

## The Theft of History: Memorial, Affect and Profanation

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*The truth is indivisible and is therefore incapable of recognizing itself; whatever claims to recognize it must be a lie. (Franz Kafka, The Zurai Aphorisms 79)*

### **“Historic, sad and overwhelming site”**

On 8 December 2009, the infamous Arbeit Macht Frei sign was stolen from Auschwitz (Fig. 1). Taken between 3:30-5:00 AM, it was replaced with a replica by Museum staff in the morning (“Auschwitz’s sign”).<sup>1</sup> With a replacement safe at hand, does the original matter?

When news of the sign’s theft reached the public, there was an instantaneous, fevered response. The act was called “unthinkable,” a “desecration,” and a “true declaration of war” (“Auschwitz death”).<sup>2</sup> Discussion forums flourished with impassioned reactions that centred around the sign’s symbolic and emotional nature—as a symbol of the Nazi’s cynical approach to the systematic extermination of European Jewry, and a crucial element within the remains of the Auschwitz camp as an experiential, physical site able to impart visitors with a somatic dimension to historical events (ibid).<sup>3</sup> As a symbol, would the replacement be as powerful? As a cue to memory, would the replacement be as effective? What makes the original sign important, valuable, or necessary if there is a replacement, and how, then, does it act as a memorial? Most importantly, what effect does the theft have on Auschwitz as a site of memorialization?

### **Monument**

The preservation of Auschwitz as a site of memorial marked a new method in the maintenance of collective memory. In the wake of the First World War, the nations that had fought developed a common physical appearance for their monuments: most towns positioned sculpted figures of soldier on plinths bearing inscriptions in battlefields, civic squares, parks, bridges, parliament buildings, or churches, and they were typically set in front of framing archways or in front of obelisks, where the names of the nation’s battles are engraved; a wreath, coat of arms, or angel figure might crown the monument (Williams 3-4). Usually, these monuments marked victories while paying tribute to the soldiers who died in battle. Auschwitz-Birkenau, on the other hand, began as a concentration camp. It was established by Nazi Germany in 1940 in the suburbs of Oswiecim, Poland initially as one more compound to hold a growing mass of Polish political prisoners. In 1942, it became the largest death camp in the Nazi’s attempt to exterminate European Jews. After being liberated in January of 1945, it has been run as a state museum since 1947 with over a million visitors a year (“KL Auschwitz-Birkenau”; “Auschwitz’s sign”). Its preservation memorializes not a victory, but stands as testament to the million people, 90% of them Jews, who were systematically murdered within its confines. As a contextualized site, it offers visitors access to the events carried out there. But the question remains, what is the nature of this access? As well, how do off-site Holocaust monuments attempt to provide this historical access—a way of experiencing this history?

These were the underlying questions in a debate that began in 1980s Germany with respect to the method, form, and effectiveness of monuments and memorialization. To a large extent, the formal and thematic paradigm of First World War monuments was maintained

during the years immediately after WWII, where additional engravings and emblems were even added to existing WWI monuments for practical and symbolic reasons (Williams 4). It was in postwar America that an aesthetic agenda was fostered, which put forward Abstract Expressionism as the West's emblematic form of freedom in opposition to Communist Russia's Socialist Figuration. This opposition played out in sculpture at an early point in postwar years, with the international competition for the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner held in London in 1951. The competition was sponsored by London's Institute of Contemporary Arts and was initiated by Anthony Kloman, an American acting on behalf of an anonymous benefactor.<sup>4</sup> This was prior to America's use of AbEx painters as cultural weapons in the cold war. None of the proposed entries were created, even the first-prizewinning entry by British sculptor Reg Butler. Numerous prize winners from the competition, though, went on to make abstract public sculpture, including Alexander Calder, Herbert Ferber, Richard Lippold, and Theodore Roszak, while over the next two decades AbEx became the dominant form of public sculpture institutionalized in America and Western Europe (Marter 28-30). Traditional forms of public monuments began to seem irrelevant during postwar years, when the inexorable rise of abstraction in modern art was coupled with the proliferation of writings on the profound suffering and devastation caused by atomic and conventional weapons, the Nazi death camps, and the political oppression of Communism.

However, the draw toward abstract forms in monuments began to wane during the 1980s. Despite being condemned as non-referential to the point of meaninglessness, Abstract Expressionism was still defended by some art historians like Joan Marter who, writing in 1994, concluded that "the viability of abstract forms as a means of remembrance" is demonstrated by Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, among "related projects in other cities" (Marter 36) (Figures 2, 3). American artist Maya Lin's memorial design, while at first glance appearing to be strictly abstract (and often read symbolically as a scar across the face of America), exemplifies the subversive and challenging stance that debates concerning the representation of historical events in monuments would begin to take during the 1980s. Composed of two black granite walls that start at ground-level and grow in height to meet each other obliquely at a central apex, the monument is covered with the inscribed names of the American dead. In chronological order beginning with 1959 and ending with 1975, the names form vertical, per diem lists that increase and decrease over the course of the war. This linear reference lends visual amplification and somatic resonance to the human cost of conducting a war that the 1970s American public deemed senseless. This divergent technique holds a stark literalness that Abstract Expressionist monuments forego in favour of forms that, for better or worse, are interpreted as symbolic. Indeed, Reg Butler's monument, initially created with the specific intention of being, in the artist's own words, "a monument to those who had died in the concentration camps" ("Final Marquette"), was instantly euphemized by the public as a futuristic television antenna (Hadden and Luce 83).

The subversively referential and starkly practical approach shown in Lin's Vietnam memorial is a manner of dealing with historical event memorialization that arose during the 1980s as discussions of practical and ethical means of representing the Nazi exterminations within memorials and literature were centre stage, culminating in seminal publications during the early 90s.<sup>5</sup> Various new forms of monuments were proposed during this period with a focus on combating the rigid physicality of traditional monuments whose symbolic openness across

time suggests an unethical treatment of the brutal reality of the atrocious events of WWII. In 1992, James E. Young coined the term *counter-monument* to denote tendencies in monumentalizing techniques that are in opposition to “the presumptuous claim that in its materiality, a monument can be regarded as eternally true, a fixed star in the constellation of collective memory” (294).

Young uses such examples as Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz’s *Harburg Monument Against Fascism* (1986). As a twelve-meter high, one-meter square pillar made of hollow aluminium and plated with a thin layer of soft, dark lead, the Gerz’s monument was progressively lowered into the ground in 1.5 metre increments as, over the years, visitors to it scrawled their names into the lead walls of the obelisk; now that the monument is buried, the *Monument Against Fascism* exists only within each memorialiser. This was the Gerz’s attempt to not build another externalization of responsibility—an obfuscatory site where attention is paid to an issue by recalling memory while similarly atrocious present-day events go unaltered (280-1).<sup>6</sup> By concretizing what one is to remember and hence prevent, the myriad of similar events that occur in the world are not flagged. People are not watching out for and attempting to prevent events *like* the Nazi’s horrific attempt at the extermination of European Jews; they are attempting to prevent *the* Holocaust, in the myriad descriptions in which this singular event has been reified. In this way, built monuments manage guilt while enabling tolerance of similar crimes, and constitute a theft of the political import in the events they are meant to archive. Young reminds us that, “Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always be there to remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience” (273). He continues, “To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. In effect, the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them” (ibid). At the same time, Young recognizes that once the monument moves its viewers to memory, it also becomes unnecessary and so may disappear. In this way, the counter-monument celebrates its own changing over time, its inevitable destruction, and the human contingency of memory.

It is because the counter-monument seeks to activate enlivened memories within people, as opposed to traditional memorial aims of externalization, recollection, and condolence, that each individual is enlisted as witness with the hope that if past events and their consequences can become instilled within people they will be understood in real time and therefore prevent future outrages. This approach breathes new life into monuments both new and old, and underlines the importance of lived experience as a prime epistemological method concerning historical events. It is also underwritten by the notion that material artefacts of *some* kind will remain, if only as canonical objects, the treatment of which I will discuss in the following section of this essay. The counter-monument holds at its core the idea that there will be forms of material to counter, and this is where the sign at Auschwitz comes in. As a historically contingent, contextually situated, materially fragile object, what can the notorious sign at the gateway to Auschwitz communicate? What effect does its preservation have on its efficacy as a reminder and hence deterrent of mass genocide?

### **Contextually Contingent Material and Collective Memory**

Although a million people visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum every year, it is plain to say that a far greater number do not. Yet, the most sinister aspects of the Second

World War are taught all over the world in Holocaust memorial museums (Williams 6-7). Like most manners of museal education, the majority of visitor interest is created by the extensive use of event images and remnant objects. To gain a firm grasp on what the sign at Auschwitz presents embodied visitors, we must first look at photographs and decontextualized artefacts in order to see how they differ in comparison.

Photographer and writer Janina Struk in *Photographing the Holocaust* (2004) relates that the “Majority of photos displayed as evidence of the Holocaust were made by the Nazis as proof of their power” (214). This extensive documentation makes the Nazi’s genocide unique, as concealment attempts by perpetrators are the norm for most organized murders of this magnitude; orchestrated violence looks to destroy the material proof of its existence and thus buries both records and bodies (102). Like other concentration camps, photography was integral to the operation of Auschwitz, used for identity papers or as evidence of abhorrent medical experiments.<sup>7</sup> Presently, pictures are shown out of context simply as evidence, and juxtaposed to images originally captured thousands of kilometres apart, giving the impression of continuity between disparate events. This may have an unwished normalizing effect, as Struk observes, where, “The historical facts of the policies of the Third Reich are reduced to easy-to-follow picture stories which can be made appropriate to many different memories [...] In the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, as in other Holocaust museums, the Holocaust narrative begins with Nazi Germany, then the ghettos, the camps and the liberations” (213). Struk posits that, when testimonies that are used to narrate accounts of Auschwitz are then paired with now-canonical photos taken of the camp and its prisoners, new ‘memories’ are formed, being neither that of the survivors, the photographers, or of the people depicted in the photos: “It is, in effect, a fiction [...] Fiction invites fantasy” (ibid). Because photograph is sometimes viewed as an indexical medium free from the messy complications of human interpretation, it is at times used as an uncomplicated pedagogical tool ambitiously allowing unmediated access to the past; contrarily, however, the process of interpreting a photo is inherently one of an imaginative filling-in. Photographs are visual cues to memory and imagination, recalling and constructing vivid experiences not initially obvious within the captured images.

Very few people have direct memories of Auschwitz, and thus the majority know it only through these remnant objects and photographs. There is a familiar canon of Holocaust objects: those usually associated with machines used to disappear bodies—boxcars, gas chambers, ovens—and the “terrible by-products” of the imprisonment and extermination processes—clothing, money, jewellery, eyeglasses, watches, hair, keepsakes, diaries, official Nazi regime equipment and insignias, as well as civilian artefacts of the 1930s and 40s used by museum curators to evoke atmosphere (Williams 25-7). James Taylor, curator for London’s Imperial War Museum, has said these canonical artefacts were crucial to the creation of Britain’s Holocaust Museum, as “one has to have striped uniforms, shoes and personal belongings of people who were murdered in the gas-chambers and a yellow star” (qtd. in Struk 192). Such a decontextualized aestheticized approach to the memorialization and education of the Nazi’s mass genocide is precisely the disembodied, uncritical tactic that traditional historiography has forwarded: a simple negation of anything material artefacts might tell us outside of their agreeability with preconceived historical impressions. Afforded the opportunity to witness the material contexts from which these objects and photographs have been drawn, one gains a

different sort of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> But what is the nature of this historical access? Is it able, like the aims of the counter-monument, to enliven past events within people?

### **Presence**

Walter Benjamin famously observes that “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 220). Even though a work of art, or any unique instantiation of a material being, can be moved or mimicked, there is no minimizing the effects of its original context or primary material. Benjamin sees the diminishing of art’s aura (the awe and reverence one feels when witnessing an original work of art), made possible by the prevalence of democratic modes of reproduction like the cinema, as a welcomed move away from the elitist bourgeois history of art and toward a politicized art—an art politically charged and socially shared. He sees this new art in opposition to the fascist mandate of aestheticizing art for political gain and societal control (227). Is it possible that this binary is inverted when one is dealing with historically contextualized sites? The sign at Auschwitz, as well as the camp itself, is both a sacralised site and a political battleground. Like all memorial museums, the aim of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is to communicate a direct message to visitors: to impart historical facts, figures, and events, and to link these things to a somatic response thereby humanizing the events. But that’s not all. There is something that the contextually situated sign at Auschwitz imparts that no photograph could. It is a non-conscious experience of intensity: affect.

Affect is what is experienced before a person forms a conscious feeling or conveys an emotion. As Eric Shouse puts forth in “Feeling, Emotion, Affect” (2005), a feeling is a sensation that has been checked against biographical and experiential information a person has previously garnered, where an emotion is the outward projection and display of this feeling as social action; affect is what makes feeling “feel;” it is the innumerable stimuli a body receives and registers, prior to consciousness, as an intensity infolded into the formulation of feelings (para. 2-5). This notion can help explain the importance of context in experiencing a site of historical events. It is often said that people are not moved by facts and figures, and it can be routinely mindboggling how inaction on the part of distant countries to respond to the atrocities of war can be accepted. The affect mechanism, as postulated by psychologist Silvan Tompkins, offers an interesting approach to explaining this troubling phenomenon. As Tompkins says:

The affect mechanism is like the pain mechanism in this respect. If we cut our hand, saw it bleeding, but had no innate pain receptors, we would know we had done something which needed repair, but there would be no urgency to it. Like our automobile which needs a tune-up, we might well let it go until next week when we had more time. But the pain mechanism, like the affect mechanism, so amplifies our awareness of the injury which activates it that we are forced to be concerned, and concerned immediately. (88; qtd. in Shouse para. 10)

National responses to distant traumatic events proceed with the same mechanistic logic, limited by what could be done given a certain set of logical restraints, rather than with the urgency of a society “forced to be concerned.” This is the same lack of affective resonance that allowed the horrible logic of the Nazi’s final solution to become praxis.

The sign at Auschwitz remains integral to a very real and concrete site of collective memory, and it offers an embodied visitor what a decontextualized reproduction or indexical image cannot: torrents of intensities that become linked with the 'facts' of history, imparting urgency to the act of memorialization. The contiguity and urgency the contextual site offers is not transmittable through the images and objects mediated through a rationalizing museal discourse. These images and objects are tasked with constructing a gestalt that is beyond their grasp. As museum educator Timothy Brown says, "The value that cultural artefacts have to make visible what is invisible introduces the paradox of confronting a traumatic past. The desire to bring forth 'positive' forms of identification (heroic memory) can occur at the expense of working through a painful and difficult past" (187). It is precisely because Auschwitz holds, as a site of affective resonance, pre-semantic information that any attempt to simply confine its potential testimony to a set of canonical images, typified objects, and ethical absolutes constitutes a failure to bear witness to the unaffected logic that engendered its inception. The sign (and other memorial entities like it) is easily reducible to a symbol, and has even been called 21<sup>st</sup> Century's most important.<sup>9</sup> However, it remains different from a built symbolic monument in a crucial way: because of its historically contextualized veracity, the sign at Auschwitz holds the weight of witness, encouraging people to constantly seek more of its testimony and instilling in them the resonance of urgency that the memorializing of historic events commonly lacks because of decontextualized means of presentation.

### **The Theft of History**

To return now to the problem of what the original sign is worth, its preservation, and its theft, we must move past the simple conclusion that Auschwitz, and sites of memorial like it, are multisensorial locations of affective resonance that communicate more than photographic images and decontextualized artifacts. In this formulation, the archived sign's authenticity might be seen to play a crucial role in betraying a sense of "real" past, as if this would somehow allow visitors to the site un- or less-mediated access to historical events. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), Jacques Derrida expounds upon and complicates this unmediated conception of the archive. The central question running throughout his lecture interrogates the relationship between the material event of the past and its corresponding imprinting in a material substrate so as to be archived. As Derrida asks, "But where does the outside commence? This question is the question of the archive. There are undoubtedly no others" (8). How does one record lived experience so as to allow it to be accessible to futurity? In what ways can documents of the past "speak for themselves?" How can the past, as unique and singular occurrence, be relived within the iterable, and, therefore, partial, inscriptions of memory and archive (100)?

For Derrida, archiving does not exist within the creation of memory, but in the creation of material traces as exterior effects of lived experience (11). Though originally joined by their synchronization in creation, the event and its documentation are separated at the moment of inception. It then becomes the task of historians and archeologists to reconstruct the event, access the truths of the singular and originary past, through the partial and material documentation. This documentation can be as formal as that kept within a classical archive, as a firmly guarded structure (Derrida recalls the Classical archons of ancient Greece who would rule over the archives and, hence, the law), or even the material traces of lived bodies within

the world as impressions (1-3; 20. 26, 30-31). But within this drive to archive, to memorialize the past, there remains the paradox informed by the necessarily selective and exclusory nature of writing. Derrida frames the paradox in this way:

if there is no archive without consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, or repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. (11-12)

This “archiviolithic” drive destroys the possibility of any perfect preservation of past events by erasing not only the material traces of the past but the pre-material memories or experiences of the past before they are able to be transcribed (10). This is the death drive that looms as an ever-present threat of failure above, but also within, the very act of memorialization as externalization and inscription of experience.

In response to this ever-present forgetting, an archive fever seeks to relive the past. Archive fever encompasses “the pure auto-affection, in the indistinction of the active and the passive, of a touching and the touched” (98) where, “this presupposes *both* memory *and* the archive [are ...] one and the other the same, *right on the same* subjectile in the field of excavations” (99). This is the historian’s dream of reliving the event through the material artifact of the past in the instants in which they were formed. The traumatic repeatability of the historical document, however, prevents this dream from being realized. It is with this idea of the traumatic nature of the archive, of archiving as a form of testimony of the past, that I would like to now return to Auschwitz’s stolen sign by consulting Giorgio Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz* through the frame of history-as-trauma as formulated by Cathy Caruth.

The notion of trauma is often brought forward as a means to explain the possible “unspeakability” of Auschwitz. For Caruth, whose work is informed by contemporary conceptions of post-traumatic stress disorder and Freud’s notions of trauma, trauma presents the possibility of discussing the troubling quagmire of referentiality in history (where normative historiography would present a simple model with linear relations to and from experience and reference). Caruth states, “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (187). This echoes Derrida’s sentiment that the moment of inscription, of memorization, of archiving, is also one and the same a moment of forgetting, of eliding, of occlusion. If we begin to think about the practical ramifications of this notion, a problematic truth claim seems to emerge. Debated here are not simply the myriad questions and possibilities of the manner in which events are “recounted,” but rather the focus is on what is actually perceived, in real time, as the event unfolds. This is problematic precisely because it places the testimony of witnesses on the reliable-unreliable axis, opening up their stories for debates as to their inherent factual grounds, along with what is normally regarded as an inability to verbalize atrocious acts.

This claim, by trauma, to the “unobservability” of events is directly contrary to the accounts of survivors themselves. Agamben firmly states that “The survivor’s vocation is to remember; he cannot *not* remember” (“The Witness” 26). As Primo Levi, who spent eleven months imprisoned in Auschwitz from February 1944 until its liberation in January 1945, relates, “The memories of my imprisonment are much more vivid and detailed than those of

anything else that happened to me before or after" (qtd. in *ibid*). This is the recoupable element in the notion of the traumatic experience, not the inability to perceive what is happening in an event, but the ability to hyper-perceive the event, in meticulous detail and veracity; what can be retold about the event is not affected by a lack of knowledge of what has happened but by an inexorable sadness that absolutely everything cannot be communicated because of the practical limitations of language and time. This is precisely the anxiety of archive fever: the conflicting combination of the manic drive to incessantly memorialize the past to (inexplicably) provide unmediated access to it, and the melancholic realization that within all of us, as within the very process of recording and archiving history, there remains an inevitable death drive that erases the past as it disallows the very archiving with which it is both fought and constituted (Derrida 94).

The theft of the sign at Auschwitz disrupts this archival project, and, in doing so, opens the site up to wider use and, in the manner of the counter-monument, dislodges the historical and ethical import of the site from its material existence, enlivening it in the minds of people. In a small chapter entitled "In Praise of Profanation" (2007), Agamben defines religion, as that which "removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere" of the sacral (74), in opposition to profanation, as that which "means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use" (75). Agamben suggests that revolutionary thinking, new modes of thought, are stifled within the religious and sacral paradigms as specific kinds of knowledge are consecrated and secularized by the museification of the world (84). Therefore, "The profanation of the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation" (92). By profaning the archiving of Auschwitz, by opening up its material existence to the possibility of new forms of use (regardless of the moral dimensions of its motivation), the theft of the sign at Auschwitz opens the site up to contemporary debate.

Within the theft of the sign, as an act of possession and possibly profit, there was an act of use or reuse that profaned the site and sign and in doing so reopened and enlivened Auschwitz from its museumification. The relationship between profanation and secularization, as long as it remains active, foregrounds the ethical import behind memorialization. This is what lived history means: not the reliving of the past, but the vivacious median of lived experience between use and preservation, between the profane and the sacred, between active invention of new uses and the petrification of ways of knowing. The theft (profane) works with preservation (secularisation) to move site, history, and memory in and out of use. This give-and-take motion is what enlivens history, what presses contemporary import onto past events and thrusts the consequent challenges of past events into daily life. To open up the possibilities of use for the sign at Auschwitz has meant its profanation, its reuse. Its theft does precisely this, while stimulating international discussion about the site, its preservation, importance and consequence.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The original sign was made at Auschwitz by Polish prisoners in 1941 as part of an overhaul of the camp; the sign is occasionally removed by officials for conservation work and a replica is used as a substitute (“Auschwitz’s sign”). The sign was recovered on 21 December 2009 by Polish police (“Auschwitz thieves”).

<sup>2</sup> Jarek Mensfelt from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum related, “It is more than just stealing something. It is a desecration”; Avner Shalev, director of Israel’s Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, said the theft, “constitutes a true declaration of war”; Polish ex-President Lech Walesa maintained it was “unthinkable” (“Auschwitz death”).

<sup>3</sup> A selection of comments from BBC news readers included many references to the camp as an emotional site: “the most incredibly atmospheric and moving place I have ever been to”; “historic, sad and overwhelming site”; “whole experience was very emotional” (“Auschwitz death”).

<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was the secret financial backer, see E. W. Kenworthy, “Whitney Trust Got Aid from a Conduit of the C.I.A.,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1967, cited in Marter, note 22.

<sup>5</sup> Possibly one of the most well referenced convergences of these issues is the conference “Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’: Probing the Limits of Representation” held in 1990 and the resulting anthology of essays (Friedlander).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, mass genocides have persisted since the Nazis: in Cambodia, 1.7 million people were killed between 1975-79; in Chile and Argentina, 60,000 people ‘disappeared’ between 1973 and 1986; in Pakistan, 1-3 million Bengalis were killed between March and December of 1971; in Taiwan, 30,000 people were killed on 28 February 1947; in Rwanda, 500,000-1 million people were killed in 1994; and, since 2003, there have been 300,000 killed in Darfur.

<sup>7</sup> Struk deals with numerous examples, and at length with the instances of documenting special forceps used to take out wombs of healthy women, and limbs of healthy prisoners infected with various substances causing sores and decay.

<sup>8</sup> Compare the relocated stones of the Warsaw Ghetto displayed in Las Vegas’ *Warsaw Ghetto Remembrance Garden* (2009) (see “Warsaw Ghetto Remembrance Garden”) to the contextual significance in a visit to Auschwitz that, even on a primary level, presents one with a sense of scale, logistics, and detail not available through photos or these decontextualized artefacts: “Only when you stand inside a gas chamber and see the marks left by thousands of fingernails in the concrete walls as men, women and children blindly struggled for an escape can you even begin to comprehend the level of atrocity and suffering” (“Should Auschwitz”).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it has been called “probably one of the most important [symbols] of the past century,” by Pawel Sawicki, Spokesman for Auschwitz Museum (“Auschwitz thieves”).

## Images

(Fig. 1) "Arbeit macht frei" sign over entrance to Auschwitz I, 1940, wrought-iron, 5 m. long. Poland. Photo: Public domain.



(Fig. 2) Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall*, 1982, engraved black granite, each wall 246' long, dimensions variable, Washington, DC, U.S.A. Photo: public domain.



(Fig. 3) Detail of inscribed names. Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall*, 1982, engraved black granite, each wall 246' long, dimensions variable, Washington, DC, U.S.A. Photo: public domain.



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