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ARTICLE

Memory as Fluid Process: James Friedman’s “12 Nazi Concentration Camps” and Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine*

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ABSTRACT

Living memorials encourage reflection about the space of traumatic events, about the remains held (or forgotten, obfuscated), and they also encourage reflection about the return of traumatic events. How are the patterns of antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia returning now? How, if at all, do reminders of the fascist past change the approach to the present? This essay reads two living memorials, James Friedman’s photographic series “12 Nazi Concentration Camps” and Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine*, as lenses through which to analyze how we interact with spaces of trauma and how the aesthetics of these photographs or stones create vibrant memorial spaces. Examining the affective nature of interacting with traumatic landscapes, this essay argues that each space calls up distinct aspects of the Nazi genocide, and each memory tourist finds a new meaning in the process of being in these spaces. The very process of interacting with traumatic landscapes alters the living memory or postmemory generated through the interchange between people and powerful things.

Keywords: Holocaust art, memory studies, James Friedman, Gunter Demnig

James Friedman’s “12 Nazi Concentration Camps” and Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine* illuminate how memory is a fluid process rather than a finite goal. These works encourage us to see the haunting nature of some memories, how they return no matter what, and how it is the walk rather than the destination that matters. Made in the 1980s but exhibited in many locations since then, Friedman’s photographic series places survivors, tourists, onlookers, and often Friedman himself at concentration camps and entices us to examine how we (and how they, the subjects) interact with and feel about traumatic sites. Since 1996, Demnig has been embedding small memorial stones in front of many sites from which victims of the Nazi genocide were deported or forced to become refugees. Both of these works negotiate space/place because the phenomenal location of the subjects or the stones generates an affective response. Since these artworks would lose their power in different locales, they illuminate the mechanism of memorial processes tied to place. While Friedman’s and Demnig’s projects are very different from each other in terms of media—one is a series of photographs, the other a series of brass stones—and while they are far from being the only two artists whose work sheds light on memory as a fluid process, looking at the texts together foregrounds how valuable such artistic projects are to the theories that derive from them. As José Esteban Muñoz so eloquently phrased it, “The making of theory only transpires *after* the artists’ performance.”¹

In this essay, I read Friedman’s series “12 Nazi Concentration Camps” as a lens through which to analyze how we interact with spaces of trauma and how the aesthetics of these photographs create vibrant memorial space. Moving from Friedman’s images to Demnig’s *Stolpersteine*, I look at the affective nature of interacting with traumatic landscapes. Each space calls up distinct aspects of the Nazi genocide, and each memory tourist finds a new meaning in the process of being in these spaces. As James Young has argued in *Stages of Memory*, the very process of choosing a memorial to a traumatic event should be visible in the final product.² I expand that view here to look at how interacting with traumatic landscapes alters the memory or postmemory generated through the interchange between people and powerful things. Jane Bennett’s work on “thing-power” is

very helpful in unpacking the pull of objects such as Demnig's stones or the things featured in Friedman's images. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett explains how "stuff exhibit[s] its thing-power" and notes that "the us and the it slip-slide into each other. . . . [T]hings, too, are vital players in the world."³ Friedman's photographs—and the interactions they reveal between inert space and the living images of his subjects—and Demnig's *Stolpersteine* remind us of the vitality of things, of their call to us to remember that remembering is a vital thing and that it never reaches conclusion. Demnig's "stumbling stones" are art as well as things, and many of the arresting objects in Friedman's series—a toy race car, a brightly colored delivery truck, a tissue, a bright sash—seem so out of place in a concentrationary universe. In one case, the stones are art as well as memorials; in the other case, the out-of-place things become foci or even puncta that alter the way we see spaces of former trauma.

In Friedman's project, desolate spaces—many of them not yet major tourist sites—are captured in supersaturated color and intense detail, forcing us to reckon with the gap between murderous pasts and their seemingly innocuous presents. Through Demnig's small stones embedded in the urban landscapes of many cities (and also increasingly in rural and remote spaces), a powerful, very small thing forces us to reckon with the lives broken by the Shoah. In Friedman's work, the victims are not specified, they are not named, but their absences are nonetheless palpable in the images; in Demnig's stones, we have only names, no images of the dead, the deported, or the fled. Both works bring the landscapes of traumatic events to the fore but in very different ways. Both projects are about the process of remembering—and also of forgetting. In Friedman's photographic series, the forgetting of the people who interact with these spaces daily confronts us; in Demnig's project, our own forgetting faces us as we may well walk right over these stones without even noticing, or we may witness others forgetting to take a moment to witness them. By interacting with space in such diverse yet interconnected ways, both artists illuminate memorialization as a process rather than an end, as an ongoing network, as a fluid endeavor rather than a fixed and finite thing.

Throughout this essay, I will return to one of the moments in Walter Benjamin's work where he delves into the ceaselessness of memory, where he uses an extended metaphor of archaeology to explore living memory:

He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. This confers the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences. He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth; the images, severed from all earlier associations, that stand—like precious fragments or torsos in a collector's gallery—in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding. . . . Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as succeeding, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers.⁴

Despite Benjamin's keen revelations about the ceaseless digging through the archaeologies of the past that constitutes reminiscence, a desire for the process of memory to end persists. "Coming to terms with the past" implies that once its terms are met, the struggle to dig into the past ends. Building a monument seems to have a finality to it, a large structure that encapsulates the desired memory production. A visit to a concentration camp can express a desire to embody the space of trauma and there to come to terms with the past in a way that closes it, seals it off, makes it whole, finite, over. What many scholars and memory tourists and survivors are finding, though, is that the process of memory making is fluid and alive. In effect, its terms are never met; it can never be entombed in such a way as to disappear. The landscape, too, while often being an agent of forgetting, continues to yield archaeologies of the past in the form of bones and other indelible markers. Friedman's and Demnig's diverse projects are among the works that demonstrate this fluid, living memory and resist the desire to close off the past.

JAMES FRIEDMAN, "12 NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS"

An American, Ohio-based photographer, Friedman's experiences with antisemitism fueled his decision to travel to and record the images of people who toured former Nazi concentration camps. Antisemitism and Jewishness shape many of his series even though their themes vary widely.⁵ Friedman's photographs open up a space for seeing memory and memorialization as a never-ending kaleidoscope of new affects. The counterintuitive and diverse titles of his projects tell stories all their own: "Self-Portraits with Jewish Nose Wandering in a Gentile World," "Hypersalivation," "Almost Never Before Seen Portraits of Remarkable People," "1,029,398 Cigarettes," "Dogs Who've Licked Me," "My Face Looks like an Ansel Adams Landscape," and many other magnificently odd titles. His photographs are, above all, about people and their emotions; the Holocaust, Jewishness, nomadism, and displacement consistently return as major themes within this diverse oeuvre.

In "12 Nazi Concentration Camps," survivors, tourists, locals, and Friedman himself interact with the spaces of trauma. Recorded with a large-format 8 × 10 camera, these memory tourists and others in their bright colors often stare directly at us, making us uncomfortable and curious all at once. In the 1980s, when Friedman took these photographs, there was not yet a Holocaust tourism culture in the way it has subsequently become established.⁶ These photographs offer an inventive way of interacting with these fraught landscapes. The difference between the story told by photographs and the reality they supposedly depict can be seen in Friedman's images where the jarring juxtaposition between past and present manifests so potently. As his subjects stand, sit, and stare, they are keenly aware of their location, and yet they are also some forty years removed from the trauma of the spaces of the camps. The photos seem to encourage us to ask: How does the landscape retain memory? And how do we access those memories?

I have been able to view "12 Nazi Concentration Camps" in multiple formats, and each time I have a different experience. I first saw them online after being invited to discuss the series on a panel at Hebrew Union College along with Friedman and Gary Weissman, a fellow

Holocaust scholar. Then I was able to spend some time in the company of the images as carefully mounted and presented large photographs at the Hebrew Union College gallery. Finally, we brought them to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), and we projected them onto the walls of the Illini Union Art Gallery. The projected version heightened the sense that these images were doubly relics of the past: the 1940s past of the concentration camps themselves and the 1980s past of the moments of photographing. During the month-long exhibit at UIUC, the photos advanced through slideshows all day long, and visitors could choose how to interact with them: one could watch one screen at a time like a slow-moving film, or one could circle the gallery and view multiple screens. I had the impression that these tourists from the 1980s, many of them likely no longer alive, were watching us watching them. It was unnerving and very effective. Like Proust's magic lantern, it allowed us to gaze at an ever-changing kaleidoscope and, as Benjamin understood, to unearth "images, severed from all earlier associations."⁷

One of the first, obvious, but still shocking things one notices about Friedman's photographs is that they are in color.⁸ Some survivors, such as Jorge Semprún, have noticed the stark contrast between their memories, in color, and the images that circulate, largely in black and white, well after the wide distribution of color film. Friedman has remarked that it is the saturated colors of his images that often irk viewers—as if it were not possible to take color photos in the 1980s, as if the sun were not allowed to shine between 1939 and 1945, as if the sky could not have been clear blue. For me, it was not so much the color that I found striking but rather the direct address offered to the viewer by many of the subjects; as they stare at us, it is so direct, it feels like a challenge. In the case of photography, there is always, as Roland Barthes so beautifully found, at once what is within the photograph and that which must necessarily be excluded from the frame: "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory . . . , but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory."⁹ The photograph's ability to represent, like any given space's ability to bear witness, is also always circumscribed.

The photograph entitled “Local resident with scythe and self-portrait, Auschwitz II (Birkenau concentration camp, Oswiecim, Poland, 1983)” features an elderly man holding a scythe and looking at us (fig. 1). Behind him, Friedman stares impassively. Friedman tells me that he composed the photograph and placed the 8 × 10 camera where he wanted it and asked for the shutter to be released when he was ready. The scythe is a fascinating part of the image as it offers an intimate link between tilling and the figure of death. Friedman’s caption: “Since the end of World War II, local residents of Oswiecim, Poland had been assigned small plots of the seventeen-square mile former Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp site to tend and maintain. During my photographing there, this man was using a scythe to cut the grass on his plot. Through an interpreter, he told me he had helped prisoners escape from the camp during the war.”¹⁰



Figure 1. Local resident with scythe and self-portrait, Auschwitz II (Birkenau).
© James Friedman

This photograph reminds me of the famous and memorable image from Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (which appeared two years after Friedman's series) of the Polish man showing Lanzmann the gesture he made to the Jews on the cattle cars: his finger across his throat.¹¹ The scythe stands there as though a belated foretelling of the death of the inmates of Birkenau. It is remarkable that Friedman constructed this series before *Shoah* changed the world's recognition of the Holocaust in 1985. Diverse and competing narratives pin the change in consciousness to different dates, and the story changes in different national contexts: Some argue that it was the 1979 broadcast of *Holocaust* that vastly increased dissemination of information about the Shoah in the United States. This has been debated elsewhere, but I just mention this briefly to note that Friedman's visits to these sites in 1981 and 1983 fall between the 1979 television show and the 1985 transformation catalyzed by Lanzmann's *Shoah* and can thus be seen as part of this burgeoning consciousness.¹² But Friedman's series has also been exhibited multiple times since the 1980s and as recently as December 2017, thus indicating that it still has great relevance—despite the huge number of photographic projects created in the intervening years and devoted to uncovering the aftereffects of the Shoah. To name just a few of these projects with which Friedman is in implicit dialogue, there is Susan Silas's *Helmbrechts Walk*, Eric Hartmann's black-and-white images of concentration camps, the illuminated photo portraits of Christian Boltanski, Piotr Uklański's portraits of cinematic Nazis, Shimon Attie's projections of Jewish life onto spaces now devoid of Jews, and many other fascinating works.¹³ Several of these projects share with Friedman's and Demnig's texts a focus on process and an exploration of how the spaces of traumatic events change memory.

Another of Friedman's self-portraits from "12 Nazi Concentration Camps," with the artist occluded by two figures, seems to put a comic spin on the image with the scythe. Here, one man stands on the right holding a spade, while the other blows his nose, as Friedman looks on from behind, forming a trio of disconnected gazes (fig. 2). One observer of Friedman's images, Lilya Kaganovsky, notes that almost all of them obey the rules of Renaissance perspective and put a figure exactly in the center of the image.¹⁴ The caption, "Local resident, self-portrait and shepherd,



Figure 2. Local resident, self-portrait and shepherd, Bisingen concentration camp.
© James Friedman

Bisingen concentration camp, Bisingen, Germany, 1981,” seems to indicate that these locals are so inured to the presence of a concentration camp in their midst that they are able to smile, blow noses, and focus on other aspects of their lives. It is windy, their hair blows, and yet captured by what must have been a very quick shutter speed, it remains crisp and unblurred by the motion of the wind. They are apart from the artist—seemingly oblivious to his presence behind them like a living Jewish ghost reminding them of what happened there some forty years earlier.

Speaking to Linda Kuzmack on October 20, 1989, during a videotaped interview conducted at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a survivor of Bisingen, Abraham Lewent, remembered,

And from Buchenwald we went to another camp, uh, this is near Stuttgart. They call it Bisingen. This was very bad. Over there was mostly

Russian prisoners of war . . . mostly Russia. And they didn't have no barracks like 20, 30 people, 100 people. It was one long barrack, maybe 1,000 people can sleep there. And there was no beds. You slept on the floor, one next to the other, one row here, one row here, and you see 500, 800 people sleeping the same thing. And over there was very bad. The temperature was always cold. I don't know why. It was always raining. It was always cold. I mean I don't [know] if it was the time of the year, but I had no clothes on. I had just that little paper jacket, no underwear, wooden shoes, no socks, just a pair of pants. No hat. No hair. You were standing in that cold. It was miserable every day. When you standing on appell [roll call] for 2 hours in that cold weather. And the . . . and the bread they used to give you on the end in the barrack. So when they call your number, no name, you used to walk through thousand people to get your piece of bread. And when you got hold of the piece of bread, to walking back to your place, they jump on you and they grab the bread out from you. So the only thing to do, the minute they gave you the bread, you should push it in right fast in the mouth and that's the only way you could save your piece of bread. And this went on for maybe 2 months . . . maybe 10 weeks in that camp. This was already in the end of the war.¹⁵

Lewent was born in Warsaw in 1924 and lived on Zamenhof Street, so named in 1930 after the famous founder of Esperanto, in the heart of what would become the Jewish ghetto.¹⁶ He was deported to multiple concentration camps and then taken to Bisingen. This chilling description of the conditions he experienced stands in stark contrast to the casual faces and actions of the locals living there and captured in 1981 by Friedman. And why shouldn't they? In other words, it is unlikely that the people still living in Bisingen—a place whose name must recall nightmares for Lewent and other survivors—can maintain a constant level of memorialization.

Survivors often remark on the incongruity resulting from the calm and indeed often beautiful scenes that they find when they return to places where they had been debased, starved, and incarcerated. They often wonder how these now pacific sites could have once been spaces of horror. Sara Horowitz describes the survivor Kitty Felix Hart arriving at Auschwitz with her son:

“Poking with her son in the ashy soil over the remembered site of a mass grave, she unearths a fragment of a bone. Triumphantly she holds up the fragment for her son. . . . When narrative fails, eyewitness turns archaeologist.”¹⁷ In this grim scene, the landscape proves its instability as a witness; for this survivor-turned-archaeologist, the human bone offers evidence that the landscape remembers. The shockingly gorgeous and gripping film *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), directed by Patricio Guzmán, also finds relatives of the disappeared scouring Chile’s Atacama Desert for a trace, a bone, a heel, anything they can identify as the relics of their lost family members or lovers.

In a photo that echoes Kitty Felix Hart’s memory and that recalls these seekers in the desert in chilling ways, Friedman captures an onlooker gazing out at a pond (fig. 3). The trees are reflected in the water, vigorous grasses lean in toward the pond, and the play of light and shadow cuts



Figure 3. Pool into which ashes from crematoria IV and V were dumped, Auschwitz II (Birkenau). © James Friedman

across the image, producing a pleasing composition that neatly folds into the circle created by Friedman to frame it. But the title and caption (added much later) abruptly tear up this peacefulness: “Pool into which ashes from crematoria IV and V were dumped, Auschwitz II (Birkenau) concentration camp, Oswiecim, Poland, 1983. This serene, seemingly idyllic spot of respite was within walking distance of the crematoria. Some years later, I read that the author of a *New Yorker* magazine article about Auschwitz-Birkenau had dipped his hand into this pond in the early 1990s and found bone fragments from Auschwitz II’s crematoria.”¹⁸ Benjamin’s “precious fragments or torsos in a collector’s gallery—in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding” are rendered here not as artistic statues of bodies but as actual bodies that then call up our belated understanding that the literal remains of the dead are now indelibly part of the pastoral scene.¹⁹

In another of Friedman’s images, another direct address to the viewer, a woman—a visitor, not a local—regards the camera, while a group of kids look at her, look at the large camera, and wonder (fig. 4). Without the caption, one might be seriously confused: Is this tourist really dressing up like a concentration-camp inmate with striped pajamas? And the awards? And the bright red-and-white sash like a beauty queen in prison garb? With the caption, “Survivor of three Nazi concentration camps, survivors’ reunion, Majdanek concentration camp, near Lublin, Poland, 1983,” everything changes. And yet, if this unnamed survivor is among others at a reunion, one wonders where the other survivors might be. Her solitude seems only increased by the gang of kids behind her, regarding her like a curiosity and perhaps more engaged by Friedman’s odd, oversized camera. She, apparently, was incarcerated for being a Pole rather than a Jewess, and the military-looking awards right below the red triangle seem to flip her designation as prisoner on its head. It looks totally reconstructed. When I asked a colleague, the historian Peter Fritzsche, for help understanding her badges, he replied that the image looked like an “imaginative rendering of a contemporary identity that defines itself in the terms of ‘1941.’”²⁰ Friedman explained in a caption that “on this day, the former prisoner of three Nazi concentration camps was being honored by Poland as a heroine during a nationally televised event. She wore her



Figure 4. Survivor of three Nazi concentration camps, survivors' reunion, Majdanek concentration camp. © James Friedman

uniform with her prisoner number and a red triangle with a 'P,' indicating she was a Polish political enemy of the Third Reich. The onlookers in this photograph seemed more interested in my large, unusual camera, tripod, and dark cloth and my odd photographic machinations than in her."²¹

In a photograph that seems to depart from Friedman's focus on faces, a distorted sign points to a "Chambre à gaz"—only instead of a gas chamber, a figure in a rain poncho (Friedman, but hard to make out) blowing in the breeze stands like a punctuation mark at the end of the arrows, exactly in the center of the image (fig. 5). Instead of leading to gas, this way, ladies and gentlemen, this road leads to life.²² This image is particularly striking for me because many years ago, I happened to be hiking right around there (in Alsace-Lorraine) and encountered (and photographed) the same sign. I was on vacation but writing about Holocaust representation



Figure 5. Signpost for gas chamber and self-portrait, Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. © James Friedman

during that time, and I came over a rise and saw an arrow pointing to the chambre à gaz. It was shocking. We took a detour to view the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, with its memorial sculptures, and then tried to recover and continue on our hiking adventure as if we had not been so close to a traumatic landscape. When I saw that Friedman had photographed the exact same sign, captured before I was there but viewed long after, I felt the same chill as I had when unexpectedly encountering this camp in the beautiful landscape of the French countryside.

Puzzling over the dark circle at the edge of the photo, I asked Friedman to explain what produced that effect. He clarified that he deliberately put a lens meant for a 4×5 camera onto his 8×10 camera in order to produce a vignetting effect: “I decided to include the image circle in most of the photographs in part because it signaled immediately that this work is unlike the traditional black and white images of the Holocaust. It

also differs from classic documentary photography, in which the goal is objectivity, with the photographer being essentially invisible. This strategy makes the photographic process and the hand of the maker visible in every image. This project was personal and diaristic, and I wanted my presence to be perceptible in the photographs.”²³ This breaking of the fourth wall and the deliberate inclusion not only of the photographer but of the frame of the image contributes to the experience of these photographs as living memorials that heighten our awareness of the process and the fluidity of memory. The sign itself, “Chambre à gaz,” with an arrow and without an explanation, becomes a vital and powerful thing, to paraphrase Jane Bennett, that affects how we interact with the landscape.

In another of Friedman’s photographs, this one not part of “12 Nazi Concentration Camps,” a striking image of Friedman dressed in a striped concentration-camp uniform is captioned “Discussing my life on the run after escaping from Treblinka Concentration Camp near Ostrow Maz, Poland” (fig. 6). Part of his “Nomadic” series, here Friedman chooses the



Figure 6. Discussing my life on the run after escaping from Treblinka Concentration Camp. © James Friedman

yellow star with the word *Jude* in the center, as well as a convict symbol and a red star, to represent him. The fiction of Friedman narrating his story of escape from a concentration camp to these two unnamed young women in a greenhouse further underscores how he feels haunted by the Shoah and how he chooses self-portraiture as a means of haunting the image with the figure of the Jew whose connection with the Holocaust is through a thread of visceral antisemitism. This resonates with Gary Weissman's theories about "fantasies of witnessing" in his text by that name. Although it is impossible for someone born after the war to relate his escape from a concentration camp, Friedman's self-employment in the scene as if he were a survivor speaks to the strong identification many feel to victimization. Moving from visiting the camps in the 1980s to enacting the survivor in this later series about displacement, Friedman underscores the indelibility of this particular past.

GUNTER DEMNIG, STOLPERSTEINE

People who live in formerly German-occupied Europe now are no doubt familiar with the sight of tourists, most likely in multigenerational clumps, visiting sites of prewar family life, ghettos, and concentration camps. These "memory tourists," to use James Young's term, try to find in space something of memory; they struggle to find from memories something of place. This experience—the often surreal and jarring exposure to quotidian daily life in the present confronting the wealth of traumatic memory—encapsulates the necessary problematic between space and time. As they recount in rich detail in *Ghosts of Home*, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer took a voyage to Czernowitz with Hirsch's parents in 1998. While there, they listened again to familiar stories, but they found that place changed memory: "On site, their memories gained relief, dimensionality, texture and color." They continued to record that "as we walked about this landscape of memory, the streets became animated with the presence of people from that past."²⁴ But they also discovered that, in the face of place, competing memories ruptured the ossified narrative. While they knew intimately the stories that their parents had told them,

the space in which the stories were re-recounted altered the outcome of the memory. Hirsch and Spitzer's journey offers remarkable testimony to how being in the space of a traumatic past opens up new memories, changes sedimented stories, and allows the dead to become visible, even if fleetingly, to the living.²⁵

Every time I walk around a German city, I stumble, as I am supposed to, over the *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones). These stones are not new. In 1996, Gunter Demnig began a project to memorialize some of the victims of the Nazi genocide through a seemingly simple but intensely engaging and important method. Each small, square brass plaque is embedded in the sidewalk and inscribed with straightforward information about the person or people who lived there. There are now some sixty thousand of them, with many more planned. One stone reading "Hier wohnte / Leo Böttigheimer / Jg. 1886 / Flucht Holland / Ermordet 1943 Auschwitz" sits right above another that reads "Hier Wohnte / Else Böttigheimer / Geb. Levy / Jg. 1901 / Flucht Holland / Ermordet 1943 in / Auschwitz" (Here lived Leo/Else Böttigheimer. . . . Fled to Holland. Murdered in 1943 in Auschwitz) (fig. 7). The family names that group the stones remind us of the loves and kinships of these people who died or were forced to flee. As she explains the thing-power of objects, Bennett notes that while "attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem of human exploitation and oppression," it can nevertheless "inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations."²⁶ The thing-power of the *Stolpersteine* seems to lead those who engage with them to an understanding of this dense network; the stones image figures from the past by locating their names very specifically in the spaces from which they were forced to flee or were deported.

Born just after the war in 1947 in Berlin, Demnig studied at Kassel's Kunstakademie and then set up a studio in Cologne. His first Shoah project, in 1990 in Cologne, was a commemoration of the deportations of the Roma, and he then began designing the *Stolpersteine* in 1993 and installing them in 1996. Originally, Demnig himself crafted and installed each stone. Family members often sponsor a stone and then travel to



Figure 7. Stumbling stones inscribed: “Here lived Leo/Else Böttigheimer. . . . Fled to Holland. Murdered in 1943 in Auschwitz.” Photograph by the author.

witness, record, and time and again post the installation on social media. The stones are not state sponsored; anyone, anywhere can commission one, and the waiting list is long. The living, fluid aspect of the memory generated by these stones is evident in these electronic traces—numerous YouTube and other online videos record installation after installation, and often include a memorial service by the family. As Viktor Shklovsky finds, “And so this thing we call art exists in order to restore the sensation of life, in order to make us feel things, in order to make a stone stony.”²⁷ This stoniness of the stone, the way in which these memorials make us feel things, connects with Bennett’s thing-power in making us understand the interlinked networks of Stolpersteine that are growing. I have only seen them in Germany, but they are now in many countries in Europe and in Argentina.²⁸ This international mapping of memorials transforms the thingness of the stones into the living memorial of art. They form an interconnected network, a mapping of memory. As Benjamin put it, in a “rhapsodic manner,” it is as if they assay their “spade[s] in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers.”²⁹ One imagines a walking tour of the world moving from one stone to the next and at each stopping stone stumbling over ever new memories and questions.

When I find these small shiny stones—in Frankfurt and, a few years ago, in Cologne, Nuremberg, and Berlin—I stop and take a photo and try to picture what those people might have been like (fig. 8–10). They may have been lovely, selfish, awful, generous, or, likely, some combination of all. Each time I pause for a photo, the locals around me just move aside—sometimes they seem confused that I am photographing the ground rather than taking a selfie or a photo up high, above the sight line. I wonder whether the passersby have seen the curious taking photos a zillion times and what it might feel like for them to walk familiar routes past a succession of gawkers from all over the world capturing images of these unimposing but very powerful memorials. I wonder if those on the stones who may have surviving family have been visited in these not-graves by their families after the initial captured moment of their installation? Sometimes the stones look newly polished and cared for; sometimes they look foot worn but forgotten.



Figure 8. Stumbling Stones spread across Frankfurt, Cologne, Nuremberg, and Berlin. Photograph by the author.



Figures 9 and 10. Stumbling Stones spread across Frankfurt, Cologne, Nuremberg, and Berlin. Photographs by the author.

While the Stolpersteine have received a mostly laudatory reaction and while they continue to populate various urban and rural landscapes, some scholars and Jewish community members find them troubling. Munich has engaged in an intense debate, including vociferous critiques of the stones by leaders in the Jewish community such as Charlotte Knobloch, who argues that they debase the victims because one literally walks over them.³⁰ One scholar, Dora Osborne, argues that by moving to an assembly-line model for their production, Demnig unwittingly replicated Nazi mechanization techniques. She further finds that “Demnig . . . appropriates and instrumentalizes the names of victims for his own artistic project.”³¹ I disagree with this and find instead that the research required to name the victims or the fact of victims’ own families requesting the stones in droves fights against the sweep of the anonymous six million and helps to recover the specificity of these people. Art historian Margaret Ewing explains beautifully part of what the Stolpersteine perform: “Not contained in a museum, nor even in a single site, the *Stolpersteine* pervade the whole city, integrating history into the spaces of everyday life.”³²

Like Christian Boltanski’s *Missing House*, in which the names of the Jewish deportees were placed on the wall of a building next to one no longer there, or like the names inscribed on Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial or the monument on the Norwegian island of Utøya—where many youngsters and others associated with the labor movement were murdered by an anti-immigrant assailant in 2011—calling people by name reverses the anonymity of a number or a mere figure. The French Holocaust expert Serge Klarsfeld—who had to endure witnessing his father’s deportation and hearing him convince the German authorities that there was no one else to take while he and his mother and siblings hid behind a false wall, never to see him again—has produced several moving texts with names of the dead as a way to reject the anonymity that still befalls many Holocaust victims.³³

In 2008, Dörte Franke released a film about Demnig and the stones entitled *Stolperstein*. In the film, Demnig situates himself as part of the ’68 generation against the Vietnam War and in favor of public art as a political act. Among the survivors discussed in the film is Peter Jordan, who

fled Munich as a child and who explains, “My father was very attached to Bavaria, to skiing, to the Alps, and I think it blinded him to what was really happening.” Jordan is among the survivors or children of victims who are trying to place Stolpersteine in Munich. Jordan’s wife describes the way in which getting her husband to talk about his German past is like “squeezing the end of the toothpaste tube” but that the idea of placing the stones in the ground to commemorate his parents would take a huge weight off of his shoulders: “Peter walked around with a stone on his shoulder, and now it’s gone.”³⁴ It is as if the stone from his shoulder were placed in the ground, and the digging of the memorial were the ever-new finding of memories of his parents. At one point, Demnig did place some stones for Jordan’s parents in Munich, only for the authorities to have them removed to a Jewish cemetery. After writing a letter in support of the Stolpersteine, Jordan received many letters from Munich schoolchildren who agree that the stones should be part of the public-art landscape—the letters were written on square sheets of paper the size of a stone. Another granddaughter of Hungarian victims suggests that the “stumbling stones might have an impact on coming to terms with the past.”³⁵

Michael Imort finds that the Stolpersteine democratize public memorialization and, further, that “the spatial distribution of the individual Stumbling Blocks generates a map of deportation sites that, much like a pointillist painting, allows for different images to emerge as one’s perspective zooms out: as passers-by come across a Stumbling Block, they notice the individuality of the fate inscribed; however, as they encounter one after another in different streets, communities and even countries, the repetition of the experience drives home at every spatial level how extensive Nazi persecution and violence were.”³⁶ It is this very spatial nature of the stones that I find most powerful. James Young characterizes them as “living memorials,” and I see them that way as well.³⁷

I wonder how many of the those who live in the houses formerly inhabited by the Jewish residents who are no longer there—who were either murdered or who left for safety—knew before the Stolpersteine were installed in front of their houses that Jewish residents or other victims of the Nazi genocide used to live there. In Frankfurt, there is a great

likelihood that the houses where those who were murdered or forced into exile lived are no longer there, as Frankfurt was heavily bombed and many of the “old” sections are actually reproductions of what was there before 1945. Place and the traces of the past are displaced by the vast destruction of the firebombing. Some houses and apartments are the deportees’ actual places of residence, some are reconstructions, and the vast majority were built sometime after the war. Along with the Stolpersteine, I also saw in Frankfurt a sign that read, “Der Jugend Eine Zukunft HEIMAT Verteidigen! Junge Nationalisten Wahlen: NPD!” (A future for the youth defend the Homeland! Young Nationalists vote: NPD [National Democratic Party of Germany!]). Memory projects juxtaposed with a recalling of the Nazi plea for a defense of the Heimat. In a careful and nuanced reading of the benefits and dangers of comparing the Nazi past to the populist (or populist-fascist or postfascist) present, Michael Rothberg and Neil Levi argue,

To grasp the present as a moment of danger, we need both to pay close attention to the spread of the far right as it manifests itself in divergent forms around the globe and to consider the deeper history of crisis and emergency that has enabled authoritarian claims on state power. At the same time, we need to remain skeptical of the equation of dangers past and present that the resurgent memory of fascism sometimes encourages, while continuing to recognize memory, in all its diverse, heterogeneous strands, as a vital resource for political critique that orients our expectations and might guide our actions.³⁸

The memory work performed by Friedman’s photographs and the Stolpersteine operate as this sort of “vital resource” as they offer means of interacting with the past that can encourage actions in the present.

Because these living memorials encourage reflection about the space of traumatic events, about the remains held (or forgotten or obfuscated), they also encourage reflection about the return of traumatic events. How are the patterns of antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia returning now? How, if at all, do reminders of the fascist past change the approach to the

present? The contemporary poet Ishion Hutchinson beautifully describes moving between times and places: “I have been crisscrossing centuries, different existences, the rhythm and mode of other places and now it has woven a basket in my head. I am pulling straws from that.”³⁹ The crisscrossing, interconnected networks of living memorials offer windows from the present into the past. Ideally, they would also issue warnings and alert us to when we may be poised to repeat some of the mistakes of the past.

NOTES

1. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 5.
2. See Kaplan, review of *Stages of Memory*, which focuses on this sense of process.
3. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 4.
4. Benjamin, “Berlin Chronicle,” 26.
5. Friedman includes Minor White and Imogen Cunningham as his mentors and has taught photography at Santa Fe Community College, Ohio Wesleyan University, Antioch College, and Ohio State University. His photographic projects have been included in solo and group shows at the Skirball Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio; the Mauritz Gallery in Columbus, Ohio; the National Exhibition Center in Fredericton, New Brunswick; the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico; the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland; and many other places as well. His work is included in the photography collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Jewish Museum in New York; the University of Colorado Art Museum in Boulder; and other collections. Articles about Friedman have appeared in such venues as *Art Forum*, *Afterimage*, *View Camera*, and *Arts Magazine*. Dora Apel, a Holocaust scholar, featured his work in her *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing*. Apel argues that Friedman’s work rejects the “somber, aestheticized modernist compositions devoid of people and shot in black and white that we have come to associate with the photographic archive of the concentration camps. . . . [H]is photographs . . . challenge documentary photographs as transparently timeless windows into history” (*Memory Effects*, 111–12).

6. In *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*, Daniel Reynolds examines how touring concentration camps inverts the vacation sense of tourism: “Instead of a culture understood as the signifying practices of life, we come upon the death of culture. In the vacuum created in such places, we erect a substitute—a culture of memorialization. Or of amnesia” (*Postcards from Auschwitz*, 10).
7. Benjamin, “Berlin Chronicle,” 26.
8. For more on color, see Sharp, “Disturbing Force.”
9. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.
10. Caption emailed to the author by James Friedman on June 1, 2018 and cited in Kail, “One Photographer's Journey.”
11. See *Holocaust Visual Archive*, “Migrations of a Gesture.”
12. There is a vast literature on this. For an account of the American context, see Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*. For a beautiful reading of how the Holocaust affects some communities, see Levitt, *American Jewish Loss*; and Kaplan, review of *American Jewish Loss*.
13. On Hartmann, see Apel, *Memory Effects*; and Baer, *Spectral Evidence*. On Uklański, see Kleeblatt, *Mirroring Evil*. On Boltanski and Silas, see Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty*; Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*; Bathrick, Prager, and Richardson, *Visualizing the Holocaust*; and Kaplan, review of *Visualizing the Holocaust*. Also see Attie and Young, “Holocaust, Genocide.”
14. Lilya Kaganovsky, in conversation with the author, May 24, 2018. I would also like to thank enormously the other two members of our writing group, Anke Pinkert and Justine Murison, for their invaluable comments on a draft of this essay. I thank Jesse Ribot for an enormously helpful conversation about the piece as well.
15. Lewent, transcript of interview.
16. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Warsaw to Name Street.”
17. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void*, 95–97.
18. Cited in Kail, “One Photographer's Journey.”
19. Benjamin, “Berlin Chronicle,” 26.
20. Peter Fritzsche, email message to the author, May 2, 2018.
21. Caption emailed to the author by James Friedman on June 1, 2018 and cited in Kail, “One Photographer's Journey.”

22. See Borowski, *This Way*.
23. James Friedman, email message to the author, May 8, 2018. For more on vignetting, see Mansurov, "What Is Vignetting?"
24. Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home*, 271.
25. For a fuller discussion, see Kaplan, *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory*.
26. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 13.
27. Shklovsky, "Art, as Device," 162. I am exceedingly grateful to Lilya Kaganovsky for mentioning Viktor Shklovsky's stoniness of the stone and for sending me his article.
28. *Deutsche Welle*, "First 'Stolperstein.'"
 29. Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," 26.
 30. See Ziv, "Munich to Continue." For more on the Stolpersteine, see Initiative Stolpersteine (website); and Demnig, Stolpersteine (website).
 31. Osborne, "*Mal d'archive*," 382.
 32. Ewing, "Unexpected Encounter," 40.
 33. See Klarsfeld, *Le mémorial*; and Paxton, "Children Strike Back."
 34. Franke, *Stolperstein*.
 35. Franke, *Stolperstein*.
 36. Imort, "Stumbling Blocks," 235–36. For more on the Stolpersteine, see Gilman, "Memory Blocks"; and Reich, "Golden Stone."
 37. James Young, correspondence with the author, May 18, 2018.
 38. Levi and Rothberg, "Memory Studies," 365.
 39. Hutchinson, interview.

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