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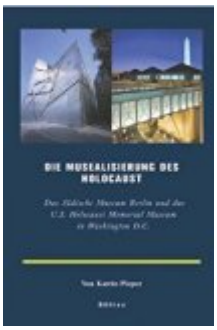
Katrin Pieper. *Musealisierung des Holocaust: Das Jüdische Museum Berlin und das U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. Ein Vergleich.* Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2006. 368 S. gebunden, ISBN 978-3-412-31305-0.



Reviewed by Andrew Gross

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Taking Holocaust commemoration as her case study, Katrin Pieper has written a comparative history with the intent of demonstrating the importance of national contexts. In this she is responding to the thesis put forward by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, among others, that commemorating the Holocaust has developed into a "global memory culture," global in this sense referring to a triangular relation between Germany, Israel, and the United States. Levy, Daniel; Sznaider, Natan, Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust, Frankfurt am Main 2001, pp. 9-11. Pieper's transatlantic response to the globalization thesis focuses on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB). She describes but is not primarily interested in their obvious overlaps in subject matter, theme, architecture, personnel, and artefacts, all of which are significant. Her main interest is rather the differences between the two museums, both in institutional structure and architecture, and she takes these differences to reveal the contours and conflicts of contemporary identity politics specific to both nations. In other words, Pieper reads architecture to elucidate divergent histories of Jewish "integration" (p. 17). Her assumption is that the spatial form of architecture can tell us something about social and cultural forms of behavior. In her analysis, museums have a doubly symbolic relation to society, serving as "projection screens" for national myths and ideals and as "sedimentary records" of the conflicts and compromises leading up to their construction: "Nationale Mythen und Ideale sowie politische und repräsentative Bedürfnisse sedimentieren sich in den architektonischen und inhaltlichen Konzepten bzw. werden auf den Ort des Museums projiziert." (p. 12)

While the two museums are often compared (reviewer's disclaimer: in a forthcoming article I compare them myself), even their names indicate substantial historical and philosophical differences. While the Washington D.C. museum sets out to commemorate the Holocaust, the Berlin museum seeks to provide a record of Jewish life in a distinct geographical region from 2000 years ago to the present. However, distinguishing between the two museums is not so simple. The JMB, as many have pointed out, is a history museum

but also a Holocaust memorial, symbolizing, through its fragmented or deconstructive architecture, the difficulty of subscribing to coherent historical narratives after the Holocaust, especially in regard to the German Jewish community (pp. 239-249). Daniel Libeskind's architecture deliberately – some would say heavy-handedly – disrupts the possibility of presenting Jewish history as a coherent historical narrative. His famous "voids" – non-functional spaces designed into the building and intended to remain empty – are attempts to evoke the palpable absence of Jewish-German history, namely the murdered and exiled Jewish citizens whose lives, contributions, and property no museum can ever replace.

The exhibit at the JMB, arranged as a narrative or storyline by some of those responsible for the exhibit at the USHMM, tends to work against the deconstructive elements in Libeskind's architecture. It is precisely this contradiction between narrative and architecture that Pieper takes to be representative of the paradoxical position of Jews in contemporary German society (p. 306, p. 319, p. 323). The debates and political manœuvrings surrounding the construction of the JMB suggest that politicians sometimes have an easier time commemorating murdered Jews than communicating with living ones – to put it perhaps too crassly. A trend that has continued through construction of the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe involves consulting American Jewish experts as a way of invoking the "Jewish eye," as James E. Young once strangely put it, while bypassing the extremely heterogeneous and not always compliant Jewish German community. Young, James E., At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture, New Haven 2000, p. 196 (in German: Nach-Bilder des Holocaust in zeitgenössischer Kunst und Architektur, Hamburg 2002). While Pieper tends to agree with Young's assessment of the "counter-monumental" function of the JMB, i.e. calling traditional German national narratives into question, she is right to counter his optimism with the observation that even counter-national narratives can serve national purposes. The JMB, as she puts it, is primarily a monument for non-Jewish Germans (p. 218, pp. 321-322).

The USHMM, on the other hand, is undeniably central to Jewish American constructions of identity, as the heavy lobbying and fundraising by various Jewish interest groups revealed. However – and this is the paradox that interests Pieper – in its representation of Jewishness it becomes emblematically American (p. 319). Hence its presence on the Mall in Washington DC near the monuments and memorials so central to American self-fashioning, and hence the overwhelming proportion (90 percent) of non-Jewish visitors (p. 89). The museum qualifies the Holocaust as an American event and represents Jews as exemplary citizens, and this in three related ways: first by figuring the United States as a liberator nation in a noble war between the forces of good and evil; second by representing Jewish survivors as model immigrants who left the ruins of the old world to prosper in the new; third by providing the survivors, and by extension the Jewish community, with a credible tale of suffering, which has an important currency in the increasingly victim-oriented discourses of contemporary multi-culturalism. In her reading of the USHMM Pieper largely follows the work of historians like Peter Novick and Tim Cole who began drawing attention to the "Americanization" of the Holocaust a decade ago. Novick, Peter, The Holocaust in American Life, New York 2000 (in German: Nach dem Holocaust. Der Umgang mit dem Massenmord, Stuttgart 2001; Cole, Tim, Selling the Holocaust from Auschwitz to Schindler. How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold, New York 2000.

Pieper's primary and secondary research is, for the most part, excellent. I suspect her monograph will serve as a source book and compendium for other historians and cultural theorists for years to come. The book is, at times, repetitive, and would have benefited from editorial pruning.

Also, the frame argument is largely a rehearsal of the familiar debates between theorists like Young, who are committed to the national context in their understanding of how Holocaust memorials can inscribe counter-nationalist narratives, and those like Sznaider and Levy who advocate understanding Holocaust commemoration from a more overtly post-national perspective. Pieper's comparison between the two museums serves mainly to illustrate her assumption that "integration" means something different in the United States and Germany. On the one hand Pieper treats integration as a synonym for "Americanization," and on the other hand as shorthand for a whole complex of difficulties – social, institutional, political, and representational – having to do with both the uncomfortable position of the Jewish community in Germany, and the resultant difficulty of fitting the Jewish Museum into Berlin's network of regional museums. I feel that both her characterization of the American Jewish community and her analogy between institutional and social integration are open to debate.

Pieper's account of "memory culture" is also rather provisional (p. 327). The emergence of "memory" in historical discourse is a hotly debated phenomenon. A good introduction to the issue is Kerwin Lee Klein's "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," in: Representations 69 (2000), pp. 127-150. What ultimately renders the JMB and USHMM comparable is their common commitment to memory, and their common application of specific design and architectural features to produce memory as a form of visitor experience. The fragmented architecture, narrative story lines, biographical emphasis, display of personal artefacts, and use of interactive exhibits – common to both museums – all encourage visitors to place themselves in the victims' shoes. What we have witnessed in recent years is not so much the Americanization as the personalization of the Holocaust.

A term that invariably appears in scare quotes in Pieper's book is "authenticity," denoting the intensity or believability of personal experience. However, Pieper does not devote enough space to explaining how certain architectural and design techniques produce "authentic memories" for visitors who are often several generations removed from the Holocaust. National differences are still important in history and architecture, and accounts of the demise of the nation-state have been greatly exaggerated. However, the increasingly migratory nature of museum experts and designs suggests that authenticity – considered as a designed experience – has gone global, especially when connected to "disaster tourism." One enduring legacy of the Holocaust might be the Diasporic character of its commemoration, the need to memorialize it everywhere. Pieper is more interested in examining the importance of national contexts, but she tacitly acknowledges the Diasporic nature of memory culture in her selection of examples – hence the focus on American and German and not Israeli museums, which are more closely linked to nation-building narratives (see p. 161, fn. 443). That Holocaust commemoration means something different in different national contexts is beyond question. However, we should not downplay its international character, which is one of the most significant –and ironic – developments of our time. What used to be derided by anti-Semitic nationalists as "rootless cosmopolitanism" is now praised, at least in academic and touristic circles, as authenticity.

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