

Call for Papers: “Creative Responses to Holocaust Materialities”

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Edited by Hannah Wilson and Jay Prosser

In recent years, there has been a greater awareness concerning the need to address the experiences and suffering of victims of National Socialist persecution as evidenced by material culture (Sturdy Colls & Ehrenreich, 2021). Undeniably, objects facilitate human interaction and, to quote Laura Levitt (2020), “tainted artefacts are oddly compelling. They demand our attention.” As Oren Baruch Stier (2015) notes, material artefacts of the Holocaust, when used as microhistorical sources, are among the most powerful signifiers of that era, because they carry and convey the material trace of an authentic experience.

Throughout the war, belongings of victims were hidden or entrusted to others, contemporaneous archives and collections were established within Jewish organisations to document crimes, property was plundered by both the occupational regime and local residents of occupied territories (Dean, 2008). The establishment of concentration and death camps created a new dimension of materiality relating directly to the perpetrators and those who suffered there (Wilson, 2022). Indeed, as Zuzanna Dziuban & Ewa Stańczyk (2020) have observed: “mass violence leaves behind a trail of destruction. Similar to people, things also fall victim to displacement and armed conflict.” Thus, the materiality of the Holocaust provided indisputable evidence of the mass murder of Europe’s Jewish population, as well as of other victim groups, and as such was used in legal proceedings and war trials. International archives and institutions were rapidly established following the wave of post-war migration, with the extended function of preserving historical documents, diaries, letters, photographs, and artefacts pertaining to the Shoah. For some of those who survived, valuables and precious family items were retrieved from safe places or returned by those entrusted to keep them. For other survivors their lost or looted property weighed all the more heavily given the erasure of human life. At the same time, mementos were also saved from the “deathworld” (Kidron, 2012) as physical reminders of their owners’ survival and suffering, and those who lost loved ones retained material memories of the deceased (Wilson, 2022).

As victims’ individual voices began to integrate more broadly into global Holocaust memory following what Annette Wieviorka (2006) deemed the “era of the witness”, set in motion by the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann during 1961–62, the significance of authentic, personal and biographical items in public and cultural spaces also increased, more so than the anonymous piles of belongings pertaining to the mass murder and dehumanisation by the perpetrators (Van der Laarse, 2017). Since then, objects have been mobilised in oral history and storytelling, cinematic works, creative practice in fine arts and literature, and museology and display. Museums are also actively seeking items still scattered or being unearthed in private, familial archives, and there are ongoing cases and research concerning restitution. Moreover, the “forensic turn” of former Holocaust sites has helped to concretize material culture of this period as its own, important academic discipline (Dziuban, 2017). Indeed, as we rapidly approach the period in which no first-hand witnesses are left, objects take on an even more urgent and significant role in the future of Holocaust memory. They offer a tangible link to the past through their provenance and apparent authenticity, even while as

objects ever more historically removed from the event they raise questions about the creative role of the imagination in our apprehension and interpretation of them.

In this special issue, we aim to further examine the 'material turn' of Holocaust studies through the lens of creative practices, which remains an understudied area of this movement. As Marianne Hirsch (2019) notes: "Commemorative artistic practices can themselves function as the connective tissue between divergent but related histories of violence and their transmission across generations. The arts offer a fruitful platform to practise the openness and responsiveness that allow such connections to emerge for the postgenerations". Our scope includes contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous artistic, cultural, and literary works, established by those with and without a direct connection to this history. Contributions to this special issue might explore artists' reflecting critically on their own creative processes working, for instance, with textiles, objects, images, or sound as an ephemeral artefact, and critics showing how survivors or their descendants have represented the Holocaust through these materialities. One theme might be re-purposing, repackaging or even 'recycling' of materials: a material intended for one purpose which has been used or examined for other ends. Another concern might be the role of creativity in the phenomenology of viewing and interpreting historical materialities, or of creativity in the effort to recover, or reconstruct, lost or stolen objects.

Suggested topics might include (but are not limited to):

- Production of creative works during the Holocaust
- Production of creative works by survivors
- Production of creative works by descendants/families
- Materiality and Jewish artists (without direct connection to the Holocaust)
- Materiality and non-Jewish artists
- Materiality in/of film
- Materiality in/of literature
- Materiality and museum display/curation
- Materiality and education
- "Forensic" and "Bystander" art
- Creative engagement with memory sites
- Creative engagement with objects

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words, with a short biography (150 words max). Please send your proposals (or any questions) via email to: holocaustmaterialities@gmail.com by 1st August 2024.