

Unfinished Landscape

Places of Remembrance and Forgetting

In his memoir, Jorge Semprun recounts that his mentor, Maurice Halbwachs - the professor at the Collège de France and the creator of the concept of *collective memory* - died in his arms in the Buchenwald concentration camp in March 1945. After his death, it was Semprun himself who had to erase Halbwachs' name, and all signs of his identity,¹ from the central registry of the *Arbeitstatistik*, so that from that moment on - at least in the intention of the bureaucrats of death—he was not only dead but also annihilated even in death.

The memory of the Holocaust is a *difficult heritage*,² a legacy that forces us to confront some of the hardest and most sensitive questions of human existence and the most extreme life situations. This remains true even as the number of Holocaust survivors continues to decrease, and Holocaust remembrance shifts from living, active group memory to becoming part of historical-cultural memory. With the destruction of communities and individuals, collective memory was broken and damaged in many places, creating a deep gap between the lost past and the present. Alongside traditional Jewish forms of mourning and remembrance, the institution of the museum-dedicated to preserving documents and memories - has been established to safeguard the remaining traces and reconstruct memory.

Rabbi Irving Greenberg draws a parallel between the Holocaust and the destruction of the Second Temple, as both historical catastrophes led to the development of new Jewish institutions: synagogues in the former case, and Holocaust museums in the latter.³

Independent Holocaust museums were opened separately from Jewish museums, interpreting the Holocaust as a European event and as part of general history. Susan Sontag defined this new type of museum as a separate category: the *memory museum*.⁴

¹ Jorge Semprun, *L'écriture ou la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 38–39.

² Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008).

³ Jenifer Hansen-Glücklich, "Evoking the Sacred: Visual Holocaust Narratives in National Museums," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9, no. 2 (2010): pp. 209–232.

⁴ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Picador, 2004), p. 77.

This museum form developed specifically to present and commemorate the destruction of European Jewry, but following its example, memory museums have also been established to process the histories of other modern genocides and to provide a space for mourning their victims.⁵

These museums also function as memorials, with one of their key missions being the preservation of memory and the reinforcement of the principle of *never forgetting*.

At the same time, through their exhibitions, the history of the Holocaust moves from group memory into *history*, accompanied by academic, critical discourse, and enters the space of ideological and historiographical debates—often standing in contrast to the memory preserved by the victims themselves.⁶

However, Holocaust remembrance in museums is not limited to the exhibition of tragic events or the integration of the memory museum function into institutional museum systems.

The incorporation of Holocaust memory into the historical-cultural and commemorative canon, and the recurring demand for related exhibitions, continuously challenges museums and cultural centers to engage further. The project “*Unfinished Landscape - Places of Remembrance and Forgetting*” of the Comité Conmemorativo del Holocausto – en el Caribe in the collaboration with Canetti House - Ruse presents the memory of the Holocaust through three works: one poem by Dan Pagis and two photographs. In doing so, it creates the illusion of a return to the past, transforming distant and alienated objects into something both personal and cathartic: it initiates the visitor, making them a quasi-witness, while also articulating a new exhibition concept as a practice of combating antisemitism.

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Comité conmemorativo del Holocausto – en el Caribe

10 August 2025

⁵ Silke Arnold-de Simine, “Memory Museum and Museum Text: Intermediality in Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum and W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 1 (2012): pp. 14–35.

⁶ Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 20–57.