

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University Open Scholarship

Spring 2018

Washington University
Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts

Spring 2018

The Afterlife of Holocaust Testimony: Reframing Collective Memory for a New Generation

Louise DiMarco

Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018

Recommended Citation

DiMarco, Louise, "The Afterlife of Holocaust Testimony: Reframing Collective Memory for a New Generation" (2018). *Spring 2018*. 32.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018/32

This Abstract for College of Arts & Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University

Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2018 by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

THE AFTERLIFE OF HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY: REFRAMING COLLECTIVE MEMORY FOR A NEW GENERATION

Louise DiMarco

Mentor: Erin McGlothlin

As we come to rely on mediated sources of knowledge to learn about the events of the Holocaust, the relationship between houses of knowledge (archives), interpreters of knowledge (scholars, curators, and artists) and viewers becomes increasingly dialogic rather than authoritative. Holocaust narratives are often characterized by silence and fragmentation, stemming from the assumed “unspeakable” nature of the events they describe, the continued absences and gaps in narrative due to an inability to fully express trauma, and the contemporary taboos built around discussions of the Holocaust. I will present the precise mechanisms by which museums and literary narratives can push contemporary viewers to confront and reevaluate these three types of voids in common commemorative practices. Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, which I have paired with the *Memory Void*, is equally about the narrator’s struggle to represent his father’s story than his father’s experiences during the Holocaust. Imre Kertész’s fictionalized account of his own experiences during the Holocaust *Fatelessness*, told by his awkward adolescent narrator, notably ends after the protagonist’s return to his hometown and includes several scenes in which the narrator attempts to explain his experiences to listeners with varying reactions. These two groupings, the *Memory Void* with *Maus* and the Terezín Memorial with *Fatelessness*, each demonstrate a different approach to navigating the fragmented testimonies that contemporary viewers now rely on in order to learn about the events of the Holocaust. However, both pairings ultimately illustrate the power of denying viewers a false sense of closure or complete comprehension while still managing to build a satisfying learning experience.