

**Jennifer Gohlke – Michigan State University**

Intermediality as Prosthetic Memory

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The Case of the United States Holocaust  
Museum

# United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



# Peter Novick

What still united the American Jews was “the knowledge that but for their parents' or (more often) grandparents' [...] immigration, they would have shared the fate of European Jewry.”

*(Novick, The Holocaust in American Life)*

# USHMM



"Institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust"

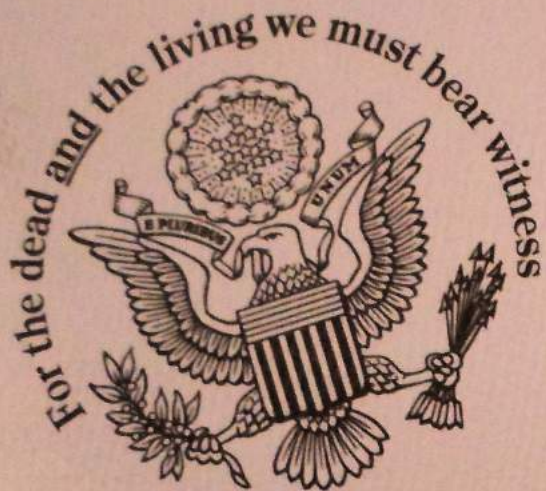
*(ushmm.org)*

# USHMM – Mission Statement

- Advance and Disseminate Knowledge About the Holocaust
- Preserve the Memory of Those Who Suffered
- Encourage Visitors to Reflect upon Moral and Spiritual Questions Raised by the Holocaust
- Reflect upon One's Own Responsibilities

*(ushmm.org)*

# IDENTIFICATION CARD



United States  
Holocaust Memorial Museum



Name: Ruth Elisabeth Dahl (Greifer)  
Date of Birth: May 30, 1922  
Place of Birth: Geilenkirchen,  
Germany

Ruth was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Geilenkirchen, a rural German town near the Dutch border. Her father, Isidor, was a respected cattle dealer in the area and her mother, Sophia, took care of the home. Ruth had two older siblings, Edith and Carl.

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# Main Claims

- The Past Displayed Through the Lens of the Present
- The Constructedness of Memory
- Intermediality as Tool to Create *Prosthetic Memory*

# Intermediality

- Within the Humanities:
  - Usually Refers to the Relations Between Literature, Visual Arts, and Music
- In This Presentation:
  - Refers to the Relations Between Anything That Mediates Information, Emotions or Ideas.



# Authentic Artifacts



# Textual Components

← Affidavit by Auschwitz Commander Rudolf Hoess Overstating the Number of People Killed in the Camp

Ich erkläre hiermit an Eidesstatt  
dass in den Jahren 1941 bis 1945  
während meiner Amtszeit als Kommandant  
des K. L. Auschwitz 2 Millionen  
Juden durch Vergasung und ca.  
10 Millionen auf andere Weise zu Tode  
gebracht wurden.

Ung. 14. 5. 1946      Rudolf Höss

The above was written signed before me  
at Nuremberg, Germany on May 19, 1946

Josephine  
Chief, Analytical Section  
Interrogations Division  
Office of A. S. King of Counsel



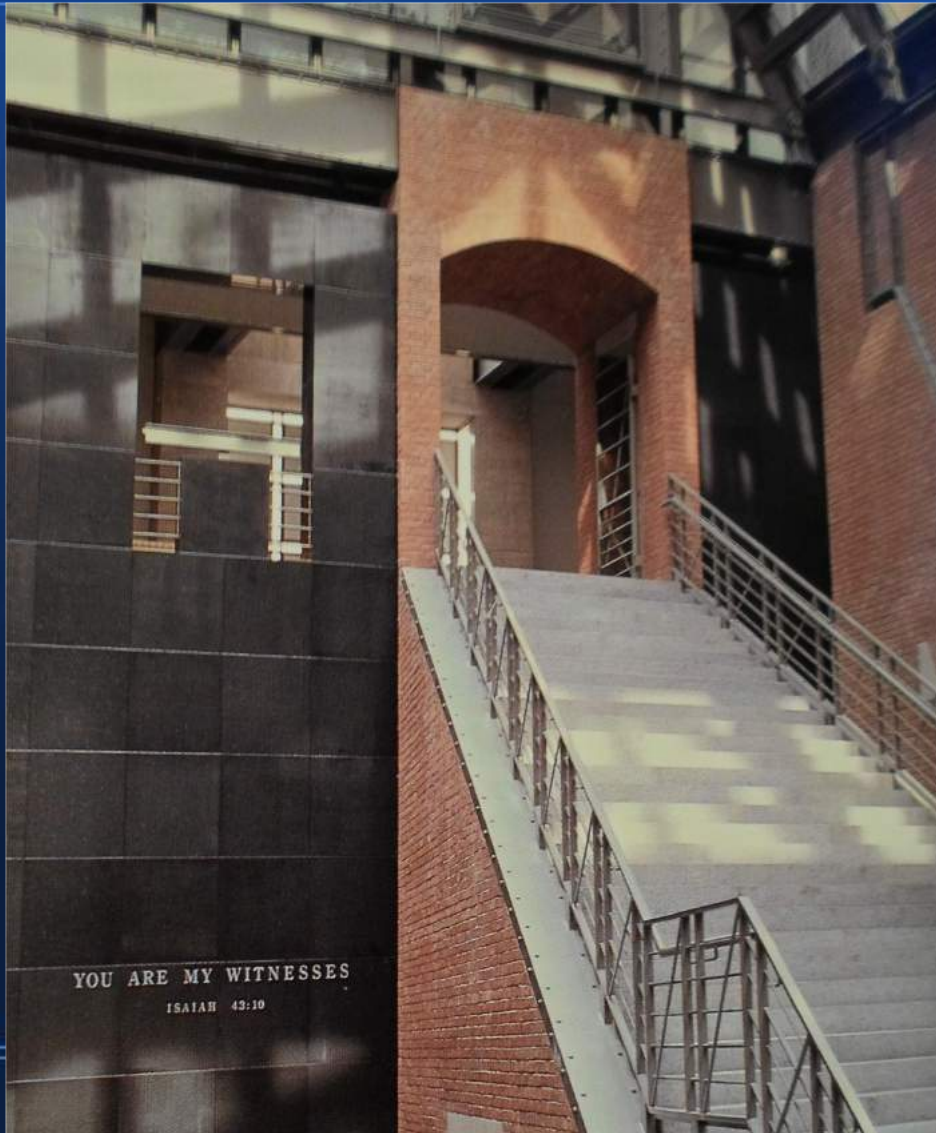
Raoul Wallenberg, Swedish Diplomat – Led extensive Rescue Effort by Issuing “Protective Passports”

# Visual Components



Photographs, Books, Posters displaying Works and Ideas on “Racial Studies”

# Architecture



← Staircase in the Hall of Witness



Brick Gate at Auschwitz-Birkenau

# James Ingo Freed - Architect

“Abstraction in architectural design operates 'as a vehicle for a certain kind of memory - a memory that remains open, fluid, and above all highly personal and subjective'”

*(Freed, Architect of the USHMM Building)*

# Prosthetic Memory

*Prosthetic Memory* refers to a kind of artificial memory that emerges when "a person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live."

*(Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory)*

# Complicates the Notion of Intermediality

Intermediality as being “prone to confusing the otherwise stable temporalities and historical contingencies of works of art and literature”

*(untimelinessofmedia.tumblr.com)*

# Conclusion

Intermediality Overcomes Untimeliness of the US Holocaust Museum and Stabilizes the Temporality of the Museum, the Holocaust, and the Exhibits.