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Icons of Defiance, Images of Loss: The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and the Semiotics of Commemoration

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, unveiled in 1948 in Warsaw's Muranów district and designed by Natan Rapoport, as a pivotal site of Jewish memory and postwar commemoration. While the Monument is renowned for its dual façades—one dramatizing heroic resistance, the other memorializing martyrdom—it is also a deeply symbolic response to the destruction of Polish Jewry and the Holocaust. This study investigates how the Monument mediated and shaped collective memory among surviving Polish Jews at the moment of its creation and unveiling. Employing a multimodal social semiotic analytic framework, the research explores the interplay between the Monument's visual and material dimensions, its spatial context within the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, and the shifting socio-political landscape of early postwar Poland. The analysis is grounded in theories of collective memory, focusing on the evolution of Jewish memory traditions and the emerging Zionist national mythology. Through detailed semiotic analysis of the Monument and its placement, this thesis argues that Rapoport's work functioned as a dynamic site of memory, encoding a dialectic of martyrdom and resistance rooted in ancient Jewish tropes yet profoundly shaped by the ideological imperatives of its time. Ultimately, Rapoport's Monument emerges not merely as an aesthetic or commemorative object, but as an active agent in the reconstruction and negotiation of Jewish memory in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Keywords: monuments, collective memory, Holocaust, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Zionism, Nathan Rapoport, *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*

Streszczenie:

Niniejsza praca magisterska analizuje Pomnik Bohaterów Getta, odsłonięty w 1948 roku w warszawskiej dzielnicy Muranów i zaprojektowany przez Natana Rapoporta, jako kluczowe miejsce żydowskiej pamięci i powojennego upamiętnienia. Pomnik, znany ze swych dwóch fasad—jednej dramatyzującej heroiczny opór, drugiej upamiętniającej męczeństwo—stanowi również głęboko symboliczną odpowiedź na zagładę Żydów polskich i Holokaust. Celem pracy jest zbadanie, w jaki sposób Pomnik pośredniczył w kształtowaniu pamięci zbiorowej wśród ocalałych polskich Żydów w momencie jego powstania i odsłonięcia. Wykorzystując multimodalne ramy analizy semiotyki społecznej, rozprawa bada wzajemne powiązania między wizualnymi i materialnymi wymiarami Pomnika, jego usytuowaniem w przestrzeni ruin warszawskiego getta oraz zmieniającym się krajobrazem społeczno-politycznym wczesnego okresu powojennego. Analiza osadzona jest w teoriach pamięci zbiorowej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ewolucji tradycji żydowskiej pamięci oraz kształtującej się syjonistycznej mitologii narodowej. Poprzez szczegółową analizę semiotyczną Pomnika i jego usytuowania, praca dowodzi, że dzieło Rapoporta funkcjonowało jako dynamiczne miejsce pamięci, kodując dialektykę męczeństwa i oporu zakorzenioną w dawnych tropach żydowskich, a zarazem głęboko ukształtowaną przez ideologiczne imperatywy swojej epoki. Ostatecznie Pomnik Rapoporta jawi się nie tylko jako obiekt estetyczny czy upamiętniający, lecz jako aktywny uczestnik w procesie odbudowy i negocjacji żydowskiej pamięci w następstwie Zagłady.

Słowa kluczowe: pomniki, pamięć zbiorowa, Zagłada, powstanie w getcie warszawskim, syjonizm, Natan Rapoport, Pomnik Bohaterów Getta

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Słowa kluczowe: pomniki, pamięć zbiorowa, Zagłada, powstanie w getcie warszawskim, syjonizm, Natan Rapoport, Pomnik Bohaterów Getta

Introduction

"In order to immortalise this historic date in our history, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland has decided that on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto-- on the spot where the heroic fight for Jewish honor broke out, a monument be erected to which the Jews of the whole world will come on a pilgrimage, in order to draw from this symbol of suffering and valor, martyrdom and heroism, -- strength for the perseverance and encouragement for a continued fight for the existence of the Jewish communities in Poland and of Jewish communities throughout the world."[1]

In April 1948, in the rubble-strewn remains of the Muranów district, a monument was unveiled to commemorate the armed revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto five years prior. Designed by the sculptor Natan Rapoport, the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* quickly became a touchstone of Jewish memory in the ruins of postwar Poland. Though not the first monument constructed to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (pl: *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim*, yi: אויפֿשטאַנד אין ווארשעווער געטאָ [*Oyfshtand in Varshever Geto*]), Rapoport's Monument is significantly more well-known, visually striking, and symbolically complex than its predecessor. The western side of the Monument features a dramatic sculpture of a group of armed insurgents, centered around the figure of Mordechai Anielewicz, the young leader of the uprising. On the eastern side, however, this striking imagery is not present: instead, a bas-relief of despondent figures, led by Nazi soldiers to an unknown destination,[2] occupies the visual center. On the plinth, an inscription written in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish reads: "The Jewish nation -- to its fighters and martyrs."[3] The juxtaposition of these façades—one depicting heroic armed resistance, the other, somber martyrdom— conveys a complex narrative of defiance and destruction.

[1] "Letter from Dr. Berman and Joel Lasebnik to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Re: Monument to Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *Archives of the Joint Distribution Committee*, April 23, 1947, available here.

[2] Commonly thought to be Umschlagplatz, the square from which the Jews of Warsaw were deported by train to Treblinka.

[3] "Pomnik Bohaterów Getta (ul. Zamenhofa)," *Wirtualny Sztetl*, n.d. Accessed on April 15, 2025. https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/w/18-warszawa/116-miejsca-martyrologii/52110-pomnik-bohaterow-getta-ul-zamenhofa.

Two views of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes,* taken by the author during the celebrations for the 80th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April 19, 2023)

In the years since its unveiling, the significance of Rapoport's Monument has expanded beyond the events of the uprising itself-- James E. Young notes that it "has endured as a kind of screen across which the projected shadows of a world's preoccupation continue to flicker and dance."[4] Correspondingly, this Monument has served as a site of Polish state commemoration during the Communist period, as a backdrop to events of geopolitical significance, including Willy Brandt's 1970 *Kniefall*, and as a site of pilgrimage for world leaders; in reproduced form, it even exists as a site of memory at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel.[5] While these developments enrich our understanding of the Monument's resonance, they risk obscuring the unique circumstances and conditions of its emergence. Like all commemorative works, its original design, symbolism, and reception were profoundly influenced by the socio-political context, cultural debates, and memory practices of its time.[6] Accordingly, I seek to understand the intended

[4] James E. Young. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 156.
[5] James Young. "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument." *Representations,* 26 (Spring 1989): 69-106.
[6] Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, "Commemorating a Difficult Past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials," American Sociological Review, 67:1 (2002), pp. 30-51, 48.

meaning of the Monument to its primary audience, the surviving remnants of Polish Jewry, at the moment of its creation and unveiling by asking '*How did Natan Rapoport's* Monument to the Ghetto Heroes *mediate and shape the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Holocaust?'* and the related sub-questions:

- How did the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* visually and materially encode this dual narrative of destruction and resistance?
- How did the Monument's physical placement within the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, and temporal placement in the socio-political conditions of early postwar Poland, shape its meaning?
- How did the Monument reflect, transform, or reinterpret earlier Jewish memory traditions?

In this MA thesis, I aim to address these themes by analyzing Rapoport's Monument through a multimodal social semiotic analytic framework to investigate "the meaning of monuments as actively created by the interplay of the material, the symbolic and the political dimensions."[7] The body of my analysis is firmly situated between the Monument's moment of origin and unveiling (1943-1948) in accordance with the critical approach, in which "analysis goes beyond a reading of the texts and extends to an exploration of the context of their production."[8] In light of this approach, over this study I analyze the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* as a multimodal embodiment of Jewish memory shaped by the postwar socio-historical and political environment. In this reading, the Monument is not a neutral site of mourning, but a site of tension and active intervention in the construction and rapid consolidation of memory at a moment of rupture and rebirth for Polish Jewry in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter will address the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, broadly centered on the concept of collective (public) memory, Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* and the 'memoryscape', before narrowing in focus to examine the specificities of Jewish collective memory and historical consciousness to the development of Zionist mythology. This chapter will also examine the embodiment of these forms of memory in monuments, with a subsection dedicated to the specificities of memorials

[7] Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico, "The meaning of monuments and memorials: towards a semiotic approach," *Punctum International Journal of Semiotics* 2/1 (2016), 28.
[8] Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 36.

to the Shoah. In the second chapter, focused on the methodological framework of the study, I will explicate the framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) within the social semiotics approach, which will be employed to analyze Rapoport's Monument. The third chapter is concerned with the socio-political and historical context of postwar Polish Jewry in the years leading up to the creation of the Monument, and will address the roles that myriad influences played in the period between the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Monument. The fourth chapter will employ MCDA to analyze Rapoport's Monument, broken into its two opposing façades, and situated within the spatial context of the ruins of the former ghetto. This chapter will also situate the semiotic interpretation of the Monument within its socio-historical and political context. The last chapter will provide final conclusions, returning to a discussion of the research puzzle.

A Note on Translations

Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Polish and Yiddish are my own. In this thesis, I have elected to retain the Yiddish and Polish spellings of names, including Natan Rapoport's, to better reflect the historical and cultural context.

Chapter 1. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

"Memory," writes Jeffery Olick, "occurs in public and private, at the tops of societies and at the bottoms, as reminiscence and as commemoration, as personal testimony and as national narrative."[9] The so-called 'memory boom' of recent decades has provided fertile ground for the flourishing of memory studies, a discipline centered on the ways in which the past is employed in constructing identities, legitimizing power relations, sustaining traditions, and shaping the cultural imagination.[10] As part of my synthetic overview of memory studies in the first part of this chapter, I highlight those aspects pertaining to the construction of collective and public memory and their embodiments as 'sites of memory', before shifting to a review of memory and historical consciousness according to the Jewish conception, culminating in a brief discussion of the role of Zionism, myth, and 'monumental' history. In the second half of this chapter, I turn to examine the role of monuments and their role in cultivating memory and delve into the specific case of the memorialization of the Shoah. Lastly, I will outline the intersection of these topics as they pertain specifically to the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes.

1.1 From Collective Memory to Sites of Memory

The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is typically considered to be an early pioneer of collective memory, working in the tradition of Emile Durkheim. The central thesis behind Halbwachs's conception of collective memory is its social conditioning, as explained in his seminal work *On Collective Memory* (*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*): "[n]o memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections."[11] Despite the fact that it is the individual who "has" memory, in Halbwachs's understanding, is inherently dependent on social structures: a person's memory forms itself through his or her participation in communicative processes and is a function of his or her involvement in a broad variety of social groups, ranging in scope from the familial to religious to national.[12] In this way, Halbwachs anticipated the ways in which recollections

[9] Jeffery K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory,* 17 (1999), pp. 333-48, 346.
[10] Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, "Commemorating a Difficult Past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials," *American Sociological Review,* 67:1 (2002), pp. 30-51, 31.
[11] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43.
[12] Ibid., 169.

could serve not merely as personal remembrance but as a vehicle for cultural identity, political legitimation, and the shaping of historical consciousness.

If Halbwachs established the social foundations of memory, subsequent scholars have elaborated its cultural and political dimensions, particularly in relation to national and communal identity. Jan Assmann, in *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, casts cultural memory as a repository of tradition, past reference, and political imagination—an institutionalized, and thus 'artificial', structure that nevertheless "functions in exactly the same way as individual memory does in relation to consciousness."[13] What emerges here is memory not as spontaneous recollection, but rather as a deliberately organized cultural system that binds identity to enduring forms of transmission. Eric Langenbacher underscores the affective force of such memories, describing them as "intersubjectively shared interpretations of a poignant past," charged with a high degree of emotional resonance.[14] Jan-Werner Müller, meanwhile, makes explicit the socio-political stakes: cultural memory provides the framework through which nationally conscious individuals order their history, so that memory and national identity become "mutually constitutive."[15] Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins extend this line of thought by defining 'social memory' in plural terms—as the diverse forms, public and private, consensual and contested, material and communicative, through which the past continues to shape lived experience.[16] Together, these perspectives suggest that memory is never neutral: it is a medium through which identity is forged, emotion mobilized, and political belonging inscribed.

Aleida Assmann advances this debate by distinguishing between four categories of memory—individual, social, political, and cultural—each discrete, yet permeable. The first two resonate with Halbwachs's legacy: individual and social memory are forged through interpersonal connections, limited in temporal scope yet dynamic in form, continuously

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[13] Jan Assmann. *Cultural Memory and the Ancient World: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.
[14] Eric Langenbacher. "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations," in P*ower and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*. Ed. by Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 26.
[15] Jan-Werner Müller. "Introduction: The Power of Memory, Memory of Power, and Power over Memory," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past.* Ed. by Jan-Werner Müller. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.
[16] Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998):105-140, 112.

generated 'from below' through discussion, mediation, and shared experience.[17] Here, the boundary between the private and the collective remains porous, underscoring the contingent, shifting nature of memory as it circulates within social groups. Political and cultural memory, by contrast, operate in a more enduring and institutional register. Political memory, designed 'from above' by elites, is long-term, unified, and instrumental, propagated through commemorations, rituals, national holidays, monuments, and grand narratives aimed at securing legitimacy and shaping collective loyalty. Cultural memory, closely allied with this politicized sphere, encompasses both 'functional' practices of repetition—rituals, traditions, and symbolic invocations—and 'cumulative' repositories of preservation: archives, works of art, and material sites of memory, what Pierre Nora famously called *lieux de mémoire.*[18]

Nora's seminal collection *Les Lieux de Mémoire* remains foundational in showing how structures, figures, even colors or songs can become national symbols that trigger affective memory narratives.[19] According to Nora, a site's memorial function may be deliberate from its inception—what he calls 'dominant' sites—or may arise unintentionally over time as 'dominated' sites. A cenotaph to fallen soldiers exemplifies the former; the beaches of Normandy exemplify the latter, though these categories are not mutually exclusive.[20] Jay Winter expands on this insight, noting that these sites of memory are critical not only for survivors, but also for later generations: when direct witnesses pass away, memory becomes second-order, "a metaphor for fashioning narratives about the past" by remembering "the memories of others."[21] The case of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* proves particularly illustrative of this phenomenon, as a 'dominant' site (the structure of the monument itself) encompassing a 'dominated' one (the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto).

Building upon Nora, scholars have underscored how memory and power intersect through the control and shaping of physical space. Elżbieta Janicka describes "symbolic topography" as a form of historical narration and group identity enacted by those who

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[17] Aleida Assmann. *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity,* trans. by Sarah Clift, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 29.
[18] Sergii Pakhomenko and Olga Sarajeva, "Securitization of Memory: a Theoretical Framework to Study the Latvian Case," *Przegląd Strategiczny,* 13 (2020): 395-410, 402.
[19] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer, with a foreword by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. 2: Traditions*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, with a foreword by Lawrence D. Kritzman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
[20] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions,* 19.
[21] Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,* Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, eds., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 313.

dominate space,[22] while Mark Nuttall and others speak of "memoryscapes," the material and symbolic sites where social memory is emplaced and made tangible.[23] In urban contexts, Manuel Castells calls this the "marking of space," whereby cities become collections of symbolic forms.[24] Natalia Krzyżanowska similarly highlights strategies of naming and commemoration as key tools of symbolic power. [25] Other scholars emphasize the close entwinement of some sites of memory with the legitimacy of ruling elites, while others retain social prestige independently. As Jay Winter notes, these latter sites often materialize political or national identity, part of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger famously term the "invention of tradition."[26] As earlier sections have suggested, collective memory is not a passive archive of the past, but an active process that can legitimize prevailing social orders and shape a community's self-understanding. Paul Connerton's insight that "control of a society's memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power" underscores these stakes.[27] Across these perspectives, the significance of monuments, naming practices, and commemorative rituals becomes evident: they do not simply preserve memory but actively anchor and redefine collective identity by deciding what and who is commemorated, what is silenced, and how historical narratives are spatially inscribed. The creation of *lieux de mémoire* is thus both a cultural and a political act, shaping not only how a society perceives its past, but its present.

This recognition brings the question of agency to the forefront. Decisions about what enters the public sphere of remembrance are rarely accidental; they are shaped by actors who possess the means to control language, symbols, and space. As Geneviève Zubrzycki notes, political and intellectual elites often occupy this position of influence, instrumentalizing

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[22] Elżbieta Janicka, "Instead of Negationism: The Symbolic Topography of the Former Warsaw Ghetto vis-à-vis Holocaust Narratives," *Holocaust Studies and Materials,* 4 (2017):212-260, 213.
[23] See: Mark Nuttall. *Arctic Homeland: Kinship, Community, and Development in Northwest Greenland.* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press,1992), 39 and "Building a Nation Today: People and Places in Greenland," pp. 223-238 in *Heritage and Identity: Shaping the Nations of the North*, edited by J. M. Fladmark and Thor Heyerdahl, (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 223; Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius. "Palimpsestic Memoryscape: Heterotopias, "Multiculturalism" and Racism in Białystok", *History and Memory, suppl.Special issue: Remembering Poland: History, Memory and Society in East Central Europe,* 34/2 (2023):33-75, 33-34; Hamzah Muzaini & Brenda S.A. Yeoh. "War landscapes as 'battlefields' of collective memories: reading the Reflections at Bukit Chandu, Singapore," *Cultural Geographies*, 12/3 (2005): 345-365, 345.
[24] Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977).
[25] Krzyżanowska, Natalia. 2016. "The discourse of counter-monuments: semiotics of material commemoration in contemporary urban spaces," *Social Semiotics*, 26:5, 465-485, 465.
[26] Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," 316. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[27] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1, 3.

history by crafting narratives that legitimize their ideological and political agendas.[28] Yet, as Ekaterina Haskins and John Bodnar argue, vernacular and official cultures intersect, sometimes clashing, sometimes converging, revealing that remembrance always remains a dynamic terrain.[29]

What emerges from this body of scholarship is a clear picture of memory's inherently political nature. Public memory speaks less about the past itself than about the dynamics of power in the present: it is a site where loyalty, dissent, and competing identities are continually mediated.[30] Langenbacher terms this the 'structural power' of memory—the ability to "define what is put on the political agenda, in what terms political issues are framed."[31] Paul Connerton links it to the dominance of certain narratives within a political culture;[32] Martha Minow points to the strategic alternation of remembering and forgetting;[33] and Hodgkin and Radstone emphasize its ethical stakes, observing that disputes over the meaning of the past are always, simultaneously, struggles over the present.[34] Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that the organization of collective memory is inseparable from broader struggles over history, authority, and identity, and that memoryscapes—both physical and symbolic—are key arenas where these struggles unfold. Thus, collective memory provides the first conceptual pillar for my study of Rapoport's Monument: it situates the monument within the processes by which communities externalize, objectify, and transmit memory.

1.2 *Zakhor:* Jewish Collective Memory and Its Transformations

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[28] Genevieve Zubrzycki, "'We, the Polish Nation': Ethnic and Civic Visions of Nationhood in Post-Communist Constitutional Debates," *Theory and Society* vol.30 (2001): 629-668), 634.
[29] Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship,* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 6.
[30] John Bodnar, "Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity,* John R. Gillis, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 75.
[31] Eric Langenbacher, "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations," in *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 26.
[32] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[33] Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 119.
[34] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Contested Pasts," in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory,* Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds.,(New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

As the previous section explicated, theories of collective and cultural memory offer essential frameworks for understanding how groups remember and reinterpret their pasts. Having examined collective and cultural memory in general, I now turn to one of its most distinctive paradigms: Jewish memory culture. As Maurice Halbwachs observed, remembrance is never a purely individual act, but always socially framed. Jan Assmann refined this insight with his influential distinction between communicative memory—the interpersonal recollections of living generations—and cultural memory, institutionalized and ritually reinforced over centuries. For Assmann, cultural memory orients itself around fixed points in the past condensed into archetypal narratives and "imbued with an element of the sacred."[35] Among world cultures, Assmann singles out ancient Israel as paradigmatic: unlike many civilizations that grounded their identity in mythic ancestry or heroic founding figures, Israel defined itself through the divine imperative *shamor ve-zakhor*—"keep and remember."[36] What Jews were commanded to remember further marks this tradition as unique: not merely myth or genealogy, but a covenant with God, mediated through Torah, *halakhah* (law), and sacred ritual time. As Ori Soltes aptly summarizes, "Judaism is defined, in short, by memory as much as by any other feature."[37]

The commandment to remember is deeply woven into Jewish textual tradition: "the verb *zakhar* [remember] appears in its various declensions in the Bible no less than one hundred and sixty-nine times, usually with either Israel or God as the subject, for memory is incumbent upon both."[38] This bilateral obligation reflects what Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, in his seminal *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, calls the essence of Jewish collective memory: the belief in divine providence, or the 'transcendent', as an active force in history, and the conviction of Jewish history's uniqueness.[39] For premodern Jewry, as Yerushalmi argues, the Bible was not only a repository of the past but "a revealed pattern of the whole of history," interpreted teleologically as the unfolding of the covenant.[40] Catastrophes—the destruction of the Temples, exile, persecution—were seamlessly

[35] Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38.
[36] Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization,* 36.
[37] Ori Z. Soltes, "Memory, Tradition, and Revival: Who, Then, Speaks for the Jews?" in *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 161.
[38] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 3rd ed. (Seattle and London; University of Washington Press, 1996), 5.
[39] Ronny Miron. *The Angel of Jewish History: The Image of the Jewish Past in the Twentieth Century,* (Newton: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 10.
[40] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 22.

incorporated into a longue-durée schema of sin, punishment, and redemption.[41] In Robert Chazan's words, the biblical pattern of "faithfulness and reward and sinfulness and punishment was more than sufficient" to interpret Jewish experience across centuries.[42]

This theological orientation points to another crucial feature of Jewish memory: its fundamentally temporal, rather than, spatial focus. Whereas Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* emphasizes the crystallization of memory in places, premodern Jewish memory was anchored in sacred time. Through liturgy and ritual, sacral memory bound past, present, and future into a single covenantal drama, creating a static historical consciousness in which time was cyclical—anchored in sacred festivals like Pesach or Tisha B'Av that not only recalled but ritually re-enacted formative events, collapsing temporal distance.[43] As Abraham Joshua Heschel noted, through these rituals, Judaism built an "architecture of time," not space.[44] This cyclical sanctification of time also reveals a paradox central to Yerushalmi's thesis: a people renowned for its rich memory culture, yet producing little historiography for much of its history. For Yerushalmi, this was no accident; the constant presence of the transcendent precluded critical history in favor of sacral memory.[45]

Unlike Yerushalmi, who saw collective memory as a receptacle for the ahistorical and divine, Amos Funkenstein placed historical consciousness, what he defines as the attempt to understand and interpret the past in relation to the present, at its center.[46] In this reading, even the conception of transcendence in Jewish collective memory is mediated by conscious historical processes: as Ronny Miron writes, "the view that Jewish history is subject to unique

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[41] See Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 13-22. Certain events in Jewish history are often called upon in reference to previous instances of similar occasions, including triumphs and horrors, some of which will be referenced in the next section. As Ori Soltes writes, "The Jewish world remembers back to …1897 (the First Zionist Congress), 1791 (the Emancipation of French Jews), 1492 (the Expulsion from Spain), 1394 (The Expulsion from France), 1304 (the earlier Expulsion from France), 1290 (the Expulsion from England), 70 CE (the Destruction of the Second Temple), 586 BCE (the Destruction of the First Temple), and beyond." (Ori Z. Soltes, "Memory, Tradition, and Revival: Who, Then, Speaks for the Jews?", 127.)

[42] Robert Chazan, "From 'Jewish Memory' to Jewish History: Two Perspectives," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 25 (2017): 279-304, 295.

[43] The Passover Seder exemplifies the structure of Jewish memory: the Haggadah enjoins every participant to view themselves as having personally left Egypt; symbolic foods, narrative recitation, and pedagogical exchanges built into the Haggadah further collapse the temporal distance between history and the present day. Tisha B'Av, a day of lamentation, fasting, and prayer, telescopes multiple tragedies in Jewish history into a single day: the destruction of both the First and Second Temples, wanderings in the desert, the defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt against the Romans, the expulsion of the Jews from England at the end of the 13th, and from Spain at the end of the 15th centuries, respectively.

[44] Abraham J. Heschel. *The Sabbath.* (New York: 1951), 8.

[45] Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 14.

[46] See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 11-15; Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 48-53.

divine providence, compared to world history, is perceived by Funkenstein as an expression of the Jews' self-perception."[47] Accordingly, Funkenstein's understanding of memory as socially framed and historically situated engenders greater similarities with the dynamics of memory examined in the previous section.[48] This memory persists through present and ongoing engagement ("immanentization") in which the past is experienced as a "remembered present;" neither static nor dependent on fixed theological positions, it remains open to both reinterpretation and dynamic appropriation across time.[49]

Between Yerushalmi's transcendent, static model and Funkenstein's immanent, dynamic continuity, a number of twentieth-century Jewish intellectuals offered further nuance to the understanding of Jewish memory. Gershom Scholem, like Yerushalmi, "expresses an ontological approach that views the past as an arena in which transcendental forces are present and active."[50] Baruch Kurzweil's static vision that "each generation is the Sinai generation; after Sinai there is no innovation"[51] echoes Yerushalmi's sense of permanence, yet Kurzweil also urged a deliberate "remythologizing:" the conscious preservation of myth as "an undamaged picture of reality," revealing the role of the divine, "which from his point of view can and should be harnessed to [understand] Jewish history."[52] Nathan Rotenstreich, like Funkenstein, emphasized the embeddedness of tradition in historical time: "Judaism is primarily a religion of tradition. Therefore the attitude to time is embedded within it, since tradition involves transmission from generation to generation."[53] In Rotenstreich's view, the moment of divine revelation may be endowed with ahistorical meaning, yet it remains anchored in real historical existence, for the past carries ontological weight—shaping Jewish consciousness across generations and acquiring renewed presence when embodied in the acts of the present.[54] Taken together, these perspectives illuminate a shared insight: Jewish collective memory is not merely a repository of the past, but a distinctive framework—anchored in covenant and sanctified time—where myth and history continually interact to shape Jewish self-understanding across generations.

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[47] Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 41.
[48] Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History,* 25.
[49] Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 53-54.
[50] Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 179.
[51] Quoted in Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 264-265.
[52] Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 262.
[53] Nathan Rotenstreich. *Studies in Contemporary Jewish Thought.* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1978), quoted in Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 375.
[54] Nathan Rotenstreich. *Studies in Contemporary Jewish Thought,* 156; Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History,* 375.

The advent of modernity through emancipation,[55] Enlightenment (*Haskalah*),[56] and resultant secularization beginning in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, however, increasingly destabilized the rabbinic paradigm of sacral memory. As Yerushalmi observed, "[m]odern Jewish historiography began precipitously out of the assimilation from without and collapse from within" of traditional Jewish life.[57] The *maskilim,* or intellectuals of the Jewish Enlightenment, and early historians of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) sought to integrate Jews into the universal narratives of European history. This transition from "memory" to "history," as Robert Chazan formulates it after Yerushalmi, did not abolish the older sacral frameworks of remembrance but set them in tension with modern critical approaches as competing narratives of the Jewish past emerged, no longer secured by a single theological framework.[58] Few of these narratives proved as historically consequential as Zionism.

Rising from a fringe theory to one of the most dominant arenas of Jewish thought, Zionism's mythos blended tragic and heroic elements, appealing to ancient symbols and contemporary European utopian ideals alike and forging a powerful narrative of renewal and sovereignty.[59] As Gilad Sharvit notes, the Zionist ideology "embraced a perspective of exile often encapsulated by the term *shlilat ha-golah* (negation of the Diaspora)," portraying exile (Galut) as an "eternal crisis" that imperiled Jewish existence and demanded active resolution.[60] Early Zionist thinkers castigated what they perceived as Diaspora passivity: Max Nordau decried the "degeneration" of Diasporic life, calling for "a Judaism with muscles,"[61] while Vladimir Jabotinsky lamented that Jews had "despised physical manhood" and celebrated the necessity of military valor.[62] In this mythic reconstruction, the "weak and apolitical Jew" was to be replaced by the heroic "new Hebrew man," both modeled on the

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[55] For more information, see: Eli Barnavi, "Jewish Emancipation in Western Europe," *My Jewish Learning,* accessed from: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-emancipation-in-western-europe/.
[56] For more information, see: Immanuel Etkes, "Haskalah," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe,* accessed from: https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/10.
[57] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 85.
[58] See Robert Chazan, "From 'Jewish Memory' to Jewish History."
[59] See David Ohana, "Introduction," *The Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites nor Crusaders,* trans. by David Maisel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[60] Gilad Sharvit, "Is Jewish Exile a Crisis? Zionism, Modern Jewish Through, and the Historical Dynamics of the Term," pp. 293-313 in *Modern Jewish Thought on Crisis: Interpretation, Heresy, and History,* (De Gruyter: Boston, 2024), 301-304. See also Yitzhak Conforti, *Past Tense: Zionist Historiography and the Shaping of the National Memory*. (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2006), 123–159.
[61] See Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader,* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), accessible at: https://archive.org/details/zionistidea0000arth_q4t5/mode/1up.
[62] See Jabotinsky's introduction to *Chaim Nachman Bialik: Poems,* ed. L.V. Snowman (London, 1924), in David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 137.

Maccabees, Bar Kokhba, and the martyrs of Masada, the ancient heroes of the Zionist paradigm and "the ethos and aesthetic of the New Man or Woman that informed European socialism."[63] Jewish history was reread as a dialectic of catastrophe and heroism, with Zionist leaders searching for "usable models, or 'monuments'" in the Nietzschean sense.[64] This mythic dialectic drew selectively on older memory tropes—*kiddush ha-shem* (martyrdom),[65] biblical destruction, covenantal redemption—even as it secularized them into a nationalist framework; as David Biale writes, "[i]n place of the belief in Jewish uniqueness, they wanted to make the Jews 'like all the other nations' (*ke-khol ha-goyim*)."[66] As Emmanuel Sivan notes, even the militantly secular Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine) framed violent deaths within an "activist martyrological ethos," where those killed in the struggle for sovereignty were honored as heirs to the great Jewish rulers and rebels of the Zionist pantheon.[67]

1.2.1 Towards the "Masada of Warsaw"

The cultivation of a Zionist monumental history illustrates how narratives of death and defeat were consciously reinterpreted as myths of heroism and renewal to serve as a "mobilizing agent to galvanize identification or commitment with a cause;" in this case, a distinct, nationalizing identity.[68] Yael Zerubavel has shown the transformation of Masada, the last stand of first century Jewish Zealots against the might of Rome, "from events that ended in death and defeat into heroic myths and symbols of national revival," demonstrating how commemoration uses the past to suit present aspirations.[69] As George Schöpflin observes, myths function as a means by which collectives "establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own system of morality and values."[70] The Masada myth, described by Nachman Ben-Yehuda as "a heroic, almost sacred narrative" emphasizing "nationality,

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[63] Steven E. Aschheim, *Fragile Spaces: Forays into Jewish Memory, European History and Complex Identities,* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 163.
[64] See Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History,* 173-4.
[65] As David Biale writes, *Kiddush ha-Shem*, or allowing oneself to be killed rather than transgress God's law, had been an act of passive resistance. By turning their weapons on themselves, in the manner Josephus describes of the defenders of Masada at the end of the Great Revolt, the Jews turned martyrdom from a passive into an active deed. (*Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History,* 74.)
[66] Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History,* 132.
[67] Emmanuel Sivan, "Private pain and public remembrance in Israel," pp. 177-204 in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 188-189.
[68] David Ohana, "Introduction," *The Origins of Israeli Mythology.*
[69] See Yael Zerubavel. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[70] George Schöpflin, "The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths," pp. 19-35 in George Schöpflin and Geoffrey Hoskings, eds., *Myths and Nationhood,* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 19.

freedom, and liberty" with suicide reframed as a defiant choice of freedom over slavery and as an antidote to the perceived "passivity" of Galut, exemplifies this function.[71] The motifs celebrated in this mythic narrative—activism, sacrifice, and militant renewal—became central to Zionist mythmaking, tying into what David Ohana points out as a "phenomenological unity," buttressed by "comprehensive significance" essential to the construction of a consolidating national mythology.[72]

The case of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising proves especially illustrative of this phenomenon through its rapid--even contemporaneous--ascent into the Zionist pantheon. As Avinoam Patt has demonstrated, by the first anniversary of the revolt, Jewish communities across New York, London, Tel Aviv, and beyond commemorated the "Masada of Warsaw" as a "fortress of freedom." The revolt was seized upon as "the defining symbol of Jewish resistance, Jewish sacrifice, and Jewish martyrdom," later linked directly to the struggle for Jewish statehood.[73] Israel's selection of the 27th of Nisan (mid-late April) for *Yom HaShoah ve-haGevurah,* the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and Heroism, was specifically intended to shadow the uprising's anniversary, further underscoring this politics of memory. The Ghetto Uprising was also rapidly adapted as a counterargument to the myth that Jews went "like sheep to the slaughter," a callous extension of the motif of (Diasporic) Jewish passivity.[74] Israel Gutman describes the uprising as "literally a revolution in Jewish history;"[75] while Dan Kurzman likewise called it "one of the most stirring, impossible, and important battles in history" and the symbolic ending of "two thousand years of Jewish submission to discrimination, oppression, and finally, genocide."[76]

This Masada–Warsaw motif illustrates how, despite its roots in modernity, Zionist myth-making did not abandon the deep structures of Jewish memory à la Yerushalmi—particularly its cyclical nature and telescoping of historical events into a secularized version of sacred time—but reinterpreted them in service of an 'emancipatory'

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[71] Nachman Ben-Yehuda. *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel,* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 93-100.
[72] David Ohana, "Introduction," *The Origins of Israeli Mythology.*
[73] Avinoam J. Patt. "The Jewish Heroes of Warsaw: The Meaning of the Revolt in the First Year After the Uprising." *American Jewish History*, Vol. 103 (2019): 147-175, 147.
[74] See Richard Kaplan, "The Myth of Jewish Passivity" in Jewish Resistance against the Nazis, Patrick Henry, ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2014).
[75] Israel Gutman, Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (New York: Houghton Mifflin, in association with USHMM, 1994), xx.
[76] Dan Kurzman. *The Bravest Battle: The Twenty-Eight Days of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 17.

nationalist project of sovereignty. As Ori Soltes writes, both 'old' and 'new' memory "are derived from focus on one or another of the multiple pasts that define the Jewish experience."[77] It is within this dense interplay between theological, sacral memory, modern historical consciousness, and nationalist mythmaking that I situate my analysis of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*.

Before turning to the material embodiment of these themes in Nathan Rapoport's Monument, it is necessary to examine the conceptual framing of monuments and memorialization. The following section explores how monuments function within the wider "memoryscape"as *lieux de mémoire* that inscribe collective narratives into physical space, mediate between absence and presence, and serve as instruments of cultural and political meaning.

1.3 Monuments: Forms and Functions

Having traced how collective and cultural memory function within broader social frameworks, the analysis now turns to the material forms through which remembrance is most visibly anchored in public life: monuments and memorialization. These commemorative structures—central nodes within what Pierre Nora terms *lieux de mémoire*—translate abstract memory into physical presence, inscribing various narratives into the built environment. "By creating common spaces for memory," observes James E. Young, "monuments propagate the illusion of common memory." In his formulation, monuments are not passive objects but active instruments, staging "constitutive narratives" in which communities perform their stories of origin, trauma, and renewal.[78] Marta Kurkowska underscores this relational aspect: monuments rarely stand alone but operate within broader constellations of commemorative sites, generating narrative networks across urban space.[79] These spatial and symbolic linkages form what Gillian Carr terms the "memorialscape"—a national or local landscape in which competing, overlapping, or hegemonic versions of the past seek material expression.[80]

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[77] Ori Z. Soltes, "Memory, Tradition, and Revival," 127.
[78] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 7.
[79] Kurkowska, Marta, "Jedwabne and Wizna," 244.
[80] Gillian Carr, "Examining the Memorialscape of Occupation and Liberation: A Case Study from the Channel Islands," *International Journal of Heritage Studies,* (2011): 1-20.

The practice of monumentalization, while often perceived as timeless, is itself historically contingent.[81] One interpretive tradition emphasizes its ubiquity: monuments function as "human creations erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events alive in the minds of future generations."[82] From this *longue durée* perspective, Western monumental practice falls broadly into three typologies: funerary monuments, monuments to historic events or ideas, and monuments venerating "great men."[83] A second scholarly tradition locates the rise of monumentalization to early modernity, linking the emergence of new commemorative forms to the rise of the nation-state. As Wolfgang Hardtwig argues, the consolidation of territorial polities and the ideal of the "imagined community" required new symbolic strategies for inculcating civic belonging.[84] Public memorials, oriented toward shared origins and foundational moments, became key instruments in materializing national identity. "The nation-state builds memorials to itself," M. L. Sørensen et al. observe, inscribing its historical narrative into public space to legitimize sovereignty, typically through enshrining "seminal events" related to the state's genesis.[85]

The memorialscape that emerged from this process enshrines a spectrum of values: heroism, martyrdom, triumph, and loss. In its narrative function, the monument parallels historiography: "like the narrative, which automatically locates events in linear sequences," Young notes, "the memorial also brings events into some cognitive order."[86] Tamir Sorek extends this argument, stressing the monument's juridical and territorial implications:

> By placing the hegemonic national narrative in the public space, it creates a concrete representation of sovereignty, provides validity and legitimacy to a political claim for a territory, and mobilizes future sacrifice for a nation.[87]

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[81] Scholarship since the 1980s in particular has seen a substantial rise in focus on interconnected topics such as memory, memorials, memorialisation, and commemoration. New concepts such as spontaneous memorialisation (e.g. Haney et al. 1997), grassroots memorials (Margry and Sànchez-Carretero 2011), and distributed memorials (Sørensen and Adriansen 2015) have been formulated to capture some of the qualities observed within these practices.

[82] Aloïs Riegl, 'The modern cult of monuments: its character and its origin', Oppositions, 25 (1982): 25–56, 21.

[83] Horst W. Janson, *The Rise and Fall of the Public Monument* (New Orleans, LA: The Graduate School, Tulane University, 1976), 1.

[84] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 1991; John Gillis 1994

[85] M. L. Sørensen et al., "Memorials and Memorialization: History, Forms, and Affects,", 9. See also Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[86] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 7.

[87] Tamir Sorek, "Cautious Commemoration: Localism, Communalism, and Nationalism in Palestinian Memorial Monuments in Israel," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 50:2 (2008), pp. 357-368, 345. See also Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

If nineteenth-century monumental culture privileged conquest and heroic individualism, the cataclysms of the twentieth century—above all, the World Wars—effected a profound transformation. As Sørensen et al. observe, the First World War marked a "threshold" in European commemorative practice, elevating the anonymous soldier over the conquering hero and institutionalizing mass memorialization.[88] The Second World War, and the unprecedented moral rupture of the Holocaust, intensified this shift: victims as well as combatants became central figures in the commemorative imagination. This reorientation altered not only the subjects of memory but its affective register: monuments moved away from triumphal celebration towards mourning and loss, ritualized through annual ceremonies and proliferating memorial sites.[89] As Bernhard Giesen and S.N. Eisenstadt note,

> the core position of the victim in collective identity leads frequently to monuments, museums, and memorial sites that keep the memory of the dead victims alive, even if their faces are forgotten and their relics are dispersed.[90]

Particularly as living witnesses vanish, material embodiments, including those *lieux de mémoire,* become indispensable surrogates for communicative memory.

1.3.2 The Holocaust Memorial: Commemorating the Shoah

As explored above, communities require institutions for remembering their dead and rituals for mourning, which have historically taken physical form through monuments.[91] Yet the Holocaust presented commemorators with an unprecedented crisis: while collective memorialization marked modern commemorative practice, the genocide of European Jewry (*he.*: *Shoah*, *yid.*: *Khurbn*, the "Destruction") represented a rupture with all prior frames of understanding. "Holocaust sites of memory," Jay Winter observes, "could not be treated in the same way as sites commemorating the dead of the two world wars." Its sheer scale and lack of meaning—its victims denied even the consolatory narratives of sacrifice or martial honor typical to conventional memorialization—compounded the challenge.[92] Artists and survivors

[88] M. L. Sørensen et al., "Memorials and Memorialization: History, Forms, and Affects," 12. See also George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars,* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[89] M. L. Sørensen et al., "Memorials and Memorialization: History, Forms, and Affects," 13. See also Don Handelman, *Nationalism and the Israeli State: Bureaucratic Logic in Public Events,* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).
[90] Bernhard Giesen and S.N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Triumph and Trauma,* (Taylor and Francis, 2004), 57.
[91] Ibid., 56.
[92] Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,* eds., (2010), 321.

confronted additional obstacles, including: the Jewish aniconic tradition against representational art; the need to avoid Christianized iconography when depicting Jewish tragedy;[93] and, as Saul Friedländer famously put it, the Holocaust's position "at the limits of representation."[94]

In meeting these challenges, Holocaust memorials evolved into a distinct genre of commemoration. As Harold Marcuse notes, they often address transnational audiences; they deliberately sustain multiple, even competing, meanings; and they deploy new repertoires of symbols, forms, and materials to convey absence and loss.[95] Rebecca Golbert has highlighted how, in Eastern Europe, postwar commemoration was further complicated by Soviet ideological frameworks that subsumed Jewish victimhood into generalized narratives of antifascist heroism. Under "the patronage of postwar totalitarian governments," Golbert writes, "public memorials and the public memory were deliberately shaped by the political ideology of Soviet communism to negate the Jewish component of suffering and to display the heroic forms of socialist realism."[96] Within Jewish survivor communities, however, commemoration initially took narrative rather than monumental form. As James E. Young notes, the first 'memorials' were *Yizkor bikher*—memorial books, which traditionally capture the history of a particular locale, were to become symbolic tombstones for obliterated communities.[97] Physical monuments appeared haltingly: Harold Marcuse identifies a first phase of Holocaust memorialization marked by a handful of early sites, including the 1943 Majdanek memorial and Nathan Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, unveiled in 1948. This was then followed by the monumentalization of concentration and death camps "as places of destruction themselves," typically at the initiative of survivors, such as the early postwar designation of Auschwitz and Stutthof.[98] Over time, as Marcuse and Young note, the degradation of physical remains of the camps, and shifting international aesthetics, and

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[93] See James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory.*

[94] Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge: 1992), 3.

[95] Harold Marcuse, "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre," *The American Historical Review,* 115:1 (Feb. 2010):53-89, 54-55.

[96] Golbert, Rebecca."Holocaust Memorialization in Ukraine," *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 20 (200), 222-243, 223.

[97] Young, *The Texture of Memory,* 7. See also Emmanuel Sivan, "Private pain and public remembrance in Israel," pp. 177-204 in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[98] The case of Auschwitz in particular has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry (see, for example, Genevieve Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz,* etc). As James E. Young notes, "In 1947, the Polish parliament declared that the rest of the camp would be forever preserved as a memorial to the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples.'

lingering questions of how to capture the absolute emptiness of the Holocaust itself led to increasingly abstract memorial forms—a trend that has continued from the 1960s into the present.[99]

Holocaust monuments, as Young has observed, reflect "both the past experiences and current lives of their communities, as well as the state's memory of itself," often revealing the tensions between national martyrdom narratives and the specificity of Jewish suffering in the Shoah.[100] Their designs bear the marks of competing pressures—religious, cultural, political, and aesthetic—while also reflecting the time and place of their creation. "In every nation's memorials and museums," Young writes, "a different Holocaust is remembered, often to conflicting political and religious ends."[101] Despite these divergences, the Holocaust memorial as a genre has emerged as one of the most potent examples of contemporary monuments, centered around both mourning and forward-looking education. As Linda Hershkovitz highlights, monuments continue to be "the most conspicuous concrete manifestations of political power," encoding the particular narratives of the cultural or ruling elites.[102] In spite of their ostensible purpose, as Young points out, Holocaust memorials are not an exception: their spatial arrangement and iconography testify to both the atrocity they commemorate and to the interpretations of those who commissioned, created, and dedicated them.

This section posits that monuments serve as dynamic sites where meaning is negotiated, challenged, and maintained, rather than as impartial stores of history or memory. In this MA thesis, I approach Nathan Rapoport's 1948 *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* within this framework and seek to understand how Rapoport's design encodes Jewish experiences of both destruction and resistance: how its imagery, placement amid the ruins of the ghetto, and intertextual echoes of older Jewish memory traditions reflect and refract the particular cultural and political currents of its inception. In the next chapter, I will provide a methodological

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[99] Harold Marcuse, "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre," *The American Historical Review,* 115:1 (Feb. 2010):53-89, 55-56. In his seminal text *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning,* James E. Young notes that, by 1993, the "number of monuments and memorial space in Europe, Israel, and America dedicated specifically to the mass murder and resistance of Jews during World War II now reaches into the thousands, with dozens more being proposed and erected every year." (James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory,* ix.)

[100] Young, *The Texture of Memory,* 114-115.

[101] Young, *The Texture of Memory,* ix. In the 1966 publication entitled *Scenes of Fighting and Martyrdom Guide: War Years in Poland, 1939-1945* by the Council for the Preservation of Monuments to Resistance and Martyrdom (Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa), already more than 1,200 sites are listed in Poland alone. (Council for the Preservation of Monuments to Resistance and Martyrdom, *Scenes of Fighting and Martyrdom Guide: War Years in Poland, 1939-1945*, (Warsaw: Sport i Turystyka, 1966).

[102] Linda Hershkovitz, "Tiananmen Square and the Politics of Place," 397.

overview of my analysis, including an overview of my chosen case study, the framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and its application, and briefly discuss the limitations of this MA thesis.

Chapter 2. Research Methods and Data/Sources

In this thesis, I utilize a qualitative, social semiotic approach to the question '*How did Natan Rapoport's* Monument to the Ghetto Heroes *mediate and shape the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Holocaust?'* and the related sub-questions:

- How did the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* visually and materially encode this dual narrative of destruction and resistance?
- How did the Monument's physical placement within the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, and temporal placement in the socio-political conditions of early postwar Poland, shape its meaning?
- How did the Monument reflect, transform, or reinterpret earlier Jewish memory traditions?

This chapter presents a justification of my chosen case study, outlines my approach to its analysis, and discusses the limitations of this research.

2.1 Justification of Selected Case Study

This thesis is centered around Natan Rapoport's 1948 *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes,* the most well-known and, crucially, most visually and symbolically complex representation of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This prominence and layered symbolism make the Monument an ideal case study, situated within broader scholarly discourses on the form and function of monuments. Scholars from various disciplines--including art history, human geography, and collective memory-- have approached the study of monuments from a multitude of angles, including as aesthetic objects evincing the artistic sensibilities of a particular epoch, as the embodiment of national identity and civil religion, and as the instruments of political elites to promote specific historical narratives and dominant worldviews.[103] Monuments, as explored in the previous section, function as 'sites of memory': material, symbolic, and functional loci that "become surrogate environments upon which political, ethical, and artistic concerns are projected and fought over [and] raise issues and questions [over how] history, memory, and

[103] See, among others, Linda Hershkovitz, "Tiananmen Square and the Politics of Place," *Political Geography* 12/5 (1993): 395-420; Iain Hay, Andrew Hughes, and Mark Tutton, "Monuments, Memory and Marginalization in Adelaide's Prince Henry Gardens," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 86/3 (2004): 201-216; Nuala Johnson. "Cast in Stone: Monuments, Geography, and Nationalism." *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space* 13, no. 1 (1995): 51-65.

trauma will be 'appropriated', 're-presented', and 'inhabited'."[104] Though the meanings of particular monuments may be contested, particularly during times of rupture, as Alexander Etkind has plainly stated, "there cannot be two monuments on the same spot."[105] Furthermore, in the words of Siobhan Kattago, "while monuments tend to valorise significant events or individuals…[Holocaust] memorials do not commemorate valorous death but are places of mourning and warnings against future genocide."[106] Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, however, defies this neat categorization by embodying a tension between mourning and commemoration, depicting armed resistance and martyrdom in a singular monument. The following sections will explicate how I will analyze this phenomenon in the chapters to come.

2.2 Approach to the Case Study: MCDA and Social Semiotics

This MA thesis employs multimodal critical discourse analysis, or MCDA, a subfield of social semiotics, as the primary analytic method to investigate the visual, material, and ideological dimensions of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis facilitates an understanding of how different forms of culturally available resources (multiple modes), including language, as well as materiality, spatial and visual design are utilized to convey specific discourses of memory, identity, and power through the visual and spatial form of monuments.[107] In this study, I am particularly concerned with the ways the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Shoah was framed and mediated by the postwar Polish Jewish elite though their spatial and symbolic control of the 'memoryscape', raising questions of power at the heart of MCDA, namely: who had the authority to shape commemorative space, whose narratives were elevated, and how these decisions were materialized in the Monument's design and placement.

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[104] See Julian Bonder, "On Memory, Trauma, Public Space, Monuments, and Memorials." *Places,* 21/1 (2009):62-79, 64; Siobhan Kattago, "Introduction," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies*, ed. Siobhan Kattago (London: Routledge, 2016),7, after Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[105] Alexander Etkind, "Hard and Soft in Cultural Memory: Political Mourning in Russia and Germany," Grey Room, 16 (2004): 36-59, 57. See, for instance, Maida Kosatica's treatment of the fate of Yugoslav monuments following the Bosnian Genocide in "Building Monuments, unleashing anger: The material disruption of contested memory," *Emotions, Space and Society* 48 (2023):1-9.

[106] Siobhan Kattago, "Written in Stone: Monuments and Representation," in *The Ashgate Research Companion,* 180-188.

[107] Multimodal critical discourse has been employed to study phenomena as wide-ranging as textbooks, student essays, digital media campaigns, videos and film, works of art, and monuments, as will be discussed in later subsections of this chapter. David Machin, "The need for a social and affordance-driven multimodal critical discourse studies," *Discourse and Society,* 27/3 (May 2016), 322-34, 322.

Social semiotics draws from the linguist Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which holds that all forms of communication, whether linguistic, visual, material, or spatial, are embedded in systems of meaning that are influenced by power dynamics, context, and culture. Halliday's three metafunctions—textual (organisation of communicative acts), interpersonal (enactment of social relations), and ideational (representation of experience)—offer a theoretical grammar for examining how signs function in various modalities.[108] Although these metafunctions were initially created for linguistic texts, scholars including Peter O'Toole in his 1994 *The Language of Displayed Art* and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in their 2006 *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* have successfully modified them to analyze the ways that multimodal and visual texts—such as pictures, sculptures, and monuments—function as communication systems. In this sense, Rapoport's Monument is a multimodal text in which the subject matter it depicts, its materiality, and its compositional arrangement all serve to produce complex symbolic meanings.

An essential insight from social semiotics is that all semiotic resources possess 'meaning potential' based on their histories of use and the affordances of their material and cultural properties. As Theo van Leeuwen notes, the meaning potential of semiotic resources is grounded in their prior uses and the range of affordances they provide, which are then actualized within particular social contexts.[109] Frank Serrafini agrees, as, given these specific constraints, "social semiotics asserts that all systems of meanings are only meaningful given the social and cultural contexts of their use."[110] This insight is crucial when analyzing Rapoport's Monument, where traditional Jewish iconography, Zionist symbolism, and even socialist-realist motifs are not interpreted in isolation, but enmeshed within a dense matrix of cultural, religious, and political references in the particular context of the ruins of the former Ghetto.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) forms a complementary foundation to the social semiotics approach. Emerging from the discipline of critical linguistics, CDA interrogates how language naturalizes ideologies and reproduces or, conversely, resists particular

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[108] Michael Halliday *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1978).
[109]Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 285.
[110] Frank Serafini, Beyond the Visual, 38.

structures of power. As scholars like Norman Fairclough and Tony Trew have shown, discourse is never neutral but is always implicated in socio-political processes.[111] CDA sees discourse--language use in speech and writing--as a form of 'social practice', implying a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s), which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially conditioned--it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.[112] MCDA extends this framework to account for how multiple semiotic modes--including language, visuals and spatial design, materiality, transitivity and others--work in tandem to convey meaning in a given text.[113] This makes MCDA particularly well-suited for interrogating monuments, where material form, symbolism, and spatial context converge the 'memoryscape'. Because monuments often reflect the ideological perspectives of those who commission and design them, they must be approached as sites where power, memory, and meaning are actively produced and contested.

2.2.1 Constructing a Multimodal Grammar

Though the principles of social semiotics and CDA were originally conceived in relation to written and oral language, these analytic methods were later applied to images and multimodal texts as part of the so-called 'pictorial turn' in the social sciences and since have come to encompass what David Machin terms a "grand theory for all forms of communication."[114] As this approach is primarily focused on the ways in which given semiotic resources communicate specific meanings, developing a grammar system is an

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[111] For a complete treatment of the development of critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, see Roger Fowler, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, and Tony Trew, *Language and Power,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979); Gunther Kress, *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989); Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change,* (Wiley, 1992) and Norman Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: the Universities," *Discourse and Society* 4/2 (1993): 133-168; and Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis: Discourse as Social Interaction," in Teun van Dijk, ed., *Discourse as Social Interaction,* (London: SAGE, 1997).

[112] Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 258.

[113] David Machin and Andrea Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction,* (London: SAGE, 2012), 6.

[114] Per Ledin and David Machin, "Doing Critical Discourse Studies with Multimodality: From Metafunctions to Materiality," *Critical Discourse Studies,* 16/5 (2019), 497-513, 498.

essential prerequisite.[115] This grammar system must reflect the fact that, as Frank Serafini notes, "[t]he choices we make about how to represent or communicate our ideas, identities,or ideologies are affected by how we frame various phenomena," in terms of the content presented, the spatial and temporal positions, compositional arrangements, and material considerations.[116] In this thesis, I will analyze Natan Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* through the lens of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, based upon the framework developed by Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin in their work *The Language of War Monuments.* Drawing heavily from the works of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, Roland Barthes, and Erwin Panofsky, Abousnnouga and Machin's multimodal framework provides a rigorous analytic method for examining monuments as active, ideological texts that embody particular discourses of the past and invest them with symbolic meaning across multiple semiotic modes simultaneously. By instituting a range of categories to examine various modes, this framework enables a close reading of monumental texts to "draw out ideologies through analysis of" different semiotic choices.[117] This subsection will outline the relevant theories of Panofsky on iconology and iconography, Barthes on connotation and myth, and others that inform my analysis through the unpacking of symbolic meanings in order to reveal the deeper strata of cultural and ideological significance embedded within.

Erwin Panofsky's scholarly contributions on iconography and iconology (1935, 1970, 1972) provides important insights into the ideological dimensions of symbolism across art and how stylistic elements—such as design, composition, gesture, and perspective—frame and promote broader attitudes, values, and ideologies within a given text.[118] Panofsky's writings offer an iconological interpretation conducted through three progressively deeper phases of analysis, classified into the natural, conventional, and intrinsic levels. The first, 'natural' level begins with the identification of elements in a given work; next, knowledge of cultural conventions, historical, or literary concepts are used to connect the elements in question to broader themes and ideas; lastly, the work of art is situated within its broader social, historical, and cultural context to uncover its intrinsic meaning. This final, 'intrinsic' level, in the "domain of symbolical values" in which "much deeper levels of meaning are realized,"[119]

[115] Giorgia Aiello, "Visual Semiotics"
[116] Frank Serafini, Beyond the Visual, 38.
[117] See Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* (Bloomsbury: London and New York, 2013)*,* 39*,* 41-57.
[118] Abousnnouga and Machin, 36.
[119] Abousnnouga and Machin, 36.

is what transforms the analysis from iconography--the traditional depiction of various phenomena--" to iconology, the analysis of "artistic symbolism" itself.[120] In the study of monuments, "iconography" can be utilized to identify the representation of conventional symbols; subsequently, "iconology" deepens this analysis to the "intrinsic meanings" that reveal "the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion."[121]

Roland Barthes' work similarly occupies a foundational place in contemporary visual semiotics; he was among the first to undertake a systematic semiotic analysis of "texts" composed of non-linguistic signs—ranging from visual imagery to fashion, locations, music, and diverse 'icons' of popular culture. Two of his most famous works, the 1961 "The Photographic Message" and 1964 "The Rhetoric of the Image," develop his conceptual framework for determining visual meaning. In order to analyse the meaning of a given image, Barthes argues, it is necessary to divide analysis into two levels: denotation and connotation. At the level of denotation, similar to Panofsky's 'natural' level, the literal features of an image are described, "independent of our interpretation."[122] Then, the implicit or symbolic meanings connoted by these features are recorded. "The level of connotation," Giorgia Aiello notes, "corresponds to the symbolic or ideological meaning, or range of possible meanings, of an image inscribed by cultural codes," and the "'implicit rules' that govern the ways in which those who make and use images 'read' their meanings."[123] By analyzing what a given image connotes, we inquire not only into what ideas and values are communicated through what is being represented, but *how* the way it is represented communicates these ideas and values.[124]

Lastly, this framework underscores the indispensability of context in multimodal analysis. Aboussnouga and Machin emphasize critical analysts must "also pay attention to the social goings on that lie behind texts in order to connect analysis to matters of production processes, decision-making, and reception." Without this contextual grounding, any study risks "disconnected textual analysis," severed from the conditions that imbue texts with

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[120] Yolanda Silva, "Icon, Iconography, and Iconology-- 3 fundamental concepts to improve your knowledge in art analysis," *Citalia Restauro,* accessed from: https://en.citaliarestauro.com/icon-iconography-and-iconology/.
[121] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History,* (Garden City and New York: Doubleday, 1955), 38.
[122] Abousnnouga and Machin, 32.
[123] Giorgia Aiello, "Visual Semiotics,". See also [Sturken and Cartwright 2009]
[124] David Machin and Andrea Mayr, "Analysis Semiotic Choices: Words and Images," in *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction,* 25.

ideological meaning. By examining the circumstances of a given text's creation--the specific socio-political and cultural contexts-- we can discern "the ways that ideology becomes loaded onto them," revealing how its meaning is inscribed through specific modalities.[125] Furthermore, as David Machin and Per Ledin argue, Halliday's linguistic metafunctions cannot, on their own, fully project the social and ideological meanings of multimodal texts. Instead, analysis must consider what they refer to as "canons of use"—the traditions, institutions, and social practices that dictate how visual forms are produced and received.[126]

These methodological insights frame my approach to Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. This analysis aims to reveal how meaning is materially encoded and socially active by positioning the monument within its "canons of use," including traditions of Jewish collective memory, Zionist tropes, and the particular political circumstances that influenced the monument's creation and reception in the early postwar period (1943-1948). Through this approach, I aim to transcend a superficial, iconographical reading to analyse how semiotic choices in design, materials, and spatial arrangement contribute to broader discussions of memory and power. In accordance with my research questions, the following chapters examine three interconnected issues: firstly, how the monument's visual and material characteristics—specifically, the sculpture *The Struggle* on the monument's western face and *The Death March* bas-relief on its eastern, as well as their framing within the wall of the monument—embody the dual memory resistance and destruction; secondly, how its location amidst the remnants of the former ghetto influences its ideological and commemorative implications; and third, how its imagery interacts with established traditional Jewish and Zionist cultural motifs. MCDA, I argue, enables the interpretation of Rapoport's Monument as a dynamic locus where theology, history, and ideology intersect in monumental form.

2.3 Data Sources

In this thesis, I employ a combination of site visitation and primary and secondary sources to investigate the discourses embodied in the Monument. I made several visits over a series of months to the Monument to record observations and take photographs from different vantage points to continue observations remotely and account for fine details, in accordance with Barthe's denotation and Panofsky's 'natural' level. On one of these occasions, I had the opportunity to witness a commemorative ceremony hosted at the Monument by the

[125] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 77.
[126] Per Ledin and David Machin, "Doing Critical Discourse Studies with Multimodality."

governments of Poland, Israel, and Germany upon on the eightieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which provided fascinating insight into the importance accorded to the uprising within the collective memory of the Second World War and Shoah to this day. During these site observations, I observed the Monument from various angles at different times of day and in different seasons; though the contemporary surroundings of Rapoport's Monument differ vastly from its original setting, by examining the Monument in divergent conditions, I strove to observe the totality of its presence.

In the previous section, I highlighted the necessity of context in conducting MCDA analysis in accordance with Abousnnouga and Machin's multimodal framework. In the specific case of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, its creation was shaped by a complex web of interrelated factors: the socio-political climate of early postwar Poland; the prominent role of the era's Jewish institutions, the Central Committee for Jews in Poland (*Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*, CKŻP) and the Central Jewish Historical Commission (*Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna*, CŻKH), and their agendas; the experiences of the survivors of the Shoah; the personal biography of its sculptor, Natan Rapoport, and the myriad political, ideological, and theological currents that influenced both the artist and his era. To supplement my visual observations with primary sources, I consulted the CKŻP and CŻKH collections in archives of the Jewish Institute of History (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*, ŻIH), the successor organization to the CŻKH, located in the territory of the former Warsaw Ghetto in order to investigate the social and political influences as recorded by the leading Jewish organizations of the period and, crucially, the sponsors of the Monument. For further contemporary references, I utilized select documents in the online archives of Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center; the Central Jewish Library, an online repository of the ŻIH, (Centralna Biblioteka Judaistyczna, CBJ); the Jagiellonian University Digital Library, containing collections of digitized periodicals of the postwar period; the digital archive of the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the most prominent international aid organization for survivor communities in the early postwar years; further documentation was sought from the online collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and Beit Lohamei Hageta'ot Museum Archive (HE: בית לוחמי הגטאות., The Ghetto Fighters' House). To supplement the primary sources, I gathered information from a wealth of secondary sources touching upon the events of the Ghetto Uprising and its aftermath, the history of the Shoah, early Soviet rule in Poland, and the construction of Rapoport's Monument. James E. Young's thorough treatment of the Monument and its sculptor was a particularly valued resource in

examining Natan Rapoport's personal history and motivations in monumentalizing the Ghetto Uprising.[127] Altogether, these secondary sources helped to situate the period-contemporary references within their broader historical, political, and cultural contexts and shed further light on the embodied meaning of Rapoport's Monument.

2.4 Application

In this thesis, I employ Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin's multimodal framework, first developed in relation to British monuments of the First World War, to analyse Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. To uncover the symbolic meanings of a monument, it is essential to analyze its material dimensions—including its shapes, colors, and spatial organization—not merely as neutral design elements, but as semiotic choices whose meaning potentials are conditioned by the socio-historical and cultural contexts in which they are made.[128] The categories of analysis, taken from Abousnnouga and Machin, thus include: the iconography and iconology expressed on both sides of the Monument; semiotic relations communicating social relations, drawn from Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, including elevation, the angle of interaction, size and height, gaze and interaction, and distance and proximity; the material composition of the Monument; curvature and angularity, surface realization and modality, and lastly, transitivity, categories based upon Halliday's systemic functional linguistics.

The spatial setting and physical location of Rapoport's Monument will also be discussed in relation to its overall meaning. "As part of the broader cultural context," Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico note, "the spatial settings in which monuments are located largely affect their interpretations."[129] This context may include "site-specific connection to events and people commemorated;"[130] in the case of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, the significance of its location in the Muranów in the territory of the former Warsaw Ghetto cannot be understated. Lastly, insights gathered from primary and secondary sources will be considered in the analysis of Rapoport's Monument within its broader historical, socio-political, and cultural circumstances.

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[127] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations,* 26 (Spring 1989): 69-106.
[128] Bellentani and Panico, "The meanings of monuments and memorials," 36.
[129] Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico, "The meaning of monuments and memorials," 40.
[130] Benton-Short 2007, 300

2.5 Limitations of the Analysis

As a qualitative, semiotic case study of one particular monument, though several of the themes that emerge may speak to broader phenomena in Jewish collective memory and Polish history, the embodied meaning of the Monument is by no means universal in scope. Semiotic analysis is by its very nature culturally limited and intended for the fullest consumption by members of its internal group, as noted by Kress and van Leeuwen.[131]

While I have attempted to encompass the themes reflected in Rapoport's Monument, my pool of sources was somewhat limited by linguistic constraints. During the early postwar period of my study (1943-48), a plurality of texts for 'internal' (Jewish) consumption were produced in Yiddish, some of which were translated to Polish. Though I have studied Yiddish and Hebrew, my lesser degree of familiarity with these languages resulted in the usage of supplemental dictionaries and a greater reliance on Polish- and English-language primary and secondary sources.

Chapter 3. The Historical and Political Context of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*

In this chapter, I will sketch over the history of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising itself before pivoting to a discussion of the socio-political and cultural history of the early postwar period, focusing on 1943-1948. By addressing the political developments and discourses that determined how the Ghetto Uprising was portrayed in articles and speeches leading up to the annual commemorative ceremonies and depicted in the artistic outpouring of the period, culminating in Natan Rapoport's Monument, I aim to highlight how these same discourses played a crucial and direct role in influencing the conceptualization and construction of the Monument. This contextual focus is especially important when employing a critical, multimodal framework of analysis: as highlighted in the previous chapter, analysis of a given

[131] See Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 33-34.

'text' is incomplete without its contextual grounding. By situating Rapoport's Monument within the socio-political and historical context of its creation, this study aligns with MCDA's core aim: to connect semiotic choices to the broader social forces and ideologies that shape them.[132] In doing so, I seek to demonstrate how the semiotic choices in the Monument were not neutral or accidental, but part of a conscious effort to shape the memory and legacy of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising amid the psychological, social, and political turmoil faced by Jewish survivors in postwar Poland.

3.1 A Brief Sketch of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its Mythic Resonance

The Warsaw Ghetto was first officially decreed on October 12, 1940 by Ludwig Fischer, the S.S. governor of the Warsaw District.[133] Located in northern Muranów, a historically Jewish district of Warsaw, the establishment of the ghetto saw the original extent of the city's Jewish population (about 30% of Warsaw's total population) forced into 2.4% of the city's area; by April 1942, over 460,000 Jews were interned in the Warsaw Ghetto.[134] "[T]he Nazi design was not simply to segregate the Jews," writes Dan Kurzman, "but to deliberately create conditions that would destroy them," characterized by extreme overcrowding, disease, starvation, slave labor, and episodes of sporadic violence on the part of the SS.[135]

By the summer of 1942, conditions in the ghetto reached catastrophe: between July 22 and September 12, the SS "deported 310,322 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka, where they were gassed to the last child" in *Grossaktion Warschau.*[136] As Chaim A. Kaplan

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[132] David Machin, "Introduction: What is multimodal critical discourse studies?," *Critical Discourse Studies,* 10/4 (2013), 347-55, 347.

[133] James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations,* 26 (Spring 1989):69-106, 75.

[134] Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 60. See Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *Getto. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*, 66. Quoting from Fischer's decree, Young writes: "The first phase of the annihilation of Warsaw Jewry-starvation-as decreed and prosaically figured by Fischer included both its means and its literal end: 'The Jews will die from hunger and destitution, and a cemetery is all that will remain of the Jewish question'. Bordering the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, the ghetto would in this vision eventually be annexed by it." (James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 75.)

[135] Dan Kurzman, *The Bravest Battle*, 23.

[136] James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations,* 26 (Spring 1989):69-106, 76. Among the victims of the Great Liquidation was Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), a renowned pediatrician, educator, and children's author who established an orphanage in the ghetto. When the 200 children he cared for were marked for deportation, Korczak volunteered to be deported along with them, and all went to Treblinka on August 5, 1942.

noted in a diary entry dated August 2, 1942, "Jewish Warsaw is in its death throes. A whole community is going to its death!"[137] In addition to the loss of over 300,000 lives, the horrific events of summer 1942 would irrevocably shake the outlook of those who remained in the ghetto, eliminating hope for survival. Even as the dire circumstances of the ghetto became ever more apparent, however, "resistance," Rachel L. Einwohner notes, "was not a foregone conclusion."[138] Exchanges between representatives of various groups within the ghetto, as captured by Reuben Ainsztein, reveal conflicting views and the emergence of a generational gap between the young and old, and between political activists and the *Judenrat* (the Nazi-imposed Jewish council) for leadership in the ghetto.[139] By the end of September 1942, however, two organizations dedicated to armed resistance had emerged: the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB), composed of left-wing and Zionist youth groups,[140] and the Jewish Military Union (ŻZW), linked to the right-wing Betar Revisionist Zionist youth movement.[141] During this period, Mordechai Anielewicz, a youth activist of Hashomer Hatza'ir [The Young Guard] who "identified as a fighting Jew only insofar as he was also a Labor Zionist and socialist," became commander of the ŻOB and, eventually, leader of the Ghetto Uprising.[142]

This activity was indicative of the new, militant mindset taking hold in the ghetto: since death was now viewed as a certainty, it was better to die in battle with the Nazis, Einwohner argues, "rather than to submit meekly to being slaughtered."[143] Writing after Ber Mark, Young argues that the true beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the coalescing of these resistance groups. In the spirit of the revolutionary, Zionist topos that pervaded accounts of the uprising, "all of these groups perceived at the outset," Young writes, "that this could not be just an uprising of Jews against Nazis but a revolt of new fighting Jews against the old passive order."[144]

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[137] Chaim A. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 396.
[138] Rachel L. Einwohner, "Opportunity, Honor, and Action in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943," *American Journal of Sociology,* 109:3 (2003):650-75, 661.
[139] See Reuben Ainsztein, *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt,* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), 35-37.
[140] Including Hashomer Hatza'ir (The Young Guard), Po'alei Zion (Workers of Zion), Dror (Freedom), He'halutz (The Pioneer), the Bund, and the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR).
[141] Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, trans. and ed. Barbara Harshav (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xvii–xviii. See also Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2003).
[142] James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 77.
[143] Rachel L. Einwohner, "Opportunity, Honor, and Action," 662, after Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw.* For the disambiguation of this myth, see Richard Kaplan, "The Myth of Jewish Passivity," in *Jewish Resistance against the Nazis,* Patrick Henry, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2014) and Yael S. Feldman, "'Not as Sheep Led to Slaughter'? On Trauma, Selective Memory, and the Making of History Consciousness," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 19/3 (Spring/Summer 2013): 139-169.
[144] Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 76-77.

In January 1943, the ŻOB staged its first armed revolt;[145] by that April, the Nazi's planned final *Aktion*, designed to deport and murder the remaining Jews of the ghetto, met with fierce resistance. Much like the choice of Yom Kippur for the establishment of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Nazi's choice of the eve of Passover--April 19, 1943--for the next *Aktion* was deliberately symbolic. Six weeks of full-pitched battles ended with S.S. Major General Jürgen Stroop's infamous report, 'The Warsaw Ghetto is no more'; almost all of the Jewish combatants died in fighting, the remaining civilians murdered or deported to the camps.[146] Though the material outcome of the uprising was as destructive as the insurgents perceived, the symbolic impact of their struggle could not be understated. In a last letter to Cukierman, Anielewicz exulted, "the dream of my life has come true. I've lived to see a Jewish defense in the ghetto in all its greatness and glory."[147]

The themes of "honor" and history proliferated in both survivors' and historians' accounts of the uprising. Its very purpose, Yitzhak "Antek" Cuckierman, a commander of the ŻOB, later wrote, was to "restore our honor.…It is fitting that we should be killed. But our honor will be victorious."[148] The ŻOB fighter Simha "Kazik" Rotem stressed the fighters' "strong sense of history and [feeling] they were the last remaining Jews," stoking a fierce determination to control the Jewish memory that would be left behind.[149] The ghetto fighters, as Dan Kurzman writes,

> would redeem the honor of their people, who had gone to Treblinka without a fight …. They would not give themselves up alive. They would emulate Masada, where two thousand years ago another group of besieged Jews had slain themselves rather than bow to the conquering Romans.[150]

Besides Masada, another explicitly Zionist element linking the Ghetto Uprising into the chain of Jewish memory was the comparison of the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents with the Maccabees,

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[145] In January 1943, the Nazis staged another *Aktion* without warning to remove the remaining 60,000 Jews in the ghetto--though the contingent of SS caught the ghetto resistance by surprise, the ŻOB managed to force the Nazis to retreat after four days of street fighting. Though ŻOB casualties were high, the fighters had managed to prevent the deportation of close to 50,000 Jews. The ideological significance of this resistance was quickly recognized. "Beginning with January 18, the Jews of Warsaw have been in a state of permanent struggle against the Germans and their henchmen," Mordechai Anielewicz wrote in a letter to the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) headquarters. (Quoted in Reuben Ainsztein, *The Warsaw Ghetto,* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), 79, 81.

[146] James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 79.)

[147] Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 357. Today, a memorial carved stone stands on the spot of the bunker where Anielewicz and most of the remaining ŻOB commanders committed suicide.

[148] Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, 159.

[149] Rotem, *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter: The Past Within Me*, (1993), xi.

[150] Dan Kurzman, *The Bravest Battle,* 26-27.

legendary warriors of ancient Judea and a critical element of the Zionist pantheon. Combining these sentiments, "the [ŻOB] would rise here not as Maccabees only, but also as workers," Young writes, part of the "ultimate mixing of Jewish and proletarian figures" that would later be materially inscribed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising's most famous and emblematic monument.[151]

3.2 After the Uprising: Searching for Meaning

From its outbreak, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising carried a moral and symbolic resonance far beyond the confines of the ghetto walls. It was "a baptism of fire, in which, as it was said at the time," Marci Shore writes, "the Jews fought with weapons in hand *[z bronią w ręku]*."[152] For the shattered remnant of Polish Jewry, this uprising, unprecedented in history, became a crucial site of meaning and identity. Renata Kobylarz stresses that its memory "became one of the most important components of the national awareness of Polish Jews, equally for those who stayed in Poland as those who emigrated to Western Europe, to North and South America as well as Israel."[153] The immediacy of this symbolic elevation is particularly striking: as Avinoam Patt argues, the "collective memory of the Ghetto Uprising was shaped almost immediately in its aftermath, well before historical accounts were written," part of a "rapid search for heroes" and the "concomitant processes of politicization and mythologization." These "concomitant processes" resonated worldwide—Bundists in the United States, Soviet-aligned Jewish organizations, and Zionists in the Yishuv (Palestine) all claimed the uprising as a moral touchstone.[154] In one memorial ceremony, *He-halutz* leaders described it as a "new Masada" on which "generations will be built," explicitly invoking the Zionist mythic chain of martyrdom and renewal explored in earlier chapters.[155]

This symbolic power cannot be disentangled from the political circumstances of the immediate postwar period. From 1944, when the Red army first arrived on Polish soil, until 1947, when the Soviet-backed communists secured political dominance, Poland suffered

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[151] James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 77.
[152] Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda. Kształtowanie historii powstania w getcie warszawskim w latach 1944-1950," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 4 (1998): 44-60, 44.
[153] Renata Kobylarz, Walka o pamięć. Polityczne aspekty obchodów rocznicy powstania w getcie warszawskim 1944-1989, (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009), 9.
[154] By "1945, when the identities of the Zionist heroes of the revolt became well-known, the uprising had been transformed into part of the struggle for the creation of the Jewish state," thereby also featuring as an important propaganda tool of state-building in Israel. Avinoam J. Patt, "The Jewish Heroes of Warsaw, 147.
[155] "Two Joans of Arc," Reuters, quoted in Avinoam Patt, "The Jewish Heroes of Warsaw," 156.

along multiple fronts of economic and demographic devastation and political instability, even to the precipice of civil war.[156] The Soviet-orchestrated creation of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) and the Polish Workers Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza,* PPR) -led State National Council (KRN) marked the beginning of a new political reality for the beleaguered Polish society. Backed by the Red Army, these organs gave rise to the Provisional Government of National Unity, which gradually eclipsed the government-in-exile following the Yalta Conference of February 1945.[157] While this body initially maintained a veneer of democratic pluralism, power increasingly consolidated in the hands of the Soviet-backed PPR, culminating in the full communist rule of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) by 1947.

The political turmoil was similarly felt among the surviving elements of Polish Jewry. Surviving fragments of prewar Polish Jewish political life sought to continue their activism under the radically altered circumstances. Some activists spent the course of the war in Poland,[158] including the Po'alei Zion Left leader Adolf Berman—who had collaborated with both the communist underground—and emerged as pivotal figures in postwar Jewish politics. Others, particularly those ideologically closest to the communists, sought refuge in the Soviet Union,[159] including Natan Rapoport, the sculptor of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. Berman and fellow Po'alei Zion Left and ŻOB member Pola Elster were invited to join the KRN following its formation, declaring that "in the struggle for a new world of labor and social justice, for a new, independent People's Poland, we [Jews] have not been abandoned;"[160] a Bureau of Jewish Affairs was later established under Berman and Elsters' leadership within the organization to organize and direct the economic, "social and cultural life of secular Polish Jewry," including "supporting the aspirations for national liberation of the toiling Jewish masses who aim to create a Jewish Soviet Republic in Palestine."[161]

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[156] Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979,* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 35.
[157] John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland 1939-1947,* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), 136.
[158] The number of Jewish survivors in the liberated area of Poland (excluding Silesia and other formerly German territories) has been roughly estimated to be around 50,000. See "Liczbowy wykaz Żydów w Polsce na podstawie spisów wojewódzkich," referenced in David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland," 93.
[159] Estimates place the number of the Polish-Jewish population who survived the Holocaust by taking refuge in the Soviet Union close to 250,000. See David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland," 92.
[160] "Przemówienie przedstawiciela Związku Robotników Żydowskich w Polsce na pierwszym zebraniu KRN," quoted in David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland," 91.
[161] "Program pracy Referatu dla Spraw Żydowskich przy Krajowej Radzie Narodowej," quoted in David Engel, 92.

The role of the Bureau of Jewish Affairs also extended to commemorating the first anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising. As early as the KRN's first newspaper issue, an article was published lauding the Warsaw Ghetto fighters for choosing to "die with honor" and emphasizing the uprising's youth-led and popular nature: rather than experienced officers, it was the "young activists of workers' and youth organizations" who led the insurgency. The article credited the "unification of all left-leaning democratic factions" with the uprising's success.[162] Already in this first anniversary, Kobylarz notes, elements of later pro-Soviet and pro-Communist propaganda appeared: on the basis of the heroic struggle of the ghetto insurgents, the ethos of the 'Jew-Hero', fighting not only for Jewish dignity but for socialism and *Polska Ludowa* (People's Poland), had entered commemorative discourse.[163]

This ideological co-option intensified with the founding of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (*Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*, CKŻP) in November 1944. Established under the aegis of the Polish Ministry of Public Administration, the CKŻP aimed both to secure survivors' welfare and to serve as their official representative to the new authorities.[164] Regarded by the state "as much as a political instrument as social welfare one,"[165] members of the PPR's Jewish faction, the Bund, and representatives of various parties-- predominately socialist and Zionist in orientation, including the survivors of the ŻOB under the leadership of Antek Cukierman--played an active role in the CKŻP's activities, ranging in scope from the economic to the cultural spheres.[166] During this period, characterized by Marci Shore as the brief moment following the Second World War when the Zionist Left and the Jewish communists found a point of unity, the CKŻP was led by Adolf Berman, whose background as a Left Zionist and collaborator with the communist underground embodied the particularities of the era.[167]

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[162] Untitled, in "Rada Narodowa" 1 (28 April 1944), quoted in Marci Shore, ""Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 46.
[163] Renata Kobylarz, *Walka o pamięć,* 24. Adolf Berman and Pola Elster, members of the Communist-backed, newly established State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa), published articles emphasizing the heroism of the ghetto fighters and their working class roots in the council's press. See Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda.
[164] David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland: The Origins of the Central Committee of Polish Jews," *East European Politics and Societies* 10/1 (1996), 89. Operating from 1944 to 1950, the CKŻP operated through a "multilevel hierarchy consisting of local, district (*powiatowy*), provincial (*wojewódzki*), and central echelons" and consisted of nineteen departments. (See "Sprawozdanie z działalności Centralnego Komitetu" in David Engel, 106.)
[165] David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland," 106.
[166] Notably, the Revisionists were not permitted to join the CKŻP and their political party was banned in postwar Poland. See Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 46.
[167] Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 268.

Under Berman's leadership, the CKŻP quickly recognized the indispensability of inculcating the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and defining its meaning and legacy, for (re)building postwar Jewish identity.[168] Annual commemorations, initially modest in scope, rapidly grew into elaborate undertakings featuring a broad range of activities, including memorial concerts and recitations, marches through the former ghetto, celebrations in honor of the insurgents, speeches and visits from international delegations, and, crucially, artistic initiatives.[169] These activities entrenched the Ghetto Uprising's place in the Jewish "national awareness."[170]

3.3 The Politics of Commemoration

The "national awareness" that developed around the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, however, was far from uncontested. As the leadership of the CKŻP sought to define both the meaning and the legacy of the uprising, it became a central site of ideological negotiation. The Soviet-dominated political order created a particular constellation of pressures and opportunities for the Jewish community of the early postwar period; under these conditions, the Jewish leaders were broadly split between the Left Zionists and the Jewish faction of the PPR. These factions often collaborated to marginalize competing parties, but they also shared a deeper ideological convergence in how they framed the uprising.[171] Marci Shore characterizes the Left Zionist factions and the Communists as of "of one mind" when it came to the image of the Ghetto Uprising: both drew upon overlapping ideological roots to craft a shared language and aesthetic—a sort of Zionist soc-realism—that would come to define the epoch.[172]

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[168] See Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda."
[169] Alina Cała, "Kształtowanie się polskiej i żydowskiej wizji martyrologicznej po II wojne światowej," *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 69/2 (2000). See Renata Piątkowska, "Konkursy na plakat rozpisane z okazji 4. i 5. rocznicy powstania w getcie warszawskim," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów,* 2 (March 2004): 197-205) and Marta Kapełuś, "Powstanie na afiszu. Powojenne konkursy poświęcone pamięci bojowników getta warszawskiego," *Pomniki oporu. Źródła artystyczne do studiów nad pamięcią o powstaniu w getcie warszawskim 1943-1956,* ed. Marta Kapełuś, Michał Krasicki, and Piotr Słodkowski, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2023), 62-74.
[170] Renata Kobylarz, *Walka o pamięć*, 22.
[171] At this point, the politics of the Jewish faction of the PPR and the left Zionist camp were generally very similar, with one specific exception: while the ultimate goal for the left Zionist camp was to build a socialist state in Eretz Israel, the PPR advocated for remaining within Poland and building socialism within the country.
[172] Marci Shore included an author's note, which I have translated here: "What meanings do these slogans have: "walka o godność człowieka [the fight for human dignity]," "z bronią w ręku [with weapons in hand]," "zginąć z honorem [to die with honor]," "walczące getto [the fighting ghetto]," "walcząca Palestyna [fighting Palestine]," "walcząca demokracja [the fighting democratic (faction)]," and even "walczący obóz pokoju [the fighting peace

This ideological linkage extended to the quest to define the meaning of insurgents' legacy vis-a-vis the contemporary issues facing the Polish Jewish community, and even the ideological conditioning of Poland itself.[173] The second anniversary celebrations of April 1945 exemplify these trends: as Bożena Szaynok notes, rather than 'self-defense' or even 'honor', the "struggle for democracy" was stated to be the main rationale of the ghetto insurgents, while "the working [robotniczy] character" of the uprising was highlighted in many of the commemorative addresses given during the ceremonies.[174] Such emphasis the working-class nature of the insurgents were reflective of the Manichean worldview of the authorities of the time, in which Polish society was divided into the "progressive camp" and the so-called "reactionaries": the Home Army, the government-in-exile, fascism, and antisemitism.[175] As Shore notes, all elements of the commemorations "touched upon the same quest—mainly, the procession and victory of the progressive camp."[176] Within this framework, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising became a symbolic weapon in the broader struggle to legitimize the new communist order and its Jewish allies.

The ideological tenor of these commemorations was reinforced by demographic realities. The vast majority of postwar Polish Jews were repatriates from the Soviet Union,[177] many of whom had survived under the aegis of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC). As Gennady Estraikh explains, the JAFC had been "established as a propaganda unit," and

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camp]." Even the slogan "za naszą i waszą wolność [for our and your freedom]" which was taken by the left from the Polish insurgents of the last century. Was this language genuine?)" Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 58.

[173] In addition to the contention within the Polish-Jewish sphere, the legacy of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was instrumentalized by the non-Jewish sectors of the rapidly consolidating communist regime, who appropriated the uprising for the current requirements of state ideology. This appropriation, as described by Jacek Leociak, ultimately led to manipulations of the Ghetto Uprising's legacy during the PRL in the spirit of internationalization, as in the Stalinist rhetoric of a 'common anti-fascist front', and polonization, beginning as early as the first years after the uprising. See Jacek Leociak, "Zraniona Pamięć (Rocznice powstania w getcie warszawskim w prasie polskiej: 1944-1989)*,*"in *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939-1968),* Alina Brodzka-Wald, Dorota Krawczyńska, Jacek Leociak, eds., (Warszawa 2000), p. 29-49.

[174] Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 48.

[175] In the second anniversary edition of "Głos Ludu," the communist (PPR) newspaper, it was written: "Our party, the Polish Workers' Party [PPR], is proud that its divisions, the divisions of the People's Guard [GL], stood at the head of those, who from the "Polish" side of the ghetto wall brought help to the heroic defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto. Our Party, the Polish Workers' Party [PPR], knows and teaches well the working masses that antisemitism is fascism, the enemy of the Polish people, of Poland." ("Głos Ludu" nr 19, 19 April 1945, cited in Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 47.)

[176] Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 48.

[177] Formally divided in two phases, from late 1945 to summer 1946, this repatriation process was carried out under the aegis of the so-called Polish-Soviet Commission representing the State Repatriation Office of the Soviet Union (PUR) and the CKŻP, with many of the repatriated Polish Jews directed to settle in the newly acquired territories of Lower Silesia. See Rita Nash, "Return to Poland: The Jews in Lower Silesia 1945-1950," *Musings: Sydney Jewish Museum Journal* 1/1 (2022).

while it increasingly acted as an unelected representative body of Soviet Jewry, its messaging reflected Soviet ideological priorities.[178] Many repatriates thus returned to Poland having internalized a specific rhetoric of communist antifascism and Jewish-Soviet solidarity. These themes dovetailed neatly with the PPR–Left Zionist commemorative framework, giving the official narrative of the uprising a distinctly *ludowy* (popular) and communist-inflected character.[179] The memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was thereby conditioned not only by the intrinsic moral significance of the event, but also by the political culture and agency of those shaping its commemoration.

Crucially, these ideological and demographic dynamics did not remain confined to speeches and anniversaries, but found material expression in a host of cultural and artistic initiatives that set the stage for the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. The CKŻP's Department of Culture and Propaganda played a particularly active role in shaping this commemorative culture. While many of the activities were events, speeches, and articles clustered around April 19th, the date chosen to serve as a commemorative holiday,[180] more and more, visual representations of the Ghetto Uprising grew in importance. By 1947–48, as Marta Kapełuś has shown, this blossomed into a fever pitch of artistic production: anniversary posters, illustrations for Jewish press organs, book covers, even films and exhibitions.[181] Two memorial poster competitions organized under the auspices of the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts (pl: *Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych*, ŻTKSP), in which Natan Rapoport himself participated and served on the jury, proved especially significant.[182] Many of the surviving designs center a Zionist, proletarian interpretation of the

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[178] Gennady Estraikh, "The Soviet Narrative of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 123 (2021): 289-307, 292-3.

[179] See August Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce w latach 1944-1949,* (Trio, Warszawa 2002), 196-7.

[180] In 1946, Adolf Berman, then chairman of the CKŻP, suggested the establishment of 19 April as a holiday for Jews and Poles alike "fighting the elements of reaction." See Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 48.

[181] See Marta Kapełuś, "Powstanie na afiszu," and Renata Piątkowska, "Konkursy na plakat," for a full accounting of the 1947 and 1948 commemorative poster competitions. For examples of other visual commemorations, see the museum catalogue in *Pomniki oporu. Źródła artystyczne do studiów nad pamięcią o powstaniu w getcie warszawskim 1943-1956,* ed. Marta Kapełuś, Michał Krasicki, and Piotr Słodkowski, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2023). See Aleksander Ford's film "Ulica Graniczna [Border Street]," first released in a limited capacity in 1948. Available on Youtube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4YYSeZ18mU

[182] Just as the CKŻP's "task was to represent Jews in dealings with the state authorities, but its purpose was also to provide material support, help with housing and care for surviving Jews," one of "the statutory tasks of the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts, apart from creating collections of Jewish art, was assistance for artists who had survived the war and were continuing to work creatively." Marta Kapełuś, "Powstanie na afiszu," 85.

Ghetto uprising both visually and through the choice of accompanying slogans,[183] highlighting the heroic topos of the 'New Hebrew Man': in many cases, literally rising from the ashes of the old world, weapon in hand.[184]

Top left: Adam (Aron) Muszka, *To the Fighters for the Dignity of the Jewish Nation on the Fourth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,* 1947 (1st prize, ŻTKSP poster competition)

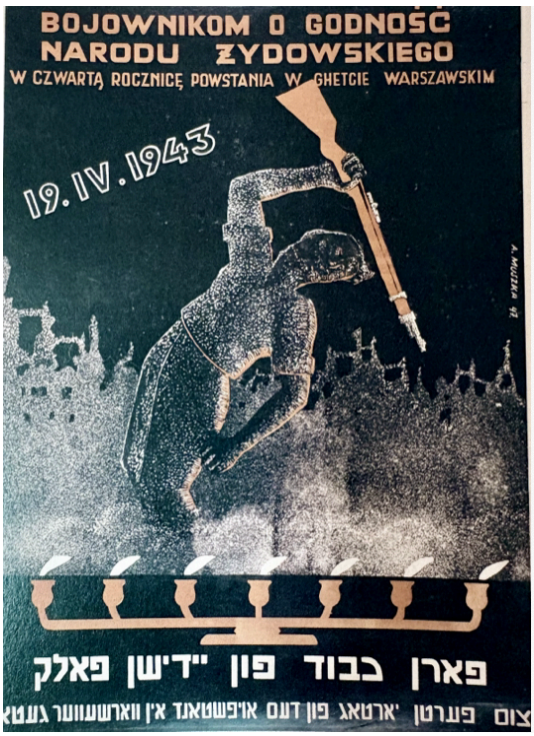
Top right: Mojżesz (Adam) Bekerman, *They Fought for Our Honor and Freedom,* 1948 (ŻTKSP poster competition)

Bottom left: Henryk Hechtkopf, *They Fought for Our Honor and Freedom,* 1948 (2nd prize, ŻTKSP poster competition)

(Source: the ŻIH collection, in *Pomniki oporu. Źródła artystyczne do studiów nad pamięcią o powstaniu w getcie warszawskim 1943-1956,* ed. Marta Kapełuś, Michał Krasicki, and Piotr Słodkowski, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2023)

[183] The 1947 edition of the poster contest was dedicated "To the Fighters for the Dignity of the Jewish Nation [Bojownikom o godność narodu żydowskiego]," while the slogan of the 1948 competition was "They Fought for Our Honor and Freedom [Oni walczyli za nasz honor i wolność]."

[184] As Michał Krasicki notes, "[F]requently, a number of tropes were employed which "sometimes [gave] an impression of a gesture aimed at emptiness or a heroic pose, a characteristic of art promoting participation in war. The ruins of the ghetto lose their primary role, become merely the background, a stage for heroic figures." "Wypełnianie próżni," 54.


BOJOWNIKOM O GODNOŚĆ
NARODU ŻYDOWSKIEGO
W CZWARTĄ ROCZNICĘ POWSTANIA W GHETCIE WARSZAWSKIM
19.IV.1943
פארן בבוד פון ייִדישן פאלק


19.IV. 1943
ONI
WALCZYLI
ZA NASZ HONOR
I WOLNOŚĆ
19.IV. 1948


19-IV-1943
19-IV-1948
ONI WALCZYLI
ZA NASZ HONOR I WOLNOŚĆ
W PIĄTĄ ROCZNICĘ POWSTANIA W GHETCIE WARSZAWSKIM

These artistic programs and the rhetorical emphases of CKŻP commemorations were mutually reinforcing. As Kapełuś argues, the recurrence of motifs across speeches and visual media suggests a "shared memory and postwar vision of the resistance," consciously fostered by political and cultural elites.[185] For this study's purposes, these activities reveal how memory was being actively produced, codified, and disseminated to a survivor community in the immediate aftermath of war and rupture. They also explain how certain themes—workers' solidarity, youth heroism, antifascist struggle—came to dominate public remembrance and were eventually crystallized in Rapoport's monument. The immediate postwar commemorative culture was not neutral, but profoundly conditioned by the political realities of Communist rule, the interweaving of Zionist and socialist mythmaking, and the needs of a decimated community to reclaim honor and agency.

3.4 Remembering Catastrophe

Alongside the narratives of the heroic, Zionist soc-realist inflected struggle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising cultivated by the CKŻP stood a parallel, equally urgent project: the documentation of the catastrophe itself. Within weeks of liberation, a small group of survivors founded the Central Jewish Historical Commission (*Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna,* CŻKH) in Lublin. Primarily teachers and historians by training, the majority of whom had themselves only recently emerged from the camps, the founders of the Commission were guided by a unique moral imperative and sense of urgency to document the horrors so recently inflicted on the Jews of Poland.[186] As Noe Grüss, one of the CŻKH's leaders, emphatically stated:

> Every Jew was aware of the fact that he had witnessed a horrible epoch in the history of his nation, and if he managed to survive, he is obligated to immortalize not only his personal experiences and suffering, but, above all, [to document] the tragic fate and

[185] Marta Kapełuś, "Powstanie na afiszu. Powojenne konkursy poświęcone pamięci bojowników getta warszawskiego," *Pomniki oporu. Źródła artystyczne do studiów nad pamięcią o powstaniu w getcie warszawskim 1943-1956,* ed. Marta Kapełuś, Michał Krasicki, and Piotr Słodkowski, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2023), 88.

[186] For more information on their activities, see: Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947;" Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust;" Laura Jockusch, *Collect and record: Jewish Holocaust documentation in early postwar Europe,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); the Jewish Women's Archives, Yad Vashem archives, etc.

> extermination of four million Jews who died as martyrs in Polish lands at the hands of the Nazi occupiers.[187]

The CŻKH appealed "to all Jews of Poland" to submit diaries, photographs, artifacts, and testimonies "to rescue this historical treasure stained with blood."[188] Under the leadership of figures like Dr. Filip Friedman, its work was both scholarly and deeply moral; Friedman openly described the Commission's efforts as "a way to get even with Hitler and his criminal regime," underscoring that this was not detached historiography, but a desperate race to preserve memory.[189]

The scope and intensity of these efforts were unprecedented. By spring 1945, the CŻKH had expanded from a modest Lublin office of two staff to more than twenty-five branches across Poland, with over a hundred workers;[190] by 1947, when it merged into the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH), it had gathered more than six thousand survivor testimonies, thousands of Nazi documents, and a vast collection of material artifacts.[191] Acutely aware of both the enormity of the task and its necessity for future generations, the Commission's prodigious number of publications spoke to the crucial nature of their work: reconstructing "the most tragic page in the history of our nation" through immortalizing the murdered victims, laying the foundation for "Judeo-centric" Holocaust research in the tradition of *khurbn-forshung* (destruction research),[192] and pursuing justice against the Nazi perpetrators and other antisemites.[193] As Grüss eloquently wrote, the Commission's work would serve as "a knowledge monument for our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters;"[194] the testimonies

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[187] Noe Grüss, *Rok pracy Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej*, 5, quoted in Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry: Making Holocaust Memory,* Gabriel N. Finder et al., ed., (20): 74-97, 74.
[188] AŻIH, CŻKH, Sprawozdania Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej, quoted in Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947," 77.
[189] Philip Friedman papers 982, YIVO Archive in New York, quoted in Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947," 77.
[190] Quoted in Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947," 75. See also Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21/1, (2007): 73-95, 76.
[191] Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947;" Cohen, "The Children's Voice."
[192] As opposed to "Nazi-centric," as Philip Friedman described in *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust,* ed. A. J. Friedman (New York and Philadelphia, 1980), 561. See Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947," 81.
[193] See Laura Jockusch, *Collect and record;* Noe Grüss, *Rok pracy*; Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Noe Grüss, eds., *Dzieci oskarżają* (*The Children Accuse),* (Kraków, Łódź, and Warsaw, 1947), i. *Dzieci oskarżają* contains passages in which Hochberg-Mariańska specifically calls out postwar Polish antisemitism, highlighting how the anthology was both "a work of commemoration, but also a protest against non-Jewish Polish society's attitude towards the Jews." (Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice," 84).
[194] Grüss, *Rok pracy,* 35.

gathered from survivors "will erect a memorial for them--not one made of marble or stone, but the one in people's hearts and memory. This memorial will be the history of their martyrdom."[195] The fruits of their labor-- a reconstituted "literature of destruction,"[196] staggering in its breadth and suffused with grief-- would also take form on the eastern face of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes.*

The missions of CKŻP, particularly its Department of Culture and Propaganda, and CŻKH were not without tension. CKŻP leaders criticized what they viewed as an overly lachrymose focus, insisting upon greater attention to "the issue of Jewish resistance…There is so much on Jewish suffering and so little on their heroism."[197] Though the primary focus of the CKŻH's research was to document the mass murder of Polish Jewry in the immediate aftermath of the Shoah, the Commission, encouraged by the CKŻP, did not abrogate the popularized, controversial subject of Jewish resistance during the Nazi occupation, particularly in relation to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Dr. Józef Kermisz published a monograph entitled *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim* (The Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto) in 1946, which contained six new photographs depicting the burning ghetto; other members wrote of the activities of the resistance underground in the ghettos and camp system.[198] This dynamic—between ideologically infused heroism and somber mourning—was constitutive of the tensions in early postwar Jewish memory and helps explain the juxtaposition of mnemonic strands in Rapoport's 1948 Monument that informed the monument's design and reception. The following section turns to Natan Rapoport himself—his biography, artistic training, and ideological framework—to examine how these broader cultural and political forces were translated into the specific visual language and semiotic choices of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*.

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[195] Grüss, *Rok pracy,* 10.
[196] See David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge and London, 1984).
[197] AŻIH, CKŻP, Prezydium, 303/4, 100, 19 Dec. 1946, quoted in Natalia Aleksiun, "The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947," 89.
[198] Three years on from Ber Mark's monograph on the same subject, Kermisz's work was still fraught with difficulty in conducting objective research, and faced criticisms regarding its reliance on, and lack of refutation of, the Stroop Report. See also Betti Ajzensztajn's *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach* (*The Underground in the Ghettos and Camps*, 1946); Szymon Datner's *Walka i zagłada białostockiego ghetta* (*The Struggle and Destruction of the Białystok Ghetto,* 1946). For a complete list of titles, see *Inwentarz Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce (1944-1947),* Archiwum ŻIH, accessible here: https://www.jhi.pl/storage/file/core_files/2022/8/10/ff55cf0e9b9c9c8069020fd23e7052fd/CZ%CC%87KH_303:XX.pdf. Agnieszka Haska**,** *Dowody i zeznania. Świadectwo o Zagładzie w pierwszych latach powojennych, Teksty Drugie,* 3(2018).

3.5 The Figure of the Artist

Combining all of the artistic, political, and cultural themes discussed above is the artist of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* himself, Natan Rapoport, whose life story reflects many of the same ruptures and ideological cross-currents that shaped postwar Polish Jewry. A trained sculptor of the Warsaw Academy of Art, the son of working-class parents and the grandson of Hasidim, and a member of *Hashomer Hatza'ir* (The Young Guard of the Zionist Left Wing), Rapoport's early years already straddled tradition and modernity. This uneasy binary—traditional religious groundings and socialist, Zionist politics—would later deeply inform his memorial aesthetics.

Rapoport spent the duration of the war in the Soviet Union, first in a Jewish artist collective, later in a labor battalion, and finally as a state sculptor working in the socialist realist tradition. These experiences were decisive: they equipped him with the requisite skill and monumental style later employed in the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, and it also embedded him in the Soviet ideological frameworks that dominated postwar Poland. James E. Young notes that Rapoport first learned of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 through Ber Mark under the aegis of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC).[199] "[N]othing had ever moved him like this before," Young states; "he lived only so that he might commemorate such an event, which he regarded as both a socialist and Jewish revolution."[200] The fact that his first encounter with the uprising came refracted through Soviet-aligned channels is significant in illustrating how his later work could simultaneously invoke Zionist motifs, socialist-realist ideals, and, reflective of his family background, embodied tropes of Jewish collective memory.

After repatriating to Poland in 1946, Rapoport entered a survivor community and political culture already invested in the memory of the uprising. His own biography resonated with that of the new leadership-- as Young aptly points out, given his own "vocation as state

[199] Ber Mark would later serve as the first director of the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny) in Warsaw from 1949-66. He "is generally considered a regime historian who adhered to the Communist Party line in his histories of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, most of which were significantly distorted by Communist bias." See Tom Navon, "At the Crossroads between Communism and Jewish Nationalism: Ber Mark as Historian of Premodern Jewish Society," *East European Jewish Affairs* 52/2–3 (2022): 235–48.
[200] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 75.

sculptor of Soviet heroes, his training in the heroic school of socialist realism [...] and his own Jewish identification as [a member of Hashomer Hatzair],"[201] it was inevitable that these factors would both "inform his memorial conception" and "contribute to our public memory of events as crystalized in the monument."[202] Like Adolf Berman and other Po'alei Zion Left activists, Rapoport embodied the 'Zionist-socrealist' synthesis that Marci Shore identifies as characteristic of the era. For Rapoport, art was an explicitly political vocation; as James E. Young writes, Rapoport "regarded his artistic mission in political terms: if as a Jew, he was also a socialist, then as an artist he would be a realist."[203] Rapoport's use of monumental, heroic figuration in the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* was not simply aesthetic preference, but was deeply tied to the ideological needs of the time, reflecting the commemorative narratives promoted by the CKŻP and the emerging communist state. His style visually reinforced the themes of resistance, martyrdom, and proletarian ideology that these institutions sought to emphasize in the postwar public memory of the Ghetto Uprising.

3.6 Designing Memory: From Maquette to Monument

Rapoport's engagement with the Warsaw Ghetto's commemorative legacy predated the 1948 monument: In 1947, he joined the ŻTKSP (Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts) and even proposed and helped adjudicate the organization's memorial poster competition upon the occasion of the uprising's fourth anniversary. As Marta Kapełuś has shown, these competitions generated a shared visual lexicon, heavily drawn from Zionist soc-realism, that was widely disseminated among the Polish Jewish community. Observing the posters, it is possible to discern a number of similarities in style and theme that would find permanent echo in Rapoport's Monument. The posters, anniversary marches, and speeches together created what Pierre Nora might call nascent *lieux de mémoire*: symbolic forms through which the survivors began to commemorate a consolidating memory of both acute trauma and striking heroism.

Following his repatriation to Poland in early 1946, Rapoport immediately sought to engage with the legacy of the Ghetto Uprising and the postwar Jewish leadership. Following Rapoport's maquette proposal to the CKŻP, it was necessary to secure permission from the Warsaw City Arts Committee to construct the monument. The committee, Young writes, "had

[201] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 80.
[202] Ibid.,75.
[203] Ibid., 73.

already marked the site;"[204]in fact, it was the location of the first permanent monument in the ruins of the ghetto,[205] designed by the Polish architect Leon Suzin and dedicated 'To those who perished / in an unprecedentedly / heroic struggle / for the dignity and freedom / of the Jewish people. / For a free Poland. / For man's liberation./ Polish Jews." Described by Michał Krasicki as "the most abstract work of the early postwar period," the "squat, ground-level monument, composed of two partially overlapping disks…was considered a symbolic tombstone placed over a mass grave."[206]

This first monument to the ghetto heroes likely impacted Rapoport's work in several ways. The choice of location—opposite the largely intact Wołyń Barracks, the former Judenrat headquarters—was a deliberate act of spatial symbolism that Rapoport echoed in his work: both the 1946 and 1948 monuments stood as accusatory counterpoints to the Judenrat's policy of submission and collaboration, celebrating instead resistance and sacrifice.[207] Suzin would even play a valuable role in designing the base for Rapoport's monument. Conversely, the very symbolism of Suzin's monument may have pushed Rapoport further towards the embodied forms of Zionist soc-realism. As Rapoport famously stated,

> Could I have just made a stone with a hole in it and said, "Voila! The Greatness of the Jewish People"? No, I needed to show the heroism, and illustrate it literally in figures everyone, not just artists, would respond to. This was to be a public monument, after all. And what do human beings respond to? Faces, figures, the human form. I did not want to represent resistance in the abstract: it was not an abstract uprising. It was real.[208]

Rapoport's insistence on accessibility was shaped both by the visual conventions of socialist realism and by the mnemonic imperatives of his audience: echoing Simha Rotem and Antek Cukierman's insistence that the fighters had a "strong sense of history" and wished to determine their own remembrance, his monument gave form to that agency.

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[204] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 81.
[205] Calls for a monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising had existed since 1943. "In his brilliant lament and manifesto 'We, Polish Jews . . .' [My, Żydzi Polscy…] the exiled Polish-Jewish poet Julian Tuwim demanded…a monument exactly one year after the uprising--the interval in Jewish tradition between burial and tombstone dedication," Young writes. This call for a monument commemorating the ghetto uprising was circulated widely among the surviving Polish Jews. As noted by Piotr Słodkowski, "this testified to the Jewish community's mood of solidarity as well as its constantly fuelled determination never to forget the uprising of April 1943." See James Young, "Biography of a Memorial Icon," 79 and Piotr Słodkowski, "Kontrfaktyczna historia powstania w getcie warszawskim," 112.
[206] Michał Krasicki, "Wypełnianie próżni," *Pomniki oporu. Źródła artystyczne do studiów nad pamięcią o powstaniu w getcie warszawskim 1943-1956,* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2023), 52.
[207] Ibid., 52.
[208] As quoted in James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 82.

In this chapter, I have sought to provide an overview of the socio-political and historical forces informing both the construction of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising's legacy in the early postwar period and how this context shaped Rapoport's Monument. These contextual elements are indispensable for examining the Monument through the lens of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, which seeks to uncover how its material form, spatial placement, and symbolic vocabulary mediated the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Tragedy, Heroism, and the Ideal New Man: Analysing Rapoport's Monument to the Ghetto Heroes

On April 19, 1948, the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* was unveiled to great fanfare, with commemorative speeches delivered by government officials, the Chief Rabbi of the Polish Armed Forces, who delivered a sermon emphasizing the heroism of the ghetto insurgents and the symbolic significance of their fight against fascism, and, incredibly, survivors of the Ghetto Uprising themselves. The gathered crowds included visiting delegations from across Poland and twenty different countries, including the Yishuv, whose representatives "deposited a container of soil from their land" at the Monument's base in honor of the martyrs.[209] This unprecedented assembly of mourners and dignitaries underscored the dual nature of the event as both a national commemoration and a transnational act of solidarity, situating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising within a shared Jewish and antifascist memory that resonated far beyond Poland's borders.

Unveiling of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, April 19, 1948 (Archiwum Szczecińskich)

[209] Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "Section of Monument to Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw Attracts Nationwide Attention." April 19, 1948. Accessed July 20, 2025. https://www.jta.org/archive/section-of-monument-to-ghetto-heroes-in-warsaw-attracts-nationwide-attention

The solemn service was held by Chief Rabbi of the Polish Armed Forces, Col. David Kahane, during the unveiling ceremony of the Monument. (Archive of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland / Archiwum Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce, TSKŻ)

Contemporary reviewers wrote of the Monument with great acclaim: in one article published in the Po'alei Zion gazette "Przełom," the head of the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts (ŻTKSP) praised Rapoport's work as "available for every common man [szarego człowieka]," and that it incarnates the "ideal New Man [idealny Nowy Człowiek]."[210] The architect Bohdan Lachert, one of the designers for the rebuilding of the Muranów district of the former Warsaw Ghetto, wrote with heavy pathos of how the monument

> attracts attention, offends with its expression, and duly expresses the 'grandeur' ['wielkość'] of the greatest tragedy known to history. The commemoration on the western side of the monument of the boundless heroism of the struggle without any hope of victory, the commemoration on the eastern side of the monument, of the boundless villainy [podłość] of the Nazis, which condemned millions of innocent and

[210] J. Sandel, "Rzeźbiarz Natan Rapoport," "Przełom" II nr 6-7 (czerwiec-lipiec 1947), quoted in Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 50.

> defenseless people to a terrible death, is for Warsaw one of the most valuable elements of the tribute paid to those who created the unforgettable pages of Poland's history.[211]

Or, as Lachert's contemporary Tadeusz Breyer stated simply in his review, "[i]t is the best monument created after the war in Europe."[212]

This chapter will build upon the socio-political and historical contexts of the previous chapter, and the theoretical and cultural context of the theoretical background to analyze Natan Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* through the lens of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). I will utilize the multimodal framework employed by Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin in their study *The Language of War Monuments* to attempt to answer the following question: '*How did Natan Rapoport's* Monument to the Ghetto Heroes *mediate and shape the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Holocaust?'* and the related sub-questions:

- How did the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* visually and materially encode this dual narrative of destruction and resistance?
- How did the Monument's physical placement within the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, and temporal placement in the socio-political conditions of early postwar Poland, shape its meaning?
- How did the Monument reflect, transform, or reinterpret earlier Jewish memory traditions?

Given the pronounced differences between the eastern and western façades, I have elected to analyse them separately before turning to the overall arrangement of the monument and the symbolism of its location. The final sections of this chapter will approach the meaning of the Monument as a whole, situated within its historical, political, and sociocultural context.

4.1 Analysing the West Side of the Monument: The Struggle (Walka)

[211] Prof. Bohdan Lachert, "Pomnik bohaterów getta," *Głos Plastyków: czasopismo ilustrowane poświęcone sztuce plastycznej,* r.9, 1948, s.56. Accessed May 30, 2025: https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/944820/edition/908414/content.
[212] Prof. Tadeusz Breyer, "Pomnik bohaterów getta," *Głos Plastyków: czasopismo ilustrowane poświęcone sztuce plastycznej,* r.9, 1948, s.56, Accessed May 30, 2025: https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/944820/edition/908414/content.

This subsection will draw from the theoretical and analytic frameworks of Roland Barthes and Erwin Panofsky, discussed in Chapter 2, to analyse the semiotic choices made by Rapoport in the construction of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*. Following the approach modeled by Gill Abousnnouga and David Machin, the discussion applies their method of analyzing monuments as communicative texts shaped by ideology. Particular attention is given to the iconography and iconology of the monument's western façade, *The Struggle* (*Walka*), situating its imagery within the broader socio-historical context established in the preceding chapter.

4.1.1 Zionist, Socialist, Revolutionary: Imagery of *The Struggle*

"An upright man with a rifle in one and a grenade in the other, raised hand, bags of ammunition on his waist, a bag with maps by his side, a strap across his chest. None of them ever looked like this-- they had no rifles, ammunition, nor maps, and besides that, they were blackened and dirty, but on the monument it's as it should have been. On the monument, it is clear and beautiful." Marek Edelman in conversation with Hanna Krall, *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem.*[213]

[213] Quoted from Hanna Krall, *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem,* in Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, "Dwie strony pomnika," *Konteksty* 3 (2019): 100-105, 101.

The west side of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes,* photo by the author, April 19, 2023.

On the west side of the monument, a high-relief sculpture entitled *The Struggle* serves as a symbolic vision of the events of the uprising, celebrating the heroism, defiance, bravery, and martial spirit of the insurgents. Central to this depiction is the figure of the hero. As Abousnnouga and Machin note, this tradition of depicting the hero stretches back to antiquity: "[t]he idea of the 'hero' in war commemoration was established by the Greeks who

represented them in aggressive, commanding poses."[214] This commemorative tradition serves two closely connected purposes: to honor those who triumphed in battle, and to present models of exemplary citizenship. As Kirk Savage observes, the didactic function of the hero-monument is to provide moral examples for public emulation. The archetypal hero, elevated both literally and metaphorically, as an object of veneration and imitation, provides the model of the perfect citizen within the nationalist framework. Not simply a recounting of a particular past event, the hero-monument serves as a narrative about national attitudes.[215] Building on this tradition of the hero-monument, earlier sections traced Rapoport's ideological commitment to memorializing the Jewish, socialist, and Zionist fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto. In this subsection, the focus shifts to the *visual strategies* through which Rapoport translated these commitments into semiotic choices—how his Monument to the Ghetto Heroes honors the insurgents not only through narrative but through its aesthetic language, symbolism, and composition.

Seven carved figures burst forth from the granite that anchors the sculpture to the rest of the monument. Their bodies are emaciated yet powerfully built, marked by wounds but sculpted with heroic vigor, capturing an inherent tension between suffering and defiance that embodies both the horrific conditions of the Warsaw Ghetto and the unwavering resolve of the insurgents. This idea is raised to its fullest extent in the sculpture's central figure. Cast in mythic proportions, with a stern and unflinching gaze that meets the viewer head-on, Mordechaj Anielewicz occupies the both visual and ideological center of *The Struggle*. Each figure in the composition-- the kneeling, elderly man lifting a stone, the young man clutching a dagger, the young woman holding a rifle, and even Anielewicz, grasping a homemade grenade-- is portrayed as a heroic archetype and rendered according to the aesthetic conventions of socialist realism emphasizing physical strength as an embodiment of determination and collective purpose.[216]

According to Barthes, bodily poses serve to connote particular attitudes, which image producers can strategically employ to influence the viewer's interpretation of a depicted

[214] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 106.
[215] See Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape,* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).
[216] See Kruk 2008

subject's character, beliefs, or actions.[217] Though Anielewicz is depicted as bare-chested and clothed in tatters, his stance is rigid and defiant, exemplifying typically heroic and martial traits; when combined with his rolled-up sleeves and a grenade at his side held like a hammer, recalling monumental socialist realist motifs, his pose serves to symbolically merge the roles of worker and fighter. This fusion recalls Young's description of the Ghetto Uprising, writing after Ber Mark, "as both a socialist and Jewish revolution."[218] Other figures in the sculptural group emphasize this heroic defiance to varied degrees: a young man and woman, facing opposing directions, weapons in hand with expressions of determination, if not trepidation; even the figure of a mother engulfed in flames, her arm lifted defensively alongside the child she protects, complicates traditional images of victimhood by positioning suffering within the realm of resistance. These supporting figures in Rapoport's sculptural group embody layered historical and symbolic meanings: the elderly man—distinctly older than the other insurgents—evokes the iconography of Michelangelo's muscular prophets, his high brow connoting wisdom within the classical artistic tradition. His kneeling pose acquires particular symbolic resonance in the context of the uprising, in which the forces of youth were narrated as triumphing over the perceived passivity of the older generation, according to the official commemorative framework developed in the previous chapter. His upward gaze, directed toward Anielewicz, visually reinforces a hierarchy of reverence and succession, with the young leader positioned as the embodiment of authority, both moral and, in accordance with his proletarian appearance, revolutionary. The noted exception to this overall framing of defiance is found in the presence of a fallen youth at the lower right, introducing a counter-narrative of sacrifice and vulnerability—what James E. Young has described as a "paean to the pathetic hero," reminiscent of post-World War I memorial sculpture.[219] Though still included in the resoundingly heroic western side of the Monument, this juxtaposition of defiant resistance with visual mourning reflects the Monument's dual role as both heroic tribute and site of mourning and symbolizes not only individual bravery, but also collective trauma and defiance. The absence of armor or protective clothing on any of the portrayed figures further reinforces the ideological emphasis on embodied sacrifice and foregrounds the tension between martyrdom and heroism.

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[217] See David Machin and Andrea Mayr, "Presenting Speech and Speakers: Quoting Verbs," in *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction.*
[218] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 75.
[219] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 88.

The representation of women within the sculptural group also serves as a meaningful contribution to the meaning of the overall work. Beyond the maternal figure engulfed in flames—reminiscent of allegorical depictions of *Liberté*—another female insurgent is prominently featured on the right, cradling a rifle. Her inclusion points to a unique facet of the Ghetto Uprising's history-- that is, the acknowledgment, even in early commemorative practices, of women's active participation in the uprising.[220] As Liz Elsby notes, women played vital roles both as combatants and as inter-ghetto couriers undertaking highly dangerous missions.[221] The statue's acknowledgment of this contribution may be partially rooted in the historical figure of Zivia Lubetkin, a co-founder of the ŻOB and a prominent leader from the left-Zionist camp, who arguably serves as a visual and ideological referent for the armed female figure. In this way, the Monument not only preserves the memory of the uprising, but cements its representational scope, asserting women's agency within a commemorative landscape traditionally dominated by masculine imagery.

As the semiologists Abousnouga and Machin note, much meaning is conveyed through the selection of physical features chosen to represent the monumental subjects; in this case, the ghetto insurgents. "The common denominator in [these] represented physique[s]," Abousnnouga and Machin suggest, "is strength," expressed through the idealized proportions and muscular physiques of the depicted group.[222] This visual coding is reinforced by Rapoport's selection of models: as Young notes, he chose "kibbutznikim,"[223] the so-called "live heroes of the Yishuv in Palestine," to embody the fighters—thus decisively inscribing Zionist imagery onto the uprising.[224] The result is a commemorative synthesis in which the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents are cast in the visual mold of the ongoing Zionist project. This symbolic continuity is further underscored by Rapoport's own view of the uprising as part of a broader Zionist military tradition; as such, the figures of *The Struggle* were intended to evoke earlier Jewish warrior archetypes, such as Simon Bar Kochba[225] and Judas

[220] This is also likely a nod to Rapoport's socialist realist roots, as the participation of women represented a common theme in Soviet monumental sculpture; furthermore, women played an active role in the settlement of the Yishuv and feature in the Zionist canon of heroes.
[221] Interestingly enough, Elsby incorrectly accuses Rapoport of only featuring one woman in the front statue, "the passive figure with the child standing behind Anielewicz." See Liz Elsby, "Rapoport's Memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising - a Personal Interpretation," *Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center,* accessed from: https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/warsaw-memorial-personal-interpretation.html.
[222] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 112.
[223] The Hebrew term for workers on a kibbutz, typically a communal farming enterprise, in the future state of Israel.
[224] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 82.
[225] The military leader of the Bar Kokhba revolt of the 2nd century CE, part of the traditional Zionist national mythology.

Maccabeus.[226] In this way, the monument projects a transhistorical iconography of Jewish resistance—one that aligns the uprising within the broader narrative of Zionist revival while drawing from the traditional framework of Jewish memory discussed in the first chapter. When combined with the visual language of socialist realist motifs, Rapoport communicates a commemorating narrative in which the resistance fighters, led by Anielewicz, are not only Jewish national heroes but also ideological subjects whose struggle exemplifies revolutionary agency and working class solidarity--the embodiment of 'Zionist soc-realism'. By depicting Anielewicz as a figure of monumental strength, Rapoport reinforced the didactic purpose of his work—offering a model of heroic behavior to be admired and emulated, and embodying the idealized vision of Zionist heroism and sacrifice with a distinctly proletarian bend.[227]

Writing in *Dos Naje Lebn*, Emil Sommerstein traced the evolution of Jewish representation during the war—from the "Jew-slave," "the persecuted Jew," and "the passive victim," to the "fighter-Jew, brave, intrepid, who dearly spends and fights for his life [który drogo sprzedaje i walczy o swe życie]."][228] It is this final iteration that Rapoport immortalizes in epic form on the western side of the Monument. In an accompanying 1948 programmatic statement, Rapoport explicitly situated the Ghetto Uprising within the long arc of Jewish heroism as

> a continuation of grand military traditions […] since the national struggles for freedom during the ancient times, through spiritual resistance, up to the ongoing struggles; I perceived the great Jewish heroism in the terrible wartime. […] This is why the characters of the combatants from the monument are both freedom fighters from the Ghetto, Jewish past heroes, and the ones that are yet to come. This is why I was trying to make an epic work, inspired by the classical spirit.[229]

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[226] Artur Tanikowski, "'Zabytek hańby naszych wrogów, a chwały naszych umęczonych bohaterów'. Urodziny pomnika Bohaterów Getta," Cwiszn 1–2 (2013), 114.

[227] By 1946, the cult of Mordechaj Anielewicz was ascendent, especially among the members of Hashomer Hatzair. On the occasion of the third anniversary, J. Barzilaya, the representative of Hashomer Hatzair from Palestine, gave a speech on the life and death of Anielewicz. "For him the struggle for the being and dignity of Polish Jewry, the struggle for socialist ideals, the national struggle and socialist emancipation in Eretz [Israel] -- these constituted an organic unity. This synthesis of struggle for the nation, for Eretz, for democracy and socialism was the source from which he drew his strength and bravery." (W 3-cią rocznicę śmierci, „Zew Młodych" (kwiecień-maj 1946), 21, quoted in Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 47. In 1947, the CKŻP passed a resolution to change the names of two streets of the former ghetto in honor of the insurgents: Nalewki Street to Ghetto Fighters' Street, and Gęsia Street to (Mordechaj) Anielewicz Street. Soon, a Ghetto Heroes Street existed as well. See Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 48. These trends would persist: by the mid-1970's, Rapoport's Anielewicz had already been adopted as an honorary Israeli archetype, reproduced on postage stamps, book jackets, tour pamphlets, and commemorative guides to Holocaust Remembrance Day programs. (James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory,* 182.)

[228] Quoted in Artur Tanikowski, "'Zabytek hańby naszych wrogów," 114.

[229] Quoted in Artur Tanikowski, "'Zabytek hańby naszych wrogów," 114.

This conception of "great Jewish heroism" drew directly from the Zionist tradition of the period, which viewed all of Jewish history and memory through a martial lens. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in this schema, was read as the modern iteration of the legendary defeat at Masada, where "the rebels took their own lives rather than surrender to the Romans,"[230] —a narrative epitomized by early commemorations of the uprising as the "Masada of Warsaw," which Avinoam Patt identifies as a common trope by its first anniversary.[231] This mythic framing was instrumental in propagating the ideal of the "New Hebrew Man," a figure of boundless strength and energy who would replace the stereotype of the "weak or apolitical Jew"—a construct analogous to the Communist "New Man."[232] In the specific context of the Holocaust, the Ghetto Uprising was read as the counterpoint to the now-infamous proposition that the Jews went to their deaths passively, "like sheep to slaughter."[233]

As explored in the previous chapter, Rapoport's own background lends further insight into this ideological layering. As a member of Hashomer Ha'tzair—the left-Zionist youth movement—who spent the war in the Soviet Union, Rapoport embodied the fusion of Zionist and socialist values and viewed his work on the Monument as a direct reflection of his own ethos. As he stated in an interview with the Hashomer Ha'tzair-affiliated newspaper *Mosty*, "this monument of the fighting youth is just as much the monument of the heroes of the ghetto as of 'fighting Palestine'." He went further: "I wanted to build a clearly nationalist monument for the Jews, not a Polish monument. I wanted to show the Polish people who we really were."[234] In sculpting *The Struggle*, Rapoport created what Young calls "distinctly Jewish martyrological and heroic icons"[235]—figures who simultaneously memorialize the resistance of the Ghetto Uprising and advance a vision of [socialist-inflected], collective

[230] David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 148.
[231] Avinoam Patt, "The Jewish Heroes of Warsaw: The Meaning of the Revolt in the First Year after the Uprising," 147.
[232] See David Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites nor Crusaders,* trans. by David Maisel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History,* 146.
[233] For the disambiguation of this myth, see Richard Kaplan, "The Myth of Jewish Passivity," in *Jewish Resistance against the Nazis,* Patrick Henry, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2014) and Yael S. Feldman, "'Not as Sheep Led to Slaughter'? On Trauma, Selective Memory, and the Making of History Consciousness," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 19/3 (Spring/Summer 2013): 139-169.
[234] Quoted in James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 82.
[235] 'Fighting Palestine' [Walcząca Palestyna] was the way that the Left Zionist camp, including Hashomer Hatzair, referred to the (predominantly socialist) Jewish settlers of the future state of Israel. "Rozmowa z twórcą pomnika, N. Rapoportem," "Mosty" rok II nr 48/170 (24 April 1948), 8, Quoted in Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda," 52.

Jewish strength. In his evaluation of the monument, Michał Krasicki describes the figures of the insurgents as

> [f]ull of youthful strength and bold in their decisive attitude, they leave behind the reality of the ghetto and simultaneously do not exist, like prototype Jewish heroes reborn in the uprising; truly free, able to face the greatest obstacles, ready to create their own state and defend it at all costs.[236]

4.1.2 Other Influences

While the visual language of Zionism and socialist realism is prominent in Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, it is not the sole source of iconographic influence. As noted in the same interview in *Mosty*, Rapoport also drew significantly from the 19th-century French sculptural tradition, itself indebted to the classical aesthetics of Greco-Roman antiquity. This lineage is reflected in contemporary critical responses; for instance, the rector of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw praised Rapoport's design for adhering to the "well-established, constant principles of the type of heroic sculpture that stretches through the centuries from Pergamon to Rude."[237] The reference to François Rude's *La Marseillaise*—the celebrated bas-relief adorning the Arc de Triomphe—locates Rapoport's work within a commemorative genre that melds classical form with the revolutionary subject, establishing a line of continuity between ancient heroism and modern revolutionary iconography.[238]

This alignment is further underscored by the presence of a female figure within the monument whose exposed breast and raised arm unmistakably recall the figure of *La Liberté* from Eugène Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (*Liberty Leading the People*). The compositional echo of Rude's *Marseillaise* is reinforced here, as James E. Young notes, by the invocation of a visual tradition emblematic of revolutionary uprising and civic sacrifice. Yet, in Rapoport's rendering, this allegory is significantly transformed: *Liberté* is not simply a revolutionary archetype but also a mother, holding her child close with one hand while raising the other in a gesture of defense against the sculpted flames of the ghetto's destruction. Her

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[236] Michał Krasicki, "Wypełnianie próżni," 57.
[237] Prof. Franciszek Strynkiewicz (Rektor Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie), "Pomnik bohaterów getta," *Głos Plastyków: czasopismo ilustrowane poświęcone sztuce plastycznej,* r.9, 1948, s.55, accessed from: https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/944820/edition/908414/content.
[238] See Ben Pollitt, "François Rude -- La Marseillaise," *Smart History,* accessed from: https://smarthistory.org/rude-la-marseillaise/.

facial expression, however, could be read as more evocative of fear and anguish than the posturing of heroic defiance seen elsewhere among the majority of sculpted figures. This iconographical reading complicates the allegory of *Liberté*, reframing her not as the embodiment of victorious revolution, but as a figure of maternal vulnerability caught, quite literally, in the annihilation of the Jewish world.

Through this figure, the monument can be read as simultaneously asserting and mourning the ideals of 'freedom and human dignity' for which the ghetto insurgents fought. Her hybrid representation—part *Marianne*, part *Pietà*—enriches the commemorative texture of the monument by serving as a counterpoint to the dominant visual narratives of strength, conviction, resolve depicted elsewhere. The sculpture group is thus presented along a continuum of mourning and resistance, running from the heroic archetype of Anielewicz through '*Liberté'* to the fallen youth. These latter figures' iconographic ambiguity mirror the broader duality of the monument itself: it is both heroic and tragic, timeless and historically grounded, idealizing resistance even as it implicitly situates it among the accompanying destruction.

This layering of classical, revolutionary, and modern iconographies underscores the monument's role as a *lieu de mémoire*. In synthesizing these diverse aesthetic and ideological elements—Zionist, socialist, classical, and republican—Rapoport constructs not only a tribute to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, but also "resolve[d] the dilemma of Jewish monument makers working in a tradition with so few monumental icons"[239] by creating a visual architecture of a Zionist historical consciousness 'from scratch', one that positions the uprising within both a national and transhistorical continuum of resistance, suffering, and martyrdom.

4.1.3 Semiotic Resources Communicating Social Relations

4.1.3.1 Elevation, Angle of Interaction, Size and Height, Gaze/Interaction, Distance/Proximity

As Peter O'Toole has noted, monuments communicate in large part through the meaning potentials—or semiotic affordances—offered by physical features such as height, size, materiality, angularity, and spatial placement. These attributes play a significant role in structuring the viewer's experience of the monument and carrying embedded connotations of

[239] James E. Young, The Texture of Memory, 182.

power and idealization. In particular, the spatial relationship between viewer and monument significantly shapes the ideological framing subject of the monument for the viewer's consumption.[240] As Abousnnouga and Machin demonstrate through their study of British war monuments, the sheer size of public monuments and the subjects they commemorate carries a substantial symbolic meaning potential and serves to encode certain narratives through the bodily experience of viewing.[241] The *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* exemplifies these principles through its commanding physical dimensions: it rests upon a platform 30 meters wide and 16 meters deep, fronted by five wide steps and flanked by identical *menorot* supported by lions, each over 1.3 meters tall. The wall of the monument itself, composed of granite blocks, spans nearly 9 meters across and rises 7.4 meters from its base. The bronze sculptural group, *The Struggle*, is affixed centrally and projects outward at a height of 5.8 meters, visually separating itself from the rest of the architectural structure and thrusting toward the viewer.[242]

This imposing scale serves to both assert the historical gravity of the subject and reinforce the specific ideological meaning of the monument. As Michał Krasicki observed, "by making the figures of the combatants… monumental, Rapoport emphasized not only their presence, but also the immensity of their deed."[243] Moreover, the size of the sculpture amplifies the symbolic weight of the Ghetto Uprising, elevating it into the epic register characteristic of socialist-realist aesthetics.[244] Crucially, due to the height and forward projection of the sculpture, the viewer must stand at the base of the monument and gaze upwards to fully perceive the tableau—structurally reinforcing reverence on the part of the viewer. Following Kress and van Leeuwen, Abousnnouga and Machin argue that elevation in visual composition metaphorically correlates with authority, power, and ideality.[245] In *The Struggle*, the insurgents are both literally and metaphorically elevated, commanding not only spatial dominance but also moral admiration.

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[240] See Peter O'Toole, *The Language of Displayed Art.* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994).
[241] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 43.
[242] Measurements and technical information were gathered from "Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw, Poland, 1948," part of the "Holocaust Memorial Monuments: A Joint Project of the Center for Jewish Art, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Miller Center/Feldenkreis Program, University of Miami International Survey of Jewish Monuments," available at: https://cja.huji.ac.il/hmm/browser.php?mode=set&id=33307.
[243] Michał Krasicki, "Wypełnianie próżni," 55.
[244] Sergei Kruk, "Semiotics of Visual Iconicity in Leninist 'Monumental' Propaganda," *Visual Communication* 7(1): 27-56, 37.
[245] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 42.

Despite this elevation, however, the figures do not recede into the realm of inaccessibility. As Abousnnouga and Machin argue, monuments often situate their subjects at a mediated distance—neither wholly equal to the viewer nor removed from interaction, they are instead lifted to the realm of the "ideal."[246] In *The Struggle*, the combatants visually loom above the viewer, yet remain physically within reach. This spatial proximity suggests a carefully modulated relationship between idealization and identification: while the Ghetto Uprising is framed as embodying the loftiest values of heroism and sacrifice, those values remain accessible and resonant for the contemporary observer.[247] As one contemporary reviewer noted,

> The pathos-laden [sculpture], presenting a scene of the fight in the burning Ghetto, has a shocking effect through the clarity and readability [czytelność] of its dramatic composition as well as through its tragic content. The sculptor was deeply moved when he created this scene and this emotion is transmitted to the viewer.[248]

In *Reading Images*, Kress and van Leeuwen further elaborate on the semiotic power of placement within a visual field, noting that elements at the top of a composition are typically interpreted as "ideal," while those at the bottom represent the "real."[249] This binary structure is clearly visible in *The Struggle*. The allegorical figure of the mother/*Liberté* is situated near the top of the composition, her arm flung upward in a gesture of anguish or defiance. In stark contrast, the body of the fallen youth lies at the base of the sculpture, visually grounded in tragedy and corporeality. The stern figure of Anielewicz occupies the center, affirming his centrality to the commemorative tableau while embodying the tension between these two poles.

Gaze, another key component of visual grammar derived from Hallidayan theory, also structures viewer interaction. As Kress and van Leeuwen differentiate, "demand" images—where figures directly address the viewer—are intended to elicit emotional responses from the viewer, while "offer" images present their subjects without reciprocal gaze, positioning the viewer as an onlooker, even a voyeur.[250] In *The Struggle*, the figures vary in their visual interaction. The mother looks upwards in fear as flames rise behind her; her child gazes back at her in intimate vulnerability. The young insurgents, clutching their

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[246] Ibid.
[247] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 123-24.
[248] Prof. Franciszek Strynkiewicz, "Pomnik bohaterów getta," *Głos Plastyków*, 56.
[249] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 41.
[250] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images,* 124.

weapons, look outward to the left and right, determination and apprehension in their carved brows. The old, kneeling man lifts his gaze toward Anielewicz, affirming a visual and symbolic chain of submission. Only Anielewicz himself gazes directly outwards, simultaneously addressing and looking beyond the viewer with a stern countenance which does not invite pity, but asserts solemn authority—a call to remember, to admire, and, in conjunction with the didactic purpose of monuments, even to emulate.

This configuration reflects what Abousnnouga and Machin describe as the metaphorical weight of vertical gaze: in Western visual culture, "up" tends to connote aspiration or nobility, while "down" suggests weakness, defeat, or introspection.[251] Notably, in *The Struggle*, no figure is shown looking downward, and just two look upwards, which may be read as a denial of despair in contribution to a narrative of defiance, solidarity, and moral clarity. At the same time, however, the similar scarcity of upwards gazes may further enforce the solemn, commemorative nature of the Monument taken as a whole--the vast majority of those represented by the depicted figures did not survive the uprising, and thus had no future aspirations beyond this 'captured' moment. In this way, Rapoport's sculptural language largely avoids interpretive vagueness, presenting the ghetto fighters not as abstract symbols, but rather as clear embodiments of purposeful action and steadfast dignity.

4.1.3.2 Materials

As Frank Serafini argues, all visual and multimodal texts possess a material dimension that serves as a crucial contributor of the meaning potential to a given text.[252] This principle is central in the study of monuments, where materials function not only as practical choices, but as semiotic elements embedded with historical, cultural, and affective significance. Abousnnouga and Machin similarly affirm that while materials used in monuments serve technical needs, they also carry connotative power.[253] Echoing Frank Lloyd Wright's assertion that "each material has its own message,"[254] Kress and van Leeuwen maintain that materials offer meaning potentials through a combination of metaphor, embodied experience, and cultural memory. For example, the solidity and weight of bronze or granite can metaphorically convey strength and permanence, qualities the viewer comprehends both through lived

[251] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 44.
[252] Serafini 26
[253] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 48.
[254] Quoted in Paul Leoworthy, "Memory, Materials and the Built Environment," *Memory Studies Review* (2024), 7.

experience with the materials, but also through recognition of their previous uses in monumental sculpture. Through this lens, as Kress and van Leeuwen observe, “the material becomes a fully exploitable and exploited resources.”[255]

To theorize these effects, Hegger et al. outline three dimensions of material meaning: visible, inner, and associative qualities.[256] Of particular relevance here are the visible, or tactile and sensory, and the associative, or historical and ideological, levels. Associative meanings, as Paul Leowrothy and Gernot Böhme have further elaborated, are contingent upon the socio-historical contexts in which materials are deployed.[257] Marble, bronze, and granite have accrued symbolic value over centuries dating back to Classical Antiquity, often representing endurance, nobility, or military triumph. As Abousnnouga and Machin note in their study of British WWI memorials, the choice of bronze connotes masculine strength and historical continuity, in contrast to the softer associations of marble.[258]

In Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*, these material choices are deliberate and laden with symbolism. The sculptural group *The Struggle* is cast in bronze, while the wall behind it is constructed from dark grey granite. Beyond the general meaning potential of granite, this granite, specifically 'Labrador' granite, was originally quarried for a Nazi victory monument planned by Arno Breker in Berlin: its repurposing here in a monument to Jewish resistance is a striking act of symbolic inversion, laden with historical irony.[259] As Rapoport himself stated in an interview with *Mosty*, he intended the fusion of granite and bronze to symbolize the unification of all creative forces in the name of national survival and Jewish collective memory:

> I wanted this monument to stand for the nation as a symbol of the unification of all creative forces. It should remind us that we must be so united, like the granite and bronze joined together into one.[260]

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[255] Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 224, quoted in Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 134.
[256] Hegger et al. 2017, 8, quoted in Paul Leoworthy, “Memory, Materials and the Built Environment,” 7.
[257] Paul Leoworthy, “Memory, Materials and the Built Environment,” *Memory Studies Review* (2024), 7-8.
[258] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 135.
[259] See Young, “The Biography of a Memorial Icon,” 83.
[260] “Rozmowa z twórcą pomnika, N. Rapoportem,” “Mosty” rok II nr 48/170 (24 April 1948), 8, Quoted in Marci Shore, “Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda,” 52.

4.1.3.3 Curvature and Angularity

The physical composition of the monument further enhances its communicative potential. The granite wall is slightly trapezoidal—wider at the base than the top—conveying stability; the sculpture of *The Struggle* carries a certain symmetricality, with roughly three figures on either side of Anielewicz in the center. The inscription at the base of *The Struggle* offers another layer of visual and ideological meaning. Van Leeuwen (2005) differentiates angularity from curvature in terms of their semiotic affordances: angular forms connote hardness, masculinity, and technicality, while curved forms suggest fluidity, gentleness, and warmth.[261] These observations can be applied to multiple visual elements, including, I argue, textual inscriptions. In the case of the Monument, there are three text inscriptions bearing the phrase "The Jewish Nation -- To Its Fighters and Martyrs" in Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew, from left to right. The textual font is bold and angular, sharp and precise, emphasizing strength and permanence and clearly visible against the dark grey of the granite base.

I proffer that the directionality of the text itself can be read in two ways: either Polish-Yiddish-Hebrew or Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish, given that both Yiddish and Hebrew are read from right-to-left. This directionality may speak to alternate conceptions of identity: read from right to left (Hebrew to Polish), this could speak to the centrality of Judaism and Zionism to the insurgents' identities (through the lens of their Zionist sculptor), where Polish is viewed as the least important component of this identity; in reverse (Polish to Hebrew), perhaps marking a symbolic *aliyah* from Poland to Israel, whose nationhood was declared less than a month following the monument's unveiling. The central placement of the Yiddish text, I propose, is due to the centrality of Yiddish in the Warsaw Ghetto as the most common language and source of identity for the city's Jewish population.

As Abousnnouga and Machin note after Barthes (1977), textual inscriptions on monuments operate as semiotic tools with their own meaning potential, which can be uncovered using Fairclough's discourse analysis framework to reveal assumptions of shared community values and memory.[262] Abousnnouga and Machin highlight how the use of "'we'" in inscriptions on British war memorials "represent a community; it suggests a consentient group of people who will all remember…in the same way [and] implicitly refers to the

[261] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 46.
[262] Fairclough 2003, 58, quoted in Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 205.

community of the nation."[263] In this case, the monument inscription signed "the Jewish nation"[264] or "the people of Israel [עם ישראל 'am Israel']" corresponds to the idea of representing the national (or nationalizing) community, and the dedication "to its fighters and martyrs"[265] suggests that all Jews (whether Polish Jewish in origin or not) will respond to the Ghetto Uprising in the same fashion, invoking both a historical peoplehood and the emerging, modern Zionist nationalism.

4.1.3.4 *Surface Realization and Modality*

Abousnnouga and Machin's framework extend multimodal discourse analysis to the textures and finishes, or 'surface realization' and 'modality', of monumental forms as forms of meaning potential. Surface realization, as O'Toole notes, encompasses choices between 'organic' or 'manufactured' appearance, 'rough' or 'smooth' finishes, and the degree of detail, all of which may signal moral, aesthetic, and ideological positions.[266] In *The Struggle*, Rapoport opts for a high degree of visual detail, or high modality, particularly in the figure of Anielewicz. Every muscle, vein, and fold of clothing is rendered with precision, creating what Van Leeuwen (1996) calls 'overdetermination'—a visual strategy "[reflecting] a need to overcompensate" from the "chaos, disruption, and suffering that is war."[267] In this case, this hyper-detailed rendering also serves as a clear visual reminder of the terrible conditions of life in the Warsaw Ghetto prior to and during the uprising.

Though I have pointed out in previous subsections how Rapoport's depiction of Anielewicz adheres to the conventions of socialist realist art, his representation in this particular respect differs. Sergei Kruk has observed that socialist realist art privileged ideological usefulness over verisimilitude through the frequent usage of tropes depicting "not specific persons but types of persons."[268] Though Rapoport clearly draws from this logic in the iconography of *The Struggle,* the effect is partially qualified through the incorporation of naturalistic representation and very high modality in the depiction of Anielewicz, along with stylistic elements drawn from other iconographical traditions, as discussed in 4.1.2. Socialist

[263] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 207.
[264] Or "the Jewish people." There are no significant differences between the Polish and Yiddish renditions of this phrase.
[265] Similarly, there are no significant differences between the Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew versions of this phrase.
[266] See Peter O'Toole 1994
[267] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 121.
[268] Sergei Kruk, "Semiotics of Visual Iconicity in Leninist 'Monumental' Propaganda," *Visual Communication* 7(1): 27-56, 37.

realist themes, while clearly present, are thus hybridized with classical and even religious references, complicating attempts to categorize *The Struggle* strictly within one visual tradition; when viewed in conjunction with the rear of the Monument, it eschews clear genre conventions altogether.

In *Reading Images,* Kress and van Leeuwen also include the articulation of the details of setting in their criteria of modality.[269] In *The Struggle,* carved flames rise behind the figures, situating them in the context of the burning Ghetto and thus expanding the depiction of the insurgents to embody not only the moral courage of defiance, but also the acutely visceral and physical stakes of resistance. The flames underscore the fact that this uprising, though already undergoing an increasingly ritualized method of commemoration in the form of a politically commissioned monument, was an imminently *real* struggle.While Abousnnouga and Machin note that British monuments on the First World War often present decontextualized figures to emphasize universality,[270] *The Struggle* situates its participants in a specific historical trauma; furthermore, at the time of the Monument's unveiling, the events depicted in the sculpture had occurred only five years previously. Its extremely significant location in the ruins of the devastated Muranów--at the time of its unveiling, the Monument stood alone in 'an undulating sea of ruins'-- further heightened this immediacy, positioning it not just as a site of memory, but as a witness to the lingering trauma and catastrophe of the very events it depicted.

4.1.3.4 Transitivity

The final analytic layer of my multimodal critical analysis of *The Struggle* considers transitivity, a concept drawn from Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and extended by Kress and van Leeuwen to visual discourse. Transitivity structures 'who does what to whom' in a given sequence, revealing agency and ideological stance. In *Reading Images,* Kress and van Leeuwen also suggest that visual representations can adopt either narrative or conceptual structures: narrative structures depict engagement in some kind of activity, while figures "communicate through their attributes, both through pose and facial expression" in conceptual representations.[271] Rapoport's *The Struggle* displays both narrative and conceptual structures: the tableau is built from the heroic figures of the insurgents and the wealth of symbolism they

[269] See Kress and van Leeuwen 1996
[270] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 53.
[271] Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 79, Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 145.

represent. All figures, except the fallen youth, are rendered as active agents in various states of dynamism: grasping weapons, looking outward, preparing for a future battle, even reacting in terror to the burning and destruction of the ghetto implied in the background. This framing aligns with the "narrative representation" schema, in which action and interaction dominate. At the same time, these figures are conceptually rich, functioning as archetypes--the mother/Liberté, the old man, the youthful fighters, the martyr-- and also fulfilling the categories of Kress and van Leeuwen's conceptual representation.

Notably, the tableau does not depict a specific moment of the uprising but compresses its symbolic significance into a singular image. In this way, *The Struggle* transcends its historical referent, exhibiting both a conceptual and narrative schematic template that conveys resistance as both time-bounded and timeless, and both individualized and collective. While each figure is distinguished by its own expressive detail and gesture, with special attention paid to Mordechaj Anielewicz, their shared orientation and symbolic purpose project a unified ideological vision of the ghetto fighters are presented as martyrs, revolutionaries, and the spiritual progenitors of a renewed Jewish (Zionist) national consciousness.

In sum, *The Struggle* employs a tightly integrated ensemble of material, visual, and spatial choices to construct a monument that is both deeply specific in its historical reference and broadly resonant as an epic of resistance and collective identity. Through these semiotic choices, Rapoport deliberately embodied the Ghetto Uprising as a didactic narrative of agency and dignity, linked visually and through monumental inscription to Zionist and socialist myths of heroism and sacrifice.

Having examined this first façade of the Monument, I now return to some of the central questions guiding this MA thesis: how did the monument's material form and symbolism mediate the memory of the Ghetto Uprising for its primary audience of survivors, and how did it draw upon and reshape older Jewish memory tropes? By situating *The Struggle* within both the ruptures of postwar Poland and the deeper strands of Jewish cultural memory, we see how Rapoport's design intervenes in the politics of memory by embodying both destruction and resistance into a form of visual commemoration that reflects and responds to the political and cultural imperatives of the early postward period. The figures' monumental proportions celebrate the immensity of their deeds and embodied defiance; the sculpted bodies, resolute expressions, and forward-driving stances evoke elements of the 'positive

hero' of socialist realism, expressed to the fullest extent by the figure of Anielewicz. In this way, *The Struggle* honors the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as "a revolt of new fighting Jews."[272] The following sections will continue this investigation by examining how these symbolic strategies are mirrored and transformed in the monument's reverse relief, *The Death March*, thereby completing the dialectic of martyrdom and heroism at the heart of its commemorative program.

4.2 Analysing the East Side, 'The Death March' (Pochód na zagładę)

Building upon the preceding analysis of *The Struggle*, this section turns to the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*' eastern façade—the somber bas-relief *The Death March*—and applies the interpretive frameworks of Barthes and Panofsky to interrogate its semiotic and iconographic logic. In accordance with the multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) approach explicated by Abousnnouga and Machin, attention will be accorded to material, formal, and spatial qualities, as well as the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of the visual representation. If the western side of Rapoport's monument stages heroic defiance, the eastern shifts the register: here, the themes developed in earlier chapters—most particularly, Jewish collective memory and martyrdom—are expressed through imagery of suffering. This section explores how Rapoport's 'reverse' side complements and complicates the Monument's overall commemorative message, expanding its visual language beyond resistance alone to encompass the full dialectic of destruction and remembrance. The themes established in prior sections—particularly those concerning martyrdom, collective identity, and historical representation—are here further elaborated in the interpretation of the 'reverse' side of the Monument.

[272] Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 76-77.

Close-up of the eastern side of the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes,* photo by the author, April 19, 2023

4.2.1 The Martyrs

As James Young points out, though the entirety of Rapoport's Monument is dedicated to the "fighters and martyrs" of the Jewish people, in order to "see the martyrs we must walk around to the stone bas-relief on the shaded side of the monument."[273] Rather than the bold, outward progression of *The Struggle,* the bas-relief *The Death March* seems to recede into the base of the monument. Carved directly into the wall, and thus from the very same granite, the relief demands a different kind of attention—a closer, slower, and perhaps more contemplative engagement. This physical embedding into the granite evokes a deeper metaphorical embedding into traditional Jewish collective memory, to be explored in greater detail below.

In the same program statement in which he laid out his Zionist, heroic vision of his sculpture *The Struggle,* Rapoport also framed this monumental facade as an expression not of a singular historical episode, but as

> a link in the chain of the Jews' suffering, which has gone on for two thousand years in the form of persecutions, oppression, inquisition and massacres of Jews….That is

[273] Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 89.

> why, when forming the figures on the monument, I avoided the episodic, the fleeting, the transient, and tried to underline that which is universal, which is permanent, which is eternally Jewish.[274]

In this depiction, martyrdom becomes an eternal condition rather than a circumstantial one, resonating with the deeper structures of Jewish collective memory explored in previous sections. As described by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, traditional Jewish memory was essentially ahistorical and cyclical in nature: through liturgy and ritual, the past, present, and future were woven into into a single covenantal drama, fostering a sense of historical continuity in which time itself was experienced as cyclical. Catastrophes, in this sense, were interpreted within a covenantal drama of sin and redemption, framing persecution as part of a meaningful historical arc. In particularly extreme theological readings, even the Shoah was integrated into this schematic framework, based upon these same "terms of divine punishment," in this case, "wrought due to a failure of Europe's Jews to live up to their covenant obligations."[275] While Rapoport was not rendering theology in stone, his desire to avoid the "episodic" echoes these long-standing mnemonic patterns: *The Death March* is portrayed not as an isolated tragedy, but as part of a transhistorical narrative of persecution. Furthermore, Rapoport's focus on the "permanent," recalling Judaism's "architecture of time," as termed by Abraham Joshua Heschel,[276] illuminates his stylistic choice of a bas-relief. Rapoport's design draws from visual archetypes expressed in Samuel Hirszenberg's *Exile (Golus/Galut),* depicting the expulsion of the Chisinau Jewish community following the pogrom of 1903,[277] and even the depiction of the expulsion from Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus, an imminently recognizable moment of catastrophe in the memory of premodern Jewry. These well-known artistic allusions, as Young notes, were "used by Rapoport as a publicly recognizable archetype for his newly deported Jews."[278]

In particular, the twelve cloaked figures evoke the biblical twelve tribes of Israel, reinforcing the archetypical and transhistorical reading. Among them, a rabbi, grasping a Torah scroll, beseeches heaven with an upward gaze, while a child looks outward, eyes meeting those of the viewer—an indictment, perhaps, or a plea. These exceptional gazes

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[274] Quoted in Artur Tanikowski, "'Zabytek hańby naszych wrogów, a chwały naszych umęczonych bohaterów'. Urodziny pomnika Bohaterów Getta," Cwiszn 1–2 (2013), 114.
[275] Ori Z. Soltes, "Memory, Tradition, and Revival," 129.
[276] Abraham J. Heschel. *The Sabbath*, 8.
[277] This pogrom was made especially famous through the publication of Chaim Nachman Bialik's 1903 poem *In the City of Slaughter.*
[278] Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 90.

contrast with the otherwise resigned, downcast expressions of the depicted group, visually distinguishing the archetypes of the sacred and the most innocent within a narrative of overwhelming submission. Resignation to their fate, as Young points out, may be characterized by the steady forward progression of the figures in the relief, but the figures' carved expressions evince sadness, despair, even despondency, as one woman covers her face with her hands. Unlike the heroic-naturalist imagery of *The Struggle,* in which the insurgents were predominantly depicted with weapons and clothing that may have been found within the Warsaw Ghetto, the timelessness of *The Death March* is further compounded by the attire of the twelve huddled figures--draped in long cloaks and robes, with the exception of the small child, they might have stepped from the Arch of Titus into the ghetto. In fact, the only reference to the specificity of their tragedy is three Nazi helmets in the background of the bas-relief, depicted "only metonymically," as Young notes, "by the tips of their bayonets, the distinctive slope of their hats."[279]

A note of particular interest is the composition of the group: the figures depicted in *The Death March* comprise both men and women, adults and children. This both illustrates the universality of the Shoah, and simultaneously, strengthens the both the ubiquity and uniqueness of the figures in *The Struggle*: the young and old, male and female, were subjected to the torture and inhumanity of the Nazis, and from these same groups emerged the resistance.

4.2.2 Semiotic Resources Communicating Social Relations:

4.2.1 Elevation, Angle of Interaction, Size and Height, Gaze/Interaction, Distance/Proximity

As noted in the preceding sections, the size of monuments and the figures they commemorate are laden with meaning potential.[280] The previous section discussed the imposing size of *The Struggle. The Death March,* while sharing the granite walls of the Monument*,* diverges sharply from its counterpart: the bas-relief of the figures shepherded out of the ghetto by the Nazi soldiers, carved directly into the granite, is 2.6 meters tall and 5.8 m

[279] Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 90.
[280] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 43.

wide. [281] Though originally intended by Rapoport to feature four menorot--one at each corner of the base of the monument--this was never completed, leaving the bas-relief of *The Death March* as the only focal point on the eastern side of the monument.

Like its counterpart, the monument's eastern façade demonstrates key insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's *Reading Images*, particularly their analysis of gaze and vertical composition. In comparison to the prominent, forward thrust of *The Struggle,* in which the carved figures loom above the viewer, the bas-relief of *The Death March* recedes into the wall of the monument, figuratively and literally. Most figures in *The Death March* exhibit "offer" gazes—eyes cast downward or closed—positioning the viewer as a witness rather than an interlocutor. The child's direct gaze functions as a rare "demand," engaging the viewer in a charged confrontation. Similarly, the rabbi's upward gaze invokes spiritual invocation rather than earthly resistance, contrasting sharply with the heroic defiance of Anielewicz in *The Struggle*.

The angle of view further affects interpretation. Due to the bas-relief's size, in order to see the entirety of the tableau, the viewer must stand close to the bottom of the monument base and gaze upwards; in some weather conditions, however, due to the muted nature of the relief, close inspection may be needed to see all of the details of Rapoport's work. Though viewers must look slightly upward at the relief, the effect is not one of dominance or triumph, but of reverent sadness. As Abousnnouga and Machin argue, elevation in visual semiotics often connotes idealization; here, however, idealization takes the form of sacrificial suffering rather than aspirational heroism.[282]

4.2.2 Materials

Following Frank Serafini's assertion that all multimodal texts possess material presence laden with meaning potential, the granite relief invites a reading of its materiality. Unlike *The Struggle*, cast in bronze, *The Death March* is hewn from the same labradorite granite that composes the wall itself. As noted previously, this granite carried both historical and symbolic connotations: originally procured for Nazi architectural projects, its recontextualization in this Monument inverts its originally intended ideological meaning. The

[281] Interestingly, these dimensions are almost the reverse of *The Struggle,* which is 2.75 meters wide and 5.8 m high.
[282] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 44.

backing of the Monument also symbolically references the walls of the former Ghetto and the Western Wall (Kotel), locating the martyrs' experience within a deeply resonant framework for its Jewish audience. As Young notes, Rapoport's original intent was to mimic the rough-hewn texture of the Kotel, imbuing the monument with particularly poignant mournful and sacral qualities. "These great stones would thus have literally supported and framed the memory of the events in Warsaw in the iconographic figure of Judaism's holiest site," Young writes, "itself a monumental remnant of the Second Temple and, by extension, its destruction."[283]

The recessed bas-relief format contributes to the affective tone. Whereas *The Struggle* juts forcefully outward, *The Death March* recedes, visually and emotionally, emphasizing weariness and historical weight. The relief's relatively modest scale further contributes to its subdued gravitas. It invites close inspection rather than awe, proximity rather than spectacle.

4.2.3 Curvature and Angularity

Rapoport's monument is largely symmetrical in the placement of its steps, menorot, and the granite blocks that form the wall. Though less pronounced than *The Struggle,* even the sculpture of *The Death March* carries a certain symmetricality, with twelve main figures in the foreground, and the focal point of the rabbi roughly centered. In another departure from its western counterpart, the figures of the twelve hold no resemblance at all to the heroic lines of epic socialist realism, instead closely echoing the carved antiquity of the Arc of Titus. This pronounced lack of socialist realist and revolutionary elements both serve to illustrate the timelessness of the bas-relief and complicate the Monument's overall message.

4.2.4 Surface Realization and Modality

In its surface realization, *The Death March* also displays a markedly lower degree of articulation than *The Struggle*. The stone, rather than cast bronze, is smoother, the forms less individuated, and details more generalized. Drawing from Peter O'Toole's differentiation between "organic" and "manufactured" surface aesthetics, the relief suggests timelessness and solemnity through its restrained execution. This subdued modality aligns with Abousnnouga and Machin's view that low modality can facilitate metaphorical certainty and symbolic abstraction.[284]

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[283] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 86-87.
[284] Abousnnouga and Machin, *The Language of War Monuments,* 155.

The relatively generic features of the figures further support this reading. With the exception of the rabbi and the child, the figures are visually deindividuated, emphasizing their archetypal status and representing a collective, rather than individualized experience. Unlike *The Struggle*, where each insurgent's physiognomy is crafted to convey uniqueness and resolve, even as heroic tropes, the figures in *The Death March* represent martyrdom as communal destiny. The articulation of details in the spatial setting is also very low relative to *The Struggle*-- besides the metonymy of the Nazi soldiers' helmets, as mentioned above, there are no distinguishing visual indicators that this bas-relief is related to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, or even the Shoah, at all.

4.2.5 Transitivity

Like its counterpart *The Struggle,* the bas-relief *The Death March* also demonstrates a complex layering of narrative and conceptual structures into a tableau, built from the pathos-inducing, symbolic figures of the martyrs. As Kress and van Leeuwen note, narrative structures depict action, while conceptual structures represent states or categories. In *The Death March*, the figures bear expressions of grief, resignation, and despair, 'frozen' in motion—suggestive of deportation or a forced march, as implied by the relief's name—but the absence of dynamic physicality lends the scene a conceptual dimension. The Nazis are not shown directly, only implied through the metonymic representation of helmets and bayonets; their absence, paradoxically, implies a greater passivity than that of martyrs themselves. It further displaces questions of agency, rendering the figures at once passive and profoundly active in their expression of grief and continuity.

Transitivity, in Halliday's sense, is thus complicated: the figures appear as affected participants in a historical process, but their solemn movement and ritualistic grief imbues them with a form of moral agency. In this way, *The Death March* enacts a form of conceptual martyrdom, a collectivized tragedy, engaging in a complex tension with the narrative heroism of *The Struggle*.

By the particular semiotic choices in his bas-relief *The Death March*, Rapoport broadens the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes*' commemorative scope far beyond militant defiance to encompass the enduring condition of Jewish oppression, understood as one more

"link in the chain of the Jews' suffering," a formulation of cyclical history through the lens of traditional Jewish memory. A visual meditation on tragedy and, perhaps, culpability is produced by the relief's subdued presence, its suggested offenders, and its emphasis on martyrs, rather than fighters. The Monument's central dialectic of resistance and destruction is encapsulated in this duality—defiant, armed resistance on one side, somber, passive martyrdom on the other—which reflects both the particularities of traditional Jewish memory and the ideological rupture of Zionism, and political imperatives of its postwar context. It is precisely this tension, embodied in the reversed façades, that allows the Monument to function as a multilayered mnemonic text for its intended audience of survivors. Having established the semiotic and iconological dimensions of its sculptural program, I will now turn to the Monument's spatial arrangement: how its physical placement within the former ghetto further shaped and mediated these meanings.

4.3 Spatial Arrangement: Framing the Monument

As discussed in the preceding sections analysing *The Struggle* and *The Death March*, the semiotic power of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* is not limited to the figures it depicts, but also extends to the architectural and spatial structure that unites them. The monument's central granite wall, onto which both reliefs are affixed, functions dually as both a literal support and figurative medium. "Earliest sketches of the monument reflect both an insistence on Jewish themes and an emphasis on the proletarian form," James Young notes,

> but rather than trying to meld them into one set of figures, the sculptor joined them back to back, bound together by a free-standing wall of roughly hewn stone that would function both structurally and figuratively.[285]

From a semiotic perspective, this wall exemplifies what Kress and van Leeuwen describe as a framing device in their theory of visual composition, which not only spatially organizes the Monument but also communicates its own layered meanings.[286] On the one hand, the stone wall operates as a metaphorical trace of the ghetto wall, materially recalling the historical segregation of Jews from the surrounding Polish cityscape. On the other, its [intended metaphorical qualities] — echoing earlier references to the Kotel (Western Wall) — imbue

[285] James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 85.
[286] See Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images,* 1996.

the work with both memorial permanence and religious resonance. As Young notes, the wall in its monumental state "resembles a great tombstone,"[287] suggesting a funerary quality that aligns with Panofsky's iconological level of interpretation: a literal-- and semantic--merging of historical martyrdom commemorated in the Monument with the ancient, sacred injunction in Judaism to *remember* [*zakhor*].

Michał Krasicki offers a further religious dimension in his reading of the flames consuming the ghetto in *The Struggle*, extending the symbolic potential to suggest that the fire encircling the insurgents is more than just a reference to the destruction of the Ghetto — it also invokes biblical and sacrificial imagery. In his words, the flames point toward "the sacred dimension of the extermination of Warsaw's Jews, the sanctity of their annihilated lives,"[288] thus forging a visual and iconographic link to the defenders of the Second Temple and the idea of the *olah* or burnt offering — the Hebrew root of the word "Holocaust."[289] When viewed within this iconographic field, Rapoport's use of granite not only binds both *The Struggle* and *The Death March* into a unified visual field, but also references a dense layering of Jewish historical, religious, and political references — each embedded within the materiality of the Monument itself.

Rapoport's "insistence on Jewish themes," as Young notes, is further highlighted by the placement of two *menorot* at the base of the Monument, flanked by lions in a clear reference to the Lion of Judah, a traditional Jewish symbol of strength, courage, and nobility.[290] Although Rapoport originally intended for four menorot — one at each corner of the monument, echoing the Temple Mount's sacred spatial ordering, their reduced number does not diminish their iconographic weight. "Of all Jewish icons," Young writes, "the menorah in its visual resonance with the Maccabean *hanukki'ah* might be that most closely associated with classically Jewish resistance."[291] In this interpretation, the menorot do not merely offer a decorative supplement but rather function as a transmitted Zionist *lieu de mémoire*— a reading reinforced by Rapoport's own convictions, the 'Zionist soc-realist' ideological leanings of the era, previous discussed at length, and the timing of the

[287] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 85-86.
[288] Michał Krasicki, "Wypełnianie próżni," 57.
[289] See "What is 'Korban Olah' and How It Is Connected to The Holocaust," Hebrewversity.com, accessed from: https://www.hebrewversity.com/korban-olah-connected-holocaust/
[290] For more information, see "The Lion in Judaism," The Jewish Virtual Library, accessed from: https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-lion-in-judaism
[291] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 87.

Monument's unveiling just weeks before the establishment of the State of Israel. The menorot and lions are thus more than merely ornamental: they act as symbolic nodes within the broader semiotic system of the Monument, drawing from and positioning a distinctly Jewish visual heritage within a post-Holocaust and Zionist-resistance framework. As with other features of multimodal analysis previously discussed — height, material, gaze, and modality — these elements extend beyond iconography into the domain of iconology, enabling a reading of the monument as a complex site of political influences, Jewish collective memory, and a new, Zionist form of representation.

4.4 Spatial Context: The Significance of Location

The significance of the spatial placement of Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* is itself a powerful semiotic resource that profoundly influences the meaning-making potential of the Monument as a whole. As the former ghetto insurgent Marek Edelman recalled during the 65th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, "The monument looked extraordinary during the unveiling ceremonies, because in the background stood high heaps of rubble, and we thought that it would remain like this forever."[292] This recollection underscores the deliberate integration of the Monument into the postwar ruins of the Muranów district, once the vibrant center of Jewish Warsaw, now refigured as a necropolis of memory. In a similar fashion as the granite wall physically and semiotically binds *The Struggle* and *The Death March*, so too does the Monument's location link it to the very historical trauma it commemorates. According to Panofsky's three levels of representational meaning, this can be read not only at the iconographic level (ruins, rubble, absence) but also at the iconological level, where absence itself became a signifier of Jewish loss and endurance in the twentieth century.[293]

As previously mentioned, Rapoport was insistent that his Monument of the uprising be erected on this specific site—near Leon Suzin's earlier commemorative stone, and directly across from the former *Judenrat* headquarters. As James E. Young and Michał Krasicki emphasize, the physical void left by the destruction of the Ghetto functioned as an *a priori* commemorative landscape, a symbolic topography of absence. Krasicki writes, "the whole of the ghetto, the scene of its tragic and heroic end, had ceased to exist. The undulating desert of

[292] Marek Edelman, quoted in Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, "Dwie strony pomnika," *Konteksty* 3 (2019): 100-105, 101.
[293] See Elżbieta Janicka's treatment of the politics of absence in *Festung Warschau ….*

rubble and ruins that replaced them became the first, indeed the only remaining visible indication of this catastrophe."[294] Here, the semiotics of spatial absence work in conjunction with the semiotics of materiality discussed earlier: if certain materials carry historical-associative meanings, so too can ruins and destruction. As Vladka Meed observes, within the postwar landscape of Muranów, "[e]very stone, every heap of rubble is a reminder of the Holocaust."[295]

The Monument, then, does not stand outside of this destruction, but deliberately emerges from it. "It would be difficult to find a more emphatic artistic gesture at the time that would oppose the ubiquitous emptiness in the razed ghetto," Krasicki writes. "In the centre of that horrifyingly denuded space, Rapoport wanted to create a permanent point of reference for human vision, memory, and thought."[296] In this respect, the monument functions simultaneously as a visual anchor and rupture. In Young's words, it appeared in its earliest days as "a singular tombstone rooted in this great burial mound," drawing its "strength, massiveness, and authority from its relatively solid placement amid the very destruction it commemorated." This emplacement links directly to Kress and van Leeuwen's discussion of the spatial grammar of images, as examined above, in which placement and proximity convey ideological stances. Here, the Monument is not a displacement of history but a metonymic extension of it—a "fragment of the event it commemorates."[297]

The contemporary critic (and future architect of the postwar Muranów district) Bohdan Lachert echoed these ideas in his commentary on the Monument and its surrounding ruins. Calling the monument site a "cemetery of rubble, soaked in the blood of the Jewish nation," Lachert argued that the visibility of destruction should be maintained: "These ruins, in as great a quantity as possible, should remain in place, commemorate the days of terror and fighting, constitute the ground on which a new city, a new life, will be built."[298] In this way, the landscape of Muranów, like the Monument itself, becomes a palimpsest: a spatialized narrative in which traces of past trauma remain legible within the visual field of the present.[299]

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[294] Michał Krasicki, "Wypełnianie próżni," 50.
[295] Vladka Meed, *On Both Sides of the Wall,* trans. Steven Meed (New York: Holocaust Library, 1993), 262.
[296] Michał Krasicki, "Wypełnianie próżni," 55.
[297] James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 87.
[298] Prof. Bohdan Lachert, "Pomnik bohaterów getta," *Głos Plastyków: czasopismo ilustrowane poświęcone sztuce plastycznej,* r.9, 1948, s.58.
[299] See Bryce Lease, "Shared Histories and Commemorative Extension: Warsaw's POLIN Museum," *Theatre Journal,* 69:3 (2017):383-401, 383.

As such, the location of the Monument is not background, nor I would contend, even context, but a constitutive element of its meaning. At the moment of the Monument's unveiling, the scarred ruins of the former ghetto were themselves a 'text', in the semiotic sense—an active, symbolically charged landscape with as much, if not even more symbolic power, than sculptures of the Monument themselves. Shimon Efrati, the rabbi of Warsaw, had opposed the erection of the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising--and all--monuments upon this principle. "Such a memorial," Efrati asserted, "is more expressive of the destruction than any building or monument, for there is no adequate description or depiction of such a destruction except a vacant lot and empty space. The destruction can only be captured by negation, the total absence of color."[300]

Rather than serving as a passive backdrop, the landscape and the Monument operated in deliberate concert, fusing the intact material form of Rapoport's design with the "horrifically denuded space" of the Muranów district. This juxtaposition set the Monument against the surrounding ruins, visually contrasting the devastation of the former ghetto with the survival—and tentative renewal—of postwar Jewish life, transformed into the most concrete embodiment of symbolic power: a monument. As Natalia Krzyżanowska argues,

> commemoration remains the key tool of symbolic power and enacting symbolism and axio-normativity in city spaces. Therein, the salience of monuments and commemorations becomes crucial, also as a tool of creating an identity of a place and providing various tools for its redefinition and re-construction.[301]

[300] Qtd in *Rabbinic Responses of the Holocaust Era,* ed. Kirschner, 151, in Gabriel N. Finder and Judith Cohen, "*Memento Mori:* Photographs From the Grave," pp. 55-73
[301] Natalia Krzyżanowska,"The discourse of counter-monuments: semiotics of material commemoration in contemporary urban spaces," *Social Semiotics*, 26:5 (2016), 465-485, 465.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: The Meaning and Legacy of the *Monument*

In this thesis, I set out to understand how Natan Rapoport's *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* mediated and shaped the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Holocaust for its primary audience—the surviving remnants of Polish Jewry—at the moment of its creation and unveiling. To address this central research puzzle, I asked three interrelated questions: How did the Monument visually and materially encode the dual narrative of destruction and resistance? How did its physical emplacement within the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto and its temporal placement within early postwar Poland shape its meaning? And how did it reflect, transform, and reinterpret earlier Jewish memory traditions?

In response to the first question, I have shown that the Monument employs a sophisticated multimodal strategy to embody both mourning and heroism. In the framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Abousnnouga and Machin 2013; Panofsky 1972; Barthes 1964; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), my reading shows that the western façade *The Struggle* monumentalizes the insurgents through a shared iconic vocabulary of Zionist iconography and socialist realism (Young 1993; Kapełuś 2023), raising the Jewish subject into an emblem of militant dignity often termed the "New Hebrew Man" (Sharvit; Ohana). Conversely, the eastern bas-relief *The Death March* invokes the cyclical temporality of traditional Jewish memory, placing the martyrs within a longue-duree of Jewish suffering and persecution (Yerushalmi; Assmann). This dialectic of presence and absence, resistance and martyrdom, is not only artistic juxtaposition but also a deliberate materialization of the traditional injunction to remember [*zakhor*] against a socialist-realist inflected modernity (Young).

Turning to the second question, I have argued that the Monument's location, both spatial and historical, is integral to its meaning. Situated amid the ruins of the former Warsaw Ghetto, it transforms the urban ruinscape into a palimpsest of memory, juxtaposing destruction and affirming survival (Winter; Janicka). Its unveiling in April 1948—marking the fifth anniversary of the uprising, during a period of communist consolidation in Poland and the rebirth of Jewish national identity in Palestine—gave the Monument added significance (Shore; Estraikh). In this setting, the Monument was not just a static marker of the past; instead, it became a stage where different, sometimes competing, memories and identities were negotiated, shaped by the intense political and cultural changes of the time (Golbert;

Huener). Thus, the Monument's meaning is inseparable from the socio-political and historical context in which it was created; it stands both as a witness to catastrophe and as a site for forging postwar identity (Kapralski).

Finally, the Monument's symbolic language needs to be read against the longue-duree of Jewish memory traditions. Scholars like Yerushalmi, Heschel, and Assmann have shown that, for most of Jewish history, remembrance was tied less to physical monuments than to sacred time and covenantal rituals. Tragedies were folded into a cyclical story of exile and redemption, marked through festivals and liturgy in sacral time. Rapoport's design consciously reworks these older tropes for the modern world. The mourners on *The Death March* evoke age-old images of lamentation, while *The Struggle* recasts martyrdom in the socialist, Zionist language of armed resistance. As Funkenstein reminds us, Jewish memory has never been static: it adapts and is reinterpreted as new historical and ideological conditions emerge. In this way, Rapoport's Monument stands at the crossroads of tradition and innovation— bridging sacral memory and modern political myth, and offering both rupture and continuity.

Building upon these themes, future research could include: comparative studies of other Holocaust monuments to investigate how differing political, cultural, and spatial contexts shaped the negotiation of martyrdom, identity, and renewal in postwar commemorative practices. Transnational memory studies, following Michael Rothberg's work, might trace how the "Masada of Warsaw" narrative circulated between Poland, Israel, and the diaspora, exploring the case of transformations of Holocaust memory across borders and generations. Oral history projects, collecting testimonies from survivors, their descendants, and contemporary visitors, could deepen our understanding of the Monument's evolving reception, especially in the years following the reconstruction of the Muranów district, or even more strikingly-- following the departure of much of the remaining Polish Jewish community after 1968.

Ultimately, this study underscores that monuments are not passive repositories of history, but active agents in cultivating and complicating memory. Rapoport's Monument illustrates how semiotic design, spatial emplacement, and interplay with political and socio-historical contexts converge to mediate collective remembrance. It also complicates our understanding of Jewish cultural memory by showing how sacral patterns of remembering

—covenant, catastrophe, redemption—were reworked through the lenses of socialist realism and Zionist mythology in early postwar Poland, challenging longue-duree perceptions, identity, and moral responsibility. Perhaps no one expressed this better than Marek Edelman, one of the last surviving leaders of the uprising, who reflected many decades later about Rapoport's Monument:

> It's a symbol! … The Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto was the first urban uprising with civilian participation in Europe in the Second World War. And it is a great thing, not only for the Jews, but also for humanity and Europe.[302]

[302] Witold Bereś and Krzysztof Burnetko, *Marek Edelman. Życie. Po prostu,* Świat Książki, Warszawa 2008, 253, quoted in in Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, "Dwie strony pomnika," *Konteksty* 3 (2019): 100-105, 101.

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