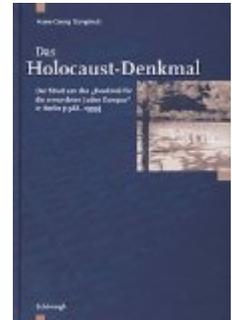


Hans-Georg Stavginski. *Das Holocaust-Denkmal: Der Streit um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ in Berlin (1988–1999).* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2002. 357 S. + 22 Abb. EUR 35.80, broschiert, ISBN 978-3-506-78635-7.



Reviewed by Peter Rosenbaum

Published on H-German (June, 2005)

Located at the site of the former Ministry gardens and in proximity to the new parliament and government district in the heart of Berlin, the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," with its waving field of some 2,700 pillars and an underground information center, has arguably become the first national memorial of the Berlin Republic. The memorial was originally conceived by grass roots activists in 1988. The memorial plans gained political momentum after the reunification of Germany and the designation of Berlin as its new capital. Finally, in 1999 the German government passed a resolution to erect the memorial. The decision to build the new memorial in Berlin shows the extent to which public acts of remembrance have entered the realm of German national politics, frequently blurring the question of who remembers whom and what, and how. It goes hand in hand with both the 1996 proclamation of January 27, the day Auschwitz was liberated, as Holocaust Memorial Day in Germany and the government's 1999 plan to support the country's numerous memorial sites (*Gedenkstättenführerkonzeption des Bundes*). Indeed, the appropriation of the Nazi era and the

victims of collectively perpetrated crimes for the formation of national identity has triggered a debate that has been well documented in at least half a dozen books.[1] This debate sits alongside the discussion of issues such as the artistic representability of the Shoah and the struggle for recognition of other victim groups persecuted during the Nazi era.

Hans-Georg Stavginski's book is one of two recent publications to provide a historical account of the memorial debate.[2] It consists of four chronological chapters that cover the genesis of the memorial from the first public call by a citizens'initiative in 1988 until the parliament's final vote on the revised version of architect Peter Eisenman's proposal. The book is based on extensive materials ranging from documentations and competition descriptions to press releases, open letters, and articles from regional and national newspapers and weeklies. Stavginski focuses on three areas of investigation: the concept of the memorial as it was formulated and discussed in competition descriptions, submissions, and colloquia; the purpose envisioned for the memorial;

and public responses to the memorial in all of its developmental stages. Chapters 1 through 3 include in-depth discussions of central topics that have emerged during the debates. The first chapter details arguments for and against the exclusive dedication of the memorial to the Jewish victims at the expense of other groups of victims, particularly the Sinti and Roma. Chapters 2 and 3 address the political and aesthetic dimensions of the memorial and the extent to which the Nazi past serves as a source for national identity, respectively. The appendix provides copies of the appeals for the construction of the memorial, development plans, and images of the finalists' projects including Eisenman's winning design in its various versions.

In the first chapter, Stavginski traces the period between the memorial's inception in 1988 by the private citizen's initiative Perspektive Berlin e.V. and the 1993 success of this group in securing the support of both the Berlin Senate and the federal government. During this initial phase of the debate, the area originally envisioned for the memorial, the former site of the Gestapo headquarters, became a point of contention. The site had already been enmeshed in a debate about its future: should it document the system of terror or commemorate the victims of the same? After a special commission decided in favor of the "Topography of Terror," an area bordering on the former death strip of the Berlin Wall and the former Ministry Gardens in Tiergarten was designated for the memorial. Here, immediately west of the Brandenburg Gate, the memorial was given an even more visible place in Germany's new capital. The first chapter also addresses the dedication of the newly designed "Memorial to the Victims of Tyranny and War" in Schinkel's Neue Wache in 1993. This project was driven largely by former chancellor Helmut Kohl's desire to have a memorial that would be suitable as a site for foreign state representatives to pay their respect to the dead and fallen while visiting the capital of reunified Germany. The resultant attempt to turn a

large-scale version of Käthe Kollwitz's pietà "Mother with Dead Son" (1937-38) into a national memorial ultimately refocused the discussions surrounding the plans for the memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe and, indeed, furthered its cause. Following widespread opposition to a memorial that collapsed all victims into one group, Kohl offered his support for a memorial exclusively dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims. The most controversial aspect of the early years of the memorial debate hinged on this very idea of a memorial dedicated exclusively to the memory of the murdered Jews. With their struggle for recognition as victims that had often been at the margins of the public eye, representatives of the Sinti and Roma favored an inclusive memorial. They argued against what they perceived as a potential subdivision into first- and second-class victims of genocide. Stavginski provides a brief history of the persecution of Sinti and Roma in Nazi Germany and the discriminations they suffered in the post-war period. He then carefully argues for an inclusion of the Sinti and Roma along with other groups of victims. The author concludes that, while the Shoah cannot be compared to the extermination of other groups of victims, respect and mourning for the victims cannot be hierarchically determined.

Chapters 2 and 3 cover the periods 1994-95 and 1996-98. They discuss the two competitions for the memorial's design, the first held in 1994 and the second in 1997, following a series of colloquia and restricted to a pre-determined list of artists. According to Stavginski, the unevenness of the submissions reflects both the ill-formulated call for submissions and an outdated notion of the term "monument" (*Denkmal*). The 528 submissions to the first competition display a range of aesthetic abilities and historical sensibilities. The description for the first competition remained vague in its objectives and expectations; it left open the questions of whether the future memorial should take the form of a monument, a museum, a memorial site, or an information center.

More importantly, the call did not specify what political and social purposes the new "national" memorial would serve. Aesthetic considerations aside, the large measure of freedom granted to the artists also revealed a fundamental confusion as to what a collective central memorial should accomplish when considering its historically charged site and the numerous memorials and museums already in place in its proximity and throughout Germany. Shortly after a jury of fifteen members had reached its decision, the submissions of the two winners (Christine Jackob-Marks and Simon Ungers) met with wide-spread criticism and caused Kohl to withdraw his support. They consisted of a monumental gravestone engraved with the names of the murdered Jews and, in the case of the second design, the names of concentration and extermination camps. While Kohl's veto came as a blessing in disguise, even to those who usually would not subscribe to the former chancellor's sense of historical responsibility, his successful intervention also points to what Stavginski astutely analyzes as a lack of public involvement in the first competition. One of the underlying questions throughout the debates around the failed first competition addresses the status of the monument within a rapidly proliferating culture of remembrance and commemoration. At the end of the second chapter, Stavginski examines how different conceptions of monuments and memorials have evolved since the nineteenth century. He pays particular attention to the post-WWII period and the memorialization of the Shoah. He concludes that the first competition seemed to rely on the nineteenth-century conception of the memorial as merely aesthetic sculpture. This left the burdened legacy of national memorials unquestioned, and ignored the memorial's inherent communicative function. Thus, Stavginski's criticism also extends to the lack of integration of public discourses into the competition and the decision-making processes.

In chapter 3, Stavginski discusses the second competition and its three preparatory colloquia,

which were intended to break the deadlock over the memorial debate. He argues that these forums again failed to address the larger aesthetic, political, and moral questions that had been raised during the debates. And once more, the public was excluded from playing a larger role in the planning process. This exclusion confirmed that decisions were based on political considerations and the artistic and historical sensibilities of the appointed members of the memorial commission, not on public opinion. Not surprisingly, it was once again Kohl's support for the design by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra which would determine the course of the memorial debate. Serra was asked to make a number of changes to the original proposal, and accordingly, withdrew from the project. This left Eisenman in charge of modifying the chosen design (Eisenman II). Despite the commissioners' final selection of a memorial proposal, the list of opponents to the memorial grew longer and became a topic of the federal elections. The opposition culminated in Martin Walser's acceptance speech for the 1998 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. He not only dismissed Eisenman's design as a "horror event made of concrete," but, more to point, questioned the very idea of public remembrance. Stavginski criticizes Walser's speech as an attempt to normalize Germany's history and, ultimately, put memory in its place--out of the public eye. The author emphasizes the need for memorials and other collective forms of remembrance that articulate the responsibility of Germans towards the victims of the Shoah. A discussion of the relationship between national identity and the Nazi past concludes the third chapter. While the concept of this memorial testifies to Germany's commitment to claim responsibility for its past, it also runs the risk of appropriating the Shoah as part of Germany's new national identity. As Stavginski explains, the memorial lends itself to serving as a means to identify with the victims. It does this through both its deflection from the perpetrators and its placement adjacent to Hitler's bunker. This

ensures its attention to and nurture of the myth surrounding Hitler rather than implicating the Germans as a people. In its current location, the memorial not only commemorates the Jewish victims but, by extension, portrays the Germans as victims of their own history.

Chapter 4 examines the debate after federal elections in 1998 until the final vote of the parliament in 1999. In his inaugural speech, the newly elected Chancellor Schröder delegates the decision on the memorial to the Bundestag and, thereby, formally elevates the memorial to the ranks of a national memorial. The German Minister of Culture Michael Naumann, one of the memorial's early skeptics, suggested opening an office of the Shoah Foundation instead of erecting the memorial. Advocates of a memorial and those of a museum soon favored a combination of the two as it provided a space for remembrance and mourning as well as for educational purposes. Moreover, the museum could compensate for what had been considered the shortcomings of the memorial by, for example, focusing on the perpetrators and other groups of victims. In his meeting with Eisenman, Naumann successfully convinced the architect to change his design, yet again, in order to accommodate a museum addition (Eisenman III). The debate entered its final phase, and the parliamentary vote revolved around Eisenman II versus Eisenman III, with the latter achieving its official approval via parliamentary vote in 1999.

In his conclusion, Stavginski summarizes his main criticisms of the memorial debate and its outcome. He argues that, rather than addressing the fundamental question of who remembers whom and to what end, the debate has continually displaced the object of remembrance. He maintains that faced with the dilemma of how to integrate the horrendous crimes of the past into its *raison d'être* as a nation, many of the debate's participants have all too quickly moved towards a conception of the memorial as a national symbol and away from critical self-reflections on both the

individual and collective level. The debate about the different status of victims (*Hierarchisierungsdebatte*) attests to a lack of historical accuracy as much as it falls short of the moral universalism that Stavginski demands of the memorial project. With its focus on Hitler as the main perpetrator and its proximity to the former Berlin Wall, the site chosen for the memorial could offer a displacement of responsibility as it potentially implicates the Germans as victims of both Hitler and the division of their country. In short, the memorial runs the risk of becoming yet another symbol in an ever-expanding national memorial landscape. Stavginski would rather that the memorial present a permanent challenge to Germany's collective identity.

Stavginski's meticulously researched monograph is laudable for its careful reconstruction of a debate that testifies to the current state of the nation's formerly divided historical self-awareness. His criticisms of the debate are based on impressive empirical evidence. This gives them strong credibility, although they are hardly ever pursued further or connected to a larger argument. More often than not, the book reads like a Who's Who of the debate's key players. Stavginski all too frequently relies on quotes where an analytical probing of the arguments brought forth in support of or against the memorial would have been appropriate. As the memorial also coincides with the transition from communicative to cultural memory, a consideration of other vectors of memory would have helped to contextualize the debate. The controversies surrounding Walser's speech certainly inform our understanding of the memorial debate. But then, so do many of the controversies that took place in the 1990s, some with even more poignancy than the Walser debate. To name just a few: the discussions about the Wehrmacht exhibit, the books by Daniel Goldhagen and Norman Finkelstein, the move of the capital from Bonn to Berlin (*Hauptstadtdebatte*), the responses to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and the debates about the compensa-

tions for former forced laborers and Jewish victims. Clearly, a discussion of all of these issues in detail would have gone beyond the scope of Stavginski's book. Yet a succinct account of where these discussions overlap could, for example, provide a more nuanced investigation of the interstices between memorial work and (political) responsibility. All in all, however, Stavginski's work represents a valuable contribution for scholars interested in post-reunification German identity as well as questions of ethics and commemorative practices in the confrontation of Germany's past.

Notes

[1]. For the most extensive documentation, see Ute Heimrod, G nter Schlusche and Horst Seferens, eds., *Der Denkmalstreit--das Denkmal? Die Debatten um das "Denkmal f r die ermordeten Juden Europas". Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1999). Furthermore, see Neue Gesellschaft f r Bildende Kunst e.V., ed., *Der Wettbewerb f r das "Denkmal f r die ermordeten Juden Europas". Eine Streitschrift* (Berlin: Verlag der Kunst Berlin, 1995); Michael S. Cullen, ed., *Das Holocaust-Mahnmal. Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Z rich: Pendo Verlag AG, 1999); Michael Jeismann, ed., *Mahnmal Mitte. Eine Kontroverse* (K ln: DuMont, 1999); Gerhard Schwegh user and J rg H. Gleiter, eds., *Wegschauen? Weiterdenken! Zur Berliner Mahnmal-Debatte* (Bauhaus-Universit t Weimar: Universit tsverlag, 1999); Riki Kalbe and Moshe Zuckermann, eds., *Ein Grundst ck in Mitte. Das Gel nde des k nftigen Holocaust-Mahnmals in Wort und Bild* (G ttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2000); and Holger Th nemann, *Das Denkmal f r die ermordeten Juden Europas. Dechiffrierung einer Kontroverse* (M nster: LIT Verlag, 2003).

[2]. The other book is by Jan-Holger Kirsch, *Nationaler Mythos oder historische Trauer? Der Streit um ein zentrales "Holocaust-Mahnmal" f r die Berliner Republik* (K ln: B hlau Verlag, 2003).

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Citation: Peter Rosenbaum. Review of Stavginski, Hans-Georg. *Das Holocaust-Denkmal: Der Streit um das „Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas“ in Berlin (1988–1999)*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2005.

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