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Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a site of memory

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Signs of the Shoah
The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory

David Duindam

Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory investigates the postwar development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, an in situ Shoah memorial museum in Amsterdam. During World War II, over forty-six thousand Jews were imprisoned in this former theater before being deported to the transit camps. In 1962, it became the first national Shoah memorial of the Netherlands and in 1993, a small exhibition was added. In the spring of 2016, the National Holocaust Museum opened, which consists of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and a new satellite space across the street.

This dissertation deals with the question how this site of painful heritage became an important memorial museum dedicated to the memory of the persecution of the Dutch Jews. It is argued that this former theater was not a site of oblivion before 1962 but rather a material reminder of the persecution of the Jews which at that time was not an articulated part of the hegemonic memory discourse of the war in the Netherlands. The memorial was gradually appropriated by important Jewish institutions through the installment of Yom HaShoah, an educational exhibition and a wall of names. These are analyzed not by focusing on material authenticity, but instead a case is made for latent indexicality: visitors actively produce narratives by searching for traces of the past. This entails an ongoing creative process of meaning-making that allows sites of memory to expand and proliferate beyond their borders.

An important question therefore is how the Hollandsche Schouwburg affects its direct surroundings.
SIGNS OF THE SHOAH
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