

Inge Stephan, Alexandra Tacke, eds. *NachBilder des Holocaust.* Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007. 303 pp EUR 24.50, paper, ISBN 978-3-412-22506-3.



Reviewed by Andrew Gaskiewicz

Published on H-German (February, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Inge Stephan's and Alexandra Tacke's edited volume contains sixteen essays analyzing the representation and remembrance of the Holocaust in contemporary German literature, film, photography, and art. This collection originated in a seminar entitled "Geschichte erzählen: Nachbilder des Holocausts," held at the Institute for Contemporary German Literature at the Humboldt Universität in 2006. The title appears to reference James Young's book, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (2000), directly--especially his argument that artists born after the Holocaust have a relationship to these events that is artistically mediated through the various forms of remembrance and historical representation they create. Young's book and other works like Shelley Hornstein's and Florence Jacobwitz's *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (2002), primarily analyze the representation of the Holocaust in monuments and museums. Stephan and Tacke's text, by contrast, charts a new direction by focusing primarily on contemporary German litera-

ture, film, and art of the last fifteen years, particularly discussing how these works both remember and historicize the Holocaust.

Stephan and Tacke emphasize that the essays in this volume focus on fundamental changes and generational transitions in the representation of the Holocaust in contemporary German writing, film, and art, with a particular focus on how these works make the past "experiential." A central question that Stephan and Tacke ask is: "*Wie und mit welchen Mitteln historisieren zeitgenössische Künstler, Filmemacher und Schriftsteller?*" (p. 12). Related to this question is the matter of how the texts analyzed address or can be connected to the post-1989 debate on victims and perpetrators, especially increased attention on National Socialist perpetrators evidenced in movies like *Der Untergang* (2004) and *Speer und Er* (2005), as well as in document collections like Klee and Dressen's *The Good Old Days* (1991, originally published in 1987 in German). One essay by Kirsten Moeller focuses on the recent debate in the German media concerning Günter Grass's memoir *Beim Häuten der*

Zwiebel (2006), while another by Anne Lena Moesken concentrates on the older 1990s debate over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, which reemphasized the perpetrator over the victim. Another aspect of this newer emphasis on the perpetrators in the Holocaust is the increased production after 1990 of so-called *Familienromane*, often autobiographical, yet usually fictionalized or distorted accounts by descendants of Nazi perpetrators. A number of the essays analyze this particular manifestation of contemporary literature. Inge Stephan's article on Uwe Timm's autobiographical *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003) and Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* (2003) shows how these novels often repress unsavory or uncomfortable parts of the past in favor of a more sanitized portrayal. Other *Familienromane* verge on the sensational, as shown by Birgit Dahlke in her analysis of Niklas Frank's strongly judgmental and pornographic *Der Vater: Eine Abrechnung* (1987), written by the son of Hans Frank, ruler of the General Government of Poland during the Second World War. Perhaps the worst example of this literary genre mentioned in this volume is Dieter Forte's trilogy *Das Haus auf meinen Schultern* (1999), which Anne Peiter terms in her analysis "Shoah Kitsch" (p. 66). The types of *Familienromane* discussed in *Nachbilder des Holocaust* even go beyond German borders. Julia Freytag compares two Austrian family histories, one by the descendant of a perpetrator and the other by the descendant of a victim, in her discussion of Arno Geiger's *Es geht uns gut* (2005) and Eva Menasse's *Vienna* (2005). Katja Schubert, meanwhile, delves into contemporary French Holocaust literature in her essay on Cecile Wajsbrot's *Beaune la Rolande* (2004), which tells the story through a first-person narrator whose father was sent to the transit camp *Beaune la Rolande* in France and then deported to his death at Auschwitz.

The two most interesting literary works discussed in Stephan's and Tacke's collection, however, depart from the autobiographical nature of the *Familienromane* and tell their stories in very un-

conventional ways. The most radical is Elfriede Jelinek's *Das Über Lager* (1989) and *Die Kinder der Toten* (1995). The story in *Das Über Lager* is told in the form of a biographical lecture that is simultaneously undermined in the course of the text, forcing the reader to make sense of the text's meaning. Alexandra Pontzen, in her analysis of Jelinek's text, calls this "eine radikalen Rezeption-saesthtik" (p. 92). Perhaps the most interesting piece of contemporary Holocaust literature analyzed in this volume is Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* (1995), which Christian Thomas in his article declares as an "eigenständige literarische Form der Geschichtsschreibung" (p. 167) because it crosses the perspectives of a scientist in Nazi Germany with those of Joseph Goebbels's daughter in complex ways as well as constructing the narrative in a way that mixes historical documents and fiction in a montage-like fashion.

Half of the essays in this volume analyze literary works, while the rest primarily analyze films, photography, and art. The film analyses emphasize the role of the Nazi perpetrators, as in *Der Untergang* and *Speer und Er*, and what Manuel Koeppen calls *Erinnerungslandschaften* in his piece on Claude Lanzmann's *Sobibor* (2001) and Romuald Karmakars' *Land der Vernichtung* (2004). The most important essay by far is Sabine Hake's analysis of producer Bernd Eichinger's and director Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang*, a film nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Picture and which has enjoyed an enormous popular reception outside of Germany. Hake notes the film's tendency to commercialize and historicize its telling of the last ten days of Adolf Hitler's life in the bunker. *Der Untergang*, in fact, promotes a distancing effect that encouraged German audiences to experience being victims of their own pasts. Similarly, Judith Keilbach notes that a distancing effect is present in *Speer und Er*, a four part docu-drama with a complex narrative that makes good use of montage to present a rather homoerotic, simplistic view of architect Albert Speer's relationship to Hitler. The emphasis

on perpetrators and *Erinnerungsorte* is also found in German contemporary art on the Holocaust. The most bizarre is the final essay by Ulf Buschmann, which discusses how toys express contemporary Holocaust art and what effect this method of representation has had. The primary example given here is Polish artist Zbigniew Libera's *Lego Concentration Camps* (1996). In a similar vein, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan's *Him* (2001) is analyzed by Alke Vierck as an expression of the *Führer* cult of the 1930s, created chiefly through the photography of Heinrich Hoffmann.

While *Nachbilder des Holocaust* offers groundbreaking scholarship on heretofore neglected areas of Holocaust representation and memory, there are some problems with this book. The sixteen essays here cover a multitude of perspectives that would have benefited greatly from a conclusion that summed up and synthesized the many viewpoints. As it stands, the editors' introduction only loosely reflects the richness of the articles contained in this volume. At the same time, most of the authors come from a literary studies background and the book lacks historians' perspectives. More alarming, perhaps, are the connections that the editors wish to make between this volume, and two forthcoming volumes in the same series entitled *Nachbilder der RAF* and *Nachbilder der Wende*. Both of the forthcoming books also stem from seminars given in 2006 and 2007 at the Institute for Contemporary Literature at the Humboldt Universität. The editors wish to make broad comparisons between the three volumes, arguing that the Holocaust, the RAF, and the *Wende* are linked because RAF terrorists were, in a sense, the "Kinder der Nationalsozialisten" (p. 15), while on a much broader level, the division of Germany was a direct consequence of World War II, implying a vague connection between the Holocaust, the GDR, and through it the events of 1989, as well as to the RAF, some of whose members fled to the GDR. The problem with these ambiguous connections is that the editors may potentially encourage the same relativistic, trivializing, and

historicist comparisons they are attempting to critique in *Nachbilder des Holocaust*.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Andrew Gaskiewicz. Review of Stephan, Inge; Tacke, Alexandra, eds. *Nachbilder des Holocaust*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2009.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23722>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.