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CURATING THE HOLOCAUST:
EXHIBITING NATIONAL MEMORY IN AUSTRIA AND FRANCE

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Holocaust memory is constructed and presented through memorials and museum exhibits in Austria and France. It analyzes how institutions define "the Holocaust," the typologies of commemoration they employ, and the ways history is structured within those spaces. It argues that these spaces are not neutral sites of preservation but instead actively shape national and international narratives through their curatorial choices. The way history is presented within these spaces reflects how each nation has come to understand its role in the Holocaust.

Part of a larger study across six countries, this thesis examines how the Holocaust is remembered and how those memories are shaped within museum spaces using a comparative analysis of four sites in Austria and France as key case studies. These four Holocaust-related institutions are valuable sites for analysis due to their contested postwar narratives. Neither country fits neatly into the categories of perpetrator, victim, or liberator. While countries such as Germany, Poland, and the United States align more clearly with these wartime roles, Austria and France occupy a more ambiguous position shaped by histories of occupation, collaboration, and contested responsibility. Austria initially advanced the "first victim" narrative, minimizing complicity, while France emphasized resistance and national unity, downplaying collaboration under the Vichy regime.

Although both countries have since publicly acknowledged their wartime roles and postwar collective memory, earlier memory frameworks continue to shape exhibition strategies. Austrian institutions tend to emphasize documentary evidence and a restrained presentation, while French institutions employ more immersive, emotionally charged techniques, situating collaboration within a broader narrative of occupation and resistance. This contrast suggests that

earlier national and international narratives continue to shape design, tone, and interpretive approach, even as both countries publicly acknowledge their respective roles.

This study contributes to scholarship on Holocaust memory and museum studies by demonstrating that national memory culture continues to shape how the Holocaust is exhibited. Collective memory evolves through political discourse, public narratives, and institutional representation. Museums both reflect and shape these shifts. As the generation of Holocaust survivors passes, museums are central to how future generations encounter this history, making these curatorial choices even more significant.

To my grandfather, who took me on my first visit to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

It was through this visit that my passion for museums developed.

And to my husband, who continues to indulge and support my enduring love for museums.

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CERCIL – Musée Mémorial des enfants du Vel d'Hiv
(*CERCIL-Memorial Museum for the Children of the Vel d'Hiv*)

Corrie Ten Boomhuis
(*Corrie Ten Boom House*)

KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau Stiftung Bayerische Gedenkstätten
(*Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site*)

Gedenk-und Bildungsstätte Haus Der Wannsee-Konferenz
(House of the Wannsee Conference – A Memorial and Educational Site)

Jüdisches Museum Wien
(*Jewish Museum Vienna*)

KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee
(*Ebensee Concentration Camp Memorial*)

La Gare de Pithiviers, lieu de mémoire et d'éducation sur l'histoire de la Shoah
(*The Station of Pithiviers, place of Memory and Education on the History of the Shoah*)

LRE Foundation

KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen
(*Mauthausen Memorial*)

Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau
(*Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum*)

Nationaal Monument Kamp Vught
(*Camp Vught National Memorial*)

Fabryka Emalia Oskara Schindlera
(*Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory*)

Topf & Söhne – Die Ofenbauer von Auschwitz
(*Topf & Sons Memorial Site – The Oven Builders of Auschwitz*)

Topographie Des Terrors
(*Topography of Terror Documentation Center*)

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PREFACE

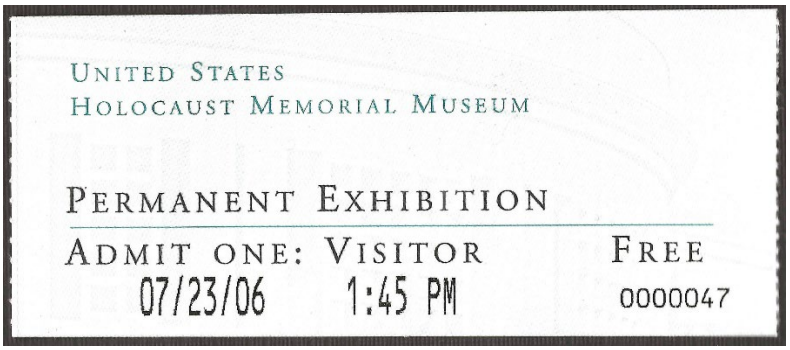


Figure 1. Admission ticket to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 23 July 2006. Author's personal collection.

This admission ticket (see Figure 1) marks my first visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). I was fifteen, traveling with my grandfather to visit family. At the time, I knew very little about World War II and the Holocaust beyond brief lessons in school. Yet, the museum left an indelible impact on me by presenting history through carefully curated exhibits designed to make a lasting impression on its visitors.

Organized chronologically across three floors, the museum traces the rise of National Socialism, the implementation of genocidal policies, and the aftermath of liberation. What followed was a sequence of spaces that shaped my memory of the Holocaust as much through their design as through their content. Upon entering the elevator to the exhibit, I was handed an identification card (see Figure 2) containing the biography of Gerda Weissman, a sixteen-year-old Polish girl whose age and appearance mirrored my own. With each floor of the exhibition, her story unfolded alongside the broader history: early restrictions, forced displacement, and eventual deportation.

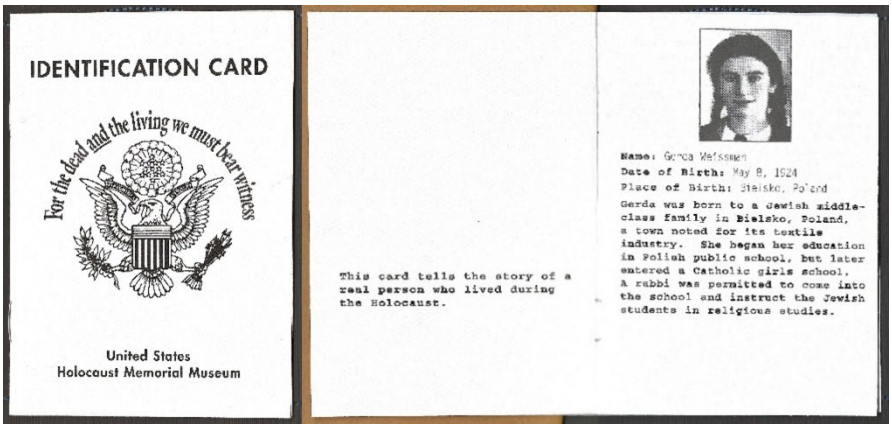


Figure 2. Identification card given to visitors at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 23 July 2006. Author's personal collection.

Upon exiting the elevator, visitors were forced into a bottleneck to begin the exhibit. Narrow passageways evoked confinement, video screens projected Nazi rallies, and Hitler's speeches were played. Bunks from Auschwitz and a cattle car were among the collection of artifacts on display. The exhibit ended with scenes of the Allied liberation. Photographs and film footage showed emaciated survivors, piles of the deceased, and the moment of discovery when the camps were opened to the world. These images were at once horrifying and redemptive, emphasizing both the scale of the atrocity and the role of the liberators. I knew little of the Holocaust, yet the experience of walking through the exhibit left me with an emotional understanding that no textbook could convey.

Fast forward, in 2019 I moved to Germany with my husband. On our first trip, we visited the former *Dachau Concentration Camp* and the *Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism*. My initial reaction was one of comparisons. I could not help but think back to the exhibit at the USHMM. I was intrigued by the vast panels of text and how few artifacts were on display. It was vastly different, almost sterile in comparison.

I know there is not a single, fixed way to tell history. Every exhibition, every memorial, and every historic site make choices on what to include, what to omit, what tone to set, what lessons to leave behind. These choices are not neutral. Museums are both shaped by and shape

collective memory. They reinforce or challenge national identities, and influence how societies remember the past, participating in a continuous, cyclical process of remembering and reinterpretation. My first visit to the USHMM remains a touchstone for me because it demonstrated the enduring power of museums to construct memory through narrative and design. That experience, revisited through the lens of my professional career, frames the central question of this study: how do Holocaust museums and memorials shape national memory, and how do their curatorial choices reflect the societies that create them?

These observations formed the foundation of this study. What I have come to understand through visiting these sites is that the way we remember and teach history—especially tragic and complex history like the Holocaust—can differ significantly depending on the country's role in that history and how it has confronted its aftermath. The contrasts I encountered were not simply stylistic but reflected different relationships to responsibility, loss, and remembrance. Each exhibition offers a unique lens through which we can understand the Holocaust, and in turn, those lenses shape how we understand history today.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Holocaust museums across Europe and the United States present the same historical event in radically diverse ways. At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., visitors encounter darkened galleries, dramatic lighting, and continuous rolling footage of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps. The exhibit environment is immersive, placing visitors within the emotional landscape of the Holocaust while emphasizing themes of liberation and moral responsibility.

At Germany's Topography of Terror Documentation Center in Berlin, the presentation is strikingly different (see Figure 8A). The atmosphere is bright, with large white panels displaying scans of documents and photographs, and rows of text detailing the structure and operations of the Nazi regime. The exhibit emphasizes presenting historical documentation and the bureaucratic mechanisms through which National Socialism rose to power and Nazi crimes were carried out.

In Poland, the Oskar Schindler Factory Museum in Krakow employs yet another approach with a recreated ghetto, concentration camp, and occupation-era streets; Nazi flags hang from the ceiling, and propaganda posters line the walls (see Figure 10B and Figure 10C in the appendix). These spaces situate the Holocaust within the broader experience of German occupation, highlighting Polish victimhood and suffering.

The differences are not accidental. Each institution seeks to educate visitors about the Holocaust; however, their presentation methods differ significantly. Museums are not neutral containers of history but are active agents in constructing national memory. As K. Hannah Holtschneider argues, "the categories of 'victims, perpetrators and bystanders' remain important structuring devices in Holocaust exhibitions," yet their usefulness as stable and "straightforward

interpretive historical categories is questionable."[1] This limitation is evident in countries whose collective memory is shaped by more complex histories of occupation and collaboration. In these contexts, categories such as victims, perpetrators, and bystanders do not neatly apply, requiring museums and memorial institutions to navigate how to present the Holocaust.

This study analyzes how Austrian and French museums represent the Holocaust within national contexts shaped by occupation and collaboration. Austria and France, both of which experienced occupation, produced collaborators and resisters, and constructed postwar narratives that minimized national complicity, fall between the categories of perpetrator, victim, and liberator. By examining how memorial institutions in these countries translate more nuanced pasts into exhibition practices, this study reveals how they navigate the tension between historical accountability and national identity.

1.1 Why Holocaust Memory Matters

Holocaust museums occupy a unique position within public history. Unlike many historical topics, the Holocaust is widely understood as both a historical event and a moral reference point, being frequently invoked in discussions of genocide, human rights, and intolerance.[2] As a result, decisions about how the Holocaust is represented in museum spaces carry significant educational and ethical weight.

Contemporary discussions surrounding Holocaust-related exhibits indicate that questions of representation remain actively contested. Public commentary by museum professionals has highlighted how institutions in the United States, Great Britain, and France approach Holocaust

[1] K. Hannah Holtschneider, "Victims, Perpetrators, Bystanders? Witnessing, Remembering and the Ethics of Representation in Museums of the Holocaust," *Holocaust Studies* 13, no. 1 (2007): 83, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2007.11087196.
[2] Ann Rigney, "Transforming Memory and the European Project," *New Literary History* 43, no. 4 (2012): 624.

commemoration differently, using replicas, graphic imagery, and immersive strategies to create emotionally engaging visitor experiences. Conversely, sites in Germany adopt a more restrained, document-forward approach that emphasizes archival evidence.[3] These debates highlight how national context and institutional priorities shape exhibition strategies and reflect deeper tensions about the purpose of Holocaust museums. This includes their roles as educational institutions, memorial spaces, and sites of national self-reflection.

The urgency of these debates has increased in recent decades as survivors pass. Museums and memorials are increasingly becoming the primary means through which future generations encounter the Holocaust. At the same time, concerns about declining historical knowledge, the persistence of Holocaust denial and distortion, and the creation of false images using AI, place new pressures on institutions tasked with Holocaust education.[4] Decisions about exhibit design and narrative strategy, therefore, carry long-term implications for how the Holocaust will be remembered and understood in the future.

1.2 National Context and Case Study Focus

This study draws on observations from forty Holocaust museums and memorials across

[3] This discussion comes from a USA TODAY article from 2017 which quotes Hans-Christian Jasch, a former government lawyer and director of the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site and Hanna Liever, an adviser to Germany's federal agency for civic education. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/01/18/germany-wannsee-conference-nazis-holocaust/96480360/#

[4] The Claims Conference has conducted nine surveys across eleven countries, including France and Austria, examining Holocaust knowledge and awareness. To view the results for France see Claims Conference, "Stunning Survey of French Adults Reveals Critical Gaps in Holocaust Knowledge," *Claims Conference*, January 22, 2020, https://www.claimscon.org/france-study/. For the survey on Austria see Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, "New Survey by the Claims Conference Finds Critical Gaps in Holocaust Knowledge in Austria," Claims Conference, April 29, 2019, https://www.claimscon.org/austria-study/. For the other surveys see Claims Conference, "The First-Ever 8-Country Holocaust Knowledge And Awareness Index Shows Growing Gap In Knowledge About The Holocaust, Especially In Young Adults," Claims Conference, January 17, 2025, https://www.claimscon.org/country-survey/. ; "AI and the Holocaust: Rewriting History? The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Understanding the Holocaust - UNESCO Digital Library," accessed February 28, 2026, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390211. The UNESCO report documents how AI has been used to fabricate testimonies, manipulate images of victims, and produce misleading or false narratives, raising concern over misinformation and historical distortion.

Germany, the United States, Poland, the Netherlands, France, and Austria to identify patterns of commemoration across different national contexts. From this analysis, two key patterns emerged. First, exhibits within a specific country consistently reflected their wartime role and collective memory in what was emphasized, which narratives were foregrounded, and how narratives were displayed. Second, these national approaches can be understood through a triangular spectrum of commemoration corresponding to three distinct commemorative positions: liberator, perpetrator, and victim. The United States approaches commemoration from the position of liberator and Allied victor; Germany commemorates as the perpetrator nation bearing direct responsibility for Nazi crimes; and Poland, as an occupied nation and location of Nazi death camps where the largest number of Jewish victims were murdered, commemorates from the position of victimhood. These positions represent the outer points of a triangular commemorative spectrum identified in this study. Other nations occupy more complex positions within this framework, shaped by histories of occupation, collaboration, and contested responsibility.

Austria and France fall within this triangular spectrum, combining elements of multiple commemorative positions. Austria can be characterized by a duality of victimhood and complicity with its postwar narrative of the "first victim" thesis.[5] Following the 1938 *Anschluss*,

[5] The first victim thesis (*Opferthese*) also called first victim myth, victim theory, and Austris-as-victim narrative among many others, refers to the postwar Austrian narrative built on the Moscow Declaration of 1 November 1943, in which the Allies identified Austria as "the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression." see "Document 684, Protocol, Signed at Moscow, November 1, 1943," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, General*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1943; repr., United States Government Printing Office, 1963), https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943v01/d684. The term "victim theory" is used by Moritz Wein, Deputy Director of the Holocaust Education Institute of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, to describe the postwar narrative that "denied responsibility for Nazi crimes." Moritz Wein, "Holocaust Education in Austria, Teaching With the Life Stories of Contemporary Witnesses," Austrian Embassy, Washington, accessed March 12, 2026, https://www.austria.org/research-science/holocaust-education-in-austria. For the broader historiographical treatment, see Heidemarie Uhl, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis: Nazi Rule, World War II, and the Holocaust in Austrian Memory," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow et al., trans. Tom Appleton and Eli Lebow (Duke University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw204.5; Judith Beniston, "'Hitler's First Victim'? - Memory and Representation in Postwar Austria: Introduction," *Austrian Studies* 11 (2003): 2.

large segments of the Austrian population either supported or accommodated the Nazi regime.[6] Yet Austrian postwar national memory cast the country as Hitler's first victim, with the narrative dominating public discourse for decades, delaying a sustained public reckoning with its role in the Holocaust.[7] According to a 2019 survey commissioned by the Claims Conference, 68% of Austrians surveyed believe Austria was both a victim and a perpetrator in the Holocaust; 77% say that Austrians did not actively resist the Nazis, with 45% stating Austrians took no action during the *Anschluss*.[8] It was not until 2021 that the first public memorial, listing the names of all 64,440 Austrian Jews murdered, was created.[9] Austria's long-standing self-image as a victim, which has been challenged by public discourse and recent memorial efforts, offers insight into how postwar memory shapes and constrains Holocaust memory and subsequent commemorative practice.

France's memory culture followed a similar yet different path, with narratives of resistance, heroism, and selective mourning dominating public remembrance.[10] After the German

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[6] "Nazi Territorial Aggression: The Anschluss," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 24, 2026, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-territorial-aggression-the-anschluss Also see; Evan Burr Bukey, *Hitler's Austria: Popular Sentiment in the Nazi Era, 1938–1945* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[7] Beniston, "Hitler's First Victim."

[8] Schoen Consulting, *Executive Summary: Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Study – Austria* (Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, 2019), 8–9, https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY-WO-WATERMARK-AUSTRIA-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-5-2-19_.pdf.

[9]The Shoah Wall of Names, as the memorial is called, is the first public memorial that lists the names of all Austrian victims. There are several other memorials dedicated to the Holocaust in Austria, including the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial that was unveiled in 2000.
ABC News, "Austria Opens First Holocaust Memorial," *ABC News*, October 25, 2000, https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=82284&page=1; Francois Murphy, "Vienna Opens First Public Memorial Listing Holocaust Victims' Names," *Reuters*, November 9, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/vienna-opens-first-public-memorial-listing-holocaust-victims-names-2021-11-09/.

[10] Henning Meyer et al., "Memory of World War II in France: National and Transnational Dynamics," in *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2012), 137, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd1km.11; Louisa Rice, "The Voice of Silence: Alain Resnais' Night and Fog and Collective Memory in Post-Holocaust France, 1944-1974," *Film & History* 32, no. 1 (2002): 22–23, 18077201, https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.2002.a400221.

invasion in May 1940, Germany occupied northern and western France, while a pro-German authoritarian government was established in the unoccupied south under Marshal Philippe Pétain. Although formally constituted through legal processes, the Vichy regime collaborated with Nazi Germany to enforce German policies and participate in the deportations of Jewish and other persecuted groups. While narratives of the resistance dominated postwar national memory, scholarship has since highlighted Vichy's active complicity in the persecution and deportation of approximately 75,000 Jewish persons and victims of other persecuted groups.[11]

It was not until 1995 that President Jacques Chirac formally acknowledged the country's role in the Holocaust, marking a significant shift in official discourse. Similar to the survey conducted in Austria, 58% of French respondents believe that France was both a victim and a perpetrator, while 45% of millennials did not know about French collaboration.[12] Despite these gaps in awareness, France's commemorative landscape has taken increasingly public stances. National institutions such as the *Memorial de la Shoah* in Paris have taken more explicit stances to confront France's role in the genocide.[13]

1.3 Museums as Agents of Memory

Having situated Austria and France within their respective national memory cultures, this study examines how museums and memorials in these two countries materially construct and communicate their narratives. These institutions do not merely preserve history; they interpret it. Through curatorial decisions such as artifact selection, photographic material, spatial

[11] Rice, "The Voice of Silence," 22.
[12] Schoen Consulting, *Executive Summary: Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Study – France* (Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, 2020), 27, https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/France-Exec-Summary-1.10.20.pdf.
[13] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Museum Condemns Antisemitic Attacks in France," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, June 1, 2025, https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-condemns-antisemitic-attacks-in-france.

organization, and the balance between immersive and documentary presentation, museums actively shape how the Holocaust is understood within national and transnational contexts.

While this research draws on site-based observations from Holocaust museums and memorials across six countries, the comparative analysis of Austria and France highlights how exhibition strategies reveal the lingering influence of earlier postwar narratives within contemporary Holocaust memory. Museums and memorials serve as memory-making institutions, shaping public understanding through the narratives they present and the artifacts they display. James Young argues that "Holocaust memorials reflect not only national and communal remembrance, or their geographical locations, but also the memorial designer's own time and place… artists commissioned to design memorials remain answerable to both art and memory."[14] This principle extends to museum exhibits as well, as curators and museum staff balance historical representation with aesthetic interpretation. Exhibition design is therefore never neutral; it mediates between historical fact, emotional resonance, and contemporary political culture. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discussion of how societies remember traumatic events and the role public institutions play in shaping collective memory.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How do Holocaust museums and memorials in Austria and France reflect their respective national narratives of the Holocaust?
- How do exhibition design choices communicate their respective roles of perpetrator, victim, and liberator?
- How do these institutions navigate the tension between emotional engagement and documentary restraint in Holocaust representation?

By analyzing museum design and curatorial choices, this study argues that Holocaust museums and memorials are not neutral spaces but active agents in constructing national

[14] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993), 8.

narratives, often revealing tensions between commemorating victims, acknowledging responsibility, and shaping collective memory. Their curatorial strategies, whether immersive storytelling, documentation, or symbolic abstraction, reveal how societies engage with their pasts and project meaning into the present.

Through a comparative analysis of Austria and France, this study highlights how differing national contexts shape exhibition strategies and the presentation of Holocaust history. As the last of the remaining survivors pass, museums and educational institutions become critical in shaping memory. The weight of "never again" not only demands that we remember but that we ensure future generations have the tools to understand the complex legacies of the Holocaust and its place in our collective history. [15] Yet remembrance is not neutral. The narratives emphasized, the spaces constructed, and the emotions evoked shape how the Holocaust is ultimately understood. Therefore, *how* we remember, not just what we remember, is imperative to the debate.

[15] The phrase "Never again" emerged in the aftermath of the Holocaust from survivors. It has become a defining motto of Holocaust commemoration. However, its meaning remains contested. As Carly Wayne and Yuri Zhukov argue, the phrase operates with multiple interpretations. Some use it as a universal call to prevent future genocides, others as a commitment to Jewish survival. See Carly Wayne and Yuri M. Zhukov, “Never Again: The Holocaust and Political Legacies of Genocide,” *World Politics* 74, no. 3 (2022): 351–96.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Collective and Transnational Memory

To understand how Holocaust museums and memorials in Austria and France came to take their current forms, it is necessary to understand how and why postwar European nations constructed divergent relationships to the same history. These differences did not emerge organically but were shaped by political, social, and moral pressures in the aftermath of World War II.

Historian Tony Judt provides a framework for understanding this process, arguing that in much of occupied Europe, populations responded to German occupation either through varying degrees of collaboration or accommodation rather than active resistance.[16] Yet at the moment of liberation, as Judt observes, "everyone sought to identify with the winners—in this case the Allies," as it became vital for nations to emerge on the "correct side."[17] This required distinguishing themselves from collaboration and association with the enemy. Judt further argues that postwar Europe resolved the moral complexity of wartime behavior by displacing responsibility onto Germany. By attributing the war, its crimes, and its suffering primarily to German actions, other nations were able to minimize their own roles in collaboration and complicity.[18] This process facilitated the construction of simplified national narratives in which countries positioned themselves as victims or resisters, while more ambiguous or uncomfortable histories were marginalized or suppressed.

[16] Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Daedalus* 121, no. 4 (1992): 85.
[17] Judt, "The Past Is Another Country," 86.
[18] Judt, "The Past Is Another Country," 86–90.

Aleida Assmann identifies the structural logic behind this reorganization of memory. She argues that national memory operates within a narrow range of permissible self-representations.

> When facing difficult or negative events of the past, there are only three honorable roles for the national collective to assume: that of the victor who has overcome the evil, that of the resistor who has heroically fought the evil, and that of the victim who has passively suffered the evil. Everything else lies outside the scope of these memory perspectives, and it's conveniently forgotten.[19]

These categories provide a framework through which societies interpret their past, but also constrain how history can be publicly remembered, interpreted, and represented. Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan expand this understanding of national memory by emphasizing that collective memory is not simply a reflection of the past, but a socially constructed process shaped by power relations, cultural practices, cultural institutions, and public discourse. Through media, education, monuments, and museums, particular interpretations of history are stabilized and reproduced, becoming widely accepted as the dominant national narrative.[20] Memory in this case is continually negotiated and reinforced through cultural practices that privilege certain interpretations while marginalizing others.

These frameworks help explain the divergent memory cultures that developed in Austria and France. Following liberation, Austria positioned itself as a victim, adopting and constructing what would become known as the "first victim" myth.[21] In contrast, France positioned itself as a resistor, constructing a national narrative centered on the heroism of the resistance movement and the moral leadership of Charles de Gaulle. Neither representation was fully historically

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[19] Aleida Assmann, "Transnational Memories," *European Review (Chichester, England)* (Cambridge, UK) 22, no. 4 (2014): 553, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798714000337.
[20] Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan, "Collective Memory: Theory and Politics," *Social Semiotics* 22, no. 2 (2012): 144–47, 74278479, https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2012.664969.
[21] For information on the first victim myth (*Opferthese*) and historiographical information, see note 5 above.

accurate, but both were entirely coherent within the limited roles available within the national memory frameworks of the time.

These national narratives shaped how the Holocaust was initially understood and commemorated across Europe. In many countries, the persecution and murder of Jews did not occupy a central place in early postwar remembrance. Instead, Jewish suffering was subsumed within broader narratives of national sacrifice, resistance, or wartime victimhood. As a result, early memorial practices and commemorative institutions frequently framed the Holocaust within the wider experience of wartime suffering rather than as a distinct historical event requiring separate forms of remembrance. This tendency reflected the political and moral constraints described by Aleida Assmann, acknowledging that the specificity of the Holocaust often complicated national narratives that emphasize resistance, liberation, or collective victimhood.

Over time, Holocaust memory has increasingly moved beyond these nationally bounded frameworks. Aleida Assmann explains that, until recently, people largely remembered the past through the lens of their own nation, but with increased travel, migration, and the expansion of technology, memories are "increasingly leaking or breaking out of the 'container of the nation-state.'"[22] This shift reflects the broader process of globalization, allowing memories to circulate across national borders.

As these memories circulate, different historical narratives come into contact with one another, prompting new questions about whose histories are remembered, how events are represented, and why certain narratives have been prioritized over others. This process, which

[22] Assmann, "Transnational Memories," 547.

Weedon argues, has facilitated the production and dissemination of collective memory, making it more accessible to marginalized collective memories.[23]

Further, this transnational turn has contributed to what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider describe as cosmopolitan memory—a framework in which the Holocaust functions as a universal moral reference point through which societies interpret questions of human rights, genocide, and moral responsibility.[24] However, this global framework introduces tensions when applied in practice, as national memory cultures do not always align with the broader narratives.

Assmann acknowledges this transnational remembrance shift, but also insists that borders do exist, and the national frameworks they have established continue to shape how the past is remembered. She draws on Ann Rigney's observations that Europe operates as a "mesostructure," occupying a unique middle ground between national and global memory.[25] Within this framework, efforts have emerged to create shared forms of remembrance that extend beyond national narratives, such as the European Union's (EU) establishment of an official Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2005. In this way, Holocaust remembrance became forced into a shared European narrative. However, this effort to construct a common memory did not eliminate the differences between national experiences. Assmann further argues that while the Holocaust may have a transnational memory, competing memory cultures rooted in different historical experiences still culturally divide Europe. This results in what she describes as Europe's memory wars.[26]

[23] Weedon and Jordan, "Collective Memory," 145.
[24] Rigney, "Transforming Memory and the European Project," 618.
[25] Rigney, "Transforming Memory and the European Project," 619.
[26] Assmann, "Transnational Memories," 552.

2.2 Europe's Memory Wars

The tensions between national and transnational memory frameworks became visible in 2013 during the collaborative development of the *Routes of Liberation, European Legacies of the Second World War* exhibit. The exhibit, created in collaboration between institutions from the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, Poland, and Germany, was the first to organize World War II memory on a transnational scale rather than through individual national lenses. The exhibit sought to tell the story of World War II from a unified European perspective, acknowledging both the commonalities and differences in national experiences, ensuring that the war's impact was fully represented.[27]

However, this framework faced several significant challenges in incorporating collective narratives into a single exhibit.

> The history of World War II is often perceived as one singular story. The fact that there are several histories of World War II, with each country having a distinct way of looking at the war, is lost on the majority of Europeans, and herein lies the main challenge for the [exhibit].[28]

Jory Brentjens and Wiel Lenders argued that the central challenge stemmed from the foundation's desire to incorporate multiple national narratives based on its wartime experiences, whether as victims, collaborators, resisters, perpetrators, or bystanders.[29] Although these paradigms have evolved (and continue to evolve), the degree and nature of this evolution vary

[27] "Temporary Exhibition, Routes of Liberation," Exhibitions, Alliierten Museum, accessed February 23, 2025, https://www.alliiertenmuseum.de/ausstellung/wanderausstellung-routes-of-liberation-european-legacies-of-the-second-world-war/.; Liberation Route Europe, *Routes of Liberation, European Legacies of the Second World War [Exhibition Catalogue]*, Exhibition Catalogue (Liberation Route Europe, 2014), 1.
[28] Jory Brentjens and Wiel Lenders, "The Liberation Route Europe: Challenges of Exhibiting Multinational Perspectives," in *Politics and Cultures of Liberation: Media, Memory, and Projections of Democracy*, ed. Hans Bak, Frank Mehring, and Mathilde Roza, 7:360–72 (Brill, 2018), doi:10.1163/9789004292017_019.360.
[29] Jory Brentjens and Wiel Lenders, "The Liberation Route Europe: Challenges of Exhibiting Multinational Perspectives," in *Politics and Cultures of Liberation: Media, Memory and Projections of Democracy*, vol. 7, ed. Hans Bak et al., Radboud Studies in Humanities (Brill, 2018), 361–66, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004292017_019.

across all affected nations. These national perspectives influence which events are emphasized, which actors are centered, and how responsibility is framed. Brentjens and Lenders note that when the team discussed curatorial strategies, these frameworks resurfaced.[30] These clashes, as Brentjens and Lenders argue, highlight the complexities of representing a multifaceted event in a single, cohesive narrative.

While the exhibit aimed to construct a shared European narrative—and succeeded—the collaborative process revealed the persistence of national memory frameworks and the difficulty of reconciling divergent historical experiences within a single interpretive framework. In this sense, the challenges faced by the LRE project reflect what Assmann describes as Europe's memory wars, where competing narratives of victimhood, responsibility, and resistance resist integration into a unified framework. Further, while scholars such as Levy and Sznaider suggest that the Holocaust has become a form of cosmopolitan memory, the LRE project demonstrates the challenges of translating this shared framework into practice.

2.3 Exhibiting the Holocaust

The Routes of Liberation exhibit illustrates the practical difficulties of translating transnational memory frameworks into museum practice. Although initiatives at the European level increasingly encourage shared narratives of World War II and the Holocaust, curators must still navigate deeply rooted national interpretations. These tensions are visible in Holocaust institutions, where exhibition design serves as a point of intersection for national narratives, transnational memory frameworks, and contemporary political debates. The question that then

[30] Brentjens and Lenders, “The Liberation Route Europe,” 367–68.

arises is, how do institutions translate national memories into physical spaces that visitors can meaningfully encounter?

Judt and Assmann explain how postwar narratives were constructed, and Pierre Nora helps explain how institutional forms preserve and transmit those narratives. Nora argues that *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) emerge when the living environments of memory have disappeared. As he famously writes, "there are *lieux de mémoire* because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory."[31] In the case of the Holocaust, as the living carriers (survivors) of memory disappear, societies increasingly rely on constructed *lieux de mémoire*, including monuments, museums, archives, and commemorations.[32] As a result, the curatorial choices made by these social and memory-making institutions become the primary vehicle through which future generations will encounter the stories and history of the Holocaust.

2.3.1 Typologies of Memorialization

Holocaust museums are not neutral spaces but are "complex, carefully scripted performance sites" [33] that can function simultaneously as sites of tourism, commemoration, historical interpretation, and education.[34] Isabel Wollaston states that the coexistence of these roles creates inherent tensions within museum practice because approaches that may be effective from an educational perspective can be perceived as inappropriate or offensive within a commemorative setting. As a result, curators must continually negotiate the boundaries between remembrance, historical interpretation, and public engagement. Wollaston therefore suggests that analyzing Holocaust sites requires paying attention to content, the institutional structures that

[31] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.
[32] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.
[33] Isabel Wollaston, "Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 63, https://doi.org/10.1080/14725880500052782.
[34] Wollaston, "Negotiating the Marketplace," 63.

shape curatorial decision-making, funding sources, intended audience, and governance structures.[35]

These institutional dynamics help explain why commemoration takes different forms. Institution type is a reflection of its mission and goals, which guide curatorial strategies and influence how visitors engage with the material. Many institutions combine functions or perform hybrid functions. Historical sites may include monuments and serve as memorials; museums can incorporate commemorative spaces. Nevertheless, the institutions that emerge reflect different institutional logics and mnemonic strategies ranging from the sole use of documentary evidence to symbolic abstraction.

In general, museums present the Holocaust through curated exhibitions that incorporate artifacts, documents, and survivor testimony. Their primary mission is the preservation, interpretation, and communication of historical knowledge. Z. Z. Stransky describes museums as institutions that establish functional relationships between objects and the meanings assigned to them, and then convey those meanings through preservation, interpretation, and display.[36] Within this typology, museums function primarily as carriers of knowledge, presenting the Holocaust as an event to be studied and explained.

Similar in scope, memorial museums integrate commemoration into their educational function, making commemoration and remembrance part of their mission. Their defining feature is the dual commitment to preserving history while simultaneously honoring victims. Karina Lennon explicitly states these sites are "to the dead."[37] These institutions expand the traditional

[35] Wollaston, "Negotiating the Marketplace," 64.
[36] Z. Z. Stransky, "The Memorial Museum of Recent History," *Informatologia Yugoslavica* 15, nos. 3–4 (1983): 227–36.
[37] Karina Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 18, no. 1 (1999): 76, https://doi.org/10.1080.

museum model to include commemoration as an essential component rather than a supplement.[38] As Aline Sierp observes, memorial museums

> become core sites for the negotiation of historical narratives and contested spaces for the manifestation of diverging memory… [they] are not neutral public forums that transmit knowledge… they are highly normative public displays on how a society interprets its past.[39]

In this sense, these types of institutions function as "political stages where powers compete to impress upon society their own versions of events."[40] In analyzing the USHMM, Ronald Berger draws on Edward Linenthal's observation that museums and memorials often adopt a "commemorative voice" that reinforces a nation's achievements.[41] This reflects a commemorative framework that emphasizes universal democratic values and moral lessons. This framework enabled the United States to create Holocaust museums shaped by its role as an Allied power and liberator.

In contrast, as Judt states, Germany was compelled to confront its role as perpetrator. As a result, German memory culture developed documentation centers located on former sites associated with Nazism. Examples include the Topography of Terror in Berlin (the former SS Headquarters) and the NS Documentation Center in Munich (the former Brown House). These institutions transform former spaces of Nazi terror into sites of critical learning, emphasizing what Aline Sierp calls "objective contextualization," in which the exhibit lets the documents speak for themselves.[42]

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[38] Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," 76.
[39] Aline Sierp, "A Contested Latecomer: The Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism," *History & Memory* 32, no. 1 (2020): 12.
[40] Sierp, "A Contested Latecomer," 12.
[41] Ronald J. Berger, "It Ain't Necessarily So: The Politics of Memory and the Bystander Narrative in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Humanity and Society* 27, no. 1 (2003): 8.
[42] Sierp, "A Contested Latecomer," 27.

Sierp further states that German institutions deliberately avoid strategies that might provoke strong emotional responses, believing that such reactions can inhibit critical reflection. As a result, exhibits limit the use of large-scale imagery and immersive displays, relying instead on text and archival materials to contextualize events. As she notes, "the lack of an emotional slant to the displayed narratives is characteristic of most German World War II museums and stands in stark contrast to museums and other countries like the [USHMM]."[43] While victim histories are not excluded, these sites prioritize the analysis of perpetrators, leaving detailed accounts of victim experience to other institutions. The curatorial approach is to avoid aestheticizing or eliciting empathy for the perpetrators, and instead present facts through contextualization rather than through emotional engagement.[44]

Monuments and memorials translate memory into symbolic rather than documentary form, embedding commemoration into public spaces through scale, material, and design. Karl Figlio argues that they are physical objects that "freeze memories,"[45] transforming complex histories into fixed representations. This was a quality that made them among the earliest forms of the Holocaust commemoration, as the survivor community sought to mark sites of killing or deportation. James Young complicates this by observing that monuments are "reinterpreted," and their meanings shift as generations encounter them in their own cultural contexts.[46]

The distinction between monuments and memorials has been debated. Young discusses Arthur Danto's suggestion that monuments are primarily celebratory, commemorating triumphs

[43] Sierp, "A Contested Latecomer," 27.
[44] Hans Günter Hockerts et al., eds., *Munich and National Socialism: Catalogue of the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism* (C. H. Beck, 2015), 11; Andrea Nachama, "Introduction," in *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS and Reich Security Main Office on Wilhelm- and Prinz-Albrecht-Straße. A Documentation*, 8th revised edition, ed. Stiftung Topographie des Terrors (Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2017), 27.
[45] Karl Figlio, "Psychoanalysis, Reparation, and Historical Memory," *American Image* 71, no. 4 (2014): 420.
[46] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 3.

and heroic individuals, while memorials are oriented toward mourning and tragic loss. Young, however, complicates this binary by arguing that they can do both.[47] The example Figlio uses is concentration camps, which have "at least three groups of memories: of the Jews, of the Germans, and of the American and British allies."[48] In practice, however, what defines a memorial is less its form than its orientation. Memorials are meant to cause reflection and evoke remembrance, often on a more intimate scale. All monuments may function as memorials, but not all memorials are monuments.

2.3.2 The Object, The Photo, The Emotion

Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich states that over the course of the twentieth century, museums have evolved from being collection-centered institutions focused on displaying objects to spaces focused on providing experiences that emotionally and sensorially engage patrons.[49] Drawing on Michelle Henning, she suggests this shift allows museums to compete in the "marketplace of leisure attractions"[50] as they increasingly adopt strategies designed to attract visitors and keep them engaged.

Within Holocaust museums, these developments reflect a broader emphasis on experiential design that seeks to move visitors beyond passive observation toward engagement intended to evoke empathy, reflection, and remembrance.[51] As a result, scholars have begun to characterize institutions that utilize these strategies as pilgrimage sites, where visitors seek to bear witness in a quasi-ceremonial sense, or engage in what John Lennon and Malcolm Foley

[47] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 3.
[48] Figlio, "Psychoanalysis, Reparation, and Historical Memory," 420.
[49] Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, "Zakhor: The Task of Holocaust Remembrance, Questions of Representation, and the Sacred," in *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, Museums and the Challenges of Representation (Rutgers University Press, 2014), 19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjxq0.6.
[50] Hansen-Glucklich, "Zakhor," 19.
[51] Hansen-Glucklich, "Zakhor," 19–20.

call "dark tourism," a form of modern pilgrimage associated with sites of tragedy or violence.[52] This shift highlights how exhibit strategies shape what museums communicate and what their narratives reflect. At the same time, the gap between the historical event and its exhibit means that museums can only construct partial narratives, shaped as much by omission as by inclusion.[53]

Artifacts are one of the primary tools museums use to create these encounters. Their power lies in the fact that they are physical remnants of history that still exist. However, how they are treated or displayed (if at all) is at the core of curatorial debates. Timothy Brown argues that objects in Holocaust exhibits are not simply pieces of evidence, but things violently removed from their original context, carrying traces of the people who were displaced or killed.[54] This connection between object and experience is what gives artifacts their particular force.

Karina Lennon quotes David Lowenthal, who states that while written history separates the past from the present through language, artifacts exist in both the past and the present at once.[55] As Kit Messham-Muir observes, Holocaust museums deploy this quality, using artifacts to recreate an element of the experience for those who were not present.[56] In this sense, artifacts function not only as evidence but as mediators between historical events and present-day audiences.

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[52] Hansen-Glucklich, "Zakhor," 19–20; See also J. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, "Interpretation of the Unimaginable: The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., and 'Dark Tourism,'" *Journal of Travel Research* 38 (August 1999): 46–50.
[53] Hansen-Glucklich, "Zakhor," 11.
[54] Timothy P. Brown, "Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy," *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004): 247.
[55] Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," 75.
[56] Kit Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 5, no. 1 (2015): 104, https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2004.11432734.

Yet, this power is not inherent. Objects require interpretation.[57] Their significance is shaped by how they are selected, contextualized, and displayed. Lennon frames this as a tension between approaches that prioritize displaying artifacts and those that focus more on ideas and interpretation. This problem was brought to light during the design process for the USHMM, where survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel cautioned, "by showing, you exclude what you can't show, the mystery has gone…"[58] His words point to a central problem—the act of display is also an act of exclusion.

Despite this, many Holocaust institutions, especially memorial museums, continue to rely on material evidence because the need for concrete, verifiable facts pushes them towards object-based displays, regardless of their representational limits.[59] Sites such as the USHMM, which houses thousands of objects on display, or the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, which displays piles of material remains, reflect this.

Lennon formulates the resolution to these problems, pointing out that artifacts exist simultaneously in the past and present, giving them tangibility. Concepts imply interpretation but lack the credibility that comes with material presence. The tension between Wiesel's statement and curatorial choices is not a contradiction but instead something to be worked through. The use and display of material evidence allow Holocaust institutions to make the past visible and "gives the museum its role within the present."[60]

Photography extends the reach of the archive but introduces its own set of challenges. Marianne Hirsch, drawing on Sybil Milton, notes that although millions of Holocaust photographs exist in public archives, the images most frequently reproduced in scholarly and

[57] Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," 75.
[58] Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," 75.
[59] Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," 75.
[60] Lennon, "The Memorial Museum: Diluent or Concentric Agent of the Museum Institution?," 75.

popular literature are often repetitive in quality, scope, and content. This repetition contributes to the decontextualization of images from their original context, detaching them from the specific circumstances in which they were produced.[61] Hirsch, however, argues through her theory of post memory that the repetition of such images enables later generations to connect with the traumatic experiences of those who lived through the Holocaust. Photographs then function as a medium through which secondhand or inherited experiences are transmitted, even as their original context becomes distant.[62]

The use of Holocaust photographs in museum exhibits remains widely debated, particularly regarding how images of violence and suffering should be displayed. Ruth-Anne Lenga argues that atrocity is not inherent in the image but is subjective depending on the viewer's contextual knowledge. She states the horror carried by many Holocaust photos is often invisible. Photos do not need to depict graphic violence to convey atrocity; rather, their meaning emerges through interpretation.[63]

She illustrates this with two contrasting examples. The first is a photograph of Hungarian Jewish men, women, and children gathering at Auschwitz. The image itself contains no visible violence, yet the individuals pictured are awaiting selection and murder in the gas chambers. The second is an image of SS guards socializing. While neither inherently displays violence, the photographs become more disturbing when considering that the photographer likely understood the fate of the Jews being photographed, or how the SS guards are enjoying themselves in the same vicinity where people are being murdered.[64] This is imperative because what curators

[61] Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 8, https://doi.org/10.1353/yale.2001.0008.
[62] Hirsch, "Surviving Images," 8–9.
[63] Ruth-Anne Lenga, "Seeing Things Differently: The Use of Atrocity Images in Teaching about the Holocaust," in *Holocaust Education: Contemporary Challenges and Controversies*, ed. Stuart Foster et al. (UCL Press, 2020), 205, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15d7zpf.
[64] Lenga, "Seeing Things Differently: The Use of Atrocity Images in Teaching about the Holocaust," 205–7.

choose to tell visitors about an image is as consequential as which images are selected for display.

A part of the curatorial strategies debate concerning Holocaust exhibits is the role of emotion in shaping visitor experience. The answer varies sharply across national and institutional contexts. Matthias Heyl argues that emotional responses are not universal or spontaneous but are historically and culturally constructed, shaped by social norms that dictate what individuals are expected to feel and how those feelings are expressed. Memorial sites, particularly those dealing with histories of violence, are therefore inherently emotionally charged and often contested spaces, shaped by the differing expectations of visitors, educators, and other stakeholders. At the same time, Heyl cautions against deliberately eliciting emotional responses. Efforts to impose empathy or overwhelm visitors can provoke resistance and risk instrumentalizing both victims' experience and visitors themselves. Emotional engagement, in this sense, cannot be assumed or engineered; it must be approached as a complex, mediated aspect of historical interpretation.[65]

Lauren Zalut's work addresses the same tension from the visitor side. When survivor testimony is placed at the center of interpretation, as the USHMM has done, history is humanized in ways that documentary panels alone cannot achieve.[66] But as the survivor generation passes, institutional space raises the fundamental question: how do we preserve the experiential force without living witnesses? The strategies developed in response, such as using recorded testimony, interactive installations, or educator training, represent one answer, but they

[65] Matthias Heyl, "Grusswort," in *Emotionen, Geschichte Und Historisches Lernen Geschichtsdidaktische Und Geschichtskulturelle Perspektiven* (V&R Unipress, 2013); Matthias Heyl, "Mit Uberwaltigendem Uberwaltigen?," in *Emotionen, Geschichte Und Historisches Lernen Geschichtsdidaktische Und Geschichtskulturelle Perspektiven* (V&R Unipress, 2013).
[66] Lauren Zalut, "Interpreting Trauma, Memory, and Lived Experiences in Museums and Historic Sites," *Journal of Museum Education* 43, no. 1 (2018): 4.

also shift the institution's relationship to emotional engagement in ways that are still being worked out.

The degree to which Holocaust museums engage visitors emotionally varies across national contexts. As Sierp observes, many German memorial sites deliberately limit emotional engagement within their curatorial strategies. This approach reflects a broader concern that strong emotional responses may inhibit analytical understanding.[67] In contrast, Jeshajahu Weinberg, the founding director of the USHMM, believes that emotion is central to the educational function of Holocaust museums. Drawing on narrative theory, he suggests that museum narratives function similarly to literary or cinematic plots, encouraging visitors to identify with individuals and become emotionally invested in their experiences.[68]

Studies by scholars such as Hansen-Glucklich highlight how immersive design, spatial sequencing, and the use of artifacts can foster emotional engagement. Through the example of shoes, Hansen-Glucklich observes how the presentation of an object can produce fundamentally different effects. At Yad Vashem in Israel, a single child's shoe enclosed in a glass case functions as a "precious object." Its isolation directs attention to the death of a single individual. In contrast, at the USHMM, shoes are displayed in accumulation; the volume evokes the scale of mass destruction rather than individual loss. As she notes, "the isolated child's shoe…evokes empathy, while the piles of shoes overwhelm, rendering the viewer helpless and despairing."[69] A similar effect can be observed in the large accumulations of shoes, prosthetics, hair, suitcases,

[67] Sierp, "A Contested Latecomer," 28.
[68] Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," 97.
[69] Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, "The Artful Eye: Learning to See and Perceive Otherwise inside Museum Exhibits," in *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, Museums and the Challenges of Representation (Rutgers University Press, 2014), 88, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjxq0.9.

and other personal belongings displayed at Auschwitz, where the scale of the display further reinforces the abstraction of victims into mass loss.

The curatorial choice is not merely aesthetic but rather reflects each institution's understanding of what Holocaust memory should do for a visitor and of the relationship between the individual and the collective it seeks to construct. This distinction highlights how emotional responses are not inherent to objects themselves but are shaped by framing and exhibition techniques.

This emphasis on immersive experience has been critically examined by Kit Messham-Muir, who explores both the possibilities and limitations of experiential Holocaust exhibits. Like Hansen-Glucklich, he observes that contemporary museums are increasingly adopting performative and affective strategies, such as immersive and emotive displays, designed to engage visitors on both cognitive and emotional levels. This is particularly in response to the challenge of representing events that post-Holocaust generations have not directly experienced.[70]

However, in contrast to Weinberg's more optimistic view of emotional engagement as a pathway to education, Messham-Muir highlights a range of ethical and interpretive concerns associated with these strategies. Drawing on a broader body of scholarship, he points to the risk that immersive approaches may instrumentalize emotion, encourage voyeuristic engagement, or lead to unintended forms of identification with perpetrators.[71] Further, the assumption that empathy will lead to meaningful understanding or ethical action remains uncertain.

Taken together, these approaches to exhibition design—typology, material objects, photographic representation, and emotional engagement—illustrate the broader representational

[70] Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," 97.
[71] Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," 107–8.

challenges that Holocaust museums confront. Material objects and visual images provide tangible connections to historical experiences, yet neither can fully convey the realities they represent; their meaning depends heavily on curatorial framing and contextual interpretation. Emotional engagement, although powerful, is culturally mediated and cannot be uniformly produced. Exhibition design, therefore, is not a neutral process of presenting history but an interpretive act that mediates between historical evidence, visitor experience, and contemporary memory frameworks. Curatorial decisions do not just determine what is shown, but also what is omitted, shaping how the Holocaust is represented, mediated, and constructed in cultural institutions.

2.4 The Ironies of Representation

Messham-Muir observes that the longstanding debates over Holocaust representation have increasingly shifted towards questions of how it is to be remembered once it passes out of living memory, and how post-Holocaust generations are supposed to engage with events they never experienced.[72] In this context, Holocaust museums have taken on an expanded role, not only preserving historical knowledge but also leaving visitors with meaningful and lasting impressions.

The scholarship reviewed in this chapter reflects the central debates within Holocaust memory studies. While it represents a small portion of a much broader and diverse body of scholarship, it has produced sophisticated tools for analyzing how exhibits construct meaning through typology, material objects, photography, emotional design, and spatial sequencing. At the same time, scholarship on Holocaust curatorial strategies remains concentrated on a

[72] Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," 97, 99.

recognizable, repeatedly cited cluster of institutions—most notably the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, and the Imperial War Museum in London. While this does not mean that other institutions have not been studied, the recurrence of this cluster reveals a consistent focus within the literature, leaving the wider analysis landscape relatively uneven.

This concentration has significant implications for the field. While the influence of these institutions (especially the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) on Holocaust remembrance and exhibit practice is undeniable, their prominence has also contributed to a narrowing of scholarly perspective. The USHMM, in particular, has attracted more analytical attention than most other Holocaust institutions, generating extensive scholarship on the "Americanization" of the Holocaust and how the European genocide has been adapted to serve American civic narratives. The repeated analysis and citation of the scholars who write them has reinforced their centrality within the field. This narrows the scope of inquiry, leaving smaller or less recognized institutions remaining comparatively underexamined. This, in turn, limits the broader discussions of how different national contexts and curatorial strategies shape Holocaust exhibition practices.

This imbalance becomes particularly evident in the case of France. Substantial scholarship has examined French collective memory and the dominance of *résistancialisme*, Henry Rousso's historiographical reassessment of Vichy collaboration, and the decades of public reckoning that followed. While these studies have shaped how the Holocaust is interpreted within French collective memory, they have focused primarily on narrative and historiographical developments rather than on how these imperative frameworks translate into museum exhibitions. The relationship between France's evolving memory and the curatorial strategies

used to present it remains largely unexplored within museum studies. This is a significant gap, since France has expanded and erected new memorial institutions where exhibitions actively reinterpret its collective memory.

A similar pattern emerges in scholarship on Austria. Existing literature has extensively analyzed the "first victim" narrative and its role in shaping postwar Austrian identity and memory culture. Scholars, including Heidemarie Uhl and Ruth Wodak, have researched and analyzed how this narrative was constructed, sustained, and eventually revised. Yet this work rarely extends to detailed examinations of how these narratives materialize within cultural institutions. Even influential studies, such as James E Young's *The Texture of Memory*, subsume Austria within a broader German framework. This limits the engagement with Austria as a distinct commemorative landscape. Moreover, when Austrian sites are analyzed, research concentrates on Mauthausen Concentration Camp, while smaller sites such as Ebensee remain largely absent from the literature. As the Ebensee case study will demonstrate, these peripheral sites often expose the tensions within national memory more clearly than major memorial sites.

Comparative approaches further reflect these limitations. While there is an abundance of studies examining World War II memory culture and postwar culture across Western Europe, there is a notable absence of scholarship directly comparing Austria and France. Further, no study has compared how these two countries' respective postwar narratives have translated into their exhibition practices. This gap is significant. As L.I. Oztig argues, "each Holocaust Museum contributes to Holocaust memorial culture differently. While Holocaust memorial culture has an international dimension, the Holocaust has not become 'one totalizing signifier containing the

same meanings for everyone.'"[73] This observation emphasizes the value and importance of examining sites across multiple national contexts.

As scholars in this literature review have discussed, this memorial culture is increasingly molded by transnational exchange, digital media, and global communication. In this context, understanding how different national frameworks interpret and present the same history becomes more, rather than less, important. The question of how two countries with similar proposed postwar trajectories, both of which adopted self-exonerating narratives, have since acknowledged complicity and maintain active, growing memorial landscapes, yet have arrived at such different exhibition strategies is the problem that comparative analysis can answer.

The irony the field has yet to fully confront is that, while scholarship has developed tools for analyzing Holocaust exhibits and has emphasized the importance of representation in shaping historical understanding, it has concentrated its analytical attention on a relatively narrow subset of institutions through which these representations are produced. As a result, the field offers a narrow view of how exhibition design operates across different national contexts. This study addresses that imbalance directly by examining how documentary restraint and emotional immersion reflect and shape the curatorial strategies used within Austrian and French institutions. It also addresses how these approaches reflect and shape distinct and often contested national narratives of the Holocaust. In doing so, it expands the scope of analysis beyond dominant case studies and situates exhibition design within the specific historical, cultural, and political contexts in which it operates.

[73] Lacin Idil Oztig, "Holocaust Museums, Holocaust Memorial Culture, and Individuals: A Constructivist Perspective," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 22, no. 1 (2023): 64, https://doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2021.2011607.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Although this thesis focuses on case studies in Austria and France, it draws on a broader dataset of site visits conducted between 2021 and 2024 at forty Holocaust-related sites in Germany, Poland, the United States, the Netherlands, Austria, and France. At each site, observations focused on the site's physical memorial landscape and the interpretive environment as a whole. This included analyzing exhibit design, institutional framing, interpretive language, spatial layout, and architectural context. Attention was given not only to what each site presented but also to how it was presented, including the selection and display of artifacts, the use of photographs and archival materials, tone, language, and the organization of the space.

The analysis presented in this thesis centers on two institutions in Austria and two in France. These cases provide a framework for examining how exhibition design reflects national narratives shaped by a history of occupation, collaboration, and contested responsibility.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

At each site, field notes and photographs were taken (where permissible) to record these elements across all sites. These records provided a basis for comparing how different institutions presented the Holocaust across sites within the national context. Although the permanent exhibit is the primary focus of this study, the analysis does not separate the exhibit from the physical site in which it is housed. A central comparison in this research is the distinction between exhibits located within preserved historical sites and those presented in purpose-built museum spaces. Since preserved structures, landscape, and material remains contribute to the overall interpretative impact and are incorporated as part of the visitor experience, the entire historical complex was analyzed.

Private guided tours were attended at several institutions and recorded with permission. These tours included both official public tours and private individual tours arranged with staff members. These tours provided insight into institutional missions, interpretive strategies, and exhibit development. Where private tours were not available, teleconference interviews were conducted with curatorial staff to discuss curatorial strategies, funding, and evolving approaches to Holocaust remembrance. All interviews were conducted and recorded in accordance with the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols.

In addition, institutional publications such as exhibit catalogs, brochures, and pamphlets were examined. The purpose of these materials is to guide visitors through the site, highlighting key themes and significant memorial features. These documents also frame the site's historical narrative and provide supplemental information, including site history and educational goals. Produced internally by each institution, they offer an additional layer of evidence regarding institutional mission and identity.

3.2 Site Selection

Sites for this study were selected to represent a range of institutional forms and national contexts. These sites included historical sites, documentation centers, national museums, monuments, and memorials. Observations from these locations inform the broader comparative framework for examining how Holocaust commemoration varies across national contexts.

Within the broader dataset, countries were selected to reflect a range of postwar narratives shaped by various wartime experiences. The diversity of perspectives allowed for a nuanced comparison of how these experiences shaped contemporary representations of the Holocaust. Although sites were observed across multiple countries, Austria and France form the central focus of this analysis due to their historically complex and evolving relationships with the

Holocaust. Both countries occupy ambiguous positions within postwar memory, with neither fitting neatly into the dominant postwar categories of perpetrator, victim, or liberator due to their histories of occupation, collaboration, and shifting narratives of responsibility.

The case studies presented in this thesis focus on four institutions: Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial and Ebensee Concentration Camp Memorial in Austria; CERCIL-Musee Memorial des enfants du Vel d'Hiv and Mémorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu in France. These sites were selected to include both national institutions and regional or local commemorative initiatives to analyze how memory is defined at different scales.

3.3 Institutional Definitions and Typology

The way institutions define "the Holocaust" and their own institutional identity shapes how exhibits are structured and presented. These distinctions become apparent during site visits and correspondence with staff, where differences in terminology and institutional typology reflect varying interpretive approaches, including the site's scope and mission, narrative framing, and visitor experience. As a result, attention was given to how each site defined itself, its scope, purpose, and relationship to Holocaust history.

3.3.1 Holocaust vs Shoah

Definitions of "the Holocaust" vary across national and institutional contexts, shaping whose suffering is acknowledged and how narratives are constructed. These definitional choices carry ethical and political weight. In some contexts, the term Holocaust is used broadly to encompass all victims of Nazi persecution, while in others, particularly in France, the term

Shoah is used to refer specifically to the genocide of European Jews.[74] These differences are reflected in how institutions frame their narratives, define their subject matter, and present victim groups within exhibits. This study shows how Austrian and French institutions define the Holocaust and how these definitional choices shape exhibition design and national memory narratives.

3.3.2 Institutional Typology

Drawing on the institutional typology outlined in the literature review, and to facilitate comparison across sites, institutions were categorized into several general types based on their primary function and mode of presentation. Many institutions exhibit hybridity; therefore, the typology presented here should not be seen as rigid but as a framework for analyzing the diverse approaches to Holocaust representation.

Museums: curate exhibits using artifacts, documents, and first-hand testimony. Their mission centers on preservation and education. They generally interpret the Holocaust as a historical event to be studied and explained.

Memorial museums: combine historical interpretation with a commemorative function. They are similar to museums in function but make remembrance and reflection central to their institutional mission.

Documentation Centers: prioritize archival evidence and critical analysis. They often focus on structures with a history of perpetration. These are generally found in Austria and Germany.

Historical Sites: preserved locations where Holocaust-related events occurred. This includes concentration camps, deportation centers, and ghettos where the physical landscape serves as evidence.

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[74] The National WWII Museum incorporates additional persecuted groups within its Holocaust definition; see The National WWII Museum, "The Holocaust," accessed July06, 2022, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/holocaust. The museum revised its definition on 8 May 2024. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defines the Holocaust as the systematic persecution and murder of six million Jews while also recognizing "millions of other victims" persecuted under Nazi rule. See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Introduction to the Holocaust," Holocaust Encyclopedia, last modified September 20,2024, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust.

Monuments: structures that commemorate through symbolic or abstract forms to embed memory in public spaces. They communicate meaning through scale, material, form, and design.

Memorials: encompass diverse commemorative modes such as plaques, gardens, sculptures, and installations. They are typically oriented toward reflection and mourning and typically offer limited historical interpretation.

The typology outlined demonstrates the diversity of institutions through which Holocaust memory is expressed. Each type reflects a different mission and approach to remembrance. These categories are not fixed or mutually exclusive but are fluid and often hybrid, reflecting the complexity of remembrance. Nevertheless, distinguishing among institutional types provides a useful analytical framework for understanding how Holocaust memorial institutions participate in the collective practice of active memorialization.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Holocaust Memorial sites are not conventional research subjects. They function simultaneously as spaces of mourning, national reflection, and public history, and are therefore approached with this in mind.

This study is conducted from the perspective of an American researcher examining Holocaust memory across multiple national contexts, who lacks the lived experiences within these countries' postwar debates. As such, the tone, atmosphere, and narrative emphasis within the examined spaces are interpreted from this perspective. To avoid reducing these institutions to personal reaction, the analysis remains grounded in observational curatorial decisions and engagement with scholarship produced within each nation. This study does not seek to judge whether institutions present the Holocaust "correctly" or "better" than others, but to understand how narratives are constructed within these sites and communicated to the public.

Several limitations shape the scope of this study. It is vital to note that this sample size does not encompass the full diversity of Holocaust memorialization practices across all affected countries, nor is it intended to be representative of national experiences as a whole. The selected sites represent examples within broader national landscapes that include hundreds of memorials, museums, and local commemorative initiatives. Each site operates within specific political, regional, and historical circumstances.

This study provides a surface-level analysis in an attempt to broaden the discussion on individual wartime experiences and national memory. The limitation of surveying the chosen sample size, despite the global impact of World War II, is that it fails to capture the diverse experiences and perspectives from all affected regions—particularly those outside of the main combatants, and countries beyond Europe where the war's influence, though less direct, was still significant.

Additionally, this analysis reflects each site at the time of visitation between 2021 and 2024. Exhibits may change in response to shifting institutional priorities and resources, the incorporation of newly available archival materials and artifacts, and revisions to interpretive narratives as national memory continues to evolve. They are also shaped by ongoing preservation concerns, particularly historical structures, and the fragility and ethical sensitivity of many of the objects on display, including personal belongings, photographs, and materials directly connected to the victims, such as the human hair exhibited at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Language also presented an additional challenge. While many site exhibitions and their publications offered English translations, interpretive nuance may have been lost, potentially shaping the analysis of curatorial intent. Some exhibitions did not offer English translations, requiring the use of external translation tools. This will be discussed in both the case study and

the analysis portion of the study. In addition, this study primarily engages with English-language scholarship. Where available, non-English sources were accessed using translation tools. While this allowed for some engagement with external sources, specific debates and interpretations may not be fully represented due to language and access limitations.

Finally, not all institutions permitted interviews with curatorial staff. As a result, the voices of museum professionals are unevenly represented, and the perspectives gathered cannot be taken to represent all institutions examined. Although interviews were conducted at several sites across the broader dataset, within the case studies of this thesis, only Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial permitted an interview. Those interviewed did so voluntarily, with informed consent obtained before participation. Participants were assured that their perspectives would be represented respectfully and that no identifying details beyond their name and professional role would be disclosed without their written permission.

Care was taken to recognize the sensitivity of Holocaust representation when interpreting curatorial designs related to atrocity imagery, survivor testimony, or visitor engagement strategies. By foregrounding transparency, consent, and respect for all participants, institutions, and subject matter, this study adheres to established ethical research standards in museums and memory studies, as well as to the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Copies of the informed consent documentation and the interview questionnaire are provided in Appendices C and D.

3.5 Analytical Framework

This study's analytical approach was shaped by visiting and comparing observations across multiple sites. Rather than imposing predetermined frameworks, patterns emerged from documenting what each site presented and how it was presented. Initial visits focused on

recording observable elements, such as artifact presentation, photographs, the use of original structures or recreations, and the organization of exhibit space. Attention was given to the narrative, including whose experiences were foregrounded, the roles of neighboring villages, and how these stories were structured within the exhibit. As more sites were visited, patterns emerged that highlighted how each country framed its role within the narrative of the Holocaust, whether through the lens of a perpetrator, victim, liberator, collaborator, or bystander. These observations revealed recurring themes that served as the basis for this analysis.

Comparisons occurred on two levels: across institutional types and across national contexts. Observations at one location or within one country influenced what was more closely analyzed at subsequent sites. For example, the observation that some institutions relied heavily on physical artifacts while others displayed few or none prompted further understanding of these differences. In several cases, patterns appeared, corresponding to either institution type or national context. This led to closer attention to how sites defined themselves, whether as a museum, memorial museum, documentation center, historical site, or memorial. This iterative process refined the analytical focus as recurring differences and similarities became apparent.

Continued comparison highlighted broader differences in interpretive approach. Sites varied in how they positioned their country within the historical narrative and in the exhibit's overall tone and pacing. One of the most significant distinctions was how physical space was used to mediate memory. Some exhibits were displayed within preserved structures, where the physical environment itself functioned as evidence, while others were housed in purpose-built museums. Others incorporated reconstructed spaces to shape the visitor experience. These themes were not predetermined categories but emerged as cross-site examination occurred.

Consistent patterns emerged among sites in Germany, the United States, and Poland, creating a triangular interpretive pattern with three dominant positions (See Figure 3). German sites favored documentary restraint and analytical presentation, with carefully curated materials that emphasize Germany as a perpetrator nation within the history of the Holocaust (see Figure 8 in Appendix A for exhibit photos). American sites relied on immersive, artifact-heavy exhibits, presenting the Holocaust through a liberator lens (See Figure 9 in Appendix A for exhibit photos). Polish sites centered on victimhood and suffering through the use of preserved historical landscapes, reconstructed environments, and material remains that serve as testimony to mass extermination (see Figure 10 in Appendix A for exhibit photos). Across these three national contexts, the relationship between a country's wartime role, its postwar narrative, and its commemorative strategy was relatively coherent. Exhibition choices functioned as institutional expressions of established national positions shaped by postwar and Cold War politics and were relatively consistent across institutional types.

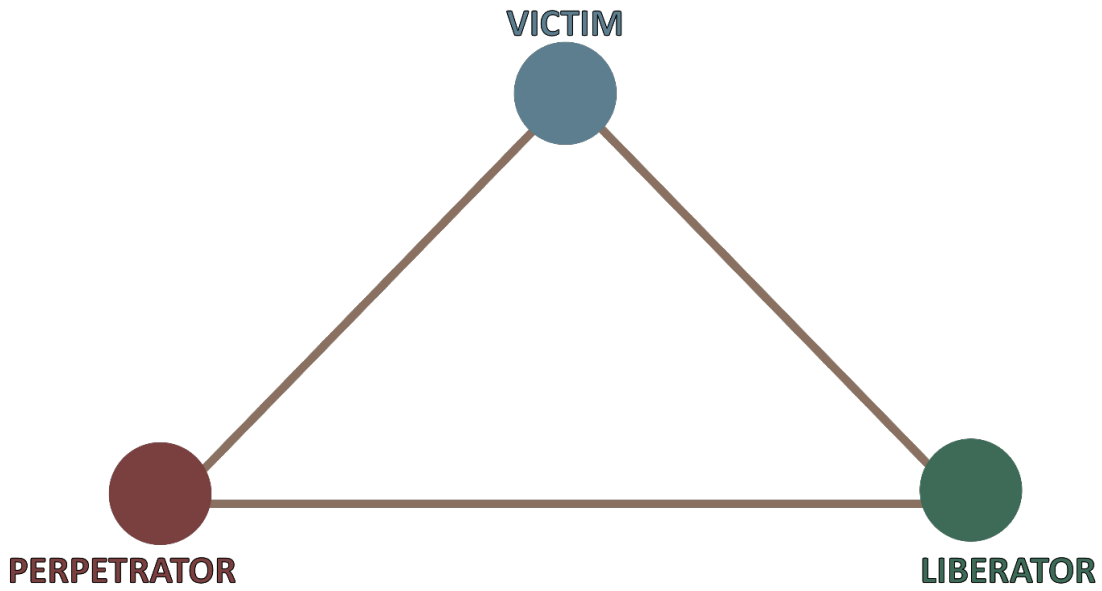


Figure 3. The commemorative triangle. A heuristic framework identifying three dominant positions through which nations publicly narrate their relationship to the Holocaust. The framework emerged from comparative fieldwork. Germany, the United States, and Poland anchor the three positions. Austria and France occupy contested, unstable positions within the Triangle's interior. Credit: Author

In contrast, Austrian and French institutions did not exhibit this coherence. Rather than aligning consistently with any single position on the triangle, sites in both countries employed curatorial strategies that varied across institutions, institutional types, and, at times, within individual exhibitions. Austrian sites varied in how they engaged with perpetration, and French sites varied in how they situated collaboration within the broader narrative of occupation and resistance. This internal variability reflected the unresolved tensions in both countries' postwar memory cultures as neither Austria nor France occupied a straightforward position as perpetrator, victim, or liberator.

This instability makes Austria and France compelling cases for comparison. Whereas Germany, Poland, and the United States present relatively stable alignments between national position and curatorial strategy, Austria and France offer cases in which that alignment is incomplete and evolving. By comparing curatorial strategies across institutions, the commemorative triangle provides a framework for mapping Austria and France's positions.

CHAPTER 4: AUSTRIA

Austria occupies an ambiguous position within the commemorative triangle introduced in Chapter 1. Unlike the United States, Germany, and Poland, whose wartime roles allow them to occupy clearer positions within the triangle, Austria occupies a more contested position as neither a straightforward victim nor an unambiguous perpetrator, but a nation whose postwar identity depended on obscuring that distinction. After 1945, Austria promoted a narrative of Austrian victimhood that obscured the extent of participation in the Nazi regime. This dynamic reflects the historical evolution of Austrian Holocaust memory, providing a framework for understanding the development of the country's memorial institutions. As a result, examining how Austria remembers the Holocaust reveals how the country has come to understand its own past.

To understand Austria's memorial landscape requires an understanding of how this landscape, and the national identity embedded within it, was constructed and eventually dismantled. This chapter examines how that transformation is expressed in the material culture of Holocaust remembrance. The chapter is divided into three sections: Section 4.1 surveys the history of Holocaust commemoration across Austria, tracing the evolution of Austria's postwar history and collective memory; Section 4.2 presents Case Study #1 on Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial; and Section 4.3 presents Case Study #2 on Ebensee Concentration Camp Memorial.

As the state's primary investment in Holocaust memory, Mauthausen demonstrates how a well-resourced memorial institution can actively construct and communicate a critically reflective national narrative. Ebensee, in contrast, where the physical camp was largely erased in the immediate postwar years, demonstrates how commemoration is contingent upon the material

traces that survive. Together, these cases reveal not a unified Austrian approach to Holocaust memory, but a commemorative landscape shaped by the postwar first victim narrative.

4.1 The Austria-as-Victim Narrative

Austria's memorial landscape cannot be understood without first examining what shaped its postwar narrative. For a large portion of the postwar period, political leaders promoted the idea that Austria had been a victim of Nazi aggression rather than an active participant. This interpretation profoundly shaped how the country remembered the Holocaust and National Socialism. By framing Austria as a victim, the *Austria-as-victim* narrative allowed the Second Republic to minimize its participation in Nazi crimes and delay public confrontation with the country's role in the Holocaust.

This narrative was not a cultural response but rather originated within Allied wartime diplomacy. Its legal foundation lay in the 1943 Moscow Declaration, in which the United States, United Kingdom, and Soviet Union governments described Austria as being "the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression."[75] At the same time, the declaration also stated that Austria bore responsibility for participating in the war alongside Nazi Germany. By simultaneously voiding the 1938 *Anschluss* and acknowledging Austrian responsibility, the Allies sought to justify Austria's postwar establishment as an independent state and to remind the country that it could not evade accountability for its role during the Nazi period.[76]

However, Austrian political leaders only adopted part of the formulation. In their Declaration of Independence, Austria was portrayed as a nation that had been led unwillingly

[75] The Moscow Declaration refers to a set of joint statements issued by the Allied powers and China at the end of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers during World War II. The declarations addressed postwar plans for Europe, including restoring Austrian independence, restricting Italy after fascism, establishing international security cooperation, and holding Nazi war criminals accountable. See "Moscow Declaration," 761.
[76] "Moscow Declaration," 761.

into Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. This interpretation emphasized Austrian victimhood while ignoring the declaration's warning about responsibility.[77] Over time, this selective reading helped formalize what historians later termed the *Opferthese* (victim thesis), also known as the first victim theory or first victim myth. What had begun as a diplomatic formulation within Allied wartime policy was thus transformed into the central narrative of the Second Republic's memory politics.

In the first few decades after the war, various reinforcing systems sustained the first victim myth. The denazification process was largely superficial, with thousands of former Nazis allowed to reintegrate into public service and political life.[78] At the official level, the 1946 publication of the *Rot-Weiß-Rotbuch* (the Red-White-Red Book) gave the myth institutional form, recasting Austria's experience under National Socialism in ways that justified the country's status as a victim "through official source materials."[79] The book itself was a collection of documents intended to persuade international public opinion of Austria's innocence, the illegality of the *Anschluss*, and the inflated claims of the resistance movement.[80] The book became the Second Republic's politics of memory, ensuring a sharp distinction between being Austrian and being a Nazi.[81]

Yet, historical research suggests that Austrian participation was more significant than the victim thesis implied. Historians estimate that Austrians joined the National Socialist German

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[77] Uhl, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis," 41.
[78] Heidemarie Uhl, "Of Heroes and Victims: World War II in Austrian Memory," *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011): 25, https://doi.org/10.1017; Uhl, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis," 44.
[79] Uhl, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis," 41.
[80] Uhl, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis," 41–42; Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (Berghahn Books, 2003), 29–30, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/stable/j.ctv27tctkt.
[81] Historian Utgaard said it best, "the [book] was unequivocal in arguing Austria's victim status and that therefore Austria deserved to be treated differently from Germany. Once officially declared a victim, Austria became a liberated rather than a conquered nation." See Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, 30.

Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, abbreviated NSDAP, and commonly known as the Nazi Party) at a higher rate than Germans, disproportionately filling a high number of administrative, police, and SS positions, as well as playing critical roles in implementing Nazi racial policies and running the camp system.[82] At the time of the *Anschluss*, approximately 182,000 Jewish people lived in Austria. Within weeks, synagogues were destroyed, and thousands of Jewish people were deported or forced to emigrate. By the conclusion of the war, more than 65,000 Jewish people were murdered.[83]

4.1.1 Memory, Commemoration, and the Holocaust

The Austria-as-victim narrative created an inherent tension in postwar commemoration. As in many countries, the desire to honor the war dead was paramount in the Austrian public memory. Approximately 1,286,000 Austrians served in the *Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe,* and *Kriegsmarine.*[84] Yet, commemorating the services of the war dead and the service of the living exposed a fundamental contradiction within Austrian commemorative culture: Austria's rebirth as a democratic state depended on the defeat of National Socialism, but many of those being memorialized had fought on its behalf.

However, the victim narrative also provided a way to resolve this tension. In the *Rot-Weiβ-Rotbuch,* all groups within Austrian society were seen as victims.[85] As a victim of Nazi aggression, the narrative collapsed the experiences of soldiers, Jews, political prisoners, and civilians into a single community of suffering, blurring the distinction between those who were

[82] Bukey, *Hitler's Austria*, 44–45.
[83] Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, "Austria," Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, March 2, 2016, https://www.claimscon.org/regions/western-europe/austria/.
[84] Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, 53, 90.
[85] Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, 31.

persecuted and those who had been the perpetrators.[86] The Holocaust and the memory of Jewish persecution were largely subsumed into a broader narrative of general wartime suffering.[87]

In the years immediately following liberation, commemoration initiatives were primarily initiated by survivor and antifascist organizations who erected small memorials at sites. Early efforts remained localized and received little state support.[88] The most prominent exception was the former Mauthausen Concentration Camp. In 1947, Soviet occupying authorities returned the site to the Austrian government on the condition that it be turned into a memorial. Mauthausen was formally inaugurated as a state memorial in 1949.[89]

Other physical traces of the camp system were neglected or repurposed for other uses, such as POW camps and refugee camps. Subcamps such as Ebensee were bulldozed to make way for new housing developments. For several decades, commemoration ceremonies were held at various former camp sites across Austria; however, at many of the sites, few physical remnants remained.

4.1.2 Shifting Memory Culture: 1970s-1990s

From the 1960s onward, broader international developments began to challenge Austria's postwar victim narrative and shift the Holocaust into the public consciousness. The 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials in 1963 and 1965 brought international attention to the crimes of the Nazi regime and the individuals who carried them out. These discussions were further intensified by Hannah Arendt's publication *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A*

[86] Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, 92.
[87] Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, 101.
[88] Mauthausen Komitee Osterreich, "History of the Liberation Celebrations - The Commemoration in Mauthausen in an International Context," Liberation and Commemoration Ceremony, accessed December 5, 2025, https://www.befreiungsfeier.at/en/historical/history-liberation-celebrations.
[89] Mauthausen Memorial, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial," Mauthausen Memorial | KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, accessed December 2, 2025, https://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/History/History-of-the-Memorial/History-of-the-Mauthausen-Memorial.

Report on the Banality of Evil (1963), which portrayed Eichmann as a "banal man." This blurred the distinction between extraordinary perpetrators and ordinary individuals.[90] Her report also generated significant controversy through its discussions on Jewish leaders and their "enjoying the 'enormous powers' granted to them by the Nazis."[91] The visibility of the trial, combined with the widespread circulation of Arendt's work, contributed to expanding public engagement with the Holocaust. Within Austria, these broader shifts were reflected in the development of new forms of public commemoration. In 1970, a permanent exhibit was inaugurated at the former Mauthausen concentration camp, becoming the "most public memory of the Holocaust in Austria."[92]

The decisive turning point came with the 1986 Waldheim affair, during which investigations into Kurt Waldheim's war record, as an Austrian presidential candidate, revealed the former UN Secretary-General had been a member of Nazi organizations and served with Army Group E, a unit involved in mass deportations of Jews from Greece and Yugoslavia. The controversy generated intense international scrutiny, forcing Austrians to confront their own history with National Socialism. Waldheim's defense that he had "done nothing more during the war than did hundreds of thousands of other Austrians" highlighted the central contradiction in Austria's postwar narrative. As Bischof argues, a 'surfeit of memory' emerged in Austria, contributing to the gradual erosion of the victim narrative as historians and the public alike began focusing on Austria's role as both victim and perpetrator.[93]

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[90] Tuija Parvikko, "The Arendt Controversy," in *Arendt, Eichmann and the Politics of the Past* (Helsinki University Press, 2021), 138–39, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv26qjj8x.10; Richard I. Cohen, "Breaking the Code: Hannah Arendt's 'Eichmann in Jerusalem' and the Public Polemic: Myth, Memory and Historical Imagination," *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*, 1993, 29–85; Sharon Muller, "The Origins of Eichmann in Jerusalem: Hannah Arendt's Interpretation of Jewish History," *Jewish Social Studies* 43, no. 3/4 (1981): 238.
[91] Muller, "The Origins of Eichmann in Jerusalem," 238.
[92] Young, *Texture of Memory*, 92.
[93] Gunter Bischof, "Victims? Perpetrators? 'Punching Bags' of European Historical Memory? The Austrians and Their World War II Legacies," *German Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2004): 23.

The 1990s brought a more formal shift. For the first time, political leaders publicly acknowledged that Austrians were both victims and perpetrators and that the country carried a responsibility for war crimes committed by Austrians during the war. In 1991, Chancellor Franz Vranitzky became the first Austrian leader to openly state, "We acknowledge all the facts of our history... the good as well as the evil…we must also apologize for the evil to survivors and relatives of the dead."[94] Michael Berenbaum, project director of the USHMM, described Vranitzky's apology as a decisive break with Austria's insistence that it "was the first of Germany's victims."[95]

4.1.3 International Context and Institutional Transformation

Many of these changes unfolded within a broader international context. The end of the Cold War removed the East vs West rationale that sustained Austria's victim-of-occupation narrative. At the same time, the globalization of Holocaust memory, including television broadcasts, public debates, and expanding survivor testimony, brought renewed attention to perpetrator histories. In 1993, the opening of the USHMM helped internationalize Holocaust memory, making the history of National Socialism, including the role of collaborators and perpetrators, more visible to global audiences. Austria's accession into the EU further required more open and reflective engagement with its history, as Holocaust commemoration became increasingly central to European democratic identity.

Within Austria, these developments reshaped the country's commemorative landscape.

[94] "Austrian Acknowledgement of Guilt for Holocaust Welcomed by Survivors," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, n.d., accessed March 27, 2026, https://www.jta.org/archive/austrian-acknowledgement-of-guilt-for-holocaust-welcomed-by-survivors.
[95] "Austrian Acknowledgement of Guilt for Holocaust Welcomed by Survivors."

The Mauthausen memorial became the focus of Austrian historical policy as the state concentrated financial resources and educational efforts towards the former camp.[96] Through this investment, Mauthausen effectively became the national framework through which Austria began to reinterpret its relationship with National Socialism, producing a broader shift across the country's memorial landscape.

This transformation contributed to the development of new commemorative projects, including the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial (2000) and the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial (2019), both located in Vienna. These projects reflect Austria's gradual shift towards acknowledging both victimhood and responsibility within its public memory. The case studies that follow examine how this transformation is articulated through the design, interpretation, and evolution of some of Austria's major Holocaust memorial sites and how each institution navigates the tensions between historical documentation, emotional engagement, and national narrative.

[96] Bertrand Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Studienverlag Ges.m.b.H, 2006), 235–39.

4.2 AUSTRIA CASE STUDY #1

KZ-GEDENKSTÄTTE MAUTHAUSEN

(Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial)

Mauthausen, Austria

KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen (Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial) occupies a central position within the country's commemorative landscape. Situated on a granite hill overlooking the town of Mauthausen in Upper Austria, the memorial is one of the most significant sites of Nazi terror on Austrian soil. Over time, the site has evolved into the primary national location through which Austria began to confront its relationship with National Socialism. Examining the development of the memorial reveals how Austrian memory culture shifted from the postwar victim narrative towards a more critical engagement with their past of complicity and perpetration.

Established in 1938, shortly after the *Anschluss*, the Mauthausen Concentration Camp was established for political opponents, 'criminals', and 'antisocials.'[97] Built beside a granite quarry, the camp embodied the Nazi doctrine of "extermination through labor," merging ideological persecution with economic exploitation. Between 1938 and 1945, approximately 190,000 men, women, and children from across Europe were imprisoned in Mauthausen and its network of over forty subcamps; at least half were murdered through starvation, exhaustion, or execution.[98]

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[97] Antisocials, also known as "asocials" (German: asozialen) is a term used by the Nazi regime as a broad categorical designation for Germans whom were considered to be outsiders such as beggars, alcoholics, vagrants, pacifists, prostitutes and the Roma and Sinti. See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "What Groups of People Did the Nazis Target?," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed May 4, 2026, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/what-groups-of-people-did-the-nazis-target; "'Asocials,'" Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, accessed May 4, 2026, https://hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/nazi-persecution/asocials/.

[98] Mauthausen Memorial, KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, "Groups of Prisoners," Mauthausen Memorial | KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/History/The-Mauthausen-Concentration-Camp-19381945/Groups-of-Prisoners.

As World War II expanded, so did the camp's function. Following the invasion of Poland in 1939, the population grew rapidly to include deportees from occupied territories, members of resistance movements, Jews, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war.[99] By 1945, the Mauthausen complex had become one of the most lethal in the Nazi camp system. US forces liberated the camp on May 5, 1945, revealing scenes of extreme deprivation that quickly circulated through international media, shaping early global awareness of Nazi crimes.

Today, the site functions not only as a preserved historical site but as Austria's central space of confrontation with its conflicted past. The memorial complex functions as a hybrid institution, functioning as a historical site with a monument landscape and museum. A large portion of the camp's original structures remain intact, allowing the material remains to communicate its history with minimal mediation. The memorial features three permanent exhibitions: *The Mauthausen Concentration Camp, 1938-1945*; *The Crime Scenes of Mauthausen - Searching for Traces*; and the *Room of Names*. Through these exhibitions, the memorial addresses distinct aspects of the camp's history and memory, utilizing historical documentation and critical reflection to situate Mauthausen within both Austria's national narrative and the broader European framework of Holocaust remembrance. Although the case study analyzes the memorial site as a whole, the 2013 exhibition, *The Mauthausen Concentration Camp, 1938-1945,* is its primary focus.

4.2.1 History and Evolution of Commemoration

Mauthausen's postwar history reflects Austria's shifting relationship with its Nazi past and how politics, activism, and eventual state intervention have shaped commemorative practices. Following the camp's liberation by American forces on May 5, 1945, the site was

[99] Mauthausen Memorial, KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, "Groups of Prisoners."

placed under US military control and briefly served as a repatriation center for victims and as a prison for SS members.[100] In the summer of 1945, administrative authority passed to Soviet occupation forces. Little was done to preserve the compound, and camp buildings deteriorated. The Upper Austrian Concentration Camp Federation submitted a proposal to put Mauthausen and the *Stairs of Death* under monument protection, but the proposal was denied.[101] On June 20, 1947, Soviet authorities formally transferred the former camp to the Austrian state on the condition the site be memorialized.[102] This handover initiated the first discussions about how, and to what extent, the former camp should be preserved and commemorated to honor those who "died fighting to reinstate a free, independent and democratic Austria at the hands of the National Socialists."[103]

In the Spring of 1949, the site was established as the Mauthausen Public Memorial (ÖDM), making Mauthausen one of the earliest former concentration camps in Europe to be designated a national memorial. A chapel and reflection room were created, a central memorial installed in the roll call area, and a short guidebook published by survivors.[104] Commemoration at this stage was driven primarily by survivors. Foreign governments and victims' groups erected plaques, monuments, and cenotaphs. Five former barracks were placed under monument protection either to maintain the appearance of the roll call area or due to the groups of prisoners housed in them, such as Jews and certain prisoners of war.[105]

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[100] Mauthausen Memorial, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial."
[101] Mauthausen Komitee Osterreich, "The History of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial," Mauthausen Komitee Osterreich (MKO), accessed November 18, 2025, https://www.mkoe.at/en/memorial-and-commemoration-work/the-history-of-the-mauthausen-concentration-camp-memorial.
[102] Mauthausen Memorial, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial."
[103] Mauthausen Komitee Osterreich, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial."
[104] Mauthausen Memorial, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial"; Mauthausen Memorial, *The Concentration Camp Mauthausen 1938-1945, Catalogue to the Exhibition at the Mauthausen Memorial*, second edition, trans. Joanna White (New Academic Press, 2019), 287.
[105] Mauthausen Komitee Osterreich, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial."

For the 25th anniversary of the Austrian Republic, the first permanent exhibition opened in 1970. The exhibition featured over 130 panels and display cases, showcasing original and reconstructed artifacts collected by former prisoner Hans Marsalek. Overall, the exhibit reflected the political and memorial climate of its time—it celebrated Austrian resistance and emphasized Austria's role as a victim.[106] Despite its framing, the exhibit marked a turning point in Holocaust commemoration in Austria, with the memorial housing one of only two permanent exhibitions on the history of National Socialism in the country.[107]

With increased public engagement, the memorial's role broadened beyond its original function as a cemetery and monument to also serve as a historical museum, encompassing an educational mission.[108] This shift reflected a more encompassing Austrian reckoning with its wartime history. In this context, a new exhibition was created in the former camp kitchen, highlighting themes of complicity and Austria's involvement in National Socialism.[109] The installation signaled a significant shift from earlier commemorative practices that had historically reflected Austria's long-standing first victim narrative.

These interpretive shifts and the memorial's growing acceptance of its role in shaping Austria's Holocaust memory paved the way for the site to expand its mission. In 2003, a new visitor center was built, featuring updated exhibitions that incorporated artifacts from the site and other international institutions.[110] Continued shifts led to the decision to redesign the permanent exhibition. An international working group established the conceptual framework, emphasizing

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[106] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 289; Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen*, 234.
[107] The only other exhibit on National Socialism in Austria was a small exhibit at the Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance. See Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen*, 232.
[108] Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen*, 239.
[109] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 291.
[110] Mauthausen Komitee Osterreich, "History of the Mauthausen Memorial."

perpetrator agency, the diversity of victims, and the camp's function within the broader camp system.

The new permanent exhibition, *The Mauthausen Concentration Camp 1938-1945,* opened on May 5, 2013, reflecting the shift toward documentation, evidence, and critical analysis. The trajectory from the 1970 exhibit to the 2013 redesign documents what Austria was willing to acknowledge at each moment. Each redesign serves as evidence about the state of the nation's memory. What once was a grassroots effort by survivors evolved into a state-supported memorial complex that now presents a more critical, evidence-driven account of victims and perpetrators.

4.2.2 Spatial Layout and Memorial Landscape

The spatial organization of the memorial complex plays a critical role in shaping how visitors encounter and interpret the site. Unlike museum spaces where historical interpretation is mediated through exhibits, the preserved camp structures and surrounding memorial landscape allow the physical environment to communicate the camp's history.

Surviving Historical Structures

Several original buildings remain standing at the former camp, forming an essential part of the memorial landscape. These include the crematorium complex, the former prisoners' barracks, the kitchen, barracks 1 (camp brothel; see Figure 11C in Appendix A), the roll call square, and the granite quarry, which includes the Stairs of Death.[111] These spaces remain largely empty and minimally interpreted, with few plaques and panels to explain the buildings' use and function (see Figure 11E in Appendix A). This limited use of didactic material allows the physical environment itself to convey a sense of spatial and emotional reality. However, this

[111] The stairs of Death were closed during the site visit due to dangerous conditions.

approach can result in the partial obscuring of certain aspects of camp life, particularly those that are more difficult to interpret or represent.

Memorial Park

Situated in the former SS administrative zone are more than twenty national monuments erected by survivor groups, foreign governments, and victims' organizations, which have transformed the grounds into an international commemorative landscape. The first plaque, unveiled in 1948, honored General Dmitry Karbyshev, who was murdered in the camp in 1945. While varied in style and symbolism, the monuments serve as a reminder that Mauthausen's history extends far beyond Austria's borders. A photograph (Figure 11B) of the memorial park is provided in Appendix A.

Memorial Elements within the Camp

Within the former campgrounds, specific locations function as concentrated points of mourning. The crematorium complex comprises cremation ovens, the gas chamber, and the execution room. Nearby is the "Wailing Wall" where prisoners carved names, dates, and messages into the cement. There are also several cemeteries located within and adjacent to the camp, including the quarantine yard, where a mass grave was exhumed. The burial areas, established during and immediately following the war, anchor the memorial landscape in the physical realities of death and the postwar effort to identify and honor victims.

4.2.3 Exhibition Design and Spatial Narrative

The leading permanent exhibition, *The Mauthausen Concentration Camp 1938-1945*, opened on May 5, 2013. Occupying the right-hand wing of the former prisoner infirmary, the exhibition reflects the broader mission of the memorial site—to preserve knowledge of National Socialist crimes, commemorate victims, and counter all forms of racism and discrimination in

the present.[112] The design follows a straightforward structure that guides visitors through the camp's history in four chronological sections: 1938-1939, 1940-1942, 1943-1944, and 1945. Intertwined throughout these sections, the history of the camp is presented on "three levels": the chronological history from 1938-1945, prisoners' experiences in the camp, and a general overview of National Socialism, which serves as the central "spine of the whole exhibit from which all the other topics develop."[113]

The exhibit stems from the curatorial philosophy of "work[ing] with what is there,"[114] i.e., the remaining buildings, the museum's collection of documents, artifacts, photos, and oral histories. According to curator Christian Durr, the aim is not to manufacture emotion through technique but to contextualize a site already marked by trauma.

> The place, as such, if we want it or not, evokes an emotional response… The pure effects of the remaining buildings, the gas chamber, the crematoria… are traumatic places; they evoke emotional responses, and it doesn't need any curatorial interventions to reinforce that or to make it happen. It's already there… And as curators, we think we don't have to emphasize that, reinforce that. It's already there. We see our task rather in contextualizing, adding contextual information, not emotional but cognitive information to this very emotional place, and to put it into a cognitive framework.[115]

This approach helps frame the exhibition's restrained aesthetic and analytical structure. Staff rely on the original camp structures, original artifacts, historical documentation, and survivor testimony to educate visitors about the site's history. This stands in deliberate contrast to the immersive and emotionally amplified strategies employed by memorial institutions in liberator nations. The absence of perpetrator guilt affords a different kind of visitor relationship to the material. At Mauthausen, the site itself carries the emotional weight; the exhibition supplements rather than replaces it with evidence and historical interpretation.

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[112] Christian Durr, interview by Author, August 30, 2023, Zoom.
[113] Durr, Interview.
[114] Durr, Interview.
[115] Durr, Interview.

4.2.3.1 Spatial and Visual Structure: The Historic Infirmary as an Exhibition Space

The exhibit is housed in the former prisoner infirmary. The decision to use this building dates back to the 1960s, when the Austrian government first adapted it to accommodate the 1970 exhibit's needs. Rather than build a purpose-built gallery, curators chose to "fit" the exhibition into the historical building, with the path through the exhibit ending in the crematoria area, forcing visitors to walk through the gas chambers and execution room.[116]

In the 2013 design, the design was intentionally conceived as an "overview exhibition" to accompany the historic site rather than replace it as the primary focus. The ideal channeling is for visitors to first encounter the roll-call square, the remaining barracks, the crematorium, and the quarry through outdoor information panels and a virtual guided tour. The exhibit then builds upon this knowledge, placing it in a broader historical and political context.[117]

Spatially, the design follows the historical architecture of the former infirmary. A long central corridor runs the length of the building, with small rooms branching off on both sides. During the renovation, markings were added to the floors, walls, and ceilings to indicate the building's original layout, reinforcing the building's historical character rather than presenting it as a neutral gallery.[118] For conservation purposes, windows were covered, and a low suspended ceiling visually unifies the rooms.

Within the architectural framework, the exhibit relies on a visual color system that orients visitors as they move through the space. Durr emphasized that the exhibition was built to work on "three levels"[119]: Historical Framework, Camp History, and Prisoners' Lives. The panels shift through shades of gray to signal chronological progression, while three accent colors help

[116] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 290–91.
[117] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 295.
[118] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 295.
[119] Durr, Interview.

distinguish the exhibit's thematic layers. Along the central corridor, gray panels with yellow trim present the historical framework through a timeline of international events from 1933 to 1945 (see Figure 12D in Appendix A). Adjoining rooms branch off, arranged by theme. Rooms on the left, marked by gray panels with blue trim, trace the institutional and administrative history of the camp from its construction and early prisoner groups to the expansion of forced labor and the development of the camp system (see Figure 12C in Appendix A). Rooms on the right, marked by gray panels with red trim (see Figure 12E in Appendix A), discuss the prisoners, including their daily routines, work, and survival.

4.2.3.2 Chronological Narrative

Narratively, the exhibit is organized into four chronological periods: 1938, 1939-1942, 1943-1944, and 1945. Each period includes the three color-coded thematic threads. Visitors move down the yellow corridor to gain historical context, enter a blue room to learn how the camp functioned during that time, and then cross the hall into a red room to see how those systems affected prisoners. The building's layout lends itself naturally to this structure, and the color-coding reinforces it.

The exhibition opens with a prologue, situating the visitor in the aftermath of the camp's liberation (see Figure 12A in Appendix A). This introductory space sets the tone for the entire exhibition, presenting material not highlighted in earlier exhibitions at Mauthausen—the fate of the perpetrators after 1945. White panels featuring documents and photos address the efforts of the Allied Tribunals and the Austrian courts to prosecute National Socialists.

The prologue presents falsified, forged, and doctored identity papers and service records, underscoring the extent to which the perpetrators sought to evade accountability in the postwar years. These documents highlight the gap between Austria's victim narrative and the reality of

many Austrian National Socialists reintegrating into society with minimal scrutiny. Equally significant, the prologue addresses the groups historically denied recognition as victims of National Socialism, including those persecuted for being homosexuals, "asocial," Jehovah's Witnesses, or those deemed professional criminals. By naming these groups directly, the exhibition foregrounds forms of persecution that were marginalized in Austria's early commemorative practices. One striking image is a photo of the former Commandant Franz Ziereis' body hanging over barbed wire. The image symbolizes the regime's collapse and the desire for visible accountability.

A creative structural feature is that the prologue was designed to serve as both an introduction and epilogue. Unlike earlier exhibitions that directed visitors out through the crematorium, the current design brings visitors back through the exhibit to exit through the prologue. This dual function encourages reflection on two intertwined themes: how Austria confronted (or avoided) its role in National Socialism after 1945, and how the legacies of persecution shaped the lives of survivors and their families. It's designed to "pick up the visitor in the present as it were and drop them back off there at the end,"[120] framing the entire exhibition within the ongoing framework of remembrance.

The first section, "1938-1939: The Construction of the Concentration Camp," introduces the rise of National Socialism and the political conditions that led to the establishment of Mauthausen. Through its tripartite color structure, this section situates the camp's origins within the broader context of Nazi ideology and the expansion of National Socialism across Europe.

The historical review begins with Adolf Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933, followed by a photo of a party rally in Nuremberg and another of Hitler giving a speech on the

[120] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 300.

Enabling Act in Berlin. Panels briefly discuss the 1935 Nuremberg Laws and the beginning aspects of Jewish persecution, and the trajectory of German armament and expansion. Although the historical overview of the *Anschluss* is brief, it is prominently featured in the camp history room, where panels emphasize the "broad support for National Socialism in the town" of Mauthausen—a perspective that challenges Austria's long-standing postwar narrative.

The second section, "1940-1942: Internationalisation [sic] and Mass Murder", places Mauthausen within the broader goals of racial and political extermination. Panels explain the German invasion of Poland, framing it as part of a broader shift toward political and racial extermination. When discussing camp history, the section highlights the influx of prisoners from across occupied Europe, breaking down the groups of people into Jews, Yugoslavians, Czechs, Soviet POWs, deportees, and forced laborers. The section also addresses how the war became a "war of extermination," detailing how policies formalized mass murder across the camp system.

Section three, "1943-1944: Arms Production and the Subcamps," examines the wartime shift towards industrialized forced labor. The exhibition uses diagrams, factory plans, and worksite photographs to show how the SS leased prisoners to private industries and how both German and Austrian economic interests benefited from forced labor. A section on female prisoners, accompanied by images of female uniforms and rare photographs, highlights the growing presence of women in the Mauthausen camp system. The memorial acknowledges the exploitation of women in the camp 'brothel' in its audio guide and displays a "request form" to visit the camp brothel. With few surviving objects and only fragmentary testimony, the history of forced prostitution relies heavily on oral accounts and contextual explanation. Its inclusion, even in this limited form, reflects the memorial's broader effort to address aspects of camp life once considered too taboo or difficult to present, while remaining consistent with its commitment to

dignity and careful interpretation. In all, this section highlights Austria's economic entanglement with the camp, an aspect that is generally overlooked in national memory.

The final section, "1945: Overcrowding, Mass Death, and Liberation," covers the collapse of the Third Reich and the catastrophic working and living conditions in the complex during the final months of the war. The exhibit intensely interprets the collapse of the German Reich, and the attempt of the SS to evacuate Mauthausen and other camps and dismantle the killing facilities. Among the displays is a March 1945 photo of Adolf Hitler greeting members of the Hitler Youth. Placed in the historical overview section, the photo seems disconnected from the scenes of war, chaos, and death. Yet, its placement functions as a juxtaposition, highlighting the contrast between the symbolic innocence of youth and the violent system they were taught to revere. Further, it reminds visitors that the camp system did not exist in isolation but was sustained by a society influenced by indoctrination, loyalty, and coercion.

The curatorial choice not to conclude with the liberation of the camp system, but rather to force visitors to walk back through the prologue (now functioning as the epilogue), is significant. The exhibit highlights the lasting physical and psychological trauma experienced by survivors. This approach differs from many Allied museum narratives, which frame liberation as a resolution and moment of triumph. An example of this is the USHMM, where liberation is presented twice. Upon entering the permanent exhibit, visitors are immediately confronted with large photographs and video footage of American troops liberating the camps, along with a quote by General Eisenhower (see Figure 9A in Appendix A). Liberation is revisited again near the end of the chronology, before the discussion of the Nuremberg trials. Media screens are presented in a more enclosed viewing space that allows visitors to choose whether to engage (see Figure 9D in Appendix A).

4.2.3.3 Language

A component of the narrative that quickly emerges is the use of specific language. In the 21st century, the term Nazi is used widely in public discourse, but the site uses the term 'National Socialist.' As Durr explained, the curatorial team approaches wording with caution because language directly shapes the narrative and can, in turn, affect how visitors interpret the site's history. Durr was quick to point out that a point of tension is what to call the camp's victims. In German (Austria's official language), *Opfer* carries religious and sacrificial connotations. It also fails to distinguish between the deceased and the survivors. The alternative 'prisoner,' which the camp uses, is also imperfect since Mauthausen was not a prison. For that reason, the term has been criticized; however, Durr noted that no widely accepted substitute has emerged.[121] These ongoing negotiations over the use of specific terminology illustrate one of the broader challenges memorial institutions face in presenting historically accurate and ethically sensitive interpretations of diverse experiences.

4.2.3.4 Visual Strategy: Photographs and Imagery

The exhibit draws on a wide range of visual sources, showcasing perpetrator photographs, prisoner-created drawings, liberation-era images, and family photographs. Throughout, personal photos featuring SS personnel appear. The images include SS personnel being sworn in on the camp grounds, and an officer walking through the snow with his spouse in the camp. Although these images risk humanizing perpetrators and portraying them as innocent, their placement within the interpretive panels emphasizes accountability and serves as a visual reminder that violence was carried out by identifiable individuals.

[121] Durr, interview.

Images showing violence or bodily exposure are treated differently. Durr emphasized that the memorial's mission is to preserve memory *and* protect the dignity of the victims. For this reason, the team uses an internal ethical test when evaluating sensitive photographs: *would I want this image displayed if it were of my grandfather?* Further, is the pedagogical value of the picture higher than the loss of dignity that it involves?[122] With that said, the exhibit does show a small number of these types of photos, including prisoners bathing after liberation, corpses in the woods near Gunskirchen, and liberation photos taken by American forces. The exhibition also features drawings created by prisoners, particularly those depicting the intake and processing procedures. These sketches offer a rare victim-generated visual record of dehumanization and are used to counterbalance the collection of photographs that are produced from the lens of the perpetrators.

Photos from the camp's liberation are also on display. Many of these photos, taken by the US Army Signal Corps, are among the most visual records of the camp's liberation. Notably, the exhibition acknowledges that not all these images were taken spontaneously; some were staged for documentation purposes. Unlike the more graphic liberation imagery common at liberator and victim-centered institutions, the liberation photographs at Mauthausen are selective and restrained—consistent with the exhibit's broader ethical framework for image use.

Overall, the exhibition's visual strategy reflects a balance between the realities of the atrocities committed at Mauthausen and the surrounding system. Imagery plays a central role in the Mauthausen exhibition. Rather than relying on photographs to evoke emotional responses, curators use images as historical evidence and tools to understand the functions of camps. As curator Christian Durr explained, the memorial does not need to manufacture emotional impact;

[122] Durr, Zoom.

the site already does. The task, therefore, is not to amplify emotion but to frame it within the exhibit's context.[123]

The ethical test Durr describes—*would I want this image displayed if it were of my grandfather?* —takes on a specific meaning at a site where the perpetrators and many of the visitors share a national identity. While questions of dignity and representation arise in many Holocaust institutions, they carry distinct weight in Austria (and other perpetrator nations). Unlike liberator-focused institutions, the Mauthausen memorial must address the crimes committed on its own soil by individuals of the same community. The discussion is not only about preserving dignity, but also about recognizing that the people photographed and put on display—whether victims, bystanders, or perpetrators—were part of the same national society that visits and interprets this site. This does not prevent the exhibition from using sensitive images, but it does shape how those images are selected, framed, and contextualized. In this way, the memorial's visual strategy is shaped by both ethical considerations and the broader challenge of presenting a history deeply intertwined with Austria's collective memory.

4.2.3.5 Material Evidence and Personal Narratives

A central part of Mauthausen's curatorial strategy is the use of material evidence—artifacts (originals and replicas), documents, biographies, and survivor testimony—to ground the site's history in real-life experiences. These materials also reflect the evolving approach to Holocaust memory by documenting responsibility while acknowledging aspects of camp life that were previously ignored, mischaracterized, or unacknowledged in Austria's postwar memory. This includes the experiences of prisoner groups whose stories did not fit the dominant national narrative.

[123] Durr, Zoom.

The exhibit establishes the importance of displaying documents from the beginning. In the prologue, the first few items visitors encounter are forged identity papers and altered service files—all documents used by many perpetrators to obscure their involvement with the camp. These materials highlight the tension between Austria's postwar narrative and the reality that many former party members reintegrated into society with minimal scrutiny. The decision to open with forged documents, rather than with photographs of victims, immediately establishes the exhibit's interpretive priorities. Before visitors encounter the camp's history, they learn how Austrians tried to escape accountability. The sequencing is not incidental; it is the argument.

Documents such as punishment orders, administrative orders, correspondence, prisoner cards, and a prisoner form used at the camp brothel serve as evidence of how the camp operated as part of the Nazi system of labor and killing machine. They also show that Mauthausen functioned within a broader political and administrative network, involving both Nazi authorities and Austrian officials. By displaying these documents, the memorial anchors its narrative in documentary evidence while reinforcing its commitment to confronting Austria's role in the camp system.

Artifacts such as a prisoner uniform and the infamous colored triangle prisoner markings chart introduce the bureaucratic logic of dehumanization. Other objects include an SS uniform jacket and postcards sent by SS officers. These items, which can be seen as "humanizing" perpetrators, serve as reminders that these horrific acts of violence were carried out by ordinary individuals, a point Arendt essentially makes in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). While the memorial prefers to work with original artifacts, Durr noted that the site's holdings were initially limited. Many items in the early exhibit were replicas or on loan. Curators ultimately

chose to display replicas only when necessary and always with explicit labels to ensure transparency.

The exhibition's use of objects also highlights gaps in the visual and documentary records. Women's uniforms, one of the few surviving material traces of female prisoners at Mauthausen and its system, assist in highlighting a marginalized group whose experiences were often overlooked. A key part of this section is the expansion of the subcamp system. A panel on women prisoners, accompanied by female uniforms and rare photographs, highlights the growing presence of women in camps such as Lenzing (a subcamp of Mauthausen) and the gendered dimensions of forced labor. Because imagery from these sites is limited, curators rely on documentation and survivor testimony to fill gaps in the visual record. Here, documents such as the "entry register" for the women's section of the camp and a "block index card," as well as survivors' testimony from a female survivor, work together to build a more complete picture of women's experiences in the subcamp system, especially in areas where the historical record is limited.

Biographical materials and survivor testimony are used throughout the exhibition to personalize the camp's history by connecting visitors to perpetrators and victims involved. Biographies of Heinrich Himmler and Oswald Pohl, both high-ranking Nazi officials, are presented as individuals whose decisions directly shaped the establishment of Mauthausen. This point is strengthened by the display of the first page of the quarry's lease agreement, signed by both the mayor of Vienna and Oswald Pohl. This framing reflects the curatorial choice to foreground agency and responsibility, while also providing documentary evidence of Austrian involvement in the establishment of Mauthausen.

Throughout the exhibit, visitors can view, listen to, and read about survivors' stories. These short individual stories introduce visitors to people who lived throughout the camp system, placing camp history in the context of real lives rather than abstract categories. One interview, presented in section four, is from a female survivor who gave birth in a subcamp and was eventually liberated by the Allies. The inclusion of her story adds emotional depth to the exhibition, drawing attention to aspects of camp life that would otherwise remain invisible.

Taken together, the curator's selection of artifacts, documents, biographies, and survivor testimonies provides a multi-perspective view of the Mauthausen complex. In doing so, the exhibit not only tells a multi-layered story of the history of the Mauthausen complex system but also reflects Austria's evolving approach to Holocaust memory.

4.2.4 Additional Exhibitions and the Memorial Landscape

In addition to the main permanent exhibition, the memorial encompasses a broader set of commemorative spaces that collectively extend the interpretive framework of the site:

The Crime Scenes of Mauthausen-Searching for Traces

Located in the infirmary basement, the exhibit approaches Mauthausen as a crime scene, examining specific locations within the camp where mass murder was carried out. The exhibit consists of six thematic panels, each addressing a distinct killing method used at a specific location within the camp. A seventh panel discusses how the dead were "dealt with." Each panel is double-sided, with the front displaying a large photo of the "crime scene" in current time; the back provides historical information about the location and the method of killing. At the center of each station, "a three-dimensional object stands as a physical trace of the crime, be it the extractor fan from the gas chamber or the syringe of an SS doctor."[124] Upon leaving the exhibit,

[124] Mauthausen Memorial, KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen, "The Crime Scenes of Mauthausen - Searching for Traces," Mauthausen Memorial | KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen, accessed March 27, 2026,

visitors enter the crematoria, the Room of Names, the gas chamber, the autopsy room, the mortuary, and the execution room.

Room of Names

The Room of Names is a memorial at the site that lists the names of all who perished at Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps. The names are printed horizontally on glass plates in no particular order. Currently, the names of more than 81,000 people who died in the Mauthausen camp system are known. The aim of the room is "to show the scale of the mass murder of people from more than forty countries and to create a dignified memorial for all victims that does not form hierarchies based on victim groups."[125]

Mauthausen: The Town and the Camp (Special Exhibition)

Located adjacent to the permanent exhibit in the infirmary, the special exhibition *Mauthausen: The Town and the Camp* examines the relationship between the camp and the surrounding community. It emphasizes the social, political, and economic entanglements that connected the residents to the camp system, including business ties and private contacts with members of the SS and those who attempted to aid inmates. The exhibit reinforces the memorial's central argument throughout that the camp could not have functioned without civilian and local participation.

The Muhl Viertel "Hare Hunt" (Special Exhibition)

In February 1945, 500 Soviet prisoners broke out of the camp by overpowering the guards and scaling the walls. In one of the few examples of mass escape from a concentration or extermination camp, only 11 of the 500 prisoners survived. Also housed in the infirmary, positioned adjacent to the main display, the exhibit addresses one of the most brutal episodes

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https://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/Visit/Exhibitions-and-Room-of-Names/The-Crime-Scenes-of-Mauthausen-Searching-for-Traces.

[125] Mauthausen Memorial, KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, "The 'Room of Names,'" Exhibitions and Room of Names, Mauthausen Memorial | KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, accessed March 27, 2026, https://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/Visit/Exhibitions-and-Room-of-Names/The-Room-of-Names.

associated with the camp. The location of this exhibit enables visitors to engage with a story that is historically connected to the camp but often overshadowed by its broader history.

4.3 AUSTRIA CASE STUDY #2

KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee

(Ebensee Concentration Camp Memorial)

Ebensee, Austria

KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee (Ebensee Concentration Camp Memorial) illustrates a different challenge within Austria's commemorative landscape. Unlike the Mauthausen Memorial, where preserved camp structures form the foundation of interpretation, at Ebensee, very little of the original camp infrastructure remains, requiring memory to be reconstructed through dispersed memorial spaces. Examining the development of the Ebensee memorial reveals how Holocaust remembrance must adapt when the physical traces have largely been demolished.

Located near the Salzkammergut region of the Austrian Alps, the Ebensee Concentration Camp was established in 1943 as a subcamp within the Mauthausen camp system. The area outside the main town of Ebensee was selected as the site for a subterranean missile development facility. The camp was constructed to support underground armaments production, with prisoners forced to excavate an extensive gallery system. At its peak, the camp held over 18,509 prisoners from across Europe, many of whom died of starvation, disease, exhaustion, and abuse before its liberation by American forces on May 6, 1945. Although medical aid was given to prisoners, more than 700 inmates still died as a result of the ill treatment they had suffered during their imprisonment.[126]

Today, the memorial landscape of the camp illustrates the complexities of commemorating sites where physical traces of violence have mostly disappeared. The former campgrounds have been turned into a neighborhood, and all that remains is the original camp

[126] Bernhard Denkinger et al., eds., *Ebensee Concentration Camp: The "Zement" Project, Permanent Exhibition Ebensee Concentration Camp* (Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee, 2020).

arch and the cemetery. Visitors are allowed access to some galleries; however, many entrances remain sealed. The absence of physical architecture requires a higher level of curatorial mediation to convey the site's history. Despite these challenges, the memorial functions not as a unified memorial complex but as a commemorative landscape dispersed across the Ebensee region. It comprises a cemetery and memorial area on the former campgrounds, as well as a separate contemporary history museum in the town center. Rather than operating as an integrated historical site, monument, and museum, like Mauthausen, the site's framework is fragmented.

Nonetheless, the memorial's interpretive framework is shaped by two permanent exhibitions: *Ebensee Concentration Camp, the "Zement" Project,* located in the historic Tunnel No. 5, and *Republic. Corporatist state. National Socialism. Persecution. Resistance.* which is housed at the Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee (Contemporary History Museum) in the town center. Together, these exhibitions provide the primary narrative for understanding the Ebensee memorial as a whole. While both exhibitions are considered in this case study, the analysis focuses more extensively on the tunnel exhibition due to its age and spatial significance.

4.3.1 History and Evolution of Commemoration

The current condition of the memorial is a direct result of decisions made in the two years immediately following liberation. During this time, as Austria began reconstructing its physical infrastructure and postwar national narrative, large portions of the former camp infrastructure were being dismantled. Initially, the barracks served as temporary housing for SS prisoners of war, then for displaced persons.[127] By 1946, local officials were advocating for the construction of a new housing development in an attempt to get rid of refugees.[128] One politician was quoted

[127] Bernhard Denkinger et al., *Ebensee Concentration Camp: The "Zement" Project, Permanent Exhibition Ebensee Concentration Camp*, 81.
[128] Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee, *Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee* (Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee, 2005), 81.

as saying, “We absolutely must try to move the camp away from our town, otherwise we will not be freed from all this misery. The same applies to food supplies, because as long as we have so many foreigners here, the camps will always be given priorities.” By 1947, the grounds were released for development, and the physical camp was leveled, eventually becoming a residential area. The tunnel entrances were sealed.[129]

When touring the grounds, the guide mentioned he had talked to several of the residents, asking how they felt about living on what was once a concentration camp, and they stated their grandparents needed a place to live. This response reflects Austria’s broader reluctance to confront its role in the crimes of National Socialism. As a result, the memorial environment at Ebensee was characterized more by absence than preservation. Whereas the main Mauthausen site retained many of its architectural remains, this enabled it to serve as a site of reflection, with the physical structures still present. Ebensee’s physical transformation made its history dependent on documentary preservation and local memory rather than on physical memory.

The first monument, known as the Lepetit Monument, was erected in 1948. It was inaugurated by Hilda Lepetit, whose husband died in the camp.[130] Like many early memorial initiatives across former campsites, the monument was established through the efforts of survivors and victims' families rather than the Austrian state. A second monument, erected shortly after and bearing the inscription “To the eternal dishonour [sic] of the German people,” was destroyed by the authorities in the 1950s.[131] While the precise reasons for its removal remain unclear, the episode reflects the contested nature of early postwar commemorations.

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[129] KZ-Gedenkstatte Ebensee, “Gedenkstätte – Vom Vergessen Zum Erinnern,” KZ-Gedenkstatte Ebensee, accessed March 13, 2026, https://memorial-ebensee.at/index.php/de/besucherinfo/kz-gedenk-staette.
[130] KZ-Gedenkstatte Ebensee, “Gedenkstätte – Vom Vergessen Zum Erinnern.”
[131] Mauthausen Memorial, “Ebensee Memorial - Ebensee Memorial,” Mauthausen Memorial | KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, accessed March 8, 2026, https://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/Ebensee/The-Concentration-Camp-Ebensee.

In 1952, efforts were made to establish a central cemetery for the camp victims. A French Commission carried out the exhumation and relocation of corpses. Survivors and relatives played a decisive role in shaping the cemetery's commemorative landscape. Over time, additional plaques and monuments dedicated to various national and political groups were added, producing a memorial environment that retained the international character of the camp's prisoner population.

A significant shift occurred in 1997 with the establishment of the permanent exhibit in Tunnel No. 5, one of the few surviving structures. The use of the tunnel-anchored interpretation in a physical space. It was a material connection to a historical landscape that had otherwise largely disappeared. This exhibit was the first sustained attempt to interpret the site through a curated historical narrative rather than solely through plaques or commemorative markers.

The development continued with the opening of the Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee (Ebensee Contemporary History Museum) in 2001, which established a formal institution dedicated to the camp's history. The museum provided the historical context and educational infrastructure that the landscape could not. Its creation also signaled Ebensee's integration into Austria's evolving national memory culture, coinciding with wider efforts to acknowledge Austrian complicity and expand Holocaust education. A photo overview of the site and its exhibitions is provided in Appendix A.

4.3.2 Spatial Layout, Memorial Landscape, and Surviving Structures

The present-day memorial landscape at Ebensee is dispersed across several locations. Visitors encounter the camp's history through a series of distinct spaces in and around town.

Although separate, each memorial and interpretive space addresses a different aspect of the camp's history.[132] No element is sufficient on its own.

The Former Main Entrance

Upon entering the former campgrounds, there is very little indication of the site's wartime function. The most visible remnant is the original archway that once served as the camp's main entrance (see Figure 9A in Appendix A). During the construction of the village, the archway was slated for demolition. However, it was preserved following protests from local representatives of the Austrian Concentration Camp Association. It now bears the inscription, "in memory of the more than 8000 people who died in the Ebensee concentration camp."[133]

Campgrounds

Beyond the archway, few traces of the camp remain. The former barracks and roll-call square are now occupied by private residences and paved roads. The transformation of the campgrounds into private property limits the possibility of reconstructing a coherent spatial narrative of the site. Visitors instead rely on signs and guided tours to approximate the camp's original setting.

Camp Cemetery

The camp cemetery, located near the former crematorium, is one of the oldest elements of the site's memorial landscape (see Figure 9B in Appendix A). To enter the cemetery, visitors walk through iron gates and a stone wall, where they encounter four significant features. On the left, the LePetit Memorial and headstones; directly in front, the national memorials associated with former prisoner groups; and on the right, a wall of glass panels with the names of all 8,412 camp victims etched on them. The memorial, titled *Looking with the Eyes of the Dead*, erected in 2011, is comprised of 156 clear glass panels that "restore[s] the names of the victims, who often appear

[132] The Lion's Walk was closed during the site visit due to seasonal access restriction. As a result, it was not possible to conduct a direct analysis of the site.
[133] KZ-Gedenkstatte Ebensee, "Gedenkstätte – Vom Vergessen Zum Erinnern."

only as numbers in the death registers of the Nazi bureaucracy, as a sign of human dignity."[134] The memorial is the first time individuals were commemorated on this scale in Austria at a concentration camp.

Tunnel No. 5

The galleries or tunnel system is the only remaining structure directly associated with the concentration camp. Although its entrance is discreetly embedded in the hillside, the tunnel is the most tangible architectural element of the site. The original gate to the camp entrance is also placed near the tunnel entrance. The tunnel system is dimly lit, with a small permanent exhibition on both sides. The tunnel system is divided into two complexes, completely preserved. Tunnel Complex A is used by the Hatschek company for industrial purposes. Tunnel Complex B, owned by the federal forestry office, contains a private shooting range and the memorial tunnel with the permanent exhibition. The tunnel offers an immersive fragment of the camp. Photos of the Tunnel are available in Appendix A.

4.3.3 The "Zement" Project and Tunnel No. 5

The exhibit *Ebensee Concentration Camp: the Zement Project* opened in 1997. Installed in Tunnel No. 5, the exhibit occupies one of the few surviving structures connected to the former camp. The tunnel is owned by the Austrian Federal Forest and leased for exhibition purposes. The curatorial approach treats the tunnel not only as an exhibition space but as a historical artifact with design choices intended to minimize distractions from the physical environment.

In addition to the main corridor, several unfinished chambers branch off from the tunnel, with only one remaining accessible to visitors. These side rooms are left largely untouched with exposed rock, uneven floors, and remnants of brickwork still visible. Some openings are framed with metal

[134] KZ-Gedenkstatte Ebensee, "Gedenkstätte – Vom Vergessen Zum Erinnern."

bars. These spaces contain no interpretive materials. Their primary function is to expose the raw conditions in which prisoners worked. One room serves as a memorial area. Further, it shows the project's construction is incomplete.

4.3.3.1 Thematic Narrative

The exhibit follows a linear structure and is modest in scale. Clear, white display panels line both sides of the tunnel, allowing physical features such as the exposed rock, uneven flooring, and low lighting to remain visible. Although broadly chronological, the narrative is organized into a series of thematic headings installed along both sides of the tunnel.

These themes trace the development of the underground gallery system and history of the "*Zement*" project, the forced labor system, daily life in the camp, and liberation. Each heading introduces a specific aspect of the camp's development or operation. Spatial and narrative progression are closely aligned. This arrangement creates a continuous interpretive sequence—the deeper you walk into the tunnel, the deeper you get into the camp's history. Unlike Mauthausen's branching, color-coded design, which allows visitors to move between thematic threads, Ebensee's linear layout offers no detours. The architecture enforces the interpretive sequence.

The opening panel introduces the gallery system by presenting a brief overview of the camp's purpose and the construction of the underground tunnels. The exhibit then explains why the tunnels were built, connecting the project to the failed German offensive against the Soviet Union in 1941 and the increasing demands of the armament industry. In doing so, the exhibit situates Ebensee within the broader wartime economy that drove the expansion of underground production facilities. The panels also addressed the decision to rely on concentration camp labor and the establishment of satellite camps throughout Austria to support this system.

Subsequent panels address the forced labor system, working conditions, and daily life in the camp. The final section of the exhibition discusses liberation and the immediate aftermath of the camp's closure. These panels address the difficulty of feeding starving prisoners and the number of deaths that occurred after liberation. The narrative concludes with the creation of the camp cemetery and early memorial activities.

4.3.3.2 Imagery and Visual Representation

A central component of the exhibit's interpretive strategy is its use of imagery. Visually, the exhibition adopts a documentary approach using scans of photographs, maps, and drawings mounted on glass panels. Because few images survive from the camp's operational period, the exhibit relies heavily on photos taken at the time of liberation. These images depict emaciated prisoners, survivors bathing after liberation, and piles of corpses discovered by Allied forces. While visually stark, the images are presented primarily as historical documentation rather than as components of an explicitly emotional narrative.

Despite the presence of graphic imagery, the exhibition does not attempt to create an overtly emotional interpretive framework. The photos function as visual evidence supporting the historical narrative presented in the panels. Instead, the site's atmosphere emerges from its physical environment. The low lighting, exposed rock walls, and confined passageways in the tunnel create a somber atmosphere that evokes the conditions in which prisoners were forced to work. In this sense, the exhibition's spatial setting contributes more to the emotional impact of the site than the curatorial design of the display panels.

4.3.3.3 Documentary Framework and Archival Evidence

In addition to the photographs, the exhibit relies heavily on documentary material. Rather than using artifacts or personal objects, the interpretive framework is built primarily through

scanned archival documents and extensive explanatory text. This documentary approach reflects the style often associated with documentation centers and former perpetrator sites, where archival evidence and contextual explanation are frequently prioritized over object-centric display.

The exhibit also includes excerpts from survivors and reports written by American liberators. However, these testimonies appear primarily as short textual quotations rather than extended personal narratives or biographies. Unlike the exhibition at Mauthausen, where biographies and testimonies have been prominently integrated into the interpretive structure, the personal narratives are presented as fragments within photo captions.

While the Zeitgeschichte Museum displays a limited number of artifacts, the total exhibition itself remains almost entirely documentary. The exhibition, which opened in 1997, is also significant in this regard. Developed during a period when Austria's engagement with its role in national socialism was still evolving, the exhibit adopts a restrained, documentation-driven interpretive style rather than one centered on personal storytelling or emotional engagement.

Together, the exhibition's reliance on documentary sources reflects both interpretive choices and the material conditions of the site itself. Because the original camp infrastructure did not survive, curators must rely heavily on archival material to reconstruct the camp's history. At the same time, the tunnel itself remains a powerful physical reminder of the forced labor carried out. In this way, the exhibition panels provide the historical context that the fragmented landscape cannot convey, while the tunnel's physical environment communicates the oppressive conditions under which prisoners worked. Unlike the artifacts, biographies, and survivor

testimony that structure much of the narrative, the tunnel exhibit relies on documentary evidence and the tunnel's physical atmosphere to convey the camp's history.

4.3.4 The Zeitgeschichte Museum

The *Zeitgeschichte Museum*, located in the center of town, provides a comprehensive historical framework that the dispersed memorial landscape cannot. Although it is physically removed from the historical site (approximately 2 km), its permanent exhibition serves as the primary site for visitors to understand the camp within the broader system of National Socialism.

The museum opened in 2001, offering comprehensive documentation of the region's contemporary and general history from 1918 to 1955. The aim of the museum is to present the period on "a scientifically sound basis and to enable an approach to the past, free from the need for justification and harmonization."[135] Separated into three rooms, the exhibit features a color scheme of white, black, gray, and orange/red. All text and photos are mounted on clear glass panels. In total, the exhibit has around 1,000 photos and documents on display, including original propaganda materials bearing the swastika, to illustrate National Socialist ideology (see Figure 9E in Appendix A).[136]

The first room (1918 to 1934) discusses the traditions of Austria's political culture using photos, newspapers, and other original documents. The second room (1934 to 1938) discusses the *Anschluss* and Austria under Nazi control. The third room (1938 to 1945) addresses World War II, the forced labor system, the resistance movement, and the history of the Ebensee concentration camp. Within this section, the exhibit is presented through listening stations featuring testimonies from men and women, a camp uniform, photographs, and film. The

[135] Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee, *Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee*, 22.
[136] Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee, *Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee*, 24; Zeitgeschichte Museum, "Zeitgeschichte Museum," Zeitgeschichte Museum, accessed March 10, 2026, https://memorial-ebensee.at/index.php/de/besucherinfo/zeitgeschichte-museum.

exhibition concludes with highlights of the postwar period, discussing the denazification process and the Austrian first-victim myth. The exhibit is presented exclusively in German, reinforcing its orientation toward a regional and national audience rather than an international memorial public.

Unlike the exhibition in Tunnel No. 5, which uses a documentary approach and the atmosphere of the physical site, the Zeitgeschichte Museum adopts a more traditional museum format. Housed in a purpose-built structure, the exhibit incorporates artifacts, testimonies, photographs, and structured thematic rooms to create a narrative framework that situates the camp within Austria's broader political history. In this sense, the museum's interpretive strategy more closely resembles the exhibit model seen at Mauthausen, where material objects, biographies, and contextual interpretation work together to guide visitors through the historical narrative.

The separation between the museum and the former camp (2km away) highlights the extent to which the attempt to erase Ebensee's physical memory has shifted the burden of historical interpretation from its physical location. As a result, the museum functions less as a direct memorial space and more as an institution that provides the contextual narrative the camp landscape cannot provide.

CHAPTER 5: FRANCE

As both a liberated nation and a collaborating state, France confronted a postwar identity built on irreconcilable truths. It was a country that produced both the Resistance and the *Velodrome d'Hiver* roundup (Vel d'Hiv), heroism and complicity, in the same years, on the same soil. The history of Holocaust memory in France is a history of collective memory shaped by political pressures, first by postwar reconstruction and later by a growing emphasis on accountability. Understanding that arc is essential to reading the memorial sites this chapter examines, because both sides exist within it. They are not neutral spaces; they are products of the specific national memory culture, and their curatorial choices—what they foreground, what their names signify, what they acknowledge—all reflect where France stands in that longer process of reckoning.

Following World War II, the Allied powers recognized France as a liberated ally. During the war, General Charles de Gaulle's Free France movement was recognized as the legitimate representative of France.[137] Postwar, this enabled France to present itself as a nation that had continued to resist Nazism despite occupation and collaboration. This political positioning laid the groundwork for a national narrative centered on resistance, in which France emerged from the war not as a collaborator, but as an Allied victor. Belgian historian Pieter Lagrou argues that this framework initially produced two dominant postwar memories: one on resistance and the other on victimization.[138] However, they were not parallel strands of memory. The victim narrative was gradually incorporated into a broader narrative of resistance, reinforcing a postwar

[137] The Free France movement was the government in exhile during World War II. After France's surrender in 1940, Charles de Gaulle fled to london, where he called for continued resistance to German occupation. This established Free France as the legitimate representative of France among the Allies. See Richard Sheposh, "Free France," EBSCO, EBSCO, 2023, https://www.ebsco.com.
[138] Meyer et al., "Memory of World War II in France," 137.

narrative of France as a nation united in suffering and opposition rather than divided by collaboration. These dynamics shaped French collective memory for decades, defining what was commemorated, marginalized, and what memory sites presented to the public.

Following France's defeat in 1940, the country was divided between a German-occupied zone and the collaborating Vichy regime, which implemented a series of preemptive anti-Jewish measures targeting both French citizens and foreign nationals. By 1944, with the help of the French police, approximately 75,000 Jews were deported through French administrative structures. The majority were deported without German orders. [139] Roughly one quarter of the Jewish population living in France was killed, either through deportation or from the conditions of the French internment camps.[140] This history of state-organized persecution carried out on French soil, by French institutions, is what the resistance narrative could not accommodate, and what French memorial culture has spent decades learning to confront.

5.1 *Résistancialisme* and the Marginalization of Holocaust Memory

In the immediate postwar period, the history of Jewish persecution was not fully incorporated into France's national narrative. The first postwar decade has been described by Henry Rousso as a period of "unfinished mourning" and by Louisa Rice as one of "selective mourning," due to the careful, deliberate lens through which the French produced their memory.[141] General Charles de Gaulle, as head of the provisional government, played a central

[139] Rice, "The Voice of Silence," 22.
[140] J. Heuman, "Entangled Memories: A Reassessment of 1950s French Holocaust Historiography," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 410, https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcu039.enten
[141] Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome : History and Memory in France Since 1944*, with Internet Archive (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1991), 10–23, http://archive.org/details/vichysyndromehis0000rous; Rice, "The Voice of Silence," 23.

role in shaping this framework of memory.[142] Under his leadership, de Gaulle declared the Vichy regime illegitimate, affirmed the continuity of the French Republic, and established a resistance-centered narrative focused on those who had fought and died for France.

This approach was reinforced institutionally through the appointment of two government committees: the *Commission d'histoire de l'Occupation et de la Liberation*, focused on the history of the Resistance, and the *Comité d'histoire de la guerre*, tasked with collecting wartime documentation. Both were mandated to document and interpret the occupation of France in accordance with the Gaullist framework. In 1951, the organizations merged to form the *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* (commonly referred to as *the* Comité). Through their publications and archives, these institutions defined the boundaries of historical inquiry, embedding resistance at the center of how France and the world remembered its experience in the war.[143]

Within this framework, the Holocaust occupied a marginal position. Jewish persecution did not fit within the scope of heroism, sacrifice, and liberation, and as a result was subsumed within a broader narrative of national suffering. The consequences of this were direct. The 1945 inauguration ceremony of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier included remains of French soldiers, political prisoners, French women, and members of the resistance. However, there were no representatives of those deported on racial grounds.[144] Jewish persecution was not denied so much as rendered invisible within the collective memory of national suffering.

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[142] In a speech given on August 25, 1944, after the liberation of Paris, de Gaulle states, "…Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, by its own people…with the support and of France as a whole, of fighting France,,,". Henry Rousso believes this speech is what established the "founding myth of the post-Vichy period." See Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 16.
[143] Heuman, "Entangled Memories," 409–10.
[144] Rice, "The Voice of Silence," 23.

In response, Jewish organizations began conducting their own research. The initiative to document the Jewish experience in Paris led to the creation of the *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* (CDJC, or Jewish Documentation Center), which published numerous studies on Vichy policies and the Holocaust. As a result, two parallel historiographies emerged—one national and institutionally sanctioned, while the other (the CDJC version) was privately funded, "highlight[ing] a minority experience."[145] Rousso described the resistance-dominant postwar framework as *résistancialisme*, in which narratives of unity and resistance overshadowed collaboration and Jewish persecution in postwar France.

While *résistancialisme* remained the dominant framework of remembrance in the 1950s, the decade also marked the gradual expansion of the memorial landscape. In 1956, the *Tombeau du Martyr Juif Inconnu* (Tomb of the Unknown Jewish Martyr), the first institution dedicated specifically to Jewish memory, was unveiled in Paris. Today, the memorial is known as the *Memorial de la Shoah*.[146] The institution, which included museum space, opened an exhibit on Bergen-Belsen in 1959.

To commemorate the tenth anniversary of the liberation of France, the exhibit *Résistance, Libération, Déportation* was displayed at the Musée de la Pédagogie in Paris. The exhibit presented the war through a lens of heroism and national suffering. While documentation on the Drancy internment camp and Vel d'Hiv roundups was included, the material was secondary and placed within the narrative of Nazi atrocities.[147] It was this exhibition that inspired Alain Resnais' *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1956), "mark[ing] a change in French collective

[145] Heuman, "Entangled Memories," 411.
[146] Ministere de la Culture, "Mémorial Du Martyr Juif Inconnu, Actuel Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine," POP-Plateforme Ouverte Du Patrimoine, accessed December 16, 2025, https://pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/merimee/PA00086470; Heuman, "Entangled Memories," 420.
[147] Heuman, "Entangled Memories," 419–20.

memory."[148] The film introduced French audiences to visual evidence of the atrocities committed in the concentration and extermination camps. While the movie played a significant role in disseminating awareness of the camps, it did so within the constraints of the French memory framework, avoiding explicit discussion of France's complicity. Further, at the request of the French film board, a photo of a French internment camp was censored before the film's release.[149]

5.1.1 Fracture and Accountability

By the 1960s and 1970s, the resistance narrative began to face sustained challenges, and Holocaust memory began to gain greater visibility. In 1962, President de Gaulle inaugurated the *Memorial des Martyrs de la Déportation* (Memorial of the Martyrs of Deportation) on the Île de la Cité in central Paris—a memorial for all victims of deportation from France. It further reinforced the idea that deportation had been a shared national experience.

A shift in historiography occurred with the publication of Serge Klarsfeld's *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France* (1978), which named all victims convoy by convoy, establishing the scale and specificity of Jewish deportation in a way that demanded remembrance around individual identity rather than collective national suffering. At the same time, survivor testimony began to widely circulate, contributing to what Annette Wieviorka later described as the emergence of an "era of the witness,"[150] in which personal experience became a legitimate and prominent form of historical evidence.

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[148] Betsy McLane, "The 'Fog' of World War II: History and Mis-Contextualization in Alain Renais' Renowned Documentary," *Documentary Magazine | International Documentary Association*, July 29, 2015, https://www.documentary.org/column/fog-world-war-ii-history-and-mis-contextualization-alain-renais-renowned-documentary; Rice, "The Voice of Silence," 22.
[149] Rice, "The Voice of Silence," 27.
[150] Rosanne Kennedy, "The Era of the Witness (Review)," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 26, no. 4 (2008): 218–21.

The historiographical turning point came with the publication of two books that challenged French postwar narrative—Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (1972), which challenged the prevailing notion that Marshal Philippe Pétain sought to protect France from German demands; and Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton's book *Vichy France and the Jews* (1981), the first comprehensive study to examine France's role in the Holocaust.[151] The implications of that scholarship were worked through publicly in a series of high-profile trials that addressed the persecution of Jews: Klaus Barbie in 1987, Paul Touvier in 1994, and Maurice Papon in 1997-1998. Each trial forced a public reckoning with the categorization of victims and the attribution of responsibility. The Barbie trial proved impactful. As Annette Wieviorka argues, the trial "centered around the arrest and deportation of the children of Izieu; It was this trial that made France, as a nation, aware of the tragedy of these children, who became a part of French history and collective memory."[152] Touvier became the first French citizen to be convicted of crimes against humanity, and Papon, who served as the secretary general of the police in Bordeaux, became the first senior official of the Vichy regime prosecuted for being complicit in deportations.[153] While the proceedings did not immediately transform the memory landscape, the trials marked a fundamental shift in what French collective memory could acknowledge and, crucially, in what the state could be held responsible for.

That shift was formalized in 1993, when Holocaust Remembrance Day was established for victims of racist and antisemitic persecution under the authority of the French state. The act formalized commemoration at the national level, officially anchoring Holocaust memory in the memorial landscape. Two years later, in 1995, President Jacques Chirac's speech at the Vel d'Hiv

[151] Julia S. Torrie, "France's Role in the Holocaust Revisited: Marrus and Paxton's *Vichy France and the Jews*," *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 4 (2022): 1535–36, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhab537.
[152] Annette Wieviorka, *France and Trials for Crimes against Humanity*, 2002, 218.
[153] Wieviorka, *France and Trials for Crimes against Humanity*, 224.

commemoration publicly acknowledged the responsibility of the French state in the deportation of Jews. The speech signified a symbolic and political break with the earlier Gaullist memory framework by explicitly recognizing state responsibility as a central component of national memory.

5.1.2 Institutionalization and the Contemporary Landscape

In the decades since Chirac's speech, Holocaust remembrance in France has become institutionalized, and the memorial landscape has significantly expanded. The *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris—France's national Holocaust Museum—inaugurated its *Wall of Names* memorial in 2005. The memorial, which lists the names of over 76,000 Jewish men, women, and children who were deported from France between 1942 and 1944, represents a decisive shift from the symbolic universalism of early memorials. In addition, the memorial landscape has expanded to include regional museums that focus on local histories of persecution, embedding Holocaust memory in the geographic locations where these atrocities occurred.

This case study examines two regional memorial landscapes and explores how regional memory influences and shapes national memory. The sites analyzed are the CERCIL- Musée Mémorial des Enfants du Vél d'Hiv in Orleans and the Mémorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation du Camp de Royallieu, both regional institutions that occupy different positions within France's memorial landscape. Together, these two sites examine how France's collective memory of the Holocaust has been constructed at the local level, how the national framework is received and adapted, and, in some cases, quietly contested what it means through the specificity of place, community, and individual memory.

5.2 FRANCE, CASE STUDY #1

CERCIL-Musée Mémorial des enfants du Vel d'Hiv

(CERCIL-Museum Memorial for the Children of the Vel d'Hiv)

Orleans, France

The CERCIL-Musée Mémorial des enfants du Vel d'Hiv (CERCIL-Museum Memorial of the Children of the Vel d'Hiv) occupies a distinctive position within France's Holocaust memorial landscape. Located in Orleans, France, the museum documents the history of the Beaune-la-Rolande and Pithiviers camps, which served as internment and transit camps for Jews, and the Jargeau camp, which functioned as an internment camp for so-called "Nomads."[154] The memorial museum discusses the broader history of arrests, internment, and deportation, giving particular attention to the fate of the thousands of children detained in these camps.

The museum operates under the auspices of CERCIL—*Centre d'étude et de recherche sur les camps d'internement du Loiret* (the Center for Study and Research on Internment Camps in the Loiret region), a research center founded in 1991 to document and disseminate knowledge about the history of the camps in the Loiret region. It situates local and regional history within the broader national framework of persecution and deportation in France.

This history is closely tied to the Vel d'Hiv roundup of 16-17 July 1942, carried out by French police under the Vichy regime, which led to the arrest of approximately 16,000 Jews, including more than 4,700 children.[155] While conducted within the broader framework of

[154] "Les Camps de Pithiviers et de Beaune-La-Rolande," CERCIL-Musée Mémorial Des Enfants Du Vel d'Hiv, Memorial de la Shoah, August 28, 2023, https://www.musee-memorial-cercil.fr/pithiviers-beaune-la-rolande/; "Le Camp de Jargeau," CERCIL-Musée Mémorial Des Enfants Du Vel d'Hiv, Memorial de la Shoah, accessed December 18, 2025, https://www.musee-memorial-cercil.fr/camp-de-jargeau-2/.

[155] Estimates for the number of people and children arrested during the roundup vary across sources. Yad Vashem and the USHMM estimate 13,000 arrests, 4,000 children; the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust cites 13,152 arrests. These discrepancies likely reflect differences in how arrests were counted, which populations were included, and the archival sources consulted. This study cites the figures provided by the CERCIL memorial museum. See Memorial de la Shoah, "Les Camps de Pithiviers et de Beaune-La-Rolande"; "The Vel d'Hiv Roundup," Yad Vashem, accessed May 4, 2026, https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/france/vel-dhiv-roundup; United States Holocaust

German occupation, German authorities did not initially require the arrest of children; their inclusion resulted from decisions made by Vichy officials.[156] After several days of detainment at the *Velodrome d'Hiver* in Paris, thousands of children were transferred to internment camps in the Loiret region before being deported to Auschwitz, where almost none survived.

Inaugurated on January 27, 2011, in a former nursery school, the memorial museum specifically commemorates the Jewish children deported from these camps. The choice to use the former school as a memorial site creates a deliberate juxtaposition between a space associated with learning and growth and the history of child deportation and death. The site not only functions as a memorial museum to children deported from Loiret but also as a site of regional memory that traces how national policies of persecution were enacted at the local level.

Today, the memorial complex functions as a memorial museum featuring a permanent exhibit on the history of the internment camps and the Vel d'Hiv roundups, as well as a memorial dedicated to the thousands of children who were detained and deported. The complex features include a small exhibit titled *Les camps de Beaune-la-Rolande et de Pithiviers dans la mémoire collective* (The Beaune-la-Rolande and Pithiviers camps in collective memory), which presents the history of commemoration in the Loiret region, and a barrack fragment from the Beaune-la-Rolande camp.

5.2.1 History and Evolution of Commemoration

The establishment of the CERCIL museum must be understood within the broader trajectory of French Holocaust memory. As discussed in the introduction, the memory of the

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Memorial Museum, "The Vélodrome d'Hiver (Vél d'Hiv) Roundup," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 22, 2026, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-velodrome-dhiver-vel-dhiv-roundup; "16 July 1942: The Vel d'Hiv Round Up Started," Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, accessed May 4, 2026, https://hmd.org.uk/resource/16-july-1942-the-vel-dhiv-roundup/.

[156] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Vélodrome d'Hiver (Vél d'Hiv) Roundup."

Holocaust can be characterized by selective remembrance. In the immediate postwar period, public discourse primarily emphasized the French resistance and national unity. This not only marginalized the experience of Jewish victims but also obscured the role of French authorities in the antisemitic persecution and deportation of Jews from France. The framework of *résistancialisme* shaped both public commemoration and early historiography, leaving sites such as the Loiret internment camps and the Vel d'Hiv Roundup absent from the national consciousness.

The postwar fate of the Loiret camps further shaped the conditions under which remembrance developed. The Jargeau camp continued to house Roma and Sinti people (the French refer to them as "nomads") until 1945, sixteen months after the liberation of France. The camp was also dismantled. Today, a commemorative ceremony is held annually.

Although thousands of Jews passed through the Loiret camps between 1941 and 1942, including approximately 4,400 children who were deported to Auschwitz, these sites did not immediately become focal points of remembrance. Pithiviers was evacuated in September 1942 and subsequently converted into a detention camp for prisoners. In the 1950s, the camp buildings were demolished, leaving only the former infirmary standing. At Beaune-la-Rolande, no physical traces of the camp remain. The barracks and all furnishings were auctioned off by the State Property Office in 1947. Two barrack fragments are preserved at the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris and at CERCIL. A monument was erected in the city in May 1965.[157]

Early commemorative practices consisted primarily of small memorials and annual pilgrimages by Jewish survivor associations. They acknowledged the roundups and deportations but focused on Nazi violence rather than the role of the Vichy administration. The deportation of

[157] "Le Cercil, Musee-Memorial," CERCIL-Musée Mémorial des enfants du Vel d'Hiv, Memorial de la Shoah, accessed March 27, 2026, https://www.musee-memorial-cercil.fr/le-cercil/.

children, in particular, remained largely unspoken, reflecting a broader reluctance to confront the moral and administrative dimensions of French participation in the Holocaust.

The shift in national and regional remembrance in the late 1970s and 1980s, particularly the growing emphasis on documenting and naming victims, influenced regional commemorative practices. The publication of the Vel d'Hiv convoy lists drew renewed attention to previously marginalized historical sites. In the Loiret region, this shift was reflected in the erection of a monument at Beaune-la-Rolande in 1989. The following year, a newspaper article was published discussing the existence of the two camps and the fate of the children deported from the area.[158]

The emerging visibility translated into institutional action with the creation of the CERCIL in 1991. Established as a research and documentation center, it responded to the absence of preserved camp structures by focusing on the collection, study, and public dissemination of archival evidence related to the internment and deportation of Jews in France.[159] Early initiatives, including a 1992 exhibit at Orléans City Hall, reflected the broader shift towards more public and visible forms of Holocaust remembrance. In 1995, CERCIL began publishing works using personal testimony for educational purposes. The growth of its archival holdings, publications, and educational programs culminated in the opening of a permanent memorial museum in 2011.[160]

In recent years, the CERCIL Memorial Museum has merged with the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris, creating a more unified educational mission focused on teaching the Holocaust within the French framework, especially the Vichy-era roundups and camps. Further, CERCIL has expanded its commemorative and educational activities beyond the memorial museum,

[158] Memorial de la Shoah, "Les Camps de Pithiviers et de Beaune-La-Rolande."
[159] Memorial de la Shoah, "Le Cercil, Musee-Memorial."
[160] Memorial de la Shoah, "Le Cercil, Musee-Memorial."

incorporating the *Gare de Pithiviers* (Pithiviers Train Station) as an associated site of memory linked to the deportations from the Loiret region.

5.2.2 Spatial and Memorial Landscape

The children's memorial is housed in a former nursery school building with no direct historical connection to the camps. Located in a tan-colored structure, the building's exterior features large photographs of children, signaling the memorial's focus on children. The primary photo is of a young girl named Aline Korenbajzer, a three-year-old girl whose photograph has become the face of CERCIL's mission (see Figure 14A in Appendix A). Aline's story encapsulates the experience of the children commemorated at the site. Born in 1939, Aline's father was arrested in the first roundup. On July 16, 1942, she and her mother were arrested. She was interned at Beaune-la-Rolande before being murdered at Auschwitz. Her photo, along with a collection of family photos, was entrusted to CERCIL. The photo was first featured in the institution's first exhibit and continues to serve as a visual emblem for the memorial.[161]

Although the school has no direct historical connection to the internment camps or deportations, the former school creates a spatial metaphor. What was once a place of education and growth is now a vessel through which the memory of deported children is presented. The use of Aline's photograph mounted on the exterior of the building establishes a spatial and symbolic framework that introduces and personalizes the story before visitors enter the exhibit.

Courtyard

Upon entering through the main entrance, visitors walk into a courtyard that serves as a transitional space. It includes a fragment of an original camp barrack, temporary exhibitions, and contextual panels that address the memory of the camps. The courtyard extends the narrative's

[161] Memorial de la Shoah, "Le Cercil, Musee-Memorial."

presence into the exterior environment, offering a space where material remnants and interpretive text supplement the archival focus of the interior exhibition.

Barrack 4 from Beaune-la-Rolande

One of the few material remnants left of the Loiret camps is Barrack 4 from the Beaune-La-Rolande internment camp. After the camp's closure, the barracks and furnishings were auctioned off, with many purchased by local farmers. In 2005, Barrack 4 was rediscovered by CERCIL, which initiated efforts to restore and preserve it. Because the structure had to be dismantled for relocation, approximately one-ninth of the barracks was saved.[162] The barrack is presented with minimal intervention. Inside, basic bunks and two interpretive panels provide historical context through text, documentation, and photographs, addressing both its original function and its postwar history.

Les camps de Beaune la Rolande et de Pithiviers dans la memoire collective

Mounted along the exterior wall of the museum building in the courtyard is a small exhibit titled *Les camps de Beaune-la-Rolande et de Pithiviers dans la mémoire collective* (The camps of Beaune-la-Rolande and Pithiviers in collective memory) (See Figure 10B in Appendix A). The exhibit, comprised of twenty-two dark blue panels with white text, serves as a transitional space between the permanent exhibit and the courtyard. Presented in French, the exhibit traces the postwar evolution of remembrance in the Loiret region.

The narrative begins in 1946, emphasizing how survivor-led commemorations framed responsibility in terms of Nazi violence and made no reference to the deportation of children. Subsequent panels chart the gradual emergence of the public's knowledge of the camps, the deportation convoys, and the Vichy regime's role in the deportation of Jews from France through the growth of publications, monuments, and public debate. The exhibit culminates in the creation

[162] Memorial de la Shoah, "Le Cercil, Musee-Memorial."

of CERCIL and the subsequent recognition of the government's role in the Vel d'Hiv Roundups. The final panel concludes with Barrack 4 being listed as a historical monument, marking the transition from symbolic acknowledgment to material preservation.

As a whole, the courtyard installation traces the development of commemoration in the Loiret region, highlighting the gradual recognition of regional memory within the broader framework of France's Holocaust memory. In doing so, the panels implicitly situate the memorial within the country's evolution of remembrance.

5.2.3 Exhibition Design and Spatial Narrative

The permanent exhibit reflects the broader mission of the memorial, prioritizing the documentation of the history of the Jewish internment and deportation in the Loiret region. The exhibit is presented exclusively in French, indicating the target audience is French nationals.

Located on the right side of the museum complex, the exhibit occupies a long, narrow space, visually divided into two parallel pathways by large panels. This linear and segmented layout structures the visitor's movement, reinforcing a chronological progression through the history of internment and deportation in France. The exhibit itself is grouped into five sections.

Upon entering the space, visitors encounter four gray introductory panels. The first, *"La marche à la guerre"* (The road to war), includes a video excerpt from the movie *La France et les Français pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (*France and the French during the Second World War). It provides a brief video introduction to the war and the invasion of France. The subsequent introductory panels briefly discuss the collapse of France and the establishment of the Vichy regime. The first panel, titled "*De la defaite au régime de Vichy*" (From defeat to the Vichy regime), provides an overview of Vichy's antisemitic policies, its cooperation with the Nazi policy of exterminating the Jews. The second panel, "*L'internement en France*" (Internment

in France), expands upon the cooperation addressing the internment of various groups deemed "undesirable." This established that the framework and legality of internment were already in place before the roundup. The last two panels discuss the Jargeau Camp and the internment of the "nomads." A photo of the introductory panels is shown in Figure 10C of Appendix A.

The central portion of the exhibit focuses on the Vel d'Hiv roundups and life in the internment camps. Organized into three color-coded sections, the panels line both sides of the corridor, dividing the entire exhibition space in half and guiding visitors through successive phases of persecution. The first subsection, "*d'Abord Les Hommes…*" (First the men…), is presented on teal panels. They focus on the initial arrest and internment of adult men. The second set of red brick panels titled, "… *Puis Les Femmes et Les Enfants*" (…then the women and children), marks the expansion of arrests to include women and children. The third set of panels, "*il n'y a plus que des gosses*" (There are only children left), rendered in a deep rose-pink color, emphasizes the isolation of children following the deportation of the women and mothers (see Figure 10D in Appendix A). The fourth set of panels features the same rose-pink color, titled "*Les Camps Apres L'ete 1942*" (The camps after the summer of 1942), which highlights the distress of the children who were left at the camps.

Across these sections, the exhibit displays administrative documents, letters, personal correspondence, and personal family photos taken before internment to tell its story. A small number of photographs taken inside the camps during their operation are included, primarily on the panel addressing the internment of men. According to the museum's director, there are few photographs of the camps during the detention of women and children. Beneath these panels, a timeline traces the chronology of anti-Jewish persecution in France, beginning with the exclusionary measures in 1940 and culminating in internment and deportation. The timeline

situates the exhibit and the Loiret region within a broader narrative of national anti-Jewish persecution.

In this section, on the right-hand side, four black panels are positioned perpendicularly to the rest of the exhibits. Each panel, containing information on both sides, incorporates small video screens. The panels list the deportation convoys that departed France to extermination camps, listing the number of Jews and children on each transport, including the age of the youngest child. The screens display scrolling lists of the names of individuals deported from the Loiret internment camps. By combining numerical data with individual names, the site moves beyond statistical representation, restoring a sense of humanity. Further, these lists reinforce the regional focus within the broader deportation system.

At the end of the corridor, visitors enter a more enclosed space defined by darker lighting and black panels with white text. This section addresses the deportation convoys themselves and explicitly introduces the term *La Shoah.* Statistical panels present data on Jewish populations in Europe before 1939 and the scale of their destruction due to genocide. Inside the secluded area, the exhibit shows photos from camps. The spatial compression and darker color palette distinguish this section from the earlier sections of the exhibit.

The fourth section of the exhibit returns to the lighter, gray-toned panels. These panels outline the implementation of anti-Jewish measures, including exclusion from public places, confiscation of property, and the tightening of restrictions specifically in the Loiret region. The final portion of the exhibit centers on individual experiences and survival. The display features recorded testimonies, personal objects, and brief biographies, including accounts from children who survived through concealment or assisted networks. A photograph of an overview of the exhibit can be found in Figure 10E in Appendix A.

An interesting aspect of the exhibit is a small section that addresses the participation of Jews in the resistance and in combat, stating, “Jews were not passive victims of Nazi Germany. They actively fought it…” Following this text, a light blue panel presents the biography of a Jewish man who fought with the resistance, along with a small collection of personal artifacts. The inclusion of this is significant within the French memorial context as it aligns the Jewish experience with the long-standing national narrative that emphasizes resistance and liberation. By incorporating this story, the narrative negotiates between victimhood and agency, which reflects how the resistance continues to shape how the Holocaust is presented in France.

5.2.4 Memorial to the Children of Vel d’Hiv

The Children’s Memorial occupies a distinct spatial zone within the museum. Located at the conclusion of the permanent exhibit, visitors must pass through the memorial room to exit the exhibit. The enclosed space, separated by a door, establishes a transition from learning through documentation to commemoration and reflection.

Before entering the memorial and exiting the exhibit, visitors encounter a large panel divided into three sections. The first panel discusses statistical information, including the number of children interned, deported, and those who survived. The central section, set against a black background with white text, lists the names of the children and teenagers who survived deportation. The third section explains the purpose and origins of the memorial, situating the project within the memorial museum's mission as a whole: to restore each child’s identity not only through documentation but by humanizing them through photographic representation.

Passing through the door, visitors enter a large room lined with illuminated panels composed of small, white squares, where a photo of each deported child is intended to be displayed (see Figure 10F in Appendix A). Where photos have been recovered, individual images

are shown; where no photo exists, the square remains empty. The grid-like structure produces a visual field in which presence and absence are given equal spatial weight, thus removing the hierarchical differentiation that some memorials can present. Furthermore, the visual structure makes the absence materially visible, as many of the squares remain empty. The decision to dedicate the memorial exclusively to children—rather than to all deportees—reflects a deliberate commemorative choice that foregrounds vulnerability and innocence as a central framework of remembrance.

5.3 FRANCE, CASE STUDY #2

MÈMORIAL DE L'INTERNEMENT ET DE LA DÈPORTATION DU CAMP DE ROYALLIEU À COMPIÈGNE

(Memorial of Internment and Deportation-Royallieu Camp)

Compiegne, France

The Mémorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation du Camp de Royallieu (Memorial of Internment and Deportation-Royallieu Camp) is located on the outskirts of Compiègne, France. Built in 1913 as French military barracks, the site housed a hospital during World War I and an evacuation hospital until 1940. Following the German occupation of France, the camp was repurposed by the German army to house prisoners of war. Renamed *Frontstalag 170 KN 654*, the camp housed British and French prisoners.[163]

In June 1941, the camp was redesignated *Frontstalag 122,* becoming an internment camp for so-called "active enemy elements," including civilians, communists, resistance members, and political prisoners, among them Americans.[164] Later that year, the first Jewish prisoners arrived from Drancy Internment Camp and were confined in Block C, a special section designated for Jews. From 1941 to 1944, the camp was used as an internment and transit camp, where more than 45,000 people were deported to Nazi concentration and extermination camps. The first convoy left in March 1942, carrying one thousand Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Between 1942 and 1944, twenty-eight convoys left the camp, carrying primarily resistance fighters and political detainees.[165]

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[163] Sara Kadosh et al., "Frontstammlager (Frontstalag) 122," in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945*, IV: Camps and Other Detention Facilities under the German Armed Forces, trans. Kathleen Luft (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022; repr., Project Muse, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1353/document.4432.

[164] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu (Exhibit Catalogue)* (2008), 12.

[165] It is important to note that these figures are approximate and comprehensive records are limited. Moreover, German authorities destroyed many of the archives further complicating efforts to reconstruct precise data.

While Royallieu did not operate as a traditional concentration camp within the Nazi camp system, it functioned as a node within the German oppression and deportation machine. Unlike Mauthausen or Ebensee, where prisoners were subjected to forced labor, detainees at Royallieu were only obligated to maintain the site and perform basic chores. While there was relative autonomy, the conditions did not preclude violence, medical neglect, or abuse, nor did they mitigate the camp's primary function as a deportation site. The last deportation convoy departed on August 17, 1944. The camp and city were liberated later that month by American Allied forces.

Today, the camp complex functions as a hybrid preserved historical site and memorial, housing two monuments and a permanent exhibition within the preserved barracks. The site occupies a unique position within the national and regional memorial landscape of both France and the city of Compiègne, which is more commonly associated in French collective memory with the signing of the 1918 Armistice that ended World War I, and the 1940 surrender armistice. In this context, the camp complicates the city's commemorative identity by including a history of internment and deportation. Of the original twenty-five barracks, three have been preserved and adapted to present the camp's history, allowing the site's material remains to serve as the primary interpretive framework.

Royallieu's history as an internment and transit camp, along with its late memorialization, demonstrates how sites outside the Nazi camp system played a central role in deportation, oppression, and the Holocaust as a whole. Its function as a transit camp highlights the significance of these intermediary sites within the deportation machine, their significance in Holocaust history and memory, and the challenges they pose when the primary evidence of their history is movement rather than mass death.

5.3.1 History and Evolution of Commemoration

In the decades following the liberation of Compiègne in 1944, Camp Royallieu did not emerge as a focal point of remembrance. Despite being the second-largest transit camp in France, the site was largely overshadowed by the dominant postwar narrative of resistance and liberation that shaped French commemorative culture in the immediate aftermath of the war.

In August 1946, the city organized a four-day series of commemorative celebrations centered on the return of the 1918 Armistice monument from the Rethondes Clearing. This celebration marked the recovery of the commemorative slab that had initially been placed at the site where the Armistice ending World War I was signed. When Hitler ordered the 1940 Armistice with France to be signed in the same railway carriage, the slab was dismantled and transported to Germany. The carriage was displayed in Berlin as a war trophy. Although the carriage was destroyed during the Battle of Berlin, fragments of the slab survived and returned to France after the war.[166]

During the 1946 festivities, ceremonies were held at the former campsite for political deportees and prisoners of war, including the laying of a foundation stone for a monument that grouped political deportees, forced laborers, prisoners of war, and resistance fighters into a shared commemorative framework.[167] The monument was intended to symbolize the struggle of all French people against Nazi occupation, further reflecting the early postwar tendency to privilege collective suffering and resistance over Jewish suffering and specific histories of internment, deportation, and persecution.

Within this commemorative landscape, Royallieu was acknowledged but not recognized as a distinct site of Holocaust memory. Its function as a transit camp did not align with the

[166] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 183.
[167] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 183–84.

dominant narratives of the immediate postwar period. Furthermore, the site continued to be used by the French military for decades, restricting both public access and preservation. As a result, the camp remained largely absent from formal remembrance, and its physical structures were shaped more by military use than by commemoration.

A significant shift occurred in the 1990s following the French army's withdrawal from the barracks. In 1993, amid a national restructuring plan for the French military, ownership of the land was transferred from the Ministry of Defense to the city of Compiegne, with the intent to establish a memorial museum adjacent to the existing deportation monument, inaugurated in the 1970s. This was the first time the municipality became directly involved in the site's use. Furthermore, the French state agreed to contribute 2,000,000 euros to the project, provided that the city assumed responsibility as both project owner and operator. The mayor of Compiegne played a central role in initiating and negotiating the arrangements, highlighting the extent to which the memorialization of Royallieu was driven by municipal rather than national or survivor initiatives. This framework established the institutional financial and administrative foundation for the memorial. In 2008, the Memorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation, Camp de Royallieu, was inaugurated, formally designating the former camp a site of Holocaust commemoration.[168]

5.3.2 Spatial and Memorial Landscape

The spatial and memorial landscape of the camp is shaped not only by the preserved barracks and internal exhibition space, but also by its broader geographical and symbolic context. The site is located near the Forest of Compiegne, the location where the armistice ending World War I was signed. In French memory, the city of Compiegne had long been

[168] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*.

associated with victory over Germany. That symbolic landscape was disrupted in 1940, when Hitler forced France to sign its surrender in the same railway car at the exact location where the 1918 Armistice had been signed. This turned a site of national triumph and pride into one of humiliation and defeat.

Although the Armistice site lies outside the memorial's physical boundaries, the history of the carriage is invoked in the museum's introductory narrative to situate Royallieu within the broader context of defeat, occupation, and repression. This frames the camp not as an isolated space of internment but as a wider part of a geographical memorial where national trauma and occupation-era trauma intersect. The site complicates Compiegne's commemorative identity rather than simply adding to it.

The memorial's spatial landscape is further defined by the preservation of original structures alongside contemporary architecture. The crux of the memorial is anchored in the surviving barracks of the former camp; however, the visitor center plays a central role in framing the site as a contemporary place of interpretation and remembrance. Architecturally, the approach was to integrate the memorial complex into the city's physical landscape and the surrounding neighborhood while also maintaining its distinct identity.[169] This was achieved by constructing a double wall that mimics the camp's original perimeter fence. The two white facades stretch along the main avenue, "breaking" open at the memorial entrance, where the Wall of Names memorial is positioned between the facades (see Figure 15A in Appendix A). The memorial, constructed of transparent panels, allows visitors to see the stark contrast between the new contemporary structure and the original barracks.

[169] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 7.

Surviving Barracks

Three original barracks (A1, A2, and A3) remain out of the original twenty-five. Two are used to house the permanent exhibit. The preserved buildings serve as both exhibition spaces and exhibited objects. Internally, staff removed the layers of paint from interior walls to reveal the barracks' different eras and allow the barracks themselves to serve as historical evidence. Additionally, the leveling of embankments between the buildings, along with elements of the outdoor furnishings, was created using materials from other demolished camp buildings.[170] In all, the barracks guide visitor movement across the former campgrounds, directing them along paths that reflect the site's original spatial order without reconstructing the camp in its entirety.

Wall of Names

Positioned at the entrance to the memorial complex, adjacent to the visitor center, the Wall of Names memorial is integrated into the double white façade "fence" architecture of the entrance (see Figure 15A in Appendix A). Comprised of transparent panels, the memorial lists the 40,000 names of known internees and deportees. The memorial's location makes it one of the first structures visitors encounter as they enter the complex, standing as an intermediary structure between the modern world and the history it commemorates. The first panel is located within the visitor center.

Due to the lack of archival documentation, the list was compiled under the supervision of the *Fondation pour la mémoire de la deportation* (Foundation for the Memory of Deportation), with information being provided by various memorials and archives. The Wall of Names reflects the fragmentary nature of the site's historical records and remains incomplete, a condition that highlights absence as an integral aspect of the site's commemorative framework.

[170] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 9.

Garden of Memory

The Garden of Memory is the open-air component of the memorial landscape extending along the perimeter of the former campgrounds. The garden area serves as an exterior exhibition space. Along the perimeter, eleven large vertical steles display maps and historical photographs. In addition, there are eight stone seating elements called "talking" chairs distributed throughout the garden (see Figure 15B in Appendix A). These spaces invite visitors to sit and listen to audio testimonies accessed through adjacent panels.

The Escape Tunnel

Two escape tunnels were discovered at the site. The first, discovered in 1975, has been preserved in the memorial complex, and the second, discovered in 2007 during the memorial's development. A shelter was constructed to protect the excavation using salvaged materials from demolished structures. The new building outlines the original structure from which the tunnel was dug. While escapes were rare at the camp, a few were successful, which "fueled the imagination and escape dreams of all internees."[171] Inside the building, interpretive panels document some of these escapes and the individuals who attempted them. Estimates suggest that approximately one hundred internees successfully escaped between 1942 and 1944.

Other Memorial Elements

On both sides of the main entrance are two monuments that are incorporated into the memorial complex. The Monument to the Royallieu Deportees, which was erected in the 1970s, commemorates those interned and deported from the camp during Nazi occupation. The Monument to the Glory of the 1914-1918 Soldiers commemorates World War I, recalling the use of Camp Royallieu as a military barracks and hospital during the war. Each monument commemorates a distinct phase within the camp's history.

[171] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 11.

Following the perimeter walls from either direction leads visitors past one of the two monuments toward the central entrance. When the wall "breaks," visitors are confronted with the view of the preserved barracks and the physical location where the events commemorated by the monuments took place. Depending on the direction of approach, the barracks are encountered either as former military structures from World War I or as sites of internment and deportation during World War II. This spatial arrangement ensures that, regardless of which end of Avenue des Martyrs de la Liberté visitors approach, they encounter a sequence of commemoration before entering the former camp.

5.3.3 Exhibition Design and Spatial Narrative

Royallieu's permanent exhibition opened in 2008. Occupying two of the three remaining barracks located in the former camp, the exhibition "allows us to understand today how the Nazis moved from a policy of repression… to a policy of deportation, much of which was racially motivated."[172] Conceived and developed by the city of Compiegne with the support of regional and state authorities, the exhibit reflects a municipality-led approach to Holocaust remembrance. Its design deliberately respects the historical traces preserved throughout the barracks, allowing the original constructions of the buildings to remain visible and legible throughout the exhibit.

Organized into ten thematic sections across two barracks, the exhibit is presented chronologically and thematically.[173] The framework draws on the most recent contributions to the camp's historiography, addressing Vichy France, German occupation, military repression, the camp system, the French resistance, and the aftermath of Nazi occupation in France.

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[172] Internment and Deportation Memorial-Royallieu Camp, *Internment and Deportation Memorial Royallieu Camp Pamphlet* (Internment and Deportation Memorial Royallieu Camp, n.d.).

[173] There are three remaining barracks (A1, A2, and A3) located on the camp. When the Germans took over the camp, the camp was organized into Camp A, Camp B, and Camp C. Each camp was designated for different categories of detainees. Camp A, which housed "political prisoners, resistance fighters, and those suspected of subversive activities." The three surviving barracks belong to this section of the camp.

5.3.3.1 Spatial and Visual Structure: The Historic Barracks as an Exhibition Space

The memorial uses the former barracks as the primary exhibition space. Similar to the Mauthausen Memorial, the exhibit is distributed within the surviving structures, with the buildings functioning as both exhibition spaces and artifacts. Spatially, the design follows the architecture of the barracks, guiding visitors sequentially through each enclosed, cell-like room before channeling them into a long corridor lined with the doors to the former barrack rooms. This arrangement visually reinforces a controlled linear movement through the exhibit, while also visually emphasizing confinement.

Curators chose to expose all historical layers to reveal the site's traces throughout the twentieth century. The flooring has been removed, revealing the original concrete floors internees walked on. The suspended ceilings added in the 1970s have been dismantled, revealing the plaster ceilings of the dormitories. The recent paint on the walls has been scraped off, exposing layers of materials, colors, and decorations that tell the site's story. The aim of this approach was to present the accumulation of history that reflects the site's changing uses over time.[174] The exhibit is thus embedded in the site's physical fabric, allowing the architecture to help communicate the story.

Movement through the space is structured rather than exploratory. Visitors proceed room by room, progressing with the chronological narrative and theming. The visual design operates on two tiers. Black panels serve as thematic headers, naming each section and outlining its argument. White panels feature archival and documentary detail, including reproductions of documents, photographs, biographical information, and supporting evidence. The black panels explain what visitors are looking at, whereas the white panels present evidence. This two-tier

[174] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 8.

system allows the exhibition to maintain a legible interpretive narrative while keeping its primary sources visible and available alongside it.

5.3.3.2 Thematic and Chronological Narrative

The main exhibit is organized across ten sections that combine chronological progression with a thematic emphasis. Sections one through six are housed in Barrack A1, focusing on the transformation of the site from a French military installation to an internment and deportation center. These sections address the defeat of France, German occupation, the establishment of the Vichy regime, and the broader processes of collaboration, repression, and resistance within France. They also introduce the camp structure, including the administration and guards.

Beginning in Barrack A1, titled *D'un armistice à l'autre* (From one armistice to the other), the opening room is cinematic with two large-scale projections covering opposite walls. One side presents 1918, showing aerial imagery of the site and the signing of the 1918 Armistice, and the other shows film footage from 1940 (see Figure 15C in Appendix A). The juxtaposition centers on the story of Foch's railway carriage, which became both a symbol of French victory and, later, German revenge.[175] By framing the exhibition through the two armistices, the narrative contrasts French victory with defeat and links Royallieu's transformation directly to it. Further, it links the site to the city's commemorative identity, associating the history of internment and deportation with a place already embedded in French national memory. The subsequent sections move through the occupation of France, collaboration, repression, and resistance before turning to the themes of internment and deportation. This progression reflects a familiar narrative structure within French Holocaust memory, in which occupation and resistance function as primary organizing frameworks. At the same time, the exhibition presents

[175] Memorial de l'internement et de la deportation-Camp de Royallieu, *Royallieu Camp Exhibit Catalogue*, 15.

documentary evidence of French administrative participation in the internment and deportation process.

Newsreels are displayed on television screens alongside documentary panels and propaganda materials, all of which are designed to frame collaboration as serving French interests. The format gives the section a different sensory register from the document-heavy panels that surround it. It places visitors in the position of a wartime audience receiving information through official channels. The abundance of propaganda material reflects how the occupation was communicated to and managed within French civilian life, not only how it was enforced.

Barrack A2 marks a clear shift in focus: sections seven through ten shift from the political and institutional structures to the experiences of the internees. Across Barrack A2, the exhibit focuses on the traces left behind by the interned. There is also a shift in curatorial strategy. Whereas Barrack A1 relies on documentary evidence and video reels, A2's central feature is the use of enlarged drawings, engravings of views of the camp, and overhead audio that plays recreated sounds of daily life in the barracks. There are no physical artifacts displayed; instead, the exhibit relies on drawings, personal notes, art, and letters produced by internees during their detention. The emphasis shifts from explaining how the camp functioned to how it was experienced.

Two rooms are worth noting. The first is the dormitory room (section eight), which uses no interpretive panels; instead, it uses floor markings to indicate where the bunks once stood (see Figure 15E in Appendix A). On one side, the original impression of the bunk remains visible; on the other, tape outlines the location and size. Six photographs of prisoners are projected within the space, and an interactive table sits in the middle where visitors can listen to letters read aloud

by actors, creating a more personal engagement with personal accounts. The second is the area that presents section nine—the deportations. Using large-format photographs and document scans, the deportation process is presented alongside telegrams from Adolf Eichmann. The heterogeneity of the camp population is reflected here, which includes political prisoners, resistance fighters, Jews, and foreign nationals.

The final section of the exhibit, which occupies the last room, contains seven double screens displaying footage from the liberation by Allied forces at Nazi campsites that were the primary destinations of internees deported from Royallieu (see Figure 15F in Appendix A). The footage shows the conditions allied forces encountered upon arrival: bodies, survivors, and the evidence of mass death. Significantly, the room is labeled "Nazi camps" rather than "liberation"—a curatorial choice that highlights the conditions of the camps over the narrative of Allied rescue. This distances the exhibit from the triumphalist framing that characterizes American uses of the same imagery.

Each screen pairs visual footage with audio testimony, including material from the Nuremberg Trials and later survivor accounts. This briefly extends the narrative beyond liberation into postwar memory and accountability. Yet, the absence of interpretive framing leaves the connection between the French collaboration documented throughout the preceding sections of Barrack A1 and the implicit suffering on the screens unclear. Instead, visitors are required to make the connection without curatorial guidance. Overall, while the exhibit presents evidence of collaboration, its victim-centered framing leaves the moral connection between perpetrators and victims unstated.

5.3.3.3 Language and Interpretive Framing

The exhibit's use of language directs responsibility toward the German occupiers. Throughout the exhibit, acts of perpetration are frequently attributed to the "occupier" or "occupying forces." In other instances, Adolf Hitler is mentioned as an individual agent. The recurring formulation "Hitler ordered" assigns causation to a single figure rather than the administrative and institutional systems through which those orders were implemented within France.

This framing stands in contrast to the documentary evidence presented alongside it. Archival materials, including police reports and administrative records, demonstrate that French institutions, particularly Vichy and the French police, actively participated in deportations. Yet the interpretive narrative does not consistently center these institutions as primary agents. This creates a tension between the documentary evidence on display and the narrative that explains it. While the documents established complicity, the narrative voice continues to organize the story around occupation and resistance. This reflects a broader pattern in French Holocaust memory, where collaboration is acknowledged but remains secondary to narratives of occupation and resistance.

5.3.3.4 Visual Strategy

Royallieu's visual strategy is central to how the exhibit creates a more immersive experience for visitors. Rather than relying solely on wall-mounted panels, the exhibition uses the full architectural surface of the barracks' walls, floors, and ceilings to project or display data. This approach places visitors within the exhibit's visual field, surrounding them with historical imagery rather than positioning them as detached observers.

In sections addressing occupation and collaboration, ceiling-mounted projectors cast colored maps onto the floor that depict zones of occupation. Other sections employ large-scale video projections, audio installations, and spatial markings to evoke the experience of internment. In the dormitory room, floor markings indicate the former placement of bunks, while overhead voices read letters written by prisoners aloud.

The exhibit ends in a plain room, where visitors encounter seven pillars aligned in the center, each fitted with back-to-back screens. On one side, photos and videos from the liberation of the camps are shown; on the other, footage from survivors' interviews and the Nuremberg trials. The material is presented without interpretive framing or warning, forcing visitors to confront images of mass death. The placement and framing of this material distinguishes Royallieu from both the USHMM, where liberation footage functions as moral vindication, and from Mauthausen, where footage is selectively displayed to reflect the memorial's ethical framework for managing difficult imagery at a site where Austrians were both victim and perpetrator.

5.3.3.5 Material Evidence and Personal Narratives

The exhibit relies heavily on documentary materials. Archival documents, including police reports, administrative correspondence, and transfer records, are presented throughout the exhibit (see Figure 15D in Appendix A). As with other sites of perpetration, these records are presented throughout the exhibit to ground the narrative in verifiable evidence. The materials also demonstrate the bureaucratic processes through which internment and deportation were carried out, as well as the involvement of both German and French authorities.

Unlike CERCIL, Royallieu contains no original artifacts. While no definitive reason is documented, this likely reflects its function as a transit camp rather than as a site of long-term

imprisonment. In response, the exhibit relies on document reproductions, photographs, and personal testimony as its primary forms of evidence. Personal narratives, letters, and individual biographies also play a significant role in humanizing the camp's population and transforming documentation into accounts of lived experiences. Further, the emphasis on individual experiences reflects broader trends in Holocaust memory, in which testimony and personal narrative serve as key vehicles for historical understanding.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Holocaust museums and memorials serve multiple functions, preserving documents and artifacts, honoring the deceased, educating the public, and providing spaces for collective mourning. They also reflect the national collective memory in which they were established and continue to operate. The institutions analyzed in this thesis are interpretive spaces in which curatorial choices, spatial layout and design, and institutional purpose influence visitor interpretation and national framings of the Holocaust.

As L. I. Oztig observes, "each Holocaust Museum contributes to Holocaust Memorial culture differently. While Holocaust Memorial culture has an international dimension, the Holocaust has not become 'one totalizing signifier containing the same meanings for everyone.'"[176] This is supported by the preceding case studies, which examine how Holocaust memory is presented throughout four sites in Austria and France. The sites examined, KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee, CERCIL-Musee Memorial des enfants du Vel d'Hiv, and Mémorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation - Camp de Royallieu, are not neutral repositories of history but are sites where communities (whether national, regional, or both) negotiate memory, reflect institutional priorities, and develop evolving approaches to Holocaust commemoration. The differences in tone, spatial design, use of objects, narrative framing, and other curatorial strategies are structured responses to how each country has understood and processed its history and its relationship to the Holocaust. Further, these sites engage with Holocaust history in ways shaped by the commemorative cultures of Austria and France. Understanding how and why they do so is central to this thesis.

[176] Oztig, "Holocaust Museums, Holocaust Memorial Culture, and Individuals: A Constructivist Perspective."

6.1 Austria and France within the Commemorative Triangle

The preceding case studies established that Austrian and French institutions make different curatorial choices in sequencing, language, use of objects and photographs, and the degree of affective engagement they invite or withhold. The question Chapter 6 addresses is not what those differences are but what they reveal. Answering this question requires returning to the triangular framework introduced in Chapter 3.5: Analytical Framework to examine what it shows when applied across four institutions in two contested national contexts.

The triangular framework introduced in Chapter 3 emerged inductively from comparative fieldwork across forty sites in six countries. As previously shown in Figure 3, Germany, the United States, and Poland occupy the positions of perpetrator, liberator, and victim, respectively. These positions are not neutral descriptors but function as structuring devices that shape how nations publicly construct and present their collective memories. The framework revealed that their wartime roles, postwar narratives, and commemorative strategies aligned in a predictable, highly coherent manner.

Germany, as the perpetrator, primarily uses documentation centers to present historical events related to National Socialism, frequently with "no original works or objects,"[177] reflecting a broader emphasis on documentary evidence and analytical presentation. Other German institutions, including historical sites and traditional museums, similarly prioritize documentary evidence, often incorporating minimal artifact displays. Across these institutions, exhibition design is typically characterized by restrained visual elements and limited use of color. This consistency is illustrated in Figure 4 in Appendix A, which brings together images from multiple German institutions.

[177] Hans Günter Hockerts et al., *Munich and National Socialism: Catalogue of the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*.

On the other two ends of the spectrum, American and Polish institutions more frequently employ immersive, artifact-centered displays, though these approaches vary slightly by site type. In the United States, purpose-built museums are typically organized around a liberator narrative, while in Poland, former extermination sites and preserved historical landscapes center victimhood through the use of material remains and spatial experience. In these contexts, the relationship between national narrative and exhibition strategy is relatively coherent, producing exhibits that align with broader transnational expectations. These approaches are not just curatorial preferences but rather institutional expressions of national positions, shaped in large part by postwar and Cold War politics. See Figure 5 and Figure 6 in Appendix A for a visual overview of American and Polish exhibits.

However, when applied to Austrian and French institutions, the framework revealed that this coherence breaks down in countries where postwar narratives were more contested. Neither country occupies a stable or singular position; rather, both produce institutions that navigate between perpetrator acknowledgment, victim commemoration, and frameworks of resistance and liberation. Their evolving narratives produce commemorative landscapes that reflect ongoing negotiation rather than a stable alignment.

6.1.1 National Narratives and the Reflective Commemorative Identity

While the postwar positions Austria and France occupied shaped the broad contours of their memorial landscapes, the four sites examined demonstrate that those narratives were expressed unevenly. When each site was established, by whom, and at what level—whether national or local—determined what was commemorated and how.

Both countries entered the postwar period with nuanced, complex postwar narratives. As Tony Judt explained, postwar Europe broadly resolved the moral complexities of wartime

behavior by assigning responsibility to Germany. This allowed other countries to minimize their roles in collaboration and complicity, positioning themselves as victims or resisters.[178]

In Austria's case, the state constructed its postwar narrative through the construction of the *Opferthese* (the "first victim" thesis), which framed the country as the first victim of Nazi aggression rather than as a willing collaborator. Over time, this narrative was increasingly challenged by several political events, including the Waldheim affair, Vranitzky's 1991 acknowledgment of complicity, and pressure from the EU. As a result, Austria occupies a transitional space between victimhood and perpetration.

While the postwar position Austria occupied shaped the broad contours of its memorial landscape, the Mauthausen Memorial and the Ebensee Memorial demonstrate that those narratives were unevenly expressed. The consequences of the first victim myth are directly legible in the commemorative landscape. The first permanent exhibit on the Holocaust did not open until 1970 at Mauthausen, emphasizing Austrian resistance and victimhood.[179] From there, as the postwar narrative was challenged, the commemorative space and Mauthausen evolved, reflecting the overall trajectory of Austrian memory culture.

The Ebensee Memorial, however, follows a different trajectory. With the physical camp demolished in the immediate postwar years, the erasure of the camp was itself a product of the victim narrative. The consequence of "erasing" the camp is the challenge to reconstruct the site's memory and history through the few surviving structures. The newer contemporary museum, located two kilometers from the former camp, places the burden of historical understanding on

[178] Judt, "The Past Is Another Country," 85–90.
[179] Mauthausen Memorial, *Mauthausen 1938-1945 Exhibit Catalogue*, 289; Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstatte Mauthausen*, 234.

curatorial mediation rather than on material remains, as at Mauthausen. The fragmentation of the memorial is not only spatial but interpretive.

Together, the Mauthausen and Ebensee memorials reflect what Pierre Nora describes as the function of *lieux de memoire*: sites that emerge to carry the commemorative weight when living memory is gone.[180] Yet they also reflect the uneven construction of Austrian memory. Mauthausen became the central national site where Austria confronted its role in World War II and the Holocaust. Ebensee, with fewer resources and a more immediate local connection to the history, reflects a slower, more uncomfortable process. The contrast demonstrates that national narratives do not operate evenly, but are filtered through institutional scale, local context, and political priorities.

France presents a different, but equally complex, configuration. Postwar, France initially constructed two dominant narratives of resistance and victimization.[181] However, the two "memories" were consolidated into Henry Rousso's concept of *résistancialisme*. The narrative dominated public memory for decades, marginalizing both the role of the French state in deportation and the specific suffering of Jewish victims.

The establishment of CERCIL reflects this delay. Founded in 1991 with the support of local municipalities, CERCIL began as a regional research and documentation organization focused on gathering information about the internment camps in the Loiret region. Its founding followed a gradual shift in public awareness, particularly after the 1987 Barbie trial, which brought national attention to the deportation of Jewish children.[182] The CERCIL Memorial

[180] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7.
[181] Meyer et al., "Memory of World War II in France," 137.
[182] The trial of Klaus Barbie in 1987 centered around the arrest and deportation of the children of Izieu, France. However, although it was a separate event from the Vel d'Hiv roundup, which is the focus of the CERCIL memorial, the trial highlighted the systemic inclusion of children in deportation policies and contributed to a broader acknowledgment that minors were arrested, deported, and murdered. See Wieviorka, *France and Trials for Crimes against Humanity*.

Museum for the Children of the Vel d'Hiv was founded in 2011, and in 2018, it merged with the national Shoah Memorial in Paris, bringing it into the national commemorative framework. The trajectory from a local research initiative to part of a larger national memorial institution reflects the slow and uneven return of suppressed history into French public memory.

The Memorial of Internment and Deportation-Royallieu Camp, on the other hand, initially focused on resistance and its regional history. The site remained in use by the French military until the 1990s, making it inaccessible for commemoration. When it finally became a memorial in 2008, local initiatives led commemorative action. As a result, the site reflects a distinctly regional framework with the exhibit situating the camp within the broader history of the city of Compiegne. Thus, the camp is part of a regional commemorative landscape already layered with competing histories.

The four sites reveal that the contested national positions Austria and France each occupy on the triangular spectrum did not produce a single commemorative response, but a range of institutional expression shaped by when each site was established, who established it, and at what level, whether regional or national. Assmann's observation that national memory constrains the available self-representations helps explain each country's broad commemorative orientation. However, it is the specific institutional histories of these sites that help explain why two Austrian institutions or two French ones can differ so markedly from each other while still reflecting a recognizably national commemorative culture. The national triangle sets the boundaries, but institutional history helps determine how those narratives are expressed.

6.2 Exhibition Design as Communication

The categories of perpetrator, victim, and liberator provide a necessary framework for organizing Holocaust representation, but they do not fully account for the complexities and

contradictions present within national memory. When applied to countries with more complex and nuanced postwar narratives, the triangular framework becomes more dynamic. This is because the triangular framework operates across two distinct but interrelated levels of analysis. At the national level, the triangular framework identifies the positions through which countries publicly narrate their history. At the site level, it focuses on the specific ways individual museums and memorials construct and communicate those narratives through their curatorial strategies. These two levels are related but distinct—the curatorial choices present within a site are shaped and constrained by where its country sits within the national framework. Yet individual sites retain institutional agency in how they translate that positioning into representation.

As established in the preceding section, national narratives do not translate uniformly into commemorative practice. They are filtered through regional and institutional histories, timing, and scale. They do not just shape what is remembered; they shape how it is presented. Exhibition design is where this becomes most visible. Choices about layout, displayed objects, images, and language are not neutral but rather reflect where each institution sits on the curatorial triangle and reflect the limits of what the national position constrains.

6.2.1 Documentary Restraint

Documentary restraint is a prominent curatorial strategy used across all four sites. Both Austrian and French institutions ground their exhibitions in archival evidence using administrative records, police reports, deportation documents, and institutional correspondence to show how persecution was organized and highlight the role the state played in its implementation.

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, Mauthausen uses documentary restraint as part of its curatorial philosophy. The exhibit's opening prologue, which also serves as an epilogue, presents forged identity papers and altered service files, unlike other sites that show liberation imagery. These panels establish the register of the entire exhibit: accountability through documentation. As curator Christian Durr stated, the preserved buildings are already traumatic sites. They do not need curatorial intervention to evoke emotion; thus, the exhibit's task is to provide cognitive framing rather than emotional reinforcement.[183] This philosophy is consistent with Aline Sierp's description of "objective contextualization," aligning Mauthausen's curatorial posture more closely with German perpetrator curatorial strategies.

The Ebensee memorial operates within a similar documentary register, with the tunnel exhibit minimizing curatorial intervention. The panels rely on photographs, documents, and interpretive texts to present the camp's history. The Zeitgeschichte Museum, which opened four years after the tunnel exhibit, reflects a different moment in Ebensee's commemorative development and illustrates the sliding aspect of the site's position on the curatorial triangle. Where the tunnel exhibit closely mirrors the documentary restraint associated with perpetrator-acknowledged commemoration, the contemporary history museum employs color, incorporates some artifacts, and uses propaganda materials and digital media, illustrating that individual sites can employ different curatorial strategies across exhibits.

Both CERCIL and Royallieu rely on documentary evidence to acknowledge collaboration while managing the emotional weight through a victim-centered register. At CERCIL, the use of administrative records documenting the arrest and deportation of Jewish families established the evidentiary core of the exhibit. However, their display alongside family photographs and

[183] Durr, Interview.

personal correspondence shifts the material's function from evidence of perpetration to tracing the history of individuals through the deportation process. It becomes more personal.

At Royallieu, the sections in Barrack A1 are document-rich and evidentially thorough, yet the interpretive language consistently attributes causation to the "occupier" rather than to the French administrative systems that implemented those orders. Extending Ruth-Anne Lenga's contextualization theory from photos to documents: what curators choose to tell visitors about a document is as consequential as what documents they choose to display. At Royallieu, the gap between what the documents show and how they are framed highlights a disconnect between evidence and interpretation.

Documentary restraint, then, is shared across both national contexts but functions differently within each. For Austrian sites, it is the primary argumentative mode; for French sites, it is the foundation on which other registers are built. Figure 4 maps these patterns across the four sites.

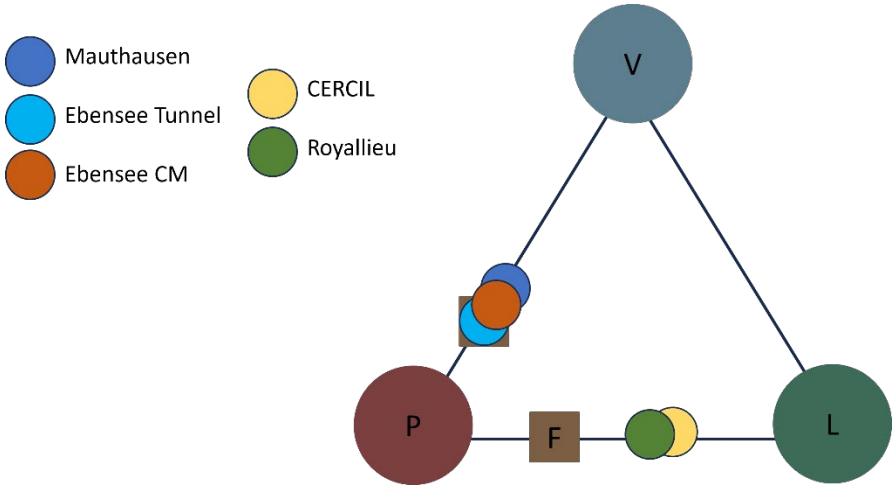


Figure 4. Comparative curatorial patterns across Austrian and French Holocaust institutions: Documentary Restraint. Austrian sites employ documentary restraint as a primary curatorial mode; French sites use documentary evidence as a foundation while layering additional registers alongside it. In the three points of the triangle, V = Victim, P = Perpetrator, L = Liberator. Credit: Author

6.2.2 Design

The visual and spatial design of each exhibition communicates its curatorial position before a visitor encounters the actual narrative. Color, spatial sequencing, and architectural choices are not neutral; they reflect where each institution sits on the triangle and what its national position allows it to do with the history it is presenting.

Austrian sites tend to be more visually restrained. At Mauthausen, color is used to structure the exhibit and guide interpretation, rather than to shape visitors' feelings. Ebensee's tunnel exhibit strips back all design to allow the space to carry the interpretive weight. The raw concrete and white panels produce an environment that is analytically consistent with the perpetrator-acknowledgment model. This restraint is not coincidental but is purposely crafted. At victim-centered and liberator sites, color is often used as an emotional instrument. For example, the Schindler Factory Museum and the Jewish Heritage Museum in New York both use red to signify Nazi power, evoke fear, and place visitors inside the atmosphere of occupation and persecution. Perpetrator sites largely avoid this because using color risks aestheticizing the history rather than accounting for it. At a site where visitors, perpetrators, and victims share a national identity, the distinction matters.

The Zeitgeschichte Museum is a contrast to this strategy. Housed in a purpose-built location, its use of orange operates less as an emotional register than as an organizational one, signaling to its regional audience that this is a contemporary history museum rather than a memorial site. The contrast between the tunnel and the Zeitgeschichte Museum within a single case study illustrates how positions within the triangle can shift, with two exhibits at the same site using different visual strategies.

Both Royallieu and CERCIL use color as a narrative device, which is more consistent with their positions on the victim-liberator side of the triangle. CERCIL uses color to discuss the

personal aspects of deportation. The color-coded sectional structure tracing the escalating persecution from arrests to the isolation of children, and the final black room that discusses the concentration and extermination camps, communicates the trajectory of persecution through color as much as through text. Panels addressing the broader history of France use more documentary restraint and subdued tones, shifting register depending on what the section is discussing. Here, color does something closer to what red does at victim and liberator sites. At Royallieu, projected maps, large-format photographs, and reconstructed spaces draw visitors into a more experiential encounter, pulling the exhibit toward the liberator pole in a way the Austrian sites explicitly avoid.

It is important to note that, while both French sites deploy color and design strategies more commonly associated with victim- and liberator-centered collaboration, their positions on the triangle reflect their engagement with collaboration rather than their design register alone. Design strategy and narrative position are not always the same thing, as a site can use affective visual language while still sitting closer to the perpetrator, acknowledging access to the question of historical responsibility. The French sites' use of color reflects what their national position licenses emotionally; where they sit on the triangle reflects what their history requires them to acknowledge.

Across both national contexts, design choices reflect where each institution sits on the curatorial triangle, with Austrian sites leaning towards perpetrator-style curatorial strategies and French sites towards liberator strategies, as their national positions license. Figure 5 maps the sites across the commemorative triangle.

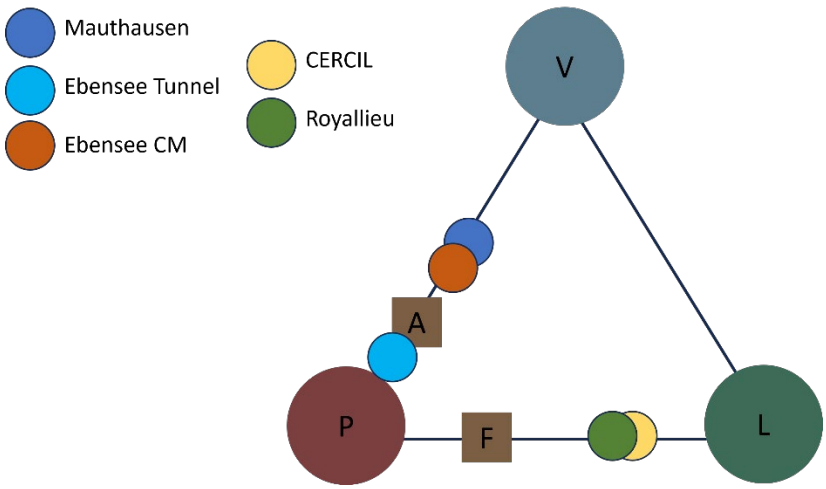


Figure 5. Comparative curatorial patterns across Austrian and French Holocaust institutions: Design. Austrian sites use restrained, functionally organized visual environments; French sites deploy color and spatial design as narrative devices. The placement of French sites reflects their engagement with collaboration rather than their design strategy, illustrating that a site's position on the triangle is determined by what it acknowledges, not just by how it looks. In the three points of the triangle, V = Victim, P = Perpetrator, L = Liberator. Credit: Author

6.2.3 Artifacts

As discussed in the literature review, displaying artifacts is one of the more contested areas of Holocaust commemoration. Timothy Brown argues that objects in Holocaust exhibits are not simply pieces of evidence but objects violently removed from their original context, still carrying traces of the people who owned them.[184] Lowenthal, as quoted by Lennon, puts it more directly: written history separates the past from the present through language, but artifacts exist in both at once. That quality is what gives them their particular force and what makes the question of how, or whether to display them so consequential.

In the case studies, the relationship between artifact display and national position is more complicated than at other sites because what is displayed is shaped not only by curatorial strategy but by material availability and the historic site's function. Of the four sites analyzed, Mauthausen is the most artifact-heavy, displaying uniforms, personal belongings, and original documentation. Consistent with its perpetrator-adjacent position, artifacts are not deployed for

[184] Brown, "Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy," 247.

emotional accumulation but as evidence. They are typically displayed alongside other materials within broader narratives rather than isolated singular carriers of meaning. The Tunnel No. 5 exhibit at Ebensee displays zero artifacts, a consequence of both the tunnel's physical condition and the postwar demolition of the camp. This places the site closer to the documentary restraint of the perpetrator curatorial styles. The Zeitgeschichte Museum incorporates propaganda materials, a prisoner uniform, and a few other personal objects, but it can be assumed these reflect more on institutional availability than curatorial priority.

This is a stark contrast with institutions that make deliberate artifact-centered choices. For example, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, a singular enamel bowl is displayed in a glass case (see Figure 6B in Appendix A). Without context, it is an ordinary object, but with curatorial interpretation, the bowl belonged to a family deported to Bergen-Belsen, who used it to hold their son, born in the camp. With context, the bowl becomes a carrier of human memory. This is what Hansen-Glucklich describes: the isolation and framing of a single object focuses meaning in ways that accumulation cannot.

None of the four sites examined here displays artifacts as isolated focal points of interpretation, but for different reasons. At Mauthausen, artifacts are displayed alongside other materials and within broader narratives. At Ebensee, the absence of artifacts reflects both the site's physical destruction and its current state of preservation. At CERCIL and Royallieu, the limited presence of objects is tied to their function as transit camps, where few belongings remained, and little material was preserved. In each case, the result is the same: artifacts do not function as focal points of interpretation the way they do at liberator institutions like the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and meaning is instead constructed through documentation, narratives, and context.

The limited presence of objects at these sites, therefore, reflects the historical conditions of their operation as much as curatorial intent. At the same time, there are clear instances where the absence of artifacts is a deliberate choice. Sites such as documentation centers explicitly position themselves as sites of interpretation rather than collection, emphasizing archival material over physical objects. In other cases, institutions make ethical decisions about what not to display. As noted in interviews, certain artifacts such as human remains or objects associated with extreme violence can be withheld from exhibition, reflecting broader debates about representation and the limits of display.

Taken together, these cases demonstrate that the presentation of artifacts, or their absence, cannot be read as a straightforward indicator of national narrative or curatorial intent. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of multiple factors, including the site's historical function, the survival or destruction of material evidence, institutional mandates, and ethical considerations. The result is a more uneven and contingent relationship between material display and memory than purely curatorial analysis would suggest. Further, across both national contexts, what each institution can display has been shaped by the same historical forces it is trying to represent. Figure 6 illustrates how these patterns map onto the comparative framework across all four sites.

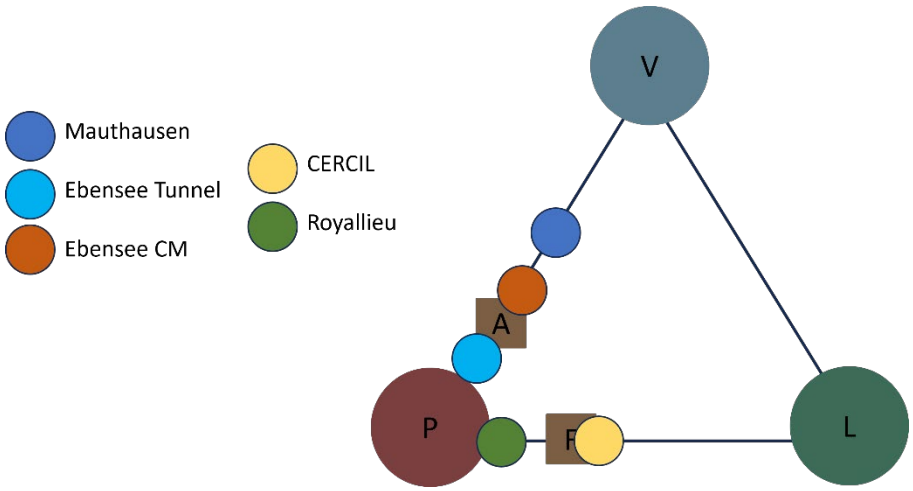


Figure 6. Comparative curatorial patterns across Austrian and French Holocaust institutions: Artifacts. In the three points of the triangle, V = Victim, P = Perpetrator, L = Liberator. Credit: Author

6.2.4 Photography

Like artifacts, photographs are widely used yet highly debated tools in Holocaust commemoration. Photos are used everywhere in Holocaust commemoration, but how they are used and displayed varies. Marianne Hirsch notes that the images most frequently used in Holocaust exhibits tend to be repetitive, and that repetition contributes to photos being stripped of the specific circumstances in which they were taken.[185] Lenga pushes further, arguing that atrocity is not inherent but rather is constructed through context and interpretation.[186] Therefore, what curators choose to tell visitors about a photograph is as consequential as which images they choose to display. This is particularly relevant to the comparative analysis because photographic strategy is one of the clearest places where a site's position on the triangle becomes legible.

At Mauthausen, as discussed in Chapter 4, photographs are selected using an ethical test to provide context rather than provoke emotion. At a site where many visitors share a national identity with the perpetrators, that test carries particular weight and reflects the broader constraints of the perpetrator's position. The result is a photographic strategy that treats images as

[185] Hirsch, "Surviving Images," 8–9.
[186] Lenga, "Seeing Things Differently: The Use of Atrocity Images in Teaching about the Holocaust," 205.

historical evidence rather than emotional vehicles. Thus, the footage taken by Allied liberators is highly regulated and intentional. Photographs of SS personnel socializing are included not to humanize perpetrators but to make clear that atrocities were carried out by identifiable individuals. Sensitive images are framed and credited, with the acknowledgment that some were staged by American forces for documentation purposes. Ebensee uses a different strategy. For the tunnel exhibit, photos of emaciated prisoners, survivors, and piles of corpses are displayed. While they are framed as documentation, their content does what the interpretive panels cannot: it makes suffering directly visible. It is the exhibit's most significant slide towards the victim pole and a large contrast from the restraint Mauthausen uses.

In general, French sites use photography more liberally, consistent with their victim-liberator side of the triangle. At CERCIL, family photographs are integrated throughout the exhibit alongside administrative records. Their function is humanizing rather than evidentiary, restoring individual identity to people who appear elsewhere only as names on deportation convoy lists.

At Royallieu, the photographic strategy culminates in the final room, where liberation footage plays without any interpretive framing or content warnings, forcing visitors to confront the visual consequences of the internment and deportation process they just followed through the exhibit. Kit Messham-Muir's observation that unframed immersive strategies carry ethical risks, including the potential to instrumentalize emotion or to provoke voyeuristic impulses, is relevant here.[187] The absence of interpretive framing in the "Nazi Camps" room leaves the connection between French collaboration and the suffering now visible on screen implicit, requiring visitors to make it themselves rather than have it explicitly articulated by the exhibit. Further, ending in

[187] Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," 107.

liberation footage rather than in the register of French perpetration itself is a curatorial argument about where the exhibit's emotional weight should ultimately rest. It reflects the victim-liberator positioning that France's national narrative licenses.

Photographic strategy, more than any other curatorial dimension, reveals the outer limits of what each national position makes possible. Austria's perpetrator-adjacent position requires careful, ethically governed selection; whereas France's victim-liberator position licenses a more expansive and affective use of the same material. The moments when those tendencies break, such as the liberation photographs at Ebensee and the unframed footage at Royallieu, are where the instability of each site's position on the triangle becomes most visible. Figure 7 illustrates this pattern.

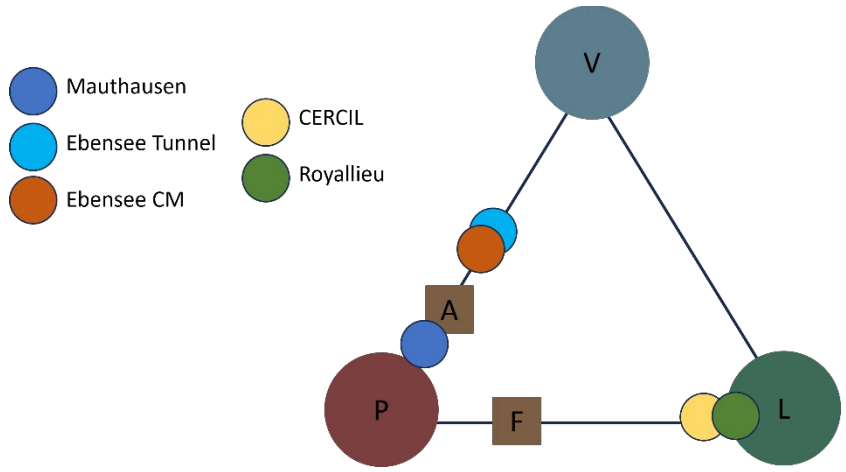


Figure 7. Comparative curatorial patterns across Austrian and French Holocaust institutions: Photographs. Austrian sites govern photo selection, whereas French sites use photos more liberally. In the three points of the triangle, V = Victim, P = Perpetrator, L = Liberator. Credit: Author

6.2.5 Synthesis: The Triangle as a layered Framework

Across all four sites, the triangular framework reveals that exhibition design is never simply a matter of presenting history. It involves decisions about which parts of that history to present, how to present them, and with what degree of interpretive direction to use. Austria's sites lean more toward perpetrator-oriented curatorial strategies, reflecting a national context still

working through the implications of perpetration. This tends to produce exhibitions that emphasize accountability over emotional engagement. In contrast, French sites use more emotionally immersive strategies, shaped by narratives that draw on both victimhood and liberation, positioning France on the victim-liberator side of the triangle. However, France's acknowledgment of collaboration and its postwar resistance narrative complicate this positioning, pulling it back onto the perpetrator-liberator axis.

This instability is the framework's most important finding. In countries such as Germany, Poland, and the United States, the triangle operated on a single plane, with national role and curatorial strategy often aligning. In Austria and France, the distance between postwar narrative and institutional practice gives the framework a second dimension. At the national level, Austria and France occupy unstable positions shaped by their postwar narratives. At the site level, a site's position on the triangle is not fixed, but shifts depending on how individual institutions interpret and communicate collective memory. The triangular framework, then, is not a fixed classification but a way of tracing these movements. It makes it visible where national narratives and site-level practices align, diverge, and remain unresolved.

6.3 Emotional Engagement and Documentary Restraint

One of the most consistent findings across all four case studies is the tension between emotional engagement and documentary restraint as competing curatorial strategies. This tension is not unique to Austria and France, but the way each institution manages it reflects the national position it occupies on the triangular framework. Understanding how and why these sites resolve the tension differently requires discussing the scholarly debates within the field and the specific choices each institution has made.

Matthias Heyl argues that the emotional responses to Holocaust exhibits are not universal or spontaneous but are historically and culturally constructed, shaped by societal expectations that dictate what individuals are expected to feel and how those feelings should be expressed.[188] Memorial sites are therefore inherently emotionally charged spaces, but they are also contested ones, shaped by the differing expectations of visitors, educators, and institutional stakeholders. Heyl's caution against deliberately eliciting emotional responses is worth noting. Efforts to impose empathy or overwhelm visitors can provoke resistance to engaging with the site and risk exploiting both victims' experience and visitors themselves.[189] Thus, emotional engagement in this sense cannot be assumed or engineered; it must be approached as a complex, mediated aspect of historical interpretation that each site navigates differently depending on where it sits on the triangle.

The caution finds its clearest institutional expression in the Austrian sites. As previously discussed, Mauthausen's curatorial philosophy explicitly prioritizes cognitive over emotional engagement. The task is to provide contextual information, not reinforce the emotional response the site already generates. In addition, Sierp's observation that German memorial sites characteristically avoid strategies that might provoke emotional responses accurately describes Mauthausen's approach. The exhibit's restrained visual palette, its reliance on documentary evidence, and its careful ethical framework for the use of sensitive imagery all reflect an institutional understanding that this emotionally charged material must be approached with care at a site where visitors and perpetrators share a national identity.

The presence of liberation photographs within the Ebensee tunnel exhibit introduces a complication to this pattern. The images that depict emaciated prisoners, survivors bathing after

[188] Matthias Heyl, "Mit Uberwaltigendem Uberwaltigen?"
[189] Matthias Heyl, "Mit Uberwaltigendem Uberwaltigen?," 255.

liberation, and piles of corpses introduce an affective register that the documentary framework otherwise suppresses. They represent a slide towards the victim orientation on the curatorial triangle because images of suffering produce an emotional response that archival documents and informational panels do not. The tension between the documentary and affective registers in the tunnel exhibition precisely illustrates the instability Holtschneider identifies in Holocaust commemoration. The Tunnel's overall approach places it firmly within the documentary restraint of perpetrator-acknowledgment commemoration, but the liberation photographs momentarily pull it toward the victim pole. The site does not occupy a single fixed position but shifts depending on which exhibit element the visitor is viewing.

Further, Holtschneider's observation that Holocaust exhibits "are motivated by educational concerns as well as the desire to memorialize"[190] captures the dual imperative that all four sites are navigating. Documentary restraint is not necessarily the absence of emotion, but a different expression of it. Presenting evidence of what happened to real people is itself a memorial act that honors the dead by grounding history in proof. Equally, emotional engagement is not merely affective; it is also about how visitors connect with and retain what they are learning. The educational and commemorative functions of these sites are intertwined with both shaping how the exhibit is designed and experienced. What differs across the four sites is not whether both purposes are present, but which register each institution's national position allows it to prioritize.

This distinction also maps onto site typology. Documentation centers, by institutional mandate, prioritize archival and evidentiary documentation. Their mission is to establish the historical record, and their design reflects that. In contrast, the mission of memorial museums

[190] Holtschneider, "Victims, Perpetrators, Bystanders?," 83.

combines documentation with commemoration, and that dual purpose opens space for affective strategies that a documentation center would not typically employ. A historical or memorial site where physical events occurred operates differently because the space itself carries emotional weight that the exhibit does not necessarily need to manufacture. As discussed throughout this chapter, Mauthausen is a memorial site where the surviving structures do the affective work; the exhibit provides a cognitive frame. CERCIL is a memorial museum housed in a former nursery school with no direct historical connection to the camps; thus, the exhibit has to do both jobs at once. The type of site shapes the mission, and the mission shapes what emotional engagement looks like in practice.

Where national position becomes decisive is in determining the boundaries for how far each institution can push within its typology. France's postwar recognition as a liberated ally, followed by its resistance-centered national narrative, allows its institutions to deploy affective strategies more expansively than Austrian ones. French institutions are not subject to the same pressure towards documentary restraint that shapes Austrian commemoration. In contrast to Sierp's description of German sites, Jeshajahu Weinberg argued that emotion is central to the educational function of Holocaust museums, encouraging visitors to identify with individuals and become emotionally invested in their experiences.[191] The French sites examined here reflect that approach, deploying affect as a primary vehicle for commemorative transmission.

6.4 Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

The analysis of four study sites has demonstrated that curatorial choices, spatial design, narrative framing, and affective strategy all reflect the national and regional commemorative

[191] Messham-Muir, "Dark Visitations: The Possibilities and Problems of Experience and Memory in Holocaust Museums," 97.

cultures in which each institution is embedded. The triangular framework, applied as a heuristic spectrum across both national contexts, has shown that no institution occupies a fixed position in relation to the categories of perpetrator, victim, and liberator. Further, the triangle does not produce fixed classifications; it tracks the movement of institutions through their curatorial strategies. Thus, the value of the triangle is not in where it places an institution but in what it reveals about how that institution moves.

6.4.1 Scholarly Contribution

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on Austria and France, two nations whose commemorative practices have been more extensively examined historiographically than through a museum studies lens. By demonstrating that the curatorial strategies employed at Austrian and French institutions reflect nationally situated positions within the triangular framework, the study addresses a gap in the literature. It also raises comparative questions that cannot be fully addressed through single-country analyses. Second, the study extends the comparison to regional sites—Ebensee, CERCIL, and Royallieu—which are even more rarely examined and discussed.

Further, the triangular framework itself is a contribution. Emerging from observations across forty Holocaust museums and memorials, it is a transferable analytical tool for comparative Holocaust research. Rather than functioning as a fixed classification system, it operates as a heuristic spectrum, positioning institutions in relation to one another based on how they reflect the national roles of liberator, perpetrator, and victim.

That finding connects to a broader debate in Holocaust memory studies about whether the Holocaust has become a form of cosmopolitan memory—a universal moral reference point that transcends national frameworks. Levy and Sznaider argue that it has, but that cosmopolitanization does not erase national perspectives; rather, it transforms them.[192] The four sites examined here support that reading. All four participate in a shared international understanding of the Holocaust as an event of shared moral significance, participating in the same broader commemorative culture. The triangular framework is a tool for holding that tension rather than resolving it.

6.4.2 Limitations of the Framework

The triangular framework used in the study operates with three positions: perpetrator, victim, and liberator. As the preceding sections have demonstrated, these categories are useful as analytical starting points but cannot produce fixed classifications. That instability is not a flaw but a reflection of the institutions' complexity. It also cannot fully account for every national position within the Holocaust commemoration landscape.

It is worth noting that while the triangular framework operates with three positions, at *Nationaal Monument Kamp Vught* in the Netherlands, the interpretive framework separates victims and bystanders into distinct categories rather than treating them as related positions on a single continuum. This distinction is analytically useful, and its absence from the three-point triangle used here represents one of the framework's limitations. The bystander category captures something that neither the victim nor the perpetrator fully accommodates.

[192] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. Assenka Oksiloff (Temple University Press, 2006), 92.

However, the bystander category has its own problems. Holtschneider's original formulation uses the terms bystander, victim, and perpetrator. Within these categories, the United States is placed in the bystander position. That classification does not hold up. A nation that liberated the camps while simultaneously turning away Jewish refugees on the MS St. Louis is not a passive country. Both actions were just that, acts. The liberator category used in this study better reflects that complexity than the bystander category, because it acknowledges that action. Refining the framework to account for nations whose roles combined different kinds of action in different directions simultaneously remains a possibility for future work.

Also, the framework, as currently constructed, plots institutions along a spectrum between three poles. A more sophisticated model would map institutions as coordinates within the triangle itself rather than along its edges, capturing the simultaneous pull of all three poles rather than movement between two at a time. That refinement is beyond the scope of this study but represents a meaningful direction for future framework development.

6.4.3 Study Limitations

Several limitations of the research design should be acknowledged. The first is that the four sites examined cannot speak for the entire commemorative landscape of Austria and France. They were selected for their analytical utility and represent national and regional institutions across both countries, but the patterns identified here are not exhaustive. Other Austrian and French institutions may occupy different positions on the triangle or navigate their national histories in ways the study did not capture.

Second, language presented a practical constraint throughout the research period. While many exhibitions and institutional publications offered English translations, interpretive nuance may have been lost in the process. Some exhibits did not offer English translations at all,

requiring the use of external translation tools. This applies equally to the scholarly literature, which the study engages with primarily in English. Specific debates and interpretations in French and German scholarship may not be fully represented as a result.

Third, visitor data was not collected. Understanding what visitors take away from these exhibitions, including how their knowledge and emotional responses shift before and after a visit, would require structured visitor surveys across all four sites. Without that data, the study can analyze what institutions produce but not what audiences receive. That is a significant gap and one of the most important directions for future research.

Lastly, curatorial interviews were limited; of the four sites analyzed, Mauthausen was the only site that permitted a formal interview with curatorial staff. The perspectives of curators at the other sites are therefore absent from the analysis, and the institutional intentions behind specific curatorial choices at those sites could be inferred only from the exhibitions themselves and published institutional materials.

6.4.4 Future Direction

This research could continue in the future in the following ways: The triangular framework could be productively extended to other countries whose postwar relationships to the Holocaust are not straightforwardly captured by the perpetrator-victim-liberator triad. Like Austria and France, countries such as the Netherlands, Hungary, and Romania also present commemorative cultures shaped by histories of Nazi collaboration, complicity, and contested responsibility, offering productive test cases for the framework's analytical scope.

A second direction would be to refine the triangular framework to include a fourth category of bystander, drawing on both Holtschneider's original formulation and the interpretive model observed at the Vught memorial. Further, a longitudinal study of comparative change

across individual institutions, tracking how a single site's position on the triangle shifts over decades in response to political, generational, and curatorial change, would yield valuable insights that cross-sectional comparative analysis cannot.

Lastly, future iterations of this study could incorporate visitor-based research, including surveys and interviews, to assess how museum narratives are received, the effectiveness of specific curatorial strategies, and the extent to which exhibitions address or reproduce gaps in public knowledge. Further, research should also examine the role of digital media and social media platforms, which increasingly extend museum narratives beyond the exhibition space and shape how Holocaust memory is engaged within wider public discourse.

6.5 Conclusion

Holocaust museums occupy a unique position within public history. Unlike many historical topics, the Holocaust is widely interpreted as both a historical event and a moral reference point, being frequently invoked in discussions of genocide, human rights, and intolerance.[193] As a result, decisions about how the Holocaust is represented in museums carry significant educational and ethical weight.

As the last survivors of the Holocaust pass, the institutions that preserve and transmit this history take on an increasing weight. The institutions examined in this study do not simply preserve the Holocaust as a historical event; they frame it, narrate it, and present it to audiences whose encounter with that history is mediated at every point by curatorial choices. That mediation is neither neutral nor fixed.

[193] Rigney, “Transforming Memory and the European Project,” 624.

There will most likely never be a single shared narrative of the Holocaust. Austria and France approach the same history from different national perspectives, through different institutional histories, and with different commemorative frameworks, yet those differences produce fundamentally different exhibitions. But that is not a failure. Understanding those different angles and the structural forces that produce them gets us closer to the full picture than any single unified account could. The triangular framework does not resolve those differences. It makes them legible and making them legible is the first step toward understanding what is at stake in how we remember the Holocaust.

As this study has shown, the commemorative orientations of these institutions have shifted over time and will continue to shift as political context changes, generations turn, and the work of Holocaust commemoration evolves. What the triangular framework offers, in this context, is not a final answer to the question of how any given institution positions itself in relation to the Holocaust, but a way of asking that question, and of attending with appropriate analytical care to the complexity of the answers.

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APPENDIX A: EXHIBIT PHOTOS

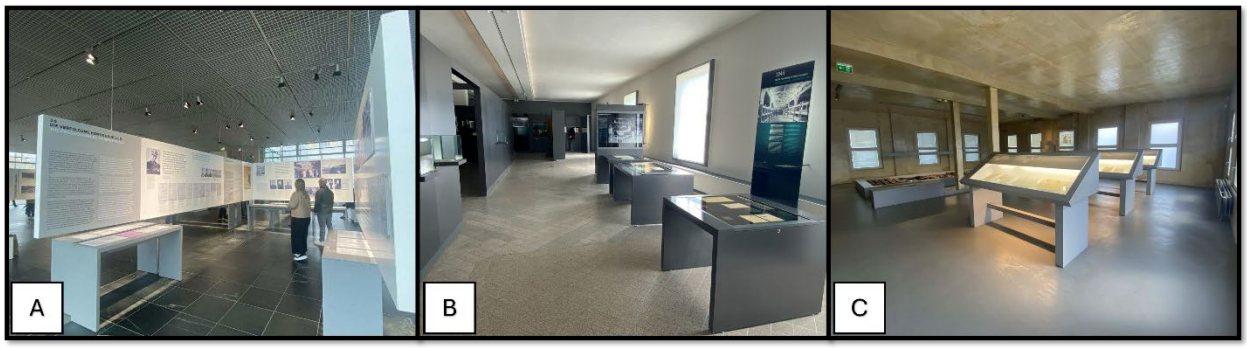


Figure 8. Holocaust documentation centers and memorial sites, Germany.

A. Topography of Terror, Berlin — permanent exhibition interior featuring the characteristic white panel, text-and-image documentary approach typical of German perpetrator-acknowledgment commemoration, May 2023. B: KZ-Gedenkstätte Flossenbürg, Flossenbürg — exhibition gallery within the former concentration camp, demonstrating the restrained visual palette and evidence-forward presentation strategy common to German memorial sites, September 2021. C. Erinnerungsort Topf & Söhne — Die Ofenbauer von Auschwitz (Topf & Sons — Builders of the Auschwitz Ovens), Erfurt — exhibition space within the preserved factory building where the crematoria used at Auschwitz were designed and manufactured, April 2023. Credit: Author



Figure 9. American Holocaust memorial institutions.
A, D: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington, D.C. Permanent Exhibition: The Holocaust. B, C, E: Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York, N.Y.

A: Opening hall featuring the testimony of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, April 15, 1946, displayed alongside liberation photographs. This frames the visitor's entry through a liberator narrative before any historical chronology. B: Display case featuring a bowl used by a family who gave birth at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, presented in isolation to center individual human experience; an example of what Hansen-Glucklich identifies as the curatorial strategy of exhibiting a single artifact to amplify emotional and commemorative significance. C: Museum of Jewish Heritage — permanent exhibition gallery

featuring large-scale Nazi imagery, red elements, and swastika iconography. The panels use color and visual scale to evoke psychological weight and institutional power. D: USHMM content warning panel advising viewer discretion prior to graphic film footage. This reflects the institution's ethical framework for managing visitor engagement with atrocity imagery. E: Museum of Jewish Heritage — A wall panel displays a large-format photograph of a mass shooting alongside survivor testimony: "First they took the men, then the women and children. We heard shots and screaming and knew they had killed the first group" (Rivka Gorodek, Holocaust survivor from Kovno). The pairing of atrocity imagery with first-person testimony is characteristic of the American immersive, emotionally direct commemorative register.
Credit: Author, October 2023.



Figure 10. Holocaust memorial sites, Poland.

A. Display of victims' shoes behind glass, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim. The material remains are preserved as collective testimony to mass murder. B. Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory Museum, Kraków — an example of an immersive design strategy. The exhibit has visitors walk between "walls" reminiscent of a ghetto. C. Ruins of a destroyed gas chamber, Auschwitz-Birkenau — deliberately demolished by retreating SS forces in 1945 in an attempt to conceal evidence of mass murder, preserved in their ruined state as material testimony to both the crime and its attempted erasure. D. Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory Museum, Kraków. The exhibition corridor features Nazi propaganda posters and antisemitic imagery, recreating the psychological and visual environment of German occupation.
Credit: Author, November 2021

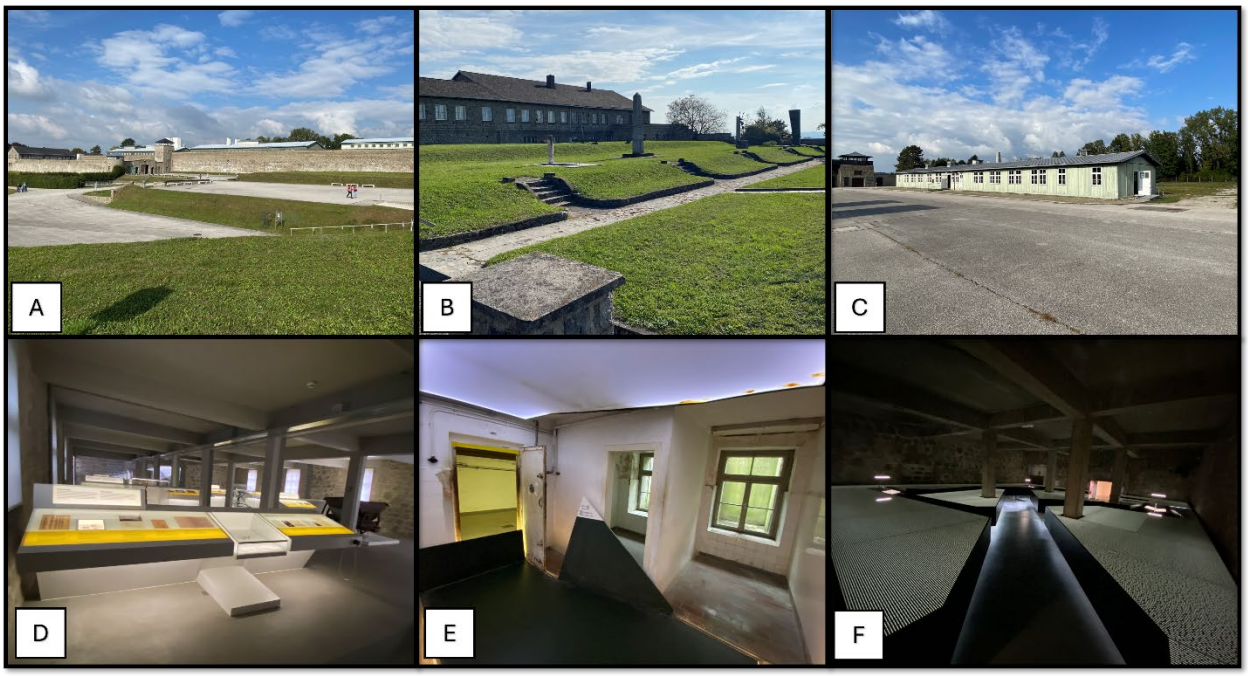


Figure 11. KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, Mauthausen, Austria. The memorial site's preserved structures reflect the curatorial philosophy of "contextualization over amplification" — working with what remains rather than reconstructing what has been lost.

A: Exterior view of the memorial complex. B: Memorial Park, right side, with national monuments erected by survivor organizations and foreign governments. C: Barracks No. 1, the former camp brothel, where women from Ravensbrück were sexually exploited. The barrack stands but remains minimally interpreted within the permanent exhibition. D: The Crime Scenes of Mauthausen-Searching for Traces, located in the infirmary basement. E: Entrance to the gas chamber; minimal interpretive intervention allows the space itself to communicate its history. F: Room of Names memorial.
Credit: Author, August 2023.

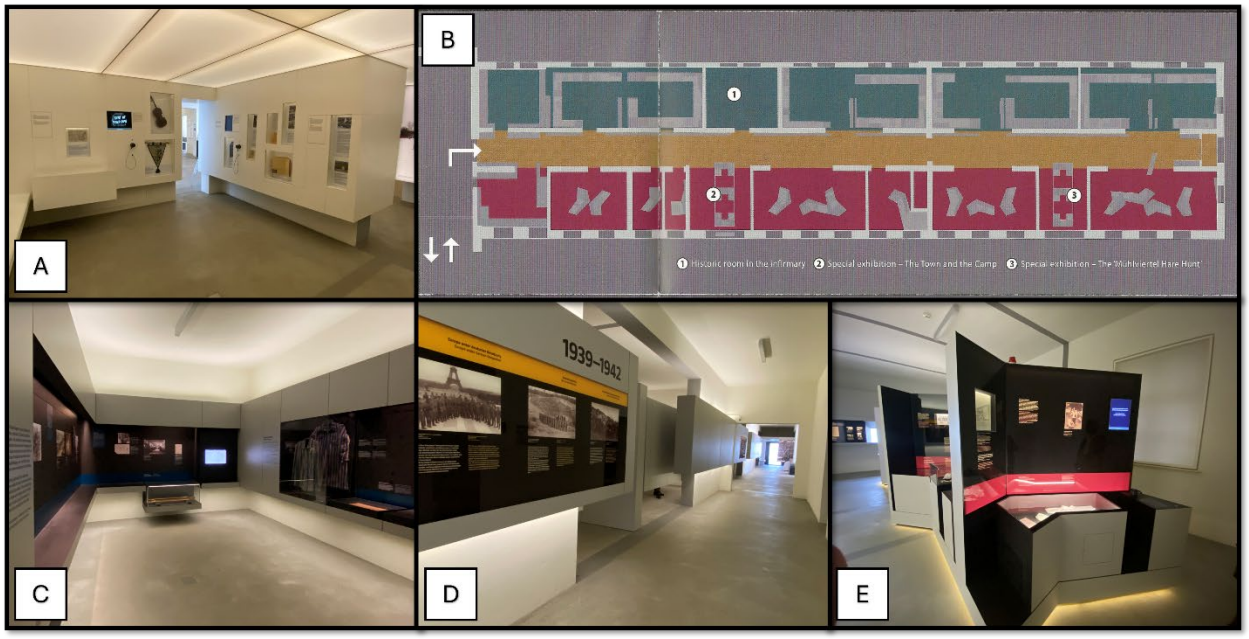


Figure 12. KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen, Mauthausen, Austria. Permanent exhibition: The Mauthausen Concentration Camp 1938–1945

A: Prologue/epilogue space. B: Floor plan showing the three-level color structure: yellow corridor (historical framework), blue rooms (camp history), and red rooms (prisoners' lives). C: Blue trim panels, camp history section. D: Central yellow corridor. E: Red trim panels, prisoners' lives section.
Credit Photos A, C–E: Author, August 2023.
Credit Photo B: Mauthausen Memorial exhibition floor plan, reproduced from institutional visitor pamphlet.

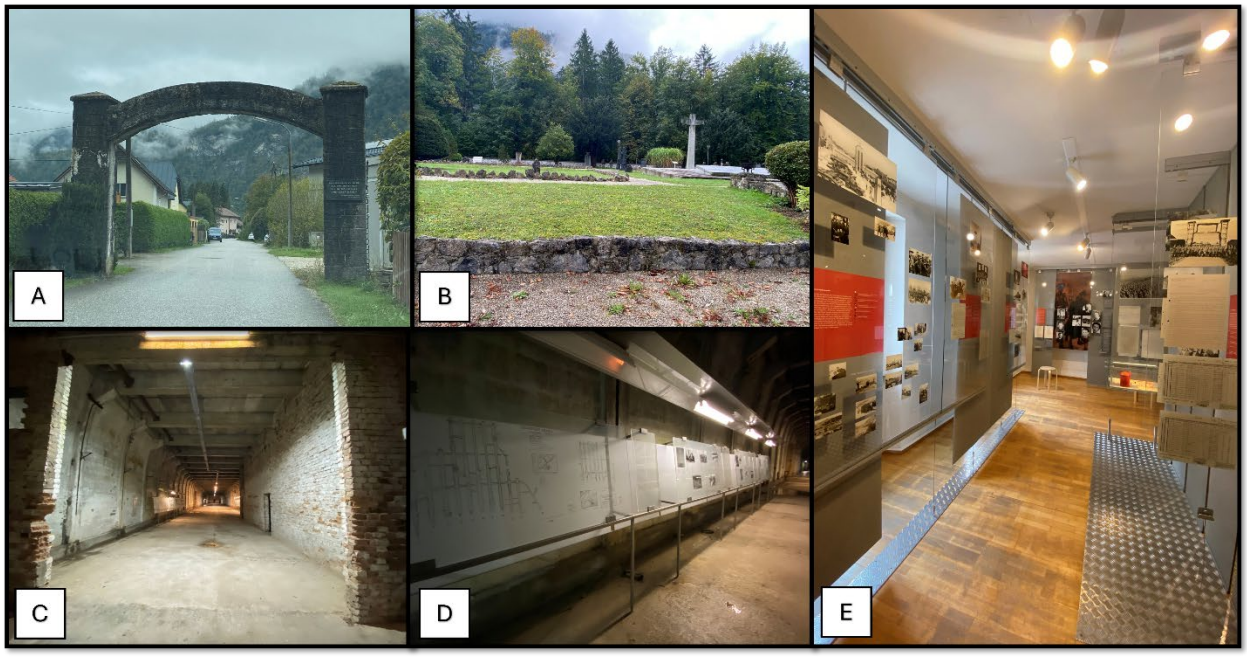


Figure 13. KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee, Ebensee, Austria.

A: Original entry arch to the former concentration camp, now situated within the residential neighborhood. B: Camp cemetery. C. Tunnel No. 5, showing the exposed rock wall and original construction conditions. D. Tunnel No. 5 permanent exhibition, Ebensee Concentration Camp: The "Zement" Project, established 1997. E. Zeitgeschichte Museum Ebensee, located in the town

center, established 2001.
Credit: Author, October 2021.

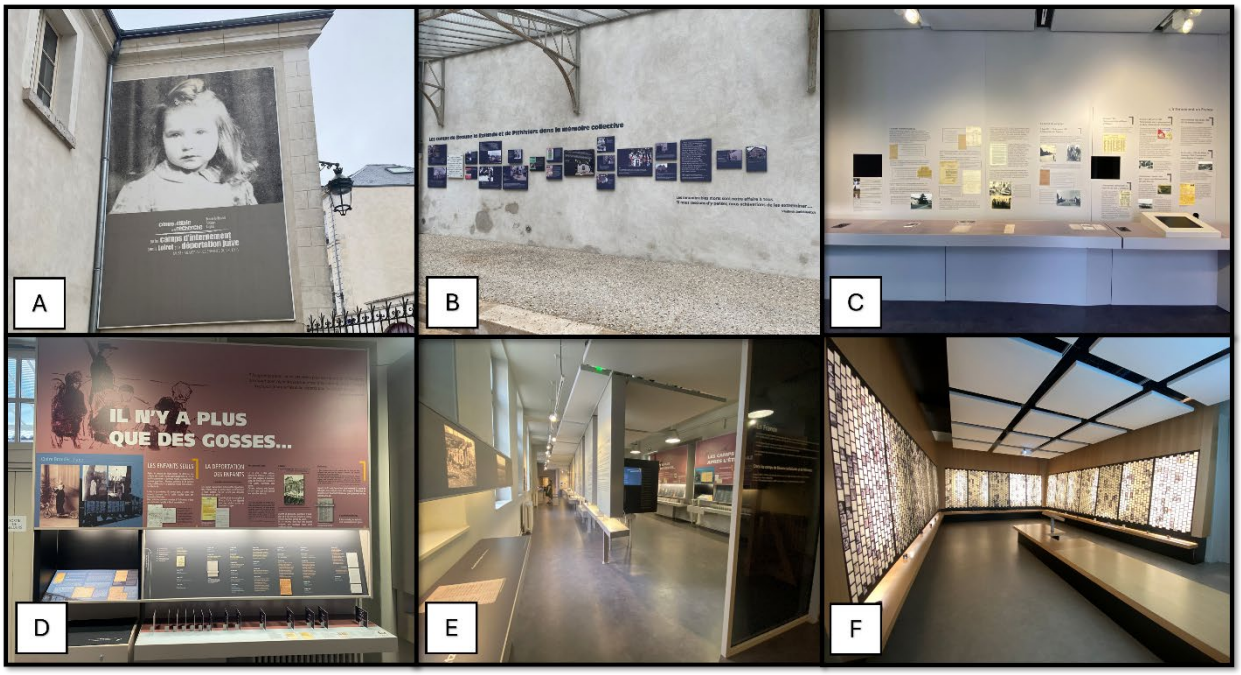


Figure 14. CERCIL — Musée Mémorial des Enfants du Vel d'Hiv, Orléans, France.

A: Exterior facade of the museum, housed in a former nursery school, featuring a large-scale photograph of a deported child — a deliberate curatorial choice that announces the institution's commemorative framework before entry. B: Outdoor exhibition panel, Les camps de Beaune-la-Rolande et de Pithiviers dans la mémoire collective, tracing the history of commemoration in the Loiret region. C: Exhibit introductory panels. D: Permanent exhibition interior, panel titled "Il n'y a plus que des gosses… » (There are only children left), featuring the color-coded sectional structure and deportation convoy panels. E: Interior exhibition space showing the deportation convoy lists. E: Corner overview of the entire exhibition space. F: Children's Memorial — illuminated grid panels in which each square represents a deported child; photographs appear where recovered, squares remain empty where no image exists.
Credit: Author, August 2023.



Figure 15. Mémorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation du Camp de Royallieu, Compiègne, France.

A: Entrance to the memorial, featuring the Wall of Names memorial. B: The Garden of Memory featuring the stone seating elements called "talking" chairs. C: Room one of Barrack A2. D: Documentary panel in Barrack A1. E: The dormitory room (section eight), which uses no interpretive panels; instead, it uses floor markings to indicate where the bunks once stood. F: The "Nazi Camps" room. The room is the final room before exiting the exhibit. Each column has a screen showing photos and videos from the liberation of the camps.
Credit: Author, August 2023.

APPENDIX B: OU IRB APPROVAL

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: September 13, 2022 **IRB#:** 14994

Principal Investigator: Lauren Brouillette

Approval Date: 09/13/2022

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Curating the Holocaust: Comparing the Collective Memories of World War II combatants and their memorialization of the Holocaust.

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Lara Mayeux

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Signed Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?
You and your memorial/museum/historical site were selected to be analyzed due to its significance in Holocaust remembrance. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of this research is to analyze how museums and historical sites from different countries teach and/or portray the Shoah in their exhibits. The questions attempting to be answered are

- Does a country's role in WWII affect its collective memories and how they present the Holocaust in its exhibits or honor the victims?

How many participants will be in this research?
Five (5) to ten (10) museums/sites will be visited in each of the following countries: Austria, the Netherlands, Poland, France, United States, and Germany. In total, there will be approximately fifty (50) interviews conducted.

What will I be asked to do?
Conduct an interview with the primary researcher, answering questions regarding your site's exhibit on the Holocaust.

How long will this take?
The interview will take 30 minutes to one (1) hour.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate?
There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating?
You will not be compensated for your time or participation.

Who will see my information?
If you consent, your name, title, and place of employment will be published in reports. Otherwise, interviews will be published as "a (insert title) from (insert country) …" or something similar, and your name will only be seen by the researcher, and the faculty advisor.

Do I have to participate?
No, but if you decide to participate, you do not have to answer any question you do not want to and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential?
Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree for data records to include my identifiable information. ____ YES ____ NO
I agree to being quoted directly. ____ YES ____ NO
I agree to have my name reported with quoted material. ____ YES ____ NO
I agree for the researcher to use my identifiable data in future studies. ____ YES ____ NO

IRB APPROVED
AAHRPP
IRB NUMBER: 14994
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 09/13/2022

Data is collected via an online platform not hosted by OU that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to the use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

What will happen to my data in the future?
Do you allow us to use your interview in future research projects? ___ YES ____ NO
Do you allow your interview to be shared with third party researchers in future projects?
___ YES ____ NO

Audio Recording of Research Activities
To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews will be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.
I consent to audio recording. ___ YES ____ NO

Will I be contacted again?
Possibly. As research continues the primary researcher might want to contact you to gather additional data. I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future. ____YES ____NO

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints?
If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, you can contact me at +49 1606920035 or lauren.brouillette1@ou.edu. The project's research advisor, Dr. Gullberg can be contacted at srgullberg@ou.edu.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

Consent for Collection and Use of Personal Data (European Economic Area participants)
By continuing through this process, you are consenting to the University of Oklahoma's (OU) use of data about you for the purpose of historical research. The following data will be collected as part of this research project:

Personal Data:
- Name, Email Address
- Employment Data (location and title)

Redacted transcripts will be maintained for life. All recordings will be deleted after the conclusion of this research project.

The researchers may share your data with other units around OU that have a business reason to use or access the data. Data will be sent internationally via email, or through the mail.

Even after you give your consent, you may ask to see your data or request to have your data corrected or erased. You may also object to or request restrictions on how your data will be processed. You may ask that your data be forwarded or transferred to another organization. Finally, you may withdraw your consent without penalty. If you do decide to withdraw consent at a later date, your withdrawal will not change the fact that your data has been processed legally up to that point.

IRB APPROVED
IRB NUMBER: 14994
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 09/13/2022

For more information or to file a complaint, now or later, please contact Lauren Brouillette at +49 1606920035. If your data protection related questions or concerns are not addressed after contacting the researcher to which you provided data, then you may also contact OU's Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or **irb@ou.edu**.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date
Signature of Witness (if applicable)	Print Name	Date

IRB APPROVED
IRB NUMBER: 14994
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 09/13/2022

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Does the museum/site discuss the role of Austria in World War II? Yes or no, why?

2. What is the mission of the memorial and exhibit? How does the exhibit directly reflect the mission/goal of the memorial? What imagery is used to reflect that mission?

3. What are some of the biggest challenges when creating an exhibit for the memorial, or the biggest challenges the memorial faces?

4. How does the site select which topics to discuss or which photos and artifacts to put on display? Are there any that cannot be discussed/exhibited? (Buchenwald refuses to show an entire Nazi flag in their exhibit. French museums refer to prisoners as deportees.)

5. Is there any specific verbiage the museum/site makes sure to use or not use? Example: use of the word Nazi or Nazi party, etc.

6. Has your site ever had to address controversy over lack of representation, misrepresentation, or dramatization?

7. Do you display all perspectives (Nazis, Guards, Jews, POWs, Romani, Gays, etc.) in your exhibit?

8. Does your site discuss the brothels and the forced prostitution of prisoners in the camps? Is there documentation/evidence of a camp brothel?

9. In your professional opinion, how does the collective memory of Austria reflect in the exhibit/memorial? Overall, how well do you think Austria memorializes the Holocaust?

10. In a *USA-Today* article, Hans-Christian Jasch, director of the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site in 2017, said, “It is not always necessary to show big piles of corpses…The point is not to overwhelm people with history, yet still grant them access to it.” How does the site view "[showing] big piles of corpses" in museum exhibits? Does your site show these types of photos? Why are showing “big piles of corpses” important/not important or needed?

11. Hanna Liever, an adviser to Germany's federal agency for civic education, states that the US, Britain, and France present the Holocaust “on an emotional level.” Do you think evoking an emotional response plays a role in educating about the Holocaust? Does the Mauthausen memorial aim to evoke an emotional response?

12. Where does funding come from?

13. Who has the final say on what is exhibited/displayed in the museum and in the various camp buildings?

14. Number of visitors every year? What nationalities? Ages?

15. When was the memorial opened? When was the current exhibit created/opened? Are there previous exhibits? Is there a discussion to update the current exhibit or the displays in the other buildings? If so, when? What changes are going to be made?

16. What languages is the exhibit presented in?

17. What is the memorial's view on having building and/or artifact reproductions on display?

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