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**The Shoah Simulacrum:
postmemory and spectral homecoming
in Maxim Biller's novella "Harlem Holocaust"**

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*The people of ages past are no longer remembered, nor
will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by
people who come after them.*

- Ecclesiastes, 1:11

In the context of the current German memory discourse, the age-old question of the interplay of remembrance and effacement has been revived. This article proposes to shed light on some of its ramifications through the prism of Maxim Biller's novella *Harlem Holocaust*.¹ Biller, born 1960 in Prague, is a German-Jewish short-story writer, novelist and newspaper columnist. Initially known for his incisive articles in the quasi legendary *Tempo* magazine and now for his satirical column "Moralische Geschichten" in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Biller writes on socio-political, cultural and personal issues, touching on German reunification, American literature, latent anti-semitism and convoluted love relationships. His novels and short stories are highly controversial.² A close reading of his novella *Harlem Holocaust* in the light of Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory and Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum facilitates the comprehension of how the German discourse on memory has slowly been hollowed out, persisting nowadays as pure form engaged in a spectral homecoming. Indeed, old memories – distorted through the manipulation as much as through the natural erosion of the past – are returning to haunt the present, oblivious that they are only spectres.

Reading the provocative short story *Harlem Holocaust* is a genuinely thought-provoking exercise: what at first appears to be an overly abrasive tone, especially in the voice of the central character of Gary Warszawski, is revealed to harbour a wealth of insights and reflections on the 'peaceful co-existence' of a new generation of Goys and Jews in contemporary Germany. To understand the pertinence of these interrogations, it proves

helpful to evoke how the concept of the generation dominates the public intellectual debates surrounding the Holocaust. As the events and their witnesses recede in time, the necessity to pass on their memory becomes ever more pressing. A chronology is established, in which the second and third generations retrospectively create the first, anchoring it in the *Stunde Null* (zero hour). The *Stunde Null* locates itself at the threshold between an abrupt end and an equally radical beginning, marking a far-reaching departure from the Nazi regime and *Weltanschauung*.³

Yet this often proclaimed clean slate is shown to fail in *Harlem Holocaust*, seeing that all the major figures in the novella recognise their identity as emanating from a positioning *vis-à-vis* events that occurred one generation earlier. This raises a cluster of questions regarding the ‘second generation’ (ambiguously referring to children both of victims and perpetrators). The memory of previous generations that inhabits and haunts Biller’s characters is not their own, but the shell of someone else’s remembrance. The phantoms they are visited by were summoned by others, direct witnesses of the events. Then again, there has been osmosis, appropriation, even confiscation of memory and suffering. Consequently, it can no longer be contended that the issues and quarrels at stake are purely scratching at the surface; they immerse into the heart of the memory discourse, just as spectres pervade all membranes.

As I will strive to expose, Marianne Hirsch’s notion of postmemory, with all the dangers and difficulties it entails, finds a perfect illustration in Biller’s equally fraught characters. Hirsch defines postmemory as

a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can neither be fully understood nor re-created. (659)

Postmemory, as this quotation reveals, engages the subject in a practise of centring and decentring, clearing one’s own mind of memories to make room for its infiltration by the mediated experience of one’s family, community or society. Haunting as the pursuit of presence ever emptying itself. The narrator, Efraim Rosenhain, will become the literal embodiment of this moment, constantly struggling with his “airbag brain”,⁴ a mind too fluffy to delay its other-directed colonisation. Visibly, Rosenhain blurs the contours of individual

and collective memory, unable to distinguish the two. The focus on the dialectics of centring and decentring, of course, implies an unmerited reading of Hirsch's concept, which legitimately intends to expose the larger share of imagination necessary to grasp the Holocaust for those who have not suffered it but remain under its grip. Applied and reapplied in varying ways, postmemory generally stresses the creative effort, which its act of re-presentation demands. However, the danger of privileging the more imaginative (more postmodern?) memory of the following generation over the more literal recollections of the first is ever lurking in Hirsch's otherwise engaging work. Ultimately, since layers of remembrance are hypothetically ubiquitous, postmemory risks being unearthed the world over and established around a meaningless void. This ominous spectre would suffice to lead the concept of postmemory *ad absurdum*.

Even so, I believe that the challenges Biller introduces into *Harlem Holocaust* are very real, valid and pressing indeed. Nonetheless, they are simultaneously constructed around a simulacrum, the mere hologram of the Holocaust. While every episode in this fluid story reflects back upon the experience of life in Germany after the Shoah for Jews and Gentiles alike, it transpires that this supposed centrepiece itself is absolutely hollow. Even as I slowly unravel the void which represents or simulates the Holocaust in the novella, I will make a case for the importance and meaningfulness of its thematic threads such as the problematic transgenerational current of traumatic (post)memory and the hypocritical exploitation of the Shoah to promote one's personal standing. Overall, *Harlem Holocaust* describes the general trend of the loss of spontaneity and candour in interpersonal relationships as a consequence of the burden of shouldering the cataclysm, its collective guilt and implications.

Narrated in the first person by the Gentile Efraim Rosenhain, the story revolves around the extraordinary figure of the antagonistic, wicked Jewish-American writer of German extraction Warszawski, who, with incredible chutzpah, relies on the shame and guilt of German conscience to fabricate his own reputation. Already unstable psychologically, prone to helium-headed migraines, Rosenhain entangles himself in Warszawski's net. He loses his lover Ina Polarker – equally drawn and repulsed by “fear“, “remorse“ and “deathly eroticism“ (Harlem 24) – to the writer, giving a rational explanation to his resentment, forays into which constitute the better part of the novella. Undoubtedly, the narrative is not based on reason and lucidity. While Warszawski ostensibly manipulates the *ménage à trois*, Ina and Rosenhain are both paralysed by the spectres of the past, re-enacting eternal roles, unable to

break the circle and work through layers of traumatic memory and collective guilt constructively.

Undeniably, as Warszawski himself acknowledges: “The Germans of today [...] are obviously *not* guilty. But the defeat, the division, the painful reunification and most of all the perpetrator complexes will always foist new guilt onto them“ (Harlem 52). Here, Biller, in an ever ambiguous move of sincerity and deceit, expresses the complex interplay of interruption and continuity inherent in the concept of generation through the character of Warszawski. Similarly, the literary theorist Sigrid Weigel points out that “the figure of the transgenerational incorporates within itself both, break and genealogy. No more is it a break within genealogy, but rather it is the notion of a propagated break in civilization and its consequences of heritage” (269). Thus, genealogy would encompass two apparently irreconcilable moments – a sense of origins, of belonging and identity pitted against the yearning of a radical break from this past, a rejection of tradition. This binary dynamic, already identified by Wilhelm Dilthey and Karl Mannheim, founding fathers of generation theory, creates the central tension of generations, in theory and practise alike.

Warszawski, of course, participates in both disruption and perpetuation of transgenerational identity bound to collective memory. As a youth in New York, he rebels against the omnipresent spectre of the Shoah taking place (albeit elsewhere, faraway) at that time, “this far-away natural disaster, transfigured and kitschified through the conversation of the parents and their acquaintances” (Harlem 33), preferring the concrete reality of black oppression a few subway stops to the east. This juxtaposition of the distant Judeocide with the neighbouring discrimination of African-Americans accounts for the novella’s title. Bearing in mind the arguments around the uniqueness and incomparability of the Shoah, this title represents a further provocative transgression. The title’s willed disturbance of categories subverts these even as their renewed evocation grants them longevity. Warszawski’s (recollected) violent outburst – “Shall I listen to your Nazi-balderdash all the time and commemorate our thousand-year long tale of woe? Shall I speak Kaddish for my people every day? Shall I cease to live because the others are dying?” (Harlem 35) – can be interpreted as a last insurgence of the real against the feigned, the advancing realm of the simulacrum. (Alternatively, it can be read as the cheeky retort of an adolescent who cannot distinguish oedipal discord from the severity of genocide.)

Soon, however, a transformation comes about, “a Saul-like experience”, after which Warszawski begins to absorb his uncle Leo Schneider’s survivor tale and assimilates his long rejected ‘Jewishness’. The reader cannot but question the motives of the conversion, for this is

the narrator's intent. Throughout the story confusion prevails as to whether behind his ugly, egotistic façade Warszawski proposes to do more than just lecture, rebuke and admonish, generally exploiting his dubious 'survivor' status for moral superiority and public notoriety. Warszawski crowns himself survivor by virtue of being Jewish and alive after the Holocaust, regardless of having 'survived' it on another continent. This confusion is mirrored in Warszawski's telescoping 'surfiction' on which the narrator Rosenhain muses:

Sometimes I thought that Warszawski was serious about the interlocking of his prose, a method conceived to encipher the authentic, sensual horror behind tangled mass of poetics and theory; and sometimes I thought all was but swaggering, sensationalism and undisciplined debauch of a garrulous author. (Harlem 40)

Jefferson Chase, in a discussion of another short story, concludes that Biller purposely calls attention to the fact that writing about post-Shoah German-Jewish conditions unavoidably manipulates (and is manipulated by, I would suggest) "the public's lurid fascination with Nazism and [makes] one's own career with corpses of the past" (118). A neutral, innocent position can indeed not exist, neither for Warszawski as popular, admired author, nor any of the other characters, let alone our biased narrator, Rosenhain. Unsurprisingly, this also applies to Biller himself. Chase credits Biller with the rare quality of "reflect[ing] upon the commodity status of [his] own works, [his] place in the 'culture industry' and the potential ambiguities entailed therein" (112). Seeing as academia operates within the confines of this cultural market, Chase believes that Biller's self-reflexivity could prove enlightening for theorists as well. In contrast to Chase's attitude of inevitable and intentionally explicit 'positionality', Jean Baudrillard asserts that it has become impossible to single out a position of discourse. Instead, discourse circulates traversing multiple subject positions word pun "it is of you/from you [*de toi*] that I speak" points up (Baudrillard 41-42). Although Baudrillard's approach highlights the deception at play in simulated, artificially separated subject positions, emphasising their *a priori* compromised nature, I cannot accept it for the purpose of my argument which still proposes to distinguish between various positions in identity culture and politics.

As a matter of fact, certain parallels do exist in the positionality of Biller's fiction, Rosenhain's text and Warszawski's surfiction. All include meta-fictional elements and societal reflections, especially on what has become known as the Holocaust industry. Rosenhain launches a regular diatribe against Warszawski and other Jewish public

intellectuals who refuse the consoling illusion of “kindred spirits”, of a “German-Jewish symbiosis, the historical alliance of two people, producing sometimes geniuses, sometimes corpses” (Harlem 50). He continues his tirade against those who refuse but continue exploiting the Central European idea of a union of Jews and Gentiles, now based more on guilt and mortification than anything else:

The fact that we nonetheless ate from the palm of their hands, that’s right, that we even let them explain the world to us, in which, if it was convenient for them, the Nazi-atrocities were turned into their arguments in the same way as gefillte fish, Jewish humour, a guilty conscience towards their own dead or – they didn’t shy away from anything! – even the Israeli complicity in Sabra and Shatila. All of it coercion, they intone from New York over Frankfurt to Jerusalem, all of it collective psychological indispensability, all of it distraction and reaction. Liars! Actors and profiteers! They knew why, mischievously, conspirationally, they giggled over the expression “There’s no business like Shoah-business“ when no “Goy“ was around. (Harlem 50-51)

And yet, Rosenhain concludes, one (read: a German) cannot possibly condemn them for it. In his bitter Finkelsteinian resentment, Rosenhain is caught up by one fundamental distinction between Norman Finkelstein and himself: he is not Jewish. As such, not only can he not openly voice his scepticism and disapproval, but he also completely assimilates the national guilt complex. Out of it, like a tumour, grows his philo-semitism, the flipside of the coin of ‘alterity’ which engenders anti-semitism.

It proves interesting to contrast the narrator’s furious criticism with Biller’s own unfiltered journalistic assessment of German-Jewish relationships in his collection of essays *Deutschbuch*. Referring to German and Austrian Jewish authors Barbara Honigmann, Robert Schindel, Robert Melasse and Doron Rabinovici (one could easily add his own name), Biller argues that theirs is the most fertile literary ground because it does not risk cultural assimilation of which he charges American Jewish literature. Rather, he believes that the “incredibly creative process of Jewish secession from the Germans is far from over“ (*Deutschbuch* 89-93). Here Jewishness is envisioned as deep-rooted ‘otherness’, even by Biller himself.

This individual ‘othering’ is echoed by a broader trend of labelling a group as victim. The manner in which Warszawski’s stage-managed life story is devoured in Germany satirically reflects on the growing mediatisation of the Holocaust. Cynically contemplated, the media landscape only encourages the seemingly insatiable demand of tear-jerking, horrifying accounts; consequently, women, homosexuals, children and ethnic groups like the Roma and Sinti are all revealed as the next victim group *en vogue*. As such, the media culture participates in what Dominick LaCapra has termed ‘displaced sacralisation’, a process generating the halo of ‘negative sublimity’ around extremely traumatising events. What has become known as Holocaust Sublime entertains dangers of establishing a victim culture where trauma is “transvalue[d] [...] into a test of the self or the group and an entry into the extraordinary” (LaCapra 23). The scandal around Benjamin Wilkomirski/Bruno Dösseker’s fake memoir *Bruchstücke* is a case in point. From a sociological perspective, his work corroborates the severe consequences of the sublimation of the Shoah in the course of which one identifies excessively with the victim group, a process one could dub ‘trauma envy’. Such unwarranted identification risks paralysing identity in the realms of this founding trauma.⁵ Yet one can easily envision the more quotidian ravage wrought by ‘displaced sacralisation’: the loss of spontaneous, natural behaviour in the face of another human being. As soon as this ‘Other’ is capitalised and essentialised, relations are bound to deteriorate, culminating in Biller’s spiteful satire.

The postcolonial terminology employed here to critique essentialism alludes to a general trend of applying postcolonial theory to German-Jewish literature by virtue of its minority status. Todd Herzog, for one, reflects on how Homi Bhabha’s notion of the ‘hybrid’ opens the door for the less pleasant racial concept of the *Mischling* or bastard. By and large, the sometimes strained translation of postcolonial theory into German is prone to leave stretch marks or spectral traces. The overstressed terminology of identity and difference (even when tempered by degrees of ‘hybridity’) of a postcolonial reading of German-Jewish literature risks reproducing the former lure of essentialised difference, as Herzog himself acknowledges.

Related by an unhinged, untrustworthy narrator personally involved in the story that revolves around an abusive, obnoxious bully, the novella achieves a clever blend of perspicaciously pinpointing social neuroses and parodying the same to an almost unrecognisable extreme. Biller dwells in the haunted borderland between reality and hyperbole, as his intermingling of fictitious and factual figures reveals. While Warszawski

himself is likened to the real-life Lea Fleischmann, George Tabori or the German-Jewish journalist and *provocateur* Henryk Broder in the story, it soon becomes apparent that he is an extravagant caricature of all these combined. As Gustav Seibt contends in his succinct essay enclosed in the book, Warszawski possesses all the possible stereotypical negative attributes of a Jew: “Warszawski is self-righteous, cynical, sentimental, mercilessly quick-witted, he turns his survivor status into the foundation for his literary career, in a manner that can only be described as blackmail – that’s why it functions exclusively in Germany –, he reaps erotic advantages from it“ (63). According to Seibt, Rosenhain actually inflates him to a larger-than-life Jud Süß:⁶ “an unshapely monster, a golem, a spawn of the oldest fancies of hatred: he seduces a German maiden, he is damnably potent“ (ibid.). The list culminates in murder, as Rosenhain finds Warszawski guilty of inducing Ina to abort his, Rosenhain’s, baby.

Gradually, the reader realises that she cannot perforate the balloon that has become Warszawski, brainchild of Rosenhain’s own helium-head. She is entrapped in Biller’s own surfiction, slipping amidst the multiple layers of his narrative. When she recognises that Warszawski is not necessarily the ogre he is portrayed to be, she can begin to disentangle the alleged facts from the narrator’s voice, hoping to find clues about either Warszawski or Rosenhain. Frustrated, she will soon renounce the project, conscious that there is no ultimate truth to be revealed. Even so, Jefferson Chase insists on distinguishing three alternative readings of the story, “(1) ‘straight,’ as a Gentile author’s satire of Jewish exploitation of the Holocaust; (2) ‘ironically,’ as a German author’s unintentional satire of German paranoia *vis-à-vis* Jewish authorship” (122). The convergence of these two interpretations of Rosenhain’s autobiographical report corresponds to the fluid reading this paper deliberately focussed on until now, implying that versions (1) and (2) cannot be separated. Chase describes the third possibility, consciously withheld until now, as follows: “(3) ‘ambiguously,’ as the fictional Jewish author’s work, whereby the satiric thrust becomes unclear” (ibid.). This last version begs an explanation. In fact, Rosenhain’s “distortions and mirages” have run through his entire narration, profoundly influencing our perception of the other characters. Chase sees them as ciphers for “media-fueled hallucinations” that need to be cut down to proportion to draw closer to the actual figures (ibid.). As mentioned earlier, any such endeavours are certain to fail, for the author’s finger forestalls every possible denouement. Instead he endows his story, like an Escher drawing, with vertiginous perspectives and, to borrow Chase’s phrase, an “ambiguous, reality-destroying frame” (ibid.). As a final culmination, Biller surrounds

Rosenhain's text with a meta-fictional parenthesis: one Hermann Warschauer presents a postscript to the text the reader followed until now, so that it unexpectedly exposes itself to be a posthumous publication of a certain Friedrich Rosenhain's manuscript. Chase regards this as a further opening for the reader, permitting the assumption that *Harlem Holocaust* is written by the supposed editor, Herrmann Warschauer, whom the character Warszawski only barely disguises. Whether this would be a final ruse, the decisive trick that Warszawski plays on the late Rosenhain, remains debatable. Biller cautiously refrains from privileging one construal over another.

In the end, Warszawski's character, like Rosenhain's, cannot be recreated as one cannot truthfully learn their actual intent or motive in the course of *Harlem Holocaust*. Accordingly, one may draw the conclusion that these figures are not only inflated, symbolised by the recurring trope of the helium balloon, but just as hollow. Following Ecclesiastes in his eternal pursuit of the wind, I assume that neither Warszawski nor Rosenhain dissimulates a truth, hiding a well-kept secret behind a smokescreen. Rather, the truth is so obvious that no one, characters and readers alike, is liable to stumble over it. *There is no truth that would apply to or be personified by these characters*. Of course, one can effortlessly stylise Rosenhain and Warszawski as opposites; truly, they require one another to play their respective roles. Binary opposites of victim and tormentor, "flesh" and "faint soul" can be erected (Seibt 64), but any such analysis would only once again veil that the prototypical modelling is already inherent in the novella. The characters are hollow, empty but for the collective projections they constitute.

Here, importantly, I digress from Chase's appraisal of Biller's prose, which deplores the limitation of Herzog's reading the individual as symbol for the collective. However, I do not wish to cement essentialist identities, of which I consider the hybrid to be constituent, but rather to highlight that these characters are blank, spectral and their identities freely flowing within the realms of the collective imagination. Instead of being individuals, Warszawski, Rosenhain, even less significant characters such as Ina, personify types: the exploitative, unscrupulous Jew, the conscience-ridden German, the soul-searching female intellectual... Being mere symbols, these figures can by definition not possess their personal memories. As a substitute, they can draw on the joint infinite pool of postmemories. The ease with which the concept of postmemory can be hijacked, filling the void of identity and personal memory with collective hand-me-downs, invites further critical reflection. Allowing second-hand memories to anchor where no lived experience could develop proves the essential meaninglessness of

the notion of postmemory, when taken to its logical extreme. Whether analysing the figures of Warszawski/Warschauer and Rosenhain, or probing the elasticity of the concept of postmemory, the reader is constantly reminded of Baudrillard's simulacra.

A simulacrum, in Baudrillard's definition, is a sign that dissimulates that there is nothing (6). One can intuitively grasp that such a notion of a loss of meaning, especially as it is conceived within the context of our postmodern consumer culture, will resonate with the themes established in *Harlem Holocaust*. The unnatural conservation of memory, the retreat of innocence and the unaffected sincerity in interpersonal relationships as they are portrayed in the novella all bare witness to the need to obscure that time has passed and meaning has been exhausted. In the more fortunate case, this passing of both sense and consciousness occurs in a self-reflexive process. Literature, with its introspective tendency, occasionally assumes such a role. In Biller's story, an outlandish apparition appears to the increasingly delirious Rosenhain in the final scene. Unshaved, dirty, reeking of alcohol and perspiration, this phantom figure remains outside the reach of the media-fed, always mediated circles of German culture. Embracing Rosenhain, the vision speaks: "The central event in poetry, and most particularly in my fiction, isn't the Holocaust, not the extermination of the Jews, but the effacement of this extermination as central occurrence in our consciousness" (*Harlem* 60).

This phrase, as Rosenhain realises in the course of his hallucination (and as a consequence of it), is a verbatim echo of a meditation in Warszawski's fictional manuscript 'Harlem Holocaust'. It moreover reflects Baudrillard's thoughts on the Holocaust's (hollow) legacy: "Forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc. This forgetting is as essential as the event, in any case unlocatable by us, inaccessible to us in its truth" (49). Preventing memory to follow its natural course, channelling it into contrived concepts such as postmemory or even counter-memory, is a symptom of our unease with the 'real', more bitter because more human, bequest of the Shoah. We cannot trust ourselves to remember humanely without the entire media apparatus, to allow the knowledge of the genocide to develop normal proportions of horror, mourning, anger, guilt and also tired indifference. As maintained by Baudrillard:

This forgetting is still too dangerous, it must be effaced by an artificial memory (today, everywhere, it is artificial memories that efface man in his own memory). This artificial memory will be the restaging of extermination – but late, much too late for it to be able to make real waves and profoundly disturb something, and especially, especially through a medium that is itself cold, radiating forgetfulness, deterrence, and

extermination in a still more systematic way, if that is possible, than the camps themselves. (49)

The medium Baudrillard refers to is, of course, none other than the media itself, through which every debate on identity is churned, every memory laundered. In a similar tone, Biller laments the distorted ideas and misshapen images that Germans hold cherishingly of their “holy Holocaust”; he wonders why scholarly terms such as “work of mourning”, “coming to terms with the past” and “never again” haunt and colonise his mind, conscious that they have gained access via the public discourse in which they proliferate (*Deutschbuch* 27).

They come from the outside, from editorials and commemorative addresses, from allocutions on the TV and honorific speeches, these are words that I have come to hear more often than “thanks“ and “please“, words spoken so gravely and poignantly, that I – and this is the most regrettable – cannot but believe them (ibid.).

The irritation in Biller’s text is comprehensible, deriving from the pretence of the German “litanies of working through” (ibid.). He agrees with Baudrillard in that the obsession is far from natural and healthy. Any other country, he claims, would be so embarrassed by this past, that it would do anything to bury it. Germany, moreover, founds itself on auto-flagellation, on its self-righteous acceptance of the burden of transgenerational blame. “The Holocaust-trauma as mother of an at long last found German national awareness? What else?“ (*Deutschbuch* 28). Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to understand why Biller nonetheless chooses to depict characters that are genuinely crushed by the onus of carrying the Shoah on one’s sleeve, like a marker of identity, like a star of David.

But why should Biller’s fiction and journalistic writing coincide, why should he be any more reducible to an essential standpoint than his characters? If he resolves to essentialise German national identity until it boils down to the collective embracing of the guilt it entails in a given text, should the reader not accord him the use of overstatement? After all, as Ina states her position on her own journalism before the narrator quietens her down lastingly, one should not take her articles too literally as “she couches it in such exaggerated terms, so that her viewpoint may be grasped in all its consequence.” (Harlem 27) Here, perhaps, Biller has dropped a clue about his own approach. There remains much to write on the specific debates

and reflections Biller raises. In this paper I chose to concentrate on the interconnected questions of German guilt and Jewish profiteering in the light of an often insincere or even hypocritical handling of postmemory. Throughout my line of reasoning I have woven the thread of the simulacrum. This penelopean thread unravelled how, in the midst of the socially pertinent critique that Biller undertakes of the deep, only partially controlled entanglement of both Warszawski and Rosenhain in the haunting net of post-Shoah German memory culture, the central event has been substituted by a simulacrum, the shimmering hologram of the Holocaust.

The people of ages past are no longer remembered. What remains is the mere commitment to recall, not an act, not a person, but the pledge itself. Circular, self-referential, memory is caught in tautology, increasingly diluting into pure form.

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² The massive stir caused by Biller's novel *Esra* in 2003 helps to contextualise the provocative force of his fiction. Its distribution was discontinued after some 400,000 copies were already in circulation. Biller's ex-girlfriend had sued out an interlocutory injunction, feeling breached in her personal rights. Despite a public appeal signed by one hundred prominent people and a general outcry over artistic censorship, the novel remains banned (cf. Wittstock, Eichner and Mix).

³ For further elaborations on the 'genealogical discourse of memory', see Sigrid Weigel's "Generation as a Symbolic Form".

⁴ All translations of Biller's work are mine. Page numbers refer to the German edition.

⁵ For further discussion, see Alexandra Bauer's "My Private Holocaust" and Zachary Braiterman's powerful article "Against Holocaust Sublime".

⁶ Jew Süß, nickname of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, a Jewish banker and protégé of Duke Karl Alexander of Württemberg in the 18th century, was the model for a number of literary and cinematographic adaptations. In a 1940 Nazi propaganda film directed by Veit Haslan, Süß was portrayed as a caricature of Jewish baseness which his moniker still connotes.