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A

THAT WHICH STIMULATES AND NUMBS US: THE MUSEUM IN THE AGE OF TRAUMA

by

LISA SHINKLE PATT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2003

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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April 9, 2003
Date

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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In Memoriam

Craig Owens
(1950-1990)

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INTRODUCTION

> *[There is] the taken-for-granted link between viewing items in a museum and the acquisition of knowledge—the assumed function of museums. This is discernible in museum architecture, the selection and organisation of objects, display techniques, catalogues and advertisements. We believe, as people have for at least two hundred years, that we learn things from museums. Naturally, it is accepted that there are different kinds of museums, but the overall experience associated with museums is edification.*[1]

> *In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things.*[2]

This dissertation examines four museum projects that opened in the last quarter of the 20th century with the purpose of presenting traumatic cultural material to the general public. These museum projects include the Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum in Vienna, the *Temple of Confessions* by Guillermo Gómez Peña, the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt (the AIDS Quilt), and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The traumatic material these museum projects showcase varies in form and intensity from mutilated and malformed human body parts floating in formaldehyde (the Narrenturm), to the threatening presence of the cultural Other (Guillermo Gómez Peña), to the material remnants of people who have died untimely deaths (the AIDS Quilt), to the incomprehensible horror of the World War II Holocaust (The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). The museum projects are similar in the way they challenge the "edification" paradigm that has generally governed the traditional museum—as Ludmilla Jordanova in the epigraph above characterizes it—the belief that "we learn things from museums." In the museum built to accommodate traumatic material, the edification role of the museum is often compromised. It is not

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[1]Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums," in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 22-23.

[2]Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

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merely the traumatic material we must consider as we analyze this museum, but we must also look closely at the potential for viewers coming upon the traumatic material to be traumatized. This act of viewer traumatization contradicts the "acquisition of knowledge" paradigm that is commonly used to describe the function of museums, for by definition, trauma is created in an individual because he or she cannot assimilate what stands before them into their existing knowledge. The traumatic event is incomprehensible and thus unknowable.

To best understand the function of these museums built to house traumatic material *and* to deal with the potentially traumatic effect of this material upon a viewer, it is necessary to construct an alternative paradigm to describe these new museums. Because trauma is one of the basic tenets of psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic theory can be a productive tool in this new construction. The psychoanalytic museum paradigm eschews models that begin with the museum object or collection. Instead, the new paradigm begins with the visitor to the museum space and focuses on a *performative act* of that viewer (which in psychoanalytic theory is called the "symptom") that points to the presence of trauma in an individual. The psychoanalytic museum paradigm can help unravel the often contradictory and puzzling audience reactions found in museums with traumatic material. It can also propose new configurations for this specific type of museum that may have first appeared at the end of the 20th century but which, by the beginning of the 21st century, has become a well-established and rapidly proliferating institution.

In this introduction, I define the museum by drawing a distinction between the purpose of the museum and how it actually functions for its public constituency. How and why museums are set up is often very different from how visitors actually use them. This distinction will help position this study within a growing scholarly landscape, for it is in a discussion of how the museum functions that viewer experience and response can be considered. These are the very ingredients used to identify the symptomology that makes a psychoanalytic reading like this study possible. A review of the current literature

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will point to the frequent, but ultimately superficial, call for a psychoanalytic reading of the museum. As a study that looks at trauma—one of the core concepts of psychoanalytic theory—and how traumatic assault may or may not be worked through in the museum setting, it is an investigation that addresses this scholarly lack. Finally, to begin a psychoanalytic analysis of the museum, in this introduction I present the concept of the traumatic symptom, which I call the "car crash" in the museum.

In its most standard definition, the museum is "a building or portion of a building used for the storing, preservation, and exhibition of objects considered to be of lasting value or interest, as objects illustrative of antiquities, natural history, fine and industrial art, etc."[3] At the center of this "dictionary" museum is the object and the belief that the material trace before it enters the museum is a malleable entity, amenable to being collected, preserved, and displayed. Once in the museum, the object is "static, safe, and out of the territory in which [its] meaning and use could be transformed."[4] Illustrating both the physical world and a classifiable knowledge, the implied trajectory between objects and their viewer is unilateral. It springs from the display to the viewer.

Although the dictionary would paint a picture of the museum as a three-dimensional visual rendition of a great encyclopedia of knowledge, current museum scholarship has questioned this limited view. Charles Saumarez Smith, Peter van Mensch, Edwina Taborsky, and Susan Pearce (the latter two through complex semiotic readings) have questioned the "universal" meaning that is often given to any specific museum object.[5] Others have seen a problem with the definition's "single" object, arguing instead

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[3]Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[4]Charles Saumarez Smith, "Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings," in Peter Vergo, ed. *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989, 6-21), 9.

[5]Smith, "Museums, Artefacts, and Meaning," Peter van Mensch, "Methodological museology; or, towards a theory of museum practice," Edwina Taborsky, "The discursive object," Susan Pearce, "Objects as meaning; or narrating the past," all in Susan Pearce, ed. *Objects of Knowledge* (London: The Athlone Press, 1990).

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that the museum object is a pawn in a number of complex collecting ideologies. Susan Stewart, for example, has defined the hermetic operation of the collection as that which does not represent the past, but rather replaces the past with classification, "with order beyond the realm of temporality."[6] James Clifford, Hal Foster, and Donna Haraway have focused on the artifacts of the "other," and the didactic message the museum imparts when these objects are treated as "tribal" cultural artifacts within an overarching museum narrative about that culture.[7] Still others have seen a problem with the assumption of a neutral audience that is universally open to the reception of knowledge. Ludmilla Jordanova has challenged the notion that innate knowledge is ontologically located in the object and that it somehow springs directly from the objects into the viewer's brain. She has argued that knowledge is, instead, located in the response of the individual.[8]

In fact, as Jordanova has pointed out, it is important to see the museum as an institution that may have had any number of publicly acknowledged or implicitly understood *purposes* but at the same time *functions* for its visitors, often in spite of or even in opposition to the museum's stated goals.

The *purpose* of the museum is, first, determined directly by the institution's Board of Directors (or an analogous circle of decision makers, such as a Board of Trustees or members of a scientific association), hired administrators, and the collection's curators. The purpose is, second, indirectly determined by politicians and other government funders (through government grants and awards). Finally, the purpose of the museum is the most indirectly influenced by the visitors to its spaces (e.g., through the statistics of attendance). In this formulation, it is easy to see how the museum's object or combined

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[6]Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 151.

[7]James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Hal Foster "White Skins, Black Masks," *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: New Press, 1985); Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (NY: Routledge, 1989).

[8]Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge," 22-40.

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objects (the collection) and overarching themes such as "history" or "evolution" are brought to the fore.

In contrast, in discussing the museum's *function*, the formula used to establish the chain of influence in the museum's purpose is inverted. Museology is not defined through the objects but through the visitors and their relationship to the museum. The function of the museum is linked to the way it is experienced, synthesized, and accepted or rejected. What is intended and stated in the museum's mission statement (and by the voice of the museum as reflected in signage and brochures) is less important than what is evaded, sidestepped, subverted, or inverted on the part of the visiting public. When determining how a museum functions, therefore, it is important to consider what is overlooked or suppressed in planning only to be noticed by the visitor in the interstices of the display—what is hidden, that is, only to be found.

Since the advent of what is popularly termed the New Museology[9] in the 1970s, the museum has been investigated in terms of how it functions for its viewers in two prominent ways.[10] The first of these has focused on how the museum functions as an institution of enjoyment. There is no doubt that for most visitors to the museum there is a feel-good effect. At the anecdotal level, most would locate that effect in the educational enterprise of the museum—learning about culture with the added benefit of spending time

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[9]The New Museology, as defined in Peter Vergo's book of the same name, re-examines the role of the museum within society by criteria other than its success in raising money or bringing in visitors. Museums are seen as more than just places of study, education, or entertainment. As Vergo summarizes it, "The very act of collecting has a political or ideological or aesthetic dimension which cannot be overlooked." Vergo, *New Museology*, 2. An analysis of the relationship of the New Museology to the advent of the post-modern museum is outside the scope of this study. In fact, it is difficult to say which came first, but it is certain that the critique of the museum and its day-to-day operation were intertwined. See below for a discussion on the postmodern museum.

[10]In isolating this moment in the history of critiquing museums, it is not my intention to ignore the rich history of contestation that existed before that time. Certainly one cannot ignore the literary works of Gustave Flaubert and his *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, André Malraux's *Museum Without Walls* or Marcel Broodthaers's wonderful critique of the museum in his *Musée d'Art Moderne*, "Département des Aigles." But it is important to look at these works of parody as operating *outside* the institution and the academy. What distinguishes the New Museology is that its critiques are *within* the institution (curators, directors, academicians). It is perhaps for this reason that it had a marked influence on the day-to-day practices of the museum. For a review of the museum parodies of Flaubert, Malraux, and Broodthaers, see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

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with friends, shopping in the gift shop, or enjoying coffee in the lunch room. On a theoretical level, most critics have located this effect in one of three mechanisms. In the first, the museum's pleasurable effect is seen as an inevitable consequence of the post-enlightenment shift from theology to epistemology. There is a delight in "edification," that is, in "knowing" the world around us.[11] The second mechanism is located in the museum's fulfillment of modernism's promise of social mobility. In addition to offering a safe environment to share experience with family and friends, it can be argued that the museum is open to all members of society—including women, children, and the poor. Regardless of one's social class, one can feel "comfortable" in the museum.[12] A third model, and certainly one of the most prominent in the last ten years, locates the museum's success in its ability to control the masses. Using a Foucauldian analysis, these critiques position the museum as one of many cultural institutions that facilitate social control even if it does so under the guise of enjoyment.[13]

The second vein of investigation into how the museum functions for its visitors has positioned the museal experience as one of alienation, even making the museum a place of death, like a mausoleum. Even though Theodor Adorno made that position

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[11]These "mechanisms" are roughly drawn from Sheldon Annis's work on museums as symbolic spaces, as summarized by Gaynor Kavanagh, "Making Histories, Making Museums," in Gaynor Kavanagh, ed., *Making Histories in the Museum* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 3. Sheldon Annis, "The Museum as a staging ground for symbolic action," *Museum* 151: 168-171.

[12]For a discussion of social mobility as it develops during the 19th century, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990) and Anne Freidberg, *Window Shopping and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For an argument that the museum functions as a social "ceremonial" space, see Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[13]See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics* (London: Routledge Press, 1995); Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*; Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Although all of these scholars use Michel Foucault as an anchor, there is no unifying theory among them, due in large part to the varying shape Foucault's thought took over the years. Crimp models his critique on Foucault's analysis of the prison and sees the history of the museum as a history of exclusions and confinement. Bennett focuses on the body of Foucault's work that moved away from architecture as a means of making power manifest and refers instead to the French philosopher's ideas in "the Eye of Power." Bennett argues that the museum served the purpose of regulating behavior through the relations of space and vision, which incorporated principles of self-surveillance and self-regulation in the museum space.

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canonical in the middle of the 20th century by noting the closeness in both etymology and function of the museum and the mausoleum,[14] unease towards the institution had been felt as early as 1793, when the doors to the Louvre opened.[15] In 1815, Quatremère de

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[14]Theodor Adorno writes, "The German word *Museal* has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying...Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association." *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 175. The "unpleasantness" that Adorno associated with the word *Museal* may have been more a critical ploy than one based in the German usage of that word. Nevertheless, his analysis spearheads a certain trend in Museum Studies that links the museum with the mausoleum.

[15]The charting of the history of the museum has been one of the most heated debates in museum studies. While most scholars agree that the modern museum began at the end of the 18th century, and will even pinpoint the museum's birth to the opening of the Louvre as a people's museum after the French Revolution, there is no universal agreement as to the circumstances that produced the museum at that paroxysmal moment. There have been a number of comprehensive histories that point to the public museum as a natural outgrowth of the *Wunderkammer* and *Kunstkammer* tradition of the late Renaissance. Germain Bazin, Alma Wittlin, and the often-cited anthology edited by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor all outline the collecting strategies of the 16th and 17th centuries that resulted in these cabinets of curiosities. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill places that first moment back in the early Renaissance, with the collections of Lorenzo de Medici. Paula Lee takes the moment back further in time to the ancient Maeuseum at Alexandria. Generally, American museums are left out of the comprehensive histories, which focus only on European institutions. Lacking the aristocracy of Europe, American museums were born in meager collections that favored natural history and were often augmented by questionable artifacts. Andrea Sulman Dennett and Edward Alexander both address these simple beginnings, exploring their origins in popular entertainment such as the dime-store museum and Peale's Philadelphia Museum, while Steven Conn explores the development of the American museum in conjunction with, and at times in competition with, the American University. Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age*, trans. J. van Nubs Cavil (NY: Universe Books, 1967); Alma Wittlin, *Museums: In Search of a Usable Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970); Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1985); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992); Paula Young Lee, "The Musaeum of Alexandria and the Formation of the Muséum in Eighteenth-Century France," *The Art Bulletin* 79 (September 1997), 385-412; Andrea Sulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (NY: New York University Press, 1997); Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983); Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

This group of what can be loosely termed essentialist historians is countered by a school of effective historians. "Effective history," as developed by Michel Foucault, is founded on a notion of archeology that replaced privileged notions of tradition, evolution, and development with a history that was discontinuous, ruptured, displaced, and dispersed. [Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. NY: Vintage Books, 1973.] The effective historians argue that the Museum by its very nature is a public institution and only begins then at that revolutionary moment when the Louvre was opened for all to see. There may be superficial connections to the earlier collecting impulses, but these are only surface similarities, produced in the most part by the fact that these early collections were dispersed and ended up in later museums. For instance, Douglas Crimp sees no link to the *Wunderkammer* tradition at all. Tony Bennett sees not links but disjunctions, centered largely on the definitions of "publicness" that prevented the development of the museum until the advances of the enlightenment. Preziosi, following the same line of reasoning calls the museum of the great "technologies" of the enlightenment, where it reigned not as a tool of social change but as a reflection of the philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic discourses that surrounded it. See Crimp, *Museum's Ruins*; Bennett,

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Quincy published *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art* (*Moral considerations on the destination of works of art*), in which he argued against the displacement of art objects from their site of origin. His position was that art is a natural object that can only be completely understood and appreciated in the site it was first intended for. As an *ancien*, Quatremère believed that classical antiquity represented the superior achievement in art. But more importantly, it also represented a *vita activa* that is dependent on an experiential content.[16] Wrested from their original site (in Quatremère's time, often by the armies of Napoleon), objects become nothing more than empty vessels demoted to being mere expressions of the *vita contemplativa* in the museum. This belief that museums rob us of an active cultural experience does not, however, end with Quatremère de Quincy. With a line that runs from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to Friedrich Nietzsche, and then to the first historical avant-garde,[17] to Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean Baudrillard (to name just a few), it is clear that the museum as an entity that kills culture forms one of the universal *doxa* of modern western philosophy.[18] Recent scholarship has explored the alienating nature of the museum as an effect that may not be as antithetical to the museum's popularity as it

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Birth of the Museum; Donald Preziosi "Museology and Museography," Art Bulletin 77/1 (March 1995): 13-15.

For a comprehensive history of the Louvre, see C. Gould, *Trophy of Conquest: the Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) and for the founding of the Louvre in the milieu of the French Revolution see Andrew McClellan, "The Musée du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor," *Art Bulletin* (June 1988): 300-313.

[16]Quatremère's belief can be linked to a strong tradition of aesthetic discourse (which develops first with Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century), which sees art as rooted in life. Quatremère, who formulated his ideas in the environment of revolutionary France, not only borrows the language of aesthetics, but also uses it as a shield in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. See Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 13-21.

[17] The "first historical avant-garde" was coined by Peter Bürger in his book, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984). Bürger positions the historical avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century when artists demanded that art regain a "use value" (after aestheticist withdrawal at the end of the 19th century). These artists would include members of the Dadaist, Surrealist, and Constructivist movements. For a concise review of Bürger's theory and a summary of the criticism that has developed around what has now become a canonical division see Hal Foster, *Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

[18]For a history of the argument against the museum, see Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, 9-112.

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would first seem. As an alienating site, the museum can act as a repository of uncomfortable cultural narratives and thus be useful in the way it cleans up the rough edges and orders the house of history. The job may not be pleasant, but the end result is satisfying because of the way the museum can contain that which threatens to consume the standard and accepted cultural narratives.[19]

It is within this complex and at times contradictory discussion of the museum's function that the call for a psychoanalytic reading of this multi-faceted cultural institution has emerged. Given the fact that museum studies have often stacked up on one or the other side of binary (pleasure vs. alienation) psychoanalytically formulated questions, while pointed and thought-provoking, have often been reduced to afterthoughts or footnotes.[20] Psychoanalytic analysis is dependent on a psychic duality—feelings of enjoyment (pleasure) *and* alienation.[21] A psychoanalytic reading would thus find its inspiration in a museum that functions as a site of both pleasure and alienation. A few notable studies have employed psychoanalytic interpretation to discuss the all-encompassing, but ultimately abstract, "museum." Didier Maleuvre's study of the museum stands out as a comprehensive example in this vein. Likewise, Donald Preziosi has always embraced a psychoanalytic method, employing it against standard

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[19]In her essay on Nazi memorabilia, Irit Rogoff describes how "strategies of display actually make the museum the funerary site of uncomfortable or inconvenient historical narratives. " From Ruins to Debris: The Feminization of Fascism in German-History Museums," in Sherman and Rogoff, *Museum Culture*, 233.

[20]Susan Crane writes, "Museums are flexible mirrors whose convex potential for multiple interpretations and participation ... will continue to make them appropriate venues for active memory work, either 'on site' or in the minds of those whose historical consciousness has been activated, nourished, challenged, and revived." Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum," in *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History*, 36, no. 4 (December 1997: 44-63), 63. Michael Ames, borrowing from Hans Haacke, has called museums "vineyards of consciousness." Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 111. Peter Wollen, in discussing the concealatory function of display, claims, "Display ... when its flow is arrested, can still have a revelatory power, provided it is seen, not in terms of the image, but in terms of the symptom." Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, eds. *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 9.

[21] Freud's dynamic system of the human psyche is governed by a dual system that relays between the pleasure principle (pleasure) and the reality principle (the withholding of pleasure which can sometimes manifest as anxiety, fear, or alienation). See Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 324.

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"historiography," in his discussion of the museum enterprise.[22] But to my knowledge, with the exception of Ludmilla Jordanova's analysis of medical and history museums,[23] there have been few attempts to address specific museums within specific psychoanalytic constructs.[24]

We find a perfect site in which to begin a psychoanalytic reading of the museum in the museal projects created to present traumatic cultural material to the general public. We could even say that by choosing to focus on museums that deal with trauma, the application of psychoanalytic theory is not just a methodological choice but a *necessity.* As we shall see, the four museums under study here employ the language of psychoanalytic theory (if not its basic tenets) in the planning, execution, and maintenance of their projects. Likewise, these four museums plan for a museum experience that will create periods of pleasure (or at least the feeling of well-being that comes with the acquisition of knowledge) while also acknowledging that there will be moments of alienation (or a feeling of confusion or incomprehension) in that same museum experience. But while the museums considered here might be unusual in the formation of their *purpose* within psychoanalytic constructs, it is how these museums *actually function* for the museum visitor that calls for a psychoanalytic interpretation. Specifically, there appears to be a common response in the visitors to the four diverse spaces that I examine

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[22]Donald Preziosi, "Museology and Museography."

[23]Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge," 22-40.

[24]Parts of specific museums have been studied through a psychoanalytic filter. Andrea Liss, for example, borrows Freudian language to help unpack the Identity Card Project and the Tower of Photographs in United States Holocaust Museum. Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography & the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Likewise, Marianne Hirsch has looked at surviving Holocaust photographs, including those at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in terms of her idea of postmemory, a concept that borrows from both Freudian and Lacanian theory. Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," in Barbie Zelizer, ed., *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 215-246. Finally, the recently published dissertation by Natasha Goldman at the University of Rochester looks at national Holocaust memorials (including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) through the lens of a Freudian-defined trauma. Natasha Goldman, "Missing Absence: Trauma and National Memorials to the Holocaust" (Ph.D. dissertation. University of Rochester, 2001).

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in this study that calls for a psychoanalytic reading, as an alternative to the edification paradigm most commonly used to unravel the function of museums.

In the course of their tour of each of these four museums containing traumatic material, and almost always at the same place, many viewers become immobile, silent, and "arrested" by what lies before them. In other words, the visitors themselves display the "symptom of trauma"—a moment when they cannot take in the material being presented to them and when in fact the potential for edification or the unavoidable feelings of alienation have *both* dropped away. [25] This "traumatic symptom" operates in a moment when the museum's *purpose* has faltered. But because of this faltering of purpose, the traumatic symptom can be a particularly useful moment in understanding how the entire museum *functions* for the viewer.

In psychoanalytic theory, the symptom appears when contents of the psyche that have been repressed in the unconscious threaten to return to consciousness. With trauma, that repressed material is the trauma itself—the entire trauma, and not just fragments of it—that resisted absorption into the conscious areas of the psychic system when it first occurred and has been banned to our unconscious depths. The symptom of trauma, then, is the return of that trauma that has been "forgotten."[26] It is perhaps for this reason that the symptomology is characterized by the same physical affect as that of the person undergoing the initial assault: a paralysis of initiative followed by immobilization,

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[25]In actuality, the events and objects that produce this arrest become insignificant and seem to blur into a nebulous sensation that escapes description. French surrealist Georges Bataille (writing in a psychoanalytically infused artistic environment), could only characterize that which arrests the victim of trauma as IT, "...I remain immobile, frozen, absorbed in IT... IT is nothing, there is nothing sensible in IT, not even finally darkness. In IT, everything fades away, but, exorbitant, I traverse an empty depth and the empty depth traverses me. In IT, I communicate with the "unknown" opposed to the *ipse* that I am; I become *ipse*, unknown to myself... hardly differing from a void—nevertheless differing from it more than does the world of a thousand colors." From Georges Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 145, as quoted in Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 129. Translation by Leslie Boldt, as noted by Taylor, 118.

[26]Thus the famous dictum by J. Laplanche that "it takes two traumas to make a trauma." Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Macey (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 88. For a detailed discussion of trauma theory, see chapter 1 of this study.

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and then an often automatic obedience or surrender to what is perceived as an inevitable, inescapable danger.[27]

This return of the repressed through a symptom of trauma is best understood in popular recountings of what is often called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), wherein a sensory element (usually visual or auditory) creates a response that can literally stop the sufferer in his or her tracks.[28] This freezing of movement is necessary to facilitate the other most noticeable symptom of what is theorized as the "flashback" to the traumatic scene. This is the absolute and immediate need to look at the source of that thing exterior to oneself (the sound, the object) that signaled the threatened return of the repressed (the trauma) in the first place. As it turns out, the need to look is twofold. It is not only a searching impulse but also a watching one. This explains the frozen action, the fixed gaze. The symptom signals both the threat of the return of the repressed *and* the initial response, which is to localize it and hold it at bay when and if it finally appears. As can be expected, this attention is a psychically and physically demanding operation, which probably explains its short temporal duration.[29] The symptom can be likened to a doorbell to the repressed that rings and reverberates for only a short while. Like the

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[27]In strict Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, by which I am abiding here, the symptom is linked to the body as opposed to *parapraxes* (modifications of speech) or hallucinations (modifications of speech and body). For a description of these distinctions, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 7. The term "symptom" is often used, however, to describe all psychic effects of the unconscious, including disturbances of speech.

[28]The assault of sound or vision is the second trauma that makes the first trauma "return." PTSD is a multi-valiant condition that exhibits a wide range of responses to trauma. In addition to the aspect I am referring to here, which is characterized as an increased arousal to sensory cues, the disorder can also manifest itself through repeated hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing and/or avoidance. For a discussion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, see Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.

[29]At least this is the case for the normal "neurotic," for whom the return is never accomplished. What Freud described as "reaction formations" (defense mechanisms) usually enable the person to deal with the threat of the return of the repressed, which enables him to "re-enter" the world. The psychotic can hold this stance for longer periods of time, as in catatonia. In fact, according to Lacan, psychotics *do* experience the return of the repressed.

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doorbell, it is ultimately only an invitation and does not reflect the actual decision for action (or inaction) on the part of the conscious realms of the psyche to answer its call.[30]

Although the symptom is merely a switchplate, it is a particularly provocative one, for it offers a unique opportunity to implicate the unconscious (and in this case, trauma) in the most innocuous everyday situations and not just in the larger historical traumas (war, terrorism, a loved one's death) that undeniably demand the attention of the psyche. For instance, think of how symptoms similar to those described above are played out in the response of passers-by to one of the many ubiquitous car crashes that litter our world's highways. To a driver approaching the scene, there may be a variety of physical symptoms—a tightening of the hands on the wheel of the car, an almost unconscious decision to slow down, sometimes even a silencing of the space inside the car (turning off the radio). But as much as these responses may vary, there is one symptom that is almost universal: the insatiable need to look at the car crash for as long as possible, and in so doing stretch the rules of the road to the absolute edges of what is acceptable without endangering one's own person, i.e., without making oneself part of another car crash. Thus as you drive by the accident and try to visually make sense of it, there is that paradoxical response of losing yourself in the scene of the crash while at some level remaining hyper-aware of those around you.[31] The car crash and our almost universal response to it are particularly potent examples of one of the many "psychopathologies of everyday life."[32]

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[30]"Symptom" is used here in the most traditional Freudian sense as a specific moment between symptom formation (an operation of the unconscious) and reaction-formation (an operation of the conscious to deal with the threat of the unconscious). Thus my reference to it as a *switchplate*. See Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 446.

[31]Thus the "*...differing from it more than does the world of a thousand colors*" of Bataille's quotation in fn. 23, above.

[32]I am here referring to one of Sigmund Freud's early works, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* that was first published in 1904 as *Psychopathologies des Alltagslebens*[English translation, 1966]. Freud does not include a discussion of trauma in this text, largely because his theory tends to address this psychic phenomenon only when it is centered on a catastrophic event, such as the death of a loved one or the effects of war. It was Jacques Lacan who rethought trauma as an everyday occurrence. By invoking Freud's phrase, therefore, I am imagining a reconciliation of Freud and Lacan around the notion of the

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We might initially dismiss the fixed gaze produced by the car crash in the witness as a benign traumatic symptom that ultimately only produces an inconvenient traffic bottleneck in urban life that has come to be defined by a pervasive leitmotif of trauma. But we should not be so hasty. This minor assault demands our attention *because* it is not completely subsumed by the larger traumatic existence that surrounds it, and *because* there appears to be no exhaustion of the novelty it presents to those passing by even though its components are predictably similar to all other car crashes. In fact, the simple clarity and universal characteristics of the "need to look" symptomology of the car crash offer a way to begin to theorize a social psyche formed in a larger, less clear, and thus less interpretable societal trope of trauma. This study is fueled by this belief: that a minor psychopathology of everyday life, such as our response to the typical car crash—the bare and seemingly insignificant traumatic symptom and the exploration of both the action that produces it and the reaction that follows it[33]—can help unpack an overwhelming phenomenon of societal psychic functioning.

We can also use the symptom associated with the endless supply of car crashes on the labyrinthine web of our nation's highways to unpack the symptom of trauma in the museum. As might be expected, however, the "car crash" in the museum is not defined by the usual elements. There is no actual collision of cars, no bloody and littered asphalt, no bodies. And although we shall see that in both the museum and its highway equivalent, the symptom is brought on by a crash (realized in the museum as an untenable meeting of meaning and a refusal to allow that meaning), it is the behavior of those coming upon the collision that will draw most of our attention. The "car crash" signals a moment when the

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"traumas of everyday life." For a more in-depth discussion about trauma and the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, see chapter 1 of this study.

[33]The traumatic symptom should be differentiated from a person who is "traumatized." The traumatic symptom marks a moment when the psychic system is disrupted, literally when a small rip opens in the Symbolic and the Real threatens to Return. A traumatized person has been unable to tackle the challenge of the Real and has become stuck in the replaying of the primary trauma of being. Obviously, for most people driving past the car crash they are able to return to the realm of the Symbolic with very little trouble (through what Freud called reaction-formation and Lacan called a recommitment to the Symbolic).

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individual has become absorbed in something that cannot be defined and can only be pointed to by a seemingly involuntary stare (thus displaying the traumatic symptom).[34]

One might argue that in most museums this loss of self may not be particularly problematic. Museums have often been fantasized as productive sites for creative imaginings.[35] But if the car crash defines not just a moment of losing oneself but also a moment that demands that one be able to move out of the lure of the crash in time to avoid another crash, then a collision in which a "spect-op"[36] only leads to another crash in which the spectator becomes the new victim would be problematic. This kind of car crash would be particularly troublesome if it occurred in a museum that was constructed to work through a major historical trauma or in a public memorial and educational site that hoped to integrate a past trauma into the cultural metanarrative, by abreacting[37] its traumatic affect and bringing it into signification within the social psyche.

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[34]It should be noted that the idea of the "car crash" as the anchor of this study is not completely arbitrary, but should be viewed as both a historical and a metaphorical gesture. The car crash is the "second generation" of a psychopathology linked to the railroad. By the end of the 19th century, a number of anxiety reactions, phobias, and conversion hysterias had been identified that could be linked to the railway, including a loss of responsiveness in a part of the body called "railway spine." Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1. Likewise, the description often given to a person that has multiple mental dysfunctions is "train wreck."

Metaphorically, we can draw from the absolute predictability and total surprise of every car crash. As J.G. Ballard has summarized it, "The ambiguous role of the car crash needs no elaboration—apart from our own deaths, the car crash is probably the most dramatic event in our lives, and in many cases the two will coincide. Aside from the fact that we generally own or are at the controls of the crashing vehicle, the car crash differs from other disasters in that it involves the most powerfully advertised commercial product of this century, an iconic entity that combines the elements of speed, power, dream and freedom within a highly stylised format that defuses any fears we may have of the inherent dangers of these violent and unstable machines." *The Atrocity Exhibition* (San Francisco. RE/Search Publications, 1990), 97. The purpose of the present study is to show how it is with the museum as it is with the automobile. Both automobile and museum maintain an iconic status that defuses fears we might have about a violent and unstable culture that produced that very icon.

[35]In both literature and film, the museum has operated as an allegory of imaginative longings. A recent literary example is Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1982) in which much of the novel takes place in the after-hours Louvre. An example in film is Chris Marker's *La Jette* (1973) in which the two protagonists meet and get to know each other in the Museum of Man in Paris.

[36]The term "spect-op" was coined by David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*, 1996) as referenced in an epigraph to an article by Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October 80* (Spring 1997): 3.

[37]"Abreaction" is a word coined by Freud to describe the emotional affect that is released from the memory of a traumatic event. See below.

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But it is exactly this type of car crash that occurs halfway into the three-hour self-guided tour of a permanent installation in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM) in Washington, D.C., that "presents" the Holocaust of World War II to a visiting public.[38] After moving through a floor and a half of displays, the museum visitor, almost without exception, stops, and directs his or her vision into a large rectangular cement "well" in order to view scenes of torture and dismemberment that have been captured on video monitors scattered on the floor of the well. Contrary to usual museum etiquette, the visitors do not just stop and look for one or two repetitions of the film sequence. They often linger through eight or ten repetitions.[39] With no real awareness of those people around them, they block access. They do not speak. They do not move. They only stand and stare.

This "car crash" in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a hauntingly disturbing scene both in its cautionary and inviting spectatoriality, will give a time and a place to the "traumatic symptom in the museum" described earlier in this introduction, while at the same time anchoring a nexus of interpretations critical to this study. At the most basic level, the "crash" can be seen as a slight rupture in a specific museum that created fixed goals and realized them through a set of very rigid rules that were supposed to guard against such captivating spectacles.

But unpacking this point of rupture in one of the most ambitious and well-attended museums of our times leads to similar questioning about other museum projects that focus in one way or other on the traumas that infect modern living. Just as the symptoms associated with the highway car crash can be seen as offering insight into a culture defined and fantasized through trauma, the car crash in the USHMM presents an

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[38]"Presents" is to be distinguished from "represents." The whole idea of whether or not the Holocaust can be "represented" has filtered down to the museum's mission purpose. See below.

[39]One might expect that a visitor would stay through two repetitions in order to establish a beginning and end to the presentation and perhaps even a third to make sure. But after that number, and especially in light of the bottleneck it creates in the visitor flow, the excessive watching demands to be interpreted.

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opportunity to rethink the function of all museums. Thus this museum car crash—the unexpected symptom of trauma that occurs within a structure that attempts to work through and not produce trauma—can, in an exaggerated form, be read as something that occurs in all museums. It might just be that within every museum there is a car crash that lures, challenges, and ultimately recenters (or, even more provocatively, does *not* recenter) the viewer into the social world.

Given the dearth of direct and acknowledged psychoanalytic studies in the field of museum studies,[40] this present investigation draws inspiration from allied fields. Close to home in the way they analyze post-World War II films through a psychoanalytic filter, Slavoj Zizek and Eric Santer's have provided much inspiration.[41] In much the same way, Kathy O'Dell's psychoanalytic look at performance has offered a provocative starting point for investigating the performative aspects of the museum experience.[42] Hal Foster's work on the abject and his daring in taking on Lacan's notion of the "Real" firsthand have propelled this study in more than the merely tangible ways. Although rarely referenced in this study, Foster's work has played a major inspirational role.[43]

But the most influential book in defining the method of this study is Shoshana Felman's landmark book on literature and psychoanalysis. It is her call to use psychoanalysis not as an application but as an implication that informs the present

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[40] In fact, twelve years ago Ludmilla Jordanova called for a complete study of the museum in psychoanalytic terms. To my knowledge, this has yet to be done. Jordanova writes that "...our methods for studying museums must address both the material and the psychic levels. This is not to say that the only way of pursuing the latter is through psychoanalysis (although a thorough-going psychoanalytic account of museums would be fascinating)." "Objects of Knowledge," 40.

[41] Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001); Eric L. Santer, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). Zizek uses Lacan's tripartite system to analyze the films of Alfred Hitchcock, whereas Santer uses Freud's formulation of mourning and melancholy to look at the films of Kluge.

[42] Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

[43] Foster, *The Return of the Real.*

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study. In a way similar to her call to generate implications between literature and psychoanalysis, the present study brings the museum and psychoanalysis together in order to "explore, bring to light and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed *implicate each other*, each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other."[44]

This dissertation is divided into three parts. In part one (chapters 1 and 2), the psychoanalytic concepts of trauma are reviewed. Part two (chapters 3-5) is dedicated to three museum case studies: the Narrenturm Pathological-Anatomical Museum, the *Temple of Confessions*, and the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt. Part three (chapters 6 through 9) focuses on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C.

The first part of chapter 1 deals with Sigmund Freud's theory of trauma. Although Freud worked on this postulate throughout his life and modified it many times, a few core concepts did not waver. Freud's first core concept is that trauma is not synthesized by the psyche when it first occurs but, to code its existence, must rely on a trauma at a later date. Freud called this "deferred action," which was later summarized by one of his followers as "it takes two traumas to make a trauma." The other long-lasting contribution that Freud made to trauma theory is the possibility that some traumas cannot be worked through or successfully repressed. Some individuals seem to operate against a basic drive for pleasure by constantly re-enacting a traumatic experience in what Freud termed the "compulsion to repeat." Freud likened the compulsion to repeat to a need to test the limits of life and honor a basic drive in all individuals that he called the "death drive."

The second part of Chapter 1, presents the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. Lacan resuscitates Freud's very unpopular "death drive" and uses it to formulate a

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[44]Shoshana Felman, ed. *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 9.

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theory that extends beyond the major traumas (such as the loss of a loved one and war trauma) that were the focus of Freud's theory. Lacan uses trauma as the major leitmotif of his theory on the most universal and basic process of human psychic development. According to Lacan, our "coming-into-being" is a traumatic experience that we never work-through but can only repress. Because the experience is repressed, there always exists the possibility that individuals will re-engage these primary processes (that memories of trauma will leave a state of repression and "return"). Therefore, when analyzing trauma, Lacan feels we must focus not just on traumas in the real world (what he termed "the Symbolic"); we also need, he says, to address the development and maintenance of the basic human psyche each and every time a person is "traumatized." Because Lacan sees everyday life as traumatic or potentially traumatic, his theory focuses on any situation in which meaning is potentially compromised. Even a visual or auditory mismatch can create some tension in individuals, and this tension re-enacts the initial trauma that marked his or her coming-into-being.

In Chapter 2, I apply Lacan's basic theory of trauma to the museum. In the first part of the chapter, I speculate on how his theory may have come into play in even the most innocuous of traditional history museums of the late 19th century (the period when the museum came into maturity). After positioning the museum in an age that has been recognized by both literary critics and modern historians as one operating under a trope of trauma, I speculate that the museum may have both fed into that trope and/or countered it by offering a respite from a traumatic existence. In the 19th century, the museum may not have been just an oasis from a traumatic life. It may also have been a place where the little traumas of everyday existence could be creatively mastered. It is for this reason that the museum experience was often described as "refreshing."

In the second part of Chapter 2, I take this museum paradigm one step further by focusing specifically on the social conditions that facilitated the emergence of the museums that occupy this study. I argue that in the late 20th century, when the age of

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trauma becomes a post-traumatic society, the possibility for a new museum type—a museum built to address trauma—exists. If the 19th century museum was used in a multitude of playful and benign ways to challenge the psyche of the viewer (and almost exclusively at the whim of the visitor), the post-traumatic museum built to address traumatic cultural material *directly* challenges the viewer to deal with its contents. In this kind of museum, the visitor is the person who will determine the success of the museum display.

In the last part of Chapter 2, I measure the success of museums built to display traumatic material and their ability to engage the visitor by focusing on a particular moment in the museum experience when the viewer does seem to be affected by the display, even though that engagement is a moment when the visitor is locked in a situation of "non-meaning" and "non-being" as evidenced by the display of a traumatic symptom. In all of the museums considered in this study, there exists a seemingly universal response in visitors to stop at a particular display element and stare at it in an immobile trance-like state. This particular moment in the display and the response that it solicits in the viewer is the "car crash" of the exhibit. The car crash is theoretically considered in chapter 2 so that it can be used to anchor the four case studies that make up the main focus of this dissertation.

The second part of the dissertation (chapters 3-5) presents three museum case studies: the Narrenturm Pathological-Anatomical Museum, the *Temple of Confessions*, and the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt. These museums, or museum projects, are examined with a narrow psychoanalytic filter to build a theory of how the museum that deals in traumatic material may function for the people who visit it. The analysis of each museum project is predicated on the belief that how the museum functions is often very different from its intended purpose.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum in Vienna. This institution, affectionately called the Narrenturm (the Fool's Tower) in reference to

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its earlier days as an asylum, houses a collection of pathological specimens of disfigured body parts. In this chapter, I examine the Narrenturm's ability to keep the visitor from being traumatized. By controlling the display environment through a sparse presentation of actual specimens, the museum acts in concert with the viewer's "desired encounter" to produce what I term the *phantasized encounter*. The phantasized encounter screens the visitor from the potentially traumatizing material (what Lacan called a "return of the Real"). The sight of a fully formed human fetus precipitates the car crash in this museum, but the bottleneck it produces is only momentary. In this museum with unambiguously disturbing material, the car crash is quickly worked through and the visitor is able to move on to the end of the display.

Chapter 4 is centered on the *Temple of Confessions*, a museum-based performance by Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In his performance art, this artist produces a traumatic moment in the visitor instead of trying to shield him or her from a trauma. Gómez-Peña sets up a museum tableau that is intended to activate repressed feelings about the visitor's fear and loathing of the Other. Gómez-Peña hoped to (re)activate the trauma that accompanied the influx of Mexicans to America. Although Lacan would have characterized this trauma as a secondary one, as we will see, visitors to the *Temple of Confessions* often get caught in the stranglehold of the primary processes. This regression to the primary processes prevented many of the visitors from seeing the trauma Gómez-Peña hoped to create as a secondary trauma related to cultural practices.

Chapter 5 focuses on the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt, commonly called the AIDS Quilt. This memorial is discussed as a transitional memorial that ultimately loses its psychic charge and becomes a museum without walls. The AIDS Quilt was created in an attempt to offer a memorial to AIDS, but because it is unable to accomplish this function, it became instead a museum of repressed cultural signifiers. The car crash for the AIDS Quilt does not occur in the manner its planners hoped for. While organizers and sympathizers did experience the traumatizing effect of the Quilt, the nation as a whole (as

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it is given signification by its leaders) did not. The social body that determines the success of a memorial, or at least the ability of the memorial to memorialize, rejected the Quilt's memorializing task. The car crash of the AIDS Quilt thus occurs *in absentia*. While the physical objects that mark the crash can be located, the actual symptom of the car crash never occurs.

Part three of this dissertation (chapters 6 through 9), focuses on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. In this final section, the language and concepts developed in part two are used to unpack this very complex and ambitious museum.

Chapter 6 gives background on the museum, from proposal to groundbreaking, and explores the architectural program as developed by James Ingo Freed and the display design as developed by Jeshajahu Weinberg, Martin Smith, and Ralph Appelbaum, among others. I show how the architecture and display of the permanent exhibit created an immediate conflict of purposes. As an escapee of Nazi Germany, Freed built a space that was open and ambiguous. Many of the museum's architectural features can, in fact, be related to traumatic effects of Freed's own personal history. Architectural elements seem to "compulsively repeat" the visual language of the Holocaust—of the concentration camps and crematoria and even of the Jewish architecture that was destroyed during the war. In contrast, desiring to control the *phantasized encounter* of the visitor, the permanent design committee hoped to create a display that was rigid and unambiguous. This conflict of purpose between the architect and the design committee makes the museum ripe for potential psychic unease in the visitor, and creates an immediate environment for the museum's car crash.

Chapter 7 takes the reader along a step-by-step visit to the USHMM. The ideal visitor on this tour is the "typical family from Iowa," a term used by the planning committee to describe the museum's target audience. It is not necessarily the visit of a survivor, a perpetrator, a bystander, or even a family member of one of the people from

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these three groups (although, in a concern to not unduly traumatize any of these groups, all these groups were considered in the planning of the displays). As described in this chapter, the tour takes the museum at face value and approaches the permanent display as a visitor would who had no direct ties to the Holocaust.

In Chapter 8, the museum's car crash is unpacked by isolating three performative aspects of the permanent display that contribute to its emergence. To examine the various and often conflicting psychic processes that lead to the car crash, these three performative elements are isolated. The first psychic process unfolds as the museum attempts to control the subject-position of the visitor (which the Narrenturm also tries to do in its museum displays). The second psychic process emerges around non-narrative sounds and olfactory elements (which are reminiscent of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance). The third psychic process attempts to account for the loss of a people (the Jews) without a symbolic marker for that loss (that is, without either a corpse or even a stand-in for a corpse—a proper name) in a fashion that creates in a visitor some of the same conflicts as arose with the AIDS Quilt.

Finally, chapter 9 focuses on the car crash *per se* and its aftermath in the USHMM. Unlike our other case studies, the car crash in the Holocaust Museum occurs halfway into the exhibit. We can thus view the car crash as a museal switchplate that can allow the visitor to "switch gears" and begin to work through the trauma of the Holocaust through a memorializing effort. Instead, I will argue, the museum misses the moment the car crash offers. Because the display suddenly relies on traditional museum methods, the viewer is unable to see the loss the museum presents as historical. Instead, the loss is read as an "absence," an assault against the self that sets into motion a numbing stance on the part of the viewer. The car crash in the USHMM ultimately turns the visitor from a witness to trauma into a new trauma victim.

Through these four case studies, this dissertation begins to explore the *limits and possibilities* of the museum as a cultural organ dedicated to not only the presentation of,

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but the working through, of traumatic cultural material. Through these museums that intentionally engage the concepts of psychoanalysis in their planning and which produce psychoanalytically analyzable symptoms in the visitors to these spaces, we can begin to develop a psychoanalytic paradigm more appropriate for this specific museum type and one that can be used to help develop new museums built to present traumatic cultural material to the public.

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CHAPTER ONE

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY CENTERED ON TRAUMA

Introduction

In this chapter, the key concepts of Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory on trauma are introduced and reviewed. This consideration is essential because the museums in this study all address trauma in their attempt to either subvert or provoke (and sometimes both subvert and provoke) a traumatic experience on the part of the viewer. This review will provide a framework from which we can begin to discuss both the motivations of the museum in setting up their exhibits and the varied responses of the viewers to these exhibits.

Trauma has been one of the core concepts of psychoanalytic theory. It was both the first psychic phenomenon that Freud turned to and one of the last ideas to challenge him as he neared the end of his life. As much as psychoanalysis has been maligned for being irrelevant and out-dated, the fact remains that when we discuss trauma, few of us can steer clear of psychoanalytic language. The theories are dressed up or disguised, key terms are given other names, but often the terms are simply integrated into the language drawn upon to discuss this phenomenon.[45] In light of this kind of discussion and in spite of the number of problems that are present in any study that sets out to use psychoanalysis as its method, a study in which trauma plays such a key role cannot steer clear of psychoanalytic constructs. Perhaps it is because trauma and its resolution remain so elusive, so confounding, that we are drawn to a discipline that accommodates

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[45]For instance, Dominick LaCapra's use of the terms "structural trauma" and "historical trauma" for Lacan's "primary" and "secondary" trauma. Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25/4 (Summer 1999): 696-727. Also, Jeshajahu Weinberg frequently uses psychoanalytic language to describe the Holocaust museum; for instance, "The exhibit planners also wanted to avoid any softening in the depiction of the stark reality of the Holocaust by the inclusion of symbolic or metaphoric exhibits, any blurring of the terrible truth by *sublimation* [emphasis mine]." Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (NY: Rizzoli, 1995), 29.

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elusiveness, which allows for a giving voice to a phenomenon without ever really understanding it.

Both Freud and Lacan acknowledged this theoretical conundrum while at the same time trying to undo it. For both men, the unraveling of trauma would be the golden key to understanding the human psyche. For Freud, operating in a *fin de siècle* urban setting that became more complicated with the First World War, trauma was considered an assault from the outside that created a sense of loss within the individual. Lacan takes Freud's writings on trauma and positions trauma at the center of his theory as a universal process that results in "normal" psychic development. Lacan views trauma as an interior process that may respond to outside assaults but ultimately has to reckon with an interior dynamic system. In other words, the human psyche is constantly dealing with traumatic assaults as it moves through life, whether or not the individual is confronted with war or other life-defying experiences. While Freud's theory tends toward the spectacular and historical (i.e., war trauma), Lacan's musings address the mundane and the everyday. It is for this reason that Lacan's theory is key to this study. Whereas Freud would not turn to a simple Sunday trip to the museum to help think through his theory on trauma, Lacan would see the possible intersection of objects, narrative, and the seeing, smelling, touching, human spectator that the museum encourages as a ripe environment for the daily traumatic assaults that define our psychic being.

Freud's Theory of Trauma

Sigmund Freud formulated his thoughts on traumatic neurosis early in his career.[46] In fact, trauma can be seen as a major leitmotif of Freud's *oeuvre*, but its understanding,

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[46]Freud begins thinking about trauma as early as 1890 while working with hysterics. In his early formulations, neurosis, including hysterical neurosis, is related to past traumatic experience. Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 466. Freud first published on trauma (with J. Breuer) in 1893, "über den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phäomene: Vorläufige Mitteilung" ("On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication) as cited in Weinberg and Elieli, 469.

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some have argued, eluded him even at his death. In his early formulations of trauma theory, he borrowed from his knowledge of medicine. As a medical doctor, he retained the basic tenets of the medical definition of trauma—that it was a violent assault to the self and that this assault affects the whole organism, not just the immediate site of the physical blow—and applied it to his economic theory of the psyche.[47] Freud felt that the traumatic event presented the human with an influx of energy that was too great to be assimilated, and the body thus had to work to immobilize the excess influx of energy. This work on the part of the psyche, a "working-through" that, if successful, led to what Freud termed "abreaction,"[48] was the source of the symptoms that characterized traumatic neurosis. Most importantly, and in a marked departure from the medical model, Freud believed that working-through was not an immediate occurrence but one that unfolded gradually. As he formulated it, trauma was marked by a delay of time between the traumatizing event and the symptoms that marked that event. He termed this phenomenon *deferred action* (*Nachträglichkeit*).[49]

World War I caused Freud to begin the first of many revisions to his theory on trauma. In thinking through what was then popularly termed "war trauma," he began to believe that not only were the symptoms of trauma marked by a delay but that the

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[47]As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, the economic hypothesis is a long-standing feature of Freud's theory. They define it as an "apparatus—described to begin with as neuronal and later, definitively, as psychical—whose function is to keep the energy circulating within itself at as low a level as possible." Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 128. Thus, psychic processes "consist in the circulation and distribution of an energy (instinctual energy) that can be quantified, i.e., that is capable of increase, decrease and equivalence." Ibid., 127. To put it more simply, Freud conceives of the psychic apparatus as a homeostatic system that is governed by a "pleasure principle," which seeks to release the "tension of accumulated excitations and to promote an equilibrium of psychic energies." Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (NY: Routledge, 1991), 2.

[48]Freud first discusses abreaction in his essay with Joseph Breuer, "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena," in Philip Rieff, ed. *Sigmund Freud: Early Psychoanalytic Writings* (NY: Collier Books, 1963), 41.

[49]Freud never developed a theory specifically devoted to deferred action. Instead, he uses the concept throughout his writings, beginning as early as 1895. Still, it was is his discussion of trauma that he clearly defined one of its elements as Laplanche and Pontalis summarize it: "[deferred action] is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context." Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 112.

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trauma can *only* be experienced as traumatic through a later event that recodes the first event and retroactively gives it meaning. Thus, for many soldiers returning from World War I, the trauma was initially forgotten, only to return in dreams and flashbacks.[50] It was the dreams that were experienced as traumatic by the soldier, not the original event. To this day, this difference has remained one of the lasting hallmarks of Freud's theory; Jean Laplanche summarized it by saying "it takes two traumas to make a trauma."[51] In other words, the original trauma, which through a process of repression becomes forgotten and thus unknowable, resurfaces to consciousness only through a process of repetition. A second trauma points back to the first trauma. That is, the second trauma re-presents the first trauma, and it is this re-presentation that informs the subject of the traumatic nature of the original event. The symptom that signals the second trauma is thus nothing more than a repeated attempt to bind and abreact the first trauma. In this early formulation of Freud's theory, the soldier with the recurring traumatic nightmare was using a repetitive process of working-through in order to "interpret" the second trauma (the dreams) as being related to an earlier trauma (the war experience).[52]

But the simplicity of this system, which appeared to be burdened only by the need for intervening time between the first and second trauma (and a good analyst) turned out to be insufficient to account for all traumas. In fact, it was in his formulation of war trauma that Freud began to doubt that all traumas could be worked through. He observed that for some soldiers the initial trauma was actually forgotten, only to return as a contemporary experience that the subject refused to link with an event from the past. In

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[50]In fact, what most struck Freud about the traumatic neuroses resulting from war was that traumatic symptoms could arise without any gross mechanical force and, in fact, that a wound or injury works *against* the development of a neurosis. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (NY and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961), 6.

[51] Laplanche, *New Foundations*, 88.

[52]In order for a working-through process to be successful, the individual must be able to understand the first trauma through the second one, must in essence *interpret* the first through the second. If the individual "refuses" the interpretation, then a working-through cannot take effect.

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this scenario, deferred action was not just a delay of time but a type of revision, "a rearrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances...a re-transcription," that the subject performed on past events which invested them with efficacy or pathogenic force.[53] In other words, even with analysis, the analysand acquired no sense of conviction of the correctness of the construction that had been communicated to him, that in fact his traumatic symptom was related to an earlier trauma.[54] Instead, he continued to repeat the repressed material in what Freud termed "a compulsion to repeat,"[55] even though such a force operates against what Freud characterized as the "pleasure principle," the great life force of the human psyche. Thus, by mid-career Freud conceded that although some traumas were worked through, others could not and were in essence kept traumatic by a compulsion to repeat.

It was the compulsion to repeat,—plus years of clinical observation that some analysands exhibited what he termed "mysterious masochistic trends of the ego,"[56]—that led Freud, late in his life, to make the last revisions to his theory on trauma. He theorized that the compulsion to repeat that occurred in some cases of trauma seemed to belong to a psychic process that was beyond the pleasure principle and was governed by a drive that he termed *der Todestrieb*—the Death Drive.[57]

Freud formulated his thoughts on the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Written in 1920, this book remains one of the most enigmatic of the psychoanalyst's works.[58] It is also generally considered to be his most theoretical treatise, since by

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[53]Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 112.

[54]Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 10

[55]A "compulsion to repeat" first appears in 1914 in *Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten* (Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through). First published in English in 1924. Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 79.

[56]Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 8.

[57]This is generally translated as the *death drive*, although Jean Laplanche translates it as the *death instinct*. For a discussion of the difficulties in translation, see Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 1.

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anchoring his theory around the Death Drive, his speculations could not be investigated in the clinic. Because resolution of the Death Drive can only be achieved through the signifying impossibility of death, Freud sets up an impossible tautology.[59] This theory was developed in a seeming contradiction to his economic theory of the human psyche as a homeostatic system defined by quantities of energy and regulated by the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure. Based largely on his work with traumatic neuroses, he speculates that in addition to the drive for pleasure there must exist another basic drive, a destabilizing and destructive force that tends toward conflict and disintegration. Freud boldly states that trauma is a human inevitability, a troubling conclusion to his life work that sought to "cure" people from their traumatic symptoms. But it was not this perplexing conclusion that kept the book in the shadow of Freud's better-known studies. The main objection was Freud's reliance on a post-Darwinian biological model to explain the drive toward death. He posited that the organic creature actually *seeks* to return to an earlier inorganic state, thus making the Death Drive a biological inevitability. Freud appears to conclude that not only is unresolved trauma an unavoidable aspect of human experience but it also seems to act as a switchplate between the volatile psyche and a prescripted biology.

It would appear then that by the end of his career Freud had not resolved one of the most fundamental human experiences, the very phenomenon that had early on spurred his interest in psychoanalytic technique. While he was certain that trauma was integral to both the formation of the psyche in childhood and defensive operations of the human psyche in adulthood, he seemed unable to pinpoint its inherent nature. For Freud, it remained elusive and changeable, and—as he neared the end of his life—unresolveable,

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[58]*Jenseits des Lustprinzips* was published in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland in 1920. The first English version was published in 1922 in London as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.*

[59]As Richard Boothby has summarized it, Freud seems to be saying, "the true goal of living is dying and the life-course of all organisms must be regarded as only a circuitous route to death." *Death and Desire*, 3.

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existing instead as an organically preordained perversion of life that compulsively rehearses the "bliss" of death.

The Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan

So troublesome were Freud's late revisions of trauma theory that his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* seemed destined for the dust bin[60] until the French philosopher Jacques Lacan rescued it and positioned it at the very center of Freud's theory.[61] Lacan rejected Freud's biologism, which posited the organic against the inorganic, and proposed instead that the tension between the pleasure principle and the death drive was a tension between primary and secondary processes. Borrowing from Freud, he defined the primary processes as those governed by instincts with the characteristic of having unbound psychic energy (the id of the young child or dreams). Secondary processes are bound energies in the service of the ego (waking thought, attention, judgment, reasoning).[62] For Lacan, trauma is an assault against the ego. He declares that Freud was right to think that trauma marks all human existence, at first in the genesis of the psychic system in the young child and later in the maintenance of that system in adulthood. But if there is anything preordained about trauma, it is not some kind of primordial desire to

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[60]Ernest Becker remarked about the Death Drive that "Freud's tortuous formulations on the death instinct can now securely be relegated to the dust bin of history," as cited in Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 7-8.

[61]It is important to distinguish the theoretical nature of Lacan's work from that of Sigmund Freud. Lacan's orientation is not clinical but conceptual. He operates in the realm of philosophy, not medicine. While much of his theory is pure speculation, in his work on trauma he works closely with Freud's work, articulating points that Freud himself questioned the most

[62]Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 340. As with all of Freud's work, the formulation of the primary and secondary processes underwent many modifications. In his earlier *topographical* construction of the psyche, the primary processes were located in the unconscious system while the secondary processes resided in the preconscious-conscious system. In his latter *economico-dynamic* construction of the psyche, the primary processes were defined by the pleasure principle while the secondary processes corresponded to the reality principle. In this analysis, the secondary processes postpone pleasure to allow for "mental experiments that test out the various paths leading to satisfaction." Ibid., 339.

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return to an inorganic state but, rather, an alienation that is built into the psychic system itself. In other words, the alienating force of the ego is the very essence of the human psyche.

Lacan's Theory of the Human Psyche

In order to better understand the threat that trauma presents to the ego, it is beneficial to review Lacan's theory about human psychic development and what he terms the three psychic realms: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.[63]

According to Lacan, the Imaginary is the first psychic realm to appear in the infant's development.[64] In this arena of consciousness, there is no distinction between the infant and the exterior world, or between subject and object. As a result, the child lacks any defined sense of self. Instead, the Imaginary exists as a realm of what Lacan terms *imagos* in which the child makes imaginary identifications with objects through a misperception and misrecognition of the self. More importantly, given the fetalization of the infant and his or her lack of coordination to unify disparate bodily impulses (sucking, seeing, excreting), the *imagos* of the imaginary are characterized as a *corps morcelé*, a "body in bits and pieces."

In truth, the Imaginary is a somewhat nebulous psychic realm that can only be theorized in relationship to the "mirror stage."[65] According to Lacan, a psychically formative moment occurs in the human infant at the age of six to eighteen months, where

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[63]I have adopted the convention of capitalizing these three psychic realms in order to distinguish them from the more common usage of these words as they are often used within these pages. It should be noted, however, that Lacan did *not* follow this convention.

[64]It is first mentioned by Lacan in a 1936 article on the Mirror Stage. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 18.

[65]One cannot help but notice the "traumatic" nature of Lacan's theory. Note how earlier stages can only be recognized through later ones.

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s/he identifies an image in the mirror as that of him or herself.[66] Through the image of another person (the image in the mirror, which may or may not include another person propping the infant up), the human infant gains the promise of bodily integrity and the first measure of control over his or her movements. Here, control is theorized quite literally since Lacanian theory is based on the "fetalization" of the human infant: a lateness of dentition and of walking, or even the most basic of coordination skills, such as holding up one's head. But an important distinction must be made. Although Lacan believes the human child is born prematurely, he does not theorize this as a general underdevelopment but, more specifically, as an underdeveloped coordination between functions. The basic functions are in place, but the connections between the functions are missing. Thus, even though the infant is still physically uncoordinated s/he is able to experience a unified whole reflected back to him or her in the mirror.[67] The image in the mirror, what Lacan terms *the Imago*,[68] unifies all the Imaginary elements of the fragmented body.[69] But because the "I" of the mirror relies on some object or person to essentially "prop" up the child, the infant experiences in the mirror's image a pleasing unity that cannot be experienced in his or her own body. The object is both part of himself or herself (as it is in the reflection) and yet not of him or herself (as it is

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[66]While Lacan formulates the mirror stage around a "theoretical mirror," this mirror should be regarded as a mirroring *effect*. It could be played out without an actual mirror, with an effect as simple as shadows on the ground or even with sounds. See below for a further discussion of the latter situation.

[67]The important term here is "experience," a sensation that occurs in the body, since according to Lacan, the infant does not yet "understand" what s/he is seeing or, to put it another way, experiences it only as a misunderstanding.

[68]I use the convention of capitalizing Imago in this case to separate it from the imagos of the imaginary realm.

[69]Lacan's formulation of this decisive stage was inspired by research in ethnology that associated behavior in animals with specific visual cues. Researchers such as Lorenz, and Tinbergen theorized about perceptual Gestalten that triggered parades, territoriality, courtship, and mating in animals. But whereas the gestalt image acts to initiate and control behavior in animals, the image in the mirror—what Lacan characterizes as a Gestalt imago—acts to produce a very sense of self.

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experience in the actual body of the infant). Lacan describes this process as *méconnaissance.*[70]

Even though the construction of self in the Imaginary is a ruse, the *Imago* of the mirror stage coordinates the chaotic inner life of the infant and introduces a fixed point in the flux of the infantile psyche by production of the whole body. Because the whole body is constructed from the "floating body parts," Lacan characterized the mirror creation as "orthopedic." The fixity of the mirror stage's image is a fundamental feature of the Imaginary function in humans. It is this *Imago* that models the ego, and it is this *Imago* that becomes the privileged psychological object. Yet, it is also an image that refuses a portion of the disconnected, discordant pieces that seem to flood the Imaginary. The *Imago* can only use a portion of the Imaginary's reservoir, and, as such, there is always an excluded remainder that exerts itself as much as the *Imago*-defined ego.[71] The discordance between ego and this first primal being (of "a body in bits and pieces") produces a alienation *of* oneself *from* oneself, a struggle that according to Lacan, "...will be the fundamental note which will be retained in the whole harmonic scale which, through the phases of psychic history, will function to resolve it by developing it."[72]

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[70]Although this has generally been translated into English as "misrecognition," the French word has no one-on-one equivalent in English. At times, it can be translated as "a misconstruction," and other times as a "failure to recognize." Both meanings are imbedded in the French word. See Jacques Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968) 96, fn.12.

[71]Thus, for Lacan, the ego is not equal to the subject. He claims, "The ego is an imaginary function, it is not to be confused with the subject." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1988), 194, as cited in Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 36. This formulation, which Lacan sees in accordance with Freud, places him in opposition to so-called ego psychology in England and the United States (often linked back to Anna Freud), wherein the terms "self" and "ego" are virtually synonymous. See Boothby, 35-36.

[72]Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 187 as cited in Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 59. Here one can see the difficulty in Lacan's language, which is not just a function of translation. It is tempting to dismiss his tautological tendency as the difficulty of discussing a psychic realm that according to his own theory is outside of language, but in truth the difficulty of his text is a hallmark of all of his work.

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The mirror stage also plays an instrumental part in the formation of the Symbolic psychic realm of the child. The Symbolic is a psychic realm that allows the subject to escape the alienation of the Imaginary. The Imaginary structuration of identity is driven by desire but ultimately denies that desire. As Lacan puts it, "The relation of the subject to his *Urbild*, his *Idealich*, through which he enters into the imaginary function and learns to recognize himself as a form, can always see-saw. Each time the subject apprehends himself as form and as ego,...his desire is projected outside."[73] Yet even though desire is excluded and alienated in the Imaginary, desire can be retrieved to some extent in the Symbolic realm through the use of language. The Symbolic is the realm of "others who speak." It is in the other that the subject finds his or her desire.[74] In fact, the subject is only constituted by the entry into language through an unfolding of the signifying chain.[75] In other words, the signifier has primacy over the signified, so that meaning is generated less by the meaning of a specific word than by the place the word has in the signifying links.

The Real, which should not be understood as the reality of everyday life, is the last of Lacan's three psychic realms and the most difficult to characterize. It can be thought of as the dumping ground for that which escapes and is lacking in the other two registers. The Real is the site of both surplus and lack. It is the site of what Julia Kristeva calls "the abject," the remainder that is left over after the individual becomes a subject capable of dealing with objects.[76] The absence that is death is rendered in the Real as a remainder of living. Thus, death is misread as the very thing that life abandons—the body

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[73]Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 108-109.

[74]The "other" should not be thought of as another person, although in some cases it can take that guise. The "other" is another word for anything that creates and supports subjectivity and can include, among other things, the object a, the phallus, the symbolic father, the Names-of-the-Father, the other of all language. In other words, it is a theoretical catch-all for much of Lacan's theory.

[75]Lacan's theory of the Symbolic borrows from structuralist and post-structuralist theories of discourse, particularly the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobsen, and Claude Levi-Strauss.

[76]Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 5-7.

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in bits and pieces. In the Real, the remaindered *imagos* of the Imaginary realm (the parts of self that are excluded from the *Imago* that forms the ego) act to fetishize death as something that was given up in order to live.

It is in this way that Lacan is able to engage with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* For Lacan, the death drive represents the return of the repressed, the return of that which has been excluded by the Imaginary, or the return of the Real. Thus, what is subject to death is not, as Freud believed, the whole biological organism, but the unity of the ego. Lacan sees the primordial aggressivity towards the self as an action that corresponds to the splitting of the subject against himself. In other words, the death drive is a desire to undo the *Imago* of the Imaginary (as formed in the mirror stage) that models the ego.

It must be noted that many researchers[77] have questioned the validity of Lacan's system that assumes an infant is incapable of body integration until he or she looks into a mirror.[78] Recent research suggests that Lacan's notion of a body image that acquires wholeness through mirrored visualization does not consider kinesthetic and haptic contributions to the sense of a whole self.[79] In fact, some researchers in the field of sociobiology and neurophysiology feel that humans may already have a complete body image at the time of birth.[80] Given these reservations, Lacan's theory of the psyche has been adopted for this study in order to engage with those current critical theories on the

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[77] This group of researchers forms a large and diverse group and includes American-trained psychologists, feminists, and sociobiologists. See Daniel Rancour-Laferriere for a summary of some of these positions; *Signs of the Flesh: An Essay on the Evolution of Hominid Sexuality* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985).

[78] As Rancour-Laferriere has summarized: "What makes Lacan's notion of a *stade du miroir* unlikely is the absurd assumption that every infant...has the opportunity to look into a mirror (what of the blind?)," *Signs of the Flesh*, 203.

[79] For a review of some of these theories including proprioception and body image (Brian O'Shaughnessy) and attentional theory (Marcel Kinsbourne) see Jose Luis Bermúdez, Anthony Marcel, and Naomi Eilan, eds., *The Body and Self* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1995).

[80] See George Butterworth, "An Ecological Perspective on the Origins of Self," in Bermúdez, et. al., *The Body and the Self*, 87-105.

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body that do seem to emerge from Lacan's formulations (i.e., they honor the fragmented anatomy of the Imaginary stage).[81] Although the mirror stage may prove to be hard to substantiate, the fragmentation of the Imaginary ("a body in bits and pieces" as Lacan calls it) is more commonly accepted as the norm. More importantly, psychoanalytic trauma theory as it currently stands, draws almost exclusively from Freud and Lacan. It is beyond the scope of this study to begin to write a trauma theory in an area of neurophysiology that is still unfolding.[82]

Lacan's Theory of Trauma

Lacan's theory of the psyche can be seen as a dynamic system that fluctuates between the two operations of trauma as outlined by Freud—the movement toward signification, toward the ego, toward the Symbolic (much like Freud's working-through), and the undoing of that signification, with a desire to return to the Real and "rewrite" the missed encounter with the Real that trauma signifies. In both scenarios, it is the Imaginary that is often re-enlisted to undertake these psychic activities. In fact, given that trauma is an assault against the ego, the threat of trauma opens the chance for a regressive defense on the part of the individual. This retreat can be characterized as an exaggerated reenactment of the originary conflict between the unbound psychic energies of the Imaginary and the binding of those energies into the formed ego of the Symbolic. The original trauma of being creates a hole in the Symbolic order that is relegated to the Real and is screened off (in the Symbolic) through repression and denial. The secondary

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[81] For a review of these prominent theories including the work of Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Iris Young, and Elizabeth Grosz see Elizabeth Gross, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994). These theories accept the fragmentation of the Imaginary without accepting Lacan's mirror stage as the mechanism by which the infant is able to construct the body's whole.

[82] Ruth Leys discusses some of the problems that have emerged in the initial attempts at theorizing a "Neurobiology of Trauma" in her book, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 229-265.

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traumas of life, which by definition occur in the Symbolic, but also by definition are denied entrance into the signifying chain of the Symbolic, point to this screened off hole in the signifying chain. In essence, they point to the existence of the Real. But because the Real is an impossible site, all trauma then becomes a missed encounter with the Real. In order to deal with trauma, and like Freud before him, Lacan sees three options. Initially, there may be a denial or a repression, a kind of honoring of the screen that hides the hole in the Symbolic. After a passage of time there can be a response of working-through (a kind of suturing of the hole that trauma creates) that seeks to interpret and integrate the trauma into the psychic economy. But sometimes the appeal to the ego results in a re-entrenchment of the ego's defenses. The traumatized ego may only be able to stabilize by becoming overly constricted and therefore even more unable to contain the pressures of the Real. The compulsion to repeat, a replaying of the fragmentation and disintegration that occurs in trauma, is an assault against the over-bearing ego and its structures. This compulsive repetition acts to enlarge the hole in the symbolic order. In this scenario, trauma offers a unique possibility to reunite with the Real (even though actual reunion is never possible outside of death and some extreme cases of psychoses). In this way, the repetition of the trauma represents a force of desire excluded by the ego. Thus, the pleasure derived from the compulsion to repeat allows an "opportunity for overcoming the restrictive and alienating form of the ego."[83]

As with Freud's theory, Lacan's notion of trauma is a governed by a process that is neither neat and tidy nor linear in its pattern. The individual in his or her reaction to trauma no doubt goes through both impulses—working-through by "negotiating" the rip in the Symbolic realm with established signifiers and compulsively repeating the trauma through an attack of the ego in the Imaginary realm as a means of attempting a reunion with the Real. In fact, the equation of how much an individual seems to be working-

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[83]Boothy, *Death and Desire*, 90.

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through the trauma, as opposed to compulsively repeating it, is often the very distinction that is used to clinically designate the neurotic from the psychotic.

The most important contribution Lacan made to trauma theory, and one that is particularly important to the present study, is his insistence that all trauma that occurs in life after the subject has successfully passed from the mirror stage into the Symbolic relates back to the primary trauma, the trauma of coming-into-being. In other words, as much as it may take two traumas to recognize the first trauma, once recognized, the secondary trauma engages the mechanisms of the primary trauma. We must renegotiate the Symbolic and our commitment to the "social contract" each and every time we set out to assimilate trauma. The resolution of a secondary trauma cannot just be added as a supplement to an already stable system. It must be "negotiated" through the definitions of the self, the body, and the world of meaning that it stands in opposition to. Most importantly, because all trauma re-engages the mechanisms of primary trauma, Lacan is able to escape the usual critique of psychoanalysis as a theoretical model. That is, while the secondary trauma is always unique and individual, the mechanisms of the primary trauma it re-engages are universal. Thus, we can use his theory to discuss situations beyond individual case studies.[84]

Finally, the last contribution of Lacan's theory is that it can be used to discuss small, seemingly insignificant traumas. While Freud was caught up in the large historical traumas of his time, most specifically the terrifying aftermath of World War I and the impending doom of World War II, Lacan's traumatic theory is more often applied to everyday existence. It is for this reason that his theories have often been used to interpret literature and film and why it can be applied to the museum, to which task we will turn in the next chapter.

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[84]Likewise, this gives the writer the license to discuss his or her own feelings as being more universal than personal. In other words, it privileges the writer's experience and celebrates it instead of trying to bury it as in traditional historiography.

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CHAPTER TWO

TRAUMA AND THE MUSEUM

Introduction

In this chapter we explore the potential of the museum to act as a trauma abreactor. By applying Freud and Lacan's theories on trauma to the museum, we can begin to theorize that, even as early as the 19th century, this unique cultural space could have acted to point to and work through the traumas of modern living. If this formulation is only speculative, by the time we reach the end of the 20th century we can begin to discuss museums that explicitly address trauma. These institutions arise in an environment that is marked by radical transformations, both historical and institutional. It is only within a post-traumatic society (a society that sees itself as traumatized and begins to try and interpret that trauma) and a post-modern museum, that a museum built to house traumatic cultural material can be imagined. In the museums that form the nexus of this study, the address to trauma can be located not only on a programmatic level but on a functional level as well. Psychoanalytically speaking, we can locate trauma's presence through its symptoms, and within all these institutions there appears to be a universal symptom. This chapter ends with a description of that symptom, which I term the "car crash" of the exhibit.

The 19th-Century Museum and a Traumatized Society

It is perhaps nothing more than coincidence that the museum came to its mature form at the same historical moment that trauma as a cultural symptom was beginning to emerge.[85] But it seems clear that although the 19th-century museum did not see itself as a

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trauma abreactor, it could well have functioned for many of its visitors as an institution that helped to alleviate some of the trauma of modern living.[86]

At first glance, it is tempting to position the museum with its wealth of objects and its address to the visual as operating in Lacan's Imaginary psychic realm. In truth, however, because the museum, especially at that moment that it was clearly defining itself at the end of the 19th century, was so dominated by the mechanisms of paradigm, metaphor, condensation, and symbolization, it can more readily be seen as a house created to serve the Symbolic realm. Within this role, as an institution that created unwavering signifying chains, museum collections can be seen as offering stability to a culture that saw itself as being made up of interchangeable parts.[87] For if one of the traumas of modern living was the threat of disappearance, the loss of self, the museum functioned to keep the fragmented body intact. Thus, the grand evolutionary narrative that helped to organize the collection could have also brought a sense of order to the fragmented self.[88]

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[85]Although museums opened as early as the 18th century, most scholars pinpoint the 19th century as the time the museum came into its mature form. By the last quarter of the 19th century, distinct museum types had developed along with a standardized system of display fueled partly by an "evolutionary mandate" that marked a new paradigm shift (Charles Darwin's *The Decent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* was published in 1871). See Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 97. Evolutionary theory also greatly influenced Freud, even if he often gave it an unusual spin as discussed above in his development of the Death Drive.

[86]A number of prominent modernist histories describe a society beginning in the mid-1800s as one increasingly subject to trauma. See George Frederick Drinka, *The Birth of Neurosis: Myth, Malady, and the Victorians* (New York, 1984), 108-22, Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York, 1991) and Elaine Showalter, *Women, Madness, and English Culture*, 1830-1980 (New York, 1985). One of the challenges to an integrated self came with the accumulation of people in cities, which created a lack of distance between self and other. As Mark Seltzer has pointed out, trauma in this environment operated not only as a *switchpoint* between the bodily and the psychic but also between the individual and the collective and between the public and the private. See Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (NY: Routledge, 1998), 254. In this period of rapid population change and migration, social death became a real threat, creating an anxiety about loss or deformation of subjectivity. Likewise, the rapid influx of technology such as the electric light and telephone in the human sphere worked to compromise and alter the conception of human identity, thereby creating a group culture that operated in what Kai Erikson describes as a "mood" of trauma. A mood of trauma is "different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up." Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in Caruth, *Trauma*, 185.

[87]Evolutionary theory brought with it a reconstitution of time itself. As Tony Bennett points out, this reconstitution allowed for parts that were suddenly interchangeable (e.g., geology and biology) and thus, even though man was elevated to the *telos* of time processes, he also became a fragmented subject, potentially formed from a number of separate histories. Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 39.

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This operation was achieved within the museum by setting outer limits to the collection, as if the world was totally knowable and containable. The cabinets of curiosities of the 16th- and 17th-century had been an open set, always ready for more specimens, and since no object could stand in for another, each was unique. The late 19th-century museum collection was, in contrast, a closed set, a collection of scarcity wherein the objects were chosen for their ability to represent other objects falling within the same class. Museum objects operated as synecdoches, so that each butterfly stood for the whole category of butterflies, and as metonyms, so that each butterfly also stood for a larger body of knowledge, such as natural history.[89] The definable and thus defined boundaries of the museum collection, doubly reinforced through operations of condensation and symbolization, reaffirmed the dominance of the psyche's Symbolic realm.

But, in fact, we have seen that, according to Lacan's theory, the psychic realm is not so linear or compact. If the museum had simply offered great signifying chains, then it would seem that there would be no need for museums at all. For why could not a concise encyclopedia or even a personal home collection do the same thing?[90] If we define the late 19th-century museum as *an institution that sought to collect and categorize culture,* then it is conceivable that in this process, it also collected the remainder—either objects or elements that exerted a surplus of meaning or, conversely, a lack of meaning—and that this remainder (unique and variable from person to person) would not escape the notice of the museum visitor.[91]

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[88]Or as Tony Bennett has summarized it, "like all the king's horses and all the king's men, the museum is engaged in a constant historical band-aid exercise in seeking to put back together the badly shattered human subject." *Birth of the Museum*, 39.

[89]Conn, *Museums*, 4.

[90]For a discussion of the late 19th-century domestic collection, see Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, 4. Also see Emily Apter, "Cabinet Secrets: Fetishism, Prostitution, and the Fin de Siècle Interior." *Assemblage* 9: 7 -19.

[91]Or, as Andreas Huyssen has summarized, "No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries...." *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (NY: Routledge, 1995). 15.

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Even one hundred years ago, long before the appearance of the museum type that anchors this study, there is reason to believe the museum experience triggered a complex interplay between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and that for the visitor there was always something in that encounter that could not be assimilated into the Symbolic order and thus acted to re-engage the mechanisms of self formation. It may have been a withered hand,[92] or a room so dark that the corners were invisible,[93] or simply a room full of art that offended or aroused. The point of rupture—the rip in the Symbolic—is always, of course, different for each person. The point is that as much as the museum, especially in the 19th-century variant, made a show in the service of the Symbolic realm, the other realms of the psyche were not totally subverted or repressed. And even though the traumas the museum produced may have been somewhat tentative or even playful (and were no doubt unplanned), they did their job in pointing to the presence of a fragmented self in the modern world.[94] Once the rip in the Symbolic made its presence known (recognized in symptoms of heightened emotion of excitement or even anxiety) the mechanisms of self-formation were (re)enacted as a means of repairing that tear. The strong museum narrative could thus have acted to both point to the trauma (the wound) and to suture that wound. In this scenario, the embrace of the Symbolic can be seen as more a re-embrace, an abreaction of the trauma, and a new commitment to what Lacan terms the "social contract" of the Symbolic. This is a renegotiation after a regress to the Imaginary as a fragmented self, and then a working-through and abreaction once

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[92]James Fenton refers to the "withered hand" in his poem about the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England. "Please sir where is the withered...hand?" as cited in Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 216.

[93]While sentience can belong to the Symbolic order in that certain rhythms, motional qualities, density of objects are common to particular cultural formations, it is also the area that often slips from the Symbolic back to the Imaginary in that it both exists *before* language *and then in spite of it.* See Randy Martin, *Performance as Political Self: The Embodied Self* (NY: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1990) 74-75. See also Chapter 4 of this study.

[94]In fact, it may not have just been the fragmented self that the museum assault pointed to. Ultimately, though, the source of the symptom does not matter, since all traumas (according to Lacan, whose theory has been adopted here) re-enact the primary trauma of being.

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recommitted to the Symbolic.[95] It is for this reason that the museum "experience," dependent on space and time and an unpredictable (and ever-changing) multi-dimensional appeal to the body, is so different from a magazine or even a *heimlich* environment. And it is perhaps for this reason that the museum experience was likened more to durational processes such as "edification" or "refreshment" than to just "education" or "enjoyment."[96]

Museums Centered on Trauma

We may ultimately only be able to speculate that the 19th-century museum addressed trauma indirectly, not as the result of any operational goal, but at an individual, functional level. Yet by the end of the 20th century, new museums began to appear (such as those that comprise this study) wherein the role of trauma in both its explicit purpose and implicit function cannot be denied. These museums include in their goals, the presentation of traumatic cultural material and in some cases this is their only stated goal. They openly acknowledge that the task may ultimately prove to be unwieldy, unboundable, and unintelligible. As such, the inability of these museums to represent or to educate would be in apparent contradiction to the intended goal of the museum as it developed in the 19th century. But if we position these institutions in a radically changing world and a dramatically changed conception of the museum as a cultural organ, the museums built to address trauma, although unusual, are not necessarily unpredictable.

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[95]I am writing about the "ideal" situation wherein the experience is resolved. There do, of course, exist alternate scenarios in which the museum experience itself is traumatic and triggers other type of reaction formations including denial, repression, and even a compulsion to repeat.

[96]Or, as Georges Bataille put it so succinctly: "[the museum] is like the lungs of a great city; the crowd floods into the museum every Sunday like blood and leaves purified and fresh." Georges Bataille, "Musée," in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-88), 239, as cited in Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), xii.

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Some have argued that if the 19th-century world was defined by a trope of trauma,[97] then after two devastating world wars (and in the United States the protracted Vietnam War) the late 20th century could be defined as operating under a trope of the "post-traumatic."[98] Trauma is no longer elided, glossed over, or repressed but has become apparent. The post-traumatic society is one that acknowledges that it is traumatized and sets out to try and interpret this trauma. Often it is the case that the society believes the "wound" has been located in, say, the devastating effects of the Holocaust on Europeans and Americans, and interpretation of the Holocaust takes the form of trying to work through the trauma. Sometimes, it is the second trauma that is evident: the symptom that leads to a continued search for origins, as in the popular trend to blame adult behavior on childhood wrongdoings.[99]

It may be just another coincidence that within the new trope of "post-trauma," the museum—the house built to endorse and at times even to produce the great signifying chains of culture—underwent its own crisis.[100] Beginning in the early 1970s, in an age that has been termed "postmodern,"[101] history as the grand meta-narrative, the glue that

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[97]Kirby Farrell writes, "In contemporary culture ... trauma is both a clinical syndrome and a trope something like the Renaissance figure of the world as a stage: a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control." *Post-Traumatic Culture*, 2.

[98]Farrell sees the activity of "interpreting" trauma as what distinguishes the traumatic society from a post-traumatic one. He speculates, "its expanded scope has allowed people to fill it with fantasies. It is the most serviceable term I can find for trauma understood as an interpretive process." Ibid., 12.

[99]See Seltzer, *Serial Killers.*

[100]It is not my intention to set up causality between traumatized society and the museum, merely to suggest a fruitful area of future study. While it has always been thought that the museum is a reflection of society, it may be worth exploring how society is a reflection of the museum

[101]I cautiously invoke the term "postmodern" here, realizing that the term is a marked one, especially as this study is put to paper at the beginning of the 21st century. The debate surrounding the relevance of this term both in its history and use is nicely summarized by Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 9-11. I do think the term is significant in discussing the museum if for no other reason than it is an institution marked by architecture, of which the postmodern has a definable presence. But the main reason for using this term is linked to a certain tradition within Museum Studies. Douglas Crimp's "The Postmodern Museum" in his *On the Museum's Ruin* has become a canonical marker within the field against which many studies, this one included, must be read.

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bound culture together, was called into question. As an institution that was built on and for history, the museum was, not surprisingly, dragged into this inquiry. Following the lead of postmodern perspectives that emerged in literary and cultural theory during the mid-1970s,[102] history as it had been constructed in the museum, the grand story of Man—whether it be the story of his descent from the trees as it was played out in the dioramas of natural history museums or his ascent from the primitive to the modern as it was told in the art museums—was exposed as fiction.[103] Postmodern critique positioned history in the slippery realm of relativism, wherein a universal "true" history ceased to exist.[104]

By undoing the very ground upon which history had constructed itself, an obvious victim was the museum object. It could no longer represent any stable notion of the past. Stripped of essential meaning, the object no longer operated as an autonomous representational unit. Often, in fact, objects were no longer considered representations at all, but pieces of evidence used to support the variety of positions the museum, the curator, or the museum critic would adopt. Instead of a seamless meta-narrative, each museum display became an "argument" for a particular view of history. Knowing was no

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[102]The term "postmodern" has a complex history beginning as early as 1945 in architecture in an essay by Joseph Hudnut on the "Postmodern House." While it was used in literary theory as early as the 1950s, it was not until the mid-1970s that the term gained a wider acceptance, first in America and then in the late 1970s in Europe. Very simply stated, the postmodern has involved a critique of the universalisms of modernism, favoring instead heterogeneity, fragmentation, and difference. For a fuller definition of the term, see Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *The New German Critique*, No. 33 (Fall, 1984) and Gianmarco Vergani, ed. *The Culture of Fragments (Precis 6: The Journal of the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation*, Volume 6, Spring 1987).

[103]The most notable changes were seen in the art museum perhaps because it was less entrenched in an evolutionary story. While postmodern critique has privileged the art museum, changes also came about in the natural history museum. But not all museums changed. Those that did not change were seen as antiquated, a testament to an earlier time. But overall, most museums tried to adopt some of the elements of the new thinking and a few even embraced it wholeheartedly.

[104]The most vocal proponent of the absolute relativist position is Hayden White, who claims that there are no grounds for preferring one way of constructing meaning in history over another. See James Young, "Toward a Received History of the Holocaust," *History and Theory* 36 (December, 1987), 21-43.

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longer formed from understanding but from "witnessing," wherein "truth" was constructed as evidential cognition.[105]

Likewise, the audience of museum visitors was no longer viewed as a generic mass to be controlled or educated. Instead, visitors were seen as a museum element to be engaged. While there was still a tendency to generalize the audience—for instance, specific divisions were made between children and adults and between lay and specialists—a greater effort was given to interactive displays. With the great concern for audience in the development of the museum's purpose and the role of interpreter being passed to the viewer, the strict divisions between the museum's purpose and how the museum functioned began to blur and merge.

It is within this environment of a post-traumatic culture and a museum enterprise undergoing its own internal traumas that the museum type that is the focus of this study can be seen to emerge. At the most basic level, because they all set out to interpret trauma, all of our case studies are post-traumatic museums. This address is sometimes overt, as in the case of the AIDS Quilt or the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum. At other times, it is covert, as in the Temple of Confessions by Guillermo Gomez Peña. It is even sometimes acknowledged only to be hidden, as in the Narrenturm Anatomical-Pathological Museum. But in all of these strategies, the role of the museum is not *to represent* trauma but *to navigate around it* in order to re-member trauma and bring it into the Symbolic World. In this way, our examples are also revealed as postmodern museums that do not pretend that interpretation equals understanding through some "universal truth." As both post-traumatic and postmodern museums, they allow their contents to be "presented" without any allusions to "representation" and privilege the viewer in the role of interpreter. It is safe to say, in fact, that all of these institutions

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[105]The term "evidential cognition" belongs to Barry Sandywell in "Specular Grammar," Ian Heywood & Barry Sandywell, eds. *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual* (London: Routledge, 1999), 39. Likewise, the keepers of history—historians—"interrogate and cross-question their sources like bad-tempered prosecution lawyers, looking for inference and evidence that 'rings true' to them." Kavanagh, *Making Histories*, 4.

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assume that their contents will be potentially traumatic for the viewer and, as such, they set out as part of their operational goal to provide exhibition elements that will help work through this trauma. At least in these houses we can safely say the museum is set up to act as a trauma abreactor—a site for working through and for reuniting the traumatized visitor with the social body of the Symbolic.

The Car Crash within the Museum that Addresses Trauma

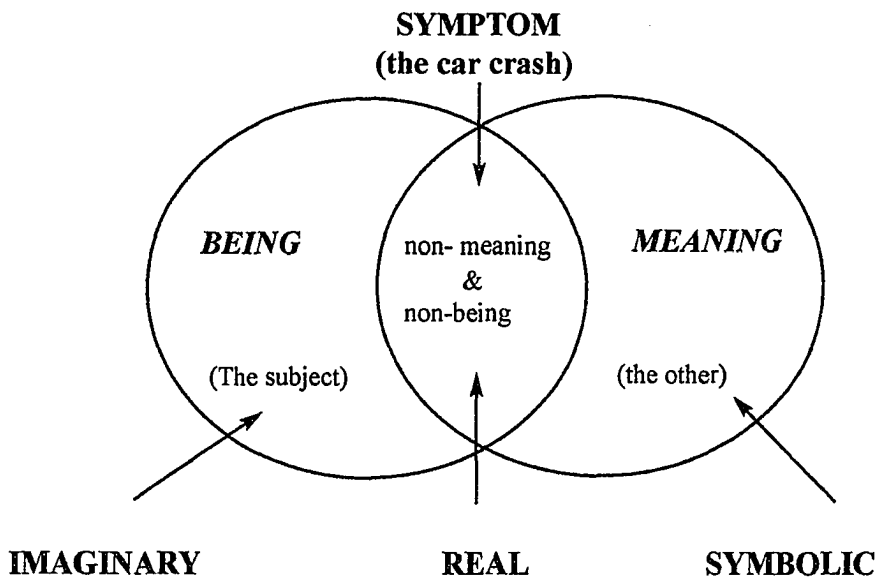
It would seem, then, that psychoanalytic theory enters the museum built to address trauma through the front door. All of the institutions addressed in this study purposely use aspects of psychoanalytic theory in the construction of their public purpose and, even more tellingly, in their private planning process. Although the degree to which the museums under study adhere to the tenets of psychoanalysis can and will be debated in the pages that follow, there is no doubt that the face of psychoanalysis enters these museums if in nothing else but the symptom. This symptom, which I characterized in the Introduction as the same psychic switchplate brought into play by a car crash on a road or highway, can be recognized through a freezing of movement, a concentrated and directed stare, and a suspension of the usual social rules that would generally discourage this type of behavior.

In psychoanalytic terms, the symptom in the museum, the psychic response to what I have termed the "car crash" of each display, acts as evidence that the museum has (often inadvertently) been able to re-engage the visitor in the mechanisms that define the coming-into-being, what we have termed the *primary processes*. The symptom results from the experience of rupture that any (re)engagement of the primary trauma precipitates. In fact, the symptom represents a moment "between perception and

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consciousness,"[106] an experience that Lacan characterized as a moment of non-meaning and non-being.

If we were to diagram the symptom that defines the car crash, it could be charted as follows:[107]



Wherein the circle on the left defines the subject as being, circulating in Imaginary misconceptions of self and ruled by perception, and the circle on the right represents the subject as defined by the Other in the realm of signification (meaning);[108] that realm given over to the consciousness of the Symbolic. The area where they overlap, where meaning and being collide creates, according to Lacan, a site not of surplus but of lack, a site of

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[106]Jacques Lacan, The *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977) 58.

[107]This diagram is adapted from Lacan's diagramming of alienation. Ibid., 211.

[108]According to Lacan, the Symbolic realm is a world of others who speak. The other is a "guide beyond the imaginary, on the level of the symbolic plane,...which can be embodied in the verbal exchange between human beings." Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I*, 141. For further discussion of the role of the other in the Symbolic realm, see Chapter 4.

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non-meaning and non-being. This is the site that marks the emergence of the symptom. In Lacan's psychic system, the point of non-being and non-meaning would mark the site of the Real. Thus the symptom emerges at the moment when the psyche is operating in the environment of the Real. This moment can be characterized more as a "threat" of the Real since the psyche (by definition) never really falls into the Real except in Death or psychosis. In the performative environment of the museum, the "threat of the Real" can be characterized as a "portal" to the Real. The interaction between display elements and the individual operating in this environment, create "holes" in the museum, in which the viewer is momentarily robbed of meaning or a feeling of being. These "holes" are not the Real, per se, but places where the threat of the return of the Real (recognized through the symptom) appears to be felt by a number of visitors. The door to the Real has been opened, even if most visitors will not enter beyond its threshold.

This diagram, to which we will return throughout the study, points to the critical elements in the response to the car crash. The first is the switchplate nature of the symptom. Its emergence does not guarantee that the individual will resolve the psychic assault by working-through the trauma and moving toward the Symbolic realm. The possibility exists that the individual can also move back to the Imaginary, to a narcissistic state such as we see with the melancholic response to the trauma brought on by the death of a loved one.[109] There is, in fact, reason to believe that once the individual enters the zone of the symptom, he or she will try to break its hold by bounding back and forth between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. As much as we might speculate on the nature of the display elements that lead to a moment in time and space when they become a car crash (signaled by the emergence of the symptom), we must also consider how the museum uses its display and signposts to move the viewer away from this moment of non-being and non-meaning. In other words, are there sufficient display elements to allow

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[109]For a discussion of the melancholic response, see Chapter 5.

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the viewer to begin a working-through or screening response to the Real, or does the moment of crisis in the museum merely act to engage a compulsion to repeat and thus perpetuate the trauma? While the mechanisms employed after the car crash have implications for each of the museums under study, the broader application to the museum in general, to its ability to function as a viable cultural organ in a world of trauma is also at stake.

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From the moment you enter the decaying, moldy and very odd building, you see excitement and anticipation written on the faces of children that fill its foyer. You hear their voices at the end of the hallway and once in awhile you see their heads pop into the small display rooms as you make your way around the circuitous path. It seems like no time before you reach the room where the kids are all congregated. There floating in a jar is a full-term human fetus. This specimen is pathological in the early use of the word, a representation of death, displaying none of the anomalies that now define the word for us; no cleft lip or extra limbs, no shrunken head, or hypersized genitals, but just a single textbook nine-month old fetus, the human at the moment it will come into the world and give the cry of life, floating there dead.[110]

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CHAPTER THREE

ONLY PHILOSOPHERS AND FOOLS NEED APPLY: SCREENING THE REAL AT THE NARRENTURM FEDERAL PATHOLOGICAL-ANATOMICAL MUSEUM

Introduction

Although it has been argued that the museum deals with objects and thus has always brushed up against death, the deceased body, the corpse itself, has generally been left out of its display halls.[111] Some have argued that this was a decision made early in the institution's history, reflecting a desire to keep the spectacle associated with the side show, the executioner's block, or even visits to the morgue that were popular in certain mid-19th-century European cities out of the museum.[112] Others have argued, in not too dissimilar a vein, that the museum hoped to appeal to (or short of that, to create) a genteel public within its halls, visitors who would recoil at the sight of dead human bodies, especially those which were dismembered or disfigured.[113] Whatever the case, even though human pathology collections[114] grew at the same time as museum collections, the

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[110]Notes from the author's journal after a visit to the Narrenturm on September 22, 1999.

[111]On rare occasions, casts of bodies or body parts were presented in the museums in cast wax form. Egyptian mummies would technically qualify as corpses but their decomposing appearance would diminish their impact as a human body that was recently living and is now dead. The ability to have the corpse produce an uncanny feeling in the viewer (as developed below) appears to be dependent on the degree to which the body "looks" as though it could be alive but is, in fact, dead.

[112]For a discussion of how the museum differentiated itself from the side-show, see Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (NY: New York University Press, 1996). Vanessa R. Schwartz describes visits to the morgue in late 19th-century Paris in *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 45-88. The distinction between side-show and museum was not as clearly drawn in the United States, partly because museums lacked centuries of accumulated objects for use as fodder. For a discussion of this gray area, see Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful.*

[113]Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 35.

[114]Until the 18th century, interest in the pathological tended to belong to the realm of the *Wunderkabinett*, where anatomical abnormalities were collected as oddities or curiosities. Generally, these specimens were not thought of as tools in the study of medicine. In the 18th century, Galen's reigning theory, which mandated that diseases had their origin in the body fluids (humours), was rejected. The new

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fact remains that body parts, especially those of white Europeans and their descendants in the New World were not typically found in public museum display halls.[115] Even during the major portion of the twentieth century, pathology collections were kept out of public museums and relegated instead to halls adjacent to medical schools or hospitals.

In this respect the Narrenturm stands as an exceptional museum, for it is a public space that is ostensibly set up to highlight both dismembered and disfigured human bodies. It is unusual not only in its contents but also in its careful consideration of the museum-goers' emotional or psychic health as they tour the collection, emotions that fall outside those of "pleasure," "refreshment," or "edification," which are associated with most museums. Even though its purpose as a public institution is ambivalent and its display parameters are at times restrictive, the Narrenturm is a museum that is fully aware that its contents may be traumatic to many of its visitors. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, and for the purposes of the current study, we can position the Narrenturm as an institution that deals with trauma in the way it addresses (or as we shall see, screens) the first trauma of social being, the abandonment of the Imaginary realm for the world of signification that is the Symbolic. In essence, the museum circulates in the material of a trauma that is not linked to a specific historical event but to the story (the cultural narrative) that anchors the chains of signification in any human being's Symbolic

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medical paradigm was centered on the relationship between clinical symptoms and bodily *sequellae*, the latter of which was gathered through autopsy. This in turn created a branch of study in the schools of medicine that was solely dedicated to pathological anatomy, although it should be noted that until the middle of the 20th century, pathology was defined not as a deviation from the norm but as any bodily manifestation that led to death. Ernst Hausner, *The Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum*, trans. Gertrude Maurer (Vienna: Ing. Ernst Hausner, 1998), 20.

[115]This is not to say that they were not collected by the museum. The Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Man in Paris have always been rumored to have body parts in their secret chambers, often of famous (or infamous) public figures. In those rare cases where body parts were made part of public displays, they were often wax casts of the originals and, with few exceptions, the body parts of non-Europeans. One of the most famous examples of this predilection is the waxen cast of Saartie Baartman's genitalia. Baartman was an African who had been displayed in Piccadilly Circus in London in the early part of the 19th century. Billed as the "Hottentot Venus," she had a condition known as steatopygia that manifested itself in an overly developed rump. When she died, Baron Georges Cuvier arranged to have a waxen cast made of her entire body along with specialized casts of her genitalia. The body cast was displayed in the Musée de l'Homme until as late as 1982. For a summary of the Saartie Baartman story, see Bernth Lindfors, "Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent," in Thomson, *Freakery*, 208-210.

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world. In the Narrenturm we can see how strict parameters to prevent a traumatic experience actually have the opposite effect and enable a confrontation with the Real in the fetishized form of a human fetus.

History and Description of the Narrenturm Museum

The Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum is located in the old Allgemeine Krankenhaus in Vienna, Austria. It was originally built during the reign of Joseph II (1764-1790) as a lunatic asylum[116] and opened in April 1784. When the asylum closed in 1869, it was converted into a hospital archive and home for nurses.[117] In 1971, the University Institute of Pathology and Anatomy moved its collection into the first floor of the tower, and in 1993 the University acquired the entire building for its growing number of specimens. It was at this time that it was decided to open a "museum" on the first floor of the structure. The Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum, which is affectionately referred to as the Narrenturm (Fool's Tower) even to this day, claims to be the only museum of its kind that is open to the public.[118]

The anatomy collection in the Narrenturm can be dated back to the middle of the 18th century, with its oldest specimens originating in the private collections of the first pathologists who worked in the city. A 1772 catalogue outlines the transfer of early collections to the General Hospital, including the only stuffed human specimen still

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[116]The architect of the tower was Isidore Canevale, who worked closely with the director of the hospital, Dr. Joseph v. Quarin, to design the structure. K. Portele, *Guide to the "Pathologisch-anatomische Bundesmuseum,"* trans. J. Fiona Fuller (Vienna: Pathologisch-anatomisches Bundesmuseum, 1987), 5.

[117]For a recent popular account of the history of the asylum, see Gerhard Roth, *Eine Reise in das Innere von Wien* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1991).

[118]Portele, *Guide to the Pathologisch.* In fact, the museum is barely open to the public. It opens its door only on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and on the first Saturday morning of each month. There are, in fact, other pathology museums opened to the public, most notably the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, PA.

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preserved in Vienna today.[119] In 1796, an official mandate was issued to create a pathological collection and house this collection in a "museum."[120] The first director, Johann Peter Frank, outlined in his biography of 1802 his desire for a room adjacent to the lecture room of the medical school in which pathological specimens could be temporarily stored and arranged. The collection grew rapidly under the tutelage of a string of directors: in 1813 there were 484 specimens, and by 1827 there were 4,307 items. From 1850 onwards, the collection often grew at the whim of the director. By 1970, the collection had grown to over 14,000 specimens and could no longer be accommodated at the University's Institute of Pathology and Anatomy. It was then that the collection was moved to the Narrenturm. The collection continued to grow in its new home and to this day accepts outdated pathology-anatomy collections from other institutions that no longer have the space or need to keep them. In addition to "wet" specimens (most of which were acquired through autopsy as opposed to surgery),[121] the current collection includes skeletal bones, 3,000 *moulages*, autopsy reports that date back to 1813, historical microscopes and medical instruments, and a large collection of veterinary specimens.

Not only does the Narrenturm house pathological specimens, but in its very construction and form the building itself exhibits a deviation from the norm.[122] It is a

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[119]The specimen is a stuffed child dating from c.1780. It is reputed to be the taxidermy work of Josef Barth, who held the chair in anatomy at the hospital from 1774 to 1786. The subject is a female, about three years of age. The cause of death is unknown. See Hausner, *The Federal Path.-Anat. Museum*, 113, for a history of this specimen and four other stuffed human preparations that once were part of the Natural History Museum collection in Vienna and were lost in a fire in 1848.

[120]"Museum" is used here as a place where one displays objects. It falls outside of current definitions of the institution, which would include the ability of the public to view these objects. The pathology collection was restricted to medical staff and students.

[121]A "wet" specimen is an actual human body part (as opposed to a wax *moulage* reproduction) that is suspended in a preserving fluid, generally formaldehyde.

[122]Even though the building was built as a lunatic asylum and its form can be linked to that function, very little has been changed either inside or outside the building, since its initial construction. In fact, it can be argued that the current museum in the building functions *because of* the building's construction and not in spite of it. Hausner ruminates about this odd conjunction of a unique building to

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tower-like, five story, round, structure pierced by windows (Figure 1). From the outside it appears to follow Jeremy Bentham's design for a panopticon, although once a visitor is inside it is clear that the center of the building does not cohere around a central viewing station but a void.[123] One side of the interior cylinder of space is pierced by an asymmetric hallway, which originally housed the medical staff (Figure 2). The stairway is found in this wing and provides the only access to each floor, which contains 28 cells or rooms that run on the outside of the tower. Because of the entrance, there are 27 cells on the ground floor, thus making 139 cells in total (Figure 3). At one time, the top of the staircase was crowned by an octagonal lantern, which, because of its raised position, offered an excellent view of the hospital. Even to this day the original form has been only slightly altered.[124]

Description of the Displays in the Narrenturm Museum

The Pathological-Anatomy Museum, or Narrenturm Museum, is divided into two parts. The first part is located in approximately one-half of the ground story, occupying

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house unique specimens: "The singularity and uniqueness of the building and its current content provide for a forceful and lasting impression on our minds. In their affinity and the way they match and supplement each other, they are the incarnation of terrifying anxieties, fears and threats such as they are extant in our imagination only when special circumstances prevail." Hausner, *The Federal Path-Anat. Museum*, 6.

[123]Jeremy Bentham's panoptical design has been discussed by Michel Foucault as a strategy of power in "Eye of Power," in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (NY: Pantheon Books, 1980). In fact, the Narrenturm was used to illustrate a Foucault essay in a recent Austrian publication. Michel Foucault, "Das Leben der Infamen Menschen" in Daedalus: Die Erfindung der Gegenwart, exhibition catalog for a 1990 exhibition of the same title at The Museum of Modern Art in Vienna, Austria (Vienna: Verlag Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990) 349-388. According to Peter Flaschberger, assistant director of the museum, the building has often been mistakenly described as a panopticon. (This comment and those hereafter attributed to Peter Flaschberger were attained on September 22, 1999, when the present writer visited the museum). It is now thought the building may have been built in the round form simply so that the maximum number of patients could be housed at the lowest possible cost. Yet even in its founding moment, the significance of the round tower was understood as an isolating strategy. It was conceived as a retaining, not a healing, institution and its form was meant to evoke a cage rather than any innovational architecture. Hausner, The Federal Path.-Anat. Museum, 18.

[124]Although the lantern no longer tops the Narrenturm, it survived well into the 19th century. Some of the cells have been linked to each other through internal doorways so that visitors can move from cell to cell without passing into the hallway.

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14 cells and the entry foyer. On the surface the museum is set up like a late 19th-century natural history museum, wherein cultural history was displayed through diorama reenactments of daily activities.[125] For example, in a cell devoted to the practice of autopsy, visitors find a lab table with a sheet-covered form (presumably a cadaver) lying on it (Figure 4). A representation of a doctor sits in front of the table, ready to perform his duty[126] (Figure 5). Cutting tools and saws are laid out on a table by the doctor's side, but there is no evidence of the specimens his activities will yield.[127] In fact, there are surprisingly few specimens in this part of the museum, and those that are scattered throughout the exhibit seemed to be placed more to add authenticity than for any representational purpose. Thus, in the room devoted to cardiology, a wet specimen heart is presented to set the scene, but nothing is there to address the subject or the etiology that led to its collection and placement in the pathology museum. "Representation" in this part of the museum is, in fact, kept in the more comfortable realm of drawing, prints, and models. These visual components far outnumber any "real" specimens (Figure 6).

Although, as we will learn in the next part of this study, the "story" of the museum seems to be a certain historical narrative about the study of human pathology (as opposed to where the specimens come from or their relationship to the etiology of disease), there is actually no logical order to the exhibits.[128] Some of the displays, such as

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[125]These groupings were also called "life groups," as opposed to single mannequins displaying clothing or tools in hand. For a history of the "life group," see Ira Jacknis "Franz Boas and Exhibits" in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 81-83.

[126]The doctor is rendered rather crudely and looks more like a scarecrow. See discussion below, on the disjunction between this representation of a human and the life-like *moulages* that are housed in the museum.

[127]This display resembles the traditional museum diorama or "life group" except that it does not have a sheet of glass or a wall or even a rope separating the viewer from the "scene." Visitors can theoretically step into the scene, although they do not. The signposts of the museum are maintained, honored, and followed by visitors even when there is no barrier.

[128]The order of the rooms is as follows:

1. History of Pathology as a Science
2. History of Pharmacology

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the cell devoted to early pharmacology (Figure 7) do not relate directly to the study of pathology, nor does an entire cell given over to dentistry, which is certainly only a minor conduit to the collection of pathological specimens (Figure 8). These rooms appear to be included simply to help transport the viewer back to a historical moment.

Because of the unique nature of the Narrenturm's building, visitors are forced to follow a single path through the displays, although there are no rules about moving back and forth between exhibits or going forward and then retracing one's steps. In most cases, anyway, the visitor must pass from one cell to the next by doubling back to the main hallway, although a couple of the rooms are joined internally. The museum tour, which is self-directed, takes about forty-five minutes. This first floor of the museum is the only part of the building that is open to the general public and thus for most people constitutes the entire museum experience.

Description of Displays in the Restricted Part of the Museum

A select few visitors—medical and nursing students and scientists doing research—are permitted to view the museum display that continues on the second and third floors of the Narrenturm. This restricted display is known only through word of mouth (there is no brochure as there is for the general museum on the first floor) and an appointment must be made to gain admittance. Whereas on the first floor, body specimens are spare, here it appears no specimen has been denied its place. Every space

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3. Sexual Diseases
4. Prosthetics
5. Dentistry
6. Eyes and microscopes
7. Autopsy
8. Digestion
9. History of the Narrenturm
10. Models, Charts
11. Neonatology
12. The Heart
13. Gift Shop

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is filled, every surface is covered, and individual rooms are filled with specimen-lined shelves (Figure 9). Vitrines make passage through the hallways cramped, and even the hallway that houses the staircase is lined with *moulages* (Figure 10). The displays seem to follow three types of classificatory systems. In the small rooms, similar forms (like appendages) *or* forms derived from similar etiology (like cancer) are crowded onto shelves. Many of the specimen jars are labeled only in Latin, and there is no wall text. Unlike the seeming disorder of these assemblages, the vitrines in the hallway are neatly set out and, using a typological organizational system, arranged largely by body part or body anomaly. For displays of body parts, no distinction is made between "normal" and "pathological." A display of human feet (almost all in the form of *moulages*) ranges from a "common" foot to one with webbed toes and another with eight toes. Because specimens are thus presented as variations and not deviations, no line is drawn between the normal looking foot and the rarely seen one. Body anomalies are presented as objects with no subject. For instance a collection of calculi display only catalogue numbers but no subject names. Groups of medical and nursing students who "tour" the hallway glance into the cells, while researchers spend their time in rooms devoted to their line of research.[129] There are no props, no dioramas, and very little signage even in the neatly ordered hallways.

The Forbidden Display of the Narrenturm

If one of the necessary components of a museum is the museum visitor, then for all intents and purposes, the first floor of the Narrenturm open to the general public and the second and third floors accessible to a select group of the scientific public constitute the "museum." But there are two more floors that are part of the Narrenturm collection

[129] In this way they act much like the study rooms of late 19th-century museums. For a discussion of the study room and its role in the early museum, see Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 42.

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that although off limits, must be figured into the museum experience. There are a few reasons for this, which will be more fully discussed later in this section, but which can briefly be summarized as follows. First, the unique and ultimately very simple form of the building, allows for an easy and immediate understanding of its interior spaces. Windows on the outside and doorways on the inside mark each cell. Even if this is only an imagined logic (the upper floors could be completely restructured), the effect it creates is immediate. For most of the lay public it is apparent that they have only been let into a very small number of the possible cells in the building. The second reason becomes apparent as you breeze through the displays on the first floor: for a pathology museum, there is a dearth of pathology here. One cannot resist the feeling that much of the collection is kept locked away from the public and that the nasty business of creating specimens is still occurring somewhere in the building. So although the collection on the top two floors of the Narrenturm is considered off-limits to the public,[130] its presence is immediately understood and its content is often imagined. But the most important reason to consider the contents of this off-limits collection is that the museum personnel guard it so carefully because its contents are considered incomprehensible to the public and in fact "maddening." [131] In this way, the top two floors of the Narrenturm offer interesting insights into display decisions linked to the museum's purpose.

Given what could be *imagined* as occupying the top two floors, a visitor might be initially disappointed as we step out of the stairwell into the fourth floor. The specimens on this story are haphazardly arranged. There is a rather large veterinary collection, along

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[130] In fact, one of the main tasks of the museum personnel is to pull kids away from the iron gate that leads to the upper floors.

[131] It was only after much cajoling that I was able to enter this part of the building. Assistant Director Flaschberger jokingly resisted my request to see the top floors. He quipped, "Only philosophers can go up there without going mad." Sensing that my credentials as an academic, even one who had ventured all the way from America, would not work to gain me access, I reassured him that I was an artist, certainly a sub-class of philosophers. He finally relented. But once he had explained how to get off and on the floors he left me to wander the halls myself. His final words as he departed the floor were, "There is nothing I can add to this."

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with remnants of private pathology collections, most of which are housed in spectacular Victorian cabinets. Because of the lack of space in the cells, which hold bottles and bottles of specimens similar in content and form to those bottles found in the restricted collection on the second and third floors, many of these large display cases have been relegated to the hallway. The hallway cabinets often hold "slices" of the body between glass slides, and vitrines reveal lined up objects on old and moldy velvet. But upon closer inspection, as we move in to confirm or deny our initial impression as to what we are looking at, we find that the slides bear no marks to identify their source or their type. One cabinet appears to hold a brain sliced into a hundred pieces, but there is no way to be certain. A small display case holds carefully arranged blobs of flesh and bone, but there are no labels and no apparent links to the human body we are used to seeing. And because all visual or categorical markers have been lost, the anomalies or deviations that ushered specific people towards their death no longer represent an individual death, nor do they represent some form of pathology. They can only stand as by-products of death itself. Not only are they unable to represent a specific person or disease, but like death, they cannot be made to fit into the signifying chains of culture. They just are, they just exist, stripped of their objectness or subjectness.

As we try to navigate around the large cabinets in the hallway, we feel as if we are in a furniture warehouse. In the final analysis, however, this jumble of furniture and body parts is not a warehouse, nor is it a storeroom for potential museum fodder. It is nothing more than a landfill for long forgotten or neglected collections that had at their center the human body.[132] As we travel around the fourth floor and then move up to the fifth there is something else we cannot quite shake off. Unlike the sanitized museum, and more like the garbage heap, we cannot ignore the smell that should perhaps be expected in a building

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[132]The Assistant Director complained that the specimens on this floor have grown astronomically over the last decade. Once it became known there was a dumping ground for what most modern pathology collections see as useless material, the "donations" have never stopped.

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given over to human remains but which still disturbs and penetrates to the core of one's being. Infusing the top two floors of the Narrenturm is the persistent odor of dust, mold, and death.

The Purpose of the Narrenturm Museum

As we briefly stated before, one of the purposes of the Pathological-Anatomy Museum is to present the history of pathology as an important branch of medicine. At the same time, and often intertwined with the historical narrative, the museum attempts to apply pathology to modern societal concerns. For instance, a room dedicated to sexual diseases devotes most of its display to HIV. The museum thus attempts to present pathological studies as a contemporary and relevant discipline and not only as a science as antiquated as the building it showcases its products in. There are, of course, other purposes to the museum, including the legitimatization of the collection, promoting the relevance of its second and third floors to a modern medical education, and even the showcasing of a collection that could theoretically generate income.[133] These are not concerns unique to the Narrenturm, however; they can be said to be common to most museums, but because the display area is so small and it is governed by so few people, these other purposes are often more apparent in the final Narrenturm Museum experience.

While the purpose of the museum seems a bit confused, or at least ambiguous (even to those that run the space), one purpose of the museum has been consistently and carefully considered. Realizing the potency of their collection and the possibility that it might be psychically disturbing to a visiting public, the directors of the Narrenturm have arranged their displays with the distinct purpose of keeping their visitors from being

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[133]The Museum must constantly fight for funds and/or recognition from the adjoining university (now housed in the old hospital).

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traumatized. Due to the nature of the subject matter, the usual museum goals, such as making the visitor feel good (either through a pleasing aesthetic experience or through the satisfaction that comes from the acquisition of knowledge) are replaced with directives focused on making sure visitors do not faint, throw up, or in other ways become so traumatized that they would never recommend the collection to someone else or return themselves. The museum realizes that they must work hard to keep the material in the world of signification, that is, in the realm of the Symbolic.

One method for realizing this goal occurs in the plotting out of *potential encounters*. The directors of the Narrenturm Museum seem to understand that museum objects do not just sit on shelves but are always contextualized in terms of the encounter—a triadic experience which in the museum is defined by the objects, the visitors and the very edifice or defined space in which the encounter takes place. As imagined by museum administrators and planners, the potential encounter is an experience that is both singular and hopelessly infinite. In the Narrenturm, it is probable that each potential encounter was considered and evaluated as to its vulnerability to the "leaks" of signification the museum was trying to avoid. The museum planners may have considered a number of scenarios, including visits of groups of schoolchildren, out-of-town visitors, the scientist specialist, or even the university student who happens upon the building while strolling through the campus that now occupies the once adjacent hospital.[134] Eventually, though, the host of potential encounters becomes fixed in a chosen encounter—the imagined "common experience" that the "average" visitor to the space will have.[135] In this particular museum that chosen encounter is segmented into two parts, one

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[134]At the very least, we know that a distinction was made between the first floor visitor and the more "specialized" second and third floor visitor.

[135]In fact, in all museums a great deal of thought goes into the definition of the "average" museum goer. See David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), especially chapter 2. This process is quite freely spoken about in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. See below.

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for the first-floor lay public and the other for the more specialized second and third floor visitor.[136]

One overt display tactic used to maximize the success of the museum's "ideal" encounter (and one that is freely admitted to by the museum directors) is abiding by an organizational system that separates out the "normal" from the "pathological."[137] In fact, this strategy is taken one step further, wherein the "pathological" is often only displayed in drawings, diagrams and charts, whereas the actual specimens are restricted to so-called "normal samples." Another tactic that the museum appears to use is a brevity in its displays. Not only is the entire visit short in duration, but the individual displays are spare and rudimentary. This becomes especially apparent when the first floor is compared with the second and third floors. Finally, there seems to have been a conscious choice to bombard the viewer with names, dates, and numbers as a means of anchoring each display. Once again, the prominence and excessiveness of the explanatory text on the ground floor becomes apparent when viewing the restricted collection on the other floors.

But, in fact, this potential encounter, now fixed and locked in by a host of display decisions, is more than just an imagined encounter that is willed into potentiality. In the museum, the fixed encounter becomes, in essence, a "scripted" encounter, held in play by a cast of authoritative framing devices (signposts) that the viewer is expected to read and, in the best of all museum worlds, to honor and respect.[138] These signposts may be nothing more than signs that point the way to rooms or exits, but generally they are much more. Vitrines, for example, sanitize and keep at a safe distance potentially offensive material, lights direct vision to important elements, carefully scripted pockets of space

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[136]It is fair to say that a third encounter is also fixed. The forbidden encounter on the fourth or fifth floors is characterized by the Assistant Director as "the one for madmen or philosophers."

[137]When pressed about how the museum deals with its potent materials, this was the one example that Flaschberger gave.

[138]Susan Crane summarizes it as follows: "Our museum experiences instruct us in social codes of behaviour... We learn how to behave in museums, what to expect from them,... and how to remember the occasion." *Museums and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 47.

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allow for congregation at one point, and a lack of space at another point encourages the visitor to keep moving. At the Narrenturm, the scripted encounter—the imagined ideal museum encounter of this specific museum, which is woven into the learned and accepted dramaturgy for all traditional museums—is offered to the viewer as a means of realizing one of the museum's most difficult purposes. The scripted encounter offers a means of navigating the collection without undergoing the kind of trauma that it could easily incur.

The Purpose of the Pathological Museum Examined in Psychoanalytic Terms

In psychoanalytic terms, we can see that one of the Narrenturm's overall goals is to guard the viewer from traumatizing material as a defensive strategy to prevent an experience that Freud termed "uncanny," or Lacan described as a "return" of the Real."[139] Freud links the uncanny with a return of the repressed (which for Lacan would be the Real).[140] When one has an uncanny encounter, what is being experienced as "dread" is something that was once known but has been forgotten. According to Freud, there are two causes of the uncanny. The first is linked to physical reality; something that was thought to have been disproven (and thus was repressed) returns.[141] An example of this first type of the uncanny would be a child's belief in animism. The second cause of the uncanny is linked to a psychical reality and the return of repressed infantile complexes. It is, for

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[139]In this section of the chapter, I am giving theoretical anchors to the rather vague language used to answer my questions about some of the museum's tactics. The directors of the institution did not use such specific psychoanalytic terms, such as the uncanny or return of the Real. Instead, they used broad vagaries such as "visitors couldn't emotionally handle it," or "you know, all those body parts, it would be too confusing," (Flaschberger) the implication being that no amount of text or explanation could compensate for this confusion or troubling feeling. The unofficial, yet prominently displayed, catalogue, a rather large picture book of the Narrenturm, does couch much of its analysis in psychological if not psychoanalytic terms. For instance, the author describes the Fool's Tower as "one of those places where the pathologies of body and mind meet and confront each other." Hausner, *The Federal Path.-Anat. Museum*, 7. This chapter of the present study is greatly influenced by Hausner's hauntingly beautiful passage about the museum's collection and its flirtation with madness.

[140]Freud's *Das Unheimlich* was published in 1919.

[141]In Freud's economic theory of the psyche, nothing is lost or discarded, but only repressed.

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example, a return to the pre-ego stage of the Imaginary when the body was in bits and pieces. This uncanny is linked to "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist...feet that dance by themselves."[142] In the adult, these remainders of the Imaginary would be located in the Real, thus the characterization by Lacan of the uncanny as the "return of the Real."

In the Narrenturm Pathology-Anatomy Museum, the ground floor displays have been arranged to potentialize a scripted encounter that guards against the return of the Real. It does this through the most basic and primary response to traumatic material: *screening.*[143] In the individual, screening would act to keep the Real from consciousness, to keep the traumatic experience from memory. According to Lacan (in his reinterpretation of Freud), we all screen, or repress, the initial trauma that marks our coming into being. The screen is not quite part of the world of signification, nor does it serve the Imaginary. It merely acts as a barrier to the Real. By using a screening tactic, the museum seems to acknowledge that because it deals with body parts, the raw material for the first trauma of being, there is little chance of bringing the collection—the actual specimens—into the realm of signification for the average museum-goer. In other words, there can be no working-through of the trauma that the museum so carefully guards against. At the same time as the museum uses the screen, it also realizes that one of the problems of screening the Real is that in that very action, the construction of the screen, one also points to the Real, to that which is being shielded. So while the museum uses the screen, it must constantly act to hide it. The confused and overly didactic displays on the first floor of the Narrenturm, presented as they are with traditional museological

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[142]Anthony Vidler, The *Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 79.

[143]Screening is another psychoanalytic term that is used with wide application. For Freud "screen memories" were formations produced by a compromise between repressed elements and defense mechanisms. Freud focuses his analysis on the *content* of the screen memory which is "characterised both by its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content." Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 410. Lacan is less concerned with the screen's content than with its *mechanics*. For him the screen is a barrier, albeit a rather porous one.

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signposts (encased and thus sanitized specimens, charts, diagrams and drawings instead of actual specimens), can be seen as diversionary smoke and mirrors. Both the visual and textual materials, constructed out of Symbolic markers, may confuse and confabulate, but they never really string together into a coherent signifying chain. There exists an attempt to keep the viewer firmly planted in the Symbolic realm, not for any pleasure gained from edification, but as a way of distracting the viewer from the screen erected to shield the Real. In other words, the museum uses the screen only to try and hide it within the shadow of the Symbolic.

On the second floor, although the need to hide the screen no longer exists, the screening tactic remains intact.[144] Gone are the diversionary tactics used on the first floor to disavow the presence of the screen. It even appears that here the screen is not only acknowledged but is even allowed to "leak." The Narrenturm collection and display restricted to medical students and scientists creates a controlled return of the Real. Although the Real does not actually return, it can never be seen (and thus, according to Lacan, it is always a missed encounter), it exists in a fetishized form in the countless specimens that crowd these two floors. The visitors to this restricted area are assumed to have the Symbolic underpinnings to bring these "fetishes" into their world of signification. In other words, with this select group of people it is assumed that some work has already been done to create anchors in the Symbolic to which the fetishes of the Real can be attached.[145] This "working-through" method of dealing with trauma (a method particularly endemic to the study of western medicine) through a means I have called a controlled return of the Real is characterized by a psychic mechanism that transforms the

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[144]The fact that the museum maintains the forth and fifth floors as a forbidden zone attests to the fact that screening is occurring in other parts of the museum. Here *screen* is understood as both a real barrier and also as a site of the phantasy that maintains the screen in the psychic realm. See discussion below.

[145]Although the fainting of the new medical student in the operating room has been often satirized in film and television, it turns out that this is more the norm than the exception. This would be the response the Museum was trying to avoid on the first floor but which it is assumed has already been suffered through by the medical student. The fainting is a classic response to the uncanny experience.

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body parts, the "things" that define the Imaginary into "objects" of the Symbolic. This process is marked by sidestepping the subject. In other words, the "object" is brought into the Symbolic without addressing the object's subjecthood (the fact that they came from individual human beings).[146] These objects bypass the subject (even though they come from subjects) and are fixed in the Symbolic through the use of proper names.[147]

The Narrenturm Collection and How it Functions for the Viewer

As much as the museum may try to set up an array of traditional museological signposts to keep the viewer on the track of the scripted encounter, this task is more formidable than it might first seem. The scripted encounter must always work with—and often in opposition to—another encounter that accompanies each visitor to the museum. Before we even enter the museum's doors, as visitors we bring with us a *desired encounter*.[148] The visitor's "desired encounter" is often a nebulous mixture of emotion, fragmented images, and (mis)information that has been formed in anticipation of the visit and which may be experienced on the part of the viewer (especially those coming to the Narrenturm) as nothing more than a dizzying or even sickening excitement. It is important to note that the desired encounter is made up of vague images (the realm of the Imaginary)

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[146]In fact, this is a method that is used throughout Western medicine. Although patients' names and life stories are of course known by the doctor, they constantly work at "objectifying" their subjects. Clinical notes avoid proper names except for the disease. It is the threat to *subjecthood* that is crucial to trauma. For a discussion of how medical patients are seen as carriers of disease and not a diseased person see Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and Pathological*, trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett (NY: Zone Books, 1991).

[147]Lacan argues that there is a fixity of proper names that glues them to whatever they originally referred to. Because of this, they are the glue that holds language and the Symbolic together. Although the specimens are more accurately defined by proper nouns, the use of Latin gives these proper nouns a status analogous to a proper name.

[148]The desired encounter is not necessarily the same as the Lacanian notion of the object of desire, although both end up being impossible to obtain. The desired encounter is likened more to what Lacan calls the object *in* desire, which is really more a fetish (an acknowledgment and a disavowal of desire). See Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet" in Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, 11-52.

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and sentience (the threatened presence of the Real), plus a host of expectations about all museums that were developed and supported in the realm of signification (the Symbolic). Like the object of desire, a desired encounter is never fixable. Although the desired encounter may form before the visitor enters the Narrenturm, once we are inside the museum it can change from moment to moment (and no doubt does if for no other reason than that we are denied access to various parts of the museum). It is in this way that the fourth and fifth floors of the Narrenturm have such a strong potential import for the visitor, even though we are never allowed to witness them. Most important, the desired encounter as much as it is desired can never be attained, can never cohere into a real encounter because the desired encounter, as in all encounters rooted in desire, is ultimately driven by a drive to undo the self.[149] The desired encounter (even though it is more an "object in desire" than "the object of desire") is in psychoanalytic terms the privileged encounter, the one that will guide the psychic response in the viewer.

If the museum operates under the parameters of a *scripted encounter* set up to promulgate its purpose, and each visitor enters the museum with a *desired encounter* that results from a precarious and ever-changing negotiation of that individual's psychic realms, there is a third encounter that must be considered in discussing how the museum functions for its visitors. That encounter, which we can term the *phantasized encounter*,[150] can be thought of as an orthopedic experience constructed from both the scripted and desired encounters. In the Narrenturm, these three encounters play out as follows: the ruse of signification, the death house as a history house (the scripted encounter) is read (the phantasized encounter) as a road map to the Real (the desired encounter). The smoke and mirror tactics of the scripted encounter invite a cat and mouse

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[149]Lacan notes that the object of desire is only attainable in death. In his theory the object of desire links the Real with the death drive.

[150]I have retained the more archaic spelling of fantasy in order to point to its ghostly presence. In other words, this encounter is not just pure fantasy but is characterized by a "haunting" presence of the Real.

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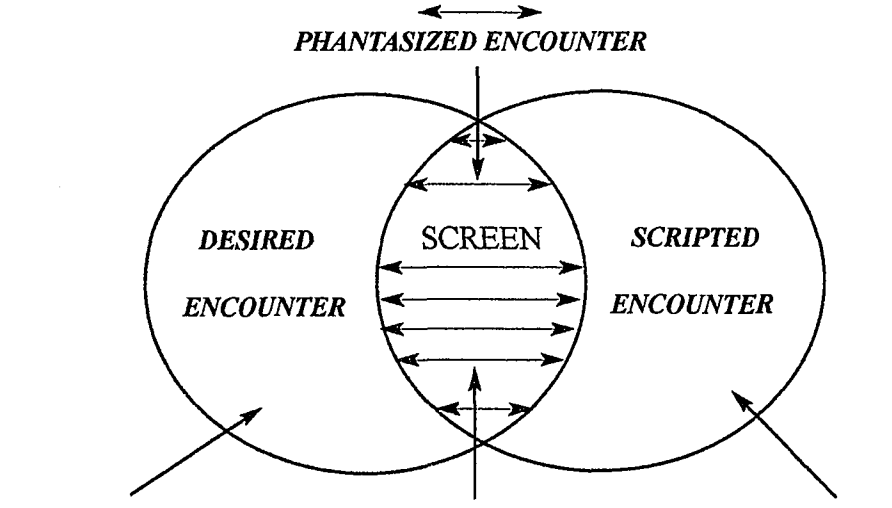
phantasized encounter in which the viewer (mis)reads the museum's signposts in order to find the "thing" (brain, monster, conjoined twins—it is different for everyone), that object that figures in the desired encounter and will undo the self through a return to the Real. The Narrenturm stands as a perfect example of this search (which may occur to some extent in all museum experiences) because we cannot imagine that this "object in desire" will not be delivered in this museum to death.

The potential number of phantasized encounters is endless, especially given the wealth of Imaginary building blocks provided by this museum. A few examples must suffice. In the pharmacy room that ostensibly links the study of pathology with the emergence of pharmacological science, the connection to death is never made clear. The jars that line the cell of the pharmacy fall short of any masterful signification and act instead as reminders of that which is kept hidden—that somewhere in this building there must be jars with mushy human remains. Likewise the sheet-covered form in the autopsy tableau and the scarecrow styled doctor beside it may have been crudely constructed to help keep the viewer in the realm of representation. Positioned as they are against the *actual tools* used to cut into human bodies, old and mottled with rust or blood (and the uncertainty is but another of the Imaginary building blocks), and the old bottles used to store man's *Unheimlich* parts, these stiff and notably "faked" forms act more to point to that which is denied in this chapter of the museum's story (body parts). Finally, the twisted tools and receptacles for imagined bloody tongues and jaws, presented as they are in the room to dentistry, that is clean and sterile, allows the viewer to phantasize beyond their probable function—the collection of teeth.

The scenarios for the phantasized encounter in the Narrenturm are no doubt varied and individual. Ultimately, though, they function very well to serve the museum's purpose. Although they differ from the scripted encounter, they still act to achieve the same goal, which is to block the potential for trauma within the museum's walls. In other words, the phantasized encounter can be seen as a negotiation between the scripted

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encounter and the desired encounter, so that in Lacanian language it can be seen as a mediator between the Imaginary and the Symbolic that acts to screen the Real. Yet the phantasized encounter is not a compromise structure, one that gives up elements in order to exist, but an overabundant experience of both body and mind.[151] It is a particularly potent experience, a mix of whimsy and fantasy that the museum seems to encourage. If we were to chart it, it might look like this:



wherein the phantasized encounter is a rapid relay between the Imaginary psychic realm and the Symbolic realm. If we imagine the overlapping space as a site of plenitude, of both being and knowing, this bliss occurs by way of screening the Real, a Real that one literally imagines to be lurking in this museum to death. This is how the phantasized encounter both acknowledges the presence of the Real while at the same time it disavows the Real's specific presence.[152]

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[151]Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 107

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The Car Crash in the Narrenturm

The phantasized encounter is so palpable in the Narrenturm that it can be seen on the faces of the museum goers or in the hesitation in the step before entering each room. In the second to the last room of the first floor display, the visitor finally comes upon an actual human specimen. Surprisingly, it is not the severed hand we had expected to find but a full-term human fetus. Perhaps the museum intended for this fetus to supply a certain degree of comfort that the nasty business of the museum as a depository for that which is remaindered in the quest toward the constructed self is not centered on the moment of death but on the moment of life. But whatever its imagined role in the scripted encounter, it is certain that the fetal lure produces the psychoanalytic symptom that we associate with trauma, and which I characterize as a response to the "car crash" of the museum.

The symptom is marked by silence, by immobility, by a steady stare that acts to signal the beginning of the address to trauma while at the same time pointing the way to the car crash. Time and space collapse, surroundings become nonexistent. Every fiber of the being is open trying to assimilate what is being seen. The next moment is a silent struggle to bring that which floods the visual field, that which has pulled the rug out from under the phantasized encounter, that which flashes before our eyes a glimpse of the desired encounter, that which threatens the very psychic processes that have been employed in the construction of the self— back into the world we are forced to live in, back into the Symbolic.

In psychoanalytic terms we can say the car crash occurs when the screen falls away, when the overlap of the Imaginary and the Symbolic is no longer a place of plenitude, no longer a screen to the Real, but a space of non-being and non-knowing, becoming instead a glimpse of the Real, or what Lacan referred to as the stain of the

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[152]"The real supports the phantasy and the phantasy protects the real." Ibid,, 41.

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Real.[153] This occurs when something in the phantasized encounter is suddenly placed in "communication with something that reaches the level of the message"[154] (i.e., signification). In the Narrenturm, in the form of the human fetus, that which is fantasized is finally delivered.[155]

In the Narrenturm, just as suddenly as the car crash appears, it is over. Its resolution is marked by the squeals of children as they leave the room and run to get their friends. For adults there may be no squeals. More often, reaction is a shrug of the shoulders, or a telling glance between museum-goers. These reactions, some louder and more robust than others, would indicate that for both children and adults the resolution, or at least the reinvestment in the surrounding world needed to move away, to break the spell of the Real, is marked by a passage back toward the phantasized encounter, back to the relay between the scripted and desired encounter, between the body and the mind. The visitor leaves the suspended fetus and moves to the last room of the exhibit, one that ironically deals with the organ that compulsively reasserts the pulse of life into the human body. The last thing we look at in the Narrenturm museum is the human heart.[156]

At the Narrenturm, if the car crash signals the moment of crisis, the moment that the museum whose traumatic content is to avoid trauma actually produces a symptom of trauma and thus a threatened return of the Real, it also points to the fact that trauma does not have to be resolved by integrating its assault into the world of the Symbolic.

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[153]Lacan distinguishes between the *tuché*, which he defines as the Real as encounter and the *tychic point*, a tangible trace of (the missed encounter with) the Real which he calls the stain. Clearly both the *tuché* and the stain appear to be working in the Narrenturm, and it is perhaps for this reason the experience is so potent. For a discussion of the *tuché* and stain see Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 55.

[154]Lacan, "Hamlet," 22.

[155]According to Lacan, this would correlate with an experience called "depersonalization," "when something in the fantasy wavers and makes the components of the fantasy appear." Ibid., 22. In this sense, it is the fetish of the object of desire, becoming what Lacan called an "object in desire," which "takes the place of what by its very nature remains concealed from the subject." Ibid., 28.

[156]This room does not differ from the other rooms in that it is mostly made up of drawings and "representations" of the heart, not actual samples.

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Sometimes we just carry the trauma with us as the baggage of being. Even though the car crash in this small and very specialized museum can be characterized as nothing more than a fender-bender (no people being carried out on stretchers, no running to the bathroom to throw-up), the impact of the minor assault on the human psyche should not be ignored. Much as Freud found that soldiers who had no physical wounds often suffered the most from their traumatic wounds, the small glimpse at death is sometimes the hardest to assimilate. On its surface, the human fetus is not that surprising or shocking. How many times have we seen that perfectly formed little human—curled up in its slightly cramped quarters, head bowed inwards, hand near the mouth—in film and advertisements or even on the evening news? It is an icon that circulates in not one but many signifying chains of the Symbolic.

But sometimes that which is known in the Symbolic, that which has been assimilated into the cultural narrative, sometimes it can still look back and startle us.[157] If the museum had intended the fetus as a disavowal of death, then as a fetish its secret was also written right there on the surface,[158] so startlingly visual, so unavoidable in its clarity that it could not be ignored. In the Narrenturm, death is not the grim reaper of medieval fantasy. There is no dark cape, no scythe in hand, no double headed monster devouring us in our sleep. Here in the Narrenturm death has a familiar face. It is our own.

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[157]This is, of course, the definition of the uncanny.

[158]According to Freud, it is the puerile desire to keep the belief of the maternal penis even after actual vision would disavow that belief that drives the child to focus on a substitute, something that is "attached" to the object of desire (clothing, body parts, stockings, shoes). This attachment is then detached to become the sole object of interest. The fetish is a "construction" that maintains a secret by being set up in the place of something else. Thus the seeming paradox of the fetish, its secrets are written into the surface itself rather than behind it. For a discussion of the fetish and how it operates in the museum, see Lise Patt, "Horns, Bats, Ideas: Encountering the Fetish at the Museum of Jurassic Technology," *Museum Anthropology* Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall 1996), 67-73.

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Not knowing the language makes me afraid of them
what might happen if I could not be heard

I desire his touch, his smell, his attention, his gaze.
I desire his warmth and unconditional love.
I desire his lips, his grip, and his sensitivity.
I desire his understanding.
I desire his body.

I hate you precisely because I understand you.

My desire is that I will get fucked by a Mexican.

To bash your little head in.

I want to know you deeply. I want to know you as myself.

Anger is coming up for me like an undigested clog of pork blood
Purity in blood?
I want to sacrifice my anger...blood to purify more blood.[159]

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CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF I COULD NOT BE HEARD: AN INVITATION TO TRAUMA IN *THE TEMPLE OF CONFESSIONS*

Introduction

The display of the Other, whether in the guise of the primitive or the exotic, is not foreign to museums, especially those dedicated to natural history and its late nineteenth century variants, the Anthropology and Ethnographic museums. While the presentation of the Other in these institutions was often done through dioramas, where life-like mannequins were posed in stances related to everyday activities, occasionally an actual person would be sequestered in the museum.[160] Generally, however, the live specimen was kept out of the museal setting and relegated instead to the circus or the sideshow.[161]

The *Temple of Confessions* is a museum project that performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña performed in a number of sites in the United States and Mexico during the 1990s. At first glance, the *Temple* can be seen as a satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic and primitive and the museum's packaging of those concepts into a nondescript but all-encompassing "Other." Chances are that if Gómez-Peña had chosen to set up his tableau with mannequins much as the 19th-century natural history displays had (and many of the early 21st-century natural history museums still do), it might have engaged the viewer at that level. But with a performative core, the project was staged in a mock-museum that relied on the traditional signposts of the natural history variant of that

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[159]Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Temple of Confessions: Mexican Beasts and Living Santos* (NY: Powerhouse Books, 1996), 43-62.

[160]The most famous example of the "live" specimen was Ishi, the sole survivor of the Ishi tribe of California. For the last five years of his life (1905-1910), he was displayed at the Museum at the University of California. For a history of the display of the Other, see Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (NY: The New Press, 1995), 41-50.

[161]For a discussion of a display of the Other in the sideshow, see Lindfors, "Ethnological Show Business."

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institution. The *Temple* thus created an experience for the viewer that was neither edifying nor pleasurable (in the way a satirical unpacking of culture might be). Instead, the artist actively invited the viewer to trauma, to a trauma that is linked to one of the basic anxieties of participating in the world as a social being. *The Temple of Confessions* touched on our undeniable need and at the same time our never-ending abhorrence of that which "speaks for us and makes our desire known"—the Other.

In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the Other is how we come to exist in the Symbolic realm of the psyche. It is through the Other that we speak, or, to put it more succinctly, *the Other is who speaks for us.* This relationship between the self and Other is not an easy one. In order to establish a functioning ego, the subject tries to incorporate, dominate, or exclude everything that does not fit into its picture of itself (which, as we remember, is in itself a false construction). Yet, since we are dependent on the Other to speak for us and to tell us what we desire, the subject is always entangled in an Other it can never master.[162] And like any threat to the ego, this lack of mastery opens up the possibility for the return of the Real.

In its solicitation of the Real, the *Temple* differs markedly from our first case study, wherein the threat of the Real can be characterized as an invasion of the Imaginary into the Symbolic. In Gómez-Peña's project, the opposite is true: the Symbolic is disrupted internally, the invasion is from within.[163] We will see that although Gómez-Peña had hoped to direct the viewer's traumatization to a secondary trauma, which for many Anglo-Americans occurred with the influx of Mexicans into America, his audience was often unable to work through that assault. Instead, the viewers got caught up in the stranglehold of the primary processes, with a threat of the Real that paradoxically emerged not because of all the rich symbolic markers that characterized the *Temple*, but in

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[162]Taylor, *Altarity*, 92.

[163]Of course the Temple does engage the Imaginary, as does any traumatic situation. The distinction I am making here is between the Imaginary mounting an attack and its being awakened.

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spite of them. In this second of our case studies, the Real is pointed to not by a fetishized form, not by something we can see, as it was in the Narrenturm, but by a repetitive auditory action. The *Temple of Confessions* opens up the possibility that what is remaindered in the Real is not purely visual but can be auditory as well.

History and Description of the Temple of Confessions

Gómez-Peña derived the *Temple of Confessions* format from a combination of two traditions: the living diorama displays found in ethnographic museums well into the 20th century, and the dramatic religious dioramas often seen in Mexican colonial churches.[164] In this collaboration with Roberto Sifuentes, Gómez-Peña, in the character of a futuristic Mexican shaman, and Sifuentes, as a street-smart *cholo*, were encased in Plexiglas boxes as "living ethnographic displays." The two artists were presented as the last two living *santos* from an unknown border religion. They were seeking sanctuary in the United States. Their presence extended beyond pure spectacle, however, since they would perform "strange religious rituals" in order to activate museum goers' "desires and fears" about the Other. Visitors were then encouraged to confess their "intercultural fears and desires"[165] to the *santos*. The *Temple of Confessions* premiered in 1994 at the Scottsdale Center for Arts and toured the United States and Mexico for two and one-half years.[166]

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[164]See Elizabeth Weismann, *Art and Time in Mexico: Architecture and Sculpture in Colonial Mexico* (NY: HarperCollins, 1985) especially Chapter VI on Retables and Chapter IX on Narrative Reliefs.

[165]Gómez-Peña, *Temple of Confessions*, 14.

[166]Display sites included The Scottsdale Center for the Arts (Arizona), the Three Rivers Art Festival (Pittsburgh), the Detroit Institute of Arts, Ex-Teresa Arte Alternativo (Mexico City), El Museo del Barrio (New York City). The present analysis is based on the observations of the artist who was present for the entire piece as recounted in Gómez-Peña, *Temple of Confessions* and on direct observations by the present author who attended Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance *Mexterminator*, at Highways performance space (Santa Monica, CA) in December 1999. *Mexterminator* was performed during the same time period as the *Temple of Confessions* and incorporated many of the elements of the *Temple of Confessions*, including the repetitive sound components that are at the center of the present analysis. This chapter is also indebted to the observations of Deborah Cullen, Sarah Wolfe, Sande Sisneros, Terri Valli Trotter and Karl Peterson who attended either the *Temple of Confessions* or the *Mexterminator* performance at various sites throughout the United States.

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The "museum" that is the *Temple of Confessions* was divided into three separate yet visually and spatially conjoined spaces. One space was given over to the Chapel of Desires where Roberto Sifuentes as "El-Colombian Vato" was presented as a "holy gangmember" (Figure 11). Sifuentes' body was covered with pre-Columbian tattoos strategically visible through a bloody, bullet-ridden T-shirt. He sat inside his Plexiglas box with fifty live cockroaches and an iguana. A small table in front of him held the stereotypic tools of the gang member: a spray can, a whip, weapons, and drug paraphernalia. Behind the Plexiglas box was the facade of a pre-Columbian temple made out of styrofoam. Positioned in front of the Plexiglas box was a church kneeler with a microphone so that visitors could confess their sins. Opposite the Chapel of Desires was the Chapel of Fears. Inside a similar Plexiglas box, Gómez-Peña became "San Pocho Axtlaneca," a "curio shop shaman for spiritual tourists" (Figure 12). Tourist souvenirs and tribal talismans from regions all over the Americas dangled from San Pocho's "Tex-Mex Aztec" outfit. Gómez-Peña shared his box with live crickets, a taxidermied rooster, and assorted reptiles. The small table in front of the artist was lined with witchcraft-looking artifacts and a ghetto-blaster that played music from around the world, including Gregorian chants, rap, Mexican waltzes, circus music, and Indian blues. At times, Gómez-Peña manipulated the dials on the boom-box to create musical sounds as if it were an instrument. Lavender neon light framed the altar. As with Sifuentes, there were a church kneeler and microphone positioned in front of the Plexiglas box holding Gómez-Peña.

In the space between the two Chapels was an area given over to what Gómez-Peña characterized as a mortuary temple (Figure 13). Inside the temple was positioned a six–foot-tall cigar store Indian. Across from the wooden figure, a female mannequin wrapped in fake leopard skin and tied with a rope was placed in a sitting position on a church pew. Also included in this space was a bulky body bag with I.N.S. stamped on it, over which dangled a taxidermied chicken. On the walls behind this tableau were velvet

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paintings of hybrid saints such as "El Transvestite Pachuco," and "El Maori Lowrider." Beneath each painting was a small ledge that served as an altar and held a votive candle and a symbolic object such as a midget Tex-Mex accordion, and a plaster Bart Simpson. Through the course of the performance visitors were encouraged to contribute to the altars. Contributions included photos, coins, tampons, and condoms.

In addition to Sifuentes and Gómez-Peña, two other performers occupied the Temple. These were "nuns." One was dressed as a pregnant "*chola*/nun" complete with two tattooed tears on her left cheek to represent the two murders she had committed. The other was a "dominatrix/nun" with a low-rider goatee and exposed garter under her habit (Figure 14). The nuns acted as either frozen icons or as "caretakers" of the chapel, gently prodding visitors to enter the two side chapels and confess. At times, they chanted religious songs and used their veils to clean elements of the display, including the Plexiglas boxes that held Sifuentes and Gómez-Peña.

During the event, El Pre-Columbian Vato and San Pocho Aztlaneca performed a number of rituals. Their repetitive actions changed when the nuns rang a bell, or when a song changed, or at times in response to their performing partner's incitement. El Pre-Columbian Vato's rituals included spraying paint into gauze and inhaling it; graffiti writing; erotic shaking of the spray can in a masturbatory manner; foundling the gun and/or pointing the gun at himself or the audience; simulated shooting up with a horse syringe in his arm, head, heart, or tongue; self-flagellation with a whip; and making out with a shrunken head. San Aztlaneca's rituals included charming a snake; acting out a "romantic" scene with the taxidermied chicken; drinking blood from a rubber heart; applying make-up; silent screaming into the microphone; and standing up painfully and doing a fascist salute.[167]

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[167]The descriptions of the performance rituals are from Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers*, (NY; Routledge, 2000), 29.

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A microphone was set up in front of both Sifuentes and Gómez-Peña's display cases, and visitors were encouraged to kneel down and confess their feelings about Mexican and Mexican-American culture[168] (Figure 15). Neither Sifuentes nor Gómez-Peña replied to their confessors unless they were abusive. After three days of performance, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes were replaced by effigies, at which time the performance became an installation for the next three weeks.[169] Written and phone confessions continued to be accepted after the microphone became inoperative.

The Purpose of the Temple of Confessions

The *Temple of Confessions* is one in a series of projects that Guillermo Gómez-Peña has created over the last twenty years to expose the instability of cultural authority. Through projects such as *Border Brujo* and *El Warrior for Gringostroika*, Gómez-Peña has become an expert at employing a fractured mélange of identities and concepts to create hybrid figures that speak through a fugitive visual and spoken language in order to undermine the standard markers of cultural signification.[170] In this respect, Gómez-Peña's projects can be seen as provocative sites in a general postmodern trend that questions the

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[168]Visitors could also confess by writing their confessions on a postcard or by calling an 800 number from home. According to Gómez-Peña, about a third of the visitors actually knelt down and confessed. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers*, 38. No statistics are available regarding the make-up of the audience, i.e. their nationality.

[169]The analysis undertaken in this chapter is restricted to the performative aspects of the *Temple* and does not include the installation that followed the performance. Overall, the *Temple* as an installation does seem to remain at the level of a satirical commentary and does not produce the same type of trauma that the performed *Temple* incurred.

[170]For instance, in 1988, Gómez-Peña created his character Border Brujo. The Brujo is an amalgamation of fifteen different personae, each speaking a different border language. Border Brujo speaks "in Spanish to Mexicans, in Spanglish to Chicanos, in English to Anglo-Americans and in tongues to other *brujos*, *locos*, and border crossers." Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1993), 75. Border Brujo's costumes include an altar jacket, *pachuco* hat, *mariachi* hat, wrestler masks, wig, dark glasses, and a banana necklace. His props include a portable altar, megaphone, cassette recorder, tequila bottle, toy violin, knife, and shampoo bottle, among other things. Ibid., 76. Border Brujo's strategy is to put a mirror between Mexico and the United States and then break it.

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fixity of culture's authoritative systems, including the meta-narratives of its history. It made sense, then, when in the early 1990s Gómez-Peña began to integrate the museum—one of culture's many fixed authoritative systems—into his performance projects. In fact, the museum could be doubly potent for this artist, for he chose to position his project in the institution at the very moment when its own authority was being cast into doubt.

As noted in chapter 2 of this study, the "death of history" at the hands of postmodern imperatives did not go unnoticed in the museum. The most apparent reaction came in the erection of monuments to the museum's purported demise. Many postmodern museums became linked with an architectural method that has been described as historical pastiche, bricolage, or collage. These buildings celebrate and, in fact, memorialize history (albeit in a now fragmented form) by combining innumerable historical and regional architectural traditions.[171] The *Neue Staatsgalerie* in Stuttgart, Germany (1983) by James Stirling, Michael Wilford, and Associates and the addition to the National Gallery in London (the Sainsbury Wing) by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown (1991) stand as good examples of this trend. Both these museums borrow from classical museum forms in very visible "quotations" which act to point to these earlier architectural forms while at the same time questioning them. Stirling borrows from Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin. In the *Neue Staatsgalerie*, Schinkel's central circulation rotunda is repeated as a central space but instead of a focal passageway to rooms of art, Stirling's rotunda is cut off from the rest of the museum by an evasive wall. With no roof, the space opens to the sky and serves more as a void. Likewise Venturi and Scott Brown borrow from various sources including a grand granite stairway inspired by Bernini's monumental Scala Regia at the Vatican, ceiling lunettes borrowed from Sir John

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[171] This was not a new imperative in architecture but rather a re-playing of 19th century ideals. In this way postmodernism in architecture was more a reaction against modernism than an attempt for a completely new style.

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Soane's Dulwich College Picture Gallery (1814) and even from classical sources such as in the use of Doric columns. But within a postmodern imperative the quotations are never totally subsumed into the whole. For instance, the Doric columns in the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery have an over-inflated entasis and the capitals have been given a rubbery look, a tactic which *points* to the desired effect of entasis in classical architecture (to correct optical sagging and make the building appear buoyant), instead of the actual effect.

Another distinguishable reaction to history's undoing in the museum was to celebrate its influence even as it lay "dying."[172] Thus, the postmodern period is marked by a proliferation of micro-museums created to document every parcel of history, from the collective history of a town, to the personal story of a single individual, to the proliferation of so called eco-museums that collect and document artifacts as diverse as agricultural tools, beauty supplies, and police chase vehicles.[173]

The third response, although less apparent to a general public, is the critical response discussed in the introduction to this study under the name *the New Museology.* Because its members were actively involved in museum production and maintenance, the New Museology can be viewed as more than a critical movement. Often their critique was used in developing new display tactics for the museum.[174] The proponents of a New Museology responded to the postmodern crisis by rewriting the museum's family history. With a 20/20 hindsight, they pointed to a museum that always carried with it a

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[172]The death of the museum is hinted at in the title of Douglas Crimp's landmark book, *On the Museum's Ruins.*

[173]For a summary of some of the stranger micro museums, see Ralph Rugoff, *Circus Americanus* (NY: Verso Books, 1995). Paradoxically, these specialized museums ended up exalting history by establishing a complex network that connects all historical modernisms together, which becomes in itself a new kind of meta-narrative. I am taking a less popular stand in describing the postmodern period as one that reconnected diverse modernist histories. The general feeling is that the postmodern response in the museum was free from the ties of history.

[174]This was particularly true in England, where the cross-over between critic and practitioner was most common.

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degree of dysfunction. That rewrite of the museum has by now become legend, with a story that picks up Quatremère's cautionary prediction of death in the museum and follows it through the historical avant-garde, to the country museum of Bouvard and Pécuchet in Gustave Flaubert's last (unfinished) novel, to Andre Malraux's *Museum Without Walls,* to Marcel Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département of Aigles, Section XIXèm Siècle,* and to Daniel Spoerri's *Musée Sentimental.*[175] The moral of all these stories turned out to be ominous: history, and by association the museum, was bound to die. These old institutions had placed too high a stake in the fixidity of material objects, had underestimated the fragility and mobility of history's framing devices, had never been able to successfully hide what lie in its secret realm (the storerooms and study rooms) and, most importantly, had ignored the varying levels of signification that the viewer brings to the museum experience.

In choosing the museum, then, it would seem that Gómez-Peña hoped to intensify his conceptual position by staging his performance about the instability of cultural narratives within an institution that was having difficulty maintaining its own authoritative position. He did this by using the very elements that had come to define the postmodern museum—(1) a structural bricolage that mixed historical elements of architecture and display; (2) the creation of a micro museum that at times was even doubly confounded by being placed in another museum; and (3) an artist intervention that critiqued the very framing devices used by the museum in a line that directly followed Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Spoerri.[176]

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[175]A concise exposition of this history can be found in Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins,* 44-64; 200-234.

[176]Both Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Spoerri created "pseudo-museums." For a description and analysis of Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle,* see Rainer Borgemeister, "*Section des Figures*: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present," trans. Chris Cullens, *October 42* (Fall 1987): 135-151. For a description and analysis of Spoerri's *Musée Sentimental,* see Jean-Hubert Martin, "The Musée Sentimental of Daniel Spoerri," in Cooke & Wollen, *Visual Display,* 54-67.

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Even though the *Temple of Confessions* appears to operate against the standard purposes of the museum, it is not without its own stated purpose. One can imagine that, just like any other larger and more formalized museum, the artist and his collaborators had to sit and think through the variety of viewer responses. Gómez-Peña thus developed his own set of *potential encounters* and planned his display and created performance contingencies based on these possible encounters. Although there was no one ideal encounter (as, say, there was in the Narrenturm) and in fact the potential for differing responses is one of the exciting aspects of performance work, we can still think of the *Temple of Confessions* as being "scripted" in the way the signposts of the museum were ever present through the use of vitrines, lighting, signage and guards (although the guards took on unusual personae).

With a cluster of potential responses anchored by traditional museal signposts, the artist expected that his bricolaged scripted encounters would produce the kind of cultural discourse he had come to expect from his performances. He hoped that the visitors to the *Temple of Confessions* would undergo the cultural dislocation that had characterized audience reactions to his past performances. In fact, it would be fair to say that the artist hoped that his "set design for a theater of mythos and 'cultural pathologies'" would precipitate a trauma in the viewer. [177] Gómez-Peña speculated that from afar the display would look "authentic," a tableau that we might see in a quaintly retrograde ethnography or natural history museum,[178] but then as viewers moved closer they would see the artifice of the exhibit, the styrofoam facade behind the altars, the kitsch objects being passed off as archeological artifacts. This disjunction would then act to initiate psychic disjunctions in the viewer. Once this trauma was activated, the artist hoped the

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[177]Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers*, 39.

[178] For example, even the American Natural History Museum in New York City.

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viewer would "work-through" this trauma by confessing their anxieties about "Mexican and Mexican-American culture.[179]

As we examine the purpose of the *Temple of Confessions* in psychoanalytic terms, there is no doubt that the *Temple of Confessions* differs from our first example in the way that its displays were set up to *produce* trauma, as opposed to screening or guarding against it. Gómez-Peña hoped that his tableau, as enhanced by the performative features, would induce in the visitor the state of anxiety that marks the presence of traumatic psychic material. He hoped that, in effect, his performance and display would be the second trauma that brought the first trauma (the influx of Mexicans into America) to consciousness. In other words, it would seem that the artist's intention in positioning himself inside a glass vitrine made-up in and enacting a caricature of the Other was to present himself as a fetishized form of the "rejected" Other, that which we have rejected as part of ourselves or as the one who can speak for us. By making that which we have rejected (and thus in psychoanalytic terms have repressed) both appear and engage us, the artist hoped to tear away the screen of the Real and produce the trauma that marks its threatened return.

Once the viewer was traumatized, Gómez-Peña's hope was that he or she would then work through this trauma by confessing fears and anxieties about the mixing of the Other into the dominant culture. What Gómez-Peña did not predict was the form the confessions would take. Although some of the confessors did voice an anxiety about the mixing of Mexican and American culture, a large number of the confessions were marked by another characteristic. They were either overtly sexual, aggressively violent, or both sexual and violent in a single confession.[180] The artist himself characterized this unexpected response as a "Pandora's box."[181]

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[179]Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers*, 39.

[180]These confessions appear as the epigraphs to this chapter.

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How the Temple of Confessions Functioned for the Viewer

We can see that not only is the purpose of the *Temple of Confessions* the opposite to the purpose of the Narrenturm, in that Gómez-Peña attempts to rip away the screen of the Real instead of installing it, but that the viewer's response also exhibited a marked detour from the brief and animated encounter we witnessed in our first case study. If we were to characterize the movement and behavior of the visitor to the *Temple*, they would be subdued. Although some guests did try to provoke the artists and/or took the advice of the "nun-guides" and interacted with other parts of the exhibit, for the most part, the visitors congregated to the sides of the two Chapels and just stood and watched the artists in their glass boxes.[182] While it could be argued that the *Temple* space is smaller than that of the Narrenturm and at the same time is more open and visually understandable than the small and confining cells of the Pathology Museum, and that this difference makes one more aware of the other visitors to the space and less able to regress into phantasized encounters that thrive on the ability to re-make the world without being watched, there seems to be more at stake in this notably muted response.

In the Narrenturm, the scripted encounter is singular and restrictive. In the *Temple*, on the other hand, the scripted encounter is open-ended and layered. The phantasized encounter that was so richly evident in the faces and behavior of the visitors to the Narrenturm appears faint and spare in the *Temple*. While we can only speculate on the degree and variety of phantasized encounters that unwound in the psyches of the viewer to the *Temple*, we can note the symptom of that activity manifested as a tendency to focus the body's attention and remain visually riveted on the cases that held the two

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[181]Gómez-Peña, *Temple of Confessions*, 23.

[182] Although I use the term "glass" throughout this analysis, it should be understood that the boxes were actually made out of Plexiglas. I use the former term because as much as material may be important in terms of construction and maintenance, the Plexiglas still "functions" as a glass barrier. Culture's metaphors are often one step behind its technology.

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performers. In fact, it appears that whereas the phantasized encounters at the Narrenturm, so animated in their symptomology, acted to search out the screen to the Real, in the *Temple* the Screen is paraded out from the start, and thus the function of the phantasized encounter is to keep that screen in place through an operation that is largely fueled not by *looking* (as in the Narrenturm) but by *watching.*

So where is the screen that figures so prominently in the *Temple of Confessions*? There can be no doubt that the artist's use of the encased boxes, like all of the display elements in his Temple, was intended to point to its multiple functions in the museum. While the purpose of the vitrine may be simply to protect the collection, and/or to allow for either the isolation and/or controlled combination of objects so necessary in realizing the categorization that the museum is set up to honor, the glass box functions in a multitude of ways for its viewers. It can function as a separator so that it creates the distance between the subject and object that it is assumed the pleasant museum experience depends on.[183] This is the "I am me" and "that is that" that is so adamantly enforced and in fact is expected in most museums.[184] It can also function as a signpost of the museum, as an indicator that says, "This is important to look at. Come here and look"[185] Similarly, there is no doubt that the shiny glass, with its reflective surface that captures light in a jewel-like embrace, acts as a lure, much the way display cases and front windows function in a department store. But in certain museums, particularly in some natural history and many science museums (and one can say without a doubt in a pathology museum like the Narrenturm), the glass-walled vitrine locks out offensive

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[183]Of course, this study would contest this general statement. It is the constant threat of collapse between the subject and the object, and then a re-mastery of each category, which I think is at stake in the pleasant museum experience.

[184]Susan Crane discusses the problems with postmodern displays that do not do this, that through "interrogatory texts" place the visitor in virtual discussions with an absent presence. See Crane, "Memory, Distortion, History," 48.

[185]Mieke Bal discusses the mechanisms of these signposts in "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Spring 1992): 556-594.

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odors, and protects the viewer from material that might jump out and harm us. In this way it functions as a screen in the most literal sense—as a barrier—and it is in this way that the glass boxes that held Sifuentes and Gómez-Peña most honored their museum setting by enclosing the "dangerous" Other.

If Gómez-Peña had intended the vitrine to be a holding chamber that enabled the viewer to be protected while looking, the status of this piece of museum furniture as simply a one-way barrier in the *Temple* is, in fact, dubious, or at least ambiguous. For one is never sure if the glass is put there to protect the self from the Other or if it is to protect the Other from the self. Protecting the self from the Other is endemic to the both the traditional museum and a western culture that felt it must protect itself from the savage (from, that is, being raped or killed). But at the same time, the scantily clad artists act as "objects in desire," in a number of scenarios—as the Other that I desire will incorporate me (sexually) or that which I would hope to dominate (violently). It is this vacillation that no doubt drives the phantasized encounter for most visitors, and thus by definition serves to erect and *maintain* the screen (and not rip it away as the artist had intended) by both acknowledging the threat of the Real, while disavowing it.

In our first attempt at interpretation, therefore, we could say that through mere presentation the artist was able to achieve his goal; that by being in the vitrine, dressed as he was and moving about in his stereotyped role, he was able to entice viewers to ignore other aspects of the exhibit and to center their phantasized encounter on him. We might even be tempted to call this the "car crash of the exhibit." Upon closer inspection, however, the arrested vision did not mark a moment of loss of being and meaning. Instead, it acted as a moment of arresting the gaze of the Other in what can be likened to what Lacan terms the "prophylactic eye."[186] In this way the "watching" was not the symptom

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[186]As Lacan describes it, the effect is homeopathic in that there is no beneficent eye. The eye is always maleficent. Thus the prophylactic eye is a form of the evil eye that acts to counteract the evil eye of the Other (here literally represented by Gomez-Peña) that has the potential to arrest movement and "kill life." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 118.

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of the "car crash" but was instead an action that can be seen in the service of the screen to the Real. Whereas Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes acted as the lures to the visitors to the *Temple* (for as Lacan noted, we are drawn to that which is presented in "travesty"), ultimately their *spectral* presence was not the calling card of the Real but merely the reinforcing screen of the Real.

The Car Crash in the Temple of Confessions

Perhaps it is because the phantasized encounter in the *Temple of Confessions* was so rooted in vision, that when the car crash of the *Temple of Confessions* occurred it was linked to a sense other than sight. As it turns out, it was not the outlandish costumes or the overlay of visual cultural markers that created the car crash in the *Temple*, but a ritualistic and rhythmic *sound.* This repetitive behavior, which can be likened to both Freud and Lacan's notion of a compulsion to repeat, created a cut in the subject or, as Lacan put it, the past that cannot be recollected (the Real), repeatedly returns in repetition to "split, fissure, fault, and crack the subject."[187]

Although the vitrines seemed to be airtight, they were not sound-tight. At irregular intervals, the artists would stand up and initiate rapid movements of the arms, ostensibly shaking a spray can or preparing a horse syringe for shooting up an imagined drug in the arm (Figure 16). These rapid movements manifested ultimately as only actions and sounds—rhythmic, violent, onanistic. At that moment the screen dropped away, and the classic signs of the car crash were universally manifested. First, drawn by the rhythmic sound and then spellbound by the suggestive action, the visitor's focus was riveted on the performing artist.[188] In essence, at that moment, the performer became part object, an

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[187]Ibid., 96.

[188]Generally, it was Sifuentes who performed these actions. When he began the rituals, however, people would generally only turn and look, but not move toward his box.

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arm, a movement, a sound hurtling through the glass barrier, literally ripping through the screen. So here in the visually overdone *Temple of Confessions*, it was the sound that acted as a summons to the Real.[189] Its driving beat, which appeared to come from out of nowhere, suddenly turned the watchful gaze of the visitor that marked most of the exhibit into the absent stare of the traumatic symptom, a moment of non-being and non-meaning that marks the presence of the car crash.

Although the eye was not the tool used to facilitate the encounter of the Real in Gómez-Peña's performance, one should not just dismiss the visual gibberish that marked the *Temple of Confessions*. If the museum project pointed to the fact that the Real cannot be represented and thus cannot speak, it did not preclude the Real from being heard. The Real can, however, only be heard when language has been withdrawn.[190] In other words, the non-language sounds of the Real do not just step into a psychic space that is yet to be occupied by language. They act instead as sounds that *exceed* language.[191]

In this way, we see that the mélange of visual icons, costumes, and fragments of stereotypical actions of the *Temple of Confessions*, while not producing the intended trauma *per se*, were vitally important in setting up the "car crash," for they acted together to withdraw language from the space. In the *Temple of Confessions*, visitors were presented with a museum that is a church that is a morgue that is a mortuary temple. There is a woman who is pregnant, who is a nun, who has a mustache. The styrofoam

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[189]A fascinating aside is here noted although it is beyond the scope of this paper. The meaning of the word *tattoo* is generally considered to be a permanent mark made on the skin by a process of ingraining indelible ink. But tattoo also means "'a signal sounded on drum and bugle to summon soldiers to bed' In this connection, a tattoo is 'a beating or pulsation as of a drum; the action of beating, pulsating, thumping, or rapping continuously on something.'" Taylor, *Altarity*, 105. Both Sifuentes and Gómez-Peña are tattooed excessively, especially on the arms that figure in the ritual actions. Thus, the tattooed artists enacting rhythmic rituals compound and/or confound the threatened encounter of the Real.

[190]Lacan develops this argument in his discussion of what he terms ~~The~~ Woman, an object of desire that is forever barred by words. See Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, ed. J. Mitchell and J. Rose, trans. J. Rose (NY: Norton, 1982), 144.

[191]Thus, in classic Lacanian language we would call the rhythmic sounds a leak of the Real into the Symbolic.

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backings that define each chapel, the artifacts that are nothing more than disposable kitsch, point to the "phantasmagoric" language of the museum. To the person standing in the space, this overabundance of signifiers that cannot string together eventually produces nothing more than a withdrawal of language.[192]

It is in this way that the responses that lead off this chapter can be understood. We can see now that the reason that Gómez-Peña was not as successful in producing the trauma and abreaction he had hoped for was because he did not offer anchors for the signification that would have allowed for this process. But, conversely, it was this lack of anchors that enabled a primary response, a powerful replay of the initial trauma of being. Paradoxically, the microphones that were originally set up to abreact the trauma Gómez-Peña hoped to produce ended up recording not workings-through but the responses of those who had traversed the borders of the Real. These recorded messages, which by definition exhibit the recommitment of the "confessor" to the Symbolic and a movement away from the "car crash," in their raw and sometimes violent sexuality act to point to the fact that the car crash in the *Temple of Confessions* ***was*** a brush with the Real. As Jean Laplanche has noted, the Real "eludes our perception ... unless it is tinged with erotism."[193] But their baseness also points to the fact that for most visitors there was no resolution to the secondary trauma that Gómez-Peña hoped to engage them in. In fact, the long period of time that most visitors stayed in the performance space (in which they would have re-experienced this auditory ritual many times) only to confess without any reference to the secondary trauma that Gómez-Peña hoped to address would point to a

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[192]In previous performances staged outside the museum, Gómez-Peña had used a variety of bricolage techniques, in his costuming, disguises, and hybrid language. But in the museum that is the *Temple of Confessions*, the artist does not just apply this method to his own persona but infects the surrounding scenario as well.

[193]Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 99. I am taking some liberty with Laplanche's summation by equating the Death Drive with the Real. In fact, the Death Drive serves the Real. The original quote is: "the death instinct eludes our perception ...unless it is tinged with erotism."

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behavior that is closer to a compulsion to repeat (in this case, the primary trauma of being) than any mechanism of working-through.

Ultimately, the importance of the *Temple of Confessions* to our present study is in the way it illustrates that the Real does not only reveal its threatened return in a "stain" in the realm of the visual but can announce itself, in the more performative *tuché*,[194] as an auditory rip in the Symbolic that occurs unexpectedly, through the rhythmic arrangement of sound. We can also see that the *tuché* appears particularly when language has been stilled. Not stilled as in "silent," although that no doubt can contribute to its effectiveness, but stilled by making the visual building blocks that hold together language, our most effective screen of the Real, falter.

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[194]Lacan discusses the stain and the *tuché* in his lecture on the "Eye and the Gaze," in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 67-78.

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..picked up a *Chronicle*. The front-page headline was chilling:
1,000 SAN FRANCISCANS DEAD...[195]

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CHAPTER FIVE

A THOUSAND CORPSES MISSING: THE AIDS QUILT AS A MUSEUM OF THE REPRESSED

Introduction

In this chapter, I turn to the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt, a project initiated in 1987 to memorialize victims of AIDS. Its periodic display on the Capitol Mall in Washington, D.C. offers a unique opportunity to explore two separate but ultimately intertwined aspects of trauma and the relationship of those traumas to the current museum project.

Although parts of the AIDS Quilt, as it is popularly known, have been and continue to be shown in museum settings, the entire blanket considered as a single entity is arguably the most problematic of my case studies. This is because it lacks the brick and mortar structure of a traditional museum. More importantly, it identifies itself as a memorial and, according to the traditional distinction between memorials and museums, is concerned with individuals and not with the collection and display of objects in the way a museum is.

The difference between objects and people is not the only traditional differentiation to be made between museums and memorials. Both objects and people deal with the meta-narrative we call history, but in different ways. At least in the past, in the period we call the "modern,"[196] museums were considered passive entities wherein the details of history had already been worked out. The museum object was separated out from culture and was metonymically made a part of a pre-established, chronologically-

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[195] Cleve Jones, *Stitching a Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 104.

[196] I use the term "modern" here as a historical division linked to "modernity." By the end of the nineteenth century, many prominent museums in both Europe and the United States had borrowed some of the tenets of evolutionary theory to construct a chronological notion of history.

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connected story. In this process, objects *and* subjects from the past were made into *objects* that could be displayed in the present. The memorial, in contrast, was generally created because of a feeling of disconnectedness from the past, because of an untranslatable yesterday that could not be fully re-membered and thus could not be made part of a connected history.[197] A successful memorial was one that, through the mechanisms of successful mourning, integrated the past into the present. In other words, it allowed *objects* from the past (say, abstract statistics) to be made into *subjects* of the present that are deserving of our empathy.

If that is how the memorial and the museum were traditionally described, in postmodern times, the distinction of one from the other has grown more problematic. Museums no longer abide by strict meta-narratives, and meaning has become more elusive and individual. And because museums can hold any kind of meaning, they can even act as repositories of uncomfortable or culturally refused meaning. Likewise, memorials have offered the same resistance to the mechanisms that serve the Symbolic. If memorials once borrowed their marble and stone forms from the language of the cemetery, today, with their seas of perishable flowers and burning candles, they often evoke the visual template of the landfill. In the memorial as in the museum, the roles of the individual and the object have become confused. Objects at memorials are collected to be made into museums[198] and museums are now being considered as sites that help us re-member individuals.[199]

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[197]Wolfgang Ernst, "Archi(ve)textures of Museology," in Crane, *Museum and Memory*, 23-24.

[198]The objects left behind at the Vietnam Memorial, which are collected each day, are being stored "in perpetuity" at the Park Service's Museum and Archaeological Regional Storage Facility in Lanham, Maryland. Thomas B. Allen, ed., *Offerings at the Wall: Artifacts from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing Inc, 1995), 5.

[199]The Oklahoma City National Memorial to the bombing victims of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, incorporates a museum adjacent to the memorial site. This building, which is called the "memorial center," is entered after visiting the more traditional memorial which is called the "symbolic memorial," and is comprised of minimalist chairs, each bearing the name of a victim. As an interesting aside, the Memorial Center in Oklahoma borrows the display language of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. See www.oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org/center/index.htm (October 2, 2002).

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Thus, our look at the AIDS Quilt as an entity that is born out of trauma and is both a memorial and a museum or, conversely, neither a museum nor a memorial, is offered not as a problem to already established parameters of the museum (or the memorial), but as a cultural object that *problematizes* the distinction in the first place. It may just be that what in modern times would have been conceived as a failed museum and in postmodern times as a failed memorial is one and the same thing—a museum/memorial created and sustained through the mechanisms of repression where we see everything and understand nothing.

The car crash at the AIDS Quilt is not dependent on a specific moment or a sequence of events and visual cues but is the entire Quilt in its visual presence. In fact, the car crash that occurs at the AIDS Quilt is not the car crash itself but the "aftermath," a tangled wreckage that stands as an effigy of a symptom that should have manifested itself but for reasons we will explore just could not.

History and Description of the Quilt

The NAMES Project Memorial Quilt entered public consciousness on October 11, 1987, when it was displayed for the first time on the Mall in Washington, D.C.[200] That first Quilt consisted of 1,920 fabric panels, each unique in its creation, unified only by a common dimension of 6 by 3 feet and the grim statistic of a life snuffed out by AIDS. People created the quilt panels by using a number of methods: some are spray-painted, others are appliquéd, still others, sewn. The name of the deceased generally appears in large letters somewhere on the Quilt panel.[201] For the public display, sewing

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[200]I use the popular name of the memorial here. The official name is the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt. The foreclosure of the cause of the memorial from the official title and the subsequent recuperation of that cause in the popular title is a topic yet to be explored.

[201]In addition to the size restriction, the presentation of the deceased's name is one of the few requirements for a Quilt panel. Sometimes the name is left out, but that omission is the thing addressed. One panel reads: "I have decorated this banner to honor my brother. Our parents did not want his name

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together 16 individual panels made 20-by-24 foot square sections. These became the squares of the Quilt that were laid out in a strict grid-like pattern (Figure 17). White canvas walkways between the large squares enabled people to walk around the Quilt.[202] From a distance, or from the air, the white pathway visually asserted the memorial's linear structure and homogenized the eccentric lines of each panel. The first display of the entire Quilt covered the area of two football fields.

The Quilt was displayed in its entirety again in 1988. For that display, more than eight thousand panels were arranged in a huge polygon behind the White House (Figure 18). In 1989, ten thousand squares were laid out in a square, once again on the Ellipse behind the White House. The Quilt was shown next in 1992 on the grounds of the Washington Monument, with just under 22,000 panels, 1600 of which had been brought to the site for inclusion at the last minute. The Quilt was last displayed in its entirety in October 1996. More than 40,000 panels covered the national mall from the Washington Monument to the grounds of the U.S. Capitol (Figure 19). To date, over fourteen million people have viewed the Quilt.[203]

The Private Purpose of the Quilt

The intended goal of the Quilt is twofold, with both purposes meant to facilitate the mechanisms of working-through the trauma brought on by the death of a loved one.

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used publicly. The omission of his name represents the fear of oppression that AIDS victims and their families feel." Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 187. Other panels represent a generic "other," "the forgotten," "those who died alone," *Ibid.*, 189. As a means of circumventing some of the "outing" concerns many of the panels only give (or more prominently display) first names. For a description of the requirements for making a Quilt panel, see the Memorial's website: www.aidsquilt.org.

[202]In later displays, the white canvas was switched to black.

[203]This statistic, which is reported by the official website for the Memorial, no doubt includes people who have seen parts of the quilt displayed in museums. In addition to the public displays in the nation's capital, which include the entire Quilt, blocks of panels are lent out to museums and schools for display. www.aidsquilt.org (October 2, 2002).

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Its first purpose is a private one, as each panel first acts as its own mourning quilt whose construction reflects the active attempt to help work-through a loved one's death.[204] The original "impulse" to make an individual quilt panel clearly belongs to the mourning process, as outlined by Freud in his essay, "Mourning and Melancholia:"

> Reality testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable oppositions -- it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning them... Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it.[205]

The individual panel of the memorial Quilt is Freud's "mourning work" made manifest. Not only does the construction of the panel demand a duration of time, which allows the slow process to take place, but its form creates a reservoir in which the hypercathected object can be placed (Figure 20). The activity of creating a Quilt panel also supports Lacan's theory on the mechanisms of mourning. For him, because any recognized death creates a crisis of self, the individual assaulted by that death must struggle to (re)define the object of desire (the other). Death is conceived as a challenge to the integrity of the ego, and thus the initial response to that challenge is marked by a regression to the Imaginary realm, the world of things, a world devoid of language. It is

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[204]Mourning quilts were particularly popular at the turn of the 20th century. They were often constructed from clothing fragments of the deceased with a cross-stitched center that gave the name and death date of the dead person. Sometimes an elegiac verse was included. Many panels of the AIDS Quilt mimic these elements in the name, the death date and especially the incorporation of clothing.

[205]Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) *TheStandard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. J. Strachey, A. Freud, et al. 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press & the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), 14:244-65. The "object" here is the loved one. This points to the fact that in Lacan's system the process takes place outside of the Symbolic realm, in the Imaginary.

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perhaps for this reason that objects mark the initial stages of mourning, each carrying an equal charge.[206] As the individual renegotiates the Symbolic realm, he or she withdraws from the lure of the Imaginary by draining the things that define it of their psychic charge. These objects, which would be the very objects that Freud identified as the hypercathected material remnants of mourning,[207] take on the status of refuse, of something that must be gotten rid of in order to maintain the new integrity of the ego.[208] The making of the Quilt thus offers an opportunity for the process of successful mourning and for the disposal of its byproducts (the objects that are attached to the Quilt).

The Public Purpose of the Quilt

The second purpose of the Quilt is a public one. This purpose, which is in itself multi-valent, is to bring the individual quilt panels together in order to construct a public memorial to the victims of AIDS. First, the Quilt is intended as an appeal to society to recognize the loss that AIDS deaths represent to American culture. Second, it seeks to incorporate that loss into the social body, into the realm of signification. This public purpose of the Quilt is grounded in the assumption that when the individual panels (which exhibit the physical traces of successful mourning) are brought together and placed

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[206]In the Imaginary, all things exist on an equal plane. "Truly utopian, this vision involves a democratic balance of part and whole, of singularity and totality." Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, 165.

[207]Generally, a few objects do retain a psychic charge, becoming in essence fossilized transitional objects. They acknowledge the process that one went through and can even reopen the wound and allow a regress back to the Imaginary if too much attention is focused on them. In this way, as they function as materialized screens to the Real; they point to while repressing its presence. The synthesis of Freud's theory on mourning and D. W. Winnicot's theory on transitional objects is a topic yet to be explored. For a discussion of Winnicot's theory on the transitional object, see below.

[208]In both Freud and Lacan's theories, the object is not necessarily a material thing. They can be what Freud terms "memories or expectations," but in normal mourning, these memories and hopes are often elicited by objects, thus the need to eventually "clean out the closet." For the link between memories and objects, see also Stewart, *On Longing*.

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in a public setting, they will act not only as evidence of a private psychic process but also as a propellant for a public acknowledgment and memorializing of a more symbolic loss represented by the multitude of AIDS deaths in America.[209]

Given Freud's model, the public memorial's success would lie in its ability to engage the viewer in symbolic substitution, an act that allows the culture to see that the people a public memorial metonymically represent are innocent victims, not individuals that brought their death upon themselves. In order to see the memorial's subject as *victim*, the culture that creates the memorial are often painted as part of a social body that has metaphorically (and at times not so metaphorically[210]) "killed" those for whom the memorial is erected. For this reason, memorials are most often centered on war losses,[211] producing rhetoric like, "he laid down his life for democracy." The successful memorial provides the mechanism for the symbolization of loss that frees the viewer from a cycle of self-blame. The most important element of this mechanism is the ability to recognize what has been lost. Or as Dominick LaCapra has summarized it, "specific phantoms that possess the self or the community can be laid to rest through mourning only when they are specified and named as historically lost others."[212]

There is no doubt that the impetus to bring the Quilt panels together into one blanket was born out of a desire to make the nation see AIDS as a historical trauma, as a break in the signifying chain of culture that was as devastating as any war. In fact, Cleves

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[209]Although the AIDS Quilt is not limited to Americans, the majority of people that it represents lived and died in the United States, largely because branches of the Quilt were initiated in other countries as a means of relativizing foreign deaths.

[210]For instance, the National Japanese American Memorial in Washington, D.C., admits "we" [Americans] were wrong. One prominent inscription, which reads "Here we admit a wrong...," is attributed to President Ronald Reagan. See www.hjaml.com/quotes/htm. (October 2, 2002).

[211]Before the AIDS crisis in the United States, memorials to people in the population who had died from disease were extremely rare. Not even the influenza pandemic of 1918-19 inspired such a national monument to collective memory. Peter S. Hawkins, "Naming Names: The Act of Memory and NAMES Project AIDS Quilt," *Critical Inquiry*, 19/4 (Summer, 1993), 763.

[212]LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss" 712-713.

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Jones, co-founder of the Quilt, claims that it was an image of the battlefield that first set the idea of the memorial in motion. After almost a year's absence from San Francisco in the early days of the AIDS crisis, he read a morning headline in the San Francisco Chronicle: "1,000 San Franciscans Dead of AIDS." Jones realized that virtually every single one of those San Franciscans had lived within a ten-block radius of where he was standing on the corner of Castro and Market, a corner that was bustling with people and daily activity, just as it always had been. He had the thought that if a bulldozer came in and razed the buildings of the Castro district, people would then see the thousand corpses lying in the sun. "They would understand and if they were human beings they'd have to respond."[213] For Jones and other organizers of the memorial event, the Quilt, as it finally came to rest on the nation's capitol acted as evidence—as mediagenic proof—of the enormity of the crisis killing thousands of people.

In psychoanalytic terms, the organizers and their supporters hoped that the Quilt would be read as a series of metonymic substitutions visually asserted by the structure and order of the panels, for example:

> panel for grave (a substitution based also on morphological resemblance), grave for body, house for body (metonymies of container-for-contained), and the linked metaphors of quilt for shroud, quilt for wall (Vietnam Memorial), quilt for page.[214]

Once the substitutions were made, the work toward symbolization could begin, the story of AIDS and its devastating loss to American culture could be acknowledged, worked-through, and memorialized.

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[213]Jones, *Stitching a Revolution*, 105.

[214]Tim Dean, "The Psychoanalysis of AIDS" *October 63* (Winter 1993): 99.

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Private Function of the Quilt

There is little doubt that at the private, individual level, the AIDS Quilt has been successful in allowing a working-through of the trauma associated with a loved one, if for no other reason than the number of highly personal decathectized objects that are glued or sewn on to the panels:

> photographs, clothes, Halloween costumes, university pennants, feather boas and military medals... locks of hair, record albums, souvenir postcards, a Barbie doll, whistles, crystals, tuxedos, a shard of glass, giant foam rubber french fries, toy cars on a painted street, a thimble, a giant cowboy hat stuffed with T-shirts to keep its shape, teddy bears, a pink Lacoste shirt, a Buddhist's saffron robe, and even a padded jockstrap.[215]

The importance of the Quilt in the work of mourning is echoed in the letters that accompany the panels to the NAMES headquarters in San Francisco:

> When the time came and I did make his panel, it proved to be, as I am sure is the case for everyone who creates a panel for a loved one, or even for a person not known to the maker, an intense grieving process, a vital step in getting through the heartache and grief of losing my son. When I began to work on Van's panel, it was, again, a source of "letting go" while wanting so badly to hang on.[216]

Not all the letters are as accepting of the loss as this one, or as leveled in their emotion:

> "P.S.: And now for the anger stage. This is a wonderful panel and I am very proud of it, but I hate it. I hate it so very much, because instead of having Frank to talk to and laugh with and hold onto, all I have is this damn piece of fabric. It isn't enough and it isn't fair, and there isn't anything I can do about it."[217]

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[215]Cindy Ruskin, *The Quilt: Stories from the NAMES Project*, (New York: Pocket Book, 1988), 13.

[216]Joe Brown, ed. *A Promise to Remember: The NAMES Project Book of Letters* (NY: Avon, 1992), 29.

[217]Ibid., 42.

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But even in their anger, there is an acceptance of the symbolization process the Quilt embodies. Mourning involves not just substitution, but an understanding of the very means and practice of substitution. What the letters relate, which is not as explicit in the sewn panels, is the acknowledgment and acceptance of the underlying mechanisms of mourning—symbolization and substitution.[218] This seems to be understood even by those who cannot yet bring themselves to sew an actual panel: "I will make a panel for you, I promise. But not yet. I just can't let go yet."[219] It is this awareness, even more than the graveyard of abandoned objects that come together in the fabrication of each panel, that positions the private making of the Quilt as an example of successful mourning.

The Transitional Memorial

Before examining the public function of the AIDS Quilt and its ability to realize its stated goals, it is useful to look at a specific memorial type that has come to occupy our current cultural terrain. This public site can be characterized as a *transitional memorial*, one that emerges right after loss and seems to operate under the rules of decathectization and substitution before there has been sufficient time for symbolization. In this scenario, flowers, candles, stuffed animals, or cursory notes are left at make-shift sites, usually the site of trauma or at some other structure that the deceased frequented such as the home, a place of work, or even a train station the deceased passed through each day.

These make-shift memorials, which often begin within hours of an individual's death, point to the fact that, like other psychic responses to trauma, mourning re-engages the primary experience of trauma in the young child. The transitional memorial appears to

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[218]Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985), 8 as quoted in Santer, *Stranded Objects*, 23.

[219]Brown, *Promise to Remember*, 19.

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replay the initial elegiac procedure of the child mourning the loss of the mother in his or her movement toward the realm of the Symbolic.[220] Freud described this behavior in the *fort/da* (gone/here) game of his young grandson. In this exercise, the toddler mastered his grief over a separated mother through a repetitive ritual. The unpredictable, and potentially treacherous, space opened up by the mother's disappearance (in Lacan's retelling of Freud, the realm of the Real) was controlled by the child through his own version of disappearance and return with a nursery toy.[221] For Lacan, this capacity to represent absence through these toys that have been removed from their usual "signified" marks the beginning of the child's empowerment and the entry into the Symbolic order.

In replaying this initial rehearsal of loss in the child, the reaction to the loss of a loved one later in life is characterized by a regressive need to attach overwhelming feelings of loss to some object. This initial object acts as a placeholder for the work toward symbolization that still needs to be done. In this respect, the material manifestation of this halting gesture of the psyche does not have to be unique or even personal, but merely material. It is perhaps for this reason that the objects that form the transitional memorial are often simple and redundant—flowers, candles, teddy bears—items that can be purchased at the corner store.

In this respect, "transitional" as a descriptive name for this type of memorial is not merely a reference to the transient nature of most (but, we will see, not all) of its manifestations, but is meant to highlight how the objects of the memorial operate for the culture at large in a way that is similar to the "transitional object,"[222] the name that D. W.

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[220]In this scenario the mother is not literally dead, but only metaphorically in the way she is being withdrawn from the child.

[221]Freud describes the *fort/da* game in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 8-9. In this account, he describes a child's play with a wooden reel with a string attached. The child would throw the reel out of his bed and squealed 'o-o-o-' which Freud took for "fort" [gone]. The child would then use the string to pull the reel back at which time he would give out a happy "da" [there]. Freud concluded that the child had compensated for the separation from his mother by "staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach." *Ibid,* 9.

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Winnicot gave to the nursery toy of primary narcissism. Thus, the objects of the transitional memorial, like the nursery toy used to rehearse mastery of loss in the young child, essentially act as psychic placeholders for the loss that the death of a loved one creates before that loss has time to be symbolized. Eventually, the flowers of the transitional memorial begin to rot, the candles burn down to the ground, and even those objects with more permanence become decathectized and lose their psychic charge. This "draining" occurs in most scenarios because symbolization and substitution for the loss have begun to take place (in Winnicot's model, a "good-enough" substitute has been created) or, in rarer cases, because the objects have been denied (either personally or culturally) the capacity to be used as a symbol for the missing person. In this last scenario, the objects can become what Eric Santer has termed "stranded objects,"[223] or symbols of nothing else but a mourning that has fallen into melancholy.[224]

To better understand the transitional memorial and its link to public mourning, we can look at the spontaneous memorial that appeared at Kensington Palace after the death of Princess Diana in 1997. This memorial, which showed the redundant and banal nature of the transitional object (here mostly bouquets of cheap flowers wrapped in cellophane), had within a few days grown to astronomical size (Figure 21). The dramatic spectacle that captivated a world in a televisual "car crash," points to the fact that the transitional objects that give the transitional memorial its visual power also appear to operate in that "transitional" psychic space between non-meaning and meaning, or the zone we have identified as the Real. Likewise, the Diana memorial illustrates that the movement to step out of the zone of the Real can be a movement back towards Imaginary excess and does not always, at least initially, find its way to the Symbolic and signification.

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[222]D.W. Winnicot discusses the "transitional object" in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971).

[223]Santer, *Stranded Objects*, 26

[224]See below for a discussion of melancholia as described by Freud

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With the Diana memorial, an Imaginary regression seems to have been in play beginning about three days after her death. As the days passed, the sea of flowers that initially acted as placeholders for individual loss began to act as placeholders for a *cultural signifier* for that loss. By the third day of the memorial, it was clear that the search for meaning of Diana's death had turned the transitional memorial into what Derrida has called an archive, "*auctoritas*" (produced and sustained through authority [of the archive]),[225] a compulsive and self-generating spectacle that tipped over into melancholic excess and signaled that the loss of her life was being denied any entry into the realm of the Symbolic.[226] Once that entry was allowed, in the address made by Queen Elizabeth on national television,[227] the memorial impulse began to wane and the compulsion to repeat that had come to define the memorial right before the Queen's address was allowed to return to the mechanisms of working-through.[228] The memorial eventually dried up (literally) and disappeared.[229]

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[225]Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68.

[226]Given the ambivalence that Diana's life created in British culture, it is not surprising that her death unleashed a melancholic response. Melancholy is particularly prevalent when you know that you have lost someone (what Freud termed a love-object) but you do not know *what* you have lost in that object. Given the yet undetermined role Diana was to play in society after her divorce from Prince Charles, this question followed her into death. The melancholic response was additionally fueled by Prime Minister Tony Blair's impromptu statements to British society about Diana's worth, on the day following her death. His statement in opposition to the Queen's silence seems to have contributed to the response. In Lacan's formulation, the Queen would be the "Name of the Father," who allows signification to occur in the Symbolic realm. For a further discussion of melancholia, see below.

[227]It is generally thought that the Queen waited too long to make this statement and thus precipitated the unprecedented outpouring of objects. In this way, the memorials in New York after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, although plentiful and highly personal, did not display the compulsive fervor that characterized the large memorial at Kensington Palace. The New York loss was immediately given a place of signification in the Symbolic. (The degrees to which the memorials in New York varied from Princess Diana's are numerous, including the multitude of deaths, the number of missing bodies, and their "everyperson" character in the former versus the one death of a person of status in the latter. Both events were characterized, however, by immediate shock and the inability to at first assimilate that shock.)

[228]Augmented no doubt by the highly ritualized public burial. Also after a few days, books of condolences were placed at all the transitional memorial sites (although Kensington Palace was the largest, it was not the only one), an act that helped bring individuals out of regressive melancholy.

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The Princess Diana transitional memorial is important to the present study because it opens up the possibility that this make-shift manifestation of the mourning process, which was no doubt meaningful for each individual that placed flowers or small trinkets at the various sites throughout London could, as a whole memorial, become hopelessly stuck in non-meaning, could be permanently locked out of symbolization. As such, the transitional memorial could eventually loose its psychic efficacy and instead turn into a sea of stranded objects, a ruin with "eerie relics and sinister holes and cracks,"[230] that points not to the people it was intended to address but to a culture's inability to acknowledge and thus work though society's loss. With this possibility in mind, we can now turn our attention to the function of the AIDS Quilt.

The Public Function of the Quilt as a Transitional Memorial

When considering the public function of the Quilt, it is important to analyze its intended goals separately. The public purpose was dependent on a two-part process. The first part was to convince the public that AIDS had taken a toll on the country by robbing it of its youth and talent; the second part was to memorialize that loss. The first goal was tied to the psychic need to acknowledge that a trauma had taken place. This can be linked to the kind of immediate response that defines the transitional memorial. We can even characterize the first few showings of the Quilt (in 1987, 1988, and 1989) as highly organized and formalized transitional memorials.[231] After that point in the Quilt's history, however, after the Quilt had been shown in three consecutive years on the Mall of the

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[229]In keeping with the usual lapse of time between transitional memorials and a more traditional memorial, the Diana Memorial to be located in London's Hyde Park is only now getting under way. See www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/Europe/07/31/dianamemorial (October 2, 2002)

[230]Peter Wollen, "Vectors of Melancholy," in Ralph Rugoff, ed., *Scene of the Crime* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1997), 34.

[231]In this respect, the AIDS Quilt points to the fact that a transitional memorial does not have to be transient in duration.

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U.S. Capitol, the efficacy of the transitional memorial in acknowledging the loss of human life in the U.S. from AIDS began to wane. Nineteen ninety-two marks a pivotal moment in the life of the fabric memorial. By the time the Quilt was shown in its entirety for the fourth time on the Mall of the U.S. capitol, it had already clearly fulfilled its transitional role of bringing loss to the public sphere, and it had even begun the mourning work of substitution. It is clear the Quilt had begun to have a mediagenic presence, but it was also clear at the time that the AIDS Quilt had not been able to make the leap towards symbolization that had been the intended second goal of its founding. In 1992, one of the most devastating years in terms of human loss to the AIDS virus in the United States, an acknowledgment by the public figures (such as church or government leaders) that help facilitate symbolization in a culture might have allowed the (transitional) AIDS memorial to move toward a more permanent symbol of loss. But instead of recognition, there was a general silence by public officials.[232]

Susan Sontag and Douglas Crimp, among others, believe that this official silence reflected the inability of the Quilt to evoke a sense of loss not only in public officials but also in the public at large. According to them, this was because the AIDS Quilt could not be "seen" as a representation of AIDS victims but only as a (re)presentation of gay men as AIDS.[233] Writing in 1989, Sontag argued that the Quilt conflated the infecting agent and its host and reinforced a sentiment that gay men had brought AIDS upon themselves (through their perceived deviant sexual behavior).[234] In fact, this feeling that gay men were killing themselves was often taken a step further. Some individuals saw gay men as a

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[232]Neither President Reagan nor President Bush ever publicly acknowledged or visited the Quilt.

[233]See Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (NY: Farrar, Straus & Ciroux, 1989); Douglas Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); and Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (NY: Routledge, 1990).

[234]*AIDS and its Metaphors* was written as a supplement to an earlier work entitled *Illness as Metaphor* (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), in which Sontag, a cancer survivor, chronicled similar sentiments about cancer victims who were perceived as having done something "wrong" to bring the disease upon themselves. Thus, both AIDS and cancer are illnesses that are linked in the public's mind with "inappropriate" behavior.

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threat not only to themselves but to others. This belief was most markedly represented in the visible avoidance of the Quilt by some individuals who thought the stitched fabric harbored traces of the virus and thus would "infect" them if they got too close.[235] The sea of everyday objects that stood as evidence of the success of mourning in the makers of the individual panels only pointed to their status as "inadmissible" in the larger cultural narrative. As C. Nadia Seremetkis has pointed out, the everyday object points to the aspects of everyday life where "micropractices leak through the crevices and cracks of official cultures and memories."[236] Where the Quilt is concerned, micropractices had to include gay desire. For people threatened by such revelations, the Quilt with its endless panels of appliquéd clothing, human hair and stuffed animals was not seen as a graveyard linked to a historical loss,[237] but as row upon row of victim/perpetrators' final beds. The Quilt was thus not a memorial but a crime scene,[238] wherein the caskets had all been upturned by the dead who refused to stay in their graves, choosing instead the life of the undead and roaming the earth and delivering their "bite."[239]

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[235]Similar reactions were seen at the first showing of the AIDS Bottle Project, a national memorial initiated in 1990 by the Institute of Cultural Inquiry in Los Angeles. Jars that made up the memorial positioned outside of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and it was noted that parents sometimes cautioned their children to stay away from the jars because they might hold the virus. Likewise, police who came to monitor the crowds around the bottles donned latex gloves before coming near the memorial.

[236]C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 13.

[237]It is not my intention to underestimate the enormous impact the Quilt has had on survivors of the crisis, including family members, friends, and the thousands of individuals who worked hard to bring an end to the AIDS crisis. My reading of this cultural document is at the macro, not the micro, level.

[238]Peter Wollen describes the crime scene as a place of degradation and terror, of the abject and the uncanny, The crime scene always brushes up against the Real, especially when the scene refuses to adhere to its own laws. As Wollen discusses it, in the traditional crime scene, the victim and the perpetrator occupy separate and clearly differentiated subject positions. In fact, however, the victim's ability to operate as subject in the crime scene, to be the "other who speaks," is negligible. For, as Wollen reminds us, "the victim sees nothing...the victim is dead." "Vectors of Melancholy," 24. With the AIDS Quilt, this is not the case. As Sontag has argued, the victim and perpetrator are one in the same. Whereas in most crime scenes the victim is dead and can't speak, with the AIDS Quilt, the perpetrator and the victim are conflated into a single agent.

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The Transitional Memorial Tips Toward Melancholic Excess

The year 1992, then, marks a pivotal turning point for the AIDS Quilt. In retrospect, it was as if the Quilt's time as a transitional memorial had run out. Confronted as it was with the lack of signifier to make the loss it represented relevant, without a replacement object, the Quilt had what can be termed a *melancholic meltdown.* This excess manifested itself in the material sense (in the number and type of panels that continued to be donated to the blanket), and also in the response to the memorial by those who stood to gain the most from a cultural recognition of the loss it represented.

Melancholia, as Freud described it, is a psychopathology that shares many characteristics with mourning. In the melancholic, the loss of a loved object is manifested as a loss of ego. The libido that has detached from the lost loved object is not displaced onto another object but is withdrawn into the ego, where it "serves to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object."[240] In the individual, this is represented by the abandonment of all material objects, even, in extreme cases, of food and nourishment. But there is reason to believe that before this complete abandonment takes place, there is an over-compensatory impulse to grab onto all objects as a final stab at substitution and symbolization, especially in that all-important transitional object. In fact, Winnicot noted that just before the transitional object loses its efficacy—right at the moment its power is beginning to wane—the child will gather more objects around him or her in a Herculean effort to offset this inevitable psychic drain. The sheer size and desperate attempt to add panels right up to the last moment before it was shown in

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[239]In his essay, "Undead," in Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (NY: Routledge), 324-340, Ellis Hanson compares media representations of AIDS to a Victorian fascination with vampires which manifests itself in "the irrational fear of PWAs and gay men who 'bite'." "I am talking about . . .gay men as vampiric: as sexually exotic, alien, unnatural, oral, anal, compulsive, violent, protean, polymorphic, polyvocal, polysemous, invisible, soulless, transient, superhumanly mobile, infectious, murderous, suicidal, and a threat to wife, children, home, and phallus," *Ibid.*, 325.

[240]Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 249.

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Washington in 1992 points to the Quilt at the extreme border of the transitional psychic realm of non-meaning, the excess marking the last attempt at signification before the transitional memorial faded and disappeared.

If this behavior on the part of the makers and organizers of the Quilt is, at best, an attempt to not totally succumb to the hopelessness of melancholy, then there is one aspect of failed mourning that did emerge in relation to the Quilt that can only be characterized as melancholic. That is the response of a part of the population that was vehemently opposed to the AIDS Quilt. This dissonant voice was most notably represented by ACT UP[241], members of which had positioned themselves in opposition to the AIDS Quilt and most other AIDS memorials. That voice, which by 1992 had taken on a markedly moralistic tone, coincided with a shift in the activity of the organization. In the late 1980s, ACT-UP had used an Agit-prop sensibility to produce visual manifestations of a rage that one could argue is a consequence of the complicated, yet normal process of mourning. These statements reflected a shock and sadness about the number of young people dying from AIDS, while at the same time they pointed to those they believed had been responsible for the deaths they were lamenting. By the early 1990s, this public activism had been replaced by an internalized rhetoric of self-vilification, that manifested itself in the vehement denouncement of other dedicated individuals in the arena of AIDS activism and in counter-productive behavior like the blocking of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bi March on Washington, D.C., in April 1993.[242]

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[241]ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was founded in New York in 1987. It was an activist group that staged demonstrations throughout the United States and Europe against what they perceived as the government's inattention to the AIDS crisis. A significant aspect of their campaign included graphic propaganda posters, billboards and media "sound bites" created in an Agit-prop tradition. Their most famous graphic emblem was "silence=death" printed in white underneath a pink triangle on black ground. The pink triangle was used in the Nazi concentration camps of World War II to identify homosexuals (men in the camps wore triangles that pointed down, while ACT UP's emblem utilized a pink triangle that pointed up). Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, *AIDS Demographics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 13-14. By the early 1990s ACT UP's demonstrations became increasingly militant, many of which alienated even those working for similar goals. See Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy" *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 3-18.

[242]Thanks to Daniell Cornell for an account of the events of this march.

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Paradoxically, this group of mostly gay men, many of whom had the virus and would have benefited from public acknowledgment and empathy because of the type of funding for research it might have produced, emerged as the most vocal opponents to the continued manufacture and display of the Quilt

Their behavior exhibited the type of self-reproachment with a decidedly moral air that Freud felt characterized the melancholic. He theorized this was caused by feelings of ambivalence that marked this troubling psychic response. The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love relationships to make itself known. But for the melancholic, this is more complex because the loss is often more abstract:

> The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love. In yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss that has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.[243]

Tim Dean, in one of the few articles that looks at the "psychoanalysis of AIDS," centers ACT UP's foreclosure of the mourning process in feelings of melancholic ambivalence.

> How much more ambivalent must homosexual love be in a homophobic culture, and therefore how much more prone to melancholic identification—and the subsequent unleashing of murderous aggression—must gay men be in the age of AIDS?[244]

Within the melancholic response, this "aggression" can sometimes form an identification with the cause of the loss, as when Larry Kramer, the founder of ACT UP, said, "ACT UP is impolite, abrasive, rude—like the virus that is killing us."[245] For Dean, this crisis within the gay community was brought on by the refusal of society to name a signifier for

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[243]Crimp and Rolston, *AIDS Demographics*, 245.

[244]Tim Dean, "The Psychoanalysis of AIDS," 104.

[245]*Ibid.*

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AIDS. For HIV-positive people who felt the urgency of this task, because of its implications in funding and other types of governmental attention that will impact their lives, this refusal resulted in a type of psychosis, what in Lacanian theory is termed "a return in the real of what has been foreclosed of the symbolic."[246]

The AIDS Quilt as a Museum of the Repressed

By the time the Quilt was shown for the last time in its entirety on the Mall in Washington in 1996, it was apparent that not only was the Quilt unable to bring its meaning into cultural signification but that it was beginning to show signs of strain in its first purpose, which was to visually represent the loss in the first place. Ten years after the impulse to make the first panel occurred, the entire Quilt had turned into an *archive auctoritas*, a transitional memorial that had become locked in the Imaginary realm. The memorial thus began to work at cross purposes with itself: its sheer size, which prevented display except in the largest of public spaces; the redundancy of the panels, sometimes twenty to thirty for a single individual; and the loss of the proper name in a sea of everyday objects[247]—all of these seemed to guarantee that the Quilt would never become an effective memorial to symbolize loss. The Quilt came to exist only as evidence of a failed attempt at signification.

In essence the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt had been experienced as a "car crash" by some members of the U.S. public and had produced the symptom that confirmed the impact of the wreckage for members of ACT-UP and the families and sympathetic core of the public that walked its white cloth paths. But at the same time it was also clear that the Quilt had failed to be read as a car crash by public officials and the

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[246]*Ibid.*, 86.

[247]As we saw in chapter 3, the proper name helps to anchor meaning in the Symbolic. Most memorials use this device, with the Vietnam Memorial being the most recent effective example.

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majority of the public, so that even though the symbolic wreckage of AIDS in America lay on the U.S. National Mall, the symptom it should have produced failed to materialize. And without the symptom, that moment of non-meaning and non-being, the Quilt could not motivate a country to resolve that imagined brush with the Real by moving toward signification.[248]

It was in 1996, then, that the "failed" memorial began to press at the door of the museum, especially the museum's postmodern variant, wherein objects are gathered for no other reason than for evidence. Instead of a memorial to AIDS, the Quilt began to look more like a museum to forgetting; its multitude of objects no longer standing as evidence of AIDS but only as disjointed clues of a denied narrative, as fetishes of a historical wound that was never acknowledged. And, in fact, as the Quilt knocked at the museum's front door, it became apparent that the Quilt had always been a museum in training. First, its "directors" had insisted that it be placed on the Washington Mall in the shadow of the great Smithsonian Museum and the newly built Holocaust Museum.[249] Second, the visitor was invited to walk the Quilt's "halls" (the cloth paths between panels) in an ordered procession.[250] Third, and most importantly, it functioned as a museum (and less as a memorial) in its all-inclusive welcome of every object.[251] The museum is comfortable

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[248]This would be the desired ideal outcome. Of course, other types of resolutions are always possible, including the compulsion to repeat.

[249]As the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in 1993, only the last public showing of the Quilt on the Mall was actually in the completed museum's shadow. At the same time, the selection of the museum site and the public debate that focused on the site took place throughout the entire history of the Quilt as it was shown on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

[250]The AIDS Quilt as it was laid out on the Washington Mall can also be seen in architectural plan as a Museum of Death, in close resemblance to Etienne-Louis Boullée's "Temple of Death," in that from the air it appears as "a buried architecture that very literally embodies the burial it is meant to symbolize." For a discussion of Boullée's plan, see Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 170.

[251]Traditionally, the memorial deals with memories, not objects. It is often bare and minimal. The museum deals not with memories but with objects. It is often excessive and redundant. But the Vietnam Memorial has taught us that the museum and the memorial could not be completely separated. Visitors to the Wall often leave behind objects in a reminder that remembering almost always involves re-collecting. In order to maintain the memorial function of the Vietnam Wall, the objects are cleared away every day. The memorial status of the monument is thus reasserted each morning even if as the day progresses it begins to look more like a museum again. In fact, the objects that are collected, evidence of

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with objects, even in this case when the objects are nothing more than the decathectized material of individual mourning. In fact, the more objects the museum collects, the less it has to remember. As Umberto Eco has noted, "there is no *ars oblivionalis*, an art of forgetting. One forgets by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences."[252]

The AIDS Quilt as Car Crash

It has been seven years since the AIDS Quilt was last shown in its entirety in Washington, and there are no plans for any future displays. The place it occupied on the Washington Mall has become nothing more than a cultural hole, what Zizek characterized as a manifestation of the Real in which one subtracts or erases all content (objects) of reality, so that "all that remains is the very empty place these objects were filling in."[253] Ironically, even as the Quilt fades from public memory, it is no longer a "museum in training." The organizers of the Quilt are now negotiating for a site in Georgia where they will be able to "display the entire Quilt in a museum-type setting."[254]

Perhaps once encased in four walls, where the signposts of the museum can point to or at least create a sense of significance, the wreckage of signifiers that now characterizes the entire Quilt will produce the symptom that the planners and keepers of the Quilt had counted on. As our case studies in this second part of the study have shown, the museum may be an optimal cultural site for the creation and recognition that

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(re)collection, are kept for inclusion in a planned "Vietnam Memorial Museum." For a sample of the objects left behind, see Allen, *Offerings at the Wall.*

The planners for the Oklahoma Memorial to the bombing victims of the Federal Building absorbed the lessons of the Vietnam Memorial and from the start created a museum adjacent to their memorial.

[252]Allen Weiss, *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 31-32.

[253]Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom*, 224.

[254] www.aidsquilt.org (October 2, 2002).

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the twisted wreckage *is in fact a car crash* that threatens the boundaries of self and of the social order and is worthy of our psychic attention.

Time will tell whether, once encased in the museum of the Quilt, the museum of the repressed that the Quilt now represents will be able to become the graveyard of loss that it always aspired to be. If that day ever comes, maybe then the "1,000 missing corpses" can come home and be buried. And maybe then a nation can finally be sad.[255]

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[255]As AIDS has spread throughout Africa and Asia, the silence that once surrounded the disease has lifted in the United States. At the same time, it can be argued that the frequent address to AIDS in the newspapers today in opposition to the moment in American history when AIDS presented the greatest threat to American society results from what Freud termed "displacement" a psychic activity wherein "an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from [is passed] on to other ideas" in order to contain anxiety. Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 121. In 1992, at the height of the AIDS crisis in America, the New York Times published eleven front-page articles on AIDS while buried in the newspaper over 100 obituaries were written about prominent gay men who had died from AIDS. In 2002, the Times published over 50 front-page articles on AIDS (largely centered on AIDS in Africa and S.E. Asia) while only one obituary was written about an individual who died from HIV complications. These statistics were gathered by the Institute of Cultural Inquiry as part of their ongoing project, The AIDS *Chronicles* (www.culturalinquiry.org)

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Memory is still constructed.

Its loss is still the architect's best friend[256]

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CHAPTER SIX

BUILDING A MEMORY: THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Introduction

This chapter is the first of four that will examine the last of my case studies, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C., a public site that, without a doubt, was created to address trauma. In this first chapter on the USHMM, I outline the history of the museum from its first plan in 1979 and examine how it could be imagined as an addition to the Washington Mall in the guise of an American history lesson.

I also look at the architectural program developed and implemented by James Ingo Freed, who hoped to make an open-ended museum space that allowed for individual interpretation. His contribution to the project came after he visited the death camps in Europe from which he, a Jewish boy, had escaped because he was able to emigrate to the United States before the massive killing of his people occurred. While visiting the camps, Freed considered the possibility of his own death. His building thus often displays elements of a sensibility governed by trauma.

The development and execution of the permanent display in the USHMM is also examined. The design team worked separately from the architect (Freed) and with different and often conflicting objectives. The team's goal was to create a "narrative" history museum in opposition to a "traditional" history museum. As a narrative, the museum's "plot" development was the driving force between the display and the design. Likewise, the display designers felt the Holocaust "story" was dependent on artifacts and text and not on any architectural conceit.

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[256]Mark Wigley, "The Architectural Cult of Synchronization," *October 94* (Fall 2000), 43.

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Because the architect and design team worked in opposition instead of in concert, the USHMM was unavoidably constructed within a jumble of concerns. In a final section of this chapter, the clash of purposes between the architect and the display team is examined. This analysis will show that, even before it opened its doors, the USHMM was unable to "fix" a single unifying purpose, even if that was its intended goal.

Reading the Holocaust of World War II as Trauma

There is little doubt in most people's minds that the Holocaust—the systematic murder of six million Jews under the rule of the Nazis during World War II—was a traumatic moment in history.[257] For those who suffered under the Holocaust and somehow survived, the horrific event seems to follow the classic rules of psychoanalytic trauma. It can be argued that the initial trauma that was the Holocaust was not coded during the historical moment of its occurrence. Likewise, even though the Holocaust "happened" to individuals, it fits the definition of historical trauma because it occurred within a social context—within the realm of signification—even though there was nothing within that realm that would account for it. Thus, when it actually occurred the Holocaust could not be fully perceived and understood. As Raul Hilberg has characterized it, "In the beginning there was no Holocaust. When it took place in the middle of the twentieth century, its nature was not fully grasped."[258] But the defining characteristic of psychoanalytic trauma is not the recognition of the traumatic event that initiated the process, but, rather, the *belated psychic manifestation of symptoms* related to that initial

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[257]I am here adopting the definition of the Holocaust as accepted by the USHMM. It is known that more than six million Jews died. The total number of people that were either put to death or died as a result of incarceration at the hands of the Nazis is estimated to be close to *eleven million*. For the controversy surrounding the definition of the Holocaust, as it would be presented in the museum, see Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York City: Penguin Books, 1995), 27-28.

[258] Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 5.

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event. These symptoms, which come after a period of latency, result from the "second" trauma that attempts to let the first trauma "speak." The second trauma points to an initial "something" that should have been noticed but it wasn't or was noticed but could not be read (that is, could not be understood). This belatedness marks one of the paradoxes of trauma—its fundamental dislocation, which results in the testimony to the traumatic event (the second trauma gives testimony to the first) but at the same time makes direct access to it an impossibility.[259]

For a catastrophic historical trauma, the experience of trauma becomes linked to survival. For many victims of the Holocaust, their trauma appeared to be linked to their very act of *not dying*. For them, there existed a feeling that a price was paid to live, but they didn't know what the price was.[260] The surprising and perplexing characteristic of trauma is that even though an individual has survived (which, one would think, would be a pleasurable outcome), the perception is that the price paid for survival is too high. Even though the survivor may come to understand the source of his or her trauma, in essence, *how much was paid*, that knowledge in itself can produce a new trauma.[261]

In victims of the Holocaust who survived the war, a number of psychic symptoms pointed to the traumatic nature of the event. The most obvious, and the one with a fairly short latency period, was what we would now characterize as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),[262] wherein survivors suffered an increased sensitivity

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[259]Caruth, *Trauma*, 9.

[260]Consider, for example this poignant quote from Elie Weisel, which is reproduced on the wall of the USHMM. "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night. Seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.
Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, *even if I am condemned to live* as long as God himself. Never" (emphasis mine).

[261]This contributes to a perception that the initial trauma has never really been found. It may be that it has been located but still refuses to be incorporated. In other words, we can point to the initial trauma and even name it, but all signifying chains refuse to accept it.

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to sounds and smells that would trigger traumatic memories. Benjamin Meed, a survivor, recalls:

> Our first years were hard. Every time we heard car tires screeching, we froze... We even had to adjust to the ringing of doorbells. For us the echo of the old world of fear and death reverberated many times a day.[263]

Such responses were generally kept private and turned out to be fleeting. The overall tendency was to block memory and avoid aspects of life that threatened to bring the memory of the Holocaust back. This same response can be seen in the other survivors of the Holocaust, the group of people who were not victims, *per se*, but have been classified as "perpetrators" or "bystanders."[264] There was, understandably, a great silence among these people, a silence that generally manifested itself in a kind of blocking, a traumatic response in which the individual refuses to acknowledge that any loss has taken place. Thus, he or she refuses not only the wound (the gap in the signifying chain) but the search for the wound itself (denying the ability to signify at all).[265]

But, of course, we know of this avoidance only in retrospect. While we in the western world were living in this period of repression, we probably convinced ourselves that it was all behind us, that there were more imminent threats to the world's survival, such as nuclear war or Communism expansion.[266] According to the theory of trauma, the first trauma was waiting for a second trauma to occur so that it could be heard.

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[262]For a definition of this disorder see pp. 11-12 of this study. I am distinguishing this "diagnosis" from the other major response to trauma, which is the compulsion to repeat. Surprisingly, this is not included in the DMSIV, except as a regressive response restricted to children. The compulsion to repeat is a symptom of Freud's death drive (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 8), a theory that is not popular in the American school of psychology.

[263]As cited in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 6.

[264]In Holocaust studies, there are no innocents. The world population is reduced to the three categories of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

[265]For poignant example of perpetrator "blocking," see Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film* (NY: Da Capo Press, 1995). When Lanzmann presses his interviewees to give him details of their participation in the Holocaust, they give him answers that are filled with blocked memories.

[266]Peter Novak, the eminent World War II historian, has noted that for the first 20 years after the war there was not even a generally accepted term (like "Holocaust") used to describe the events of the war.

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After a long latency period, over 20 years, in fact, the second trauma did come, and its force was swift and reverberating. It is now generally agreed that the repression of the Second World War was lifted, at least for most Jews, during the Six-Day War. On May 15, 1967, President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced his goal to annihilate the State of Israel. This proclamation became the second trauma that was needed to point to the first trauma that was the Holocaust. By resurrecting one of the first trauma's battle cries—the total annihilation of a people based simply on who they were—the Six-Day War pointed to the hole created by the Holocaust. The second trauma, the war against Israel, woke many Jews up to the devastation of the first trauma and fixed that horror in the slogan "Never Again."[267] It is now generally believed that this was the moment that American Jews, both those who were survivors, and those who were bystanders, now woke up to the Holocaust and tried to alleviate the anxiety associated with trauma by opening their checkbooks.[268]

As its name implies, the Six-Day War was fast and effective in its traumatic task, but it was also an event that occurred almost 35 years ago, and 22 years after the end of World War II. To speak of those who survived the Holocaust and their ensuing trauma as being part of that later event is to speak of a fast dwindling group in society. There are now more people living on this earth who were born after World War II than there are those who lived through it. Yet these younger people, who may or may not have direct ties to those who survived the Holocaust, are not free from the trauma of this event. Their inability to experience the trauma of those (their parents and grandparents and other family members) who were traumatized by the Holocaust creates a new trauma, a kind of ballooning of effect that results in the assumption of symptoms of the traumatized

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For a discussion of the general silence and inability to name the events of World War II, see Greig Crysler and Abidin Kusno, "Angels in the Temple: The Aesthetic Construction of Citizenship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Art Journal* 56/1 (Spring 1997), 53.

[267]The realization that there was an original trauma is not to be equated with locating the wound. The wound may not be fixable, or knowable, even though its presence is felt.

[268]Crysler & Kusno, "Angels," 54.

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survivors. Within this inherited trauma, without an understanding of underlying etiology of the initial trauma, a hysterical reaction is produced. Thus, even though the source of the survivor's trauma can be located and pointed to, the fact that the trauma is unresolved makes any attempt at resolving the secondary trauma of those who did not experience the initial trauma a theoretical impossibility. It simply cannot be worked through.

The inability to fix meaning to the traumatic wound is best represented in current attempts to define the Holocaust. Unlike Holocaust survivors themselves, who insist there can be no meaning in that horrific event, second- and third-generation Holocaust "survivors" accept all meanings. They are afraid to throw any out. For them, the Holocaust can:

> point to the possibility of evil or the reality of evil. It can suggest that we must guard against the aberration of Nazism, or that in a crisis the world will not rescue Jews in mortal peril. It can point to the world's indifference to the murder of Jews, or the courage of a few, who stood up to Nazi terror on behalf of Jews. It can mean Nazi against Jew, or German against Jew, or Christian against Jew, or goy against Jew — or evil against good, strong against weak. It can suggest how monstrous a few can become, or how readily all of us can, by our silence or inaction, become complicit in monstrous crimes. It can point to the weakness of Eastern European Jews who allowed themselves to be murdered, or to the heroism and inner resources required to face death with dignity and faith or the courage of Jews who resisted and rebelled. Or the Holocaust can be understood as a demonstration of Jewish helplessness in the Diaspora and the consequent importance of "Jewish power," which the State of Israel represents.[269]

The fact that the Holocaust means something different to everyone only acts to intensify the sense of trauma, for it prevents any sense of community.[270] As a society,

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[269]Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocautst: From Auschwitz to Schindler; How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (NY: Routledge, 2000), 173.

[270]There are, of course, communities that coalesce around the trauma (as opposed to the wound). This kind of community does not work to locate the wound but uses the trauma itself as "a heady privilege ... Among the many items selected by culture to symbolize status, incomparability alone is inimitable." Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 14.

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we are unable to fix a meaning, so instead we collect all interpretations in what has been characterized as a "garbage heap of meaning."[271]

Likewise, Saul Friedlander has pointed out that for anybody writing about the Holocaust, there can be no single signifying chain:

> Whether the historian or analyst is a survivor, a relative of survivors, a former Nazi, a former collaborator, a relative of former Nazis or collaborators, a younger Jew or German distanced from more immediate contact with survival, participation, or collaboration, or a relative "'outsider" to these problems will make a difference even in the meaning of statements that may be formally identical.[272]

And because the categories are in themselves fugitive (just by moving through life your classification can change), the person who writes, discusses, or otherwise ventures into any discourse about the Holocaust is often unable to recognize his own voice.[273]

Sometimes this inability manifests itself as a self-imposed silence,[274] while for others it creates a disjointed, prosthetic speech. Dominick LaCapra has described a writing method that results from feeling that "I have no right to these voices." As LaCapra

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[271]This expression comes from Jorge Luis Borges in his short story, "Funes the Memorious." Funes was characterized by his phenomenal memory, which resulted from a fall from a horse in his late teens. "For nineteen years," Borges writes, "he had lived as one in a dream: he looked without seeing, listened without hearing, forgetting everything, almost everything. When he fell, he became unconscious; when he came to, the present was almost intolerable in its richness and sharpness." (63) But what was unique about Funes' memory is that it was a memory of "a garbage heap," as Borges puts it. "He was, let us not forget, almost incapable of ideas of a general Platonic sort. Not only was it difficult for him to comprehend that the generic symbol dog embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse size and form...[but] his own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time he saw them." He was unable to forget differences, to generalize, to make abstractions. "In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence." Thus, without the ability to create meaning, Funes was cursed to remember all the details. Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes the Memorius," *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (NY: Modern Library, 1983): 59-66.

[272]Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 12.

[273]Much like Borges's Funes, who could not recognize his own face in the mirror.

[274]Andrea Liss has pointed out that two silences surround the Holocaust. The first is the silence of the survivors. The second is "the silence that the law of the voice of the legitimate witness would impose on the inauthentic voice of the post-Auschwitz generation. According to this logic, any later commentary would only diminish the aura of the truth." Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows*, 85-86.

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writes, "[by] experiencing a lack of a viable voice, I am constrained to resort to quotation and commentary more often than I otherwise might be."[275]

We can thus see from the very beginning, before we even embark on a study of the museum created to mark the great historical trauma of World War II, that any discussion of the Holocaust is compounded by the disparity between those who lived during the initial event and those who did not, between those who were victims and those who were not, or even between survivors or victims and those who, having not lived during the initial event, understand the trauma of the Holocaust but are not in themselves traumatized by it. There are even people who do not understand the trauma of the Holocaust and are traumatized by this inability to understand it. When all of these voices are put together, the mix can be volatile. And that is exactly what happened in the planning and execution of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.[276]

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[275]Dominick LaCapra, "Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historian's Debate," in Friedlander, *Probing the Limits*, 110.

[276] This section of the dissertation, which focuses on the USHMM, is drawn from multiple visits by the author to the museum and a rich body of literature that already accompanies this relatively new site. A brief review of this literature follows:

The building and subsequent opening of the USHMM initiated a flurry of press. Some of the articles celebrated the museum such as Ken Ringle, "The Holocaust Museum: An Album of Agony," *Washington Post* (April 22, 1993); Lance Morrow, "Never Forget," *Time* (April 26, 1993): 56-57; Stuart E. Eizenstat, "Holocaust Memorial Deserves Capital Place," *Christian Science Monitor* (April 28, 1993); Most of the articles gave the museum mixed reviews including Michael Kernan, "A National Memorial Bears Witness to the Tragedy of the Holocaust," *Smithsonian*, vol. 24, no. 1 (April 1993): 54-62; Jonathan Rosen, "The Misguided Holocaust Museum," *New York Times* (April 19, 1993); Edward Norden, "Yes and No to the Holocaust Museums," *Commentary*, vol. 96, no. 2 (August 1993): 23-32; Henryk Grynberg, "Don't Universalize the Holocaust Memorial!," *Midstream*, vol. 32, no. 4 (April 1986): 7; Some of the articles could only find fault with the museum including: Leon Wieseltier, "The Milk Can," *New Republic*, vol. 208, no. 16 (April 22, 1991): 47; Liliane Weissberg, "Memory Confined," *Documents* 2/4-5 (Spring 1994): 81-98; and Sander Gilman, "Locating History," *Documents* 2/4-5 (Spring 1994): 72-74.

In the same year that the museum opened two books were published by members of the Museum team. The first book, which claims to not be a catalogue of the museum and yet is prominently displayed in the bookstore, was written by the first director of the museum, Jeshajahu Weinberg in collaboration with Rina Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (NY: Rizzoli, 1995). This is a coffee table format publication with large color photographs of the interior of the museum interspersed with text outlining the reasoning behind the display elements in the permanent exhibition. The other book that emerged right after the museum opened is by Michael Berenbaum, the Project Director of the Permanent Exhibition from 1987-1993. *The World Must Know: The History as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993). Berenbaum contextualizes the museum within the history of 20th century Jewish culture; An early publication (published before the museum was completed) outlined the planning and execution of the architecture; James Ingo Freed, "The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Assemblage* 9: 59-79; Two years after the museum opened the only comprehensive book about

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Background and History of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

An Act of Congress established the USHMM in 1980. President Jimmy Carter provided the official rationale for the museum in his address at the first Days of Remembrance ceremonies at the Capitol Rotunda, April 24, 1979:

> Although the Holocaust took place in Europe, the event is of fundamental significance to Americans for three reasons. First, it was American troops who liberated many of the death camps, and who helped to expose the horrible truth of what had been done there. Also, the United States became a homeland for many of those who were able to survive. Secondly, however, we must share the responsibility for not being willing to acknowledge forty years ago that this horrible event was occurring.

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the USHMM to be written by an outsider was published: Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (NY: Penguin Books, 1995).

Once the USHMM opened, a number of books that took a more critical look at the museum or a certain aspect of the museum, began to emerge including Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold* (NY: Routledge, 2000); which explores the museum within the context of what the author terms the Holocaust "industry"; Greig Crysler and Abidin Kusno, "Angels in the Temple: The Aesthetic Construction of Citizenship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Art Journal* 56/1 (Spring 1997): 52-64 examine the conflicting subject positions the museum asks the visitor to its space to assume; Marianne Hirsch examines the use of photography in the museum in "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, Barbie Zelizer, ed (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 215-246, as does Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography & the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Ken Johnson, "Art and Memory," *Art in America* (November 1993): 90-98 focuses on the artwork that was commissioned by the museum; Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) examines the museum in terms of its ability to come to terms with historical trauma as does James E. Young, "Toward a Received History of the Holocaust," *History and Theory* 36 (December 1997): 21-43; Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) questions the museum's sole reliance on a documentary method (as opposed to a representational method); Timothy Ryback examines the decision not to display the hair from Auschwitz victims in the USHMM in "Evidence of Evil," *New Yorker* (November 15, 1993) 68-81.

Books or articles that include personal meditations on the USHMM include Geoffrey H. Hartman, ed. *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Peter Homans, ed., *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Harold Kaplan, *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

As the museum nears its 10th anniversary, a number of Ph.D. dissertations are beginning to surface that focus on the USHMM. One can expect these will be in print within the next couple of years. Notable examples include: Michaela Eva Tork, "The Shadow of the Object: Mourning and Melancholia in Autobiographical Film and Video about the Holocaust (University of California, Los Angeles, 2001) and Natasha Goldman "Missing Absence: Trauma and National Memorials to the Holocaust (University of Rochester, 2001).

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> Finally, because we are humane people, concerned with the human rights of all peoples, we feel compelled to study the systematic destruction of the Jews so that we many seek to learn how to prevent such enormities from occurring in the future[277]

Even from the beginning, the mandate for the museum was complex and at times contradictory: to rally the people who had suffered, to instruct non-Jews, to serve as repentance for a silent nation, to impart a moral imperative about human rights. But the most important function of the USHMM was to have the museum stand as an example of what goes wrong when the ideals of America go awry.[278] The Holocaust was to be presented as an example of the ultimate violation of America's Bill of Rights, or as James Young has written, "The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum defines what it means to be American by graphically illustrating what it means not to be American."[279] It is only within this framework, as an American history lesson, that the museum could be placed on the mall among other grand monuments dedicated to what is great and virtuous about the United States.[280]

Building the Museum: The Architecture of the USHMM

The museum's architecture was developed before and independent of the displays that would later come to fill its halls. James Ingo Freed, a principal in I.M. Pei's architectural firm, was the architect selected from a large group of competitors to design

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[277] From an undated press release of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council as cited in James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 336.

[278] Linenthal provides a detailed account of the battle between President Carter and the Museum Commission over semantics in the creation of a mission statement for the Museum in *Preserving Memory*, 52-72.

[279] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 337.

[280] In fact, the placement of the Holocaust Museum on the mall was not without debate. See Freed, "The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 59-79, and Kernan, "A National Memorial Bears Witness to the Tragedy of the Holocaust," 50-65.

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and build the USHMM.[281] Of the three possible survivor types (victim, perpetrator, bystander), he must be regarded as a victim of the Holocaust.

Freed was born in Essen, Germany, in 1930 and remembers some of his childhood as a German Jew, particularly *Kristallnacht*, which he spent riding the streetcars with his father to avoid the violence. He escaped from Germany through a string of European countries and finally arrived in America with his sister in 1939. His parents also managed to escape, arriving on one of the last refugee ships to America in 1941. Once the family was reunited in the United States, Freed recalls, "there was a conspiracy of silence about the Holocaust and about our being Jewish."[282]

Although Freed expressed reservations about the project from the start, feeling that "this was an emotional building not an intellectual building,"[283] he claims that every time he started a design, "I just froze."[284] He wanted the structure to allow for all of the horror and sadness of the Holocaust, yet he questioned whether he could create "an architecture of sensibility" in order to realize this goal. In the early days of thinking through the design for the Museum, Freed looked at buildings Jews had occupied before the Holocaust, especially Polish synagogues (Figure 33).[285] It was his trip to what remained of the death camps, including Auschwitz and Treblinka, however, that began to thaw the defense that had guarded him from his own trauma. He describes his visit to Birkenau:

> When I walked into this [camp], some archaic memories must have been stirred, because emotionally this was a turning point for me. As we walked

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[281] As with almost every facet of the Holocaust Museum, the selection of Freed as architect was not without contention. See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 72-84.

[282]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 85.

[283]Freed, "USHMM," 59.

[284]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 86. Freezing is a classic symptom of trauma.

[285] Freed also drew inspiration from the images in Carol Herselle Krinsky's book, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1985).

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> to the crematorium, there were scuffed-up little bones everywhere that had never turned to dust. I stood in a time warp, realizing that, except for good fortune, I would have been brought to such a place to die.[286]

The visit to the camps and the ruined Jewish ghettos of Poland gave him the architectural language he would eventually use in the museum. The memory of how the camps were built stayed with him "as I suppose a doctor would remember what the hospitals were like, so an architect remembers. The addition of heavy steel to a raw wall became for me a very important thing."[287] Freed became interested in the "methodologies of camp construction" and what he describes as "a sort of modernist attitude toward the showing of structure, and the perfection of things."[288] It was these "tectonics" that the architect held to be important in constructing the museum, for they addressed the memory of the place and not just the events that had occurred there.[289] The ambiguous and open-ended space of memory became important to Freed, for he felt that the visitor to the museum should imbue the architectural forms with their own meanings. An invocation of the incomplete was intentional. Imbalances were built in. Idiosyncrasies were created to "jog the memory."[290] At least in intent, then, Freed fought against totalizing historicity, feeling that "it is essential that people are left with what separates

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[286] Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 86. Dislocation of time is the hallmark of trauma.

[287]Freed, "USHMM," 64. We could, in fact, argue that his visit to the camp was indeed the second trauma that coded the first trauma (that he survived the Holocaust but did not know what survival meant). This seems evident in his almost photographic memory of the "structure" of the trauma and his compulsive need to repeat these elements in the design for the USHMM (see below). Trauma is an unfolding process that seems to gather momentum, especially as it relates to the confounding and compounding nature of Holocaust trauma. With this extremely traumatic event, the trauma can turn into the wound of the next trauma. The signifying chain of the Symbolic realm turns into a counter-signifying chain of the Real.

[288] Freed, "USHMM," 64.

[289]"The memory of the place has to stand in lieu of the event." Freed, "USHMM,". 63.

[290] Freed, "USHMM," 64. With this statement, Freed seems to accept the ancient tradition of remembering through the exceptional, the deviant, and the irregular. See also, Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

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them more than with what joins them together. We created differences, so that memory must play a part."[291]

From his research at the camps in Europe, Freed developed a formal architectural language, which he then used in conceiving the Museum. The elements of this unique language include the following:

- **Fences and Gates,** which Freed used as a metaphor for the fencing in of people. He viewed the fences (and gates), not as the sides of passageways or, in the case of a gate, as an entranceway, but as barriers, as screens, and, ultimately, as lies.
- **Bridges,** which referred to the bridges in the Jewish ghettoes, which were used to isolate Jews from the rest of the world. The architect was also interested in how the bridge had been used "to insulate people from the virus of Judaism. The issue was turned into a biological metaphor. The body politic was a real body and the Jews were the infective agents."[292]
- **Towers**, which were used as the metaphor of watching, an activity that existed in both the ghettoes and the camps. In addition, the tall imposing structures refer to the tower-like structures that remained in the Warsaw ghetto after it was demolished. Parts of buildings were left standing. "It's a way of undermining structures ... which is also a metaphor for the entire Holocaust."[293]
- **Triangles**, which were used by the Nazis to differentiate types of deviancy. Cloth triangles were sewn on prisoners' clothing, a different color for each offense.

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[291]Freed, "USHMM," 64.

[292] Freed, "USHMM," 62. Freed uses a language of the medicalized body throughout the interview. See below for further speculation about this chosen language.

[293] Freed, "USHMM," 62.

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- **Steel Strapping**, which was used at the site of the crematoriums to reinforce the ovens and which remained after the destruction of the crematoriums as a evocative skeletal metaphor of the oven's function.

Freed integrated this "Holocaust language" into the building in a number of obvious ways. The "gate as screen" was translated into a neoclassical facade on the 14th Street entrance, what Freed terms a "pure fake" because it is open to the sky (Figures 22 and 23). Shifting and recentering the visitor three times before we actually enter the Museum, the purpose of this facade is to disorient us. Freed designed two entrances: busloads of children were to enter to the right, while individuals were to enter to the left. The experience of selection manifests itself in an immediate segregation of movement, felt before the public even enters the great hall of the Museum.[294]

As we enter the large reception area, which is called the Hall of Witness,[295] glass screens and heavy steel overlays raw concrete walls and create an industrial look (Figure 24). The huge lobby is covered by a ceiling of glass and steel that reveals the glass bridges that hang above us and right above the ceiling, also made of glass (Figure 25). These transparent passageways connect the row of towers on one side with the rest of the building on the other side (Figure 31). Freed intended these bridges to be both dangerous paths for those crossing them and as a metaphor for a screened watching of the people below. "You are walking on air, while from below people see ghosts crossing overhead."[296] The heavy use of diagonals in the Hall of Witness also evokes a world of

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[294]Because of tightened security, in practice, all visitors now enter through the left. Anyone entering the building must go through a metal detector, and all bags are also x-rayed.

[295]"Hall of Witness" is rendered in the singular form, thereby creating an uncertainty about what part of speech Witness refers to. The entry hall is always packed—thus one would expect this to be a hall of *witnesses*. But even if the word "witness" is taken to be a verb issued as an imperative to all those that enter the hall, there is nothing in this grand space to witness except (according to the rules of a tautology) the potential witnesses in the hall. Because the architectural logic of the building is shielded from the viewer, once she or he is in the structure, the command to witness seems to be arrested in this Hall. This large gathering space acts as a holding pen. This ambiguity is further enhanced by a large inscription on the back wall, which reads, "You are my witnesses" (Isaiah 43:10).

[296]Freed, "USHMM," 71.

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dislocation, of distorted metal after a fire. All bracing, bridges, and truss work are built up of double angles.

There are also many obvious references to the camps in Europe. In an eerie *mise en abîme*, the arched entryways seen throughout the structure evoke both the main entrance to the extermination camp at Birkenau and to the "entryway" of the crematoria ovens at that camp (Figures 26 and 27). The stairs that lead to the main doorway at the back of the Hall narrow dramatically from the base to the opening in the wall as a physical recitation of the perspectival exaggeration that occurs in the panoramic photo of Birkenau (Figures 28 and 29)—an image that has become iconic in the cultural narrative of the Holocaust.[297] The hall is lined with bricks in a pattern reminiscent of the barracks at Auschwitz I, and the northern side of the building, parts of which are apparent through the glass ceiling of the Hall of Witness, is made up of a row of four brick structures that are shaped liked the Auschwitz watchtowers (Figures 30 and 31).

Attached to the main structure of the museum is the Hall of Remembrance.[298] This space, intended as a memorial to Holocaust victims, was the only part of the museum that was not entirely left up to the architect. The planning committee felt that this site should be a hexagonal in shape, and for Freed, it was a difficult requirement to work with. "long in one direction, short in another direction, and yet it doesn't have direction. It's rotational, it doesn't stop spatially, but keeps bounding you."[299] Eventually, the architect came to like the hexagon purely for its imbalance. It is in this structure that the use of the triangle is most insistently felt, in the floor tiles, the corner windows, and the joining walls (Figure 32). Although hidden from the visitor to the

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[297]In that famous photograph, it is a train track that leads to the main entrance, but the exaggerated angle, in one case a byproduct of photography, in the other, the conscious intent of the architect, is uncannily similar.

[298] In calling this structure the Hall of Remembrance, the imperative is unequivocal.

[299]Freed, "USHMM," 64.

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museum, in transverse view the hall is almost an exact replica of the type of Jewish synagogues that blanketed the pre-War Polish countryside (Figures 33 and 34).

The building itself is five stories high, plus a sub-floor. Each floor is divided into two parts separated by the connecting glass bridges and circular stairways at the end of each level.[300] In plan and experience, the parts of the building often look and feel piecemeal. This seems to have been the intent of the architect. "There is no cohesive theory, but instead a variety of spaces held together by mucilage."[301] The permanent exhibit occupies floors four, three and part of two. The other part of floor two is occupied by the Wexler Learning Center with interactive displays. An archive and library occupy the fifth floor, which is closed to the public except by appointment. The first floor is essentially given to the lobby (the Hall of Witness), a special display for children called Remember the Children: Daniel's Story, and the Museum Gift Shop. The concourse level (the sub-floor) houses a theater, an auditorium, and an exhibition gallery with changing exhibits. Neither restaurant nor cafeteria was included in the design or in the final building.[302]

The Development of the Permanent Display at the USHMM

In his book, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, founding director of the museum, Jeshajahu Weinberg, "tells the story" of the Museum,[303] a story in which it

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[300]A more detailed description of each floor follows in Chapter 7.

[301]Freed, "USHMM," 65. Once again, note Freed's medicalized language.

[302]A small snack bar is housed in an adjacent building, but visitors must leave the main museum and pass through security on our way to and from the lunchroom.

[303]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*. The preface to the book clarifies the intentions of the book to be "a souvenir, an introduction and an invitation." It also contains a disclaimer... "Although the book has been written and published at the request of the Museum, the opinions expressed should not be understood as representing the official point of view of the Museum," (15). At the same time, this book figures prominently in the gift shop and is indicated as the "official" guide to the Museum. Likewise, the

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quickly becomes clear that the architecture was regarded as the *memorial* of the official title. Weinberg writes,

> Whether consciously or unconsciously, Freed has designed what could be regarded as a self-sufficient memorial monument to the victims of the Holocaust. The building would have been an outstanding architectural statement even if it had not contained a historical museum.[304]

In making this statement, Weinberg implies that it is the display itself and not the architecture that defines the *museum*.[305] In fact, as Weinberg tells the story, the structure was a "container" that the design team had to work around. As a container, however, it was not a benign white box, but

> "as a memorial rather than a museum, the building is understandably unkind and unwelcoming, not necessarily caring for the needs of the visiting public.... [N]o restaurant or cafeteria was included in the Museum's design for fear of desecrating the holiness of the place.[306]

In fact, by claiming that Freed was the architect of the *memorial*, Weinberg stops just short of stating that the *museum* was not architectural but entirely conceptual, thereby essentially making the design committee the "architects" of the museum.[307]

Weinberg's reasoning that it was the design committee and not the architect that created the Holocaust Museum is rooted in his own differentiation between a "traditional"

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title page of the book lists the publisher "in collaboration with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum."

[304]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 26.

[305]Freed himself called his building a *memorial*. He did not feel his building was just a container for a museum. See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 86.

[306]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 27.

[307]Thus, even in this grand architectural statement, the museum essentially exists without walls, and it is closer in other ways than mere proximity to that other great museum without walls we have considered in this study, the AIDS Quilt. Although Weinberg only hints at it, the animosity toward the architecture (and, to some extent, also toward the architect) on the part of the display committee was at times palpable. Martin Smith, the first director of the design team, is quoted as saying, "For me, there would be no building, because I don't believe in any architectural solution to the Holocaust. If I built anything, I would build it underground." Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 107. Even within the committee, the feelings were not unified. Ralph Appelbaum, Exhibit Designer worked in concert with the architecture, creating an exhibit that had "a vocabulary much like Freed's building." Ibid., 169.

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history museum and a "narrative" history museum. He feels that the traditional history museum functions to convey information and aesthetic impressions. The main activities of this type of institution are to collect, preserve, research, and publicly display authentic objects. Although traditional history museums may be considered receptacles of knowledge, "such museums usually do not educate in the sense of changing and developing their visitors mentally, emotionally, or morally.[308] Weinberg's "narrative" history museum, in contrast, "uses its exhibits as building blocks in a continuous story line and displays them in their historical context."[309] Most importantly, the narrative sequence must have a plot.

> The plot triggers identification, which envelops us mentally and forces us to relate to the meaning of the story line. Being gripped by the plot, projecting ourselves into it, identifying with its heroes and developing resentment towards its villains, we get emotionally involved.[310]

For Weinberg, the narrative museum is governed by a strict set of directives. These include:

1) A display sequence that is determined by the flow of the narrative (and not necessarily by the flow of the architecture).

2) A permanent exhibition that does not change after being installed.

3) A preconceived circulation path for the visitor that allows for no choice of movement.

4) The impossibility of a traditional, annotated catalogue.[311]

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[308]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 49.

[309]Ibid.

[310]Ibid. Note the extensive use of psychoanalytic language in terms such as "identification," "projection," and "resentments," all of which are couched in "mental" or "emotional" scenarios. Weinberg seems to recognize the psychic potential of the museum space. It should also be noted that Weinberg's co-author, Rina Elieli, is a psychoanalyst.

[311] It is unclear why there can be no annotated catalogue, as a narrative seems to lend itself to a catalogue format. I think the implication here is that the objects in the museum are not "museum objects" subject to "cataloguing." In the center of the Weinberg book 50 pages are given to the exhibit, straight

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The other major difference between the collecting museum and the narrative museum is that in the former, the curator is in charge, whereas in the latter, the historian dominates.

For Weinberg, the mission of the Holocaust Museum design team was not to memorialize the Holocaust but to create a "history museum" that takes as its point of departure a historical narrative. To best achieve this goal, it was thought that a

> thematic neatness [had] to be observed in the depiction of the historic event as presented in the exhibition. The exhibition [had] to be limited to the historic event, so as not to obscure its metaphoric universality.[312]

But even as Weinberg defined the domain of the narrative history museum as that of the historian, in the case of the Holocaust Museum it was not the historian but a filmmaker who was given the task of putting together the permanent exhibition.[313]

This job was awarded to Martin Smith, an English film director of modern historical documentaries. He stayed on the job for two years and was then replaced by Raye Farr, also a documentary filmmaker.[314] It was Smith who hired Ralph Appelbaum as Exhibit Designer. By the time Smith and Appelbaum came on, only the "storyline" had been developed. As conceived by the concept team headed by Michael Berenbaum, the Holocaust "story" was to focus on "the history and centrality of the Jewish experience told from the point of view of those who suffered, those who died, those who rescued and those who stood idly by."[315]

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photos with no explanation. None of the wall texts in the permanent exhibit are repeated in this "official" book of the Museum except when captured by the photographic documentation.

[312]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 19.

[313]Ernst van Alphen points out that it is an almost universal dictum in Holocaust studies that historical discourse (especially in a documentary style) should be chosen over imaginative discourse when teaching about the Holocaust. *Caught by History.*

[314] Martin Smith was hired in 1988. From the beginning, it was agreed that his tenure was to last for only two years. Raye Farr, who assumed his role after Smith returned to England, stayed on as head of the Film and Video Department after the museum opened. The selection of a filmmaker by the USHMM (over a historian) points to the museum's belief that film and photographs offer the best "evidence" of the Holocaust. The planners hoped to create a museum rich in "televisual mediums" and they wanted someone versed in film and photographic technique.

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With only the storyline and the blank floor plans to work with, Smith and Appelbaum began to develop the plot of the storyline. Whereas the storyline laid out the parameters of the event that was the Holocaust, the design team now had to zero in on the acts that defined that grand narrative. First the conceptual design was laid out. Three structural approaches were considered for the display. This activity corresponds to the usual method of the museum, which is to identify potential encounters by the "typical" visitor.[316] The first approach would be based on strict chronology, the second approach would be governed by geography, and the third approach would present a linear sequence of major themes.

Ultimately, all three approaches were used in the final exhibit. The period from 1933 to 1939 was handled in a linear chronology. Once the Holocaust begins, however, the planning team structured the exhibit around the recurring theme of the "Final Solution": ghettos, deportations, concentration camps, and death camps. For this middle section, the geographical methodology was considered but ruled out because a "presentation by country ... would have been utterly repetitive.[317] In the final part of the permanent display, the narrative returns to a chronological structure. In this last part of the exhibit, there are also three thematic exhibition sections that fall outside of the historic

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[315] This quote is attributed to Susan Morgenstein in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 138. In fact, the storyline was over eight years in the making. For a discussion of the often contentious battle over the language that led to the official museum storyline, especially the centrality of the Jewish people to the conception of the permanent exhibition. (Linenthal, 36-51). It is interesting to note, especially in light of the final decision to keep the representation of the Holocaust in the USHMM essentially a "Jewish event," that the words "Jews" and "Jewish" are not mentioned once (in text that reads as a mission statement) on the front of the official brochure to the museum. (Brochure obtained in 2000 and 2001 by the author). See Figure 84.

[316]We have already discussed the very difficult task of fixing a visitor "type" to the USHMM, but in terms of the decisions that were finally made, the museum privileges the younger viewer, the visitor that did not live through the Holocaust. Linenthal claims the design was intended for "the Iowa farm family." *Preserving Memory*, 198.

[317] Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 55. Weinberg was concerned that the display would become boring in its redundancy, but repetition is also a means of soliciting repressed psychic material.

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narrative: the rescue of Jews by non-Jews, resistance to the perpetrators, and the fate of children in the Holocaust.[318]

It was only after the conceptual framework for the exhibit was laid out that objects were hunted down to complete the display. It was determined that the narrative museum was defined by a visual historiography and that "when dealing with modern times, photographs are the primary carriers of its narrative."[319] This imperative is the clearest sign that although the USHMM seems to follow a fairly traditional tack in sticking to a single narrative, the museum does adopt a postmodern method of "argumentation." Just as photographs are often employed in a court room as evidence that add authenticity to a crime scene, in the USHMM photographs give authenticity to the Holocaust "story." There was great concern that the photographs look "authentic," and as a result, another great debate ensued around the issue of retouching their surfaces. Many of the design team felt that the scratches, dust, and dirt of the old photographs should be retained, whereas Arnold Kramer, the director of photo research, felt that retouching would be "an unconvincing badge of honor."[320] The photographs finally used in the exhibit seem to operate in a realm of compromise. The defects that remain are minimal and generally occur around human figures or at places where the seams of retouching would be most noticeable. Torn and damaged corners are filled in for the final photos, but close-up head shots of victims retain evidence of dirt and dust marks. The selection of the type of photos tended to move from an initial impulse to display the horror of the atrocity photos[321] to a general anxiety that these types of photos would scare visitors away.[322]

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[318] Not surprisingly, controversy surrounded the high profile position of the rescuers in the exhibit. Some of the planners argued that their presence created "an unwarranted, massive upbeat element" at the end of the exhibit. Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 55.

[319] Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington,* 66. In an almost self-fulfilling prophecy, the final exhibit "feels" as though it is dominated by photographs even though there are only 189 photos in comparison to 1000 artifacts.

[320]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 171.

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Feeling that the photos should reflect the museum's "judgment and good taste,"[323] Weinberg maintained a strict rule that no genitalia would be displayed.[324] In the end, photographs were cropped to exclude genitalia, and/or were placed behind "privacy walls" to shield viewers from an immediate confrontation of the images.

Films and artifacts could also impart elements of the narrative, but only with certain conditions. With the photos and objects, it was decided that scale was important: the larger the object or photo, the better. Weinberg himself said that all of the photos had to be blow-ups and that the objects should have a "terrible immensity." The size of a potential memory was thus directly linked to the size of history's artifacts. Weinberg proclaimed that the museum should reflect a "Grand Canyon memory, not just valleys."[325] Of over ten thousand small artifacts that were donated to the museum by survivors and liberators, only a very few were chosen for display. Appelbaum described the collection as "the contents of what survivors brought out in their pockets." Smith was more caustic in his analysis: "To my eyes there were fewer than a dozen tiny artifacts worth displaying and a photographic collection that seemed a motley of happenstance and cast offs...[The collection is] pitiful and tragic."[326] Given this imperative, these small

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[321]"The atrocity photos" is the term used to describe the photographs taken right after the liberation of the camps. Their subject matter is largely human corpses and German soldier perpetrators. For a discussion of these photographs, see Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*

[322]Some of this fear was substantiated by focus groups that toured the early stages of the display. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 193.

[323]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 196. It is odd to think of any phrase that includes the words "good taste" in conjunction with the Holocaust.

[324]Which manifested itself as a prohibition against *male* genitalia.

[325]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 147.

[326]For both quotes see Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 146. Most of the artifacts, which the curators called "object survivors," are stored in a warehouse outside of Baltimore. In this way, the Museum hoped to operate against the excesses that characterize the AIDS Quilt. But by not using the everyday objects that survived the Holocaust in the hands of survivors, the Museum may also be subverting the processes of mourning and memorializing for those very survivors. See Chapter 9 below.

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personal objects were usurped by grand physical objects, such as a gypsy wagon, a railroad car, a bunker from Auschwitz, and a Danish rescue boat.

The films chosen for the display are primarily newsreels[327] There are in fact fewer films than there first seem to be, as most of what is shown on the monitors are slide shows of still photographs, which are often covered over with text (Figure 45). Weinberg discusses the decision to integrate still photos into what he calls "monitor programs." He writes, "combining still photography with monitor programs greatly enhances not only the quality of the presentation but also the quantity of the presented visual material.... Moving images let people identify more readily with what they see than do still photographs."[328] Weinberg goes on to claim that the use of televisual displays was intended to target a specific audience:

> The younger generation is accustomed to the assimilation of knowledge through the use of audiovisual and interactive computerized devices. The United State Holocaust Memorial Museum speaks this language of the young, thus enhancing its ability to open the minds and hearts of the young to the history it presents.[329]

The last major component of the display was the wall text, which was kept purposely brief (and often terse). Weinberg writes, "Just as people go to museums and exhibitions not to listen but to see, they do not go there to read. Those who want to read about the Holocaust seek out books or go to archives. This is why exhibitions should be very sparing in the display of text."[330]

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[327]Almost all the films (with the exception of the film that marks the "car crash") have soldiers in them, usually Americans liberating the camps or British scolding German soldiers or members of Hitler's elite corps. Not all the films have sound.

[328]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 62.

[329]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 63. It is unclear which "young" age group Weinberg is targeting. The Museum is not suggested for children under eleven.

[330] Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 69. There is, in fact, a substantial amount of text to read given that almost all the monitors also have text.

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There is also very limited sound throughout the exhibit; very little of what project director Cindy Miller calls a "narrative voice."[331] Instead, it was thought that quotes from "perpetrators, survivors, witnesses and historians,"[332] along with the large photomurals, would be more "open-ended" for visitors, thereby engaging them more directly.[333]

Having established the formal parameters of the display, the planning team then began its operations, albeit under a distinct and strict ideology that "tried to stick to the established course of events and to remain in line with the views of mainstream Holocaust scholarship in the United States and Israel."[334] The committee made several significant decisions about the course of the display:

1) The narrative would primarily reflect the point of view of the Jewish victim, even though the plight of non-Jew victim groups would also be presented.

2) There would be no presentation of victim statistics, since, "[there] has never been agreement among scholars about the number of people who perished in the Holocaust.... The planning team did not want to adopt any of the varying estimates, nor

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[331]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 168. It would appear that Miller is here referring to the authoritative narrator's voice that occurs sparingly throughout the exhibit. She does not seem to be addressing the other forms of "intentional" sound, such as the speeches of Hitler or his generals that accompany more than one film segment.

[332]I find the list of possible people to "quote" interesting. Bystanders have become "witnesses," and "historians" are also included in the formula. It is unclear from the way it is stated in Linenthal whether this distinction can be attributed to Cindy Miller or to Linenthal himself. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 168.

[333]Here "open-ended" is used quite differently than Freed would use the expression. Here the meaning would equate with a generalized, universal, all-encompassing *appeal*. For Freed, it equates with individual, personal, and thus varied *response*. See below.

[334]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 155. Any mention of revisionist history regarding the Holocaust was left out of the display and, thus, remains out of the ongoing discussion surrounding the museum. Revisionist history about the Holocaust includes those historians who belief the Holocaust never occurred to those who belief the numbers of Jewish deaths have been exaggerated. For an elaboration of these differences and the relevance of the revisionist debate see Frank Miele, "Giving the Devil his Due: Holocaust Revisionism as a Test Case for Free Speech and the Skeptical Ethic" (www.skeptic.com/02.4.miele-holocaust.html). Also, in keeping with the American theme, no European accounts are given, particularly those of Germans or Poles.

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was it able to embark on a project of statistical research of its own. It therefore refrained from mentioning figures altogether.[335]

3) The victims would be shown as they looked before or after (as survivors of) the Holocaust.

4) Contrary to the wishes of Israeli Holocaust scholars, the term *Holocaust* as used in the museum would also include non-Jewish Holocaust victims.

5) The victimization of homosexuals would be included.[336]

6) No money would be accepted from the German government or from German corporations for funding of the museum.

7) There would be no chapter on postwar Germany. The planning committee felt this would be a mistake for two reasons. "First, it would have been perceived as an attempt to down-scale German guilt, as an inadvertent expression of forgiveness on behalf of the Museum. Second, it would have unreasonably extended the part of the exhibition devoted to the "aftermath."[337]

With concept, form, and ideology thus all in place, the team now set out to implement its ideas. That process turned out to take almost five years. The United States Memorial Holocaust Museum opened to the public on April 22, 1993.

A Clash of Purposes at the USHMM

Reviewing the architectural program and the display design at the USHMM, we can immediately see that even before the museum opened to the public it was plagued by a conflict of purposes. This clash is most clearly represented in the use of the term

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[335]Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 158.

[336]The committee created a separate category for homosexuals because it was all homosexuals that were persecuted, not just Jewish homosexuals.

[337] Weinberg, *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 165.

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"open-ended" to describe the museum's purposes. While both Freed and Weinberg use this phrase to describe their ends of the project, they attach radically different meanings to it. For Freed, "open-ended" means an individual, personal, and varied response. For Weinberg, however, the phrase means an all-encompassing universal appeal, one that is so broad that few can escape its snare.

In designing the building, for example, Freed wanted to create a site that was "sufficiently ambiguous and open-ended so that others [the visitors] can inhabit the space, can imbue the forms with their own memories."[338] The way the site spatially and visually addresses the Holocaust shows that Freed was successful in realizing his goal. Whether we consider his design an attempt to master the past or a dramatic but pathological replaying of the initial trauma, however, depends on our point of the view when we come to the space. For those who have seen the sites of the camps themselves,[339] the building operates to remind them of that earlier experience.[340] There is an obsessive compulsion to repeat, if not the trauma itself, the objects-the strapping metal, the watchtowers, the overhead bridges-that anchor its presence.[341] For those who did not witness the camps themselves, either while they were operating during World War II or on pilgrimage after the war, the USHMM building may appear to be a kind of postmodern pastiche, oddly out of place among its Neoclassical neighbors. Yet even for visitors who never saw the actual camps, the building can act as an ambiguous and

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[338]Freed, USHMM, 65.

[339]Of course the two groups that saw the camps are very distinct and have their own unique memories. It is not my intention here to conflate the victims with later visitors to the sites of the camps but merely to make the point that if you have seen the camps themselves, even if you did not notice small details during your visit, what you saw comes back to haunt you when you enter the USHMM.

[340]My first and second visits to the USHMM were separated by a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When I viewed the museum after my trip to Poland, I could not help but notice the similarities. In fact, it was only after going to Auschwitz that I noticed the obsessive referencing that occurs in every detail of the building.

[341]In his early 1960s lecture on the Unconscious and Repetition, Lacan states that what is repeated in the symptom of trauma is "always something that occurs...as if by chance." Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 54.

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uncomfortable site. The obsessive repetition of architectural motifs does not escape notice. Even if it does not point to a trauma through a memory formed with the body, it does so through vision, through a feeling that this repetition is a fetishization of some secret that is being kept from the viewer.[342]

Ultimately, one is inclined to read Freed's building as a grand statement of a single man's attempt to undo his own traumatic experience (which was brought on by the Holocaust) by going back to the moment when the trauma had yet to occur, when objects were just things, when buildings were just buildings. In response to comparisons of his towers to camp watchtowers, for example, he has said, "I don't want to [tell] anybody these are towers and towers are bad. Towers may be good."[343] Likewise, his constant analogies of the interstices of his building to the binding structures of the human body point to Freed's need to put the body back together again. This can be seen as a manifestation of the psychic struggle between the Imaginary (where there is a (mis)perception that the body can be constructed out of parts) and the site of the Real (the site of trauma where the body exists only in its remaindered parts). Freed's building and his response to critiques of it position his processes as regressive, as moving away from the Symbolic realm and toward the Imaginary He is regressing to the moment before the Other existed, the moment of *just things* before they become *objects*.[344]

Although Weinberg insisted that Freed's building was a memorial to the Holocaust (if only in order to vehemently oppose its contribution to the "museum" aspect of the building), in truth it can only be seen as a monument[345] to *trauma*: to Freed's trauma, to

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[342]One could even argue that for these visitors the link to the trauma of the primary processes is even more direct in that it is not filtered through the trauma of the Holocaust. The "uncomfortable feeling" would signal the threat of the return of the repressed.

[343]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 88-89.

[344]In the Imaginary, even the body is a "thing."

[345]I am distinguishing here between a *monument* and a *memorial*. A monument can celebrate trauma, whereas a memorial acts to resolve it.

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the trauma of survivors, to the trauma of visitors to the camps after the war, and even to the trauma of those who come fresh off the street, innocents, if you will, who cannot help but be affected by the dislocations of materials, space, and details the building offers.

Whereas Freed's purpose was to keep the building "open-ended" in order to facilitate a variety of responses, including the very real possibility of a regressive return to the Imaginary or the Real, the design committee felt that their purpose was to screen the trauma (the Real), while apparently understanding that in this process they would also be pointing to it. Thus, they even seemed to understand the risk involved in this process. Once pointed to, the Real could leak out. And because the Real can leak out, their tactic can be seen as a screening one, a defensive stance against the return of the Real. In this way, the museum appears to support the *phantasized encounter* on the part of the visitor. But it is a phantasized encounter that the Museum attempts to control and manage.

In its attempt to control the phantasized encounter as a counter-measure against a possible "invasion" from the Real, the Museum brought the trauma of the Holocaust to Washington, infused it with American ideals, and then, through a strict unbending narrative, corralled it and named it.[346] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a museum that sets out to present the Holocaust through a spatial narrative that positions the trauma within a parable of United States citizenship.[347] If this intent were ever in doubt, it is clearly reiterated in the undisputed Memorial portion of the museum. This is the last site of the visitor's tour. In that minimal, quiet space, devoid of any distractions, the death of six million Jews is written into an American story.[348] In the earth beneath the

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[346]This defensive stance was seen to benefit both survivors who might visit the space and individuals who were born after the Holocaust and to whom the return of the Real could be misconstrued. For them, the return of the Real may not happen from the victim's point of view. It was important to guard against the return of the perpetrator's and the bystander's Real as well. See Figure 73, a political cartoon by Dana Summers points to the potential of "misreadings" of the museum. Reproduced in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 265

[347]Crysler & Kusno. "Angels in the Temple," 52.

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memorial structure, a wall plaque tells us, dirt from thirty-nine death camps in Europe is mixed and buried with dirt from Arlington National Cemetery. The lesson of the "moral drama"[349] that the visitor has just "witnessed" in the permanent exhibit of the museum can be summarized as follows: while Americans may not have died in places such as Birkenau and Dachau, their ideals were certainly murdered there.

We have also seen that in order to fix the "American" wound within the far-reaching and unwieldy trauma of the Holocaust, the museum employs a strict narrative and uses a strategy that relies on a mixture of film, photography, recorded oral histories, material artifacts, and architectural space (these somewhat begrudgingly). In both concept and technique, the museum creates—in essence insists upon—a fixed-subject position for the visitor who comes into the space. That fixed-subject position is the ubiquitous "American," the "typical family from Iowa." Throughout the long and extended planning phase of the museum project, this visitor was conceptualized as visually sophisticated but historically naive, a viewer who would be comfortable with televisual mediums but not be accustomed to seeing the type of horror that marks the Holocaust.[350]

All of the strategies the museum employs—the use of evidentiary material such as photographs and real objects (as opposed to representations); the adherence to a strict, and for the most part, linear narrative; and, especially, the anchoring of the museum encounter to a perceived unified community—can be seen as attempts on the part of the museum to ward against the excesses that accompany any signifying task. During the planning stages, in fact, there was great concern that visitors might come to the museum and take the wrong subject position (as satirized in Figure 73) or that the story-line would

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[348]The use of "death" in the singular is purposeful here as the six million Jews assume a single entity status that is balanced against the single noble U.S. soldier.

[349]Hayden White describes the exhibit as a "moral drama." See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 250.

[350]The belief on the part of the USHMM was that only by fixing the subject position of the visitor were they able to anchor the Holocaust to a specific historical moment. Of course, this objective was a problem from the start and the intent to keep a fixed subject position is reflected more in a constant reassertion of that position in the museum display instead of a steady, sure, and constant point of view.

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be so open-ended or so plagued with obvious reproductions (in contrast to genuine artifacts) that Holocaust deniers would use the museum's displays to build their own arguments.[351] During the planning of the museum, a number of *potential encounters* were considered (and sometimes bitterly fought over) and rejected. Some of these encounters even became forbidden.[352] This process of selection and rejection was governed by a perceived need to control the viewer's *phantasized encounter* by removing any extraneous material that might facilitate these types of Imaginary reconstructions. Thus the conception of the museum became spare, not visually overwrought. Surprisingly, however, the need to control a variety of responses was achieved by reducing the potential visitor to either a survivor or a typical family from Iowa.[353] Likewise, the psyche of the potential visitor was also reduced to an apparatus that operated in either-or responses. The "open-endedness" of the display program at the USHMM became a description not of a site that solicited a multitude of responses (as was the case for Freed in the design of his building) but one that solicited a generic all-encompassing type response, a very much-controlled phantasized encounter.

Not surprisingly, the clash of purposes between the architect and his building versus the planning committee and their displays creates an immediate environment that acts to disrupt any attempt to keep the museum experience firmly planted in the Symbolic realm. Whether it is the constant return to the trauma as triggered by the architecture or the constantly slipping screen that the display committee attempts to

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[351]Which of course already points to holes in the museum's conceptualization of the visitor as a unified "American" subject.

[352]Such as the prohibition, imposed by Director Jeshajahu Weinberg, against showing genitalia. These rejected and forbidden encounters, "remainders," if you will, were carefully identified in advance and relegated to those "other spaces" that the museum revels in, which in the case of this particular museum are realized in The Wexler Learning Center and a large storeroom in Maryland.

[353]The third visitor acknowledged in the initial planning process is one who ends up haunting the displays, even if he or she is not always acknowledged. This is the Nazi sympathizer.

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erect to ward off the "forbidden" effects of that trauma, it would seem that any attempts on the part of the USHMM to act solely as a trauma abreactor are doomed from the start.

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. . . becoming seeks bodies[354]

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TOUR OF THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION AT THE USHMM

Introduction

Before turning to an analysis of how the museum functions for the visitor (as opposed to how it functions to fulfill the museum's intended purpose) an in-depth description of the permanent display can bring coherence to the very complex and long visual display the museum offers. In this chapter the reader is taken step by step through the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The exhibit chronicles the "state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933-1945."[355] The tour is self-guided and is advertised as being two to three hours long. The description here is based on a performative interpretation and simulates an actual visit. It may, therefore, vary at times from a strict spatial chronology.[356] In other words, the tour is guided by the rich visual mélange that crowds the spaces *and* by the congregation of people who stop and stare at certain aspects of the exhibit and thus act as a lure to other visitors to stop and stare, too. It is the combination of the people in the space and the display itself that helps to direct our vision throughout the display. In addition, we will see that vision is not the only sense that is activated in the USHMM. The tour through

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[354]Allan Weiss, "Dolls of Nedjar," presentation at the College Art Association Annual Meeting, New York City, 1997.

[355]United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. Visitor's Guide (Brochure), 2001.

[356]The reader is directed to Figures 76-79 for floor maps to the exhibit in order to understand the strict spatial chronology of the display elements.

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the permanent exhibit also engages the senses of hearing, smell and, to a lesser degree, touch.

Given all the sensory appeals and/or assaults (depending on our perspective) in the museum, it is clear that any description of a "generic visit" will ultimately fail. Each visit is marked by its own set of performative circumstances, including the number of people in the space, the time of day, and even the number of foreigners in the space (which may introduce foreign languages into our auditory field). The following narrative should be viewed, then, as a place to start a discussion about the experience of some visitors to the space and not as a master-narrative for a "universal visit."[357] It will become apparent in the chronicling of even a single visit that the possibility of a universal experience does not exist for this particular museum. (This may true for any museum that sets out to chronicle history.)

The Visit to the Permanent Exhibition

The actual visit to the permanent display takes approximately three hours.[358] As we enter the museum and move into the grand Hall of Witness, it is not immediately apparent where the exhibit begins, and most people have to ask at the information desk prominently positioned in the Hall. We are directed to a bank of elevators at the back of one of the side walls (Figure 76). Entrance to the exhibit is limited by time periods, and visitors must wait until it is their time to enter.[359] As we walk to the elevators that will

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[357]The tour that follows should, in fact, be read as a tour by the museum's target audience—the typical family from Iowa. It is not the visit of a survivor, perpetrator, liberator, or even a family member of one of these subject groups. The present author would represent a member of the target audience with the exception of the Midwest origin. She is a second-generation Midwesterner.

[358]Except where noted, this description of the exhibit that follows is based on the author's visit to the museum on April 21, 2001. Visits were also made in 1994, 1998, and 2002. I am indebted to those who accompanied me on these visits or who offered comments after their own independent visits to the USHMM including, Ariel Patt, Deborah Cullen, and Melinda Smith Altshuler.

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take us to the fourth floor, where the display begins, we pass a table of small booklets. The cover of each booklet states that it is an "Identification Card" (Figure 35).[360] We are encouraged to pick up one of these booklets, each of which tells the life of a Holocaust victim. The idea is that we will follow—and perhaps share—the life of this individual by reading pages of the booklet at marked times throughout the exhibit.[361]

When we enter the elevator, the interior maintains the visual language of the Holocaust in a stripped-down version. The interior of the elevator is a combination of steel and bare bulbs, like an interrogation chamber. At the top of the elevator is a small video screen that begins by showing footage of Americans liberating the death camps (Figure 36). We hear a voice somewhere behind us; presumably this is one of the soldiers we are seeing on the screen. He describes his first encounter of the death camps:

> The patrol leader called in by radio and said that we have come across something that we are not sure what it is. It's a big prison of some kind, and there are people running all over. Sick, dying, starved people. And you take an American, uh, such a sight as that, you...you can't imagine it. You, you just...things like that don't happen.[362]

As the slow-moving elevator reaches its destination, it comes to a stop and lingers in stillness before the doors open, thereby heightening our anticipation. The doors open

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[359]Entrance to the museum is free, but when visitors arrive, each individual must obtain a ticket with a time to enter stamped on it. Because tickets often run out, many people pre-order tickets and pick them up when they arrive. Although the time-determined entrance is common at many museums in the United States, it operates at this museum as the first instance of how a visitor's movement is controlled through the exhibit.

[360]Once again, the language here is ambiguous. It is in fact a card that identifies the individual described in the book, but it is has been incorporated into the exhibit as a means of having the visitor identify with a specific victim of the Holocaust.

[361]The Identity-Card Project was initially developed as a computer-based interactive project. The "Identity Card" was to be fed into "updating stations" on each floor. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 304. The computers proved to be troublesome, however, and now the visitor just picks up a completed booklet at the beginning of the exhibit. Visitors are encouraged to read segments as they move through the three floors. There are 558 cards, 260 representing people who died and 298 who survived, although these numbers may somewhat inaccurate. I have obtained seven cards during my visits to the museums and all the victims represented in my Identity Cards were "survivors."

[362]Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 166. As in the rest of the permanent display, all sound is separated out from the videos. Long square tubes project from the ceiling, in this case the elevator's ceiling, and direct the sound to a very specific place, functioning almost as a cone of sound with an eerie dead silence surrounding it. The effect is disorienting.

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to an oversized black and white photographic image (Figure 37). To the right of the photograph are large display letters that spell out THE HOLOCAUST. The photograph shows the charred remains of victims in a cremation pyre. Behind this pile of bodies stands a row of soldiers staring straight ahead at the pyre. Their distance from the smoldering fire is equal to our own distance from the photograph as we first confront the image, a device that acts to arrest our movement as we begin to exit the elevator (Figure 38). The wall text next to the photograph reads: "Shortly after liberating the Ohrduf concentration camp in Central Germany, American troops encounter the charred remains of prisoners. April 1945. National Archives, Washington, D.C." To the left of the photograph is a short film, in grainy color that depicts trains arriving at Dachau, bodies in the trains and German prisoners. It is a 45-second loop with no sound.[363]

Directly across from the film is a display of concentration camp uniforms. They have been cleaned and pressed and even the arms are stuffed the way dry cleaners do to maintain a form (Figure 40). One of the uniforms is turned around so that you can see the patches that have been sewn on it.[364] The signage for the uniforms is as follows:

> THE VICTIMS: The Nazi State victimized untold numbers of people, forcing them from their homes, and confining them in prison camps. These uniforms were worn by concentration camp prisoners. On loan from the State Museum Poland or donated by individual survivors.

In this small antechamber both the formal and ideological mission of the museum are thus set up and the three large components, photographs, film/video, and artifacts, are presented. The photographs and film that initiated the exhibit and the photographs that

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[363]This sequence is all film with no stills and includes some color segments. There is no sound. The film title is listed as *Dachau* by George Steven. The images are as follows:

Trains with bodies.
American soldiers photographing bodies.
German guards being led away with hands up.
Close-up of German guards, including female guards.

[364] This is the first instance of metonymy in the museum. The uniforms are in a three-story shaft. At the end of the journey, we see these uniforms again in such similar configuration that it is almost a *déjà vu* experience. The uniforms are the bookends to the exhibit.

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confront us as we round the corner[365] were all taken in Germany, which doubly compounds the Germanness of the crimes.[366] Likewise, from the first use of "American" in the elevator to the first photographs of American soldiers, (one that even depicts a future president of the United States)[367], it is clear that America is the representation of "good" in opposition to German "evil." The third element in the conceptual triad is, of course, the Jews. They have been depicted only as charred body parts or as "living" corpses in the liberated camps. Or they are the completely absent bodies in the uniform display.

As we turn the first corner of the exhibition path, we are confronted by the sound of men singing in German. As our eyes adjust to the light, we find ourselves facing images (both photographic and video) sparingly mixed with artifacts that advance down a long corridor to the left. To our right are photographs of pre-Nazi Germany. This is the only place we see Germany before the rise of Hitler.[368] On the left side of the room is a small room in which a continuous film on the rise of Nazism in Germany is shown. From its placement on the side of the room, it is clear that entering the space and viewing this film is an optional component of the exhibit. In truth, we spend little if any time with the images on our right or left (in the film room), for we are drawn to the film with sound elements straight in front of us (Figure 41). As in the elevator, the sound is separated out from the moving images. The "sound tube" is located about 10 feet back from the monitor.

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[365]These photographs include one of Eisenhower at Ohrduf (standing in front of prison bodies) and a camp prisoner being fed a meal at Buchenwald.

[366] Thus, it becomes easier to conflate the Nazis with the German people. It would have been a clearer of equation of Nazi=evilness, for instance, if the Nazis had been shown invading Poland.

[367]Eisenhower, surrounded by American troops, "inspects" inmates' bodies.

[368]There is no attempt to delineate the social and economic problems in Germany following World War I and the Great Depression before Hitler. I am assuming this would lessen the "guilt" factor and chip away at the pure "evilness" of the Holocaust that the museum is trying to advance. The effect is that evil just appeared out of nowhere. It is only the first of many ambivalent messages about the Holocaust, and whether it was a uniquely evil event or whether, given the right set of circumstances, it could happen again.

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In actuality, the sound acts more as a backdrop to the images. This is so, first, because the sound is largely composed of the German words, and, second, because the video, like all the videos in the display, is subtitled, with white lettering that occupies up to a quarter of the bottom of the screen.[369] The film segments are non-sequential.[370] Although the sound does seem to line up with the on-screen sequence it relates to, the skewed angles in the hall make the sound seem to "move" with us, thereby creating a visual/auditory disjunction. Visitors to the exhibit appear to linger at this video, perhaps because of the sound sequence or the bits of color film that make this video stand out from the black and white photographs that surround it, or simply because it is early in the display and we have not yet become tired. In any case, this film creates the first of many bottlenecks in the flow, and to move ahead we must walk around other people.[371]

Now we enter a long corridor in which the exhibit is placed behind floor-to-ceiling sheets of glass (Figure 42).[372] The corridor is separated into segments, indicated by sheets of thick glass that jut out from the wall, and the effect is ceiling-high vitrines. The divisions created by the glass are also insistently maintained by the wall text.

The darkness of the corridor contrasted to the bright lights directed on each "vitrine" also makes for a cinematic effect.[373] Each segment is given a title. Under the title

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[369]Generally, these subtitles are descriptive or narrative and are NOT translations of German sequences.

[370]This sequence is all B&W film with no stills. There is some sound (as noted). The images are as follows:

Marching music and cheering heard behind a cheering crowd.
Crowd sings German anthem.
Background talking, shuffling, with images of a Nazi Cabinet meeting
Hitler heard while he talks between cabinet members (unofficial talk)

[371] The bottleneck acts to alert us that we are in a self-regulating exhibit. On my first visit to the museum in 1994, it was at this spot that I realized there were no museum guards or docents or other "representatives" to work crowd control.

[372]The large amount of glass gives the display a dangerous feel and makes an oblique reference to *Kristallnacht*. The display and explanation of that historical moment greets you at the end of this display corridor.

[373]The effect could also be registered as an interrogation chamber.

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is a text rendered in smaller font than the title, and then generally under that there is a continuation of text in even small font. Each segment in this corridor is dominated by photographs,[374] often laid out in strips to appear as film stills. Generally, there is also a monitor with a subtitled video segment. Most, but not all, of the segments include at least one artifact. There are slightly more Nazi than victim artifacts in this first corridor. We move through segments that include **The Terror Begins, Boycott of Jewish Businesses, Banned Books, Nazi Propaganda, The Science of Race, Jewish Decrees**, and **Jewish Responses**. Most of these exhibits are very ordered, and if they include literature or books they are laid out on tables. The one exception is the display of banned books, which are scattered on the floor. Behind them stands a large photograph of a Nazi-sanctioned book burning (Figure 43).[375]

Midway along this corridor we encounter the second sound video. This is a mesmerizing mix of Nazi youth singing and Goebbels giving a speech.[376] The rhythm is hypnotizing. Here we encounter our second bottleneck in the movement of visitors.

At the end of this first long corridor is a red and white striped border gate. Although we can see the rest of the exhibit beyond the bar, it is clear that we must turn and follow the flow of traffic in another direction. As we round the corner, we enter a large room, where the first thing we hear is Hitler giving a speech.[377] The video monitor is

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[374]The image that jumps out at us the moment we turn the corner is of an SS officer with a German shepherd. The menacing dog meets us at eye level, and his muzzle underlines his aggressiveness. It is also uncannily reminiscent of the light bulb coverings we have just seen in the elevator that brought us up to the beginning of the exhibit.

[375]This begins a trend seen throughout the display. The Nazi part of the narrative is orderly and displayed at waist or above level, whereas artifacts of the victims are often scattered on the floor.

[376]This sequence is all B&W film, with no stills, and with sound as noted. The images are as follows:

Marching music behind a crowd.
Goebbels giving a speech in front of a crowd.
Clapping by crowd.
More Goebbels speaking
More clapping

(As we face this film the sound from a film behind us interferes. It is Hitler's voice giving a speech, interspersed with clapping)

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on the opposite wall, and some viewers simply cut across the room to watch the film (Figure 44).[378] Because of this film, it is easy to miss the exhibit to the left of the room, which focuses on "Enemies of the State" and the one to the right, which focuses on *Kristallnacht.*[379] The wall text for the "Enemies" exhibit is as follows:

> During the 1930's the Nazis singled out various groups for persecution: Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists, liberals, pacifists, clergy, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Roma, Czechs, Poles, Soviet Union, mentally and physically disabled."[380]

Adjacent to this list of general enemies is another text that focuses on Roma (gypsies) and includes what is billed as an authentic gypsy wagon.[381] Behind us, as we face the wagon, in the center of the room is a Plexiglas-box on the floor. This box contains the fragments of a Torah damaged during *Kristallnacht.* The Torah is opened so that we

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[377]In actuality, we begin to hear this speech in the preceding room, before we even ever enter the room with the film that accompanies the sound.

[378]This sequence is all B&W film, with no stills, and with sound as noted. The images are as follows:

Marching music, with Hitler youth.
Youth reciting loyalty oath.
Hitler speaking
Cheering crowds.
Hitler speaking.
Cheering crowds.
Singing by Hitler Youth.
Youth cheering.
Youth marching.

[379]In this room, we first encounter display text titles in quotation marks. The titles of both displays are rendered in quotes on the wall. This would seem to indicate another "voice." Is this an authoritative voice or a voice that is being questioned? Or is it that the "truth-value" is being questioned?

[380]This list is almost a perfect reversal of the order in which these people were persecuted. In other words, those appearing at the bottom of the list were persecuted earlier and with more vehemence than those at the top of the list.

[381]Neither Weinberg nor Linenthal give a clear indication as to why Gypsies were singled out for display here. Weinberg's book asserts that the museum was "the first Holocaust museum to present, in the framework of an encompassing portrayal of the Holocaust, material on the victimization of homosexuals." Weinberg also points out that a "gay academician" continues to assist the museum in securing exhibits and eyewitness testimonies about the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust (161-162). Given this testament, it is surprising that the museum decided to use this display moment to focus on gypsies, a group that may not have much relevance for the visiting U.S. audience, instead of gay people. The number of Holocaust deaths claimed for each group varies greatly. Between 200,000 and 500,000 Romani (gypsies) were killed during the Holocaust, Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 247-248. Statistics for gays and lesbians have varied between 15,000 and 1 million, Ibid., 188.

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can see its slashed surface and is arranged in a scattered manner on the bottom of the box. (Figure 46) The wall panel dedicated to *Kristallnacht* is behind the Torah display and can easily be missed, given the diversion of the Hitler sound bite and the narrow passage between the text and the Plexiglas box.[382] The wall text title is again set off with quotation marks, "Kristallnacht," and the text begins with the sentence, "The pogroms were given the name Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass)..."

As we return to the video and sound that focus on Adolf Hitler, we encounter a wall display of black and white photographs that illustrate Hitler's rise to power. Behind these photographs, and behind a gridded iron gate, we can see a very large Nazi flag hanging on the wall (Figure 44). A wall text tells us that this "banner" flew over Hitler's mountain retreat.[383]

Next to the Hitler exhibit is a segment that focuses on Exiles. Here we see a display of passports, some black and white photographs, and a video that scrolls still photographs of famous exiles with their names and occupations given in subtitles on the bottom of the screen.

We have almost reached the end of the first half of the first floor of the exhibit, and it is only at this point that we find the first reference to the beginning of the war. A small display presents the start of the war with the invasion of Poland in 1939. At the end of this narrow passageway is a large photograph of German soldiers leading blindfolded men. In front of the photograph is a tree stump on the floor behind a very low containing wall (Figure 47).[384] The wall text reads:

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[382]The Kristallnacht display had been moved to a more prominent position in this same room before my March 2002 visit to the museum.

[383]Because the flag is hidden, we are forced to have a more intimate encounter with it. See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 199, regarding the design committee debate over Nazi memorabilia.

[384] The tree stump is not behind glass or Plexiglas. On two separate visits to the Museum, I witnessed a visitor leaning over and touching the stump. An alarm went off even as the person drew back. In both instances, no museum "official" emerged to either assess the situation or to turn off the alarm. The alarm automatically turned off after about two minutes.

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> In the spring of 1940, the Nazi occupation authorities in Poland initiated a campaign by all Polish priests, teachers, writers, artists, politicians, and suspected resistance members. The photograph was taken shortly before these SS men killed their blindfolded captives. This tree stump marked the site of a mass grave near the village of Palmiry in Poland. German security police executed almost 2,000 Poles there in 1939 and 1940.

Across from this display is a large wall text purported to be a comment by Hitler:

> I have issued the command—and I'll have anybody who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad—that our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction of the enemy. Accordingly, I have placed my death-head formations in readiness—for the present only in the east—with orders to them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space [Lebensraum] which we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians.[385]

After we turn a sharp corner, we find ourselves standing in a large room. There is a bench in the center of the room, the first time a place is offered to visitors for sitting and contemplation. On the left side of the room is a large display dedicated to the physically and mentally disabled. The display is dominated by a hospital bed with shackles and belts attached. Next to the bed is a physician's smock that has been cleaned and pressed and is display on a mannequin form. The text outlines how the physically and mentally disabled were the first victims of systematic Nazi murder under a code-named "Operation T-4." Since the first floor is laid out chronologically, we are to assume this operation occurred after the Polish invasion, although it appears as a sort of non sequitur.[386] In the same room, across from the hospital display, is a series of maps that outline the progress of

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[385] There are two points in this quote worth noting. The first is the decision to insert the German word *Lebenraum* in the text. This is generally done when there is no comparable English word or concept, which is not the case in this example, or to exert a sense of authority and/or authenticity. One suspects that it might have been retained here to point to the "Germanness" of the Final Solution. The second thing is that it is only in this quote by Hitler that the plight of the Armenians is acknowledged in what many people feel was a Holocaust of equal severity. The museum decided to not give any attention to the Armenian plight. The controversy over using a quote by Hitler as a massive wall text was solved by rendering the text flush to the wall, in distinction to other large wall quotes that are formed out of raised letters. I must confess that I never noticed the distinction on any of my many visits to the exhibit.

[386] In historical fact, persecution of the mentally ill occurred in Germany before the invasion of Poland.

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Hitler's army as it invaded European countries. To the right of these maps is a large photograph of Hitler and his generals in the field.

We now walk across a bridge that connects one half of the building with the other. In this bridge, which is made of made entirely of glass, are etched the names of European cities Jews lived in before the Holocaust. These city names act to enclose the space (Figure 25).

About three quarters of the way across the bridge, there is a break in the names that allows us to look out into the space beyond.[387] We are looking at the top of the atrium of the Hall of Witness. The space is opened to an architectural feature that resembles a skeletal passageway. The ghostly passageway bisects the ceiling space creating a visual reference to the main entrance to Birkenau (Figure 48). In this way, it also mirrors the stairway in the Hall of Witness. The only difference is that this skeletal passageway is twisted, as if it has been through a fire that melted and distorted the metal (Figure 49).

After crossing the bridge, we enter into a series of four rooms. The first two rooms contain small cubicles. This section is titled "American responses." Each cubicle has room for three people who sit on a bench and face a monitor. There are three phone-like listening devices with buttons used to select different programs. Outside of each cubicle a large monitor is suspended from the ceiling at about eight feet from the floor. It repeats the program from the enclosed cubicle under it only, unlike the cubicles, the sound is audible to everyone that passes by. All narration for these programs is provided by a male, American voice.

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[387] The glass bridges were particularly problematic for the designers. In order to connect the bridges to the permanent exhibition, the design team etched the names of perished Jewish communities and first names of Holocaust victims on their surfaces. In doing so, though, they undermined the architect's intention for these bridges to be experienced as watchtowers. The eye is arrested on the surface of the glass, not drawn to the space beyond the transparent barrier. The opening in the names that allows for a view of the twisted metal seems to be some kind of visual compromise.

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The third room is empty except for an object described as the Scroll of Esther in the center of the room. No source or attribution is given.

We next enter into the last room of the first floor. This is a tall tower-like structure (which we will learn later runs through the three floors of the permanent exhibition). The walls of this room are covered with photographs taken between 1890 and 1941 in Eishishok, a small town in Lithuania (Figure 50). These photographs chronicle the lives of the town's predominantly Jewish residents, who in two days in 1941 were rounded up by an SS mobile killing squad and murdered. The photographs are arranged like a patchwork quilt, mixing black and white, sepia, hand-colored, and colored images (Figure 51). The quilt effect is heightened by the fact that we can only make out a pattern as it moves up the wall and the subjects are no longer visible. Many of the photographs at the top of the room are, in fact, smaller than the ones at eye level. At this point the exhibition draws its strength from the authority of the archive, and only secondarily from any individual photograph.[388] The floor of this room has been removed, and we are standing on a glass bottomed bridge. We pass through the room on this bridge, which enables us to look over the side and down into the other two floors of photographs.

After we have passed through the tower of photographs, we find ourselves in a hallway, where we walk down a flight of stairs to the third floor and into an irregularly-shaped foyer that displays artwork. Here we find the commissioned work of Ellsworth Kelly, whose characteristic pie-shaped canvases are painted white (Figure 52). Although there are a few places to sit in this quiet space set up for contemplation, most people pass right through barely acknowledging the art.[389]

We are now on the third floor of the building and the second floor of the permanent exhibit. This part of the display is dedicated to the Holocaust. As previously

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[388]The photographs visually echo the AIDS Quilt that had periodically been displayed right outside the door of this museum.

[389]For a discussion of the art in the USHMM, Johnson, "Art and Memory."

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mentioned, it is organized thematically and not chronologically or geographically. The first thing we notice as we enter this floor is that the material under foot changes from smooth granite to cobblestone. Soon we must mount a wooden bridge (with a wooden floor, Figure 53) that takes us past images of Poles wearing armbands that identified them as Jewish on the one side and an image of people crossing a wooden bridge in the Warsaw ghetto (much like the bridge we now find ourselves standing on). We make a quick turn to the right and find ourselves on a long expanse of the bridge and surrounded by several exhibits on Jewish ghetto life. On our left is a casting of the wall that surrounded Warsaw's Jewish sector (this is one of the few items in the Museum that is not an authentic artifact). In front of it is the gate from a Jewish cemetery in Tarnow and a milk can, one of two that were buried in the Warsaw ghetto to preserve secretly kept documents. On the right we pass a model of the Warsaw ghetto that was hidden and transported in a fairly ordinary looking suitcase. Besides a model of the ghetto the suitcase contains seals and money used in the ghetto. Above the model is a series of monitors that scroll still photos (Figure 54).[390] As we move down this elevated bridge, traffic begins to get clogged again and often comes to a standstill.

At the end of the first leg of the bridge are three more monitors. Two are behind low walls, whereas the other is completely open to inspection (Figure 55). A short

[390]As noted above, the monitor programs consist of photographic images that have been "filmed." A still image comes on the screen for about 3-5 seconds and then is replaced by another still image that comes on the screen, etc. The effect is one of scanning a wall of images or of slowing down a film so that each frame is scrolled past the viewer.

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sequence of still photographs has been transferred to video on 90-second loops.[391] People push and shove to look over the low wall, which has been placed there to keep very young children from seeing the images. The wall that was intended as a shield, however, acts instead to attract voyeurism.[392] The monitor that is not behind the wall shows images from Babi Yar. The distinction between the images on this screen and the ones on the hidden screens is not an easy one to make. As we push past the people who are stalled in the tour, we make a tight turn, and this is one of the first times in the exhibit that we hear other museum visitors, partly because there are so many of them bumping right up next to us.

When we walk down this next leg of the bridge, we see a railroad car in front of us. The bridge goes all the way to the middle of the railroad car, inviting us to enter it. There is also, however, a turn on the bridge that allows visitors to bypass the railroad car altogether.[393] Most people move down the bridge and into the railroad car. As we pass through the car, we become aware of the very strong smell, a combination of old wood and dead organic matter that we assume must be the residue of dead human bodies. There

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[391]The film sequences on the bridge combine B&W film with B&W stills and do not include sound. The images on the three screens are as follows:

THE KILLING SQUADS	ACCOMPLICES	BABI YAR
Burying the dead.	Stills of bodies with text.	Stills of digging.
Running away.	Bodies, female, nude.	Aerial views of graves.
Women's backs, lined up.	Nude female clasping hands.	Narrative story with text retelling massacre.
Stills of victims lined up ready to be shot.	Backs of nude women.	
Naked corpses.	Stills of bodies.	
Head of a victim (beheaded and held up).		
Quivering body dying.		
Blood from a dead body.		

[392]The permanent exhibit is recommended for children eleven years and older. An eleven year old could easily see over the wall. A six year old may have more difficulty. Thus, the effect of the wall is not to protect the young from its images (the three times I went to the exhibit I saw no young children) but to invite voyeurism.

[393]Presumably, this choice was created for survivors who might find the interior of the railroad car too traumatic.

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is no air conditioning in the railroad car, and the temperature difference from outside to inside is startling. Most people do not linger in this part of the exhibit.

Standing in the middle of the railroad car, we can look out and see a huge photomural of the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau (Figure 56). The perspective captured in the photograph is uncannily our own.[394] As we walk across the small bridge that connects the railroad car to the floor of the exhibit, we notice suitcases scattered about with surnames and dates on them (Figure 57). Labels identify them as coming from Auschwitz.[395] Crossing the bridge and making the left turn leads us back to the exhibit. We notice here that the floor has returned to granite.

Ahead, we see a cast of the famous *Arbeit Macht Frei* fence that stands in Auschwitz I in Poland. Wall text next to it announces **The Concentration Camp Universe**, reasserting the universality of this fence as a symbol of the entire Holocaust (Figure 58).[396] Positioned right in front of this famous gate are artifacts confiscated by the SS from prisoners at Auschwitz, including umbrellas, prayer shawls, eyeglasses, and artificial limbs and leg braces. The artifacts are scattered on shelves, all of which are behind glass. There are also wall images of prisoners arriving at Auschwitz. Most of these photographs depict women, children, and the aged, the groups that were usually singled out for immediate death. Other photographs are of the prisoners (all men) who were kept as workers at Auschwitz.

As we move forward, we are given three choices to continue our journey. We can turn left and enter a reconstructed barrack from Auschwitz. We can turn right and enter a

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[394]This is a large photomural similar in size to the image that opened the display. Our presence at the opening of the railroad car places us, however, in the subject position of the victim, not the liberator.

[395]Their scattered positions at the foot of the boxcar are a visual metonymy of dead bodies.

[396] As Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt have pointed out in their comprehensive study of Auschwitz, this fence was rarely seen by the thousands of Jews who were gassed at Auschwitz. The gate was located at Auschwitz I, which remained largely a prison camp for Poles. Jews were taken to Auschwitz II (Birkenau), 1/4 mile away. They never saw this fence. *Auschwitz: 1270-Present* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996).

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glass-enclosed room with a large photomural on the back wall of Birkenau gate and the title "Voices from Auschwitz" on the glass wall. Here we can hear stories of survivors from Auschwitz (Figure 59). Except for the large photomural depicting the entrance to Birkenau, there are no visuals in this room, only taped voices that spill out into the corridor. The third option for movement is straight ahead, where we see a wall with an aerial photograph of what turns out to be Auschwitz-Birkenau.[397]

Most people turn left and enter the barrack. This structure is simple, with a set of bunks on the left and the right (Figure 60). In the center of the barrack is a cement, four-walled well (Figure 61). Inside the well are three video monitors that show "medical experiments" recorded by the Nazis.[398] This "privacy" structure creates the second real bottleneck in the second floor of the exhibit, as people tend to linger at this spot for quite awhile. They seem trance-like, mesmerized, which only acts to draw more people to the well. The walls are four feet high, once again not quite high enough to block the vision of most eleven-years-olds, presumably the youngest people at the exhibit. In addition, the corners of the well do not perfectly join which allows us (particularly small children) to

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[397]This is the famous aerial view of the Auschwitz complex that confirmed what American intelligence already suspected—that Germans had a tremendous killing operation going on in the back woods of Poland. The surveillance photograph would figure prominently in the American decision to not intervene by bombing. None of this controversy is referenced in the exhibit.

[398]The images are fragmentary and do not show any entire experiments actually taking place. Instead, they are close-up images of women, children, and men, sometimes with printed text below the image, which only identifies the subject of each image. For instance, an image of a man simply reads, "dwarf who was a Jewish teacher." The B&W film sequence with no sound displays the following images:

Body parts lined up in a container (filmed sequence).
Stacked cadavers (filmed sequence).
Still of emaciated young children.
Another still of even more emaciated children.
Filmed sequence of a young woman with a flawless face and deformed body.
"Extreme" temperature experiments on men, as noted by text (filmed sequence).
"Extreme" air experiments on a single individual (male), as noted by text (filmed sequence).
Another air experiment sequence (film sequence).
Film sequence of a skull that is opened on the top (unclear is the person is dead or not) to reveal the brain.
Injections of children with sea water (stills).
Still image of a "dwarf who was a Jewish teacher," as noted by text.

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"sneak" a look through the corner cracks. As in the shielded videos on the bridge, the space here becomes congested, as the people linger at the well.

As we pass out of the barrack, we encounter a model of the killing process at Birkenau (Figure 62).[399] The model is entirely white. It is made out of plaster, cast from a clay model. The small figures that represent the victims of the Holocaust are rendered crudely with few features (Figure 63). In one section of the model, the prisoners enter the crematorium and undress. In another section they are depicted being gassed, with a representational license that depicts them as "melting." In the last section, they are shown as they are put into the crematorium ovens. On the wall above the model of the killing process is a large photomural of women unknowingly waiting for execution in the woods that surrounded Auschwitz. We next walk past the aerial photograph on the back wall that presented itself before we made the turn into the barracks. Very few people retrace the path back to the entrance of the audio display, "Voices from Auschwitz."

Here we cross another glass bridge to get to the other side. This bridge, very similar to the first, has the first names of victims etched on its sides (Figure 25).[400] Next we pass through the four rooms that make up the towers. In the first room, we walk into a room of shoes (Figure 64). The shoes are not behind Plexiglas or glass, and the smell of musty rubber is overwhelming. The display text claims the shoes were confiscated from prisoners in Majdanek. On the wall behind the shoes is a poem by a "Yiddish poet,"[401] Moses Schulstein:

> *We are the shoes, we are the last witnesses.*
> *We are shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers.*
> *From Prague, Paris, and Amsterdam.*
> *And because we are only made of fabric and leather.*

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[399]The museum commissioned sculptor Jan Stobierski to re-create the scale model of the killing process, which has been on display at the Auschwitz Museum for many years.

[400]In using first names, the bridge references the AIDS Quilt more than the Vietnam Memorial.

[401]"Yiddish" poet is a designation given by the museum. Although Yiddish is not an "ethnic" type, it is used for Schulstein because he wrote poetry in Yiddish.

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And not of blood and flesh, each one of us avoided the hellfire.

The poem is mirrored on the opposite wall in Hebrew.[402]

The next room has an unusual set-up. A wall is used to block an exhibit that, according to the semiotics of this particular museum, would indicate that what is to be seen behind it is shocking. What we see behind the wall is a photomural of sheared hair as it is found in a display at Auschwitz (Figure 65).

Another room displays a replica of a crematorium from the Austrian concentration camp of Mauthausen. Opposite the ovens is a quotation from Elie Wiesel, framed by two barbed wire posts from Auschwitz:

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night. Seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God himself. Never.

Finally, once again we pass into the Tower of Faces that we first encountered on the first floor of the exhibit. This ends the second floor of the permanent exhibition.

We venture down spiral stairs to a foyer at the beginning of the third floor of the exhibit, where we encounter another work of art commissioned by the museum. This is by Sol Lewitt and consists of a series of canvases that are painted various shades of gray (Figure 66). There are places to sit in this pie-shaped space but few visitors stop.[403]

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[402]This is the only museum text that has been translated to Hebrew, or any other language for that matter. Poetry runs throughout the museum, often in large wall texts such as this. There is so much poetry, in fact, that one cannot help but think it is placed in opposition to or at least in conversation with Theodor Adorno's famous dictum about the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz. "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." Adorno, *Prisms*, 34.

[403]By this time most people also have to use the restroom. Although there are restrooms on each floor, the restroom at the start of this last section of the exhibit is the one that is always full.

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Finally, we enter the last floor of the exhibit. The first part of the floor is given to rescuers of Jews in Poland, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Denmark, among other countries. It includes a display of an actual boat used by Danes to rescue the Jews in their country. There is also a large wall dividing the first room of the exhibit that shows the names and biographies of rescuers (Figure 67). Few people stop to read it. Generally, we are pretty tired by now, having been in the museum for over two hours. We move to the end of the first long corridor and see an exhibit dedicated to the Jewish resistance. We see a display of tree trunks taken from Rudniki Forest, which sheltered the largest group of Jewish partisans in Soviet-occupied territory. In a glass display case are some of the resistance fighters' weapons, and a small video screen, placed as low as the vitrine, shows images of resistance fighters, including a woman, Bruskina, who is being hanged (Figure 68).[404] When we double back around, we come to the back of the free-standing wall that bisects the long corridor and read more about the Jewish rescuers.

At the end of that corridor, as we prepare to turn right, we see an almost exact duplicate display of the concentration camp uniforms that marked the beginning of the permanent display. In this case, the central garment is stained and appears unwashed but still it has been pressed and put on a form, which neutralizes its effect.

As we turn the corner we encounter a large photomural of Mauthausen Camp, where American soldiers are liberating the prisoners. Under the photograph a crumpled Nazi flag lies on the floor (Figure 69). The wall text reads **Liberation: Encounter.** There are three monitors, each, to the left and right of the photograph. The three on the left show film footage from the liberation of the camps. One shows the liberation of Majdanek and Auschwitz by Soviet troops, the second displays the liberation of Bergen-Belsen by British troops, and the third (the one closest to the photograph), shows the

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[404]Given the formal language of the display, this video monitor's position identifies it as a "dangerous" image. There is no wall in front of it, but it has the same mesmerizing effect on visitors as the monitors behind privacy walls. Most of the woman resistance fighters chosen for depiction in the various displays are beautiful young women, often fair haired with delicate features.

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liberation of Dachau, Mauthausen, Nordhausen, Ohrduf, and Buchenwald by American troops. The three monitors on the right show what is termed "liberation aftermath." Once again, the images are selected by nationality, with the American segment closest to the center. The middle screen on the left has sound (once again removed from the video screen by a sound tube). Here, we hear a British soldier lecturing German soldiers in German about their faults. Following this speech is a brief segment with an American male voice outlining sanitation tasks needed in the newly-liberated camps.

The last stretch of the permanent exhibit is a long narrow hallway and an ascending ramp that takes us past (on the left) the artwork made by children in the Theresienstadt ghetto near Prague and (on the right) trials of Nazi perpetrators. The Nuremburg Trials are shown on video, and visitors may also use earphones to listen to actual recordings of the proceedings. The last room of the tour of the permanent exhibit is a display titled **New World**. Using still photographs, this display chronicles the spread of Jewish survivors throughout the world, with emphasis given to the formation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Behind this display is a large theater where visitors can sit down and view *Testimony*, a film by Sandra Wentworth Bradley. In this one-hour documentary, survivors recount their experiences.[405] The amphitheater's walls are faced with gold stone from Jerusalem (Figure 71).

The exhibit ends with the words of Elie Wiesel printed on the wall: "For the Dead and Living we must bear witness."

As we leave the permanent exhibit, we immediately find ourselves standing before the Hall of Remembrance. This is a quiet space, warmed by the burning of an eternal flame (Figure 32). Visitors are very aware of its symmetry, especially after the

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[405]Survivors are defined here as both Jewish camp survivors and gentiles who helped the Jews escape. The filmmaker was commissioned to create a film that included resistance, rescue, and defiance. The film is remarkably layered, with no resolution because there are no neat endings. Unfortunately few people stop here at the end of their walk through the display.

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asymmetrical skewed angles of the exhibit they have just left. People can sit on the stairs, which double as stone bleachers. Earth gathered from the camps and ghettos of Europe are buried under the floor of the hall.[406] Above the hidden dirt sits the eternal flame. Two quotes displayed as wall text. On one wall:

> *Only guard yourself and guard your soul*
> *carefully, lest you forget the things*
> *your eyes saw, and lest these things*
> *depart your heart all the days of your life,*
> *And you shall make them known to your children*
>
> *and to your children's children.*
>
> —Deuteronomy 4:9

And on the opposite wall:

> *I call heaven and earth to witness this day*
> *I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse.*
> *Choose life—that you and your offspring shall live.*
>
> —Deuteronomy 30:19

As we depart from the Hall of Remembrance, we enter a large foyer where comment books are available. Here we can leaf through the books and read other comments as we enter our own comments. Finally, we exit the permanent exhibition through the Birkenau-inspired opening, which places us back in the Hall of Witness. Our tour of the permanent exhibit is complete.

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[406]The dirt is from 39 Holocaust sites, plus soil from Arlington National Cemetery, commemorating the Americans who liberated the camps.

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This will be and this has been.
I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake[407]

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CHAPTER EIGHT

AN ANTERIOR FUTURE OF WHICH DEATH IS THE STAKE: HOW THE PERMANENT DISPLAY OF THE USHMM FUNCTIONS FOR THE VIEWER

Introduction

In this chapter, the permanent display of the USHMM is discussed in terms of how it functions for the viewer. In order to do this, the reader is "walked" through the museum three separate times. Each tour ends with the "privacy well" in the middle of the concentration camp barrack on the second floor. It is this well that I have positioned at the center of the car crash. Each trip through the first half of the Holocaust display will focus on a different experiential element. In the first trip through the museum, we will focus on the subject-position proposed by the museum for the visitor to its spaces. While it may have been the intention of the museum to confine the visitor subject-position to "liberator," "victim," or "witness," we will examine how other positions are also available. Likewise, the possibility of actually fixing a specific subject position is explored through the lens of the actual museum experience that seems to solicit a variety of subject positions from the viewer.

Our second trip through the museum will focus on elements of the display that are not centered entirely on vision, particularly hearing and smell. Because the sound elements are used sporadically and often without warning they have a unique ability to bypass the temporality the museum sets out to chronicle and thus act to collapse historical time and bring the viewer back to regressive states of being. Likewise, smell (a non-intentional component of the display that results from the use of large artifacts or large number of artifacts) works to augment the experience and often to work (in a

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[407]Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), 96.

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Proustian moment) against the intended historical narrative of the museum by re-engaging memories from the viewer's personal memories.

On our third trip through the museum we will focus on the depictions (or lack thereof) of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. We will explore how the USHMM presents the Jewish victim and how this depiction withholds the Jewish "subject." We will also see that the individual sign of subjectivity is not, however, completely erased from the permanent display and that the viewer often "manufactures" the body from objects (clothing and eyeglasses) that once touched the body's surface.

These three trips will be used to explore the multiple operations at play that create the symptomology that I have characterized as the "car crash" of the museum. We shall see that often in concert but also at time in opposition, they combine to contribute to the frozen, immobile staring "victim" of the car crash that occurs in the middle of the permanent display. This chapter will focus only on the experiential components that lead to the car crash. A discussion of this most provocative psychic switchplate and the possible psychic manifestations that follow its occurrence will be reserved for Chapter 9.

How the Museum Functions for the Viewer

The Museum planners insisted that visitors fall into two subject positions. First the ideal visitor would be a collective, generic, unified "American." Second, this visitor would be a "citizen" of both the United States and the world who, as the museum planners had conceptualized it, would be incapable of understanding the intricacies of history (such as origins and consequences) but at the same time capable of empathy and a grand conceptualization of good and evil. Insistence on addressing such a visitor turns out, however, to be the one strategy that continually acts against the museum's intended goal to teach visitors about the trauma that resulted from the Holocaust and to work-through its assault by bringing it into the cultural narrative. For a number of reasons, which will

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be outlined below, many visitors to the USHMM are unable to assume or maintain the subject-position desired by the museum. When the appeal to the visitor as a single social body fails, when the story being told does not feel like the visitor's story, or when it becomes so confused that it abolishes all anchors, individual histories begin to surface in the gaps caused by the broken collective. In a museum so visually dominated by part objects, bodies in bits and pieces and by the cutting, wrenching, and deliberate effacing of the material trace of the subject, it is not surprising that the visitor is subject to a re-engagement of the primary psychic processes that brought that individual into the Symbolic world of signification. From the moment we step into the Museum, we are primed for a regressive return, either to the world of part objects that define the Imaginary or to the realm of remainders (part objects and affects that must be given up in order to enter the world of the Symbolic, including the desire to die) that define the psychic region Lacan called the Real. In worrying about the historical remainder, the excesses of the signifying process that mark all attempts at "writing" history, the museum did not (and possibly could not) guard against the excesses of the most primal of traumas—the trauma that marks our coming-into-being. It can even be said, in fact, that the methods the museum uses (such as the privacy walls) to guard against remainders—the signifying gaps we call the Real—lend themselves instead to leaks from the Real. In other words, the very carefully considered mechanisms that form the core of the museum "experience" may offer the viewer little armor *against* the excesses of the Real, but act instead to point the way, to open up portals to its psychic domain.

Certainly this is one way we can explain the "car crash" that occurs in the middle of the permanent display. As we saw in Chapter 7, this psychic regression seems to occur halfway through the tour when visitors stop to look into a cement "privacy" well[408] in the barren barrack on the second floor of the display. Visitors halt. They stare

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[408]Four "privacy" walls created to shield "young viewers" from disturbing images are joined at right angles to create a "well" that invites adult viewers to look inside.

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rigidly, silently, into a cement well in the middle of one of the most public spaces that culture has devised. They are looking at images of death and torture, but also at the fetishized forms of the Real, that are "distorted, abstracted, disfigured, and hollowed out...[at the] ultimate thresholds of inscribable dislocation."[409]

The regression that occurs in the middle of the "tour" of the USHMM permanent exhibit does not come without warning. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss how the Real threatens to return in the USHMM through the very mechanisms that the museum (wishing to operate solely in the Symbolic) uses to keep it at bay. These mechanisms can be generally identified as (1) the establishment of a subject-position for the visitor, (2) the use of sensory elements other than vision to augment the experience, and (3) a prohibition against demeaning the Jewish victims by displaying them as individual, identifiable subjects in the form of dead bodies. Inadvertently, and surely against museum purposes, these mechanisms often create opportunities for a *breakdown* (instead of the desired maintenance) of the psychic screen that guards the subject from the excesses of signification this museum that chronicles death would expect to produce. In essence, the three mechanisms work against the museum's purpose to guard the visitor from "leaks of the Real," that would undo their Symbolic register. If the Real was allowed to return it would disrupt the social contract that enables us to live in a community of other subjects (largely because it would lead us to psychosis). While many variables no doubt contribute to the etiology of the universal symptom that defines the car crash in the USHMM, we will see that these three mechanisms, clearly created to serve the museum's purpose, are turned on their heads when we look at what actually happens to visitors in the space. Operating together, these three operational goals contribute to the car crash that everyone expects to see in this museum that chronicles horror. Nevertheless, as with any car crash, when it finally appears it comes as a total and complete surprise.

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[409]Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), 27.

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Shifting Subject-Position in the USHMM

We have established that the USHMM set out to fix the subject-position of the visitor to its space as "American." But if that was the name given to the collective community that came to the museum, it is clear that the museum also hoped to confine that subject-position to the roles of "liberator," "victim," and "witness."[410] Greig Crysler and Abidin Kusno have identified the changing subject-position of the museum as a four-part process: we enter as visitor, change into a liberator, then become a witness, only to at last become a victim. Finally, as we walk out of the permanent display, we return to being a witness.[411] Andrea Liss asserts that the institution's framing of subject-position is hardly kept hidden. For her, the journey through the museum moves the visitor from Jew, to victim, to transformed witness, with all these positions culminating at the end in the reborn American citizen.[412] One suspects that either of these scripts of subject transformation might fulfill the museum's purpose. What really happens, however, is that the subject-position is constantly confused and in flux. It changes from moment to moment, not from floor to floor.

In the great entry hall, before we even enter the exhibit, we are asked to be a witness.[413] As we move to the elevator on the way to the display, we pick up a "passport," one of the pieces of the Identity Card project. Here, with a picture and a

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[410]The traditional historical subject-positions are slightly altered here. Traditionally, the three categories are limited to victim, perpetrator, and bystander. It is argued that there were no "witnesses" to the trauma (by definition there can be no witnesses, since the initial trauma is not recognized as a trauma) and "liberators" arrive only after the trauma of the Holocaust has ended. The museum is thus clearly stating its goal to act as a traumatic abreactor, to master the past trauma by creating the liberators and witnesses that did not exist when the trauma was initially unfolding.

[411]Crysler & Kusno, "Angels in the Temple," 56.

[412]Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows*, 17.

[413]Remember that this space is called the Hall of Witness.

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short biography, a visitor is given a Jewish surrogate, a "hook" on which to hang our "Jewish identity." Not only does our subject position change as we pick up our "double,"[414] but the museum, in hoping that the visitor will quickly reach the point of empathy with their Holocaust partner, already seems to be reversing the visitor's subjectivity. As Jonathan Rosen points out, "there is a reverse principle at work here, as if everyone were expected to enter the museum an American and leave, in some fashion, a Jew."[415]

With our Identity Card in hand, and our Jewish surrogate beside us, we now enter the elevator and become a witness, but not to the Holocaust itself, for according to the logic of the museum narrative, the Holocaust has not yet happened. Instead, we become a witness to another American, a soldier who witnessed the Holocaust for us (himself another surrogate). Through the stumbled words and silences that mark this man's attempt to describe a traumatic scene, we are forced to bear witness to a witness's testimony. This alerts us to the trauma before we ever experience it. It is not the only time we will be asked to read history in reverse.

As we exit the elevator we see an image of the horror we have just been warned about—the photo of the charred remains of victims in a cremation pyre that initiates the tour. In position and distance, we are standing in the same position as the liberating American soldiers. Thus, less than five minutes into the display and before we even step out of the elevator, we have already assumed multiple roles: witness, victim or at least victim surrogate, witness to a witness, liberator, and (presumably the one subject-position that is never doubted)—American. It is as the American, upholder of justice, both judge and jury, that we look at the material on the first floor.

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[414]According to the laws of trauma, there were no witnesses to the Holocaust while the event was unfolding because they didn't know that what they were experiencing was traumatic. Witnessing is always an event that unfolds in reverse time, beginning at a later point in time than the time of the initial trauma. Thus, we are being asked to go "back in time" with our passport guide. We cannot, therefore, be a witness, but only a victim, a perpetrator, or a bystander.

[415]Jonathan Rosen, "America's Holocaust," Forward (April 1991): 12, as quoted in Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows*, 25.

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We begin viewing the exhibit as a liberator and keep that position for approximately 20 feet, as we pass a series of photographs depicting the camps after liberation. As soon as we turn the corner into the main portion of the first floor display, however, we are asked to become jurors. First, we are visually directed—by the museum signposts of bright spotlights in a dark setting—to consider the camp uniforms worn by Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz as evidence. The signage reaffirms their evidential status by metonymically identifying these material traces as victims.[416] Next, we enter the long, dark corridor that separates us from the exhibit with brightly-lit, floor-to-ceiling glass vitrines. As noted in Chapter 7, the darkness of the corridor, in contrast to the bright lights directed on each "vitrine," creates both a cinematic and a judicial effect. The ceiling-to-floor sheets of glass prevent anything but a frontal and distanced confrontation with the material, thereby reaffirming the judicial distance. These objects are placed here as evidence, to give meaning through their sheer presence.

Here, the museum literally erects a screen between the material trace and the viewer but, ironically, in doing so undermines the psychic screen to the Real the museum is hoping to erect. There is no possibility for a solitary exchange with the objects, the kind of interchange that is so necessary in the development of a phantasized encounter, even if that phantasy is one that is being "suggested" by the museum.

The subject-position shifts again as we enter the second floor of the permanent display, the part of the presentation that is dedicated to the actual Holocaust. Our first activity on this floor is to cross a wooden bridge that takes us past artifacts from the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. This sequence of the exhibit is unquestionably the museum's most successful effort to establish a sustained subject-position. As we travel across this bridge as a "Polish Jew," the positioning of the visitor as a victim seems firmly

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[416]As noted in Chapter 7, the signage for the uniforms is as follows: *THE VICTIMS: The Nazi State victimized untold numbers of people, forcing them from their homes, and confining them in prison camps. These uniforms were worn by concentration camp prisoners. On loan from the State Museum Poland or donated by individual survivors.*

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established. Our pace slows down, as we traverse the bridge, and we begin to feel squeezed into a narrow space. At times we come to a halt. Individual objects such as a milkcan and a suitcase are solitary and so close that they feel as if they are within our reach and open to private inspection. The wooden bridge feels authentic; we cannot help but notice the difference in sound and feel when our feet hit it.

But the subject-position is wrested away from us when we finally get to the end of the bridge and are able to see what has caused the slowing of the pace and the bottleneck. The three monitors—two behind low walls, the other completely open to inspection (Figure 55)—depict the fate of our recently-assumed subject position—Jewish occupant of the Ghetto. The most visible screen shows images from Babi Yar. Behind the wall, one screen displays film sequences identified as "The Killing Squads." The other screen shows images of "Accomplices."[417] If we have accepted the subject position suggested by the museum, the wall is placed there to screen us from our own fate.

Paradoxically, the short cement wall is a literal screen that disrupts the psychic screen (the phantasized encounter) that the walk we have just taken on the bridge has created. For once we peer over the cement wall and see those first film images of the victims, we see *ourselves* (Jews) being shot (by the roving "killing squads"). The narrative that was so carefully created and maintained through a phantasized appeal suddenly collapses.[418] We stand and watch ourselves being shot, killed, maimed, and thrown into a hole. If we were to follow the logic of the subject-position suggested by the narrative, we would walk through the rest of the display as the "undead," as phantoms, "living" our death in reverse.

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[417]For a complete list of the images on these three monitors see fn. 391, above.

[418]The collapse would be the normal psychic operation that would be necessary to keep the visitor in the Symbolic realm. In Lacanian terms, the maintenance of a subject-position as a dead victim would lead to a psychotic episode, the return of the repressed through the Real.

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Now we move down a ramp to a railroad car, the decayed organic smell of which, once we are inside, reminds us that *we are in fact dead.* After we move out of the railroad car, we see the material objects that were stripped from us-our suitcases, brushes, razors. Normally these are simple accouterments of life, but because we are now phantoms, they no longer belong to us. Instead, they become remainders of a failed Symbolic realm. At this point, even if the visitor has already abandoned the subject-position of victim, he or she is more likely to be in a regressive state (triggered by the confusing subject-positions on the first floor which is augmented by the experience of being on the second floor bridge and having that subject-position immediately killed). The visitor is thus psychically more attracted to the Imaginary realm than the Symbolic, a psychic regression that the endless number of once everyday objects, reduced to merely "things" reinforces.[419]

As shown in Chapter 7, after we pass by remainders of everyday life, the visitor is given two choices. We can move to the right and listen to the Voices from Auschwitz (which are already spilling out into the corridor), or we can turn left and enter the Concentration Camp Barrack.[420] Perhaps because the visitor is already lost in an Imaginary regression and/or because the "Voices from Auschwitz" telling their stories are clearly in the service of the Symbolic which has been momentarily abandoned, most visitors turn to the left and enter the Barrack.

The concentration camp bunker is not as brutal as one would imagine. It is, in fact, almost banal. The uncanny familiarity of the space is enhanced by a peculiar display case-—the privacy well with unjoined corners that emits a familiar televisual glow (Figure 61).[421] The domestic setting is strong. In fact, the placement of the privacy well (a cement

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[419]The personal items include umbrellas, prayer shawls, eyeglasses, and artificial limbs and leg braces. These personal items, once touched by parts of the body, facilitate a return to the Imaginary psychic realm.

[420]As noted in Chapter 7, there is also a third choice, which is to move ahead through a narrow passageway in order to reach the map of Birkenau on the back wall. Few, if any, visitors exercise this option.

[421]In fact the light "leaks" out of the corners of the well.

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hearth with the blue glow of a television transmission) in the center of this domestic sphere seems so thought out, even though we know that it could not possibly have been intended in this fashion, that it becomes both a *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich* experience.

As we stare into the cement well in the center of this barrack, we view what the museum has established as "forbidden" images—Jewish victims as subjects. What should be disturbing, what the narrative the museum has prepared us to see as horrific is, paradoxically, stimulating and fascinating. It is a visual montage of the Imaginary, of the body in bits and pieces. One could read the video programs as a spectatorial presentation of the Jewish subject, now undone, an endnote to that which we have just performatively enacted as we walked the halls of the museum as first, living, and then, dead Jew. But perhaps because the museum has taken us down the path of subjecthood, of negotiating the Symbolic through the Other (the Jew), the images in the well seem to operate as more than supplemental to an unfolding story of the Holocaust. The dismembered and ruptured bodies present a threat to our own subjecthood. We, the visitor, are no longer the Jewish surrogate. Now we are simply an individual attempting to negotiate the Symbolic realm, by bringing these images into our own arena of signification. We stop and stare, and our stare signals that the assimilation of these body parts into our Symbolic is a difficult proposition. In fact, the images may resist the Symbolic and instead signal the threat of the return of the Real. It is for this reason that we linger and stare. We seek to find[422] and then hold at bay what we see. We have reached the car crash of the exhibit (Figure 74).

When vision is Usurped in the Permanent Display

There is no doubt that most museums are governed by vision. As we saw in our case study of the *Temple of Confessions*, however, appeals to the other senses,

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[422]The three monitors display the exact same montage in the exact same order, but it takes a moment or two to figure this out, after which we generally focus our vision on one of the screens.

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particularly when those appeals are sporadic, unpredictable, and sparingly used, can be powerful tools for pointing to the Real and soliciting an immediate regressive return to primary psychic processes. During the planning of the museum, sound was given only a minor role in the permanent exhibition. The planners minimized what they described as the "narrator's voice." When that voice does occur, as on the first floor in a section called "American Responses," it is American and male.[423] Sound elements not considered part of the narration are generally linked to the films scattered throughout the display. The presentation of these sounds was obviously carefully considered, as they emanate from sound tubes, which are long square slim projections that come down from the ceiling and seem to be intended to center the sound. We must assume that a certain sensory effect was desired, as this same device is used even in the small confines of the elevator (to give "voice" to the soldier's recounting of the camp's liberation) that moves us from the ground floor to the first floor of the exhibit.

As we begin our journey through the permanent exhibit, it is not long before we come into contact with the first of the museum's "non-narration" sounds. As we turn the very first corner of the display area on the first floor, we are suddenly assaulted by the sounds of singing. We strain to hear for a moment or two, as it always takes a little longer to locate language in song, but eventually we recognize the German cadence. The singing suddenly stops, and now we hear the stops and starts of impassioned speechifying. Again, the language is German. Thanks to the sharp corners and skewed walls of Freed's design, we suddenly become aware that this burst of sound seems to come out of a well of silence, and it soon also becomes apparent that the cones of sound function to counter Freed's design. In other words they are there to augment the sound, not to isolate it. The silence Freed's building creates, a silence that is read retroactively through the presence of

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[423]In fact, there are no "official narrative" voices in the entire permanent exhibit that are not male. Female voices can be heard in the *Voices from Auschwitz* and the *Testimony* film at the end of the permanent exhibition.

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the rhythmic sound, allows our hearing to burst to the surface of experience, and not even a menacing dog in a life size photomural can compete with our search for the source of that sound.[424] The *rhythm* of the speech and the harmonic singing create an opportunity for a temporal collapse and a regressive return to self.

Lacan noted in his analysis of the mirror stage that, especially in its early moments, rudimentary notions of self-identity are not always marked by vision (or even a mirror) for that matter, but can be precipitated by something as simple as echoed sounds.[425] So although the Imaginary realm is marked by the visual, other senses can become attached to the originary moment. Sometimes, in fact, if it is through another sense, a regression to that defining act of individual subjectivity can be swift and immediate. It is generally agreed, at least in our age of endless eye candy, that we have not trained our other senses in the realm of the Symbolic the way we have vision. In fact, sometimes the other senses actually point to the instability of vision, which brings us back to what James Clifford has characterized as the "forbidden area of the self."[426] In the songs and measured words of the speechifying we hear in the first floor of the USHMM, it is their rhythm (and not necessarily their Germanness) that challenges the hegemony of vision. This disruption acts to destroy the parameters of time and place within the museum and the immediate effect is startling. The bottleneck in the flow of the visitors shows how this sound burst creates an auditory mini-"car crash."

But the function of this auditory assault is even more startling. The subject-position that the planners fought hard to keep out of the exhibit was the *perpetrator*. Careful decisions were made about the nature of Nazi memorabilia and how they depict

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[424]In this sense the behavior exhibits the symptomology of PTSD, although in a very minor form.

[425] As noted by Kathy O'Dell, "The key point is that at the mirror stage the child realizes that representations of the self, whether they be images or sounds, are not the same thing as the self." O'Dell, *Contact with the Skin*, 31.

[426]"The area that translates as a disruption of the distinction between inside and outside, and the splitting of the ego that mediates between an 'id' interiority and an external 'otherness.'" Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 216.

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the horrors of the Holocaust.[427] But what is most striking about the first floor of the exhibit, the portion of the narrative story that is presumably the most vulnerable to subject vacillation because it deals with a time when the Nazis have yet turned into a killing machine, is the appeal through sound to a *Nazi subject-position.* Because the sound (all German and all non-narrative) operates immediately to create a temporal collapse; it essentially throws us back into the time when these songs were sung and these speeches were given. We are forced to accept one of the only subject-positions possible for that time of unrealized trauma: perpetrator, victim, or bystander. When we finally find the source of the sound and see that a subject-position of Jewish victim would be foreclosed by the event (there would be no Jews at either event), we are left with only two choices. Most people presumably take the position of bystander, but the perpetrator position is also available for anyone so inclined. Not surprisingly, in this part of the exhibit when a moment of sound creates a premonitory mini "car crash," most people stand transfixed through at least two or three repetitions of the film segment that accompanies the song and the speech. It is one of three times this happens on the first floor. The second time is when we hear a mesmerizing mix of Nazi youth singing and Josef Goebbels giving a speech. The third is when we hear Adolph Hitler talking to his men in impassioned speech.[428] The voices of the Nazis augment the sparse visual references to them, creating a larger presence in the visitor's memory than the museum no doubt intended.[429]

In symptomology, in the way the viewers linger and watch the films over and over—a behavior marked by looking but not necessarily by actually seeing—appears to function for the visitor to compulsively repeat rather than work-through the auditory material affronting them. In fact, although film and sound would seem to act together to

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[427]See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 199-205.

[428]For a list of the film and auditory sequences of each of these three video programs, see fn. 370, fn. 376, fn. 378, above.

[429]In fact, as pointed out earlier, the first floor is dominated by the "sound" of the perpetrators.

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cement a Symbolic link, they appear to act instead as a kind of missed encounter, not unlike the missed encounters that characterize the Real. No matter how long we look, we cannot marry the sound and the vision. There always seems that something is mismatched or even missing. This is especially clear as we finally move away from the video and are left with only the resonating sound. In fact, many people move away only to return because, paradoxically, as we move away from the sound tube, which is supposed to be the optimal position for hearing and viewing the video together, the sound becomes more nuanced, and we can actually hear better. This disjunction has a particularly disorienting effect and creates in us a very visible push and pull between the Imaginary and the Symbolic realms, an interplay that operates against the museum's purpose to present a tightly narrated lesson in the Symbolic.

As sound disrupts the overwhelming visual display on the first floor, it must also be seen as only the first of many appeals to the other senses. On the second floor, this appeal becomes more subliminal. We could even argue that, given our fascination with television and movies, we have developed our sense of hearing to rival sight. But what of smell, or touch? These are the two senses that would seem to have the least history in the museum (except for taste which has no history at all in the traditional museum). In fact, one could argue that given the use of vitrines as the standard museal ur-furniture, history in the museum is something that traditionally cannot be touched or smelled.[430]

While we have discussed the regressive function of the bridge and the videos on the second floor of the exhibit, and the appeal and then collapse of that appeal to a "victim" subject-position, there is no doubt that smell plays a role in facilitating this regressive return. The potential for upset in allowing visitors to move through the empty railroad car that was used to transport Jews to Auschwitz was undoubtedly recognized by the museum. They constructed a bridge so that visitors would not have to pass

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[430]Alain Corbin once complained that western history as it is written—and here we might add, as it is displayed in the museum—has "no odor." As quoted in Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 92.

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through the car if they did not want to. For visitors who do enter the railroad car (and most people do), the smell, augmented by the lack of air-conditioning, is overwhelming. The effect is immediate and almost repulsive, and most visitors quickly exit the car.[431] But as we move past the display of objects confiscated from Jews upon their arrival at the camps, the smell lingers. Perhaps it is neural memory, for the combs, suitcases, shawls seem haunted by this smell, and just as we seem to clear our nose, we find ourselves inside a camp barrack. The smell of the wood in this simple pine structure operates in the ambiguous psychic zone that marks the Real. It is olfactorily traumatic but also familiar and reassuring, since it smells like a cabin in a summer camp in the woods. Our desire to sit or lie down is overwhelming. No doubt we are not the first to feel this impulse as signs are posted all over the interior of the Barrack to not sit or lie on the bunks. We have to appease our need to touch by leaning and holding onto the top of the low walls that define a cement well. We are standing and watching images in a cement well, but we are also smelling cabins at summer camp or backyard playhouses. Thus, in pure bodily sensations, before we even begin to process the images pulsating from the floor, we have reached a moment that is sensually restorative (that undoes the smell of the rotting railroad car). Once again, we have reached the car crash of the exhibit.

Suitcases, Combs, Shoes: Where Is the Victim?

We have already determined that the planners of the USHMM thought hard about the desired subject-position of the visitor and implemented a number of strategies to position the visitor in that role. But what of the other subjects in the museum? How does the museum represent the historical figures that occupy the broad categories that define the Holocaust: the perpetrator, the victim, and the bystander?

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[431]It is surprising that after more that 50 years these objects still carry such olfactory punch, but the scent is notable and persistent.

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The USHMM sets up the definition and formal parameters of these three categories within the first twenty feet of the permanent exhibit. The first subject-position we encounter is the *bystander*—an American soldier who "tells" his story in the elevator going up to the display, and the second bystander is the group of American soldiers who greet us in the photomural that begins the actual exhibit. Because the museum has framed Americans as the "good guys," the bystander position is both symbolically and literally transmogrified[432] to astounded liberator who is a bystander only because as an American he was incapable of comprehending evil.[433]

As soon as we round the first corner of the exhibit, we find the second subject-position of the Holocaust display, the *perpetrator*. As previously discussed, this presentation initially consists of sounds that immediately draw our attention to the photomurals on the back of the wall of the second room of the display. In sound and visual documentation, it is ambiguous as whether the perpetrator position is occupied by the German people as a whole, or just by the National Socialist Party. All of the photos and films that initiate the exhibit (including those that feature Americans) were actually taken in Germany. This geographical literalism acts to compound the "Germanness" of the crimes.[434] In form and ideology, then, the subject-positions of liberator (bystander) and perpetrator are set in opposition to one another. America (as represented by the American soldiers) can be interpreted as "good," in opposition to Germany (as represented by Nazis, by German people in public spaces, and even by the German language), as "evil." This opposition is formally reinforced by the use of films and

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[432]Literally in the use of a photograph to first visually represent this subject-position. I am alluding here to the almost alchemical changes that come about in a transmogrification.

[433] This was, at least, the argument used by the museum in order to gain a site on the Washington Mall. See p. 129 above.

[434]For instance, there are no views from Auschwitz, the largest killing center and the most symbolic of the death visited upon the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Auschwitz is, of course, located in Poland. The Nazis shared both language and native land with the German people. What I am saying here is that there could appear to be a subtle conflation between the two groups of people by not clearly delineating the differences either visually or through auditory means.

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photographs that mirror each other, including photographs of Americans and Germans that are the same size and one film segment made for Americans and another one for Germans. An identifiable high American official (General Dwight D. Eisenhower) is countered by an equally high Nazi official (Josef Goebbels). This presentation creates an immediate "reality effect," a documentary feel that augments the courtroom appeal of the first floor of the display, and brings into play ideas of guilt and innocence.

The third element in the subject triad of the Holocaust that the USHMM sets out to present is, of course, *Jews as victims*. In stark contrast to the Germans and the Americans, our first confrontation with the Jewish victims in the museum as individual participants in the events of World War II is actually an *absence*, a people with no physical presence.[435] The Jews are thus first represented by a method that natural history museums have often employed, in a metonymic substitution that transforms the subject into an object. Directly behind the first film of the exhibit is a display of concentration camp uniforms.[436] The arms are stuffed with forms to maintain a bodily presence. If there is any doubt as to their significance at this point in the exhibit, the

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[435]It could be argued that the Jews are in fact depicted in the first photomural of the exhibit. They are the mass of bodies in a smoldering pyre. Likewise, Jewish prisoners are seen in a few of the photos with the American soldiers, although as *Muselmänner* ("living corpses), their appearance is startling similar, with hollowed out faces and spindly extremities of living corpses. I am making a distinction here between Jews as supplements to an American message of righteousness and Jews as a completely separate and identifiable subject category. For a discussion of the *Muselmänner*, see Giorgion Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (NY: Zone Books, 1999). In this study, Agamben refers to a quote attributed to Jean Améry to define this living corpse: "The so-called Muselmann...no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsion. As hard as it may be for us to do so, we must exclude him from our considerations." *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella E. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 9 as quoted in Agamben, 41. Ironically, I am claiming that the visitor does, in fact, "exclude him from our consideration." Likewise, there are a few depictions of the *Muselmänner* in the first film sequence. But, due to their chaotic and confusing juxtaposition of perpetrator and victim, these films do not act to *represent* any one group but can only *show* the camps after liberation. For this distinction, see Nicolas Losson, "Notes on the Images of the Camps," trans. Annette Michelson, *October* 90 (Fall 1999): 25-35.

[436]Because of this position, they become the third element we focus on. The first things we see are the photos and films of the Americans. Then, because of the sound, we are drawn to the back wall of the second room, which shows the Germans. It is only now that we realize we are standing next to the uniforms.

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signage makes it clear by identifying the uniforms as "Victims...on loan from the State Museum Poland..."[437] The prohibition that was established early in the planning of the permanent exhibit to not depict Jews as victims seems to extend only to photographs and film. As the display of the uniforms so early in the exhibit asserts, the traditional natural history museum method of letting a part object associated with the subject stand in for the subject that the part once had a relationship with (often a piece of clothing or a tool that meets the body such as a comb or a piece of silverware) is the method employed to depict the Jewish victim subject-position in the USHMM. Books, combs, hair, tree stumps, and a plethora of other objects are used to stand in for the victim subject.[438]

But the objects are never allowed a simple one-to-one relationship with the victims of the Holocaust. In contrast to the other material components of the display, components used to *augment* the display elements that relate to the Nazis (Figure 72), the objects that *represent* the Jews are almost always presented in a confused mass and with only a few exceptions are seen below waist level and on the floor (Figure 43).[439] Although this is most insistently felt on the second floor of the exhibit, when the Jew is reduced to death itself and is returned to the low-lying earth, the low-lying "Jewish position" is also prominent on the first floor of the display. Thus, we see a Torah unfurled on the floor. Books that represent those burnt on a night of destruction in Berlin are scattered on the floor. Even a tree stump meant to represent the place where Jews

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[437]It is interesting to note that the "State Museum Poland" is in fact the museum that has been established at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp and Extermination Center (Birkenau). Thus the museum withholds the most obvious reference to the horror of the Holocaust in very the beginning of the display.

[438]Once again, it could be argued that other objects that are used metonymically to represent the other two subject positions, especially the Nazis. (In order to reinforce their role of innocence, the Americans must disappear from the exhibit the moment the horror begins). I would argue that they often fall short in their metonymic role, acting instead as supplements or pieces of evidence that reiterate the visual material being presented in film or photographs. Often an object will be just like the object captured in a photograph, a particularly potent example of the material trace taking on an evidentiary and not a metonymic role. See Figure 72.

[439]The most notable exceptions are the glass cases on the second floor that display the artifacts confiscated from the Jews when they entered the camps. The cases are more like crypts in the wall stacked vertically one on top of the other (Figure 58).

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were executed is left in a position on the floor which makes its viewing difficult. One could argue that this type of placement is meant to replicate real life and intended to take the viewer back to the chaos that defined a historical moment when these material traces entered the Holocaust story. But even if that was the intended goal, the placement can also *function* to represent the Jews as *infantilized objects*, disordered, unsocialized, and not just historically victimized but *ontologically* vanquished.[440] In this respect, the metonymic operation of the traditional museum, set up to serve the Symbolic realm, in the USHMM acts to keep the Jews in the Imaginary. This placement seems to run counter to the museum's wish to bring the tragedy that befell the Jews of Europe into the signifying chains of history.[441]

This lock-out from the Symbolic is particularly evident when we are called upon to memorialize the victims the museum presents. In order to memorialize, we must convert the object into a subject for whom we are capable of feeling empathy. This is how the USHMM is most different from the traditional natural history museum: it asks us to absorb the lesson of history by converting the subject into an object (a traditional function of the museum) but then *also* asks us to re-member the subject of history (a traditional function of the memorial). In the USHMM, this re-membering is an almost impossible task, for while everything points to the Jewish bodies, their clothing, their combs, their eyeglasses, the museum offers surprisingly few of the victims' actual bodies. The mass of Jews remains in a metonymic relationship to the Holocaust as statistics rather than as individuals with proper names attached. This makes the memorial task of

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[440]The visual sign of vanquishment is reaffirmed on the last floor of the permanent exhibit when the Nazi flag is shown for a second time, this time crumpled on the floor beneath photographs of Americans liberating the camps (Figure 69).

[441]While it can be argued that the lack of individualization in this representation is meant to depict a "Nazi" perception of the Jew as an anonymous mass, one must question the role this would play in the USHMM. This kind of stance would seem to reinforce stereotypes, especially since none of the wall text alludes to these concerns (i.e. "like this disordered presentation, the Nazis thought of the Jews as an anonymous mass"). The anonymous, disordered presentation also operates against the museum's goal to memorialize the dead. See below.

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the museum particularly problematic, for without the corpse[442] (or its Symbolic substitute—the proper name), we are unable to mourn the dead.[443] We are unable to name the dead. We are unable to put them to rest.

As much as I have discussed the *regressive* positions that the museum facilitates for the visitor in its confusion of visitor subject-positions and in the use of auditory supplements to an overly visual spectacle, there is another psychic activity played out in the walls of the exhibit that can only be seen as a struggle *toward* symbolization. Although the museum offers us bodies only in bits and pieces, the visitor does try throughout the exhibit to re-member the individual subject of the Holocaust. Was it not Freed who equated his building with a body held together by mucilage? This analogy can also be used to describe the activity of the visitor. From the moment we step into the museum we are assaulted with body parts either metonymically (to represent live victims) or more searingly in a visual parapraxis, where a photograph of burnt bodies is captured in a method that in itself is a burning (photography).[444] The part objects are often fetishistic—razors, combs, yarmulkes—objects that have touched the part of the body that most defines us—the head which holds the face and which in the individual creates subjectivity.[445] Their obsessive recurrence, hundreds upon hundreds of objects only point to the fact that the corpse is not there, or even that it is there but hidden.[446]

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[442]I am defining the corpse as an intact human body that still maintains some trace of subjectivity, generally in the face. For a discussion of what constitutes a corpse, see Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 45-88.

[443]This phenomenon was most notably present at the Twin Towers in New York after the 9/11/01 attack that left over 2,000 people dead and buried. The relief effort was focused on recovering body parts and for those people who were not able to recover any parts, ashes from the site were given to them. Likewise, all memorials being proposed for the site must include the list of the dead, the Symbolic replacement for the "body."

[444]Using photography to represent burnt bodies is an *indexical* tautology, which can in effect act to screen content in favor of technique.

[445]This subjectivity is retained even after death. As Schwartz characterizes the late 19th-century practice of going to the morgue to view corpses, the activity was centered on identifying the dead through their face and their clothing, which was taken off the unidentified person and hung above their dead body.

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It is only after the visitor has been through the graveyard of metonymic Jews on the second floor that the dead subject of the Holocaust is finally delivered (the person for whom we are to mourn). This happens in a brief film segment on a monitor tilted up from the ground at the bottom of a cement well. This film depicts a group of children lined up for inspection, followed by a beautiful young woman whose head has been opened to reveal her skull, followed by a male dwarf who is identified as a Jewish schoolteacher. Here, finally, we are offered faces, individual persons who catch our glance, and in so doing physically and psychically arrest us.[447] We are pierced by the looks of these people who peer at us even as we know that in the Symbolic realm of history they are certainly dead.[448] Even though they are "historical" corpses in the story as it is told in the Museum, at this performative moment that marks the car crash they are "living corpses" staring back at us. Our quest for symbolization is momentarily undone. We are staring at death in its most flagrant service of the Real. The confusion creates the symptom we are so used to by now (the fixed stare and physical immobility). And where are we at this moment in the display? We are standing inside the concentration camp barrack staring inside the well of "forbidden" images. Once again, we have reached the car crash.

Spectacular Realities, 52. Thus it is that clothing and the face create an equivalency. Both face and clothes (or either) "identify the man."

[446]With the rich use of documentary photography, it begins to feel like an intentional hole—so few photos offer us the individual corpse.

[447]According to Lacan, the gaze of the other is the gaze of the world that "looks back" at us, the subject. This gaze "changes all perspectives, the lines of force, of my world, orders it, from the point of nothingness where I am..." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 84.

[448]The stare of those that are already dead creates what Roland Barthes called the "punctum" of the photographic image. Barthes discusses the punctum in his last work, *Camera Lucida*. He describes the haunting quality of a photograph of Lewis Payne, who in 1865 tried to kill Secretary of State W.H. Seward. The photograph catches him in his cell as he waits to be hanged. He claims the "punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake," 96.

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Peepshow format.

Snuff films.

Naked women led to execution.

People are being shot.

Into the ditch, shot, spasms, collapse, dirt thrown in over. Crowds of naked people.

Naked people standing about to be killed,

naked people lying down dead.

Close-up of a woman's face and throat as a knife is plunged into her breast — blood all over.

Someone holds a severed head in his hands.

Mass graves of thousands.

Naked.

Naked corpses.

Naked corpses.

Street beatings.

The gun, the smoke, a figure crumbles.

Naked corpses.

Naked women dragged to death.

Shooting.

Screaming.

Blackout.

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The film begins again.[449]

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CHAPTER NINE

"THE FILM BEGINS AGAIN": A TRAUMA IS A TRAUMA IS A TRAUMA AT THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Introduction

Now it is time to examine the car crash and its aftermath at the USHMM. In the previous chapter, we saw how the museum functions in a multitude of ways for the viewer. The *impact* of the car crash depends on a number of display tactics. These tactics include soliciting a subject position for the visitor when he or she enters the permanent exhibit, introducing smell and hearing into the viewer's experience, and deciding to present the victims of the Holocaust as metonymic objects instead of as "subjects."

Because of the effects of these factors, the car crash has a particularly long half-life. The symptom of the car crash in the USHMM is like the car crashes of our other case studies except for one thing. The USHMM car crash creates such a strong image in a visitor's mind that it is difficult for the visitor to break its spell and keep moving. The visitor lingers for a long time in a stretched-out symptom marked more by "fascination" than by "horror." A careful look at this stretched-out symptom will determine the degree to which the visitor is able to fulfill the mandate of the museum, which appears to change right at the moment of the car crash.

While the visit up to the moment of the car crash is built upon a historical narrative that invites the visitor to assume a specific subject position (to enter, that is, into the historical narrative and become part of it), the elements of the exhibition that follow the car crash appeal to the visitor to memorialize the great loss of life caused by the Holocaust. I will argue *that it is right at the car crash that the museum turns from its museum purpose to its memorial purpose* (as mandated in the museum's official title). A

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[449]Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 156.

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careful look at the car crash and its aftermath permit speculation on whether this controversial part of the exhibit is able to allow for a process of working through both the immediate trauma that the car crash produces and the larger trauma the museum addresses (through a process of memorialization) or, conversely, and more provocatively, how it may begin an inward descent (a numbing produced by melancholy) that is manifested in a compulsion to repeat: a trauma that is a trauma that is a trauma.

The Car Crash in the USHMM

In chapter 8, I separated out three psychic mechanisms that facilitate what I have identified as the car crash in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.[450] These mechanisms are (1) a confusion of subject-position for the visitor, (2) the appeal to senses other than vision to overwhelm the power of the visual display, and (3) the lack of individual victims, either in visual remains as corpses or in a symbolic representation such as proper names. I argued that, together, these three mechanisms act to precipitate a regressive state on the part of the visitor, which makes him or her vulnerable to an escape of the Real. This threatened escape is identifiable through "the symptom" that I used to mark the location of the car crash.

Even though these mechanisms were discussed in succession in chapter 8, they must be understood as occupying the same time and space. They act together, or at least implicate each other, but at the same time they can also act in conflict with one another. For instance, just as the visitor might be working toward resolving a momentary feeling of instability—say, looking at the horrific image that greets us as we exit the elevator on the first floor of the display—by assuming a "liberator" subject position, the singing in

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[450]These are by no means the only mechanisms. The contributory psychic factors that lead to the car crash are multiple and must include the histories of the visitors and their experience with the Holocaust before they even enter the museum. Many psychic mechanisms are (by definition) so hidden that they elude even the most astute observer. The point to be made in isolating these three mechanisms is to examine what seems to be a multi-sensorial assault (or appeal) to the psyche of the viewer. This assault (or appeal) acts to potentialize the occurrence of the car crash.

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German coming from the next room may act against that tentative feeling of "knowing" one's position in the museum. Although the museum planners may have carefully tried to control the phantasized encounters of their visitors—as each of the three mechanisms we have explored may by itself keep the visitor in a "controlled" phantasy—when the three mechanisms combine, they do, in fact, create a psychic see-sawing that is characteristic of a phantasized encounter ballooning out of control. In other words, the back and forth movement between the Imaginary (manifested as a state of being confused) and the Symbolic (figuring it out) means that the psychic screen needs to be built over and over again, instead of being erected just once and then using the display tactics to sustain it (as the museum planners intended). To maintain the screen, we must expend tremendous psychic energy to constantly zig-zag between the two psychic realms (the Imaginary and the Symbolic), especially as we move deeper and deeper into the permanent display.

It is for this reason that when we hit the car crash—when we begin to stare into the cement well in the center of the barrack, when the psychic screen is ripped away—the effect is so paradoxically calming. It becomes a respite from the psychic energy that has been (though not necessarily intentionally) demanded from us by the museum in order to shield us from the real horror that motivated the construction of the museum in the first place. That horror is death. The car crash gives us a "psychic" respite by suddenly offering us that which we have tried to shield our psyche from. The images on the video screens point to the presence of the Real. The car crash becomes a "portal" to that forbidden psychic realm. The psychic energy needed to construct the screen (the shields us from the Real) is suddenly no longer needed.

In the USHMM, the symptom produced by the car crash marks the moment when the visitor begins to operate under the conditions of trauma.[451] As we have seen,

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[451]This is one of the paradoxes of trauma. Because it cannot be assimilated into the Symbolic order, the traumatic moment does not require psychic energy. It is only the aftermath of trauma that puts demand on the psyche (i.e. mastering or compulsively repeating the trauma).

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the conditions of trauma re-engage the primary processes that defined our coming-into-being and leave us in a particularly raw psychic state. But the fall into the condition of trauma, signaled by the symptom of stalling and staring, is also a moment when the viewer can begin to master that trauma. As a *psychic switchplate,* that symptom signals the instant when we can begin to work through the trauma it marks.

One possibility for beginning to work through the trauma occurs if the visitor is able to view the images at the bottom of the privacy well as "fetishes" of the Real, as remainders of signification. In this scenario, one that is reminiscent of the visitor's response to the human fetus at the end of the Narrenturm display (as discussed in chapter 3), the visitor quickly resurrects the screen to the Real (and thereby represses the primary trauma that has been momentarily re-engaged) and through a re-engagement of a "phantasized encounter," reads the traumatic moment the car crash presents as representing a historical trauma (a trauma in the arena of the Symbolic). This historical trauma can now be named, the loss it has produced in the visitor's social world can be mourned, and finally a new signifying chain in the Symbolic can be created to fill in for this loss. This is, no doubt, what the USHMM planners hoped to achieve, though perhaps not at one particular point, such as the "car crash." As we have seen, the switchplate moment can also signal the beginning of a response wherein the viewer begins a descent into the Imaginary realm. This descent does not bounce back and forth between the Symbolic realm (and thereby screen the Real) but becomes locked, especially if the trauma that the symptom so clearly signals is seen as a primary process absence (as opposed to a historical loss), as an assault against the visitor's own ego. The moment of potential working through can then become nothing more than a compulsion to repeat the trauma that created the assault (as a way of trying to return to a moment before the absence that is a condition of being a living being in the Symbolic realm). This is an endless replay of a moment that, according to trauma theory, can never be relived.

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A lingering in the Imaginary (as opposed to a quick resurrection of the screen to the Real) seems to mark the psychic activity of many of the visitors as they reach the barracks and stare into the cement well. It is important to note that the visitors do not just stop for a minute or even five minutes. They are likely to linger for ten or fifteen minutes, if not longer. For many, it seems that the car crash abandons any address to history and its traumas and re-engages the primary processes of the psyche. In other words, what is "traumatic" about the car crash for most people is not its "Holocaust" content but its address to the initial trauma of being, the trauma that marks every person's passage into the Symbolic realm.[452] It is for this reason that the response is not accompanied by a shielding of the eyes or auditory commentary (as we saw with the first "mini" car crash on the second floor—the execution of Jews in the Polish and Russian countrysides). This major car crash is a trauma that produces an effect closer to fascination than terror (Figure 75).[453] This effect is enhanced, no doubt, by the loss of historical markers in the film segments at the bottom of the privacy well. All of the shots are close-ups, and in images that include a group of people, all background markers have been removed (Figure 70).[454]

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[452]As reviewed in chapter 1, in choosing life the individual sacrifices the bliss of omnipotence that characterizes the bodies in bits and pieces of the Imaginary and accepts the "contract" of the Symbolic. It is then that the Real becomes crucial, for it must "archive" the "bits and pieces" of the Imaginary that have been given up in order for the individual to enter the Symbolic. In making this statement, I am not addressing the survivors of the Holocaust who may visit the museum and for whom the images in the well may set in play a genuine "historical" trauma. That is, the images may, in fact, remind them directly of the Holocaust. According to Lacanian theory, this process would also engage a memory of the initial trauma of being, if in a less direct manner.

[453]Lacan describes the appeal of the Imaginary as one of "fascination," a spell that holds the gaze of the subject. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 40. In this way the response *is* close to that of crowds that gather at a car crash. I am not the first to notice this. Ann Farrington, one of the display planners said the constant crowds reminded her of "people stopped at a traffic accident," from an interview with Farrington on June 23 and June 25, 1993 as cited in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 306.

[454]This is in stark contrast to the first, mini car-crash on the second floor, which shows the murders of the Nazi "killing squads." These are brutal images shot in landscapes with complex compositions that include victims, perpetrators, witnesses, and all the everyday objects that accompany all of these people. There is, for example, one scene that shows a soldier holding up a bloody head. All of these elements contribute to placing these events in a specific time and space.

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Why is it that the car crash in the USHMM does not work as an incentive to re-activate the "phantasized encounter" on the part of the visitor (as seen in the car crash of the Narrenturm)? Why does it not initiate a process of using the moment of psychic instability to convince visitors that the traumatic feelings they are experiencing are related to a hole in the Symbolic realm and not to an assault against the visitors' own egos? Why does the visitor linger so long in a state of "fascination" instead of horror? We can argue that the visitors linger because the museum offers both space and opportunity for them to linger. The privacy well is placed in a fairly spacious barrack, and the roof overhead creates a sense of intimacy, as the rush of people entering the space is masked. But the reluctance to move on seems to result from more than a spatial opportunity to linger. As much as we can argue that the visitor lingers at the privacy well because of psychic imperatives, the museum signposts also point to the fact that this point in the display is a crucial one. The privacy well comes at a particularly important moment in the visitor's tour of the USHMM. It occurs when the narrative of the Holocaust is complete, at least that part of the story which, if it were being read through a psychoanalytic filter, would mark the moment of that the Real will finally "return" (and triumph), the moment right before death.[455]

The privacy well marks the place in the display when the "case" of the Holocaust has been argued and we the jury are about to be called upon to give our verdict. This is the moment right before (if the Museum has been successful in its task) we say *YES, this was horrific, this was a major historical trauma, and this was an assault to me as an American.*

It is also the moment when the victims we have finally been able to see (these children, women and men with identifiable faces) can be turned into a shared loss, when

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[455]We encounter the cement well right before we see the model of the crematorium at Birkenau. The model is visible from afar, and it is clear enough from this vantage point that it chronicles the killing process at one of the extermination centers. But because it is a small model, the details are not discernible from inside the barrack. Wanting to see the model more clearly sets up a push-pull impulse on the part of the viewer. See below.

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our feelings of empathy can be solicited, when the deaths of these people can be mourned and memorialized. The car crash in the USHMM is not only a psychic switchplate. It is also a museal one, for it marks the point in the display when the USHMM attempts to switch its role from museum to one that solicits the psychic mechanisms that would construct a national memorial. As a museal switchplate, the privacy well must effectively push the viewer toward the psychic realm of the Symbolic and decrease the appeal of the Imaginary (even in a process that we associate with the phantasized encounter). With an audience stalled in a wooden barrack and locked in an Imaginary snare of images in the bottom of a cement well, it is clear that the museal switchplate does not, in fact, immediately succeed in its purpose.

Does the museum ever achieve its goal to shift to a memorial? Is the lure of the car crash too great for the museum display to offset? Or does the museum never allow the viewer to reconcile with the Symbolic? Instead of helping the visitor begin a process of working-through and memorialization, does the museum produce a feeling of melancholy in those who are called upon to mourn? Does it create an inward spiral in which every thing, every interaction, seems to compulsively repeat a "feeling" that is never allowed to surface?

It is now time to examine the aftermath of the car crash and to attempt to answering these vexing questions.

The Aftermath: The Film Begins Again

We can imagine the strength an element of the exhibition must need to lure the visitor out of the trance that marks the car crash in the center of the barracks. This job is done by an exhibition element that seems to continue to run counter to the goals of the Museum and the mandates of the display committee.

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When we look up from the cement well and try to plot out our next move, we have two options. We can double back and enter the room ("Voices from Auschwitz") we passed on our way into the barrack, or we can follow the forward trajectory and move toward the large model of Auschwitz II. Not surprisingly, most visitors choose the latter option simply because it will keep them moving in a forward trajectory.

As noted in chapter 7, the model of the crematorium at Birkenau is all white. None of its figures—faceless women, men, and children—are more than five inches tall, which creates an odd dollhouse effect. This "miniature" feature of the model references the language of youth (or nostalgia for youth in the adult), and supports a continued experience of interiority, of private contemplation.[456] Paradoxically, in the way the model relates to the domestic realm of childhood experience (of bending down and peering into a self-contained world), the model seems to continue the *heimlich*—and equally *unheimlich*—feel of the barrack.[457] This effect is compounded by a representational strategy that suggests that what we are looking at is not something real but a fantasy world. As the figures are shown dying in the gas chamber, they "melt" (the clay—later cast in plaster—used to construct the figures is left unformed at the base, which gives a liquid effect) in an manner that mimics the wicked witch in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*.[458] What is most startling about the model, from a critical vantage point, is the way it seems to *abide* by the museum's mandate to not show the Jews as "victims" of the Holocaust by *breaking* one of the display mandates to use only artifacts in the exhibit halls. In this model the *subjects* are absent because the victims of Birkenau have been

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[456]As Susan Stewart has postulated, the miniature operates at the place of origin, the childhood of the self that creates an "interior temporality of the subject." Stewart, *On Longing*, 68.

[457]Stewart writes, "[t]he miniature, linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulatable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination." *Ibid.*, 69.

[458]In the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* (1938) the "wicked witch" dies by melting, beginning with her feet. Her upper body remains intact to the last minute when her face dissolves and all that is left is her hat.

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reduced to traditional museum *objects*. Instead of being the first display element that initiates an appeal to memorialize the people it depicts as dead, and instead of presenting the Jewish victims as subjects that have been lost, the model operates to create the effect of the traditional museum, wherein the true subject is absent. Even though the Museum wishes to create a memorializing effect[459] (and especially at the point in the display where the story has been told and the Jews are dead), the display elements act against this purpose. Because the appeal to the Symbolic does not manifest itself in this very important display component, the regressive state that the car crash created in the visitor runs the risk of sustaining its psychic position of locking the visitor in a melancholic response.

The anti-memorializing stance of the white plaster model is reinforced by the next element of the permanent display, which is a large photograph of the barracks of Birkenau on a snowy day. There are no prisoners, no guards, and no people at all in sight. Likewise, the aerial view of the complex to the immediate right of the photo reaffirms the absence of all victims. It also marks a point in the museum when the opportunity for the switch from museum to memorial (which the museal switchplate attempted to make in the middle of the concentration camp barrack) has failed to materialize.

If there existed a moment when the museum could have carried the visitor toward a moment of reconciliation with the subject matter, when we could have been invited to mourn the victims' deaths, when we could have seen the loss of life as an assault to the "American story," that opportunity has now for all intents and purposes has been lost.

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[459]In stating that the museum wished to create a memorializing effect, I am relying on the signposts of the museum to draw this conclusion. As I show in chapter 6, it is not necessarily how the museum saw the relationship between the "museum" and "memorial" parts of their official title. Weinberg described the relationship as follows: "In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the building and the exhibition work in tandem. The memorial building envelops the exhibition with the right ambiance; the exhibition endows the memorial building with historical context." *Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 26-27. My analysis borrows more from Crysler and Kusno, who feel that the USHMM, "seeks to reproduce [the Holocaust] in a manner that makes every visitor simultaneously a 'witness' and a surviving 'victim,' thereby preparing them to enter the building's memorial spaces and participate in acts of remembrance." "Angels in the Temple," 56. The part of the permanent exhibit that follows the privacy well in the barrack would correspond to the surviving victim preparing for memorialization of their analysis.

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Instead of re-asserting the museum language that it developed in the first half of the display, instead of using large artifacts that "touched" the subjects of the Holocaust or using large photomurals to capture the images of these same subjects, the museum resorts to the old, traditional museum markers—the representation, the model, and the map. At no other point in the entire permanent exhibit in the USHMM is the traditional museum language so present. Perhaps this strategy was used to engage the Symbolic through symbolization (i.e., representations instead of artifacts). And perhaps that strategy would work in a traditional history museum. But in the USHMM, and at this particular moment in the display, the traditional strategies of the museum operate against subjectivity by asserting the traditional museal division between object and subject and actually operate to keep the visitor in a regressive, numbed state.

Although the signposts of the memorial may not be offered by the museum, the visitor's need to memorialize is not entirely diminished. Having just left the cement well that marks the car crash, it is fair to assume that the psyche is "raw." To counter this vulnerability, the visitor works toward symbolization. But the search for meaning can become extremely difficult, especially when key elements for symbolization are withheld. Dominick LaCapra has pointed out that when the need to memorialize occurs in a "rhetoric of absence,"[460] it often engages not the psychic mechanisms of mourning but rather of melancholy. And as we saw with the AIDS Quilt, melancholy is a particularly poignant example of how trauma cannot always be worked-through. With no subject to mourn, the individual may turn away from symbolization and participate in a continual thrashing back and forth between the Real and the Imaginary in a behavior that is characterized by a "compulsion to repeat." Instead of producing meaning, the compulsion

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[460] LaCapra concludes: "When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of impossible melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted." LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," 698.

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to repeat searches for the source of unease (for the original wound of the trauma) by constantly (but almost always not consciously) (re)soliciting a traumatic affect.

It is the compulsion to repeat on the part of the museum's display "language" and in the visitors' search for affect in what is becoming more and more a numbing experience that governs the last part of the permanent exhibit. As we cross the second glass bridge leading to the four towers that will complete the exhibits on the second floor, we notice that the etching on the glass echoes the bridge above it.[461] With the list of names, we might for a moment think we have been given an opportunity for symbolization, to finally "find" the subjects of the Holocaust. On closer inspection, however, we discover they are only first names. The complete proper name, the symbolic stand-in for the dead subject is once again withheld.[462] In fact, first names operate in a significatory limbo. A first name is not yet a proper name, but it is also no longer an object. It is state closer to the world of childhood than of historical narratives.[463]

As we enter the first tower with its display of shoes, we are immediately met with the smell of rubber and sweat, surrounded by a peculiar odor of dust. In the way it re-engages the initial assault of smell in the museum (in the railroad car on the second floor), this smell has a traumatic effect. This immediate sensory address, plus the lack of Symbolic anchors, keeps the shoes from their intended metonymic role. Shown *en masse* in a large shallow pit without a glass divider, the shoes' positions on the floor (Figure 64) create an indexical rather than metonymic reference.[464] They are not representations of

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[461]This doubling can also be read as a traumatic gesture operating under the logic of "it takes two traumas to make a trauma." It was not until my fourth visit to the museum with a list of tasks to complete that I remembered to look and see what was etched on the first bridge of the exhibit. The names on the second bridge re-engage a memory that is falsely constructed. One assumes that the first bridge also had first names when, in fact, it had the names of cities. This conclusion regarding "false" or "traumatic" memory was reinforced by every guest I brought with me on my various trips to the Museum.

[462]With the use of only the first name, the reference to the AIDS Quilt is stronger than a reference to the other great national memorial outside the USHMM doors, the Vietnam Memorial.

[463]And once again, the subtle reference to the "infantilized" victim is made.

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individuals who have died, but remainders of what was left behind when the person was pulled out of them. They remain as what Julia Kristeva calls the "ultimate imprint of the death drive." They do not represent a loss, that is, but stand as a sign of absence, as an index of the subject now wrested away, as a representation of death itself. Almost immediately after encountering the car crash, the visitor is now thrown into a situation where the Real (through its fetishized form in the scattered shoes) threatens to return.

This absence of the subject and the threat of the Real are reiterated in the next room. Given the now firmly established language of the museum, the "privacy" wall we see as we enter indicates that there is a "dangerous" image behind it. But behind the wall we find nothing more than a large-scale photograph (Figure 65). Its subject is the shorn hair of prisoners at Birkenau, not even the hair itself. Here is a double absence—neither the subjects nor their metonymic substitute is delivered.[465] But even if the actual hair had been placed behind the glass partition, one suspects that as a "souvenir of death," it would have operated against the work of Symbolization. As Susan Stewart has pointed out, souvenirs of the mortal body act to erase (instead of anchoring) the significance of history."[466]

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[464]The "index" refers to one of the elements of the sign system developed by Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's trichotomy of signs includes the Icon (a sign that has the quality of the object it denotes), the index (a sign that denotes an object by being affected by that object), and the symbol (a conventional sign with an arbitrary relationship to the object it represents). The classic example of the index is the footprint left in the sand. See James Hope, ed., *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics by Charles Sanders Pierce* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 243-53.

[465]Although the Auschwitz Museum donated hair to the USHMM, the planners decided that it should not be displayed. Like all other debates concerning the museum, the fight over whether or not to show the hair was very heated and included rabbinical discussions as to whether it constituted living tissue, to its status as a body part, and to the simple fact that it was out of context since it has been removed from the camps it came from. For a recapitulation of that debate, see Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 211-212. Ultimately, the decision was made that it was not appropriate for an "American" museum. Linenthal quotes Alvin Rosenfeld, one of the planners of the permanent display as remarking, "It must not be forgotten that we are a National Museum on the National Mall and we must behave accordingly." *Ibid.*, 214.

[466]Stewart, *On Longing*, 140. In fact, Stewart feels that the "relic, the hunting trophy, and the scalp" are "anti-souvenirs. " They mark the horrible transformation of meaning into materiality more than they mark, as other souvenirs do, the transformation of materiality into meaning." *Ibid.*

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In the last room on the second floor, the visitor comes face to face with the "Tower of Faces" (Figure 50). This is the second time the visitor has entered this tower, the first time being on the first floor of the exhibit. One could argue that these photos offer a host of faces to pin to the Holocaust, but in addition to the obvious problems in actually engaging with photos that are presented more as an archive (most of the photos are too high to see any details), than as a photo-album, they also operate against the display mandate for large photos in the museum. Coming as they do at this point in the exhibit, when the signposts of the display have been firmly established, and following the room of shoes and the image of missing hair, the photos operate as nothing more than "object survivors." They are merely the remainders of history. They are not subjects soliciting our empathy, but objects that were left behind.[467] We continue in our slow march of the museum, tired and numb.

As we finish our tour of the permanent exhibit by moving to the third floor, the absence of subject that marks the four towers of the second floor takes an unexpected turn. Gone are the large crowds of the first floor. This floor is quiet and sparsely attended, which creates a strange feeling that even some of the visitors have "disappeared." If we had hoped that the third floor would bring us to a cathartic end, the feeling is never fulfilled.

As on the first floor, on the third floor we experience yet another mini car crash. We are drawn to one of the last displays, perhaps because it presents an opportunity to find a face or to begin a process of empathy or even to counter the numbness that is beginning to set in. After passing by a list of names of "liberators" and "rescuers"[468]

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[467]Andrea Liss points out the great difficulty in having photographs serve as objective historical documents and as emphatic markers. Given the USHMM's insistence on using photographs as objective documents, she sees the Tower of Faces as nothing more than discarded ruins. *Trespassing Through Shadows*, 10.

[468]The text of this list is small and the list is long, but few visitors stop to study it, except to satisfy an initial curiosity as to whose names are listed there. It is a non sequitur. Why all these names of liberators and none of victims?

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(though few stop to read this list), the visitor moves quickly through the third floor. The only group that gathers does so in front of an exhibit of the Jewish Resistance (Figure 68). As a backdrop to the display, there are tree trunks taken from the Rudniki Forest, which sheltered the largest group of Jewish partisans in Soviet-occupied territory. We see some of the resistance fighters' weapons displayed in a glass case. Next to the display case is a small video screen. Given the formal language of the Museum, this position of this video monitor, which is low and tilted up, identifies it as a "dangerous" image, even though there is no wall in front of it. The film shows a young woman, identified only as "Bruskina," being hanged in a public execution. The blank stare and the long commitment to the film by the viewer identify these images as "traumatic."

But as the fifth instance of a car crash in the Museum, and coming at a moment when the visitor would hope for some psychic healing, this filmed hanging does not simply point to trauma but compulsively repeats it. This compulsion to repeat, although arguably subtle by itself, is augmented by the sound of the German language, which magnifies its effect. As we look at the hanging Bruskina, we hear a British soldier lecture German soldiers in their native language (this occurred after the liberation of the camps). This is one of the most perplexing elements of the entire exhibit. The USHMM exhibit of the Holocaust begins with German sound and ends with German sound. The visitor is exhausted,[469] and the numbed psyche wonders if "the film begins again." The subject-position proposed by the Museum for the visitor has by now become so confused or undone that it has been abandoned.[470] The subjects of the exhibit seem likewise mutilated in a visual and auditory mismatch. And the psychic wound that the spectacular "car

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[469]Even the speediest journey through the exhibit takes two and a half hours.

[470]The presence of the American soldiers also acts as the second bookend to the display. But here they appear more as a ruse, as a failed attempt to have "the assault on being American" fill in for the loss that the story of the Holocaust in the museum is intended to create. But because the loss is being experienced as an absence (as an assault against the self), it is the German language that follows you to the exit.

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crash" in the center of the permanent exhibit opened up has found no subject to "suture" it. It begins to fester.

As we leave the exhibit, we are dumped into the periphery of the monumental memorial space of the museum. Not surprisingly, very few people enter the space. The memorial impulse is just not present. By now, all we want is to get out of the space as fast as we can. Resolution is thus withheld. Memorialization is compromised. We are no longer spectators to the story of the Holocaust. We have collided with the very museum itself. By now, we ARE the car crash. No longer just spectators, we have become the museum's victims. A trauma breeds a trauma that refers back to the original trauma of life.[471] In the USHMM it is true: a trauma is a trauma is a trauma.

As we venture out of the museum and look at the Washington skyline with the Washington Monument piercing the view, we cannot help but notice the line of people silently waiting to enter an adjacent building to get a "snack."[472] We can imagine that the museum had hoped for a grander response at the magnificent Memorial Hall they placed at the end of the exhibit. But most visitors simply do not have an urge to memorialize the victims. Instead of candles, it is food and drink that the visitor seeks. Taking in the outside world through the mouth is the most basic response to a threat to the ego, the

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[471]While it is impossible to actually substantiate this claim in every visitor, there is a peculiar trend among critics to the space that points to this conclusion. Two notable examples are Tim Cole and Andrea Liss, both of whom have written extensively about the same performative "elements" of the exhibit in a manner comparable to my own, if not in such a psychoanalytic framework. Both critics confuse the contents of the privacy well within the barrack, which is, according to my analysis, the site of the museum's car crash. For instance, Tim Cole's litany of images (which he claims are in the privacy well) that begin this chapter appears to be a condensation of all the "disturbing" videos in the entire USHMM permanent exhibit, except, oddly enough, the very images that are at the center of the "privacy well." Likewise, Liss claims that the images inside the well are "images of *Einsatzgruppen* murders and so-called medical experiments conducted on camp children inmates" (*Trespassing Through Shadows*, 76). This confuses, or at least conflates, the "mini car-crash" at the end of the "ghetto" bridge on the second floor with the "car crash" in the middle of the barracks." Both Liss and Cole are thorough historians. I have experienced no other gaps or omissions in their reading of the museum Thus, their codings of the images at the center of the "car crash" can be seen as "traumatic" readings.

[472]As seen in chapter 6, the snack bar is not located in the museum proper but in an adjacent building. To get to the snack bar, the visitor must wait to go through security, which often takes quite a bit of time. It should be noted that the eating facilities are nothing more than an actual snack bar. There is no formal restaurant and the seating capacity is no more that 100 people.

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most primitive way to re-center oneself in the world of the living.[473] It is our most basic psychic tool for feeling, to find the edges of the self even if that awareness comes with no meaning.[474]

[473]Thus, the almost universal "food rituals" that accompany burial rites.

[474]For a discussion of oral urges and the activity of the psyche, see Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 40-41.

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We had spent the night in Oskiem, realizing that we couldn't visit both Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II in one day. Our trip to Auschwitz I had emotionally drained us, and we went into town to drink away our demons and stare silently at the people rushing home to dinner. That night, the motel room was small and confining. I slept poorly. The trains kept running past my door and, anyway, I was afraid I would dream.

We headed out to Birkenau in the morning and remained alone there for most of the day except for an elite corps of German soldiers who marched through the rows and rows of empty barracks, red berets in hand. The sheer size of Birkenau was overwhelming, and it took half a day to walk the perimeter. The rocks under foot led me to trip and fall, my American feet not used to uneven surfaces. Small pebbles kept invading my shoes and I stopped once or twice to clean them out, wondering if these small white forms were indeed stones. We didn't talk to each other and sat alone near the pond of ashes staring into its murky surface. I carried around my camera all day but didn't take one picture. If you asked why, I'd probably say I kept being distracted.

For if I were to speak of only one memory, one sensation that would always remain with me from what can only be described as a museum of trauma, perhaps the *museum that defined trauma in the 20th century, it was grass. Not the grass of nature but the grass of man. The clean crisp day perhaps could be excused - as nature often ignores the history of its most fragile experiment, but the lawnmowers, methodically mowing the rows and rows of grass that through the last 50 years had tried to cover the ruins of Birkenau, made me shudder. At first I tried to rationalize it...of course the grass would have to be mowed in this national historical site. But then I kept wanting to scream SHUT UP! Get out of here! never come back! stop sweeping! stop raking!*

In the late afternoon we drove back to Krakow and took a train to Venice. I was glad to be in a place where there was only water.

The summer after my trip to Auschwitz I suddenly developed an allergy to grass. The smell of summer, of lazy youth, of ice cream and lying in the park catching fireflies, now made me catch my breath, and gasp for air. Was it not Freud who said the uncanny does not have to be linked to "home" in the literal sense or to any architecture at all but to the sounds we associate with home with comfort, with familiarity, with smells linked to youth, and security, and knowing the world is all right? The uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old—established in the mind and which has become alienated from us through the process of repression..."The uncanny is something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light." I knew my new-found allergy to grass was trying to reveal something to me, that man is capable of evil, that the world is unstable, that like the grass that grows over the ruins of Birkenau, the memory of the Holocaust will one day be hidden and forgotten. I couldn't, and still can't, totally grasp the importance of what is now an annual teary-eyed reminder.

Andre Breton once said madness prefers the shadow to the prey.

For me, after Auschwitz, it does.[475]

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CONCLUSION

THAT WHICH STIMULATES AND NUMBS US: THE MUSEUM IN THE AGE OF TRAUMA

When setting out to write about trauma, the writer faces an inherent dilemma. Invoking trauma in his or her work, he or she ends up writing about a wound that refuses to be named. Writing about trauma is thus more an articulation of silences than a capturing of discourse.

The relationship of the museum to trauma is equally fraught with silences and gaps. In this study, I have focused on one of these gaps, a moment in the museum experience that I have called the *car crash.* In the four museums under study, the car crash does not come as a total surprise. Although the actual time and place it emerges may be unpredictable, it may just be that in museums set up to directly address trauma there will always be what Andreas Huyssen calls a surplus of meaning that exceeds the Symbolic order.[476] That is to say, there will always be some kind of car crash.

Ultimately, the importance of the car crash to this study is that it facilitates a reading of the museum that is not based on the traditional "edification" paradigm (and its feel-good function for the viewer). Since the car crash signals a moment of non-meaning and non-being, it has allowed for an analysis of the museum based on the psychoanalytic principles that can explain this type of psychic phenomenon.

Essential to this psychoanalytic paradigm has been the construction of new terminology for the museum experience. First is the concept of the *phantasized encounter*, a psychic activity in viewers that guards them from the threatening presence of the Real. The Real is the site of death and "significatory remainders" that if encountered, according to psychoanalytic theory, can produce psychosis. It is the psychic region that archives

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[475]Lise Patt, unpublished manuscript, "Looking for Benjamin," (2002), 20.

[476]Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 15.

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trauma. In museums created to present traumatic material, the threat of the Real is of foremost concern and, therefore, the phantasized encounter is a productive psychic activity for the visitor to participate in. The phantasized encounter prevents an encounter with the Real by screening this threatening psychic realm. It screens the Real by creating an "orthopedic" experience that mediates between the visitor's *desired encounter* (an impossible encounter that the individual, paradoxically, always seeks even though it would involve an encounter with the Real) and the *scripted encounter*, which is the official attempt the museum display committee makes to keep the visitor firmly planted in the Symbolic realm (and which also, paradoxically, points to the presence of a Real that needs to be "steered clear of" or even hidden). The phantasized encounter offers a way to navigate traumatic material in a museum without a confrontation with the Real.

We have also seen that although vision appears to play the most significant role in the creation and maintenance of the phantasized encounter—perhaps for no other reason than vision has traditionally been the prominent sense addressed in museums—other senses also play a role in building this psychic screen. We have seen, for example, that non-narrative sounds and smells have a delicate relationship to the phantasized encounter. We understand this only because when they appear unexpectedly they disrupt the phantasized screen and can even rip it away, as with the films of Nazi activities and the room full of shoes in the USHMM. We have also seen that, at least for non-narrative sound, it is not just the display elements that contribute to their potency. We have seen, for instance, how the architecture of the USHMM, which, through the use of skewed angles in the permanent exhibition, removes the "background" noise we have come to expect with congregations of people. We saw how crowd noises were essentially eliminated in the USHMM. In this scenario (and one that seems to be increasing with the advent of more non-traditional shaped museums),[477] non-narrative sounds can have a

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[477]For example, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain, or Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. For a more detailed description of the latter, see below.

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startling effect and must be considered as instrumental in the maintenance (or lack of) of the phantasized encounter.

In our four case histories, the phantasized encounter is theorized as something that occurs at the beginning of the museum experience, as something that operates before the car crash. We can appreciate the effectiveness of the phantasized encounter because when the screen to the Real that the phantasized encounter installs and/or maintains is wrested away from the viewer at the "car crash" of the exhibit, the museum experience becomes stalled or, in some cases, begins to be felt as traumatic itself.

We have also speculated on what happens after the car crash. Although the car crash's presenting symptom may be universal—the stalling of movement and a prolonged and steady stare on the part of the individual exhibiting the symptom—what happens after the car crash (after the symptom manifests itself) does seem to vary. As developed in this study, the car crash is merely a calling card of the Real, and the visitor must decide how he or she will address this solicitation. The car crash in the museum thus has the potential to either "stimulate or numb us." Stimulation, an activity that is familiar to the traditional museum visitor, signals the visitor's attempt to venture toward signification (a move toward the Symbolic), whereas numbing indicates that the visitor has fallen back into the self-absorption of the Imaginary.

The response to the car crash seems frequently to vacillate between numbing and stimulation, or to begin by inducing one psychic response only to have the individual retreat into the other. In Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Temple of Confessions*, we saw how the auditory supplement to the visual tableau riveted the viewers' focus on the performers, a response that operates in the realm of psychic solicitation (thus stimulation). We saw that the same sound could, over time, produce a numbing effect that resulted in an audience member's lingering in the performer's space in an attempt to master the distress produced by the initial sound by constantly "re-enacting" (re-experiencing) it. Likewise, as a mediagenic "car crash," the AIDS Quilt seemed to initially

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stimulate a group of people to action. Eventually, however, it began to precipitate psychic fatigue, a numbing response produced by a psyche made ready for signification only to have that meaning denied (through the refusal of society to give signification to the AIDS deaths in America).

Sometimes the response to the car crash results in only a retreat to the Imaginary, a retreat to the self that blocks out signification. We have seen how in the USHMM and for a select group of people (this study focuses only on the response in a viewer from the museum's target audience who has few if any links to the actual Holocaust), the car crash can initiate a numbing response. The car crash in the USHMM *and* the museum display tactics that surround the car crash show that when the car crash is used as a switchplate for not only the psychic activity of the viewer but also for a shift in purpose for the museum, it can operate not to jump-start symbolization but, rather, to move away from signification. To use the car crash as a springboard for the establishment of the signifying chains we call the Symbolic (which a memorializing response would necessitate), the museum must offer the viewer "subjects" (the building blocks of a memorializing process in the Symbolic). When all the museum offers a visitor is "things" (such as, in the USHMM, the use of statistics), the car crash becomes a springboard back to the Imaginary, producing not mourning and memorialization but melancholia and non-closure.[478] Although it is beyond the scope of this study to "rewrite" the USHMM, we cannot help but speculate on how altering some of the displays (listing of some of the dead, for example, on the last floor of the exhibit) might stimulate visitors to the museum and allow them to use the car crash as a meaningful start to a memorialization of the victims of the Holocaust. In this way, the function of the museum would more closely match its purpose.

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[478]Or, as we saw with members of ACT-UP towards the AIDS Quilt, even demonization of the victim who is supposed to be mourned.

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But we must also consider that, although the USHMM seems to fail in its memorializing purpose, it does contain elements that can make it a powerful agent in *producing* trauma in its visitors. That might not be a bad thing. In fact, the museum built to deal with traumatic material has the potential to be a rare public space not scripted by medicine (and a concept of healing) or theology (with its promise of salvation) capable of dealing with that trauma. The museum built to address trauma can become a site of *production*, a site where the phantasized encounter can operate not in opposition to the car crash but in concert with it. We caught a minor glimpse of this relationship in the Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. The car crash in that small museum was resolved by re-starting the phantasized encounter, not by trying to bring the moment of non-being and non-meaning (the car crash) into signification.[479]

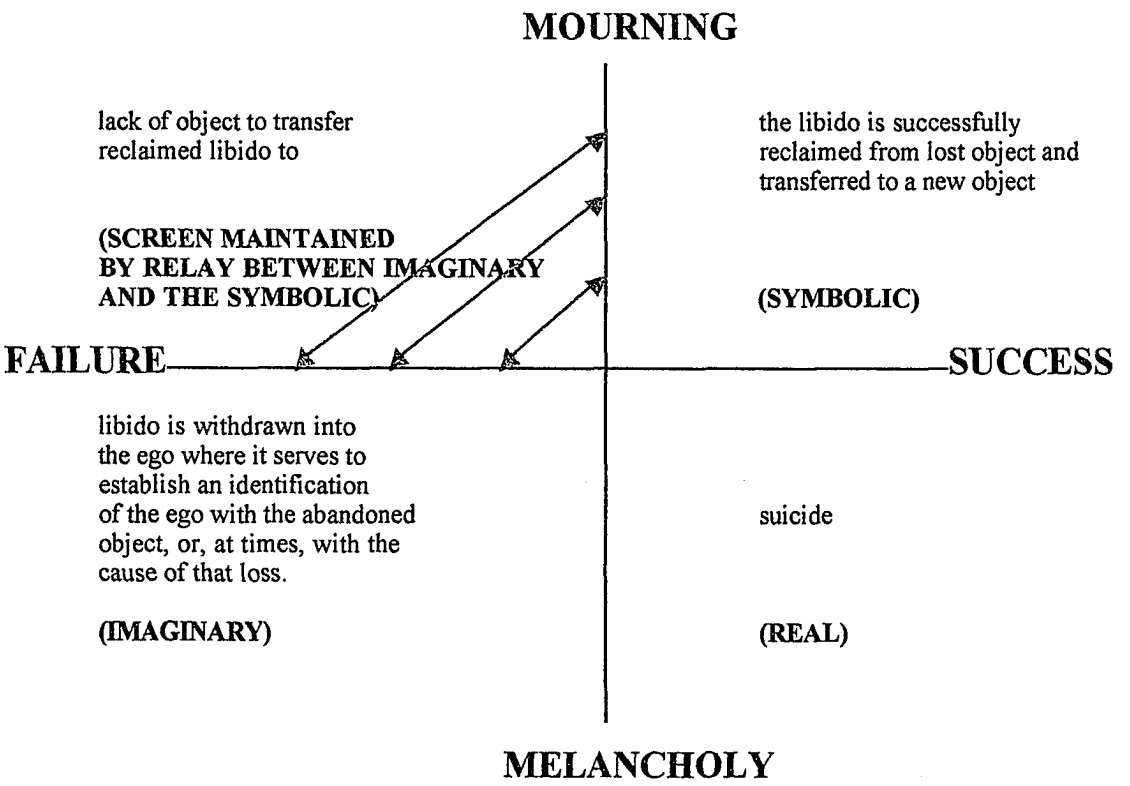
With the psychoanalytic paradigm as a guiding force we can imagine a museum built to address historical trauma (not the trauma of coming-into-being that the Narrenturm addresses) that *produces* trauma in the visitor without resolving or sublimating it. This museum would celebrate the phantasized encounter, that vacillation between the Imaginary (non-meaning) and the Symbolic (meaning), and not see it as merely as a "holding pattern" for eventual signification in the Symbolic. A phantasized encounter that accompanied visitors after they exited the museum's halls would permit that visitor to remain engaged in the trauma the museum produced. Particularly in the case of the trauma produced by the Holocaust, this phantasized encounter created in the museum but sustained outside the museum could be an effective tool in using *absence* to keep the traumatic historical event the museum addresses in the mind of the visitor. Visitors would not memorialize, but neither would they fall into melancholy. Instead, they would operate in the realm of a "failed mourning," a psychic activity that would support the screen to the Real (the horror of the trauma of the Holocaust) without

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[479]Because the Narrenturm dealt with the primary trauma of our coming-into-being, it could not, according to psychoanalytic theory, be resolved.

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disavowing the Real. Freud, who was partial to binary systems, never discussed failed mourning outside of its manifestation as melancholia, but he opens a space for another definition of failed mourning in his discussion of what could be termed *successful melancholia*, of suicide. Freud felt that the melancholic's propensity towards self-annihilation could be explained by the objectification of the ego. He postulates "the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object."[480] By committing suicide, the melancholic is finally able to detach from the object (his or her own ego) by killing it, thus himself or herself. Following his lead, Freud's binary can be expanded so that a category of failed mourning would emerge in opposition to successful melancholia. This can be charted as follows:



[480]Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 14:252.

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Failed mourning is thus a situation in which the subject has been fairly successful in hypercathecting the object of his or her loss, or (as is the case in a museum like the USHMM) has reached an understanding about the mechanism of substitution inherent in this process, but has been unable to redirect libido onto another object (because none is offered by the museum, as with the USHMM, or by society, as with the AIDS Quilt). In charting Lacan's system onto Freud's (in parentheses), we can see that failed mourning operates as a phantasized encounter, relaying between the Imaginary and the Symbolic realms. The struggle for meaning that marks the phantasized encounter (or failed mourning in this case) requires psychic energy and conscious attention, whereas memorialization can fall from consciousness as signification becomes more embedded in the Symbolic and as the historical event the memorializing activity addresses retreats in time.

We can begin to understand the relationship between the car crash and the phantasized encounter in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin (Figure 80), as it existed in 1999 to 2000.[481] From the air, this building looks like a large lightening bolt, although this design element is lost as you approach the building from the street.[482] Its zinc-clad facade mimics the often-gray Berlin sky.[483] The entrance to the Jewish Museum is through the ochre Baroque building that houses the Berlin Museum next door, and the connection between the two museums—like the wound that continues to haunt the Germans and the Jews in this city—is subterranean (Figure 82).[484] The museum itself is built around a void, a void that is immediately made visible to anyone entering the interior

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[481]During this time Libeskind's museum was completed but had no displays installed in it. The empty museum was open to the public at limited times, and by appointment only.

[482]For a complete history of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, see Daniel Libeskind, *Jewish Museum Berlin* (G + B Arts International, 1999) and Daniel Libeskind and Bernhard Schneider, *Jewish Museum Berlin*, trans. John William Gabriel (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1999).

[483]Over time, the zinc will weather into the same sky-blue shade as the untempered zinc window frames of the Berlin Museum next door.

[484]Freud often noted that trauma resurfaces in very "literal" signs. There is not the usual masking that occurs in other psychic processes, for instance in (non-trauma related) dreams. Libeskind seems to constantly play on trauma's literalness at the expense of being too obvious.

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spaces (Figure 81). This empty, unused space bisects the building and even extends outside. It disrupts every room and hallway, and, in fact, some of the spaces become so small and deformed that they become useless as exhibition chambers.[485] The void in the Jewish Museum can be read as its car crash. This "absence" refuses any representation of history. Sometimes this refusal is literal, as in the way it does not allow traditional museum displays on its skewed walls, and even when it does, the void points to the "artifice" of these displays by offering only distressed presentation surfaces, the void exists only as a space that denies meaning.[486]

Unlike the USHMM, the car crash in the Jewish Museum is a void that *refuses* meaning, not a space that acts to disrupt established meaning by ripping the screen to the Real away. Here, the car crash initiates and constantly interrupts the museum experience. In the Jewish Museum, we are not allowed the self-indulgence of a regressive return that the wresting away of the screen to the Real seems to produce. Nor are we prone to reach for the Symbolic and to assimilate the *experience* and *meaning* of the void into the realm of signification. In other words, by having the museum acknowledge the space of non-meaning, and even embrace it, we use the car crash (the void) to establish and constantly *engage* the psychic screen to this void. And like all phantasized encounters in the museum, this phantasized encounter is drawn from the desired encounter and the scripted encounter (of the museum), but in the Jewish Museum, Libeskind has expanded the scripted encounter to the world outside the museum.

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[485]According to James E. Young, the original design called for walls that were inclined at such an angle that they would have prevented any hanging exhibition. "Against Redemption: The Arts of Countermemory in Germany Today," Peter Homans, ed. *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia), 187.

[486]This analysis is based on my visit to the museum in September 1999, when the permanent exhibit was yet to be installed. The permanent exhibit now occupies the museum and is open to the public. The prominence of the void has been offset by the artifacts that now crowd the museum. (Thanks to Zelda Zinn for her impressions of an August 2002, visit to the museum.) The possibility of a museum that does NOT have objects in it but relies on the audience and the space to deliver meaning is a new chapter the museum has yet to write.

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When we look up from the void, or even while we walk down a corridor towards its disjointed visual manifestation (for we can never escape it in this museum, Figure 83) we cannot help but notice the construction cranes through the museum's distorted and off-centered windows. These massive and terrifyingly unstable machines were used not only in the service of the Jewish Museum but are found all over Berlin, as the city continues to rebuild itself. We are forced to contemplate how this new building campaign, this desire to obscure, if not erase, the visual signifiers of a "glorious" past,[487] relates to the trauma that is the Holocaust, here "pointed to" (and *not* represented) by a void. Libeskind demands that the car crash both stimulate *and* numb us. It is not an either-or possibility or first one response then the other, but a simultaneous happening, the activity of the phantasized encounter. It is a provocative proposition that we hope will continue to be explored in other museums built to trauma.[488] For as we tentatively forge a path into the 21st century and into the third millennium of what is paradoxically called the Common Era by historians, trauma, that most strange and perplexing of human emotions refuses to lay dormant.[489]

Trauma appears to be a symptom *and* a "trope" in our society that will not disappear. The extent to which we can explore new paradigms for the museum, in both their analysis and construction, will allow us to meet the challenges that accompany acts

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[487] In fact, it could be argued that Berlin is rebuilding itself in America's image, with modern architectural forms emblazoned with capitalist logos.

[488]This conclusion would vary from that of Irit Rogoff, who in a coincidental reference to the car crash that anchors the present study, characterizes the Jewish Museum as a "hit and run" museum. She feels the museum merely "performs a lack," much as the museum once "performed a plentitude." "Hit and Run—Museums and Cultural Difference," *Art Journal* (Fall 2002), 64.

[489]As this study is concluded at the beginning of 2003, the city of New York has opted to create a memorial in an attempt to bring "closure." The officials seem to understand how best to achieve this goal - the names of all the dead (the subjects required for Symbolization) are required in the memorial design as well as a place to bury "unidentifiable body parts" (the fetishes of the Real that threaten signification). Edward Wyatt, "Draft Guidelines Released for Trade Center Memorial," *New York Times*, 9 January 2003, sec. B, p. 3. In light of Libeskind's Jewish Museum, one must question whether "closure" is the most effective tool for keeping the trauma of the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks against America in public consciousness. As an aside, Libeskind was chosen to reconstruct the World Trade Center. Like the Jewish Museum in Berlin, his World Trade Center design is anchored by a "void."

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of historical trauma. If we can begin to consider the museum as an institution not limited to objects and spaces (as unique as either or both of these may be) but as a public site that engages the psyches of its visitors, we may find the opportunity to use the museum as a site of cultural production. We may not welcome trauma nor know how to deal with its wrath, but as long as we have museums, we have the potential to constantly engage with historical trauma and to thereby contemplate its lessons. This would be preferable to hiding trauma away in the recesses of our mind and our cultural narratives, where without warning, and always with surprise, it could one day resurface and rob us of our ability to bring meaning and understanding to future acts of history.[490]

[490] In this way the next historical act of trauma could be productive in bringing forth meaning to past acts of historical trauma, becoming in essence the second trauma that gives the first trauma meaning.

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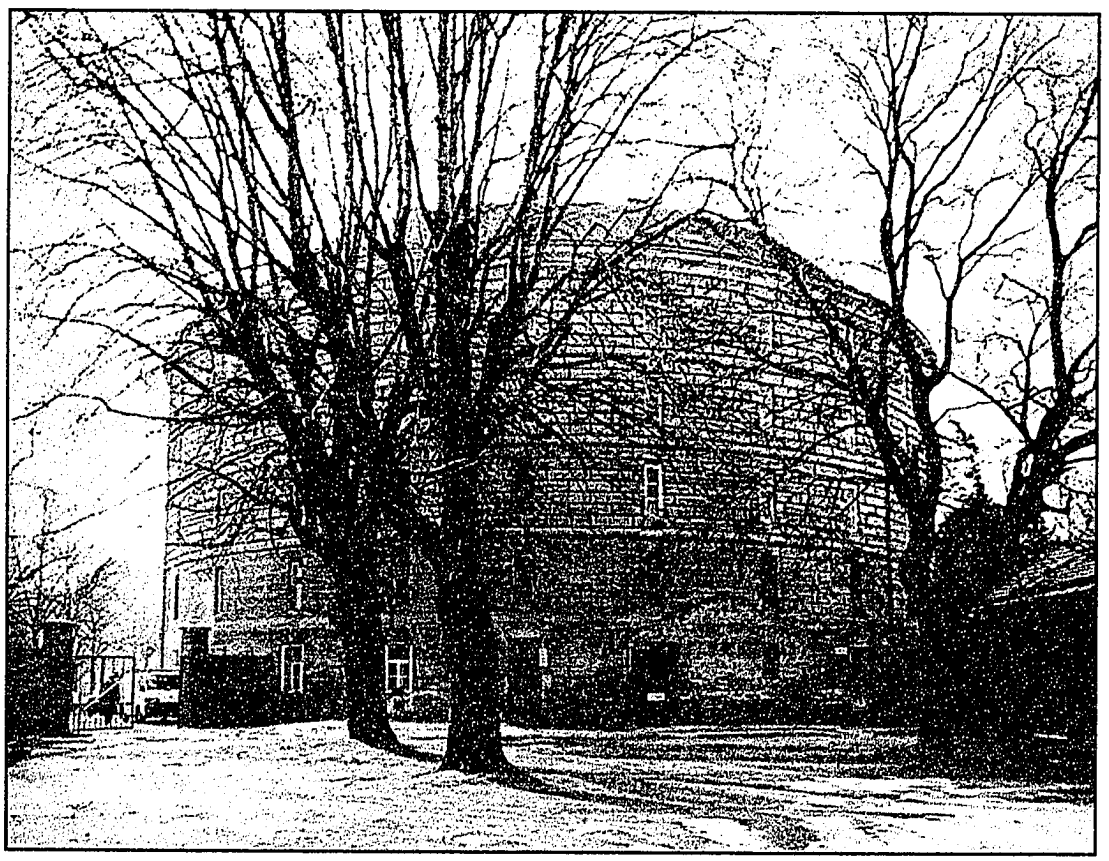


Figure 1. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Outside view from Sensengasse.

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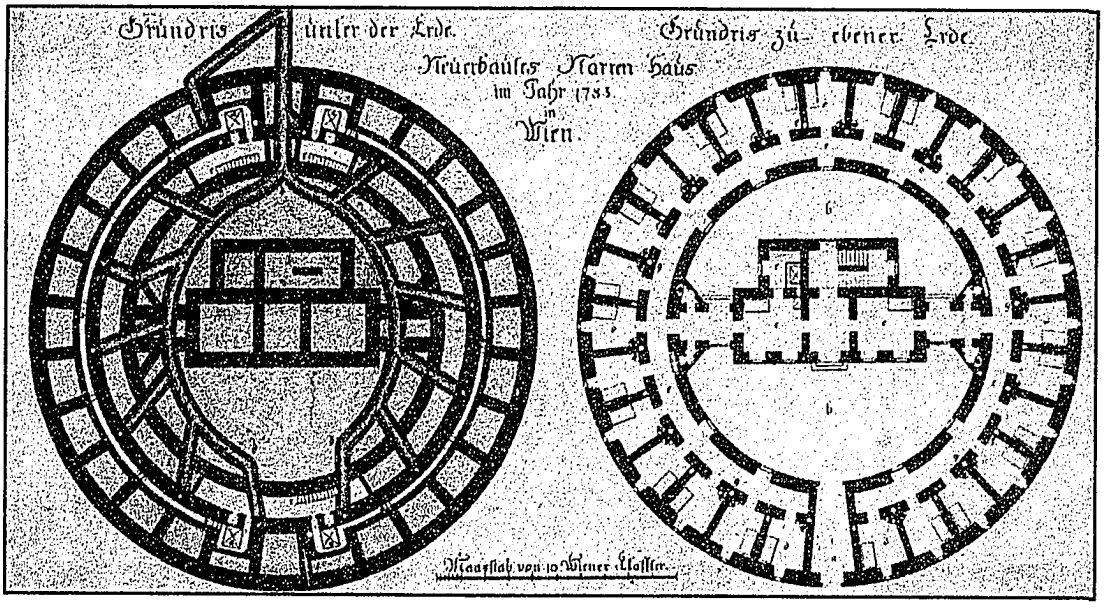


Figure 2. Narrenturm, original plan (1783).

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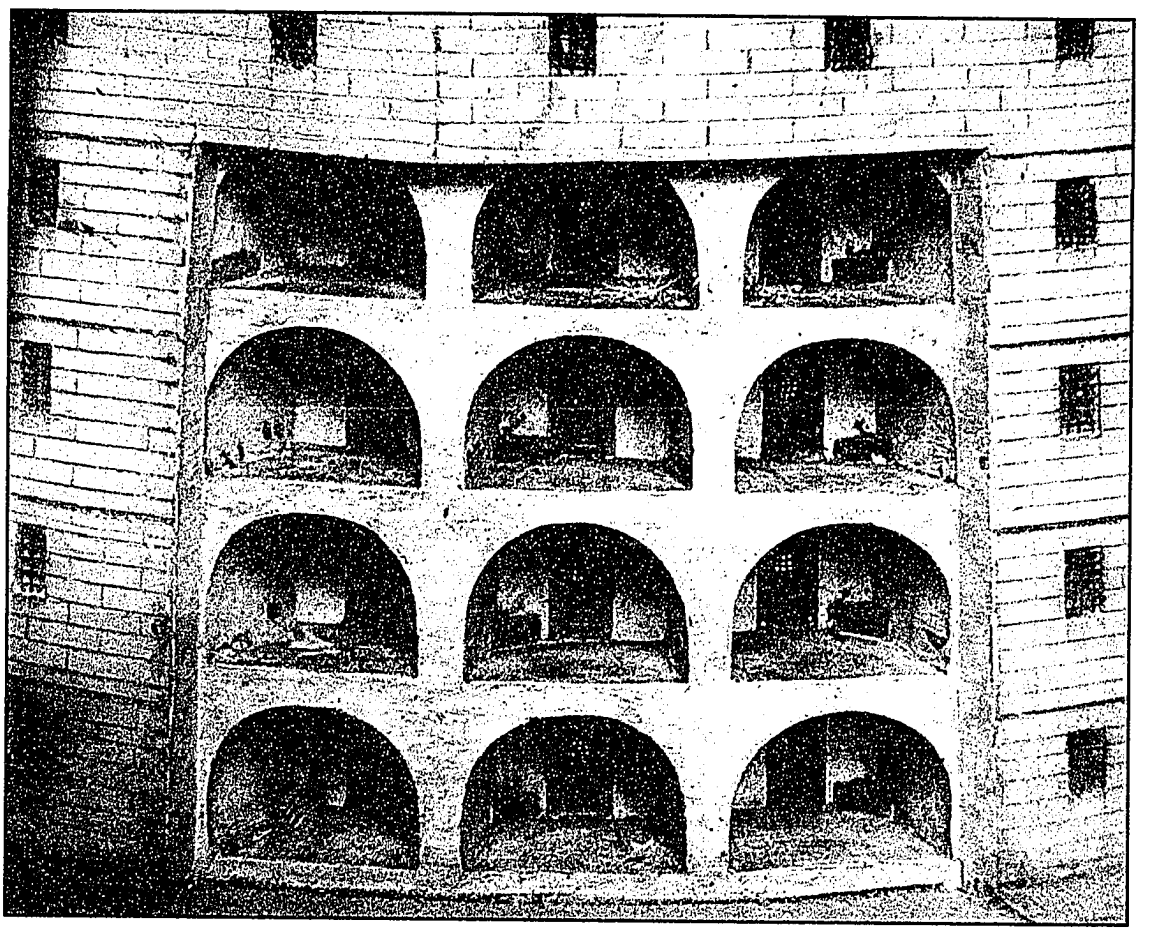


Figure 3. Model of the Narrenturm asylum.

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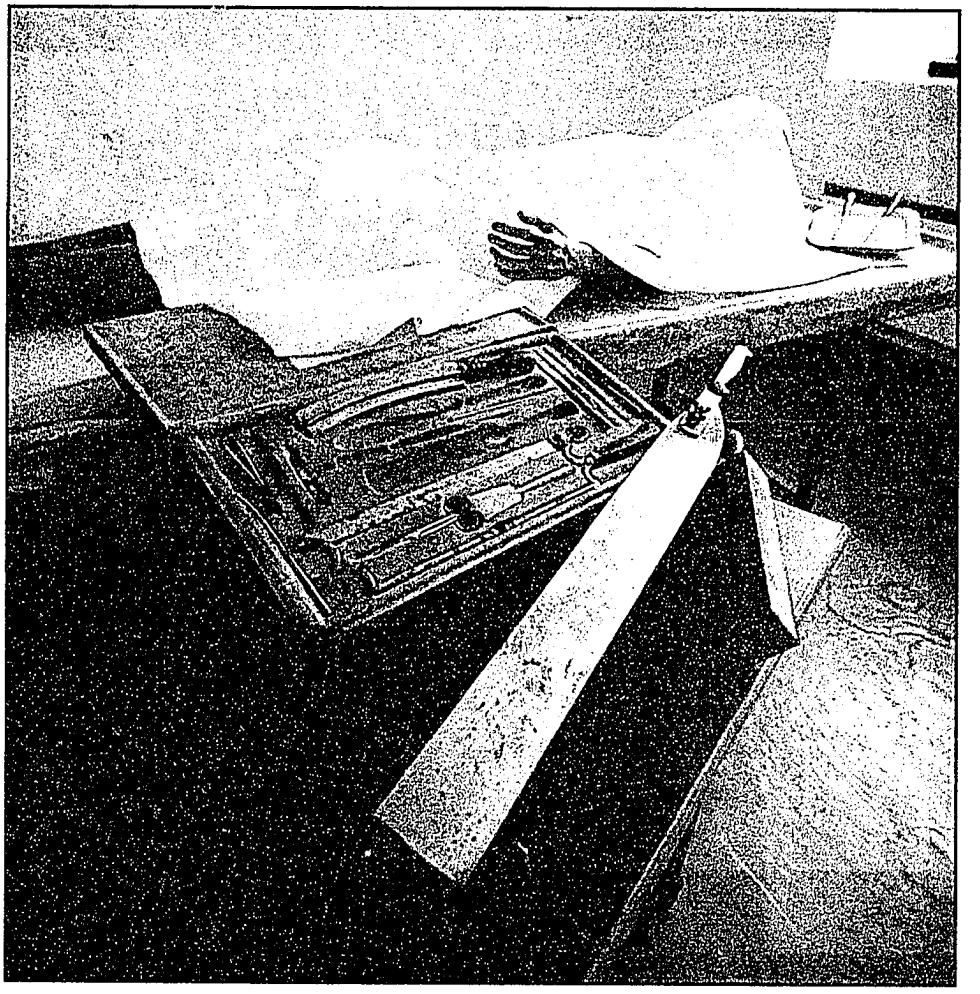


Figure 4. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Model of dissecting table and set of instruments.

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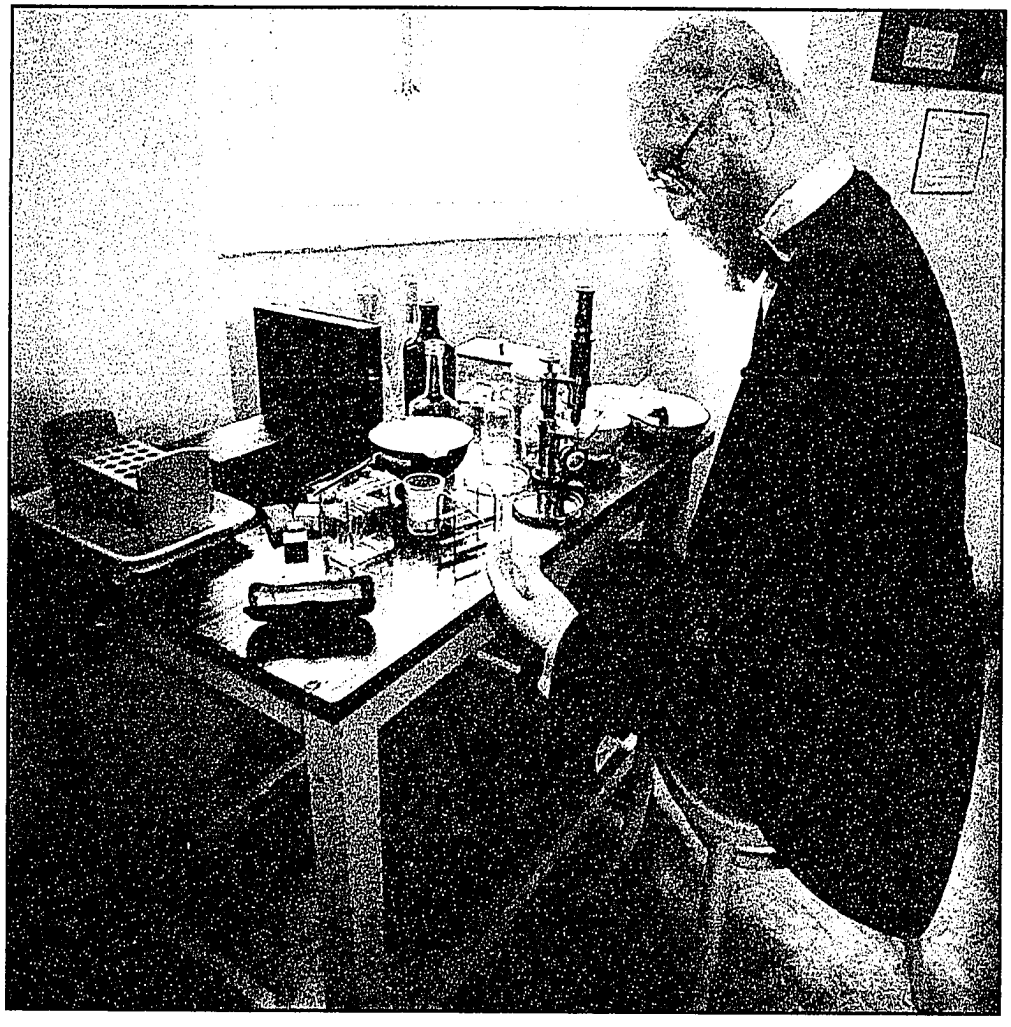


Figure 5. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Model of doctor.

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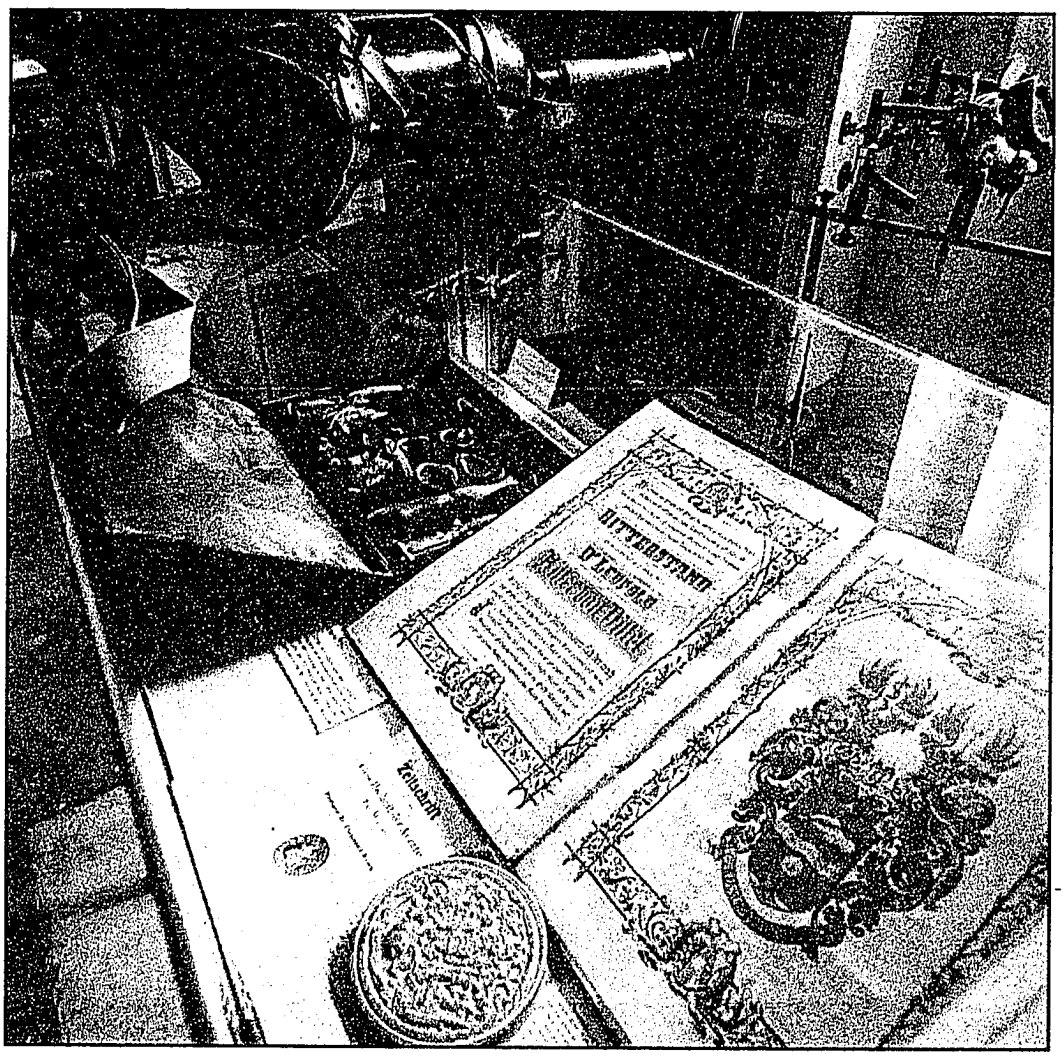


Figure 6. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Display in vitrine.

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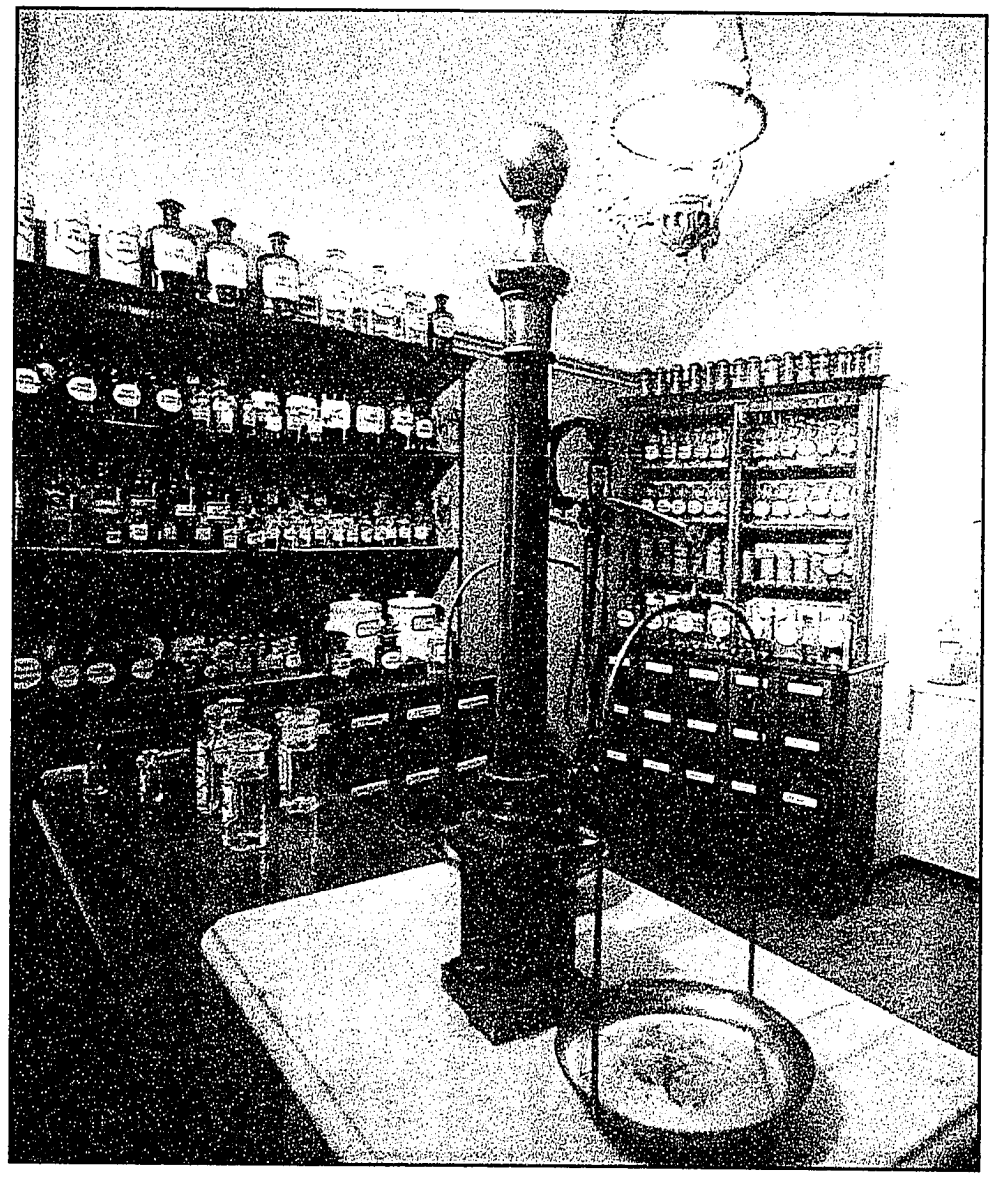


Figure 7. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Historical pharmacy.

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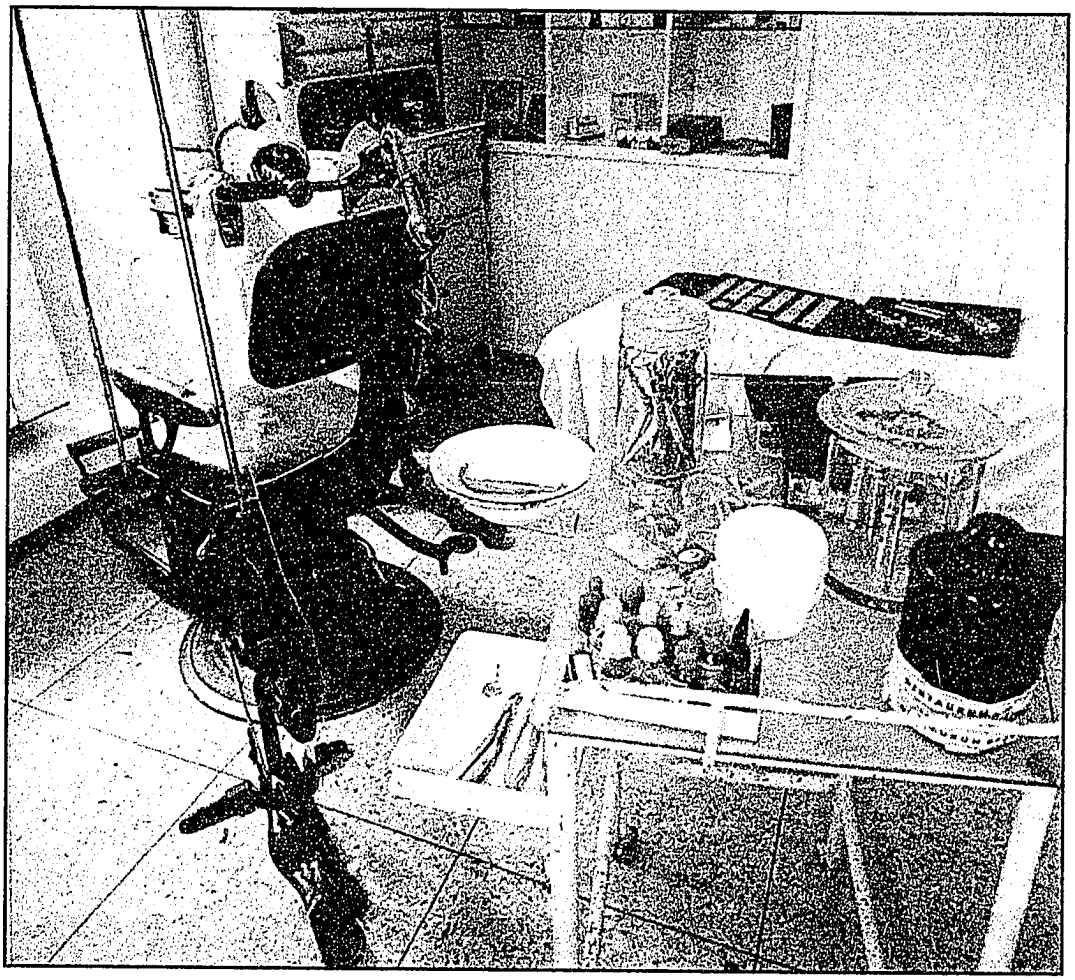


Figure 8. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Old dental surgery display.

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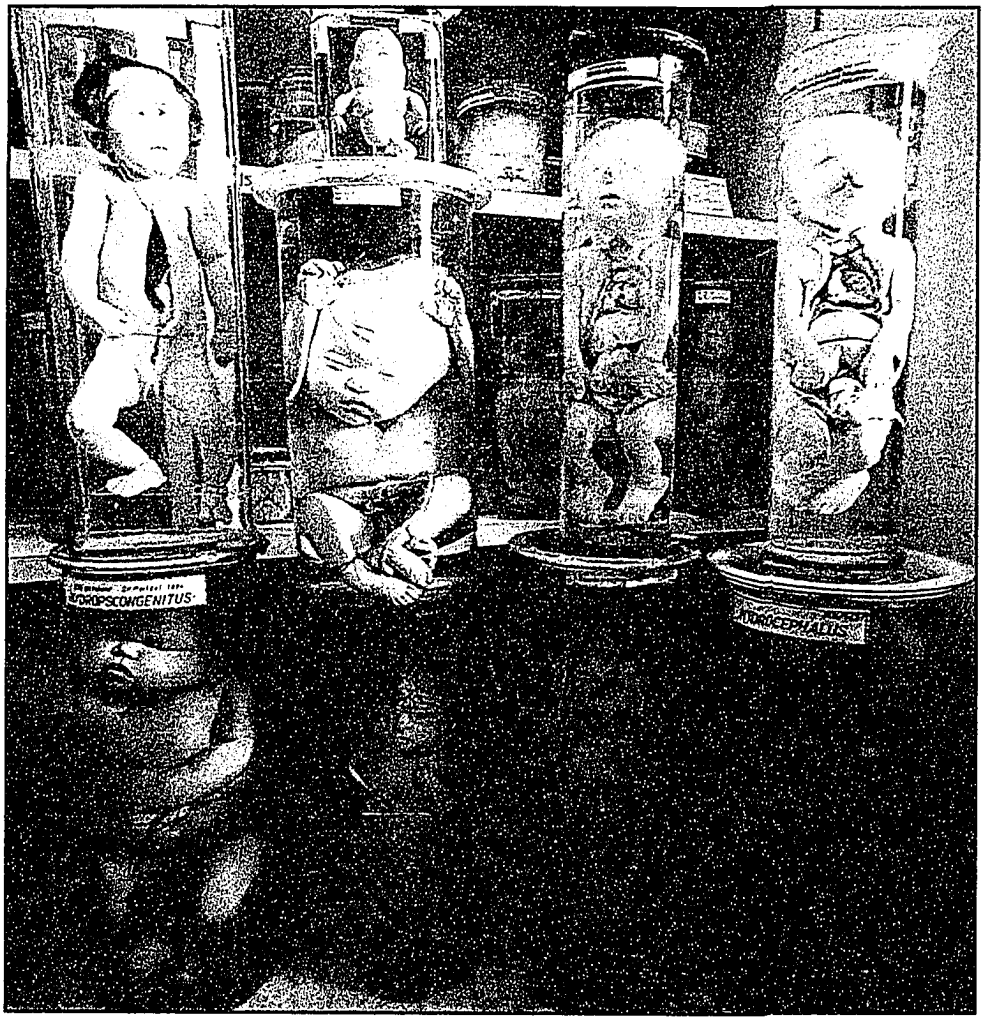


Figure 9. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Malformed newborns.

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Figure 10. Narrenturm Federal Pathological-Anatomical Museum. Second floor display of moulages.

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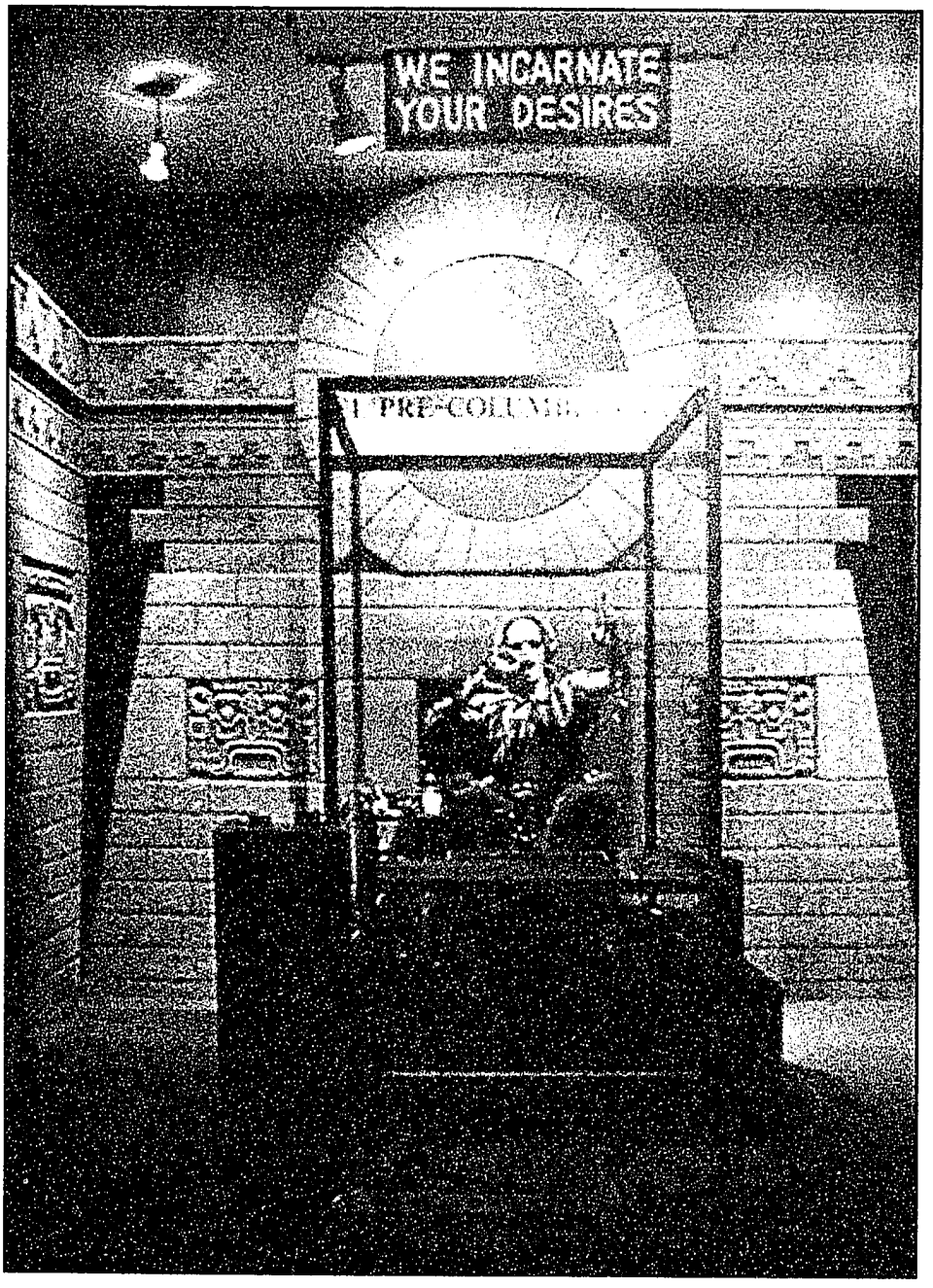


Figure 11. *Temple of Confessions*. Roberto Sifuentes as "El Colombian Vato."

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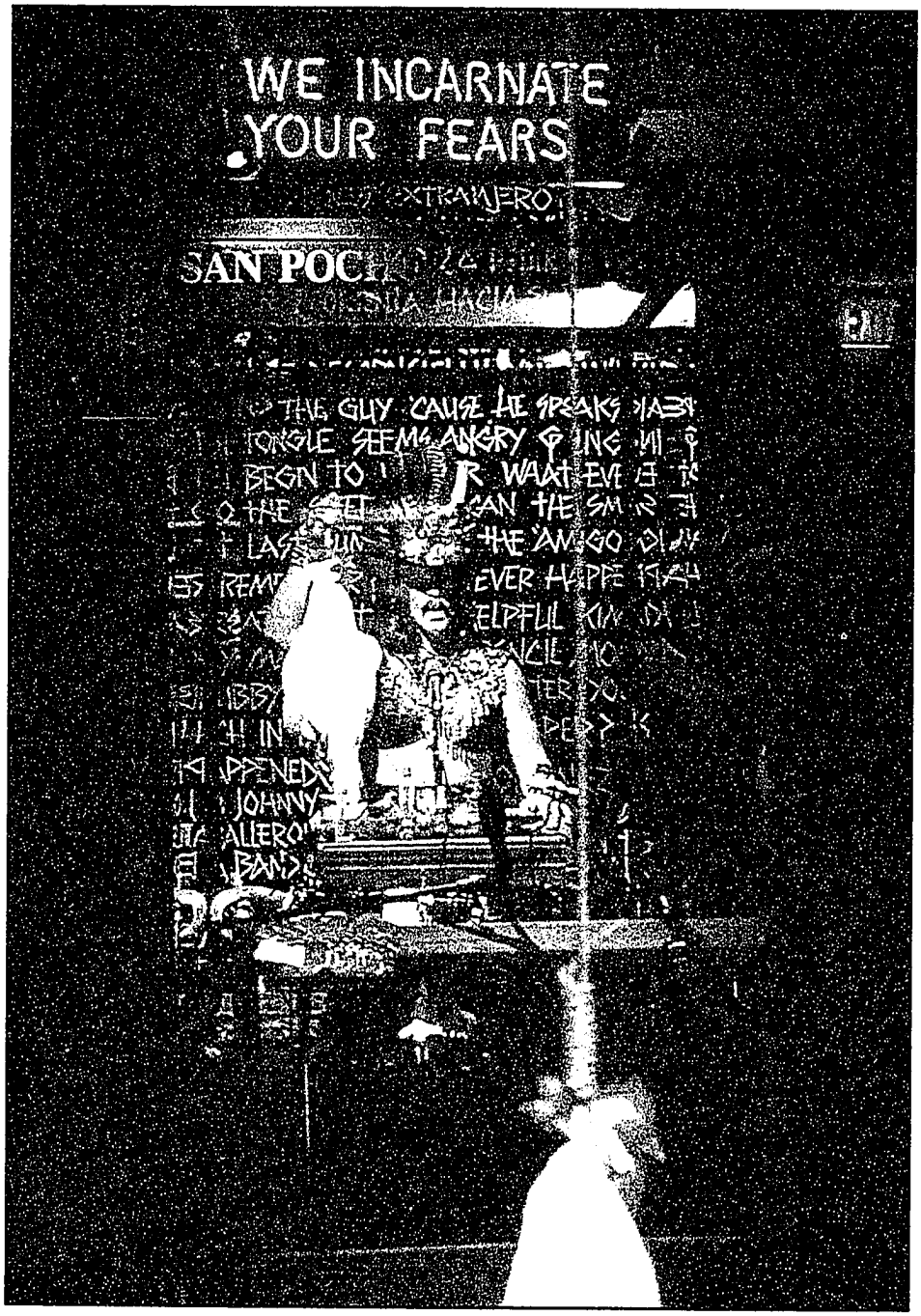


Figure 12. *Temple of Confessions*. Guillermo Gómez-Peña as "San Pocho Axtlaneca."

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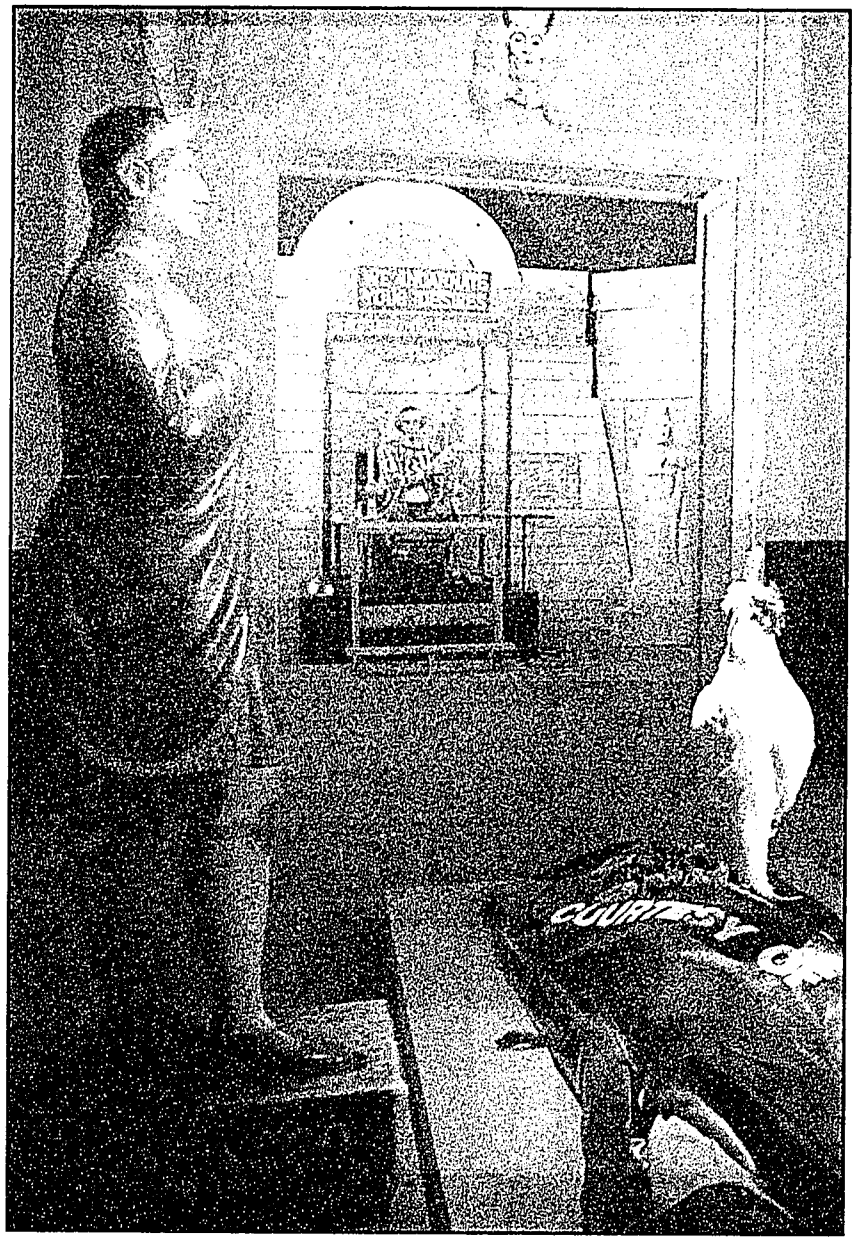


Figure 13. *Temple of Confessions*. Mortuary Temple.

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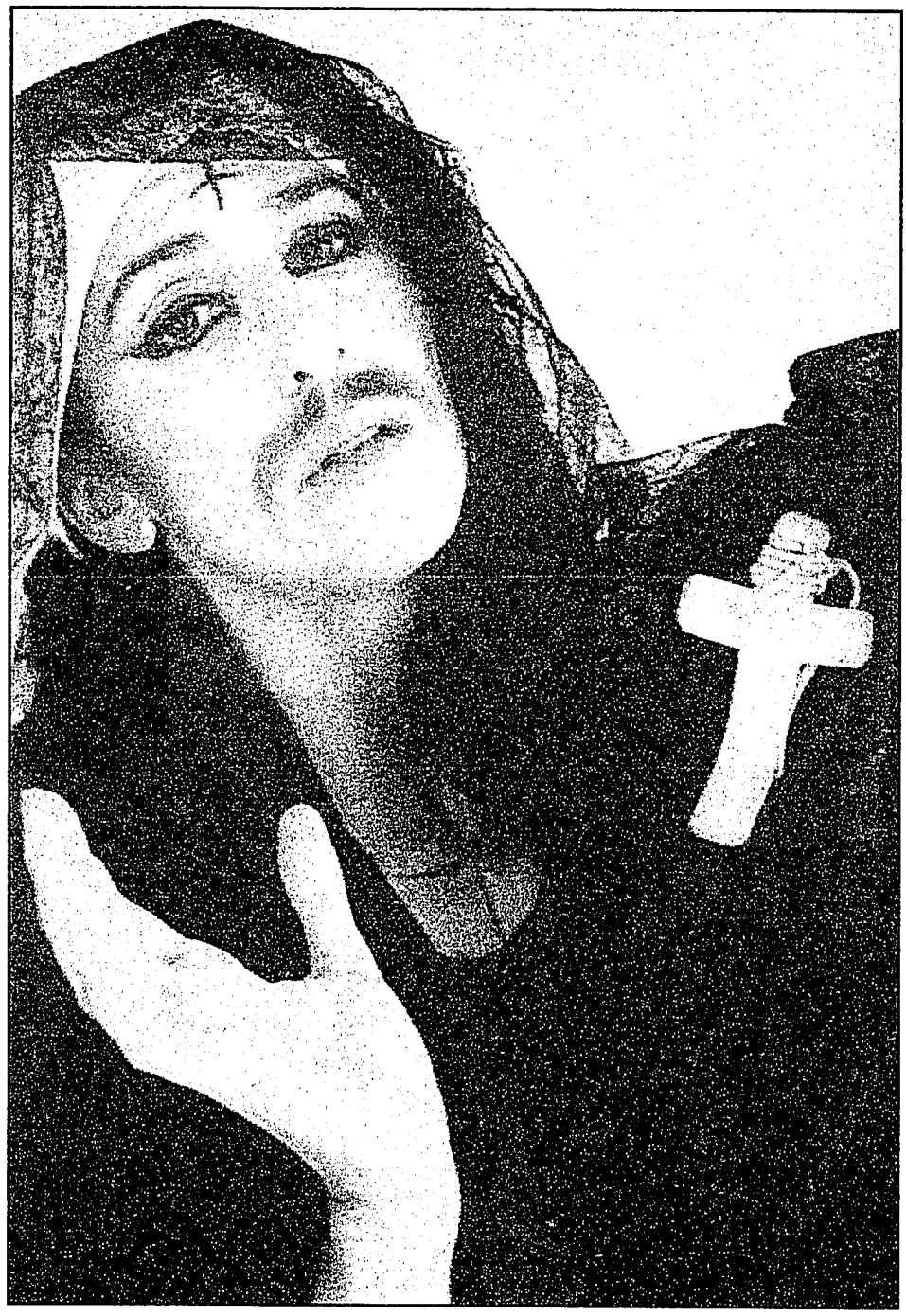


Figure 14. *Temple of Confessions*. "Nun Caretaker."

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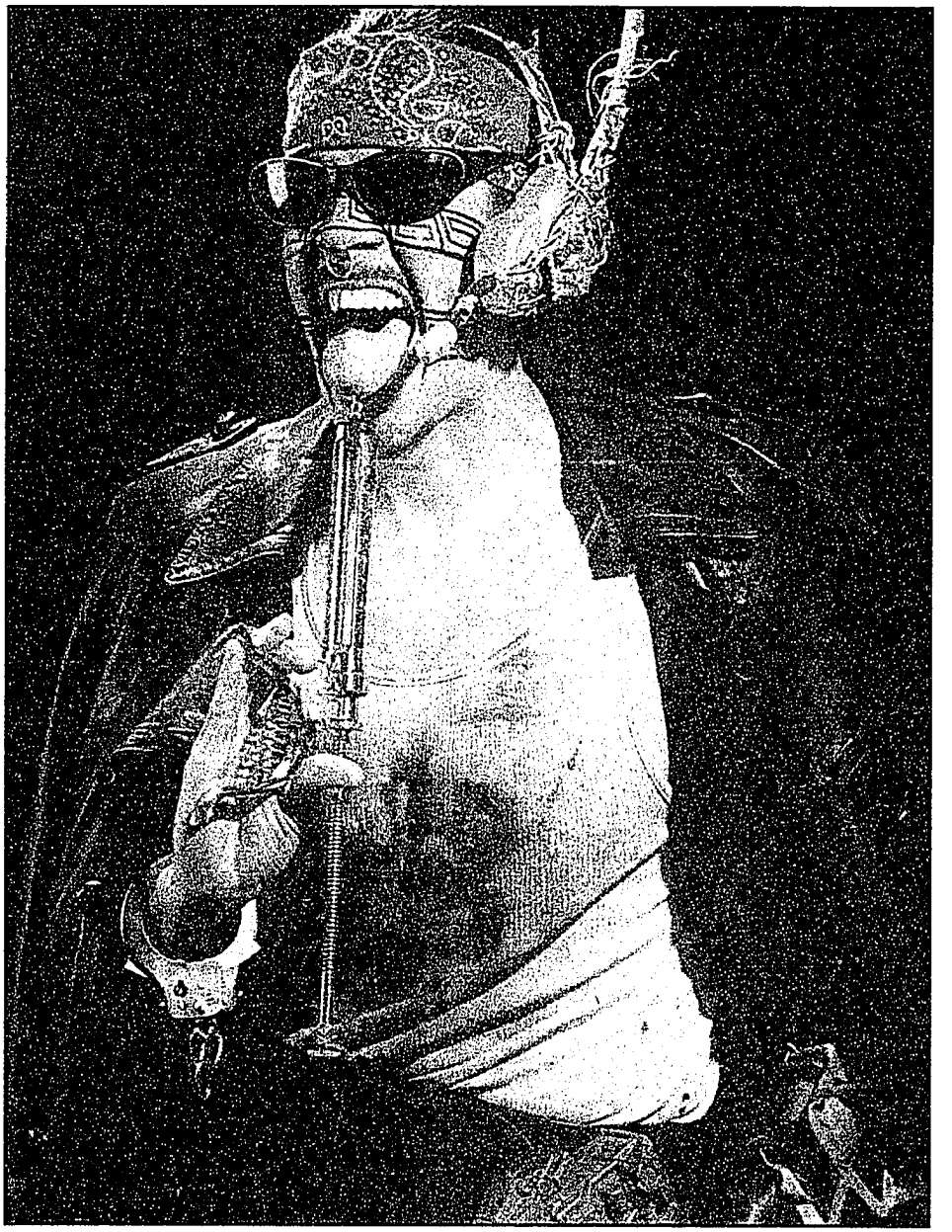


Figure 16. *Temple of Confessions*. Roberto Sifuentes "shoots-up" his tongue with a horse syringe.

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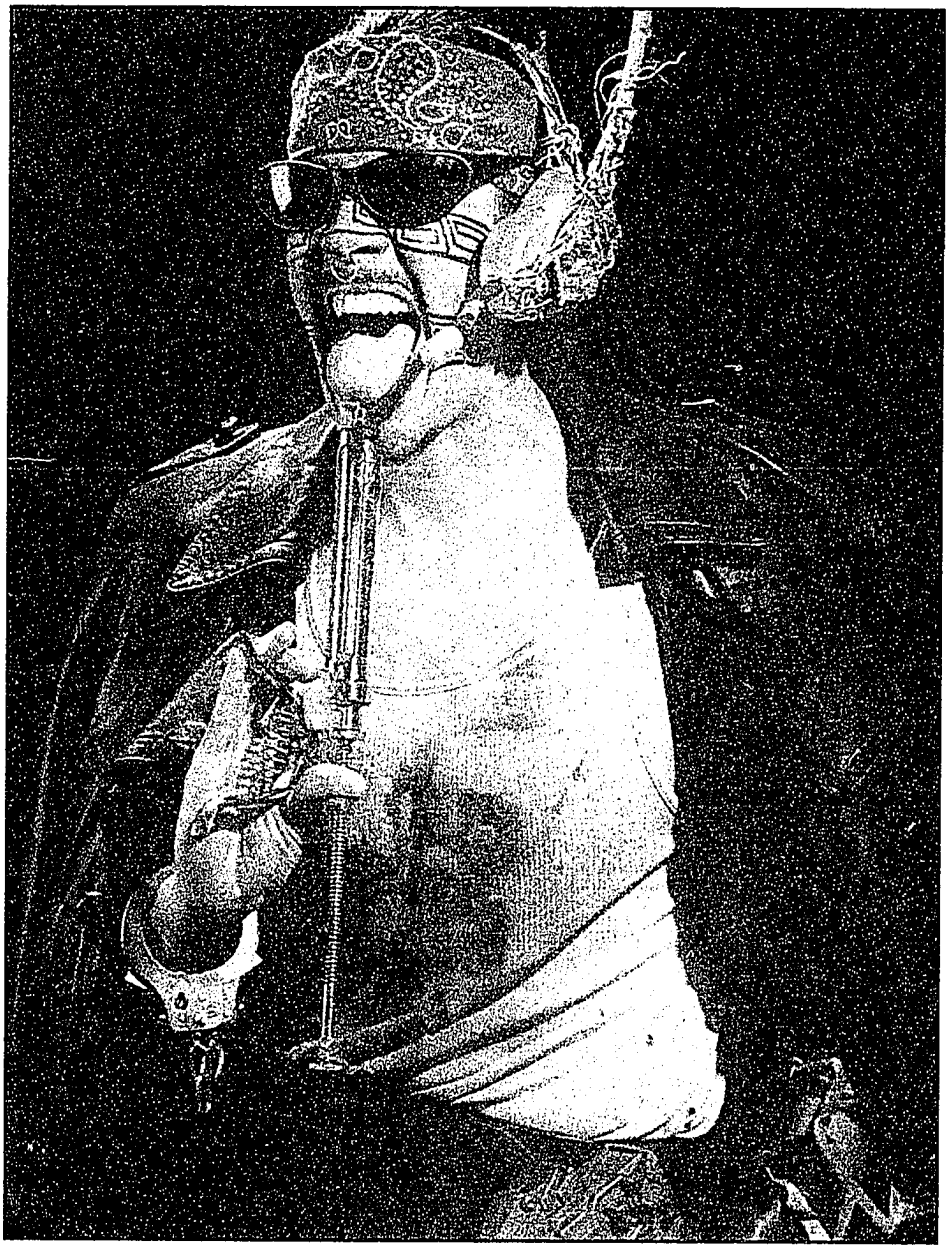


Figure 16. *Temple of Confessions*. Roberto Sifuentes "shoots-up" his tongue with a horse syringe.

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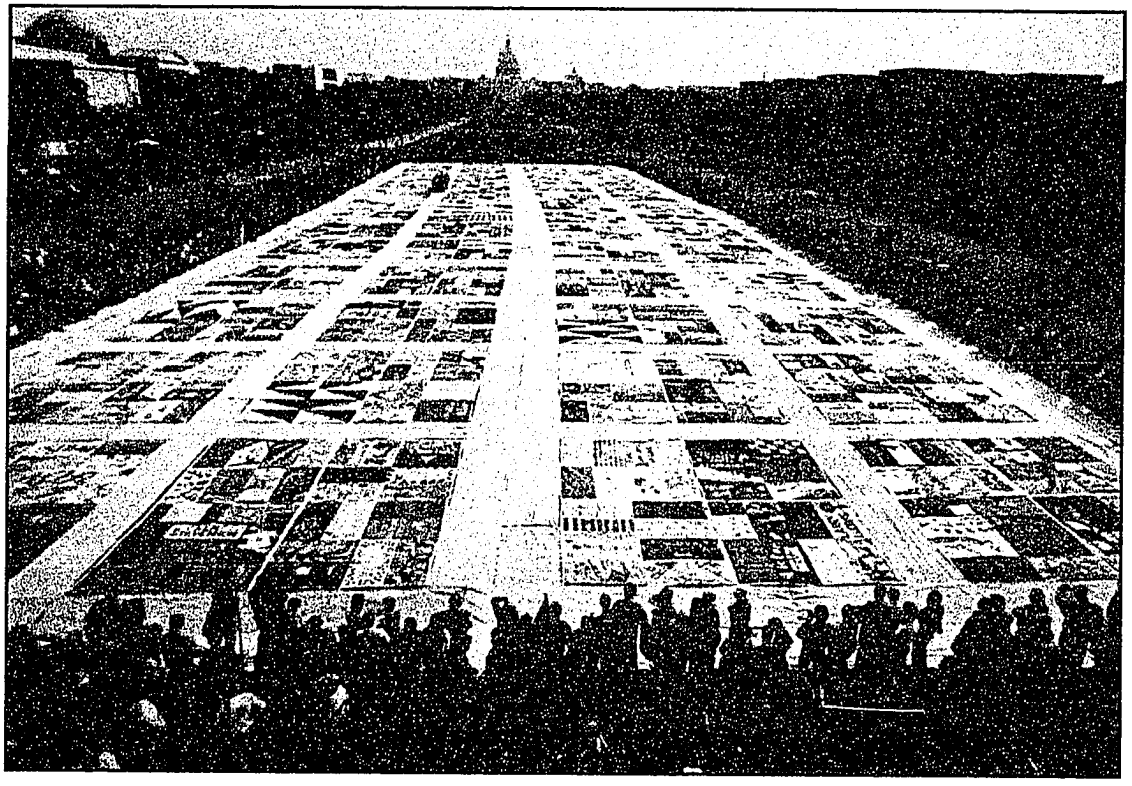


Figure 17. The NAMES Project Memorial Quilt. 1987 display on the Washington, D.C. Mall

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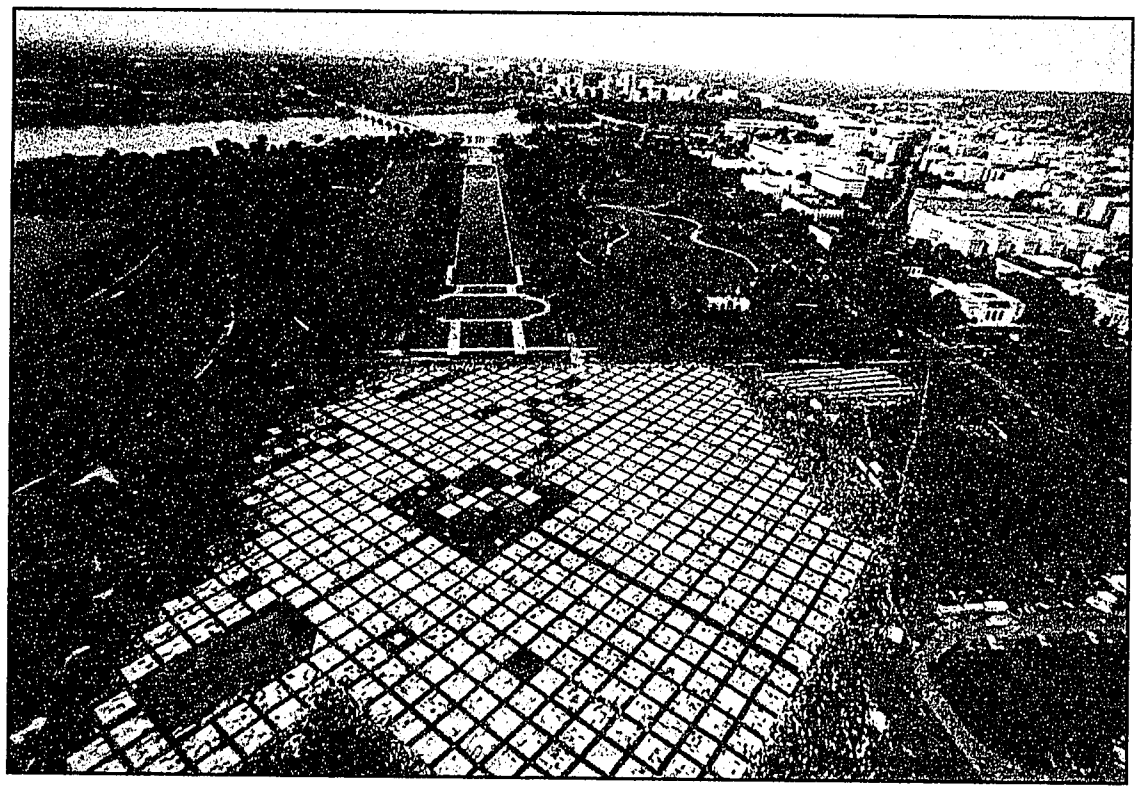


Figure 18. The NAMES Project Memorial Quilt. 1988 display behind the White House.

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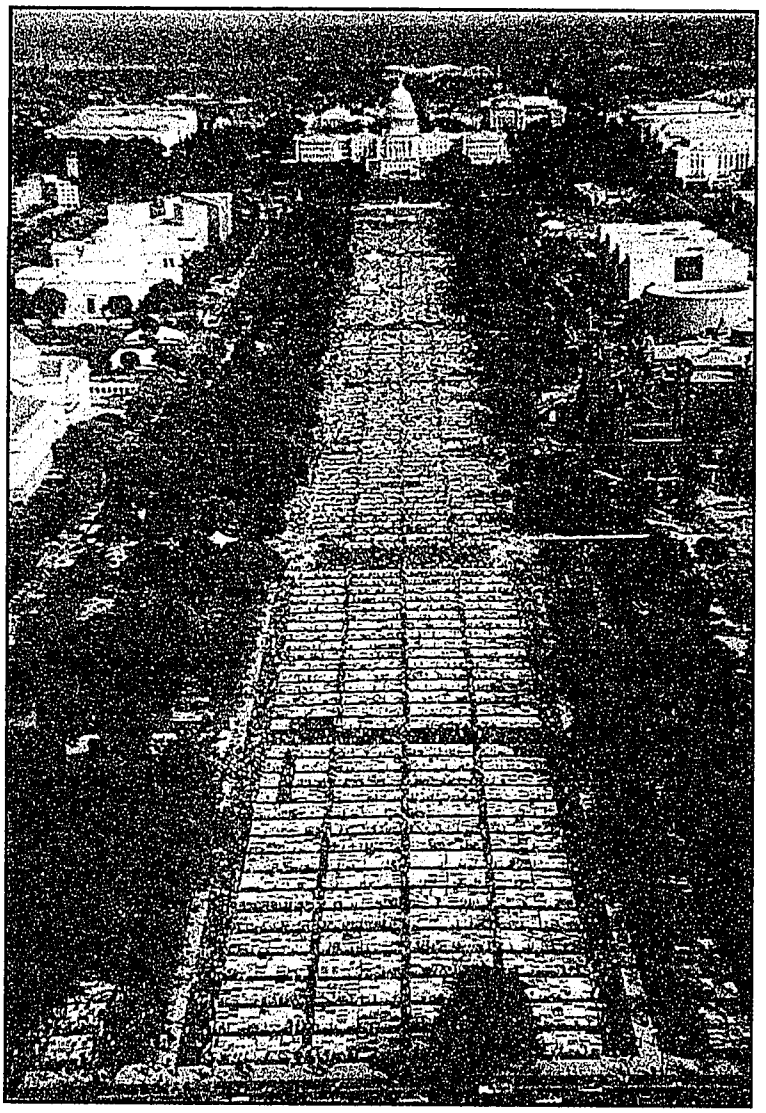


Figure 19. The NAMES Project Memorial Quilt. 1996 display on the Washington, D.C. Mall.

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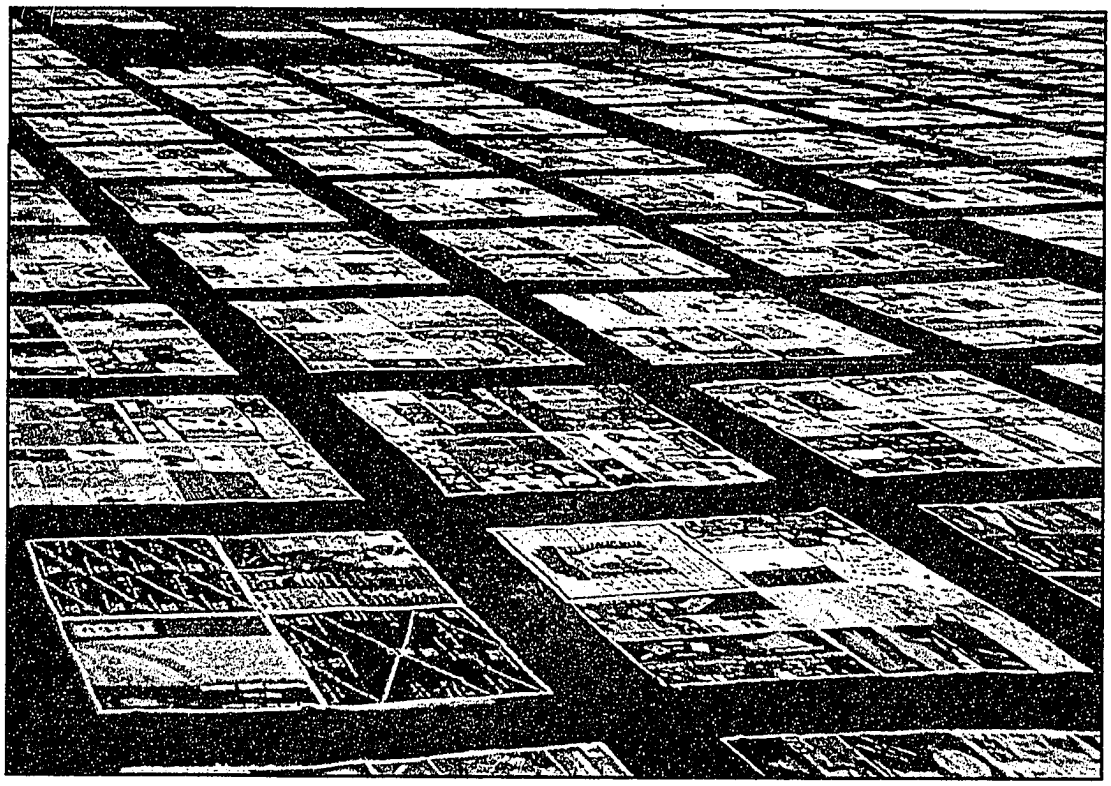


Figure 20. Panels from the AIDS Quilt.

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Figure 21. Makeshift memorial outside Kensington Palace following Princess Diana's death in August 1997.

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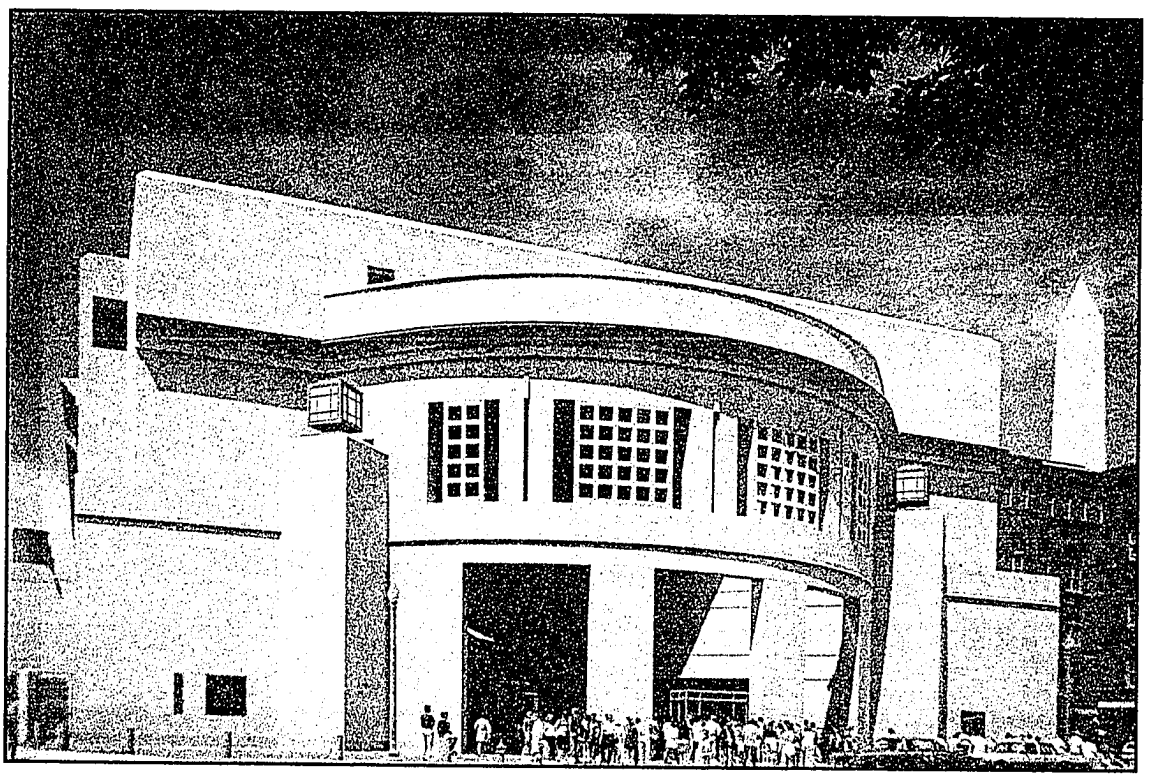


Figure 22. James Ingo Freed (architect). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Entrance from 14th Street.

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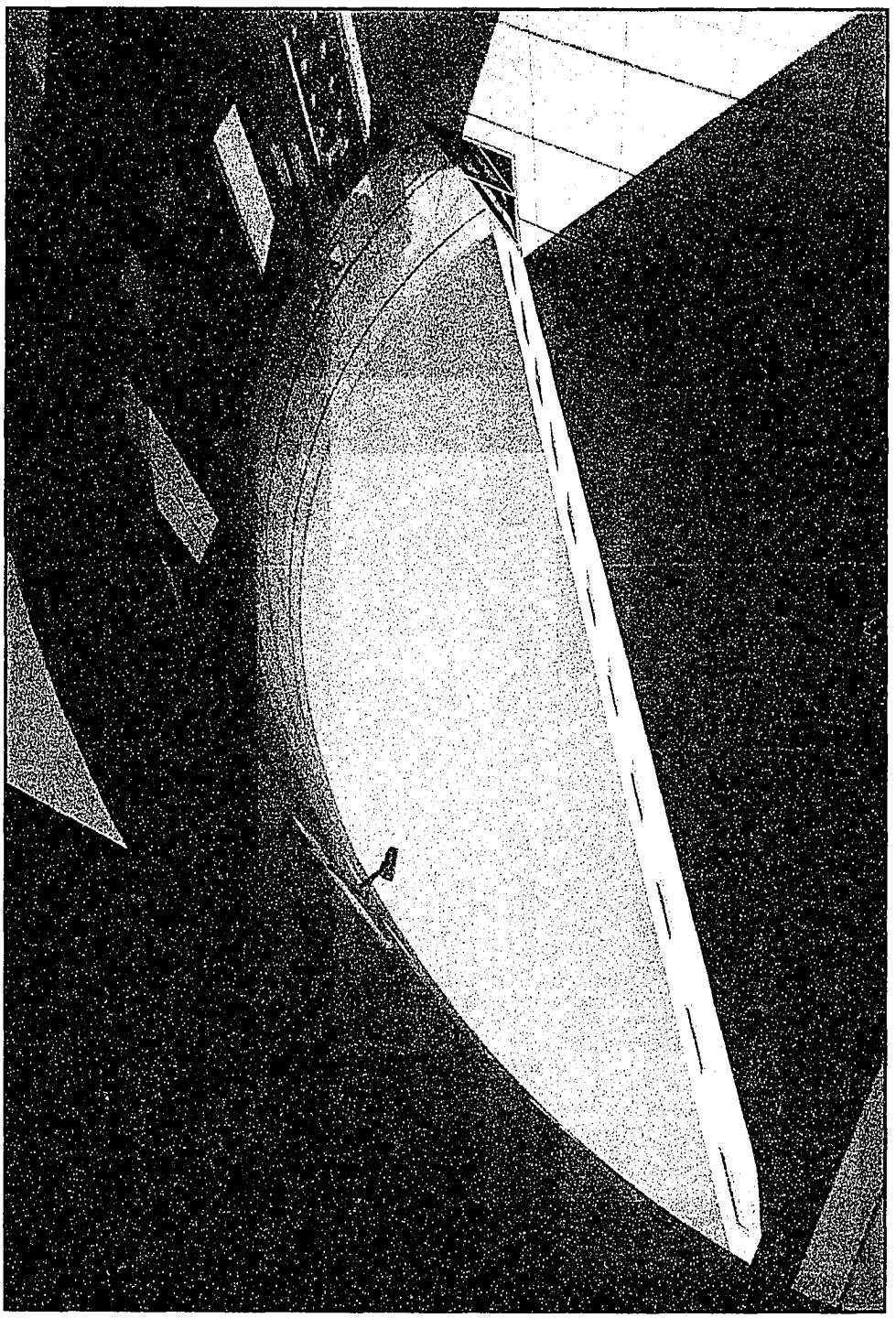


Figure 23. James Ingo Freed (architect). United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. Behind 14th Street facade looking up to the sky.

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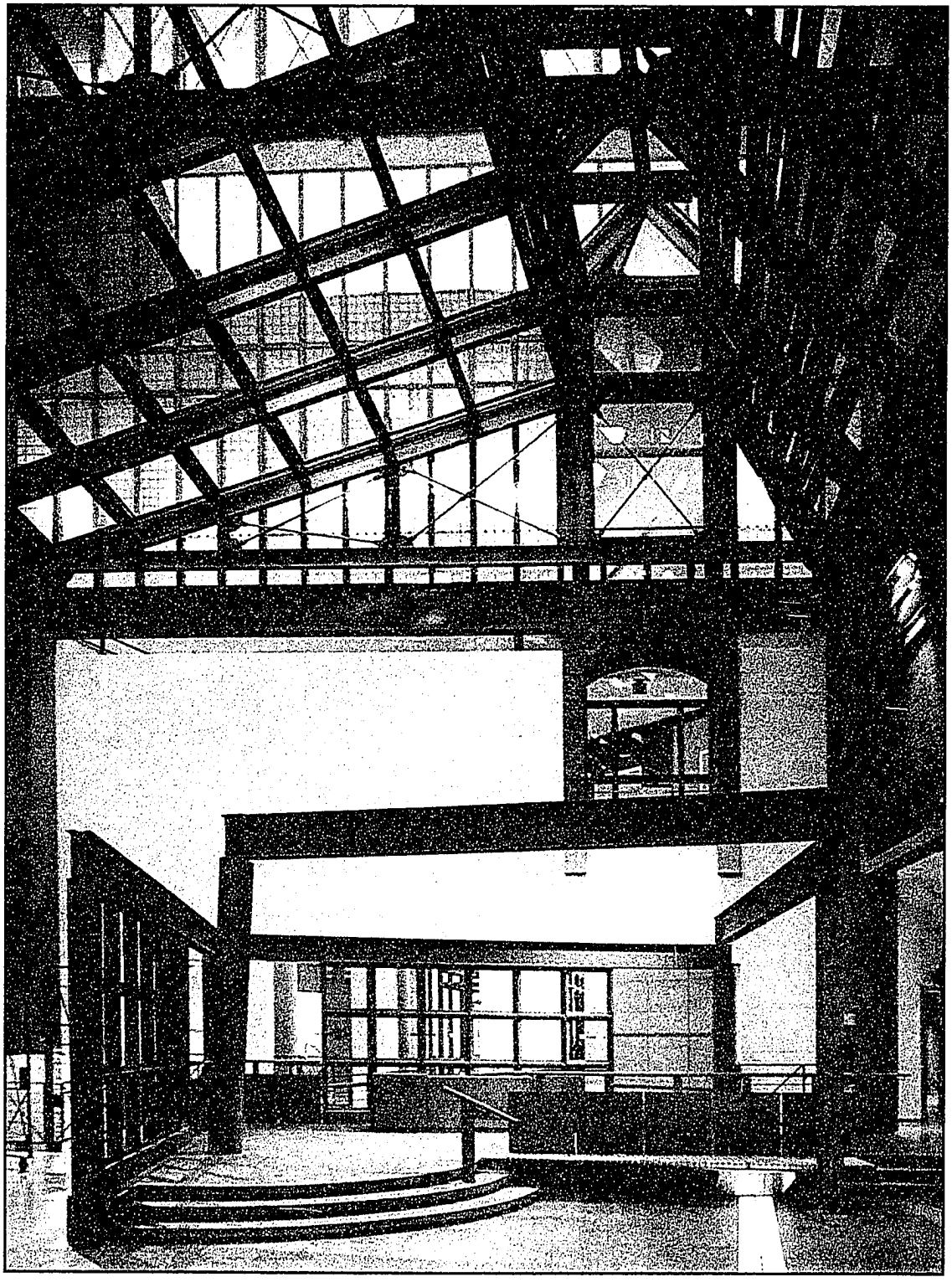


Figure 24. James Ingo Freed (architect). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Hall of Witness.

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Figure 25. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Skylight over the Hall of Witness seen through glass on one of the connecting bridges.

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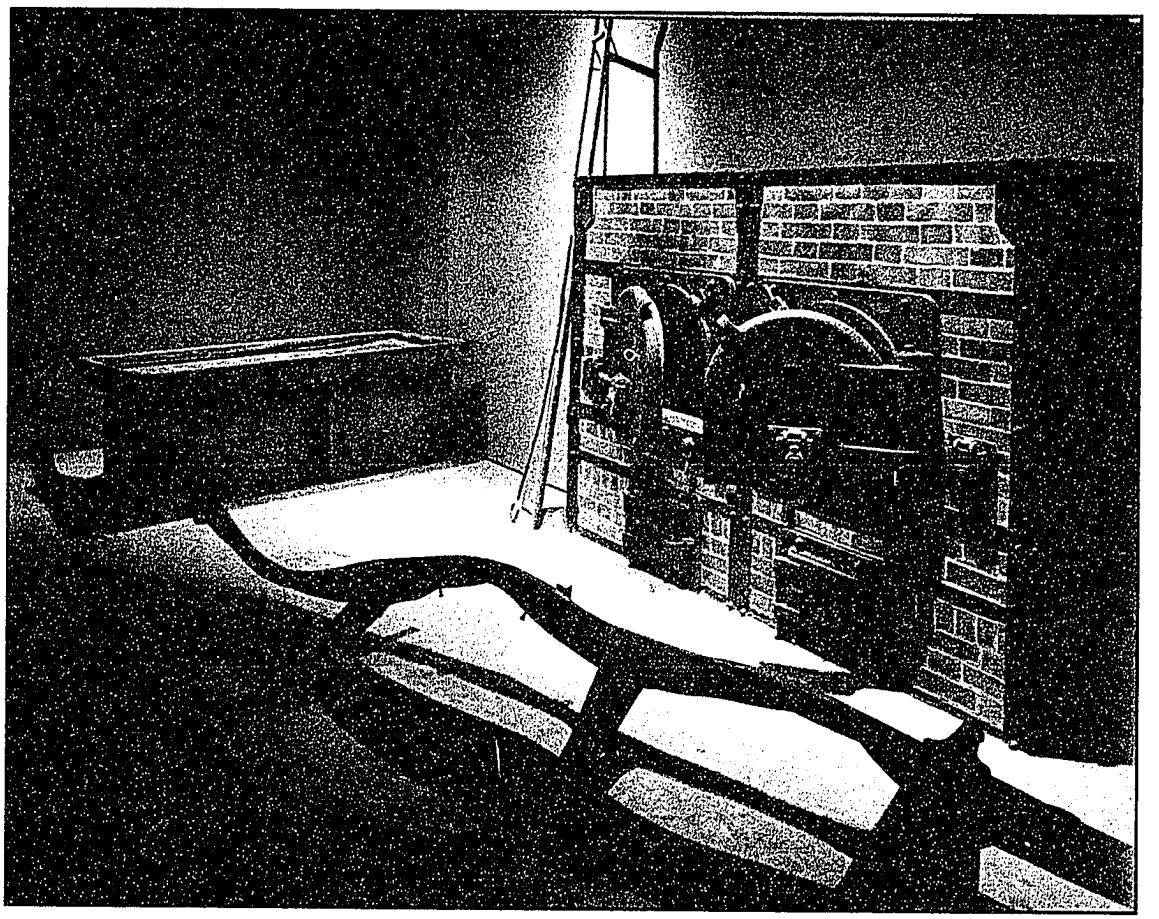


Figure 26. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Replica of a crematorium in the concentration camp of Mauthausen, Austria.

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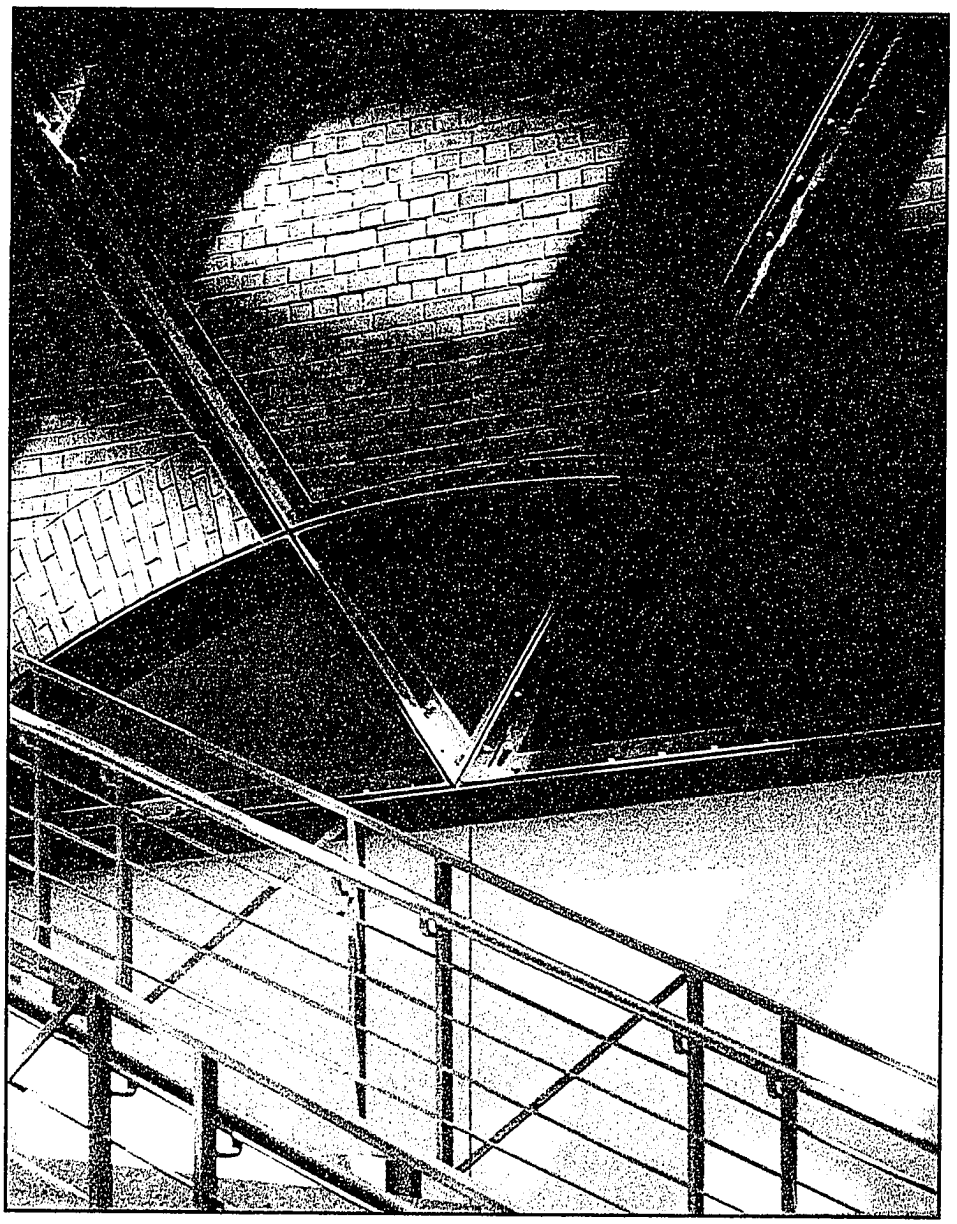


Figure 27. James Ingo Freed (architect). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Hall of Witness, steel bracing.

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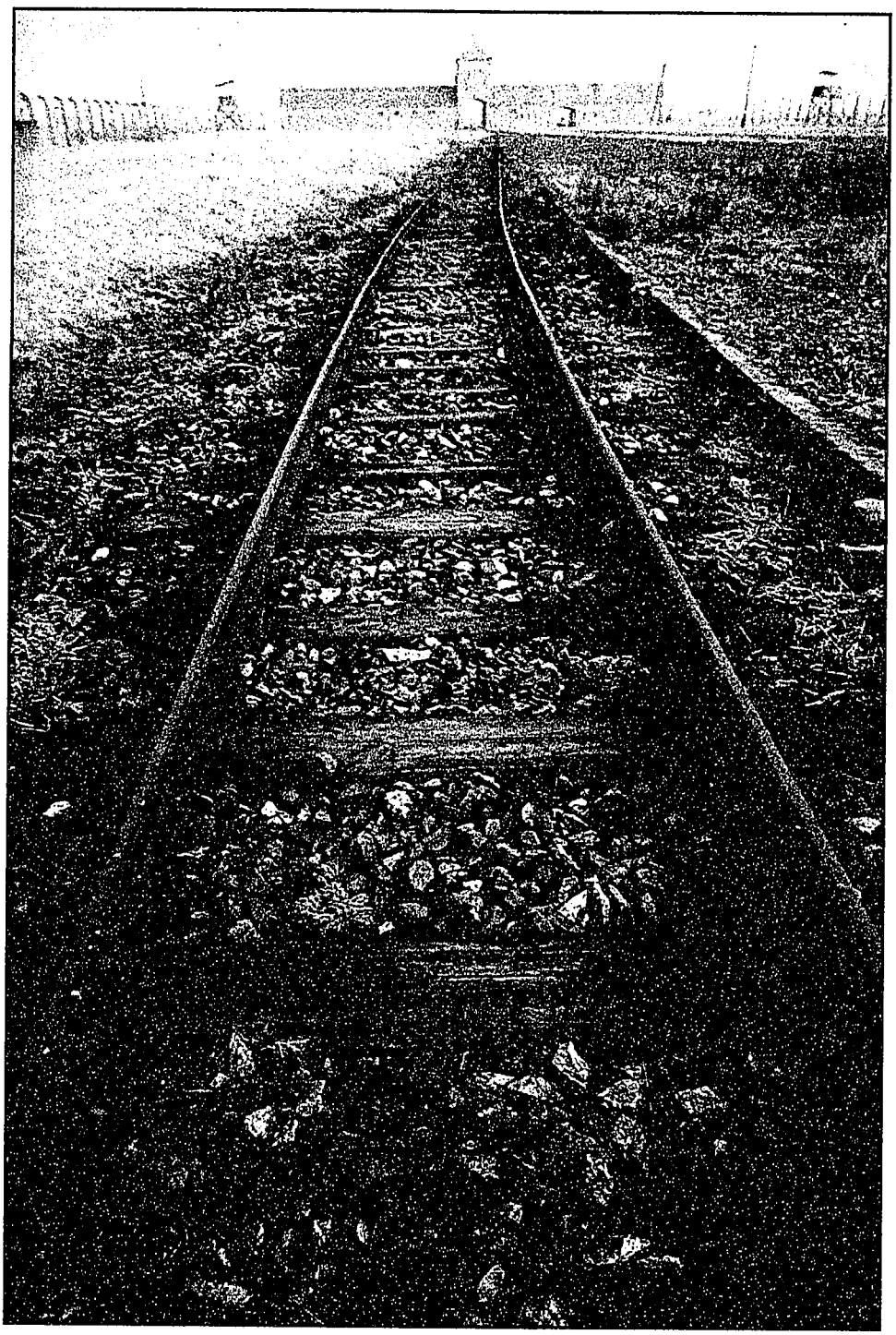


Figure 28. Railroad tracks leading to Birkenau death camp, Poland.

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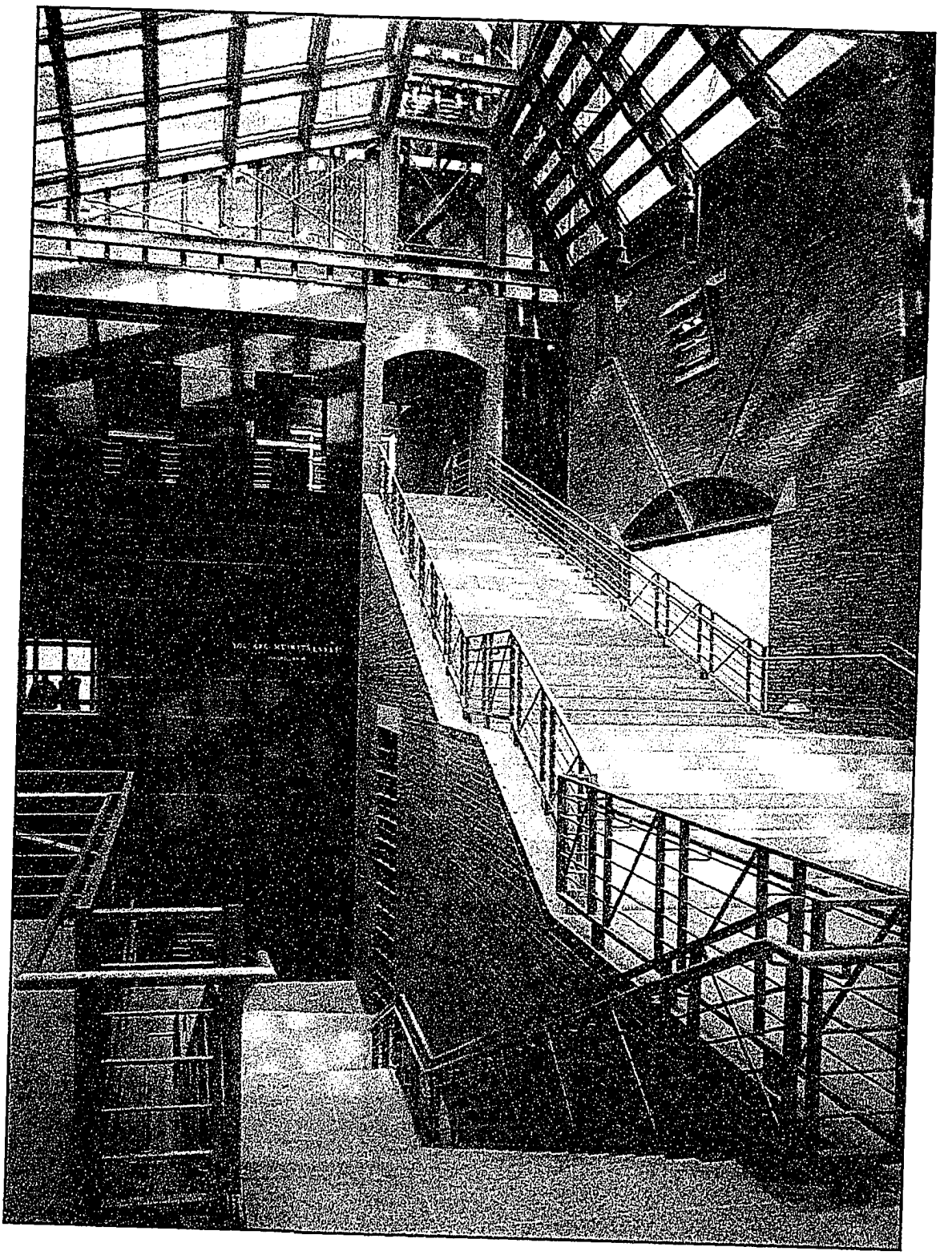


Figure 29. James Ingo Freed (architect). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Stairway in Hall of Witness.

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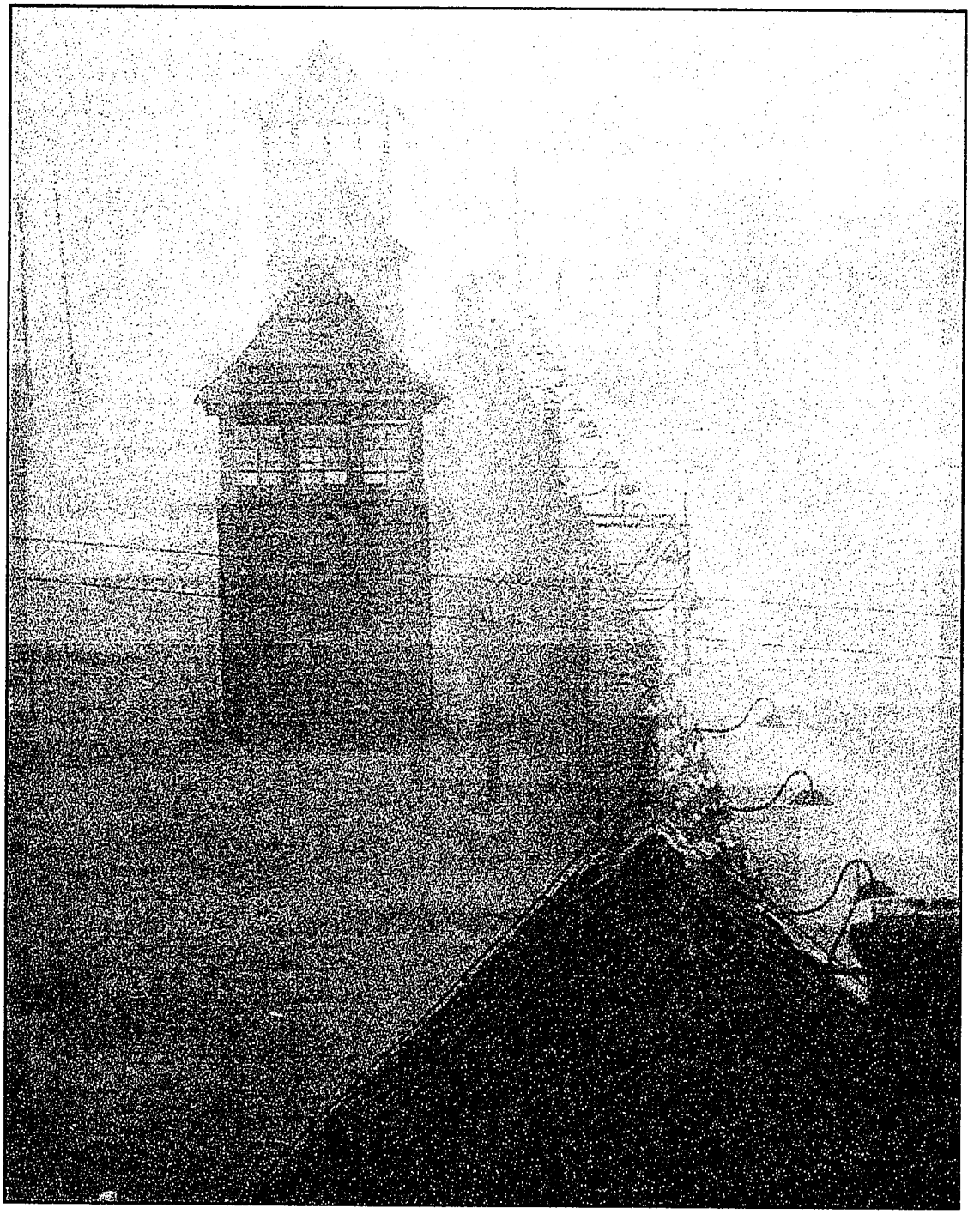


Figure 30. Auschwitz I Museum, Poland. Watchtowers.

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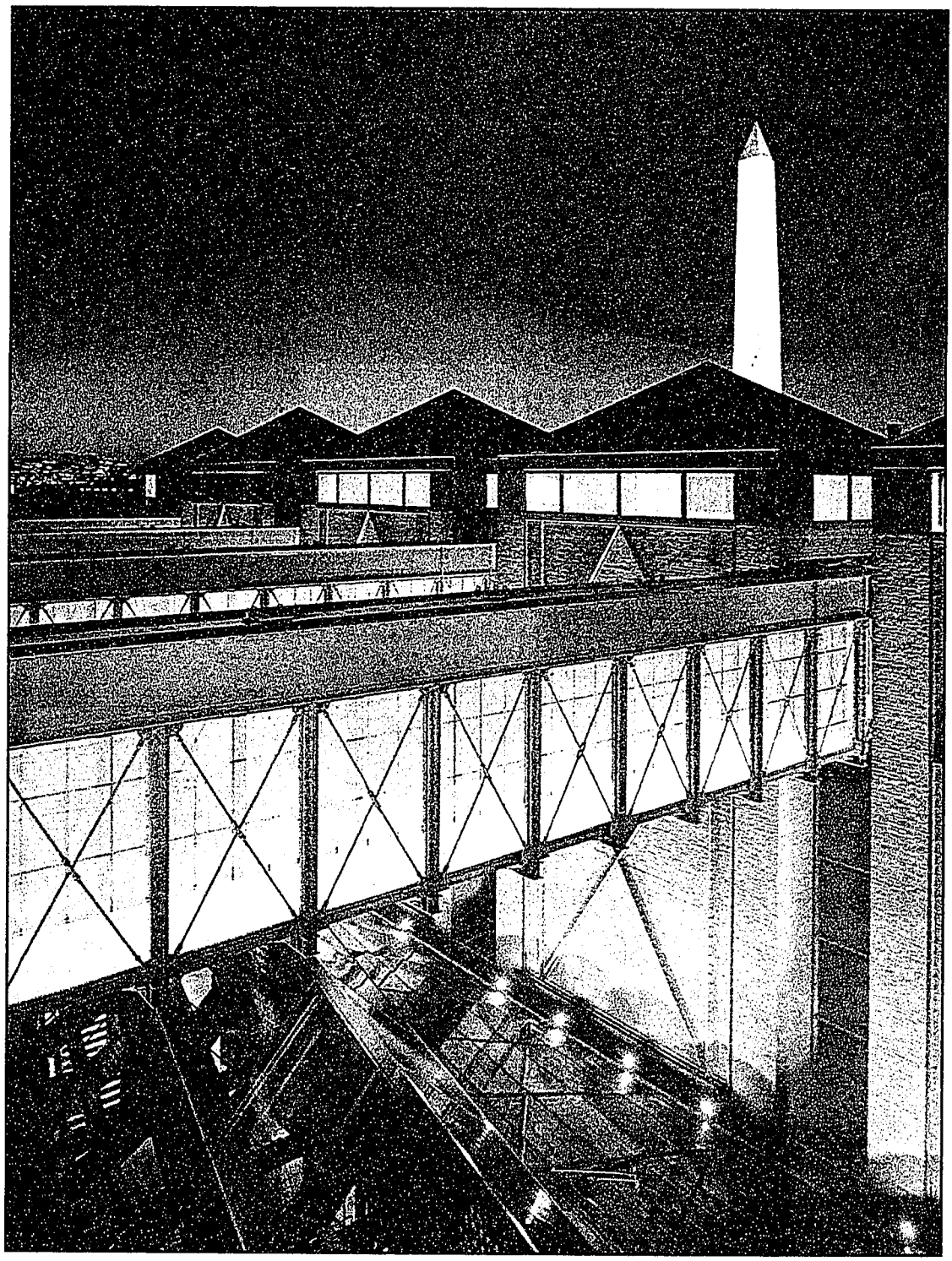


Figure 31. James Ingo Freed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Bridges over Hall of Witness.

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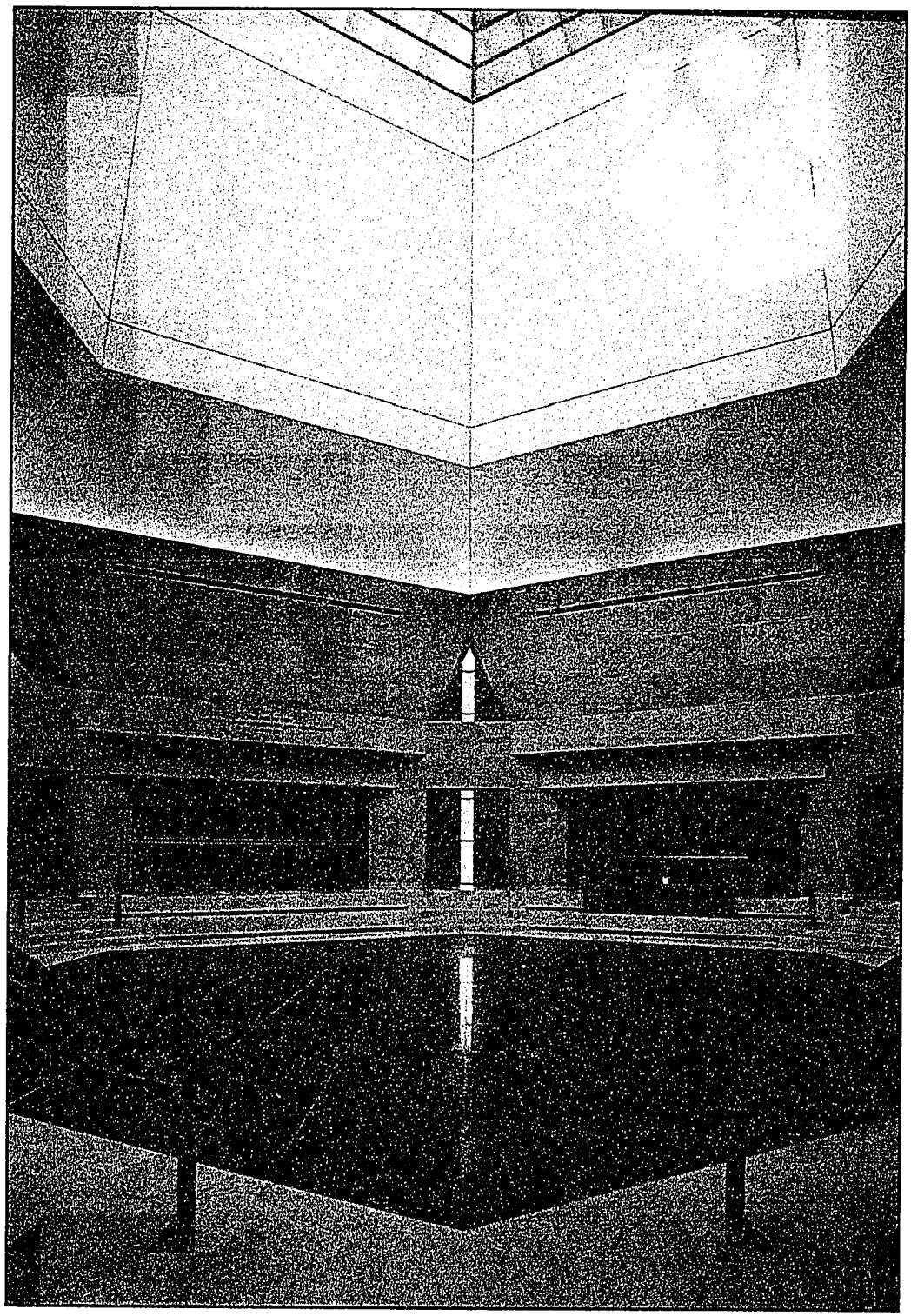


Figure 32. James Ingo Freed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Hall of Remembrance.

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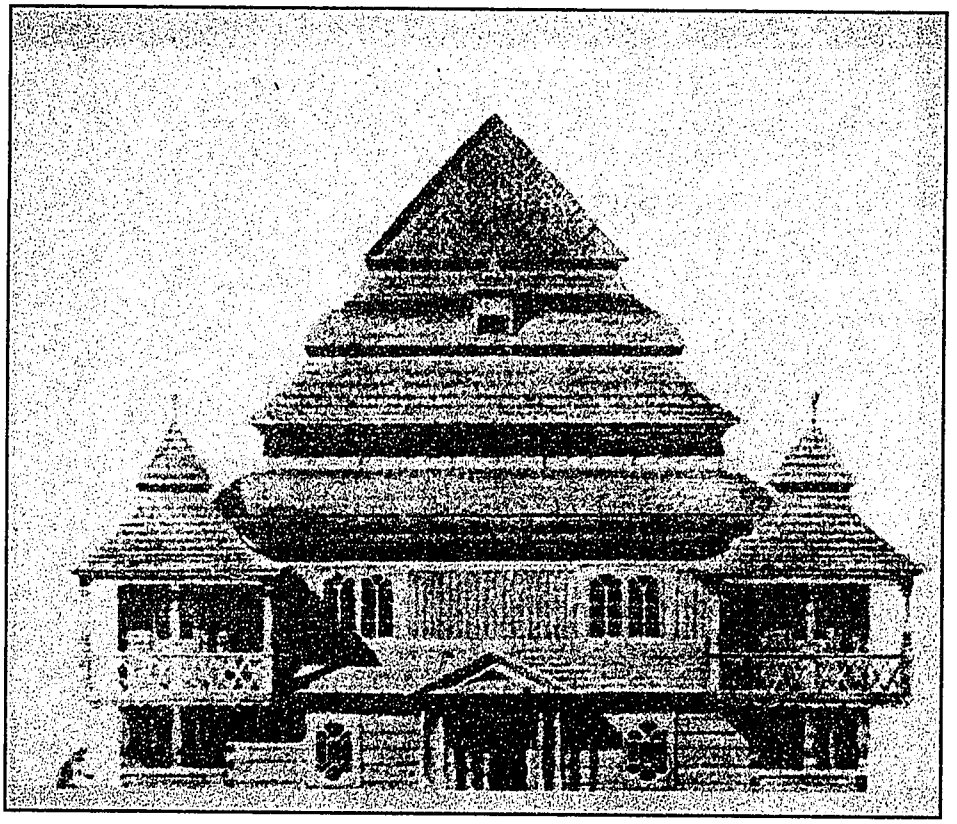


Figure 33. Polish synagogue. Pre-World War II.

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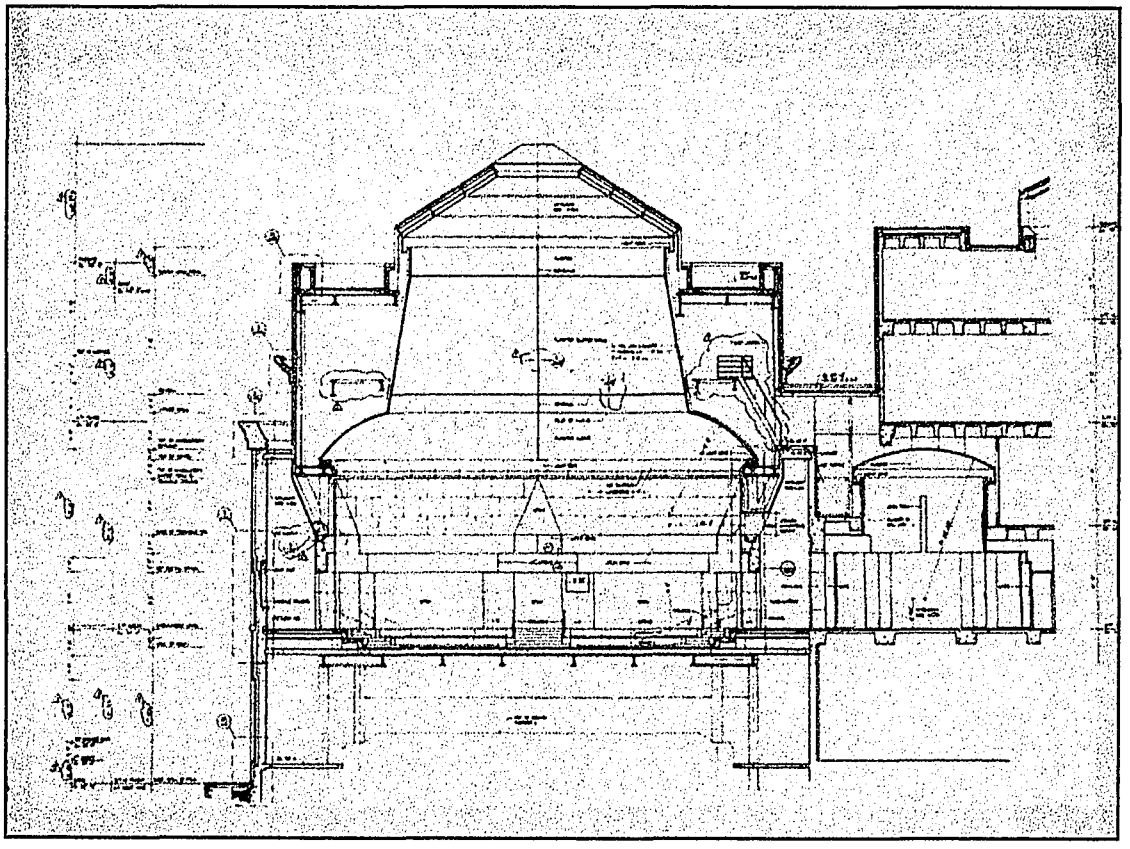


Figure 34. James Ingo Freed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Elevation plan of Hall of Remembrance.

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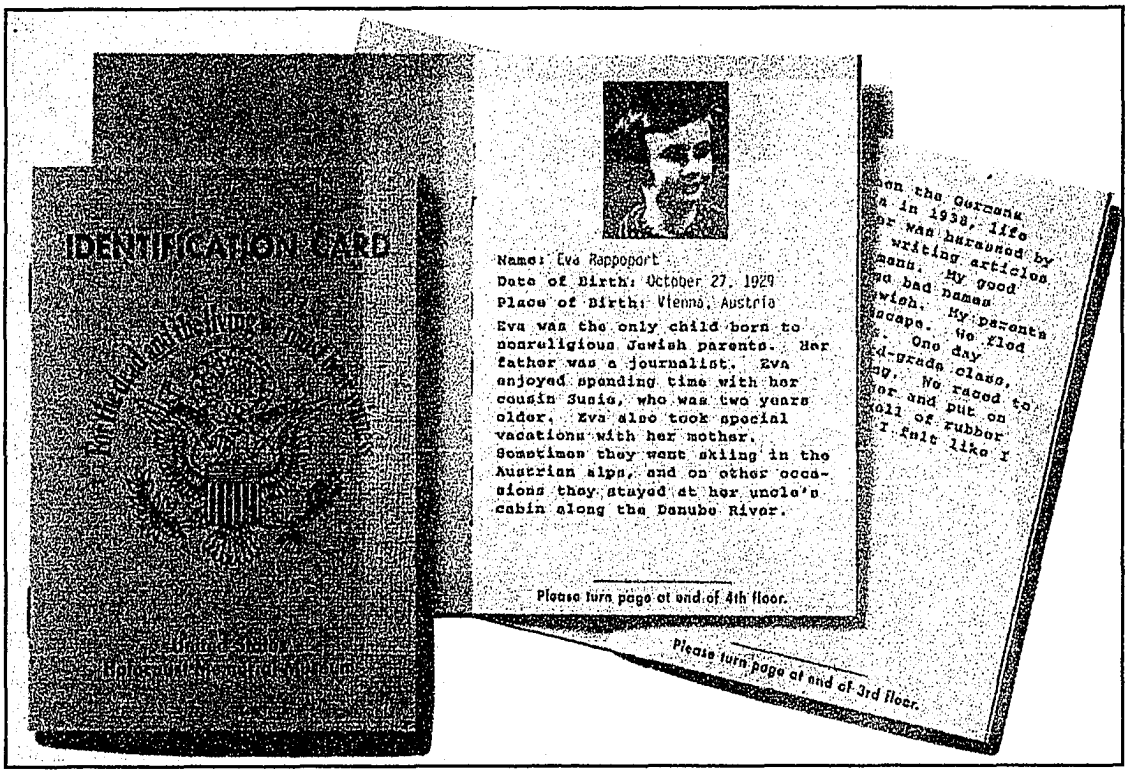


Figure 35. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Identification Cards.

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Figure 36. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Inside elevator leading to permanent exhibition.

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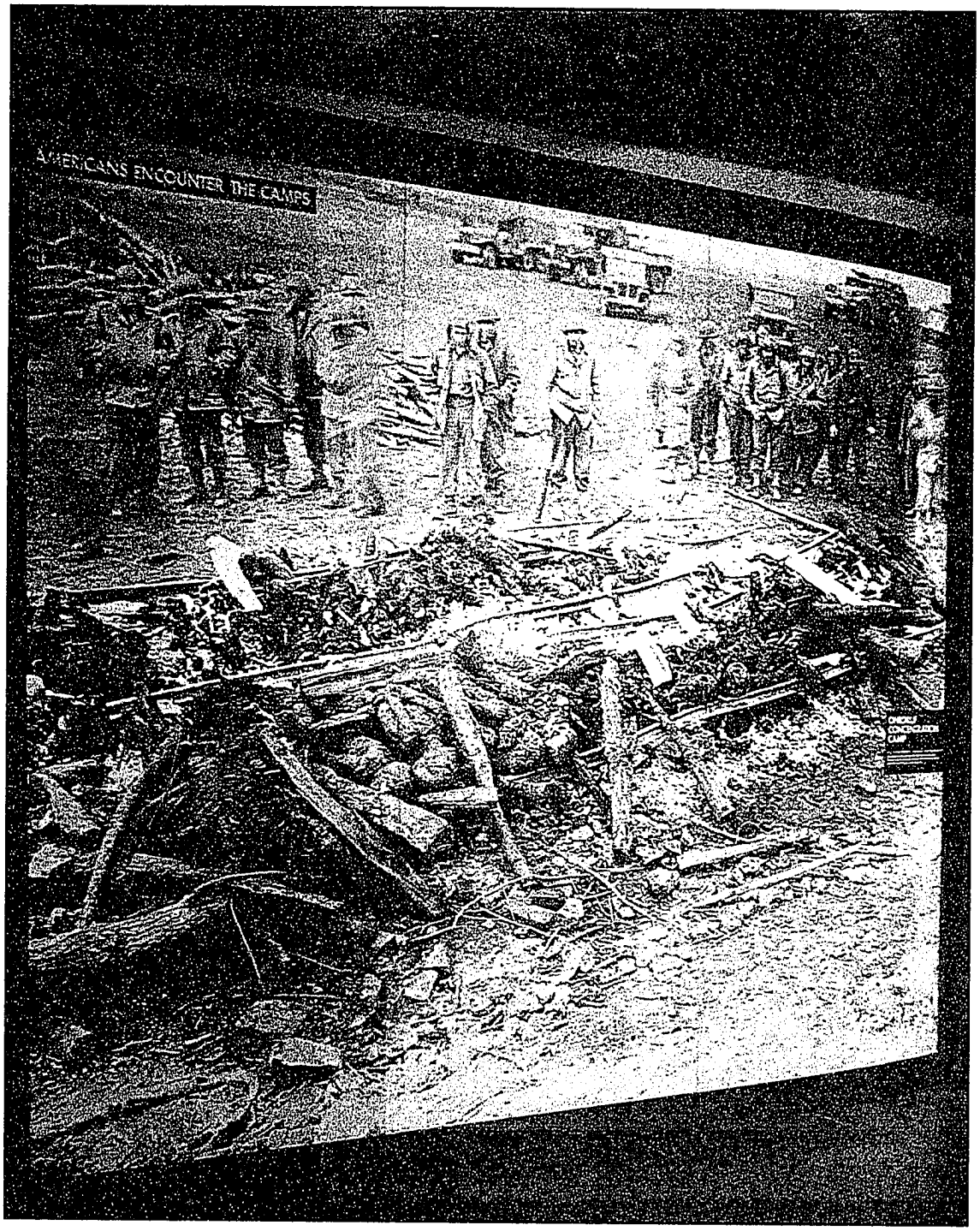


Figure 37. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photomural of charred corpses of Ohrduf concentration camp.

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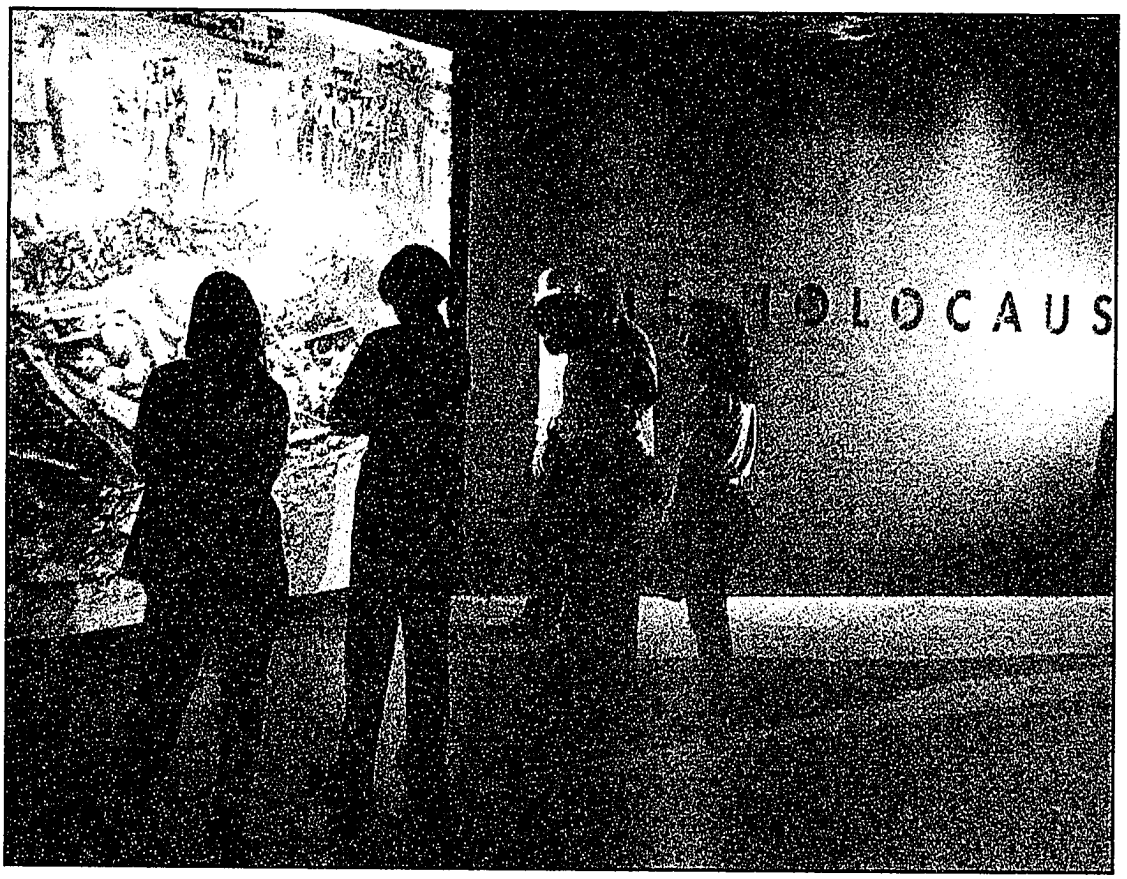


Figure 38. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Visitors encounter first photomural of the permanent exhibition.

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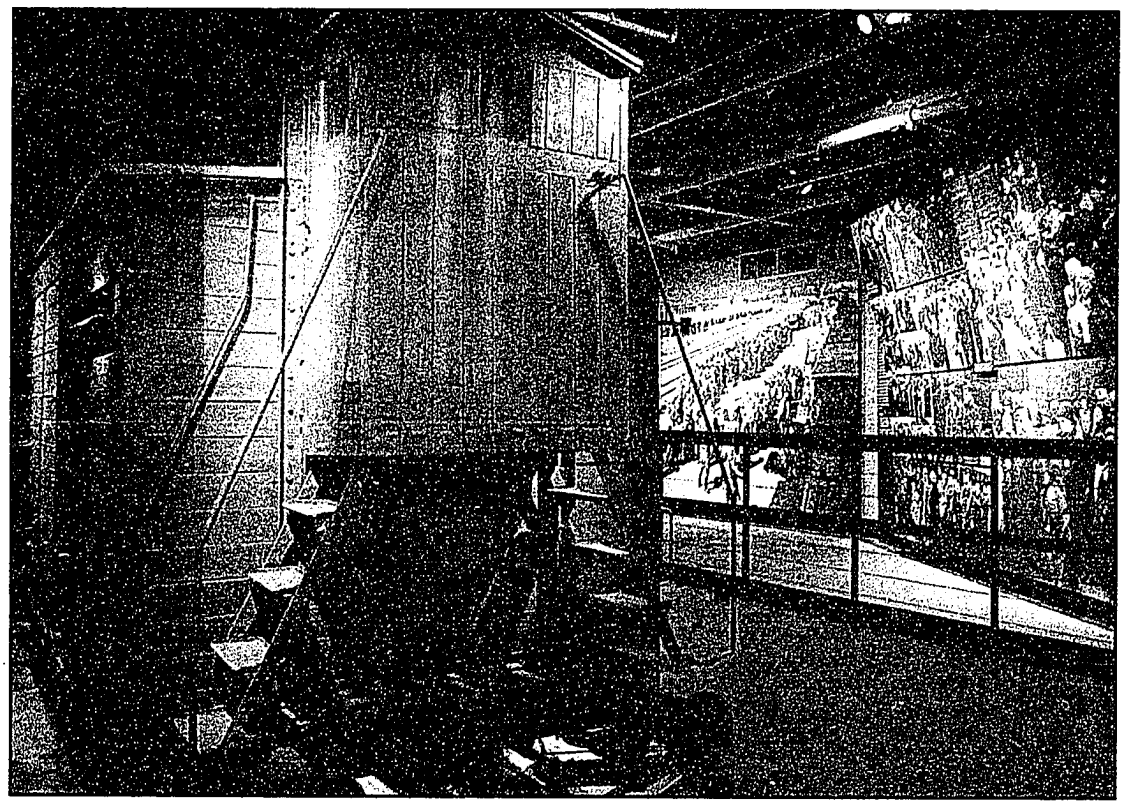


Figure 39. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Rail car from Treblinka death camp.

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Figure 40. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Prisoner uniforms.

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Figure 41. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of the beginning of Nazi Rule in Germany.

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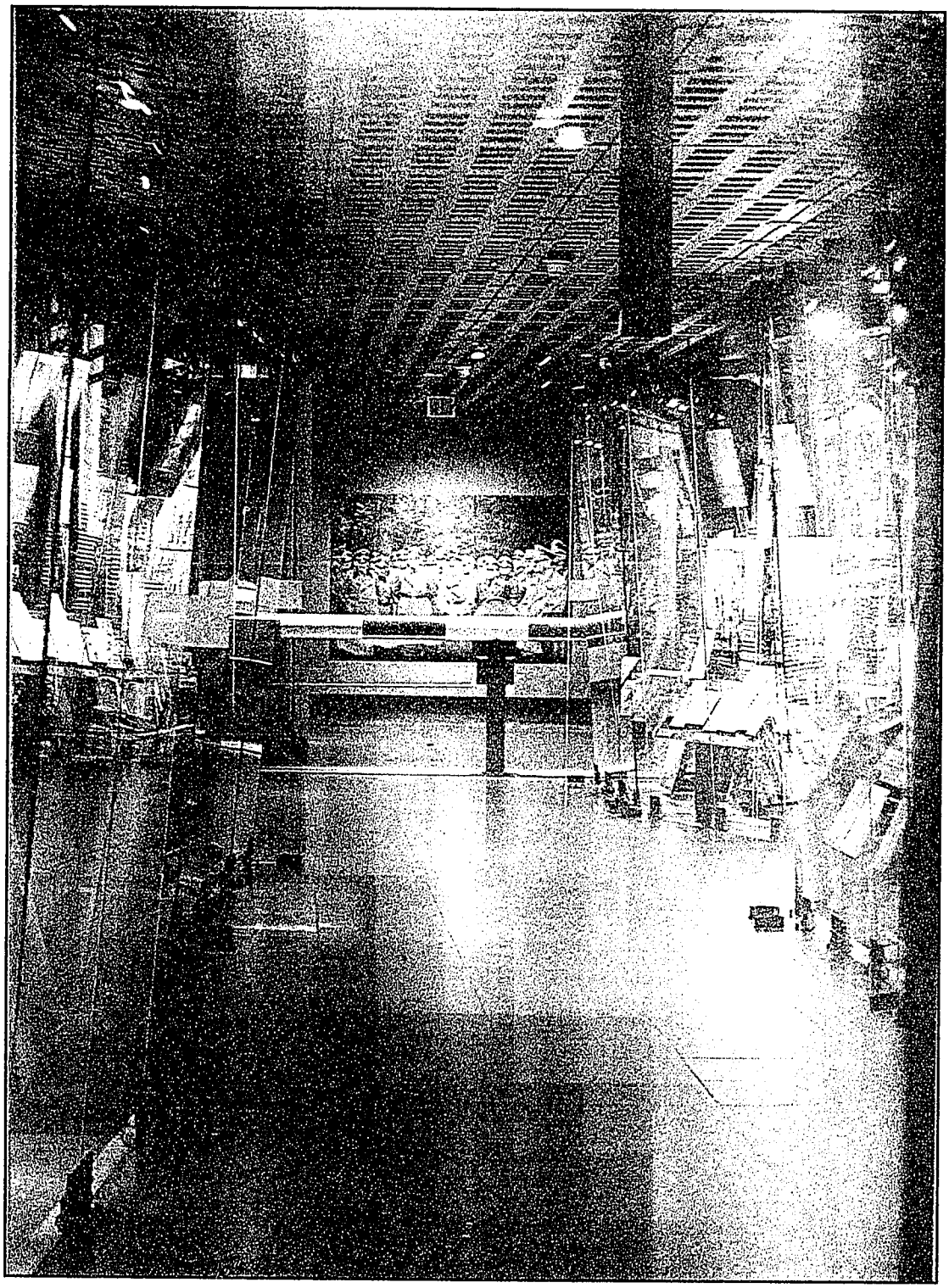


Figure 42. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Corridor of displays on the first floor of permanent exhibition.

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Figure 43. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of Nazi book burning.

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Figure 44. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of Nazi society.

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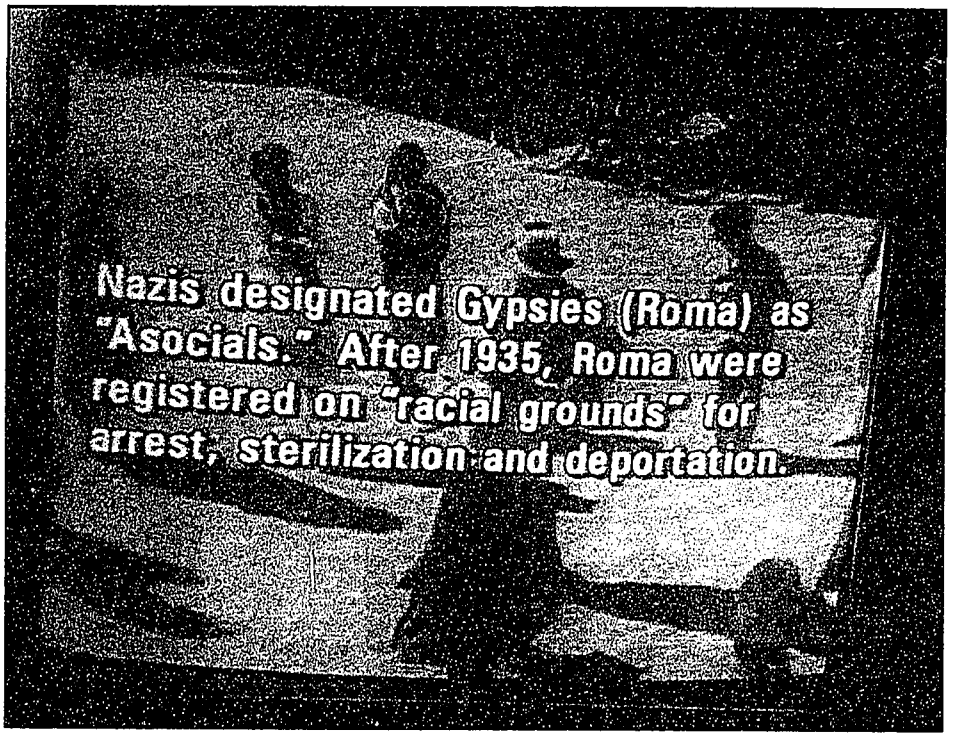


Figure 45. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Video monitor with images overlaid with text.

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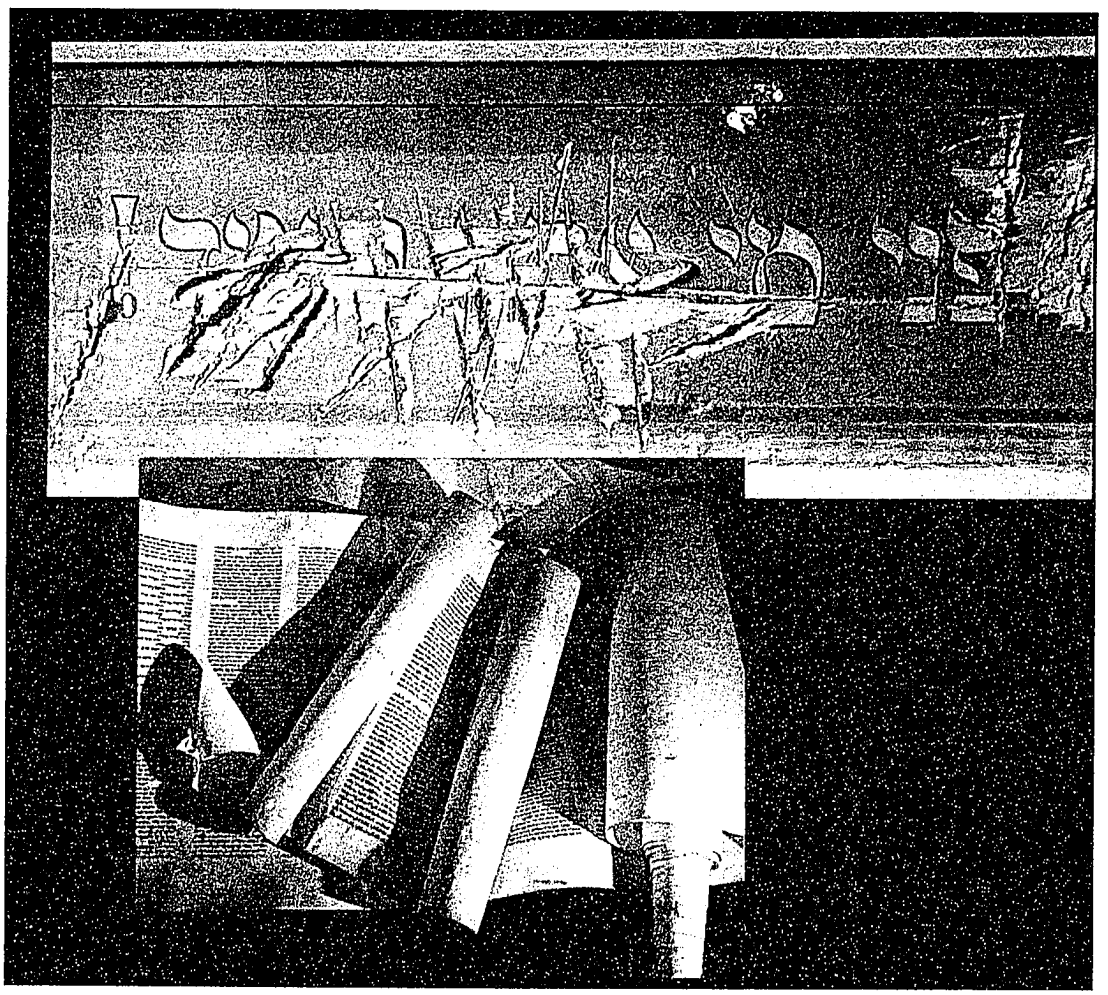


Figure 46. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of Torah scrolls.

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Figure 47. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of tree stump that marked the site of a mass grave near Palmiry, Poland.

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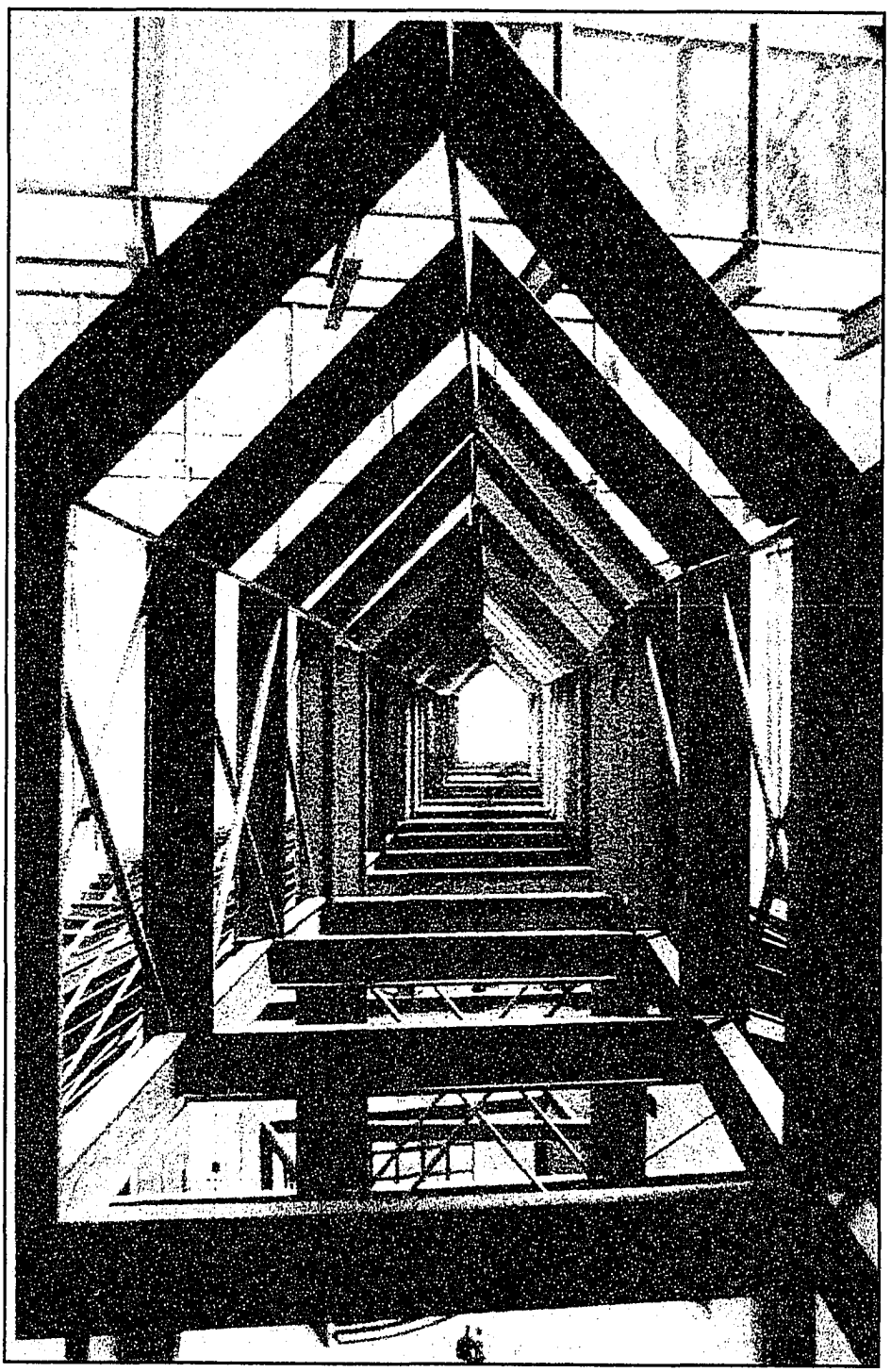


Figure 48. James Ingo Freed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Metal bracing creating a "ghost" tunnel viewed from glass bridge.

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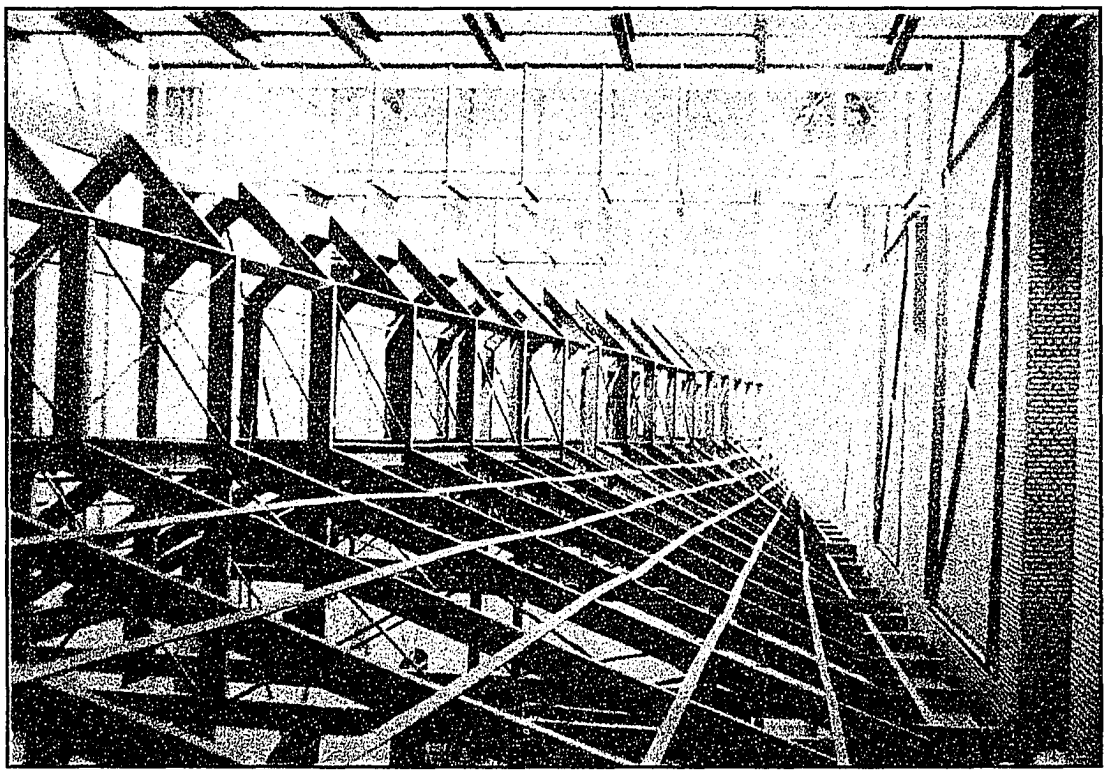


Figure 49. James Ingo Freed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Distorted metal above glass ceiling over the Hall of Witness.

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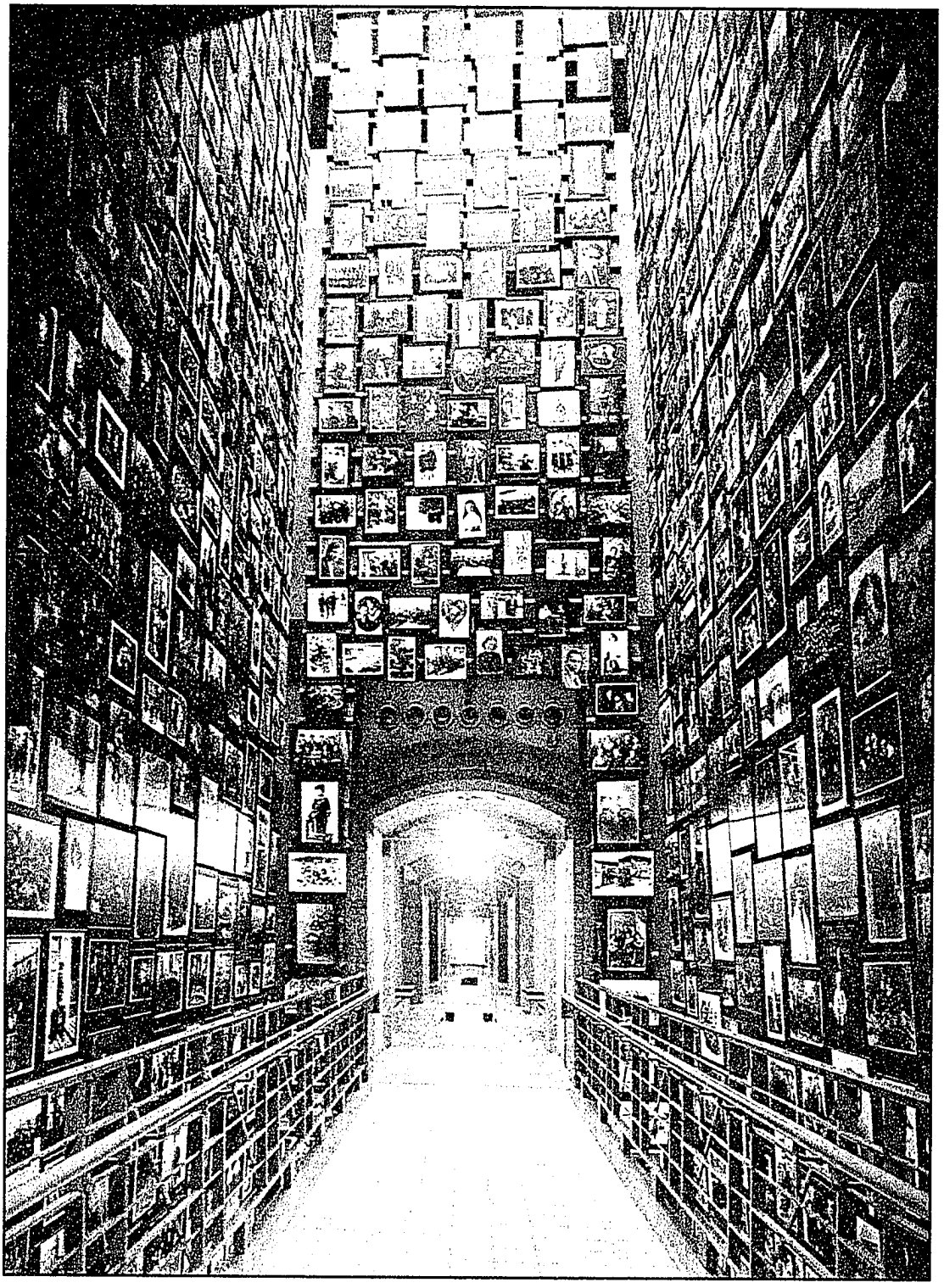


Figure 50. United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Yaffa Eliach Shtetl Collection of photographs.

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Figure 51. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Detail of the Yaffa Eliach Shtetl Collection.

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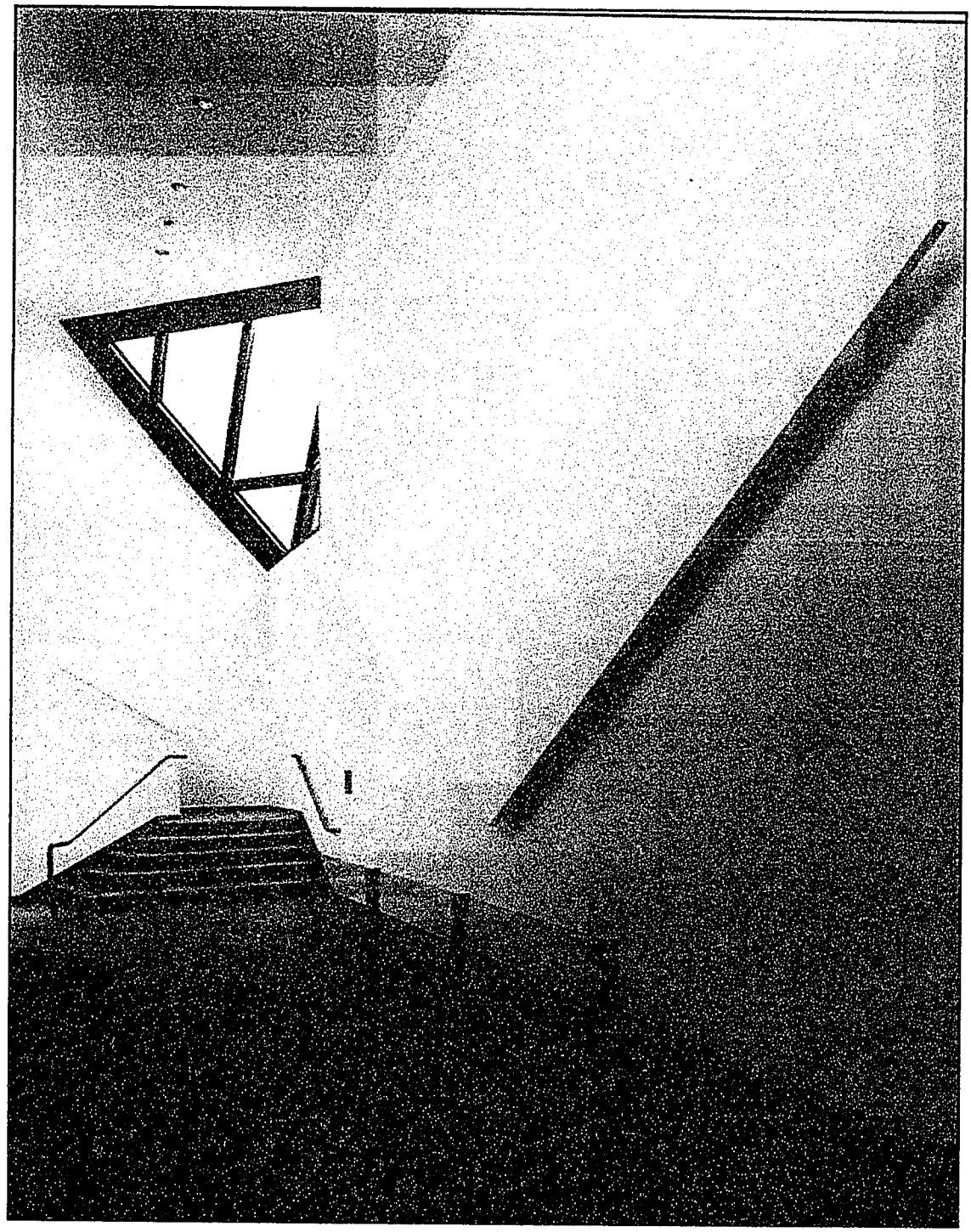


Figure 52. Ellsworth Kelly, ***Memorial.*** United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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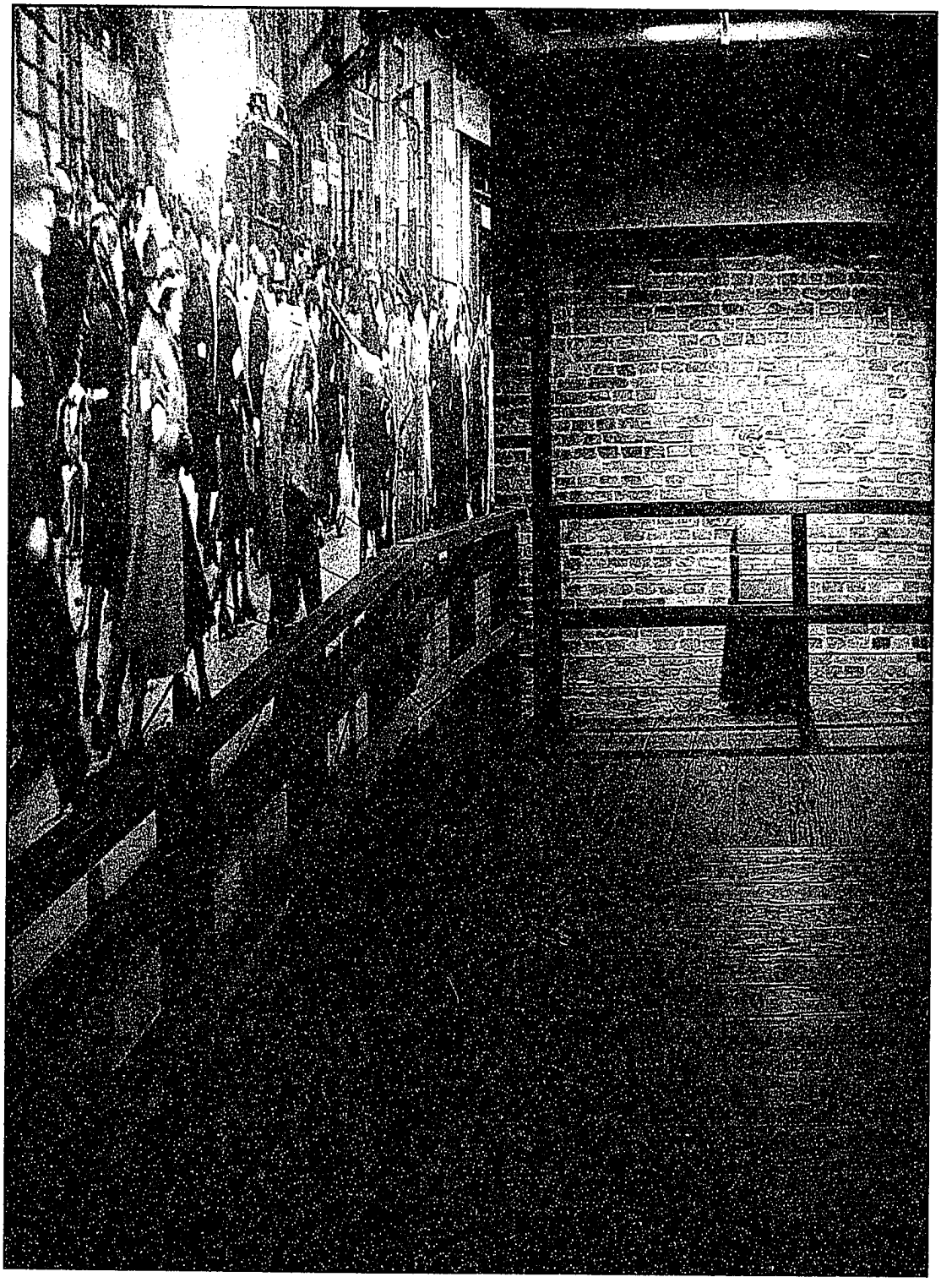


Figure 53. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Wooden bridge with photomural of the Warsaw Ghetto on the left.

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Figure 54. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Video monitors display life in the Warsaw Ghetto.

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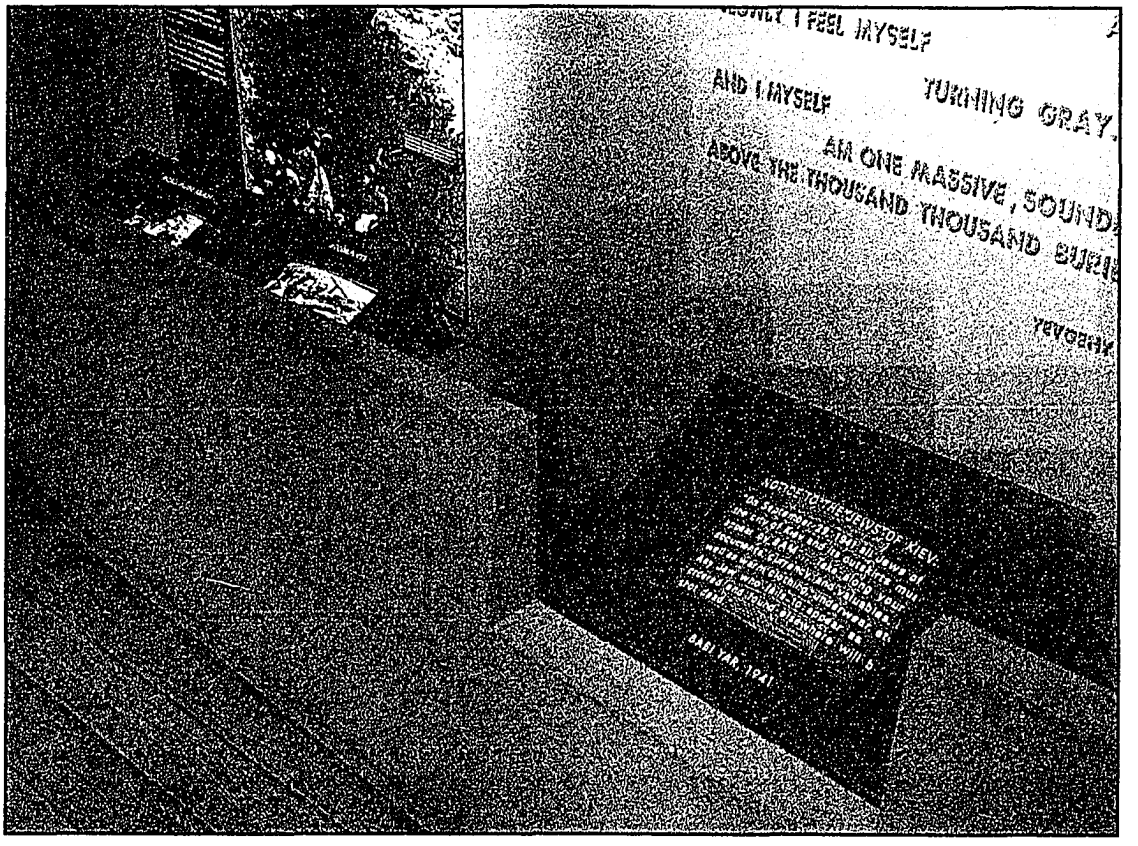


Figure 55. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Monitors behind "privacy walls" display images of the Einsatzgruppen murdering Jews, Gypsies, and Communists in Europe and Russia.

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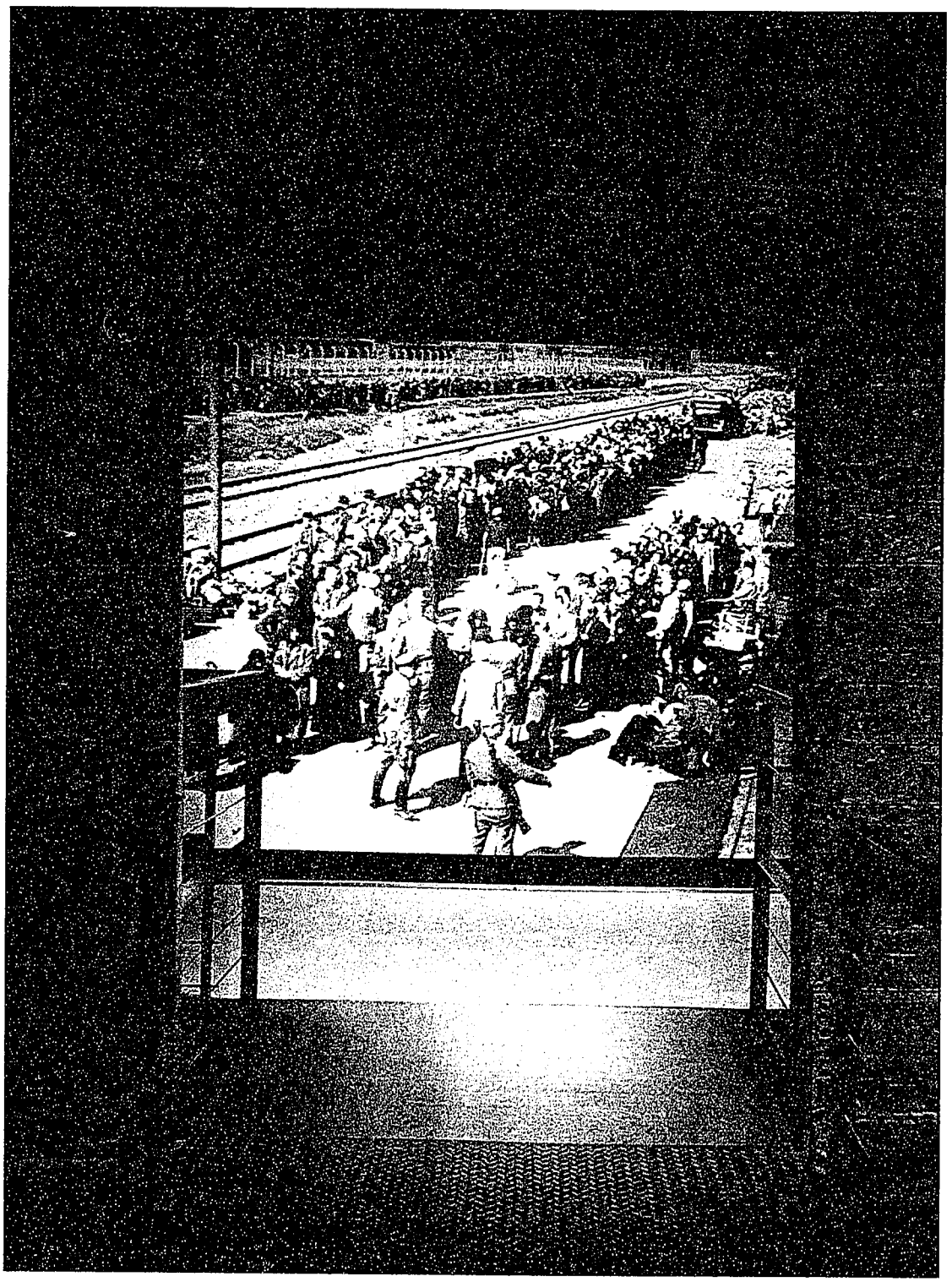


Figure 56. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photomural of prisoners arriving at Auschwitz as seen from inside a rail car.

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Figure 57. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of luggage confiscated from prisoners arriving at Treblinka.

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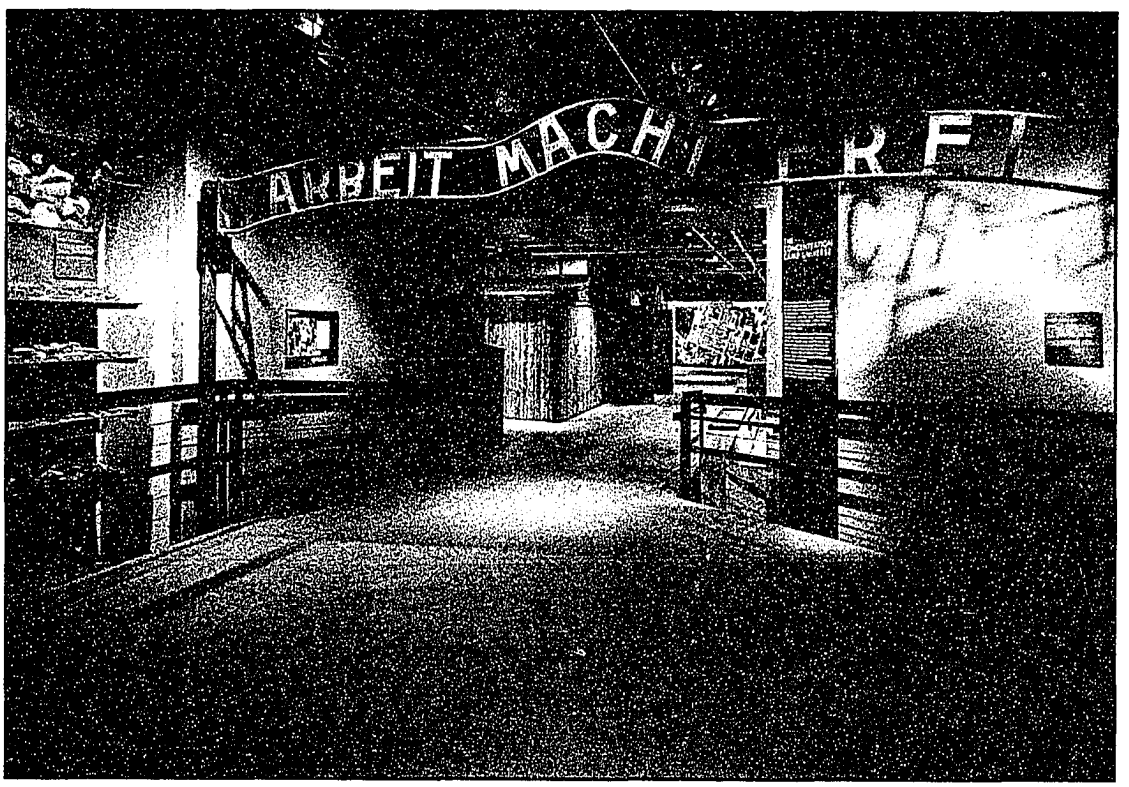


Figure 58. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of gate from Auschwitz I in Poland (cast of original).

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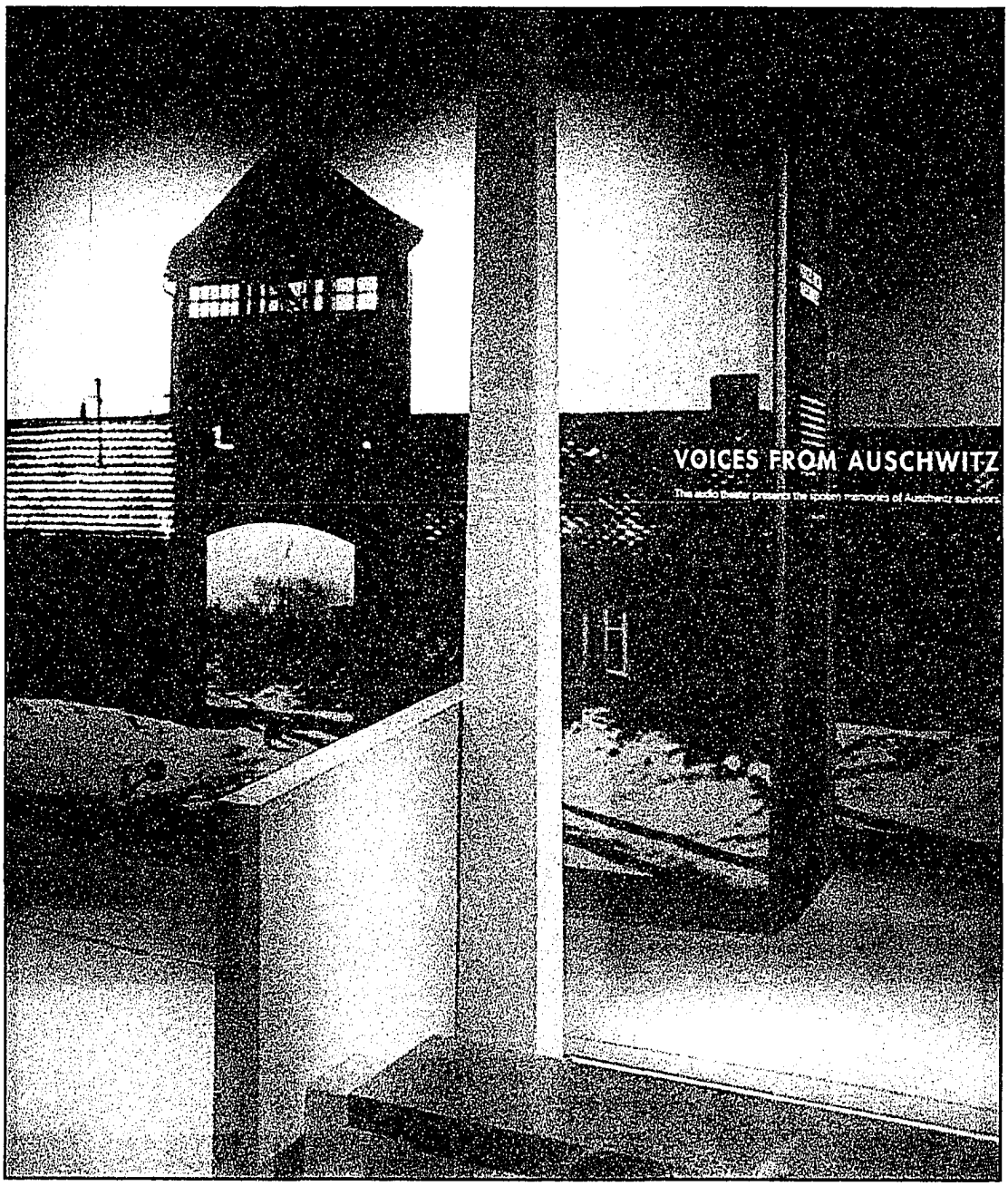


Figure 59. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Audio theater which presents "Voices from Auschwitz."

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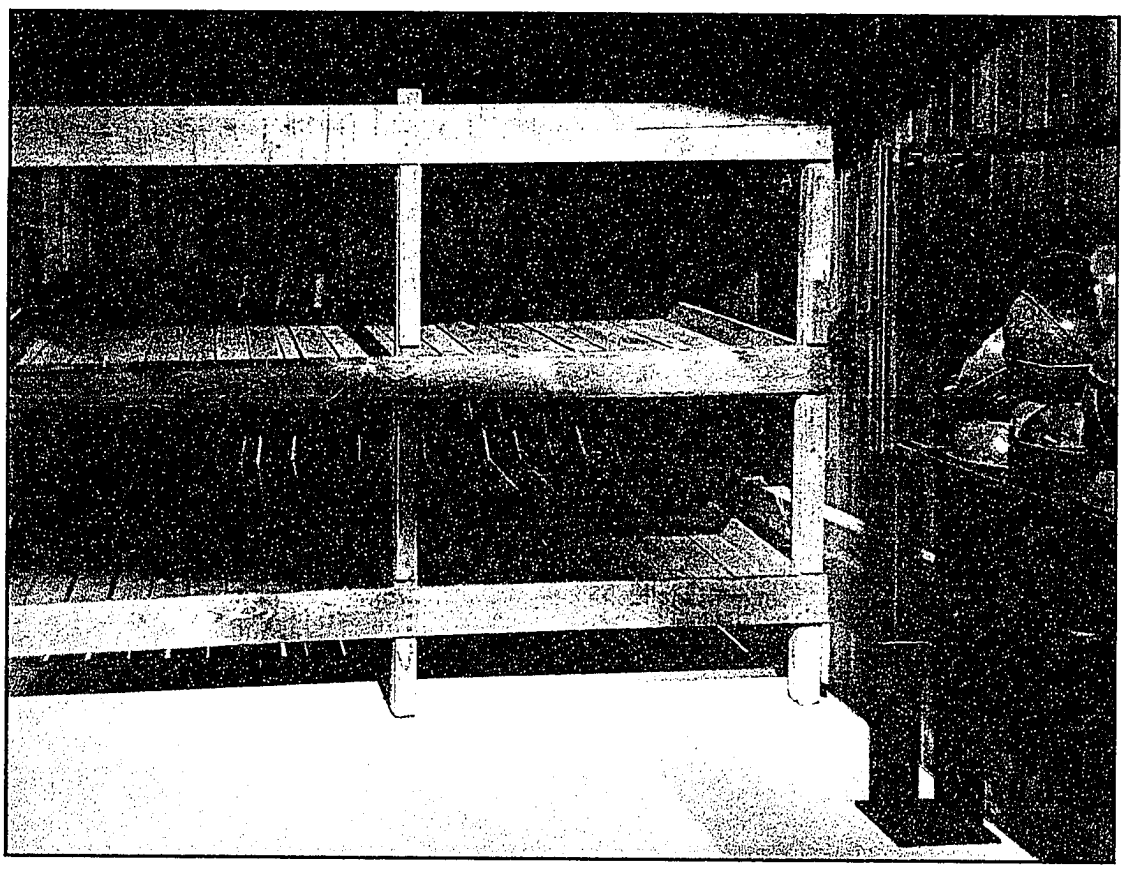


Figure 60. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Bunks inside a reconstructed barrack from Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

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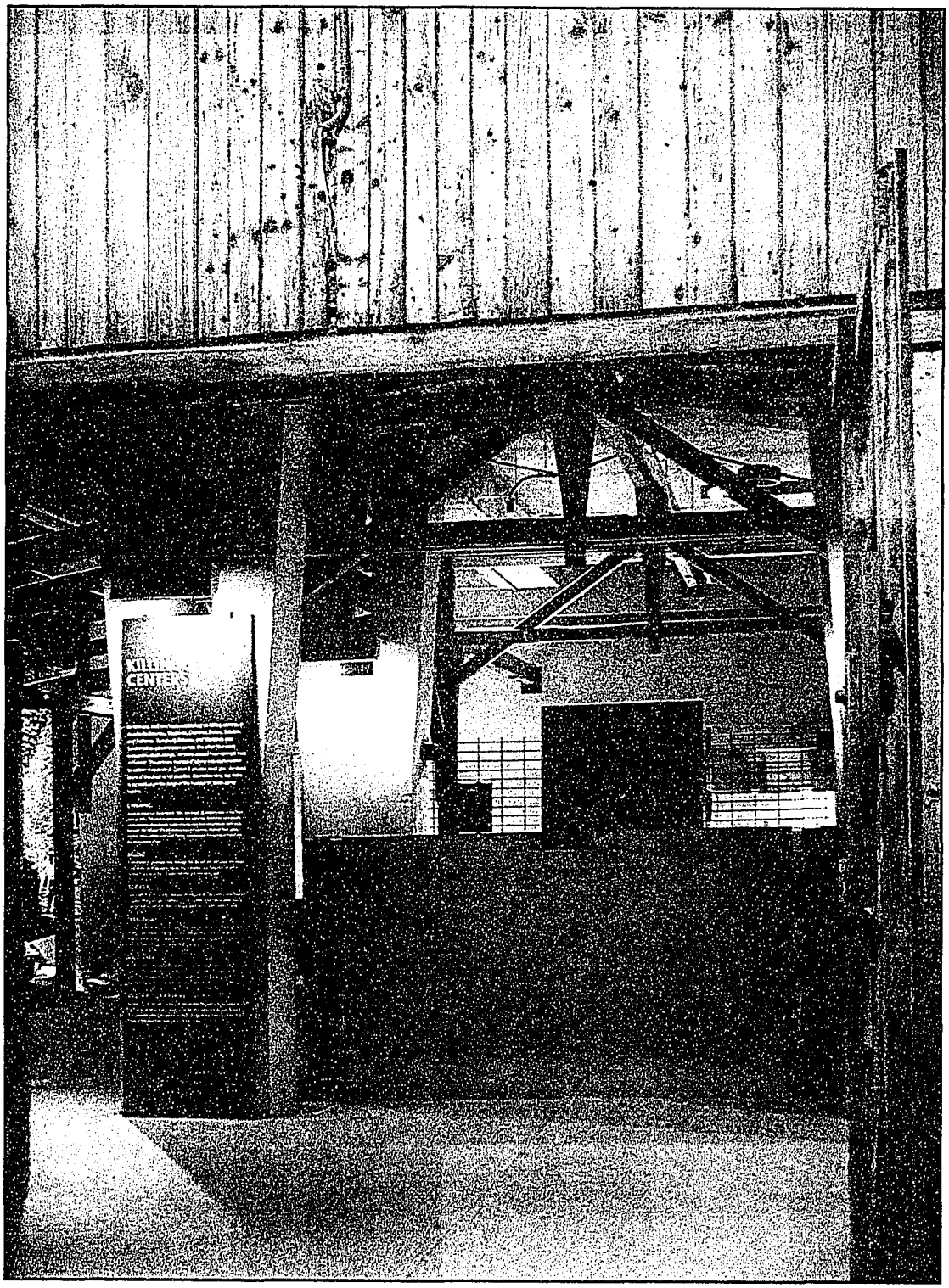


Figure 61. United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. Privacy well with three monitors displaying videos of "Nazi Medical Experiments" inside.

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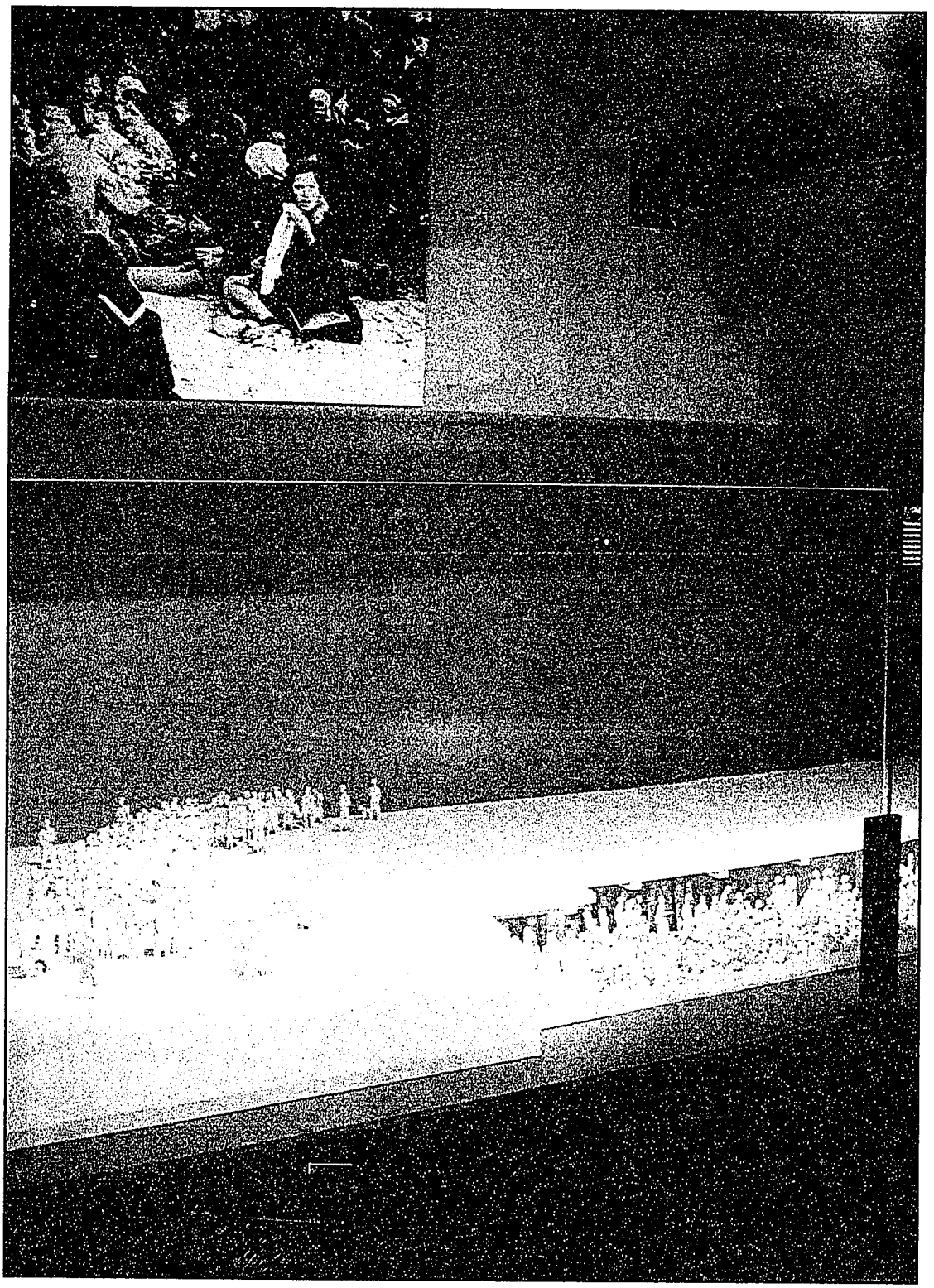


Figure 62. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Model of the killing process at Auschwitz Created by sculptor Jan Stobierski.

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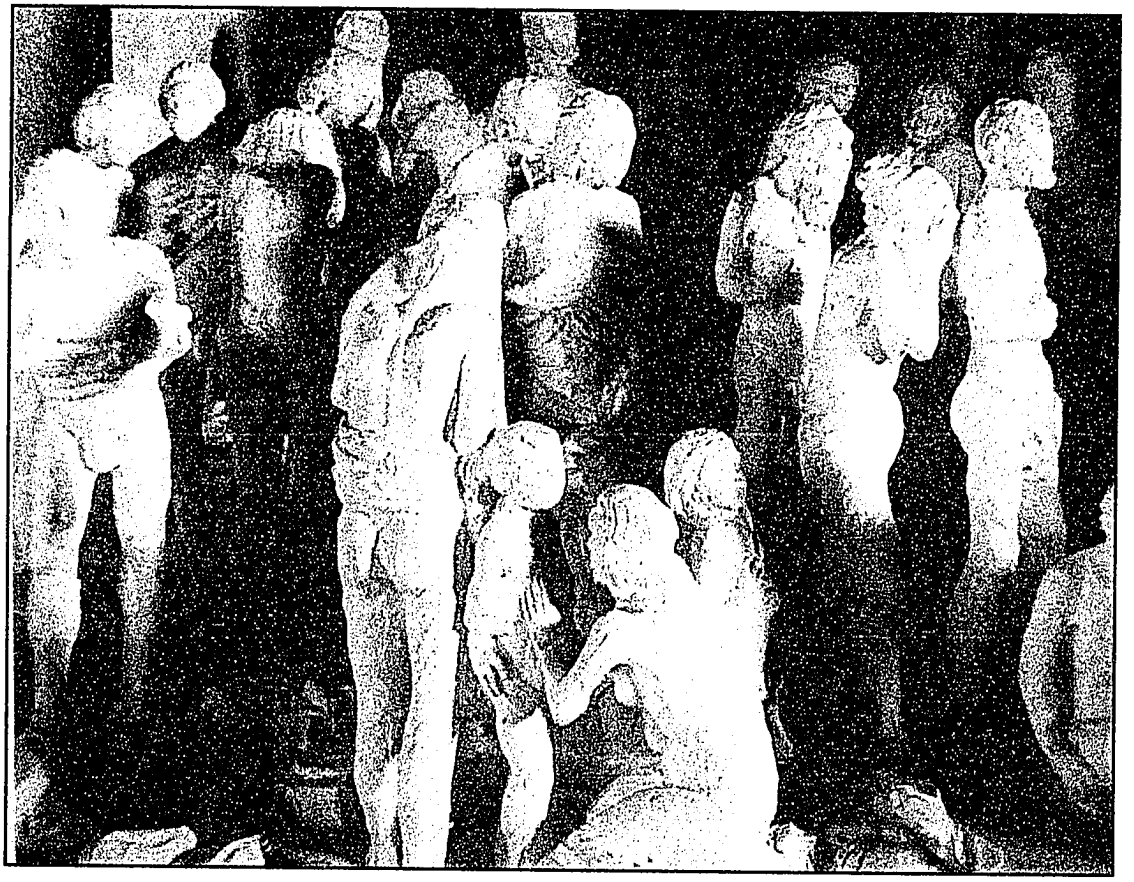


Figure 63. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Detail of model by sculptor Jan Stobierski of the killing process at Auschwitz.

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Figure 64. United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. Shoes confiscated at Majdanek Death Camp.

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Figure 65. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Shorn hair from the Birkenau death camp.

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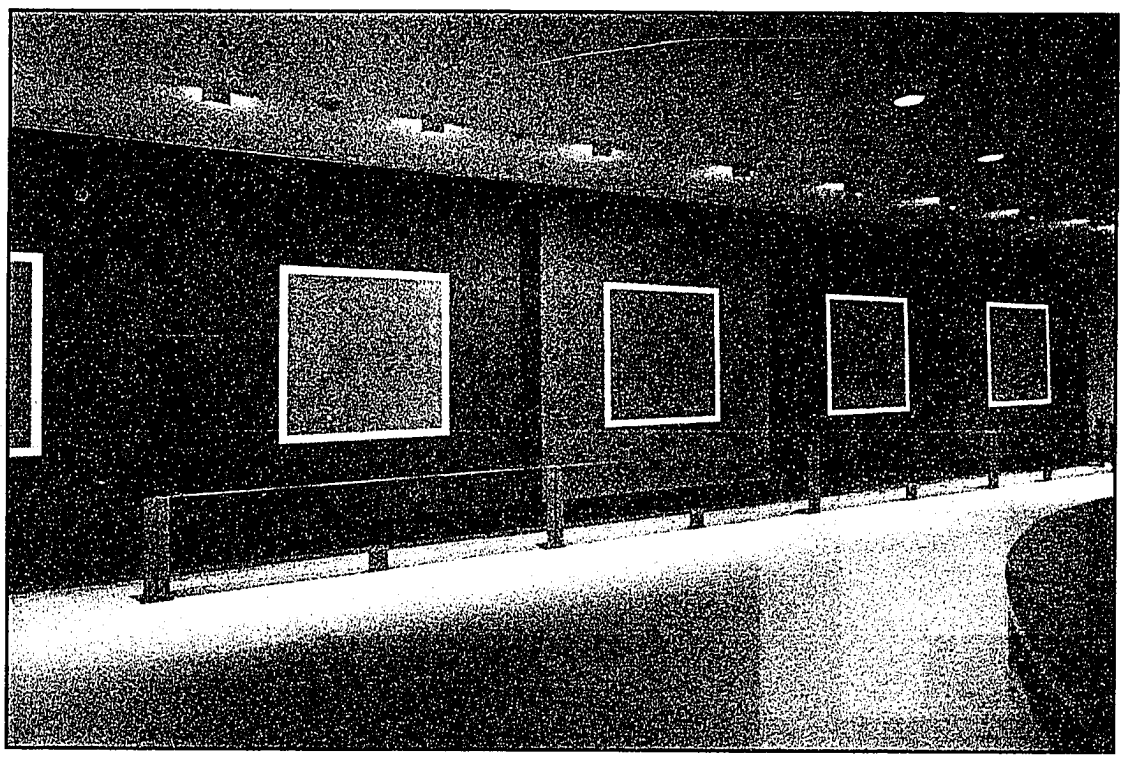


Figure 66. Sol LeWitt, ***Consequence.*** United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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Figure 67. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Rescuer's wall with the names of 10,000 individuals who rescued the Jews during World War II.

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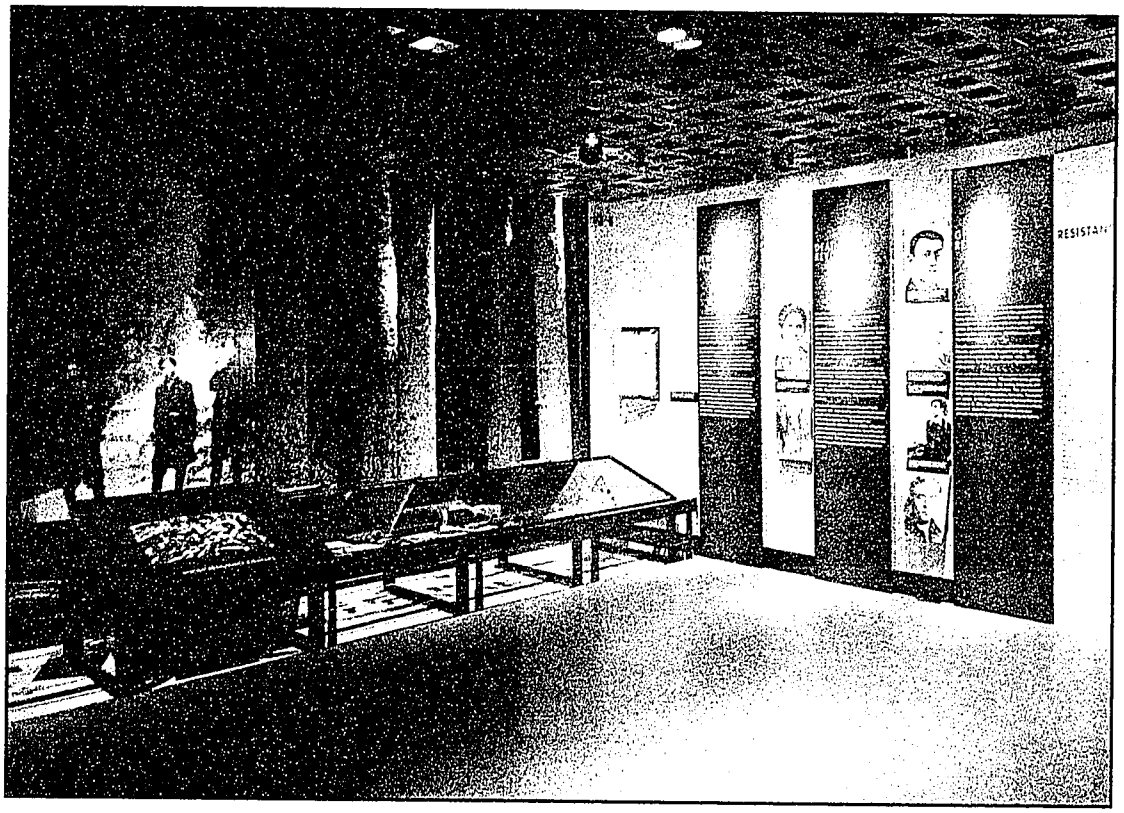


Figure 68. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of Jewish resistance to Nazi persecution.

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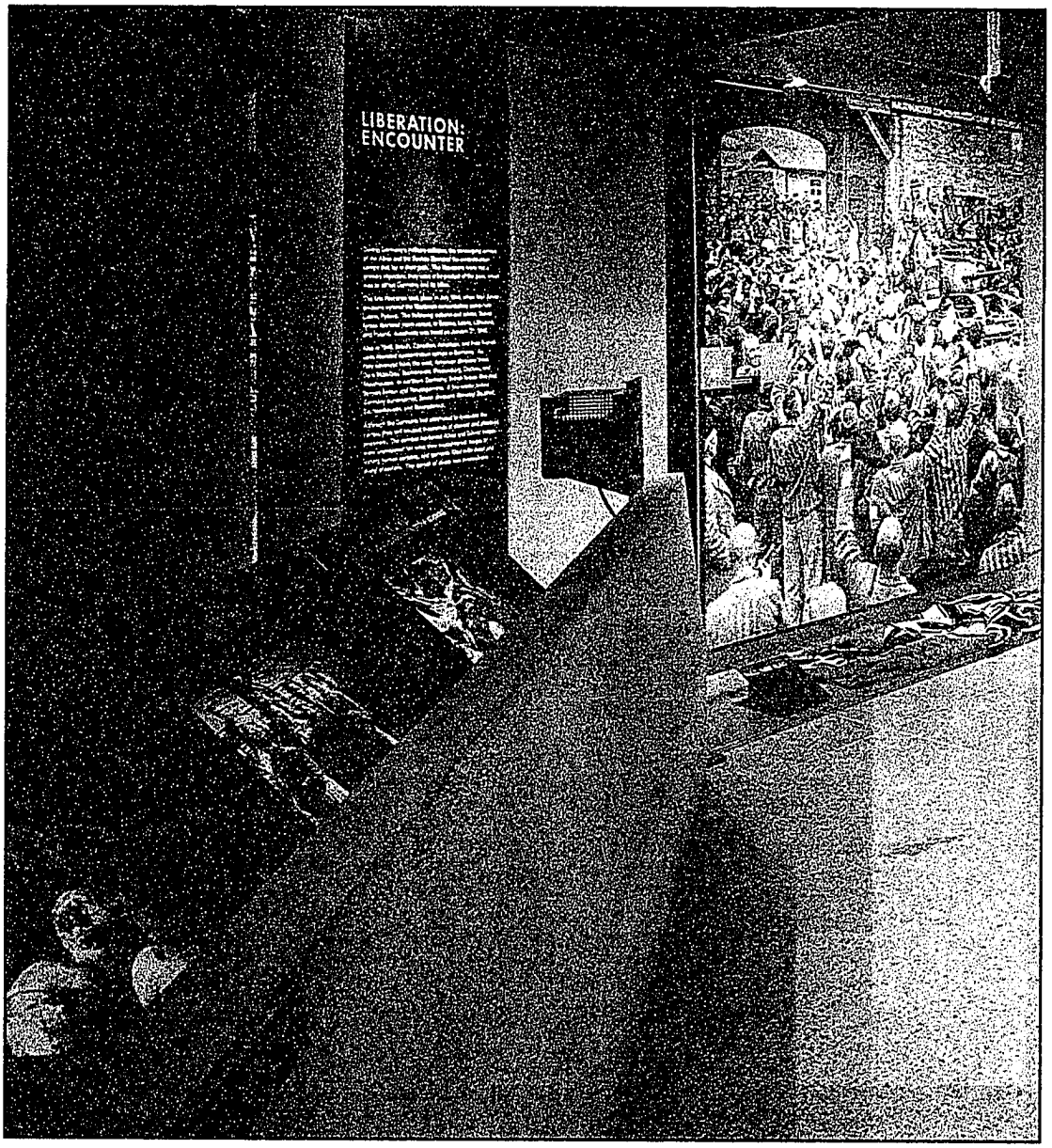


Figure 69. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of liberators encountering the camps.

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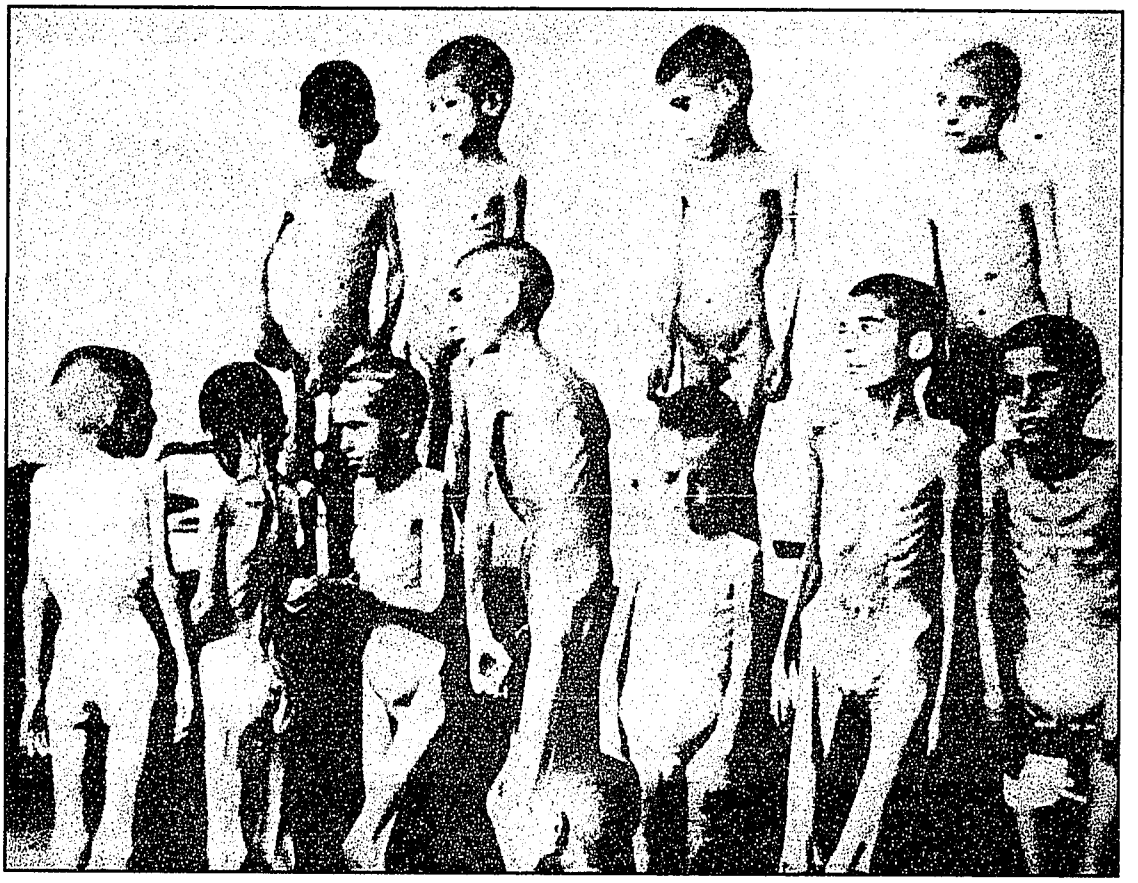


Figure 70. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Image from the video monitor in the privacy well.

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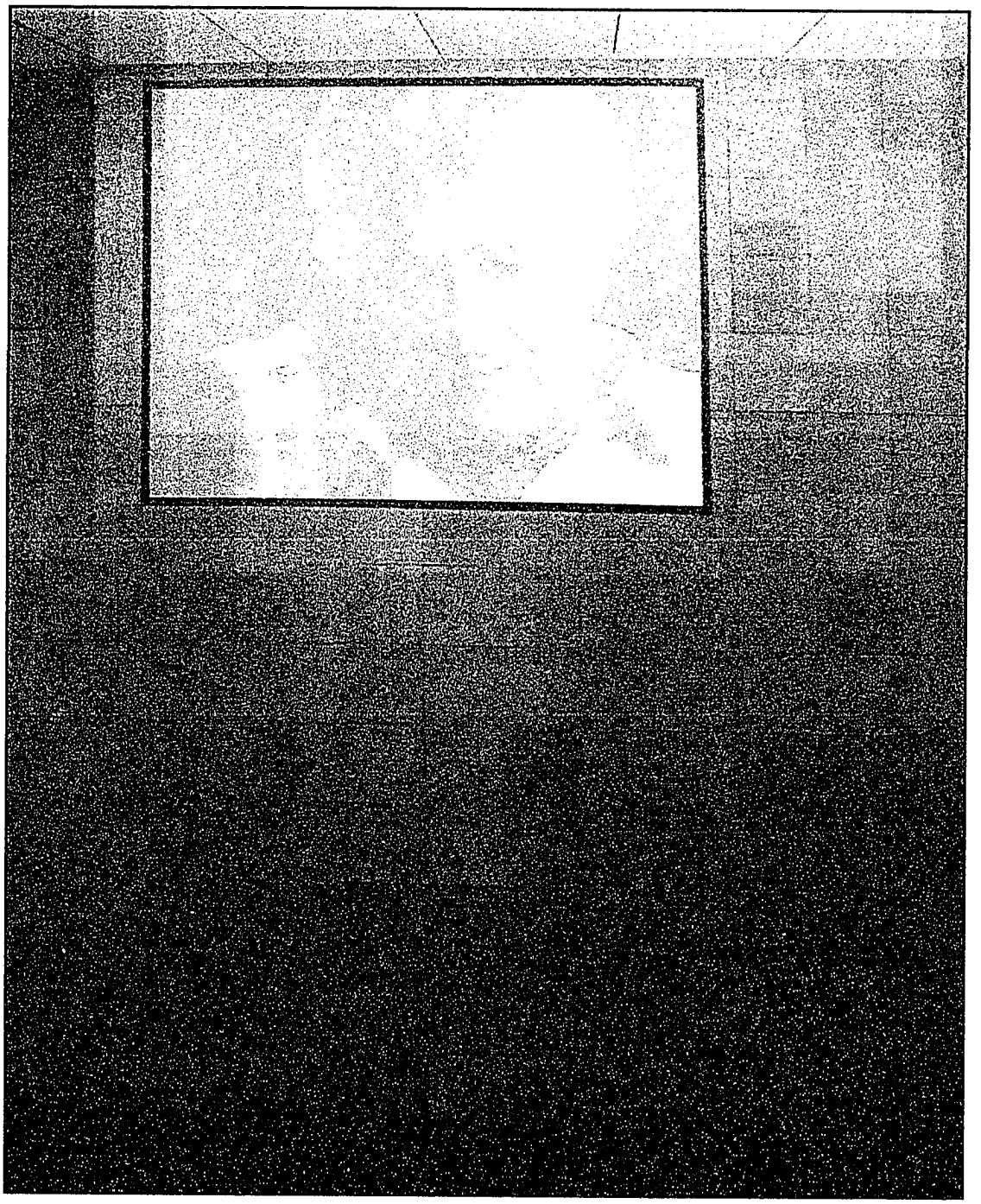


Figure 71. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Film in amphitheater at the end of the permanent exhibition.

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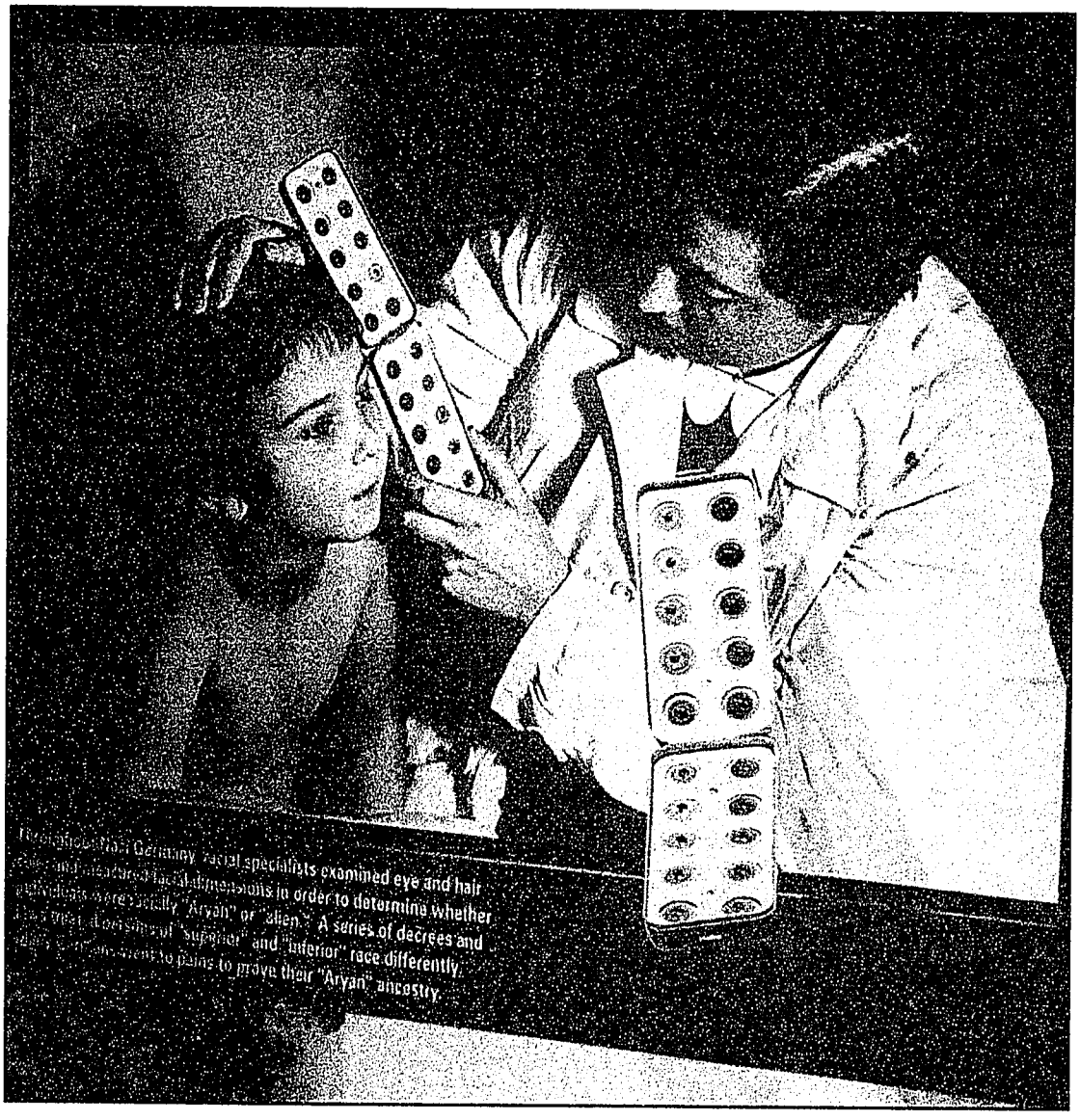


Figure 72. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Display of instruments used by the Nazis to measure facial features.

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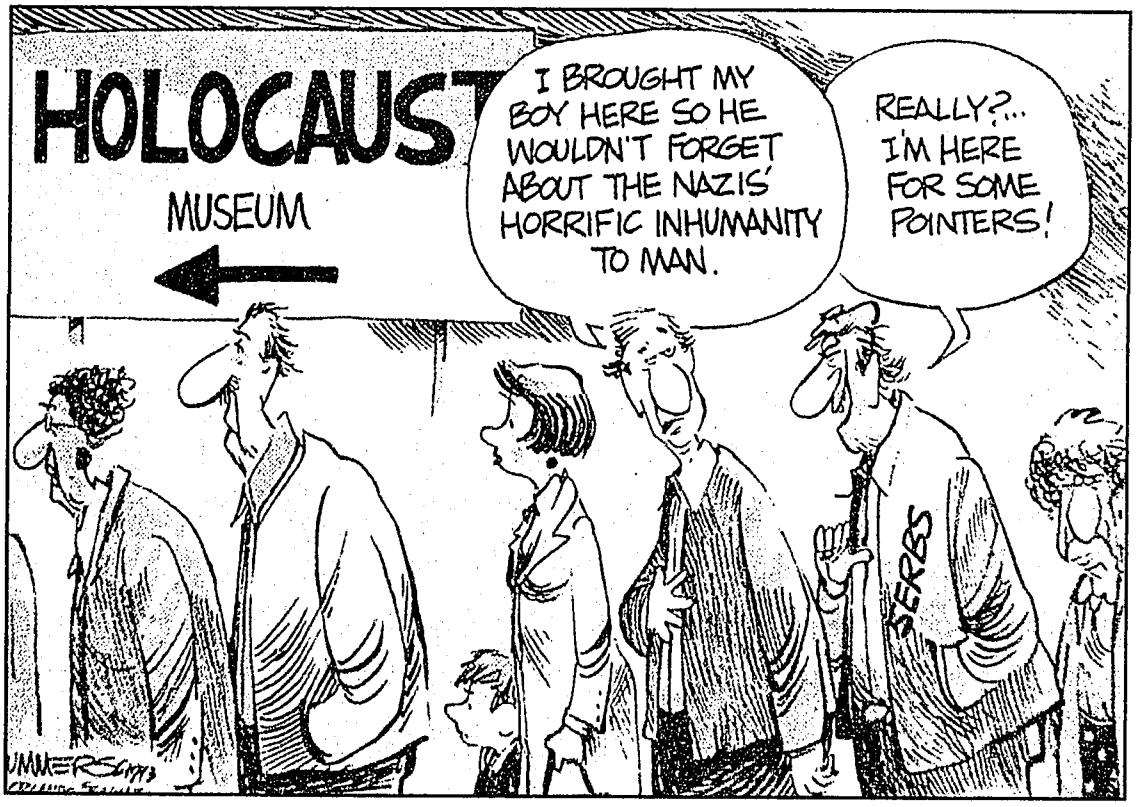


Figure 73. Comic by Dana Summer depicting multiple possible responses to a Holocaust Museum.

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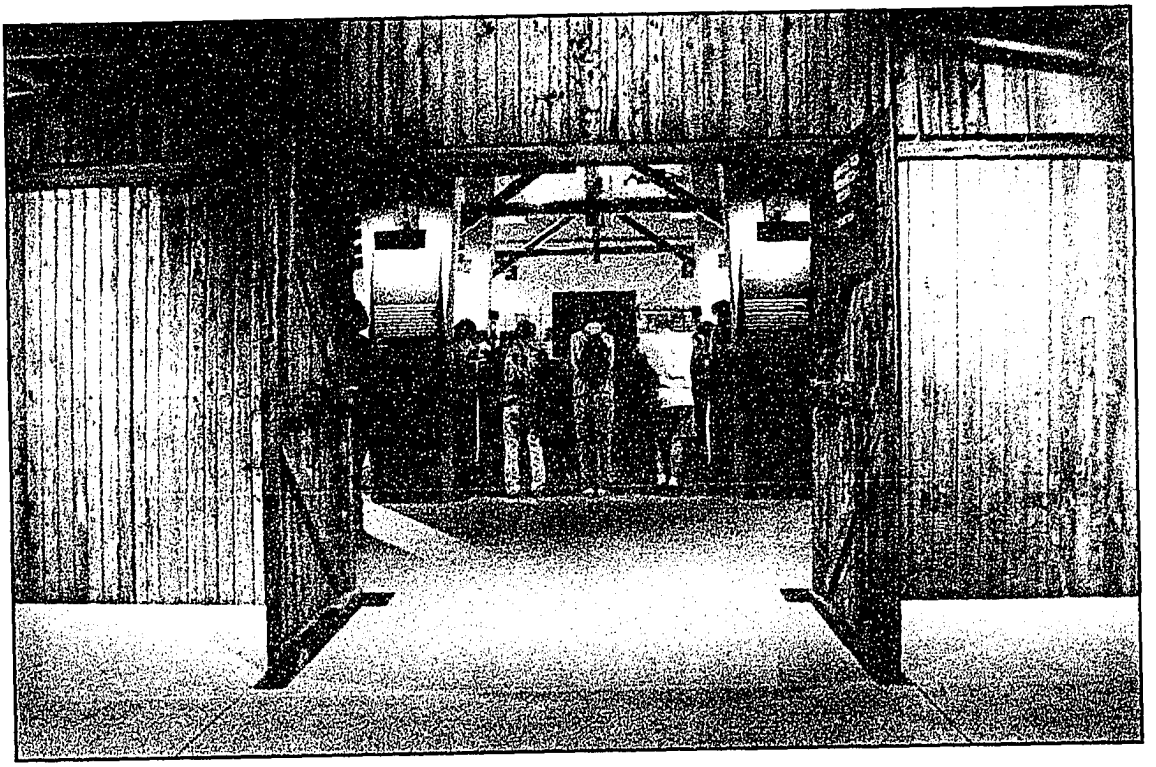


Figure 74. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The car crash."

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Figure 75. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Faces of visitors at the "car crash."

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A. Entrance to Permanent Exhibition (Elevators to 4th Floor)

B. Stairway (Birkenau inspired)

C. Second Entrance to Museum as Designed by Freed (now used as an exit)

D. Snack Bar in Adjacent Building

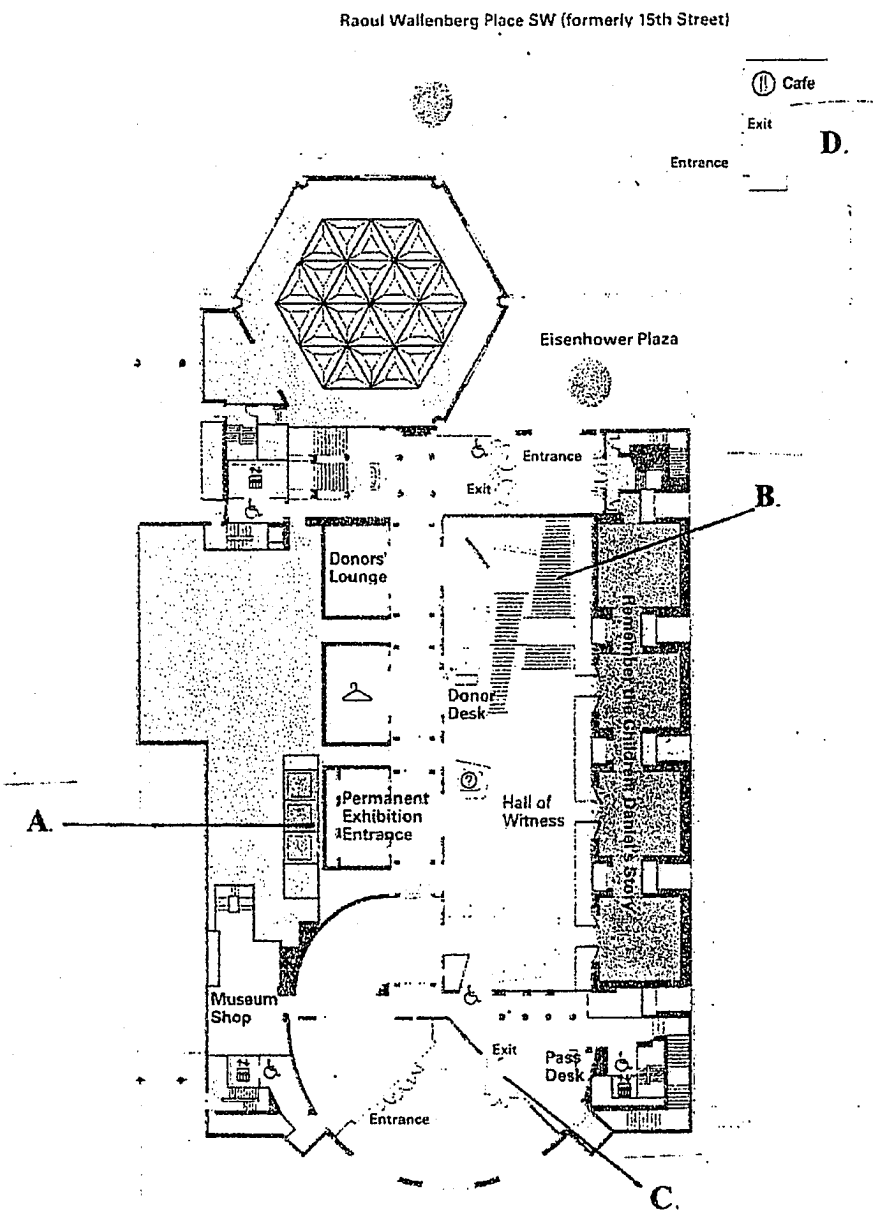


Figure 76. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Floor plan of first floor.

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E. Entrance to Exhibit (as you exit elevators)
F. First film segment (no sound)
G. Concentration Camp Uniforms
H. First sound video
I Second sound video
J. Third Sound Video
K. Torah fragments
L. Gypsy Wagon
M. Border Gate
N. Glass Bridge with names of European cities etched on it
O. American Response
P. Scroll of Esther
Q. Tower of Faces

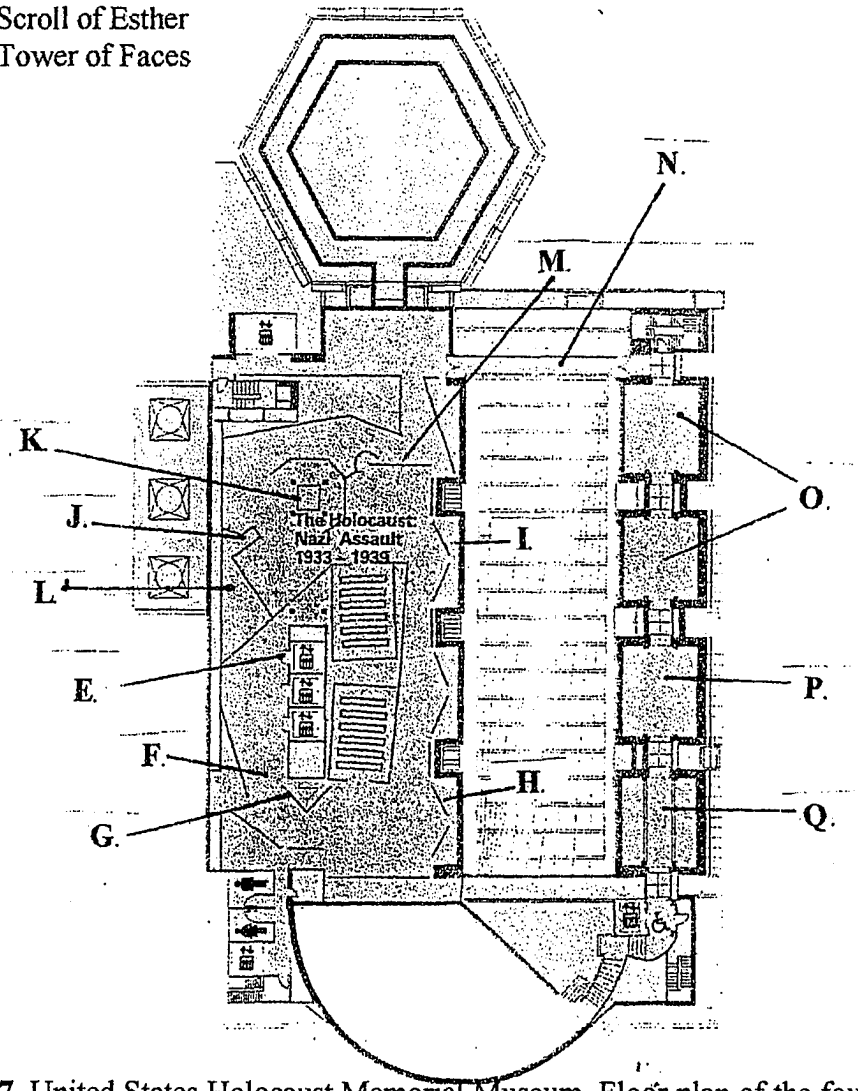


Figure 77. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Floor plan of the fourth floor (first floor of permanent exhibition).

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R. Wooden Bridge
S. Video displays behind "privacy wall"
T. Railroad Car
U. Bypass Bridge
V. Artifacts confiscated from inmates
W. Voices from Auschwitz
X. Privacy will showing "medical experiments"

THE CAR CRASH

Y. Model of Birkenau Crematorium
Z. Photo of Birkenau
AA. Map of Auschwitz/Birkenau
BB. Glass Bridge with first names of victims etched on it
CC. Shoes
DD. Photomural of Hair
EE. Tower of Faces

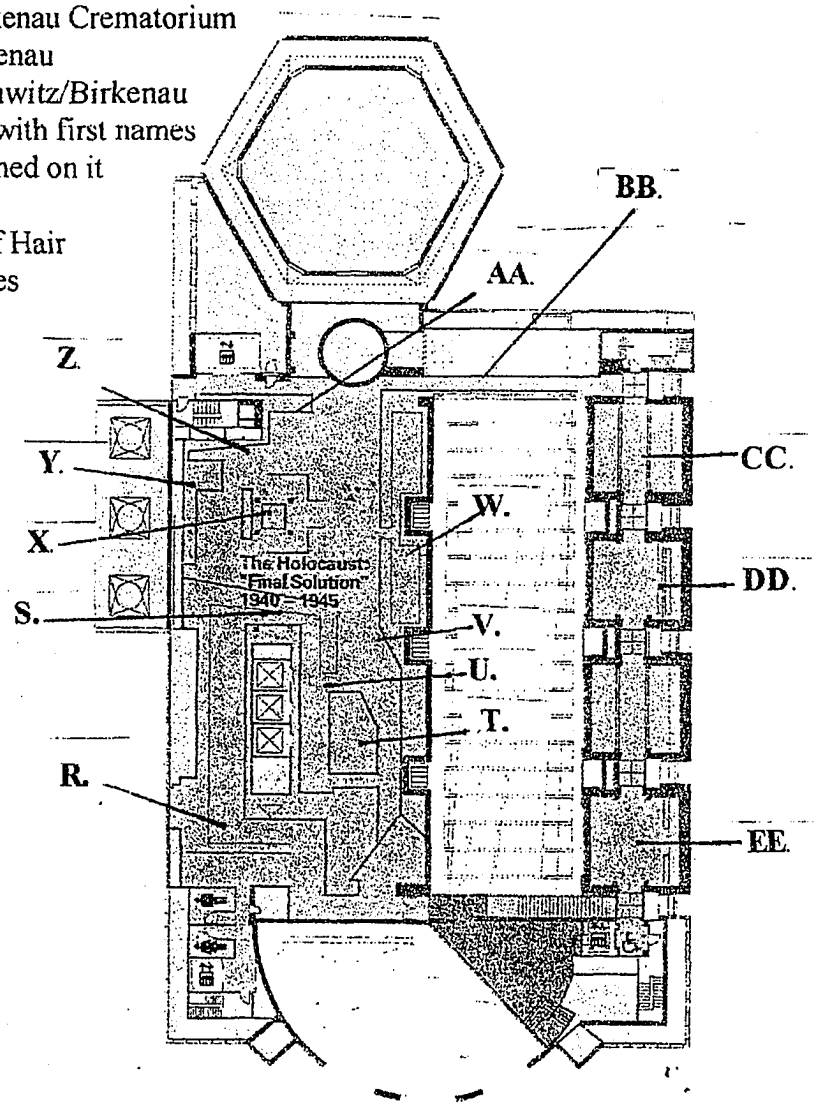


Figure 78. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Floor plan of the third floor (second floor of permanent exhibition).

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FF. Wall of Liberators and Rescuers
GG. Video of Resistance Fighter Hanging
HH. Sound Video of Soldier Lecturing in German
II. Concentration Camp Uniforms
JJ. Theater
KK. Entrance to Hall of Remembrance
LL. Exit from Permanent display (down stairs to 1st Floor)
MM. Exit from Permanent Display (outside to snack bar)

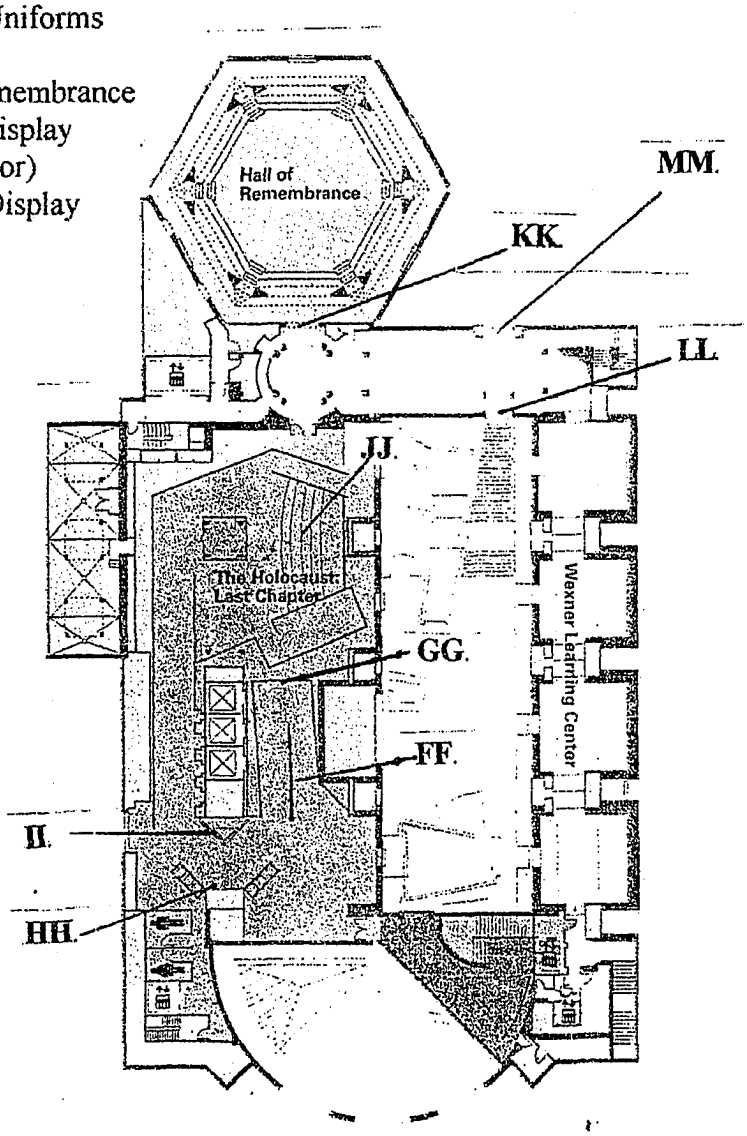


Figure 79. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Floor plan of the second floor (third floor of permanent exhibition).

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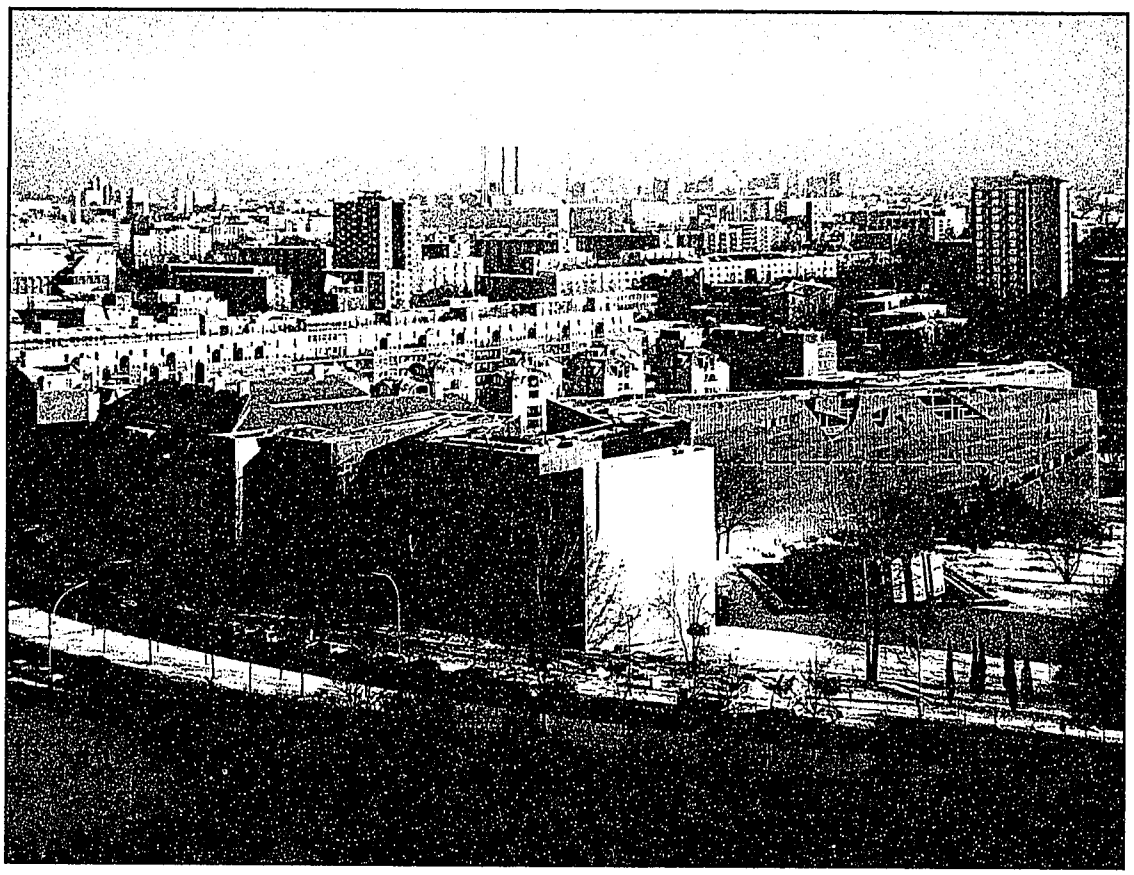


Figure 80. Daniel Libeskind, The Jewish Museum in Berlin. Aerial view.

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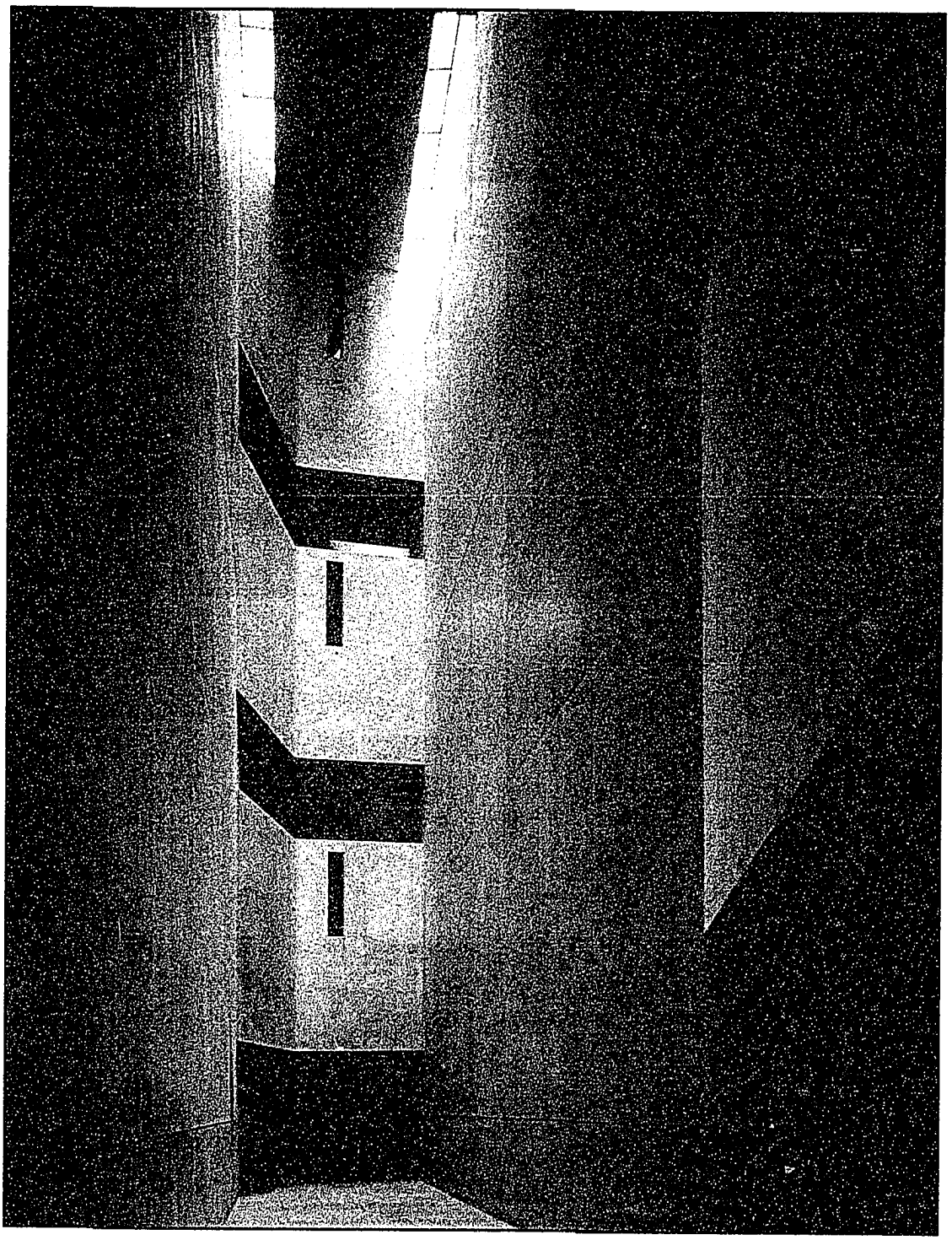


Figure 81. Daniel Libeskind, The Jewish Museum. Interior view of "void."

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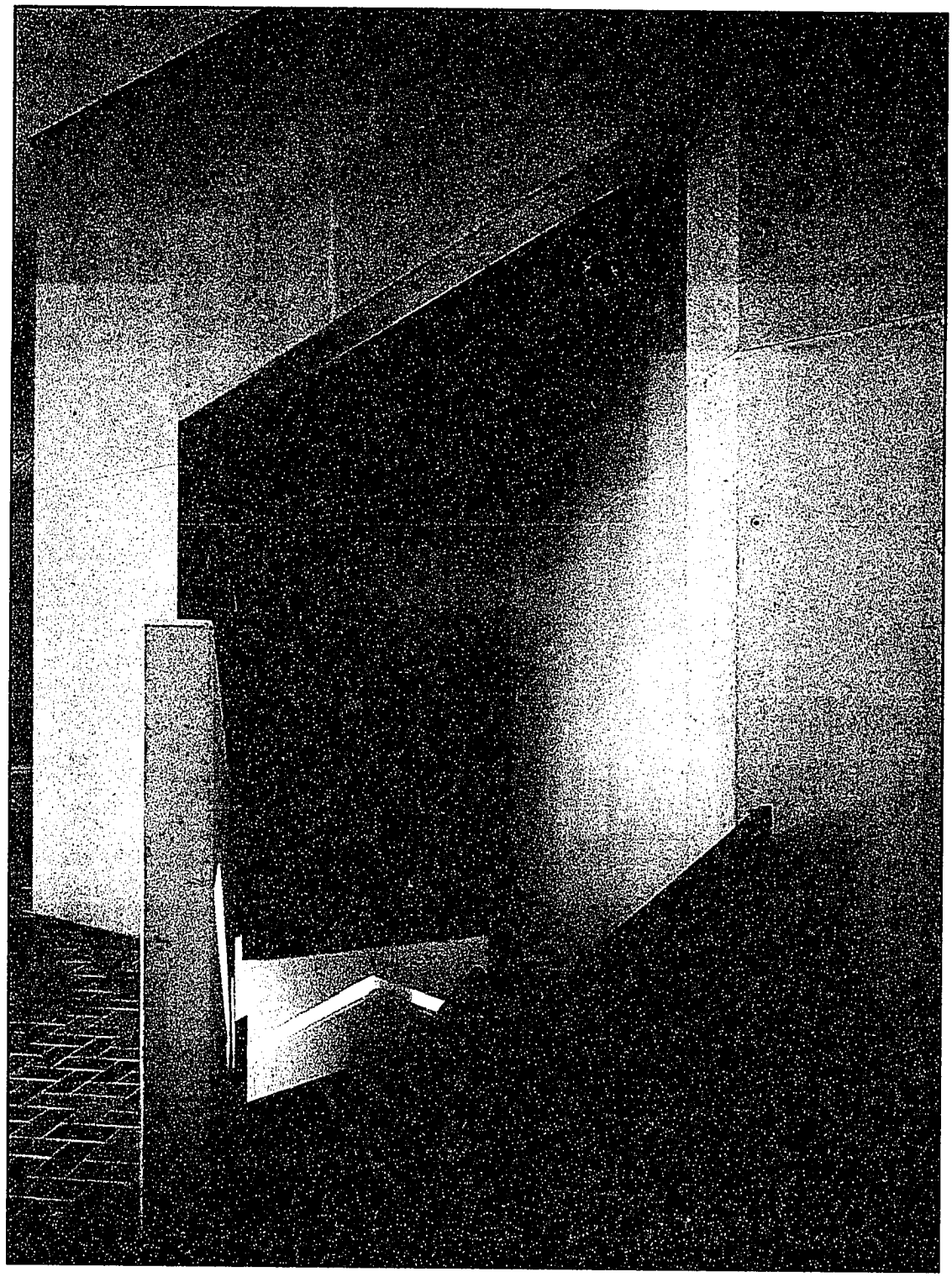


Figure 82. Daniel Libeskind, The Jewish Museum. Entryway.

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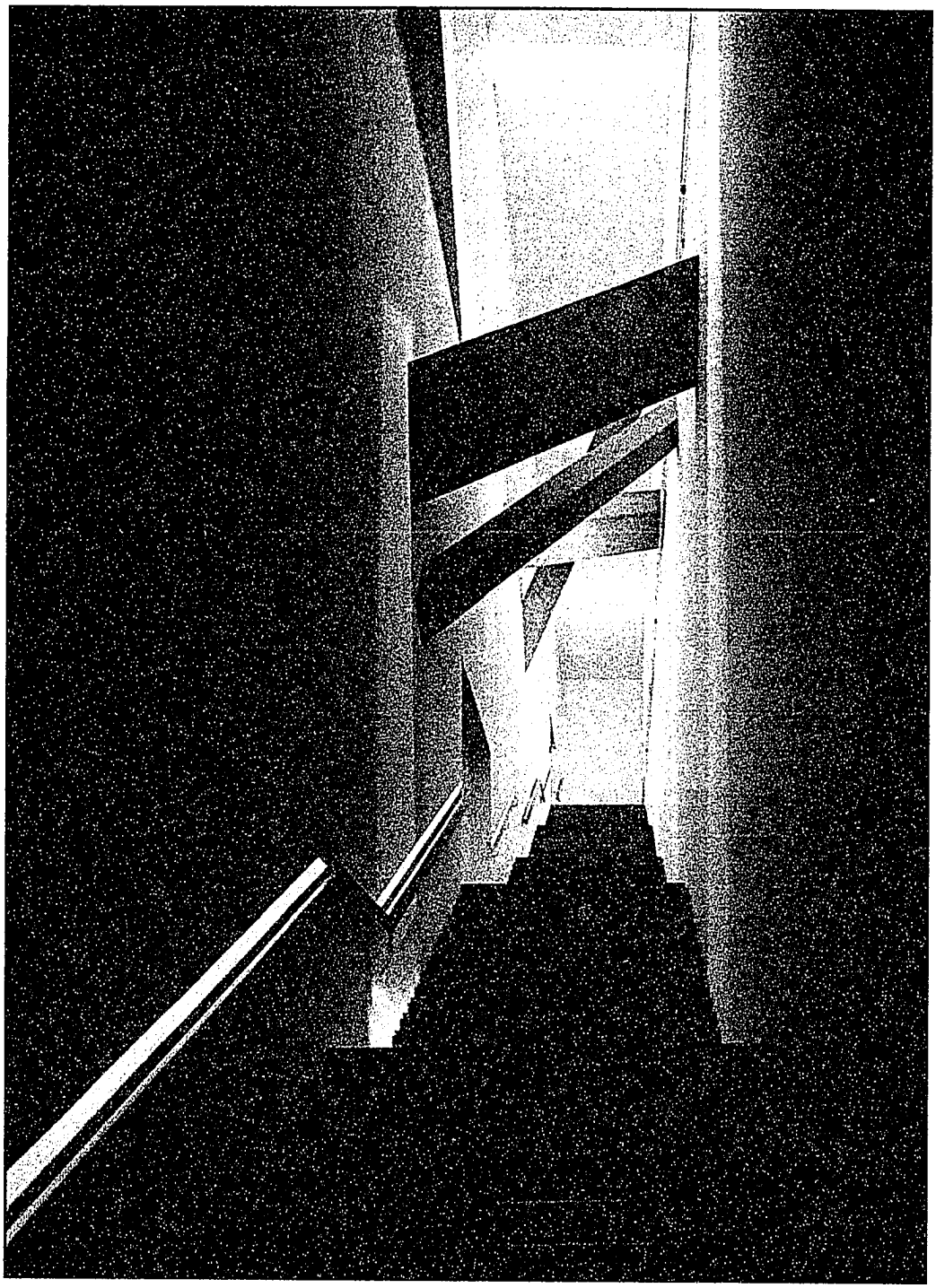


Figure 83. Daniel Libeskind, The Jewish Museum. Stairway with "solid" voids.

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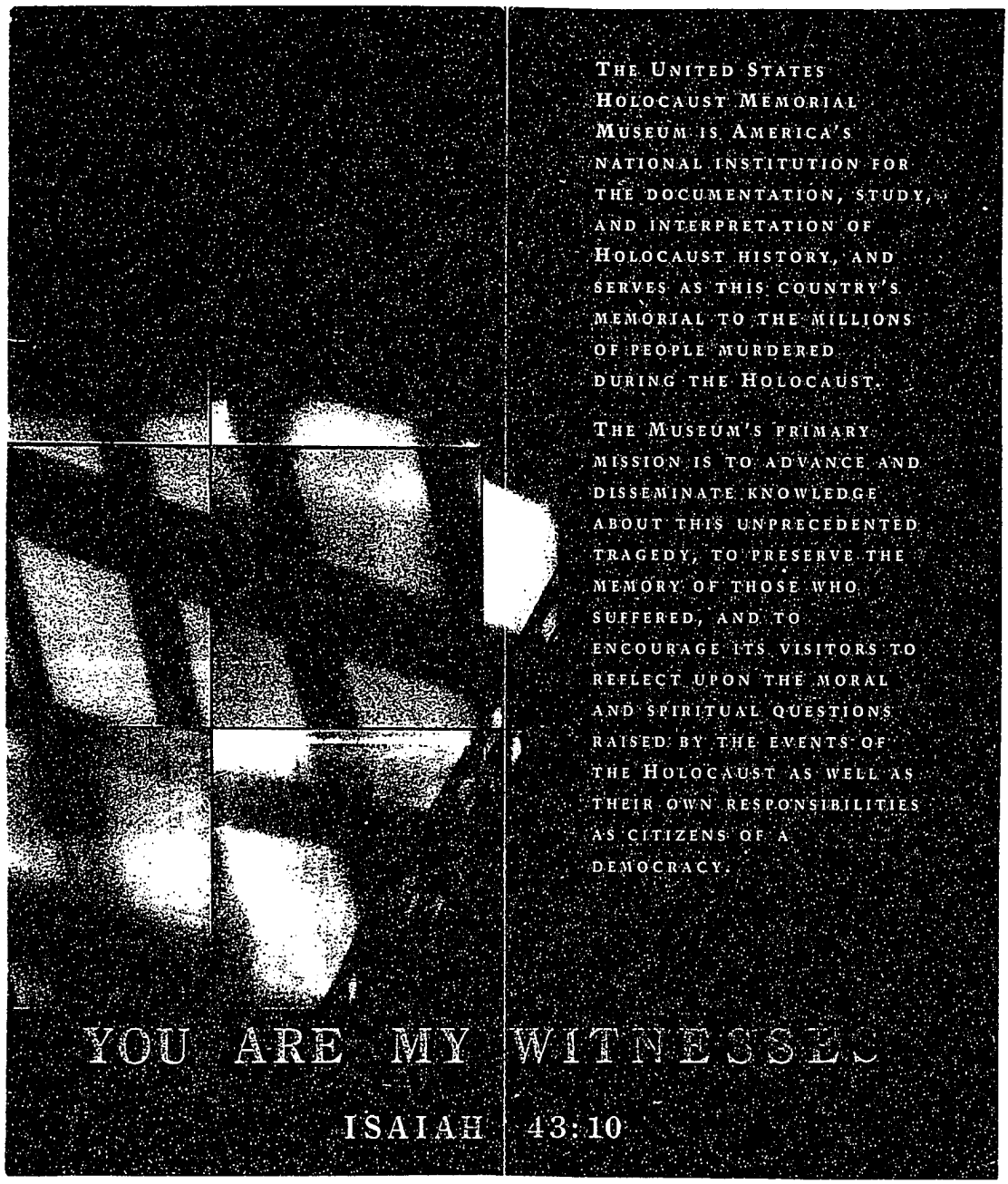


Figure 84. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Brochure text.

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