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Agents of memorialization: Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* and the individual (re-)creation of a Holocaust landscape in Berlin

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Abstract

In their studies of the memorialization process and its outcomes, geographers have traditionally focused on state-driven commemoration. This is true for studies of Holocaust memorials in Berlin, which have mostly investigated the roles of the state in the creation of state-sanctioned memorials. It is also important to focus on non-state actors who are engaged in the creation of memorials to better understand how individuals interpret and shape a cultural landscape. In this paper we use a case study of German artist Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones), which are small memorial stones that commemorate individual victims of the Holocaust at their former homes and businesses. Individuals, families, and school groups conduct historical research and finance the emplacement of these memorial stones in sidewalks in Berlin and other cities. The research findings are based on participant observations at ten installation ceremonies in Berlin in May 2011, interviews with Demnig's assistants and participants in the ceremonies, and media accounts of the *Stolpersteine*. Responding to recent calls for the inclusion of agency in the memorialization literature, we study how individuals shape a cultural landscape. These agents of memorialization negotiate meanings of the Holocaust with city and federal governments, thereby (re-)creating a cultural landscape for current and future generations.

Keywords: *Stolpersteine*; Holocaust; Berlin; Memorialization; Agency; Cultural landscape

Gunter Demnig walks the streets of Berlin like a man on a mission. He does not usually stop to chat, but he will answer the occasional question in his soft-spoken timbre. Decked in his brown leather fedora, denim jacket, and thick pants despite the warm weather, some observers might come to the conclusion that he is just another quirky Berliner. But they would be wrong.

The artist from Cologne, Germany, always seems to do his work the same way, no matter what city he is visiting: down on his right knee, tools off to one side, the occasional spectator or school group on the other. Demnig is on the road most of the year, 300 days in 2009 and 255 in 2010. Reaching in his jacket pocket for a cleaning rag, he polishes the small stone he has just finished installing in the sidewalk.

HIER WOHNTE
MARION EHRLICH
JG. 1928
DEPORTIERT 29.11.1942
ERMORDET IN AUSCHWITZ

Here lived Marion Ehrlich. Born in 1928, deported on November 29, 1942. Murdered in Auschwitz.

Another *Stolperstein* has been laid. Another victim of the Holocaust is now remembered.

Introduction

This article focuses on the roles of individuals in the making of a cultural landscape of Germany. We investigate the ways in which individuals (re)create meanings of the Holocaust through participation in a memorialization process. The memorialization of individual victims of the Holocaust with each *Stolperstein* (literally, stumbling stone) contrasts state-sponsored memorials that present the outcomes of the Holocaust as large, incomprehensible numbers. For comparison, the *Stolpersteine* are small, 10-by-10 centimeter memorial stones placed in sidewalks in front of homes or businesses that were the last known location of Holocaust victims (see Fig. 1). The *Stolpersteine* present a human dimension of the Holocaust that is often missing from state-sponsored narratives and representations of the past.

Geographers have traditionally focused on state-driven commemoration – for instance, how state governments have

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shaped Germany's memorial landscape.[1] However, more recent geographical scholarship has begun to recognize the roles of individuals as producers *and* consumers of commemoration.[2] Our research brings together three strands of literature to understand how agents shape processes and outcomes of memorialization, namely individuals' inclusion in the memorialization process, subjects of memorialization, and personal responses to memorialization. We argue that individuals (re)shape Berlin's cultural landscape through the *Stolpersteine* in four ways: writing the past onto a landscape, interpreting and co-constructing the stones' meaning at installations, challenging state-sponsored narratives of the Holocaust through the memorialization of individual victims, and creating new understandings of a past and present cultural landscape through everyday encounters with the *Stolpersteine*.

In this paper, we describe Gunter Demnig's biography and details of the *Stolpersteine* creation process, followed by an overview of the literature on the role of individuals in the memorialization process and Holocaust memorialization in Germany. Thereafter, we introduce our fieldwork methods and analyze how the *Stolpersteine* project demonstrates the power of individual agents to shape a commemorative landscape. We conclude that individuals have the power to restore Holocaust victims' names to their former geographic location. As a result, this project enables and causes people to mentally 'stumble' over Germany's Holocaust past in their everyday lives.

The *Stolpersteine* creation process

Gunter Demnig was born in Berlin in 1947 in a household that spoke little about World War II or the Holocaust. He was 18 when he found out that his father had served in the German army before and during the war. Despite many attempts to talk with his father, Demnig said that his father suppressed everything related to the war.[3] Demnig started a degree in art pedagogy at the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts in 1967. In 1985 he opened a studio in Cologne, and his art became more political and personal as he began to work on public art projects. In 1990, he was hired by the city of Cologne to create a temporary memorial trail for Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims. Eventually, the trail wore off the sidewalks, and Demnig retraced the lines in 1993. The retracing of the trail sparked the idea for the *Stolpersteine*:

> [As I was working,] an older lady came to me. She was a witness at that time [during the Holocaust]. She said: 'Nice what you are doing here, but no Gypsies ever lived in our area.' I showed her all my documents. The woman's jaw dropped with the shock. That was the idea for me because she didn't realize that. *They'd lived in the same neighborhood.*

Fig. 1. *Stolperstein* for Marion Ehrlich. Giesebrechtstraße, Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Berlin. Photograph: first author.

> It was confirmed by the Jewish community, which told me, 'Until 1933, we celebrated together with our Christian neighbors.'[4]

After this conversation, Demnig planned to install 200 stones in Cologne in 1993 for the Roma and Sinti victims whom he had previously researched.[5] However, he did not receive permission from the city council until 2000. During the interlude, he installed several *Stolpersteine* illegally in Berlin beginning in 1996. These stones were retroactively legalized when Demnig received permission to install more *Stolpersteine* in Berlin. After Berlin and Cologne gave Demnig legal permission to install the memorial stones in 2000, the project began to receive media coverage, and the project took off quickly. As of April 2013, Demnig has installed over 40,000 *Stolpersteine* in roughly 1000 locations in Germany and 12 other countries.[6] As Uta Franke, Demnig's partner, explained:

> It used to take much longer to get the permission [for new installations]. Now people call me: 'We've already got our permit.' They call and want us to come immediately! A year ago, I had to explain: Get a permit first. So I had some time until they called again. But now, it all happens at the same time. People have a permit, and they want the stones. Cities like Hamburg, Cologne, Berlin, Stuttgart, and Frankfurt am Main, but also smaller ones with big Jewish communities want us to come at least twice a year. Impossible to manage even in one year![7]

Demnig and his small team of assistants produce the *Stolpersteine* in a memorialization process that spans across Germany.

[1] The following works investigate the role of the German government in remembering its violent past: J. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven, CT, 1993; B. Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*, Chicago, 1997; R. Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century*, Chapel Hill, 1998; K. Till, Staging the past: landscape design, cultural identity, and *Erinnerungspolitik* at Berlin's *Neue Wache*, *Ecumene* 6 (1999) 251–283; B. Grésillon, Berlin, cultural metropolis: changes in the cultural geography of Berlin since reunification, *Ecumene* 6 (1999) 284–295; R. Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990*, Berkeley, 2000; B. Forest, J. Johnson, and K. Till, Post-totalitarian national identity: public memory in Germany and Russia, *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004) 357–380; K. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*, Minneapolis, 2005; J. Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond*, Stanford, 2006; M. Azaryahu, The politics of commemorative street renaming: Berlin 1945–1948, *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011) 483–492.

[2] S. Hoelscher and D.H. Alderman, Memory and place: geographies of a critical relationship, *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004) 347–355; D. DeLyser, Authenticity on the ground: engaging the past in a California ghost town, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89 (1999) 602–632; U. Staiger, Cities, citizenship, contested cultures: Berlin's *Palace of the Republic* and the politics of the public sphere, *Cultural Geographies* 16 (2009) 309–327; N. Johnson, The contours of memory in post-conflict societies: enacting public remembrance of the bomb in Omagh, Northern Ireland, *Cultural Geographies* 19 (2011) 237–258.

[3] D. Franke, *Stolperstein: Ein Film von Dörte Franke*, 76 minutes (2008).

[4] Franke, *Stolperstein* (note 3).

[5] K. Grieshaber, Plaques for Nazi victims offer a personal impact, *New York Times*, 29 November 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/29/arts/plaques-for-nazi-victims-offer-a-personal-impact.html?pagewanted=all (accessed 5 August 2013).

[6] G. Demnig, *Stolpersteine*, 2013, http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/technical-aspects (accessed 5 August 2013).

[7] Franke, *Stolperstein* (note 3).

Before Demnig can create and install a *Stolperstein*, individuals or groups must receive a permit for the installation from the city government. In Berlin, each of the 12 districts have slightly different applications for the installation permit, but the major requirement is documented proof that the victim lived or worked at the address where the stone will be installed. For many victims, proof is relatively easily obtained because the Third Reich kept meticulous and well-organized details of deportations and arrests for much of World War II. One example is the *Gedenkbuch Berlins: der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* [literally, Berlin's Memorial Book of the Jewish Victims of National Socialism], a comprehensive book of 55,969 Jewish victims who were deported from Berlin or went missing during the war.

After a permit has been obtained, the individual or group sends the historical information to one of Demnig's assistants. The *Stolperstein* is funded by the individual or group that requests the stone or by a sponsor. The €120 price of each memorial stone offsets Demnig's expenses, pays his workers, covers the materials for the *Stolperstein*, and the installation of the stones. Once a *Stolperstein* has been researched and paid for, the information is placed on a list for production. Demnig tries to include as many details about a victim's life on a *Stolperstein* as possible to help memorialize the effects of the Holocaust on individuals. As indicated in the introductory vignette, a victim's name, maiden name (if applicable), birth year, death date, and his or her fate (whether he or she was deported, murdered, killed in a concentration camp, committed suicide, etc.) are listed on a *Stolperstein* if the information is known. Once on the list, the details are hand chiseled into a brass plate in Berlin by another artist, Michael Friedrich, and then delivered to Demnig's workshop in Cologne. When newly created *Stolpersteine* have been delivered, Demnig and another assistant take extensive trips to install hundreds of stones around Germany.

Before a *Stolperstein* installation, Demnig and his assistant look for the address and a place to park their van. Demnig selects the location to install the stone in the sidewalk, sometimes with suggestions from family members or a sponsor. Depending on the pavement of the sidewalk, Demnig and his assistant may break up asphalt or concrete with a jackhammer or remove a few cobblestones with a hammer and chisel. Demnig then fits one or more *Stolpersteine* into the hole by adding or removing enough dirt to level each stone. Once the stones are arranged, Demnig pours concrete around the sides to secure the stones and fills in the rest of the hole with dirt and gravel. Finally, Demnig or his assistant polishes the stones before going to the next installation.

Individual agency in memorialization

Much of the geographic literature on agency in memorialization has questioned the role of the state as the designator of official memory.[8] However, scholars have focused less on the participation of non-state actors in memorialization processes. Peters argues that this is especially true in Berlin, where scholars have largely researched a small number of high-profile, high-controversy projects but ignored its more 'ordinary places'.[9] Some geographers have recently begun to pay attention to the role of individuals and non-state actors in the memorialization process, including individuals as agents in the memorialization process, subjects of memorialization, and personal responses to memorials.

Individual agents in the memorialization process

In the last two decades, scholars have investigated the creation of memorials, either by states or groups that aim to preserve the memory of the past. Individuals and government agencies often disagree about the representation of the past, and these contestations are reflected in memorial landscapes. In this section, we provide an example of research on state memorialization processes from Karen Till and contrast this with studies of the roles of individuals in memorial creation. Till has written about state memorial processes in *The New Berlin*.[10] Till studies the role of the German government in the creation of relatively new state-funded Holocaust memorials: the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* [Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe], the *Topographie des Terrors* [Topography of Terror], and the *Jüdisches Museum Berlin* [Berlin Jewish Museum]. Till argues that these memorials reflect the German government's interpretation of history:

> Traditionally national places of memory were created and understood as glorifying the pasts of 'a people.' But such places are also made today to forget: they contain and house disturbing absences and ruptures, tales of violence. Places of memory both remember pasts and encrypt unnamed, yet powerfully felt, absences – absences that might be considered modernity's ghosts of the nation.[11]

In other words, Till argues that state-sponsored 'national' places of memory may conceal the past as much as they reveal it. In contrast to state-sponsored memorials, the rest of this section examines individual participation in memorial creation processes.

Jordan examines the agency of individuals in her history of memorialization in Berlin.[12] She argues that a memorial entrepreneur – 'someone willing to lobby on behalf of memorialization' – is essential to any successful memorial in Berlin. She describes the history of several memorials, including the efforts of German writer Inge Deutschkron to preserve the factory of Otto Weidt, a German who attempted to save the lives of his blind Jewish workers between 1941 and 1943. Cooke also studies the role of key actors in the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial in London.[13] He investigates the debate between the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Anglo-Jewish community, and the British media over the location of Britain's first public memorial dedicated to Holocaust victims. Staiger's research on the destruction of Berlin's *Palast der Republik* [Palace of the Republic, the former GDR parliament] underlines the expanded role of civil society in memorialization and erasure in urban landscapes.[14] She argues that civil society has contributed to the negotiation of historical memory in Berlin through both preservation *and* erasure. '[The] negotiation of the present and future of Berlin… takes place not only in but about its

[8] See note 1, and S. Berg, A project in jeopardy: the unending battle over Berlin's Sinti and Roma memorial, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,736716,00.html (accessed 5 August 2013).

[9] D. Peters, Theorizing the new Berlin as an 'ordinary' city – does it advance the 'comparative gesture' in urban studies?, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Los Angeles, 2013.

[10] Till, *The New Berlin* (note 1).

[11] Till, *The New Berlin* (note 1), 9.

[12] Jordan, *Structures of Memory* (note 1).

[13] S. Cooke, Negotiating memory and identity: the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, London, *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2003) 449–465.

[14] Staiger, Cities, citizenship, contested cultures (note 2).

buildings, monuments, ruins and vacant lots. The collective standing of the citizenry in this city is intimately linked with the future of these burdened sites.'[15]

A 2004 special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* on memory and place addressed the roles of individuals in the memorialization process.[16] In this issue, Hoelscher and Alderman explain the role of agency in memorialization from the perspective of social class:

> Representatives of dominant social classes have been most adept at using memory as an instrument of rule. …Moreover, it is often the case that memories of ordinary people are appropriated by elites and pressed into the service of conquest and domination… Recent research suggests, however, that less-privileged groups… are becoming ever more adept at making use of memory to challenge their own subordination.[17]

Hoelscher and Alderman argue that the memorialization process is laden with power issues that should be investigated. Other authors in the special issue call for scholars to move beyond an 'elite-public' dichotomy in research on memorialization agents[18] and to consider the roles of political actors, heritage institutions, and tourists as agents in the creation of memorial landscapes.[19] We aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of individuals in Holocaust-specific memorialization processes.

In contrast to the state-centered focus in *The New Berlin*, much of Till's recent research has investigated individuals in the memorialization process.[20] For example, Till researched a project in Cape Town, South Africa, where construction workers uncovered the largest mass grave ever discovered in South Africa in 2003. The colonial-era mass grave, containing 3000 bodies, forced current residents to think about Cape Town's violent past and sparked a grassroots movement to envision and create a more just future. Community organizations and artists/activists argued that the burial ground was more than an opportunity for forensic study and academic investigation of South Africa's colonial history. Rather, activists and local artists organized workshops to discuss historical colonial and racial injustices. Till argues that scholars rarely study the memory practices of individual artists and activists, and she calls for research that is sensitive to the ways in which individuals and groups 'experience memory as multisensual, spatial ways of understanding their worlds.'[21] In response to this call, our project investigates the ways in which individuals commemorate the Holocaust in their everyday actions in Berlin.

The participation of individuals in Holocaust memorialization can contribute to a deeper and more personal understanding of Germany's past. Individuals, particularly Germany's younger generations, obtain a deeper understanding of their nation's past when participating in Holocaust memorialization projects. Through active participation in the *Stolpersteine* project, our informants – including school children, victims' family members, and donors for individual *Stolpersteine* – came to understand Germany's past in a more personal way. Instead of seeing the Holocaust as the death of 13 million victims, or 6 million Jewish victims, participants learned about the Holocaust through research on a specific victim or a small group of victims. In the next section, we discuss the literature on subjects of memorialization.

Individuals as subjects of memorialization

In addition to participating in the memorial creation process, individuals have been the subjects of memorialization projects. For example, Alderman analyzes the discourses of the memorialization of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., through street names and school names in the United States.[22] He studies how individuals and groups, including local African American activists and local chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, have organized projects to rename streets in honor of Dr. King.[23] Alderman argues that memorializing a historical figure like Dr. King is usually a contentious issue because some actors and groups may have different interpretations of history and seek to downplay King's historical legacy. Similarly, the *Stolpersteine* have been contentious in Germany because some homeowners and city government officials diminish the legacy of the Holocaust. These people think that the *Stolpersteine* are unnecessary because they believe Germany has adequately expressed remorse for the Holocaust and built enough memorials.

Merrill researched the memorialization of Silvio Meier, a squatter who was murdered in Berlin in 1992.[24] Merrill found that Meier was memorialized through an unofficial memorial plaque and annual vigils and demonstrations, and some activists have tried to renamed a local street after Meier. Merrill argues that street naming is a more traditional way to memorialize individuals in Berlin, while vigils and demonstrations attract many more active participants. Azaryahu has also written extensively about the politics of street (re)naming in Germany as a commemorative action.[25] Throughout his work, Azaryahu focuses on commemorative street (re)naming as historical revision of a cultural landscape, similar to returning Holocaust victims' names to Berlin's landscape through the *Stolpersteine*. For example, Azaryahu researched the commemorative street renaming practices that were carried out in Berlin from 1945 to 1948. He argues that street renaming is a twofold process of de-commemorating the history of the old regime,

[15] Staiger, Cities, citizenship, contested cultures (note 2), 312–313.

[16] The special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (3) was edited by Hoelscher and Alderman.

[17] Hoelscher and Alderman, Memory and place (note 2), 349.

[18] Forest, Johnson, and Till, Post-totalitarian national identity (note 1).

[19] O. Dwyer, Symbolic accretion and commemoration, *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004) 419–435; L. Desforges and J. Maddern, Front doors to freedom, portal to the past: history at the Ellis Island immigration museum, New York, *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004) 437–457; S. Hanna, V. Del Casino, C. Selden, and B. Hite, Representation as work in 'America's most historic city', *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004) 459–481; D. DeLyser, Recovering social memories from the past: the 1884 novel *Ramona* and tourist practices in turn-of-the-century southern California, *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004) 483–496.

[20] K. Till, Artistic and activist memory-work: approaching place-based practice, *Memory Studies* 1 (2008) 99–113; K. Till, Wounded cities: memory-work and a place-based ethics of care, *Political Geography* 31 (2012) 3–14.

[21] Till, Artistic and activist memory-work (note 20), 99.

[22] D.H. Alderman, Street names as memorial arenas: the reputational politics of commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr. in a Georgia county, *Historical Geography* 30 (2002) 99–120; D.H. Alderman, School names as cultural arenas: the naming of U.S. public schools after Martin Luther King, Jr., *Urban Geography* 23 (2002) 601–626.

[23] Alderman, Street names as memorial arenas (note 22), 101.

[24] S. Merrill, Berlin: active remembrance in a melancholic city, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Los Angeles, 2013.

[25] Azaryahu's research on street renaming includes M. Azaryahu, Street names and political identity: the case of East Berlin, *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986) 581–604; M. Azaryahu, The purge of Bismarck and Saladin: the renaming of streets in East Berlin and Haifa, a comparative study in culture-planning, *Poetics Today* 13 (1992) 352–367; Azaryahu, Politics of commemorative street renaming (note 1); M. Azaryahu, Renaming the past in post-Nazi Germany: insights into the politics of street naming in Mannheim and Potsdam, *Cultural Geographies* 19 (2012) 385–400.

followed by commemorating events, heroes, and ideologies of the new regime.[26]

Beorn and colleagues conducted a collaborative historical geography project that incorporates Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to compile location data about the Holocaust.[27] The research team participated in a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum workshop organized by Knowles, Cole, and Giordano. This workshop used GIS to represent the personal and embodied nature of confinement and surveillance in Auschwitz. Individual layers in their GIS map correspond to a Holocaust victim's or survivor's personal experiences and geography. As we note in this article, the *Stolpersteine* also represent the life history of individual victims, but this history becomes a part of a material rather than a digital landscape.

Personal responses to a Holocaust landscape

Some scholars have studied personal responses to the past at specific sites of memorialization. For instance, DeLyser argues that individuals create strong connections to places that support specific versions of the past, whether real, imagined, or mythic.[28] Beyond making emotional connections to a landscape, memorialization can also provide healing. Foote developed a continuum of memorialization based on a community's response to violence or tragedy. He divided those responses into four categories: sanctification, designation, rectification, and obliteration.[29] As Foote explains,

> The creation of memorials can play a healing role in times of community distress for many reasons. …A dedicatory ceremony makes grief public, setting an example for survivors who may otherwise have difficulty facing their losses in private. …In this sense the dedication of a memorial can offer a sense of closure, a sense that the worst is behind.[30]

Sanctification happens most often after martyrs or heroes have died or when a community faces a great loss. Sanctification involves a permanent memorial and a ceremony that dedicates a space as sacred. Designation is similar to sanctification because the site of violence has a marker, but there are no rituals or consecration services to 'sanctify' the space. Rectification occurs when the site of a tragedy or violence is restored to its former function after a period of fame. The space is no longer associated with the event that occurred and retains no sense of shame in the minds of community members. Foote notes that obliteration only occurs when senseless violence causes community members to feel shame. Obliteration goes beyond merely 'cleaning' a space to return it to a former use; rather, it is the complete scourging of space and destroying everything at the location.

Foote's categories are appropriate for many memorials in Europe, particularly World War I and II memorials that are highly sanctified. However, the *Stolpersteine* do not neatly fit into just one of Foote's categories. Given the wide range of responses to the *Stolpersteine* observed in Berlin, the 'stumbling stones' fall between sanctification and designation. Some individuals consider the stones highly sacred, while neo-Nazis have defaced or tried to remove several *Stolpersteine*. This range of responses indicates that the Holocaust past is still a contentious and highly debated issue.

Johnson describes an example of the strong emotions that surround the commemoration of violence. She researched public memory practices in Northern Ireland as a response to the bombing of Omagh in 1998.[31] In August 1998, the Real Irish Republican Army set off a car bomb near Omagh's courthouse, killing 29 people and injuring 220 more. Because Northern Irish society is highly divided along religious and nationalist lines, Johnson notes that memorialization of this act of terrorism could have been an extremely polarizing act. However, she argues that by memorializing all victims – which included both Protestants and Catholics – some degree of reconciliation could be reached. Similarly, we observed that families who requested a *Stolperstein* also found emotional closure through memorialization.

Moye provides another example of individuals' emotional responses to tragedy.[32] After Hurricane Katrina greatly damaged the Southeastern U.S. in 2005, homes that were damaged were spray-painted with X's. The various colors of paint indicated if the home contained dead bodies, if it was scheduled for demolition, or if the home was structurally safe. As they returned to their homes, survivors responded with grief, joy, or relief to homes marked with different colored X's (or 'Katrina Crosses' as they came to be known). Individuals also respond with different emotions to former locations of violence or tragedy when they encounter a *Stolperstein*.

Holocaust memorialization in Germany

Memorialization in Berlin, as is true for perhaps all of Germany, is highly contested: numerous authors highlight struggles over the meaning, location, and cost of nearly every monument and memorial in the German capital.[33] One of the fiercest contestations concerns who and what should be memorialized. Germany began to memorialize victims of World War II almost immediately after the end of the war. However, Ladd notes that it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that younger generations of Germans began to question the faceless and nameless memorials that often focused solely on the victims as groups or numbers rather than individual victims and perpetrators.[34] This period marked a major increase in the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – the process of coming to terms with mistakes of the (implicitly Nazi) past – with the understanding that such a past should never be repeated.[35] *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is still present in Germany, represented in the thousands of Holocaust and other war-related memorial sites around the country.

In *Legacies of Dachau*, Marcuse traces the shifting meanings – or 'uses and abuses' – of the Dachau concentration camp throughout the twentieth century.[36] Marcuse notes that most concentration camps in Europe were not initially preserved to record the history

[26] Azaryahu, Politics of commemorative street renaming (note 1).
[27] W. Beorn, T. Cole, S. Gigliotti, A. Giordano, A. Hollian, P.B. Jaskot, A.K. Knowles, M. Masurovsky, and E.B. Steiner, Geographies of the Holocaust, *Geographical Review* 99 (2009) 563–574.
[28] DeLyser, Authenticity on the ground (note 2).
[29] K. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, Austin, 2003.
[30] Foote, *Shadowed Ground* (note 29), 80–81.
[31] Johnson, Contours of memory in post-conflict societies (note 2).
[32] D. Moye, The X-Codes: a post-Katrina postscript, *Southern Spaces*, 2009, http://southernspaces.org/2009/x-codes-post-katrina-postscript (accessed 5 August 2013).
[33] Some examples are: Young, *Texture of Memory* (note 1); Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin* (note 1); M. Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy*, New York, 1998; Till, Staging the past (note 1); Till, *The New Berlin* (note 1); Jordan, *Structures of Memory* (note 1); Azaryahu, Street names and political identity (note 25); Azaryahu, Politics of commemorative street renaming (note 1); Azaryahu, Renaming the past in post-Nazi Germany (note 25).
[34] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin* (note 1), 152–153.
[35] For more on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, see Till, *The New Berlin* (note 1), 8.
[36] H. Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: the Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001*, Cambridge, 2001.

of the atrocities that were committed within their walls. Immediately following the war, camps were used to house liberated survivors, refugees, or to intern German soldiers. In the 1950s, camps were preserved as educational sites or memorials, and, in general, these sites first opened to the public in the 1960s and 1970s. Marcuse's history of the shifting meanings of Dachau is an example how Germany has struggled with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and the *Stolpersteine* are a recent example of this continued process of coming to terms with Germany's past.

In Berlin, contextualizing, or 'digging up,' a violent past raises a number of questions. Which 'ghosts' should be remembered? Which versions of the past warrant remembrance or forgetting? And, in what *forms* and *places* should memory be concentrated? Till critically examines the role of the state in creating some of Berlin's most famous Holocaust memorials and the ways in which Germans deal with the past through political dialog and contestation.[37] She argues that the state-funded memorial district in Berlin was a manifestation of German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's (in office from 1998 to 2005) agenda of 'normalizing' Germany to the rest of the world through a presentation of guilt and penitence, similar to Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and Jacques Chirac, who also apologized for past national crimes. Till notes that the use of Berlin's landscape as a national morality stage actually had the opposite effect. By making the Holocaust past 'hypervisible,' Till says, it has actually become spatially *invisible* and devoid of meaning. By forcing memorialization of the Holocaust onto the national stage in a centralized location, Till argues that the memorial district has turned the Holocaust into a product meant to be consumed by local Germans and tourists alike.

In contrast to grand memorials sponsored by the German government, Stangl focuses on vernacular, or everyday, memorials in Berlin.[38] He describes vernacular memorials as symbolic or physical traces of collective memory actions that give testimony to everyday life in the past. Stangl argues that Berlin's vernacular memorials are 'fluid' because many sites could be commemorated, but lack public interest or funding. Using street signs in Berlin as an example, Stangl also argues that vernacular memorials – much like the *Stolpersteine* – do not have to be monumental in physical size to represent collective memory. We now turn to literature that has investigated the *Stolpersteine* project.

Several scholars have recently researched the *Stolpersteine* through geographic and landscape studies frameworks. Harjes applies the term *Stolpersteine* to several Holocaust 'counter monuments,' including Demnig's project and the *Gedenktafeln* (metal historical markers hung from street signs) in Berlin's Schöneberg district.[39] Harjes compares the *Stolpersteine* to the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe (at the time of her writing, not yet completed). She argues that the *Stolpersteine* are useful as a counter monument because they 'speak out' for individual victims. However, she finds them problematic because they lack contextual information.

Hansen compares Holocaust memorials in Hamburg, Germany, and Haifa, Israel.[40] He traveled to Hamburg primarily to research war memorials, and discovered Demnig's project by accident. Hansen states that the project serves as a kind of tombstone for victims who were never given a burial ceremony, which counters Demnig's intentions that the *Stolpersteine* not be considered gravestones. Hansen underlines one major significance of the *Stolpersteine*:

> You may not intend to visit the memorial, yet this one will visit you! This is an important spatial strategy. You are not likely to take a long walk around Hamburg without visiting a *Stolperstein* at some point. ...You suddenly stand in front of the place where a man, woman or family was dragged out and taken to a camp – formerly a real environment or space of memory, but today turned into something different: a *lieu de memoire* or site of memory.[41]

Gould and Silverman focus on the *Stolpersteine* as a vernacular memorial embedded in Berlin's cultural landscape.[42] They describe their participation in a German–U.S. collaboration called *Germany Close Up*, sponsored by the German General Consul in New York and the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Gould and Silverman were introduced to the *Stolpersteine* on their first day in Berlin. They find that 'the narrative of the *Shoah* [the preferred Jewish term for the Holocaust] becomes an ever-evolving dialog with local residents and tourists.'[43] While these three articles primarily focus on meaning-making aspects of the *Stolpersteine*, we focus on individuals' agency in commemorating the past.

Site selection and fieldwork methods in Berlin

Berlin has over 3000 *Stolpersteine* – more than any other city except Hamburg, Germany. Demnig was scheduled to install more than 100 new *Stolpersteine* over a 3-day period in May 2011. A list of *Stolpersteine* installation locations for May 10 and 11 was obtained from one of Demnig's assistants. The initial plan was to attend 17 of the 32 installations based on their geographic proximity, but it quickly became apparent that it was not logistically possible to walk or take Berlin's public transportation to attend the next installation on time. Demnig and his assistants traveled in a van between the installation sites, which were located across three districts in Berlin.[44] To keep up, installations at sites in close proximity were selected, and installations at ten sites were observed. The first author conducted fieldwork in order to study the involvement of participants in *Stolpersteine* installation ceremonies, the second author oversaw the fieldwork research, and they co-authored this article.

Herbert argues that ethnographic methods like participant observation are useful for answering geographic research questions.[45] Ethnography can reveal the ways in which social structures are reproduced and challenged, and it can reveal how these social structures are meaningful to those who engage with them. At the installation ceremonies, insights were gained into the ways in which survivors, victims' families, school groups, and financial sponsors shaped Berlin's memorial landscape through the

[37] Till, *The New Berlin* (note 1).
[38] P. Stangl, The vernacular and the monumental: memory and landscape in post-war Berlin, *GeoJournal* 73 (2008) 245–253.
[39] K. Harjes, Stumbling stones: Holocaust memorials, national identity, and democratic inclusion in Berlin, *German Politics and Society* 23 (2005) 138–151.
[40] A.H. Hansen, Memorials and memory politics in Hamburg and Haifa, in: P. François, T. Syrjaämaa, and H. Terho (Eds), *Power and Culture: New Perspectives on Spatiality in European History*, Pisa, 2008, 163–185.
[41] Hansen, Memorials and memory politics (note 40), 173.
[42] M.R. Gould and R.E. Silverman, Stumbling upon history: collective memory and the urban landscape, *GeoJournal*, September 2012, http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10708-012-9466-6 (accessed 5 August 2013).
[43] Gould and Silverman, Stumbling upon history (note 43), 9, emphasis original.
[44] Demnig tries to visit Berlin four times a year to keep up with the demand for new *Stolpersteine*. This means that he only installs stones in a few districts each trip.
[45] S. Herbert, For ethnography, *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2000) 550–568.

Stolpersteine. Through participant observations, rituals such as telling victims' personal histories, singing religious songs, saying prayers, and placing flowers and candles around the *Stolpersteine* were observed during installations. Before and after these ceremonies, the first author spoke in English or German with several people who were present, including victims' family members, financial sponsors, and teachers and parents of school children who helped research the victims' past.

Formal interviews were conducted in English with two of Demnig's assistants and two staff members at the *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand* [German Resistance Memorial Center] who help coordinate and manage the *Stolpersteine* at the municipal level. These interviews focused on the memorial creation and installation process. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with thirteen pedestrians in German with the help of a translator. These pedestrians discussed their knowledge of the *Stolpersteine* in their neighborhoods. In the next section, we analyze individuals' agency in memorialization through observations from four *Stolpersteine* installations.

Individuals as agents of memorialization: the *Stolpersteine* project

While the *Stolpersteine* are a powerful presence, the memorial stones do more than remind us of the past. The *Stolpersteine* are also the material outcomes of recent struggles over the right to memorialize the victims of the Holocaust. The *Stolpersteine* are similar to memorial sites of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement described by Dwyer and Alderman:

> These sites are produced by, and are in turn productive of, partisan views of collective memory and urban space ostensibly related to the past but the results of which are directly implicated in the shaping of alternative futures. They are, in effect, materialized discourses emplaced in the landscape.[46]

Like the sites of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the *Stolpersteine* are the product of individuals' participation in a memorialization process, and they become materialized discourses that are embedded in a landscape for anyone to encounter.

The vignettes in this article and thousands of personal stories from other installations demonstrate individuals' agency to shape a memorial landscape in at least four ways. These include the power of individuals to write the past into a memorial landscape, individuals' emotional responses to the past during an installation, the significance of commemorating specific victims of the Holocaust, and the symbolic meanings of individuals walking by and encountering *Stolpersteine* in their everyday activities.

'Writing' a memorial landscape

The first way that individuals have agency to shape memorial landscapes is through the actual text of the memorial. Alderman argues that geographers have largely overlooked the significance of the words and phrases used on memorials and monuments, and these words matter because they are implicated in the social construction of the past.[47] Individuals and state actors both have the power to 'write' a Holocaust memorial landscape into existence. As the installation for Gittel Littwack shows, the work of many individuals restores her name and the memory of her tragic fate to her former geographic location.

Gittel Littwack

This day was to be a *Stolperstein* day (Fig. 2).

Finally, Demnig drove his van up to the sidewalk at No. 7 Bartningallee, and Demnig appeared, *Stolperstein* in hand.

The children rushed around Herr Demnig with the first *klink* of the hammer strike. The children had been waiting for the artist for more than an hour. Their music teacher led them in familiar German folk songs sung to parents whose faces beamed with pride as their children participated in such an important historic event.

As usual, the installation did not take more than a few minutes. It was an easy installation – the stone for Gittel Littwack would be added to others at the same address for Rosa Ziegler, Herta Jakobsthal, and Herbert Jakobsthal.

Demnig knew just where to put this special stone.

Within a few minutes, Demnig had to rush off to the next installation, already behind schedule for the other dozen or so installations that day. But the children, parents, and teachers all crowded in to see the culmination of their time and effort:

HIER WOHNTE
GITTEL LITTWACK
JG. 1939
DEPORTIERT 9.12.1942
ERMORDET IN
AUSCHWITZ

Here lived Gittel Littwack. Born in 1939, deported on December 9, 1942. Murdered in Auschwitz.

A local Jewish cantor recited the Kaddish as the crowd stood in silence for the first time that day. Then, a little girl stepped forward and read from a piece of paper.

> 'Dear Friends, I thank each of you for all the time and effort that you have sacrificed for this special occasion. …When I think about little Gittel, I thank God that my brother and I were spared a similar fate.'
> 'The *Stolperstein* for little Gittel should serve first as a reminder for you, and second as a memorial for all humanity, that such a cruel time should never be forgotten,' she continued.

'PS: I found this Eskimo saying very nice and fitting for this occasion:

> Perhaps they are not stars, but rather openings in heaven
> where the love of our lost ones pours through
> and shines down upon us to let us know they are happy.'

Audience interpretation and emotional response to the past

As we described in the literature review above, geographers have observed many different emotional responses to landscapes of tragedy and violence. The individuals who attend *Stolpersteine* installation ceremonies are no exception, and many of them consider the stones sacred. This is one example of Foote's category of sanctification, and the next two vignettes illustrate the emotional responses of individuals at installations.[48] Further, as the

[46] O. Dwyer and D.H. Alderman, Memorial landscapes: analytic questions and metaphors, *GeoJournal* 73 (2008) 165–178.
[47] D.H. Alderman, 'History by the spoonful' in North Carolina: the textual politics of state highway historical markers, *Southeastern Geographer* 52 (2012) 355–373.
[48] Foote, *Shadowed Ground* (note 29).

Fig. 2. Children crowd in to watch Gunter Demnig install a *Stolperstein* for Gittel Littwack. Mitte, Berlin. Photograph: first author.

Fig. 3. Symbolic accretion at the *Stolpersteine* for Rachel and Solomon Schmidt. Pintschstraße 18, Friedrichshain, Berlin. Photograph: first author.

accompanying photographs illustrate, some of the victims' family members place and leave objects at the memorials, including flowers, Israeli flags, and candles. These actions are what Dwyer has called symbolic accretion – 'the appending of commemorative elements on to already existing memorials.'[49] Azaryahu also notes that leaving vernacular objects, much like the objects left at a *Stolperstein* installation, have the effect of making a site sacred for audience members.[50]

Rachel and Solomon Schmidt

The family of Rachel and Solomon Schmidt was a diverse, boisterous group. As the first author walked up, he heard people speaking English, German, French, and Hebrew. Dressed like they were attending a funeral, the Schmidts' children and grandchildren had traveled from the United States, Israel, and Germany to witness the ceremony. The Schmidts' eagerly anticipated the installation of two new *Stolpersteine*.

Demnig could only stay for about fifteen minutes to install the stones before he had to drive on to the next installation, but the family tried to insist that he stay for the ceremony. The Schmidts' stayed at the site for over an hour and recalled the lives of Rachel and Solomon before singing a Hebrew song and reciting the Kaddish, the Jewish mourner's prayer.

Two family members mentioned in speeches after the installation that this was the first time that they were able to 'bury' their relatives. They had ordered special yarmulkes for the occasion with a Hebrew text that read, 'In remembrance of Rachel and Solomon Schmidt, done [performed] in Berlin on May 11, 2011.'

The Schmidt family observed several Jewish customs, including singing, reciting the Kaddish, and laying candles and roses by the *Stolpersteine* to commemorate their loved ones (see Fig. 3). The two stones were installed in a quiet street where they will be little noticed, but to the family and financial sponsors, the place is now sanctified.

Max Riess

The family of Max Riess waited for nearly an hour. 'Where is Demnig? What is taking so long?' the oldest woman asked. The day had turned uncomfortably warm, and the group had expected Demnig to arrive at 12:30 sharp (Fig. 4).

The first author tried to alleviate the tension by speaking up for the esteemed artist. 'Well, you see, Demnig often runs late to the afternoon installations because of traffic. And, often the families want him to stay for their ceremonies after an installation.' He was defending a man he hardly knew.

The family nodded approvingly. 'And do you work for Demnig?' the woman asked. The first author explained that he was a student from the United States, conducting research on the *Stolpersteine*. For a few moments, he had uncomfortably drawn attention to himself. The family was intrigued. They wanted to know why he was studying the project and how he found out about it.

This must be how Demnig feels, he thought. Constantly bombarded… It is so easy to get emotionally invested.

Commemorating individual victims

Demnig's *Stolpersteine* present a version of the Holocaust past that greatly differs from the versions of history presented at state-sponsored memorials like those discussed by Till.[51] Demnig envisioned the *Stolpersteine* as a way of retelling the history of the Holocaust through individual or family narratives in a distinctly different way than the large, impersonal memorials created by the German government. As Demnig has said, the trigger behind the project was 'the idea that we have to restore their names. In the concentration camp they were numbers.'[52] This practice of presenting individual names and faces as part of the history of the Holocaust has also been employed in other memorials, including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This museum gives visitors an identification card or 'passport' of a Holocaust victim or survivor to provide visitors an 'authentic' experience.[53] The *Stolpersteine* similarly give a more 'human face' to the Holocaust by

[49] Dwyer, Symbolic accretion (note 19), 420.
[50] M. Azaryahu, The spontaneous formation of memorial space: the case of *Kikar Rabin*. Tel Aviv, *Area* 28 (1996) 501–513.
[51] Till, *The New Berlin* (note 1).
[52] Franke, *Stolperstein* (note 3).
[53] The Holocaust 'Passports' at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum are discussed by E.T. Linenthal, The boundaries of memory: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *American Quarterly* 46 (1994) 406–433; R. Handler, Lessons from the Holocaust Museum, *American Anthropologist* 96 (1994) 674–678; N.J. Peterson, Postmodernism and Holocaust memory: productive tensions in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, in: J.N. Duvall (Ed), *Productive Postmodernism: Consuming Histories and Cultural Studies*, Albany, 2002, 167–195.

Fig. 4. A relative of Max Riess approaches Gunter Demnig to photograph the newly installed *Stolpersteine*. Photograph: first author.

embedding the names of individual victims into a landscape. The next vignette, like all the participant observations, shows that the *Stolpersteine* memorialize individual victims and give a ‘human face’ to the Holocaust.

Mathilde Jacob

The first author observed the next installation with a large group of people at a school in Mitte, at the corner of Altonaerstraße and Lessingstraße. This school offers an anti-racism course in which students research the history of a victim who once lived at the school’s location. There were already seven *Stolpersteine* installed at the site, and Demnig added a new one in front of the school. The students joined Demnig for the installation, telling the audience about the class’s purpose while holding up a banner that read ‘A school without racism is a school with courage.’

They told the history of Mathilde Jacob, who was deported on July 27, 1942, to Theresienstadt, where she died in 1943. After Demnig had installed the stone, the school group and other attendees crowded to see. Then, several students read information about the *Stolpersteine* project to encourage the audience to become involved.

Fig. 5. Gunter Demnig bends to clean four newly installed *Stolpersteine*. Mitte, Berlin. Photograph: first author.

Individuals’ everyday encounters

Before the *Stolpersteine* are installed, the locations where Holocaust victims once lived have little meaning for the public. They are simply sidewalks that are part of everyday urban life (Fig. 5). However, when individuals and groups install a *Stolperstein* at a site, they are intentionally ‘re-placing’ a victim in the physical space from which they were once removed. By evoking their memory and marking their former location, Demnig’s stones commemorate a real person who actually lived at the address – not just an ‘anonymous victim of history.’[54] Once a landscape takes on a new meaning, even if just for a few people, it has been turned into *place*, embedded with social meaning, as we have demonstrated in the vignettes. This is the emotional power of a single *Stolperstein*: to cause individuals to ‘stumble over genocide’ in their everyday life.[55]

Individuals encounter the *Stolpersteine* during their daily activities just by walking on Berlin’s sidewalks. As Adams notes, walking brings the human senses into interaction with place, and the *Stolpersteine* bring pedestrians into contact with the Holocaust past whether or not it was their intention.[56] The first author observed that some people step on the *Stolpersteine* when they do not watch where they are going (see Fig. 6), but other individuals take the time to find the stones in their everyday activities. The *Stolpersteine* can become part of individuals’ daily activities intentionally or unknowingly. These chance, everyday encounters with the *Stolpersteine* demonstrate that the individuals can be involved in Holocaust commemoration whether or not they choose to be.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how the *Stolpersteine* memorialization process operates and the ways in which individuals shape memorial landscapes. When studying memorials, it is important to pay attention to the creator(s) of the memorial and that person’s intentions. Demnig – a political artist – initiated the *Stolpersteine* project, while many Holocaust memorials in Berlin are initiated and financed by government actors and agencies. Demnig designed the

[54] Quoted in C. Nickerson, Artist lays down plaques for victims of the Nazis, *International Herald Tribune*, 14 January 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/14/world/europe/14iht-web.0114victims.4198978.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all (accessed 5 August 2013).

[55] The authors thank Dr. Joshua Inwood for sharing this phrase.

[56] P. Adams, Peripatetic imagery and peripatetic sense of place, in: P. Adams, S. Hoelscher, and K. Till (Eds), *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, Minneapolis, 2001, 186–206.

Fig. 6. Two pedestrians walk close to three *Stolpersteine* on Friedrichstraße, Berlin. Photograph: first author.

Stolpersteine to be permanent memorials of individual victims, their names, and ultimate fate for future generations to encounter. Further, Demnig decided to install the memorials in sidewalks to force people to encounter the memorials. The *Stolpersteine* thus force a reaction from pedestrians who stumble over the stones. Recently, Alderman and Inwood have argued that the study of streets named for Martin Luther King, Jr., 'offers an opportunity to explore place naming as a cultural arena for racial and ethnic minority struggles to reshape the identity of landscapes, the contours of social memory, and the larger sense of political membership and social inclusion communicated within the public realm.'[57] Similarly, by memorializing individual victims of the Holocaust, the *Stolpersteine* reshape local commemorative landscapes and give new meaning to the streets in which the Stolpersteine are placed. By bringing the Holocaust into people's conscience, Deming forces people to deal with uncomfortable issues and mentally 'stumble' over the implications of the absence of victims. *What if this person were still alive today?* The *Stolpersteine* remind us that we will never know the answer.

Our research has demonstrated the central role of emotions in memorialization. Individuals who are actively involved in the creation process may develop a strong emotional connection to the *Stolpersteine*. The *Stolpersteine* are spread across Europe, but the project is more than a collection of stones that are embedded in sidewalks. The project also creates connections to the past through the memory of tragic events and lives that were lost. The stones elicit strong emotions as we demonstrated in the vignettes, and they require people to engage with places of former violence. We recognize – as Anderson and Smith argue – that emotions are an integral part of human interactions with space and place.[58]

Finally, the *Stolpersteine* indicate that the socio-cultural and geographical context matter in the study of memorialization. As mentioned above, Berlin has a wide range of Holocaust memorials that serve different functions. Many of these memorials are place-specific, commemorating events that took place in the city of Berlin and its neighborhoods. In a city that at times has tried to hide, destroy, and move on from the past, Demnig's *Stolpersteine* reinscribe the past in Berlin's sidewalks for all to encounter. In addition, participation in the research and installation process forges historical and emotional connections to the places in which people live and work. As geographers, we must thus consider the meanings of local spaces, places, and landscapes in the creation and experience of memorials.

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[57] D.H. Alderman and J. Inwood, Street naming and the politics of belonging: spatial injustices in the toponymic commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr., *Social and Cultural Geography* 14 (2013) 211–233, 213.

[58] K. Anderson and S. Smith, Editorial: emotional geographies, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26 (2001) 7–10.