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Citation

Alphen, E. J. van. (2015). List Mania in Holocaust Commemoration. In S. T. Popescu D.I. (Ed.), *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era* (pp. 11-27). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/34982>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

2

List Mania in Holocaust Commemoration

Ernst van Alphen

The rise of the archival mode in Holocaust commemoration is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although archival lists have been used widely since the end of the Second World War, they were at first not always considered to be effective as memorials. Lists were rather seen as instrumental, because they gave access to referential information. In the first few decades after the end of the war it was the narrative mode of diaries and testimonies that was viewed as the most effective means of Holocaust commemoration. The referential information provided by narrative was more extensive, comprehensive and elaborate than the basic information offered by lists.

This essay argues that since the beginning of the 21st century the archival mode is increasing in importance, especially in the form of lists. The continuing establishment of Holocaust museums and memorials seems to be an important phenomenon of the last ten years. Often these memorials are not made according to the conventional format of the monument, or of the counter-monument (another important trend in the 1990s, in addition to perpetrator art, that has become a convention in itself; see Young, 1994). Many of the recent memorials consist of lists, are presented in digital form and can be visited on the web. The most well-known example is probably the redesigned Hall of Names at Yad Vashem in Israel, reopened in 2005. The Hall of Names commemorates every Jew who perished in the Holocaust. It houses the extensive collection *Pages of Testimony* – a listing of short biographies of each Holocaust victim.¹ Over two million pages are stored in this collection. In close connection to the Hall of Names exists the digital *Shoah Names Database*, initiated in 1999, in which the names and biographical details of two-thirds of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis have been collected and recorded.²

Another example of a memorial consisting of a list and being digital is *Digitaal Monument Joodse Gemeenschap* in the Netherlands (Digital Monument Jewish Community). The historian Isaac Lipschits initiated this digital monument in the year 2000 and since 2005 it can be visited and consulted on the web. The main goal of this website is to be a memorial. It

wants to keep alive the memory of all Dutch Jews who died in the Holocaust. This means that around 101,800 victims are being commemorated by listing them with their names, date, place and country of birth, and the date and camp where they were killed. In case more information about a specific person is available, for example partner, children and other relatives, it is also added on a subsequent page. The second goal of this work is educational: to offer later generations the chance to find out about the Dutch Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

In the Netherlands another impressive memorial has been established, although this one is not digital. It is devoted to all Jewish and Roma children in the Netherlands who were killed during the Holocaust. It is titled *In Memoriam: De gedeporteerde en vermoorde Joodse, Roma en Sinti kinderen 1942–1945*. (In *Memoriam: The Deported and Killed Jewish, Roma and Sinti Children 1942–1945*) This memorial was first presented in 2012 in the form of an exhibition, then in book format. Its initiator, Guus Luijters, was inspired by the project of Serge Klarsfeld in France, who already in 1995 published *Mémorial des enfants juifs déportés de France*. What these two memorials of children have in common is that adding photographs of the children to the listed names and dates compensates the factuality and impersonality of lists. The issue I would like to address in this essay is what exactly do these recent memorials, digital or not, perform when they are based on the genre or format of the list and the activity of listing. Within Holocaust Studies and Holocaust commemoration the format of the list is highly respected as well as highly problematic. It is respected because all victims can be acknowledged and represented. Not by means of one symbol or allegory that is supposed to represent all victims, but through their own individual names and through information that confirms the individuality of those persons, like date of birth and date on which their life ended. That same activity of listing is, however, also problematic because the genre of listing is potentially contaminated by its history, as the Nazis had particularly excelled in listing.

Killing through Archiving

The Nazis pursued what they called *restlose Erfassung*, which means a total registering, without loose ends; an expression that connotes also 'all-embracing seizure'. This ambition led to a fanatic policy of counting, making lists and conducting censuses. Keeping the registry of the inhabitants of the German Reich up-to-date was the main task of the Bureau for Publications of the SS Security Office, the so-called *Sicherheitsdienst*. But the total registering did not stop with the registration of all inhabitants of the Reich; it was also performed in the concentration camps. In other words, the Nazis excelled as archivists. Let me explain in more detail which structural principles of the camps can be characterized as archival. In many

concentration camps the Nazis were fanatic in making lists of all the people who were put on transport, who entered the camps; whether they went to the labour camps, or went directly to the gas chambers. It is thanks to the existence of these lists that after the liberation it was possible in many cases to find out if the detainees had survived, and if not, in which camp and on which date they had been killed (for the role of the archive in Nazism see Ketelaar, 2002).

On arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau, detainees would get a number tattooed on their arm, being in this way transformed into archived objects. They were no longer individuals with a name, but objects with a number. Like objects in an archive or museum, the inscription classified them as traceable elements within a collection. Upon entering the camps they were also sorted into groups: men with men, women with women; children, old people and pregnant women to the gas chambers. Political prisoners, resistance fighters, were not mixed with Jews, and received no tattooed numbers on their arms. Artists, musicians, architects were usually sent to camps like Theresienstadt. Selecting and sorting on the basis of a fixed set of categories are basic archival activities and so is the making of lists.

When Holocaust memorials or artworks are based on the format of the list, they can be responsible for producing uncanny effects. In my earlier work I called this a Holocaust effect (Van Alphen, 1997). Listing creates an effect of the Holocaust because it adopts, usually unreflectively, processes or devices that were also used by the Nazis in implementing the Holocaust.³ The making of lists was a crucial device. Guus Luijters, responsible for the *In Memoriam* (2012a) for the Jewish children, is not unaware of the fact that he deploys Nazi categories for his memorial. He explains that when we use the term 'Jewish children' we in fact use Nazi definitions and terminology. He quotes from Deborah Dwork's *Children with a Star* (1993) to explain why these Nazi categories are problematic: 'It is not new, but it should be said again that the deployment of racial – and racist – laws that were adopted or imposed all over Europe, identified many people as Jewish, many people who did not consider themselves as Jewish' (Dwork, 1993: 12). Yet Dwork uses the term 'Jewish children' on purpose, and so does Luijters. He is well aware of the fact that terms like 'transit camp', 'transport', 'Jewish counsel', 'mixed marriage', 'list', 'selection', 'transport list' are contaminated terms, which conceal the truth. Still we have to use these terms, according to Luijters. He does not explain why.

But using the terms 'list' and 'transport list' as a way of giving insight into Nazi historical reality, is not the same as using listing as a device for making a memorial. A memorial that is based on listing, as most of our contemporary memorials are, does not necessarily convey historical knowledge about the Nazi past or Nazi practices. At first sight its use seems to be unreflective and highly contaminated by the Nazi use of it. That is why I argue that memorials, which use listing as their main device do not only

commemorate the Holocaust, they also create Holocaust effects. Therefore, my question should be reformulated in the following way: can the production of Holocaust effects be an effective and responsible way of Holocaust commemoration? 'Listing' then is a performative verb. In order to answer this question, I will first discuss several art works that are highly self-reflexive in their deployment of the device of listing. They use the list in order to understand and expose what a list is and what a list does.

The Referentiality of Lists

The representational genre of the list is often legitimized by its referential efficiency: a list does not refer generally, metaphorically, but refers to all items, all individuals, in the case of a Holocaust memorial, to all victims, by explicitly mentioning them all. French artist Christian Boltanski who has turned listing into a privileged practice for making art works, explores this referential function of listing.

Boltanski has produced many artist books, usually in the context of an exhibition. They are not catalogues documenting the exhibition; they demonstrate in the material form of the book the issues that are also at stake, but differently, in the framework of the museum exhibition. Those books usually consist of lists. They list photographs, items, names, descriptions of art works and the like. Let me list a few of these books in order to give some examples of Boltanski's obsession with listing:

- In *Liste des artistes ayant participé à la Biennale de Venise 1895–1995* (1995), Boltanski lists the names of artists who have been shown at the Biennale of Venice.
- In *Erwerbungen rheinischer Kunstmuseen in den Jahren 1935–1945* (1993c), Boltanski lists all the acquisitions of museums in the Rhineland area in Germany between 1935 and 1945.
- In *Diese Kinder suchen ihre Eltern* (1994a), he lists the posters printed by the Red Cross of children who were left displaced or homeless in devastated post-war Germany. Each poster has a portrait of the child and information on special characteristics in an attempt to find a family for them again.
- In *Archives* (1989), he lists photographs which he cut in 1972 from a weekly journal about crime. The listing shows the faces of perpetrators and victims without indicating the difference.
- In *Liste des Suisses morts dans le canton du Valais en 1991* (1993a), he lists all Swiss inhabitants of the canton Valais who died in the year 1991. The list is organized on the basis of the days of that year, of who died on which day in 1991.
- In *Archive of the Carnegie International 1896–1991* (1992a), he lists alphabetically the names of the artists who were included in the Carnegie

international shows between 1896 and 1991, indicating in each case in which year they were presented. Boltanski is himself included in the list. His work was shown in 1991.

- In *Les Suisses morts* (1991), he lists the portraits of people who died in the Swiss canton Valais. These portraits were taken from obituary notices of the deceased, cut from the regional Swiss paper *Le nouveliste du Valais* in the 1980s.

In yet another artist book Boltanski demonstrates the fact that the referential function of lists is to a certain extent illusionary. This book consists of the real telephone directory of the Swedish town Malmö. The directory is from the year 1993. All he changed was the cover of the original directory. A white sheet of paper was glued on top of the original cover, printed with the name of the artist, the name of the museum responsible for this publication (Malmö Konsthall), and the title *Les habitants de Malmö* (The Inhabitants of Malmö, 1993b). The telephone directory as artist book foregrounds how the referential nature of pragmatic lists is ultimately illusionary. The referentiality begins to evaporate from the moment such a listing is being performed. More and more people of the list will move to other places or they will die. After some time the list only provides the names of people who once lived in Malmö but who are now gone or dead. Boltanski foregrounds the illusionary referentiality of the directory by adding a four-page errata to the directory. A three-page list of names of people is introduced by the following statement 'You can't reach these inhabitants of Malmö on the phone anymore. They died in 1993' (Boltanski, 1993b: n.p.). Boltanski's telephone directory creates a Holocaust effect comparable to what his well-known installations do, but this time it is the listing of names that is responsible for it. Over time the directory becomes a memorial of all the former inhabitants of Malmö. Similarly to what Boltanski did with the Malmö telephone directory, the referential function of these previously mentioned lists is challenged. But the way he undermines the referential function is now different. These lists stand for human beings or objects in the real world. Like arrows they refer to them. But in small remarks in the introductions to these artist books Boltanski redirects their representational function. In the case of the book project *Diese Kinder suchen ihre Eltern* (These children are looking for their parents) he introduces the Red Cross posters in the following way:

Now fifty years have passed, and when I look at the faces of these lost children I find myself trying to imagine what has become of them. They have become part of the post-war history of Germany with all its changes. Has fate brought them happy or unhappy lives, made them rich or poor? I would like to find them again. They are about my own age, and their history is similar in some ways to mine, to ours. We too, are in search of our parents. (Boltanski, 1994a: 7)

The referential reading of the list transforms into a metaphorical reading of it. Whereas the portraits in combination with the added information first referred to specific children, now grown up, Boltanski reads the listed portraits in what they have in common with himself, or with anybody: in one way or another we are all looking for our parents. Whereas the enumeration of lists is usually seen as an alternative for articulation by means of analogy or symbolization, Boltanski creates analogies on the basis of enumeration. His reading of the list is metaphorical. The same semiotic transformation takes place in the presentation of his book *Les Suisses morts* (The Dead Swiss). Explaining why this book exclusively focuses on Swiss people, he states the following:

Previously I made works concerned with dead Jews. But 'Jew' and 'dead' go too well together, the combination is too illuminating. By contrast, there is nothing more normal than the Swiss. There is really no reason at all why they should die; in a certain sense they are more frightening, because they are like us. (Boltanski, 1993a: 86)

Boltanski reads the list of dead Swiss as a *memento mori*, as a warning that we should all remember our mortality. The referentiality of the list is not completely cancelled but it is overruled by the analogy with the fact that the mortality of these Swiss people is not different from our mortality.

What exactly enables Boltanski's reading of lists as metaphorical instead of as referential? Although each item in the list has a referent, the fact that the list as such makes the impression of being endless makes the referentiality lose its specificity. The referentiality becomes general or abstract, which creates a paradox. The gradual evaporation of referentiality is an effect produced by listing: the more endless the list, the less specific its referentiality. When the referential function loses its strength, the symbolic reading of the list imposes itself.

Seen from this paradoxical effect of listing it is not really surprising that since the opening of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC in 1982, designed by Maya Lin, so many other memorials have been modelled on this memorial consisting of a list of all US military who died in Vietnam. The listing of individual names seems to make these soldiers' referentially present.⁴ Each name stands for a soldier who died. Their absence or death is momentarily transcended; referentially they are made present again. But the listing, seemingly endless, of all those names has an opposite effect. These memorials are so effective because the listing results in an overwhelming effect of absence. Ultimately, it is the incredible, that is, uncountable number of the people who died that overwhelms us. Whereas each individual soldier can be imagined, made 'present' by means of a referential name or portrait, the endlessness of the list cannot be imagined. The unimaginable number of people who died strikes us by their absence. This is the moment

that the referential function transforms into a metaphorical – or symbolic – one, and the pragmatic list that can be consulted to know who died, transforms into a memorial for all those who died. And perhaps also into a *memento mori* for those who still have to die. The success of such memorials in the form of a list depends entirely on the dissolution of referentiality.

The Imposition of Categories

Boltanski's obsessive listing shows another problem with the referentiality of pragmatic lists. At different moments in his career Boltanski published artist books that consist of inventories of his own works. Whereas Marcel Duchamp archived his oeuvre by means of the archival practice of storage in his *Green and White Box*, Boltanski archives his oeuvre by means of a listing of his works. In 1992 he published a so-called *Catalogue* (Boltanski, 1992b). This catalogue lists chronologically all his books, printed matter and 'Ephemera' of the period 1966 to 1991. His other art works, installations and exhibitions are not included in this list. All items are numbered; the list consists of 80 items. The *Catalogue* looks like a real catalogue: it has no image on the cover, only the name of the artist, the title and the names of the publishers (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln; Portikus, Frankfurt am Main). It could be the kind of catalogue that is used in archives or museums. In 2009 Boltanski published a book titled *Archives*. This book looks like a typical archival cahier that is used in archives or libraries for archival recording. It looks administrative, utterly functional and objective. This archival cahier is wrapped in the kind of plastic bag that is also used in archives to protect documents, to keep them acid free and dust free. The archival 'look' of Boltanski's books and catalogues is strongest and most convincing in the case of the publication titled *Lost* (1994b), made on the occasion of exhibitions in 1994 in Glasgow, Dublin and Halifax. This publication consists of a cardboard sleeve containing a folder that can be closed with an elastic band. The folder contains several folders with papers, and index cards organized in bundles. The form of this publication looks in all details like the folders used in archives for keeping documents. Also the index cards inescapably evoke archival organization. *Archives* (2009) lists all of his works that were not included in the earlier catalogue of his books and printed matters. It contains a *catalogue raisonné*, a list of publications about his work, a list of personal exhibitions, and a list of collective exhibitions. The *catalogue raisonné* is organized on the basis of the different 'genres' practised by Boltanski: his paintings, his reference vitrines, his inventories, his family albums, his biscuit tins, and more.

The fact that Boltanski published listings of his own works at different moments in his career demonstrates that those listings are already not complete the moment that they appear. The catalogue that lists all of his books and printed matter is itself not included in the inventory in which

this listing is performed. This indicates that listing is a time-bound process: it lists past items, but not present or future items. In the case of a living artist such listing can never be complete. If total control in the sense of complete overview is being intended, then this listing should take the form of an open-ended practice. But the two listings by Boltanski of his own works point also at another characteristic of listing. Listing is the result of distinctions imposed on the work. One listing concerns his artist books and printed matter, the other one his other artistic works, his installations and exhibitions. Of course, this is a very conventional distinction because the genre of the book is ambiguous, not only used by artists but also by writers. To make a separate list for this ambiguous genre seems at first sight not arbitrary and imposed on the work, but seems almost 'natural' and inherent to the kind of work. Another one of Boltanski's lists makes the arbitrariness of categories imposed on the work more visible. In his *Inventaire du Cabinet d'art graphique 1977–1998* he lists the acquisitions of the Prints and Drawings Department of the Centre Pompidou in Paris between 1977 and 1998. Curator Jonas Storsve explains in the introduction that Boltanski's listing did not pursue completeness but was the result of strict distinctions and categories imposed on all prints and drawings. They were the following:

- aesthetic criteria do not matter;
- the listing concerns the artist who had entered the collection not his or her works; each artist is going to be presented by one work, arbitrarily chosen;
- the artists are listed alphabetically;
- works with the following characteristics will not be included in the list:
 - those of which the size is bigger than one metre
 - those that consist of oil paint on paper
 - works that incorporate lamps
 - architectural drawings
 - carnets and artist books
 - the collection of illustrations titled *L'oiseau qui n'existe pas* of which the first donation was done before the official opening of the Centre Pompidou
 - diptyques
 - works that consist of series of which each part is framed independently
 - oeuvres that consist of volumes
 - drawings representing a rhinoceros. (Boltanski, 2000: n.p.)

Especially the rules of exclusion turn Boltanski's list into a Borgesian list that is the result of arbitrary, incomprehensible distinctions and categories. The first criterion, aesthetic criteria do not matter, imposes negatively a distinction on the prints and drawings collection of a museum that is usually central to art museums. Whereas museums and archives are closely related

because they are institutionally dependent on storage, inventories and catalogues, they differ in the imposition of aesthetic criteria. Boltanski's listing has resulted in a list in which masterworks of a certain artist are excluded and marginal works and marginal artists are incorporated. Boltanski's listing of works of the Centre Pompidou's Prints and Drawings Department foregrounds the awareness that listings are only partly the result of what they referentially refer to. They are to a great extent the result of the distinctions and categories on the basis of which the listing takes place. What is made present by means of listing is not simply the referential world of objects implied in the list, but the conceptual categories used by the archivist and imposed on the referential world.

The Addendum of Lists

In the same year that Guus Luijters presented his *In Memoriam* for Dutch Jewish and Roma children, a so-called *Addendum* (Luitjers, 2012b) was published. This *Addendum* contains new lists that were not part of the original lists of *In Memoriam*. First of all, a list of addresses frequently referred to, such as of pioneer camps, or of orphanages. Second, a list of Dutch children, who were not deported from Dutch transit camps, but who had been sent to other countries by their parents, had been caught and then transported from transit camps in Belgium or France, namely Mechelen and Drancy. Luijters regretted that his first listing was the result of the decision to insert only children in the list who had been deported from the Netherlands, even if these children were originally German, Hungarian, Turkish, Belgian or French. Because of this curatorial decision Dutch children deported from other countries than the Netherlands remained unmentioned and invisible in the list. His reconsideration indicates, however, the crucial importance of the agent who makes the list. Comparable to what Boltanski did when he made a list of all the acquisitions of the Prints and Drawings Department of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, it is clear that Luijters is responsible for what the list looks like in crucial ways. The list is not referential in an unproblematic way. It is also the result of categories, motivated or not, chosen by the list maker or curator of the list.

After the two added lists, a list follows with corrections in the transport lists out of which the original *In Memoriam* consisted. In the introduction to these corrected transport lists, the kind of mistakes that have been corrected are listed. As becomes clear, the list is presumably never complete, but produces new lists, and lists within lists. There never seems to be an end to this process. The question that imposes itself then is if this proliferation of lists is the result of a listing mania or listing obsession, in this case the one of Guus Luijters, (instead of the differently fuelled obsession of the Nazis of the *Sicherheitsdienst*), or is the referential function of lists by definition illusionary, and lists can be expanded endlessly.

It is not only Luijters *In Memoriam* that raises this question. It seems to be a structural problem of all works based on lists commemorating the Holocaust. The memorial list that has served as source of inspiration for *In Memoriam*, Serge Klarsfeld's *Mémorial des enfants juives déportés de France* (1995) poses this question even more pertinently. This memorial list does not have one 'erratum', or 'addendum' but has eight of them, in French called *additif*.⁵ After the memorial had been opened in 1994, eight extra lists with new information and corrections appeared from 1995 until 2007. Those *additives* did not only make all kinds of corrections in the original list, but also added new categories of listing to the original one. When one begins to list, there seems to be no end to this impulse.

The Mnemonic Function of Listing

Since the Enlightenment when the rhetorical tradition fell into decline, the referential function of listing has become the dominant one. In the rhetorical tradition of the classical period the organization of a list had, instead, especially a mnemonic function. When things are arranged and presented in a given order they help us to remember them by recalling the place they occupied in the image of the world. Listing as a mnemonic device was especially practised by means of an architectural walk through a building. Through compiling all the architectural elements one passed by when walking through a specific building, one could remember the elements, or building blocks, of an argumentation, which one wanted to 'build' into a speech to be delivered. By remembering the tour through the building, one was able to remember different building blocks of one's argument in the right order.⁶

At first sight the mnemonic function of listing seems to be highly pertinent for those Holocaust memorials that use listing as their main device. For their main function is also mnemonic. But what this mnemonic function of listing exactly consists of, how it works and what it does, first has to be further examined. In what follows, I will discuss some works that are highly self-reflexive in their use of listing in order to activate memory.

The mnemonic function of listing seems to have been reactivated in texts by Georges Perec. His books *Espèces d'espaces* (Species of Spaces, 1999) from 1974 and also his well-known *La vie mode d'emploi* (Life: A User's Manual, 2008) from 1978 consist of lists. The role of memory is not immediately clear, but minor remarks indicate the crucial function of memory. The first book *Species of Spaces* is clearly not narrative. Browsing through the book we immediately identify a great number of lists, but in the overall framework of the text we do not immediately recognize a visual pattern of listing; at that level no rhetoric of listing seems to have been used. The table of contents indicates, however, that the sequence of chapters forms a list of spaces, arranged from nearby to spaces further away, which embed the earlier spaces. The very first space is the space that brings about the intimate space

of reading and imagination, namely the page. From there we go to the bed (where the writer writes and reads), next to the room, the apartment, the apartment building, the street, the neighbourhood, the town, the countryside, the country, Europe, the World, and finally Space. In the last chapter on 'Space' the nature of this listing is described in a nutshell by means of an anecdote told by Perec about how, when he was young, probably as all children did, he wrote his address in his calendar:

Georges Perec
18, Rue de l'Assomption
Staircase A
Third Floor
Right-hand door
Paris 16e
Seine
France
Europe
The World
The Universe. (Perec, 1999: 84)

In each chapter Perec describes from a diversity of angles the space the chapter is about: physically, functionally, activities that take place in that space, memories connected to the space, and so on. In the chapter about the bedroom Perec relates memories evoked by this space:

My memories are attached to the narrowness of that bed, to the narrowness of that room, to the lingering bitterness of the tea that was too strong and too cold. [evoked *mémoires* follow]. That summer, I drank 'pink gins', or glasses of gin improved by a drop of angostura, I flirted, somewhat fruitlessly, with the daughter of a cotton-mill-owner who had recently returned from Alexandria, I decided to become a writer. (Perec, 1999: 21)

It is clear that the bedroom is a privileged space in the sense that it succeeds better than any other space to activate memories. This privileged role of the bedroom turns the whole project of *Espèces d'espaces* into a Proustian endeavour. And indeed, *Species of Spaces* is a rigorous application of Proust as a method of writing, with the difference that it does not limit itself to the bedroom but also includes a gradual extension of spaces within which the bedroom is embedded.

These spaces are real, physical and material. That is especially true for the bedroom, which can be described in great detail. But real and material they may be, time wears them away. In the two final paragraphs of the last chapter 'Space', Perec reflects on the instability and tangibility of spaces.

Spaces fail as points of reference. It is at this moment that Perec deviates from a Proustian poetics. Also, spaces ultimately fail in resurrecting memories, because spaces are not stable but fragile. Spaces change over time, or even disappear. That is why they cannot be counted upon as storage of memories. The solution for this instability of spaces is mediating them by means of listing them. The transposition from real space to written space safeguards the mnemonic function of space. The very last words of the chapter indicate that the mediation of space through writing, or more specific listing, can guarantee the survival of memories: 'To write, to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs' (Perec, 1999: 92). It is this closure of *Species of Spaces* that explains the function of the listing of spaces of which this text consists. It is not space as such that performs the mnemonic function. Spaces can only have that function after having been mediated in the form of a remembered or written list.

Perec's experimental text demonstrates the importance of listing. Material objects and spaces, like his bedroom, but also traditional monuments, are not stable. Although they are material, they change over time, they fall apart, are destroyed in wars, in natural disasters, or more profane, by whatever kind of human agency. But mediated in the form of a list, memories can survive. Because the wreckage of time will ultimately destroy material objects; yet memories will survive when they are mediated in traces. For to write, but also to list, concerns 'to wrest a few scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs' (Perec, 1999: 92).

This mnemonic potential of the listing of spaces seems to be negatively confirmed by another experimental list of Perec. In 1975 he published *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu Parisien* (An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris, 2010). This text is in many respects the opposite of *Species of Spaces*. Like that text it is not narrative. He described the text himself as the result of a quest of 'what happens when nothing happens'. But in contrast to *Species of Spaces* it is not the spatial dimension on which the listing of different chapters and sections is based, but the temporal dimension. From the beginning to the end the text offers descriptions of only one single space: Place Saint-Sulpice in Paris. What he describes during different moments of the day, and that during three days, is what he records at this Parisian square. The only variation in this sequence of observations is the location at the square from which he observes what happens at the square. This can be the Tabac Saint-Sulpice, the Café de la Mairie, the Café La Fontaine Saint-Sulpice, a bench (looking in the direction of the fountain). Perec returns to the same locations at different days. In every section he lists the sequence of his observations at the square. So, he does not describe the physical

characteristics of the place, but rather what evolves temporally: one observation after the other. As a reader of these lists we follow Perec, the focalizer. This results in lists like the following:

(date: 18 October 1974, Time: 12.40 pm, location: Café de la Mairie)

[...]

An 86 passes by. An 87 passes by. A 63 passes by
People stumble. Micro-accidents.

A 96 passes by. A 70 passes by.

It is twenty after one.

Return (uncertain) of previously seen individuals: a young boy in a navy blue peacoat holding a plastic bag in his hand passes by the café again

An 86 passes by. An 86 passes by. A 63 passes by.

The café is full

On the plaza a child is taking his dog for a run (looks like Snowy)

Right by the café, at the foot of the window and at three different spots, a fairly young man draws a sort of 'V' on the sidewalk with chalk, with a kind of question mark inside it (land art?)

A 63 passes by. (Perec, 2010: 12)

In this text the writer Perec seems to be imprisoned in the present tense of his observations. He records the sequence of his observations, which does not result in a narrative account of what took place at the Parisian square but in a listing of what he saw moment after moment. But there is no temporal coherence, no cause-and-effect relation, between the sequences of observations. The only coherence is spatial: all these observations were recorded at the same place, Square Saint-Sulpice in Paris. On the second day there is, however, a moment that fatigue undermines his observation. His focalization is momentarily displaced from the external world of the square to his inner, subjective world. He then lists the following observations:

A Paris-Vision bus goes by. The tourists have headphones

The sky is gray. Fleeting sunny spells.

Weary vision: obsessive fear of apple-green 2CVs.

Unsatisfied curiosity (what I came here to find, the memory floating in this café...).

(Perec, 2010: 33)

The displacement of his focalization to his inner world makes the reader aware of Perec's fear of apple-green 2CVs. This is indeed a recurring topos in his observations. But having now access to his inner world leads, subsequently, to the revelation of Perec's motivation behind the experimental

project *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. The project was a systematic procedure for the quest for memories. But taking the listing of time instead of the listing of space as its structural principle this quest utterly fails. No memories are released by using this structural principle.

Yet, there is more about this listing of observations, moment after moment. This list of external observations makes the reader aware of the degree to which our perception of the outer world is formulated through categories and classifications that are utterly conventional or even stereotypical. There is no development in Perec's observations (no narrative), his observations do not show a learning process: no gradual increasing capability to see more, better, or more intensely. The only moment that his observations become less formulaic and conventional, the only moment that he can see more, is when his focalization for just a few seconds displaces itself from the external to his inner world.

Listing Photographs

Most of the Holocaust memorials using listing as their main device seem to suffer from the same shortcomings as Perec's *An Attempt*. The kind of traces to the past offered by these memorials is also extremely formulaic and conventional. All we get to know is the most basic coordinates of the people commemorated: their names, dates and places of birth, and dates of places of when they died. Their individuality is paradoxically defined only by what distinguishes them differentially, that is chronologically and regionally. It is place and time that substantiates the name. The contours of each individual person remain, however, invisible. Yet, in the case of these Holocaust Memorials the listing of names is significant in a way that cannot be compared to Perec's practice of listing. Listing the names of Holocaust victims also means giving back to them their names. These names were taken from them in the camps as a way of deindividualizing them. They had become anonymous. In some camps their names were replaced by a tattooed number. So, listing names of Holocaust victims is a device that reattributes individuality to them.

The contrast between Perec's *Species of Spaces* and his *An Attempt to Exhaust a Place in Paris* provides us with more insight into the difference between Luijter's *In Memoriam* and Klarfeld's *Mémorial* discussed earlier and the Holocaust memorials that consist just of names, dates and places. In the Dutch context, for instance, the *Digital Monument of the Jewish Community* (2005), mentioned in the beginning of this text, and the publication from 1995, also titled *In Memoriam* that contains the names of 101,414 Dutch Jews deported from the Netherlands and who died in the Holocaust. Why is it that Klarfeld's and Luijters's memorial lists seem to be so much more effective as memorials than the other Holocaust memorial lists, whereas these were also intended to function as memorials? Is it because the latter

are first of all historical instruments, which offer information, whereas in the case of Luijters and Klarfeld the commemorative function dominates?

I don't think it has anything to do with the fact that the latter two memorials are exclusively devoted to children. This difference would only create a sentimental effect on the viewer. A fundamental difference between Luijters's and Klarfeld's memorials and the other memorial listings is the addition of photographic portraits to the names and dates of the victims. These photos document their lives before they were transported. Usually, they were taken as family portraits. Or they were taken at school, to document a certain age when they were in a certain grade. These photographs make it possible to imagine lives still untouched by the Nazi persecution. Although by means of a single image, the individual portrait *reconstructs* the life that we know no longer exists. At the same time the photographic portrait confronts us with the fact that this life belongs to the past. It is the medium of photography as such that connotes that what we see is a past that has been erased.⁷

The addition of the photographic portrait compensates for the lack of referentiality that comes with names in the course of time. In my reflection on listing I have distinguished a double function of the list. First of all it is referential; each item of the list refers to something or somebody. The list as a whole evokes endlessness and makes us aware of the enormous scale of the Holocaust. The commemoration of individual victims is served by the first function, whereas the scale of the Holocaust as such is evoked by the second one. The referential function becomes, however, weaker over time. For the second and third generation of survivors the names and their coordinates still speak to them. On the basis of these names they can reimagine the relatives or friends they lost. But for generations that come after them the referential function evaporates and it is the other function of evoking the enormity of the Holocaust that remains.

It is this presence of the photographic portrait that enables the list to function as memorial for generations that have no personal connection to the victims. The memorial listings of names, dates and places commemorate people who died, not their lives before they died. It was Perec's experimental listing in *Attempt to Exhaust a Place* that made us aware of the degree to which our perception of the outer world is formulated through categories and classifications that are utterly conventional or even stereotypical. The listing of names, dates and places is not able to escape this effect of the conventional and stereotypical. The victims of the Holocaust are only defined by their names, date and place of birth, date and place of death. Although all this information *delineates* what is specific for one individual person, these elements are at the same time rather powerless in evoking what this individuality consisted of.

The listing of descriptions of different spaces in Perec's *Species of Spaces* is, however, much more effective and successful in activating memories and in

evoking what is personally specific. From this I deduce that the *In Memoriam* for children, not the names and dates as such but the photographs, overwhelm us with the intimate existence of the children who died.⁸ The visual details represented by the photographic medium confront us with the living existence of the children who were murdered. In the case of each photograph we are drawn into the life it represents, knowing what follows. This happens, even if we have no familial relation with the individuals in the photographs.

Although the names, dates and places produce a referent, a referent that is one individual person, this referentiality remains at the level of information. The referent is only embodied when the photograph is added. It is only then that historical information transforms into commemoration of that person, of a person who can be imagined. The embodied individuality of each child is, however, at the same time, transcended. This is the paradoxical effect of the seemingly endless list. As explained before, the endlessness of the list makes referentiality lose its specificity. Referentiality becomes general or abstract which creates a paradox. The gradual evaporation of referentiality is an effect produced by listing: the more endless the list, the less specific its referentiality. Whereas thanks to the photographs each child can be imagined, the endlessness of the list cannot be imagined. The unimaginable number of children who died, by their absence, strikes us. This is the moment that the referential function transforms into a metaphorical – or symbolic one – and the pragmatic list that can be consulted to know who died, transforms into a memorial for all those who died. So, the children are commemorated in two respects: first, as anonymous beings, all looking the same and part of an unimaginable number of children who died in the Holocaust; second, through their portraits as individual living beings. It is then paradoxically their anonymity that contributes to the effect of unimaginability. What is now imaginable is their individual existence; what remains unimaginable is the number of children who died. Their individual existence is not commemorated by means of their deaths, as happens in the memorial listings of names, dates and places, but by means of the lives they were living before being murdered.

Notes

1. See http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/hall_of_names/what_are_pot.asp (accessed 1 May 2013).
2. See <http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en> (accessed 1 May 2013).
3. In her article 'Bad Holocaust Art', Katherine Biber argues that in many cases our 'obsession with fascism' bears an 'uncanny resemblance' to the phenomenon itself (2009: 116).
4. Maya Lin Vietnam memorial orders the list of names according to the day the soldiers died – not alphabetically – which gives an insight to the dimension of the war. This ordering places the individual into the course of the events.
5. The first *additif* appeared in 1995, no. 2 in 1997, no. 3 in 1998, no. 4 in 2000, no. 5 in 2003, no. 6 in 2004, no. 7 in 2006, and no. 8 in 2007.
6. For the role architecture played in the mnemonic practices in the classical period, see Yates (2001 [1966]).
7. For an analysis of the photographic image in terms of a reality that unavoidably belongs to the past, see Roland Barthes' seminal text *Camera Lucida* (1981).
8. For the role of photography see Marianne Hirsch (1997).

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