Image vs. Anti-Image: the Role of Photography in the Construction of Testimony to the Holocaust

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Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucinda* (38)

Through an image’s malleability and capacity to extend the limits of language and suggest that which lies beyond its frame, photographs depicting the events of the Holocaust serve as a strong means of testimony through their ability to speak of the Event even when its victims cannot do so for themselves. An image holds the reality of an event, as well as the ability to look beyond simply the photographed scene, which in turn forces the spectator to mentally digest all the visual stimuli present within the frame. This means of testimony is principally utilized within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), in which the testimony of the events of the Holocaust is transmitted through the images themselves as well as their subsequent installations within the context of the Holocaust. Equally as capable in constructing a means of testimony which speaks to the devastation and loss of such a staggering number of individuals is the negation of image – the anti-image – leaving in its place the presence of absence through tangible space, as made manifest in the exhibits and structures of the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB). This dichotomy of tangible absence between image and anti-image reaches its peak in two specific exhibits within these two institutions: within the USHMM, the Tower of Faces, which holds 1,000 pre-war photographs, all depicting the faces of Jews murdered during the Holocaust, speaks to the magnitude of the Event by providing specific tangible images which
account for their deaths, while the JMB illustrates the culmination of Holocaust devastation in the Holocaust Tower, a bleak, empty concrete tower that stands for the tangible void left by the murder of Berlin Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. These towers are just two of many means through which image and anti-image work to construct testimony to the devastation and loss caused by the events of the Holocaust.

In the realm of visual testimony, an example of an image’s capacity for testimony resides on the third floor of the USHMM’s permanent exhibit, in a section dedicated to displaying images and artifacts of the Einsatzgruppen, or the mobile killing squads. One photograph in particular, simply labeled “Massacre of Jews by Germans and Latvians” depicts four women of varying ages, with linked arms and forced smiles.
Partway behind one of the woman cowers a younger girl with her head bowed and shoulders slumped. No other information is given regarding these women besides that which the spectator understands from the image itself, its title, and its contextualization amidst other similar images within the USHMM: sometime after the picture was taken, the women were killed. In considering the function of an image such as this, which outwardly depicts the atrocities that served as realities throughout the Holocaust, one rarely stops simply to ponder the aesthetic quality of the image. Rather, one may consider what, if anything, the photograph says, or what sentiments it evokes from its audience. In this contemplation, the photograph essentially challenges its audience to consider that which lies outside the limits of a frame, thereby illustrating Barthes' claim that an image is most provocative when it *thinks*. The basic placement of the women within the photograph establishes the basis of understanding on the part of the *Spectator*, while the details of the image, such as the placement and demeanor of the young girl, extend the limits of the photograph by inviting the spectator to question such details: why is the young girl hiding? Why are her shoulders slumped? More importantly, what is she reacting to that the other women are trying hard to ignore? This invitation to consider the aspects of a photograph – both latent and explicit – suggests the simultaneous invitation of the image to provide testimony to that which it portrays, in that, through an individual’s solitary perception of the scene, the photograph “immediately yields the ‘details’ which constitute the very raw
material of...knowledge" (28), and it is thus from this constitution of knowledge that the image comes to occupy the role as testimony to the events of the Holocaust.

Specifically in regards to Holocaust images, photography is recognized primarily for its role as a source of evidence to the Event. As straight evidence, these photographs are able to validate that to which the image bore witness by capturing the events on film. As with the image of the four women and young girl, their capture within the frame of an image confirms their basic existence in regards to their location at the time of their deaths. In their book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub quote poet Paul Celan who suggests that “'[n]o one bears witness for the witness...[t]o bear witness is to bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely, of that solitude'”(3). Thus the individual nature of bearing witness is born in that no thing, no person, may bear witness for another; rather, the witness may only bear witness for him/herself, with only the possibilities of evidence to confirm his/her experience. This moment of tangency between the individualization of a photograph’s invitation for its spectator to think and the individual nature of bearing witness thus localizes the concept of bearing witness within an image.

Within photography, there is no such thing as a raw, unaltered image. All photographs are inevitably influenced by their physical contexts, or the deliberate
aim of the photographer that is made manifest in the shot itself. Barthes explains this manifested intention of the photographer to be the *stadium*, in that the image displays the deliberate portrayal which the photographer intended to capture (27). Barthes explains that “[t]he stadium is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, ‘politeness’) which allows me to discover the Operator, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them ‘in reverse,’ according to my will as a Spectator” (28). This stadium is what comes readily available in any photograph: the posed subjects, the smiles, the background material; all of these aspects contribute to that which the photographer tries to display in the capture of his subjects. Bearing in mind Barthes’ explanation, we may thus understand stadium’s function as a means through which the Spectator may contextualize, and thus act to install, that to which the image bears witness, in that it serves to construct a window depicting a time, a place, and a people that is no more. In the case of the aforementioned image illustrating the women during a massacre of Jews by Germans and Latvians¹, the stadium is present in the women’s posed smiles, acknowledgement of their Spectator, as well as in that which occurs around them: an indiscernible number of masses on the ground, possibly resembling human bodies or clothing, as well as a uniformed guard standing in the background, bearing a clearly visible firearm. These aspects contextualize the Event through visualizing real people and space within the realm of the Holocaust, and thereby function as a general
means through which the image may begin to provoke, think, and thus testify to the atrocities to which it bears witness.

This foundation of context through the *stadium* of an image thus illustrates the construction of testimony, in that the visual framework of the photograph supplies the first layer of the multi-dimensional account made possible through the simple capture of an individual or space on camera. As with the image of the Latvian Jews, the image captures the living presence of the four women and young girl, and even in light of their impending deaths, the image is able to construct a window of what has been, which in turn functions as a means of testimony by offering forth straightforward visual stimuli depicting direct events of the Holocaust, including the individuals involved, as well as their physical surroundings. From Peter Haidu’s suggestion in “The Dialectics of Unspeakability” that photographs serve to respond to the “obligation to think at the same time dialectically and undialectically” (278), we may understand the idea that the image speaks to the practical reality of the situation (the setting of the massacre itself), as well as that which cannot be articulated (the women’s identities, their eventual demise). In this sense, the *stadium* aspects of the photograph thus lay the foundation for the construction of testimony by holding the capacity to speak for a situation when no one else can.

In addition to the *stadium*, Barthes also argues towards the emergence of a particularly telling detail amidst an otherwise static *stadium* image – a detail that
evokes the coveted pensive nature that any effective photograph should possess. This detail, which oftentimes leads to an invisible extension of the image’s meaning and significance, is what Barthes labels as the *punctum*. This emergence of the *punctum* is emergence of that to which the image bears witness, in that it is the uncovering of an otherwise overlooked detail that unlocks the potential for further discovery and understanding within the image, which in turn furthers the solitude of responsibility to uphold the existence of that detail and all that it may contain. As Barthes explains, the *punctum* is “the accident which pricks… (but also bruises…is poignant)” (27). Thus it is through the emergence of this accident, this detail, that the image opens itself to the possibility of further understanding regarding the circumstance which it portrays. In the case of the image depicting the five Latvian Jews, it is the presence of the young girl that speaks to their true circumstance. Standing halfway behind one of the women with her head bowed, the girl appears frightened by that which is happening around her. And, while it is impossible to know precisely to what she is reacting, the capture of her demeanor – a much more raw stance in relation to her posed companions – on film serves as means through which one may discern the fear and anguish that victims such as she endured. Barthes refers to the *punctum* having, “more or less, the power of expansion” (45) through its ability to capture more than the surface value of an image. It is through simply the physical demeanor of the young girl that the *Spectator* begins to grasp the immense fear
and terror which gripped the victims of massacres such as this. Susan Sontag suggests in *Regarding the Pain of Others* that a photograph serves as “a species of rhetoric” (6), in that it provides a specific context to an event which, in this case, refers to one of many Jewish massacres. And, while this photograph depicts only five individuals among millions who suffered similar fates as the women captured on film, this image lends itself to the construction of testimony if not only through the *punctum* – the captured moment of vulnerability when the young girl was not aware of her position on film – but also through the overall *stadium* by illustrating the specific circumstances which occurred during one of the many Jewish massacres. Therefore, in his distinction between the *stadium* and the *punctum*, Barthes lays ground for a more involved means of bearing witness, which one may then employ as a means through which s/he may begin the extraction of testimony. It is through a sort of fusion, or co-existence, between the *stadium* and the *punctum* – in that the presence of the *stadium* allows for the discovery and contextualization of the *punctum* – that allows for an image’s expansion of ideas and explanation, thereby contributing to the multi-dimensional nature of photographs in their construction of testimony.

This emergence of the *punctum* thus continues the development of testimony through the content of an image in that, as with the young girl in the photograph hiding behind the other women, the materialization of a minute detail has the capacity to extend the understanding of an image far beyond that which is
capable through language alone. As Felman and Laub explain, “testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frame of reference” (5). These bits and pieces of memory, which can be likened to the latent details present within an image, thus only gain true meaning when placed within the context already established by the stadium of the image. In this case, the contextualization of the four older women and their posed bodies makes the hidden, slumped position of the young girl seem out of place, and begs the question of why she appears as she does. From these questions, the dimensions of testimony continue to grow, which in turn suggests an image’s function of offering forth not a finite account of Event, but rather acting as what Felman and Laub define as a “discursive practice, as opposed to a pure theory” (5), in that testimony is an act of development, of an unfolding account regarding an individual or group in relation to the events of the Holocaust, as demonstrated through the active natures of both the stadium and the punctum.

In his explanation of the punctum, Barthes offers forth what appears as a very individualized interpretation of its purpose, suggesting that much of the punctum’s meaning, and even its discovery, relies heavily on the part of the Spectator. Early in Camera Lucinda, Barthes explains his self-proclaimed position as “mediator for all Photography” (8), as well as his determination “to be
guided by the consciousness of [his] feelings” (10). Even in light of Barthes’ personalized interpretations of photographs, one may still perceive of the sheer importance of the image itself in the construction of testimony in that, even in his explanations of how an image – specifically its punctum – pricks or bruises its spectator, the poignant action is still one which belongs to the image, and not the spectator, in that it is the detail which affects the spectator, not the spectator whose interpretation necessarily affects the detail, and thus the image as a whole. This understanding thus suggests that the consciousness of feeling to which Barthes so readily surrenders himself is actually constructed by that which the image presents, which is then interpreted into how the spectator might decide an image to suggest. However, it remains that it is precisely the image – the punctum – that offers a detail and thus a fragment of understanding which in turn leads to the further expansion and construction of testimony to the events of the Holocaust.

The classification of testimony as practice suggests its role as an ever-expanding aspect of an event, which in turn illustrates its imperative nature in the construction of understanding in relation to an event. Felman and Laub emphasize this idea of testimony as an active text when they suggest that “[t]o testify – to vow to tell, to promise and produce one’s own speech as material evidence for truth – is to accomplish a speech act, rather than to simply formulate a statement” (5). Thus this call for testimony emphasizes the act, rather than
simply the result of testimony, which suggests that the image provides an ongoing account of that which it portrays, each testimony being subject to change with every passing spectator due to its ability to evoke different thoughts from every new audience. As with the image of the five women during a Jewish massacre, a spectator’s eye may be caught by the presence of the young girl, while another’s gaze may focus in on the woman on the far right of the group as she nervously plays with her hair. Whatever the defining aspect may be, it is the presence of these details which furthers the evolution of an image into a form of testimony. Through this evolving act, the imperative nature of testimony appears in relation to Holocaust images, in that the images serve to offer forth not simply a static, but rather an ever-developing understanding that allows its audience a glimpse into that which cannot be articulated through language.

As this classification of ever-evolving image suggests, a photograph is never static: each shot displays a small glimpse of reality, and thus makes way for the possibility of various understandings through that reality. Susan Sontag suggests this point in her book *On Photography* by explaining that “Nobody ever discovered ugliness through photographs, but many, through photographs, have discovered beauty” (85). Through the act of discovery, Sontag points to the ability of photographs to capture more than what simply meets the eye. The photograph lends itself to the discovery of different layers of understanding that in turn aid in the creation of a more complete comprehension of that which is
photographed. In the construction of testimony, photography acts as evidence by contributing to the context of the Event, in that the image is able to provide a specific image of the Event itself. That photographic evidence then doubles as a means of testimony through its capacity to, as Barthes suggests, make its audience think. As with the image depicting the Jewish massacre by Germans and Latvians, the background of the image—the masses strewn on the ground, other individuals milling behind the women, the presence of guards amidst the captives—begs the posing of questions regarding not only the women pictured, but also their surroundings and eventual demise. Thus through photography, it is possible for the existences and traumas endured by victims such as these women to not necessarily be recreated, but to be recognized.

This recognition of life amidst the Holocaust through photographs thereby illustrates the capacity of images to serve equally as witness, evidence, and testimony. One such image that exemplifies this recognition of life is that which depicts roll call of prisoners taken in Buchenwald, Germany between 1938-1939, and is also displayed within the USHMM in the section entitled “Nazi Assault—1933-1939”, which serves to offer further contextualization, and thus a stronger formation of testimony to the events which the image depicts. In this aerial image, the prisoners appear as a seemingly endless sea of prisoners, the majority rendered anonymous from their uniform clothing and shaved heads.
The rows of prisoners serve as the image's stadium, as the mass of people serve the surface purpose of granting the spectator some sense of the sheer magnitude of individuals victimized by the events of the Holocaust. And, while it differs from that of the five Latvian Jewish women, this image continues to offer forth testimony to the events of the Holocaust by serving as a means of recognition to the events endured by the masses victims of the to Holocaust through their capture during roll call. Upon further analysis, however, not all individuals participating in roll call are uniformly shaven and dressed. In the bottom left corner, the image displays small plots of dark amidst the sea of otherwise blanched heads. These spots of dark are the hair of some of the men in the roll call lines, which immediately brings into question how it is that these select men
have not yet been stripped of their identities in exchange for becoming yet another nameless face amidst the rows of prisoners. Taking into consideration Barthes explanation of the punctum, we may thus understand that this second element of the men’s hair will “break (or punctuate) the stadium...it is not [the spectator] who seek[s] it out...it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the spectator]” (26), which in turn establishes the men’s unshaven heads as the punctum of this image. Like the image of the younger girl standing behind the four women in the aforementioned photograph, this minute detail serves to expand the surface of the image, in that the discovery of this discrepancy between prisoners allows for speculation upon how and when the different prisoners arrived at camp, as well as what hardships the shaven prisoners have endured that the men just arrived have yet to experience. From the raising of such questions and observations, the development of testimony is furthered through the image’s ability to extend the limits of understanding.

In considering the countless number of reproductions and circulations a Holocaust image, such as those featured within the USHMM, endures, it is important to understand that that specific image remains the sole object capable of testifying to that to which it bears witness. The image bears the reality of a scene that cannot be recreated through any means of written or spoken language, and thus renders even the photographer unable to testify to the image which s/he indirectly bore witness through film, placing the photographer in the realm of the
spectator. Felman and Laub suggest an image’s role as testimony by explaining that “the appointment to bear witness is... an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak for other and to others” (3). It is through this appointment to bear witness, to speak for an other, that illustrates the image’s role in providing testimony to an event by providing a visual representation of the reality of the Event. As with the image depicting the Latvian Jews, in addition to that which depicts roll call at Buchenwald, the photographs function to speak to their spectators about their subjects when the subjects are rendered without language. Thus an image holds the ability to witness as well as provide a vehicle of victim testimony to the events of the Holocaust, in that a photograph not only offers evidence to the existence of its subjects, but it also serves to provide the possibility of a deeper understanding that extends beyond the limits of language through the image’s ability to not rely fully on any conversion of language to display their subject matter through the presence and perception of the stadium and punctum. As Barthes explains, dependence on a text, whether written or spoken, means complete dependence on language to construct explanation, and therein lies the potential for language to influence the interpretation, in that, “a sudden action of a single word” can shift the entire meaning of a work (28). Therefore, through its ability to extend the limits of written or spoken language by dwelling in a visual realm, a photograph depicting the events and victims of the
Holocaust effectively serves to speak silently both for and to others, thereby establishing its capacity to function as testimony to the victims of the Holocaust.

In continuation of the idea that photographs may function as a means of speaking for their victims, the image may actually grant its subject a sort of reincarnation of voice through its ability to represent a sliver of reality. As Jean-François Lyotard argues in *The Differend*, one becomes a victim to an event when one loses the means by which to prove the existence of the event (8). In this sense, verbal and written testimonies are more vulnerable, in that they rely fully on language as a means of transport, while photographs extend the limits of language and offer a vast medium that not only proves the existence of the event, but invokes a thoughtful demeanor in the consideration of what, exactly, the image suggests about the Event and the individuals affected. When language fails, photography is able to contribute visual evidence, which in turn provides visual testimony to the events endured, such as the distinction between seasoned and newly-arrived prisoners in the image depicting roll call at Buchenwald. By establishing a contrast in the mere attire worn between the prisoners, the image is able to speak to the prisoners' status in the camp, even though they cannot do so for themselves. Dori Laub suggested this possibility of constructing testimony through the relaying of information in "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony, and Survival," when he explains that "[w]hat ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing...is not simply the information, the establishment of the
facts, but the experience its of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony” (85). In considering Laub’s suggested link between the role of witness and the construction of testimony, we may conceive of testimony’s dependence on witnessing, in that, in the case of the aforementioned photograph, the image serves as the vehicle of witness by capturing the scene on film, and through its display, the image is able to testify to the photographed event. Therefore, through the images captured, photography proves its value in both bearing witness as well as providing visual testimony for its subjects to the rest of the world in regards to the events of the Holocaust.

Similar to Barthes’ argument explaining the importance of the *punctum*, Edward T. Linenthal explains the importance of “dirty” photographs as a means of bearing witness to the Holocaust in his book, *Preserving Memory: the Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (171). Because of these images, the Holocaust gains a sense of validity through the ability to produce real photographs surrounding the Event which potentially display a *punctum* – a point of discovery – thereby offering forth a window of further explanation into the events of the Holocaust. Barbie Zelizer seconds this argument in her book, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye*, when she suggests that “as images become more complex and multimediated, their truth-value is communicated in configurations that allow us to see less: in some cases it dissipates; in others it is reconfigured; in still others it completely disappears”
We may interpret this dissipation of truth-value to be the dissolving of the *punctum*, in that, through digital reconfiguration, the minute details of an image may become lost, and thus the essential meaning of the image is lost. This claim thereby reinforces Linenthal by suggesting a reduction in truth by tampering with photographs, thereby depicting the importance of the *punctum* in images as a means of lending an aspect of reality, and in turn testimony, to the events of the Holocaust through their capture on film.

In addition to the photographed scene, we must also take into consideration the significance of the physical context in which the image is found as a continuation of the photograph’s display of testimony. In the example of the “Massacre of Jews by Germans and Latvians,” the photograph was found among Gestapo papers in the city of Liepaja, Latvia (Berenbaum 98). This physical contextualization of the photograph itself further enhances the formation of testimony by also acting as another telling detail in the contextualization and explanation of the photograph. Through its placement within Nazi ownership, the significance of Nazis’ possession of their actions on film increases in relation to the formation of testimony. In his book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen describes the recreational nature with which the Nazis treated their extermination of the Jews, explaining that a prisoner could be executed

[... ] in a variety of ways, depending on the Germans’ disposition; if in the mood for the emotional jolt that bullets provided, they shot the Jews on the spot; if preferring to feel flesh spit and bone crush under the last of the
cudgel, to see blood flow... they pummeled them to death; if in a more ceremonious mood, they opted for a hanging. (306)

By focusing on the executions as a means of entertainment, we may discern the Germans' potential desire to in a sense commemorate their actions through the possession of photographs. Barthes suggests that photographs function as alibis for the persons involved which serve to "inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire" (28) which, in relation to Goldhagen's explanation of the Germans' attitude towards Jewish extermination, suggests that Nazis kept the images of massacres such as the "Massacre of Jews by Germans and Latvians" as a means of commemorating and further boosting the morale of their troops through the perceived success of their actions. This interpretation of German motives, suggests the foundation of yet another telling detail, and thus consider the formation of testimony through simply the placement of the photograph in the Gestapo papers, in that the physical context of the photograph provides further explanation to the events and persons involved, thereby furthering the construction of testimony through photographs by serving to offer forth yet another means of contextualization to the events with the image portrays.
In its all-inclusive nature to testify to all aspects of horror within the Holocaust, the USHMM dedicates a portion of the permanent exhibit to the years of the Final Solution, in which it displays images of the organized bedlam which overtook the various concentration camps at the end of the war. One such image is that which depicts the selection process of the Hungarian Jews from the Subcarpathian Rus region on the ramps at Auschwitz. In this particular transport group of Jews, all victims were gassed upon arrival (Berenbaum 124). In addition to its physical contextualization within the USHMM's section featuring images of the Final Solution, this photograph of the selection of Hungarian Jews offers first and foremost a visual context – and thus a stadium – to the image, depicting the mayhem of the ramp selection with clusters of people, some already in prisoner uniforms, other still in their civilian clothes, as the occasional Nazi guard mixes
throughout the masses, attempting to obtain order throughout the chaos. Behind the mass of newly arrived prisoners sits the now vacant cattle cars on which the Jews traveled for seemingly endless hours before reaching the gate of Auschwitz, which is faintly visible in the background. These aspects serve to contextualize not only the individuals present within the photograph’s frame, but it also contextualizes the captured events within the general timeline of events throughout the Holocaust. The mass congestion of various groups of people, seasoned prisoners, newly arrived prisoners, as well as guards, suggests the presence of the photograph towards the end of the Holocaust in that there is a distinctly established and working hierarchy present: the guards carry out the selection process of who shall live and who shall die from the batch of Hungarian Jews, while the already uniformed prisoners are on duty to empty the boxcars of any articles left by the newly arrived prisoners. Thus from this contextualization of the stadium, the image establishes itself within the later years of the Holocaust, thereby establishing the base of its testimony to the lives and events captured within its frame.

However, as with the images before, there is a detail – *punctum* – which detaches itself from the continuity of the masses and pricks the spectator. In the case of this image depicting the ramp at Auschwitz, the *punctum* manifests in the presence of a middle-aged man who stands amidst the masses wearing no trousers and only one shoe. It is through the detail of an image, in this case the man and
his overly disheveled appearance, which Saul Friedlander, in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, points to in the presentation of an image as the point at which reality exists and is then perceived through a filter of memory (17) which we may then perceive as the construction of testimony. Through the recognition of this man, as with the recognition of the young girl and the men with hair amidst the shaven heads, the image of this shoeless man lends itself to the speculation of further detail and context surrounding the man's circumstance. Therefore, again through the distinct discovery of the *punctum*, an image automatically cements itself within the construction of testimony, in that the *punctum* is able to act as a sort of catalyst from which the circumstance of an image may be extended through the spectator's extension of the scene through question which in turn serves to extend the voice of the image, and thus its subjects, itself.

While one may argue that the strongest instances of testimony occur in photographs such as the three aforementioned images, which all contain instances of *punctum*, it is also possible for testimony to be borne of more distinctly posed images, such as family portraits, or other photographs that primarily offer *stadium* rather than both *stadium* and *punctum*. Oftentimes, images depicting ghettos or even pre-war life benefit from verbal or spatial contextualization, such as placement within a museum setting, as a means of further testifying to the events depicted. In some cases, even, it is the complete negation of image that forms the
most poignant means of testimony in that, through a pointed limitation of images, it is also possible to focus more on the bleakness of a space in commemoration of the sheer enormity of devastation during the Holocaust. However, with such accompaniments to images inevitably comes the muddling of testimony in that, by introducing other means explanation and discovery of testimony, the details of the account risk being lost amidst the onslaught of stimuli in relation to the Event. Saul Friedlander explains that the ‘truth’ of an account may become lost amidst “the problems raised by the opaqueness of the events and the opaqueness of language” (4). This idea of the opaqueness of language thereby furthers the effect of photography, in that it does not rely on language in any form to construct its primary means of understanding. It is thus through its malleability and capacity to be accommodated within a more spatial contextualization that photographs continue their construction of testimony in regards to the events of the Holocaust.
One of the widely broadcasted examples of this more manicured presentation of stadium images is the Tower of Faces, located in the USHMM. The Tower is a three-story tall segment of the permanent exhibit which is “devoted to the Jewish community of the Lithuanian town of Eisiskes, which was massacred by units of the German Einsatzgruppe and their Lithuanian auxiliaries in two days of mass shooting on September 25 and 26, 1941” (“USHMM”). The exhibit consists of roughly 1,000 reproductions of pre-war life within the Jewish community which document the “rich religious, cultural, economic and familial life of the Jewish community that existed prior to the occupation of Eisiskes by the German Army in the last week of June 1941” (“USHMM”). Through the overwhelming presence of condensed, visual pre-war documentation, in
conjunction with the knowledge of the eventual Jewish massacre that struck the
town, we may identify the construction of testimony through the images as well as
the spatial contextualization of the Tower in that the images serve as a means of
depicting the reality of the victims’ lives before the Holocaust, while the
placement of the images within a space commemorating the subjects’ collective
demise serves the purpose of testifying towards the magnitude of the Event and
loss of victims. In her book, Trespassing Through the Shadows: Memory,
Photography and the Holocaust, Andrea Liss suggests this point by explaining the
significance of the Tower, in that it creates “an echoed experience that functions
more in harmony with the layered way in which the memories overlap and intrude
on the mental time zones of the past and present, especially involving
circumstances of extreme traumatic dislocation” (33). This overwhelming
collection of pre-war images serves to blur the lines, as Liss suggests, between
past and present, in that the images depicting relative normalcy to which the
audience can relate, augment the tragic testimony which the images themselves
construct through the spectator’s knowledge that all individuals pictured were
later destroyed.

In light of examining images such as “Massacre of Jews by Germans and
Latvians” the roll call at Buchenwald, the ramp of Auschwitz, as well as the more
blatantly posed images like those dwelling within the Tower of Faces, it is
necessary to point out that, principally due the different contexts and
circumstances under which these images were captured, the photographer plays a futile role in the construction of testimony through an image. For example, the individual who photographed the women in Liepaja, Latvia was perhaps striving to simply capture the four women pictured in the foreground of the image. However, as previously mentioned, these four women are not what make the image think. Rather, it is the partially hidden girl, of whom the photographer may have had no knowledge when s/he captured the image, who pushes the image, and thus the spectator, to think. From this potential discrepancy between photographer intentions and that to which the spectator is drawn, it is clear that the construction of testimony relies primarily on the spectator as to what exactly will be elicited from a given image. Sontag cites Virginia Woolf in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, who claims that photographs “are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye...the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous systems. That system sends its messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling” (26). This connection of past and present in conjunction with the stimulus of an image thus confirms the idea of testimony lying not in the conceptualization of the photographer, but in the image itself and thus the spectator’s interpretation of said image.

Furthermore, the testimony elicited from an image also relies heavily on the position of the spectator in relation to that which is displayed in the image. Whether the individual was a Nazi supporter, an affected Jew, or even an
individual far removed from the Event drastically alters the content of testimony which these three different classifications of spectators would glean from an image. However, the contextualization of such images may actually serve to silence the spectator and his/her perceptions and interpretations of the testimony which the images display in that, by placing the image within a certain context, such as a museum, the image acquires a lens through which it may be understood. Revisiting the image depicting roll call at Buchenwald, a Nazi supporter might regard the image with pride, finding it to depict primarily that which the Nazis wished to accomplish. A surviving Jew would clearly view the image in a completely different light, perhaps finding it to be no more than a brutal reminder of that which s/he endured. Finally, an individual completely removed from the events of the Holocaust who is viewing the image in the context of its museum setting may view the photograph simply as a reference to what has been.

These differing viewpoints are thus what institutions such as the USHMM and other such Holocaust museums and memorials strive to accommodate by providing a distinct narrative contextualization, and thus testimony, to the events of the Holocaust, which thus serve to silence the voice of the spectator, and to perceive of the image within the provided context. The photographs’ respective installations within the USHMM in three acts—“Nazi Assault – 1933-1939,” “Final Solution – 1940-1945,” and “Last Chapter” (Linenthal 168) — thereby serve
to produce their own narrative in the construction of testimony by placing the images in categories. Linenthal quotes museum designer Ralph Appelbaum in explaining the importance of the museum’s physical feel, rhythm, and mood in the mediation of the narrative which aids in the construction of testimony:

> [c]onstrictive space on the third floor, for example, where, as visitors enter the world of the death camps, the space becomes tight and mean, with a feeling of heavy darkness. Indeed, walls are not painted, pipes were left exposed, and, except for fire exits and hidden elevators on the fourth and third floors for people who, for one reason or another, have to leave, there is no escape. (170)

Thus through this construction of spatial narrative in light of the specific events depicted, the image actually gains further contextualization which in turn serves to further enhance the testimony elicited through the displayed photographs’ content.

While images clearly serve as a means of constructing victim testimony to the events of the Holocaust, one may also construct a sense of visual narrative and testimony through the definitive lack of images. As Jean Baudrillard suggests in his book *The Spirit of Terrorism*, one’s absence in material space serves as a means of immortalization in an imaginary space (48). It is thus through this emphasis on absence – absence being understood as an actually presence of nothing – that the role of images falls away and gives way to the role of space in the construction of testimony to the events of the Holocaust. Such is the case with the JMB, which focuses primarily on the negation of images in an exchange for
an emphasis on the physical structure of the museum as a means of capturing the magnitude of human devastation caused by the mass extermination and exile of Jews. And, with the emphasis on space, the space actually becomes dependent on the images – or in this case, lack of images – in that, through the negation of image, the substance of nothing is born. Thus, in the case of the JMB, the lack of images serves as the **stadium** of the structure, making way for the **punctum** which manifests itself in the presence of nothing, the space, which acts as the means through which the JMB offers for testimony to the events and victims of the Holocaust.

In the construction of narrative space, it is essential to examine the architectural aspect of the structure as a means of gleaning any particular message the architect wishes his/her work to express. In this sense, spatial narrative differs greatly from the visual narrative constructed by the aforementioned images, in that the architect’s aim and explanation is considered an important aspect of
his/her product. In the case of the JMB, architect Daniel Libeskind strives to make tangible the physical void left by victims of the Holocaust and, as Baudrillard suggests, create an “intense presence” through their absence (48). This aim speaks directly to the construction of testimony through Libeskind’s distinct goal to materialize the void of those lost to the Holocaust, thereby speaking to their lives and the losses thereof. In light the understanding of *stadium* as the distinct presence of a photographer’s – or in this case, architect’s – aim, the architectural elements of the JMB contribute to the construction of testimony by providing the *stadium* of the structure, in that through the structural elements, Libeskind’s architecture supplies a background – much like the background of an image – on which the spectator may build a better understanding of the events commemorated. Within the emptiness of the architecture itself, one may obtain a glimpse into that which was, and that which is no more, in that the physical architectural space speaks to a hidden depiction of the emptiness left in the wake of the Holocaust, thereby formulating the perception of the *punctum* through the presence of an absence.

Libeskind begins his construction of such a narration of victim testimony through the abstract design of the JMB structure itself. Attached to the Berlin Museum, which is housed in the old Kollegienhaus, built in 1735 and restored after World War II (Schneider 17-18), the Libeskind building, containing the JMB, appears stark with its titanium zinc shell and seeming random smattering of
jagged windows. There is much speculation regarding the actual shape of the building and what it represents: some believe it to be an abstract half of a Star of David, while others feel it resembles a lightning bolt. Both of these interpretations lend themselves to the construction of testimony in direct relation to the effect Jewish extermination and exile on Berlin itself through the physicality of the Libeskind building: the severed Star of David suggests the complete devastation of the Jewish sect within Berlin, while the lightning bolt suggests the utter division and dismemberment of all of Berlin as a result of the Nazis' rule. As Libeskind explains, "[t]he task of building a Jewish museum in Berlin demands more than a mere functional response to the program. Such a task in all its ethical depth requires the incorporation of the void of Berlin back into itself, in order to disclose how the past continues to affect the present through the aprioras of time" (Schneider 19). By creating a structure of such abstract design, Libeskind orientates visitors to the museum within a space that is to both narrate the events, as well as commemorate loss of individuals in the wake of the Holocaust. Thus through highlighting the void of Berlin in a physical structure, Libeskind underlines the goal of the museum to highlight the physical impact and void left by the extermination and exile of Jews, thereby illustrating the museum's dependence on image and visualization in that, if images depicting the Event did not exist, there would be nothing to negate, and thus there would be nothing to mark the presence of nothing as something.
This conscious consideration of meaning as well as function suggests the role of the museum structure itself as a means through which it may act as a "spatial wrapper" (Jameson 111) by simultaneously marking the impossibility of intrusion as well as exclusion in regards to the impact of the Holocaust on Berlin. In *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson discusses the role of the wrapper, in relation to the Frank Gehry house, in constructing a sort of "scaffolding memory" (111) by the synchronized violation of old and new space within each other. By employing Jameson's explanation of the spatial wrapper, the museum structure as a whole, including the Kollegienhaus, becomes that which constructs the wrapper, in that the Libeskind building violates the old space of the Kollegienhaus, while the Kollegienhaus maintains a
simultaneous connection to and distance from the Libeskind building, thus creating the conjunction of seemingly “foreign bodies” (113).

As Bernhard Schneider explains in his book Daniel Libeskind Jewish Museum Berlin, there is no exterior connection between the old and new museum buildings; however, there is no other way to enter the new building without first entering the old (34). Therefore, in a sense, one must first enter the history of Berlin to conceive of the historical impact of the JMB. James E. Young seconds this notion in At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture, when he suggests that “[n]othing in Berlin’s history ever changed the city more than the persecution, expulsion and murder of its own Jewish citizens. This change worked inwardly, affecting the very heart of the city” (161). Thus through the obligation of first entering the Berlin Museum in order to reach the JMB, Libeskind offers a sense of physicality to the impact of the Holocaust on the history of Berlin. The construction of this outward wrapper solidifies the first of several physical indicators that establish the museum’s construction of spatial narrative as the primary means of depicting victim testimony, acting simultaneously as both the stadium and the punctum, in that the structure itself outwardly signifies the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish community in Berlin through its design, but the space of the structure also serve as a means of commemoration to the void left in the wake of the destruction of the
Jewish people. Through both these interpretations, one may distinguish the way in which the JMB serves to create testimony to the events of the Holocaust.

In addition to the exterior shell of the museum, Libeskind continues the creation of victim testimony by instilling various tactile elements as a means of constructing the spatial narrative of the Event. For example, Libeskind's Axes, located in the basement of the JMB offers a sort of crossroads for the visitor, in that the Axes consists of three paths: one leading to the permanent exhibit (Axis of Continuity), another to the Garden of Exile (Axis of Exile), and finally another path leading to the Holocaust Tower (Axis of the Holocaust). As Ingke Brodersen and Rüdiger Dammann explain in their book *Stories of an Exhibition: Two Millennia of German Jewish History*, "[t]o many of the Museum’s visitors, as they moved through its rooms, the articulation of space that colors, forms, and
materials in the still empty exhibition floors yielded, provided an expansive frame of interpretation in which to understand and reflect individually on German Jewish history” (176). Unlike the spatial narrative of the USHMM, such as the recreation of the death camps, which serves primarily as a means of escorting the visitor through the exhibit, the spatial narrative of the JMB offers a much more personalized experience, allowing visitors to “[form] their own interpretation of the architectural elements employed by Libeskind” (177). However, as Brodersen and Dammann suggest, it is the personalized experience in relation to the architectural elements implemented by Libeskind which further suggests a the presence of deeper meaning in the construction of victim testimony, which is directly related to the definitive lack of images within the walls of the JMB in that, unlike the images whose effects and details, Barthes suggests, make the photograph, and thus the spectator, think, the spatial elements of the JMB accommodate the desire or need to dig deeper into the construction of testimony to the events of the Holocaust through the visitor’s ability to choose which path s/he will follow.

The interpretation of meaning within the Axes is further emphasized once more through the museum’s lack of pictoral narrative in relation to the events that the Axes commemorate. While the Axes do feature a select collection of personal items donated by the families of Holocaust victims (182), the emphasis again, like in the rest of the JMB’s exhibits, is on the lives of the victims and their
contribution to society prior to the devastating events of the Holocaust. As Brodersen and Dammann suggest, when surviving relations contribute such “emotionally laden objects to an institution like the Jewish Museum, [they] are expressing their wish that a parent, cousin, or friend be remembered in the country where they had lived, and to which they felt they belonged” (182). While the presence of these objects do lend themselves to the potential for a deeper understanding of the Event, and thus a deeper offering of testimony from the structure, in comparison with the abundant visual narrative of the USHMM, which serves as the primary means by which the museum elicits a reaction from its visitors, the Axes of the JMB serve to again offer forth a means of testimony, in that the different paths and artifacts therein contain aspects of more latent testimony which prick their spectator or pique an interest that could lead to further investigation or speculation in the construction of testimony to the events and victims of the Holocaust. Therefore, through the Axes’ continued restriction on the construction of visual narrative to the Holocaust, as well as Libeskind’s extension of spatial narrative through the Axes’ invitation for visitors to essentially choose their own construction of narrative, the JMB continues to structure a definitive form of testimony to the victims of the Holocaust.

Finally, the culmination of Libeskind’s design is the Holocaust Tower, located at the end of Axis of the Holocaust’s path. The Holocaust Tower is a “bare, concrete tetrahedron rising the full height of the building” (179). The
Tower is sealed and unheated, and is only lit by daylight passing through a narrow slit in the wall. This final aspect of the museum is to represent the architectural manifestation of the "[a]bandonment, doubt, fate, and helplessness" (179) that existed in light of the events of the Holocaust, and the dawning of the Final Solution.

As Schneider suggests, the city’s odors and sounds carry just faintly into the Tower (51), offering the distinct feeling of detachment from the world to which one previously belonged. Thus through the distinct construction of spatial narrative through the cold distance of the Holocaust Tower, Libeskind further extends his formation of victim testimony.
As previously mentioned, the presence of the Holocaust Tower has the direct antithesis of the visual pictorial narrative depicted by the USHMM—specifically that of the Tower of Faces which, as previously explained, displays 1,000 images of individuals who were killed in the events of the Holocaust—through its complete negation of images or any other artifact depicting the horrors of the Holocaust. While the USHMM depicts the magnitude of human loss through images illustrating the wagons of corpses upon the arrival of liberating troops (Berenbaum 7), the JMB opts to depict the event through a physical means which offers visitors the opportunity to experience a mere fragment of the separation and confusion endured by victims, as well as the physical void now felt by the city of Berlin through the loss of such a percentage of its population. This physical structure commemorating the void of human loss thus continues the presence of *punctum* in the empty space created within the Holocaust Tower, in that the Tower signifies the distinct absence of a group, and thus it is through this manifestation of the emptiness of the space as a substance of commemoration that presses its spectator, or visitor, to think and thus experience the testimony created in the wake of the Holocaust.

Echoing the sentiments of Maurice Blanchot, Libeskind suggests that “[t]he Jewish Museum is conceived as an emblem in which the Invisible and the Visible are the structural feature which have been gathered in this space of Berlin and laid bare in an architecture where the unnamed remains the name which keeps
still” (Schneider 6). Libeskind’s words resonate throughout the Holocaust Tower, which, by offering no face to the nameless void of victims, serves as a means through which the invisible victim may become visible. Holocaust Tower represents a culmination of that which Libeskind wished the structure to exhibit by capturing the Invisible within the Visible, which in turn illustrates the presence of both the stadium and the punctum within the Tower itself, in that the structure itself sets a background of physical circumstance in which the more latent manifestation of emptiness is generated through the presence of absence within the tower’s cold, stark walls. Therefore, through the overall emphasis placed on the spatial narrative through the museum structure itself, its Axes, and finally the Holocaust Tower, the JMB succeeds in producing an equally poignant, as well as stimulating source of victim testimony to that of the USHMM’s visually narrated testimony through its ability to incorporate both the stadium and the punctum within the structure and architecture of the museum itself.

Through its ability to preserve and display an exact moment in time through film, photographs are often regarded as the primary means by which to provide evidence to an event such as the Holocaust. However, when considered more deeply, the role of photography extends far beyond simply the terms of visually connecting image with event. Rather, an image holds the capacity of further understanding through its ability to transcend the limits of language and divulge a more detailed account of that which the image portrays, which in turn
suggests photography's role in providing testimony to an event. By containing elements of *stadium*, as Roland Barthes suggests, such as the background and setting of an image—something which the photographer perhaps wished to convey—images are able to provide a distinct reality to the atrocities, while the element of *punctum* provides the minute detail which serves as a catalyst to delve deeper into an image and capture the essence of the Event's victims, thereby providing testimony to their lives in the wake of their deaths.

As a means of creating a sort of narrative as a means of uncovering the events of the Holocaust, the USHMM in Washington, D.C. utilizes photographs as the primary means of communicating the victimizations and atrocities committed at the hands of the Nazis. In all three examples of images housed within the USHMM—"Massacre of Jews by Germans and Latvians," the image depicting roll call at Buchenwald, and the Hungarian Jews on the ramp at Auschwitz—the spectator may discern a distinct display of *stadium* through all three images' ability to lend an idea of time and place within the events of the Holocaust through the individuals and surroundings captured on film. Also within these three images, though, is the presence of the *punctum*—a seemingly insignificant, nigh potentially overlooked detail—that holds the power to unfold a new host of possibilities in the construction of testimony and understanding surrounding the events within the image. In the case of "Massacre of Jews by Germans and Latvians," which depicts four women appearing to pose for the
camera, while a younger girl cowers behind them, the young girl serves as the moment of punctum, in that her presence and demeanor, which differs greatly from that of the other women, begs questions regarding the reason for her appearance and what it is the other women try so hard to ignore in the face of the camera. Thus through the discovery of the punctum within the stadium of an image, photography is able to further cement itself as a strong vehicle in the formation of testimony through its ability to suggest that which lies beyond the frame of the image itself.

While the presence of the punctum does serve a monumental purpose in the construction of testimony to the events of the Holocaust, it is also possible to construct a means of testimony through images consisting primarily, if not completely, of stadium. These images often depict life prior to Hitler’s rise to power and eventual takeover by the Nazi regime. Such a exhibition also resides within the USHMM and contains over 1,000 pre-war images depicting everyday Jewish life before their destruction. The Tower of Faces uses its posed photography to instill in its visitors a sense of the magnitude of individuals affected by the events of the Holocaust. By containing such a mass of ‘normal’ images – all of which depict those killed at the hands of the Nazis – the spectator may still glean a sense of understanding – and thus testimony – to the Event through the Tower’s ability to further contextualize the events within a schema of normalcy, thereby illustrating the sheer magnitude of the Event and its victims.
Finally, acting as a complete antithesis to the importance of images in the construction of testimony to the events of the Holocaust is the distinct negation of images as a means of constructing testimony. Such a feat is executed by the JMB, which focuses on the definitive lack of visual testimony in exchange for a more spatial emphasis in order to compose an understanding to the events of the Holocaust. And, while these two means of testimony appear disconnected in their dualistic natures, the negation of images as well as the presence of empty space actually appear dependent upon the presence of images, in that without first having a presence, there can be no absence. Daniel Libeskind, architect of the JMB, employs this concept throughout his design, starting first with the outward structure of the museum building itself. By constructing the building to resemble either a severed Star of David or a lightning bolt, Libeskind constructs a frame through which one may view the impact of the Holocaust on the city of Berlin itself which, in turn, acts as the stadium aspect of the structure through its ability to contextualize the building within both historical as well as modern significance. However, also present within the stark structure of the JMB is an aspect which speaks to the unattainable void left in the wake of the extermination and exile of such a large percentage of the Berlin population. This illustration, made manifest through the museum’s bleak titanium zinc walls and jagged windows, thus acts as the punctum, pointing to a more latent understanding of the Holocaust’s devastating impact on the city and culture of Berlin.
What may serve as the most poignant and effective aspect of the museum’s construction of spatial testimony to the events of the Holocaust rests within the stark walls of the Holocaust Tower, located at the end of the Axis of the Holocaust. This dark tower serves to create a means of physicality in understanding the complete separation and alienation endured by victims. The walls and structure of the Tower itself again serve as a means of offering forth a sort of background – and thus *stadium* – to the Event, while the physical space and dead air trapped within the Tower acts as the *punctum* through their ability to, in a sense, materialize the nothingness left in the wake of Holocaust devastation. Thus, through both the USHMM as well as the JMB’s embrace of both the image as well as the negation thereof, both institutions succeed in constructing a strong sense of testimony through an image – or anti-image’s – ability to extend the understanding of the Event beyond that which is dependant, and thereby limited, by written or spoken language.

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1 Berenbaum 98. The image is also featured in Michael Berenbaum’s *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, which displays a number of images found within the museum exhibits.

2 Berenbaum 43. The image is displayed in Michael Berenbaum’s *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.*

3 Berenbaum 125. This image is highlighted in Michael Berenbaum’s *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as told him the United States Holocaust Museum.*
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