Renata Stih & Frieder Schnack

BERLIN MESSAGES
Impressum

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No Place for a Wreath
On two projects of Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock

The main function of memorials has always been remembrance. The traditional purpose of commemorating is to formulate a binding concept of history with monumental means and pass it on to present and future generations as a valid model and example. Up until the mid-20th century, memorial sites functioned as venues for rallies, parades and public festivals, such as the victory celebrations on Sedan Day. After 1945, however, remembrance in conjunction with a memorial became a static and unclear concept. Static in its claim to permanently demonstrate sorrow, grief and remorse; unclear because the historical facts, reasons and effects of National Socialism or individual fates are usually not expressed at the official memorials. Historical information is instead transferred to exhibitions and historical museums, so that in front of memorials one can remain silent and lay wreaths.

In the last years, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock have been preoccupied with this form of commemoration which is increasingly deemed noncom-
Bench: At Bayerischer Platz, Jews may sit only on yellow park benches. Eye-witness reports, 1939
Ashtray: Cigarettes and cigars are no longer sold to Jews. June 11, 1942
Factory: All Jews are obliged to do hard labor. March 4, 1941
Organized arrests at the place of work for deportation. March 26, 1943
Shirt: All Jews over the age of 6 must wear a yellow star with the word “Jew” on it. Sept. 1, 1941
House: Jews may inherit only when the national socialist morals are upheld. July 31, 1938

mittal and empty. In order to fill what has become an unclear concept of remembrance with content, they dealt with historical documents and urban function in their Memorial for the Bayerische Viertel (Bavarian quarter) in Berlin (1993). In memory of the Jewish population that once lived in this quarter, the artists mounted eighty metal plaques on lamp posts along several streets. On the one side of the plaques, mounted about as high as street signs, one can see picture motifs, on the other side, short texts.
The texts are, for the most part, excerpts from decrees that, starting in 1933, gradually restricted Jewish citizens in their everyday life, then deprived them of their rights, and finally led to their extermination. The images are simple, color pictograms: swimming trunks for the decree: “Baths and swimming pools in Berlin are closed to Jews. December 3, 1938”; a pearl necklace for: “Jewelry, items made of gold, silver or platinum and pearls belonging to Jews are to be turned to the State. February 21, 1939”; a black surface for the decree banning Jews from emigrating, imposed in 1941. The pictograms do not make use of historical designs, but could stem from a game of memory or from language textbooks that make it easier to learn vocabulary
with the help of colorful pictures. And just as these pictures are meant to help pupils better memorize the new word, the images in the Bayerische Viertel do not simply serve as eye-catchers but are simultaneously mnemonics inscribing the historical information in one’s mind. Moreover, the seemingly harmless casualness with which the plaques are dispersed throughout the quarter becomes a metaphor of the creeping, daily deprivation of the rights of Jews during that period, and is thus an image of the omnipresent banality of evil.

Playing field: Jews are excluded from sports groups. April 25, 1933
Thermometer: Jewish doctors may no longer practice. July 25, 1938
Musical score: Jews are expelled from all choral groups. August 16, 1933
Blond pigtail: The subjects “Genetic Heredity” and “Race” are examination fields at all schools. September 13, 1933
Rubber stamp: Jewish civil servants may no longer serve the State. April 7, 1933
File (back): All files dealing with anti-Semitic activities are to be destroyed. February 16, 1945

In addition, the memorial in the Bayerische Viertel intervenes in the cityscape to trigger communication. Since the signs are distributed all over the quarter, the project is aimed at direct, step-by-step discovery and thus offers the opportunity to enter into a dialog going beyond the information conveyed: the passers-by will first search for explanations, and it is hard to imagine that people will wait for the bus or chat below such a sign without talking about the quarter’s Jewish past.

(continued on page 12)
Juden werden aus Sport- und Turnvereinen ausgeschlossen.  
25.4.1933

Jüdische Ärzte dürfen nicht mehr praktizieren.  
25.7.1938

Juden werden aus Gesangsvereinen ausgeschlossen.  
16.8.1933

Vererbungslehre und Rassenkunde werden an allen Schulen als Prüfungsgebiete eingeführt.  
13.9.1933
BUS STOP / Bushaltestelle, Berlin 1994/95
Concept for a "Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe"
Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock also combined information and communication in their design for the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. At the center of the site that was otherwise covered only with greenery, they planned a bus stop from which buses would depart several times a day to the authentic locations of the persecution of the Jews: in Berlin, for example, to the villa of the Wannsee Conference; the former Jewish quarter, the "Scheunenviertel"; the "Topography of Terror" exhibition; and, outside the city, to the concentration camps Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz. The proposal of the two artists met jury resistance. For the central and official memorial of the Federal Republic, the jury instead wanted a traditional form that, with monumental means, "has an effect for many centuries." 4 Stih and Schnock's design, however, is quite different to the traditional concept of a memorial. Not a place where one stands in silence, no place for a wreath; instead, a means of transportation reminiscent of bowling-club outings and bus trips to buy cheap goods, of recreation and leisure time. But here the buses would travel to the most burdened places in German history. The use of these vehicles reveals a purposeful mode of thought that takes seriously remembrance, for which a memorial is intended, and is concerned with the effectiveness of remembering. 5 Like many others, Ignatz Bubis, the president of the Central Council of Jews at the time, pointed out even before the invitation of tenders that Germany does not need a central memorial because the authentic sites are located here. Immediately after the results of the competition were announced, more and more people called into question, on principle, the project of a central memorial. "For Germans, there is no ad-equate form of public action concerning the crimes of the Third Reich. One can only repeatedly try to find such a form, in vain, not with the triumphant gesture of art (because art always triumphs), but with one's head bowed, at the sites of mass murder, in the camps." 6

Stih and Schnock's proposal stands in the tradition of Joseph Beuys's "social sculpture". His "Spülfelderprojekt - Gesamtkunstwerk Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg" (1983/84), which was never realized, or "7000 Oak Trees" (1983-87) were not concerned with superficial landscaping but with creating and expanding ecological awareness. This shaping of awareness can indeed be compared with the moral mission of a Holocaust memorial. Beuys's concepts are based on a visionary conception of man; he presupposes the responsibility of the individual for the community as part of his "social sculpture". The audience is therefore more than just a group of passive viewers. The projects of Stih and Schnock are more pragmatic. The artists aim to convey historical knowledge and create a functioning tool to this end. As passers-by, or participants on the bus trips, the viewers also become an integral part of the artwork. The memorial does not function without them, they are given the task of further conveying the memory.

By taking up the achievements of Joseph Beuys, the proposals of Stih and Schnock lead to a fundamentally altered memorial. In the sense of an "expanded concept of art", their aim is to trigger collective processes. Here, remembrance means that people gain information, learn things and talk...
with each other. Identification and consensus are not delegated, but acquired anew time and again through each individual's participation and active behavior. The "triumphant gesture of art" can do no more than initiate a process, during the course of which the artist steps back behind his or her project. The artist delivers an idea and chooses the material according to its usefulness and not its permanence; the artist refrains from personal imprint that would make him or her visible as the inventor. The focus is on historical authenticity toward which the implementation is to be oriented. New forms of memorials, like those of Stih & Schnock, thus stand for a kind of art that doesn't even attempt to come up with an ultimate binding image, a form that "has an effect for many centuries." These memorials are not meant to impress, overwhelm or move the viewer, but to condense history and keep it alive. Therein lies the humility adequate to the topic.

Christoph Heinrich

(5) "The points of departure are simple circumstances: How do I get to Sachsenhausen? Do I take the subway or tram? Coming from Berlin, you have to switch trains three times and then walk quite a distance. That's why we find it absolutely logical to say, then there is a bus." Frieder Schnock in a conversation with Renata Stih and Harald Frische, Ein Objekt, nichts weiter, in: die tageszeitung, March 28, 1995.

Christoph Heinrich is head of the Gallery for Contemporary Art, Hamburger Kunsthalle.
The newcomer should try to understand first and criticize either never or very late.

Let yourself be carried away by the optimistic groundswell of the country. Then you will retain a happy outlook on life and things will start coming your way.

The American projection of a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst as a foreign-looking man with a beard and an accent of like thickness helps the refugee neuroligist and analyst.
Americans have a special way to soften social contacts. Germans frequently mistake a friendly reception of themselves and their projects for genuine interest. It is likely to be an indifferent position or an elegant negation.

A professor in a German university is a man of research rather than a teacher. He will find it difficult to understand that it is the student who is at the center of the American system and not the professor.

Remember that Europe is the cradle of American culture. Do not exchange it for what is inferior in American thinking. Remember the culture you bring to America.
Americans are polite listeners. Don’t take their comments on The Beautiful way you speak English too seriously.

Be wholly absorbed by the American community. Become an active member of a religious group — no matter whether it be Catholic, Protestant or Jewish.

Often the employment of the wife made possible the retraining of her husband. While the emigrant went to school, she earned the money for the family.
Forget what you have been, concentrate on what you can become. Don't think anything under your dignity, as long as it is an honest way of making a living.

Germans and especially Berliners are accustomed to a rude directness. Typical in America is a very cautious way of dealing with people, using a very "diplomatic" language.

Find in all the different nationalities with whom you have to live the spirit which made America great.
Americans are born collectivists. They constantly live in groups, and participate in group activities to an extent unknown anywhere else in the world.

Don't isolate yourself in little foreign language communities. Do everything possible to speed up the process of Americanization and integration.

In America one never says "no" if it's possible to avoid it. In almost every case there is an indirect approach.
America has not waited for you.
The newcomer has to adapt —
not the Americans — his way.

Women tend to adopt "The American look"
in dress much more rapidly than men. They
acquire greater language facility and The
outward manner of American Society sooner.

You can dress casually. Be aware
that denims, regardless of kind or color,
are not permitted in some places.
You'll never make it

That's a fabulous idea!

I'll eat your balls off

Very interesting.

Isn't she fat

What a nice dress.

What a lummy girl

Great to see you!
Who Needs Art, We Need Potatoes / Was brauchen wir Kunst, wir brauchen Kartoffeln, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1998

Two potato beds, a red carpet on the stairs leading up to the entrance and three electronic displays in between the columns. Our piece seeks to address passer-bys and the visitors away from James Stirling’s postmodern extension, back to it’s classicist entryway. It’s Cour d’Honneur is dedicated to Wilhelm I, King of Württemberg. His equestrian statue on a high pedestal stands in a central position on the green in front of the building.

Commissioned as a centerpiece for that space, our work links history, with the values, possessions and tasks of a museum. Our work evokes questions about art and life, the role of art as catalyst for social and cultural developments, our tolerance and capacity for new visions and insights. The result fits this space like a glove, combining the existing traditional artifacts with unobtrusive additions and the use of electronics, resulting in a dialogue between art, nature and technology.
The Art of Collecting
Flick in Berlin

Panel discussion at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, on September 25, 2004.
Introduction (abbr.) by Renata Stih:

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Perhaps you have seen the posters in the immediate vicinity of the Hamburger Bahnhof. One of them looks like an upside-down German flag and is titled: “We demand: Free admission for former slave workers”. On the other you can see a floating zeppelin with the inscription: “F.C. Flick Collection”. The text is: “Tax evaders, show your treasures”. The mobile version drove through the city all week long.

Our project “The Art of Collecting” deals, roughly speaking, with the eroticism of money. Mr. Flick says he stands in front of the art to protect it from harm. But who protects the art from Mr. Flick, when he makes art an instrument to add a brighter side to the Nazi past of his gloomy family history? The size and mass of the Collection are incessantly mentioned as features of quality, although it was built up intensively only starting around 1996. And by extending the basement rooms it even surpassed the documenta in Kassel by a few square meters! The raving comments on the length of the former storage facilities are reminiscent of games of pubescent boys fiddling around with a measuring tape.

Indeed, it fits together like chalk and cheese, when the Chancellor demands that tax evaders be ostracized, while on the other hand heartily congratulating the tax-saving Swiss-by-choice Friedrich Christian Flick at the exhibition opening of the seven-year loan by his mailbox company and ennobling him through an invitation to the Chancellor’s office.

Yes, you heard correctly. The Collection is named after Friedrich Christian Flick; it doesn’t belong to him, however, but to a mailbox company on the island of Guernsey, a so-called tax haven in the English Channel – and the collection is now hanging in a public museum.

Friedrich Christian Flick, the collector and businessman, can be glad that he doesn’t have to build and maintain a museum of his own now, as was planned in Zurich. In Berlin, the maintenance of the collection, consuming approx. 7 million euros in 7 years, will be financed by the taxpayers of a bankrupt city.

After seven years of good behavior, one will then see how things proceed; no gifts were made on the occasion of the opening.

Very interesting is the resolution that Zurich’s town council passed in March, 2001.

I quote: “In an official statement, the town council made it clear that in regard to the compensation fund, it would have come to a different deci-
sion. Apart from that, the city president, in a personal conversation with Friedrich Christian Flick, pointed out that large parts of the Zurich population would welcome the participation of the Flick family in the compensation fund of the German industry. This would be a visible sign that Friedrich Christian Flick takes into account the historical responsibility of the Flick family.”

Even though it was about establishing a private museum, the inhabitants of Zurich attached to it the demand for compensating the slave workers.

In January, 2003, the director of the Berlin State Museums then announced the coup made with Friedrich Christian Flick. One was faced with a fait accompli, the contract was signed, discussions were not desired. A wall was built to fend off criticism.

If you would like to read an authentic interview with Friedrich Christian Flick, we recommend the one in the Neue Züricher Zeitung from April 27, 2003, which is reprinted in our publication “The Art of Collecting”.

In it, Friedrich Christian Flick makes it clear that he sees no reason to give money to former forced laborers, since some former Flick companies paid disproportionate amounts into the compensation fund. On the contrary, Hungarian forced laborers each received a compensation amounting to 2000 marks from the Deutsche Bank, after it had acquired the Flick consortium.

Instead of making compensation payments, Friedrich Christian Flick established a foundation against racism and xenophobia in Potsdam. “Wouldn’t the last surviving slave laborers have deserved the money more than radical right-wing youths in Brandenburg?” asked the press.

In his article, “The Purging of the Past”, the former director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Tom Freudenheim, describes the origin of the Frick Collection residing in a plush mansion on 5th Avenue in New York and states: “When we view a work of art, the former owner rarely plays a role in our aesthetic perception, but the collector is always present in the background. Such collectors and their collections convey the impression of an elegant masquerade – an attempt to raise oneself above the profane, lovely spheres of everyday life. Perhaps it is time for art museums to adopt a new trademark taken from the iconography of the Western world: the image of Pilate washing his hands in innocence.”

“I’m the richest man in the world and still, no one in Duckburg invites me”, said Uncle Scrooge. “You must show your money”, said Donald. “Collect fancy art and people will love you”, “I only read figures on bills!” said Scrooge McDuck. “A crazy world! A man’s wealth is not what he’s got but what he spends” and he started buying works of art every day, spending millions on it. He hated to be such a doggoned spendthrift!

One day he saw some abstract paintings that looked exactly like the pattern of his family’s quilt from Scotland. That was it! He started painting himself, moved to Berlin, became real famous and made it to documenta.
Der Führer kommt
Ich soll hier
schon gewesen sein
Walter Benjamin
CV

Stih & Schnick,
artists, living in Berlin

Renata Stih,
Prof. of Art and Technology,
University of Applied Sciences, Berlin

Frieder Schnick,
artist historian, Ph.D., critic, curator, art consultant

2000 Rockefeller Fellows, The Rockefeller Foundation,
Bellagio Study and Conference Center
http://www.stih-schnick.de

Projects in Public Space (selection)
1992-3 Places of Remembrance, Memorial in the Bavarian Quarter, Berlin-Schöneberg
1994-5 Bus Stop, Concept for a "Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe", Berlin-Mitte
1995-7 Image Spheres, 24 hour program for a campus, University of Applied Sciences Esslingen
1998 Invitation, Advertising self help groups, Berlin-Alexanderplatz
1998 Who Needs Art, We Need Potatoes, Environment, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart
1999 Händel and Gretel and the Gold in the Reichsbank, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
2001-2 Mind Maps / Heart, Hand and Mouth, light sculptures in München-Riem
2003-4 Signs from Berlin, The Jewish Museum New York
2004 The Art of Collecting - Flick in Berlin, NGBK / Akademie der Künste, Berlin-Brandenburg
2005 Berlin Messages, Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale
2006 LIFE BOAT, Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale

Group Shows (selection)
1996-7 Deutschlandbilder, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
2002 CTRL_SPACE, ZKM, Karlsruhe
2004 The Ten Commandments, Hygiene Museum, Dresden
2005 RAF, KunstWerke, Berlin

Lectures (selection)
2005 The Art of Collecting - Flick in Berlin, Schule für Kunst und Mediendesign, Zürich/CH.
2004 Like James Bond - Art with an Assignment, School of the Art Institute, Chicago/USA.
Public Art and Social Sculpture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst/USA.
Public Space and Memory, Princeton University, Princeton/USA.
2003 Signs from Berlin, Goethe Institut, New York/USA.
2002 Kunst für alle Fälle - Art for All Purposes, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, München.
2001 Public Art and Social Sculpture, University of Chicago/USA.
Dark Sides of Berlin, Visiting Artists, School of the Art Institute, Chicago/USA.
Art and Politics, Bard College, NY/USA.
2000 Social Sculpture, GSD, Rouse Visiting Artist Progr., Harvard University, Cambridge/USA.
1999 Reflections on Art, Space and Commemoration, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis/USA.
1997 Why Do We Need Memorials Today?, Williams College, Williamstown/USA.
1994 Places of Remembrance, Rockefeller College, Princeton University/USA.

Bibliography (selection)
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Young, James. At Memory's Edge, New Haven, 2000.
Illustrations

Cover
Raisin Bombers / Rosinenbomber (DC 3), 2004, photo on canvas, 120 x 160 cm.
3
German Export, 2004, drawing, 29.7 x 21 cm.

PLACES OF REMEMBRANCE,
ORTE DES ERINNERNIS IM BAYERISCHEN VIERTEL,
Memorial in the Bavarian Quarter,
Berlin-Schöneberg 1992/93
4-5
Places of Remembrance 1933 and 1993,
2003, two lightboxes, 152.4 x 122 cm each.

6-8
Some of the 80 signs attached to lamp posts, 1993, silk screen prints on aluminum (text and image), 50 x 70 cm each (photos Stih & Schnack).

8
Cat, 1992, gouache and pencil on paper, 37 x 25 cm.

9
Playing field, Thermometer, Musical score, Pigtails, 1993, silk screen print on paper (text and image), 49 x 69 cm / 63 x 90 cm (paper).

BUS STOP / BUSHALTESTELLE,
Concept for a Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, 1994/95
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BUS STOP / Brandenburg Gate (Brandenburger Tor), 1995/2005, photo montage on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.
BUS STOP / Sachsenhausen, 1995/2005, photo montage on canvas, 160 x 120 cm.

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BUS STOP / Neue Wache, 1995, 1995, photo montage on canvas, 90 x 135 cm.
BUS STOP / Humboldt Universität, 1995 model, 11 x 6 x 20 cm.

12
BUS STOP/ Schedule, 1995, drawing on enameled aluminum, 26 x 35 x 1 cm.
BUS STOP / Sign, 1995, drawing, 29.7 x 21 cm.

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Drancy, 2003, photo on paper, 90 x 120 cm.
Tour du Champ de Feu, 2003, photo on paper, 80 x 120 cm.

YOU KNOW THIS ISN'T BAD ADVICE, 2005
German Emigrants in America

14-19
You Know This Isn't Bad Advice, E1 - E18, 2005, photo montage on canvas, 35 x 80 cm each (work in progress).

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Read My Lips / Read My Mind, M1- M4, 2000, photo/drawing on canvas, 70 x 100 cm.

21
Magnus Hirschfeld: Sexology, 2005, drawing, 19 x 24 cm.


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Who Needs Art, We Need Potatoes / Was brauchen wir Kunst, wir brauchen Kartoffeln, Environment, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1997, 3 LED displays, 2 potato beds, red carpet. The potatoes get planted and harvested every year.

23-25
Potato Portraits / Kartoffelportraits, 1997-2004, photo series, 30 x 20 cm each.

THE ART OF COLLECTING -
DIE KUNST DES SAMMELNS - FLICK IN BERLIN,
Berlin-Mitte, September 2004

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Picketing the opening of the Flick Collection in Hamburger Bahnhof. Billboards and billboards on trucks, publication and symposium (Sept. 25, 2004 at Akademie der Künste Berlin-Brandenburg), in conjunction with NGBK, Berlin

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Foreword - Public Enemy, 2004, print on canvas, 70 x 90 cm.
Ask Gretchen / Die Gretchenfrage, 2004, print on canvas, 70 x 90 cm.

We Demand: Free Admission for Former Slave Workers / Wir fordern: Freier Eintritt für ehemalige Zwangsarbeiter, 2004, billboard poster, 238 x 355 cm.

Tax Cheaters, Show Your Treasures / Steuerflüchtlinge, zeigt eure Schätze, 2004, billboard poster, 238 x 355 cm.

Passing the Chancellery / Beim Kanzleramt, public event, September 21, 2004, photo, 20 x 30 cm.
Donald + Uncle Scrooge, the Collector, 2004, photo 60 x 40 cm and photo 30 x 40 cm (text).

BERLIN-TEMPELHOFF, 2004

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The Führer Is Coming / Der Führer kommt (JU 52), 2004, photo montage and drawing on canvas, 100 x 70 cm.

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POST - Raisin Bomber / Rosinenbomber (DC 3), 2004, photo and drawing on canvas, 120 x 160 cm.
ZUCKER - Raisin Bomber / Rosinenbomber (DC 3), 2004, photo and drawing on canvas, 120 x 160 cm.
KOHLE - Raisin Bomber / Rosinenbomber (DC 3), 2004, photo and drawing on canvas, 120 x 160 cm.

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Greetings from Walter Benjamin / Ich soll Sie schön grüßen von Walter Benjamin, 2004, light box, 154 x 94 x 15 cm.
Walter Benjamin, philosopher, born 1892 in Berlin (Magdeburger Platz 4), committed suicide in Port Bou / Spain in 1940, after his failed bid to flee to America.

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