the museum. In the meantime, more than 350,000 visitors in 1999

toured the building *sans* exhibition through a program operated by the *Deutscher Pädagogischer Dienst*. This further deepened the controversy over use of the site as visitors experienced and embraced the architecture with its untempered Holocaust imagery.

In late 1999, Blumenthal called together an international peer group of museum professionals, among them Ken Gorbey of the New Zealand Museum Te Papa Tongarewa, to explore the state of exhibition development at the JMB. At a weeklong conference, the group quickly determined that the project was facing further delays and turned from the state of exhibition development at JMB to how to correct the problem.⁴ Ken Gorbey played a significant role in the discussions and Blumenthal asked him to take control not just of the exhibition development but also of the entire museum project with the goal of an opening in September 2001. In April of 2000, Gorbey joined the museum and brought with him his assistant in the TePapa project, Nigel Cox, to head visitor experience.

The JMB's shift in exhibition staff in April 2000 reflects longer trends in the organization, funding, and mission of German museums. Museums became more reliant on public funding throughout the 20th century and increasingly occupied a place within the civic structure of society.⁵ Museums exist today in an increasingly competitive funding environment. Decreasing private funding and diminishing returns of earlier endowments force museums to rely on public funding. However as curators at the JMB recognize, national and local governments, often the majority-funding source for contemporary museums "have adopted 'small government'

⁴Nigel Cox, interview by Brian Miller, January 2004.

⁵ See H. Glenn Penny, Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) for an analysis of the increasing role of museums within civic space in fin-de-siècle Germany.

strategies driven by economic policies that require achieving and maintaining budget surpluses. These surpluses have been arrived at mainly by cutting expenditure to which museums and the cultural sector in general have not been immune.”⁶ The attitude that museums must act more like businesses to survive and prosper is becoming progressively more apparent amongst museum professionals. As Alma S. Wittin stated in her 1970 treatise on a program for museum renewal, Museums: In Search of a Usable Future, “we live in a culture based on selling and buying, and a comparison with societies in which museums are state-sponsored has to include a reference to the loss of individual freedom that often is a part of the package.”⁷ This statement foreshadowed a subsequent move to charge admission to museums and introduction of an admittance fee has become the norm over the past several decades. This purchase by the visitor, in turn, created an aura of expectation much like that associated with the purchase of a commodity. This broader evolution of museum format is apparent in decisions made by the curatorial staff of the JMB.

Arguments over how to classify the clientele of the museum were central to how the sell message of the museum. When Gorbey and Cox arrived, they brought with them the semantics of referring to the people that visit the museum as customers or clients rather than visitors.⁸ The existing German staff rejected the overt consumerist conception of customer. Thomas Friderich, then head of exhibition research, declared that the term “visitor experience [the original title used

⁶ Ken Gorbey, “*Even Art Museums Need Missions*,” conference paper presented at “Symposium: The Museum. Mirror and Motivator of Cultural-political Visions. 1903-2003. 100 Years Österreichische Galerie Belvedere,” Vienna, Austria, 18 October 2003. Text of presentation provided by Ken Gorbey.

⁷ Alma S. Wittin, Museums: In Search of a Usable Future (Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1970), 214.

⁸ See section heading “Stranger, Guest or Client: Conceptions of Museum Visitation” in chapter 2 for a discussion on the practice of classifying museum visitors.

by Nigel Cox] is untranslatable to Germans.”⁹ Friedrich’s conceptions of a traditional museum with exhibitions tailored to a tone of academic seriousness did not agree with the highly accessible and interactive nature that the Gorbey and Cox team sought to develop in order to promote a financially successful venture. Cox, in response, claimed that “critics have been ‘over reductive’ in suggesting a museum’s only options are to be traditional or Disney like.”¹⁰ Inka Bertz, then supervisor of the museum’s collections stated, “I think museums should speak with authority . . . [I see] a danger if you’re being too much a part of a culture industry and an entertainment industry. You lose that authority.”¹¹ The inclination of Gorbey and Cox to use the term customer is telling. According to Christiane Birkett, head of evaluation and visitor research, “they were perceived as businessmen,” by the earlier staff and were less inclined to create a museum for academia.¹² Supported by visitor marketing research, Gorbey and Cox argued that the museum-going public did not want another site of remembrance of a German troubled past and actively sought to tailor the message of the museum to what they perceived as public desire. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the JMB staff perceived through market research that their target audience, non-Jewish Germans were experiencing “Holocaust fatigue.”¹³ This attitude conflicted with the ideas of the earlier group of exhibition designers who sought to structure a

⁹ Julia V. Klein, “From the Ashes, a Jewish Museum,” The American Prospect 12 no. 3 (2001): 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Christiane Birkett, interview by Brian Miller, January 2004.

¹³ Javier Pes, “Museum Practice,” Jüdisches Museum Berlin press release, 1 March 2002. Available at: <http://www.jmberlin.de/tp21806.htm>

message of atonement within the displays. The attitude of the incoming curatorial staff, providing displays that conform to their perception of what visitors want to see, illustrates the often presented criticism of the JMB as a Disneyland-like place that appeals to a mass audience at the expense of intellectual seriousness even though the curators ultimately reverted the term to visitor.

Prior to April 2000, the first curatorial staff developed exhibition themes for their peers, historians and art historians. The original staff had little interest in popular wants and desires. According to Christiana Birkett, the original staff felt that “business destroys art.”¹⁴ Gorbey and Cox overtly rejected this conception of museum use. For Gorbey, a successful museum was an existing museum and for a museum to exist, it must be profitable. Coupled with this financial necessity, which manifests itself in explicitly creating a brand, Gorbey (and many contemporary museum professionals) sees the museum as a place not strictly for stern edification from a position of authority but as a space of learning through interaction and negotiation, fun learning with choices. The conception of a corporate brand with slick packaging seems foreign to the traditional position of museums in society. Recognizing the unbridgeable conception of how the museum should communicate its representations, Gorbey fired most of the previous staff.

Just as marketing has infiltrated many museum structures in contemporary society, the influences of commercialization entered the JMB. By catering to the needs and desires of visitors (or customers as Gorbey and Cox would have it) in the name of desired continued existence, the JMB altered the way it presents itself to the public. The JMB is clearly a commercial success and provides ample opportunity for the dissemination of information about

¹⁴ Christiane Birkett, interview by Brian Miller, January 2004.

German Jews and the Holocaust. In addition, their methods promote open interpretations for individual visitor reflection. A common critique of the JMB, however, is that the curators predicated this presentation on the intention of appealing to the most people without offending anyone to provide a pleasant visitor experience. If this is the case, and I argue that it is, then the current curatorial staff of the JMB has given up too much of their position of power in their exhibition messages. Mediation must occur between satisfying the perceived desires of the museum going public and the importance of communicating vital information concerning the realities of the Holocaust.

Branding in the Jewish Museum Berlin

Turning to the process of exhibition creation in the JMB, this section focuses on the conception of the brand, a common corporate device that focuses and promotes a desired identity, developed by the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff. I follow with an analysis of curatorial decisions concerning the first temporary exhibition and conclude with an exploration of a portion of the permanent exhibition to illustrate the way the Gorbey and Cox brand influenced the displays. From early research, the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff learned that “over 40% of all respondents had ‘negative feelings’ towards previously visited Jewish museums and sites – guilt, shame, loss, bewilderment.”¹⁵ To create a more inviting environment and potential for commercial success the curators determined that the brand of the museum should focus on other aspects of German Jewish history. This process ultimately resulted in the current brands of the museum that are sold to potential museum consumers in a variety of promotional materials:

¹⁵ “Thoughts Towards Branding from Qualitative Research,” n.d., (CPP-JMB).

“German-Jewish history in all of its dimensions” and “Life – not just death.”¹⁶ The JMB was not to be only a Holocaust museum or memorial.

The importance of branding was evident from the earliest days of the Gorbey and Cox curatorial team. In a September 2000 email from Ken Gorbey to staff member Joshua Derman on “Positioning the Museum”, Gorbey stated

[a]ll too often we are perceived as a Holocaust Memorial and this is a major problem. The statement our building makes enforces this Holocaust Memorial perception . . . For a whole variety of reasons, sponsorship, public relations area, exhibition design, etc., it is the right time to start to change this perception and re-positioning (sic) the Museum. . . . The process requires us first and foremost to establish the ‘values’ that we believe it is important for the Museum to hold to.¹⁷

The development of these guiding principles or values follows from an understanding of the institutional history of the museum. Gorbey understood that construction of the Libeskind extension served

as the tail that wagged the museological dog, having a very great deal to do with the subsequent high level political decision to establish a museum of German-Jewish history . . . The alignment of architecture with a broad mission is very evident. The political processes involved resulted in intelligent decisions vis a vis societal need.¹⁸

Over the last decade of the 20th century, the physical manifestation of the *Libeskindbau*, shifted from a city museum that contained a Jewish department [the first stage of the JMB’s institutional history] to a museum built to address a societal need, namely, to deal

¹⁶ “Branding folder,” (CPP-JMB).

¹⁷ Ken Gorbey, <k.gorbey@jmberlin.de> “Positioning the Museum – a Workshop,” 29 August 2000, personal email, CPP-JMB.

¹⁸ Gorbey, Ken. *Even Art Museums Need Missions*.

with the National Socialist past by helping to confront the German Jewish relationship and seeking the lessons in that failed relationship.”¹⁹

However, with the hiring of the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff, the role of the museum shifted yet again. The desire for commercial success drove this shift. The current brand evolved from an understanding that while the Holocaust is certainly part of German-Jewish history the museum’s exhibition message (which often battles with Libeskind’s architecture) focuses not on the actors of the Holocaust but on Jewish responses to it. The projected vision is one of emotion and bravery, a message that could be embraced by all visitors. The choice of objects and the manner in which they are collected, positioned, and displayed lend a sense of dignity to the German-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. As Gorbey stated in a March 2002 press release “[w]e want visitors to see Jews not just as victims but as citizens who have made enormous contributions to Germany.”²⁰

An analysis of the proposed first temporary exhibit for the JMB provides a good example of the way the revised brand of the JMB came to dominate exhibit content. The pre-Gorbey and Cox exhibition team proposed the art of Bedrich Fritta to comprise the museum’s first Temporary Exhibit in early 2000. Fritta was a Czech-born cartoonist and graphic designer in Prague before the war. A Jew, he was interred at *Theresienstadt* in November of 1941 in the *Zeichenstube*. During this time, Fritta was part of a group of artists that created images of Nazi brutality in concentration camps and smuggled the images out of the concentration camp. In July of 1944, Fritta was arrested along with a number of other painters and deported to Auschwitz-

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Pes, “Museum Practice.”

Birkenau for creating what the Nazis termed horror propaganda. A portion of Fritta's work, dedicated to his then three-year-old son Tommy, survived hidden in the walls of his Theresienstadt workshop.²¹ The initial curatorial staff determined that these images should be the subject matter of the JMB's first temporary exhibit. In what illustrates the important ideological shift in the museum's intended message, this exhibition was never realized because of "its powerful Holocaust associations." Nigel Cox wrote in a November 2000 internal report, *Exhibition Approval Team*, that "showing the Fritta first would strongly confirm the 'JMB focuses on the Holocaust' message that we have been working so hard to move away from."²²

Nigel Cox's comment illustrates a significant and important ideological shift in the focus of the museum's brand. The exhibition team that was hired in the spring of 2000 sought to distance the museum's exhibition from a dominant Holocaust message. The museum was to represent the history of German Jews and while the Holocaust would obviously comprise a portion of the exhibit, the focus would be not on Holocaust perpetrators but Jewish responses to it. One of the most trenchant critiques of the current JMB exhibition is that the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff, cognizant of this desire of visitors (customers), de-emphasized messages of the Holocaust so as not to alienate the non-Jewish German visitor (the majority of visitors) to ensure high visitor satisfaction and thus museum profitability. This critique is too simple and crude to be entirely useful, but it does suggest that the pull of commercialism in contemporary Western

²¹ Lucy S. Dawidowitz, Miriam Novitch and Tom L. Freudenheim, Spirited Resistance: Art from Concentration Camps, 1940-1945, (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981). Freudenheim, as indicated above, was the deputy director of the curatorial staff replaced by Gorbey and Cox in the spring of 2000.

²² Nigel Cox, "Exhibition Approval Team," 24 November 2000, CPP-JMB. underlined in original.

museums is fraught with potential dangers.

In a personal interview with Nigel Cox, I discussed the hazards of organizing exhibition content solely on perceived visitor desires.²³ He provided an example from the exhibition construction in the TePapa exhibition. Cox suggested that the New Zealand staff was aware through visitor marketing research that New Zealanders were “tired” of hearing about a decree that officially subjugated the Maori peoples (indigenous peoples of New Zealand). He likened this decree to the 3/5 census reckoning for African-Americans in 19th century U.S. history. The museum was dedicated to exploring the history of Westerners and the Maori people and thus this declaration was vital to a proper understanding of the historical relationship. The curatorial solution was to create a huge billboard of the decree in one of the main atriums and to place the most comfortable benches in the entire museum in front of the display. Thus, visitors could ignore the display if desired but the comfortable seats would call to their tired feet and seated, they would face the billboard containing the “essential” information. In a similar way, the Holocaust is very much a part of the exhibition strategy at the JMB but there is a precarious balance between desire for commercial success and academic integrity. An analysis of some of the permanent exhibition stages illustrates this point.

Exhibition Development in the Jewish Museum Berlin: The Underground Axis System

This section explores exhibits on the Holocaust in the underground portion of the *Libeskindbau*. The shift in message realized under the current exhibition strategy sought to minimize the alienation of the non-Jewish German by its focus on the agency of victims rather

²³ Nigel Cox, interview by Brian Miller, January 2004.

than the actions of perpetrators. The JMB is composed of three levels. A visitor experiences them in the following order; beginning with the underground, which is comprised of the “Axis of Continuity,” the “Axis of the Holocaust,” and the “Axis of the Exile.” Then one enters Level 2, which begins with the origins of Jewry in Germanic territories after Charlemagne’s empire and continues up to 1800. Finally, on Level 1, visitors view the temporary exhibits and permanent exhibition dealing with the 19th and 20th centuries. (see Figure 6). The visitor then exits the facility by passing again through the underground level.

The evolution of the underground exhibition expresses the progression of curatorial intentions for the appropriate representation of the Holocaust in the JMB. In a series of reports prepared in early spring 2000, in anticipation of the arrival of Gorbey and Cox, the first exhibition team indicated their desire for constructed exhibition space to reflect

the existing language of form in the Libeskind building, without imitating it. It [the framework of the permanent exhibition] acts as a medium, inspiring lively dialogue between the building’s architecture and exhibition design while providing accents of harmony and contrast. Transparent and translucent materials will be used wherever possible to allow unimpeded awareness of the exceptional architecture.²⁴

The underground portion of the museum, as it exists today, is most closely linked to Libeskind’s architecture. It remains primarily in an unadulterated state and is what Nigel Cox refers to as a “Libeskind moment.” The evolution of the “Axes” exhibition space from the ideas of the terminated exhibition team, to the early ideas of the Gorbey and Cox administration, and to what finally came to comprise the space nonetheless tells the tale of differing curatorial intentions.

²⁴ “Report: Exhibition System for the Permanent Exhibition,” April 2000, 2. (CPP-JMB).

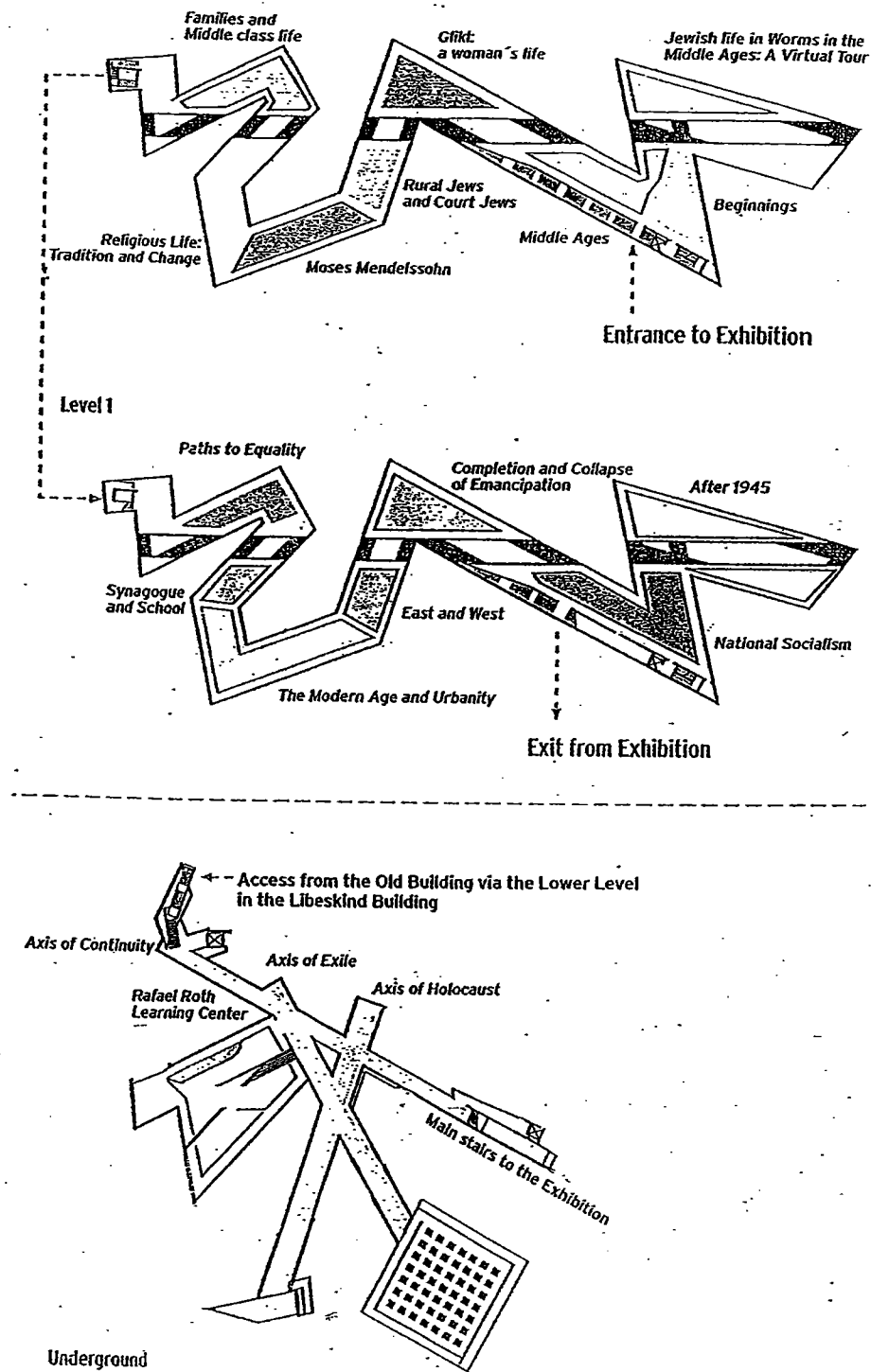


Figure 6. Map of the Jewish Museum Berlin's exhibition areas

A report called *Axis System in the Lower Ground Floor* details some of the earliest proposed exhibitions. These proposals are strongly linked to a desire to support the dominant architecture, exemplified in the ideas about how to fill a showcase at the junction of the main axis and the Axis of Exile:

The transparency of the showcase window would be muted with a dark foil. The case contains a light installation that confronts the visitor with a moving collage of light points and indecipherable fragments of structures and words. The visitor, attracted by the strange light reflexes on the muted glass, will try for a while to interpret the visual signals, then give up and proceed along the Exile Axis. What remains is a feeling of not having been able to understand or recognize something. This confusion of consciousness will combine with the effect of our concept in the Exile Axis to produce a diffuse feeling of helplessness.²⁵

Cox's notes (from October 2000) suggest another use of this specific space: "[i]n the case which is built into the wall all kinds of objects will be shown, objects which people took with them when they left Germany: suitcases, technical equipment for their profession, letters, photo-albums etc."²⁶ Ultimately, curatorial use of this case and the series of vitrines along this axis resemble what Gorbey and Cox envisioned. The vitrine contains a series of images, documents and personal belongings that told the story of emigration. The curators attached text to each of the vitrines. One reads as follows:

Objects of Memory from Berlin: The luggage to Chile also included many things from Martha Simon's side of the family, such as her porcelain coffee set which had been in her family for decades. Martha Simon, the daughter of Olga and Georg Simon, came from Berlin. When Marta and Ludwig

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ "Segment 0: The Axis," (CPP-JMB).

married in 1922 they chose to live in Marta's home town rather than Blingen. Four years later their son Herbert was born.²⁷

The text goes on to describe the Simon's family travel to Chile, where they set up a new life and, ultimately, their return to Germany in 1963 when "the items they had taken with them in 1939 from Berlin to Chile accompanied the family back to Germany."²⁸ The stories are ones of action by emigrants not of the abstract dislocation suggested by earlier proposals. Gorbey expresses this change in exhibition strategy in his understanding of mission within a given museum. For Gorbey, the scope of a museum is to establish, "the piece of intellectual territory an institution commands, and the intellectual framework applied to that territory (the 'what' we cover); coupled with the result, the societal good that the institution undertakes to value, to contribute to, to grow and to nurture (the 'why' and reason for existence)."²⁹ As demonstrated by their exhibition decisions, the societal good that is embraced and illustrated is one of positive Jewish responses and agency rather than a focus on the horrific actions taken against them. This curatorial emphasis is seen even more clearly in the section of the building known as the "Axis of the Holocaust."

The desire to evoke the fractured dislocation committed against Jews clearly evinced in earlier proposals is further illustrated by the early ideas for the "Axis of the Holocaust." The intensity of this unrealized representation emphatically illustrates the curatorial intentions of the earlier staff for the exhibition space:

²⁷ "Cases: Axis of Holocaust and Axis of Exile," n.d., 6. Pamphlet in English describing the contents of the showcases in the underground axes. Provided by JMB to visitors in 2004.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gorbey, "Even Art Museums Need Missions."

Proposal 2: The visitor enters the axis and looks toward the black wall at the end. The wall showcases are filled with soil giving the impression of a room that has sunk into the earth. The visitor hears an almost indiscernible, dull throbbing noise that causes a slight vibration. This scenario awakens the feeling of being hermetically sealing in. Air (seemingly) and daylight cannot enter thus generating a threatening, unbearable atmosphere: this symbolizes the situation in the extermination camps.³⁰

Rather than fill the five vitrines on the Holocaust Axis with dirt, the Gorbey and Cox exhibition staff suggested filling these cases with the stories of five families. A number of the stories the new staff suggested in October 2000, again illustrates the conception that the focus should be one of action rather than helplessness. For example:

- Pastels of Peter Grumbacher showing impressions of his life in a concentration camp in Southern France, Peter sent these pastels together with love letters to his young girl friend until he was murdered.
- Last letter of the widow of Max Liebermann. Martha Liebermann before she committed suicide to resist against her announced deportation (sic).³¹

Ultimately, the vitrines along this axis contained a variety of objects that tell the stories of lives lost, attempts to live despite overwhelming repression, and modes of struggle forced upon Jews. For example in Case 9c, there are collections of documents that are described in this accompanying text:

Protestant (Jewish): Alfred and Emmy Cantor both came from families with Jewish antecedents but had been baptized as Protestants, as was their daughter Anneliese. However, after Nuremberg racial laws came into effect, the family was forced to produce 'proof of origin.' Countless documents from the 1930s and 1940s are testimony to the efforts the Cantors made to provide the necessary

³⁰ "Report: The Axis System in the Lower Ground Level," March 2000, 23. (CPP-JMB).

³¹ "Segment 0: The Axis," (CPP-JMB).

evidence. Despite this they were still Jews under the Nazi law. They were therefore deported and murdered.³²

The exhibition strategy by which this portion of the museum communicates its message suggests a variety of responses to the onslaught of Nazi rule. The displayed documents emphasize the actions of victims caught in a bizarre system of faux science. By focusing on the actions rather than the system, the exhibit suggests the victims still had control of their lives. While the current exhibition does not seek to diminish the horror of the Holocaust, it does ignore perpetrators in favor of an extended focus on the actions and responses of the victims. In doing so, the exhibit silences other potential messages. Clear messages replaced vague exhibits. The focus on tragic yet sentimental stories of everyday life, not abstract suffering and guilt, negated earlier conceptions of utilizing the site for German reflection and atonement.

Exhibition Development in the Jewish Museum Berlin: Two Millennia of German-Jewish History

In this final section I turn to an analysis of the permanent exhibition, *Two Millennia of German-Jewish History*, that communicates chronologically the history of Jews in Germany from the fourth century to the present. In this section of the museum, museum curators intentionally muted themes of anti-Semitism or dealt with them in moments of isolation to make the museum more palatable to the public. This is an excellent example of the way larger commercial pressures have influenced representations of and indeed public memories of the Holocaust in contemporary Germany.

At the end of the underground axes is a well-lit stairway where the visitor ascends from

³² "Cases: Axis of Holocaust and Axis of Exile," 31.

representations of the Holocaust and begins the experience of exploring the rest of the history of Jews in Germany. In the original conception of how to use this stairwell, the curators suggested that “on the way up questions will occur to the visitor: “How could it have come to this catastrophe?, How could the Germans let this happen?, Where do all the prejudices against Jews come from? Why were the Jews not only persecuted but also systematically annihilated?”³³ The current exhibition does not openly address these questions. Instead, at the top of the stairs, the visitor is startled to find a massive artificial pomegranate tree, which, through the way that its fruit disperses seeds in many directions, suggests the Diaspora of Jews throughout Europe. The narrative then proceeds chronologically from a copy of a decree of the Roman emperor Constantine made in 321 C.E. which is “considered to be the oldest written testimony of what has since become a nearly 2000 year-old German-Jewish history.”³⁴ The narrative structure proceeds with displays of the medieval world of *Ashkenasy* Judaism, including an interactive theater that explores early Jewish communities in Germany. It continues with a case study of the life of Glikl bas Judah Leib, a 16th century author and businesswoman to illustrate the diversity of Jewish life.

The stories proceed with views of Jewish participation in court life and the Enlightenment with the underlying tone of positive contributions to the development of Germanic society. The exhibition explores the underlying tensions of anti-Semitism throughout the exhibition, but anti-Semitism is not displayed as a continual thread throughout German-Jewish history. The segment

³³ Marion Meyer, Georg von Wilcken and Silvia Reim, “Suggestions for the Development of the Museum Dramaturgy,” internal JMB report, 23 March, 2000, 6., (CPP-JMB).

³⁴ Stories of an Exhibition: Two Millennia of German Jewish History (Berlin: Jewish Museum Berlin, n.d.), 27. Exhibition catalogue of current exhibition available at the JMB bookstore.

entitled “Rural and Court Jews 1500-1800” suggests a glaring difference in conception from the earlier curatorial narrative. In an earlier report on the development of narrative strategy the title of this section was titled, “Merchants, Court Jews, Jewish Beggars – Professions, Rights, Bans.”³⁵ This segment was to be followed by another entitled “Anti-Jewishness and Persecution of Jews – The Continuity of Exclusion.” In its current form, the absence of the second titled



Figure 7. Example of false wall construction at the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photograph by author.

segment and the conscious curatorial decision to exclude “Jewish Beggars” from the title suppresses an understanding of anti-Semitism, widely acknowledged to be a vital formative

³⁵ Thomas Friedrich, “On the way to the ‘story-line’: The basic threads of a thematic structure for the permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin”, 6. Internal JMB report. (CPP-JMB).

influence in German-Jewish history. While anti-Semitism is not absent in the current exhibition, its representation in the current exhibition diminishes or deals with this theme in moments that are more isolated than those suggested by the earlier curatorial staff. Answering the questions that the earlier curators envisioned would be in the mind of the museum visitor as they ascended from the underground axes would involve a more thorough and pronounced exploration of this underlying tension. The continual tension of anti-Semitism is not as enunciated in the current exhibition.

The muting of the continual theme of anti-Semitism and the focus, when it does occur, of the triumph of Jewish individuals over prejudice continues on the next level, which illustrates 19th and 20th century German-Jewish life and promotes the theme of “inter-related diversity.”³⁶ Rather than drawing anti-Semitism as a prominent thread throughout the history of Jews in Germany, the exhibits crudely reduces this important theme to “so what happened?”³⁷ In the current segment entitled “The Emergence of Modern Judaism: 1810 to 1930,” the narrative illustrates “a young generation of German Jews at the heart of modern urban culture.”³⁸ The earlier conception of this segment suggested that:

The basic idea of this segment goes back to the once-planned ‘Modernity’ Room in the original part segment 1848-1919 of the permanent exhibition. Drawing it together with the thematic development of the thematic complex in the years after 1919 would make an

³⁶ “Segment 10: Passage,” (CPP-JMB).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

extremely attractive presentation possible, full of *tensions* and facets. [my italics]³⁹

The current version of this segment, built to resemble an early 20th century arcade, is filled with a large collection of objects and images dealing with fashion, department stores, banking, mass-tourism, popular entertainment and culture, newspapers, music, science and literature. The fantastic breadth of these objects and images subdues the tensions of anti-Semitism, integral to earlier curatorial conceptions. In written remarks concerning the development of this current exhibition narrative, Nigel Cox notes, “the present Passage sequence shows a wonderful time of progress and new ideas. The question is: So what happened? There needs to be a link between the end of the passage and the beginning of the NS era.”⁴⁰ This internal reflection is important to understanding the historical conception of the current exhibition staff. While the current exhibition traces the threads of anti-Semitism throughout the history of German Jews, it does this in a fashion that downplays the role of anti-Semitism fashioned by the earlier group. The curatorial desire of the Gorbey and Cox administration for commercial success diminished uncomfortable aspects of the narrative.

Beyond the actual exhibition materials that narrate the history of Jews in Germany the design and flow of exhibition space also speaks to the curator’s desire to promote commercially palatable visions of German Jewish history. As discussed earlier, the *Libeskindbau* is, in its architectural design, laden with suggestions of absence, fracture, and dislocation. The evocative

³⁹ Thomas Friedrich, “On the way to the ‘story-line’,” 8.

⁴⁰ “Segment 10: Passage.”

meanings of the physical spaces within the building add to messages transmitted in actual exhibitions. This is readily apparent in the underground axes portion of the museum where the lines of the architecture add to the subject matter of exile and Holocaust in the current exhibition. The earlier conception of the exhibitions sought to work in concert with the architecture in



Figure 8. Another example of false wall construction at the Jewish Museum Berlin. Photograph by author.

communicating its messages throughout the entire museum, not just the underground portion.

The earlier group of curators sought to foster an “interplay between the building’s architecture

and the design of the exhibition.”⁴¹ They considered it essential “to consider using materials which are opaque, transparent or translucent” so as not to mute the structural design and to create a harmony between exhibition and architecture.⁴² Exhibition researcher Thomas Friedrich, discussing objective elements of the facility, stated, “the outer impression the building makes on the visitor and the impression made on visitors by the route they are compelled to take on their way to the permanent exhibition” influences the messages the visitor harmony between exhibition and architecture.⁴³ The earlier curators saw this as a positive interplay; the current curatorial staff, apparently, do not.

The subsequent curatorial staff muted this powerful architectural voice by constructing false walls in the first and second level of the exhibition (See Figure 7). The Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff saw this alteration of space in the permanent exhibition area as necessary to allow their desired narratives to speak. Nigel Cox, when asked how the architecture was or was not integrated into the themes and messages of exhibition, stated:

You could argue that the building already says everything and many Berliners already thought so. Three hundred thousand people paid to visit the empty building and loved it but what they loved, in my opinion, was its expressionistic expression of the Holocaust, in other words, it was an empty building that already said something and what it spoke about was very grim emotions and yet at the same time it was slightly a blank slate on which one could project anything you like. I think that is why the visitors liked it so much, they could all read it as responding powerfully to their own inner feelings of the past. We could not live with that, it was too strong for us. One reason was that all of its

⁴¹ “Report of Exhibition System for the Permanent Exhibition,” 6. Internal JMB report, (CPP-JMB).

⁴² Ibid., 11.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

messages were tied up with the Holocaust. And this museum, by decree of Michael Blumenthal, was not a Holocaust institution. The subject of the museum was two thousand years of German-Jewish history. So there you have an early tension between the subject of the building which I know Daniel Libeskind does not perfectly agree with us, but this is my opinion, that the subject of the building, which is the Holocaust, and the subject of the museum which is two thousand years of German-Jewish history, which is another thing, which includes the Holocaust but is a different thing.⁴⁴

I quote his response in length because it succinctly states the position of the current exhibition staff. As dictated by their developed brand, the JMB is not a Holocaust institution and to achieve its desired messages the curators consciously muted the architecture so that their desired narrative dominated the exhibition.

To achieve this Gorbey and Cox developed what they referred to as three modes of using the building. First, they designed “Libeskind moments,” spaces in the museum “when the architecture came through so strongly that we would not try to get in the way of it. We would let the architecture speak.”⁴⁵ The underground axes most clearly express this moment. The second mode was one of cooperation, where “we [Gorbey and Cox] tried to co-exist with [the architecture] comfortably to take moods from it, to take points from it and add to that what we wanted to make in exhibition terms.” And “the third mode was that we [Gorbey and Cox] were going to obliterate the architecture. We were going to completely cover it if necessary, cover windows, obscure shapes and so forth.” This third mode (See Figure 8) resonates most clearly in the upper two levels of the exhibition and, ultimately, supported the representation of their conception of German-Jewish history as being about something more than just the Holocaust.

⁴⁴ Nigel Cox, interview by Brian Miller, January 2004.

⁴⁵ Ibid. The following series of quotes are from this same interview.

Conclusion

The original curatorial staff of the JMB saw the *Libeskindbau* and the development of an accompanying exhibition as an opportunity to confront and atone for a troubled past. The museum's executives, however, determined that this mode of representation would not produce a commercially viable museum and hired the curatorial team of Ken Gorbey and Nigel Cox to realize their vision of an appropriate and sellable conception of the Holocaust and German Jewish history. The methods of the Gorbey and Cox curatorial team departed from the conceptions of the first team and embraced modes of operation that are increasingly characteristic of contemporary museum practices.

A dominant feature of these new practices is the commercialization of museums both in terms of the processes used to determine appropriate messages and the means by which exhibition design communicates these messages. Decreasing public funding drives museums to secure financial stability, and thus continued existence, by creating a commercially viable enterprise. The development of a brand and exhibition tailored to what was perceived as public desire in the JMB under the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff is an excellent example of this movement within contemporary museum practices. The Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff conducted visitor research to discover what potential and actual visitors would like to experience in the JMB. This, in turn, led to the creation of an exhibition perceived as suitable for a positive visitor experience. Of course, the purposes of this are pedagogical but they are also commercial. The prospect and necessity of commercial success in large part dictated the messages presented

in the current exhibition. As a result of this mode of commercialization, the current exhibition diminished and reshaped the history of the Holocaust to be more palatable to the public. By replacing the earlier mode of representation with the commercially viable method of the Gorbey and Cox curatorial staff, the potential place of the JMB within a system of German atonement for the Holocaust was muted. German-Jewish history is a unique and troubled history and utilizing the evolving model of the new commercially successful museum to express this history does not successfully accomplish the important goal of atonement. While the curatorial message of the current exhibition in the JMB does deal with important aspects of this history, the privileging of a visitor-friendly message over a more difficult one diminished an opportunity for reconciliation envisioned by the initial staff.

-Conclusion-

The Berlin City Museum, formed in 1962 by the *Association for the Friends and Sponsors of the Berlin Museum*, traveled through many conceptions and social upheavals before it finally opened its doors to the public as the Jüdisches Museum Berlin (JMB) in 2001. Prior to 1989, the planners of the museum focused on a museum concept that presented the history of Judaism in Berlin and Germany as integrated within the larger history of the city and nation. Planners presented this model as critical to counter the intended eradication of Judaism during the National Socialist period. By including the history of the Jews as a constitutive component of the larger history of Germany, museum planners hoped to enunciate the vital contributions by Jews to the history of Berlin and Germany. The acceptance of the Libeskind design in 1989 for the planned extension to the Berlin City Museum dramatically altered the planners ability to continue with its conception of integration. Daniel Libeskind's dramatic architectural design, dominated by Holocaust imagery, fundamentally informed museum planners' intentions for appropriate museological messages during the early 1990s and created, I argue, an insurmountable impasse to the planners in the late 1990s who sought to return to the early model of integration. This thesis analyses the formative period of exhibition development in the JMB, during the late 1990s through the museum's opening in 2001, to present an example of the construction of Holocaust memory in contemporary Germany. The manner in which the Holocaust is represented in contemporary Germany has critical implications to a society that

seeks to come to terms with its genocidal past.

In chapter one, I developed a model to explore the processes of societal interaction that guide the formation of a particular representation or memory of the past. I suggest that utilizing William Sewell's model of system and practice presents cultural historians a valid method to explore the creation of memory and, more importantly, the ideological and economic impetus for the emphasis on one representation over another. Chapter one presented a number of examples within current Holocaust historiography that seek to debunk the process of memory construction as led by the pursuit of capital 'T' truths. This lays bare the actions and intentions of different groups, in a position of power, desiring control of what they perceive as the correct ideological discourse. Exploring the intentions of these power structures that seek the privilege to articulate the official representation of the past illuminates the process of memory construction in a given society. One such group possessing the power to articulate official representations of the past are museum curators. My exploration of the curatorial processes of exhibition formation in the JMB illustrates the process of, and competition for, memory construction.

Chapters two and three presented and analyzed the detailed construction of Holocaust representation in the Jewish Museum Berlin. In chapter two, I contextualized the cultural landscape in which the museum's curators operated. The use of visitor marketing research developed over the 20th century into a tool that the JMB's curators used to make exhibitional decisions based upon the prospect of "high visitor satisfaction." In doing so, the present curatorial staff of the JMB chose representations based upon commercial viability to the

detriment of the unique pedagogical responsibility inherent to the presentation of Holocaust memory in contemporary Germany.

In chapter three, I presented and analyzed the exhibitional intentions of the two curatorial teams at the JMB during the period of exhibition formulation. The first group sought to utilize the Libeskind architectural design to inform their exhibitional content with the central mission of creating a site for reflection and German atonement for the Holocaust. The subsequent curatorial staff sought to distance museum messages from the inherent Holocaust imagery of the *Libeskindbau* and to present messages that emphasized the active resistance of the victims of the Holocaust and minimized representations of German perpetrators. Informed by the visitor marketing research projects of 1999 and 2000, the curatorial staff perceived that the museum-going public was experiencing “Holocaust fatigue” and were not likely to visit a museum whose exhibitional content centered on the Holocaust. The JMB’s curatorial staff, utilizing practices more often found in the corporate marketplace, made these exhibitional decisions, based upon the prospect of commercial success.

The memory of the Holocaust, and the manner in which it is represented, in contemporary Germany, is of vital significance. How a society reconstitutes itself after such a tragic event profoundly illuminates the inner workings of memory and commemoration practices. The manner in which the present curatorial staff of the Jewish Museum Berlin conceived and constructed the exhibitional messages and representations of the museum suggests the increasingly dominant role, and potential dangers, of commercialism in presenting a remembered

past. Germany leads the world in acknowledging and exploring their past social crimes but, I argue, an important opportunity for atonement was lost when the current curatorial staff privileged financial success over the presentation of more difficult and uncomfortable, yet socially necessary, representations of the horror of the Holocaust.

-Bibliography-

Primary Sources: Publications cited in Martina Weinland and Kurt Winkler's Das Jüdische Museum im Stadtmuseum Berlin: Eine Dokumentation. Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung Beuermann GmbH, 1997.

Berlinische Notizen. Nr. ½, 1975.

Berlinische Notizen. Nr. 4, 1987.

"Aktuelles der Woche," 10.2.1983. Landespressediens Berlin.

Primary Sources: Archival materials and internal reports housed at the Jewish Museum Berlin. This material was made available to me during a research trip to the Jewish Museum Berlin in January 2004. This material was contained within several boxes containing folders and notebooks and was located in Mr. Nigel Cox's office. Due to the internal nature of these reports, many are undated but were written during the formative period of exhibition development at the Jewish Museum Berlin (1999 -2001). The author maintains a copy of all of the materials indicated.

Birkert, Christiane. "Summary of Visitor Research and Evaluation at the Jewish Museum Berlin." Internal report emailed to the author in 2003.

"Branding folder."

Cox, Nigel. "Exhibition Approval Team," 24 November 2000.

Friedrich, Thomas. "On the way to the 'story-line': The basic threads of a thematic structure for the permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin." n.d.

Kirchberg, Volker. "Summary," Basica Forschungsinstitut. n.d.

—., "Summary", Basica Forschungsinstitut - Geschichtswissen potentieller Besucher February, 2000.

Meyer, Marion, Georg von Wilcken and Silvia Reim, "Suggestions for the Development of the Museum Dramaturgy." 23 March, 2000.

"Thoughts on Study no. 3: Expectations and Thoughts on a Jewish Museum in Berlin." n.d.

- “Thoughts Towards Branding from Qualitative Research.” n.d.
- “Some Replies from Study # 4.” n.d.
- “Visitor and Market Research at the JMB October 2000.” n.d.
- “Post Opening Evaluation Report.” n.d. but written after September 2001.
- “Report: Exhibition System for the Permanent Exhibition,” April 2000, 2.
- “Report: The Axis System in the Lower Ground Level,” March 2000.
- “Segment 0: The Axis.” n.d.
- “Segment 10: Passage.” n.d.
- “Thoughts Towards Branding from Qualitative Research,” n.d.

Secondary Sources: Books, Articles, Pamphlets, and Press Releases.

- Allen, Keith. “Towards a Transatlantic History of the Museum Visit.” AICGS/German-American Dialogue Working Series Papers. American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 2002.
- Applegate, Celia. A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Assmann, Jan. “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity.” New German Critique 65 (Spring/Summer 1995).
- Borghart, Pieter and Christophe Madelein. “The Return of the Key: The Uncanny in the Fantastic.” Image and Narrative, January 2003.
- Borsdorf, Ulrich and Heinrich Theodor Grütter, eds. Orte der Erinnerung: Denkmal, Gedenkstätte, Museum. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1999.
- “Cases: Axis of Holocaust and Axis of Exile,” n.d. Pamphlet in English provided by JMB to visitors in 2004.
- Cole, Tim. Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler – How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Confino, Alon. “AHR Forum: Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method.”

- American Historical Review, 102 (December 1997).
- Dawidowitz, Lucy S., Miriam Novitch and Tom L. Freudenheim, Spirited Resistance: Art from Concentration Camps, 1940-1945. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981.
- Doering, Zahava D. "Strangers, Guests or Clients: Visitor Experiences in Museums." conference paper presented at Managing the Arts: Performance, Financing, Service, Weimar, Germany, March 1999. Full text available from Institutional Studies Office of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
- Fiske, John. Understanding Popular Culture. Routledge: New York, 1989.
- Faubion, James D. Michel Foucault: Power - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. New York: The New Press, 2000.
- Finkelstein, Norman G. The Holocaust Industry: Reflection on the Exploration of Jewish Suffering. New York: Verso, 2000.
- Gillis, John R., ed., Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Gorbey, Ken . "Even Art Museums Need Missions," conference paper presented at Symposium: The Museum. Mirror and Motivator of Cultural-political Visions. 1903-2003. 100 Years Österreichische Galerie Belvedere. Vienna, Austria, 18 October 2003.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. On Collected Memory. Edited by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Henderson, Amy and Adrienne L. Kaeppler, eds. Exhibiting Dilemma: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.
- Huener, Jonathan. Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003.
- Jahrbuch 1995 Stadtmuseum Berlin. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1997.
- Judaica Katalog: Abteilung Jüdisches Museum. Berlin: Vera Bendt, 1989.
- Karp, Ivan and Steven D. Lavine, eds. Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of MuseumDisplay. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Karp, Ivan, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds. Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture. Washington : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

- Kirchberg, Volker. "Visitor Studies in Germany: Past, Present, and Potential." Visitor Studies Today! 3, no. 1 (2000).
- ., "Repository of Memories or Catalyst of Illumination? Attitudes and Expectations Towards the Jewish Museum Among Generations and Classes." Lecture manuscript presented at the William Paterson University Seminar on Genocide and Holocaust at William Paterson University, New Jersey, April 4, 2004.
- Klein, Hans-Joachim. Museum und Öffentlichkeit: Fakten und Daten, Motive und Barrieren: Berliner Schiften zur Museumskunde. Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1981.
- Klein, Julia V. "From the Ashes, a Jewish Museum," The American Prospect 12 no. 3 (2001).
- Kurin, Richard. Reflections of a Cultural Broker: A View from the Smithsonian. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.
- Lackmann, Thomas. Jewrassic Park: Wie baut man (k)ein Jüdisches Museum in Berlin. Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2000.
- Libeskind, Daniel. The Space of Encounter. New York: Universe Publishing, 2000.
- Linenthal, Edward T. Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Linenthal, Edward T. And Tom Engelhardt. History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.
- Lord, Barry and Gail Dexter Lord, eds. The Manuel of Museum Exhibitions. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.
- Marcuse, Harold. Legacies of Dachau The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Klaus, Neumann, Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Orosz, Joel J. Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1990.
- Penny, H. Glenn. Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Pes, Javier. "Museum Practice," Jüdisches Museum Berlin press release, 1 March 2002. Available at: <http://www.jmberlin.de/tp21806.htm>

- Sewell, William H. "Concept(s) of Culture," Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds. Beyond the Cultural Turn. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Simpson, Moira, G. Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Stories of an Exhibition: Two Millennia of German Jewish History Berlin: Jewish Museum Berlin, n.d.
- Till, Karen E. Place and the Politics of Memory: A Geo-Ethnography of Museums and Memorials in Berlin. PhD diss. Submitted to University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996.
- Weil, Stephen E. "The Museum Made Public," Museum Management and Curatorship, 16, no. 3 (1997).
- ., Rethinking the Museum: And Other Meditations. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.
- ., A Cabinet of Curiosities: Inquiries into Museums and their Prospects. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.
- Weinland, Martina and Kurt Winkler. Das Jüdische Museum im Stadtmuseum Berlin: Eine Dokumentation. Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung Beuermann GmbH, 1997.
- Wittin, Alma S. Museums: In Search of a Usable Future Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1970.
- Young, James E. Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- ., The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- ., At Memory's Edge : After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.