

Review

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share of female perpetrators and a number of survivors, as mentioned in Rochelle G. Saidel's 2004 book, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*.

A minor quibble is the misspelling of German words. It is laudable, though, that the contributors refrain from using the perpetrator's language when dealing with annihilation. With very few exceptions, they avoid the Nazi German "extermination" (*Vernichtung*) that one finds too often in other works. May we attribute this to women's writing?

This superbly written and edited volume would make a fine reader for a university course on women and the Holocaust. I also recommend it highly to be included in any library collection on the Holocaust.

WORKS CITED

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Karin Doerr

Oren Baruch Stier. *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2003. xvi + 277 pp. 15 figures. ISBN 1-558-49408-1, \$37.50.

Do we live in an age that looks to memory now that history has, as Fukuyama claimed and Niethammer pondered in 1992, come to an end? The question arises less from the demise of the so-called "Evil Empire" than from the deconstruction of naive realist historiography, the development of Photo-shop CS among other manufacturers of simulacra, and perhaps, the foreclosure of any complicity in the series of atrocities that both preceded and followed 1992. As a consequence, do we yearn for the hoped-for realia of recollected *Erlebnis* (lived-experience) or the monumental materiality of sites of memory (Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*)? Or conversely, are we anxious about possibly acting out (yet-to-be) recovered memories? The list of publications in the human sciences over the last decade throughout Europe and North America would suggest a near obsession with the means, meanings, motivations, and aftermaths of memory. Books with titles reading "Memory", "Mémoire," "Gedächtnis/Erinnerung," compete for our attention with others shouting "Trauma," "Trauma," "Trauma."

Both series converge on—and perhaps emerge from—the Holocaust. A quick check of Amazon indicates that there are over eighty works in which “Holocaust” and “memory” are conjoined. Oren Baruch Stier’s *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* is another such title that attempts to find some forgotten niche in this growing archive of memorabilia. With its suggestions of preservation and of duty, the title itself, *Committed to Memory*, embodies the duality of the many embodiments of Holocaust memory that the author addresses. Stier examines a broad spectrum of sites in which Holocaust memory work is being performed: museum exhibits of boxcars and hair piles, Art Spiegelman’s (auto)biography *Maus* and Emily Prager’s novel *Eve’s Tattoo*, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale and the Shoah Visual History Foundation, the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance and the March of the Living.

Several of these locations have already been frequently visited by previous scholars, and one in particular, *Maus*, could have been missed without any loss to Stier’s argument, since his analysis adds nothing to the extensive literature on Spiegelman’s work. But a number of his other journeys are enriched by his participant-observer perspective, especially his involvement with the March of the Living and his tours through the changing formats of the Museum of Tolerance over the course of the 90s and into the year 2000. The author insightfully intermixes his own experiences with the literature on technology, tourism, and ritual, and thereby supplements James Young’s extensive work on monuments and memorialization. Stier’s discussion of the “strategies of display” and frames in which Holocaust exhibits and testimonies are presented is often quite nuanced, except that he never questions the authenticity and genuineness of those two framing words “authentic” and “genuine,” and has a, for me, far too positive valuation of the effects of technology on memorialization.

Stier describes his project as tracing the public mediations of “collective/cultural/social” memory, those embodiments of contemporary Holocaust memorial culture, along two primary trajectories. They are the temporal (primacy given respectively to atemporal, past, present, and future-oriented representations) and the physical (primacy given respectively to iconic/idolatrous, ocular/aural, interactive, and ritualistic performances). Yet another structuring principle also appears to be at work, for *Committed to Memory* can also be seen as a complement to Lawrence Langer’s *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. Over and against Langer’s masterful morphology of survivor memory, a delineation of five types of memory (deep, anguished, humiliated, tainted, unheroic) present in the oral testimonies of survivors, Stier offers five modes of memorial practice (remembering, inscribing, framing,

mediating, performing). Moreover, in contradistinction to Langer's concern with survivor witness, Stier addresses the subsequent generations of, in Dori Apel's terms, secondary witnesses (cf. Liliane Weisberg's review of Apel's *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* in *Biography* 26.3). More significantly, where Langer would problematically grant an immediacy and singularity to the oral testimonies of the survivors (especially in contrast to written testimony), Stier emphasizes the mediated and social character of memory.

With this emphasis, Stier avoids the excesses of the recent literature on trauma that has as a primary focus the memories of the Holocaust victim; those works would ascribe real unmediated presence—Truth—to traumatic recollection, and irreproachable innocence to the allegedly victimized recollector. In those studies, trauma becomes the norm, the ground of not just identity, but history as well. Such presuppositions facilitated the hoax perpetrated by Binjamin Wilkomirski/Bruno Doessekker and his purported memoir, *Fragments*. Stier briefly discusses select works by a number of these trauma theorists, including Shoshana Felman, the late Dori Laub, and Ernst Van Alphen (he does not address either Cathy Caruth or Bessel van der Kolk, who are the leading proponents of trauma theory). However, by rarely—and never directly—addressing “trauma,” Stier fails to engage a key, if not the key, *point de capiton* in the study of Holocaust memory. And he no less avoids the discussion of such psychological categories as denial and repression that are also often associated with studies of the Holocaust and memory, and that like memory, for Stier (following Amos Funkenstein), can be understood to have a collective dimension without hypostatizing them.

In lieu of “trauma” as the arch-index of the Holocaust, Stier substitutes an even more problematic and never defined notion: sacrality. He argues that “turning a religious studies perspective” (40) on Holocaust remembrance—such as attending to its “sacred core” (42) and to the “mythic and mystic forces undergirding” it (xiii)—“contributes to a deeper understanding” (40). Yet to leave a notion such as the “sacred” all but unexamined (cf. 166–67) ignores the critical perspective of many of the historians of religion (such as Jonathan Z. Smith and Catherine Bell) that he otherwise makes good analytical use of, and thereby obviates the promised “deeper understanding.” More significant, the omission of such reflection is accompanied by a neglect of the questions about the religious character and “redemptive slant” (35) of the Shoah that so many of his sources ask.

In his concluding chapter, Stier addresses the obverse of the biblical command, “Zakhor” (“Remember”), the obligation that shadows reflection on the Holocaust: “Never Forget.” Remembering and forgetting are always in a

dialectical relationship. As Stier notes there are dangers in neglecting the one for the other: idolatry on the one hand, negationism on the other, and triumphalist identity constructions in both cases. We must somehow negotiate our way between Nietzsche's happily-grazing-because-forgetful cows and Borges's prostrate-because-unable-to-forget "Funes the Memorious." Are we then suffering from too much memory of the Holocaust—or not enough of the right kind? Stier's answer to both questions is yes.

Jay Geller

Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, eds. *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003. 336 pp. 74 b + w photos. ISBN 0-253-21569-2, \$22.95.

Since the Enlightenment the observation of the visual world has had a privileged status: it is a precondition and guarantee of knowledge and understanding. Being an eyewitness of something implies more or less automatic apprehension and comprehension of the observed situation or event. This link between seeing and comprehension, however, has been radically disrupted in the experiences of Holocaust victims.

Ernst van Alphen, *Image and Remembrance*

In his most recent novel, 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature winner J. M. Coetzee builds his story around the eponymous main character, Australian writer Elizabeth Costello, who, in the course of the book, delivers several lectures in international settings. In a chapter entitled "The Problem of Evil," Costello goes to Amsterdam to present a talk to a conference of theologians and philosophers. She takes as her subject a novel she had been reading about the July 20, 1944, plot to kill Adolf Hitler, a novel that cast a "malign spell" upon her due to the visceral details it contains about the execution of the would-be assassins. The reading experience summoned one word to Costello's mind: *obscene*. This, in turn, causes her to speculate about whether "people are always improved by what they read." Her conclusion is a resounding NO: she believes that when the author wrote the novel, he "came in touch with something absolute. Absolute evil." And, when she read the novel, she says, "that touch of evil was passed on to me." Costello articulates the conundrum thus: "How can we know the horrors of the Nazis . . . if our artists are forbidden to bring them to life for us?"

Lurking behind this conundrum is, of course, the admonition (later retracted) from T. W. Adorno that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." As evidenced by the fact that the dilemma posed by Adorno is now