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BUT THERE WAS LOVE

SHAPING THE MEMORY OF THE SHOAH

*Edited by Michal Govrin, Dana Freibach-Heifetz,
Ety BenZaken and Raya Morag*

PERSPECTIVES ON JEWISH
TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

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But There Was Love

Perspectives on Jewish Texts and Contexts



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Shaping the Memory of the Shoah

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Michal Govrin, Dana Freibach-Heifetz, Ety BenZaken
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Michal Govrin and Raya Morag

But There Was Love: Shaping the Memory of the Shoah: Introduction to the English Edition

Never Again Is Now

The English edition of *But There Was Love—Shaping the Memory of the Shoah* proposes a new paradigm for Shoah memory and remembrance. It is derived from the four-year workings of a group of researchers and artists that met at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. The group sought to rethink Shoah memory and its ramifications in Israel and in today's global cultural, social, psychological and political reality after 80 years (1945–2025). The research group was formed by Shoah survivors and members of the second and third generation. Its activities included lectures, interviews, discussions, an exhibition, the publication of a book, and the establishment of a global Jewish project based around the *Hitkansut* remembrance ritual.

The group calls for a new conceptualization of Shoah remembrance. It presents a new epistemology centered around the undoing of the long-held attitude seeing the Shoah through Jewish victimhood as the sole, ultimate, and legitimate position. Instead, the group positions the extraordinary Jewish and human struggle in facing dehumanization and extermination as the essence of the Shoah. In the midst of the Nazi systematic mass murder, the multiple modes of resistance of women, men and children stand as unique expressions of humanity. Shifting the focus of remembrance from victimhood to human resistance and resilience supports a call for an active mode of remembrance—to remember with responsibility—that confronts our present time with profound ethical challenges.

The sacrificial and victimhood-oriented attitude toward the Shoah was embedded in its naming by a Latin term, Holocaust, that semantically and culturally anchors the event in a sacrificial context and tradition. Accordingly, we preferred to use the term Shoah rather than Holocaust in the title of this volume.

The global collective effort to gather archival documents and written testimonies of the Holocaust continues. Sadly, as the last survivors of the Shoah pass away, we are fast approaching the end of the first generation's oral (face-to-face) testimonial endeavor. The dark reality of genocides and attempted exterminations perpetrated around the world since the Holocaust up to the third decade of the twenty-first century, once again teaches us the importance of respect for

human dignity and integrity as the ethical challenge and the core legacy of the Shoah.

We hope that *But There Was Love—Shaping the Memory of the Shoah* will contribute to a worldwide recognition that the Shoah, as a formative event of Western civilization, should pave our way for responsibly re-empowering the decree “Never Again Is Now.”

Michal Govrin

Preface: How to Remember the Shoah



Fig. 1: Fanny Haim, Ioannina, 25.3.1944.

Ever since I first saw the photograph of the woman from Ioannina,¹ I have not been able to get it out of my mind. Surrounded by members of the Jewish community in the final moments before they were transported to their death, she lifts up her face beseechingly. In 2009, when the photograph was found, her granddaughter identified it as the image of Fanny Haim, who had survived Auschwitz and died in 2008. The sadistic gaze of the SS photographer who captured her in his lens had already excluded her and the Jews of Ioannina

1 Photo taken by a Nazi/German soldier. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Deportation_of_Jews_of_Ioannina_March_1944# (last access: 10.7.2016).

from the family of humankind, marking them as garbage to be disposed of. But in this photograph the humanity of her expression blots out his objectifying gaze, draws us toward her, transforms us into sharers of her destiny, and ceaselessly demands of us: Remember, and turn this memory into resistance to the eradication of a human being, into a commemoration of humanity.

Seventy years after the Holocaust, with the dwindling of the generation of survivors who carry within them the horrors of that event, how will its memory be transmitted to those who were not there, to future generations? The survivors charged with the obligation to transmit the memory have formulated this dilemma starkly:²

We, the generation of Holocaust survivors, are becoming fewer. In not so many years there will no longer be upon this earth any person who will be able to testify, 'I remember what happened in the Holocaust.' There will remain only memoirs and studies, photographs and films, and testimony of survivors. Then the memory of the Holocaust will change from being an imposed fate, seared into our flesh and our souls, to a historic mission that humanity and future generations must carry forward with responsibility and to which they must imbue content and substance.

The memory of the Shoah contains many voices, many ways of bridging our memory of the past and our responsibility to the present. Let me begin with the most personal.

A Personal Note

I am a woman and mother who lives in Jerusalem. I am also the daughter of a survivor. On arriving in Israel in 1948, my mother, Rina Govrin (Regina Rega Poser Laub), underwent plastic surgery to remove the number tattooed on her arm at Auschwitz. As a child, I did not know that my mother “was in the Holocaust,” that she had survived murderous *aktionen* (attacks and roundups) in the Krakow ghetto; the concentration camps at Płaszów, Auschwitz, and Birkenau; and the “death march” to Bergen-Belsen. Nor did I know that she was saved thanks to the willpower of ten women who called themselves the *Zehnerschaft* (she was the only nonreligious woman among nine ultra-Orthodox women). My mother never told me about the murder of her first husband; about how she ran after the lorry with children from the *Kinderheim* (children’s “home”) at Płaszów, among whom was her eight-year-old son on his way to the gas chambers; nor

² From “Minshar Hanitzolim” [The survivors’ manifesto], written by Tzvi Gil, Raoul Teitelbaum, Prof. Israel Gutman, and the chairman of Yad Vashem, Avner Shalev, Yad Vashem, 2002.

about how her friends held her back. I also did not know that after the liberation she commanded the “Bricha” (the Illegal Escape) in the British zone of Germany, part of a movement responsible for smuggling hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe to Mediterranean ports on their clandestine escape route to Palestine.

My mother kept her silence. She refused to be a victim. But the emotional scars of her story were burned into me. Vague negative images during childhood, outlines of horror and struggle, of weakness and guilt, of the power of survival and Eros: zones of pre-memory that become the deep foundations of story, of myth.

Twenty years after her death, I could no longer run from the duty to give voice to the silenced memory, to “remember” that which I had never lived. After years of denial, what had been seared into me demanded to be exposed. In search of my mother’s story, I turned to the women who had survived with her and were still alive, to archives, to a meeting with the German prosecutor in the Hannover trial in which my mother testified against one of the Krakow ghetto commanders; to a report deposited at the Haganah Museum relating my mother’s activities in the “Bricha”; and to an unexpected meeting with the woman who had been the kindergarten teacher in the Krakow ghetto of my mother’s son, my exterminated brother. Opaque traces of people, of events. Crumbs of material, like the pieces of body tissue collected after a terror attack.

And the rest? What was the meaning of those unsettling tatters I had discovered of my mother’s story? And what constitutes the “memory” of someone who was never there?

Fiction and Memory

From among the crumbs of information a fiction necessarily takes shape. A historian—or anyone for that matter—needs a burst of imagination to fill in what is missing, to weave a story out of events and chronology. As for me, I excavated the non-verbal emotions transmitted to me in my attempt to create the “living” characters of my mother, her first husband, her son who perished. Fiction enabled me to get closer to them, at last, to give them presence.³ The story’s power made it possible to create continuity, albeit partial, between the “there” and the here-and-now; between that which was cast out as “the other planet” and its multifaceted and mighty continuations, whether revealed or concealed.

³ Govrin, Michal. *Mother’s Silence*, novel, forthcoming.

And what is the compulsive urge to transmit, to tell? Is it responsibility? Duty? To the past? To the present? And what are the forms and formulations of transmitted memory, both personal and collective? And how can we name the *unnamable*?

The fictionalization of history in general, and of the extreme case of the Holocaust in particular, raises fundamental questions concerning the processes that occur during the transmission of memory—on individual and communal levels. Is it possible to trace the emotional burns (the “radioactive fall-out” coined by Yolanda Gampel)? In contrast to personal testimonies (whose mode of telling is nonetheless subject to controversy), is the transmission of memory a mere assembling of historical documents or is it not inevitably an expression of the affect (the burns) involved in the imaginative act of filling in the gaps between two “details of reality”? What are the neurological, psychological, historical, cultural tools needed to understand these processes?

What are the modes of writing, of articulation, of transmitted memory? How do we transmit a complex memory of a struggle to survive, or, alternatively, the memory of weakness and betrayal, of cruelty and murder? Does the power of imagination, and most especially the artistic imagination, enable us to be more intimately attentive to events and their multiple facets?

The Holocaust, as a test case, points to another poignant aspect of the question of fiction. Nazism made unprecedented use of fictitious and highly effective modes of propaganda; in carrying out the Holocaust, and throughout each of the increasing stages of atrocity, Nazism intentionally used deceit, make-believe, and staging. The deportees were told falsehoods; the camps were masked in macabre disguises; and even the traces of death were immediately erased, hidden or camouflaged by misleading sceneries or “masked” products. The Holocaust took place as part of a tendentious fictional story, a spectacle with the proportions of an eschatological apotheosis, all of this serving its perpetrators. The Nazis’ fictional disguise did not cease with their defeat but serves as the ongoing basis for Holocaust denial.

Yet beyond the initial shock that the memory of the Shoah is necessarily a construct of fiction emerges another dimension: that of the responsibility of shaping it. If this memory is not an imposed one, we can be responsible to the way we shape it. We can turn it into a tool in the continuous struggle against the erasure and annihilation of the human face.

The mounds of rubble today are flourishing cities, the killing fields and the mass graves are covered over by fertile fields, but their deep ramifications linger. The survivors’ bleeding wounds have been covered by a scab that has dulled the pain and enabled them to build new lives and to have children. But the generations after the rupture bear the residue within them, as individuals, nations, eth-

nic groups, and states. Generations of the biological descendants of all the participants in the extreme event of the Holocaust—the descendants of the survivors, of the perpetrators, of passive observers, and of righteous non-Jews—bear traces of the trauma, both that which was verbalized and that which was silenced. Those traces are expressed directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly.

What to Transmit—and How?

From the moment I felt the duty imposed on me to tell what had been silenced in my mother's life, I understood that what I had experienced as a most intimate and hidden secret was dizzyingly like the experiences of many others of the second and third generation; that my most personal story was not an individual one, but a shared one.

But that understanding left me with urgent questions. More than eighty years after the conclusion of the Second World War, with the dwindling of the generation of survivors who carry within them the horrors of that event, how will its memory be transmitted to the next generations of those who were not there? How can one retain the memory of the individual human being at the heart of the collective memory? And how can one keep the appeal to humanity at the heart of the transmitted memory of an event whose core was the extermination of human beings? Finally, how can one transform the transmission of memory so that it not only looks to the past or perpetuates the trauma but also renders it into a life force and becomes a commitment in the here-and-now?

The Transmitted Memory and Fiction Research Group

In 2011, with a sense of urgency, I approached The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute to found a discussion group. The group would study the ways of shaping the memory of the Shoah and transmitting it from a variety of aspects drawn from different disciplines and in multiple modes. At its center would stand the question of the transmission of a trauma, based on the extreme case of the Shoah and the modes of its transmission to the individual and to society.

The research group members were artists, researchers, curators, historians, brain scientists, and psychoanalysts; they came from three generations and from varied origins and backgrounds. We convened monthly between 2012 and 2015.

The multi-voice discourse enabled us to examine critically and from various perspectives the ways in which the memory had been transmitted.

However, from my experience as a theater director and a writer, and no less from my own personal background, I knew that we could only have a deep discussion if an existential connection were created between us and each of us shared our unique relation to memory transmission. First of all, the personal dimension of memory as a living force needed to emerge. Thus, from the very first meeting, the boundaries of profession and academic research were crossed, facilitating a personal encounter with the members' most secret memory. Through the years individual memories were revealed to have a complex and often surprising presence in the members' professional careers and lives. Already at the first meeting the protecting title of "research group" was lifted, and with it the professional or public persona of the participants. An awkward, hesitating personal voice emerged, saturated with pain and wordlessness. With it a circle of acute and supporting listening was established.

In the midst of this first meeting, Etty BenZaken burst out singing a Ladino melody—a song of love and longing sung by the Jews of Thessaloniki transported to Auschwitz—shaking the participants hearts; and when at the end of the meeting Mendy Cahan started a Yiddish song, and the participants joined him in a dance around the seminar tables at the Van Leer lecture room, we knew that we had turned into a small community, and that from then on our language would cross learnt disciplines and obey our innermost existence. And maybe this is the thread we were looking for: transmitting memory, even at the heart of a collective, as a personal experience.

Only after a person meets, recognizes, and shares their hidden or repressed story are they liberated from the loneliness of their silence and able to hear the other's story empathetically as part of a shared destiny.

The discussion, involving a novel combination of scientific and artistic investigations, with attention to personal residues, led to many important insights. This book is constituted by such a fusion of professional and personal discourse. It invites every reader to add his or her own story.

The Many Voices of Memory

In contrast to the widespread view that the memory of the Holocaust has a single collective and pre-formulated message, in our work in the group we pointed out how much of our individual memory results from a multitude of facets and

modes of expression unique to each of us, and how much the collective memory requires the voice of the individual.

The multiple facets of memory are already evident in the generation of the survivors. This was made clear when the group hosted three well-known survivors, each of whom presented how he chose to shape his personal and professional memory.⁴ The writer Aharon Appelfeld, who was left alone at the age of eight and survived on his own, wandering from place to place, presented love as the center of his personal Holocaust memory. The historian Shaul Friedländer emphasized the individual voice and testimony, an approach that led him to a methodological revolution in the study of the history of the Holocaust. The historian Dov Kulka, who was sent as a child with his parents from Theresienstadt to the “family camp” in Auschwitz, bears the memory of the power of evil.

We listened to the voices of the group’s twenty members, of the succeeding generations, some of them direct descendants of survivors. We saw how even a transmitted memory preserves a remnant of the trauma and how each of them has formulated for themselves, consciously or unconsciously, the transmission of the memory of the Holocaust as an open, personal question that requires them to take a stand in the present.

Through the duration of the group’s activity a change occurred in us. We no longer regarded memory as a collective message, nor as an effort to preserve the trauma by emphasizing victimhood. We now related to memory in an reversed way—as a personal choice and as an individual and therefore multifocal position. Memory as not only facing the past but responding to the present needs; not frozen in victimhood but responsible to shape the future.

Thus, as the Knesset debated the Law against Infiltrators in 2014, we held a public juridical debate on the status of the African asylum-seekers in Israel. And when hate slogans were written on a Druze medical office in Yokneam and on the walls of a mosque in Fureidis, we travelled to express our solidarity. At the same time we gave voice to the ultra-orthodox and Mizrahi communities—parts of Israel society that were excluded from the official memory of the Shoah.

Shaping Memory: Exhibition and Ritual

In 2015, after four years of meetings, we searched for the appropriate ways to share our conclusions with the public outside the laboratory-type circle of a research group. The first way we developed was an exhibition at the Van Leer Jeru-

⁴ The full deliveries are transcribed in the first section of the book.

salem Institute entitled *What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later*. The second was the creation of a gathering (*Hitkansut*) for Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day.⁵

The exhibition did not attempt to transmit a uniform message,⁶ instead, it invited each visitor to embark on a personal journey. In various mediums—film, interviews, texts, plastic art, videos, and a music-and-text installation—the multiplicity of voices and of ways of remembering was presented. The survivors' words and the personal stories of the group members were part of the exhibition, and the visitors were invited to participate in discussions or to write down their thoughts. Through this personal journey the visitors were invited to ask themselves: What is the form of memory? How does memory affect my present, my stance toward the world?

What is memory, and how can we shape the memory of the Shoah? This question has informed each of the research group members in their work and creation and deeply influenced each one's projects, while the Shoah in its multiple forms continues to cast a shadow over world affairs. In a variety of voices this book invites its readers to ask themselves this question and to apply it to their own challenging responsibility facing the other and society in a changing world.

The Shoah was the extermination of the other human being, of human being as the *other*. But those trapped in the machine of death struggled to survive and to do so, as much as possible, while maintaining their human dignity. The righteous among the nations did not remain bystanders but saved lives, risking their own lives and those of their families in the process. In the midst of darkness and evil, goodness and love were shining, to quote Aharon Appelfeld's guiding words. May the memory of the Shoah become a struggle for humanity even in the heart of darkness, and a compass for our continuing responsibility to the dignity of the human being as a human being.

The upturned face of Fanny Haim, in the deportation square of Ioannina, demands this of us.

⁵ Discussed in the closing section of this book.

⁶ See Yehudit Kol-Inbar's chapter "And who will remember? And how shall we preserve a memory?" *New Approaches to Exhibits on The Holocaust* in this book.

Dana Freibach-Heifetz

Book Sections and Chapters

At the heart of this book lies the question of passing on the memory of the Holocaust from the survivors to the next generations. The shift from a direct memory, one that is engraved onto the survivors' very bodies, to the shaping of the memory from beyond the space of time and experience, is explored in this book from a wide variety of perspectives and voices. At a time in which a fight is being waged in the world over the Holocaust's narrative, this book offers a fundamental, critical, artistic, and personal discussion of the process of shaping the Holocaust's memory – its character, its motives, and its ramifications.

This issue has many facets. First, it requires an examination of the characteristics of personal and collective memory alongside an analysis of memory's role in the shaping of the present – both of the individual and of society, which seeks to maintain and impart the mark of a formative event in its history. Second, the construction of memory formations from a distance, by those who did not undergo the trauma themselves, utilizes poetic devices from various fields of art and life, and it is influenced by cultural worldviews and traditions that are uncovered, on their various aspects, in the book. Third, awareness of the memory construction process, which is similar in many ways to the creation of fiction, is foundational to a critical examination of Holocaust memory formations as well as the attempts to deny it. Fourth, the shaping of collective memory in general, and of the Holocaust in particular, has significant ethical ramifications. Finally, it raises the question of how these insights lead to the shaping of the memory of the Holocaust. All these facets are echoed in the various voices in the book.

This book is based on the discussions of a multidisciplinary research group that was held in the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute between 2012–2015; at the heart of its activity lay the issue of the shaping of the memory of the Holocaust. Due to the questions that guided the research group, in addition to the numerous professional expertise, research, and art forms of its members, the texts and images in the book present a wide variety of styles, genres, and fields of thought. Each text opens with a personal monologue from the writer, thereby establishing the subjective aspect of meditating on memory. Throughout the book, each text and image stands and can be understood by and on its own; nevertheless, similar and sometimes surprising links arise between the different approaches, constructing central themes in regard to the meanings of the Holocaust and the shaping of its memory. Accordingly, the book is divided into seven sections. Hereinafter, the book sections and chapters are introduced in order to shed light on the process upon which the book is based and on its components.

The opening section, *Conversations in First Person*, includes two conversations with three Holocaust survivors who were part of the ‘founding fathers’ of public discourse on the Holocaust in Israel and around the world. In these conversations, which were documented in the three survivors’ meetings with the group members, these Holocaust survivors speak openly of their life during and after the Holocaust and of the ways in which their biography led them to art and research on the topic of the Holocaust. The first text documents a meeting with the author *Aharon Appelfeld*. During this meeting, sections from his works were read as part of a conversation about his thoughts and personal experiences in regard to the link between memory and imagination, silence and language, and the origins of personal and artistic power – in his words, “where does the power to write come from”. The book’s title, *But There was Love There*, comes from his words during this meeting. The second text in this section documents a conversation between and with Holocaust historians *Saul Friedländer* and *Otto Dov Kulka* about repressing versus processing memories, the link between the personal and the scientific in history research in general and in their research in particular, and ‘the behind the scenes’ of their pioneering scientific work and the controversies it spurred. This conversation deepens the awareness of historical research’s role in shaping collective memory and its ramifications.

The second section, *Languages of Memory*, examines the essence of memory from three main perspectives or languages. The first is the psychological language – psychoanalyst *Yolanda Gampel* offers insights about memory and forgetting from her multi-decade study of the intergenerational transference of the memory of the Holocaust in survivors and second and third generation Holocaust survivors (in which she coined the key phrase ‘radioactive transference’), as well as her personal biography as a second generation Holocaust survivor who was silent about the trauma. The second language is the artistic one – artist *Orit Livne* presents three large-scale cloud drawings whose minute details she painted over a long period of time, as the clouds changed over and over again in a way that embodies, in her eyes, the constant changing and movement of the memory. The third is the scientific language – neuroscientist, memory researcher, and neuropsychologist *Eli Vakil* opens a window into the cognitive and neurological processes that occur in the brain in various aspects of memory and forgetting, and explains their roles and necessity for the individual; he discusses ways of treating traumatic experiences, and draws an analogy between these neuro-psychological treatments and the processing of trauma in the Israeli memory of the Holocaust.

The third section, *Facing the Nothingness*, is a collection of texts and visual images that confront different aspects of the fracture created by the Holocaust; it presents five such written or visual texts. The first is curatorial – curator *Yehudit Kol-Inbar* presents the ways she, as director of ‘Yad Vashem’'s museum division,

faced the challenge of creating an exhibition of the Holocaust from the Jewish perspective. She describes the new approaches she developed for this challenge with her 'Yad Vashem' colleagues, illustrating them through three successful exhibitions dedicated to the topics of women and children in the Holocaust, exhibitions that were daring in their innovativeness, as well as through the shaping of the exhibition that presented the group's work. In the second text of this section, writer *Michal Govrin* writes 'a negative of a testimony' about the power of imagination to highlight the presence of the nothingness. She also depicts her journey of collecting and preserving memory fragments of her late brother Marek, who was killed as a child in the Holocaust before her birth, up to his memorialization in the 'Yad Vashem' 'Children in the Holocaust' exhibition and in the UN as 'the child who did not leave a trace'. The third text in this section was created by photographer and researcher *Dana Arieli*, who presents four images from her 'Phantoms' project, which documents remnants of history in central global sites in which dictatorships operated. This project hints at the relationships between culture, memory, and politics, with the images that are presented alongside the texts adding personal, historical, and political dimensions to the photographs. The fourth text was written by plastic artist *Gary Goldstein*, who presents a poetic fragments collection that illustrates the experiences that shaped him as the son of Holocaust survivors who grew up in a reality in which the nothingness was very much present – in the shadow of family members who were killed and about whom he did not know, and within silence, forgetting, and feelings of emptiness. Alongside these fragments are eight of his drawings, portraits from what he calls "a forest of portraits" of family members he never met. The section ends with the story of *Mendy Cahan*, theater artist and second generation Holocaust survivor, who tells of his personal journey that led him to create the non-profit organization 'Yung Yidish', which preserves and nurtures the Yiddish culture, and of the meaning of passing on memory by collecting and preserving books "that have the dust of forgetting", in his words.

The fourth section, *Echoes and Witnesses*, raises the issue of Holocaust testimony and thoughts of the ramifications or echoes it left behind. First, researcher of modern Jewish thought *Ron Margolin* presents reflections on the Holocaust and its religious meanings in Jewish thought after the war, and on the complex relationships between the personal, the communal, and the theological in this field. Margolin also presents his ethical stance regarding 'the lessons of the Holocaust' and the moral responsibility it imposes on the next generations. Holocaust researcher and historian *Mali Eisenberg* presents ultra-orthodox Holocaust literature and the 'ultra-orthodox resistance' that operated in Polish ghettos in the fight to practice the Jewish way of life and rituals in hiding, presenting it as an alternative, ultra-orthodox historiography to the Zionist-secular historiography.

Eisenberg discusses the debate over whether these acts should be categorized as the work of ‘a resistance’ and the development of a model of spiritual bravery as ‘alternative bravery’, and explains the importance of the way the memory of the Holocaust is constructed for the formulation process of ultra-orthodox society’s identity. Next, historian *Yochi Fisher* discusses the dialogue between mythical memory, historical research, and literary fiction. She does so using her father’s mythical testimony – which is alive yet silent – about his experiences in the Holocaust; Fisher creates memory and completes her father’s story by writing fragments addressed to him. The next two texts in this section explore the topic of testimony. In the first text, Holocaust researcher and political philosopher *Michal Aharony* examines Hannah Arendt’s skepticism in regard to Holocaust survivors’ testimonies (in light of Arendt’s first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, from 1951); Aharony offers her own critical interpretation, which links this skepticism to Arendt’s broader outlooks on suffering, mercy, and compassion. The section ends with an essay from writer and essayist *Michal Ben-Naftali* about ‘the death of the witness’, i.e., about what’s left after the witnesses are gone – in line with ‘death of God’ and ‘death of the author’; about whether the impending deaths of the last Holocaust survivors will serve as the end of ‘the era of testimony’ regarding the Holocaust, as declared by Elie Wiesel; and about how this will affect Israeli society’s mourning as a fundamental characteristic of its self-perception.

The fifth section, *Poetics of Memory and Forgetting*, explores various ways of shaping the memory as well as the forgetting of the trauma. This exploration is demonstrated by five writers from several artistic fields: literature, plastic art, music, and installation. Literature researcher *Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan* raises the question of the act of literature as “a way to cry out”, in Appelfeld’s words; in other words, how can a traumatic fracture be shaped in a literary and coherent manner without betraying it or falling into the abyss of madness. By doing so, Rimmon-Kenan exposes the techniques of several authors who dealt with this challenge. Literature researcher *Rina Dudai* addresses the same question with a focus on one creator – Dan Pagis. Dudai ties the literary shape of the riddle at the heart of Pagis’s research with the riddle at the heart of his poems; she views the form of the riddle as a fundamental constitutive representation, both by the researcher-creator and the poet-creator, of the world after the catastrophe of the Holocaust. Painter *Meir Appelfeld* writes about the mission of forgetting and memory in the creation process, and about the link between creation and theology in the history of Western art – i.e., art as a ritual that is a remnant of the magical ritual. This is accompanied by three of his paintings which, like his whole body of artistic work, were based on the stance he formed about memory and forgetting. Composer *Eitan Steinberg* writes about memory and forgetting, which are bound together in the musical composition, and about the forgetting as conditional for

creation as a kind of ‘remembrance in the future’. Steinberg demonstrates this through the thought process of composer Arnold Schoenberg and through some of his own works, in which the memory’s features become a composing technique, concrete or abstract inspiration, and even the work’s subject. The section ends with an essay by multidisciplinary artist *Etty BenZaken* about the ‘Virtue for Opening the Heart’ installation, which she co-created with Eitan Steinberg. BenZaken describes her personal process of creation – from a starting point that is full of doubt, through meeting the corpus of the familial and artistic memory, to finding the artistic solution that echoes these memories in a new way.

The sixth section, *Representation and Responsibility*, continues on from the previous section by presenting representation methods from two additional fields of art – cinema and photography; it emphasizes the ethical aspects of representing the Holocaust and displaying the portraits of its survivors. Cinema researcher *Raya Morag* examines the ways in which cinematographers who are third generation Holocaust survivors shape their attitude towards the Holocaust as well as the ramifications of these ways on their personal identity, and the place of guilt in their lives. She does so through a comparative lens, examining documentary creators from four countries – Israel, Poland, Austria, and Germany – as well as contemporary cinema in Cambodia, the subject of another study of hers; through these means, Morag reveals various stages of processing the past and building ‘a new regime of memory’. Cinema researcher *Odeya Kohen Raz* examines, through Arnon Goldfinger’s documentary film *The Flat*, the link between ethics and aesthetics in movies made by third generation Holocaust survivors in Israel; these people, unlike their parents who repressed the memory, deal with the memory of the Holocaust and the challenge of the gradual disappearance of the ‘cinematic referent’, i.e., Holocaust survivors who can testify about this period. Kohen Raz analyzes Goldfinger’s aesthetic solution and its ethical implication: taking responsibility for first generation Holocaust survivors and, despite their physical absence, making them present in the film. Cinema researcher *Sandra Meiri* provides another perspective on the discourse about the link between the aesthetic and the ethical in Israeli cinema, focusing on movies about maturation in the shadow of the post-trauma of women who experienced sexual violence during the Holocaust. Meiri shows the aesthetic means that were developed in these movies for representing the sexual trauma indirectly, a representation that is committed to loyalty to and respect for the survivors’ experiences on the one hand, and to emphasizing the disastrous consequences of intergenerational transference on the other; she calls these movies “cinememory”. Next is the introductory chapter of *Aliza Auerbach’s* book *Survivors* (2009), which is presented alongside several of the photos that appear in the book: portraits of survivors who currently live in Israel, portraits that emphasize the power of survival and the miracle of their rehabilitation, photos of objects they

saved from the Holocaust period, and photos of them surrounded by their large families. In the introduction, Auerbach recounts her personal connection to the subject and the process of creating her book. The sixth section ends with philosopher and writer *Dana Freibach-Heifetz*, who examines the process of creating the book *Survivors* (by Aliza Auerbach) and the movie *Fragments* (by Yonatan Haimovich), the latter of which documents the lives of immigrants from the Soviet Union in the building in which Haimovich lived as a child. Based on talks with Auerbach and Haimovich about their photography processes, an ‘ethics of documentation’ is formulated by Freibach-Heifetz. This ethics depicts and delineates the attentiveness that enables, and even invites, survivors of trauma to give testimony as a personal interaction between listener and narrator, an interaction that incorporates responsibility into what she calls “secular grace”.

The final section, *Hitkansut – Shoah Remembrance Ritual*, was written by members of a team founded by Govrin as a conclusion to the research group’s work; this team shaped the Haggadah of a new and different memorial ritual, ‘Hitkansut – a Ritual Gathering for Yom HaShoah’, which has been further developed and circulated by Shalom Hartman Institute. *Rani Jaeger*, one of the founders of Beit Tefila Israeli and the director of Shalom Hartman Institute’s ceremony division, discusses the conceptual and practical essence of the ritual. In his essay, Jaeger defines the components of ceremonial experience and offers practical tools for those who create and conduct rituals; this includes the ritual’s structure, the sources of its inspiration, the linguistic challenge of the ritual, as well as the relationship between the ritual and the community’s life on the one hand, and the personal intimate realm of its members on the other. Next, the group’s and the team’s leader, *Michal Govrin*, writes about the relationship between ‘the responsibility of remembering’ and ‘remembering responsibly’. Govrin analyzes how Holocaust memorial ceremonies in Israel and around the world are designed in light of mainly the Christian worldview, versus the Jewish ways of formulating the exodus from Egypt. She then describes how the ways of shaping the Jewish memory in the Passover Haggadah affect the process of shaping the ‘Hitkansut for Yom HaShoah’. Against this background, the ‘assembly’s Haggadah’ is portrayed as moving between two axes – from lamentation to getting up from the mourning, and from the responsibility of remembering to the demand to remember responsibly; with the order of this Haggadah’s chapters serving as a transformative, experiential, and mental process, both for the individual and for the ‘assembly’s circle of memory. *Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield*’s final essay describes the adaptation of the Hitkansut ritual to the Shoah memory for the North American context. She describes how the Hitkansut ritual embraced enthusiastically by the North American Jewish community, recently provided modes of facing Covid, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the aftermath of October 7th 2023. She concludes

with the hope that the Hitkansut ritual would be a mode of Shoah remembrance with dignity and integrity.

The community of shared history and responsibility that was created between the research group's members is echoed in the communities that are created in the 'Hitkansut' circles. The book's readers are also invited to take a part in the memory communities, to add their personal voices and insights, and to be partners in the shaping of the memory of the Holocaust.



Section One: **Conversations in the First Person**

Aharon Appelfeld

“Everything was Death. But Within It There Was a lot of Love”

Michal Govrin: I am excited to welcome Aharon Appelfeld, who will be opening the first session of our research group. We were not there, in the Holocaust, and the “memory” we hold of it is comprised of transmitted traces and a process of shaping similar to that of fiction. Therefore, we have undertaken to discuss the transmitted memory as a form of fiction. Aharon Appelfeld survived the Holocaust as a child, and chose to shape his memory through the prism of fiction. The characters he created accompany us beyond convention and ideology, and a reading of his works, one by one, reveals the roundabout way in which fiction can strike at the heart of the human kernel of the Holocaust and epitomize the good that flickered in the depths of darkness. Over the years, I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to engage in one-on-one personal and professional discourse with Aharon. I find myself following the trail he blazed, both in his literary act and in the depth of thought that rises up from his work. My dialogue with the works of Aharon Appelfeld also formed the basis for my decision to establish the discussion group Transmitted Memory and Fiction. During our preparation for the session, Aharon suggested that we include some excerpts from his works. He will read them himself, and at his request I will join in occasionally.

Aharon Appelfeld: I will read the opening section from *The Man Who Never Stopped Sleeping*:¹

1 Appelfeld, Aharon (trans. Jeffrey M. Green). (2017). *The Man Who Never Stopped Sleeping*. New York: Schocken, 3.

Translated from Hebrew by: Shaul Vardi.

Note: This is a written version of a conversation with the writer Aharon Appelfeld that took place at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute on April 20, 2012 and constituted the opening session of the research group. A video recording of the encounter is available on YouTube in two parts (in Hebrew, see: <https://tinyurl.com/366y85tn>). At Professor Appelfeld’s request, the encounter took the form of a conversation rather than a lecture, and this is reflected in this written version. As part of the encounter, Appelfeld read selected excerpts from his books. He read most of them himself and Michal Govrin assisted. Some of the excerpts have been omitted from this text for the sake of brevity; readers can find the full texts in Appelfeld’s works, many of which have been translated into English. [Comments in parentheses are by the editors].

At the end of the war, I became immersed in constant slumber. Though I moved from train to train, from truck to truck, and sometimes from wagon to wagon, it was all in a dense, dreamless sleep. When I opened my eyes for a moment, the people looked heavy and expressionless.

No wonder I don't remember a thing about that long journey. I ate what they gave out or, rather, from what was left over. If I hadn't been thirsty, I probably wouldn't even have gotten up to look for a slice of bread. Thirst tortured me all along the way. If some memory of that sleep-drunk journey still remains with me, it's the streams where I knelt to gulp the water. The chilly water put out the fire inside me for a while but not for long.

The refugees carried me and supported me. Sometimes I was forgotten, and then someone remembered me and went back to pick me up. My body remembers the jolting more than I do. Sometimes it seems that I'm still in that darkness, drifting and being borne along. What happened to me during those days of sleep will probably be unknown to me forever. Sometimes a voice that spoke to me comes back, or the taste of a piece of bread that was shoved into my mouth. But aside from that, there is just darkness.

Michal Govrin: I will read the opening section of *The Story of a Life*:²

The pages before you are segments of contemplation and memory. Memory is elusive and selective; it holds on to what it chooses to hold on to. I won't say that it retains only what is good and pleasant. Very like a dream, memory takes specific details out of the viscous flow of events—sometimes tiny, seemingly insignificant details—stores them deeply away, and at certain times brings them up to the surface. Like a dream, memory also tries to imbue events with some meaning.

Ever since my childhood, I have felt that memory is a living and effervescent reservoir that animates my being. When I was still a child, I would sit and visualize the summer holidays at my grandparents' home in the country. For hours I'd sit by the window and picture the journey there. Everything that I recalled from previous vacations would return to me in the most vivid way.

Memory and imagination sometimes dwell together. In those longburied years it was as if they competed. Memory was tangible, as if solid. Imagination had wings. Memory pulled toward the known, and imagination sailed toward the unknown. Memory always brought me pleasure and tranquillity. Imagination would take me from place to place, but eventually would depress me. At times I learned that there are people who live solely by the power of imagination. My uncle Herbert was like that. He had inherited considerable wealth, but because he lived in a world of imagination, he wasted everything and was completely impoverished. When I got to know him better, he was already a poor man, living off the goodwill of his family, but even in his poverty he did not cease to dream. His gaze would be fixed far beyond you, and he always spoke about the future, as if the present or the past didn't exist.

It's amazing how clear even my most distant and hidden childhood memories can be, in particular those connected to the Carpathian Mountains and the broad plains stretching out at their foothills. During those last vacations before the war, our eyes would devour the mountains and plains with a fearsome longing, as if my parents knew that these were the last holidays, and that from now on life would be hell.

2 Appelfeld, Aharon. (trans. Aloma Halter). (2004). *The Story of a Life*. New York: Schocken, 1–2.

When World War II broke out, I was seven years old. The sequence of time became confused—no more summer and winter, no more long visits to my grandparents in the country. Our life was now crammed into a narrow room. For some time we were in the ghetto, and at the end of autumn we were thrown out of it. For weeks we were on the road, and then, eventually, in the camp, from which I managed to escape.

During the war I was not myself, but like a small creature that has a burrow, or, more precisely, a few burrows. Thoughts and feelings were greatly constricted. In truth, sometimes there welled up within me a painful sense of astonishment at why I had been left alone. But these reflections would fade with the mists of the forest, and the animal within me would return and wrap me in its fur. Of the war years I remember little, as if they were not six consecutive years. It's true that sometimes images surface from the heavy mist: a dark figure, a hand that had been charred, a shoe of which nothing was left but shreds.

These pictures, sometimes as fierce as the blast from a furnace, fade away quickly, as if refusing to reveal themselves, and again there's the same black tunnel that we call the war. This is the limit of conscious memory. But the palms of one's hands, the soles of one's feet, one's back, and one's knees remember more than memory. Had I known how to draw from them, I would have been overwhelmed with what I have seen. On some occasions I have been able to listen to my body, and then I would write a few chapters, but even they are just fragments of a pulsing darkness that will always be locked inside me.

Yehudit Inbar: There's a sentence in *The Story of a Life* that has stuck with me for many years. You say that in order to survive or to keep living during that period, someone had to reach out their hand to you. Otherwise it was simply impossible. I keep that motto with me whenever I have to deal with difficult materials. When I'm choosing what to include in an exhibition, I try to look for positive materials, because there was a lot of positive there. In those circumstances, that little gesture of reaching out a hand is amazing. These are things you give us, and in many ways this is what we should learn from the Holocaust—not just the endless victimhood that leads us to terrible places. You descend into the depths and look at them, and from there you create life and the positivity of life. In many senses, I received the hand you talk about. You, too, gave me a hand.

Aharon Appelfeld: I'd like to comment on the point you've raised. When we talk about the Holocaust, we talk about the horrors, dreadful sights, pain . . . all kind of ugly things associated with the subject that lead people to reject it. And that's a tragedy. When I arrived in this country in 1946, at the age of thirteen and a half, the first thing I sensed was that people didn't want to touch the subject. That was part of the silence. I arrived on a farm, a kind of kibbutz, for training. Whenever I tried to say anything—I didn't have any words and I couldn't say much—but anything I tried to say met with rejection. Essentially the message was: what you're about to say is meaningless. What matters is the present. The past with all its suffering and ugliness and death doesn't matter.

And what I wanted to say here is that my memories of the Second World War—and I hope this won't surprise you—are associated for me with a lot of love. Endless love. Anyone who was in the ghetto saw how mothers protected their children, how they didn't eat and only worried about feeding their young ones, how young lads stayed with their parents so that they wouldn't be left alone and protected them up to the last minute . . . What endless love. Of course everything was a catastrophe, everything was death. But within it there was a lot of love.

If I ask myself where the strength to write comes from, then it isn't from the horrific sights but from these images of love, and they were everywhere. On the personal level, there was an exceptional kind of devotion in this time. This devotion was expressed in words: you said a kind word to someone and just by doing that you saved him, because he was on the brink of death and that word was what saved his life. And it's interesting that people instinctively knew the right word to say at that moment. Not to mention that in those days someone would offer you a piece of bread, or half a piece of bread, or a quarter of a piece. On the brink of oblivion, on the brink of death, there was a lot of love.

The Jewish family, which was the most important kernel of Jewish life, was visibly manifested in those times. Grandchildren cared for the elderly up to the last moment, even though there was nothing you could do, nothing you could change. The only thing young people might have done was . . . but if the young ones had fled or abandoned the elderly, that would be the tragedy of the Holocaust. And even if you did run away, you didn't even want to think about what would await you.

There was some kind of love there. More than the civil code—some exceptional love. That's what I absorbed from it all. Ka-Tsetnik, for example, presented in his writing everything that people still dismiss to this day, the full ugliness—and there was ugliness there, but the victims were not to blame for it. When you're hungry, after two weeks of hunger, or a month, you're more like an animal . . . you're constantly hunting for a crumb.

So I believe that the people who said a kind word to me then, or reached out their hand to give me a piece of bread, saved me as a human being. My world was not left with the image of the hangman; my world was not left with the sight of endless, irreparable evil. I was left with people, and I loved them.

Even when I was outside [the ghetto], after I ran off to the forests, the Ukrainian underworld adopted me and I stayed with them. This was a cruel and harsh underworld, but even there someone would give me a piece of bread. I remember a wonderful moment there when one of the criminals noticed that my shoes had completely disintegrated and he gave me another pair. He changed me; he made me a different person.

I think it's impossible to create in any field, and certainly in this field, without love. That's the foundation of our lives and that's what builds them. And since in this case the catastrophe was so enormous, I would suggest that there was a need for some kind of surfeit love. On some level I thank God that along the whole way there was always someone who reached out their hand and said a word to me. I was alone in the world, a boy alone in the world . . . but someone gave me a piece of bread. If you only connect to the evil, you absorb and accept that evil. Evil is poison. I stood many times in the rows [during roll calls]. Throughout the whole war, nobody—no Jew, no victim—ever thought to themselves that they wanted to be like the officer at the front. No. I'm not saying that there weren't traitors or bad people—there were plenty. But the light . . . there was always some kind of light. That's the image that comes back to me. On every transport—the transport going there, and later, after liberation—there was always a Jew who had a Torah scroll on his back instead of a knapsack. He would walk alongside us or at the front carrying the Torah scroll on his back. For me, at least, that's something I remember more than all the thirst and hunger and stuff . . . That devotion, that moral devotion to declare that the Torah is more important than everything that is going on. That is might.

Yehudit Inbar: People need to shout out the things you say across the world.

Aharon Appelfeld: Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place and seen his reality. Because it was so difficult, because everything seems so satanic, people cannot imagine that there was also good and light there; there was also humanity.

I really like Primo Levi. He's a very dear person. But if you notice, in his books the Jewish heroes have been infected by the murderers and they've become a bit similar to them. But that's not how it was, that's my deep sense. The victim did not become a murderer, even if he underwent some kind of transformation. It's interesting that Primo Levi describes all kinds of cripples who absorbed evil, and their body—and maybe their soul, too—changed completely. They became a kind of reflection of what was around them—and then everything was bad, everything was evil. But with his last bit of strength, the victim held onto something good, kept something good within him. If that hadn't been the case, I wouldn't be standing here before you and I wouldn't write. A person cannot write from a point of negation, of no—a person writes from the basis of something internal, something with language. I'm not talking about my early years at home, up to the age of seven or eight, when I absorbed a lot of love and loyalty and friendship and affection, of course. I'm talking about the ghetto, the camps, everywhere; also the return after what happened, the long journey across Europe to Yugoslavia, Italy, and the Land of Israel. Yes—there, too. There, too. This is what we live on:

we live on the good. We can't live on poison, poison doesn't nourish. Sorry for saying this . . . but I need to add a reservation. I was a child, and children have both limited absorption and over-absorption: it moves between these two poles. For example, when I was in the forest I used to love watching the water and seeing my reflection. I drank, but more importantly than drinking I wanted to see myself in the water, it made me really happy. My reflection shimmered in the water. It's hard for me to explain the happiness I felt then, but I can remember the amazing happiness of seeing myself in the water.

Raya Morag: What about humor? How does humor connect to this life? Humor not necessarily as something comic or ironic, a distant glance, but as something that plays a different role in your texts.

Aharon Appelfeld: Look, humor appears in some places, but not in all the places in our life. There isn't humor in the synagogue; there isn't any overt humor in that sphere of human and God. During the Second World War, there was plenty of black humor. But I think the religious sphere also existed during the Holocaust. People were close to the edge, close to death, close to evil, and that leads to some kind of movement that you could call "religious." We forget that by this time some people were already removed from this realm, yet the Holocaust drew them in and sparked some form of religious revival in people's souls.

I'll read a passage from chapter six of *The Story of a Life*.³

Every town, it would seem, had its own Janusz Korczak. In our town the person who led the blind children to the railway station was the director of the Institute for the Blind, the teacher Gustav Gotesman. He was short, the same height as the children, and he did everything fast. He was renowned for his method of teaching: everything was learned through music. Melodies were continually wafting from the Institute for the Blind. Gotesman believed that music not only served as a good instrument for learning but also enhanced sensitivity in people. All the children at the institute spoke in melodic tones, even when they addressed one another; the frailty of their little bodies complemented the pleasantness of their speech. In the afternoons, they would sit on the steps and sing. They sang classical songs and Yiddish folk songs. Their voices had harmony and sweetness, and passersby would stand by the railings and listen to them. [. . .]

On October 13, 1942, the director of the Institute for the Blind was ordered to bring his children to the railway station. The children dressed in their Sabbath best; each put a book in Braille in his backpack, along with a plate, a mug, a fork, a spoon, and a change of clothes. Gotesman explained to them that the road to the railway station was not a long one, and that they would make five brief stops en route. At these stops they would sing classical songs and Yiddish songs. When they reached the railway station, they would sing their anthem. The children were excited, but not frightened. [. . .]

3 Ibid., 42–46.

At [the] first stop, the children sang songs by Schubert. There was a strong wind near the well, and the children strained to raise their voices. No one was there apart from them, and their song sounded like a prayer. [. . .] At the fourth stop, next to the ghetto’s fence, many emotional people were waiting for them and showered them with gifts. One man on a balcony shouted at the top of his voice, “We love you, children, and soon we’ll meet again. We’ll never, ever forget how you sang. You were the angelic choirboys of our ghetto.” [. . .] Here, too, women surrounded the children and didn’t allow them to continue on their way. But now they were no longer on their own. The soldiers posted alongside the ghetto’s fence began swinging their clubs, and all at once, the singing ceased.

On the narrow road to the railway station, the children halted and again broke into song. The guards must have been taken by surprise and let them sing at first, but not for long. They immediately set upon the children with their clubs, and the children, who were holding one another’s hands, trembled as one body. “Don’t be afraid, children,” Gotesman whispered, and they managed to overcome their pain. At the railway station, they still managed to sing their anthem in its entirety before being pushed into the cattle cars.

Someone wrote a seminar paper about this chapter. He went off and checked whether there was really an orphanage in the town and whether I had got all the details right (I was eight and a half years old when I left my hometown). And what did this seminar paper discover? That there really was an orphanage, and the children were deported. There were Communists and observant Jews, and they were all deported. That’s what happened in every town, not just in my town. That’s what happens when you look for reality in a writer’s work. The particular is true if it is general. Otherwise it just remains in the confines of the particular.

When I was very young, twenty-four, I wrote a story called “The Road from Drubna to Drovitz.” What was this journey? A group of Jews, most of them observant, but there were also some who weren’t, and a small boy among them are traveling to visit their rebbe. They travel from Drubna to Drovitz, and there are stops along the way. At the first stop they sing psalms, light a fire, and drink coffee. The two-year-old boy is excited by what he sees. Then they make a second stop at a slightly higher altitude. Here they sing special songs and part of Ibn Gabirol’s “The Kingly Crown,” then again they light a bonfire and all the rest of it. This journey lasts for a whole night—they set off in the evening and reach Drovitz: from Drubna to Drovitz. And there are stops along the way, and at each stop there are also some arguments. There was one Bundist who wants to sing at one of the stops and they don’t let him. Eventually they allow him to go ahead and he sings a Bundist song in Yiddish. And so it goes on. When they reach Drovitz in the morning, the town is empty. Nothing. There was a pogrom, people were killed or fled, and the town is empty. That’s how the story ends. I was very young and I was trying to say something. If you ask me now what I was trying to say, I don’t know. And of course there was some element of imagination. A month after the story was published, I received a letter: “Dear Appelfeld, I also made the journey from Drubna to Drovitz.”

Period. I also made the journey from Drubna to Drovitz. “I’m eighty-two; you may even be a little older than me” (I was twenty-three or twenty-four at the time). “I’m surprised that you remember all the details so well, and you remember exactly what happened at each of the stops. The coffee we drank is still before me, I still drink from it. And the special night, the slivovitz we drank . . . especially Reb Mendel’s slivovitz.” The old man repeated every detail. “I imagine you are living in an old people’s home, but if you could write me I would be very grateful, you will be reviving my soul. You presented an entire world; you gave me such a gift that I do not know if I will ever be able to repay you.” That’s what he wrote. I put the letter in my coat pocket and of course to this day, more than a few years on, I never replied . . . But without mystifying the whole thing, the interesting point is that I wrote the story out of some feeling of inner conviction . . . my conviction was so strong that it became a reality: Drubna exists and Drovitz exists. I just chose the names because of the way these sounded—Drubna, Drovitz. But for him it was tangible reality. I’m not raising this for no reason. I’m trying to show you that my writing is not realistic, it’s not realism, it’s not a replica of reality. A large part of my work is not just a replica of reality.

I remember that when I sent my first stories to editors, then of course they would send them back. They didn’t publish them. They would write: “Where did this happen?” Or a page and half on, in parentheses: “You need to expand here . . . where did this happen, why did it happen like this?” Gradually you have to become sure that what you see is really true, that it isn’t leading you to some kind of false place. It must be true in terms of your inner world. Your inner world leads you to the true images. That kind of thing has happened to me a lot over my life. I remember that I wrote a story in the 1950s about refugees who came to Israel after the Holocaust. They didn’t go to the kibbutzim or moshavim or Tel Aviv, but they lived on the beach in huts, a bohemian life by the sea. They’d come from the camps and ghettos—a normal life wasn’t an option for them. They’d drink coffee, play cards, deal in the black market, things like that. And that was the life they . . . I mean, after the Holocaust you can’t just sit in an armchair and read *Haaretz*, so you live that way. None of them were married, each of them had a boyfriend or girlfriend and they lived on the beach. There was a very well-known literary critic at the time, Azriel Uchmani from Sifriyat Poalim, who was on the far left of the scene. He looked at me and asked, “Appelfeld, how old are you?” “Twenty-five.” “This is what you want to write? This?! Instead of them working, getting up each morning, you write . . . What is this?! Is this educational? What is this stuff? We have moshavim and kibbutzim and training programs and the army . . . and you have to write this?” Of course it was a slap in the face for me. I mean, I felt that maybe what he was telling me was true. After that final point, he said: “Anyway, now show me where it was. I’m willing to go

with you to that place, show me exactly where it was.” So I told him, “I saw it in . . .” “Ah, so it didn’t exist. You didn’t see it.”

I walked around with my first book for years. No-one wanted it. Every time the same question: “Why don’t these people work?” Before that, I had written a short story about a woman Holocaust survivor who arrives in Israel, lives on the edge of Tel Aviv, and can’t fall asleep. That’s her problem. She’s thirty-two years old and she can’t sleep. The story is her struggle with the night. I sent it to Yediot Aharonot or Maariv (these newspapers still had literary pages back then). They wrote on top, “What’s this about? What does it mean that she can’t sleep?” In the 1950s, the atmosphere in Israel was so ideologically mobilized that there was no room for anything else, not another word or imagination, not any other possible course of life. Either you went to the army or to training or you worked for the labor union. The people who came here in the 1940s and 1950s—Holocaust survivors—brought enormous baggage with them. Baggage of life and pain. And here there was a kind of wall. You couldn’t . . . I mean you could only speak in that language, you couldn’t introduce any other kind of language or any other word.

I remember one time I was walking with a friend of mine from Czernowitz who I’d met here. We were speaking German—that was my native language. Someone came up from behind me and said, “Jew—speak Hebrew!” The tragedy is that at the time—in 1946, when I arrived—the Jewish community here numbered half a million, maybe a little more. And so many refugees arrived—about 750,000 Holocaust survivors. The people who came brought a whole life with them, full of thoughts and feelings. Yes, it was hard for them to speak—but no-one helped them to speak. There were walls on every side—actually positive walls. You went off to a kibbutz or to work in the orchards—that’s fine, nothing wrong with that. But the orchard choked you . . . what’s so good about it if it chokes you?

Mendy Kahane: When I read your work, or when you talk and tell your stories, I hear echoes of Yiddish literature, I hear Zeitlin and all kinds of names. A very full world, as if the world of Yiddish is speaking in a Hebrew garb.

Aharon Appelfeld: I’m a Jew. I speak Jewish.

Mandy Kahane: You speak Jewish. And when I read the newspaper—it’s a bit hard for me to say this, but I feel that they don’t speak Jewish anymore.

Aharon Appelfeld: Let’s put it this way. Ideological life was so strong in the 1940s and 1950s, and if you will—so persuasive, that there was a kind of total repression of everything that came before. I was thirteen and a half years old when I arrived and I brought a lot of baggage with me. I didn’t have an education—I’d finished first grade and that was it. My mother tongue was German, my grandparents

spoke Yiddish, the surroundings were Ukrainian, our neighbors were Poles, the elite spoke French—I mean, anyone who graduated from high school, and there were two Latin high schools in my city, spoke French. Those were the languages of the elite, German or French. Not that I knew anything of all these languages—I didn't know anything. But I felt I'd brought some serious baggage with me, not just a bundle of rags on my back.

First they take your name from you. My name at home was Erwin, more or less Aharon. The only thing I brought from the Holocaust—no clothes, no belongings, no education—was my name. Erwin was a kind of exclusive name, a meaningful one, and one I had grown up with. So they took that from me. Occasionally—no, it was more than occasionally—I'd hear my mother in a dream or a daydream calling "Erwin, Erwin." The name always came like a ringing bell. Erwin. Another thing—we had a big house there, and I was an only child. I used to play in the inner room. I'd play with blocks, and I had a kind of little train that went round and round, like all the rich kids. Every half hour or so, as if to make sure I was still alive, my mother would call out, "Erwin, wo bist du?" (Erwin, where are you?). And I would reply, "Ich bin hier"—I'm here. It was like a kind of ritual, and it was really nice to hear, "Erwin, wo bist du?" The name sounded pleasant. Suddenly they cut the name away from you. As if in a circumcision, they cut your name off.

Secondly, you had some grounding in these languages, particularly in German and Yiddish, which for me went together—German from my parents and Yiddish from my grandparents. Then they told you, "No! That's forbidden! It's a foreign language!" So you start to stammer . . . We arrived without the language, and it's not such an easy task for your mouth to get used to the new language. After all, the most precious thing a person can take with them is their mother language. You don't have to be a psychologist or sociologist or whatever to understand that a mother tongue is like a mother's milk. If you cut off someone's tongue, they will be an invalid. All the group of children I was with, I see them now—they are engineers, physicians—and to this day they still find it hard to construct a sentence. Even now. They phrase it wrongly and it sounds artificial. It doesn't have a foundation, as if they had just plastered it on. To this day they still stammer. To this very day. So they take your name and they take your mother tongue.

Another thing . . . This was a transitional period. My parents were assimilated Jews, but my grandparents were traditional. They lived in the Carpathian mountains and we used to visit them two or three times a year. There were tall trees there and low houses, and the smell of flowers and fruit . . . all the good things. Grandfather had a little synagogue next to his house that belonged to him. Since there weren't many Jews, on Sabbath the local Jews and visitors would gather at the synagogue. A little wooden synagogue coated in wine-red wallpaper. And inside sawdust, and flowers on the windowsills. It was enchanting, and the prayer was

part of it. Grandfather would wrap me inside his prayer shawl. Hopelessly (because he knew I didn't know anything) he would show me the letters, making an effort as I huddled under the prayer shawl. He was afraid of father, who would be furious if I learned it . . . The sight and smell also stuck with me. So all the meaningful things in life—name, language, belief or a drop of belief—were all taken from you. You are left with nothing. Then I made a desperate effort to find my way back to myself.

Not to mention the Holocaust, of course. There was a taboo about that, too—a strong taboo. Thirteen-year-old children arrived, and instead of saying, “Children, tell us how it was. What happened to you, how did you get here?”—instead of this, there were all kinds of slogans: “We have come to the Land to build and to be built,” “not like lambs to the slaughter.” It was all taboo. So you yourself have nothing, just a bit of the present. No parents, no grandparents, no familiar sights. In sociological and human terms, the consequences are harsh. I felt that if I wasn't going to live with my parents, and I wasn't going to live with my grandparents, and I wasn't going to be connected to their faith, then I would be nothing. Even at the age of thirteen, it was clear to me that my physical and spiritual existence depended on my connection to them. That's what I'm talking about.

Michal Govrin: Your comments are true regarding our whole existence here in this country.

Ron Margolin: I have a slightly harsher perspective on the Yishuv before the war and the Yishuv after the war. After all, a large majority of the people that supposedly gave you—the newcomers—this message of Zionism and building had also come from there. It's a reaction (that began then and continues to this day) of repression, and an inability to see the newcomers, who reminded them of all the people who didn't make it here—their brothers and sisters, and sometimes parents or cousins who had been murdered. When you read the famous comment by the Lubavitcher Rebbe (a comment that angered Haika Grossman back then) that the Holocaust was an operation that allowed the recovery of a sick people . . . then that's the ultra-Orthodox version of the secular slogan “from Holocaust to revival.” It's a sickness that has accompanied us since then, an egotistical way of looking at ourselves, instead of considering our commitment to those who are gone. But you look at the people who are gone. In Israeli culture the focus is always on ourselves. There's a structural and cultural problem here. And that's a great task, I think: to save the Jewish people from its disastrous inability to adopt a human perspective that encompasses everything you manage to say.

Ety BenZaken: Of course it has much wider ramifications. The Zionist ethos, which as you say was unable to contain or see those who did not make it here,

later developed into an inability to contain any alternative narrative, for example the narrative of the Mizrahi Jew or the Palestinian Arab. This influences us as a society. This healing we need is vital because we were raised on a very particular kind of ethos that cannot contain any otherness.

Michal Ben-Naftali: My sense is that the “us” or the “we” have undergone a process of pluralization. I have a strange feeling that you describe your experience here in Israel in much more brutal and difficult terms than what happened during those traumatic years (and you didn’t use the term traumatic). Your unique, existential ability to witness and mobilize good doesn’t seem to be applied to your experience in Israel.

Aharon Appelfeld: I spoke about the Holocaust and about manifestations of great love, of motherhood and love for children on the edge of the pit. That was one side of it. To this day I am grateful that I saw what happened to the victims and it didn’t lead me to an ideological perspective. The ideology in Israel, too, was alien to me, and it still is. Ideology classifies and numbers things. It tells you exactly what you are supposed to want; it sees the world and mandates the world and all you see. That’s alien to me; it always has been. I got a lot in Israel. It’s a wonderful country. For years I used to sit in cafés, and to this day I still like to sit in cafés. The cafés were full of Holocaust survivors. There was one café I went to for almost twenty years, Café Peter.

Aliza Auerbach: I remember you sitting there with a slice of cheesecake.

Aharon Appelfeld: I sat in Café Peter for twenty years and it felt like my home. People spoke Austro-Hungarian German there. They ate strudel or cheesecake, you could choose one or the other. I didn’t have money to pay and I had a long list of debts with Ilana. In the 1950s and 1960s, Israel was surrounded by a wall of ideology, but most people were like me, more or less. Refugees, I mean. The minority that was ideology imposed its will on society as a whole. It was a harsh ideology that made lots of demands of people. But because I was . . . among my people, let’s say, then I didn’t feel it. In *The Man Who Never Stopped Sleeping*, the refugees take the young man from one train to the next, from one place to another, and in Israel, too, they kept on taking him.

One thing that the Land of Israel meant to me, and that’s stayed with me to this day, is my love of the Hebrew language. If you read *The Man Who Never Stopped Sleeping*, you’ll see that this young man was so frustrated by how hard it was to bond with the Hebrew language. He would sit every day and copy passages from the Bible, passage after passage. So you have the Hebrew language, and you have all the wonderful people I met here (and I don’t distinguish between those who arrived thirty years before me or twenty years after me) . . . People who

have a sense of a Jewish world. And I found lots of people here who have a sense of a Jewish world.

Michal Govrin: Suddenly lots of Jews arrive. The world you describe—of shelves left orphaned, of voices we buried deep in the ground because we couldn’t cope with them. The landscapes we left behind that have no place in our reality here and that we cannot return to. In that sense, the transmission of the memory of the Holocaust is a metaphor for so many other uprootings. And your voice is a bridge for repeated transmission. Our need that never stops, the man who never stopped, never stopped . . . We stand in front of this abyss all the time; we have to cross it time after time and seek paths to it.

Odeya Kohen Raz: What relationship do you have today with your mother tongue, with German?

Aharon Appelfeld: A mother tongue is a mother tongue.

Odeya Kohen Raz: Do you write in it? Do you dream in it?

Aharon Appelfeld: I stopped speaking German when I was eight or eight and a half. I didn’t nurture my German. During the war I spoke Ukrainian and Russian. I even had a Ukrainian name—Yanek. So I didn’t nurture my German. And over the years it disappeared somehow, even from my dreams. [But] even now, occasionally, [when I’m writing], then when you write have to concentrate, you write a sentence and search for a word, and in my case I search for a word in Hebrew. And suddenly what springs to mind is not a Hebrew word, but a German one. I didn’t expect it or anticipate it . . . it was buried there somewhere. Since a mechanism of effort is activated, then instead of the word I need, it raises up some word from somewhere else, and sometimes it’s quite accurate.

Odeya Kohen Raz: Do you feel a need to write in German? Do you sometimes want to express yourself in the language?

Aharon Appelfeld: No. That doesn’t happen. I mean . . . my German isn’t cultural, it’s from the home, like homemade bread, and it stayed on the level of cheese and bread and that kind of thing—very vital things that I love very much, but not more than that, and I didn’t nurture it. I couldn’t have done, because nurturing German would have meant that it would compete with my language, because I wanted to make Hebrew my mother tongue. I realized that if I didn’t make Hebrew my mother tongue, I wouldn’t be able to extract what you need to extract from the language. So there was an element of competition here. I didn’t nurture other languages, either—even Russian, which I knew very well by this point. The one language I did nurture was Yiddish. Only Yiddish.

Odeya Kohen Raz: Did you want to write in Yiddish, too?

Aharon Appelfeld: No, because it wasn't . . . because I realized that if I wanted to be a Jewish writer, I must know Yiddish. It was almost an ideological decision, I'd say. I needed to know Yiddish, so I made an effort. During my visits to Meah Shearim, I learned to listen to how the children learn in Yiddish. Sometimes I would go into a study hall and learn a page of Gemara with someone in Yiddish. And there were also Bundists in Jerusalem who would meet once a week and talk in Yiddish, and listen to lectures in Yiddish. Later I learned some Yiddish at the university. With Yiddish, I didn't feel . . . with German, I felt there was a competition, but with Yiddish there wasn't any competition. I still enjoy speaking Yiddish. I'm not always fluent, but some days I speak very fluently.

Galili Shahar: There is a lot of ambivalence in your comments. The Holocaust event you describe isn't one of a concentration camp and an extermination camp, because the person is still clothed; they still have their human image, their tradition . . . they hold a page and speak a word; they still have a family. It's a kind of suspended culture, very Jewish, and the Holocaust still holds something in suspension. It even has continuity. Something very, very normal—and very extreme. I thought about Aharon—the priestly mission you were given when you arrived here, so to speak. There's the act of speaking, but all the stories are written with a kind of stammer. And you say: it's not just because of the struggle to learn the language. It continued here, in Palestine—the Land of Israel, and afterwards in the state. The Holocaust is also present in the experience of migration. Your study of Hebrew has something of an impulse or attraction in it. I'd call it the filling of a lack, because you describe things that were lacking, and from these depths stems speech—clipped, but nevertheless speech.

Michal Govrin: Aharon, your writing has addressed the reality in Israel as a piercing question, or in other ways—but it is also about Europe. In European writing, the image of the Jew is being drawn toward the image of the holy martyr, together with the growing expropriation of the Jewish story. Some Jewish writers have also got caught up in this easy route of echoing the ready-made European story. They blend into it and meet its needs in terms of the salvational image of the Jew suffering in the Holocaust. The struggle today revolves around questions about how to tell, who holds the story, and from what perspective it will be brought. And in this context, your tone is so important—a tone of non-innocent insistence, aware of the Jewish perspective, and with the strength and sound of the Hasidic tale that continues to rise up from the writing . . . and humor, in the sense of the ability to look at things upside down.

It is no less important to examine your act of writing as it appears in translations into European languages. The strength of a story that comes from Hebrew, has survived all the obstacles of local silencing, and then encounters the European silencing, which is perhaps even stronger than the Israeli equivalent—of a Europe in a state of repression, and with the return of antisemitism. The issue of transmitted memory and fiction is common to us and Europe, but are we aware of the echo created by what we do here in our internal discourse—how it looks from the standpoint of the other? In that sense, your writing acts within Hebrew and within Israel, but no less so in Europe and in the entire world.

Aharon Appelfeld: I will read the opening section of *The Age of Wonders*.⁴

Many years ago Mother and I took the night train home from the quiet, little-known retreat where he had spent the summer. The coach was new, and on one of its rounded walls was a poster of a girl holding a bunch of cherries in her hand. Our places were reserved, the seats solid and comfortable with embroidered white antimacassars on their headrests. The compartment door was open and a girl, very like the one in the poster, stood there with a wooden tray in her hands. She stood in the doorway for a long time and then suddenly, as if set in motion by some external command, started walking down the aisle serving coffee and cheesecake. [. . .]

The silence of the summer was over. Now we were on the long journey home. It too was magical, full of delicious details, such as the girl with the green silk scarf around her neck, who for some reason looked to me like a baroness. Her face against the white antimacassar was pale and transparent. Only a short while ago two servants had lifted her suitcases onto the luggage rack, and a swarthy man with a strangely elegant air had kissed her on the forehead. She had not moved a muscle since. She sat staring into space, her eyes apparently fixed on some point in the distance. Although she was partly hidden by the compartment curtain, half her face was enough for me. A stream of pleasure flowed through my limbs at the sight of her silhouette. But alas, my happiness was already flawed, created incomplete; a thin sorrow gnawed at it. The secret suspicion that this pretty face would wither before the end of the long journey shadowed my small joy. I fixed my eyes on her intently, determined not to miss the slightest movement of her face.

Michal Ben-Naftali: Did the Eichmann trial, or any other event, mark a shift in terms of the way you were accepted? Do you feel that your writing suddenly found a public echo, a community that reads and responds?

Aharon Appelfeld: In recent years I have received letters. Quite a lot of letters. Some of them are rather formal: “Thank you so much,” “fine writing.” Some imply a degree of reservation: “That’s fine, too.” And some letters follow a pattern that has repeated itself over the past decade: “Appelfeld, I’m the son of Holocaust

⁴ Appelfeld, Aharon. (trans. Dalya Bilu). (1981). *The Age of Wonders*. Boston: David R. Godine, 3–4.

survivors. My parents never told me, and I didn't ask. Now they are gone, and your books are my parents." No less than that! This shakes me every time, because I'm not willing to be a parent to so many children. A few, yes—but not so many! [laughs]. And it's not one or two letters. Almost every week I get a letter like that. I sense that there is a kind of undercurrent here. Because they don't say, "My parents never told me, I never asked, now they've gone and it's all over." No—it isn't over.

Michal Govrin: All of us are also a little bit your children.

Aharon Appelfeld: One more thing before we part. They are making a film based on one of my early books, *Night After Night*.⁵ I went to see them shooting the film. The story is about a boarding house in Jerusalem where people live in Yiddish. It's set in the 1950s, the people are Holocaust survivors, and they feel that if there is a holy language, it is Yiddish, so they speak in Yiddish. They live a bohemian life—lots of vodka, cards, lots of women, lots of everything—and lots of Yiddish. I wanted to see the actors. Most of them were the children of Holocaust survivors, aged around 30–35. Suddenly, because they were involved in this film, another layer was revealed—the Yiddish they picked up, the Russian they picked up, the Polish they picked up. As if on top of their Israeliness there was some kind of additional layer. The Israeli character can be a bit rough and crude; here there's another layer, a very delicate one, and a much more delicate, whispered kind of speech . . . That was a real surprise for me—in these particular conditions, suddenly a different kind of layer is exposed.

Michal Govrin: And that's also part of Israeliness.

Aharon Appelfeld: But it's not visible, it's latent, not fully expressed. Yet here it was expressed fully. Whole sentences in Yiddish, something you wouldn't expect from someone who came from some moshav or was born in Afula or . . . You wouldn't expect that . . . or, I don't know, my father was a pilot, you wouldn't expect that, either.

Michal Govrin: I would like to thank Aharon Appelfeld for his work, for the words in his books, for the words that led to the founding of this group, and for the words that have opened up our closed discussion here today and cleared a way for us. We could not have expected such works or for more words than we received. And I just want to ask for many more books from you. After all, you have suitcases full of manuscripts, I know that. So take stuff out of your suitcases! [laughs]

Aharon Appelfeld: Thank you very much, it was a real pleasure to be here.

⁵ Appelfeld, Aharon. (2019). *Night After Night* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Keter.

Saul Friedländer and Otto Dov Kulka

On Historiography and the Personal Voice

Michal Govrin: This morning we are pleased to welcome to our session two of the most prominent historians of the Holocaust—Saul Friedländer and Otto Dov Kulka. Saul Friedländer’s book *When Memory Comes* (1978) revolutionized the discourse about the Holocaust: a historian who is himself a Holocaust survivor exposed his own personal memories—how he escaped from Prague to France with his parents, and how he was separated from them, taken to a monastery, and saved, while his parents were caught and murdered as they attempted to cross the border into Switzerland. In his book *Kitsch and Death* (1982), Friedländer initiated the discussion of Nazi esthetics and the poetic shaping of “evil.” And in the two volumes of his monumental work *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997, 2009), he broke new ground by juxtaposing a comprehensive historical study with a panorama of human voices taken mainly from journals written by Jews during the Holocaust.¹ Otto Dov Kulka, whose historical studies examined the ideological principles of Nazism, wrote personal journals over a period of decades documenting his experiences as a child in the family camp at Auschwitz, alongside reflections on the subject of his research. Part of this unique archive was recently published in the book *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*. The book was immediately translated in many languages and created a public storm.²

The two scholars have maintained a long and intimate friendship and there is a direct connection between their respective personal books, as well as between their fields of research and approach to the Holocaust. We have heard some extracts from their books, and we now listen to a conversation between them and pose some questions—we of the subsequent generations who follow in their path and continue to ask, in our own ways, the questions they asked themselves.

1 Friedländer, Saul. (trans. Helen R. Lane). (1979). *When Memory Comes*. New York: Farrar; — (trans. Thomas Weyr) (1984) *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*. New York: Harper & Row; — (1997). *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution*. New York: HarperCollins; — (2007). *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination*. New York; HarperCollins.

2 Kulka, Otto Dov. (trans. Ralph Mandel). (2013). *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Translated from Hebrew by: Shaul Vardi.

Note: This is a written version of the meeting between the historians Friedländer and Kulka and the research group that was held at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute on October 11, 2013. A video documentation of the meeting is available on YouTube in two parts (in Hebrew, see: <https://tinyurl.com/3fyxes5r>).

Odaya Kohen Raz: The word “myth” came up repeatedly in your comments, yesterday and today.³ For me, that raised the literary association with the Homer’s *Iliad* and *Ulysses*, which is divided into a national story about the victory of the Greeks and a personal one about Odysseus’s return journey. The work maintains a perfect artistic balance between these two planes. We can see this in your comments, too: an attempt to create the impossible balance between the broad, historical story—the return to the large group—and the inherently personal story: where do people return to, how, and what happens when they get back? Is it possible to aspire to this kind of balance after the Holocaust, or is this an unrealistic aspiration?

Saul Friedländer: You ask how someone—like Dov or me—who experienced what they did can go back to everyday life and write about their experiences in an abstract way. In other words, how can they be like Ulysses and know where to return to and find Penelope? As far as I’m concerned, I think there was a long period when I totally rejected the past. Thinking about it now, in light of my conversation with you here, it strikes me how much I repressed things without even noticing it . . . I’ll give you a little example. While I was working at the embassy in Paris, it never even occurred to me to go to the places I used to go to with my parents as a boy, and that I went to later alone as a child who got beaten up in the Jewish orphanage. I didn’t even consider going there, even though I knew where we were (I only discovered the exact street names later, but I knew the general area very well). I couldn’t have cared less . . .

The years passed and I traveled to Geneva to complete my doctorate. My parents were caught by the Swiss (and then passed on to the French, and then to the Germans) at Saint-Gingolph, on the border between Switzerland and France. I knew that: I knew it from letters that had been handed over to me later on. My father writes “we were deceived,” and it says there: “Saint-Gingolph, September 20, 1942.” I lived in Geneva, an hour away by car, and I had a car, yet it never occurred to me to visit Saint-Gingolph to see the place I had read about in the letter. It was only when I started to write *When Memory Comes* that I thought about going there. And I did go: I retraced the route my parents took through the mountains, and I asked people there about it (for example, there was a hotel ledger that provided information about the route taken by the groups that tried to cross from France to

3 Kohen Raz is referring here both to the excerpts Kulka and Friedländer read from their books at the beginning of the section transcribed here and to Friedländer’s public lecture the day before, which is accessible on YouTube: “Prof. Saul Friedländer: Some Reflections on Transmitting the Memory of the Shoah,” in Dina Porat, Carlo Ginzburg, Michal Govrin & David Ohana (eds.) (2023), *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 37:1, 1–2, DOI: 10.1080/25785648.2022.2164433.

Switzerland: the main base was at Novel, and from there they made their way down to Saint-Gingolph). What's amazing from the psychological angle—and this is part of the massive self-repression—is that I lived in Geneva for seventeen years, and it was only after seventeen years that it occurred to me to see the place I had been aware of all the time. It wasn't because I was scared, it just wasn't on my mind . . . Classic and total repression. So, to answer your question, the return is very slow—homeopathic, you might say—because otherwise it is impossible. I don't know whether consciousness and emotion could have returned on a massive scale immediately after the war. Some people—perhaps older people, who experienced the war as adults—were able to remember everything, feel everything. And there are others who are still alive today and who have totally deleted it all. I moved some of the way, but I did so in very small steps, slowly, and that was the only way. The shock that changed it all was the year I spent in Berlin at the Wissenschaftskolleg. That was a very unpleasant year—tempting, but also very unpleasant. The shock from that year—1985–1986—was so strong that it broke through all my barriers. But look how long it took . . .

Dov Kulka: The parallels between our journeys are amazing. We both sunk into the “normality” of life in some way. I went back to Czechia and dived into normality—high school, sports, youth movements, Czech patriotism, and a Communist ideology that promised a different world. When I was in Switzerland as part of a group of children and youths, because of some health issues, I met the Zionist movement, and then the way forward was unequivocal: to the kibbutz. Eight or nine years of kibbutz, building a new man and a new society.

The interesting thing is that in our youth group we were about 40 youths aged 15–16 on Kibbutz Kfar HaMaccabi. The kibbutz was founded by Germans, Czechs and Austrians; it was a little bit liberal and a little bit nerdy . . . But the interesting thing is that none of us young people ever raised the subject. Not one of us. All of us had someone who had survived, from Czechia or Slovakia, through the camps or in hiding. It was irrelevant, totally irrelevant!

And I'll add something else. People often say that the Yishuv or Israelis didn't want to hear what the survivors had to say. I tend to disagree. I think that the sense of the “footsteps of history,” or returning to a historical past and a new land, and things that have since become clichés—“taking our fate into our own hands” and building “a new man” . . . And the return to the land, to agriculture, the addictive desire to build a new society. I think that this whole dream was so dominant, even for all the people who arrived here from the transit camps, that despite all the difficulties it was irrelevant to discuss the event we had put behind us . . . Just as we left Europe behind, and bourgeois society, and our family – my father's family.

There is another inconsistency or contrast: there were hours of happiness as everyone danced the hora, with the sense of exultation of the pioneering society. I left the celebrations and walked around the fields, and then it came back to me. I walked through the landscapes of my memories. And my journals in this period were full of melancholy, or even despair. But the path I chose—and the path Saul chose, too—in order to confront this period was a scientific one—the only one open to us. We both worked with German colleagues, a first generation of graduates. We built the enterprise that put in place the historical foundations for confronting that period. Personally I was always careful not to include autobiographical elements in my historical studies of the period . . . So much so that my Israeli and German colleagues, and my students, were unaware of my connection. But in my book *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, I revealed how the period I was born into in 1933, and the time I spent in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943–1945, preoccupied me in two dimensions: the first in my studies as a historian, and the second, as the subtitle of the book states, in “reflections on memory and imagination.” In both dimensions, my reflections extended far beyond the physical Auschwitz.

For decades I was convinced that the only way to understand this past is through historical research—a path I continue to follow today in my work. You may ask, “Where was Auschwitz all this time?” *It was present*. But only in my journals and dreams. At some point, about twenty years ago, I decided—or more accurately I agreed—to record a series of interviews that were really monologues: my autobiographical thoughts about that “metropolis of death.” When the idea was first raised of publishing those “reflections on memory and imagination,” I felt that it was wrong to mix together study of my biographical past and study of the historical past. It was only after I completed my three latest major research and documentation projects, from 1997 through 2010, that I decided to publish my personal “non-scientific” thoughts.

Galili Shahar: I will try to connect the story of the whistling Jewish boy—you, Dov⁴—and the Jewish boy-narrator in your book, Saul.⁵ When people sing and play Schiller and Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*, the ambivalence is demonic. This de-

4 Galili Shahar is referring here to the popular Jewish tale of the simple boy who, by whistling or playing the flute, opened the Gates of Heaven on Yom Kippur (the story is attributed to the Baal Shem Tov and was presented in a literary version in Sholem Asch’s story “A Village Saint”). Shahar associates this tale with a passage Dov Kulka read at the beginning of the session from his book *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death* (24–29) in which he describes how, as a child in Auschwitz, he played Schiller and Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* without being aware that this was the melody he was playing.

5 This refers to an entry from the diary of Moshe Flinker, a sixteen-year-old boy from Brussels, dated January 21, 1943, the appears as an introductory quote for the chapter “Shoah (Summer

monic quality is already present in the original, not in the sense of Auschwitz, but regarding enlightenment, since it is Lucifer who carried the light. But the whistling or flute-playing is different. It does not come forth from a choir, whether Greek or German. It is a private, unique echo box, rare and feeble. Wagner claimed in his essay that the Jews do not sing, they whistle or moan in the synagogue . . . We may address this living texture through Hölderlin's concept of the caesura—the pause. The rhythm is interrupted in mid-flow and through the collective playing another voice is heard. This is the feeling when we read in your book, *Saul*, the testimony of the Belgian-Jewish boy whose Hebrew embodies tradition and an insistence on tradition. Within all the expansive system of documentation and historiographic writing, this testimony stands as a type of caesura.

Dov Kulka: This is the greatness of *Saul's* book, that it brought these voices with the authenticity into the broader texture.

Saul Friedländer: The intention was complex. Of course, I had arguments with some colleagues whom Dov knows very well—Martin Broszat, for example. The arguments were fierce and unpleasant. I'm not talking now about Hans Mommsen or Ernst Nolte; let's talk about Broszat. He was without doubt one of the great historians of Nazism, head of the enormous Institute of Contemporary History in Germany (Institut für Zeitgeschichte), which concentrated mainly on Nazism. In one of his articles he raised some ideas I disagreed with. I replied to him, and he angrily proposed that we correspond quickly: he would present his position and I would reply; we would each write three letters and then publish them. And so it was. Toward the end of his first letter, after presenting his ideas, Broszat came to the subject of the Jewish victims: "Of course, we must show great respect for the memory of the victims; but this is a mythological memory that severely disturbs the rational historiography of the young German generation" (he did not want to mention me by name). Naturally this lit up every possible warning light for me. I replied that he was effectively arguing that the victim's subjectivity is so dominant that they cannot observe and study the past without their massive subjectivity distorting reality. I asked whether someone who was a member of the Hitler

1942—Spring 1943)" in Friedländer's book *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945*:

"It is like being in a great hall where many people are joyful and dancing and also where there are a few people who are not happy and who are not dancing. And from time to time a few people of this latter kind are taken away, led to another room and strangled. The happy dancing people in the hall do not feel this at all. Rather, it seems as if this adds to their joy and doubles their happiness . . ." (397)

Youth (I did not know then that he was also a party member, that only became known after his death) does not also bear some burden of subjectivity. Of course that raised the tone of the exchange of correspondence and I think that was the final point. The end of the beginning. Because of these arguments I decided [to write this book].

It took me another two or three years to begin the work of writing two volumes (Why two volumes? Because I was afraid that I would not have the strength to write the whole story . . . So, logically enough, I decided to start from the beginning and go as far as the war, and then—if I had the strength and I was still around—to continue). The basic intention was to show that victims can also write the history of the Third Reich from their perspective. Since I was very conscious of my subjective position, I hoped I would achieve sufficient distance, like those German historians (who in most cases do not mention, or at least at that time did not mention, how old they were during the war and whether they were members of the Nazi party). I mentioned in the introduction that I was, of course, aware that I carry a subjective burden, and that by declaring this from the outset, I hoped the readers would be able to relate to my text accordingly.

But I had another important goal. In historical terms, the Holocaust has been described mainly in terms of Nazi actions, from start to finish. It was Raul Hilberg—who I admired—who blazed the trail [to a different approach]. He focused very skillfully on the Nazi extermination machine, and in 1961 published his monumental book *The Destruction of the European Jews*. But regarding the Jews he showed a kind of scorn, with angry comments about the Judenrat and so forth, and even that was only mentioned toward the end of the book. The Jews were not part of the overall picture. The outside world was also not part of the overall picture. So alongside my substantive response to Broszat, I also wanted to show that there is a Jewish dimension here, too, and without it you cannot understand the full picture. There is the focus on the Nazi machine, and there is the focus on the outside world, which supports this machine or defends itself from it, and there are the victims. And the victims are not passive (although they were passive in military terms, with the exception of a handful of ghettoes); they expressed themselves. They see things differently from the SS or the Obersturmführer. They are on the other side, but they see and they write. Where do they write? In journals and letters.

I barely used these materials in the first volume, for 1933–1939, because that period was “straightforward,” if you can put it that way, once you are familiar with its various stages. The difficulty comes, of course, in describing the Holocaust in 1939–1945, because there you move from one country—Germany, or Germany and part of Poland—to the whole of Europe, with completely different worlds and different Jewish communities. The first volume has a somewhat monolithic character—Germans and Jews, or German society and Nazism. In

the second volume, as history progresses, we are dealing with the Jews of Lithuania, of France, of Italy . . . From all this mishmash—from the ultra-Orthodox to the most extreme secularists—how can you create a description that represents the victims' side and describes their reactions without getting completely lost?

I'll spare you the details of the approach I adopted, which was based on taking very short periods and sections, like in the cinema, so that the Jewish voices appear in juxtapositions—a voice from Warsaw and a voice from Lodz and a voice from Bucharest, all taken from journals. But the more I wrote the more it offered a broad perspective of what happened from the victims' perspective. But at the same time, as you read, you can see the Jew from Paris standing in line to buy potatoes with vouchers and still not realizing what was happening; and the Jew sitting in Bialystok and already knowing, or at least hoping, how to get out of a situation that was getting worse every day. This polyphony provided, I hope, portraits of such different people, each of whom found themselves facing the same fate, whether they knew it or not (in most cases they didn't, because even those who did know somehow hoped that it was not true).

I had another intention, too. When you read about the Holocaust, if you are in the right state of mind, every so often you receive a shock. But historical writing very quickly "domesticates" this shock. The historical explanation says that such-and-such happened, and this is the explanation for the extermination machine, and this is the structure of Eichmann's office . . . and you immediately take things for granted. By introducing the Jewish voices into the historical story—whether stunned or completely naïve, my goal was to disassemble the "domesticating" historical story. You relate the history, and suddenly a boy like Moshe Flinker appears and wonders: didn't everyone ask themselves why Jews were killed in the house next door? And why did God bring these events on the Jews? Maybe it is a sign of imminent redemption? In other words, the boy tries to understand, from his theological perspective, why the disaster is happening (and of course, he is unaware of its full depth; he lives in Brussels under an assumed name, in an ultra-Orthodox family; they sit there with their false identity until they are caught and taken to Auschwitz, all of them; two sisters survived and they found his diary). So the purpose of these voices is to break up the historical narrative and, if possible, to give the reader this momentary sense of shock: it cannot be. And it all comes from journals; I hardly used memoirs at all, even though I myself have written memoirs. I was concerned that with the passage of time, even if the memories are written in the best possible faith, they will always have something of the quality of a distant perspective, and naturally they also embody the organization of the material. By contrast, in the journals of people who were killed shortly after they wrote what they wrote, everything remains entirely raw. I will give an example of a girl from a ghetto in Galicia where there were two massive "Aktions" and the Jews were killed

in the town cemetery. They killed them all, including the girl who wrote the journal. A Polish woman found the journal on the roadside near the cemetery, collected the pages, and after the war handed them over for publication. The writer repeatedly mentions two of her friends. She relates that one was annihilated in the cemetery, but at least her end was not as bitter as that of her second friend, who was seen being choked . . . When you read this, and you know that the girl was writing this while the events were happening, thinking of her two friends and taking comfort that what happened to one did not happen to the other, you are left stunned for a moment. In this way the human voice, from journals and letters only, can break through our “comfortable” feeling as we read a history in which we understand every detail. It can make us stop and say to ourselves that what is being described here is not something natural or obvious.

Dov Kulka: One amazing thing is the way the historians reacted to Saul’s book. Not just historians, but the educated German public. As if a screen had been torn apart. Almost all the main newspapers spoke of the “voice of the victims.” “We didn’t know . . .,” “we weren’t aware . . .” They weren’t aware that the victims existed as more than an object.

Ron Margolin: I would like to focus on the subject of myth. I was astonished by the text Dov read. A year and a half ago I visited Poland for the first time and I felt the mental difficulty, the struggle to connect to the suffering. I remembered stories about my grandmother’s brother, who died in the Holocaust, but I still found it hard to connect to the pain. I was amazed by this, because if I can’t connect to it, who can? This leads me to a sense of a total gulf between what you have both said and written and the myth of the Holocaust that has emerged in Israeli society. It’s an enormous gulf. How can you bridge it? You have explained your efforts and attempts to cope with this as historians. But here, in Israeli discourse, I feel that we’re banging our heads against a brick wall. Just now there is a debate in Israel about the tens of thousands of young Israelis who have chosen to live in Berlin, and in this context I identify completely with the comments by Yair Lapid.⁶ The fact that these young people don’t see anything problematic about living there is no coincidence. It might have been a coincidence if we were talking about a handful of people, but this is a significant phenomenon, so it’s clear that there is an antithesis here to the way we have handled the Holocaust—

⁶ Margolin is referring to comments by Yair Lapid, who at the time was serving as finance minister, against Israelis who move to Berlin. Regarding Lapid’s comments, see, for example: “Think About It: Why Israelis Moved to Europe,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 27, 2013: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/columnists/think-about-it-why-israelis-moved-to-europe-329878>

a profound cultural response by the younger generation to the myth of the Holocaust in Israeli society. A kind of counterclaim—unconscious or ill-considered, perhaps, but far from simple. The serious question is, how are we tending to future generations? As a historian, I certainly do not belittle academic work, but I am also aware of its limitations. The history books will remain, but the myth will still live on . . . Given the evident trend in Israeli society today, with which we are all familiar, how can we transmit the personal dimension, the aspects you both raised in your books, into the collective consciousness?

Dov Kulka: I don't have an answer . . . I said what I said, and it was published at some point, but I didn't dare to get involved in things in the way Saul did. I'll tell you one thing. The journal *Der Spiegel* contacted me and suggested that one of their correspondents could accompany me when I went back to Auschwitz. I refused, of course. I explained my refusal and insisted that they publish it, and they did. I wanted to keep to myself the immediate picture of myself returning into that void and the presence of that void. These are the landscapes I wander around by myself (I went with the correspondent to the Gate of Mercy in Jerusalem when she visited the city—I was willing to do that). But I never asked myself that question . . . It may seem wrong, an abandonment of responsibility, but I haven't reached that stage—maybe I will some time . . . Some things really anger me, such as the fly-past over Auschwitz. But I allowed myself the luxury of not doing more than I did. You . . . your circle . . . you took on yourselves the great task, but as for me, I don't have any answers. I can discuss various phenomena, but I can't tell people the right way to deal with it all.

As for Berlin—I lived there while I was doing my PhD. I worked in the archives there. I received a lot of my European culture through the German language. The German language isn't Nazism, and Nazism did not eliminate the language. That's also why I never asked [people about their past] while I was in Germany—and this was in the mid-1960s, so I knew that half the people around me had been involved. I didn't ask. I was there to work. Again, maybe it's kind of luxury I allowed myself not to ask who had been involved and who hadn't. I stuck to my work. The breakthrough came when we had the debate with the Germans—and for me, particularly with Ernst Nolte. But I'm digressing: we're talking about Israeli society. I can only answer for myself, and I don't have any compliments to offer.

A group member asks: But you're allowed to do that. We aren't.

Dov Kulka: I'm a thinking person and I needed to do it.

Saul Friedländer: "Needed" . . . but in most cases it's impossible . . . Look, I've tried to describe—and to criticize—the official structure, the mythology, if you

like, of the Holocaust in national discourse in Israel. But there are a lot of thinking people who aren't necessarily influenced by the official discourse. You identified an authenticity in us, and you asked how we can convey this to Israeli society. But an inherently individual authenticity cannot connect to a mythological and political framework that shapes a story to meet political, national or nationalist needs. That's an impossible connection . . . Yes, there is an authenticity in what both of us have written and in what many other people have written (Israel Gutman, who just passed away, and Yehuda Bauer, of course, and many people in Israel who wrote on the basis of their personal feelings). This writing has undergone changes: in Ben-Gurion's time there was an effort to suppress the subject, but then the situation reversed and we reached the outrageous situation we see now. A day or two before the lecture I met with Dov and told him that I was going to criticize manifestations of force such as the fly-past over Auschwitz. He told me that he had read the interview with Amir Eshel⁷ and it had outraged him. I felt good about that, because if it outraged him, then maybe as a leftwinger I'm also right . . . Today I saw in the English version of *Haaretz* that Yehuda Bauer also wrote critically about that interview. But Amir Eshel is probably expressing the majority feeling. I don't know whether my criticism of him yesterday changes anything (after all, people who come to a lecture know what they're coming to, who they identify with, and who will be speaking, and in this case they know that the speaker isn't from the right wing). It's very hard to know how to convey a personal message to a collective, and actually it's impossible, because the collective is conditioned by completely different factors—politics and propaganda.

When I began to write the lecture in August, I read by chance in *Ynet* that Minister Israel Katz commented that the use of gas [during the civil war] in Syria had a strong impact in Israel, because millions of Jews were murdered in gas chambers. I thought to myself that Minister Katz was using appalling political events in a very crude way. Then I read the interview with Amir Eshel, and after that I read that the prime minister, who spoke about his grandfather at the United Nations, had returned to the theme of the Holocaust on a pretty major scale in his speech at Bar-Ilan. And then he also explained to the Czech president . . . The claims of a shared destiny with countries subject to the cruelty of the world is completely distorted. It is not just outrageous, but it also creates the impression that a monster has been created here that is no longer connected to the original source. A distorted picture of events that has no connection to current times. We are not living during the Nazi

7 Friedländer is referring to the article "Fighter Jets Over Auschwitz: IAF Commander Talks About a Mission That Shaped Israel's Future Decisions," *Haaretz*, September 2, 2013. The article included an interview with then-commander of the Israel Air Force, Major General Amir Eshel, regarding his participation a decade earlier in an Israeli fly-past over Auschwitz.

era. Amos Oz reminded Begin long ago that Hitler was already dead. Begin lived in the shadow of the Holocaust because he left his parents behind in Poland; it may be that Amos Oz should have been more considerate of this background. But today, I don't know how we lower the tone. The danger of a collective myth is that the constant association between contemporary events and the Holocaust, and the constant references to annihilation, inevitably create a rhetoric or imagination among the speakers and listeners that cannot easily be withdrawn. This is a distortion of the perception that the nation is in danger. The mixing together of the current reality with the extermination of the people decades ago is liable to create a sense among speakers and listeners that the current danger is one of extermination, so that we must act and act quickly. There was a moment like that, immediately after [the Arab armies attacked on] Yom Kippur. The sense of a threat of extermination within broad and accepted discourse is a catastrophic phenomenon.

Michal Rovner: In a way, your book [Rovner turns to Friedländer while holding a copy of his book *Nazi Germany and the Jews*] came to represent for me the “site” I was working in [Auschwitz]. I prepared an artwork and thought I was traveling there for two weeks. But I suddenly realized that the place “did not accept” my work, did not accept art. My work was site-specific in the most challenging way, like an abyss. I prepared a work that was site-specific, but what did the site itself have to say about the work? What it had to say was that everything I did before I arrived in this site was completely irrelevant. So I started to learn more about this place as I visited it. I read your book and other books and I was astonished. All of you here are so deeply involved in this subject and knowledgeable about it, but as an outsider I can say that before we even enter into the aspect of ideology, there is a tremendous condensation of the components of the Holocaust picture here in Israel. One of the things that amazes you as you read this book is the scope, the level of intricate detail . . . It isn't just Hitler, Eichmann, Hess, Himmler, and three or four other figures in a play. The play has an infinite number of characters! So many people who came to see the exhibition—educated people—didn't even know about Auschwitz 1, Auschwitz 2, Auschwitz 3 . . . So how can you take this picture, full of details, and use it to illustrate the potential for humanity to take leave of its senses? This is an exploration of the human, of what it means to be human, and how humanity can behave in these ways. When we were children we used to stand in front of a bonfire, throw on twigs, and shout “Hitler is dead.” It was very easy for us to sum up the whole story . . . Your book isn't read out or taught in school, but in my opinion it's compulsory reading for anyone anywhere so that they can not only understand the Holocaust of the Jews, but understand the negative human capacity we must acknowledge.

Sandra Meiri: I would like to address the subjective dimension of the myth about the Holocaust that was created in Israel. In my opinion, not enough attention is paid to the elements that feed this myth from inside: the fear—perhaps authentic—of extermination. Without this, the myth could not survive and would disintegrate over time . . . People don't address this aspect, the "substance" that enables the myth to continue to exist and to spark small bonfires that everyone dances around. The article about Dayan's plan to use nuclear weapons, published on the fortieth anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, makes you wonder where we could have found ourselves if the plan had been implemented. That was forty years ago, so what can we say today? I think this fear—which may ostensibly seem very unauthentic or a cynical exploitation of the Holocaust—is sustained by an underlying anxiety that is uncontrolled and unchanneled.

Saul Friedländer: Yesterday I tried to talk about the recurring anxiety that surfaced during the period of waiting before the outbreak of the Six Day War, when part of the population in Israel returned completely to a Holocaust mindset. During the Yom Kippur War, Holocaust rhetoric was not used so much, but I think the same anxiety was present below the surface. And since this anxiety returned again in 1990 with the "sealed rooms" and missiles, it's clear that this is a fundamental anxiety present among the public. The question is, where does it come from? After all, it doesn't come only from personal memory, because the generation that remembers is gradually diminishing. There is the generation that lived through the Holocaust and the second generation, but there is also the "force-feeding" of the public by leaders who use this anxiety, consciously or otherwise. In other words, there is a process. The anxiety, which we may term authentic, is fed by constant references to the events, so that it is no longer possible to distinguish between anxiety that stems from an authentic source in the past and the constant use of symbols, images, and arguments that draw a parallel between our society and the defenseless Jews of that time. There is some foundation there, but because the subject is constantly regurgitated in political propaganda (even if this sometimes comes from people who really feel this way, because of an ideologically-driven worldview, or because of a message they absorbed from their parents, or for some other reason . . . we can't see them all as "cynical exploiters) it is quite serious. This process creates a worldview that is liable to interpret genuine threats through the prism of extermination, through a distorted historical prism, and as a result to push for a particular course of action. And that action may be catastrophic.

Johanna Gottesfeld: I think these are the delayed outcomes of trauma. You mentioned that you don't like the word "victim" [turning to Dov Kulka], but that's what it is: to keep on feeling like a victim forever. If you were hungry once, the theme of

hunger will always stay with you in one way or another, and it will also be passed on to your children in one way or another. “Being a victim” also stays with you in all kinds of situations. For example, on the subject of the fly-past, for a lot of survivors it conveyed a sense of power, of “never again.”

Dov Kulka: Firstly, it’s true that I said that I have reservations about the term “survivor.” I feel embarrassed and even angry when people call me a “Holocaust survivor.” People ask me, so what are you then? And I reply: Dov Kulka. In my opinion, seeing the victims as carriers of trauma obscures their place in life. Secondly, and more deeply—I would even say acutely: I live in this country, and there is nothing that infuriates me more than the use—sometimes in good faith but often less so—than the association between the Holocaust, the fate of the Jews in the so-called “final solution,” and the *raison d’être* of our existence here as an eternally-threatened people. This perception blurs the very distinct character of this event with types of threats from a different world. In my opinion, we fail to emphasize the universal dimension of the Holocaust. The Holocaust did focus on Judaism, because Judaism was one of the components of Western civilization; the revolt was one against the existence of that civilization, against values that at least in part originated in Judaism and passed on to Christianity and from Christianity—in its secularized form—to democracy and Socialism. The actions focused on Judaism, but on its universal message: the Jewish perception of the unity of the world and the equal value of human life stands in opposition to the Nazi ideology of a racial hierarchy. In other words, these were two opposing worlds. When we focus solely on our suffering as Jews, as people hated everywhere, and so on, we diminish the essence of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is attached on to the struggle for our specific existence here—which is something important and even historic; but the Holocaust was different in its dimensions and its meaning. That’s why it infuriates me every time. Not just the fly-past, but when our prime minister uses this theme obsessively. And I find it even harder when the justification for our adhesion to this land becomes part of a political messianism that seeks to include this argument, this self-conviction. That’s wrong. I say that both as a historian and in the simple sense of the word; and no less—as a Jew who lives here. I’m grateful to you, Saul, for confronting these aspects. I didn’t do so, and that’s wrong. I go to a Peace Now demonstration, or demonstrations for various other causes, but I haven’t raised this issue as a banner in my spoken comments in the way Saul has or many others do. That gap infuriates me but it also paralyzes me.

Michal Govrin: If I may, I would like to follow up these last comments with my own question. I will begin from the paralysis and silence you have both mentioned, and from there move on to the question of fear that Sandra raised, and

perhaps the ongoing trauma Johanna discussed from her daily work in *Amcha* (the Israel Center for Psychological and Social Treatment of Holocaust Survivors and Second Generation) My question concerns a point that I find threatening, but that I nevertheless feel is unavoidable, something that silences us and underlies this fear: in our understanding of the Holocaust as the basis for shaping any kind of myth, how can we cope with the question of hatred and evil? I think that the fear, silence, and the great repression are the product of the radiation of the threat and dread. We think, “How can we cope with something like that?” And then we run away from it . . . There is a fear of approaching it, a need not to think, not to look at the person opposite us. And as a result we return back to our own memory of ourselves—Jewish, Israeli memory. Saul, in *Kitsch and Death* you turned your gaze not only to Israeli culture, but also to the great question: how could people in Europe remain silent for decades, and is Europe talking about it now? Are we accepting responsibility for continuing to do what you did in the book? How can we write a memory that does not close itself off again and again in the ghetto, but is capable of including all the participants as part of a single story that is also an inseparable part of ourselves? Galili hinted at this earlier in his comments: how can we relate to European culture, to the heritage of enlightenment we quote, without examining the contexts in which it was written and without seeing what it leads to, as if it is the truth? After all, many of the Israeli youth movements perpetuate the traditions of the youth movements in Germany without taking even a moment to consider the fact that these platforms—like love of the soil and the land—are imported. We haven’t even begun to criticize the European heritage . . . and if we do, what language will we speak? Will we mention Judaism? After all, Judaism itself includes so many voices . . . we haven’t begun to criticize those, either, beyond the level of our convenient slogans. Going to a Peace Now demonstration is easy, but understanding the Orthodox heritage is difficult. And there are so many voices—which ones should we take? Which ones will lead us to conclude, “these are dangerous voices”? And which ones have nuances in which we will discover a struggle. And which ones—ones that to Wagner sounded like wailing—are actually our credo? When will we begin this work of cultural clarification? In this sense, I am grateful to you, Saul, for your book *Kitsch and Death* and for what you and Dov have done. The attempt to metapho- rize Auschwitz led us to a very volatile point: on the one hand, an authentic testi- mony to the strength of the constant psychological influence of a given place (this is also true for me personally, if I can say so in public, since my brother was mur- dered in a gas chamber; in some way this echoes his voice . . . Is that what he thought? Or not?). And on the other hand, the challenging question: what is this great temptation, which is also a great fear, made of? And how can we dismantle it? How can we avoid falling into purple prose, into sentences that must excite

people and thus repeat a set of metaphors that bring us to a point of excitement? What happens then in our psyche? And what are the constant means of juxtaposition, the poetics of the struggle against excitement, of its clipping? And what are the ramifications in the real world: what aspects of European culture and reemerging today from the basements, returning in a different reincarnation, in a reincarnation of hatred of Israel? It's not forbidden to say this. You can long for peace but also recognize rising antisemitism in Europe. These are two things we need to live with at the same time. I think there is a kind of purism in the rejection of the need to confront what we faced in the Holocaust. Its face may be the opposite of ours, but this is the face of Esau (as the biblical commentators interpret the image of the angel in the struggle at the Ford of the Jabbok between Jacob and Esau). Maybe this is a profound sense of guilt? Maybe part of it is the monotheistic Jewish myth? Maybe we need to consider Jewish separatism? These are very tough questions and we haven't begun to ask them yet. In my opinion, we will not be able to shape the Holocaust before we confront not only the question "what happened to us?" but also the question as to the mechanism that could lead to such an insane dehumanization of the other, up to the point of their industrial and ecstatic extermination. I will end with an "artistic" quote from the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who on September 11, faced with the images of the falling towers, remarked that the events were "the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos."

Saul Friedländer: He tried to retract his words later.

Michal Govrin: It came out spontaneously, from his subconsciousness. Have we started to discuss esthetics, the shaping, how to create a myth that we will not fall into? How many of our national ceremonies replicate this? I am posing this question to you as historians, as people of culture. It's a question that bothers me day and night and scares me. I must say that a year ago, when I traveled to the Holocaust Day event at the UN devoted to children, and the photograph of my brother—the only photograph that remains of him—was suddenly screened in the UN plenum, it threw me into an emotional turmoil. Eventually I understood: I'm afraid. I'm afraid that something will reach out and catch me, too.

Saul Friedländer: If I may, following on from Michal's comments, I'll tell you that in 1967–68, when I came to teach at the Hebrew University for the first time, I had a seminar class with outstanding students. Because the students were so special, I thought that I could show them a film that of course was not screened at that time in Israel—Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Today everyone is familiar with this film, but back then it was impossible to find a copy and screen it, it was kind of forbidden in Israel in that period. I found an unedited version from

Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot on three separate reels. We put up a small announcement in the Kaplan Building, but when I arrived at the Weiss Auditorium it was packed with 300–400 students from all the faculties. The reels arrived late and it was impossible to tell which order they were supposed to be shown in. We put on the first reel. The film describes the first day of the Nuremberg Conference in 1934, and on this reel it showed endless lines of enthusiastic children. The Führer's car drives past and they wave flowers. But the people in the auditorium didn't understand what they were being shown. They chatted and laughed among themselves. Then we put on the second reel, which showed a scene shot in a closed hall, not outdoors. A group of party leaders met, and each one discussed his achievements over the past year. You see Hess and Goebbels, and at the climax of course Hitler appears. Some of the photographs from his speech there have become very well known. There were no subtitles, of course, and very few people in the auditorium could understand what he said in his Austrian-German, maybe only me and Michael [Hed]. But even so, the auditorium fell silent, from the force of the pathos and the enthusiasm of the 2,000 or 3,000 people in the audience in that hall, from the shouts of "Sieg Heil!" and so on. Then came the third reel, which showed a ceremony in which three leaders—Hitler, Himmler, and a third man, maybe Goering—went up to an altar, to the sound of cannon fire and shouts, and performed a flag ceremony. Hitler walked among the ranks, and at the head of each huge group someone stood with a swastika flag. Hitler took the flag from the martyrs of the putsch of 1923, soaked in their blood, and with it touched the flag of the military group standing there. In the background you can hear the Horst-Wessel Lied, with its captivating melody, followed by "Ich Hatt Einen Kameraden," which is the song most identified with the First World War, although it was written earlier. The whole time Hitler was facing the camera, Leni Riefenstahl's camera. He looks at the man carrying the flag, touches the flag with the flag of the martyrs of 1923 . . . but to the viewer, it seems that Hitler is looking at the viewer. All this with the music in the background—kitsch and death.

Then the reel stopped . . . It took at least 30 seconds until the first students began to stand up and leave, slightly stunned and talking quietly. We tried to explain this later in the seminar. I'm not saying they were hypnotized, but it was clear that the film left them all under a powerful, strange impression. To this day I can't explain it, but it is something of that "enchantment." And eventually that led me to write about the danger of the attraction to power.

Michal Govrin: The staging of power.

Saul Friedländer: Yes, theatrical staging with massive artistic effects, including the cathedral of light, which the Nazis, and Speer among them, knew how to use

effectively—far more so than the Communist regime. There's no comparison. Another comment, if I may. Somewhere else I tried to compare the Nazi kitsch, or the Nazi attempt to mobilize art, with the similar attempt made by the Soviets. I think I understood the main difference. In the mythology of the Communist bloc, they always talked about the glorious future that lay ahead—"to life." But with the Nazis, by contrast, there is this ritual of death, and the ritual of death is what worked, because there's something sacral and quasi-religious about it. It has already been claimed that they used the tools of the Catholic religion—most of the leadership came from a Catholic background—such as the ritual of death, sacrifice, martyrs, apocalypse, with the addition of artistic and production tools. That could be another comment or thought following your question.

Michal Govrin: I'm sorry that we have to finish, and I apologize to all those who did not have an opportunity to speak. I cannot find the words to express my thanks to Dov for joining us here today, and to Saul, who came from Los Angeles to celebrate his birthday with us. Let us make a "toast" to next year, a toast to Saul, and a toast to creativity.

Dov Kulka: Many thanks to Saul and to you all.

Saul Friedländer: Sincere thanks to Michal, to Dov, and to everyone.



Section Two: **Languages of Memory**

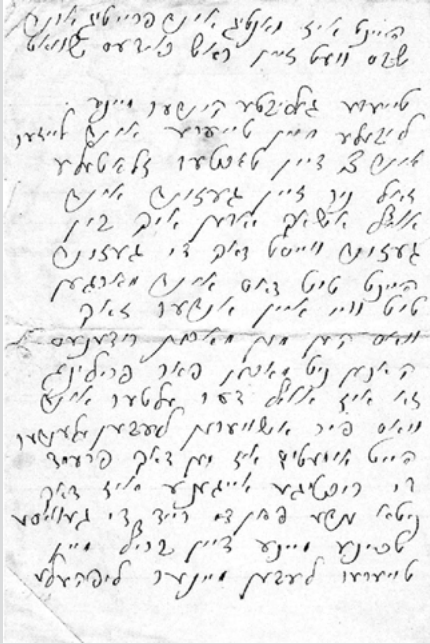


Fig. 1: A letter from Hannah-Rebecca Isiss Plen, Lithuania, 1941

"טייערע, געליבטע קינדער, מיין לעבן, מיין טייערע ליבעלע און לייזר, זלטקעלע די קליינינקע, מיין זייער, טייערע קליינינקע"

(Yiddish: "Dear, beloved children, my life, my dearly beloved, and my dear Lazer, tiny little Zlatkele, who is so dear to me"). When I first encountered the letters, my mother had kept and asked that we only read after she passed away, I discovered. . . All those years I always said that in my generation we did not have grandfathers or grandmothers. And suddenly I discovered that I did have a grandmother, not only before but also after I was born... And what a grandmother! In those letters – although she could not see or meet me, and knew it was impossible and that she never would – she nevertheless wrote to me and described me, described how she imagined me grow up, imagined my first word, my first smile, my first baby steps. . .

We, who were born in the war but far away from it, as well as all the generations born since, possess a knowledge that is partly imagined knowledge, a knowledge that has been elaborated. We did not go through the terrible experience of the Holocaust. We heard and read about it. We heard about it from parents or grandparents who survived, and it was preserved as a sort of act of memory, a pool of knowledge located somewhere between real and fiction – in fantasy, in stories, something that may or may not have happened. And *that* is something that I often hear from the Second generation, that we are bearers of memories which we do not even know. . . and when we are fortunate enough to find a real piece of evidence, like a letter describing the story, then fiction becomes reality and enters the flow of life as an extremely positive experience.

Yolanda Gampel

Memory of the Present

Preface

The ability to remember everything is the same as the inability to remember something specific; remembering too much or remembering nothing at all both constitute the same disorder. What's important is forgetting, which is why we need a mechanism that can make us forget, both at the rational and emotional levels—an entire world whose past is doomed to extinction. A world without a past can become poor, empty, and atrophied. The tension between the past and future is fertile and necessary. It is that tension that creates our state of mind as individuals and as a society, driving our aspirations and our evolution. Memory is a principle of unity, of continuity; it is a bridge that ensures the link, the connection between the subject and his experience.

Blanchot defines the essence of memory and oblivion after the catastrophe of the Holocaust. He makes a distinction between knowledge of the disaster and knowledge of a disaster and defines the boundaries between the self of a witness who experienced the disaster and the listener's unharmed self. While the knowledge about the disaster coils around the event's subversive essence, knowledge of a disaster confirms the disaster's intrusive influence. "No one looks directly at the sun" was Aharon Appelfeld's reply when asked why he did not write directly about the horrors of the Holocaust. Struggling to extend a bridge into an inaccessible world is the common denominator of all attempts to describe, talk about, show, or understand the Holocaust. It is a nearly impossible, and yet necessary bridge between remembering and forgetting.

The impossible traumatic nature of the Holocaust revolves around the struggle between the impulse to touch the core of that burning experience and the instinct to preserve oneself and keep one's distance; distancing makes it possible to represent the situation. How can one transmit the metaphor, which the Nazis turned into reality? Historic or quantitative descriptions are not enough to define the previous century's calamity of mass destruction; rational explanations and linguistic descriptions are required, too. Therefore, to transcribe history, a different thinking about memory is required, a new path.

Family and People, Memory, and History

I have lived to the age of 74 knowing that I belong to a generation that started its life together with Nazi genealogy. The Nazi genealogy started in the form of genocide and deprived part of my generation of the emotional experience of grandparenthood. Of course, the Nazi's thinking and iniquities had nothing to do with emotional well-being; all the Nazi thinking wanted was to eradicate the Nazi's fear of the Jews, which made them feel uncanny. Their goal was to annihilate and completely erase the existence of the Jews from the face of the earth and leave no trace behind them, to literally make them disappear in a cloud of smoke; but the vestiges keep incarnating in the universe in different and surprising ways.

Jewish tradition instructs: *“And on that day you will tell it to your son, ‘This is done because of what the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt’.* Therefore, on the face of it, Jewish culture is imbued with history. Indeed, dealing with the collective memory is part of a regular ritual that is carried out year after year, repeatedly, cyclically; but the collective memory preserved inside that ritual is transformed, each time, into a continuous present in which the community lives anew, time and again. This is not about the real past or its documentation.

Jewish-American historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi studied the nature of Jewish historical consciousness in his famous essay *Zakhor*. At the heart of his text lies the paradox he wishes to decipher:

Although historic meaning has always greatly preoccupied Judaism across generations, for Jews, historiography [i.e., the detailed investigation of historical events] was, at best, an accessory [to other studies] and for the most part played no role at all; accordingly, while the memory of the past has always been central to the Jewish experience, its main preserver was not the historian.

It was only at the age of 74 that I first read the letters my mother had kept for me, from my grandmother and my mother's sister, describing in detail all that happened to them and to other members of our family who remained in Europe. That was when I first discovered that in my early childhood, until the age of 2, I did have a grandmother, who carried me in her consciousness, in her thoughts, and her heart. Her lullabies enveloped me from a distant time and place.

I think my mother was that bridge without words who transmitted to my consciousness what had transpired in the Holocaust. She had the words and the emotional experience, but she could not speak them out or convey the experience to me in a symbolic way. Her hugs, her gestures, and her mother's songs were passed on to me. It may be that this was when my journey started, a journey of over forty years of research and work with adults who were children during the

Holocaust, and with their descendants. I also think that this is what led me to live here, in Israel, and later also to work with Palestinian colleagues.

Here in Israel, Holocaust survivors were able to find continuity, a link – not always conscious – to their parents' wishes. Here they also found protection, since in other places in the world something seemed to have been severed. The fear that people might find out they were Jews kept existing almost immanently, and outside of Israel, they did not have the enveloping protection of a framework that provided a place for and a recognition of the past, of the legacy that had been targeted for annihilation. Indeed, this mental envelope allows us not only to *survive* but also to try to *live* in this country, despite all its complications, vicissitudes, and wars.

For many, giving birth to children in Israel is a way to prove to those who committed genocide that generations continue, that we exist despite everything that happened; and the traditional “you will tell it to your son”, is a call to transmit memory from generation to generation, was now endowed with horrific contents: Auschwitz, Uprooting, Shoah. We are a generation whose legacy is a profound historic revolution.

I wish to focus again on personal memory: these bits of memory accentuate how personal memory is on the border of history. The nurtured history will be assimilated in that unidimensional static collective memory. This history does not settle for mere symbolic stabilization but presumes to do much more, it proposes to embed itself as a memory that ensures redemption. Yerushalmi places *memory* and *history* as opposed poles on the time continuum; and at the end of his book, he emphasizes how the detailed study of Jewish history – i.e., Jewish history as a stand-alone object of research – constituted a new type of approach. The historiographic approach knowingly sets itself opposite to the Jewish memory which is embedded in worship and tradition. The modern preoccupation with history arises from the continued decay of that collective memory, following the collapse of traditional Jewish ways of life in modern times and the great fall experienced regarding their past. The main and fundamental Jewish experience in the twentieth century is that of uprooting.

Structuring Memory, Structuring Identity

I now wish to relate to memory based on my personal experience as a psychoanalyst and researcher who, for 40 years, dedicated a great deal of thought to the question of dealing with the memory and oblivion of those who children during the Holocaust were – and with situations of social-political violence after the Shoah.

Psychoanalysis has focused on those aspects of memory that provide structure to our lives in conscious as well as unconscious ways. Memory stems from an attempt to connect various stimuli and sensations, which are scattered in the sensory apparatus and converge in the present moment via action. We may therefore define memory processes as a structuring of meaning in connection with the other. This means that structuring a memory also means constructing an identity, as in constructing a conscious subject who connects with the scattered components of the past and creates a narrative out of them.

Taking a testimony is an attempt to carry out a critical act; it is an act of taking ethical responsibility, whose purpose is to lead to a process of acquiring and structuring meaning; an act that aims to overcome unconscious resistance. What is the place of psychoanalysis in the transference which is activated by such a testimony? Are we worthy of being entrusted with guarding those memories? Psychoanalysis uses language, speech, and words that operate on memory and in turn, give rise to other memories. This means that during therapy, a process of remembering evolves in the transference space, and events that were forgotten, distorted, or modified by history, time, imagination, and the narrative – arise again. The words we say, the speech we use to tell the story, are expressive of our subjective state, our being. We may see psychoanalysis as a historical-graphical anamnesis in a movement of interpretation and appropriation. In this process, the memory's envelope is re-woven and re-built, in a way that ensures the self's sense of continuity over time and identity. This process revives forward-looking anticipation and preparation for the future.

When survivors seek psychoanalysis or come to give testimony to a historian, a social psychologist, a journalist, or a legal practitioner, they are engaged in seeking an almost impossible knowledge about themselves. Giving testimony is a modality of remembering, but remembering is a discovery of the self and an effort to rebuild a continuity in life. This movement leads to facing the inevitable failure of such an effort, which is impossible no matter what. Author Charlotte Delbo says: "I have a feeling that that self who was in the camp was not mine, it's not the person you have here in front of you. No, that is entirely unbelievable. And everything that happened to that self, the one from Auschwitz, has nothing to do with me now. It is not my concern. They are so different, the deep memory and the common memory". In such situations "the right thing to do" loses its relevance and the question arises if we are not in fact in search of an understanding that can no longer be reconciled with our other perceptions, if our search does not lead us not to the connection we sought but, on the contrary, to severance. The disaster of the Shoah cancels many formulas we used to believe in as Jürgen Habermas put it, Auschwitz destabilized the foundation of our lives and altered the principle of life's continuity in history.

How can we connect interpersonal processes with the building of collective stories, such as myth, mythology, or history?

It is an endless intergenerational memory, given to constant transformation, where each story keeps changing all the time; it is hard to fully grasp this occurrence and write it down as history because then we would need to write a historic memory that changes each day, by the place or time we look from.

Memory and the Shaping of the Present

Are these topics currently relevant? Are they more relevant today than ever, with a nuclear threat lurking overhead? How must we relate to our present, given the current political situation and state of war? How are the forking paths of the relations between Israelis and Palestinians narrated today, and how will their explanations and meanings be transformed in the future? Is the topic at hand only about memory, remembering, and oblivion? Do our questions about memory and the past mask the dark side of the present? We know that such darkness exists in our time; do we have the courage to look that darkness in the eye? Do we dare think of our current time and capture the dot of light in the darkness, that light that comes toward us but also keeps getting away, as we feel like we are witnessing an occurrence that must not be missed or taken for granted? For we are walking on a tightrope: our response may come prematurely, or belatedly, not yet, or not anymore. Currently, studying the present to live in indicates that what's past is, to a certain extent, the shadow of the hypothesis of the present. To live in the present, in the *now*, means *doing*, which comprises action, work on that which is present and takes place here and now. In Hanna Arendt's words: doing, and that which makes the human subject human.

The fissures that appear between the past and the present help us define temporality, the nature of different times. The present and the future are not just a repetition and transformation of an experience we already experienced, but something new which in turn keeps renewing every day. In the new present, there is no connection with memory. For example: David came for a session after he stayed in New York on 9/11. When he greets me, he declares that there is no connection between the fact that he saw the collapse of the Twin Towers at breakfast, through his hotel room window which was facing the scene, and the fact that he was born during the Holocaust. A thinking whose object is the present time, as Janine Puget already maintained some time ago, takes us away from a world of *representation* and leads to a world of pure present, a present that is facing us, a world of *presentation*. Our being in a state of present presence causes us to mo-

mentarily let go of the representation. As psychoanalysts, we see David's statement as a denial, a defense against the pain he felt in the past – a view that comes from a world of concepts that is based on linear, deterministic thinking. We interpret his words as an expression of the difficulty to relate to the present as it exists in front of us, and to painfully look with eyes wide open at the terrible current event.

Auschwitz and Hiroshima showed mankind that death and violence belong to the most intimate parts of our identity. These monstrous and painful memories left a load behind, a burden that destroys not only victims' but also uninvolved bystanders' perception and representation systems. Those memories create a legacy that causes violent identifications in those who were victims, and in their children. Thus, survivors' children do not have their memories of the Holocaust but an inner reality that is created in them of the loss their families suffered, a reality of suffering and humiliation, which has been deposited through intergenerational transmission not only in the survivors' children but in all of us.

Let us now relate to a type of memory that shatters into smithereens, a memory that is transmitted from generation to generation and monstrously scatters in time and space. Borrowed from physics, the term "radiation" is a metaphor for the monstrous effects of social-political violence; radiation makes us think of violence, cruelty, the terrors of war, and different forms of social violence; it allows us to perceive the war generated by those words and images which the media bombard us with daily. The memories of those who were children during the Holocaust exist in their everyday reality, which contains some representations of those times; but they also have frozen, sealed aspects, which they cannot express in words, and which constitute radioactive vestiges that cannot be transformed into memory. These aspects are not necessarily repressed but it is almost impossible to turn them into representations or to invoke their ghosts. Psychoanalysis, however, has focused on those aspects of memory that, consciously and unconsciously, give structure to our lives – and on the sensory memories that are created out of the attempt to gather and connect stimuli and sensations that are scattered throughout the sensory apparatus and communicate in the present through action. The violence and torture used in the Holocaust destroyed man's ontogenetic development and brought him back to a state of primordial helplessness. The fissure undermined the stable conceptual constructs of order and values in the inner and in external worlds.

How can we perceive, grasp, or understand the "radioactive nucleus"? It is an endlessly accelerating process in which anything can be given shape or disappear as soon as it appears. The "radioactive nucleus" is a form of "virtual emptiness" that contains all the possibilities for change, constantly appearing and disappearing. We might say that the "radioactive nucleus" is like being and non-being coex-

isting side by side, with a bias in favor of non-being, destruction, and extinction. Destruction and extinction may produce a destructive experience characterized by a movement of appearing and disappearing, a movement that disappears as soon as thought tries to capture it. We must still learn how the radioactive remnants penetrate consciousness, which permanently operates to maintain its organization and find areas and forms for self-expression. Radioactivity may move in unexpected ways, without touching anyone. Radioactive identification is made of external elements that were assimilated, fixated, and internalized as a false reality or as unconscious fantasies, and could suddenly be validated in moments of extreme traumatic tension. When carrying this metaphoric radioactivity in one's psyche or body, as a trace, as the nucleus of identification, or in any other form, one may become trapped in it in a way that may not allow him or her to live.

Memory, Fiction, and Narrative

The Holocaust confronted victims with such excessive emotional experiences that it caused the disintegration of thought processes and left the survivor wordless, speechless.

Between silence and words, there is a space that no testimony can cross, which may be also the clash zone between ethics and survival. In Eli Wiesel's words, "The Shoah is a sacred domain, no one can enter and then suddenly realize that you had to be there to understand. No one can ever understand, but we nevertheless must keep trying". Primo Levi adamantly claimed that the compulsive need to testify has a twofold goal, one that is looking backward, and one that is looking forward. One goal is to try to answer the terrible question "is everything that took place in the world of the concentration camps decipherable and translatable"; and the second goal is to find an answer to the question "What can every person do to prevent such atrocities from occurring again in the world, which remains saturated with harsh violence".

How can we find the right words to speak about the Holocaust? One of the dangers related to speaking about the Holocaust is related to how the listener hears things, how he receives the survivor's discourse. The listener's silence has the power to determine the meaning of the discourse. Once the listener assumes the role of the speaker, the power becomes shared, but, only to a point. Listening to the survivor is an asymmetrical dialogue in which the listener is always silent in the face of such horror. The listener is left almost wordless.

But leaving the survivor imprisoned in his or her frozen narrative implies a no lesser danger, of the formation of a sadistic scene expressed in a visual hallucination.

To avoid such terrible imprisonment, the survivor must walk the narrow path between the original terror and its representation in words. Psychoanalysts can help the survivor who takes this path to build an alternate thinking process, which would serve as an intermediary space between the horror and the act of looking at it.

Bion writes: “Psychoanalytic jargon was being eroded by eruptions of clarity. I was compelled to seek asylum in fiction. Disguised as fiction the truth occasionally slipped through. Fiction provides shelter from the barrage of basic assumptions. The seed of an idea may strike root and grow out of the grasp of answers, examples, and scientific facts”.

In the absence of evidence, the literary narrative operates as a space where a process of mourning can be facilitated, thus challenging history’s amnesia. I think that not only writing but also cinema, painting and any other type of fiction are like a reexamination of the negative impact of Holocaust materials, intended to bring into existence a sort of “counter-memory” that allows us to discuss the political, social, and psychological aspects or the aesthetic value of loss and trauma. All that is the result of a display that operates through various languages and narratives and allows to find and reconstruct loss through a variety of mourning rituals. Fiction in the broad sense, and more specifically texts, operates at several levels. At the first level, every author, in his or her perspective, chooses and relies on different forms of repetition of the loss, by selecting textual themes and constructs. At a second level, the figure, the character, the drawing, the photograph, or the picture recreate the mourning pattern as the author faces the loss and the mourning process again. That is to say, the characters, the paintings, the photographs, and the pictures reconstruct a textual mourning pattern, which confronts the loss and the process of mourning. Finally, the products – the novel, the film, the play, the painting – are a way, or at least an attempt, to force the author, the reader, and the viewer to confront the circumstances of the loss. Over the years it turns out, through research, writing, and clinical work, that the history of the wound of the Holocaust remained, in many cases, a scar; the history of the wound, which remained unrecognized and defiant, forces an understanding, through literary or metaphorical language, which allows to listen to the story.

Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoa* (France and UK, 1985) is a 9-hour long documentary on the Final Solution, in which he interviews a variety of figures – Nazi officers, passers-by, and survivors. In these interviews, he focused and relied almost entirely on the power of personal memories as they manifested in the interviews themselves – direct and spontaneous memories, as opposed to written and edited memories. Lanzmann’s work consists of detecting and reconstructing distant destruction; it is an act of construction and deconstruction, testimonials that grasp, coax, and eventually lead to disillusionment.

The Holocaust is a legacy of absences. Lanzmann explains that “everything started with absences. I knew a lot about the Shoah but I had not been deported so I had to start from scratch, from nothingness, to find the images of nothingness. Using words and images, Lanzmann created presence out of absence. *Shoah* brings life into memory; through art, he brings back to life a language that the Nazis took away and revives the ability to speak and transmit the truth, even those truths that cannot be represented or spoken out. Lanzmann was ethically committed to carrying out this mission, dedicating 10 years to writing, shooting, and editing his film. The faces, the places, and the views are a tapestry of words and pictures that keep coming out of an interplay of images, screaming voices, and silence, an interplay of concealment and nameless dread. The film is nine hours long and contains no melodrama or pathos; the journey towards memories, the journey of the memory, continues. The film does not contain a single archive picture from the periods it depicts, as it shows the extermination sites as they are today.

I wish to briefly mention the Israeli film *Waltz with Bashir* (Israel, 2008), an animated journey exploring the depths of Israeli director and scriptwriter Ari Folman’s consciousness, which brings up that which has been forgotten and repressed from the days of the first Lebanon war. When the repressed event of the massacre is shown on screen, the traumatic memory makes its appearance, and the animated characters turn into real photographs of real living, screaming, suffering people.

Memory can also be seen as the structuring of the presence of that which is absent. That which was destroyed survives as a space, an essence, some sort of “being” in the present. Memory allows for that which was destroyed not to disappear from consciousness. The disappearance of that which was destroyed in the Holocaust is also the disappearance of memory. To cancel something – a state, a sensation, a social link, a people – is not enough to destroy it since memory will conserve and reconstruct the missing parts in the present. To maintain the disappearance another presence is required to fill the absences, the void. The absence remains, then, and opens the way for the historian or social scientist to read and interpret the present through the lack, the void, the absence, through that which could not exist.

Orit Livne, Painter



Fig. 1: Guy and Sally Gottlieb, France, 1943.

My mother and her little brother are photographed here, and their names are written on the photo "Sally and Guy". Date: 1943. I have no information about this photo. I only know that it was taken during the period when my mother and her brother were hiding and fleeing, during the German invasion of France. When they started running away, in 1940, my mother was only six years old. She lost everything all at once, her home, her father who was drafted, her mother who abandoned the family. I think she has carried this feeling of placelessness and liminality all her life, this inability to feel a sense of belonging. At an older age she immigrated to Israel, got married and raised two daughters, but we returned to live in France for a while and I never managed to settle in properly in Israel. I think my mother passed on to me the inability to feel a sense of belonging. It created in me a place of inner exile. In all my paintings there is an element of somewhere else. Some kind of otherness. It's hard to say that this sky is the sky of Jerusalem. . . I named this series of cloud paintings "No Longer There and Not Yet Here." Something in transition. My mother was always in transition, and I feel that way to this day, unable to belong. In art I have a feeling that there is a place. Even it's a cloud in the middle of the sky, it's a place I exist in, express myself. Albeit somewhere I created myself, but a place nonetheless. My place.

Orit Livne

Clouds

Clouds are always in transition, no longer there and not yet here. Even when I paint the clouds of this land, they are soaked with the climate of my childhood, a mother landscape that has been assimilated and exists in me as a mother tongue.

“That notion of the embodiment of Time, the inseparableness from us of the past [. . .] all that indefinable past unrolled itself which I did not know I had within me.” (M. Proust)¹

The clouds painted as an object fixate the moment, but they are a symbol of the complexity of the relationship between past and present. The one true fixated thing in them is transitioness as a place with an existence of its own.

‘No longer there and not yet here’ is the mark that is tattooed in me, a personal memory from a mother who could not find her place after the Shoah.

¹ Proust, Marcel. (2012). *In Search of Lost Time: Time found*. Translator: Helit Yeshurun. Tel Aviv: New Library, Hakibbutz Hameuchad. 338.



Fig. 2: Orit Livne, Untitled, oil on canvas, 140x105 cm, 2013.



Fig. 3: Orit Livne, Untitled, oil on canvas, 70x130 cm, 2016.

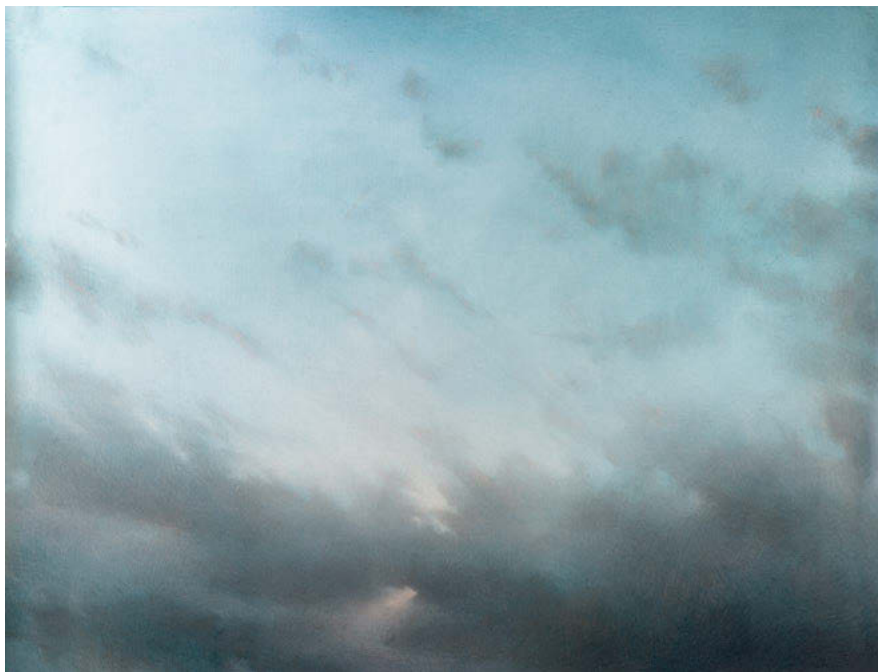


Fig. 4: Orit Livne, Untitled, oil on canvas, 140x105 cm, 2014.

Eli Vakil, Clinical Neuropsychologist



Fig. 1: Alagreen Gliduani, Tunis, ca. 1937.

This is a picture of my grandmother, who was killed in World War II at the age of 41, by an Allied shelling against the Nazis who were already in Tunisia. She went out to save a child injured by the previous shelling, and then another barrage came, and she was killed. The most interesting thing is that I had not connected this at all with my somehow being tied to the World War, to the Holocaust. . .”, I always pictured the Holocaust as a matter of concentration camps, but not this type of injury. Actually, my mother, too, and consequently, of course, me as well, were affected in some way by the consequences of this War.

Since I have been in the discussion group, “Memory and Fiction”, thoughts about the role of Forgetting have occurred to me. There have been studies in recent years about people with unusual autobiographical memory -- we should not be jealous of them – it is a brain fault. A person with absolute recall is an amazing phenomenon: you can give such a person a date, and he will say exactly what day it was and precisely what he was doing on that day as though it had happened today or yesterday. Apparently, we would be jealous of such people, but these people actually suffer and cannot function. I think that we, as a nation, if we just repeat and preserve all the details, it would not allow us to function in a healthy way. It is true that we need to remember these details, they need to be in our background, but we need to extract their significance, to go beyond these very specific memories, to the larger picture. And the larger picture is that to understand and remember, is not just to know what happened then, but to consider, what does this say to me today? What enabled a particular nation to wish to annihilate another, or other nations? We need to think of this in terms of what it says to me as an Israeli, as a person living in a sovereign, independent, powerful, capable nation, that includes minorities. To see the greater picture is to depart from the past and to transfer its significance to our present, here.

Eli Vakil

Memory and Oblivion from Individual to Society: Consequences for Remembering the Holocaust

Introduction

In this Chapter, I will attempt to deduce from the individual's extensive, accumulated memory processes to the memory processes of society at large, and particularly concerning the memory of the Holocaust. Our focus is on different aspects of normative memory processes that have been studied in humans. The primary endeavor of memory *researchers* is the attempt to understand the cognitive, brain, and biological processes of this phenomenon. As for the question of *the purposes of memory*, investigators can only propose hypotheses. In the first section, we will try to raise a variety of conjectures for possible answers to the question: Why do we remember, initially on the individual level and then on the society, and about the consequences this has for remembering the Holocaust. In the second section, we will deal with three different phenomena that may be interpreted as limitations of human memory, but that can essentially be viewed as reflecting *the flexibility of human memory*: memory bias, reconsolidation, and forgetting. These manifestations attest that by contrast with digital memory, in which all information we have coded is maintained in a computer, human memory is apparently 'imperfect' since it is fragile and changeable. The accepted view among most memory researchers is that the process of remembering is not at all similar to the process of extracting a file from the computer – recall is essentially a process of reconstruction of memory, that undergoes filtering by the person remembering and is influenced by the context and personal biases, and thus there is variability between people recalling the details of the same event that they experienced. Here, too, we will propose hypotheses regarding the role and essentiality of these processes for the individual and will also deduce from this their essential function for collective memory, such as that of the Holocaust.

The Purposes of Memory

Studies during recent decades have indicated that memory is not unidimensional but is rather composed of different types of memory that are processed in different areas of the brain. Similar to other cognitive processes, memory acts as a syn-

chronized neural network spread over wide areas in the brain, in order to enable the execution of this complex process. Despite the extensive preoccupation with memory on both the individual and collective level, for the most part, attention has not been paid to the question of its purpose or its significance – why do we recall the memory of a relative who is no longer with us, or why are we reminded of an event that occurred in the past? Research on memory deals with an attempt to understand the components of memory and its types, and the connection between these with different brain areas. Regarding the purposes of memory, scientists can only offer hypotheses without the ability to prove their correctness unequivocally. I will propose here several possible purposes of memory, that are not contradictory but rather complement each other; and perhaps the challenge is to discover the proper balance between the different purposes of memory. And since the struggle against forgetting is not just on the individual but also on the collective and national level, I will also attempt, given the individual's purposes of remembering, to offer insights regarding the memory of society at large, and regarding the memory of the Holocaust in particular.

1 Goal One: Survival value

Memory enables a person to avoid situations, places, or people that have previously caused him discomfort, or pain, or that endangered his existence. In the same way, the memory navigates a person to connect with and be helped by parties that have given him enjoyment and helped him to survive. This is apparently a basic, essential purpose of memory that is not unique to man: animals also instinctively avoid places that constituted danger for them and remember to return to places where they previously found or hid food (as birds are accustomed to doing). It is noteworthy that in humans, memory serves survival both rationally and consciously (when deciding to avoid a particular activity, since previous experience aroused a sense of threat), as well as instinctively, similar to animals (when the body signals distress and anxiety near a place in which a threat to survival was experienced). A prime example of that is a post-traumatic reaction, where a person enters a state of distress upon encountering anything directly or indirectly reminiscent of the traumatic experience.

The question arises as to whether, similar to an individual, there is also any survival value for the nation's past experiences? As with the individual, it is a basic, legitimate instinct that the nation should also care first and foremost for its survival. Therefore, there is a place to accept understandingly the position of its leaders, who witnessed with their own eyes the need to reinforce the State of Israel's security resilience, as one of the lessons of the Holocaust. In this context, I

would quote the words of Prof. Shaul Friedlander on the response of the young State of Israel to the Holocaust, as an aggressive survival reaction, that expresses the need to be masters of our fate and capable of defending ourselves as a society and a nation.¹ An echo of that may be found in the expression “Never Again,” quoted by leaders on various opportunities as an expression of the need for military resilience as one of the lessons of the Holocaust; as Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi wrote in a visitor’s book upon visiting Auschwitz in 2008: “I came as the IDF Commander in Chief on the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day and the eve of the State’s 60th Independence Day, to state – Never Again! Jews shall never again stare horrified, helplessly through barbed-wire fences. We have come to remember and not to forget, to say to them and their memory – Never Again!”² However, when politicians make manipulative use of survival to serve their own political interests, there is concern that emphasizing only the value of survival is liable to decline into nurturing feelings of revenge and hatred, not just toward one who is perceived as threatening our existence, but rather even toward the stranger and alien person living among us.

The concern voiced above is possibly, among other things, what brought the late Holocaust survivor and historian, Prof. Yehuda Elkana, to write “In Favor of Forgetting”:³

I do not see a greater danger to the future of the State of Israel than the fact that the Holocaust has been systematically and forcefully thrust into the consciousness of the entire Israeli public. For the first time, I understand the seriousness of our deed, whereby for decades we sent each and every child in Israel to visit repeatedly “Yad Vashem.” What did we want young children to do in such an experience? We recited by rote and insensitively, without explanation – ‘Remember’! For what? What is a child supposed to do with these remembrances? For very many, these pictures of atrocities were likely to be interpreted as a call for hatred. ‘Remember’ could be understood as a call for endless, blind hatred. We should forget. I do not see today a more important political and educational role for the leaders of this nation than standing next to life, devoted to building our future, rather than dealing night and day with symbols, ceremonies, and lessons of the Holocaust. They must uproot the control of the historical ‘Remember’ upon our lives.

1 In his words at a meeting with members of the research group “Transfer of Memory and Fiction” at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, see note 7.

2 *Walla!* News site, April 30, 2008.

3 Elkana, Yehuda (1988). “In favor of forgetting.” *Haaretz*. March 2, 1988. See: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/1.1841380>.

2 Goal Two: Ethical lesson

Memory enables the drawing of lessons not only in survival terms but also from the ethical aspect in terms of integrating appropriate behavior. This is the purpose of memory that is apparently unique to mankind, since it sometimes requires going against survival and instinctive drives. Thus, for example, what will a child who has experienced violence during childhood do with these memories when he has matured? Will he conclude from this that the efficient way to acquire what he wants is through violence? Or the opposite: due to memories of the physical and emotional pain that afflicted him, will he make every effort in adulthood to avoid violence toward others? It is sad to note, that the majority of studies show that abused children in adulthood is at high risk to turn out to be abusive parents. We can learn from this that the process of deriving conclusions from past memories and experiences must be accompanied by counseling and guidance according to an ethical code, since we can not necessarily ‘rely’ on the natural process to lead towards appropriate conclusions.

What about the ethical lessons society learns from past memories? Lessons from the past do not surface by themselves during the Memorials held at memorial ceremonies. From the very same occasion, different nations are likely – just like different people – to reach opposite conclusions, or temporarily to adopt different lessons; after all, reality does not have the strength to determine which lesson is correct and appropriate to derive from it, it is a value decision by someone who has undergone the experience (both individually and collectively). Thus, for example, the experience of slavery and emancipation of the Hebrew Nation in the land of Egypt, in itself, was likely to lead to the lesson that a strong nation must oppress the minority and prevent it from consolidating and accumulating power that would enable it to remove the yoke of slavery from itself; but in many verses spread through the Torah, it is clear that an opposite lesson was chosen: that we must learn from the Jewish experience as a persecuted and oppressed minority in Egypt, and in particular to protect minorities and weak people in society, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.⁴

⁴ For example: “And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Exodus* 22:20); “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Exodus* 23:9); “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Leviticus* 19:34); “You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pawn” (*Deuteronomy* 24:17); “Remember you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment” (*Deuteronomy* 24:18).

Are not we confronting a similar dilemma vis-à-vis memory of the Holocaust? One lesson that can be derived from it is, as noted: ‘Never Again’ – we will not permit another situation in which another nation would have the power to destroy us, in which our fate and existence would depend on other nations; it is possible to learn from the Holocaust that we, as Jews, must be strong enough so that we can defend ourselves against whoever comes to destroy us, in other words: to act only for the purpose of survival. But is not there also a place for a lesson such as “You shall love the stranger”? Precisely because as a minority we experienced the injustices and violence inflicted upon us by the majority, then when we are the strong majority, cannot we be aided by the collective memory of our existence as a persecuted minority in order to show compassion to the minorities among us, and to treat them as we wished they would treat us? Indeed, in this spirit, several of the Holocaust museums around the world emphasize education for tolerance and the war against racism as part of the universal Holocaust lessons; thus for example, The Museum of Tolerance (MOT) in Los Angeles, whose founders declare that its purpose is to examine the roots of racism and discrimination worldwide, with an emphasis on the history of the Holocaust.

In this spirit Rabbi Doctor David Hartman wrote:⁵

I believe it is destructive to turn the Holocaust into a category that organizes dominance of the modern Jewish identity. It is dangerous, both ethically as well as politically, for our nation to view its essence as a remnant of the Holocaust. The claim that we have suffered uniquely in history is pointless and at times uncouth. Our bodies and intelligence have tasted the bitter results of human indifference and lack of humanity. We have experienced upon our bodies ethical evil and social injustice. But let not these experiences tempt us into ethical arrogance. Our suffering is fit to lead us not to self-righteousness or self-pity, but rather to intensified understanding and sensitivity toward all human suffering . . . Israel is not just a reaction to modern anti-Semitism: beyond everything, it is a modern expression of the eternal covenant at Sinai . . .

And further along:

The Jewish People did not enter directly from Egyptian bondage to the Land of Israel. First, we came to Sinai . . . we spend years in the desert to cast off from our backs the tormented cloak of the past. Only when we had overcome the humiliating memory of bondage and spitefulness . . . did we come to the Land. The memory of suffering in Egypt blended into the normative demands of the Covenant of Sinai. We had never focused on suffering separate from its ethical and normative implications. Jewish suffering did not produce self-pity but rather ethical sensitivity: ‘And you shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’ Auschwitz, like all the rest of Jewish suffering throughout our history – must

5 Hartman, David (2005). “Auschwitz or Sinai”. *Make Your Heart the Inmost Chamber*. Translation: Yahav Zohar. Tel Aviv: Am Oved. p. 192.

be absorbed and interpreted within the normative framework of Sinai. We will mourn forever when recalling Auschwitz. But we will build a new, healthy society when remembering Sinai.

As another example, we can quote the Israeli writer, Aharon Appelfeld, who writes about the Holocaust in his unique fashion, wherein here and again within all the evil and horror around, there come to the surface compassion and kindness that were revealed to him during the Holocaust. That is what Appelfeld's soul beheld (or chose to see), and that is what he perhaps also tries to teach his readers to see.

To summarize, we can see in this goal an answer to Elkana's call in favor of forgetting. Instead of 'tossing the baby out with the bath water', with the help of proper education it is possible to continue to encourage memory of the Holocaust, yet to select the lessons that can be taught from it – not necessarily a lesson of hatred for others, but rather of compassion for the alien.

3 Goal Three: Continuity of Identity by Connecting the Past to the Present and the Future

Our memories of the experiences we have undergone and the knowledge we have amassed are the components that define our self-identity. This hypothesis is supported by new studies, which revealed that for people who suffer from memory problems (amnesia), there is great difficulty in imagining events in the future. Researchers have inferred from this that the same mechanism that enables recall of past events is exactly what also enables imagining the future; in other words, the mechanism in question enables mental progression along an axis of time from the past to the present and to the future. Given that, it may be argued that the memory mechanism enables the integration of self-identity not only by connecting the past with the present but also with the future; that is, alongside the memory of past and present events, dreams and expectations of the future are an important factor in the process of integration of self-identity.

Both societies and nations cope with the integration of self-identity through the collective integration of past memories with present reality and expectations of the future. Therefore, in all nations, one can find ceremonies, holidays, and memorial days, whose purpose is to preserve the memory of past events that the nation has experienced as part of its integration as such. Among the Jewish People, they also celebrate annual events of the distant past that arouse joy (such as the Exodus from Egypt on Pesach), or sadness (such as the destruction of the Holy Temple on the 9th of Av), along with mentioning the yearning throughout the many years of Exile for the future return to Zion. During modern history ceremo-

nies are also created to celebrate joyous occasions such as Israel Independence Day, and on the other hand: to commemorate traumatic events in the nation's history such as the Holocaust. Echoes of this may also be found in the Scroll of Independence, mentioning the past on the one hand, "In the Land of Israel the Jewish People has arisen, in which their spiritual, religious, and State image was shaped, where they live a life of national sovereignty, where national cultural institutions have been formed," while on the other hand, the future is also mentioned, "that had not ceased to pray and hope to return to its Land and to renew therein its sovereign independence." Both of these are critical for the integration and preservation of the Nation's independent identity, as well as its aspirations and dreams for the future. In the context of remembering the Holocaust, especially notable is the seal it has affixed upon the Jewish national identity; although, as noted, it is appropriate that this seal be characterized by the definition of its identity by the integration of our aspirations to be a tolerant, humanistic, enlightened and peace pursuing nation.

4 Goal Four: Accumulation of Knowledge

Memory enables the accumulation of knowledge, thereby enabling action not only based on one's recalling experiences, but also based on the knowledge other people have accumulated. As Isaac Newton phrased it: "If I have seen far off, it is because I stood on the shoulders of giants." In this context, it is important to emphasize, that the unique ability of man to think abstractly and symbolically enables the transfer of information between humans not only through observation, but also in a variety of forms that enable documentation of knowledge (such as books, pictures and computers) that are transferred not only from place to place but from generation to generation. This enables the exploitation of knowledge that has accumulated in places that are distant in space and time, i.e., in previous generations and distant places. This ability enables human society to advance in huge steps from generation to generation in such a manner that barely occurs among animals, for whom the transfer of information depends on experience and physical observation, so that their knowledge does not accumulate nor is it transferred from one generation to the next.

Does collective accumulation of knowledge exist? Apparently, the answer to that is positive. Moreover, the accumulation of knowledge is essential for society no less than for the individual. Documentation of events that predated the Holocaust and enabled it, just like those that occurred during the Holocaust and after it, is critical for understanding what happened and for an attempt to prevent the reoccurrence of terror like the Holocaust. Here, too, the contribution of Holocaust

Museums comes to the fore, which reveal the buds of hatred that led eventually to the stage of physical destruction; whether involving scientific, objective research or personal, subjective writing (as will be explained in the next section), all of these present different, reliable versions of the same terrible phenomenon, in all its implications.

As may be seen, there is indeed a parallel between the purposes of memory for the individual and the purposes of collective memory. We have also seen, it is possible to deduce from this the implications of remembering the Holocaust for us as a society. The fact is also prominent that the various purposes of memory complement each other – we must be concerned about our survival, not just physical survival but also spiritual survival, by deriving ethical lessons from past injustices that will help us to integrate our national identity through study of the past.

The Flexibility of Human Memory

1 Memory Bias

Diversions of memory have been investigated often during recent years in the context of eyewitnesses in the framework of legal proceedings, since in this area memory diversions have consequences for people's fate. An illustration of this subject is found in *The Innocent Project: The Search for Truth*,⁶ in which it was found that in about 75% of those found guilty, they were subsequently found to be innocent (for example, as a result of DNA tests), while the original verdict was based primarily on eyewitness testimony. Over the last four decades proof has accumulated that memory bias is liable to be created, for example, due to prejudices; in a series of laboratory studies, the investigator, Elizabeth Loftus⁷, showed that eyewitnesses tended to ascribe to Afro-Americans robberies or thefts, even though white people actually committed them. Loftus even demonstrated the bias of witnesses without the witnesses being aware of it; in one case participants watched a short film in which a red car collided with a blue car, and when they were asked to estimate the speed of the red car's travel, it turned out that the phrasing of the question influenced their answers – when the question was

⁶ Harrington, Roger (2017). *The Innocent Project: The Search for Truth*. Independently published

⁷ Loftus, E. F., & Palmer, J. C. (1974). Reconstruction of automobile destruction: An example of the interaction between language and memory. *Journal of verbal learning and verbal behavior*, 13(5), 585–589.

phrased “at what speed did the red car smash into the blue one,” the speed was estimated as higher, as opposed to the situation where they were asked, “at what speed did the red car bump into the blue one.”

Various theories of memory have tried to explain how this phenomenon is possible. Most of the theories claim that we need to differentiate between two types of memory: one is a very specific, individual representation (*verbatim*), and the second is more general, schematic, and represents the basic information (*Gist*).⁸ Thus, for example, we are capable of remembering a specific wedding in which we participated recently, and at the same time, we have a more abstract, schematic recollection of a typical wedding, that was created from repeated experiences of weddings, that formed a schema in our brain of a ‘wedding’ that represents the main shared characteristics of all weddings. The bias in the recall is formed when specific details of a certain event are missing, and we unconsciously complete the missing information from the schematic memory of the same type of experience, projecting it onto the specific event. It is important to clarify that memory biases are formed as a result of heuristic cognitive processes (such as generalization, analogy, abstraction, finding rules, etc.) that serve us in daily life and make thinking processes more efficient, enabling us ‘to predict’ occurrences based on memories of the past; the schematic memory provides hints and helps us to reconstruct information, and based upon that to make quick decisions. In other words: memory is a subjective recording, and the interpretation of the rememberer of what he received is influenced by explicit and implicit processes; from the physical, emotional, cognitive, and cultural context in which the rememberer is found. Of course, there are objective facts – but the memories are the product of an encounter between reality and the inner world of the rememberer and the context in which he is found at the stage of recalling the memory. It is possible that the evidence will not match the objective truth, but nevertheless will express the witness’ subjective truth, as he experienced it, with all its emotional and behavioral consequences for the person. Therefore, for each recollection, a renewed construct of memory occurs (reconstruction).

The social parallel to memory bias is the narrative that society tells itself. In collective memory, too, including the shaping of Holocaust memory, the recollection is a reconstruction in which a mixture of interpretations and social influences are intermingled, and not necessarily a precise factual description of all the historical details. In the end, society, like the individual, acts according to the story or the narrative that it tells itself about itself and its world. Therefore, aside

8 Reyna, Valeria F., and Brainerd, Charles. J. (1995). “Fuzzy-trace theory: Some foundational issues.” *Learning and Individual Differences*, vol. 7, no. 2, 145–162.

from legal contexts, there is no actual significance or even any need to distinguish between ‘Memory’ (apparently objective, that actually occurred) and ‘fiction’ (subjective, that might not have happened in exactly the same way in reality); they both express the truth of the person or the society who are telling them.

An example of the narrative being no less important and maybe even more than the historical truth, is the words of “Achad Ha’am” regarding Moses our Teacher:⁹

Indeed it is known, that the real heroes of history, that is to say, those who became active forces in human life over generations, are not at all actual beings that lived in reality at some time. Because you do not have an historical hero whose spiritual form was not formed in the people’s imagination in a totally different manner than what actually existed, and this imaginary picture that the people created for themselves according to their needs and spiritual inclination, *that* is the real hero, who existed briefly in reality, and the people did not see him at all like he was.

Similarly, Aharon Appelfeld emphasizes the importance of art in remembering the Holocaust, and says:¹⁰

Usually, our point of departure is that testimonies are considered authentic, and art is considered an invention. This is not correct. What you see in your imagination is actually your whole personality more than the memory. Memory is only one element. While you invent any kind of situation, you muster your entire personality. The moment you are in the world of imagination, you discover more, you see more, and feel more.

2 Reconsolidation

One of the memory chers in recent years, both in animals as well as humans, is reconsolidation. Evidence has accumulated that stored memory becomes less stable and more exposed to changes when it is reconsolidated. The significance of this is that upon recollection of previously stored information, that information is exposed to the influence of new information that is likely to be combined with the older information. There are currently attempts to make clinical use of the reconsolidation process. For example, to reduce fear for someone who has experienced a fearful episode; when this event is brought back to consciousness and the person is simultaneously exposed to calming information, and when this process

⁹ Ginzburg, Asher Tzvi [Achad Ha’am]. (1959). “Moshe” *At the Crossroads*. Tel Aviv, D’vir.

¹⁰ “Art is a shield against banality, an interview with Holocaust survivor and author, Aharon Appelfeld,” interviewed by Michal Starnin and Merav Zano on the “Yad Vashem” website: <https://www.yadvashem.org/he/articles/interviews/aharon-appelfeld.html>

is repeated over and over, a reconsolidation of the event's memory is formed that enables storage in memory of an experience that is now perceived as less frightening. So that the next time it is recalled it will not arouse the same frightening experience. It appears that this is the same mechanism at the basis of psychological interventions in which disturbing, painful experiences are aroused that merit reframing in treatment, and are reconstructed in memory as a less painful experience, or at least as having a different meaning.

In the same way, it is also possible to make use of reconsolidation in the collective memory of national trauma for the purpose of reconstruction, so that the memory will arouse not only pain but also other feelings similar to those above. For example, if we also succeed on Memorial and Holocaust days to deal with tolerance, accepting the alien, and the war against racism, we can then enrich our collective memory, and be able to turn pain and trauma into a constructive and empowering mechanism for the individual and society altogether.

3 Forgetting (Oblivion)

The fact that the human brain investigates and to a great extent manages to understand itself is amazing. Is it possible to understand how man makes use of his power of thought in order to understand that power? When coping with this difficulty over the course of the history of science, comparisons have been drawn between brain activity and the height of technology in each era – in an era when the wheels of machines moved industry, the neurological dialogue was on the ‘wheels’ of the brain; when the telephone and lines of communication constituted the height of technology, dealing with the brain was like the “great communicator”; today, the computer serves as an analogy to brain activity. But like every analogy, it is accurate up to a certain degree. In the context of memory processes, this comparison increases the desire to preserve memory vs. the fear of forgetting – the usual tendency is to relate to forgetting as if to a malfunction of the memory process, that one needs to learn to live with it as a necessary evil, just as the loss of information from computer memory is considered a malfunction. This analogy is not accurate. It should be emphasized that I am not dealing here with pathological forgetting that is caused by dementia (such as Alzheimer's) or by brain injury that causes loss of memory (such as amnesia), but rather with normative memory processes that are also characterized by forgetting.

In recent years evidence has accumulated that forgetting is not a malfunction of brain processes, but rather an inherent process of normal activity. Even at a functional level, it turns out that forgetting has an important contribution to man's normal functioning. We emphasize here the distinction between the contri-

bution of forgetting in emotional terms as compared to its importance in cognitive terms.

Advantages of forgetting in emotional terms – in recent years research evidence has accumulated that indicates how avoidance of thoughts, feelings, and difficult memories of trauma or loss can lead to resilience. It was found that in cases of loss or childhood abuse, those who repressed their difficult memories showed fewer signs of distress, and adjusted more quickly to their lives, immediately after the loss or trauma, and even years later.¹¹ Nevertheless, it should be clarified that the latter does not negate what is stated above regarding the use of reframing to reduce fears – the effectiveness of therapy using the reconsolidation/reframing system is dependent on the careful, precise timing of the therapeutic intervention, and not every exposure or recollection of memories from trauma will be effective.

In Jewish sources we can also find positive discussion of forgetting – Joseph saw how he succeeded in overcoming yearning for his father’s home with the help of forgetting in a positive sense,¹² and in later sources, Jewish philosophers discussed the emotional advantages of man’s proper functioning.¹³

Advantages of forgetting in cognitive terms – regarding the latter, we can learn from case descriptions and studies conducted on people with outstanding autobiographic memory.¹⁴ From all these studies a very consistent picture emerges accord-

11 Bonanno, George. A. (2004). “Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?” *American Psychologist*, vol. 59, no. 1, 20.

12 Genesis 41:51: “Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, “God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home.”

13 See the commentary by the Maggid of Dubno on the verse “Forgot the God who brought you forth” (Deuteronomy 32:18) in the Torah portion of Ha’azinu: “From the virtue of forgetting with which God has endowed man, for if he lacked the nature of forgetting, man would not build a house or marry a wife” (*Ohel Ya’akov*, [5632, L’viv, Lewin & Co., S.L. Kugel, p. 239]; R. Nachman of Breslov: “In man’s eyes, forgetting is a great disadvantage, but in my eyes it is a great virtue. Since were it not for forgetfulness, it would be impossible to do anything to serve God. If man remembered everything he had undergone, he wouldn’t be able at all to rise to serve in any way, since everything he has experienced would confuse him endlessly” (Jerusalem, Da’at Printers, 5721–1961, Section 26); Rabbeinu Bahya: “And from the usefulness of forgetting, since were it not for forgetfulness, man would not remain without sadness and would not be bothered by anything joyful in the world, and would not enjoy what gladdens him, when he recalls the misfortunes of the world.” (*Hovot halevavot*) by Rabbeinu Bahya in Hebrew translation: R. Yehuda ibn Tibbon, published by A. Loifer, Brooklyn, 2012, Section 2, Chapter 5, p. 123).

14 Like the rare case of a person with unlimited memory, described in the book by the father of modern neuropsychology, Alexander Luria, A. R. (1987). *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory*. Trans: Lynn Solotaroff. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

ing to which, along with these individuals' phenomenal ability to recreate past events in great detail, they find it quite difficult to view the overall picture, to create an abstract schema from the details, and to identify patterns. The conclusion derived from these findings is that abstract thinking ability and identification of patterns within a collection of details require a certain level of forgetting; the 'forest' can only be seen when the 'trees' appear more vaguely. Therefore, forgetting is not just a lack of memory, but rather a process or complementary counter force against memory, with its advantages and disadvantages. Given the latter, it is possible to assume that natural forgetting arising from age has an essential role – it enables a more abstract view of reality, and by this advantage can develop life wisdom based on the mature person's extensive experience, that has the power to identify types and patterns beyond the details and to distinguish between important and unimportant information. This conclusion is connected with what is written above regarding the purposes of memory, one of which is deriving lessons from the past to the future. It seems that deriving lessons can be carried out only from the perspective of passing time, which necessarily leads to a degree of forgetting details, and thus enables viewing the whole that helps in this process.

An impressive literary example of the latter is "*Funes the Memorious*" by Jorge Luis Borges, a man described as having a phenomenal memory, yet who is also lacking the ability to filter and distinguish from among the mass of details between essential and unessential so that it makes it difficult for him to reach ideas and principles; and as he puts it, "My memory, sir, is like a giant heap of rubbish."¹⁵ An echo of this is also found in the words of Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum: "If so, according to this, if there were no forgetting, there would be no room for new ideas, so therefore forgetting is a great good that causes new insights in Israel, which are precious before the Holy One, Blessed be He, more than everything."¹⁶

Just as a balance between memory and forgetting is essential for the individual's functioning, it is just as essential for the functioning of the nation. Delving into details will prevent an overview of reality and will thus interfere with drawing conclusions, not seeing the forest from the trees. Therefore, we must ask: Have we found the right balance between memory and forgetting? Here we need to mention the words of Yehuda Elkana "In favor of forgetting" – Has not enough time elapsed to enable us to view Remembering the Holocaust in a broad perspective? For example, would not it be better to mark Holocaust and Bravery Memorial Day while maintaining a certain distance that would enable a dulling of the

¹⁵ Borges, Jorge Luis. (1998). "Funes the Memorious", from: *Fictions*. Translated: Yoram Boronovski. Tel Aviv: The New Library, The United Kibbutz.

¹⁶ Teitelbaum, Moshe. (5775). "May Moses Rejoice", published by Joel Teitelbaum, Brooklyn, 5775, Weekly Portion *Ekev*, paragraph 8.

pain and lower the existential anxiety accompanying Remembrance? And perhaps reenacting the terrors of the Holocaust in great detail interferes to some extent with the possibility of contemplation in perspective and deriving from it the appropriate lessons for the 'here and now'?

Summary

In this article, an attempt has been made to contemplate the memory of the Holocaust from the point of view of individual memory research and its reflection in collective memory. As detailed above, this observation produces several conclusions. First, the need to define the purposes of Holocaust Remembrance. Just as for the individual, so too for the collective, Remembrance has complementary purposes – along with concern for physical survival, there is a need to draw ethical lessons from past injustices for the necessity of our spiritual existence as a nation; these lessons will also mark our objective as a nation through learning and investigation of the past, so that our identity will be defined not just by our past but also by what we aspire to be. Secondly, for an individual, memory is the product of a meeting between reality and one's inner world, and therefore for each recollection, a reconstruction of memory occurs; so, too, in collective memory, which is the narrative society tells itself. Therefore, the memory of the Holocaust as it arises in the community's narrative, in the personal stories of survivors, in literature and art, is in this context 'truth' in every sense, no less than the 'objective truth' as researchers and historians present it. A further insight is with regard to the role of forgetting – it turns out that it is essential for man, in emotional as well as cognitive terms, and so, too, for our collective memory of the Holocaust there is now perhaps a certain place to learn from forgetting. In emotional terms, a certain distancing from dealing with the details of the Holocaust's horror might enable dulling of the pain, thus enabling more normative living and lessening of existential anxiety associated with it. In cognitive terms, an overview enables seeing the 'forest' at the cost of blurring the 'trees', and perhaps the time has come to contemplate this with a somewhat remote perspective of the Holocaust, which is something that will enable drawing lessons regarding current reality. Such a process will be able to increase our emotional resilience, as a nation that experiences such terrible trauma and has succeeded in turning it into a source of spiritual strength no less than physical power.



Section Three: **Facing the Nothingness**

Yehudit Kol-Inbar, Curator



Fig. 1: Women and children driven out of Shiedlovitz, 1942.

This photo of a woman from Shiedlovitz on her way to Treblinka with her two children portrays a person in the most difficult situation imaginable: she is on her way to die and is aware of it. She walks in a line of people with her two terrified children, holding the little one in her arm and pressing him to her while hugging the older one with her other hand. This woman made a decision. You can see it in her determination, in the tilt of her chin, in how tightly she holds her mouth. Her eyes are focused, she is even looking upward and not forward. She made the decision to make this horrendous moment the least terrible that she can, both for her children and those around her.

When women would arrive at the camp, and no longer had their home, their community, their family, their children, even parts of themselves were taken away – their hair, their clothing – and they remained with nothing. So, if someone said a kind word in the morning, if someone adopted someone else (many created alternative families, in other words, older women adopted younger ones and cared for them), they were fortified by that. That helped them survive and make the road to death more humane. These are the incredible things that I deal with every day. I tell myself that evil exists, but I don't want to learn from the evil, I want to learn from the good. I feel that we need this learning. I truly want to point and shout: embrace these things, they can change our lives, they can make our place better. I therefore feel that the Holocaust is an inspiration.

Yehudit Kol-Inbar

“And Who Will Remember? And How Shall We Preserve a Memory?”: New Approaches to Exhibits on The Holocaust

Introduction: The Central Importance of The Holocaust and its Transformation into a Representational Model of Major Catastrophe

Seventy years after the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, roughly the same amount of time during which the Holocaust of European and North-African Jewry has been commemorated in various ways,¹ there is no doubt that the Holocaust, in which six million Jews were murdered, among them 1.5 million children, has become part of the Jewish, Israeli, and worldwide consciousness. In contrast to Yehuda Amichai's poem, quoted in my article's title,² in which he hints that the enfolding memory within forgetfulness is the way to preserve this consciousness, we can state that the Jewish people have indeed implanted the Holocaust into human collective memory.

The representation of the Holocaust is reflected in academe, education, media, literature, cinema, and more, but it seems that it has reached a peak in museology. Exhibitions on the Holocaust, both at the killing fields and in thousands of museums and monuments all over the world, are part of what has been defined in the 1990s by James E. Young as a “museum boom” (Young 1994: 19).

1 Proposals to establish a site of memory in Palestine began to be formulated even during the war, in September 1942, when the first news about the death camps reached the Palestinian Jews.

2 “But the best way of preserving memory is/to protect it within forgetting/so that not even a single recollection/will be unable to penetrate and disturb the eternal rest of the memory . . .” from Amichai, Yehuda (trans. Karen Alkalay-Gut) (1995): “Who will remember those who remember?”, *Prairie Schooner*, vol. 69, no.4., 133–135. Retrieved 4/10/18 from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40634109>.

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Amichai, Yehuda (trans. Karen Alkalay-Gut) (1995): “Who will remember those who remember?”, *Prairie Schooner*, vol. 69, no.4., 133–135. Retrieved 4/10/18 from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40634109>; Amichai, Yehuda (1998). *Open Closed Open*. Tel Aviv: Schocken, 177. (Hebrew)

Nearly every Jewish community as well as non-Jewish countries and cities around the world has erected a memorial or a museum and held an exhibition with record high attendance.

One small example of the major importance of the Holocaust in human consciousness worldwide could be seen recently at the opening of the exhibition focused on children during the Holocaust, *Stars without a Heaven* (Yad Vashem, April 2015). The media coverage of the opening and its echoes in print and digital media were almost too extensive for an exhibition – from a feature in the *New York Times*³ to European, South America and Asia press in the rest of the world, including locally.

The importance of commemoration of the Holocaust as a sociocultural process that inspired other people struggling with genocide's traumas was noted a decade ago by Nili Keren in her introductory article to the special issue of the journal *Massuah*, focusing on Holocaust museums in the 21st century.⁴ Keren depicts the function of commemoration as shaping national and other types of collective consciousness, and the impact of modes of Holocaust commemoration on them. Examples of this can be seen in the study delegations sent to Yad Vashem by countries and peoples where genocide took place, such as Rwanda. Representatives of the Tutsi and Hutu tribes arrived from Africa (through the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs) during the early years of 2000, to consult with Yad Vashem on modes of commemoration. I remember that I saw these representatives on the road leading to the museum, members of each tribe walking down opposite sides of the road. Later, we were asked to speak with each tribe separately. Other countries or communities that have suffered from continuous trauma and desire to address it through a museum display have also studied the Yad Vashem model, as for example when a delegation from the African American Museum of the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. visited Jerusalem. A further instance was that of Suzanne Bardgett, who curated and was the director of the Holocaust Exhibition at London's Imperial War Museum and served as a consultant in setting up "The Srebrenica Memorial Room", to commemorate where the Bosnian genocide of July 1995 began to unfold.⁵

3 Kershner, Isabel. (2015). "Looking back at the Holocaust through a Child's Eyes", *The New York Times*, 15 April, 2015, A4. Retrieved 4/10/18 from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/world/middleeast/looking-back-at-the-holocaust-through-a-childs-eyes.html>.

4 Keren, Nili. (2007). "How does one shape memory?", *Islands of Memory, Holocaust Museums in the 21st Century*. In N. Keren (Ed.), *Massuah Yearbook*, vol. 35, Massuah Institute for Holocaust Studies, Ministry of Defence Publishing House, 9–21. (Hebrew)

5 Bardgett, Suzanne. (2007). "Remembering Srebrenica", *History Today*, vol. 57, issue 11, 52–53. Retrieved 4/10/18 from: <http://www.historytoday.com/suzanne-bardgett/remembering-srebrenica>.

I experienced this phenomenon, personally, when I was invited to a conference in Guatemala City in 2009,⁶ in preparation for the establishment of a museum about the genocide that took place in Guatemala during the 1990s. Invited guests were directors of museums of catastrophes and genocides from all of South and Central America, and I was asked to give a presentation about the Holocaust History Museum.⁷ It was evident during the lecture that everyone was looking to us as a model. We embodied disaster in its most extreme, and were the ones who knew how to remember, commemorate, and bring the Holocaust to the consciousness of the entire world.

The most acutely complex issue in curating exhibitions on the Holocaust is how to address the subject in a world without survivors and without the possibility of discovering new original materials. How can one build an exhibition in a world in which visitors have been exposed to so many visual horrors that their emotional threshold has been stretched to its limits? Or when their knowledge is decreasing, as the Holocaust turns from a contemporary, tangible, witnessed event into a de-traumatized historical event? This article aims at addressing these issues through my personal experience as a curator.

Turning One's Gaze to the Holocaust as Inspiration: The Exhibition *Stars Without a Heaven* (Yad Vashem 2015)

Stars without a Heaven was the third exhibition at Yad Vashem on the subject of the fate of children in the Holocaust.⁸ While the two previous exhibitions, *No Child's Play* (Yad Vashem 1996),⁹ and *Monument of Good Deeds* (Yad Vashem Janu-

6 International Meeting on Museums of Remembrance, Guatemala City, November 12–13, 2009.

7 The title of my lecture was: “How to build an historical museum: The case of Yad Vashem – The invisible voice: ‘For the more I speak of him, the more I remember him’ [Jer.31:19]”.

8 Chief Curator: Yehudit Kol-Inbar; Contacts, Budget and Administration: Hedva Nachmias; Deputy Curator and Coordinator of Contacts: Maayan Zamir-Ohana; Consultant: Nina Springer-Aharoni; Educational Consultants: Inbal Kivity Ben-Dov, Masha Pollak-Rosenberg, Tamar Don, Rinat Maagan Ginovker, Yochi Nissani; Exhibition Design: Studio De Lange – Chanan de Lange, Catalogue Design: Michal Sahar and Naama Tobias, Catalogue edited by Yehudit Kol-Inbar. http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/museum/exhibitions_pavilion.asp (retrieved 4/10/18).

9 Yad-Vashem, Jerusalem (March 1996). Curator: Yehudit Inbar, Associate Curator: Shiri Peles, Design: Chanan De Lange, Catalogue Yehudit Inbar (Ed.), Catalogue Design: Pnina Fridman, Educational Consultants: Yona Gal and Naomi Morgenstern.

ary 2013)¹⁰ engaged in children's viewpoints through the subjects of play and creative art, this exhibition dwelt specifically on the fate of Jewish children. As in the exhibition *Spots of Light: To be a Woman in the Holocaust* (Yad Vashem 2007), we selected 10 subjects not necessarily associated with the Holocaust: family, identity, play, work, study, birthdays, friendship, home, dolls and teddy bears. The exhibition designer, Chanan de Lange, structured an overall design policy: after the entrance area where the "The World that Was" was exhibited, with a short explanation on the subject of the exhibition, the visitor opened a door and entered the exhibition space. The feeling was of leaving a protected home to enter a grove or a forest. The entire space was composed of 33 symbolic "trees" in which the exhibition material was "planted." Visitors had no set route, but viewed the exhibition in any order they wished. At the end of the exhibition, there was a large glass case in which all of the dolls and teddy bears not displayed in the "trees" were seen in a kind of joint meeting, labelled with the story of the boy or girl who had owned them.¹¹ From there, by way of the text written by Professor Michal Govrin about her murdered brother Marek,¹² and the concluding text, the visitor left through a different door.

The lack of visual materials from the Holocaust was especially evident with respect to children. As Michal Govrin wrote about her murdered brother, "Marek left no trace", the materials that could represent the stories of the few survivors, or of children who were murdered but about whom we do have some information, were few. Therefore, in this exhibition we took the stance that everything that could help to give those children a voice should be considered for display. In the first exhibition on children during the Holocaust, *No Child's Play* (Yad Vashem

10 Yad-Vashem, Jerusalem, N.Y. (January 2013). Curator: Yehudit Inbar, Deputy Curator: Tal Kobo, Design: Design Mill. The exhibit was inaugurated on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day in the U.N. USA and in Jerusalem. The name of the exhibition was taken from Dunia Rosen's will. <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/newsletters/general/newsletter.v1.asp?cid=122012> (retrieved 4/10/18).

11 The toys and games and artwork made by the children, are the consequence of the special bonds we at Yad-Vashem formed over the years with children survivors. The toys were exhibited in the three above mentioned exhibitions on children, and in the History Museum. As a result, numerous toys and games were collected, of course, relative to the opportunities. They now comprise the largest collection of this type in the world.

12 Michal Govrin is an Israeli author, poet and theater director with significant action in the field of Holocaust memory studies (see below her work as director of the multidisciplinary research group 'Transmitted Memory and Fiction'. Govrin's mother, Regina-Rina Poser-Laub-Govrin (1912–1987) refused to join Oskar Schindler's rescue of Jews in Cracow in order to stay with Marek, her son by her first marriage. Marek died in an aktion (a roundup of the Jews for deportation). This past has deeply affected Michal Govrin's life and work. See: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/govrin-michal> (retrieved 1/29/2018).



Fig. 2: The exhibition *Spots of Light: To be a Woman in the Holocaust*, Yad-Vashem, Jerusalem (April 2007). Curator: Yehudit Inbar, Deputy Curator: Rinat Pavis, Assistant: Suzy Shor, Historical Advisor: Judy Baumel-Schwartz, Exhibition Design: Studio De Lange – Chanan de Lange, Catalogue: Yehudit Inbar (Ed.), Catalogue Design: Pnina Fridman.

1996), the lack of experience and perhaps the lack of confidence was one component of the process, which is why the work on the exhibition was conducted in stages – each time we progressed further beyond the current level of doubt about the content and the design. In contrast, in this exhibition, our cumulative and joint experience became basic components in our work on this exhibit, enabling the designer Professor De Lange and myself to attempt new and different modes of exhibition.¹³

The innovations in the exhibition may be classified into several categories:

A different, more holistic museological approach. This was an exhibition, which integrated all of the Museums Division's staff into the curatorial process.

The design. It was symbolic. Usually, in permanent exhibitions and exhibits on the Holocaust, great caution is taken not to descend into kitsch. The subject is sufficiently loaded that there is no need to add drama or to encourage the visitor

¹³ Besides the exhibitions mentioned above we worked on the exhibition *Spots of Light, to be a Woman in the Holocaust* and on *Shoah, Block 27 — The Jewish Pavillion at Auschwitz- Birkenau* (Poland, 2013).



Fig. 3: The exhibition *Spots of Light: To be a Woman in the Holocaust*, Residenzschloss der Staatlichen Kunstsammlung, Dresden, Germany, 2008.

to feel that he must imagine himself as a Jew during the Holocaust. Instead, we created a very delicate transition from the home to the symbolic forest.¹⁴

Collaboration with educators from Yad Vashem. In the exhibition *No Child's Play* (Yad Vashem 1996), the two educators with whom we collaborated¹⁵ gave me some invaluable advice: not to introduce visual material or information that is too horrific for a young audience. I believe that in exhibitions for adults, as well, we should exercise restraint, since there is no possible way to make the horrors concrete, and there is no need to do so. The facts are sufficiently difficult even when displayed in a subtle way. Shockingly gruesome photographs sometimes attract people for the wrong reasons. It seems to me that this insight is one of the

¹⁴ One of the ways to progress is by error. Many times I was warned not to try new ways, especially in the temporary exhibitions — but there is no choice but to dare. In contrast to a permanent exhibition, which is heavily invested and designed to last for many years, a temporary exhibition leaves more leeway for the extremely important dialogue between curator and designer to decide together on the risks to take to obtain the best possible results.

¹⁵ Yona Gal and Naomi Morgenstern.



Fig. 4: Display cases for objects and other material in the form of a symbolic ‘forest’. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* Exhibition (2015), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. (Photographer: Elad Zagman).

strongest reasons for the exhibition’s success: it remained for 19 years, and was visited (also in a traveling exhibition around the world) by millions of people and justified the theory about including educators as “audience advocates”.¹⁶ Consequently, in this exhibition we asked the administration of the International School for Holocaust Studies to add three representatives from their staff to our curatorial group. The three women participated in our curatorial meetings and expressed their opinions on the process, the issues, and the materials in which we were engaged. With their support, we modified the language of the texts. The epitome of the cooperative effort came when the designer adapted the exhibition spaces according to their needs and the subjects they would cover with the young people who would visit the exhibition.

New approaches to exhibition materials. Due to the nature of the exhibition, what stood out especially were the toys and games collected or received as dona-

¹⁶ The expression was coined by Elaine Heumann-Gurian, one of the most productive curators in the field of historical exhibitions. She was curator at the Museum of the Holocaust in Washington D.C., the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington and other places in the world.

tions (Peled–Carmeli 2014).¹⁷ In like manner, the Art Collection presented works of art created by children during the Holocaust, most in facsimile form due to their fragility.¹⁸ Alongside we displayed works by child survivors who created their artworks as adults, such as André Lifschitz (2012), who made a sculpture he called “Autobiography,” referring to the time he was in hiding in Belgium,¹⁹ or painter Chava Wolf-Wijnitzer (2006), constantly depicting her terrifying childhood in Transnistria in bright colors.²⁰ Additional innovations included the integration into the exhibition’s visual art and literary creations by second- and third-generation artists and authors based on their families’ stories. Some artworks were made specially for the exhibition, such as Sigalit Landau’s paintings and sculptures on her father Freddy’s life in Transnistria, as well as on his dog Tufik (2014),²¹ Nava T. Barazani’s collages,²² referring to her mother Julia’s stories from the Jado concentration camp in the Libyan desert (2014); and works such as that by Daniela Silberstein Aslan (2014) on her father Felix, who was a child in Belgium²³ and through the abovementioned literary text by Michal Govrin on Marek, the murdered brother she never knew. In addition, third-generation ar-

17 When I began working at Yad Vashem (1994), the relatively few artifacts at the museum collection were received originally from the Archives. In 1995, I suggested to the late Haviva Peled-Carmeli to come and be the head of Artifacts Collection department at the Museums Division. The museum currently holds approximately 38,000 items. About the story of the Artifacts Collection, and the way it was built, see Peled-Carmeli 2014.

18 See: Kol-Inbar, Yehudit. (2016). “From its crumbs, you re-knead our names”: Children’s artwork from the Holocaust in the Yad Vashem Art Collection. In E. Moreh-Rosenberg & Walter Smerling (Eds.), *Art in the Holocaust: 100 Artworks from the Yad Vashem Art collection* (exhibition catalogue). Berlin: The German History Museum-Berlin, 54–70.

19 André Lifschitz (2012). *Self-portrait as a child* (Autobiography), Yad Vashem, Museum Division, Art Collection: Sharkskin, 50x20x20. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* (2015). Yad Vashem, The Catalogue, p.157.

20 Chava Wolf-Wijnitzer (2006). *The Forest*, Acrylic on canvas, 25x40, the artist’s collection. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* (2015). Yad Vashem, The Catalogue, p. 65.

21 Sigalit Landau (2014). *Father and Tufik*, Yad Vashem, Museums Division, Art collection: Bronze 22x27x13; Ink on paper 18x25.5. Gift of the artist. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* (2015). Yad Vashem, The Catalogue, pp. 150–151.

22 Nava T. Barazani (2014), *Untitled*. Collage, 20.5x28.5; Collage glue to book cover, 24x16.5, private collection. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* (2015). Yad Vashem, The Catalogue, p. 163.

23 Aslan D. Silberstein (2014). *Untitled*. Mixed media. The work was created for M.Sc degree, Department of Industrial Design, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* (2015). Yad Vashem, The Catalogue, pp. 158–159.



Fig. 5: Esther Anuyan's work at the entrance to the exhibition *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* Exhibition (2015), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2015. The work was inspired by the story of her grandfather, Menachem Kogel, who was a child in and during the Holocaust, and by Lena Küchler-Silberman's book, *My One Hundred Children*. Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Department of Ceramic and Glass Design. (Photographer: Elad Zagman).

tists also contributed works, such as the animated short film made by Liran Kapel about her grandmother Nyusha (2012).²⁴

Cooperative ventures with students of art and design. This is another way to enrich the exhibition and the children's stories. We contacted the Department of Ceramic and Glass Design of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, and the Department of Visual Communication at The Holon Institute of Technology (HIT), to ask students to create works in glass and porcelain and short animated films.²⁵ The new works were used to compensate for the lack of visual materials, although sometimes we had partial materials, and became a mode of

²⁴ Liran Kapel and Yael Dekel created the film for their animation studies at the Sapir Academic College in 2012. They titled it "Nyusha," the name of the grandmother who was a child survivor, and whose voice they used on the soundtrack (taken from her filmed testimony as part of the Spielberg Archives project, since grandmother Nyusha passed away).

²⁵ Head of the Department at Bezalel: Dr. Eran Ehrlich; Head of the Department at HIT- Holon Institute of Technology: Tamir Sheffer; Project Mentor: Dana Ben-David.



Fig. 6: Sigalit Landau, “Father and Tufik,” 2014, bronze, collection of the Art Museum, Yad Vashem. From the exhibition *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust*, Pavilion for rotating exhibitions, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2015 (Photographer: Elad Zagman).

display for the children’s stories. Students were invited to study-days, at which we presented survivor stories; the students then chose which story on which to work. This was followed by a collaborative work process, whose outcome was 16 one-minute animated films and 14 artworks made of ceramic, glass, or porcelain. The clips were integrated into video films by video artist Niv Ben David and screened inside the “trees”. The glass creations were presented in glass-front display cases, with one at the entrance near the title sign.²⁶ We hoped that by doing so, we would attract young audiences to the exhibition.

Enriching the collection of stories about children. In order to increase the number of children whose stories we would present in the exhibition, we chose the following method: children with more extensive materials were presented as a core story in one of the thematic sections of the exhibition. These stories were presented with original material or through students’ works. On the other side of the “tree”, we installed a screen on which we added stories of other children related to the same topic. Ben David created 22 short films on the core stories and

²⁶ Artwork by Esther Anavian was inspired by the story of her grandfather Menachem Koegel and Lena Kuchler-Silberman’s book *My Hundred Children* (1987).



Fig. 7: Dolls belonged to child victims of the Holocaust. *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* Exhibition (2015), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. (Photographer: Elad Zagman).

27 on the associated stories, for a total of 49 videos. These were made from stills we located, clips from video interviews of survivors, clips from relevant films such as “The Children of Villa Emma” (1983),²⁷ animated films by the HIT students, and more.

One of the most heart-breaking stories concerned the Children’s Block initiated by Freddy Hirsh in the family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau.²⁸ In the exhibition *No Child’s Play*, the director Yvonne Kahan created a short film from testimonies, paintings, and more. The film was assimilated into the current exhibition in

²⁷ Villa Emma (1983). A documentary film, directed by Nissim Dayan, Israel Film Service, about a group of Jewish children that were saved in an Italian village.

²⁸ Fredy Hirsch was one of the unique heroes of the Holocaust, deputy head of the youth ghetto at the Terezin ghetto and subsequently. In September 1943 he was deported to Birkenau with some 5,000 men, women and children. In the so-called “Family Camp”, probably created by the Germans in anticipation of a visit from the Red Cross, Hirsch took care of the imprisoned children until March 1944, when they were murdered (including Hirsch) in the gas chambers. https://www.yadvashem.org/sites/default/files/yv_magazine41.pdf (retrieved 30/1/2018). See also: Kol-Inbar, Yehudit. (2017). “On the Human Spirit in Auschwitz-Birkenau”, *Haaretz*, 31 March 2017, Tarbut Vesifrut, 3.

the “tree” “The Children’s Block at Auschwitz-Birkenau”, through the story of Yehudit (Dita) Kraus, who was 14 at the time and one of the few who survived.

Integrating music into the exhibition. The music chosen was not original music from the Holocaust, but a piece composed by a rock band (Kerach Tesha, 2005) for the poem “A Dream”, written by Abramek Koplewicz who was murdered in Auschwitz- Birkenau at the age of 14.²⁹ The poem, set to music, was presented in the film as part of the displays of his two drawings, contributing to the contemporary appeal of Abramek’s story as perceived by young visitors.

The concentration and forced labour camp in the desert. An additional unusual topic both in terms of content and rich materials is the “tree” on Libya and the Jado camp. Although North Africa appears as a topic in the Holocaust History Museum, here it received a prominent place on one hand, while on the other hand it was integrated into the overall story. Children’s games from the camp were reconstructed, songs were taped, a translation was made into Libyan Arabic, and a lexicon of the language used in the concentration camp was created by the exhibition consultant Nina Springer- Aharoni (2014–2015), and as we said above, artworks by Nava T. Barazani were displayed, inspired by her mother’s stories of her childhood experiences in a concentration camp.

The subject *The World that Was Before* (in the area of the entrance to the exhibition), and a Library space (at the exit) were elements I attempted to include in all of the exhibitions in which I have been involved.³⁰ In this exhibition, video-artwork by Ben David (2014–2015) opened the exhibition with a work using original footage showing children before the Holocaust.³¹ At the exit of the exhibition, there was a shelf with books and a place for visitors to sit and write their thoughts. All of the texts were housed in a huge transparent two-sided container, visible from outside the entrance to the exhibition and from inside.

All of these elements were used to create a cluster of individual stories firmly ‘planted’ in themes, which, using and audio elements, composed a rich picture of the lives of children during the Holocaust. In contrast to the perception of the past – which Young described in his book referring to the children as the “victim-ideal”, the “unrealized potential”, as “Israeli citizens who were unable to reach Eretz Israel and never became part of it” (1993: 258)³² – in the three exhibitions on children, es-

29 The disk was launched on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, 2005.

30 In the exhibit “*No Child’s Play*” there was a bookshelf with children’s books and a desk with hundreds of notebooks which were filled in by visitors’ responses. In the exhibition “*Spots of Light*” we built an entire room which was a library and space for visitors who wanted to write their impressions of the exhibition.

31 Niv Ben-David created the “The World that Was” in Block 27 at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

32 Eretz in Hebrew, the country of Israel.

pecially the latter, I tried to give the children murdered and the few who survived the fullest respect for the short period of time they lived. The result was very moving, since it showed how children behaved during the most difficult situations imaginable, while reflecting the life force within them, their creativity in addressing the situation, their childlikeness alongside the maturity forced upon them, their optimism and desire to live despite everything. The behavior of children during the Holocaust can be an inspiration to our lives today. We should look up to them and not down on them as “wasted potential”. The exhibition slogan greeting visitors is a quotation from writer Aharon Appelfeld: “I was alone in the world, a child alone in the world . . . but the light, there was always some sort of light there . . .”³³ This turned a spotlight onto the bitter fate of the children, but showed simultaneously the impressive path they took towards death.

“What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later” Exhibition, Meetings, and Discussions at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute 2015: Representing Ideas in Texts or “Live”

Visitors at the exhibition are invited to take part in exploring the open question of how to remember the Holocaust seventy years later. How, today, can memory encompass the rupture that irrevocably changed all the diasporas and all the ethnic groups of the Jewish people? How can we remember the Holocaust without succumbing to the feeling of victimization? How can we remember it individually, here and now? And how can we respond now and in the future to the demand embodied in the words “the responsibility to remember – to remember responsibly?”

This is the opening text of the Exhibition *What is Memory? 70 Years Later*, at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute representing a statement by the *Transmitted Memory and Fiction* Study Group, initiated and headed by Professor Michal Govrin, who for three years discussed and studied at the institute the transmission of

³³ Appelfeld, Aharon. (2012). Talk delivered to the *Transmitted Memory and Fiction* Study Group, 20 April 2012, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem. Retrieved 4/10/18 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4enIVWWogR0>. The same slogan opens my introduction for the Catalogue of the exhibition *Stars Without a Heaven: Children during the Holocaust*. See: Kol-Inbar, Yehudit. (2015). Introduction. In Y. Kol-Inbar (Ed.), *Stars without a Heaven, Children in the Holocaust* (exhibition catalogue), Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 7–9.

Holocaust memory.³⁴ The exhibition was intended to reflect a different approach to the subject of the Holocaust, while simultaneously expressing the multiple voices of the groups, of visitors, and of the different approaches to memory (Picture 3). The group was comprised mostly of scholars, a composer and a singer, a film director, a curator, and a few visual artists (working in multiple styles). The texts also reflected the ideas of the group's guests, Aaron Appelfeld, Dov Kulka and Saul Friedlaender, whose works formed the philosophical underpinnings of the exhibition (see below).



Fig. 8: View of the Exhibition *What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later*. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem, 2015. (Photograph: Multimedia Van Leer).

A steering committee of people from the group was chosen to lead the project, and drafted the philosophical foundations of the exhibition as three circles: survivors, the group, and visitors.³⁵ The connection between the three was the big

³⁴ Govrin, Michal. (2017). "What is memory? Seventy years later". In A. Mahera & L. Papastefanaki. (Eds.), *Jewish Communities between East and West, 15th–20th centuries: Economy, society, politics, and culture*, Conference Proceedings, Ioannina, Greece: Isnafi Publications, 313–325.

³⁵ The Steering Committee comprised Prof. Michal Govrin who initiated and headed the group, Dr. Yochi Fischer, Deputy Director of The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Yehudit Kol-Inbar, Direc-

“question mark,” which is why we approached the designer Chanan de Lange.³⁶ After introducing him to the group, he made a request: he wanted to be an equal member of the steering committee. The response was positive, reflecting the group’s approach of working together in recognition of each member’s expertise, while admitting that the total was greater than the sum of its parts.

The building allocated for the exhibition was not the older, more familiar building of The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, but its new building for The Polonsky Academy, designated for postdoctoral fellows.³⁷ Not only did the space lack an exhibition infrastructure, but the building was decidedly ‘anti-museum’, with its open construction and transparent walls inside and outside (excluding the closed research scholars’ rooms, which were closed during the exhibition as well). The design solution that De Lange proposed was “talking heads,” giving a voice to members of the group as a response to the need to make the texts more communicative, since they formed the major component of the exhibition.³⁸ No one had any idea how to carry it out, since the tapes of the discussions were still very long and lacked structure. Furthermore, there were severe time constraints, with only a few months until opening. It was finally decided that filmmakers would be invited to interview everyone on the way they proposed to shape the memory of the Holocaust, and to state how it should be remembered. In addition, each member of the group would give a short talk on his or her own field of expertise, to take place in the building’s various spaces, plus panel discussions with audience participation in the main auditorium.

An accelerated work process begun by all involved interviewees, interviewers, and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute’s financial and organizational divisions that accompanied the process. At the same time, the plan was structured to connect the abovementioned exhibition circles (survivors / the group / visitors). It was decided that the talks by the survivors who spoke to the group – Aharon Appelfeld, Dov Kulka, and Saul Friedlaender, who were all children or adolescents during the Holocaust – would form the cornerstone of the exhibit. Visitors were greeted at the entrance to the exhibition by three specially-constructed ‘gates’ on which quotations from the three authors were posted, reflecting the different memories of those who had been ‘there’: Friedlaender referred to the impact of the past on how

tor of the Museum Division at Yad Vashem, and Prof. Chanan de Lange. Design: Studio de Lange; Graphics: Tamar Garama-Inbar; Films: Ron Ofer and Yochai Rosenberg.

³⁶ C. De Lange, one of the leading designers in the field, is also Professor of Industrial Design at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem.

³⁷ Designed by Chyutin Architects and inaugurated in July 2013, a gift of the Polonsky Family.

³⁸ Even if there were past exhibitions such as “Voices from the Holocaust” throughout the world, the “voices” were metaphorical.

we see the present, describing the major importance of survivor testimony in writing the history of the Holocaust. Appelfeld spoke about the love that existed during the Holocaust, love that gave him the capacity to write. Kulka spoke of how he viewed the deaths to have exceeded the bounds of history. After passing through these gates, visitors could proceed to the other exhibits.

The second section of the exhibition was displayed in the building's space open on all sides, both from the outside (through its glass walls) and from the inside. Desks and comfortable armchairs were installed here, facing structures that looked like music stands, built especially for the exhibition. Screens were installed for viewing the films of the individual group members' presentations. Headsets enabled visitors to concentrate on the video, while sitting comfortably.



Fig. 9: Picture 4. Presenting people's voices at the Exhibition *What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later*. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem, 2015. (Photograph: Multimedia Van Leer).

A third exhibition space was accessed by descending a broad staircase, where visitors could view selected artworks by the artists of the group (engaged in painting, drawing, photography, and video), and an entire room that included music and fabric curtains, on which texts recorded by group members were written.

The exhibition opened on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day in April 2015. The opening attracted a large audience. It remained open to the public for about three weeks, with visitors including high school students, university stu-

dents, and professionals. A symposium was held with invited guests from all of the Holocaust remembrance institutes in Israel. The exhibition and the events enjoyed wide media coverage.

Although the exhibition's approach was 'anti-museum', its solutions, which integrated curatorship with design, while breaking most of the rules of both spheres, created an event that expressed the dynamism of the ideas and innovations of the group's work. Its path reflected a different kind of voice in terms of modes of exhibition, but also another voice in terms of content and ways to remember the Holocaust, 70 years later.

Summing Up: How to Represent the Holocaust to Contemporary Audiences

The way to express such a painful, traumatic subject such as the Holocaust in visual terms relies on changing the exhibition's philosophical perspective. Museums and exhibitions reflect ideas, the "keystones" on which displays are structured.³⁹ The curator's function is to crystallize those ideas with the assistance of experts in the content on display, or project initiators from the museum, or educators, or others. The curator must emphasize that a museum is not a learning tool; its power lies in being able to enrich the visitor with an emotional and intellectual experience.⁴⁰ Evil can serve as the framework for understanding the context in which events took place, and how each person can turn to the "dark side" if he fails to maintain moral, humanistic values. There is nothing to learn from evil as such, and certainly not to display it in order to transmit an experience.⁴¹

³⁹ Inbar, Yehudit. (1988). *Preparing a Museum Program*. Jerusalem: Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture, The Museums Council, 5.

⁴⁰ In 2010, author Mario Vargas Llosa visited Yad Vashem as the head of a delegation from Peru. As head of a committee charged to establish a museum of the history of Peru, he sought to see and learn how we established the Holocaust History Museum at Yad Vashem. After explaining the purpose of his visit, I told him that he, as the person who at age of 26 wrote a book on life in a military boarding school (*The City and the Dogs*, 1959), a book on a subject seemingly local and specific yet which touched so many hearts, surely had the talent and the passion to lead the process that would express the broad human insights drawn from Peru's historical narrative. I noted that the rest was museology — curators would translate the ideas into an exhibition with relevant creative displays.

⁴¹ I am also critical of exhibitions in which the visitors are led to feel they are in the victims' place, such as putting visitors in a cattle car. This is emotional manipulation, which is not incorrect, but in no way contributes to a deeper understanding.

Consequently, when dealing with subjects that are especially difficult, the curator must seek points of light and illuminate them against the background of evil. Turning our gaze away from the evil and towards the hidden treasure of human goodness is the proper direction towards moving and inspiring visitors. This is why in exhibitions on the Holocaust one should take this approach, and the goodness in the case of the Holocaust is mainly the story of the Jews, the victims of the Final Solution. As early as 1965, this view was expressed by Frieda (Friedkeh) Mazia, a Holocaust survivor, member of a Zionist youth movement and an educator who wrote her thoughts in a letter to the Massuah Institute secretariat, expressing her opinion that the memorial planned to be built on the site should be a project that inculcated “humane and Jewish values” (Mazia 1965).

The Jews were unable to escape the fate that awaited them. They were encircled, with the death trap closing in on them from all sides. The question that should interest us is what the humanistic aspect of their journey towards death was. When curating an exhibition on the Holocaust we must represent the horrors of the Final Solution only as a framework, and transfer our gaze to how people looked at others. We would expect in such terrible situations that the subjects would be blind themselves to all humane behaviour and violently struggle for survival. However, here we see that the opposite took place. Not to say that all the Jews turned into ‘saints’ tolerant of each other, but taking into account everything they went through, many, if not all of the Jews, demonstrated extraordinarily humane behaviour along the road to annihilation. In practice, without such behaviour, no survival – even for a short time – would have been possible. People took responsibility for others, whether or not they were related. Adults took responsibility for younger people, providing support even during the most unimaginable moments. Religious and secular Jews helped each other at critical junctures.

It is important to have displays on the “Righteous Among the Nations” who rescued Jews while risking death for themselves and their families. Displays could also be included to highlight the behaviour of entire nations, such as the Danes, who succeeded in preventing the genocide of their Jewish citizens. Although Yad Vashem has recognized only 26,000 “Righteous”, undoubtedly a tiny number of people, each one shines doubly bright against this background as they show it was possible to behave otherwise.

This should be the direction in which we strive, what we should learn from the Holocaust. This is a pivotal moral lesson: how to address suffering and evil, not by adopting their tactics, but by responding humanely. The Germans and their collaborators made the decision to murder and torture, but the decision of how to respond and cope was the victims’ only. They understood that the decision

to “see the ‘Other’” despite everything, even after having been deprived of culture, community and family, can intensify one’s power to stand up against evil.⁴²

As curators, memory agents, and keepers of the legacy of the Holocaust, we must take up the banner of “seeing the ‘Other’” in the Holocaust and show its relevance today, in relation to racists and their actions. To accomplish this, we must use our ‘museological toolbox’ or forge new and perhaps more relevant tools. We can use the “light” that Appelfeld spoke of, when referring to love that existed during the Holocaust, in order to reinforce the good in the world.⁴³ This is the position we are obligated to take on behalf of those Jews who were tortured, murdered, and of whom only a few survived; this is the way to continue and contribute to commemorating the Holocaust in the most humane and moral way possible.

Dunia Rosen was 10 years old when she was forced to go into hiding, concealing herself all alone in a pit in the forest. Dunia, thinking that she was the last Jew in the world, wrote in her will:

I wish you would build a monument for us, one that will reach the sky. A pillar that the whole world will be able to see – a statue not from marble and not from stone, rather from good deeds. I believe with complete faith, that only a monument made in this way, could secure a better future for you, and for your children (Rosen 1954: 5).⁴⁴

Dunia thought that she wrote her testament for a world without Jews, but as for us, who consider ourselves to be the forthcoming generations continuing the Jewish people, it is incumbent upon us to work toward fulfilling Dunia’s will.

⁴² See: Kol-Inbar, Yehudit. (2017). “On the Human Spirit in Auschwitz-Birkenau”, *Haaretz*, 31 March 2017, Tarbut Vesifrut, 3. And: Kol-inbar, Y. (2012). “Not Even for Three Lines of History”: Jewish Women Underground Members and Partisans during the Holocaust. In B.C. Hacker & M. Vining (Eds.), *A Companion to Women’s Military History*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 513–546.

⁴³ In the talk Appelfeld gave at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in 2012, I asked him what is his strongest memory from the Holocaust as a child survivor, and he answered one word: “love”.

⁴⁴ The name of the exhibition *Monument of Good Deeds* (Yad Vashem, January 2013) was taken from Dunia Rosen’s will.



Fig. 10: The Exhibition *What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later*. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Polonsky Building, Jerusalem, 2015: A view of the exhibition through the windows of Polonsky building.



Fig. 11: The Exhibition *What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later*. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Polonsky Building, Jerusalem, 2015: video installation area.



Fig. 12: Journal from YUNG YiDiSH centre exhibited in *What Is Memory? Seventy Years Later*, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Polonsky Building, Jerusalem, 2015.

Michal Govrin, Writer



Fig. 1: Rina Govrin (Rega Poser-Laub), Israel, circa 1948.

This photograph of Mother on a swing, with all the joy of life, the intensity and appetite for life within her . . . I believe this is the most powerful thing that she passed on to me: her overriding refusal to be labelled as a victim. When I think of her, in all her complexity, this is the legacy, this is her inspiration. I received from her the need to find other ways and means of survival, which is also a revolt and a conscious struggle against the Nazis' intention to blot her out as a human being.

The need to confront evil head on, in retorts that aren't malevolent in kind, but rather in grandeur, in laughter, like the ability of her ultra-Orthodox friends to pray in Auschwitz, like her ability to sing lyrics by Tchernikhvosky. These are spiritual moments. The humane struggle against evil, as a way of life.

I didn't deal with any of this for many years, for firstly it was necessary to live, to give birth, to be a mother, to live life in all its fullness, in all its carnality, to discover new inner worlds. I approached the Shoah late with a feeling of responsibility: a responsibility to remember, and to remember responsibly. Not the tortures, the contemptibility, the means of annihilation – Mother removed her number, she didn't want it to be her story – nor the victimization and the way in which "It was done to us." True, it happened, it needed to be documented. But what I didn't see in the Auschwitz Museum, for instance, is what happened to people within their inmost selves: how they, the women in the camp, went on lending support to each other. Mother recounted stories about the Kinneret to the women, for she had already visited Israel, and on the Sabbath they sang hymns while they pushed wheelbarrows filled with stones. In Auschwitz, I didn't see what inner struggle the inmates had gone through to keep up their spirits.

This is what I felt I must recount. It is a memory that is conscious of evil, but which seeks to understand, here and now, to what extent the Shoah and the consequences of the *Hurban* are part of our own make-up (whether Ashkenazi or Sephardic, the *Hurban* (destruction) has shaken the entire Jewish Nation). I discovered the need to accept the transmission, verbal and non-verbal, in the body's movement, in lifting the hand toward the swing, in the joy of life, and especially in the survivors' ability to build a new life. After all we're all children of survivors, in one way or another.

Michal Govrin

Marek Laub: Negative of a Testimony

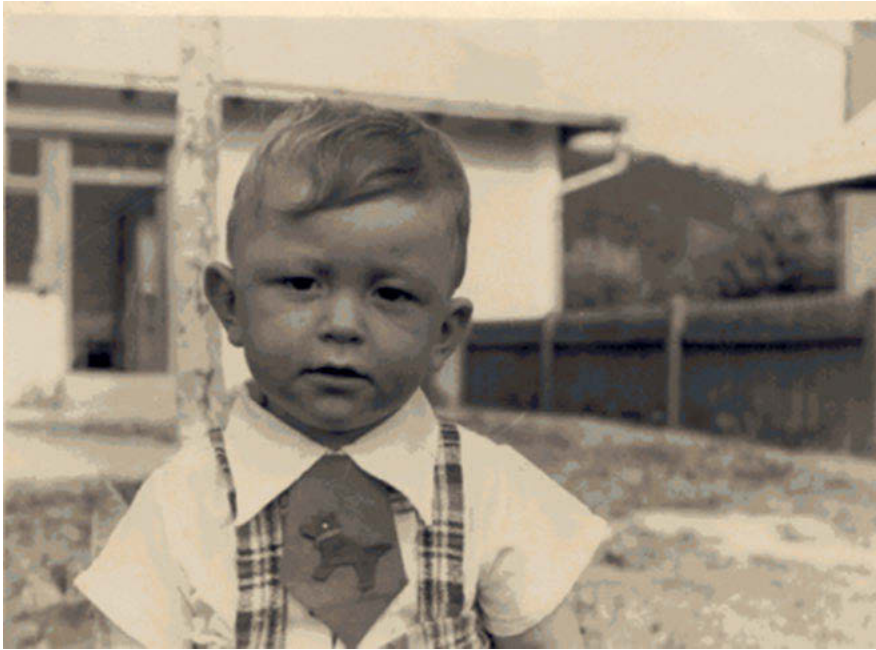


Fig. 2: Marek (Mordechai Laub), age 3, Poland, circa 1939.

What remains of an eight year old boy, who was murdered?

Testimonial page at Yad Vashem: “Delivered in Tel-Aviv, 26.3.1956, by Rina Govrin (formerly, Regina Poser-Laub), ‘wife’ (widow) of: Laub Gabriel.

Place and country of birth, Przemyśl, Poland.

Place of death, Hovniki, near Przemyśl.

Married.

Number of children: 1.”

At the bottom of the page: “Names of children under 18 who perished: Mordechai.

Age: 8

Place and date of death: 14.5.1944, Auschwitz.”

Mordechai Laub. Marek.

Translated from Hebrew by: Gabriel Levin

Testimonial page and a couple of photographs in the small album bound in soft brown suede, hidden in mother's dresser. Night's when I was left alone, the only daughter of a second marriage, in a third-floor apartment in Tel Aviv, my little girl's hand groped after the album. I removed it with a pounding heart, and my dread obscured the features of the boy in the yellow photograph, with faintly slanted almond eyes. Grinning under smooth shining, hair, combed to the side, wearing shorts with suspenders. Standing upright, at once bold and bashful. He'd stare straight back at me, with a slight movement of the mouth, somewhere between a smile and a serious look of concentration, before I hastened, my heart beating fast, to slip the album back into its hiding-place.

Mother's flicker of words, her face illumined, "I'd take Marek out onto the balcony covered in snow, to have him breathe the cold air. The governess was horrified, but I'd bundle him up and take him out." Or in a soft, caressing voice, "I would bring Marek a *gogel-mogel*." Without my knowing this dish with such a strange name, or my imagining under what terrifying circumstances Mother would "bring" it. And when she died twenty-five years ago Mother took with her Marek's features lodged within her, his gestures, his outbursts of tears, and his mirth.

And yet, I knew him. From up close. He pressed against me in Mother's bosom. She bent over him too when she stooped over my cradle, singing in her molten, golden voice to both of us in a tongue that was foreign to me, *Aha, Aha, kodeki devah, aye li loo li, loo li la*. He was hovering by me like an obscure shadow. Mother's son. For years. Without my even daring to say, "My brother."

Marek. The beloved son of Regina and Gutek Laub, the owner of successful lumber mills in Przemyśl. A spacious flat, a modern apartment building, the first with an elevator in the entire city. In a room filled with toys he plays, perhaps, with the electric train Father brought back from Vienna, and the tiny carriages chug up the bridges, the rising barrier-bars, the small lake, the curving rails, the train I yearned for in the modest apartment in the tenement block for state employees in Tel Aviv when Father, Pinchas Govrin, Mother's second husband, built with me a grocery with a miniature scale made of cardboard and real flour.

A dreamy, mischievous child, climbing up the trunk of the chestnut tree in the garden, clasping it with his strong hands and his legs half-exposed in shorts. "Marek! Marek! You naughty boy!" the governess calls after him in exasperation. He must have been like that, because I too climbed the pine trees alongside the freshly planted grass that grew under different skies between new, white buildings, hugging the rough-barked trunk, oozing sap.

Mother never told me how Gutek was murdered and hung in public, or how she'd removed his body from the scaffold in spite of the injunction against doing so, in order to give him a proper burial, as I was informed years after her death. How had Marek reacted? Did he leave his room for the vestibule when the driver

from the wood-manufacturing factory rang the doorbell, holding his cap in his hands, and in the end lifting his face, darkened with fear, toward Mother, and said, “They hung Pani Laub.” And how Marek, behind Mother’s petrified body, clings to her, and the pain slices through him, like slivers of glass from the lamp he lets fall as he rushes back to his room sobbing bitterly, gasping for air, just as my throat would constrict when Mother’s body stiffened and for no visible reason her face clouded over. And how, left alone, Mother and Marek traveled in haste from Przemyśl to Krakow, to the grandparents who had already been driven into the ghetto? And what did Marek do in the ghetto?

One day I gave a lecture at a university in New Jersey. At the end of the lecture a sensitive-looking man with bright, penetrating eyes came up to me. “My mother is from Krakow too,” he said. “I think we once spent a summer together in Safed.” “Could be,” I said, recalling the Polish conversations Mother conducted with strangers, as I, dragged along, a solitary child, stood by her side in agony in the clear morning air. “I’ll ask her on the phone whether she knew your mother,” he suggested. “Yes, do ask her.” And the following day I received an email with his answer, “My mother said she was well acquainted with your mother. Also in Safed. She said that as a matter of fact she had been your half brother’s kindergarten teacher in the ghetto, and in the same breath she described his dreadful death.”

Already in Tel Aviv, in the apartment of the former kindergarten assistant in the nursery school which had been formed in the Krakow ghetto, I’d heard from her directly, “I remember very well the day your mother came to the kindergarten. A tall, elegant woman, holding Marek’s hand. ‘This is my child,’ she said, ‘he needs special attention,’ she added, ‘he’s gone through a lot. His father was murdered.’ I can’t get that child out of my head,” she said, “You know, there were a lot of children, and one can’t remember all of them. But your brother” (I shuddered) “I can’t get him out of my head. Always neatly dressed, tall for his age. A very bright child. Sometimes he’d burst out in laughter, and sometimes in anger. He was a natural leader. The children followed his every word.”

And mother’s elderly cousin is the only other person left who still holds on to a shred of his memory, as, after being confined in the ghetto, she lived with the rest of the large family in an overcrowded apartment. However, she spoke sparingly, “I remember him . . .” she’d say, “yes, the boy was tall for his age, very bright” (same expression) “he liked to draw.”

In carton boxes in the Yad Va’shem archives, onion thin carbon copies, crabbed lines printed in German. Testimony taken down from my mother in 1973 in the police division for the investigation of Nazi war crimes. In the charges pressed against one of the commanders of the Krakow ghetto she describes the Aktion, as she saw it from her hideaway in the garret over Zgodi Square, “Which I prepared for my son and myself.” Horrifying descriptions, of people shoved into the square,

shots, strewn dead bodies, the sick flung out of the windows of the hospital for the treatment of chronic diseases. A family she knows passes by, and the accused aims his pistol at them. She doesn't hear the shot, only sees the bodies falling. "I couldn't keep looking," words from her testimony jump at me, "for I was hiding with my son and I couldn't leave him."

And suddenly they are there, both of them, in the garret. With the booklets she perhaps prepared for him for when the time came. Marek, already nearly seven, holding tightly on to his teddy bear, so that Mother wouldn't hear how fast his heart was beating, for he could hear barking and shouts and children crying, screaming outside. He clasps his teddy bear with all his might and tries to shut his ears.

And then, probably drowsy from the sleeping pills he'd been given, he is concealed in a rucksack in spite of his long limbs, borne on Mother's back during the Aktion's Liquidation of the ghetto and—at its climax—rounding up of the children of the ghetto. Bearing him on her back during the march to the Plaszów Camp, among the few children who'd been smuggled in with their mothers. And how, mornings, when the women left to work in the sewing workshop—the *stickerei*—alone in the women's barracks, he'd gather around him other children, perhaps, who'd been smuggled in. And evenings, when Mother returns, she always brings something. "She was the only one who bartered in goods," Erna, who worked with her in the *stickerei*, told me, "because she had a child." And once again the gogel-mogel surfaces from the egg she whisked into a thin layer of foam. And the voices speaking to me about the sewing workshop capo, who discovered the egg Riga Laub "had arranged," and how she faced him when he threatened to send her to the firing squad, and standing erect she rebuked him in front of all the female interns, he should be ashamed of himself for "betraying his people." And an ominous silence descended around her, like the time when all of a sudden in a bus in Tel Aviv, Mother rebuked in so many words the bus driver who lowered his head in silence. "He was a ca-po," two incomprehensible syllables muttered under her breath as we got out of the bus.

And then, after the order was given to round up the children who'd been smuggled into Plaszów, I read documents describing how the children hid every morning in the latrines. (In the latrines . . .?) How did they play there? And how were they caught in the end and transferred to the Kinderheim? And did Marek, stand out there too, nearly eight years old, a bright, mischievous child? Did he tell the children who gathered round him about the moon beams, which bore them at night beyond the cracks of the barracks in a tiny electric train far far from the shots, the yelping of the ferocious dogs, the women pushing wheelbarrows laden with rocks, and the scorched smell of burning bodies?

I refuse to think of Marek, shoved with the other children of the Kinderheim into the truck covered in a black tarpaulin, their hands protruding from under the black canvas in one mighty outcry, “Mama! Mama!” The outcry drowned out by the singsong of German lullabies, resounding from the loudspeakers hung from the trees around the Apel Platz with calculated sadism, transmitting live the Mother’s Day celebrations from Germany, muffling with gay melodies the screams of 20,000 prisoners and the fusillade coming from the beefed up unit that surrounded them with their machine guns, firing at the mothers running after the black trucks bearing their children away to Auschwitz, to the gas chambers.

And the last hours.

In Bnei Brak, in a heavily furnished apartment, I meet one of the ultra-Orthodox women who stuck together and survived as a group of ten, including Mother, the only secular Jew among them. “When we reached Auschwitz,” she recounts, “we were left for the entire night outside, next to the gas chambers. There were some women who prayed. There were others who threw themselves on the electric barbed-wire fence. Your mother told me, “Let’s look.” She led me behind the gas chambers. There was a little birch grove. And she scrutinized the tree trunks. “Maybe Marek left me a sign. Maybe he wrote something to me.”

Many years later, when I arrived with my eldest daughter to what had been turned into the Auschwitz Museum, over there, near the ruins of the gas chambers, my body froze. I moved with effort, retreated toward the solitary birch trees. Scrutinizing the tree trunks as my head spun. From afar could be heard the voices of the visitors, the tour groups. I feebly removed from my handbag a plastic knife. I carved an M on a tree trunk, slowly. M, Marek, Mama, Michal. As if this way, one line after another, a boy would join us for a moment, who’d certainly turn into a handsome man, his already graying hair parted to the side. A boy in shorts and suspenders, gazing through slightly slanted eyes. Bright, mischievous. Marek. Standing for a moment among birch trees, on the thin grass.

At the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust on the 27th of January 2013, the exhibit *Children in the Holocaust* created by Yad Vashem was displayed at the UN headquarters in New York. It included drawings, poems or toys of children in the Holocaust. The exhibit, curated by Yehudit Kol-Inbar, opened with the story of Marek, “The child who did not leave a sign”. A special commemoration session was held at the UN Plenary Hall in New York, and the story of Marek’s short life was told as his picture was projected. The same picture that I used to secretly take out with pounding heart, gazing at the strange child. Marek’s face seen for a brief moment at such public and international context, were a devastation tremor of presence. Beyond the abyss of absence.



Fig. 3: Marek's photograph presented at the UN Plenary Hall, New York, International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, 2012.

In 2015 a large exhibit was displayed at Yad Vashem Museum. It ended with Marek's picture accompanied by the curator's words: "A million and a half children were murdered in the Holocaust and only in rare cases did they leave something behind by which they might be remembered. Their hopes and dreams cannot be recreated – we can only imagine these children's thoughts, and hope that children everywhere in the world will be able to grow up peacefully in the bosom of their family."

Dana Arieli, Photographer and Researcher

For me, almost any encounter with Nazi objects raises the question of fascination: the fascination of the citizens of the time who – alongside all the horrors – found themselves living in a society that was intimately associated with a esthetics. The Nazis understood the tremendous power inherent in the shaping of reality; they understood the power of architecture; and they had a well-developed perception of the power of culture to create a world. Examples of this include the use of flags and lighting, which was typical of Albert Speer, among others, or the positioning of Adolf Hitler as initiated by Heinrich Hoffmann and greatly elaborated by Leni Riefenstahl. They did not overlook any object, large or small, and engineered every aspect of daily life in the Third Reich. Thus to analyze the symbols of the Third Reich solely from a functional perspective leads to the reduction of this phenomenon. I have often suggested, semi-humorously, that my journeys to Germany following the relics of the Third Reich will end if I manage to find a thimble with the legend “Sieg” on one side and “Heil” on the other – one of the smallest objects they designed. Anyone who engages in the design of objects on such an obsessive level undoubtedly understands the power of the object to engineer reality. I am well aware that the Nazi objects committed murder. You do not have to hold a Nazi weapon to recognize this. Books, too – engineered on the level of content and design – carried an enormous amount of power.

Dana Arieli

Button-Camera

Five pictures, three decades, some perspectives on dictatorship – one still current, the others retrospective.

I've been studying dictatorships for three decades. For most of my writing career, I've attempted to break down extreme situations, in which political domination gives birth to unspeakable things.

Having researched these issues for some time, and faced with ever-increasing questions, I've also tried to approach these themes creatively: I've begun to take photographs of relics that dictatorships have left behind.

I visit sites where genocide occurred. The walls are soaked with the murmurs of informants, with signs of abuse, with whimpers of dread and of death.

I'm aware that observing these in hindsight, I cannot grasp even the smallest portion of the horrors which occurred here. My view of the matter is distant, postponed and uninvolved. I have no personal memory of these eras. Still I feel that I must, I am obligated, to give testimony at present.

While staring into the heart of darkness does not provide all the answers, it gives new insight. Especially with regard to the nature and characteristics of the commemoration culture which surrounds us all. Regenerating such a culture is very much required today, since direct witnesses are disappearing.

I was born in Jerusalem in 1963. In recent years, I'm constantly struck by the fact that Israel was 15 when I was born. To my Sabrah consciousness, however, there was nothing ephemeral or transitory about the state. I used to reject such definitions as “first, second, third generation to the Shoah” – especially when it came to art and creative pursuits. I wasn't inclined to obsess as I now do over Nazism and the Holocaust. Initially, my recurrent journeys to sites of dictatorial horror were grounded in intuition: I instinctively felt that photography would deepen my research interests. My position changed with time, as I realized that I too, like many others, was influenced by what Yolanda Gampel describes in her studies as “nuclear fallout.”

Since 2009, when the phantoms project began, I visited more than 17 countries, and dozens of cities and sights within them, occupied by dictatorial governments operating mechanisms of repression and surveillance (<https://phantoms.photography>). This is a photography driven research that began with a quest after relics mainly in Germany. But gradually my focus extended and I visited other countries.

My photography archive currently has more than 50,000 frames, mostly documenting remnants of dictatorships.

The camera supplies a protective layer. I want to believe I could avert my gaze from things I would rather not see – yet insist on documenting – with the lens providing me a veil of separation. The lens protects me from the objects it reflects. Photography lets me to work as a research unit speaking in 1st person singular, without mediation. It lets me connect with my soul, my feelings. It lets me ponder between different modes of writing that do not rely on collective and academic citations, but personal sign-posts.

The Phantoms Project – documenting the relics of dictatorship – allows me to view my subject from a different perspective, and study rifts in cultural memory between different countries. These differences are not just due to geography; some of them are discernible in one and the same country. The interconnections between history, memory and politics that came to the fore in my journey strengthened my initial assumption: that economic, social and political conditions manufacture different approaches to memory – which is slippery, ever-shifting and undefined in nature. More than 15 years have passed since my first journey. I believed that that a single travel would liberate me. With an irony reserved for holocaust researchers, I secretly hoped that “photography will set me free.” Today, after dozens of journeys, it is clear to me that I’m yet to undertake many others.

Perhaps it was the house in Kovshei Katamon 6, in Jerusalem that was etched on my heart. In that small house lived my grandfather Gavriel Asaf (Zamler) and my grandmother Haya Asaf (nee Handelsman). Both having made Aliyah in 1934. Their phantoms, which I later came to research, barely held sway there. Unlike dozens of other houses, where no pictures of those who were gone were hanged on the walls – they held a single image right there, next to the door where grandma opened as she entered the balcony. It depicted my grandmother’s mom and dad, exquisitely dressed, surrounded by her brothers and sisters, all waiting to hear the photographers’ instruction. Every Sukkot, my grandma lit a single soul candle to their memory. It survived many autumn winds. In my consciousness, it took the visage of an everlasting ghost. This is how my “phantoms” came to be: a shared memory to both of us, begging me not to let go of the second where these two families – hers and her husband’s – were cast into a common pit of death.

I chose five images. The first was made before I began researching the subject, in the 1985. The second – in 1991 – while absorbed in my PhD on Nazi Germany at the Hebrew University. The third was taken in Dachau, during 2017 on a later journey while I was still dedicated and working on the series. The last in a

installation photography taken towards an exhibition of my creations during 2022. Five views on realms of horror.

A man is standing in front of a building.

A man is standing in front of a building, on the roof there is a red star.

A man wearing a suit is climbing up the stairs.

It appears he just finished.



Fig. 1: Dana Arieli, *Man in front of a Red Star*, Budapest, 1985.

I can not see the expression on his face. maybe he is climbing from a subterranean structure, maybe an underground station. I can not recall. The man does not know I am photographing him. Others do and they stare at me.

I imagine your suit. Is it made from wool? It looks old-fashioned. Can you afford paying for its cleaning every year, or maybe your suit is loaded with patches and pockets filled with holes? What's inside your pockets, anyway? Do you wear this suit only for special occasions? Are you on your way to meet a higher ranked officer than you?

I have a feeling you used to wear trousers and coats that were made from wool. You probably needed them in the frozen winter of Nadwórna, then Poland now

Ukraine. Did grandma managed to sew something for you before she left for Israel? At least one coat, with lining in the same color she sewed for me. And she never understood why I told her it was too hot for Israel. We, the ones born in Israel, were so different. As opposed to the young people who were forced to exile - we could never wear sandals with white socks as they did. I did not want the lining in my purple coat but she explained this is the way to do it. Is it possible that a button was split and your sister – my grandma – sew it for you? Did she had a thimble then? Did she circled the thread three times surrounding the buttons before she tore it using her teeth as usual?

I am looking at the position of your body. It transfers a definite posture. My eye is moving between you and the red star above you. It is full with dust, hanging above you. I am thinking about your relation with this sign.

I am pressing the shutter a couple of times. In my negative there is an amazing composition – You are going up the stairs, your head is located just beneath the red star. Its pisses me of. I prefer the last photo in the negative.

More than thirty years passed since I photographed you. There is still a question with no decisive answer: What is a good photo. Why do I take the same photo more than once when I am sure its a good one. The differences are tiny but I always see them. Sequences are really important to me. they reaper again and again in my photography. I have an issue with symbols. especially with those that appear in deserted places. places with a small, I call them. Stairs are always the beginning of an image to me. they attract me because they enable me to play with diagonal lines. They create constructivist compositions. I admire Constructivism and in particular Alexander Rodchenko and Sergei Eisenstein. I did not know their names when I took your photo. At that point in time the name Leni Riefenstahl did not mean anything to me either.

I am looking at you. You might be an official of the Dictatorship. Maybe an official of the dictatorship who used a red star. You might be on the way to work. I imagine your life inside this building. Maybe you are an official who is silent like the one in the short story by Heinrich Bell? Murke's Collected Silences, right? I can not remember now who was the high school teacher who taught me that short novel. But I remember that Burke used to test himself: he was making courage tests to himself like I do until today. In your story, is there an elevator which keeps running all the time? Paternoster as they call it, in German? Are you using the life against regulations? Are you cleaning the brass ashtrays in the entrance to this building? An officer of the dictatorship, debating with yourself is it safe to look in the eyes of higher officers as they enter the building?

I wonder if you have an office. Is it big? I know all corridors leading to such offices. their smell. this combination between dust and mold. I have taken a deep

breath in such places numerous times. Maybe you are a photographer working for the Stassi secret police and under this suit of yours you hide a Button Camera?

I've been collecting things as long as I can remember. In recent years, it's tiny chairs and buttons. My button collection is small compared to grandma Haya's. That was the first collection of anything I came across. I used to play with them. She would sit me down next to her and ask me to assort all the buttons – by size, or color. Her button collection amazed me. They looked like the stars, or precious stones. I would pour them all on her bed. I used to sit on the starched bed sheets, stacking piles of buttons.

Haya was a seamstress. The huge pockets on her checkered robe always had a button or two in them, as well as other strange implements she needed for sewing or cooking. And a cloth handkerchief as well. It was all there, in that perfect cache of hers. Her giant scissors would always peep out of the pocket, and she would patiently explain that I must not touch them, because they're very sharp. Finally there was her thimble. It was that thimble, actually, that led me to travel to Germany.

Were some of the buttons from Buchenwald?

Repeatedly I search for all those objects that inhabited the rooms of my childhood. Buttons, thimbles, old issues of Burda magazine with their cutting patterns for dressmaking, chalks which she used to mark the pattern on cloth with, her sewing machine – Singer, unadorned – with a wheel that took three or four pushes to start and some attempts to get the string in, and then glide into the eyelet.

Such handicrafts – sewing, knitting, weaving, embroidering, ironing – they come back to me in recent years, swamping my consciousness. I try repeatedly to recreate the structure of her home. I draw the furniture in their proper places, reminded of pictures that popped up from books, or those that hanged on the wall. I was 12 years old when the The Jewish community in Nadwórna who perused in the Holocaust published its memory book. Grandma showed it to me with great pride. To me as usual the photos in the book appealed, not the words. With great respect I wrote with a pencil everything she pointed at and wanted me to remember. "Write here", she said, and I followed: "My friends are coming to say goodbye before me and your grand-father embarked on a journey to Israel". "After this corner stood the house where I grew up." "Next to the pharmacy was my elementary school". As if she wanted me to be ready for a phantom journey telling all about her past. Two pages in this book included all the names of my family who was massacred in an action at Shukkot eve, October 6, 1941.

Did I hear your name before? I am not sure. But the sight of your face – That I certainly remember. They peeked out of the frame that was hung over grandma's bed side, next to the door to the balcony. I know she was the first thing see saw every morning when she woke up.

In the frozen photo you were not alone. Grandma's family, your family, was also there. you were dressed up nicely and came to the photographer and he instructed you were to stand. Sitting are two adults. I understand now they are probably you mother and father. they look sad. When I was young I did not realize how they knew someone will kill them. You are standing on the left side. there are two other young people next to you. But I remember your face. that's probably because of your ears. they are big and sticking out of the frame. Mummy says my ears are also big.



Fig. 2: Dana Arieli, "Uncle Jacob," (a page from the artist book *Button-Camera*, 2022).

Now I already know your name. Ya'acov. I have constructed a death tree of Handelsman and Zamler families at the age of 55 based on Grand father's pages of testimony. But nothing hinted that you were also a photographer. you were dealing with documentary photography. look they even thank you at the opening of the book. "Most of the photos included in *The Jewish community in Nadwórna* 's book were taken by Ya'acov Handelsman until 1939 who later perished in the Shoah. How old were you in 1939? And how did the photos lasted to Israel? I still need to find that.

Now it is all clear to me:

Grandma with her buttons
 You and your camera
 and me, with my Button Camera.



Fig. 3: Dana Arieli, *Button Camera*, 2022. Installation Photography by Ran Erde for the exhibition *Zeitgeist* (curator: Yuval Etzioni).

How could I forget?

How could I forget that I took your picture there, on the back, where that guy stood?

How could I forget the way you would hold the strap of that tiny bag on your wrist?

And how joyful I am to remember how the texture of that shirt felt, and its zipper at the front, that you can't see on the frame. Neither can you see the red mole near your eye, or the broken nail on your thumb. Good. That's mine. I don't want to share it with anyone else.

It was so horrifying to look at your body position, that I was so thrilled to see again. and your hair, that looks Straighter here as opposed to how it was in reality, and the trail on the side, that may serve as a reminder to him.

How could I forget?

That we were there together in 1991. I have already started studying history than, and already knew about Albert Speer, and we have already discussed this on the car many times on the way to mount Scopus. And you already told me that you



Fig. 4: Dana Arieli, *Daddy, Nuremberg*, 1991. From the series: *The Nazi Phantom/Phantoms Project*.

think that its a bit ambitious to write a PhD on the Nazis and the Soviets as well, and you think its better that I will concentrate only on the Nazis. You though that it was way more interesting. And How I loved these conversations with you. Maybe 10 years after you died I wrote a book comparing between Germany and the former USSR and until today every time I look at the cover, designed by Asaf, I am not so sure what you would think about it, because you never read it. you were no longer here when it was published.

How could I forget?

Our stop at the tourist information in Nuremberg, the small of the mildew tree, inside that hut and how she mocked me, when I asked in English where on the map is Zeppelin field?

And your smile when I entered the car and told you she was making fun of me, and you told me not to worry because you will take me there. And how we parked the car on the “Greater Way” how’s name I did not know then.

How could I forget?

That you stood exactly where he stood. And how lucky I was that I found this negative and I could enlarge you, and see you once again, and feel that I am touching you, although you are a phantom, like all the rest of them.

How could I forget that I was there with you?



Fig. 5: Dana Arieli, *Dachau*, 2017. From the series: KZ/Phantoms Project.

I am starring at you.

How did you get here?

Where did you come from?

Are you here alone or somebody is with you?

Do you have a family?

what ties you to this place?

do you understand who does it feels when your family is being slaughtered all at once?

it was on Shukkot eve. Just letting you know. she use to lite soul candles ever since.

you look a bit lost.

how are you feeling now?

what touched you?

what really touched you?

You see that I am taking a photo of you.

It's because of the hat you are wearing. because of the feather attached to your hat. it is hard to notice it in this size.

and also because you remind me of Diego Rivera. He did not have a moustache. Do you know him? do you know his story with Frida Kahlo? maybe you saw this dubious movie they did on both of them in Hollywood. I did not like this movie, but the music was great.

In 1991, when I visited Nuremberg I was also in Mexico City. I visited their villa in Coyoacán. I remember now only this fascinating blue color of her kitchen. and the hut were Trotsky slept. especially his desk, with the papers filled with his bold, who changed their color with the years. like the paper with Rabin's blood. They were both assassinated due to their political world view. in Leni Reifentahl's movie *The Triumph of the Will* she used an air ballon with a camera inside. In one frame there are over 125;000 people. I plan of photocopying this image 56 times. I will present it in a white cube in a sequence. And if I will do it will someone understand why 56 times? 125,000 time 56 equal 6,000,000.

I will approach you.

I will ask.

Gary Goldstein, Visual Artist

I remember that in 1998 I came from Israel to Hartford, Connecticut to attend my father's funeral. I expected that my family, my mother, brother, sister and I would be alone at the cemetery. To my surprise, there were over 200 people present. I discovered that my father was beloved. That's my parents were people who the entire community loved and cherished.

I did not remember my father ever saying "I love you." I remembered only the beatings and insults. The anger.

A process of healing began for me when I became a grandfather. Through the physical contact with my first grandson, I retrieved sensations, touches, smells and words that I received from my parents. That was the beginning of change. I began to see them as people who treated me, among other things, with warmth.

During the time of our meetings as a group at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, I found a greeting card for Hannuka that my father had sent me. I imagine that it was from the mid-90s when my mother was in the early stages of dementia. He wrote in his broken English. I could hear his Yiddish accent as he wrote:

"11/20

Hi kids How are you all
Home everything is ok
You never so much snow
This year more than last year
It is only December
Home is everything ok
cept your Mother she forget
olot Shuli she is working
The Boys are orede
Katie is in England
Michael is very busy He is agod
Boy, I am closer to my eightieth year
We love you Mom Dad."

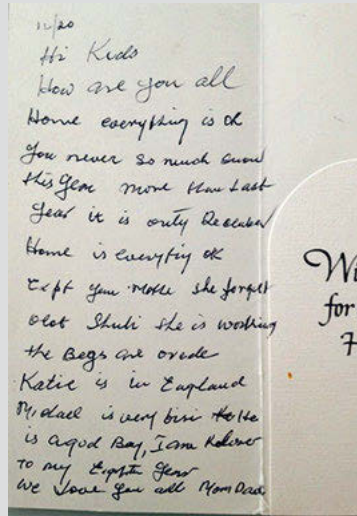


Fig. 1: Postcard from Sam Goldstein, USA, the 1990's.

Gary Goldstein

Inside That Gray Cloud

Thrilling leaves falling intermittently. Blackened hulks, shapes against a light sky. Memories of childhood. Children alone in silence, bombarded by screams, by hits, by cries. These black forms dancing, flaccid and inert on a leaden floor. Decimated by memory. Memories in an empty mind, emptied by thoughts dripping from that box into an overflowing pool. The waves inundating and drowning me. Stifling my air, my breaths. I am old. A no longer child. I am chilled by the waste, by the pain of that earlier time. Each time I remember. I cannot forget. I am grey. Leaden. Led to damnation. To silliness in memories, barbs and thorns and howling winds blowing me away. Knocking me down. Trampled and spiked. Stuck with barbs of thoughts, of flickering lights.

I was surprised that when I let Anat, my wife, read the texts which I had written, how difficult she found them. I was surprised as well when I read my brief texts to my writing Group – whose members are “second generation” – the reactions of difficulty, of pain, of horror. That is after listening to their brief tales of horror and woe. Stories of just growing up. Growing up in houses where people try to be normal, try to raise families, try to build their lives. Yet, intentions apart, results something else

Before I run away
Before I fall flat on my face
Before I kneel in obeisance
Obeying all requests
Before I hang out the laundry
Stretching and distorted
Uncomfortably forward and to the side
Before I finish the drawing
Blackening the space around the flower
I die of boredom and continue out of need
Out of satisfaction.
Before I sway from my
Decided path
Determined
Before
I knew
About today.
Before I lay me down

To sleep
 Putting an end to
 Today's consciousness
 Replenishing my desires
 Before I can't take it anymore
 I kneel
 I hide
 I fade away.

I tried to recall my mother saying my name. I could not really remember. What I did recall was Gary. Although that was strange, since the pronunciation of that Americanized name with her heavy Yiddish accent was probably unnatural to her. I asked my wife, Anat how my mother called me on our visits home. She said Gersheleh. I have no recollection of her calling me that name. Gersheleh for her was so much more familiar. It was warmer and intimate. It bespoke a continuum, a continuation. It made me small and loved, yet at the same time, foreign to myself and to others.

Each sentence when I was growing up never ended in the same language in which it began. The English words were pronounced in a heavy, Yiddish accent something which made me ashamed. I looked down upon my parents, upon their foreignness. Those diminutives, Gersheleh, Hanka, Moisheleh, made them small. They made us small. They diminished us. They created the feeling in me of Gershon, a stranger in a strange land. Nicht a hier. Nicht a heir. Neither here nor there.

During one of my brother's visits to Tel Aviv, sitting along the sea, we began to speak about our family while growing up. The more we spoke the less I remembered. It was as if hearing about a family I had seen in a film once. The more that we spoke, the more I felt like I was sinking. I was getting more and more tired. All my digestive problems returned after an extended period of well-being. I can see the mechanism in my reaction to my family. My shutting off and shutting down. A defense mechanism. I could not remember. I felt distant. I had no strength to move or to talk. I felt empty.

I was gone. Long gone. I was found and then not. Looking for myself. Looking. Lost. Listless. Hiding from myself. Buried under layers of heaviness. Flowers, blooming, yet I center upon the prickly, wounding parts. Fuzz. Fizzy. Effervescent. ORANGE. A kind of self portrait. Fleshy. Flecks. Flickers. I see only in snips, in snippets. In parts. Nothing is whole. There is only a hole. Nothing is whole. The walls. Dark. Scaling. Looming ever upward, covering the light. Covering my view of the outside where the lives of others transpire while I expire, respire, rip the tubes. Heaven help me and those around me. A net of mesh. A net of brambles, of things I feel and do not see. I feel lost at sea. I am sightless, hearing only the inner

noise, the necessities of day to day. The occasional bursts of hope send me rushing – scampering up the walls. Scaling the sides. Seasick with the effort. Feeling the scratches, the tears on my flesh, lunging, extending my body as at the end of a race. I lay panting, short of breath, my face on the floor.

I always knew that both my parents came from very large families, each from a family of eight children. I had cousins, uncles, and aunts. All those family members were murdered during the war. Only my father, my mother and her younger sister Tova survived. Despite all that I knew, and despite my mother's constant telling of her experiences, I never thought of my parents and what they experienced before the war and in the ghetto and the camps. I never thought of their families, my families, and what happened to them. For me, their presence was one of lack. While preparing for a lecture at a conference at Bezalel, I was amazed to see that most of my work from the last fifteen years was comprised of portraits. I realized with surprise that my work assumed the guise of a forest of faces, a forest of portraits of people that I never met, seemingly that I never thought about. Yet, I never stop thinking about them. Their images appear, transform and reappear in drawing after drawing, year after year on pages of old books upon which that I create my works.

So many stilled voices, once so loud so vibrant. None believed in their silence, their stillness. Snow covering their tracks leaving no trace. Children's voices, their excitement and energy drowning out the possibility of death, of debts, of devastation. Walking ahead, head raised, the frenetic energy, the lost souls, seeking salvation seeking peace, settling for less.

The street with that huge building, looming with its gaping mouth, large and with a locked gate, which opens to the inmates enclosed within. The row of bells named and others nameless. 29 Franciskanska Ulice, on the corner of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Ulice in the old Lodz Ghetto. This six story building was part of my mother's recollections. At the corner where trams and buses run, you turn right in the direction of the Jewish cemetery. Anat and I went there with Milena, who guided us. After walking around the ghetto, to see the neighborhood where my mother and her family lived before and during the war, we continued to the cemetery. Then we went to eat Polish food. We ate pirogi, delicious, in a simple, modern, unappealing yet, somehow inviting restaurant with an abandoned garden in the front. We ate the doughy, comforting warmth. We felt life, sustenance, enjoyment on our taste buds, flowing into our bodies.

According to my mother's deposition to the German Reparations Commission, her family owned that large building. She recounted her memories going along with her father, and sometimes by herself, collecting the rents from their tenants. According to Milena, there is no record of my mother's family owning the building.

Will I last? Be the last in my class? The last one standing? Remaining after their demise? Will I live forever? Will I die with a bang or with a whimper? Drool. Saliva dripping off the corners of my mouth. My chin.

The crinkles of the scar on my cheek more pronounced and declarative every day. I stare in the mirror. My oracle. My father stares back. He was alive. Immortal like me. Now I am immortal without him.

Sadness sprinkles down. A light drizzle. First pleasing and then drenching wet. The breeze makes me shiver. Exposed. Naked. My clothes stick to my skin. To my bones. My gaunt muscles.

I cower. Within myself. Within my cave. My bunker. I seek relief. In myself. From myself. To be relaxed at ease. In myself. From myself. At home. In bed. Escaping into other lives. Not alone in a room. In space with myself. That raging beast devouring me. Gnawing my bones. Breaking the bones. Sucking the marrow.

I scream. I run. I escape. In my dreams. In life. In here, rooted to the spot. The spit still rolling down my chin. Welling up in my mouth. Collecting. Filling the space. Stifling my screams.

I'm choking. I'm choked. I wait for relief. I wait. I cannot walk. Cannot talk. Cannot run. Ridicule. Eject. Ejaculate. All remains. Exposed.

Feasted upon by the crows. Black. Cruel. Critical. Cawing. Making their unpleasant screams. Their yells. They fly away. Strings of flesh. My flesh in their beaks. I remain. rooted to the spot.

In life. In death. Rooted. Unable to move. To make. To initiate. To ingratiate. It is God's will. My will. My lack of will. Not lack of want. I want. I wanted. I desire still. And now I am still. Not moving. Rooted to this spot. This ground. This earth.

If I exist, I exist in people's memory. They in turn eaten. Chewed up. Their chins dribble and run with spit. And then, they forget.

When I was 32 or 33, married and living in Jerusalem, I met Arnold – a distant relative, whom I met once 22 years previously at my brother's bar mitzvah. Arnold suddenly reappeared in my life when he was in Israel to promote a book that he had written chronicling his experiences as a boy during the Second World War.

He describes my parents meeting after the war, their wedding and one other previously unknown fact – My father had been married before the war; He had a daughter who was murdered in Auschwitz. Shortly after that meeting, I visited my parents in the USA. I read them this excerpt in the book referring to my father's previous relationship. Both my parents were silent. My mother turned red. I asked if it was true. They said yes. I asked my father how old the little girl was. He said four years old. What was her name? Mary. Miriam. Whom did she look like? Dina, my younger daughter. That was the only time that we spoke about the subject.

Soft formless clouds
 Against a bright morning sky
 The edges bright white
 The bulk dark
 Days are formed in habitual pattern
 Simple actions
 Repeated one day
 And the next
 That routine
 That simplicity
 A country life
 In the midst of this
 City
 To clean
 To organize
 To throw away
 To do without
 Clearing space
 In this small apartment
 More than enough for our needs
 Reading
 Adventure stories
 Of war
 An escape
 A life lived
 Vicariously
 Making drawings
 With small laborious
 Marks
 Repeated
 Mark after mark
 Drawing after drawing
 Day after day
 The drama included
 Held fast
 In those frozen images

For years, I had no memories of the house in which I spent most of my childhood. I could remember only my room which I shared with my younger brother and the back porch. Through efforts, I regained the living room and dining room and parts

of the kitchen. The rest of the house still remain unknown. The porch had a tin roof which I loved during times of rain. The sound of the rain pelting the roof was augmented by the tin. Almost any rain seemed like a storm. It was a place of refuge during summer storms where the warmth and wet combined with a dry shelter within.

The back porch was a refuge for also my father who smoked. My mother did not and could not stand the smell and residue of smoke, something my father trailed wherever he went. He often chewed Dentyne Chewing Gum, an effort to mask the smell. It was in the kitchen, after coming into the house, that my mother added a detail to a story with which I had grown up.

After the war, my parents lived in a displaced persons camp in Lampertheim, Germany for five years. There, they had a daughter, Feigeleh, named after both my father and mother's mothers. Tsipora. Bird. She died at 1 1/2 years of age, scalded to death by a pot of boiling water placed on a hot plate on a board between two chairs. The pain and agony to my mother was a theme frequently returned to by her.

One day in the kitchen, it could have been raining. It could've been winter. My father entered. I was sitting there with my mother. On my father's entrance, my mother shrieked "because of you and your cigarettes Feigeh is dead. You should have watched her and you went out for a smoke".

My father recoiled as if struck. He tightened like a coil and sprang at my mother as if he was going to grasp her face or throat. He growled and inches from her face he stopped, mute, helpless, limp.

What we do is bad at first, for a long time, and then, hopefully it gets better. Does it get better? Does something about us change? And what is it? Day in. Day out. Pubis up. Tailbone down. The same movement practiced each day. Each day something different. Each day exactly the same. There is a tremendous sense of loneliness. Of being inside. Of feeling the heating come on. Of turning away the cold inside us. There is no sense of the person, of life being sublime or transcendent. There is the room. The heat. Silent hours. No insights. Just inside. Just things. Life before was boring. Now is boring. There is a mist, grey and unformed. Darkness inside of me. Me inside that grey cloud. That grey smoke. It makes me tired, so tired I can barely move. Escape? But to where? The smoke is inside me. It makes me tired.

Little boy plays alone in a room. That room is attached to house, to a neighborhood, to a town. When thought of and remembered, there are spaces. There are places. There are no people. There is the floor. Carpeted. . Closed. There are two beds closely spaced. Two windows each on a different wall. There is the ceiling and door jamb. There is green abstract wallpaper. It was similar to Josef Albers square within a square. Although this one gives the impression of being a closed set, a stage. Again, a closed space. A closed box. Yet, this one repeating again and again, serial like.

Sometimes, the room with its walls seems so substantial, so real. So fortified. Sometimes, it seems like cardboard, miniaturized.

Sometimes stable. Sometimes hurtling into space. The house uncharted and unremembered is dark. The room is bright. There were small toys. There were tiny soldiers sharing that loneliness. Where were they? Were they in boxes? In bags? On the floor? There was a chest of drawers. I do not remember where. There might have been a closet for clothing and for toys.

Inside the house the protected, protracted space. It is space where one drifts weightless and alone in the dark. Dark nesses spared of light. It is the place where I do my work. There is no importance of my work to anyone but to myself. To think not is a conceit. To do it, to invest so much, is a conceit devoid of reason, of sense. Yet I do it, listening to poems, to hear the words expressing emptiness and loneliness, expressing death and its fear, the fear inside of me. There is something in the act, the action itself, which gives me warmth.

Morning. Early. Beginnings. Beginning. The excitement of making and seeing. Looking at what emerges. What flows. Whales captured. Harpooned. Killed. No longer alive. Captured. The men needed to live. To emerge alive. Living. 1942. Giving up their children. Knowing their fate. The guilt of not protecting. Of not fighting. Of giving them up to survive. Then, his next daughter . . . dying because of him? Medicated. Raging. He survived. He kept living. Why? How? How could he live with himself? Everyone dead. He survives.

To begin again
 Each new drawing
 Is so frightening
 Afraid of what
 Yesterday we saw two boys with a drone
 Flying it in a field
 In the middle of the city
 The drone got stuck
 In the trees
 It's propellers
 Twirling helplessly in the branches
 Neither up nor down
 Going nowhere
 The upturned faces
 Expectantly
 Hopefully

Gazing at the propellers

Impotently

Turning

Making sounds

Stuck

When I was six or six and a half years old I was photographed together with my one year old brother, my older sister and two other lovely, well-dressed girls. We were at a picnic, all well-dressed, clean, sparkling, the hopes of immigrant, tailor parents at a Ladies' Alteration picnic at the Foreman's home.

I am squinting, frowning into the camera, chubby, a double chin, slightly bow-legged. That has been an image that I have carried inside myself for years. I look unhappy. I appear unhappy. I am unhappy. We were photographed together simply because we were children. We didn't know each other.

I think of my grandson, how loved he is, surrounded by love. How many photos of him laughing and smiling. I ignore the photos of him unhappy and unsmiling, indeed frowning.

I have always felt unloved and unhappy as I appear in that photograph. It could well be that there are other moments, undocumented, with me smiling, running, happy. That fat, unloved, unlovable boy is what I see when I close my eyes, although I am surrounded by love. I can feel that my interpretation of the photo may well be flawed. In any event, I am not that little boy now. If he was here now, I know that he would be lovable, loved. My brother in his joy at standing, in his chubbiness, seems happy as he is today, except when he is not.

When I consider that little boy, I feel that the radioactivity of my misery infected and contaminated me all my life. I was NOT bad. My parents were not bad. My brother and sister were not bad. We were just miserable. That misery resurfaces so often despite so many signs indicating a different reality.

In that photograph, I was a vessel of hope, the hope of others. I still feel that little boy inside my body. I am pregnant with him now. I want so much to love him and I long for his love.

Bathing in warmth,

Aglow.

The sun's rays softening its painful midday glare.

Floating. Drifting.

Alone.

A part.

Words.

Sounds.

Soothing, caressing thoughts lifting and snatching away.
Conscious of the light's nearing end.



Fig. 1: Gary Goldstein, drawings from the series *Milkwood* (2011), 24.5x34 cm, ink, pencil and an oil felt-pen, painted on the pages of a book.



Fig. 2: Gary Goldstein, drawings from the series *Milkwood* (2011), 24.5x34 cm, ink, pencil and an oil felt-pen, painted on the pages of a book.

Mendy Cahan, Singer, Actor, Founder of YUNG YiDiSH

I remember a moment at Hebrew University: I was looking at a microfiche of one of the first literary almanacs in Yiddish from 1890s. and suddenly I asked myself: Why is this so rare? Why have I never encountered any of these publications until today? How come I never held one in my hands? After all, I grew up in a Yiddish-speaking world. . . . Until that moment, I was convinced that the Holocaust did not succeed in its goal of annihilation. Father survived, we are alive, there are fifty synagogues in Antwerp, we speak Yiddish at school, there is the State of Israel, with street signs in Hebrew. Yet, at that moment, I suddenly understood that the Holocaust had “succeeded”: it had succeeded in destroying such large parts of my culture, of my language, of my consciousness, discarding any trace. At that moment, something arose within me, a feeling that I had to do something about it. How could I be living in Israel for seven years, studying at Hebrew University, immersed in Israeli bohemia and never encountered any sign of the fact that such a rich culture exists? How is it possible that there is not a single Yiddish bookstore in Israel?

Mendy Cahan

Unsettling Dust

For me, passing on the memory of the Holocaust is associated with childhood memories: I am with my brothers, on a visit to Israel, leafing through a book with pictures of what happened in the Holocaust. There were no photographs, but there were drawings: extracted teeth, skulls, and my brothers told me: “Don’t look, you’ll dream about it, you’ll have nightmares.” But I wanted to look. I did not completely understand what was happening in those pictures. I also remember that my mother said things to my brothers. They were 11, 12 and I was 6. And I heard bits and pieces: “People got off the train,” “they hid food in their pockets,” “they shot anyone they saw eating,” “Father was there too.” Later, age 10 or 11, I heard from the other room, in the middle of the night, a scream from my father. I think that is my most vivid and complete Holocaust memory: Father’s scream in the middle of the night, and my mother waking and calming him: “Shh . . .” I had never heard such a scream, and I have never heard anything like it since. I understood that the scream was about something truly horrific, horribly horrific. The fact that I heard my big, strong father scream like that created a sort of hole in my consciousness, and I started to dig there, to try to understand, to try to remedy.

Another childhood memory: People came to visit, including my father’s friend Haim Andelman. He was an architect who lived in Israel, but they had a special connection. Andelman was a *mentsh*, someone you could rely on. I could see that. I heard that they were together *in di lagern*, in the camps. But the word *lager* can also refer to a summer camp, and they were both there, together. Sometimes I asked, “What did you do in the camps?” Father worked there with coal. He worked in an airplane factory and that sounded like a great adventure to me, and a place of close friendship . . . We, the children, felt that our lives were very boring compared to their lives: We had no Nazis, no adventures.

I grew up in Antwerp, in a religious family, and the Holocaust memory was the family memory. My classmates were also the children of Holocaust survivors. I think there was only one child in the class who had two grandfathers and two grandmothers. It was a bit strange, and we felt as if he was a bit less Jewish than us. Once, when I was four years old, I asked my father – we were on a visit to Israel, it was sunny and he was more relaxed – “Where are your Mami and Papi?” And he half replied, “*di Yekes hobn zey nebekh farbrent*”: The Germans did burn them. This brought to mind pictures of witches burned at the stake. It was a very confused picture, between knowing and not knowing what the Holocaust was.

The passing on of memory is a very strange matter. I do not understand how a memory is passed on. Even at YUNG YiDiSH, with all of the old used Yiddish

books I collect, it is impossible. Because I collect dusty books, texts that seemingly have lost their interest. Another cardboard box full of books . . . When will I ever have time to read it all, barely enough time to open the book. And when I open it, light shines from the book and I connect with the things that happened. I learn, remember, understand – but that remains between me and the book; it does not light up the world. Perhaps a reader in another fifty or one-hundred years, or in another thirty years, will open the book like I am opening it now, and the light will shine on.

It is very beautiful, this monument. Once it was a tree and they destroyed the tree and made paper from it. They took scorched soil or other things and made ink from it. This process is like making tefillin: In order to “capture” the word of God, you take a little piece of an animal, skin it, and write letters on the skin. The tree is dead, the animal is dead, the word is dead – but through these magical connections, you behold life.

My father grew up in Transylvania, in a shtetl. He received no education besides his studies at the yeshiva where he learned until age 14. During the war, he moved from work camps to forced labor camps to death camps. My mother, who grew up in a slightly larger town and was more educated, spent the war in Romania. The Jews there were subject to harsh restrictions but not death camps. They met after the war when my father returned, 23 years old, to look for family members who survived. He didn’t find his parents or siblings, but he met my mother. He was then a young man of 24 or 25. (I inherited some of his versatility: He was a political activist with *Poalei Zion* (Jewish Social Democratic Labour Party), an astute Talmudist and trader, who also knew how to perform, to grab a violin and play. What was important in his eyes, was to keep the faith and make a living for the family. Father’s world had collapsed: He was the scion of generations of rabbis in the Cahan family. Though he had already stopped wearing a *shtreimel* before the war, he remained religiously observant during and after the war, throughout his life. My father risked his life and gave up vital rations to obtain *tefillin* in the death camp. When he was still in the work camp, on three occasions he had a chance to flee but refrained from doing so because he feared he might be forced to commit sins: There was a non-Jewish woman who took a liking to him, and she offered to help him escape and gave him a key. But he tossed the key away and stayed, enduring years in the camps. All that was expressed in that scream.

Another memory that was passed on to me: During one of the Yiddish summer courses I taught in Vilna, I was walking around Ponar where I encountered an older man there. There are huge pits in Ponar that were meant for oil storage. Today the pits are empty, like empty eyes staring up at the sky. But the Nazi killing squads filled them with a massive number of dead bodies. 100,000 killed. As the Red Army advanced toward Lithuania in September, 1943, the Germans began

opening the pits, to incinerate the bodies and erase the evidence. A group of eighty prisoners from the nearby Stutthof concentration camp was formed for that purpose and sent to Ponar: the *Leichenkommando* (“corpse units”) to remove and burn bodies. From time to time, of course, those prisoners found people they knew there: a child, woman, relative, friend. They realized that they too would be killed there in the end.

The prisoners managed to escape through a tunnel they had dug for three months. With spoons and fingers, they dug a tunnel 35 meters long. On the night of April 15, 1944, forty prisoners broke off the shackles from their legs and fled through the tunnel. Some of them were discovered by the guards and shot to death. But fifteen managed to escape and eleven of them reached the partisans. The man I encountered that day in Ponar told me that he had come close to one of those *Leichenkommandos*. “There was such a smell of death that emanated from this man . . . two weeks after his escape . . . no soap could scrub it away . . .” And as he was recalling his encounter, his eyes became the eyes of a terrified animal; and I, through his eyes, experienced the encounter with that creature. This former partisan, now in his 80’s or 90’s, who went through so much, but at the moment of this recollection was so full of fear, terror, speechless shock. The memory was impossible to pass on in words, but so much was conveyed to me with a look.

In 1962, my father arrived in Antwerp with nothing – two salamis, packs of cigarettes – and started over there, from scratch. In Communist Romania, he did amazing things that I did not know about when I was a child: He was a fruit exporter and, at the same time, he sold Swiss watches on the black market. All this allowed him to live in a private room, with his wife, and thus he was able to lay tefillin in Communist Romania. He became Romania’s railroad supervisor, which enabled him to travel with his suitcase full of watches . . . The KGB knew that he was smuggling and tried to catch him – he was always traveling from place to place, overseeing the conveyance of fruits – and one day, they did catch him. They placed him in a refrigerator to make him confess, but he didn’t say a word. And meanwhile, workers from the train stations came to complain that the fruit shipments were rotting and had to be released. In the end, they freed him. In the years that followed, he said nothing about this. Only at the end of his life, we spoke a little and he wrote his memoirs. When we spoke, he said, “The Germans aren’t a bad people. They’re just too disciplined; they listen too much to the voice of their leaders. But the Communists were much worse – they penetrated the minds of every single person!”

A memory with my father: We’re on vacation in the city of Baden-Baden. He was already retired, and he felt comfortable there because he understood the language, thanks to his Yiddish. As we toured there, I asked him, “But how do you

feel here, in Germany?” and he said, “We, the Jews, are a weak people: We can’t harbor resentment and the desire for revenge. I, at the end of the war, said that I didn’t want any money from them. They shouldn’t try to buy my forgiveness with money! But thirty years later, I thought – What good did that do? After all, the money could have helped the family. In Israel, too, there was a need to build, to create, and they took the money from the Germans.” While strolling leisurely the streets in Baden-Baden, he suddenly stops in front of an empty lot between the row of buildings, and turns to me: “See this beautifully flattened clean plot. I was here two months ago, and there was here these entire building . . . How those Germans manage to demolish so neatly without leaving any trace . . .”, he said with a bitter smile.

I am a native Yiddish speaker, but still my path to Yiddish culture was a surprise. After yeshiva, I studied at the university – French literature, German literature, philosophy. And then I said to myself, if I am already studying comparative literature, then why not a bit of Yiddish literature too? It would give me something more to compare and then I would be able to complete my degree. I thought I could cover this subject in a year – after all, how much Yiddish literature was there to learn? Soon I discovered that this literature has an extensive history of a thousand years, and before I knew I was encountering idioms that I had heard from my father, realizing that they originated in the 15th century. There was a depth to this world that I had been unaware of, and so many unexplored territories to call my own.

There’s a saying in Yiddish based on a verse from *Pirkei Avot* (“Sayings of the Fathers”): “In a place where there are no [worthy] men, strive to be a man”; in Yiddish this became: “In a place where there is no worthy man, even a herring is considered a fish [*iz hering oykh a fish*].” I also recalled a story I was told as a child: “Why did Joshua deserve to be the people’s leader after Moses? Because every day, after Moshe delivered his daily lesson to the entire nation in the desert, Joshua would neatly arrange all of the books. That’s how we learned that you need to respect books.” (The roots of agnosticism were implanted in me because I knew there were no books during that period, and thus transmission of truth was blurred.) I was working in radio then as a news broadcaster in Yiddish and at the end of every newscast, I would say in Yiddish: “Whoever has Yiddish books at home that don’t serve you, call me and I’ll come and collect them.” That’s how it started: I rode on my Vespa, collecting books, meeting all sorts of people. Writers who gave me books and asked me to come again; people who told me about the books they had received; one woman who told me thirty years after her husband died, “My husband told me: They won’t let Yiddish disappear. Someone will come one day, they’ll come to realize that Yiddish is important.” She recounted how she had arrived in Israel after the war and boldly went to teach in a kibbutz kinder-

garten, and how the little children would place their hands over their ears when they heard her speak. “They were only three or four years old,” she said. “How did they already know that they must cover their ears when they hear Yiddish?” And one man, a well-known professor, an expert on the destruction of the Second Temple, told me disparagingly, “I have some of my father’s books. Come take them.” He did not know that his father was one of the most renowned Yiddish literary critics. He was unaware that his father’s Yiddish library included books by the greatest Yiddish authors with dedications to his father. Yet he knew about the destruction of the Second Temple.

And so, I have been collecting Yiddish books for several decades already. I love books that are covered with dust, the dust of forgetting. When I collect them, I sometimes feel like Janusz Korczak, building an orphanage for Yiddish books. At first, I kept the books in my home library. People started to come, but when the collection began to grow, I looked for a place where the books could be accessible to the public. My father passed away in 1997 and I used part of my inheritance to rent a basement in Jerusalem and transform it into a library and culture hub – YUNG YiDiSH Jerusalem. In 2002, ‘we opened a branch in Tel Aviv, but after 4 years we were forced to relocate and found refuge in a dilapidated space in the central bus station. We collect the books, sort them, repair them, build shelves and a library, and lo and behold – the place gradually becomes a cultural center, a meeting place. Slowly but surely, it is again possible to hear the books in Yiddish in their full diversity. Religious, secular, and everything in between, and the books of the past form the core for a wide range of contemporary activities: poetry readings, concerts, exhibits, lectures, book launches and more. By honoring what was forgotten, what may be no longer needed, by allowing space for what may already have served its purpose, memory has something to settle upon.

But it was difficult to embark on this journey in Israel. It was hard for me to raise money. I also started to work in Vilna, and other memories arose there. In Vilna – which before the war was home to 70,000 Jews and where today 200 remain, most of whom arrived from Russia after the Holocaust – I suddenly met Jews who had studied in Vilna before everything was destroyed. And when they spoke Yiddish, you could hear in a single sentence their classrooms and teachers, their education and their respect for culture. You could connect to the vitality that once was. With a few friends, we began to teach summer courses there, to connect our Western European memory with their Eastern European memory. And from those summer courses, we inaugurated an institute for Yiddish at Vilnius University in 2002.

We are continuing to collect more and more books, and we already have over 80,000 books at YUNG YiDiSH. Each time you meander among the shelves, something different speaks to your heart. Sometimes it may be a collection of

magazines from 1905, 1924, 1937 . . . You leaf through them, week by week, and read articles, a serialized novel, jokes. You see pictures of beautiful infants, children, letters to the editor, development and expansion of an entire world . . . and you can see pictures, read articles and understand what was left unsaid. Books and more books, scholarly works, belles-lettres, religious writings. The reason for collecting this diverse array of books was practical. I wanted to create a representative library as the same threat hovers over every Yiddish book: It may never be published again. But I also collected the books because I was looking for a way to spark the imagination of those who visit the library. I felt that we needed to make them hear the scream or the laughter, that we needed to awaken this polyphony in their consciousness. After all, so much is lacking: the people are no longer here. The buildings are gone, the streets, schools, synagogues . . . Barely a remnant of the complex web of community life. The most physical things are these books. The consolation lies in what happens when you open a book: It is alive. And the reader lives within it. No other object can awaken people in this way. The book speaks, speaks lying down, speaks even when you place it inside a plastic cover. Of all the monuments we have to what was destroyed, the book is the only tombstone I know that has the power to resurrect the dead. Because if you open the book, you connect to life – to the person who wrote the book, to those who held the book in their hands, and to those who passed it on. The vision of the dry bones: The text, which became something inanimate, comes back to life.

When I was a child, I read on the Kellogg's' Corn Flakes box that hedgehogs curl into a spiny ball when facing danger. But when automobiles began to appear on roads in the early 20th century, it was calamitous for the hedgehogs: If they heard a car approaching while crossing the road, they would stop and curl up inside their spines, as they had always done. But this did not help them, of course, and they were run over. Several decades later, researchers noticed that hedgehogs who heard cars approaching were reacting differently: They continued to run quickly across the road. I was very interested in the transmission of this memory. How is this memory passed on? After all, a hedgehog that is run over is no longer alive to pass on this memory. A hedgehog that witnessed another hedgehog being run over must have returned home and told others that it was imperative to “change tactics.” I do not know how this works, but something is passed on. This applies to both hedgehogs and us. It is a wonder.

The location of YUNG YiDiSH suggests something exotic, eclectic and contradictory. I have always aimed to operate the library at industrial sites: In Jerusalem, it was among auto repair shops. It was also less expensive there, of course. But we are also a repair shop, a workshop. In Tel Aviv, we are located at the central bus station, and the noise of the buses underscores the nature of YUNG YiDiSH as an oasis of culture. It is interesting that we have always chosen locations

that slightly evoke roughness and corrosion. We took a concrete space that had never been used, and with a lot of volunteer work and a lot of good will, we turned it into a space that honors the Yiddish culture. Like the diverse range of books, a diverse collection of people come to the center: Israelis, foreign workers, religious Jews from Bnei Brak, tourists, politicians from Germany and Poland, schoolchildren, architects, graphic artists, and dancers who train in the adjacent studio. Young people come to do projects here; they are interested in Yiddish in all sorts of forms, and the space is alive. Instead of wasting time writing letters and requests for support, which are usually turned down, we have formed a broad network of volunteers; we rely on self-funding and on the generosity of individuals.

We, the Jews, pass on a story from generation to generation: We assemble once a week, on Shabbat, to read a portion of the story together. It is always the same story: the story of the world, the story of life, the story of the nation. There is tension between what is written and what is transmitted orally – the interpretations, the innovations, the sermons, the *vort*. But what makes us unique is that we have the story to tell, to discuss, to interpret; it is a good story that has stood the test of time. So many rounds of persecution and forgetting – like the Inquisition – and, still, we cling to the story, and it clings to us. The Yiddish culture is the continuation of this. It is another layer of the story. And we remember that what is written is not the essence. Instead, we insist on seeing the spirit, the possibilities that hide behind the words. It is impossible to define Yiddish culture. This culture is a complete system, a wondrous idea. Language in itself is a wonder; it is amazing. In the primordial chaos, the *tohu bohu*, there was a sense of wonder *תהוה* from *תהייה* *wonderment* – and thus the story begins. I feel that the story is mainly transmitted orally. The written text is a process of taking something alive and making it inanimate. The written text is death, it is the tefillin, it is the pages, the footnotes, all of the sickness of a culture that exists in order to remind us that what is written is not the important thing; rather, the important thing is life, what we do and what we say. Whatever is transmitted orally is alive – it is passed on through intuition, with a glance; and within this, we can breathe.

In 2015, I acted in the film *Son of Saul*. It was a very profound endeavor. I was not there as just an actor. I was commissioned to translate the script to Yiddish, to the Yiddish spoken at the time of the Holocaust. During this work, I saw how the language was shifting toward places of death, of destruction, when there was no longer strength to speak, or there was no possibility of speaking. But it was also shifting toward places of survival. There are suddenly codes, humor, hints, gematria, new words for new phenomena: How do you call food prepared from the bones of a horse? Suddenly, all of the layers of the language operated in a different way. For me, it was very interesting and very difficult. And to imagine that

there were people who even inside the camps understood that someone should know this – if someone remained. Philologists collected and wrote, inside the ghettos and camps. They continued to be sensitive to human discourse even in the midst of destruction . . . Such dedication is something worth connecting to. And to think about the art created in the displaced persons camps, about the 16-year-old survivors who had lived in the camps since the age of 12, and how much they wanted to live after their release! They married and had children and made fateful decisions . . . This is what made us who we are. With this great catastrophe, there also came continuity.

What I am trying to make us understand is how much we have lost. How many parts of our consciousness were burned, leaving us incomplete. How traumatized we are and how it will take years upon years to fathom what was lost. Remembering also brings consolation and healing. I live in the Israeli context, where historically Yiddish was shunned aside. I feel this is not only an injustice to the language and culture and to all those who created and lived within it, but also an insult to ourselves that we do not know how to appreciate and connect with this amazing phenomenon: a millennium of gradual, nuanced development of a complete and rich world, stretching across countries and continents, a search for words, the invention of our humor, defining our place in the world and how we connect to it and live as Jews with our massive tradition of homiletics and of fiction, all while absorbing what surrounds us. It's so precious . . . I am trying somehow to convey a bit of these feelings. This culture existed for centuries, solely based on the love of the spirit. When you look at this Yiddish library, you can understand that this honor, this love, is so essential for every culture, for every endeavor. We will vanish, but our presence here should be connected to this fragile legacy.



Fig. 1: At the YUNG YiDiSH center, Tel Aviv.



Fig. 2: At the YUNG YiDiSH center, Tel Aviv.

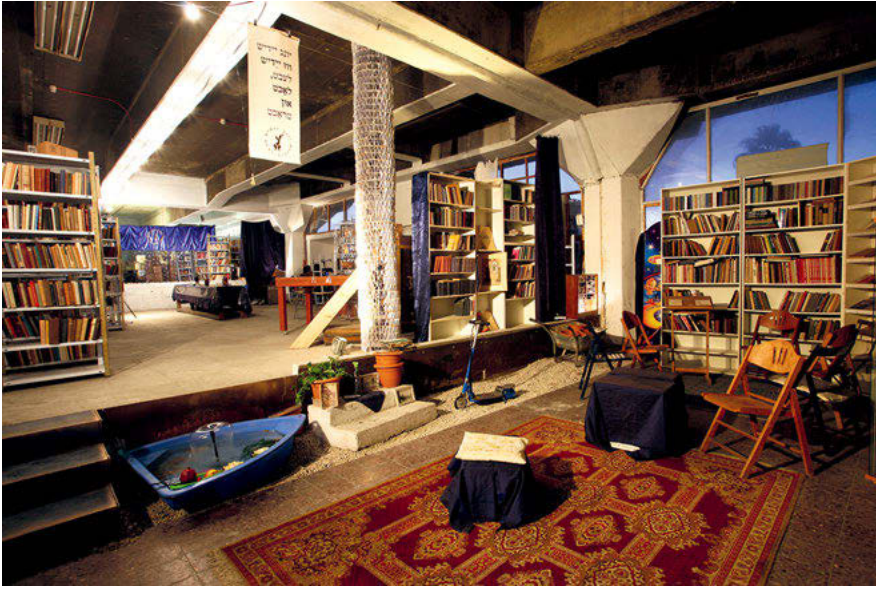


Fig. 3: At the YUNG YiDiSH center, Tel Aviv.



Section Four: **Echoes and Witnesses**

Ron Margolin, Researcher of Modern Jewish Thought

About a month ago I was at a conference in Krakow, and I visited Auschwitz for the first time. It was a chilly mid-January day, but the skies were blue. I stood there and looked up at them. I was reminded of the first time I returned from Poland, on a summer day four years earlier. Then, I had landed from Warsaw after visiting the city's large Jewish cemetery, and what had once been the ghetto but is now a residential neighborhood. In that first visit, the skies had also been blue and clear. I looked down from the airplane and said to myself: Here, it was here. This is the Warsaw where my grandfather was born in 1901, from which he immigrated to Israel in 1919 as a member of a Zionist youth movement. This is where all the childhood stories he told us took place. This is the Warsaw of Janusz Korczak, and that is how this city's skies looked when the Rebbe of Piaseczno cried out, in one of his last sermons, "Why aren't the skies weeping?!"

Researching the Holocaust is very meaningful to me. It is especially important to me to expose the Israeli public to deep religious discourse on the Holocaust because little is known about this discourse in Israel. One example is Hans Jonas' theological essay: "The Concept of God after Auschwitz". I edited this essay after it was translated to Hebrew, and I am glad it was published. As an educator and academic, I am very disturbed by how the Holocaust is treated in Israel. My first visit to Auschwitz, when I was over the age of fifty, was mentally unbearable for me. Yet our children are taken on Holocaust tours, in which they visit a different extermination camp every day, as if they were art museums. . . . Is this the right way to handle Holocaust remembrance? In the essay I mentioned, Hans Jonas says he knows very well that his theological writing as a philosopher is an imaginary act. And despite this, he emphasizes that it is very important in his eyes, because it is a discussion of the spiritual and human significance of the events that took place in Europe in the Second World War. Hans Jonas' attempt to understand what remained of theology in the face of what happened is an important example of the debate on many questions: Does the term "chosen people" have meaning when the people has been chosen for annihilation? Should the world view at the foundation of the expression "from destruction to restoration" really be maintained? The discourse that arose from observing the blue skies – those very skies that remained silent facing what was happening on the earth's surface – is one of the vital keys to diminishing the banal dialogue on the Holocaust. There is too little creative, frank, and deep thinking, confronting the huge void left by the Holocaust, and therefore this void is often filled with cliches. These cliches have been waved more than once by the organizers of those very youth tours that trouble me so much.

Ron Margolin

Reflections on the Holocaust in Jewish Thought

A large part of the literary oeuvre devoted to the Holocaust and its horrors deals with personal memory, in contrast with the memory of historical documentation, which falls within the territory of historians. However, alongside the narrative genre, philosophical writings have developed, which place the question of the Holocaust's meaning in the center, without necessarily linking it directly to literary memory. Based on individual memories, and enabled by the work of the guardians of collective historical memory, various thinkers have conducted a theoretical discussion of the big questions raised by the Holocaust, from a theological and existential standpoint, questions it is difficult to silence.

This process began as early as the first years of the war. The pages of *HeHalutz*¹ *HaLochem* (The Fighting Halutz) – the underground periodical of *Akiva* a Zionist youth movement in Krakow – were penned primarily by Shimshon Draenger, one of the leaders of Krakow's underground and among the aforementioned movement's heads there.² Draenger asked himself why the underground was fighting a battle that did not have a chance, and his answer, which stemmed from his Zionist consciousness, was that the fighting's purpose was to boost the morale of the halutzim in the Land of Israel, looking ahead to the time when they would be called upon to found the Jewish state there. The sermons of the Hassidic leader and educator Rebbe Kalonymus Kalman Szapiro of Piaseczno, which were collected in his book *Aish Kodesh* (Holy Fire),³ also include, in their final pages, deep ponderings about what was unfolding. After many attempts to comprehend the war's events through the terminology of traditional Jewish thought, the Rebbe reached the conclusion that the event's gravity was unparalleled in Jewish history. Such a statement by one of Hassidism's most eminent teachers in the Warsaw Ghetto was no small matter from a religious perspective since, at the end of his days the Rebbe of

1 The term "halutz" refers to the pioneer Jews who immigrated to the Land of Israel in the years preceding the establishment of the State.

2 Draenger, Shimshon. (1984). *HeHalutz HaLochem (The Fighting Halutz): Mouthpiece of the Pioneering Jewish Youth in the Krakow Underground*, August – October. Tel Aviv: The Itzhak Katzenelson Ghetto Fighters' House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew)

3 Shapira, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman. (1960). *Aish Kodesh (Holy Fire)*, Jerusalem: Piaseczno Hassidic Committee Publications. (Hebrew). See now: Shapira, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman. (2017). *Sermons from the Years of Race*. A critical edition according to the Author's Manuscript by Daniel Reiser, Jerusalem: Herzog Academic College, W.U.O.J.S and Yad Vashem.

Piaseczno found himself conceding that the events of the Holocaust could not be understood in terms of divine providence. Thus, for him, the Holocaust was a lapse in the world order, a kind of second *shevirat ha-kelim* (*breaking of the vessels*)⁴ even within the divine world itself.

Yet naturally, most philosophical writing about the meaning of the Holocaust began after the end of the war. And Elie Wiesel's first book, *Night*,⁵ would appear to constitute a turning point in this theoretical current. *Night* is the personal story of Elie Wiesel, who was deported along with his family from Hungary to Auschwitz. But the book – which includes a description of the capture and hanging of a *pipel*,⁶ the young boy who smuggled carrots to his fellow inmates in the labor camp Buna near Auschwitz – is not only a personal story but also contains a distinct theological leap, even if phrased through literary dialogue rather than theoretically. One of the inmates quietly asks his peer as they stand quietly in formation facing three gallows; the camp's Nazi commanders have hung the boy from the middle one. "Behind me, I heard the same man asking: 'For God's sake, where is God?'" And from within me, I heard a voice answer: "Where is He? This is where-hanging here from these gallows . . ."⁷ This inner answer could be understood by Wiesel's Catholic readers in France as an allusion to Christianity: The hanging boy could be perceived by these readers as the image of Jesus the Christian. Yet from the narrator's Jewish perspective, the meaning of Elie Wiesel's story is that God was revealed in the Holocaust through the deeds of those individuals who succeeded in preserving God's image and rose above the circumstances for the good of others. Thus God, according to Wiesel, was revealed in the Holocaust in the image of people such as the boy *pipel*.

Night is a personal story that ends with a deep theological statement. Essay writing about the Holocaust began to develop bit by bit following the event, in an endeavor to grapple with its theological and philosophical implications. The Holocaust marks the deepest break in faith in individual divine providence in particular, and collective national divine providence as reflected in the history of the Jewish people, in general. Ostensibly, the destruction of the Second Temple also created a serious theological crisis due to the loss of the religious center in Jerusa-

4 The fracturing of the vessels or channels into which the powerful divine light was pouring during the process of creation according to the famous Kabbalist R. Yitzhaq Luria. Occurring before the universe came into existence, this catastrophe affected the *sefirot*, which constitute the divine *pleroma*.

5 Wiesel, Elie (2006). *Night*. Translation: Marion Wiesel. New York: Hill and Wang.

6 The term "pipel" refers to a young boy who wins special privileges in a concentration camp in exchange for collaboration.

7 *Ibid.*, 65.

lem. However, there is no similarity between the severity of the Holocaust's repercussions and the spiritual crisis that plagued the people of Israel following the destruction of the Second Temple. The latter did not involve an attempt to exterminate the entire people, rather only the suppression of those who rebelled against the Roman Empire. Haman the Agagite's dream of destroying the Jewish people, a dream whose demise the Jews celebrate each year during Purim, was almost realized in full in the time of the Nazi regime in Europe. A third of the people was exterminated, and if it were not for the Allies' victory over Nazi Germany, who knows if, and how many, Jews would have survived the Second World War. It is no wonder that many good people lost faith in God's collective and individual providence during, and directly after, the Holocaust.

Faith in divine historical providence is not the only thing that was shattered by the Holocaust. In my opinion, various attempts to rationalize God's judgment after the Holocaust also sound absurd. The concept of Israel as the chosen people – whether through inheritance or a divine choice of the people of Israel as a collective – became grotesque to a great extent, when the people that was supposed to act to realize the divine intention in the world almost became extinct. “And yet, paradox of paradoxes: it was the ancient people of the ‘covenant’, no longer believed in by those involved, killers and victims alike, but nevertheless just this and no other people, under which the fiction of race had been chosen for this wholesale annihilation . . .”⁸

The establishment of the State of Israel, three years after the Holocaust, indeed provided relief for many and allowed them to view the state's establishment as compensation and rectification of the destruction, yet at the price of denying the gravity of the events from an individual perspective. The secular formulation of the concept of reward and punishment through the cliché “from destruction to restoration” was interpreted, consciously and even more so subconsciously, as part of the dialectical progression of history in the spirit of the philosophical method of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel asserted that human intellectual history progresses in a dialectical process, in which the later stage is a synthesis of the two previous stages, and the previous stage is intellectually inferior to the following one and is intended to rectify the deficiencies of the previous stage. However, the third and last stage, which synthesizes between the two, supersedes them both, as it comprises the advantages of its predecessors while liberating itself from their disadvantages. In the Hege-

⁸ Jonas, Hans. (1996). “The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice”, in: Jonas, Hans. *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the God after Auschwitz*, Evanston: Northwestern University press, 133.

lian spirit, the idea that, following the destruction the people was rewarded with restoration, renders the personal suffering and the horrendous wrongdoing incurred by each Jewish individual an ostensibly positive force, which propelled the wheels of history of national salvation. The faith in historical divine providence was conceived as stronger than the most painful facts of life, at the cost of turning those murdered into a necessary sacrifice on the path to the final national redemption rewarded to the remaining members of the nation. Yet, it would be unthinkable to come to terms with the barbaric murder of a million children as any justification for the establishment of the State of Israel.

Although some viewed the story of their own survival in the Second World War as testimony to a divine miracle, many many more saw the Holocaust as proof that a compassionate and gracious God who cares for the flock and directs history to realize the People of Israel's spiritual destiny, does not exist. In order to maintain their faith in Jewish historical providence, others relied on the argument that previous disasters also could have undermined faith in divine providence yet in any case they did not. Their opponents argued that the utter absurdity revealed in the fact that the "chosen people" was chosen from among all peoples for none other than destruction, is the ultimate, indisputable proof that a divinity that watches over Jewish history does not exist, and that the State of Israel was established as a result of the human suffering of members of the Jewish people, not by divine salvation. These types of arguments have mostly been raised since the sixties.⁹

In this context, responses by the Orthodox religious world are of particular interest. These responses can be divided into two types. Ultra-Orthodox leaders who attributed no special theological meaning to the Holocaust can be enumerated among the first type. A typical example of this group was Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe and the Chabad movement's seventh leader. Alongside the argument that we cannot comprehend God's acts, he compared the Holocaust to surgery by a physician who amputates a diseased limb to save the entire body. The Lubavitcher Rebbe based his position on a complete separation between the material and the spiritual, and he concluded that physical-corporeal evil is not necessarily intertwined with mental-spiritual evil, and

⁹ For example, by the Jewish American thinker Richard Rubinstein, by the Warsaw-born Jewish American journalist Alexander Donat, and in historian Yehuda Bauer's later articles. See: Rubenstein, Richard L. (1966). *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, Johns Hopkins University Press; Donat, Alexander. (1976). "Voice From the Ashes: Wanderings in Search of God", in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*. Editor: Steven T. Katz. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press; Bauer, Yehuda. (2000). *Rethinking the Holocaust*, Yale University Press.

therefore the physical suffering involved in the Holocaust was not necessarily connected to spiritual suffering in the afterlife.¹⁰ Yet, those who do not adhere to such an extreme dualism like the Lubavitcher Rebbe may find it quite difficult to accept such an approach.

Unlike these voices, which concerned themselves with justifying God's judgment following the Holocaust, among the leaders of ultra-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox Judaism were those who opposed discussing the Holocaust in these terms and instead directed their gaze towards the absolute evil revealed in it. One such leader was Rabbi Joseph Ber (Yosef Dov) Soloveitchik, who concluded it was impossible to deny the existence of evil in history. In his words:

Evil is a fact that cannot be denied. There is evil in the world. There are suffering and agony, and death pangs. He who would deceive himself by ignoring the split in existence and by romanticizing life is but a fool and a fabricator of illusions. It is impossible to conquer monstrous evil with philosophical-speculative thought.¹¹

Since, according to Rabbi Soloveitchik's position, there can be no euphemism of history, which he coins as "fate", his approach to Judaism holds that humanity must mold its own destiny – "According to Judaism, man's mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny – an existence that is passive and influenced into an existence that is active and influential; an existence of compulsion, perplexity, and speechlessness into an existence full of will, vision and initiative."¹² Proximate to Rabbi Soloveitchik's stance, Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits asserted in his book, *Faith After the Holocaust*,¹³ that the divine was revealed in the Holocaust through the extraordinary human behavior of the oppressed. As an example, he cited the case of a Jewish couple who hid in an attic in the Ghetto. When they were discovered by Nazi soldiers, the man wanted to kill the first German who entered the attic, but the woman yelled out "thou shalt not kill" and prevented him from doing the deed, even though she knew they would die as a result, because she preferred to uphold the sages' prohibition "be killed but do not transgress". To Berkovits, this woman was elevated to a supreme level of human greatness:

At that moment, there no place on earth holier than that dark and dusty corner in that very attic in the Warsaw Ghetto. It was the Holy of Holies on earth, sharing in the very majesty of Sinai, when God descending upon it, proclaimed his "thou shalt not kill!". Who knows,

10 Schneerson, Menachem Mendel. (1977), *Faith and Science: Igrot Kodesh (Holy Letters) by the Holy Lubavitcher Rebbe May He Live a Long Life*. Kfar Chabad: Lubavitch Institute. 115–118. (Hebrew)

11 Soloveitchik, Joseph B. (2006) *Kol Dodi Dofek (Listen, My Beloved Knocks)*. translation: David Z. Gordon. New York: Yeshiva University, 4.

12 *Ibid.*, 5–6.

13 Berkovits, Rabbi Eliezer. (1973). *Faith after the Holocaust*, New York: Ktav Publishing House.

whether that wretched little attic was not wrapt in even greater majesty than Sinai! In Sinai God proclaimed, in the Ghetto a hunted human being, at the risk of her own life, encanted God's commandment.¹⁴

The significance of religious voices like these is their refusal to speak about the Holocaust in terms of justifying God's judgment, instead proposing insights that do not seek to justify God's silence under these horrific circumstances.

After the World War, philosophers and existentialists spoke a great deal about the importance of personal responsibility. In his novel *The Plague*¹⁵, Albert Camus presented personal responsibility as one of the main ways to overcome existential absurdism, which the events of the Second World War elevated to heights never known before. Hans Jonas, whose book *The Imperative of Responsibility*,¹⁶ first articulated the human responsibility to prevent technological developments that could endanger the existence of future generations, explained in his theological essay "The Concept of God after Auschwitz" why the idea of "God" must undergo a conceptual change following the Holocaust. He summarized the essay in the following words:

Having given himself whole to the becoming world, God has no more to give: it is man's now to give to him. And he may give by seeing to it in the ways of his life that it does not happen or happen too often, and not on his account, that it 'repented the Lord' to have made the world.¹⁷

In Israel, in contrast, the discussion of the concept of human responsibility in the wake of the Holocaust has been limited to the Jewish-national context in the spirit of political Zionism. The State of Israel came to be perceived more and more as the ultimate Jewish response to the Holocaust and the responsibility demanded of the Israeli public was narrowed to responsibility for the state's military and economic existence. In Israel, the tendency to view the Holocaust exclusively as a national tragedy is also prominent, and there is scarce reference to the link between the Jewish Holocaust and the human catastrophe the Second World War also brought upon millions of people who were not Jews. These words do not purport to minimize the magnitude of the tragedy endured by the Jewish people in the Second World War, and certainly not the severity of the Final Solution, which intended to wipe out the Jewish people, and was halted only by the Allies' victory

¹⁴ Ibid, 77.

¹⁵ Camus, Albert. (1957). *The Plague*. translation: Stuart Gilbert. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

¹⁶ Jonas, Hans. (1984). *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, 142.

over Nazi Germany. Yet, clearly the vast majority of Israelis are unaware that, in addition to the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, approximately 26,160,000 civilians were murdered in the Second World War (in addition to 1,840,000 German and Austrian civilians), 19,000,000 soldiers were killed (in addition to another 5,500,000 German soldiers). In other words, more people were killed in the Second World War than in any other war in human history. Therefore, it is critical to understand the Holocaust as part of a greater tragedy that struck many peoples, in varying degrees of severity. The fate of the Jews cannot be isolated from the fate of humanity, and the tendency of Jewish tradition – which draws from the biblical masterpiece – to view Jewish history as a sacred national history propelled by unique divine providence, does not stand the factual test of historical reality. Commemoration of the tragedy of the Jewish people, which suffered more than any other people from the criminal brutality of the Nazis and their abettors, should also ideally become a beacon that reminds the world of the suffering of all humans who fell victim to the maniacal misdeeds and racism of the Nazis and others like them. The ever-increasing dulling of the senses in Israeli society with respect to inflicting racist harm on minorities cannot be tolerated and is incompatible with the Holocaust's most basic lessons. A people that has suffered more than any other from reprehensible racism cannot allow itself this type of dulling of the senses.

In my view, the Holocaust's central human lesson has not been learned or heard properly. I refer to the imperative of responsibility which obligates every human being to preserve the divinity revealed in the human spirit. This is the imperative answered by the Righteous Among the Nations, and all those persecuted by the evil Nazi regime who maintained this human spirit in every daily act they committed under impossible circumstances. Therefore, thinkers who deal with the Holocaust's meaning are called upon to continue discussing its ethical implications, as well as the moral obligations it imposes upon human beings in general and citizens of the State of Israel in particular.

Mali Eisenberg, historian and educator

In my house, the Holocaust wasn't discussed. Moreover, mentioning it was forbidden, and on Holocaust Memorial Day, the television was turned off. Both my parents were second generation survivors, a large part of my family was murdered during the Holocaust, and my parents wanted to protect Me and my siblings. However, the more they forbade me to discuss the subject, the greater my curiosity grew: What was this dark, unknown, forbidden subject?

My maternal grandparents were Belz Hassidim who were exiled to Siberian forced labor camps. A large part of their family was murdered during the Holocaust. The story on my father's side was also tragic: my grandmother, who came from a very religious family from the Polish town of Bogdanov, emigrated to the Land of Israel for Zionistic reasons. After she left, her mother died of a broken heart. One of her brothers was drafted into the Polish army, and his fate remains unknown. Her father and younger brother, Joseph, were hidden by Polish neighbors, and since they had a synagogue in their home, they brought the Torah scroll to their hiding place. When the Nazis came and announced that anyone hiding Jews would be killed, the family that hid them brought out my grandmother's father and her brother. They were shot dead while the father was holding the Torah scroll.

My grandmother also had a sister who escaped at the age of sixteen and went to fight with the partisans. In the 1950s, when my grandmother was already convinced that no one else had survived, her sister came and knocked on her door . . .

My parents didn't talk about any of this, just as their parents didn't talk. I found out about my family story long afterwards, and not from them. I researched my maternal roots when I was a student; and as to my father's side, I discovered the facts only three years ago. My cousin began the investigation, and I expanded it. With the collaboration of a few cousins, all third generation, the picture became clear.

I had been interested in the Holocaust from an early age as a sort of mystery, and as I grew older, I realized that this would be the field to which I will dedicate my professional life. For years my parents tried to hide it, to protect me, but in the end, we all follow our heart's desire. My parents taught me to turn away from this subject, to avoid confronting the past – but rather than paralyze me, it sparked a strong sense of purpose in me.

Mali Eisenberg

'The Hassidic Underground' as a Counter Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Historiography

Introduction: On Participation in the 'Assembly' Group

We never focused upon suffering detached from its moral and normative ramifications. Jewish suffering did not breed self-pity, but, rather, moral sensitivity: "You shall love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt".¹

During the 1920s the Franco-Jewish sociologist Morris Halbwachs coined the term 'collective memory', which refers to individual awareness to the historical past as it was molded by memory agents of the society in which he lives. The creation of the shared memory in a manner which fits the current needs of the society guides it to creating a shared identity. However, one can already read about the meaning of fostering memory and its constitutive function in building a collective, in Jewish sources. The Bible emphasizes the need to remember past events, and even commands it. Among the commandments to remember, the most emphasized is remembering the exodus from Egypt – one of the cornerstones of Jewish belief, whose remembrance is a positive commandment of the redemption of the nation. Leaving slavery for freedom is the moral justification for establishing a society based upon mercy and morality. This memory is not merely abstract: it summons one to return to the experience of suffering, and through it to find an individual and collective path. "You shall not vex or oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt" (Exodus 22, 20).

As a researcher specializing in the subject of Holocaust memory within the Haredi society, I was involved in the think tank of the "assembly" which sought to experience the historical event together in a memorial evening, while discussing and adopting the topical insights and moral ramifications which arise from them. Inasmuch as the "assembly's" direction adopts the traditional framework of Jewish memory, it is natural to try to include members of the Haredi sector in the dialogue we wished to create.

1 Hartman, David. (2005). "Auschwitz or Sinai." *A Heart of Many Rooms*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved.

Note: This article was first published in 2015 entitled "'Between Mila 14 and Mila 18': a Hassidic underground as a counter historiography", *Beshvil Hazikaron (In the Path of Memory)* vol. 20, 24–31.

Aside from the format, we thought that the content would also befit the Haredi values which form the basis of memory, inasmuch as the prism of education, which seeks to adopt topical insights from the past, also characterizes the Haredi view of memory. Thus, ‘actualization of the past’ appears in practice in the Haredi view of Jewish history, indeed sometimes so much so that it negates history as an independent scientific discipline of itself:

The motif of history in Jewish doctrine is not identified with the study of history, just as ‘Remember the days of old’ in Judaism is not simply to remember just the history . . . We are Jews today because we continue Jewish life from ‘yesterday’ . . . With only memory, even if it is immortalized in hundreds of marble columns, written in thousands of books and detailed in monuments and museums, one can guarantee nothing.²

Another central motif which characterizes Haredi historiography and memory of the Holocaust is the term ‘Sanctifying G-d’s name’ (martyrdom). Through it, one can weave the events of the Holocaust into a recognizable historical format, and create a continuity of Jewish history saturated with hate of the ‘Esau hates Jacob’ type. This motif, including ‘spiritual heroism’ is central to the Haredi Holocaust narrative. Thus, we integrated testimony on spiritual heroism, and Haredi writers who portray their views into the format of this ‘assembly’.

“Memory is not something stored in books. It is based in human awareness, each man and woman in their own way, each generation and its world”. (from the introduction of the ‘assembly’). Memory of the Holocaust is multifaceted, and includes an obligation to improve the world. The awareness of this, beside the imperative need to act in advancing discourse and tolerance in the divided Israeli society – impelled the planning committee to create the ‘assembly’ as a pamphlet inviting discussion groups between the various sectors of the society in which we live, with the obligation to remember, and remember responsibly.

Between Mila 14 and Mila 18

And the lads in the basement, who had dedicated themselves solely to learning Torah and the duties of Hasidism, remained almost totally bereft of the needs for the holiday. Therefore, we invited some of them to us [. . .] the lads sat with us in the room, and all the other people sat around in the neighboring apartment. There were some sixty to seventy people sitting around the festive tables, which were adorned for the holiday. Most of them were Gerrer Hasidim, lads and yeshiva students [. . .]. The war raged outside, but within the hid-

² Hemed, S. (2000), “Judaism shall not live solely on the memory of the destruction” *Yated Ne’eman*, 25 May, 2000, 4–5.

ing place Passover was celebrated as well as could be; public prayers, discussions on Torah matters, even singing Hasidic melodies; thus passed the second night of the 'seder' in this hiding place [. . .] there were a few in the hiding place who insisted on leaving before it was too late, "We will go out, surrender to the Germans, and they will take us to labor camps". Thus a few said, but my husband and brother in law who came from the cellar on Nelevky Street again decided: "No! We will not surrender!"³

Adjacent to the events of 'Holocaust and Revival' sits Holocaust memory, which became an essential component of Jewish identity, fertile soil for a contrast to social narratives and identities. The contrast of the Haredi narrative to that of the secular-Zionist one as to the ethos of bravery during the Holocaust is a subject of articles: The statement "We will not surrender" in Bila Sharharitz Bar's testimony on the Hasidic underground in Warsaw, emphasizes how in the very same point of historical time and space two different faces of the revolt – physical and spiritual – are revealed. The cry "We will not surrender!" has different meanings.

One of the elements which characterizes Haredi literature in general, and that which deals with the Holocaust in particular, is its being the counter literature' which, according to the Haredi writer, Aharon Sourasky, came about "not a priori, but after the fact, as a counterweight to inappropriate literature".⁴ Haredi Holocaust literature clashes with secular-Zionist Holocaust memory and molds a 'counter-memory'. It upholds alternative past-figures which are more congruent with views, ideas and interests of minority groups which combine to create an alternative memory to the hegemonic one of the society.

I shall present the competing narratives through the story of the Hasidic underground in the Polish ghettos, a good example which presents a contrasting model of heroism to the model of those who revolted in the ghetto and the partisans. The field of discourse, the terminology and the agents of memory who aided the construction of this memory will be examined within the framework of the Haredi narrative which creates a 'counter historiography'.

3 Sharharitz Bar, Bila. (1961) "The Last Days of the Hasidic 'Bunker' in the Warsaw Ghetto – Testimony on the Spiritual Resistance Movement in the Largest of the Ghettos", *Beit Yaacov* vol. 25, 7–19.

4 Sourasky, Aharon. (1986). "The Pangs of the Creations of Today's Haredi Writers", *Hamodia*, 16 May, 1986, 8.

The Hasidic Underground in the Polish Ghettos

And here, in these ghettos, there were those who not only did not submit at all to the fear filled reign of the Satan, and rebelled from the beginning against his enslaving regime, but even thanks to this dangerous struggle with Satan reached new heights in belief and devotion [. . .] these were the Hasidic lads of the spiritual-moral rebellion movement, which existed in several ghettos. These rebellious Hasidim totally ignored the despots' regime, paid no attention to its decrees and didn't submit to its staff of wrath.⁵

In the article, "Hasidic underground in the Polish ghettos", which Moshe Prager published in 1959,⁶ he presented a picture photographed in Warsaw, of Jewish youths in traditional Hasidic garb, including several whom he had identified as his brothers. Prager was excited about the fact that at that time (in 1943) Jewish youths walked around Warsaw in traditional garb, and he called them "The Hasidic underground" as a title of bravery. What was the Hasidic underground (also called the Matisobses)⁷ which Prager sought to praise? It had its own 'military forms':

- A) A daring and uncompromising resistance movement fighting against the occupying Nazi regime whose activities focused upon the spiritual-religious field.
- B) Fighting on two fronts simultaneously: active resistance to the orders of the Nazi regime, as well as the commands of the ghetto's 'Judenrat' administration.
- C) The existence of spiritual-religious resistance cells in several ghettos, which were interconnected by secret emissaries sent by the 'Central Staff'; These cells survived until the final elimination of the ghettos.⁸

In addition to describing the underground, Prager also wanted to research its origins – the Hasidic tradition. According to him, the 'Hasidic environment' created the ethical establishment which enabled the casting of the spiritual armor in the difficult times. Prager emphasized that the crowding together in the shadow or

5 Prager, Moshe. (1963). *Those who did not Surrender – The History of the Hasidic Rebellion Movement in the Ghettos*, Bnei Brak: Netzach, 6.

6 Prager, Moshe. (1959), "A Hasidic Underground in the Polish Ghettos", *Yediot Yad Vashem* vol. 21–22, 7–10.

7 Named after Matityahu (Matti Gelman), a penitent who joined the Gerrer Hasidim and, according to Prager, was one of the organizers of the 'Hasidic Underground' in Krakow. See *Those who did not Surrender* 8–36.

8 *The Hasidic Underground in the Polish Ghettos*, 7.

the Rebbe of Gur within the Gerrer court imbued an atmosphere of Hasidic 'spirit and warmth' which united the lads; and this unity – together with personal acquaintance – enabled them to coalesce into “secret joint circle” under the conditions of wandering during the years of the Holocaust. Moreover, the |”characteristic line of Gerrer Hasidism” was to encourage “Independent spiritual- Torah” organization; “In the ‘Shteiblach’ (small synagogues) the lads were united in groups with their ‘Komandanten’ (commanders), and there was a close nationwide connection between the ‘Komandanten’. This feeling of independence, and the organizational abilities, left its mark on the organization and power of resistance of the Hasidic underground.”⁹



Fig. 1: Haredi Jews who were captured during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Photograph from the report which the S.S. general Jürgen Stroop, who commanded the quelling of the uprising sent to his commanders. Pictured from left to right (the process of identification is still being debated by researchers) Rabbi Lippe Kaplan, Eliyahu Levin (the son of Rabbi Hirsch Chanoch of Bendin), Mendel Alter (the son of Rabbi Nechemiah Alter), Yankel Levin (the son of Rabbi Mottel Levin of Lodz and the grandson of Rabbi Hirsch Chanoch), an unidentified man, and Rabbi Heschel Rappoport – a Gerrer Hasid and teacher.

The perception of ‘alternative heroism’ in the guise of the Hasidic underground drew terminology from the Zionist mythos: underground, Komandanten, resis-

⁹ *Those who did not Surrender*, 148

tance cells. Adoption of the Zionist terms to describe acts of spiritual bravery aroused the ire of several people, including, surprisingly, Nathan Eck, the historian, from Yad Vashem. Eck had introduced to the discourse on the Holocaust the term ‘sanctifying life’:

One should wonder about the ‘militaristic’ terminology which Mr. Prager chose. [. . .] Why? Is it not enough for this Haredi writer, who succeeded in raising the memory of this group of youths, who managed to find consolation in learning Torah and keeping the commandments, whose belief and trust in G-d increased and deepened during the days of killing, which cannot be said about the vast majority of the myriads of our people who were destroyed? Why did he find it proper to dress them in garb which is unfitting for them? And more: The Nazis, as is known, did not make any decrees against Jewish belief [. . .] they set only one prohibition against the Jews [. . .] the prohibition to live! [. . .] therefore, if someone desires to use fashionable terminology, terminology of resistance and rebellion, he could use them for any Jew who tried to foil the oppressor’s intentions, and violate the ‘prohibition to live’. In other words, about every Jew who managed to save himself. One would, however, expect a Haredi writer who has come to reveal a hidden chapter and shine the light on a group of youths close to him in spirit, to relinquish the fashionable terminology.¹⁰

Eck was active in the ‘resistance’: a central activist in the Gordonia movement, an educator and a Zionist politico who dealt with underground activity in the Warsaw ghetto within the framework of JSA (A Jewish self-help social organization). He fled from the ghetto with his family during the great expulsion, was sent to Auschwitz from the Vital camp in 1944, jumped off the train and reached Paris, where he hid until the end of the war. He clearly espouses the widespread view that ‘resistance’ and ‘uprising’ solely mean armed bravery; while Prager believed that the war was against Judaism, and thus any struggle to maintain it falls under the category of ‘resistance’. Roger Gottlieb writes about the relationship between the viewpoints of the passive victim of the war versus that pattern of resistance:

Resistance takes place in situations of repression [. . .] acts of resistance are premeditated acts performed by the repressed group in order to foil the use of force of the repressing group, to limit it or to end it. For there to be such an intention, the resisters must be aware of at least two things: a) They must be aware of their own identity and of several of their own characteristics; b) They must make several assumptions regarding the manner in which the repressing group carry out their controlling and repressive activities, or, in other words, to weigh how the attack on their self-identity is carried out. On this basis, there are two possible pathways: to act or to remain passive. It follows that acts of resistance are acts of free will.¹¹

¹⁰ Eck, Nathan. (1960), “Religious experience or ‘resistance operation’“, *Yediot Yad Vashem*, vol. 15, 21–22.

¹¹ Gottlieb, Roger. (1983). “The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust”, in Michman, Dan (1995), “Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust and its Meaning – Theoretical Comments”, *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, vol. 12, 13–14.

If the Nazi war was indeed aimed at Judaism, and not just at the Jews, then the defining of the Hasidic act as 'underground' meets Gottlieb's criteria: It acted to safeguard its unique characteristics, and saw its struggle as a fitting reaction to acts of control and repression whose aim was to fight their self-identity. Why, then did Eck take umbrage at the use of the terminology, underground? It seems that even the Hasidim within the ranks of the Hasidic underground had difficulty with the question of terminology. Rabbi Shalom Horowitz, who was counted among the ranks of the 'Matisobses',¹² commented, "We learned because we believed in G-d, and we believed that this was G-d's will, and not against the Nazis. To be against the Nazis would entail being in active fighting, and what we did was a 'war of study'".¹³ Despite that, Horowitz continues using the following terminology: "We were in underground conditions, we studied in 'heders' and later in bunkers, almost until 1943. What is an 'underground'? You do something in opposition, in hiding. The war against the 'evil inclination' is also a war". Horowitz adds: "We believed then that the Nazis wanted to uproot Judaism, and especially Haredi Judaism".¹⁴

It is possible to apply Gottlieb's definition of the term 'underground' to the group which Prager described. Either way, until Prager used the term to define this religious activity, no one – not even from the Haredi community – termed it an 'underground'. However, in the State of Israel – and in all the European countries conquered by the Germans – participation in 'resistance' activities garnered special social approval among those who opposed the Nazi rule, among the underground and similar organizations. The Haredi society was aware of this general scale of values, and Prager granted it – through borrowing that terminology – its own heroes to uphold in the pantheon of heroes in the newly coalescing Haredi picture of Holocaust memory. This memorial picture was molded under Prager's aegis, primarily through the monthly periodical *Beit Yaakov*.

Who was Moshe Prager (1909–1984)? He was a Gerrer Hasid, a Holocaust researcher and a publicist. He was born in a suburb of Warsaw called Praga, and named Moshe Mark. He physically experienced the beginning of the Holocaust, was involved in saving the Gerrer Rebbe, Avraham Mordechai Alter, and even reached the land of Israel with him in June 1941. His wife and daughter remained in Poland and were murdered. When he reached Israel, he brought the first accounts of the horrors of the Nazi regime in Poland to the public, and from then

¹² *Those Who did Not Surrender*, 21.

¹³ The author's telephone interview with Rabbi Shalom Horowitz, 6/1/2010.

¹⁴ It seems that the term 'to uproot Judaism' was taken from Prager's writings over the years. It is possible that this viewpoint was adopted from the perspective of time, and not while the events occurred.

on regularly reported on the situation in Poland in the daily newspaper *Davar*. After the Holocaust, he was one of its pioneering researchers in Israel: his pioneering book *The Destruction of Israel in Europe*¹⁵ is considered to this day one of the first research books on the Holocaust. Later, from the 1950s until his death, he focused upon molding awareness about the Holocaust and its memory within the Haredi space.

Prager acted as an advisor to the staff of 'Office 06', who toiled to prepare the foundation for the case which the State of Israel submitted against Adolf Eichmann. He acted to imbue the trial with a historical character, and he felt it should encompass the 'Holocaust Case' in its entirety. Prager discovered, however, that his historical grasp of the place of the Holocaust within Jewish history – termed the Haredi narrative – was rejected out of hand. He was severely disappointed with the state establishment, which didn't succeed in giving expression to the Haredi world which had been destroyed and the Haredi world which still remembers today. This disappointment motivated him to point an accusing finger at the architects of the trial after it ended. Indeed, the Eichmann trial had a critical role in the creation of a 'counter' Holocaust memory within the Haredi community.

Holocaust Memorialization in the Haredi Educational Journal – The Space of Discourse

During the first two decades of the existence of the State of Israel (until after the Eichmann trial) public discussion focused upon the ghetto fighters and the partisans, in the Zionist movement, as the representative of the voice of all the Jews, the Zionist solution as the lesson to be learned from the Holocaust was the paratroopers from the land of Israel as the story of heroism of the *Yishuv*. In opposition to this viewpoint, held by the general Jewish community, the various groups of the Haredi community upheld a 'counter history' – alternative heroism – the 'faults' of Zionism and the rescue attempts.

Eyal Zandberg claims that "Collective memory does not attest to a shared past, but, rather, on a past remembered as a group, within the framework of the community." For him, the media, including the press, holds great importance in creating and solidifying the 'Us': "Reading the newspaper – consumption of shared texts, exchange of the themes and symbols, the awareness of each reader

15 Prager, Moshe. (1947). *The Destruction of Israel in Europe – Summarizing Chapters Including a Portfolio of Documents and Certificates*, Tel Aviv: The Kibbutz HaMeuchad.

that the same text is reproduced simultaneously for thousands of other people – converts the newspaper and the reporter into one of the most significant agents of memory.¹⁶ This matter is doubly important when dealing with the Haredi press, inasmuch as it the main legitimate means of communication in Haredi society; inter alia because it fills an important function in administering the society's values, and therefore it is under strict supervision.

The written text serves as practically the sole factor perpetuating collective Holocaust memory in the Haredi society. Trends of perpetuation are translated in this society into educational or popular literature – fiction, personal memoirs, reports, articles and regular columns in the Haredi press, sermons and lectures, weekly Bible-portion pamphlets and children's literature.

The monthly periodical *Beit Yaakov*, or to give its full name, *The Monthly Periodical for Matters of Education, Literature and Philosophy*, was published in Israel from 1959 until 1980 by the Beit Yaakov Center in the Land of Israel. It was printed on newsprint and dealt, as its name indicates, primarily with educational-philosophical matters of interest to Haredi women and teenage girls.¹⁷ This periodical, one of the first of Haredi women's newspapers in Israel,¹⁸ began its publication immediately after the 'Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day' law was passed (7 June 1959), and reflected Agudat Yisrael's unique way in dealing with the Holocaust. Indeed, the Holocaust was widely discussed: In the first hundred editions one hundred and two articles on the Holocaust were published, and in the following hundred editions there were eighty five articles. It seems to me that no other Hebrew periodical compared to it in the number of articles allocated to the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was discussed in that monthly in the spirit of the idea that "Esau hates Jacob", which was expressed, for example, by the use of terms such as 'archenemy', 'Haman'¹⁹, and 'Amalek'²⁰ to describe the Nazis. In the framework of trying to cast the events of the Holocaust into a recognizable historical mold, the Haredi historiography seeks to show that the Nazi war was a struggle against the Jewish religion. Thus, Nazi antisemitism is but another link in the chain of

16 Zandberg, Eyal. (2008). "Between Destruction and Victory: The Meaning of the Holocaust as Seen Through the Daily Press in Israel 1948–2003," in Neger, Menachem et al (eds.), *Coverage as the Story – views on Media Discourse in Israel. In Honor of Yitzhak Ro'eh*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 196–197.

17 Its readers included many men.

18 It was preceded only by *HaMaor – The Journal of the Women of Agudat Yisrael*, which came out only once in 1955.

19 Yechezkele, Moshe. (1966). "Cursed is Haman in the DP Camps", *Beit Yaakov*, vol. 26, 82–83.

20 Prager, Moshe. (1961). "Our Generation's Amalek", *Beit Yaakov*, vol. 22, 2.

‘the eternal hatred for the eternal People’, and the ultimate response to it are various expressions of “martyrdom” during the Holocaust and preserving the bastions of Judaism upon its end. If the war is against the spirit, then the ultimate response is bravery of spirit. This viewpoint was the cornerstone in creating the new Haredi consciousness after the Holocaust, which ensures the continued existence of the “authentic Judaism”.

Prager, editor of the paper during the whole period of its existence, and its driving force, already began to develop the model of spiritual heroism, which would later become “alternative heroism” while he toured the DP camps as an emissary of the *Yishuv* (1947–1948). Spiritual heroism was not absent from non-Haredi writings of the historians of that period, despite physical heroism having a more central part, with Prager himself being one of those including it at the beginning of the process; however the change in terminology where the “alternative” was emphasized, was the basis for the differentiation, and the creation of an opposing narrative, which connected the Holocaust to the rest of Jewish history. This narrative sanctified the path of Haredi Judaism, granting meaning to its lifestyle and worldview, the ideology and beliefs of the Haredi community in building a unique identity, which was an important component in the process of the rehabilitation of this society in Israel after the Holocaust. In this process, even terminology maintains an important function.

The Hassidic Underground in the “Haredi Counter-Historiography”

There were those who viewed the stories of “martyrdom” as an attempt to clear orthodoxy from the charge of passivity during the time of the Holocaust,²¹ and even to defend the rabbis who abandoned their flocks during this period. This approach takes up a considerable place in Haredi circles. In contrast, various researchers emphasized the ‘accusatory’ Haredi historiography, which criticized ‘Zionist belligerence’ and those who revolted in the Warsaw ghetto for accelerating the process of destruction, and saw in “martyrdom”, or, in other words, the power of spiritual resistance, as an alternative to the Zionist model of heroism in the form of those who revolted in the ghettos. These included Moshe Schonfeld (1910–1975), the founder of Satmar Hasidism, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1888–1979),

21 Goldberg, Amos. (1998). “The Holocaust in the Haredi Press – Between Memory and Repression”, *Yahadut Zemanenu*, vol. 11–12, 177.

Moshe Prager, and Rabbi Moshe Sherrer (1921–1998), the chairman of the Agudat Yisrael movement in the United States.²²

The first significant mention of the Hasidic underground in the issues of *Beit Yaakov* was in May-June 1961, in the heat of the Eichmann trial. A long article was published in that issue, which included the testimony of Bila Sharharitz Bar,²³ who identified the Hasidic group in the “picture of the rabbis” from the Stroop report:²⁴

And here is my holy husband, how he stands and looks straight at the murderers. My husband is the second in the picture, and the first – that is my brother-in-law, Shaul Teitelboim, they both went together during all the years of terror, and weren't separated from each other. I see them now, both standing straight, without any fear or terror of death. And I easily recognize the chief spokesman of the Hasidic band, that is R' Heshel Rappoport [. . .] I shall never forget his last sermon in our bunker [. . .] Heshel then called a 'gathering' of all the people of our court, and spoke to us. He spoke and spoke for two hours. We all cried all our tears, even the men, and even the brave Hasidic lads [. . .]. The German officer, certainly one of the murderers seen in the picture, called out in a humorous and laughing voice: “Everyone with a beard, approach me”. And they approached with might and determination. My husband also approached happily, and he then commanded me: “Do not follow me, you will be saved, I believe in divine providence, you will survive.” And he, with all the bearded Hasidim of our bunker were taken by the cursed murderers in a special group, and were executed on the spot, in the courtyard of Novoliypiya on the corner of Leshano [. . .]. I was taken to the 'Umschlagplatz' and from there was transferred to Maidanek. On the way there, I met a woman who had hidden with us in the courtyard, and she told me everything.²⁵

The issue of the *Beit Yaakov* magazine marking twenty years since the Warsaw ghetto uprising focused upon stories of heroic martyrdom. This abundance of articles, unusual even for this magazine, reflects the response to the emphasis given to the uprising in the Israeli public.²⁶ Indeed, when Prager came to criticize the Israeli prosecution in the Eichmann trial, he wrote about spiritual heroism and claimed:

22 One can learn about the principles of their approach from Prager's book *Those Who Did Not Surrender*, which received widespread distribution, and in Sherrer's articles in Agudat Yisrael in America's magazine in the 1960s. See also: Tydor-Baumel, Judith. (1995), “Reactions to the Rebellion in the Ultra-Orthodox World”, *Pages for the Study of the Holocaust Period*, vol. 12, 301–302.

23 Bila Sharharitz Bar's daughter, the reporter Shoshana Chen, told her mother's biography, and in doing so revealed these details of the Hasidic underground. See: Chen, Shoshana (2003), “Mother's March for Life”, *Yediot Acharonot*, 11 April 2003: 54–62, 112.

24 *Those Who Did Not Surrender*, 178

25 *The Last Days of the 'Hasidic Bunker' in the Warsaw Ghetto*, 7–19.

26 *The Holocaust in the Haredi Press*, 176.

This phenomenon of another Auschwitz, of the praying Auschwitz, of the believing Auschwitz – there is a great lesson to be learned in it. This phenomenon of Jews of heroic spirit, who were pushed into depthless darkness, yet were unscathed, who stood eye to eye against the joyous, laughing Satan without flinching – this is a unique phenomenon even in a history full of twists as the Israeli material. It is a shame that the full truth of revelation of burning faith within the straits of slavery has not yet been disclosed.²⁷

It seems that this issue, and those which followed it sought to expose the “full truth of revelations of belief” – the truth which did not get to be examined in the Eichmann trial. Despite the fact that he was one of the architects of the Eichmann trial, Prager expressed essential and deep criticism of the way the trial was conducted. In the August-September 1961 issue he claimed that the planners of the trial deliberately silenced fundamental events, and that the character of the trial was a source of disappointment for the Haredi sector. The hope that the trial’s forum would repair a ‘historical injustice’ in the manner in which Haredi Judaism had been portrayed in the period of the Holocaust was widespread within the haredi public during the first days of the trial. Dozens of petitions from readers regarding that reached the *Beit Yaakov* magazine, all seeing Eichmann’s trial as an ‘opportunity’ to present different aspects of the Jewish-Haredi public during the Holocaust period from its own point of view:

In my opinion, it is worthwhile to present documents such as those printed in your recent issues before the Eichmann trial which is taking place now in the holy city of Jerusalem [. . .] why should the documents in this trial be all one-sided, and show only the terrible horrors. It is important that the wider world which will be following this trial hear not only what the German Amalek did, but also the spiritual heroism of our Jewish brethren who remained loyal to their heavenly Father until the last moment.²⁸

The actions of the members of the Hasidic underground expressed “their loyalty to their heavenly Father until the last moment”. Readers’ letters and the issues of *Beit Yaakov* testify to the yearning for a historical narrative that would glorify the expressions of Jewish spiritual heroism, and would be a heroic model for the coalescing Haredi society and the strengthening of the coming generations, in the face of the challenges of reality. In this historical narrative, dealing with Nazism as a historical phenomenon, and the horrors it produced was marginal, inasmuch as the educational prism stood foremost in the eyes of the Haredi writers. Spiritual heroism, then as now, is the focus of the narrative: “We have no interest in perpetuating the suffering, in bequeathing the horrors, in presenting the terrible

²⁷ Prager, Moshe. (1961). “A Bundle of Comments on the Margins of the Trial”, *Beit Yaakov*, vol. 27–28, 6.

²⁸ Menachem, Ben. (1961), *Beit Yaakov*, 24: 15.

cruelty of Nazism merely for the sake of 'perpetuating facts'. We, as Haredi Jews, ask, 'What will this bring us? What can we learn from it?'"²⁹

“Repairing Parchments for the Flying Letters” – Between A Hasidic Underground and A House of Study for Teaching Gerrer Hasidim in Bnei Brak

A different article in Beit Yaakov, “Repairing Parchments for the Flying Letters”, deals broadly with the Hasidic underground. The Haredi writer, Aharon Sourasky, describes therein the birth of his book *Those Who did not Surrender*, and emphasizes its originality in presenting the truth about the best sons of Haredi Judaism, and its being a purely documentary book. The emphasis on the authenticity of the story of the stories of the underground is interesting, and is an example of the cancellation of it (the Hasidic underground) by ‘external’ factors. “The book appeared exactly during the time of raising the memory of the Warsaw ghetto uprising”, Sourasky notes, and can now “camouflage all those who speak improperly about Haredi Judaism, by ignoring its part in the resistance to the Nazis.”³⁰

Sourasky interviewed Prager for the article, and asked him, inter alia, how, as a Holocaust researcher, he did not as yet uncover “such an important and vital subject”. Prager replied that he “simply didn’t know”, and explained that “in the documentary sources of the secular from the Vale of Tears” they “silenced the subject and hid the facts”. But Prager also accused Haredi Judaism: “We are indeed guilty! [. . .] Religious Judaism did virtually nothing to shine light upon those cases of heroism.”³¹

Prager dedicated his book *Those Who did not Surrender* to the members of the House of Study for Teaching: “Dedicated with love and appreciation to those continue by the bravery of their lives ‘those who did not surrender’ – the members of the House of Study for Teaching Gerrer Hasidim in Bnei Brak – from the bearers of the Torah-Hasidic heritage of the glorious Polish Jewry.”³² Sourasky pauses at this point and deduces that after Prager was deeply impressed by the supreme heroism of the apprentice Hasidim in Poland, and primarily because it

²⁹ Fried, S. (1995). “To Remember”, *Yated This Week*, 28 April 1995: 8.

³⁰ Sourasky, Aharon. (1963). “Repairing Parchments for the Flying Letters”, *Beit Yaakov*, vol. 47, 32.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 33.

was ‘heroism in life’ and not ‘heroism in death’ (perhaps in contrast to the armed underground), Prager decided to dedicate himself to the construction of the House of Study for Teaching Gerrer Hasidim in Bnei Brak. Prager was asked about the connection, and replied: “Rather than having to save the burning parchments, it is primarily preferable, and most essential to deal with saving the flying letters, their absorption and actual revival. It is necessary to deal with writing ‘living Torah scrolls’, to raise a generation of true Sons of Torah, [. . .] to save the Hasidic-Torah heritage which had been uprooted and stunted.”³³

The source of the term ‘Burning parchment and letters flying in the air’³⁴ is attributed to Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, one of the Ten Martyrs. Taking on responsibility for ‘saving the letters’, and more – ‘repairing the parchments for the flying letters’ (as in the article’s title), is in essence Haredi immortalization: revival of the Torah heritage which had been uprooted – that is itself the proper answer to Nazism. The reincarnation of the Hasidic underground from then, which suckles from the Hasidic outlook is found today within the walls of the House of Study.

In the ‘House of Study for Teaching Gerrer Hasidim in Bnei Brak’, which was built through Prager’s initiative on land already dedicated to that purpose in 1962, was also set the permanent home of the ‘Archive of Martyrdom’. Within the framework of this collaboration, the archive regularly supported the institutions excelling students, and was supported by chosen “alumni of the ‘Kollel’ who voluntarily dedicate time and effort for the aims of the archive.” The archive, founded by Prager in 1964, was meant to fill a void:

‘Yad Vashem’, the central national memorialization project [. . .] has, until now, initiated limited activities to reflect and commemorate the status of spiritual heroism and revealing the totality of expression of moral and spiritual rebellion. As to the second largest and extensive memorialization project – ‘Beit Lochamei Hagetaot’ (The Ghetto Fighters’ House) – it has explicitly defined its aim as commemorating ‘heritage of the Holocaust and the rebellion’, and while it has managed to gather and save valuable original documentation on impressive manifestations of martyrdom, it is, of course, not its function to focus upon these subjects. Traditional Judaism thus remained deprived, and even distorted.³⁵

In addition, Prager bestowed upon the archive educational goals, among the concentrating and preparing material for the institution for *Beit Yaakov* teachers in Jerusalem. Therefore there was close collaboration between the archive and the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Avoda Zara, Chapter 18, Law A.

³⁵ Prager, Moshe. (no date). “The Plan for a Supplementary, Complementary and Comprehensive Project for the Memorialization of European Judaism: The Testimony House for the Holocaust and Martyrdom”, 1 (Prager Archive, Classier 41, Martyrdom Archive).

magazine *Beit Yaakov*, which deepened in 1972 when the magazine’s editorial board was moved to the archive’s offices. The use of the archive’s treasures for educational purposes was attuned to Prager’s desire that the archive would have a dynamic character: “In the archive there is no mere historical research. The outlook is educational, with the purpose of demonstrating and enlightening the eyes of the younger generation, and the following generations of the entirety of demonstration of Jewish spiritual heroism during the Holocaust.”³⁶

Summary

During the 1950s the memory of the Holocaust had already served as an important subject in the process of rebuilding Haredi society, and molding its identity: The manner of remembering the Holocaust and the emphases on memory sharpened the borders of the society.

Presenting the Hasidic tradition as that which tempered Hasidic youth to steadfast spiritual resistance during the Holocaust³⁷ is based upon a narrative of continuity, and catalogues the struggle as a strictly spiritual one: Unlike the underground movements and the partisan fighting, the struggle of the Hasidic underground was conducted beyond the historical reality – in a spiritual war.

This spiritual war had many participants who spread a web of support, without which the underground could not have existed: as we saw from Bila Sharharitz Bar’s testimony at the beginning of this article, with her stating that due to the lads’ dedication solely to learning Torah, they were left almost completely without the necessities for the holiday, and thus were invited to the holiday meal: “The lads sat with us in the room, and all the other people sat around in the neighboring apartment. There were some sixty to seventy people sitting around the festive tables, which were adorned for the holiday.” Describing the underground thus expands the boundaries of the ‘fighting side’, and grants rehabilitation to the wider

³⁶ Skolsky, David. (1998). In: Notzer, M., “In the Archives of Heaven,” *Yom Hashishi*, 9 January 1998, 31.

³⁷ A similar idea is presented regarding girls’ education, based on the image of Sarah Schenirer as an outstanding figure in Haredi society. See: Shaul, Michal (2012), “An Orphaned Generation Seeks a Mother: ‘The Heritage of Sarah Schenirer’ as a Tool for the Rehabilitation of the Haredi Society”, in Kaplan, Kimi and Stadtler, Nurit (eds.), *From Survival to Establishment: Transformations in Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel and its Research*, Bnei Brak: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 31–54.

public (and this is in contradistinction to the elitist character, relatively more limited, of the armed underground).

The educational prism stood before Prager and his colleagues in the magazine and the 'Archive of Martyrdom', when they exalted the story of the Hasidic underground as a phenomenon worthy of praise, a model for steadfastness which was forged prematurely, yet whose preservation enabled raising the camp's banner then, and even to protect it against what was to come. The magazine and the archive threw a spotlight upon the 'special phenomena' of religious Judaism during the Holocaust, and created a foundation for those religious aspects during the Holocaust period. They sought to perpetuate the Haredi world that was lost, with its giants of spirit, and to relink the severed generational chain. In the picture of continuity they created, they forged the outlook that the Haredi world was the continuation of the world from before the destruction: Its victory is in its actual existence and in the strengthening of the world of Torah within it. Thus the determination of the Admor of Slonim that they must "save the spirit" of the victims received a double meaning, inasmuch as they acted to memorialize the spirit of the martyrs by emphasizing their spiritual heroism through the Hasidic underground, and thus saved "the moral stature of those who were turned into ash."³⁸

38 Gal, Y. (1991). "The Forgetfulness and the Denial", *Yom HaShishi*, 13 April 1991, 36.

Yochi Fischer, Historian

On my father's nightstand was everything he needed on turbulent nights: pills, small doses of medication in a box – the kind that can be lifesaving in moments of death; a flashlight; the bed-time Shema Yisrael prayer; a battery-powered radio; The Path of the Upright by Moshe Chaim Luzzatto; and Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning. On sleepless nights of memories from the camps, horror, weakness and fears, he would turn on the small light by his bed, and sail with Frankl to the world of the camps. The descriptions would come to life before his eyes, and Frankl's moral choice of inner freedom gave him strength, time and again.

We grew up on stories that Father would repeat over and over, countless stories of miracles and events that never fused into a continuous story. In his testimony at Yad Vashem there is the complete story, with all of the atrocities. But the most heart-wrenching part for me is when he speaks about his disappointment with his friends in the village. My father came from a small village in Serbia – there were about 300 Jews among a population of 12,000 – and he tells how they were led to the train for deportation:

. . . after four days of detention in the synagogue, we headed to the train. And I still remember one image . . . the goyim knew that we'd be taken to the train on Saturday, and the street was full of goyim, with the Hungarians . . . I couldn't understand it: My friends, my classmates, were suddenly throwing rocks at the procession . . . It's a very difficult image that has haunted me for many years. After all, we had played together just a few days earlier and now they were standing in the street and spitting and throwing at us . . . the insult . . . it infuriated me.

My father was such a good man, a good soul. Those who knew him could hear the indignation in his voice.

Yochi Fischer

Creating My Memory

I grew up in the home of a survivor, my father. He was born in 1928 in Serbia and survived the Holocaust of Hungarian Jews in the camps. My father would often recount his memories and talk about his past. It was a story told in mythical terms, an untouchable *Haggadah* that occurred somewhere out there in the distant camps and forests in the expanse of Europe, a *Haggadah* that had clear heroes and abstract “bad guys,” along with moments of victory and redemption. And like the Passover *Haggadah*, he’d say that we must keep telling it over and over again, so that it would never be forgotten. Always the same memories. The memories had a repetitive dimension, and each story always had a main point, a moral: “It was lucky that . . .” “And then a miracle occurred . . .” It was not a concrete memory, but at the same time it was very alive.

While the stories ostensibly gave expression to my father’s trauma, only its “lighter” aspects surfaced. Most of the trauma remained unspoken. Bursts of speech, anecdotal fragments with long silences that averted the real difficulties, the losses, the abyss – my father’s memory was composed of these. I never asked what really happened there or about the historical context of the events; I never asked what was correct and what was incorrect in those remembrances – it was a forbidden and sealed area.

Shame and guilt were the primary emotions these memories evoked in me. The incessant stories about the Holocaust aroused a feeling of shame and a longing for a redemptive silence, and perhaps even a redemptive forgetfulness. On the other hand, they stirred interest and a sense of responsibility to continue remembering something. But I didn’t know what.

In recent years, through research and writing, I’ve tried to fill the personal fracture with details, with life, with sights: to create my memory.

But how do you create memory?

On the one hand, I face the repetitive and sealed memory of my father’s stories, as I experienced them in my childhood; on the other hand, my professional persona as a historian seeks a historical understanding of these events, of the actual occurrences that I can extract from my father’s stories. But it turns out that these are not enough. Therefore, I’m adding fictional details to them that enrich the historical aridity with living details and manage to burst the sealed bubble of my father’s stories. It is this fiction that enables me to approach the concrete history, the more public memory that is open to all.

In this way, I am creating my Holocaust memory. Is it a repetition of my father’s stories? Certainly not. Is it disciplinary history? Certainly not. Is it a fic-

tional novel? No, or at least not in the conventional sense. It's my personal way to unpack the trauma and flee from the paralyzing repetitiveness that I experienced in my childhood. I move between the mythical-fictional and the historical-concrete, and this movement enables me to keep a proper distance from my father's memory. It creates a perspective toward him that doesn't erase his fracture but allows the fracture to be mine too.

This is my psychological and theoretical way to build my memory. It includes three levels, three conversations: with the mythical Haggadah-memory from the distant past; with my childhood, when this memory was handed down to me; and with the present, as I try to create my own memory.

Does this also have value for others? I don't know. I hope so.

I write.

Fragments addressed to my father.¹

I'm Being Cruel

August 24, 1944²

Re: Placement of Jewish laborers

From: Chief Inspector, Dr. Krannewitter

The elderly and frail Jewish men and women evoke superfluous and false compassion in the population. This is particular true among the Czechs, who form connections with the Jews, and spread this false compassion as much as possible.

The Jewish workforce deployed in the Nikolsburg region wants to work, but they are not used to working. For this reason, the work assigned to them generally goes slowly. Housing and feeding the children among the Jews, in addition to the elderly men and women, imposes a significant burden on the employers. In general, it should be noted that the Jews are cohesive, quiet, comply with the regulations established for them and so far have not created disturbances.

Inspector, Regional Office

As a "report card" from your lost high school classes, I found for you Dr. Krannewitter's evaluations. Dr. Viktor Krannewitter was pleased, Father. The chief inspector, who was also a physician and was responsible for the area to which you were sent, stated in his monthly report to the governor of lower Austria in August 1944 that you were "cohesive, quiet, don't refuse and work well."

¹ Excerpts from my book *Leo*, Afik Publishers, 2023.

² A document from the archives of the Nikolsburg region. Translation from German by Israel Fischer.

Here you already pop up, Father, with a bashful and slightly guilty smile. I know that smiling child, how much he wants to be liked and to please the authorities – especially if they’re in dress uniform: generals, rabbis, physicians.

A little guilt also takes hold of me now as I look past you, add strangers to your story and ask whether you want to personally meet the chief inspector. You’re confused, but I’m cruel in order to break free. Here Father, lift your eyes, look. It’s him. You didn’t know him, but he knew you and your quiet and devoted work that summer. He’s also the one who later recommended sending you to hard labor on the front, which was drawing near:

Höherer Dienst.


Name: Krannewitter Dr., Rufname: Viktor Amtsbezeichnung: (Postinspektor) Bes.-Gr. A4a2 geboren am 14. Juli 1893 in ... Landkreis ... Religion: ...			Berufliche Ausbildung: a) Studien, Prüfungen und deren Erfolg: b) Fachprüfungen und deren Erfolg: Vordienststellen (Bez.-Bem.):	
Familienstand: ... Beruf des Gatten: ... Kinder: 1. (Name) geb. am 2. (Name) geb. am 3. (Name) geb. am 4. (Name) geb. am 5. (Name) geb. am 6. (Name) geb. am 7. (Name) geb. am			Überleitungsdienstzeit am 30. September 1938 (1938) 17. 9. M. ab ... 1. Vorgemerkt seit 2. a) Übernahme i. d. Vorbereit.-Dienst b) Ernennung zum Reg.-Referendar 3. Eingestellt als Regierungsassessor 4. Dilitdienstalter 5. Allgemeines Dienstalter 6. Angestellt am 7. Besoldungsdienstalter Befördert am ... zum ... BDA ... Wohnungsanschrift: I., Schubertg. 7/12 (R 59-6-20)	

Fig. 1: A record of Viktor Krannewitter’s personal details and his work for the Nazis.

When you reluctantly look at the man and the archival record of his professional life as a Nazi, your lower lip curls over your upper lip in amazement and helplessness. I search for contempt or interest in your eyes. But only a quiet sigh betrays your horror and awe.

Tiles

“My mother was already en route to Israel. She was on the ship during those days,” you’d explain to me when I tried to understand. “We had to arrange a place to live for her, so she’d have somewhere to go when she arrived. Uncle Yissachar was already an officer then and Uncle Gaby was a sapper,” you said proudly.

Confused by the information that suddenly made me a regular Israeli girl, with uncles who are officers, I wanted to confirm this: “Really?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” you’d continue, as if being a native Israeli and the army had always been second nature to us.

“I saw the big military base in the middle of Jaffa,” you’d say. “Every time large groups of new immigrants arrived, they cleared part of the base and whoever grabbed an apartment got one. When the Bulgarians arrived about a month ago, Bulgarians grabbed apartments there. When the Romanians arrived, Romanians grabbed apartments there.”

Your mother was now about to arrive, so it was your turn to grab. “Did I already tell you that Yissachar was an officer then?” you’d ask me. “He had his own jeep and rode into the base and grabbed one of the homes by the sea. The first and second floors were already taken, but the third floor was empty. It had a huge balcony. Someone had to guard that apartment until Mother’s boat arrived,” you’d tell me.

You had already been released from the army due to medical problems. Yissachar equipped you with a rifle and you stayed in the apartment 24 hours a day to make sure no one else would grab it. Every once in a while, someone would replace you for a few hours.

“Why did you need a rifle, Father? To shoot the Bulgarians?”

“Do you know where that was?” Mother would interject in your story. “In Jabaliya, there in southern Jaffa. They call it Givat Aliyah today.” And I’d nod and make a note to myself to investigate this one day, and meanwhile imagined a hill with a large Arab house on it, with my father standing by the entrance with a rifle he didn’t know how to use and a mob of Arabs and Jews of various types all around. The house had beautiful blue porcelain tiles like the İznik tiles I saw years later in Istanbul, and it had no furniture. Just a big mirror with a wooden frame leaning against one of the walls, occasionally reflecting the image of a young man in an empty home. Voices in unfamiliar languages echoed from the floors grabbed by others and you were waiting for your mother, relying on your brothers who were soldiers and longing for a home of your own.

“And it didn’t bother you? How could you?” I’d hurl at you.

“What do you mean? There was a war!” you’d respond.

“But you were also expelled from your home,” I’d continue.

“How can you compare?” you’d say angrily. “How can you compare?”

When your mother arrived, you grabbed another half of a small apartment that became available on the first floor, and you put your mother's sister there with her son. Her husband and another son remained "there" along with your father, my grandfather, and most of the Jews of the village. On Saturdays, all of the refugees from the village of Petrovo Selo, on the banks of the Tisza River, would gather at your place, adopting the home in Jaffa as their own.

And so, between half of the first floor and the third floor with the large balcony facing the sea, your "home" was rebuilt. Five years after you were expelled from your home and your land, you built an Eastern Europe in the Levant among the blue tiles.

Shiva

The days of the shiva were wonderful. I finally returned home and my brothers were there with me, just us, and not only for a moment – but for seven whole days.

When my childhood friend Anat – whose parents grew up in Tel Aviv, were in a pioneering youth group and spoke our Israeli language correctly and precisely – came to pay a condolence call, she tried to rip the mask off me: "What? Your father was in the Holocaust?" she asked with that innocence she had never lost. "But how could you have never told us anything? How was it possible that we never knew?" I tried to explain that I had felt different, so I had concealed it – that I had wanted to be like everyone else, that no one else in the class knew what it meant to be "second generation" and that I thought it was possible to erase the pain. But the words I mumbled were hollow and sounded banal. Inside, I cringed again, like in childhood. I was ashamed.

Anat later married Avner, who had been with us since kindergarten. Avner was a swarthy, confident and handsome boy. How proud I was when the teacher chose him and me to be the boy and girl to "slowly step forward and march before the nation" on Israel's Memorial Day when we were in sixth grade. I wasn't pretty but I thought I had been chosen because of my long braid, which I saw as symbolizing Israeliness. I felt that the two of us "dripped the dews of Hebrew youth"³ and when the nation asked, "awash in weeping and wonder," we both replied in a single voice that we were the silver platter on which the state was delivered. But the teacher, who didn't trust the intuition of the audience at the ceremony, asked that we carry an actual platter. And thus, an exilic element again emerged in my Israeli performance: We held in our hands Mother's Shabbat candle tray, with its frills and old-fashioned look. I was afraid the whole time that they'd say it was ugly.

³ Phrases taken from Natan Alterman's poem *The Silver Platter*.

Michal Aharony, Scholar of Political Philosophy and Holocaust Studies

I ask myself why have I been studying the Holocaust for so many years, the testimonies of Auschwitz survivors. In my book there is also one chapter dealing with the *Sonderkommando*, which is, one might say, the worst of the worst. Perhaps it's because I'm looking for an answer about the light, about the good . . . how could have people gone through this? How could they survive this experience? These are questions about preserving one's morality, humanity, and human dignity. Aharon Appelfeld wrote about the need to rescue humanity from the horrors: "I do not mean to simplify, to attenuate, or to sweeten the horror, but to attempt to make the events speak through the individual and in his language, to rescue the suffering from huge numbers, from dreadful anonymity, and to restore the person's given and family name, to give the tortured person back his human form, which was snatched away from him."⁴ In my research that focuses on Hannah Arendt's political theory and testimonies of Holocaust survivors, I attempt to examine whether Holocaust victims of the concentration and death camps were able to maintain their humanity, given the horrific conditions they were forced to endure. I'm very critical of Arendt who didn't really listen to the survivors. She didn't think that their testimony was philosophically important or interesting. What I could relate to the most in Appelfeld's text is addressing the person, the individual, the name, and thus bringing it down to reality, coming as close to it as possible. This issue of finding humanity in such a horrific situation may sound rather naïve, but for me it's a form of consolation.

⁴ Appelfeld, Aharon. (1988). "After the Holocaust." In Berel Lang (ed.). *Writing and the Holocaust*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 92.

Michal Aharony

Reflections on Hannah Arendt, Radical Evil and Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies

Introduction

This article deals with Hannah Arendt's attitude towards Holocaust survivors' testimonies, as reflected in her first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) [hereafter: OT].¹ Although Arendt's analysis of life in the concentration camps and her reflections on "total domination" relied heavily on Holocaust survivors' testimonies, her attitude towards eyewitness accounts was ambivalent and even skeptical. The doubts that Arendt expressed in OT regarding the value of eyewitness accounts in explaining the events of the concentration camps are not exceptional in the general attitude of historians, who have traditionally treated them with great mistrust. The late Raul Hilberg, for example, one of the most prominent Holocaust scholars, was always suspicious toward testimony. He preferred to distance himself from testimony and ignore it altogether, as he believed that the nature of testimony and memory is in conflict with the main goal of the historical profession: the search for factual truth.

My main argument in this article is that Arendt's attitude towards testimony and her tendency to downgrade the importance of Holocaust survivors' experience should be reflected upon not only in the context of the general perception at the end of the 1940s, beginning of the 1950s, which could not cope with survivors' testimonies, but mainly in light of Arendt's broader theoretical stances regarding political judgment and other social mores that focus on suffering, pity and compassion, as reflected in her later writings.

Arendt was born in Hanover in 1906 and died in 1975. The emergence of totalitarianism in the 1930s and 1940s profoundly influenced her, impacting Arendt's life and political thought, from her first book until her last works. One might say that Arendt was herself a Holocaust survivor, even if she did not define herself as such. She was a German-Jewish refugee, who was forced to flee from her home-

1 Arendt, Hannah. (1979). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New ed. with added prefaces. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Note: This essay is based on parts from my book: Aharony, Michal. (2015). *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Total Domination: The Holocaust, Plurality and Resistance*. New York: Routledge. See especially: 17–22, 209–214, 223–224.

land, and became stateless for 18 years. When the Nazis seized power in 1933, she was arrested by the Gestapo for engaging in illegal Zionist activity and was released after a week. She succeeded in fleeing and reached Paris, where she spent eight years as a refugee. Following the occupation of France in 1940, Arendt was arrested and incarcerated in the Gurs camp in the country's southwest, but she managed to escape within a few weeks. In 1941, Arendt and her husband, Heinrich Bluecher, fled to the United States, for which they had refugee visas.² She became an American citizen in 1951 and lived in the country, pursuing a distinguished academic career, until her death. Arendt was active in the German-Jewish community in the United States and published articles in the Jewish-American press. Her Judaism and her approach to the Jewish question played an important part in her thought. Arendt espoused a strong affinity for Zionism, even though she was critical of Zionist ideology and was increasingly censorious in regard to Israel.

Total Domination

Before I examine Arendt's attitude towards testimony, I shall briefly introduce the concept of total domination. In totalitarianism, a regime whose essence is terror and whose outcome is a most radical negation of freedom, Arendt saw the inversion of politics, an eradication of every sign of humanity. According to her, German totalitarianism was an unprecedented form of government, a phenomenon that could not be understood according to our traditional political concepts or by traditional standards of judgment.³ The central aim of the German totalitarian regime, Arendt argued, was not merely murdering millions of human beings, but achieving total domination, namely, the virtual eradication of human plurality, legality, morality, individuality, and the capacity for spontaneity. This goal, according to Arendt, "can be realized almost to perfection" only in the concentration and extermination camps, which were "the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power."⁴ They served as the major "laboratories" for the re-

2 Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. (1982). *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 113, 158–159.

3 Arendt, Hannah. (1994). "Mankind and Terror." In: *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 297–306, 302.

4 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 422, 438.

gime, a realm in which the basic assumption of totalitarianism that “everything is possible” was tested and proven.⁵

The organized attempt of totalitarian regime to achieve total domination over human beings, thus eradicating their humanity and human dignity, is carried out through a three-step process, as Arendt describes in OT: The first step involves destroying the juridical person; the second step is the murder of the moral person in man; and the third is annihilating human individuality and uniqueness.⁶

Killing the Juridical Person in Human Beings – The process of killing the juridical person in human beings is carried out through the arbitrary exclusion of certain categories of people from the protection of the law, thus rendering these individuals utterly “rightless.” Hence, the inmates of the concentration camps were living “outside the normal judicial procedure in which a definite crime entails a predictable penalty.”⁷ This process became possible through the arbitrary acts and regulations of the totalitarian regime that deprived people of the ability to act. Arendt points at a phenomenon she calls “statelessness” of millions of human beings whom the totalitarian regime rendered homeless, stateless, outlawed and thus superfluous. The Jews became paradigmatic of this state of “rightlessness.”⁸ It was a process that began with the first racist law passed in Nazi Germany, which deprived the Jews of their legal and civil rights and reached its extreme in the destruction of the Jews.

Killing the Moral Person in Human Beings – The second step toward total domination “is the murder of the moral person in man”; that is, the destruction of conscientious or moral agency. The destruction of the moral subject in the camps, according to Arendt, has three consequences: first, life in the camps deprived the inmates of any genuine moral choice and left no space for making conscientious protests. Second, the constant struggle for life eliminated human solidarity and led to complete isolation of the inmates. And third, the extreme conditions of life in the concentration camps led the victims to become complicit in the totalitarian crimes. Arendt maintains that in the Hobbesian world of the camps, where people constantly had to struggle for their lives, the Nazis were able to thwart any human solidarity among the inmates by intentionally turning the prisoners against each other. This achieved a dual purpose: the destruction of the inmates’ morality as well as their motivation to resist.⁹

5 Ibid., 437.

6 Ibid., 447, 451–453.

7 Ibid., 447.

8 Ibid., 296, 447.

9 Ibid., 451–452.

Destroying the Individuality of Human Beings – After killing the juridical person and the moral person, all that the totalitarian regime must do to realize total domination is, in Arendt's words, to destroy "the differentiation of the individual, his unique identity."¹⁰ The supreme goal of the totalitarian regime, according to Arendt, is to eliminate human *spontaneity* and to "organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all humanity were just one individual."¹¹ It should be stressed that this experiment of total domination is an attempt to transform human nature itself.¹² As already mentioned, this experiment, according to Arendt, was realized almost to perfection in the concentration and extermination camps through the permanence and institutionalization of terror and torture. In fact, the process of depriving the victims of their humanity began long before they arrived at the concentration camps; it began with the harsh conditions in the ghettos, through the long and difficult journey in sealed carriages, etc.

This unprecedented phenomenon of a systematic, calculated attempt to annihilate human dignity is what Arendt called "radical evil," a term first coined by Immanuel Kant. For Arendt, radical evil was a will that "could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice."¹³ By "radical evil" Arendt did not mean diabolical evil but rather a systematic (human) program of producing evil, behind which stood reason. Radical evil was unknown to us prior to the emergence of totalitarian regimes; it is beyond the evil we knew and thus requires new knowledge and understanding. As Arendt emphasizes, it "has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous."¹⁴ Whereas murder is a limited evil because the murderer leaves a body behind, radical evil destroys not only a life; it destroys "the fact of existence itself." It erases the identity of the victim and the ability to remember and mourn him. Arendt indeed believes that the victims of the concentration camps disappeared into "holes of oblivion."¹⁵

After the war, accounts of both the Nazi and Soviet concentration and slave-labor camps began to appear in survivors' memoirs, novels, and diaries, as well as in official documents. Arendt read many of these works, and for the writing of her theory of total domination in OT she especially relied on the books of David

¹⁰ Ibid., 453.

¹¹ Ibid., 438.

¹² Ibid., 458.

¹³ Ibid., 459.

¹⁴ Ibid., See also 443.

¹⁵ Ibid., 442–443, 452.

Rousset, Eugen Kogon and Bruno Bettelheim. All three were survivors of Buchenwald and Dachau, early Nazi concentration camps established on German soil. As she read such works, Arendt reached the conclusion that the concentration camps were the fundamental apparatus that distinguished the totalitarian regime from other types of governments.¹⁶

Dwelling on Horrors

The concentration and extermination camps haunted Arendt's thought since she first realized that the rumors about them were true; their existence lay behind her preoccupation with the problem of evil, from OT, through *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), and up until her later works. In OT Arendt argued that only people "who have not actually been smitten in their own flesh" in the concentration camps and are consequently "free from the bestial, desperate terror [. . .] can afford to keep thinking about horrors."¹⁷ The survivors of the concentration camps, according to Arendt, are not capable of reflecting on their experience in any meaningful way. An eyewitness account by a survivor is problematic for Arendt because it is given by a person who, in her understanding, was reduced to "a bundle of reactions [that] separates him as radically as mental disease from everything within him that is personality or character."¹⁸ Any effort of survivors to describe their *experiences* remains unintelligible, unimaginable, and incredible, as Arendt writes: "the experiences themselves can communicate no more than nihilistic banalities."¹⁹ Testimonies of survivors are "banal" because while they convey "a series of remembered occurrences" they lack any *thought*; and they are nihilistic in the sense that they tell a story about an absence of reality, suffering, and loss. The experiences of the survivors cannot provide us with the proper solution to the problem that they raise; they can only serve as a yard-

16 Bettelheim, Bruno. (1943). "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 4, 417–452; Kogon, Eugen. (1947). *Der SS-Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager*. Berlin: Tempelhof; Rousset, David. (1946). *L'univers concentrationnaire*. Paris: Editions du Pavois.

17 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 441.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, 442. In retrospect, "nihilistic banalities" echoes the notion of "the banality of evil," coined by Arendt years later.

stick for judging what sort of conditions we should fight against, how people ought *not* to live.²⁰

The experiences of the survivors in and of themselves cannot teach us about the camps, according to Arendt, because they lack positive content and, therefore, they are not unique. In her view, firsthand accounts are inherently unintelligible, since they try to communicate things that evade human understanding and human experience. “Anyone speaking and writing about concentration camps is still regarded as suspect,” Arendt writes. Even the survivor himself “is often assailed by doubts with regard to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality.”²¹ Not only do testimonies lack thought, there is also no common language that can bridge “the terrible abyss that separates the world of the living from that of the living dead.”²²

What Arendt reveals here is an accurate perception of the contemporary atmosphere regarding survivors of the camps. Although numerous testimonies of camp survivors were already available in the late 1940s, they fell on deaf ears. Psychologically speaking, the inability and unwillingness of the survivors to share their experiences—which in their own eyes looked incredible—with others went hand-in-hand with the reluctance of the audience to listen to these tales of horror. This was the case in Europe, in the United States, and in Israel. It took three decades until the survivors stopped being “suspect” and became instead privileged witnesses in the eyes of society.

But Arendt went further than most of her contemporaries by refusing to give meaning to suffering. Although Arendt is by no means indifferent to it, she emphatically argues that the suffering inflicted on the victims in the camps—intense as it was—is not the distinguishing characteristic of totalitarianism. “Suffering, of which there has been always too much on earth, is not the issue, nor is the number of victims. Human nature as such is at stake,” she wrote.²³ Furthermore, the immense suffering of the victims portrayed in testimonies not only distracts us from the main issue at hand, it might also affect us in a negative way by provoking the emotion of pity.

Arendt’s wish to avoid being carried away by suffering can be traced from OT, through *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and on to her later writings. Following Nietz-

20 Ibid., 441–442. Cf. Howes, Ells, Dustin (2008). “‘Consider If This Is a Person’: Primo Levi, Hannah Arendt, and the Political Significant of Auschwitz.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*. 22 (2): 266–292, 270.

21 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 439.

22 Ibid., 441.

23 Ibid., 458–459.

sche, Arendt vigorously criticized “the politics of pity,” epitomized in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s work. In her analysis of Rousseau and the French Revolution in her work *On Revolution*, Arendt ties Rousseau’s emphasis on compassion and pity in his political theory and the “Pity and Terror” of Robespierre.²⁴ For Rousseau, pity “is a natural sentiment which, moderating in each individual the activity of love of oneself, contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species.”²⁵ According to Arendt, both compassion (the capacity for suffering with others) and pity (a sentiment which is the “perversion” of compassion) are located in the human heart and hence should play no role in the public sphere.²⁶ Arendt’s alternative to compassion is *solidarity*, which is a principle that “partakes of reason, and hence of generality” and, therefore, “is able to comprehend . . . all mankind.”²⁷ Solidarity is not guided by suffering and, in contrast to pity, “keeps its sentimental distance” between people. Whereas pity “can be enjoyed for its own sake,”²⁸ and thus remains passive, solidarity can lead to action, which is, for Arendt, political by its nature.

Reading OT in light of Arendt’s crystallized ideas in *On Revolution* regarding suffering and compassion can help us better grasp her attitude toward the survivors. When writing a political theory on totalitarianism, Arendt—the impartial observer who is “free from the bestial, desperate terror”—does not allow the suffering of the camps’ victims to arouse any passions in her that will lead her astray from reason.²⁹ This distance, according to Arendt, is the fundamental condition for historical understanding and judging.

In Arendt’s contention that the victims who survived the camps cannot truly reflect on what had happened to them, we find the seed of her understanding of judgment.³⁰ Only in the more general context of Arendt’s theory of judgment, which prioritizes the spectator’s disinterested reflective point of view over that of the engaged actor, can we understand her stance regarding who can or cannot

24 Arendt, Hannah. (1977). *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin Books, 81.

25 Rousseau, Jean Jacques. (1964). “Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality.” In Roger D. Masters (ed.), Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*. Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 132–133.

26 Arendt, *On Revolution*. 81, 88, 95–96.

27 *Ibid.*, 88.

28 *Ibid.*, 89.

29 *Ibid.*, 95.

30 Cf. Wellmer, Albrecht. (1996). “Hannah Arendt on Judgment: The Unwritten Doctrine of Reason.” In: May, Larry & Kohn, Jerome (eds.). *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 33–52, 35.

afford to “keep thinking on horrors.”³¹ In her writings, Arendt presents two distinct models of judgments, one based on the standpoint of the actor and the second (which will be focused on here) on the standpoint of the spectator. Arendt defines judgment as “one, if not the most important activity in which [the] sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass.” The human capacity to judge, for Arendt, is “a specifically political ability.”³² On the other hand, in her later writings she characterized judgment as a mental activity which she attributes to the non-participating spectator, e.g., poets or historians.³³

Arendt’s understanding of political and moral judgment as the faculty of the spectator draws on Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment. According to Kant, reflective judgment is related to what he calls “enlarged mentality” (*eine erweiterte Denkungsart*), namely, the ability to think “from the perspective of everyone else” or to “reflect upon one’s judgment from a universal point of view.”³⁴ That is, only the disinterested observer is in the position to see “the whole that gives meaning to the particulars.”³⁵ Following Kant, Arendt argues that only the spectators, those “who are not engaged in the game themselves” can truly reflect on and judge the spectacle.³⁶ The capacity of the disinterested spectator to think “representatively,” that is, from the perspective of everyone else, is exercised through the faculty of imagination, which is closely related to historical understanding (*Verstehen*). It

31 Though Arendt did not have a written “theory of judgment,” we can learn about her views on this subject from several of her works, such as: *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, *The Life of the Mind*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and *Between Past and Future*. Arendt meant to dedicate the third volume of her work *The Life of the Mind* to the subject of judgment but did not accomplish this due to her sudden death in 1975. See Beiner, Ronald (1982). “Hannah Arendt on Judging.” In: Arendt, Hannah, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. Ed. and with an interpretive essay: Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 89–90; D’entrèves, Maurizio Passerin (2000). “Arendt’s Theory of Judgment.” In: Dana Villa (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 245–256.

32 Arendt, Hannah. (1993). “The Crisis in Culture.” In: *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books. 197–226, 221.

33 Several commentators have dealt with the contradiction between Arendt’s two different views on judgments. See Bernstein, Richard, J. (1990). “Hannah Arendt: Judging—The Actor and the Spectator.” In: Reuben Garner (ed.), *The Realm of Humanitas: Responses to the Writings of Hannah Arendt*. New York: Peter Lang. 234–254.

34 Kant, Immanuel. (1952). *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. C. Meredith. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 151. See also Wellmer, “Hannah Arendt on Judgment,” 33, 40; Benhabib, Seyla. 1988. “Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Hannah Arendt’s Thought.” *Political Theory* 16 (February): 37, 44.

35 Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 68.

36 *Ibid.*, 15.

should be stressed, however, that the ability to think from the perspective of everyone else is not *empathy*. The notion of empathy contradicts Arendt's understanding of critical thinking and her basic idea of plurality.³⁷

Arendt's writing, undeniably, did not reveal great empathy for those who actually experienced the terror of the camps. Was she trying, however, to represent or imagine their standpoint? Some commentators have argued that Arendt was more successful in representing the perpetrator than the victim, better able to recapture the mind of the anti-Semite than the Jew, that of the white Boer settlers than the blacks in South Africa.³⁸

Conclusion

Although Arendt uses testimonies of camp survivors as a base to her studies—a fact that may seem a bit paradoxical in light of her low appraisal of their value—in OT, as in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, her attitude toward testimonies is instrumental. They are means, raw material, but not the central factor. Arendt is not philosophically interested in the victims' human experiences as such for reasons that have been outlined previously: her criticism of pity, her avoidance of compassion, and her belief that a spectator can exercise political judgment in a way that a participant cannot. As mentioned, Arendt dismissed the significance and relevance of testimonies and eyewitness accounts for the understanding of the phenomenon of the concentration camps. She held that in dealing with an "unimaginable" phenomenon such as Auschwitz, the point of view of the survivors, who cannot distance themselves from their experience, could not be relied upon to build an accurate analysis of the event. All seem part of an effort to distance herself from anything that hampers her liberty to formulate political concepts.

The traditional attitude of historians to ignore or be suspicious towards Holocaust survivors' testimony, that Arendt expresses in OT, has changed over the course of the last years. In the last two decades we have witnessed more and more historians who utilize survivors' testimonies in their studies; Saul Friedländer and Christopher Browning are two important examples. I follow their foot-

37 Ibid., 43; Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture." 221. Cf. also Benhabib, "Judgment and the Moral Foundations," 43–44; Benhabib, Seyla (1990). "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative." *Social Research*. 57 (1): 182–184.

38 Kateb, George. (1984). *Hannah Arendt, Politics, Conscience, Evil*. New Jersey, Rowman & Allanheld: Totowa. 61–63; cf. Benhabib, Seyla. (1990). "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative." *Social Research* 57, no. 1, 167–196. 184.

steps. I am convinced, in contrast to Arendt, that as scholars who “dwell on horrors,” our responsibility as thinkers, not least political thinkers, is to *listen* very attentively and thoroughly to survivors’ testimonies, which have undeniably taught us a great deal since Arendt’s time. The literature of Holocaust survivor testimonies is fertile ground for thought, especially with regard to Arendt and her emphasis on the human condition and plurality.

I believe that Holocaust survivors’ testimony and the *insights*³⁹ of people who experienced the camps “in their own flesh,” are invaluable sources of historical understanding. Indeed, precisely because these accounts aspire to describe a reality in which *common sense* is absent—precisely because of that, we *need* to listen. Arendt was clearly right when she called the camps a “phantom world,” noting that the survivor himself is “often assailed by doubts with regards to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality.”⁴⁰ I personally heard such a claim from many survivors whom I interviewed.

The paradoxical condition of survivors who attempt to convey an experience that is incredible in their own eyes is succinctly expressed by Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo in her memoir: “Today, I am no longer sure that what I have written is true, but I am sure that it happened.”⁴¹ Clearly, there are unreliable written and oral testimonies and sometimes memory plays tricks on survivors; all of these limitations, however, do not make the testimonies less valuable. The insights of survivors are an essential contribution to our knowledge on the Holocaust in general, and on the concentration and extermination camps in particular, without which it could never be complete. Notwithstanding, I do not wish to argue that survivors are the exclusive authorities in interpreting life in the camps. Indeed, we need to also draw on analyses by political theorists, historians, sociologists, and psychoanalysts.

Furthermore, I find Arendt’s clear-cut distinction between the categories of the “actor” and the “spectator” dubious, even more so given her contention that genuine philosophical reflection is the exclusive asset of the latter and a priori denied to the former. This is a strange argument that seems to owe more to the idealistic tradition of German philosophy, and its unbounded self-confidence, than to a careful consideration of the intrinsic value of testimonies. Arendt’s stance completely ignores the spectator’s responsibility and his or her emotional

³⁹ As Arendt explains, the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* or insight designates the judging capacity of the actor and it is exercised through the faculty of common sense. Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture.” 221.

⁴⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 439.

⁴¹ Delbo, Charlotte (1995). “None of us Will Return.” In: *Auschwitz and After*. Trans: Rosette C. Lamont. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1–114, 128.

reactions; helplessness, a feeling of complicity, a sense of guilt (or its repression) often color the interpretation of the events by such a spectator. Even if one is willing to go along with Arendt's claim that testimonies are imperfect since they are necessarily removed from the event they aim to reflect, there is little reason to assume that the spectator is somehow better equipped to surmount this difficulty, as if the actual experience of the horror is an irremediable obstacle to understanding. The fact that some of the most prominent Holocaust historians, such as Yisrael Gutman, Saul Friedländer, and Dov Kulka, are survivors themselves, only reinforces my argument.

Michal Ben-Naftali, Author and Essayist

In my doctoral thesis, in the 1990s, I dealt with questions related to the representation of “the Jews” in French postmodernist thought after Auschwitz: Levinas, Lyotard and Derrida. I tried to show that the playfulness attributed to this thought actually hides an abysmal seriousness and historical commitment, even where the modes of representation of the Holocaust are not explicit. In retrospect, I think that I devoted myself to the subject and blocked access to it at the same time, that I tackled these questions to bypass them . . .

In 2010 I wrote a book of personal essays called “On Retreat” in which I described in the third person a portrait of withdrawal. But even in this book I could hardly touch the question that has been preoccupying me: that of depression and its intergenerational transmission. Gradually I found myself writing fragments about my grandmother. She arrived from Poland to Palestine in 1934 and a few years later she learned that her entire family had perished. In a certain sense she was a survivor, although she herself was not in the camps. And indeed, we don’t have an accurate word to describe people of her kind. These fragments were collected into a memoir, “Spirit”, which is centered on a family revolving around a hole. In this book I am not talking about the history of my family in terms of passing down memory or handing down content. Actually, I am trying to talk about a reverse process, where what is delivered is not content but a form empty of content. I called this transmission ‘depression’. Depression is transmitted intergenerationally as a form whose origin lies not in the psyche but in spirit. This is not the Hegelian spirit that condenses and expands and accumulates knowledge and properties in a dialectical process until it becomes the absolute spirit. It is rather a diminishing spirit that shrinks time and again to the zero point; a spirit pregnant with silence, since there is nothing to convey.

Michal Ben-Naftali

Death of the Witness: Thoughts on what Remains when the Witness Departs

Apocalyptic tidings of the end of a condition, a figure or a phenomenon are familiar to us from modern or modernist discourse. In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries we heard about the “death of God”, the “end of the subject”, the “end of history” and even the “death of man”. Needless to say, none of these are about concrete, actual death, but refer to the end of a certain sensibility, of a distinct socio-cultural period or position, the implication being that from now on we can no longer continue to speak the same language. It is as if a certain discursive mode ceased to exist, lost its validity, even though the apocalyptic vision in each of these articulations preserves the knowledge that the repressed might emerge in hidden but radical forms, and that, as in “Totem and Taboo”, the one who was declared dead might yet turn out to be more powerful and demanding in death than when alive.

In an article from 1967, Roland Barthes spoke about the “death of the author”. While the author’s authority as an omniscient presence at the origin of the text’s formation, meaning and justification seemed to have filled the theological void that opened up with the “death of God”, Barthes sought to shift literary interpretation and criticism from the monologic-centralized intentionality and message of the author of the text to the language of the text itself.

However, Barthes’ “death of the author” in the late 1960s coincides interestingly with the rise of another discursive figure, perhaps the most distinct figure of the postmodern era: the witness. In fact, Barthes, unlike other French thinkers of his time, did not engage with questions concerning representation “after Auschwitz”, a periodization that did not serve to map his thought. And yet, is there any affinity – affective or otherwise – between the dimming of the author’s authority and this figure of the witness, born at the same time out of a sharp critique of metaphysical certainties and modern humanism, a figure stripped of sovereignty, a figure whose strength lies in its weakness, and who is searching after new forms of speech? And if indeed there is some kind of connection between the end of one and the birth of the other, is the figure of the witness, by now, also condemned to death? Are we heading towards a period characterized by the “death of the witness” and the establishment of a new configuration of the discourse? Are we now witnessing a further epistemic change, in the spirit of Foucault, according to which the rules that constitute similarity between discourses – for example, between the philosophical, aesthetic, legal and ethical discourses of

the last forty years or so – are about to be replaced by a new, as yet unknown pre-discursive network?

As mentioned, in Barthes' environment a profound reflection about testimony and witnesses begins to take shape from the 1970s onwards. Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Claude Lanzmann stand at the threshold of an era that Elie Wiesel would later call the "Age of Testimony", comparing the decisive generic weight given to testimony in this period to that of tragedy in classical Greece. The "Age of Testimony" did not begin immediately after the Holocaust. Openness to a radical questioning of the meaning of historical trauma and its far-reaching consequences required a process of maturation in Israel, Europe and as well as in America. The crucial characteristic of the "Age of Testimony" is its resistance to the Nazi conception of genocide as erasure of any possibility of seeing and reporting. Testimony in this perspective is victory over a regime that has set itself the goal of eliminating the human virtues of speaking and witnessing, through a strategy aimed at massive dehumanization of both the living and the dead, a strategy that begins with erasing proper names and ends with clearing away bodies. In other words, Nazism created an anonymous mass event that in every aspect resisted perception and transmission, forcing participants, in all subject positions – victims, murderers, collaborators and bystanders alike – to collaborate with this suppression and silencing. The forgetting of the event, oblivion, will not merely occur later on, at the perverted edges of historical revisionism, since it is the very logic of the Nazi phenomenon that thwarts the possibility of bearing witness and bridging the impassable distance between the reality of death and the world of yesterday, as well as that after the war. For this reason, there is no more effective resistance to Nazism than giving voice and representation to the authentic witness, that is, to encourage a deliberate effort by the surviving witness to overcome both the resistance to articulation inherent to the event and his or her own resistance to return to the traumatic past, thereby insisting to make it an acknowledged element in a new moral discourse and praxis.

However, Wiesel's and others' "Age of Testimony" went beyond the massive collection of written and oral testimony archived at various sites around the world: it forced historical writing to liberate itself from an earlier scientific ideal, innocent of values and moral constraints, as Saul Friedlander said, and to find a necessary connection with performative speech. For the relationship created between historiography and testimony, the problematization of conventional historical representation, and the merging of cognitive and moral categories not only prevented the Holocaust from becoming a univocal monumental historical narrative. Testimony constituted new conditions of discourse centered on a figure with a hyperbolic ethical claim, a figure which the discussion of the Holocaust acti-

vates intensively and inexhaustibly. Testimony, unlike historiography, commands, but it commands from now on the subject's responsibility towards the witness's misfortune and suffering at any time and place, a responsibility that in turn defines the subject as a subject. The figure of the witness has thus become a universal conscience and consciousness, a mark of the bearable and the unbearable, the possible and the impossible, the touchable and the untouchable. These insights, based on different perspectives in relation to the witness, explicitly and implicitly dictated the space of articulation and representation in order to prevent his or her becoming a victim again. The witness – and speaker – of the era of testimony has become the gatekeeper of a culture that created a both fragile and solid discourse of ethics as first philosophy.

But if this image is correct, if testimony, or more precisely the concept of testimony, the idea of testimony has already been expropriated from the particular historical context in which it was thought and first used, in what sense should we think of the “death of the witness”? After all, the actual and concrete death of the witness, the death of first-person witnesses to the Holocaust is not necessarily the end of the “age of testimony”, that is, of the idea of testimony in its historical, philosophical and legal manifestations as reformulated after the Holocaust. I do not intend to offer an apocalyptic vision, and even if the future holds extreme epistemic changes, we currently cannot anticipate the nature of these changes, what era will replace the age of the witness and which figure, which “who”, will be the recipient or addressee replacing the witness. Furthermore, it is possible that the era of testimony has not yet exhausted itself precisely because it involves the highlighting of its gaps, the impossibility of exhausting it, a project that due to the very nature of witnessing has been handed down and preserved and will be left for second-order witnesses as both textual and visual heritage.

Why, then, does the question of the death of the witness arise today evoking our concern and anxiety? Perhaps first and foremost, because the witness who is already a living dead, the one who carried his death all his life, the one who was supposed to die and managed to survive and testify – is now destined to leave the world like all flesh. Interestingly, it is precisely the natural death of the witness who is no longer subject to the arbitrariness of murder that shocks us. As if we wanted those witnesses who survived genocide, who experienced death, who experienced death and resurrection, to bear witness to the impossible, to turn into a sanctuary lamp beyond annihilation, to be exempt from death. As if we find it hard to accept the additional death, the final death of the survivors. As if we were asking for their first death to have freed them from their second death. The shock is therefore in the double death, in the circular fatality of death, a shock we in fact experienced already on learning about the voluntary death after the war of people like Primo Levi, Jean Améry or Paul Celan, those who could no longer stand the life-

death tension and took their own lives. Our reaction to the death of the witnesses thus goes beyond the obvious fears of each generation in face of the inevitable unknown which is the generation to come, suggesting, rightly or wrongly, the loss of something of value that the older generation holds in its very body, forming a buffer between memory and oblivion. To the generational gap, intensified by the acceleration of historical processes and their attendant banalization, which might undermine crucial human qualities such as perception and judgment; to the fear that the freedom of choice of future generations will dull the heart and fixate the concepts – is added the difficulty we still experience as a culture and as a society facing the space of total death, a difficulty that dissuades us from asking brave, defiant questions, from distinguishing between the real unbearable and the imagined unbearable, that is, between an unbearable that opens thought by making it vibrant, vulnerable, dynamic and boundary-expanding, and the unbearable that inhibits thinking, that fears thinking and what it might do to the already known, to prejudice and decisive truth.

What dies with the passing away of the witness? What will happen to memory, what will happen to the archive, what will happen to the word “Holocaust” – these questions are posed not only by the witnesses themselves, but by a society anxious about what is happening to it and what might still happen to it, precisely because it has never known how to find the right distance from the space of death, if there is such a thing as a “right” distance, and which has therefore always oscillated between a melancholic incorporation of the memory of the Holocaust and a chilling political and bureaucratic indifference towards the socioeconomic plights of living survivors.

The death of the witnesses thus opens up, and from another place, the question of Israeli society’s mourning as a defining characteristic of its self-conception. Even if it is clear that the survivors’ melancholia was an inevitable reaction and possibly unconscious resistance to the reality of Nazi extermination which aimed, beyond the actual killing, to kill the work of mourning essential to recognizing their existence, one should also ask about how melancholic incorporation of the witnesses shaped Israeli social consciousness as a whole, beginning with the 1961 Eichmann trial. The melancholic debt that incorporates the dead in the body of the living has become such an essential and self-evident trait of our society that it does not allow us to perceive the working through of the social mourning process except as a forgetful and opaque deviation. However, the question of the relationship, in Freud’s terms, between the reality principle and the melancholic phantasm cannot be ignored, and it arose during the Eichmann trial in view of Hannah Arendt’s anti-melancholic counter-reaction. Indeed, Arendt’s report on “Eichmann in Jerusalem” took a distance from this melancholic temperament, from this temperature. Not from the memory of the Holocaust, not from the obligation to tell, not from the nec-

essary historicization of the events, not from the analysis of Nazism and totalitarianism. No. But Arendt raised the question whether rather than the witness her or himself, the one who is better at seeing and judging is the one bearing witness to the witness. The witness's witness may occupy this advantaged position because he/she does not devote him/herself to traumatization and fixation of the position of the victim, Arendt believed, contrary to everything the "age of testimony" has instructed us to think. The debate about the report she wrote, about her conclusions as well as the manner in which she wrote it is a separate issue. But isn't the distinction between endless melancholic grief and the work of mourning, which can be completed and should be completed in the name of the reality principle, a distinction that Israeli society must confront, and perhaps thereby pour significant existential content into what otherwise has always resonated as a foreign, almost vulgar word: resurrection [tekuma]. As that of people rising from a prolonged Shiva trying to understand their responsibility towards life, their own lives as well as the lives of others.

2011



Section Five: **Poetics of Memory and Forgetting**

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Literary Scholar

I am a literary scholar who has never studied directly either the holocaust or the problematics of memory. Before joining this group, my attitude to the holocaust was a bit like that of the Israeli Chief of Staff in the seventies, Raphael Eitan (Rafoul), toward one of the many military operations. He was asked by a foreign correspondent for details of the operation. Not wanting to divulge and not knowing English well, his answer was: "What was – was was". I therefore experienced Michal's invitation to participate in this research group as a great challenge, and indeed it forced me to reconsider many of my uneducated attitudes. The reconsideration took the form of an analysis of two novels, one by Nabokov and one by Faulkner, both dealing with memory but neither with the holocaust. The results are briefly discussed in the essay that follows.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan

The Literary Act as Giving Shape to a Scream: a Transition to Poetics

“One must give shape to the scream; otherwise it will sound like madness, or worse – like a fake”, Aharon Appelfeld, the great Israeli writer-survivor once wrote.¹ But how can one contrive such a shape? How is it possible to represent a memory of a personal or collective trauma? What shape can provide coherence while preserving the traces of rupture? And what medium best suits the expression of rupture – visual? verbal? musical? These questions, as well as many others, were discussed in the research group “transmitted memory and fiction” in relation to the extreme trauma of the holocaust as well as to less extreme events. Our discussions laid bare interesting convergences of various disciplines and unveiled an axis of modes of shaping memory, from the unconscious, spontaneous, at one pole through varying degrees of consciousness to intentional, artistic shaping at the other pole.

Remembering, it may seem, is retrieving something that happened, reporting it, reconstructing it; but things are much more complex both in life and in literature. Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*² can serve as a good starting point for an analysis of the ways in which the literary act both shapes memory and unveils its problematic nature. In an act of compensation for the fragile relationship between the narrator and his deceased half-brother, the former embarks on a search for his brother’s life-story. The book he writes (the one we read?) is a kind of biography of Sebastian as it is ‘reconstructed’ by his half-brother. In the course of his search, the narrator meets some of his brother’s friends and acquaintances, trying to obtain, through narrated events and episodes, insights into Sebastian’s personality. One of the respondents warns him: “Don’t be too certain of learning the past from the lips of the present. Beware of the most honest broker. Remember that what you are told is really threefold: shaped by the teller, re-shaped by the listener, concealed from both by the dead man of the tale” (44).

The quotation suggests that remembering is not the recapitulation of what happened but a creation of the past, including subjective biases as well as an element of invention. Biases exist in memory even at the most basic, neurological,

1 Appelfeld, Aharon. (1979). “Beyond the Tragic” [Hebrew]. In *Essays in the first Person*. Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 49.

2 Nabokov, Vladimir. (1971). *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. First published in 1941.

level, the level of perception, at the time of occurrence in reality, and they include an element of forgetting necessary for the process of re-organization.³ The psychic level similarly contains a tension between rupture and its inclusion within a signifying structure. The psychoanalyst Yolanda Gempel describes this situation with the help of a metaphor of “growing a new skin, patch by patch” – a fragile skin but nevertheless enabling a continuation of life.⁴ An interesting question emerges here: Does literature reveal and externalize processes that happen within us in a spontaneous and unconscious way? Does part of its power derive from the fact that it causes readers to experience these processes? After all, the reader also tries to “construct” the ‘real’ life of Sebastian Knight and she too faces uncertainty, inviting elaboration and interpretation.

Nabokov’s novel gives rise to another interesting question: How can one revive a memory that is not yours? Michal Govrin is writing a novel about her mother, a survivor – together with other women – of death camps in circumstances that arouse admiration. How is it possible to tell the mother’s memories when she is no longer alive and even when she was – kept silent? At the end of Nabokov’s novel the narrator realizes that what he wrote is, in fact, his own story: “try as I may, I cannot get out of my part: Sebastian’s mask clings to my face, the likeness will not be washed off. I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows” (namely, Vladimir Nabokov) (172). In a similar vein, can Michal write her mother’s silence, or can her writing only reflect that silence as experienced by Michal? Is every biography, in a sense an autobiography?

That physical distance enhances the capacity to see through the imagination also emerges from Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*⁵ Imagination is an important component of the creative aspect of memory as well as of the power of literature and its effect on the reader. “If I had been there, I could not have seen it this plain” (190), one of the characters muses. The central trauma in this novel is the American Civil War, more specifically the trajectory of one Southern family with one black son and one white (two different mothers). The white son kills the black one who threatens to marry another sister, also white, without knowing (but perhaps intuitively suspecting) that she is his half-sister. The novel is told by four different narrators, only one of whom took part in the events themselves, another narrator belongs to a different family, yet another is a third generation of that other family and the fourth is a Canadian student studying at Harvard

3 See Eli Vakil’s chapter in this book.

4 See Gempel’s chapter in this book.

5 Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage Books. First published in 1936.

with the third narrator. They all try to reconstruct the past in order to understand it, each offering a different interpretation. All of them rely on rumors they heard from other characters, and there is hardly any direct contact with the events. This narrative strategy emphasizes the plurality of voices, the subjectivity of memory and its creative-inventive aspect.

The novel dramatizes a tension between two positions concerning the possibility of reconstructing past memories. On the one hand, a doubt is cast upon the reliability of all the narrators, consequently upon the very possibility of reaching ‘truth’. The opacity of memory is manifested not only by mutually contradictory versions but also by the characters’ (i.e. Faulkner’s) style: convoluted sentences with many subordinate clauses, impeding the separation of the wheat from the chaff and reaching some “bottom line”. As in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the literary technique causes a readerly experience analogous to that of the characters: rupture, engendering fragmentation and a simultaneous effort to reconstruct. Frustration with the evasiveness of memory is explicitly expressed by one of the characters: “It’s just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that’s it: they don’t explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales . . . (100). The sentence then shifts to a metaphoric mode, comparing the state of affairs to the discovery of old, unreadable faded letters:

They are there, yet something is missing . . . You bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy, inscrutable and serene, against the turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs (101)

Couldn’t this paragraph apply equally well to the endeavor of reconstructing the memory of the holocaust?

Opacity is a frustrating quality of memory, but it is also a basis for the freedom of creation, a creation that may be more faithful to the traumatic past than the failed attempt to reconstruct it. The two students in *Absalom, Absalom!*, whose dialogue creates the past that had a profound influence on the life and personality of one of them but remained strange and inexplicable to the other, are characterized thus: “. . . the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them, at least, to Shreve) shades too, quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath” (303). In the framework of this research group, the “rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales” remind

me of Gempel's notion of "growing a new skin, patch by patch", recalling again the axis of memory and its different degrees.

In my opinion, literature (and art in general) is not only one pole of the axis but a spiraling step above. Literature does not only externalize processes existing in real-life memory – although it does that too. It possesses linguistic and structural procedures enabling a dramatization of the tension I have discussed, i.e. giving an expression to the devastating, unverbalizable, rupture and at the same time integrating it within a new coherent pattern. Moreover, literature can produce in the reader an experience analogous to the one dramatized in the text ('performative repetition'). Thus both the literary work and the readers' response embrace the tension between the new signifying pattern and the continuous, untamed, traces of the trauma. This is how literature manages "to give shape to a scream", to return full circle to the quotation with which this discussion started.

Rina Dudai, Literary Scholar

In 1942, some of my father's family were already in the Theresienstadt ghetto. From there they were moved to the family camp at Auschwitz, and in 1944 my grandmother and two of my uncles were murdered there. My young uncle Michael – twelve years-old at the time – survived because he was selected to be one of the hundred children serving Mengele as runners in Auschwitz. Michael survived the war and lived for many years in London, and in later years came to Israel and died here at a good old age. A short while after his death, after the appearance of a death notice in the Jewish Chronicle, his son received a mysterious email from the Czech Republic, from a woman called Helena Krushka. My cousin had never heard of her.

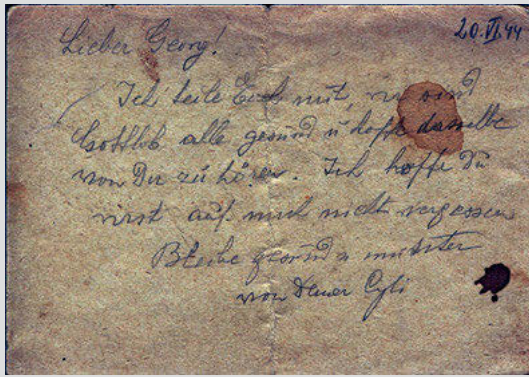


Fig. 1: Postcard from Tsila Honigwachs, Auschwitz, 1944

She said that she had a postcard from my grandmother Tsila, written right before she was sent to the gas chambers. It turned out that Helena Krushka's first husband, also killed in the Holocaust, was a close friend of my Uncle Leo (one of my two uncles who died at Auschwitz), and had worked with him as a doctor in the hospital in Theresienstadt. Helena, who survived the war, had kept the postcard all those years, and now, at ninety, wanted to return it to our family. The postcard was posted on June 20, 1944, three weeks before my grandmother Tsila was sent to the gas chambers. It is written in German and says: "Dear Gerry, I am happy to tell you that we are all, thank God, healthy, and I hope to hear the same from you. I hope you won't forget me. Be well, Yours, Cylia." Most of these postcards were composed identically. The prisoners were ordered to write them before their deaths, to deceive those still in the Theresienstadt ghetto before their dispatch to Auschwitz. But in one line of her own my grandmother refused the fixed form, and it cries out from the text: "I hope you won't forget me."

Today, when many survivors have already died, we are left with various forms of documentation about that terrible period, whether as authoritative accounts of the experience or artistic renditions of it. We become memory-bearers, charged with the task of processing it further, for coming generations. It is so important how these precious materials are dealt with and transmitted, so that the memory not be stained with the pornography of atrocity, not become infected by all kinds of evil enchantments, and will be passed on in a way that allows for depth and complexity, staying true to memory in its open and more concealed aspects.

Rina Dudai

A Secret Sealed: Between the Researcher's Riddle and the Poet's in Pagis' Work

The Secret as a Basic Building Block of Pagis' Poetry

"In every poem of Dan's," says Aharon Appelfeld of his good friend, Dan Pagis, "there's this secret. There are those for whom the riddle of their lives is of the essence. With them, death comes and adds a further riddle."¹ Pagis's work, Appelfeld tells us, is an attempt to talk about the offenses and fears, about the hidden faces of horror, folded into the unseen layers of his writing. Gershon Shaked chooses the metaphor of a pure crystal to describe Pagis:

When I try to think about Dan Pagis the poet, the writer, what first comes to my mind is a pure crystal. His life, oeuvre, world always looked to me like crystals. Below the surface flow lava currents of pain. Beneath time, which was frozen and transformed into a classical poem, were days of flame, terrible historical and biographical memories, and only freezing the tensions allowed him to live with them. Under the transparency of the crystal an opaque enigma could be seen, so concentrated that the crystal became transparent. All that remains is the pure crystal.²

Indeed, what Pagis wrote about David Fogel's poems surely applies well to himself – for his poetry isn't straightforward, doesn't give a factual account; "the key is lost; or to be more precise, has never been there."³

Pagis was born in Radowitz, Bukovina in 1930. Four years later his father separated from the family and went alone to Palestine, and in that same period Dan was orphaned from his mother. With the outbreak of war, he was transferred with his grandfather and grandmother to a labour camp in Transnistria, a time in his life that he would from then on keep sealed inside. After the war he came to Palestine, was educated on Kibbutz Merhavia and in Gat, studied at the Kibbutz Seminar and got involved in teaching. In 1949 he published his first poems. Some years later he began his studies in literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusa-

1 Appelfeld, Aharon. (1987). "The Last Lucidity," *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature* 10–11, [Hebrew] 11.

2 Shaked, Gershon. (1991). "Discovering Wounds without Seeing Blood," *Iton* vol. 77 no. 22, 138–9.

3 Pagis, Dan. "Introduction," in David Fogel, *Collected Poems*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 60.

lem, and went on to become a lecturer there in medieval literature, in the department of Hebrew literature. Pagis died in 1986.

In interviews, Pagis related that for many years he had tried to avoid the Holocaust and didn't dare talk about his feelings or about the connection between his poems and his personal biography. He confessed that only after perhaps twenty years, the time came when the Holocaust experience began to pay off its debt, and he couldn't not but write about it.⁴

As a researcher of medieval literature Pagis published many studies.⁵ He emended the poems of Levi Ibn al-Taban, edited David Yellin's *Theory of Sephardic Poetry*, adding an introduction and bibliography, and brought to completion the work of Chaim Brady in publishing the poems of Moses Ibn Ezra. He published studies, in which he presented the theory of Sephardic poetry as formulated by Ibn Ezra,⁶ including a panoramic view of the spirit of the age in *Innovation and Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy*.⁷ In his last book, *On a Secret Sealed*,⁸ he focused on theoretical aspects of the genre of the riddle, and included an important chapter on the literary riddle. His career as a published poet began in 1949, and he went on to publish books, among them – *The Shadow Dial* (1959), *Late Leisure* (1964), *Transformation* (1970), *Brain* (1975), *Double Exposure* (1982), and a collection of his last poems and prose pieces (1987).⁹ In an anthology of articles published after his death¹⁰ Appelfeld described all six poetry books as “the essence and evidence of the struggle he waged with terror,” and describes Pagis as a master craftsman at revealing and concealing the struggle to bring horror to light.

In this chapter I want to explore the connection between Pagis' writing as an academic researcher of medieval poetry, and Pagis the poet, whose writing is a response to the foundational experience of his life: the catastrophe of the Holocaust.

The enquiry will proceed utilizing the prism of the poetic device of the riddle.

4 Barghash, Rahel. (1984; 1986). “Conversation with Dan Pagis” [Hebrew], *Hadoar*, 15–17.

5 After his death, Pagis' articles were collected in a book edited by Ezra Fleischer: Dan Pagis, *Poetry Aptly Explained: Studies and Essays on Medieval Poetry* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993).

6 Pagis, Dan. (1970). *Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory: Moses Ibn Ezra and His Contemporaries* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik.

7 Pagis, Dan. (1976). *Innovation and Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy*, Tel Aviv: Keter.

8 Pagis, Dan. (1986). *A Secret Sealed: Hebrew Baroque Emblem-Riddles from Italy and Holland*, Jerusalem: Magnes.

9 Pagis, Dan. (1991). *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], Bnei Brak and Jerusalem: Hakibutz Hameuchad and Mosad Bialik.

10 Anthology of Articles in Memory of Dan Pagis, *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature*. (1987-8), [Hebrew] 10–11.

In his research on medieval poetry Pagis focuses primarily on the place of poetic convention, and on the fictional status of the poem, examining the notion that “The poem’s best is its lie.”

His book on Ibn Ezra, as well as *Innovation and Tradition*, emphasize the importance of poetic tools and devices, showing their contribution in constructing the meaning of the poem. Pagis stresses a sense of certainty, confidence and belief in the power of poetic tools to give expression to any meaning. Pagis’s research into medieval poetic convention aims to understand more general poetic principles through the window of that time.

In his book *Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory* Pagis makes a link between metaphor and the riddle. His claim is that good riddles contain good metaphors, because these two figures actually have similar qualities.¹¹ In a lecture Pagis gave at the Hebrew University, in May 1986, he argued that the literary riddle had run its course and was disappearing, and with it interest in its theorization. Despite this, Pagis didn’t abandon his project of understanding the mechanisms of riddles, which relate to strategies of bridging gaps, or lacunae. He claimed that composer of a riddle is required to employ a strategy of ellipsis, of gaps, so as to hint at his/her subject while also encoding it. Meanwhile the addressee’s strategy is to bridge the gaps so as to expose the subject. Furthermore, in solving the riddle, the addressee is required to show the keys to its undoing. In his view, the device of the riddle provides a starting point for a broader discussion of absence, and about the tension between absence and existence. Every riddle should establish a balance between obscurity, coding and encryption, and clarity, along with clues to releasing what is encrypted. If the riddle leans too far towards obscurity and encryption, the addressee will be unable to reach a solution, and conversely, if the riddle is overly clear, it will be obvious. Thus, a good riddle has to have an essentially equal tension between encryption and decipherability. The literary riddle has only one solution, intended by its composer, and when it is solved the riddle as such ceases to exist. Pagis indicates the process undergone by the reader in solving the riddle, in which one becomes more receptive, allowing a new and fresh view of the contemplated object.

In his book *A Secret Sealed* Pagis makes a distinction between a typical/clear or true riddle, and an unclear/atypical, bogus riddle:¹² a clear, true riddle is a challenging question requiring one to declare its solution, which is immanent in the question. The solution is a logical conclusion arising from hints contained in the question. The question and the declaration of its solution are both basic to the

¹¹ *Secular Poetry*, 55.

¹² *A Secret Sealed*, 36.

game, with a reward associated with winning and a penalty with losing. The unclear/atypical, bogus riddle, by contrast, permits no solution through recourse to hints contained in it. It is a challenging question on a subject known only to the questioner, and sometimes there is no one in possession of a solution; it is an enigmatic question in an invented universe lacking the key to its solution.¹³

Perhaps the moment when the book came out – not long before Pagis' death – is not coincidental: it seems that researching medieval poetry gave Pagis a safe zone, from which he could grapple with riddles in a way that was critical, corroborated, enjoyable, and above all controlled: solving the riddle is to dissolve it, with a concomitant yield of pleasure for the one finding the solution (and perhaps also Pagis the researcher). The basic situation of the classic riddle is one of mastery in problem solving, and to research riddles is to a great extent to experience control of the unfamiliar, the strange and the incomprehensible. Perhaps studying the riddle of the distant Middle Ages and Renaissance was for Pagis to be in a protected space of investigation, a safety net from the experience of the trauma of the Holocaust; someone who knows how to create a typical riddle also knows its solution.

However, in his poetry, Pagis used the apparatus of the riddle as a work tool to penetrate the spaces and absences of trauma.¹⁴ It seems that it was precisely the enigmatic, unclear riddles that served Pagis as a foundational device, bearing that riddle he could not solve even forty years after the experience of trauma, as it emerges at the end of his poem "The Story":

Right after this came
the end: an empty page.

Forty years now have gone by.
Still leaning above that empty page,
I do not have the strength
to close the book.¹⁵

In the end, after all the riddles, a blank page remains to which one must listen, respecting its silence.

¹³ See Hazan-Rokem, Galit and Shulman, David. (1996). *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*, New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ See Sidra DeKoven, Ezrachi. (2016). "The Poem as an Air Bubble in the World, and Like Its Reflection: Rereading Pagis' 'Wind from Variable Directions' alongside Kohelet," *Studies and Documents* [Hebrew], Hanan Haver (ed), Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 146–7; Oppenheimer, Yochai. (2016). "'To Measure the Dead Space': Trauma and Poetics in the Poetry of Dan Pagis," *Studies and Documents* [Hebrew], Hanan Haver (ed), Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 29–59.

¹⁵ Pagis, Dan. (trans. Stephen Mitchell). (1981) *Points of Departure, Collected Poems*, JPS, [Hebrew], 243.

Pagis seeks to preserve the split, that doubleness in his psyche/soul:

They [his book of research into the riddle, and a book of his poetry] are very different. And I want them to be different. I don't want one thing to elide with another [. . .] it's a kind of schizophrenia. A split. And like those who go to a good psychiatrist – one has to pay for both. And I pay – for each one – with my blood and marrow [. . .] the two areas inside [. . .] it isn't that they are just different, they are opposed.¹⁶

Asked in an interview with Ilana Zuckerman about the publication of the two books, the academic work on the riddle *A Secret Sealed* and his book of poems *Double Exposure (milim nirdafot)*, he said: “my research is very disciplined; I am not predisposed to essay writing. On the contrary – it is completely dry, systematic, full of technical matters.” It seemed to Pagis that academic research and poetry were two essentially different fields of knowledge, with each field demanding a different kind of psychic organization. And yet despite Pagis' declaration that these two domains, the academic and the poetic, are different and even opposed, it seems to me that there are possibilities of reciprocal relations between them, the bridge being his biography. At the heart of the discussion will be two conceptual systems: that system of concepts dictated, in poetic language, by the riddle, and alongside it, concepts belonging to the theory of trauma. I would argue that in Pagis, the riddle both as a poetic device and as existential situation, draws on and is nourished by the experience of the trauma of the Holocaust, and makes its way in dialogue with Pagis the man. Trauma as an existential foundation of an undeciphered riddle comes to light as an essential thread over years, both on an academic-theoretical path and a poetic one, and breaks out in full strength at the end of his life.

The riddle reflected in his poetry

From childhood Pagis bore the burden of a formative experience which he never disclosed to anyone, including his wife, Ada Pagis, who eventually wrote that only towards the end of his life did he largely remove the masks he had constructed, so that he could know himself better:

Some years were hidden from me, especially the time when they sent him away to Transnistria, and I had to live with them being a secret [. . .] because he wasn't prepared to formulate it [. . .] he stubbornly silenced it until the end of his life [. . .] for most of his life,

¹⁶ From an interview with Ilana Zuckerman in 1983. It was published in 1991 in *Iton*, vol. 77 [Hebrew], 22–23.

self-concealment was an existential need [. . .] his poetry was like Charon's ferry, leading us back and forth between the land of the living and, [. . .] the dead, for the experience of trauma was the wellspring and formative force of his life.¹⁷

According to Freud and the subsequent psychoanalytic tradition, trauma as an event has a total quality, where the subject is intensely afraid, feels helpless, out of control, and fears obliteration. It is an experience which fundamentally disturbs the subject's psychic equilibrium. The mind's defense mechanisms cannot deflect or regulate the profusion of stimuli flooding it, and as a consequence the subject cannot respond to them appropriately.

At the heart of the traumatic experience is a "something," formulated by Lyotard in the concept of the "differend", by Agamben as a "lacuna" and LaCapra as "excess," something which evades any representation. Trauma is then the occurrence of a terrible event, whose terribleness cannot be represented in language or other symbolic system; every attempt by the subject to represent the event, even for him or herself, is bound to fail. As Primo Levi put it: "Those who have [touched bottom], and who have seen the face of the Gorgon, did not return, or returned wordless."¹⁸ The story of the witness who survived is haunted by the muteness associated with the trauma. How can one give appropriate representation to that trauma which has no expression, to that lacuna? How, in the story of the survivor, can the enigma or secret of his or her trauma be represented?

I argue that, in his research into medieval poetry and the history of the riddle in Italy and Holland, Pagis derived safety, certainty and power from the very preoccupation with that genre. This scholarly preoccupation with the distant genre of the medieval and Renaissance riddle seems to have been a protected space for Pagis, the scholar. Nevertheless, an understanding of the apparatus of the riddle became for Pagis, the poet, a work tool for penetrating, in his poems, the experience of trauma. A poetic form for expressing terror while staying alive, as he put it. In the domain of poetry Pagis used the device of the riddle to penetrate that "excess," that "lacuna," of trauma. The discourse of the riddle is a paradigm for Pagis' poetic work, as he uses it to try to approach and capture the unrepresentable actuality of trauma, that unseen essence. But at the same time he takes the risk that the riddle will remain a riddle, or in the straightforward words appearing with the title of the book about the riddle: "if one lingers over a secret sealed / he will learn, from what is sealed, to keep it sealed."¹⁹

17 Pagis, Ada. (1995). *Sudden Heart*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 10.

18 Levi, Primo. (1988). *The Drowned and the Saved*, London: Michael Joseph.

19 Pagis, Dan. (1986). *A Secret Sealed: Hebrew Baroque Emblem-Riddles from Italy and Holland*, [Hebrew] Jerusalem: Magnes, 189.

As I will show in the following examples, the riddle is present in Pagis' poetry from the very beginning of his poetic journey, in various forms.²⁰ In the first example we will initially put aside the title of the poem, and relate to the poem as a kind of riddle asking "who am I?":²¹

The sand is swift, overflowing,
 burrowing inside itself, searching
 for remnants, tombstones, ancestors'
 bones.
 I never understood this hunger
 for the past. I
 am a series of instants,
 shed my skin with ease,
 forget,
 outsmart myself.
 In all this desert only I can guess
 who was who."²²

The poem is called "Snake." Lacking the title, we wonder throughout the poem who this "I" is. The full solution of the riddle is in the title, and it leads to its undoing. In fact, we can argue that this poem is directly concerned with the form of a riddle: it is a verbal picture in which there is in parallel the movement of some object in space and time. In the first picture the speaker observes an "overflowing" movement in the desert sand, "burrowing inside itself, searching." The search goes through a transformation, beginning in space, with synecdochic representations of a whole breaking up,²³ colors becoming the tones of annihilation – "remnants, tombstones, ancestors' / bones," to a search for a lost time: "I never understood this hunger / for the past." The swift sand doesn't perform the search; it stands for the traces of the unseen image of the snake below the surface.

²⁰ In this article I do not intend to examine Pagis' poetic biography in the context of the riddle. On that matter, see the wide-ranging article, Yacobi, Tamar "The Cryptic in the Late Poetics of Dan Pagis," in *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature* 24 [Hebrew], 181–222. My aim is to show how a common thread passes between Pagis' scientific work and his poetry, and is woven by the psychic work, using the form of the riddle, of facing the catastrophic experience of the Holocaust.

²¹ For a detailed analysis of the poem, see Dudai, Rina "Forgotten, Remembered, Forgotten: Forgetting and Memory in Processing Holocaust Trauma in Poetic Language," *Pages in Holocaust Research* vol. 23, [Hebrew] 109–132.

²² Pagis, Dan. (trans. Stephen Mitchell) (1981). *Points of Departure*, Philadelphia: JPS, 61; *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], 148.

²³ Synecdoche is a literary device in which the part stands for the whole, the specific the general, the individual the plurality – or vice versa.

The poem displays a bogus riddle: the solution is no solution: although it is clear that it concerns a snake, the solution to the snake's questions isn't conveyed to the reader, or even to the snake, and by the end of the poem we are left with an unanswered question, which isn't even indicated by a question mark: "who was who." The riddle becomes a metaphor for an existential situation of disappearance. The movement of sand traces an absent character, about which one can learn only from its past, which the character searches for. The character lives in two parallel realities: one involving an infinite search for its past; and the other living in the present of "a series of instants," shedding its skin with ease, outsmarting itself (in an intertextual echo of the serpent in Eden: "Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field") and busy with conjecture.

Hunger for the past is the hunger to recover the lost present of the source of the trauma, that empty time which made an impact but isn't remembered. The wish to search for the past is aimed at incorporating it into linear-historical time, thus redeeming the trauma from the plane of its secret. The more the past is not found, the more the trauma works as the compulsion to an eternal present. The experience of void can't be represented; it escapes all meaning. Everyday life, however, "a series of instants," does not unfold on that timeless traumatic plane outside of consciousness. For the snake all that is left is to hypothesize about "who was who."

Another of Pagis' riddles asks "where?":

I hid in the room, but forgot where.
 I'm not in the closet.
 And not behind the curtain.
 Nor in the great fortress between the table legs.
 The mirror is empty of me.
 For a moment it seems to me that I am in the picture on the wall.
 One day, if someone comes and calls me
 I'll answer and I'll know: here I am.²⁴

The question displayed here opens a narrative of hide and seek, also echoing the "where are you?" in the conversation of God and Adam following Adam's first transgression. In Pagis' poetic narrative, a feeling of survivor guilt and shame emerges, recontextualized as a derivative of the story of the Garden of Eden. The main point I want to highlight in this poem is the presence of the other as essential to the poem's speaker's return to a real existence.

24 Pagis, Dan. (trans. Shoshana Olidort). "Where," *Curated* website, <https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/poems-dan-pagis>; *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], 244.

Traumatic experience is indelibly bound up with an awakening of the sense of an “I”. An extreme feeling of powerlessness accompanies the subject confronted by terror and the possibility of personal extinction. One of the most severe effects of traumatic situations is the disappearance or radical reduction of the person while alive.²⁵ An echo of this can be heard in this poem-disguised-as-a-riddle, in which the “I” is hidden away, and the one who can restore him to his existence is the other who calls to him. The condition of nullification of the “I” intensifies from moment to moment. The search for the “I” begins in concrete reality, and then at a certain stage passes into the fictional reality of the mirror and the picture on the wall, and yet in these spaces too, he is not to be found. This is particularly evident in the mirror-search, which gives rise to the riddle of the mirror in medieval poetry. The mirror allows one to see oneself in a place where one isn't, but the speaker of this poem sees that “the mirror is empty of me.” The empty reflection is a projection of the traumatic kernel, a negation of what is, emptiness, the lack deep at the heart of the source of the trauma. Extricating oneself from this place is by no means certain. It is represented as possible – if someone will come and call to him; and if he then answers and comes to know himself, in the dialogical enunciation of “here I am.”

If the first poem represents the subject's disappearance, effected by the apparatus of the riddle about an animal, and the second poem represents the emergence from disappearance by means of a riddle of hiddenness, which finally becomes a possible dialogue with one's fellow, the following poem examines the nucleus of the trauma of emptiness from an entirely different place:

Brain, pleased, surveys his centers;
 a center for speech, a center for lies,
 a center for memory
 (seventy clocks, at least, each keeping its own time),
 a special center for pain—
 Who is speaking please? Who's there?
 Suddenly he hears the astounding news:
 There is a hidden circle somewhere
 whose center is everywhere
 and whose circumference is nowhere;
 a center which is so near
 that he will never
 be able
 to see it.²⁶

²⁵ Goldberg, Amos. (2012). *Trauma in the First Person*, Or Yehuda: Dvir and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 131–155.

²⁶ Pagis, *Points of Departure*, 121–2; *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], 199.

The main point here is the discovery of “a hidden circle somewhere”: a systematic search of the organism reveals the brain – a search which each time penetrates to a deeper center, beyond speech, beyond lies (poetic language), beyond the centers of memory and pain – to something sensationally new: the existence and centrality of a vanished circle. The poet adopts the mystical-kabbalistic form of a center which is “everywhere / and whose circumference is nowhere,” and represents it not as an all-embracing reality, but as an all-embracing nothingness.²⁷ The central point of the circle is not seen, and I identify it to be the “differend,” the “lacuna,” and the “excess” at the root of trauma, its kernel. It is what leaves its impression, though evading all signification, Lacan’s “Real” – a kind of existence for itself, whole and unrepresentable. In meeting the real, all apparatuses of mediation collapse, so that the subject “will never / be able / to see it.”

I will conclude with a poem published in 1987, after Pagis’ death:

For a Literary Survey

You ask me how I write. I’ll tell you, but let this be confidential. I take a ripe onion, squeeze it, dip the pen into the juice, and write. It makes excellent invisible ink: the onion juice is colorless (like the tears the onion causes), and after it dries it doesn’t leave any mark. The page again appears as pure as it was. Only if it’s brought close to the fire will the writing be revealed, at first hesitantly, a letter here, a letter there, and finally, as it should be, each and every sentence. There’s just one problem. No one knows the secret power of the fire, and who would suspect that the pure page has anything written on it?

In this narrative poem Pagis relates to writing in language appropriate to a secret; it is a riddle which will never be revealed because the keys to its undoing are not known. The poem doesn’t let on the secret and the riddle has no solution. The poem is dynamic, and there are moments when it seems that the solution is close at hand. For although the writing tool is based on secrets (invisible ink and colorless onion juice, similar to tears) and the empty page, it could still be that the solution can be discovered by bringing the page close to fire. Here the secret of writing is hypothetically and progressively brought into presence: “at first hesitantly, a letter here, a letter there, and finally, as it should be, each and every sentence.” But the epiphany turns out to be fantasy, for “no one knows” the secret. The

²⁷ See my extended analysis of the poem in my article “Forgotten, Remembered, Forgotten” [in Hebrew]; Hirschfeld, Ariel. (1986–7) “Writing a Secret on the Path of Truth’: On the Form of Meaning in Dan Pagis’ ‘Twelve Faces of the Emerald,’” *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature*, vol. 10 [Hebrew], 137–151.

empty page is thus seen to be pure, unblemished by writing.²⁸ But one way or another the poem was written. Both the fire and the mirror, from earlier in the poem, are overt symbols of destruction – the mirror, whether bearing a reflection or not, is an ancient symbol of death, as seen in the custom of covering mirrors at the *shiva*; and fire, which alone can restore the writing on the translucent page, and expose its absence.²⁹

In a post-catastrophe world, the artist is required to spend time in a place of unsolvable riddles, of silences and unknown depths. The form of the riddle in Pagis' world became a place more open to all kinds of hearing the other, hearing words before they are spoken, of pain and tears hidden from view, which strive to make, as Paul Celan put it, a "breathturn."³⁰

The article is based on my lecture at the NAPH annual conference in Montreal in 2008.

²⁸ Yacobi discusses, in a detailed analysis of the poem, whether the riddle in Pagis' late poems is continuous with the earlier work, or a new development. "Crypticism in Dan Pagis' Late Poetry," 187–8.

²⁹ I am grateful to Michal Govrin for bringing this to my attention.

³⁰ Celan, Paul. (trans. Pierre Joris). (2014). *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

Meir Appelfeld, Painter

You inquired about my paintings and wondered whether the darkness of the sunflower painting contained an indirect reference to the Holocaust or to my being a second generation to Holocaust survivors. In response let me relate, that when we were little children, our house was always full of people. We lived in a small apartment in Kiryat Moshe [in Jerusalem], and there were evenings when the apartment was packed with people, sitting, eating, and smoking till the late hours of the night, and father would tell stories. Those nights ended late, and then the house needed tidying, and sometimes it happened again the next day, people would just appear. They didn't phone, just appeared, and father would tell stories; and sometimes [one of the guests] would say to my father: "you should write this story, why won't you write this story, it's a good story [not understanding the difference between storytelling and literature]." The notion that my biography is expressed in my paintings is also a 'good story' too good. Not that it is baseless, but still, that's not how things work. Today there is a tendency to see the biographical as all embracing, but I will speak as a mystic: art touches realms that are beyond the biographical.

As a second answer (regarding my creative process and development as a painter) I will say that I came to painting from the field of music. At the beginning of my journey, I thought I would be a violinist. In the field of music, training has not changed considerably over the years, and resembles in a way, the training of a Renaissance apprentice. The training starts early on, it is very ordered, and in keeping with the model of the Renaissance workshop where one finds a master and within this reality one trains and develops. When I started painting that was what I was looking for. I wanted to have an orderly way of working, I wanted to be a performing artist. I define myself as a performing artist, not as a creative artist. I need some kind of ritual, some kind of action plan, and then, things will be revealed, but indirectly.

Meir Appelfeld

The Role of Memory and Forgetting in the Creative Process

Gershom Sholem cites the following Hasidic story in his article “Hasidism: The Last Stage”¹:

When the great Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light the fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Years later when a disciple of the Ba’al Shem-Tov, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: “Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer,” and again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, another rabbi, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, “I do not know how to light the fire. I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.” It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

The years passed. And it fell to Rabbi Israel of Ryzhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: “I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient.²

Sholem observes that “this small and profound story symbolizes the decline of a great movement. And also (. . .) it reflects the profound change of values that took place in the movement. A profound change that in the end nothing survived of the secret except for the story of the act itself.”³

From the sacrificial fire, a symbol of an unmediated connection to God; to the prayer that without knowing its hidden intention can turn into a mechanical ritual; to the ‘place’ that allows the worship to be performed and is known only to the Tzaddik; we are left with the story of the deed, the aesthetic act, which is lower in rank, that becomes the heart of the lost ritual, as long as it is tied in its core to an unmediated connection to God.

The development of Western art broadly speaking imitates the course of our story. From the fire – this is the idol statue that can be seen and touched by the

1 Sholem, Gershom. (1977). “Hasidism: the last stage”. *Chapters in the History of Hasidism and its History*, ed. Avraham Rubinstein, Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 50.

2 Wiesel, Elie. (1964). prologue from *The Gates of the Forest*.

3 Sholem, Gershom. (1977). 51.

believer; to the prayer – this is the medieval icon an object of worship stripped of the sculptural volume of the statue; to the story, the description of great biblical and mythological narratives embodied and realized in the historical painting in the sixteenth century; to the presence of the sacred place – this is the faint and hidden pantheistic whisper in some of the landscape and still life paintings of the seventeenth century. Landscapes and objects that serve as a reminder of the heroic landscapes where gods and man of great deeds walked.

But isn't our story also the story of the development of every person? The child who touches the world directly, among whom the mythological whisper lives; The young man who stands his ground, who investigates the hidden aspirations, who seeks to be aware and in doing so distances himself from the ability to touch that which is tangible; and the old man, who knows the tale and is sobered of the search for the hidden intentions and asks again for the child touch with the presence of the world.

The backbone of our story is memory, the memory of the magic act in which man acts upon the world, participating in its chronicles not as a spectator but as a man of action, as a miracle worker, and later as an artist. It is a memory which binds us to our forefathers and ushers us closer – in human terms to the sensation that outlines God's presence in our world, his transcendence beyond human existence.

You may ask what is the connection between the creative process and this theology? My answer will be everything.

By conjuring up the feeling of infinity – we sharpen the sense of the present, its essence. In relation to the unattainable – we learn to celebrate the ordinary, and find fragments of sacredness in it. And from an artistic point of view, it was in opposition to the historical painting that the awareness of the attainable became present. And by attainable, I mean the categories of Still Life and Landscape. Paintings which in moments of grace illuminated the sanctity of the 'place', and the possibility to elevate the materiality of the object to the virtue of an instrument of worship.

It was the historical painting that set an enigmatic ideal; that sought a world rich in details that competes with nature itself and at the same time seeks to subordinate the detail to a comprehensive sense of the whole. In the world created by the historical painting, we encountered the deeds of the gods and people of the Bible; faithfully described in a natural setting: buildings, as well as crowds of people, animals and objects. In order to implement and rise to the challenge setup by this ideal category – which even great painters attained only in moments of grace – the education of the painter was centered around the needs of the historical painting, primarily the internalization of Roman and Greek art.

When we attempt to discuss the artistic process, we can discern a number of interwoven types of memory, which in the past made it possible to design history painting: The first memory is the memory of the art of the past. During the Renaissance, the apprentice began his studies by copying engravings and drawings owned by his Master. Then he turned to look and draw from paintings, and only after he immersed and cultivated his observation of two-dimensional works, he turned to look at sculpture. The refinement of his line perception preceded tonality, the decorative element preceded the illusion of volume, and the internalization of the art of the past preceded the observation of nature. In other words, learning past masterpieces enabled a process in which the whole precedes the detail; as opposed to learning from nature in which the painter seeks to integrate the details observed in nature into a comprehensible whole.

The purpose of the training process was to internalize (the art of the past and the appearance of nature), the culmination of which was forgetting. The painter is not required to mechanically cite the art of the past, but to rediscover it within himself according to his own terms, in his own art. The antidote to subjugated imitation of the art of the past was drawing from nature. The antidote to the enslaved imitation of nature was the assimilated sediments of past art.

The second memory is the memory of nature's appearance. Nature has two aspects: the detail that can be imitated and brought closer to the scrutiny of the artist gaze – in the study of the human figure and Still Life genres; and in contrast the infinite details that are beyond the ability of imitation – in the Landscape. Here too the apprentice is required to assimilate, to celebrate the detail that can be studied from nature, while not forgetting the sense of the whole that is expressed in the works of art of the past as a source and inspiration. There have been many debates in art academies in the past about the proper interpretation of the mimetic move. Some have argued that the painter must build the whole from the most beautiful and perfect details selected from nature; while others have argued that the painter must correct nature in the process of imitating it, and this in light of the ideal form of the art of the past.

The third memory can be called the mystical memory. This memory is a variation of sorts of the Neoplatonic concept that took hold and was shaped, among others, in the writing of the president of the Art Academy of Saint Luca Federico Zuccari (1539–1609). Zuccari distinguishes between the 'internal drawing' – which is God's seal inscribed on the painter soul, and the 'external drawing' which is a copy of the 'internal drawing' (and is the actual drawing one can see). The concept of 'internal drawing' seems to make the observation of past art and nature redundant. This abstract concept can be seen as foreseeing the future – abstract art at the turn of the twentieth century that sought the unmediated connection to the spiritual. But during Zuccari's time, the practice at the workshop was of fore-

most importance. The capacity to reconcile contradicting theoretical ideas and at the same time preserving the established course of imparting the art of painting and securing the proper creative process seemed flawless. In other words, the workshop did not allow abstract ideas foreign to the language of the artistic undertaking to negate the accomplishment and course of action that preserved it.

The fourth memory is the memory of the art of drawing. Through drawing the painter learned and internalized the art of the past and the appearance of nature. Through drawing, his inner vision took shape in the preparatory sketches for his painting. But more than that, drawing itself, as an unchanging language and practice, carried within it the memory of past art. Drawing in itself constitutes the internal grammar of the art of painting, the core of the unchanging ritual of the practice of art.

The fifth memory – this is the biographical memory. Here I am not referring to the painter's life and its influence upon his work, but rather to the cumulative weight of his own work over the years. There is point in time were his maturity and old age allow a full view of his endeavor prompting reductionism and simplicity arising from the experience and his reflection about his own art; a reflection rooted in an inner conversation between him and the body of work he produced. It is a moment in time were his body of work carries with it a sense of concreteness which enables a new creation in relation to it.

Facing memory in its various manifestation, the painter tried to grapple with the historical painting. Facing the white page, at the beginning of the creative process, the painter conceived and conjured up that which he internalized: the art of the past that shone through him, diffracted into a new specular by virtue of his unique personality.

And since history painting was put on a pedestal as the chosen genre, as an ideal; even the lowly Still Life and Landscape painters benefited from the training process, which strives for high ideals difficult to attain thus elevating the entire artistic endeavor. So, their paintings were created basking – so to speak, – in the light of the historical painting.

Without comparing one can still recall that the High Priest does not enter the Holy of Holies alone, but as a representative – who prepared himself and received the support of the congregation. The historical painting required a lot of preparation, not in the sphere of purification, but in creating a living connection to the past. But first and foremost, it demanded that the painter be made a living representative of all that preceded him. This, stemmed from the perception that the unmediated connection to the secret was lost, and all that remains is the memory of this connection that was entrusted to our ancestors long ago.

Today we confuse recollection with memory, we are limited in our ability to remember. By memory I mean to touch what is hidden inside us, what is beyond

our ability to contain. We cannot contain an entire event that is greater than us. We find it difficult to contain those who are closest to us, let alone ourselves.

When we touch the memory of something greater than ourselves, we connect with the memory of the community. The request for empathy, the request that “a person must see himself as if he came out of Egypt” is absurd, it is wonderful as an idea, but not as a practice. To reach this level of empathy, a mediator is required, a ritual that allows us to be part of the congregation once more. The congregation in human terms is infinite. Art was and should be attentive to the rustle of the congregation (past and present), not only to the inner voice of the individual, if it is to contain that which is greater than us.

A full memory means the nullification of the individual and its regrowth from the communal. It means the cancellation of the painter and his regrowth from within a group of artists who preceded him. Memory is hard to bear, it is a shared experience. Remembering should not be an artificial act but a slow process of accumulation. Therefore, any attempt to touch and animate it requires turning to the past in order to obtain form and pattern. It is the ritual, we inherited and abandoned, on whose doors we must knock.

The Passover seder is a ritual that commemorates the exodus from Egypt, while serving as a living substitute for the act itself. In the life of a child, who can easily imagine the parting sea, the seder night has its own reality, which integrates with the story of the Exodus. The grandfather at the head of the table, the tension before the four questions, the endless time until the meal is served, are not only intended to recreate the experience of the Exodus from Egypt, but to replace it with a new experience, which at its core is connected to the unknown experience related in the story. The seder night of the adult is different. The fixed structure of the ritual enables the blurring of the boundary between the near and distant past. It gives concreteness to the feeling of depth of time; and with it a discernment of what is beyond his comprehension.

In the attempt to remember we learn about the potent presence of forgetting. But oblivion is not complete. It is a serious partner in the process of creation. The goal of the process is not the discovery of what has been entrusted to oblivion, but to touch upon the unmediated feeling of it – as a rhythm, as a hidden compass.

The ritual as an eternal and unchanging structure allows summoning up the past. We can never travel back in time; rather we can seek to reunite with our ancestors. This in hope that our hyperawareness will not impair this union. In looking at the past there lies a key. But only a key, not an essence in itself.

In moving away from the magical pagan initial contact there was a recognition that the sacred unknown must be shielded and concealed. The fire turned into whispering coals, and to preserve it, a vessel had to be built that could con-

tain the energy that was held within it. Hasidism recognized the hidden power that lies within the story. For the visual artist it was painting. The painting, unlike the story, sought the concrete, the object; in this respect, it echoed the vessel of idolatry that later was converted into an icon. The painting wore two veils and over time they were established and developed. The first – the mimetic veil, the second – the illustration of the founding narratives of the sacred stories of the Bible and Greek mythology.

The mimetic element preserved the illusion of reality that the idolatrous statue sought. The illustration of the stories sublimated the ritual itself, which received new form in the mythological and biblical story. Over time, the concrete – the imitation of the living flesh – became an end in itself, and the life of the gods – as a subject matter – was abandoned in order to describe the life of mortals. As the French painter Edgar Degas observe: “See how different the times are for us; two centuries ago, I would have painted ‘Susannah Bathing’, now I just paint ‘woman in a Tub’.”⁴

On the other hand, there was a growing awareness of the medium, the language of art became an end in itself. Painting was stripped of the mimetic and the narrative. It was stripped of its concrete clothing that covered the magical experience, as well as of the narrative that carried with it the memory of the tangibility of the ritual.

Now art (at the beginning of the twentieth century) sought and presumed it can touch the secret spiritual element directly. This utopian ambition robbed painting of the tools that made possible its direct and vibrant connection with its audience: its mimetic quality, and the illustration of the common constitutive narratives of the Bible and Greek mythology. In the name of apparently unmediated connection to a universal spirituality that is – so to speak – apparent to every person, whatever his heritage is.

An attempt to create a lasting ritual out of nothing is short lived. Great energy lies in the breakup from tradition, but this energy cannot be imprinted and converted into a new tradition of sorts. Abstract art’s attempt to reveal the secret of art only led to the loss of the vibrancy of its secret its livelihood, to its humiliation, which marked the culmination of secularization. A secret without a garment to conceal it cannot exist. Similarly, the request of abstract art to directly touch upon the secret can be seen as akin to the invocation of the explicit heavenly name. And when the heavenly name rolls in the public domain – in the street so to speak – it not only loses its magical power, but confirms the claim that it did

4 Barnes, Rachel (ed.). (1992). *Artists by Themselves: Degas*. London: Bracken Books, 42.

not possess any power in the first place. Revealing the secret and destroying it are one and the same.

The living connection to the past was through the vestments of the secret in which the seal of the secret (of art) was stamped, and not through direct contact with the 'fire'. The vestments of the secret around which the ritual was established were instrumental in facilitating a connection to the past. Without an ordered ritual man is a solitary creature, cut off from his past. A fear nestles in him that by turning to the past he will lose his selfhood, when the opposite is true; only by turning to the past will he find himself again. The cancellation of the ritual linking the artist to the artistic collective was paradoxically the cancellation of his selfhood, since there is no individual without the communal, no creation without an echo of the distant and more recent past.

In the preface to Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's *Book of Tales*, it is written: "Because it would have been better not to reveal in them [that is, in the stories] any hint to what they allude to, because when a thing is hidden, one can act upon it more . . ." ⁵

The purpose of reading the story, comments Rabbi Nachman, is not to decipher the clues woven into it. The hints are there so that the reader become aware that there are hidden deeds in the story, nothing more. Art can forcefully influence the viewer-reader when it contains a living secret. If it is to regain its potency, contemporary art has to focus on concealing rather than exposing. The wounds of the long process of secularization have not yet healed, the tools that made possible the conservation of memory and with it the preservation of man as a whole being have been broken. We don't need new rituals, but patches upon patches to cover and heal the old rituals.

5 *Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Stories*. Jerusalem: Breslov Hasidic Printing Foundation in the Land of Israel and Abroad.



Fig. 1: Meir Appelfeld, still life, oil on canvas, 72x75 cm.



Fig. 2: Meir Appelfeld, still life, oil on canvas, 72x75 cm.



Fig. 3: Meir Appelfeld, still life, oil on canvas, 72x77 cm.



Fig. 4: Meir Appelfeld, still life, oil on canvas, 72x75 cm.

Eitan Steinberg, Composer



Fig. 1: Stolpersteins commemorating Helene and Siegfried Steinberg, Münster, Germany, 2011.

These two Stolperstein stones were found by my late brother Ilan during a business trip in Münster. He went to look there because he knew that the family's house was on Koenigstrasse. While walking down the street he saw the two stones, which commemorate the fact that Helene and Siegfried Steinberg once lived at 33 Koenigstrasse. Siegfried was killed in Theresienstadt and Helene was shot while trying to flee during deportation. Helene and Siegfried were the brother and the sister of my late grandfather Hugo. When I received this photo, I was struck with the feeling of a very strong connection: I have a big family! True, they are no longer alive, but I'm a part of a big family. There's proof. Someone acknowledged the fact that the family lived there, acknowledged that the Steinberg family's home was at 33 Koenigstrasse. It's documented.

All this caught me while I was working on a viola concerto I'd been commissioned to compose, while I was struggling to decide what direction the piece should take. Suddenly the photo of the stones arrived and I knew: This is it. Then, through the composition, I created a dialogue – which I feel was completely real and very vivid – with Siegfried and Helene. Together, we embarked on a journey of “Let's see what happened since then.” The musical piece is an abstract manifestation of Siegfried and Helene gazing upon us in the second decade of the 21st century.

Eitan Steinberg

Remembering and Forgetting in Music Composition

To Remember the Future

Every time I'm asked to compose a new piece, my starting point is silence, the silence of before-creation. Silence enables me to listen to what will come from the future, from the unknown, and let it crystallize into an idea. Some call this imagination and others define it as intuition. In my eyes, it's future knowledge: It's not quoted from the past; it stands on the borderline between knowledge streaming from the consciousness and its manifestation in sound. There are many ways to remember and many ways to forget. Is remembering the opposite of forgetting? Do we need to know something in order to recall it? Ostensibly, our reservoir of memories is stored in the brain, but I experience memory as a complex system that also includes spiritual, out-of-body branches that are accessible to us through something like cloud storage technology. Knowledge is not only stored in the physical body, but also in the metaphysical dimension, whether it is personal and private knowledge, or general and collective knowledge.

Remembering supposedly refers to the past, to acquired knowledge. If that is so, it operates along a time axis of events. But time itself is not linear; it's flexible and winding, speeding up and slowing down. In the same way, remembering and forgetting are not linear; their speed and direction varies. When I remember one event, various associations lead me to recall other events that happened at other times; they come to mind at different speeds, communicating with my thoughts in the present and with my feelings about the future. It's a spiral of infinite potential. In it, remembering includes an additional direction, one that comes from the future. At the end of the opera *Un re in ascolto*¹ ("A King Listens") by the Italian composer Luciano Berio, the following text by Italo Calvino appears:

Memory stands guard over silence
recollection of the future the promise
which promise? this one that now you may
barely touch with the voice's extremity
and that slips from your mind as the wind caresses
the darkness in the voice the memory
in the shadows a memory for the future

¹ Berio, Luciano (1981–83). *Un re in ascolto*. Music-Theater.

Forget in Order to Start Creating

All the activities in our lives are supported by different types of memories; intellectual memory, emotional memory and other types of memories are stamped in our spirit, soul and body. But when I start composing a new work, the memories related to it block the new that is trying to emerge. As I listen, trying to enable a memory from the future to arrive, I have to make a conscious effort to forget what already exists. During my years as a composer, I've collected and built a broad body of memory in all things relevant to the art of composition. This body of memory includes musical skills (notation, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration and many other skills); musical memories from the family, surroundings and culture in which I was raised; musical memories from other cultures in the world where I've lived or visited; works of music I've been exposed to over the years; works of music I myself have played; musical styles of other composers; and an intellectual dialogue with my composition teachers. All of the above are types of information – tonal, form-related, technical and conceptual. Without this essential body of memory, I wouldn't have become a composer. But in the moments of thought and inspiration, as I start working on a new composition, this mountain of knowledge paralyzes me.

Before writing a new composition, I ask myself basic questions, such as: Why do I want to compose? What do I want to compose? My answer is that I want to compose something that I've never composed before – and in order to do this, I know I must forget. The word 'forget' in Hebrew (*lishkoach*) includes the word 'power' (*koach*), and in the creative context, forgetting indeed offers great powers of healing and enabling. Of course, after completing the composition, and as time goes by and the work enters the dimension of the past, I discover contexts of my earlier works and those of others in the composition. I find in it the many echoes of that body of work. But when just starting to compose, forgetting is a prerequisite for embarking into the unknown.

People are very judgmental about remembering and forgetting. Remembering is perceived as something positive and active. It is viewed as an achievement because we can 'utilize' the knowledge we remember. Forgetting, on the other hand, is considered negative; it represents inactivity or weakness. 'I forgot' means my knowledge is gone, and it is impossible to 'utilize' no-knowledge. But in the initial moments of creative activity, I experience the opposite: There's something stagnant and stagnating in remembering, something automatic and static in its incessant activity, while forgetting has something unexpected and sudden to it, something that invites activism. This activism is the catalyst that sparks the creation of the new work. All of the above refers, of course, to forgetting by choice and not due to pathology. It is a temporary forgetfulness that I, as a composer,

choose and struggle to reach in order to create something new. And each time anew, when I forget – I'm aware that I'm basking in a moment of grace: I sit in front of an empty page, and I too am empty. Sometimes this moment of grace doesn't arrive. Then I feel stuck, walled in and resort to a technical activity in order to feel that 'I don't know.' There are all sorts of exercises I use. For example, to write notes on the page only for the sake of writing, without thinking, and then toss everything into the trash. And again the next day, until enough momentum is generated to set the wheels of creativity in motion.

Arnold Schönberg's 'Forgetting'

Artists from different art fields have referred to forgetting as an enabler of innovation and renewal. As an example, I'll focus on the Austrian-Jewish composer Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951). His conscious act of 'forgetting' was so comprehensive and fundamental that it significantly influenced the history of music. In the first half of the first decade of the 20th century, Schönberg, like other composers in his day, felt that in order to create new music, it was necessary to abandon the familiar tonal system. This system was based on a hierarchical organization of tones and harmonic functionality in the conventional musical scales – the major and minor scales of seven notes. Schönberg realized that he had to look for other ways of pitch organization and new means of liberation from the old organizational system; he aspired to compose music that would not rely on the harmonic logic of the past. In order to jettison the established musical theory that had guided the creation of music in Europe for three centuries, Schönberg needed to 'forget':

When I compose, I try to forget all theories and I continue composing only after having freed my mind of them.²

The traditional tonal system had developed over the course of Western musical history in a way that enabled the creation of music on different levels: This system dominated musical scores in the horizontal dimension (the melodic line), in the vertical dimension (the harmony and counterpoint between the lines of all of the instruments) and in the diagonal dimension (musical movements and events that appear at different intervals, and refer to previous or subsequent movements and events). In this tonal-harmonic system, the musical syntax was known and familiar not only to the composer, but also to the musicians and listeners; any

² Schönberg, Arnold. (1975). *Style and Idea*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 91.

progression in the work was anchored in it and the musical process was clear to all. Based on this familiarity with the syntax – even if only acquired intuitively, from listening – the listener could ‘anticipate’ the next step in the work, and the fulfillment of this expectation gave the listener satisfaction and pleasure: Some tension was resolved. Even if the listener was ‘wrong’ and the music developed in an unexpected direction, the very game of expected and unexpected was entirely based on the system of remembering: Musical tension was built in order to resolve it, or in order to surprise the listener with an unexpected turn. But it always remained within the limitations of the conventional syntax.

Schönberg decided to abandon this system in order to develop new expressive means of composing. But in the second half of that first decade of the 20th century, no other theoretical system was available to him. Therefore, the first attempt that he and a group of other artists made was to create a subjective composition, from the depths of personal expressivity, from the stream of consciousness and intuition, without relying on theories and models. This immediate composition was done without structural planning (melodic, harmonic or rhythmic). Instead, there was a deliberate effort to avoid using the musical syntax of the past. Schönberg composed in the expressionistic style, drawing from his experience in the here and now, and not from the reservoir of memory.

The conscious effort to transcend historical-musical knowledge and focus on the contemporary experience, leaving the theoretical underpinnings behind (and to do this almost alone, in the face of a barrage of criticism from colleagues, critics and the public), was indeed a real leap. Schönberg’s “Three Piano Pieces, Opus 11” (1909) is an example of how he gently broke the traditional tonality and pioneered a new experience of composing. It is customary to define it as an atonal work, but Schönberg himself opposed this new term, which was coined by the Austrian composer and theoretician J. M. Hauer. In response to Hauer, Schönberg wrote:

The expression ‘atonal music’ is most unfortunate – it is on a par with calling flying “the art of not falling,” or swimming, “the art of not drowning.”³

Schönberg himself preferred to define his new musical research an ‘emancipation of the dissonance.’ He claimed that the consonance and dissonance in his new works were understandable to the same extent and had an equal function, and that this is what canceled the tonality. Despite Schönberg’s reservations, the term ‘atonality’ took root, and until today he is regarded as the representative of this style.

3 *ibid.*, 30.

Indeed Schönberg's atonal composition challenged the principles of the tonal system, however, without an appropriate alternative theoretical foundation, the potential of the work was exhausted quite quickly. Until then, the traditional foundation of scales and rules of style functioned as 'glue,' allowing a broad creative canvas. Now, however, there was no external mechanism to lead to 'the next step' in composing. That's why most of the atonal works from the second decade of the 20th century were short.

Aware of the need to construct a comprehensive and applicable theoretical system to replace the tonal foundation, Schönberg immersed himself in thought and planning. In 1923, about two years after his first attempts at composing with the new system, Schönberg gathered some of his pupils and introduced them to the principles of composition with a system of twelve tones (tone rows). Tone rows had been used previously, but Schönberg's innovation was the construction of a theoretical foundation that enabled organizing tone rows without a structural hierarchy. It was atonality expanded and anchored in detailed theory. In his search for a new musical 'memory,' Schönberg pointed to one factor that he believed was especially important to 'forget' – the tonal hierarchy. It was a central element in tonal music, and Schönberg himself noted that tonal hierarchy was still present in the atonal music that he had previously composed. The hierarchical tonal structures – those that cause us to sense that a certain tone is 'home,' 'a gravitational force,' 'a point of convergence,' or 'a resolution' of the accumulated tension – are structures embedded in our memory. Schönberg understood the need to create a different logic, a different aesthetic. And indeed, in the tone row (dodecaphonic) technique, all of the tones are equally important.

Schönberg now faced a double challenge: He had to 'forget' not only the tonal music theory of the past, but also the atonal style he had worked with in the not-too-distant past. Though the dodecaphonic technique represented the opposite of tonal thinking, we can still find traces of the past, some more faded than others, in Schönberg's works: melodic elements, chord structures, a rhythm more typical of music styles of the past, a familiar counterpoint texture.

Schönberg's groundbreaking 'forgetting' created a new musical reality, and for thirty years (through the late 1940s), two styles dominated the composing arena: One was based on the dodecaphonic 'series' or 'row' of twelve notes, and the other, which turned to the opposite direction – the neoclassical style. Soon, with the processes of innovation and resistance to innovation, the memory from the future became something from the past that must be forgotten. In the rapid pace in which these processes occurred in 20th century art, Schönberg's avant-garde soon became outdated and a target of criticism from young composers. A new technique developed: total serialism, in which not only the tones were organized in a predetermined series (like the tone rows in Schönberg's music), but

also the durations, the dynamics, performance characteristics and all of the other parameters in the work. The preparatory work for each composition was done with the help of a mathematical matrix. Paradoxically, this complete control of all components of the work produced music that sounds free and flexible, and this soon led to another new technique: aleatoric music. In aleatoric music, some or all of the elements of the work are left to the performers' discretion in real time, during the performance. In various parts of Europe and the U.S., other styles developed one after another, or in parallel: minimalism, sonorism⁴, spectralism⁵, and many other 'isms'. Finally, in post-modernism, all of the styles became means, tools in the composer's studio. Composers now had at their disposal countless systems for planning a composition and for the tonal organization of its components. The world of contemporary composition became a simultaneous reality of styles and techniques, some clashing with others, but all existing in parallel, with each composer choosing or constructing a musical syntax to work with. Sometimes, the same composer creates works with different styles, in different musical languages. In today's super individualistic era, one can say that not only each composer has their own theory, but sometimes even each composition.

Memory as an Anchor in my Works

Within the many ways to 'forget,' I realize that many of my compositions deal with memory in one way or another, with a connection to the recent or distant past, familiar or muted. If in order to start composing I try to forget, it turns out that during the course of the work itself I actually engage in remembering: I find myself drawing musical inspiration from the past, from what was forgotten or is liable to be forgotten. I've discovered that during my three and a half decades of composing, I've referenced memory in nearly every composition, on different levels and in one or more of five main ways:

- *Integrative reference*: using techniques, tonal structures or musical styles from the past, but embedding them entirely in the new context of my personal and contemporary musical language.

4 Sonorism: A composing technique and musical style that emphasizes the timbre and sound of each tone (sonor). This style developed in the Polish School of the 1960s, led by the composer Krzysztof Penderecki.

5 Spectralism: A composing technique and musical style based on the acoustic properties of sound, with composing decisions made with the help of graphical representation and mathematical analysis of the sound spectrum. This style developed in France in the 1970s and was led by the composers Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail.

- *Abstract reference*: the piece includes no reference to musical material from the past, but is inspired by an abstract element from the past, musical or theoretical.
- *Reference of deconstruction and reconstruction*: after dismantling musical-textual material from the past (an old melody, folk song, literary text or Early music work), I use its components as building blocks for a new work.
- *Concrete reference at a specific point*: quoting from a musical source from the past at a particular point in the new composition.
- *Concrete reference in the entire work*: the work is an arrangement of an old folk song or of an early music piece. In such arrangements, I leave the original melody at the center, easily recognizable, with almost no change. And I compose a musical envelope for it, conducting an intercultural and interstylistic dialogue between my personal, contemporary musical language and the cultural context of the original.

Of the many possible examples, I chose to illustrate some of these references via three works:

A. *The Return to Koenigstrasse* viola concerto (2011)⁶

Like many of my compositions, this concerto includes integrative references to memory: Early music systems of organization are embedded within my personal, contemporary musical language. (For example, the work includes the use of modes – the ancient systems of tones that preceded the major and minor scales). The work also employs playing techniques that are closer to the folk and early way of playing music. (For example, the violist is required to play without the vibrato that is typical of classical concert playing.) However, I chose this work as an example of an abstract reference to memory: The piece includes no reference or quotation of music from the past, but the core inspiration is a memory from the past.

The work was commissioned by conductor Doron Salomon and the Israel Sinfonietta Be'er Sheva. When I started working on it, I didn't know what type of composition it would be or what it would be based on. I sat in the living room in the evening and tried to clear my thoughts and my inner ear by composing sketches on a large music notation sheet. The size of the sheet amplifies the empty space I experience: Countless notes have already been written; countless notes are still possible. It was clear to me that all of the notes I was writing in

⁶ A video documentation of the work is available on *YouTube* under the title: "Eitan Steinberg, Viola Concert." See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHgzJ0bmYsg>. (accessed: 7.4.24).

those moments were irrelevant to the composition, and still I continued writing as if reacquainting myself with the viola, and thinking anew about the concept of ‘concerto’ and what it means here and now. And then, a telephone call interrupted my work: My brother Ilan was calling from Germany, where he was working. He told me that he was in the city of Münster, at 33 Koenigstrasse, and was surprised to find two *Stolpersteine* (from the German artist Gunter Demnig’s project) on the sidewalk across from the entrance to the building. The stones bore the names of Siegfried Steinberg and Helene Steinberg. Within seconds, a photograph of the two stones also popped up on my phone and stirred a whirlwind of emotions. Almost nothing had been told to us, and what little was told did not correspond to what was written on the *Stolpersteine*. A thundering silence clouded the history of my father’s family, and he used to cynically dismiss our questions by saying that his family was inclined to insanity. He explained the death of several uncles by telling us that they had gone insane and committed suicide. The lack of clarity and consistency in his answers to our questions immediately disappeared, and the reason for the obscurity was suddenly obvious. In a single moment, I was brought back to the Steinberg family’s home at 33 Koenigstrasse, the home where my grandfather grew up with his sisters and brothers. Two of them continued to live there when they were older. The circumstances of their death were now clear:

HIER WOHNTE SIEGFRIED STEINBERG JG. 1875
DEPORTIERT 1942 THERESIENSTADT ERMORDET 27.3.1944

HIER WOHNTE HELENE STEINBERG JG. 1882
VOR DEPORTATION FLUCHT IN DEN TOD 3.11.1941

[Here lived Siegfried Steinberg, b. 1875
Deported in 1942 to Theresienstadt, murdered March 27, 1944]

Here lived Helene Steinberg, b. 1882
Fled and was killed before the deportation, November 3, 1941]

Since I only knew the factual details inscribed on the *Stolpersteine*, I decided to imagine a family past of emotions, relationships, conversations and family tales, an extensive heritage. The concerto for viola started to take shape, inspired by a series of imaginary conversations and interviews I conducted with my father’s uncles, those whose fate was unknown to me – until they suddenly reappeared in a formative event. I call it ‘formative’ because all at once I was umbilically reconnected to a land, place and language that were foreign to me, unbeloved and frightening, and now took on a new meaning. The renewed and surprising encounter brought Siegfried and Helene back to the family, along with our centuries-old connection to the Münster area, where our family had lived since the

Middle Ages. At the same time, this event also restored to Siegfried and Helene what they had lost – their home, their city, their future family.

The work has three movements played with no pause between them. It was composed from an associative connection with the renewed encounter: The first movement is pensive, as if describing Siegfried and Helene's distant and probing contemplation – somewhere from the world beyond – of the events of the war and the human condition in this world. The second movement offers a more lyrical approach, with longing for life, for love, for freedom. The third movement is written in the spirit of the optimistic heritage of the Steinberg family: Love people, love life, live life to the fullest! An interlude with an oboe solo, which repeats in variants, marks the end of a movement and the start of a new movement. The interlude functions in the work as a veil of memory, thinly concealing something that was unknown and forgotten. The proximity of 'unknown' and 'forgotten' is not a contradiction in my view. As stated, I believe that knowledge is not only stored in the physical body, but also exists in other dimensions. Another role of the oboe interlude, is to enable the work 'to breathe' between movements, to rest for a moment in order to enable the containing of what follows. Every interlude is a pause from the effort of remembering, a short plunge into the pillow of forgetfulness.

B. *Dancing Memory Fish* for voice and ensemble (2012)⁷

The work was composed for the voice of my partner in life and artistic work, Ety BenZaken, for performance with the Israeli Contemporary Players. At the time I composed it, Ety and I were part of the 'Memory and Fiction' research group. My persistent focus on memory further sharpened in the wake of the meetings with this group and took form in this work, whose subject is the phenomenon of memory itself. It's a sort of musical diary of reflections, a meditation on forgetting and remembering – two elusive components of consciousness that are as slippery as a fish, with an impressive ability to dance within our minds. The composition is an example of integrative reference to memory (here too, because of my very musical language, which embeds tonal systems and techniques that existed in Early music). It's also an example of abstract reference to memory (because the inspiration for the work is memory as a conceptual topic). But I present it here as an example of specific concrete reference to memory: The work incorporates three musical quotations of children's folk songs, quotations that are different and detached from the general musical language of the work.

⁷ A video documentation of the work is available on YouTube under the title: "Eitan Steinberg – Dancing Memory Fish – Ety BenZaken." See: <https://youtu.be/x0p3gPkNw5M?si=cZPu0SLKowVzKvrD>. (accessed: 8.1.25).

As a text for the work, I selected a number of sentences from “Tract on Memory” by the Israeli poet Harold Schimmel, a poetic work in the English language, built as a series of personal and philosophical reflections on the essence of memory. Here are a few sentences from it:

The life expectancy of a memory, like life expectancy itself, is completely variable, liable to accident, permutation. / As we know from photographs, backgrounds exist with pertinent information that the eye may or may not have recorded. / But like at the library of scrolls at Alexandria, the images all the time lose something – The black ink goes ghostly brown. Sometimes dries, flakes and vanishes. / How is it possible to imagine objective reality entering subjective consciousness and re-emerging without being tainted by its residence?

The music in the work echoes various characteristics of memory: It contains musical contrasts such as repetitiveness versus staticity, frenetic activity versus flowing movement, deceleration versus acceleration, fullness versus sparseness, tumultuous noise versus calm silence; these contrasts sometimes appear in multiple layers, simultaneously. As in other vocal works of mine, in which I enjoy exploring and broadening the musical use of voice and language, here too the vocal role includes transitions from singing to speaking, murmuring and the fragmentation of words: This time, these transitions reflect not only my musical interest in the connection between word, pronunciation and sound, but also the processes that occur in our minds when we think and talk, remember and forget.

The three quotations of children’s songs appear as three sudden breaks in different places in the work. They interrupt the work’s continuity, narrative and flow of time, as well as the performance of Harold Schimmel’s text. In those places, the singer performs three folk nonsense songs and play songs. She performs them in the style of a folk singer, unlike the vocal style used in the rest of the work; she pronounces their lyrics with clear diction, unlike the complex singing-speaking games that appear in the rest of the work; and she performs them in three different languages – German, Ladino and Arabic – which interrupts the flow of Schimmel’s English-language poetry. These are clear windows of memory from a distant childhood, like the childhood memories that in old age become alive and real, sharper than memories of the recent past. One song is a children’s ditty my grandmother used to sing to me, in German, while I ‘rode’ on her knees.

Hoppe, hoppe, Reiter / Wenn er fällt, dann schreit er / Fällt er in den Graben / Fressen ihn die Raben / Fällt er in den Sumpf / Macht der Reiter plumps!

[Hop, hop, rider / when he falls then he will cry / If he falls into the ditch / the crows will eat him. / If he falls into the swamp / the rider will go plop!]

When singing the last word, my grandmother would suddenly spread her knees and almost let me fall to the floor, only to save me with a big smile and immediate place me back in the saddle on her knees. The second children's song was used by Sephardic Jews in Turkey to play the very same game. Etty's grandmother would sing it to her, in Ladino sprinkled with Turkish words, while she rocked her on her knees and almost dropped her at the end of the song:

Kayikchi, Balata / Pishkadiko de la mar / Pum, pum / Se kayo a la mar!

[One sailor, on the shores of Balata / A fish from the sea / Pum, pum / fell in the sea!]

The third song is an Arabic nonsense song that Etty learned from her students in the Theater Department at the University of Haifa. Like folk nonsense songs in many languages, it is a collection of sentences that do not create a logical narrative, but connect only in rhyme and association. Here's a section of the song:

والاوضه الها مفتاح / والمفتاح عند الحداد / والحداد بدو بيضه / والبييضه تحت الجاجه / والجاجة بدها قمحه
والقمحه فالطاحونة

[The door has a key / And the key is with the locksmith / And the locksmith wants an egg /
And the egg is under the hen / And the hen wants flour / and the flour is at the mill.]

These quotations lead us into another dimension, detached from the reality of the composition, but not detached from the consciousness of the person who remembers. On the contrary, the moment the window of memory appears, each of the listeners experiences an immediate process of remembering: We remember what we've forgotten, what we've repressed, what is obsolete or abandoned, in this or that children's song, and also the people who sang to us, the sound of their voice, the touch of their hands. When the window of quotation closes, the listeners immediately return to the reality of the composition, until the next interruption. These windows are a pause (static or active) from the continuity of the composition, moments of dreaming. In the words of Harold Schimmel's poem:

"Put remembering to sleep and you come up with dream."

C. *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart* – music sound track for an installation (2015)⁸

The installation *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart* consists of a sound track I created and from large fabric art works that Etty made. We created the joint work with the support of The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, for the exhibition that concluded the research of the ‘Memory and Fiction’ group. The work addresses the recalling of memories by weaving fragments of memories into a simultaneous sequence, layered and polyphonic. For each visitor in the installation space, the impetus for remembrance is visual – the silk fabric scrolls that Etty created, on which dozens of memories are inscribed; and audio – the music and the countless narrative voices emanating from the sound track. Sometimes the voice of one person is clearly heard, sometimes two people speak in a duet, sometimes there are multiple voices speaking simultaneously – and the musical tones enwrap-rock the multiple voices. The memories come from many sources and places, and create a fabric of common memory: common to all of the forgotten, to all of the remembered, to all of the visitors in the installation space.

The audio building blocks I chose for the work were from three sources:

1. Audio documentation of stories and conversations of members of the ‘Memory and Fiction’ research group in a meeting that was devoted to the members’ personal interest in the question of memory. Some members of the group also brought recordings of their family members, including some who were no longer alive.
2. Audio documentation of members of Etty’s family and my family, from our personal and family archives. These included stories, conversations and events, starting from the 1960s and continuing into recent years.
3. Excerpts from recordings of four of my compositions: The concerto for viola and orchestra *The Return to Koenigstrasse*, the piano composition *Angel’s Steps*, the voice and viola work *In a Hidden Cleft Among Cliffs* and the symphonic work *Cosmic Progressions in the Heart*.

During the composition process I acted according to two principles I set for myself at the outset:

1. The continuity of the work will be created with the composition techniques I use when composing works for live performance. But here I’ll translate those

⁸ An excerpt from the installation is available on *YouTube* under the title: “BenZaken-Steinberg: Amulet for the Widening of the Heart.” See: <https://youtu.be/k6B5CukXjwg?si=WDNwRREXNsgRZmwM>. (accessed: 8.1.25).

techniques into studio work in order to construct a composition that is meant to be heard as a sound track.

2. The work will have a spiral structure, without a starting point or end point, and the sound track will be played in a loop. Each visitor who enters the hall, at any random point of time, will experience that point as a musical starting point. And the moment the visitor leaves the hall will be the end point.

I treated the various sources of sound as if they were musical instruments in an ensemble or orchestra, and I treated the possibilities of combining them as if they were possibilities of texture and orchestration. Each of the recorded voices carries a number of simultaneous characteristics: vocal timbre, volume, intonation and a spoken text that includes language, pronunciation and content. As with all recorded vocal information, especially when it conveys a text, there is an experience of here and now: When we hear the recordings, the things that were said in the past are brought back into the present. This game of past and present, forgotten and remembered, was sometimes disorienting for me during the process of composing; I felt that the recordings of people, some of them already deceased, made them real and present again in the world.

It took several months to compose the work. First, I collected all of the recordings and listened to them in their entirety. While listening, I marked potential excerpts that seemed appropriate for the work, based on their content and criteria of timbre and intonation, suitability for a particular texture, pace of speech and word flow – fluent or hesitant. I chose excerpts of different lengths, ranging from one to thirty seconds each. I made a list of all the excerpts and created a catalogue of hundreds of fragments and their details. After narrowing down the choices – sometimes choosing only a word or two from a recording – I created the pool of excerpts for the work. In parallel, while working with the spoken recordings, I chose four of my music compositions that I felt had potential for meshing with the spoken fragments.

Equipped with all of the building materials I had chosen and their ‘catalogue,’ I headed to the studio. The weaving and mixing of materials was done in the studio in real time, with almost no planning in advance⁹. To deal with the broad scope of possibilities and abundance of recording channels, I sometimes tried to avoid complete control of the materials and to leave my knowledge somewhat nebulous. On one hand, I had to plan the use of hundreds of fragments, their duration and placement. On the other hand, I didn’t want to know exactly where I

⁹ The recording was made at Eshel Studios in Tel Aviv, with the substantial assistance of the recording technician Rafi Eshel, with whom I’ve enjoyed working for many years.

was in the work and which of the characters had already ‘appeared.’ I wanted to allow the work itself to guide me and to develop gradually. There was a sort of bipolar situation of remembering and forgetting, with constant movement between the two, a gentle pulse that enabled me to contain the many materials and to compose. The texture was created by merging the spoken fragments and music excerpts; I did that so meticulously that within one month, about seventy parallel sound channels were created, that incorporate the abundance of information. In addition to the challenge posed by the multiplicity of materials, it was a challenge to manage the unique mergers created in the studio; memory worked overtime.

Amulet for the Widening of the Heart includes a wide range of references to memory. In fact, we can find all five of the types of references to memory listed above: integrative reference – because elements from the past are deeply embedded in my musical language; abstract reference – because the theoretical inspiration for the work was the idea of a pool of shared human memory; reference of deconstruction and reconstruction – because the recorded spoken fragments function in the work not only as inspiration, but also as musical raw materials: some were deconstructed and became building blocks for the composition, and their clear and spoken source of sound could no longer be identified; concrete-specific reference – because many fragments of spoken texts were preserved ‘as is’ in the layered and contemporary texture, functioning like musical quotations from the past. In addition, parts of the work can be viewed as if they were units with full concrete reference to memory: Similar to the folk songs I arranged, I left recorded fragments here and there (primarily fragments in which people presented something in song and not in speech) and I treated them as if they were an old tune that I wish to arrange. In these cases, I left the ‘melody’ at ‘center stage,’ and enveloped it with a so-called arrangement. Besides all of these references, there were additional layers: Quotations of quotations were created by the very fact that I also included recordings of performances of previous works of my own; dialogues of memories emerged when I included new recordings of Etty, responding in singing to a recording of her mother and grandmother singing the same song.

Despite the multiplicity of audio materials, the complexity of combining them and the simultaneous textures, joined by the internal voices of the visitors in the exhibition space as they read and remember – despite all this, *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart* is, most of the time, a quiet, gentle piece. I see it as a lace embroidery: When you move closer to the embroidery, you notice the multitude of tiny woven details; but from a distance, like when the visitors at the exhibition listen to the sound track heard in the installation space, the copious texture is not threatening or burdensome at all. It’s a soft and inviting fabric. It invites the listeners to tour the rich and layered realms of remembering and forgetting.

Etty BenZaken, Vocalist and Multidisciplinary Artist

My grandmother Esther was the one who taught me the song “Arvoles lloran por luvias” (“Trees Cry for Rain”). It was from her that I learned Ladino love songs, and for each song she had a story too. This is her story about this song, as she used to tell me in her broken Hebrew:

At our place in Bursa, there was a man who sang very beautifully. Those songs, the old ones. He would sing the songs that only old women in Bursa remembered. People would beg him to sing, because back then we didn’t have radios:

“Come sing by **my** house.”

“No, come sing by my house.”

“No, come to **us**, because my mother too wants to hear you. We’ll prepare fruits and sweets from the best of Bursa!”



Fig. 1: Esther Molcho, Israel, 2005

“No,” he would answer, “without the sweets.” Because he didn’t want people to come for the food; he wanted them to come only for the songs. And so, they would decide on a place, everybody would gather, and he would sing, so beautifully:

*Arvoles lloran por luvias
y montanias por aires
ansi lloran los mis ojos
por ti, querida amante*

It means – “like the trees cry for rain, like the mountain cries for the wind to come, so my eyes cry for you, because I love you so much.” Truly, he loved a young girl in Bursa, but his father married him off to a rich man’s daughter in Istanbul. Many years later, when he visited Bursa, he would stand by the house of his first love and sing, “Arvoles lloran por luvias,” so she’d know that he still remembered her.”

This story is about an individual memory: a man sings to his first love. Many years after I started singing it in my concerts, I learned – first through someone from the audience who came to tell me, later through folklorists – that this song is also tied to the memory of an entire community because of the refrain “I go and wonder, asking what will become of me / In a foreign land I will die.” The Jews of Salonika sang this song in Auschwitz.

Etty BenZaken

Amulet for the Widening of the Heart

In a digital, post-multimedia era – in which interdisciplinary artists document their inner body activities on smart devices, broadcast them to screens, translate the data into computerized animation and transform them into laser drawings – in this era, I record people's stories, transcribe the recordings and handwrite them on fabrics, those that tear, shrink and get soiled, those you need to iron and which yellow over time. I then piece them together with a visible, hand-sewn seam. For three months I worked on *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart*¹ – an installation created with music by my husband and collaborator, composer Eitan Steinberg – and every few days the doubts and despondency revisited me: Fabrics are too material in this world that has become completely virtual. To sew today is pathetic.

Many meters of natural silk are spread across our living room, after I have cleared out all of the furniture. But the shape and structure of the future quilt are still unclear to me, so I concentrate on transcribing the texts I recorded. Some are memories that I have documented from my family elders; others are memories that Eitan and I recorded specifically for this installation, from our friends in the “Memory and Fiction” research group. The listening and the transcribing take time. In order to keep the personal nature of the storytelling, I do only little editing, leaving the texts in the spoken manner and in the first person, and write them on silk fabrics in simple handwriting, in colors: I cut squares of fabric in all sorts of sizes, stretch them across the worktable, plan the size of the letters and number of rows, and slowly copy each word, careful not to make spelling errors or stains. Every time I make a mistake, I discard the fabric and start anew. Like a Torah scribe, but instead of sacred verses, I write memories.

A Story for the Installation, by Eyal Donagi

I have a childhood memory – a bit foggy – from age six or seven: I had a tire, from a car, and I would take it and roll it. You know, there's a method to roll it and run after it, so I'd roll it from home to the forest. And every time I went there – I somehow was sure that I was going to meet God . . . there, in the area between the road and the forest . . . And I

1 Etty BenZaken (visual design and fabric art works) and Eitan Steinberg (soundtrack and original music), *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart* – installation, 2015. Commissioned by The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute with the support of the Polonsky family, as part of the *What is Memory? 70 Years Later* exhibit.

Note: A chapter from: BenZaken, Etty. (2019). *The Box of Voices – Essays of an Interdisciplinary Artist* [Hebrew], Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad.

don't know what really happened when I got there . . . I only remember that walk, with the intention.

I approached the subject of memory through my ongoing research on folklore and the way that personal and communal memories are passed on through folk songs, folktales and memorates. Memory is a creative material that has also inspired Eitan's musical work for years, first through his ongoing engagement with folk music, and second through his creative approach to specific memories: The invitation from Michal Govrin to join the research group found him busy composing a concerto for viola, *The Return to Koenigstrasse*,² engaging in an imagined conversation with his uncle and aunt who perished in the Shoah.³

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute's wonderful decision to host an exhibition to summarize our research group's activity encouraged both of us to implement an idea that had been waiting in our drawer: to weave into a single work of art the recordings of our families' elders, in which they shared their memories in various languages. We imagined a work composed of two layers. One layer, of audio, will comprise a musical soundtrack incorporating fragments of the storytellers' voices; another layer, a visual one, will consist of texts written on large quilts. The two layers will densely fill a single space, and those who enter it will hear and read fragments of dozens of memorates. Each visitor's internal voice of reading will add another layer of sound, unheard in the space but heard in their minds; the visitors' own personal memories that come to mind will further add to the internal sound. Eitan and I saw in our imaginations how each visitor enters the exhibition hall at a particular moment in the soundtrack, stops to read one particular text of the dozens of stories, adds memories of their own in their thoughts, and thus experiences a personal, singular version of the installation. We asked our friends from the research group to come to a special meeting in which we'd record their memories as well, and we cautiously suggested to anyone so inclined to bring recordings from the elders in their family.

A Story for the Installation, by Michal Aharony

I'm third generation. My grandfather was the sole survivor of his entire family, and he didn't speak about it. We barely know what happened. He came from an ultra-Orthodox family, and was apparently slated to become a learned rabbi. He apparently fled to Siberia, and ultimately became a laborer, a failed contractor. Only a few years ago, I discovered the fate of his family in "pages of testimony" at Yad Vashem: two brothers, two sisters and two parents who were killed. But he . . . total silence.

2 Eitan Steinberg, *The Return to Koenigstrasse* – a concerto for viola and orchestra, 2011. Commissioned by the Israel Sinfonietta Be'er Sheva.

3 See Eitan Steinberg's chapter in this section.

In the exciting meeting in preparation for the future installation, our friends from the research group told us family anecdotes, shared songs they recalled from their childhood and literary texts that left a special impact on them. They generously shared with us family documents and precious recordings of their older relatives, including some who had already passed away: Yolanda Gampel read from the letters her mother and grandmother wrote to each other during World War II from opposite sides of the ocean, until her grandmother's murder along with the other Jews in Plungyan (Plungė); Odeya Kohen Raz brought a music notebook in which her father wrote his first compositions as a child; Michal Govrin brought a recording of her mother imitating the call-song of the synagogue beadle in Kraków; Rina Dudai brought a photograph of the last postcard her grandmother sent from Auschwitz.

We recorded the meeting. Eitan clipped dozens of short audio segments from it and sewed them together with dozens of bits of recordings of our deceased relatives: Mama (my maternal grandmother) and my mother singing together children's songs in French and loudly laughing; Eitan's father engaged in casual conversation; Nona (my paternal grandmother) blessing my father in Arabic; Grandfather Albert BenZaken conducting his first Passover Seder in Israel, in a family recording made in 1956 on a reel-to-reel tape recorder.

For several weeks, I often went with Eitan to the recording studio, where he wove the voices into his music and created a cherished multi-layered world of sound. But along with the soundtrack that was taking shape, I also heard my heart pounding: The exhibition will open in a month and a half, and the silk fabrics are still waiting on the living room floor. The pieces of written fabrics have indeed multiplied, but all of my efforts to sew them together still look wrong to me. I sew and unstitch, and because of the delicateness of the silk, the unraveling makes holes and bunches up the fabric. When I realize that I can't use them any longer, I take another step backwards and write the stories again, on new pieces of silk. I have no choice but to defer the enormous sewing task that awaits me, until I clearly envision the correct structure of the patchwork.

A Story for the Installation, by Miriam Hamawi

In the summer, our mother would buy us sandals; she would call them *karayokas*. I don't know what that word means. The summer would arrive and she'd say to us, "Come on, let's buy *karayokas*" And our mother loved colors, so sometimes she'd buy us blue, sometimes red . . . And one time, she sewed two identical dresses for me and Margalit, made of thin red-colored wool, with pointy collars. We have a photograph together next to the house in Turkey, and we're both wearing the same dress.

In Turkey, it was common for Jews to work in textiles, so fabrics and needles run through all of the branches of my family tree. My grandfather, Nissim, had a

small fabric shop in the city of Bursa, where he also sold silk stockings, night-gowns, underwear and tablecloths. When he settled in Israel with his wife and children, he bid farewell to his beloved shop, and in the bedroom of their immigrants' apartment in Jaffa, he started a small workshop for fabric flowers. Fabric flowers were then a fashionable adornment for evening dresses, especially large roses made of the same fabric as the dress – and that was Grandfather Nissim's expertise. Ever since she was a child, my Aunt Shira worked as his sales agent: Clutching a suitcase full of flowers in her small arms, she made the rounds of all the fabric shops in Jaffa peddling her wares. There was demand for Grandfather's flowers even during the austerity period, and one shop owner would pay for them with another precious commodity: cloth handkerchiefs! As the years went by, the fashion changed, but Grandfather continued to make fabric flowers. When I was a teenager and he was already in his seventies, my father tried to explain to him that the whole business was no longer economically viable: The work was long and tedious, the daughters and granddaughters had to help, and the pay was very meager. But Grandfather continued to dip in gelatin the elegant pieces of fabric he received from the evening dresses stores, and hung them to dry on clotheslines that became sticky over the years. When the pieces of fabric hardened, he gently collected them from the line; and then, with loving skillfulness, using hot pincers and special iron stamps, he made them into petals of all sizes. When the family gathered in the evening, we worked with him, his daughters and granddaughters, like an assembly line: one cut bunches of thin metal telephone wires; the next strung small pearls through the ends of the wires, like a flower's stamen; a third wrapped the metal wires with green fabric tape, like stems. We placed the beautiful green stems, with their pearl stamens at the top, in an empty shoe box. There they awaited Grandfather, who was the only one who knew how to clothe them with fabric petals: an inner circle of small petals, a second circle of medium-sized petals, a third circle of large petals whose concavity, so convincing, was stamped into them by the hot iron. Like real magic, spectacular roses blossomed between his fingers, while in the background, a cassette tape played Ladino old songs. I learned entire songs by heart, until the cheap plastic flowers from China took over the market. The shopkeepers demanded that Grandfather lower his prices accordingly, and he was compelled to agree with my father: The whole business was no longer economically viable. The telephone wires, iron stamps and pincers were packed into shoe boxes and buried in the closet. The bedroom was no longer a workshop. Only the Ladino cassettes continued to play there.

A Story for the Installation, by Livna Matarasso

From both sides of my mother's family that remained in Salonika, only her uncle Aharon survived. He lost his wife and daughter in Auschwitz. When he arrived in Israel, many people asked him about their loved ones, and he sadly had to tell most of them that they were burned in the crematoria. He told very few stories about his survival: that he ate potato peels from the garbage, and that Salonikans, when they wanted to pass messages among themselves, would sing in Ladino. No one there understood that language but them, so they would insert into the songs the words they wished to convey. When my mother learned about the Holocaust at school and they spoke about it in class, she too said that from her family only one uncle had survived. But the teacher didn't believe her. My mother always recounts how the teacher answered her, "In everything you're jealous of us and want to be like us, the Ashkenazi Jews. But in this too?! The Shoah?!"

On the Egyptian side of my family, my father's side, the talent for textiles is linked to a dramatic incident in which Nona was the tragic hero. Even she – the wise woman who received the nickname *El Hukuma* ["the government"] – was subdued by the social conventions of Cairo of the 1930s. This is what Aunt Hilda told me, with my father interjecting from time to time:

Aunt Hilda: Our mother was very talented in sewing, very, and she wanted to work in that. Why? The situation at home was not so good, from an economic viewpoint, as they say. It's well-known, I told you, our father was very good, and wise, and with a good heart second to none, but he had . . .

My father: A *duda*. (Turning to me) Do you know what a "*duda*" is?

Aunt Hilda: (Answering for me) *Duda* in Arabic is a worm.

My father: Our mother, of blessed memory, would say: *Abouk kwayes awi, bas andu duda*. [In Arabic: "Your father is very good, but he has a worm."] And the worm was gambling.

Aunt Hilda: You know, in Egypt there were the horse races, and he would bet. He would take us, I remember it; he would stand up and shout, like you hear the fans at soccer games today: *Yalla ya Sherf! Yalla ya Sherf!* That's how he'd shout, and Mother would say, "Sit down, stop shouting." He wanted the horse he bet on to win. And at nightclubs too. Sometimes he wouldn't come home all night. We'd see him in the morning. But when he won – we were royalty. He'd buy everything for us. But he didn't always win . . . He'd also lose a lot. Our mother had an acquaintance, an Arab woman, very rich, and that woman brought her fabric and asked that she sew for her. Because Mother was such a good seamstress. Our mother agreed, but then Father came home and saw her sewing . . . Do you know what he did? That fabric – it was very expensive, very expensive, because that woman was very rich – he took it and cut it into pieces! He told Mother, "Don't ever do that again!" In their time, it was as if the husband was inferior if his wife worked. That's the way it was in Egypt. Unmarried women – they would work. But married women – never. So that's the way it was, Mother could have made a livelihood, but Father didn't allow her. That's it.

In my family tree of textile lovers, the closest branch to me is my mother. At age 13, she was sent on her own from Turkey to Mandatory Palestine out of fear of the Nazis, who had already reached the neighboring country, Greece. She arrived by train with a group of Jewish girls on January 1, 1944 (“Henrietta Szold herself welcomed us!”), and immediately changed her name from Diamante to Margalit. (“The instructor explained to me that there were several Hebrew translations for my name: Yahaloma, Pnina, Margalit. I chose Margalit.”) After her high school studies at Mikveh Israel, she joined kibbutz training at Birya, and there, in the doll factory, thanks to the charming tiny clothes she created, she became known as a talented seamstress. When she married my father and gave up the kibbutz dream, she found a job in a clothing factory. She gradually advanced up the ladder of threads until she became an independent seamstress, an expert in wedding gowns and evening dresses. Every morning, the dining corner at home would be transformed into her studio, and in the evening Mother would return it to its previous state: sweep the shiny remnants of brocade fabric and Guipure lace, and collect – using a long stick with a small magnet attached to its end – all of the pins that had fallen onto the floor that day. After finishing the work on each dress, she would conduct a special ceremony to ensure that the dress would be pleasing. Of course, the ceremony was taught to her by the family folk healer – Mama, Esther Molcho, my grandmother from the Turkish side of the family. My mother, as modern as she was, held onto it for many years. Here’s how she described it:

There were always fabrics, seamstresses and clothes in our family . . . even as a child, I helped my aunts with the hems . . . When I was already an independent seamstress and started to make wedding gowns, Mama told me that I should take each dress I’ve completed into the bathroom for a moment. She said it would bring good luck, and the dress would always be pleasing and attractive – in the eyes of the one who wears it and in the eyes of those who see her. So when I finished a wedding dress, I would take it on the hanger, with the trail and everything, and hop into the bathroom (laughs). Do you remember that? I’d hold it up high so that it wouldn’t get dirty, God forbid, stand for a moment and then go out. Mama would say, “There isn’t a person who doesn’t go to the bathroom, right? Even the king. So, in the same way, there isn’t a person who won’t love the dress” (laughs). Those were the beliefs they had in their generation . . . But it’s a fact that the dresses I sewed always were a success! They always were pleasing!

Over the years, my mother sewed my concert dresses for me and the costumes for my theatrical shows. She’d make the cuts on paper according to the sketches I drew, and while I was drawing on the paper, we would argue. For example, before the music theater production *Princess of Five Faces*:⁴

⁴ Etty BenZaken (text, stage directing, set design) and Eitan Steinberg (music), *Princess of Five Faces* – music-theater for a singer-actress and ensemble, 1995.

Mother (complaining and imploring, but in a restrained voice): Why do you always need everything to be complicated? Do you think anyone in the audience will see it? After all, they're sitting far away. Do what I tell you, it's much simpler: The outside of the coat, the blue side, can be sewn from wild silk, okay. But the inside, the red, doesn't need to be made from such fabric. It's hard to work with, and it's expensive too. And then, everything you bump into – will pull a thread and leave a mark, a little wrinkle. It would be better to do the inside with lining cloth. It will shine nicely for you, and in any case, you say that they'll only see the red side for a short time.

Me (insisting): No. Both sides from wild silk. Even if they won't see the details from a distance. I chose wild silk because it's woven from two threads, lengthwise in one shade of color, and widthwise in another shade. In the stage lights, the folds of the fabric will shine in special hues.

Mother (now angry): A two-sided coat of wild silk, one blue, one red, which won't show the seams on either side, and from which the lighting will draw out the crisscross threads. You yourself must hear that it's exaggerated, right?

Nonetheless, she sits and sews, and a magnificent royal coat emerges from her handiwork: two-sided with internal seams, each side with perfect finish.

When I created *Fabric Stories*⁵ for my students at the University of Haifa, my mother was no longer alive. I inherited her sewing machine, but I didn't know how to use it. So instead of using it to sew together the hundreds of fabric squares that comprised the quilt the actors worked on during the performance, I connected the squares with pins and hired a professional seamstress to sew them together according to my instructions. It was only during the preparation work for the exhibition of our "Memory and Fiction" group that I finally dared to learn how to sew. I opened the machine – which had stood idle in my home for nearly five years, closed and covered – and discovered the treasures my mother had saved for me. For certain "saved for me" because Mother, who was aware of her approaching death, took the trouble in her last months to organize the closets, give away fabrics, pass on jewelry and hand out some of her things as gifts. She even marshaled her remaining strength to alter one of my performance dresses – after noticing in a concert video that it was a bit large for me. While she worked, she kept repeating in my ears the steps for installing the top thread in the sewing machine. She managed to also arrange the machine's small inner compartment, and this is what she left in it: her scissors; three issues of the *Burda* fashion magazine (not recent ones, but issues devoted to teaching the basics of cutting and sewing); a box of ribbons and zippers; a box of threads in all sorts of colors; a tiny box of pins; needles for the machine; metal spools for filling the lower thread; a tiny bottle of machine oil;

5 Etty BenZalen (text, stage directing, set design), *Fabric Stories* – multi-lingual stage production for 16 actors. Produced by the Theater Department, University of Haifa, 2011.

a tiny screwdriver. The seamstress who came to my home to teach me to sew was excited: “For five years you didn’t open the machine and look how it’s preserved! Everything’s ready for you, just sew!” But I, who as noted “always needs everything to be complicated,” chose for this installation silk of the type used for drawing – transparent, delicate and vulnerable – like the human stories I write on it. I immediately realized that I couldn’t run it through a sewing machine because the fabric’s very thin fibers get caught and tear. So, I did learn to use the machine, but the enormous project that lay before me would require me to sew by hand.

A Story for the Installation, by Meir Appelfeld

After people leave us, it’s always interesting how they remain with us . . . not intellectually – not what they wrote or said, but their presence. In the case of some people, for example, we don’t remember exactly what they looked like. On the other hand, there are people, such as Dan Pagis, whose presence is very strong and hypnotic for those who knew him. His name was mentioned, and I immediately saw him sitting. Here, on the chair.

Meanwhile, while roaming the Internet, I learned how silk threads are produced. It turns out that their shine is connected to the fact that the threads contain animal protein. The cocoons of the silk worms are steamed, or boiled in water, while still alive; only in this way do the silk fibers they weave around themselves remain intact and can be used to produce a long and strong thread. I was shocked by this information, and the claim that there’s no evidence that cocoons are capable of feeling pain did not help. Though I was shaken, I decided not to change the fabric at this stage of the work. Frightened, with new doubts, I conveyed my heartfelt thanks to the tens of thousands of small larvae, who in diligent toil infused the silk with their life force, which now illuminates the fabric with a special gleam.

What will be the right structure? What is the appropriate inspiration for its form? With which world of textile will the quilt engage in dialogue? Hovering in my imagination were fabrics sewn and embroidered in all sorts of styles, places and periods – for example, an American quilt from 1889 that I saw at The Jewish Museum in New York. The quilt had belonged to a family of immigrants from Russia, and it appeared that the women of the family had sewn some of the squares while still in their former homeland, because the pieces were connected using techniques typical of Jewish sewing in Eastern Europe. On that quilt, the square patches are surrounded by a frame of a different fabric. The frame is decorated with small, colorful applications: images from nature (flowers, birds), Jewish symbols (the Star of David), American motifs (a tennis racket, an American flag, an admiral, a rocking chair) and Russian motifs (a dancer in folk costume, a man in Russian attire playing a balalaika). Without any words, the quilt tells a complete story about a Jewish family thrilled by its new homeland – where its admiral is victorious and expands its borders, where there is leisure to play sports, where

there are birds, flowers, and even a rocking chair for resting a bit and enjoying them, but where there are still longings for what was left behind, in Russia, for the balalaika that resounds in their memories.

A Story for the Installation, by Sandra Meiri

I think that I've tried to connect to this type of memory my whole life. To the wealth of pre-Israeli Judaism. I suffered so much when we came to Israel . . . I was nine years old. I didn't find myself in anything – not in the youth movement, not in anything. And I didn't understand why we needed to sing all of those songs. When we arrived in Israel, my mother said to us, "Girls, now you're free. We've come home." And I thought, what home? What am I even doing here? . . . So I built a home for myself in books and in music.

Alongside the American-Russian quilt, the white linen and underwear of the Sephardi-Jewish dowry are also folded in my thoughts: six tablecloths, a dozen napkins, six sheets, a dozen pillow cases, a dozen nightgowns and the same number of underpants – all embroidered on their edges with dainty hand-knitted decorations. But not all of the dowry is white: There are also colorful velvet fabrics with magnificent adornments embroidered with golden thread. In the book *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire: Aspects of Material Culture*,⁶ scholar Esther Juhasz describes the items sewed from those splendid fabrics: the dresses worn by the bride at the wedding events, the impressive bedspreads, and especially the bedspread that will cover the bed on the wedding night, and the one on which the woman will rest after giving birth, when she receives guests in her room, resting against the embroidered pillows. Juhasz describes the custom of donating such items when they get old – sometimes after being used for several generations – as a gift to the synagogue: A dedication to the deceased woman is added to the bedspread and it becomes a curtain for the Torah ark; the fabrics migrate from the intimate feminine world at home to the public sacred world of the synagogue and become cloaks for the Torah scroll, which is tied with their sashes; the cloth is also used for tablecloths and napkins and for covering Elijah's chair, as well as for wedding canopies and sukkahs. From Mama's stories, I know that the close connection between the female body and female work on the one hand, and the sacred world and religious faith on the other hand, did not end when the fabrics reached the synagogue; sometimes the cloth also made its way back again:

Mama: I too gave birth at home, with my mother of blessed memory. At home it was truly better than at a hospital. I gave birth to my four children at home, and only when I came to Israel and gave birth once more, I went to a hospital. And what agony I suffered there. Oy-yoy-yoy. At the hospital, everyone is angry, and the women are one next to the other, the

6 Juhasz, Esther. (ed.). (1990). *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire: Aspects of Material Culture*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum.

nurse is busy, she prepares gauzes, compresses, who will hear me? And in our place, in Turkey, when we gave birth at home, how they would help, poor things. If they saw a woman was in severe pain – they'd all run to the synagogue and bring the Torah curtain to place on her belly, and tell people to come and read psalms by her side.

When I think about the healing qualities of the Torah curtain, I notice that amulets made of parchment or paper hover among the fabrics fluttering in my imagination – the type of small protecting amulets that Mama would give me to place in my garments, keep in my bag or take with me on flights. Some of them were handwritten amulets, specially ordered for me, with my name; others were printed amulets that Mama purchased or received at the synagogue. The Hebrew letters were sometimes written in Rashi script or in enigmatic initials, and other times in graphic patterns of a menorah or checkered cubes. I sit and read my favorite book, *The Hebrew Amulet*,⁷ and examine photographs of Jewish amulets from Ashkenaz, Afghanistan, Morocco. The shape of the parchment is often very elongated, laden with texts in tiny letters. Suddenly, the structure – and the essence – of my quilt dawns on me: It will be a patchwork of giant amulets stretching from the ceiling to the floor – not of sacred verses, but of mundane human stories. Each of the amulet's fabric quilts will be two-sided, and each piece of fabric will be sewn precisely parallel to the one behind it: In the right lighting, the story written on one side will be lightly reflected within the story written on the other side. In each such giant amulet, the story squares will be made of white natural silk, but will be surrounded by a frame composed of rich and colorful remnants of colorful wild silk, echoing the decorations on the dresses, bedspreads and embroidered Torah curtains. The amulets-Torah curtains remind me of a passage from the novel *What's Written Above*⁸ where I placed a spiritual last will in the mouth of one of the characters:

I'm rambling on. All I wanted was to ask you: Don't hide from your children. Tell them about yourselves, about your childhood. Show them the family photo album and write down for them the names of those in the photos. Dear children, love your mother, Elsa. Even when she grows old and bent, see her through the wrinkles, through the crooked fingers. She's still the beautiful young woman from the port of Jaffa. No, she's not a young woman – she's the freckled girl in the sailor's suit, graceful and sweet-lipped. Look at her through time, and not only her; see the child in every old person and the old person in every child. Perhaps it will be hard to contain all those memories that will emerge from the endless human stories, that flood of compassion that will pound on your heart, that love for all human beings. But don't be deterred by the difficulty, children, the heart can widen.

7 Davis, Eli and Frankel, David A. (1995). *The Hebrew Amulet* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Institute for Jewish Studies.

8 BenZaken, Etty. (2004). *What's Written Above* [Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 109.

When I recall this text, the name and purpose of the installation becomes clear to me: This work, bursting with stories and memories, is an Amulet for the Widening of the Heart.

In a one-month marathon, I sewed the fabric art works: five large silk quilts – perhaps contemporary Torah curtains, perhaps giant amulets. Each fabric is three meters tall and one meter wide, and is composed of three layers in the best tradition of American quilts: One is an internal silk layer, continuous and unseen; on each side, another layer is sewed to it, comprised of many dozens of fabric squares of different sizes. I wrote about 120 texts on these patches. Most of them are personal stories and memories, and the others are literary texts, folk songs, liturgical poems, and biblical commentary mentioned by the storytellers. Most of them are in Hebrew, while some are in English, Aramaic, German, Hungarian, Yiddish, Ladino, Latin, Arabic, Polish, French and Russian. A single silk print of a photo is also sewn onto each of the five quilts, and the small images stand out in the multitude of written words: a photo of the last postcard that Rina’s grandmother sent from Auschwitz; a photo of an unfinished napkin that Michal’s mother knit; a photo from the music notebook of Odeya’s father; a photo of a tiny amulet that I carried in my clothes as a child; a photo of a small metal hoop that Livna’s grandmother used for healing. At the back of one of the patchworks, I sewed together dozens of single words, in a narrow and elongated structure. Those were the remnants of the fabrics I ruined while sewing and unstitching. Together, they now formed a tall tower – the enlarged shape of a Kurdish amulet from Persia. Among the five large fabrics, I placed a wooden box with lemons inside. Letters of the Hebrew alphabet are written with clove nails on each of the lemons – and that’s because of something Mama told me: “If you want to pray and you don’t know how to ask, simply recite all of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and ask the angels to arrange them on your behalf.”

One of my quilts stands out, adorned with Rashi script, with words in an arched structure, all an echo and memory of the Torah curtains in the synagogue. The text on it is a great amulet. It’s true that I made it up, but as a Torah scribe of memories, I wrote it in fervent devotion:

Those who see and hear these words
and intend with all their heart,
these words shall be for them
an amulet for good remembering
And those who wish to forget their heart’s burden, shall add
and for good forgetting
And those who wish to remember,
but whose chest is too narrow to contain so many memories, shall add
and for the widening of the heart



Fig 2: The installation space for *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart* by Etty BenZaken (fabric works) and Eitan Steinberg (soundtrack and original music), in the exhibition “What is memory? – 70 years after”, Polonsky building, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem, 2015.

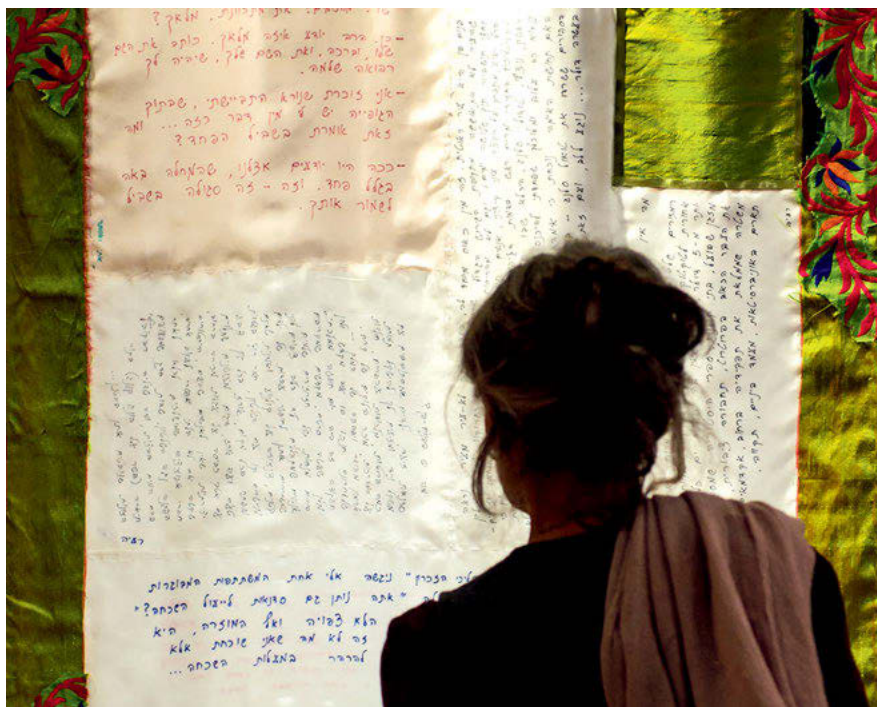


Fig 3: From the installation *Amulet for the Widening of the Heart* by Etty BenZaken and Eitan Steinberg.



Section Six: **Representation and Responsibility**



Fig. 1: Hunger in Rithy Panh's *Exil* (Cambodia/France, 2016).

This frame is taken from the film *Exil* by Cambodian-French director Rithy Panh, who devoted his oeuvre to documenting the Cambodian genocide. The all-encompassing hunger of the Cambodian Revolution is embodied in this image of a barefoot boy curled inside a dinner plate, a symbolic memory of his parental home, one that becomes his whole world, a yearning for consolation.

I grew up in Israel during the 1950s and 1960s, haunted by photographs of *Muselmänner* and tales of Holocaust inmates who fought to survive their dreadful hunger by telling stories about the meals they used to eat. Rithy Panh, a survivor of the Cambodian genocide whose entire family perished, created a body of work that is an example of art created by survivors that expresses the horrific world they experienced. Art thus becomes not a cathartic media, but an ethical one, a media that enables the raising of demanding questions such as how such a genocide was possible, how could the Cambodian Communists (Khmer Rouge) execute such evil, such a horrific autogenocide? For me, Rithy Panh defines the role of such art not only for the artist, but for everyone: the ethical obligation to ask essential questions about the past and answer them truthfully is shared by him and his viewers.

Why did I choose Cambodia? One part of the answer is that dealing with the Holocaust is too painful for me. I don't have the stomach for it. I am able to delve into the difficult moral, human, emotional, and maternal questions that I've dealt with since my childhood by responding to them indirectly through a different social, political, artistic, and cinematic context. This is my way. I don't know if we can call it a healing of wounds, because such wounds could never be healed.

Another part of the answer is that the Holocaust imposes on us an ethical decree related not only to it but to human evil in all its forms. The knowledge of the Cambodian genocide is relatively repressed in the West: only recently have cinema scholars begun to deal with post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian cinema. I don't know if this is a satisfactory response, but it is the only one I am able to provide.

Raya Morag

Four Views: Members of the Third Generation Reflect on the Holocaust in 2000s Cinema

An analysis of Third Generation Holocaust Israeli cinema created during the second decade of the 2000s reveals that it is a unique corpus in world cinema in terms of its coming to terms with the past. As both the difficult integration of Holocaust survivors in Israel since the 1950s and the multifariousness of their cinematic representation prove, the position of the victim as a mediator and facilitator of past recognition processes is not self-evident. The shift that took place during the second decade of the 2000s from learning about and recognition of Holocaust horrors to dealing with their memory, and from direct witnessing to archival and media-mediated forms, is also a shift from early Holocaust memory work, which struggled with shifting the double black hole of forgetting and denial to the contemporary one based on recovery, on the one hand, and the commercialization of memory on the other. But the current memorial work is also connected with the burden of an ethical response in an era in which direct, face-to-face contact with the witnesses is gradually disappearing. The question of what could be the meaning of such a witnessing for both the individual and the collective, the person and the family, becomes critical to shaping the cultural memory of the Holocaust in the future.

How is the uniqueness of this corpus conveyed? At the verge of the end of the Age of Testimony,¹ Third Generation Holocaust films, most of which are autobiographical, reveal a rift in the perception of the Holocaust as an intergenerational trauma. The protagonists in these films are aware of the intergenerational time gap and the psychological processes imposed on the Second Generation, in particular the process that Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory.” This concept defines the contrast between the First Generation’s traumatic memory of the Holocaust and that of the Second Generation. Hirsch claims,

¹ From the end of World War II until the mid-1960s, over half a million immigrants from Europe arrived in Israel, most of them Holocaust survivors. Several tens of thousands of survivors also arrived during the two waves of immigration from the Soviet Union, the first in the early 1970s and the second in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to 2023 data of the Fund for the Welfare of Holocaust Survivors, about 148,000 survivors live in Israel, but about forty-two die every day.

Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation—often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible . . . [. . .] It is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after . . . [. . .] [P]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who, like me, have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration.²

According to Hirsch, members of the Second Generation of Holocaust survivors unconsciously adopted both the silent and the spoken memories of the First. Since their parents' memories were immeasurably more dominant and overwhelming than their own, those of the First Generation came to dominate their mental reality. Third Generation Holocaust (mostly autobiographical) documentary films, such as Arnon Goldfinger's *The Flat (Ha-Dira)*, (Israel-Germany, 2011)³ and Yael Reuveny's *Farewell, Herr Schwarz (Heye Shalom Peter Schwartz)*, (Israel-Germany, 2013), suggest a rift in the Holocaust as an intergenerational trauma. Aware of the time gap between the First Generation's suffering and the relative distance from the processes imposed on the Second Generation, which unconsciously adopted the First Generation's narrative, Third Generation protagonists seem not to be haunted by the Second Generation's horror. While feeling, of course, deep empathy for the First and Second Generations of Holocaust survivors (their grandfathers, grandmothers, and parents), the Third Generation nonetheless opposes the profound (intergenerational) processes of silencing assimilated by the Second Generation, and even claims a self a-victimization. Motivated by attempts to recognize the impact of unconscious processes on their identity as adults, it seems that members of this generation reconstruct their own post-memory. Simultaneous with this self-reconceiving, these directors tell stories that subvert their families' constitutive narratives.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that a significant portion of the stories told by the Third Generation in Israel is based on challenging not only the silenced historical burden that has lasted for almost seven decades and the perception of intergenerational post-traumatic processes as total and homogeneous in nature, but also the type of stories that previously dominated Holocaust films – stories of victimhood. Thus, the generation gap allows the members of the Third Generation to ask questions about the nature of memory and the positioning of the Second Gen-

2 Hirsch, Marianne. (2001). "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 1, 9–12.

3 See an analysis of the film in Odeya Kohen Raz's chapter in this book.

eration as a “sacrificial” generation: Third Generation members are not seen in these films as haunted by the memory of the Holocaust in a way that could undermine their identity. Their commitment to the memory of the past is realized in ways different from those we are used to seeing in Second Generation films (made thirty-five years after the end of World War II, during the 1980s). Members of the Third Generation do not present themselves as “memorial candles”; in this sense, their films pave the way for self-acceptance, the result of memory work that lasted for about fifty years.

The Third Generation films made during the 2000s outside of Israel – for example, in Poland, Austria, and Germany – testify to various stages of coming to terms with the past, as well as the construction of a “new regime of memory.” The cinema in these countries relates to the Holocaust as a defining event both in Europe and transnationally, and as an ongoing process of acknowledging guilt.

Israel

Arnon Goldfinger’s documentary *The Flat* begins with the emptying of his grandmother’s apartment after her death; however, the story turns into a detective mystery. The changes undergone by the apartment during this process mirror changes in the emotional life of the director, a Third Generation member of the Holocaust, and his mother. Old Nazi periodicals discovered in his grandmother’s house, for all the world resembling a 1930s Berlin home, lead to a search for the silenced family past, to evidence that his grandparents had been friends with an SS officer and his wife. In uncovering this family secret, Goldfinger reconstructs the family’s constitutive narrative, as well as his own. The film questions the phenomenon that Holocaust historian Dan Diner (1990) termed “negative symbiosis” between Jews and Germans after the war. Diner claimed that the two peoples, the Jews and the Germans, are connected to each other in a bond that will not be severed for many generations because the Holocaust became a defining, foundational, event on which both nations understand their past and define their identity.

Goldfinger travels to Germany to meet the daughter of SS officer Baron Von Mildenstein, who worked for Goebbels and was related to Eichmann. Her father and mother, as it turns out from letters and Nazi newspapers, were friends with his grandparents, who visited them many times after the war and maintained a long correspondence with them. The two couples were not only close before the war, but continued their friendship after it. Goldfinger confronts his mother and also Von Mildenstein’s daughter with the information he revealed. Both grew up in an era of repression and silence, but their reactions are different: The latter is

willing to listen to the truth, although she does not understand the meaning of the negative symbiosis between her parents and the Nazi couple, especially when it turns out that her grandmother, her mother's mother, was murdered in Theresienstadt. The former, von Mildenstein's daughter, refuses to break the repression. The mystery is not solved, of course, since it is not rooted in details revealed, but in far-reaching questions about the past. The viewers are exposed to a fascinating picture, revealing the mechanisms of repression simultaneously in both families, the German and the Jewish. For the Israeli viewer, *The Flat* also indicates for the first time the possibility of freeing the members of the Third Generation of the Holocaust from the power of the memory processes that paralyzed the Second. When Goldfinger finally closes the door of his grandmother's apartment, he leaves much of the burden of the past behind.

In *Farewell, Herr Schwarz*, the director, Yael Reuveny, like Goldfinger, uncovers a family secret after her grandmother's death, turning her family's narrative upside down. Her autobiographical documentary also tells a story based on the negative Jewish–Nazi symbiosis. At the beginning of her film, Reuveny says: “When I was a child, my grandmother used to show me the only photo she had in her album from before the war. So, there was only one story: The amazing story of how her brother Feiv’ke died twice.” *Farewell, Herr Schwarz* describes the journey of the director, a Third Generation member of the Holocaust, following this founding family story. Her grandmother, Michla Schwarz, apparently the only one to survive from her entire family, told her granddaughter that she lost her beloved brother Feiv’ke for the first time in Treblinka, where she thought he had perished. The second time, in 1945, she met an acquaintance of her brother at the train station in Lodz who informed her that Feiv’ke was alive and promised to bring him to the train station the next evening. However, the next day, after waiting endlessly, Michla was told that anti-Semitic nationalists had burned the shelter where her brother was staying and he had perished during the night.

After the death of her grandmother and after five years of searching throughout Europe, Reuveny discovers that Feiv’ke survived the war. After 1945, he lived in the barracks – turned middle-class housing – of the Schlieben concentration camp, where he had been a prisoner in a satellite labor camp of Buchenwald. He had denied his Jewish origins, changed his name to Peter, married a German woman, and raised a German family, dying only in 1987. Reuveny untangles her attachment to the narrative told countless times by her grandmother. She also violates her grandmother's entreaty to not go back to Germany. In revealing the truth about Feiv’ke, this film offers a different closure than *The Flat* in terms of the German Third Generation: Peter's grandson looks for his (silenced) Jewish origins, studies Hebrew and Jewish history, and finally immigrates to Israel; Reuveny, in contrast, immigrates to Berlin, where she feels free from her haunted family past.

Are the Third Generation Holocaust films' characteristics – rift in intergenerational trauma, opposition to Second Generation silencing, acknowledgment of post-postmemory processes, a-victimization, self-conceiving identity, and subversion of the constitutive family narrative – another proof of this corpus' maturity? Undoubtedly, the presence of “symbiosis stories” enables the unburdening of a load carried for almost seven decades. Moreover, it allows a new recognition of the Third Generation in regard to its redefinition of tasks in relation to future remembrance of the Holocaust and its legacy, and assistance in healing their parents' generation.

Moreover, the films' subversion of the family narrative is not only rooted in staging an opposite narrative, but in their meta reflection on such a narrative; that is, by raising the assumption that the false narrative about the brother who died twice (in the case of Michla Schwarz) or the hidden secret (in the case of Goldfinger's grandmother) were invented in order to build a family, to unite it, and to protect it in every way possible.



Fig. 2: From the film *Farewell, Herr Schwarz* (Yael Reuveny, 2013).

Subversion of victimhood as the dominant subject position in the films of the Third Generation reaches poignant expression in Noa Aharoni's documentary *Shadows* (*Yaldehy Ha-Tzlamim*, 2017). *Shadows* presents the horrific situation of victims who became victimizers in their own homes. The film dares to tell the stories of the Second (and Third) Generation children of Holocaust survivors who grew up in families where violence and abuse reigned. Aharoni shows that the First Generation, which lost its parents, its childhood, and youth, raised a Second Gen-

eration that is also, in many ways, devoid of childhood and parents. Second Generation memory is dominated by terrible fear, severe physical violence, near-murder, hatred, and anger, but also by pity and projection – a tragic intergenerational burden. The protagonists' stories are not only related to their parents' memories, but also to their parents' personalities as they were shaped during the war years. Simultaneously, they reveal their own dread as parents of inadvertently passing on the violence, abuse, pain, and horror to their own children.

The dedication "In Their Memory," which appears at the end of the film, sheds light on both the search for a new language of memory to which cinema is committed in a generation where the last survivors are gradually disappearing, and the search for truth that is considered essential for the next generations.

Poland

Ida (Poland-Denmark-France-UK, 2013), the fiction film made by Polish-British director Paweł Pawlikowski, takes place in 1962 in Poland, and tells an unconventional initiation story. Anna (Agata Trzebuchowska), a young woman who grew up in the monastery's orphanage, prepares to take her vows as a nun (chastity, abstinence, obedience). Unexpectedly, the abbess informs her that before the ceremony she must meet her aunt, Wanda (Agata Kulesza), who lives in Lodz. When Anna knocks on her door, a man gets dressed and leaves. A jolt seizes the viewers, who guess that Anna is a Jew who had been hidden in the monastery; they ask themselves whether the aunt is a prostitute and for this reason refused to contact her only surviving relative.

But this is only the first in a series of upheavals that the film renders for its viewers. Pawlikowski, in his fifties, looks back, through *Ida's* story, on the period in which he grew up as a child in Poland. In a way, he even delves into the meaning of being half "Third Generation," since his paternal grandmother was Jewish and was murdered in Auschwitz. These ways of looking back are reflected not only in the script he wrote (with the British playwright Rebecca Lenkiewicz), but also in the unique photography style he developed with the film's director of photography, Łukasz Żal.

Wanda reveals to Anna that her real name is *Ida* Lebenstein, and that their family was destroyed during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Their journey to the village the family had lived turns into a geo-psychological journey into the historical and the personal past. The tension between Wanda and Anna erupts during the journey when Wanda tries to tempt Anna, in vain, to experience some of the pleasures of life before she takes her vows. The question she addresses to Anna-

Ida, “And if you go there and discover there is no God?”, reflects on both the absurdity and the tragedy of the happenings. Thus, when they search for traces of their family in the village and arrive at the house of a villager who refuses to admit that her house once belonged to a Jewish family and asks Anna – dressed as a nun – to bless her baby daughter, Anna agrees; and all at once questions of faith, identity, destiny, and choice become inextricably intertwined.



Fig. 3: From the film *Ida* (Paweł Pawlikowski, 2013).

Their search ends when the son of the owner of the house, Feliks, offers them a deal: they will waive their entitlement to reclaim their house and the family's property in exchange for him leading them to where their family members are buried. When they reach the forest, Pawlikowski shows Wanda and Ida at the corner of the frame huddled together while a mound of mud and dirt, which keeps piling up before their eyes as Feliks digs in the frozen ground with a hoe, is at the center, and the trees behind. The unusual framing intensifies the viewers' listening to Feliks's answer to Wanda's question about her son, who was left with his family when she joined the resistance: He murdered Wanda's black-haired and circumcised son ("How did you do that?" asks Wanda, "with an ax?"); but he gave the baby Ida, who did not look Jewish, to the monastery.

At this stage in the journey, the frequent drinking of alcohol and casual sex turn out to be not only part of Wanda's terrible post-war despair and disillusionment with the regime, but also symptoms of a post-traumatic reaction. Pawlikowski revealed in an interview that the character is based on Helena Wolińska-Brus, a Polish Jew who escaped the Warsaw ghetto and fought in the ranks of the partisans against the Nazis. She had been a judge by profession who served the Communist regime and sent many political prisoners to their deaths. During the 1950s, she served as a military prosecutor in Poland in the Stalinist show trials and in 1968 immigrated to Britain.

The journey continues to the old ruined cemetery in Lublin, where Wanda and Ida bring the remains for burial ("We'll have to find a priest," states Ida, and Wanda replies: "You mean the rabbi"). Pawlikowski's choice of black-and-white photography and a square frame format, adhering to the style of Polish films of the 1960s, is intensified in the desolate and frozen sites. The positioning of the protagonists at the bottom or on the sides of the frame with a vast landscape or a wide sky in the background, the aesthetics of minimalism, and the use of diegetic music (a Polish song on the radio in the car, jazz music played by the orchestra in the motel) – deepens the drama. This unique film aesthetic signifies that the questions regarding the murder of the child, the reasons for the Poles' collaboration with the Nazis, the meaning of religious faith, parental guilt during monstrous life circumstances, and the comparative weight of education versus origin in determining identity are inseparable from the journey.

Pawlikowski uses editing to repeatedly intermix the fates of Wanda and Anna-Ida. Upon returning to their pre-journey lives, Anna attends her friend's vows ceremony at the convent; the cut to Wanda's apartment leads us to experience with her another evening of anonymous sex, after which she commits suicide. Another cut finds Ida in Wanda's empty apartment, wearing her aunt's dress, high heels, lighting a cigarette, sipping alcohol. This imitation and gestures mark, above all, a private mourning ritual. The inevitable breaking of boundaries that evening leads Ida back to the convent. Dressed again in her nun's habit, the camera follows her through the fields, at dusk, on her way. Does the camera movement portend a transformation? Ida, who has become Anna again, alone in the world, sheds light on the European-Polish view of both the past and the present as hopeless.

Austria

Simone Bader and Jo Schmeiser's documentary film *Love History (Liebe Geschichte, Austria, 2010)* focuses on five Austrian women who gradually recognize and affirm that they are each descendants of Nazi perpetrators. The interviewees describe the Austrian Nazi families in which they grew up while focusing on the shock of trying to reconcile their beloved father, mother, or grandparent with the SS officer or sadistic camp guard who tortured female prisoners. Katrin Himmler talks about the burden of her family name being an inescapable part of her identity. Patricia Reschenbach says, for example, that "when we were children, my father told us once that he shot partisans. I thought he was a hunter and partisans are some kind of animals. When I found out that partisans were human beings, I was shocked." Ditalinda Pollach says that she raised her daughter differently, and did not hit her, but she feels that, against her will, she is passing on to the next generation the violence that is inside her because it "gets under the skin." The fear that "the Nazi father inside me will break out," as one of them puts it, is dominant.

In between the short monologues, the directors insert prominent dates in the history of Austrians' denial of their past: from the 1950s, when they saw themselves as victims of the Nazis; through the Kurt Waldheim affair in the 1980s; and up until the 2000s when the Leopold Museum in Vienna refused to obey the law of restitution and return looted artworks to their Jewish owners. The film stages the personal female narrative, almost uninterrupted by the directors, against the national male narrative, heard in the voice-over. The sharp contrast between the courage and the moral position of the female speakers and the directors and the events reported in the voice-over narration is intensified through the choice of the directors to mediate between the viewer and the personal stories through photos of the city of Vienna. Sophie Maintigneux's photographs reveal the development of Viennese architecture over the years, turning the urban environment into a mediator of memory. Stylish long shots taken from a static camera follow the everyday, beautiful sights of the city. The seeing stands in stark contrast to what is heard, but it also allows the viewer a pause between the stories. The emotions that arise from the monologues echo in the reflections of the buildings. Street reflections seen on the buildings, photographs of the same town square taken from different angles, color games – enable the viewers to oscillate between the pleasure of aesthetics and the horrors of memory.

Thus, due to the editing, viewers' relation to the women's uncompromising confrontation with their past is not based on identification; however, the stylization does not lessen the drama. As in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoa* (1985), where the unbearable contrast between the beauty of nature and the horror of the camps is revealed, in this film too the contrast between the beauty of the city and the hor-

rific stories told intensifies the horror. *Love History* is exceptional in breaking the myth of Nazi women as apolitical and of the Austrian Second and Third Generations as disconnected from the past. In doing so, it becomes a documentary film whose very making is part of the generational transformation it documents.

Like the interviewees in *Love History*, Austrian director (and scriptwriter) Stefan Ruzowitzky is a Third Generation member of the Holocaust whose grandfather was a Nazi. His documentary film *Radical Evil (Das radikal Böse, Germany-Austria, 2013)* begins with a quote from Holocaust survivor and author Primo Levi: “Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”⁴ This motto portends the film’s unique representation of the major enigma of the twentieth century, that of the ordinary man who becomes a monstrous perpetrator.

Ruzowitzky uses three audial sources to reflect on the enigma of the ordinary man: original quotes taken from the diaries and letters of the Nazi death squads, the Einsatzgruppen, who shot some two million Jewish civilians in Eastern Europe during World War II; excerpts from SS Head Heinrich Himmler’s Posen speech from early October 1943, given in Nazi-occupied Poland before officials of the Nazi party; and interviews with psychiatrists, historians, genocide experts, and ninety-three-year-old Benjamin Ferencz, one of the chief prosecutors at the Nuremberg trials.

The Einsatzgruppen quotes are read by well-known German actors, whose voices are familiar to German, Austrian, as well as global viewers (from films such as *The Counterfeiters*, *Downfall*, *Inglorious Basterds*, *Labyrinth of Lies*, *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, and *The Reader*). In contrast, non-familiar actors reenact the death squads’ lives and deadly acts: watching Nazi propaganda films, vomiting after the first massacre, shaving before the next day of executions begins, and posing together for a souvenir photo. Their anonymity, symbolizing the faceless Nazi masses, stands in contrast to the familiar voices of the actors who speak “in their place.” The actors’ voices endow the quotes from the diaries and letters with a dramatization that makes them alive but, due to the self-reflexive irony of their immediate identification as cinematic celebs, paradoxically also keep the horror at a distance. Most importantly, it is this uncanny combination of the familiar sound with the unfamiliar image that reflects again and again, during the entire viewing, on the disastrous relationship between the individual and the crowd, which is at the heart of the enigma. The anonymity of the unknown figures turns them into “everyone,” a symbol of the mighty faceless Nazi crowd. Both the disconnect between

⁴ The quote is taken from Primo Levi’s *Reawakening* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 228.

the body and the voice and the unfamiliar face also sharpen the burden that the Third Generation in Germany takes on; when they read the testimonies of the Einsatzgruppen, they put themselves for a moment symbolically in the place where their grandfathers had been. In his voice, in their voice.

The second audial source, the unmistakable recorded voice of Himmler, is intertwined within the Einsatzgruppen accounts and thus assists in enhancing the sense of authenticity. The third audial source comprises interviews with renowned researchers: for example, American psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton analyzes the immediate adjustment to an “atrocious producing situation”; Christopher R. Browning, author of *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1998), discusses the question of responsibility; military psychologist Dave Grossman analyzes the anatomy of killing, the diffusion of responsibility, and the distancing of the victim through his dehumanization; psychologist Roy Baumeister emphasizes the need for belonging and the fear associated with exclusion; and Reverend Patrick Desbois, one of the founders of an organization working to uncover and document mass extermination and burial sites in the East, reveals the power of the extermination method of shooting. The major insights achieved in research during the last sixty-eight years have an accumulating effect. The total impression that emerges from the connection between the accounts revealed in the diaries and letters and the scholarly reflections is one of the outstanding achievements of this film.

When *Radical Evil* represents the results of prominent psychological experiments (of Solomon Asch’s group-conformity experiment, Stanley Milgram’s obedience to authority experiment, and Philip Zimbardo’s prison experiment at Stanford⁵), the camera is located above the experiments, which are presented through minimal graphic means. Providing a high angle gaze, the camera once again raises the question of proximity and distance from evil and from past events. Ruzowitzky uses a split screen such that a line of boots is juxtaposed with a closeup on the face of one of the soldiers, thus raising both Holocaust iconography and reflexively reflecting on it, while calling for the viewers’ awareness of the perva-

5 In 1951, the American-Jewish psychologist Solomon Asch conducted an experiment on group conformity. His conclusion was that we tend to adapt ourselves to the beliefs and behaviours of other people. In 1962, psychologist Stanley Milgram examined obedience to authority in an experiment he conducted at Yale University. The conclusion of the experiment, the results of which were published in the early 1970s, was that the participants obeyed authority even when they were ordered to perform actions that were contrary to their values and conscience. Social psychologist Philip Zimbardo’s Prison Experiment was conducted at Stanford University in 1968 to examine behaviour in captivity. His conclusion was that under authoritarian circumstances, ordinary people can commit terrible acts towards their subordinates.

siveness of these images. Benjamin Ferencz closes this complex discussion by emphasizing that out of the 3,000 soldiers of the death squads, only twenty-four were put on trial (due to lack of seats in court); fourteen were sentenced to death, but the verdict was carried out in only four cases. All the others served various periods in prison and were released in 1958. According to Ferencz, the court failed its mission.

Though the film does not include testimony from victims and thus is mostly non-emotional, its multi-layered presentation demands an ethical response from the viewers. Ruzowitzky's reflection on Hannah Arendt's "radical evil" allows Second and Third Generation viewers to examine the perpetrators' unique point of view in order to ultimately confront themselves, time and again. Robert J. Lifton claims in the film that it is impossible to separate psychological research from ethical positions. *Radical Evil* proves to its viewers that spectatorship is also an act that demands an ethical response.

Germany

In the opening minutes of *Austerlitz* (Germany, 2016), the camera is positioned motionless behind a row of trees, showing people at a tourist site. Some are pushing baby carriages, the atmosphere is cheerful, and the rustle of the wind in the trees and the chirping of birds is heard – none of which suggest a concentration camp. There is also no hint that the camera is following the visitors and mutely recording their attitudes toward the site without their consent. As the day of this visit to Sachsenhausen continues, the Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa maintains the same documenting style and the viewers slowly realize there is nothing in the faces or the expressions of the crowd that would disclose either that this is a terrifying site, or what they feel.



Fig. 4: Tourists visiting Sachsenhausen concentration camp, from the film *Austerlitz* (Sergei Loznitsa 2016).

In his book on the dangers of mythologizing Auschwitz, historian Tim Cole distinguishes between “tourism” and “pilgrimage.”⁶ Loznitsa, who sees himself symbolically as a member of the Third Generation of the Holocaust, shows that what we see in his film is not a pilgrimage and entails no feeling of holiness. The opposite is true. Most of the visitors are young people immersed in the act of tourism: They listen to the explanation on an audio guide, look at the map, talk, and take pictures. The director, who is also the photographer (along with Jesse Mazuch), manages to photograph them at eye level without their noticing. By showing the day of the visit without any commentary or narration, he accords this observational documentary a unique power. In the absence of any conventional mediation, the viewers ask themselves if there isn’t something bizarre about the sight of a visitor posing against the entrance gate with the inscription “*Arbeit macht Frei*”? How is the “click” of a camera tolerated when, after a guide explains that the poles were used for hanging prisoners, one of the tourists is photographed posing as if tied to one? Is this not tourism turned dark?

The camera keeps a distance from what is happening and does not show what the visitors see on the site, and thus its view does not become a “touristic” view, that is: passing, moving on, based on “death attractions.” The black-and-white photography intensifies the questions – is this Holocaust tourism a worthy

⁶ Cole, Tim. (2000) *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler; How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold*. New York: Routledge.

means of remembrance? Has there been a gap between the memory of the self photographed at the camp site and the memory of the site itself, or the memory of the history presented there? As far as Loznitsa is concerned, there is hardly a moment of quietude, silence, or solitude. The guides at the site, using various languages, are mostly heard when they tell anecdotes, for example about one of the failed assassination attempts on Hitler. In between, the obsessive photo-taking of the current era rules. At the end of the film, the camera lingers near the entrance to Sachsenhausen. Another selfie by the gate, the cry of a baby in a stroller breaking the tourists' sounds.

The concentration camp and the extermination camp are not places, topographies, sites, cities. They are the embodiment of the encounter with death. To visit, see, tour, and leave means – according to Loznitsa's film – to violate the demonic logic of Auschwitz, making it a place that permits the option of leaving, though even those who survived Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen, or any other camp, never really did leave.

These four views of Third Generation films in Israel and Europe reveal an ongoing process in which, while shaping the identity of the generation and re-writing the intergenerational dynamics, the films are committed to revealing new faces in this dynamic. However, like the cinema of the First and Second Generations, the cinema of the Third is also committed to an ethical address from its viewers, demanding both their recognition of the past and their ethical responsibility towards it. In this respect, cinema's shaping of the cultural memory of the future becomes, at the threshold of the end of the Age of Testimony, a continuous ethical challenge.



Fig. 1: Reuven and Mattityahu Kohn, Buchau, Czechoslovakia. 1917.

In this photo, which shows my father, Reuven Kohn, at the age of four or five with his two- or three-year-old brother (Matti), I see his personality and have a glimpse into his childhood, about which I heard so much throughout my lifetime. I see his confidence with his brother, unaware that this peaceful state would end as they grew. His family (parents and brother) managed to escape in 1939 (he was 17), a week before Hitler entered Prague. However, his two grandmothers and two aunts who remained behind were murdered. My father and his family were saved, but a fracture occurred. It was a harsh transition from their European culture to Israel.

The Holocaust is an exceptional event in history and culture, and as a Jew and film researcher I studied Holocaust films as a mission. Moreover, I wanted to study history in order to understand my father's history. The more I learned, the more I understood the fracture and could bridge the rift that was hidden in him. In that sense, it is a calling to learn from history and preserve the memory of it via films that tell those stories, and at the same time to deal with my father's personal pain.

Odeya Kohen Raz

Arnon Goldfinger's *The Flat* (2011): Ethics and Aesthetics in Third Generation Holocaust Cinema

In the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium, films by the second and even the third generation to the Holocaust were motivated by the gradual disappearance of Holocaust survivors and witnesses.¹ Regine-Mihal Friedman claims that these films, both documentaries and features, are characterized by “the deliberate attempt to probe differently the limits of documentary representation, to reaffirm the unremitting power of fiction, and to celebrate the transfiguration of the real through a personal, creative vision”.² In other words, because it is these generations that struggle with the void, the lack, and the emptiness left by the gradual disappearance of survivors and witnesses (namely the real, the referent), they show a will to overcome the limits of documentary representation via personal, creative vision; to “transfigure” the real, in Friedman’s words, in order to deal with questions of memory and commemoration.³

The Israeli documentary *The Flat* tells the story of emptying the apartment of the grandmother of the director, Arnon Goldfinger. Following her death at age 98, he discovers that after the war his grandparents, Gerda and Kurt Tuchler, renewed their pre-war friendship with an aristocratic German couple, the von Mildensteins. Von Mildenstein was already a member of the Nazi party in 1929 and a senior SS officer by 1932. The Tuchlers arrived in Palestine in 1936 and lived in their Tel Aviv apartment until their respective deaths. Goldfinger sets out to un-

1 Such as the brothers Daniel and Pascal Cling’s documentary *Heritage* (Héritage, France, 1996); Emmanuel Finkiel’s feature *Voyages* (Poland/France/Belgium, 1999) and his documentary *Casting* (France, 2001); Marceline Loridan-Ivens’ feature *The Birch-Tree Meadow* (La petite prairie aux boulevards, France/Germany/Poland, 2002) (its title refers to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp; and Robert Thalheim’s feature *And Along Comes the Tourists* (Arn Ende kommen Touristen (Germany, 2007).

2 Friedman, Régine-Mihal. (2005). “The Transmutation of Testimony in Cling, Najman and Finkiel’s Aftermath Films.” *Studies in French Cinema*, vol. 5, no. 3, 195.

3 Two made in Israel films, Tal Haim Yoffe’s documentary *The Green Dumpster Mystery* (2008) and Arnon Goldfinger’s *The Flat* (i.e., the apartment) (2011) provide powerful examples.

Note: For the full version of the article see Kohen-Raz, Odeya. (2012). “Arnon Goldfinger’s *The Flat* (2011): Ethics and Aesthetics in Third Generation Holocaust Cinema.” *Studies in Documentary Film*, vol. 6, no. 3, 323–38.

cover the nature of this unimaginable relationship. As part of his search, he contacts von Mildenstein's daughter Edda and learns from her that his mother's grandmother, Susanne Lehmann, was murdered in the camps. This fact was never mentioned in his family and Goldfinger, striving to uncover the past, raises questions that the second generation – his mother, Hannah, and Edda von Mildensteins – had never dared ask.

Faced with no firsthand memory of witnesses, and a second generation that dared not ask, Goldfinger uses a variety of artistic devices in a less conventional way for a documentary film. Though it is common in documentaries to commemorate the first generation via photographs and letters, as well as to interview remaining family members (from the second generation) and friends, Goldfinger does more than that: He insists on reviving the first generation in creative ways, as though demanding their presence vicariously in his film. Goldfinger's editing, camera movement, and use of soundtrack, as well as showing his grandparents' portraits at meaningful moments in the narrative, serve to connect and create a dialogue among the first generation (which the director can no longer document or interview), the second (his mother), and the third (himself). His quest constitutes a *responsibility* – an ability to respond. This is an ethical response, a responsibility for the other, in this case the other that is absent, manifested in the documentary film by various aesthetic modes of remembering and representing the dead and forgotten. I claim that looking at the “faces” (and voices) of the first generation as he makes them “present” in his film is a plea to take responsibility. Emmanuel Levinas explains the ethical aspect of the concept of responsibility:

Ethics, here, does not supplement a preceding existential base; the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility. I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other, thus as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face. [. . .] meeting the face is not of the order of pure – and simple perception, of the intentionality which goes toward adequation. Positively, we will say that since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having *taken* on responsibilities in his regard.⁴

Friedman emphasizes that the other are the victims, as she relates to Claude Lanzman's noting that in his documentary *Shoah*,

Nobody says “I”, meaning that as a rule the eyewitness speaks for an “Us”: those who never came back. This harrowing plea to bear witness, the duty of the “saved” to testify for the “drowned” in Primo Levi's terms, recur in each one of the personal testimonial films.⁵

4 Lévinas, Emmanuel. (1984). “Ethics and Infinity.” *Cross Currents*, vol. 34, no. 2, 194.

5 As quoted in Friedman, “Transmutation”, 198.

Goldfinger's ethical stance is intertwined with his aesthetics. His artistic vision brings the voice and presence of those who did not survive (that he cannot film or record), thus strengthening the ethical imperative not to forget them, taking on, as well, responsibility for remembering those that his family (the second generation) fail to recall.

The Flat approaches the question of trauma and memory of the Holocaust by moving along two axes in the plot: the emptying of Goldfinger's grandparents' apartment and his investigation into the traumatic past. Both are conveyed via the imagery of the apartment. Once cleared (of both objects and subjects), the apartment becomes a symbol of the silenced past, as well as of resisting denial and negation. The prologue shows the flat before it is emptied while Goldfinger's voice-over describes his memories from it, and his dilemmas.



Fig. 2: From *The Flat*: portraits of Kurt and Gerda Tuchler.

We see Goldfinger's grandfather portrait filmed from an ominously low angle. Kurt Tuchler, having been a distinguished judge in the past, perhaps wonders, as a legal and moral authority, what his grandchild will choose. Gerda Tuchler's portrait ends the prologue, as though of young Gerda from the past is gazing back at her grandson's intruding camera in the present. Goldfinger's grandparents are gone; however, the *editing* in of the portraits from the start encourages us to interpret

their gazes as part of a symbolic “silent dialogue” between the gaze of the portrait (the past) and that of the movie camera (the present), thus reframing the past.

The symbolism of the apartment, together with the unique employment of the Tuchlers’ portraits functions as a bridge between generations, between past and present. Marianne Hirsch’s acclaimed notion of postmemory is one way to bridge this gap:

Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they “remember” only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right.⁶

As Hirsch emphasizes, the term “postmemory” is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative differences from survivor memory; its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, is based in displacement, vicariousness, and belatedness:

Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation – often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible. That is not, of course, to say that survivor memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly – chronologically—connected to the past.⁷

Postmemory, is based on a direct encounter with a Holocaust survivor or witness, who, like a Lévinasian other, generates an ethical response. Goldfinger’s quest, representing the memory work of filmmakers belonging to the third generation, lacks this direct face-to-face confrontation. The ethical call arises not from the uncovering of any past traumatic truth or event that could result from such an encounter, *but from insisting on investigating it – by establishing a unique aesthetic dialogue between documentary filmmaking and art.*

The Tuchlers’ portraits that open and close the opening sequence, and also reappear at other significant moments in *The Flat*, raise the question of how the *mise en abyme* functions in a documentary film, in particular one whose concern is the Holocaust and familial memory. Lucien Dällenbach describes the *mise en abyme* as “an internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative by simple, repeated, or spacious (or paradoxical) duplication”.⁸ Its functions are rhetorical, reflexive, and metaphorical.

⁶ Hirsch, Marianne. (2001). “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 1 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dällenbach, Lucien. (trans. J. Whiteley and E. Hughes). (1977; repr. 1989). *The Mirror in the Text*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 36.

The images of the apartment and its objects in the opening sequence are encapsulations of the film's themes: a documentary that films the process of emptying a concrete apartment of its worldly goods (a metonymy) also functions as a metaphor. It underscores how the past can be easily erased, emptied, especially now when the Holocaust survivors are no longer with us.

The medium itself, its form and its vocation, is also duplicated: Similarly to the play-within-a-play in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (considered by scholars a paradigmatic *mise en abyme*), the Tuchlers' portraits are a "picture-within-a-picture." Throughout they are juxtaposed at crucial points in time when Goldfinger learns new things about his past, creating thus a "meta-dialogue" between the gaze of the camera and that of the portraits. In *Hamlet*, the purpose of the play-within-a-play is to act out the unwitnessed murder of Hamlet's father and make the murderer – the king – succumb to his feelings of guilt. Indeed, he does react to the play: He retreats to his chambers where he confesses, a confession witnessed only by the audience. The common element between *Hamlet's mise en abyme* and *The Flat's* is that the weight of responsibility rests entirely on the playwright/director's shoulders, as well as the spectators.' The portraits and the camera have the power to generate responsibility – the ability to respond – but not to provide testimony.

Gerda's and Kurt's portraits, which strategically constitute an integral part of Goldfinger's use of family photographs, reflect his desire throughout the film to position himself as a bridge to his mother's past. For example, when he tries unsuccessfully to get his mother, Hannah, to remember her grandmother Susanne, who was murdered, he reads in Hebrew from Susanne's letters in a voice-over. Later we see and hear his mother reading as her grandmother addresses her directly – "little Hanele" (who was four years old at the time they were written) as she translates the words first from German to Hebrew and gradually reads only in German, "resurrecting" Goldfinger's mother's mother tongue. This tactic brings Susanne's words (almost gone and forgotten) from the past into his mother's present existence. Goldfinger's mother tongue is Hebrew and he himself has no direct access to the German language of the silenced past. At the beginning of the film, he describes the language gap between him and his grandmother Gerda – she didn't know Hebrew and he didn't know German, so they spoke in English. This reaches its climax when his mother reads her grandmother's request of her: "Don't forget me." Susanne's voice and her subjectivity become "physically" present in the dialogue not only because it is spoken in German, but thanks to the voice of his mother, who had actually been in the presence of her grandmother in the past. Gerda and Hannah met Susanne in Berlin and Susanne came to visit them in Israel before the war– even if his mother does not remember it.



Fig. 3: From *The Flat*: Hannah with Gerda and Susanne in Israel.

It is as though Susanne's voice and her subjectivity return to engage in a dialogue. This can only be achieved in film and this is how Goldfinger strives to engage the viewer in his attempt to give a voice to the dead and forgotten.



Fig. 4: From *The Flat*: Hannah reading Susanne's letter.

He takes a similar strategy of “reviving the physical past” when he and his mother are in Berlin visiting the house where Susanne’s sister lived. A black and white photograph shows Susanne hugging little Hannah during her stay at Berlin as a baby. Goldfinger films his mother looking at the building and turning her head to observe the neighborhood. In a subtle use of a match-cut in the editing, the turning of Hannah’s head, accompanying the circling embracing camera movement implies that he wishes to place his mother in the same position she had been while in her grandmother’s arms in Berlin. Will she express emotions now? His mother, however, remains detached. In this respect, Hannah is an example of what Helen Epstein terms “Lot’s wife” (especially in respect to the second generation): “fear of turning around and looking back lest he or she might turn into a pillar of salt.”⁹ This sequence shows Goldfinger’s postmemory as third generation, indeed differing from the survivor’s memory in both its temporal and symbolic meanings. As Hirsch notes, the textual nature of postmemory relies on images, stories, and documents passed down from one generation to the next. Furthermore, the term *postmemory* is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory; it has been mentioned as a “secondary, or transgenerational quality that is rooted in displacement, vicariousness, and belatedness.”¹⁰

⁹ Epstein, Helen. (1979). *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 72.

¹⁰ Hirsch, “Surviving Images,” 9.

Goldfinger uses the photographs of Susanne and Hannah together as a trace or index, or a *footprint*, for they convey thus a material, physical, and extremely potent connection between the generations. Susanne and Hannah were there together – now they are not and someone has to remember and acknowledge this. Therefore, Goldfinger uses the animated sign of footprints on the 1932 map of Berlin as a representation of Susanne’s literal footprints. This is, as it were, a symbol of an index. Since he is denied direct contact with the referent (as are we), he symbolizes it.

This is understood by Goldfinger’s other attempts to connect the referent from the past with the present. He strives to obtain a concrete acknowledgment from Edda regarding her father’s past, but fails, and he fails again when he tries to find Susanne’s husband’s gravestone (he had died before the war). The same effort, and failure, accrue in Yoffe’s documentary *The Green Dumpster Mystery*. This failing has the same function as the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*, as it calls for responsibility. It is a spectacle of failures: no one sees the king’s confession but the spectator; Edda does not acknowledge her father’s responsibility when Goldfinger shows her documents uncovering the truth. Edda’s only desire is to end his investigation, so she terminates their final conversation by asking arrogantly, “Anything else?”

Goldfinger’s ethical aesthetics is based precisely on his persistence in asking as well as showing what is not being acknowledged; it is a refusal to collaborate with denial and silence. The film ends with the emptied apartment, the two portraits hanging on the wall, which Goldfinger takes with him when he leaves. Clearing the apartment may symbolize the desire to “empty” the past, to do away with it. Goldfinger, however, takes the past with him, while resisting this position.¹¹

11 My interpretation of the film differs here from that of Raya Morag that appears in this book.



Fig. 1: Medi and her two children, Oradea, Romania, the late 1930's

This is Medi, my mother's cousin, who died in Auschwitz with her two children. My mom wouldn't stop talking about her all through my childhood. All it took was for her to mention Medi's name and her face would be flooded with tears. Looking back on it, this was my first encounter with the experience of Holocaust remembrance. Remembrance in the sense that you lose a loved one very unexpectedly and without understanding why and what's left is unbearable pain. I remember her kneeling, showing me this picture, "Look, Medi . . . her two kids," weeping and weeping.

And as an adult I find myself contending with this very subject, the transmission of pain and memory. How to transmit memory so that it's still fresh, but not traumatizing, without those feelings of shame, horror, of Hell itself. I examine the ways Israeli cinema has found ways to do just that, employ poetic devices to constitute a memory not unlike the memory transferred to me by my mom, through emotion, the senses, even unconsciously, not fully aware of what it

encapsulates. I consider this an ethics of memory, or ethical memory. In English I use the term "cine-memory."

Sandra Meiri

Cine-Memory: The Representation of Women's Sexualized Trauma in Israeli Holocaust-Related Narrative Films

In this article, I explore a group of coming-of-age films that depict the transmission of women Holocaust survivors' post-traumatic sexually related symptoms to the second generation through vicarious rhetorical strategies. I argue that these films contribute to the legitimization of the disclosure of sexual violence through the mediation of artistic, cinematic, creation — what Marianne Hirsch has termed 'postmemory',¹ while attesting to the persistence of women's trauma.

The persistent portrayal of female survivors as victims of sexualized violence in Israeli cinema attests to the ubiquity of such violence in the Holocaust. In early films, like *The Great Promise* (Joseph Lejtes, 1947), *My Father's House* (Herbert Klein, 1947), *The Faithful City* (Joseph Lejtes, 1952), and *The Sun Rises on the Horizon* (Hervé Bromberger, 1960), female characters who have managed to survive the Holocaust are portrayed as young beautiful women,² who had been forced into prostitution, later becoming unfit mothers and/or mental patients. In *My Father's House*, Miriyam, who had been forced into prostitution during the Holocaust, gives 11-year-old Holocaust survivor, David (the film's protagonist) her comb. David cannot understand why she had needed a comb in the camps, as women's heads had been shaven. She replies: 'Not all, some of us had to keep our hair . . . that's why they let me keep my comb'. *My Father's House* explains that the endurance of sexual violence and the sense of unfit motherhood are interconnected. Miriyam resists her friend's repeated pleas to adopt David, insisting that what was done to her is now part of who she is. Although Miriyam agrees in the end to be David's surrogate mother, her words, nevertheless, as well as her mel-

1 Hirsch, Marianne. (2008). "The generation of postmemory." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 105-118.

2 See: Flaschka, Monika J. (2010). "Only pretty women were raped": The effect of sexual violence on gender identities in the concentration camps." In: Hedgepeth, Sonja M. and Saidel, Rochelle G. (eds), *Sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 83

Note: This is a somewhat different and much shorter version of my article: Meiri, Sandra. (2015). "Visual Responses: Women's Experience of Sexual Violence as Represented in Israeli Holocaust-Related Cinema", *European Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, 443-456.

ancholic, even apathetic behavior, suggest that what she had experienced in Auschwitz cannot be erased and will always be part of her womanhood.

This notion is enhanced in films that associate the experience of losing control over one's body, sexuality and womanhood with the characters' feelings of undeserved motherhood, or love. Films like *Tel Aviv-Berlin* (Tzipi Trope, 1987), *The Summer of Aviya* (Eli Cohen, 1988), *Over the Ocean* (Yankol Goldwasser, 1991), and to some extent *Blind Man's Bluff* (Aner Preminger, 1993) and *Newland* (Orna Ben-Dor, 1994), address the suffering of women during the Holocaust, and how it affected both the victims and their children. This critical trend has continued in the 2000s with films that focus on the second generation: *Six Million Fragments* (Tzipi Trope, 2001) is a salient example of traumatic transmission, telling the story of a daughter whose mother's haunted past leads to the daughter's mental breakdown; *Burning Mooki* (Slava and Lina Chaplin, 2008), *Once I Was*, and *Intimate Grammar* (Nir Bergman, 2010) deal, each in its unique way, with the transmission of women's post-traumatic symptoms of sexualized violence to male protagonists. What these films emphasize is the importance of creating a cinematic remembrance in respect of female victims of sexualized violence, who, in the films, are always marginal figures, never the protagonists.

At least two reasons account for the marginalization of female victims of sexual violence as characterized in Israeli cinema. The first is that Israeli cinema had long been male-dominated.³ The second reason is one of particular interest for the study of gendered Holocaust representations. Studies addressing Israeli cinema's portrayal of women's unique suffering during the Holocaust are scant. Those who have addressed it have criticized it as stereotypically negative.⁴ Such studies disavow women's sexualized trauma, which, like all traumas, is one that festers and resurfaces. They disregard the notion that 'Auschwitz' was indeed 'another planet', where violence was fundamentally 'sexualized':

[V]iolent acts can be understood as sexualized if they are directed at the most intimate part of a person and, as such, against that person's physical, emotional, and spiritual integrity . . . This definition of the term ['sexualized violence'] covers direct physical expression of violence . . . bodily attacks, an unauthorized crossing of body boundaries. They range from flagrant

3 Gertz, Nurith. (2004). Holocaust survivors, aliens and others in Israeli cinema and literature. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 48. (Hebrew)

4 See especially: Kozlovsky-Golan, Yvonne. (2010) "Public property": Sexual abuse of women and girls in cinematic memory." In: Hedgepeth, Sonja M. and Saidel, Rochelle G. (eds), *Sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 234-252. And: Steir-Livny, Liat. (2011). "Near and far: The representation of Holocaust survivors in Israeli feature films." In: Talmon Miri and Peleg Yaron (eds) *Israeli cinema: Identities in motion*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 168-80.

sexual advances to rape. In Nazi concentration camps, sexualized violence also included forced sex labor, sex for survival, forced sterilization, forced abortion, and other medical procedures . . . and emotional expressions of violence, such as imposed public nakedness . . . infringement on intimate space, deplorable hygienic conditions, leering stares, suggestive insults, and humiliating methods of physical examination, all part of the constant impending danger of becoming the victim of sexual assault by the SS or camp guards.⁵

In her discussion of Holocaust representations, Sara Horowitz asks: ‘What accounts for the persistence of certain images?’⁶ Earlier in her article she asserts: ‘If we bring such representations into the study of the Holocaust — and inevitably, we study representations — then we must confront even what discomforts us, precisely because it discomforts us’ (163). That said, making a film focusing wholly on the theme of sexualized violence has remained one of the biggest challenges for Israeli filmmakers, in that such endeavours would almost certainly be considered by Israeli society/audiences as a desecration of Holocaust memory. The marginalization on the one hand, and the recourse to *images* evincing women’s trauma on the other, seem like a compromise between the fear of (re)opening wounds entailing a deep sense of helplessness, guilt and shame, and the urge to represent it.

In the films explored here sexualized violence is evinced by focusing on the transmission of trauma, which ceases to be private and becomes collective. They look at women’s sexual trauma by showing how it affected the second generation. They not only acknowledge that sexualized violence in the camps was an inherent part of the Nazi dehumanization, but also suggest that such forms of violence, treated by Israeli society either with silence or contempt have had dire implications regarding the transmission of post-traumatic symptoms. The various rhetorical strategies adopted by such films emphasize cinema’s ethical role regarding sexualized violence suffered by women during the Holocaust. These rhetorical strategies are poetic devices that call for *displacements* in time and space. I consider here three such devices: allusion, parapraxis and metaphor, beginning with *Wooden Gun* (Ilan Moshenzon, 1978), which paved the way to the use of vicarious rhetorical strategies.

Wooden Gun established (1) that woman’s sexualized trauma *can* be cinematically dealt with in vicarious ways and (2) that it was transmitted to the second generation. Set in the early 1950s, the film implies that there is a connection between the sexual violence suffered by women during the Holocaust and the violence that has infiltrated Israeli society in the wake of the Holocaust. Yoni, the

5 Halbmayr, Brigitte. (2010). “Sexualized violence against women during Nazi ‘racial’ persecution.” In: Hedgepeth, Sonja M. and Saidel, Rochelle G. (eds), *Sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 30.

6 Horowitz, Sara R. (2000). “Gender, genocide and Jewish memory.” *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, vol. 20, no. 1, 163.

film's young protagonist, renounces his participation in violent games when he learns about the genocide of the Jews. His mentor is mad Palestina, who has lost her entire family in the Holocaust.

What connects Palestina to the aspect of sexual violence inflicted on women is the film's *allusion* to Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963). In Fellini's protagonist's childhood memories, the female character dominating his sexual fantasies (other than his mother) is Saraghina. Saraghina is a grotesque prostitute, dressed in rags barely covering her big body. Her hair is wild, she stomps barefoot in the sand — she lives in a dilapidated shack by the seashore — and her face is heavily made-up, her facial expressions (rendered in close-up) emitting ravenous sexuality and eroticism. Although Palestina's attire is not slovenly (rather, it suggests a past life), her hair is wild and she usually strolls the beach barefoot, like Saraghina; Palestina too lives in a dilapidated shack by the seashore. In several scenes she is accompanied by a two-man survivor orchestra of saxophone and accordion. These scenes seem to be a tribute to Fellini's dream-like quasi-Surrealist style.

However, unlike the young boys' jovial experience in *8½* (they pay Saraghina to dance with them, to free them from the shackles of their Catholic puritan upbringing), Palestina's function in *Wooden Gun* is to balance Yoni's violent behavior. The children viciously attack her, calling her 'lunatic.' Her facial expressions and language are mad, not with lust (like Saraghina's) but with pain. The allusion to extraverted female sexuality (Saraghina) and the fact that the children violently attack Palestina (as a form of acting-out the violence experienced in the Holocaust by their parents), who is far from flaunting her sexuality, is precisely what inscribes Palestina as a victim of sexualized violence. It thus becomes clear that women's sexuality in the Holocaust was not attacked because they flaunted it, but simply because it was possible. Fellini's spectacle of woman's grotesque sexuality (rendered from the point of view of young boys) is vicariously turned into a spectacle of violence against women's sexuality.

This lesson, addressed to the viewer, is further underscored by the film's last scene, in which Yoni learns about Holocaust atrocities from a visual medium. In this scene Palestina takes Yoni into her shack — a memorial, full of lit candles. The walls are covered with photographs of her dead family, including her two young children. Yoni inspects the photographs carefully, and each time he looks at a new photograph he asks who the people in it are. Palestina keeps quiet (which intimates how she had survived), and Yoni must figure out on his own what lies behind the photographs — the mass murder of Jews. Later, the camera zooms-in on a photograph that does not belong to Palestina, a staging of one of the most iconic images of the Holocaust, included in the infamous 'Stroop Report —

The Warsaw Ghetto no longer exists'.⁷ During the reaction-shot of Yoni's stupefied expression, we hear guns firing on the soundtrack, conveying how he is vividly imagining the act of execution in the still photograph. The soundtrack then reiterates phrases of Yoni's war games ('kill him! break his head! don't be scared!'), indicating that he is making the connection between the Nazi violence and the war games. As Judd Ne'eman notes, this marks a turning point in Yoni's state of mind, from identification with Israel's militarism and its repudiation of victimhood in the wake of the Holocaust, to one with the Holocaust victims.⁸ The camera movement (the zoom-in) and the soundtrack emphasize cinematic expression (movement and sound), which is further enhanced by the reconstructed iconic Holocaust still photograph *coming to life*. The latter strategy manifests the role of film in dealing both subjectively and ethically with the documentation available to us (in the last scene Yoni is set apart from his friends, looking down on them from a top of a sand dune, conveying thus his new and superior ethical stand). The fact that the Holocaust victim with whom Yoni comes to identify is a woman whose suffering is evoked through an allusion to woman's sexuality suggests the impor-



Fig. 2: Saraghina and the boy Guido, from *8½* (Federico Fellini, 1963).

⁷ See: "Warsaw Ghetto uprising — photos from the Stroop Report." Available at: <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Poland/WarsawGhetto/WarsawGhettoUprising.html>.

⁸ Ne'eman, Judd. (2005). "The tragic sense of Zionism: Shadow cinema and the Holocaust." *Shofar*, vol. 24, no. 1, 30–31.

tance of dealing with women's particular sort of suffering; the more it is repressed, or silenced, the greater its impact on the second generation.



Fig. 3: Palestina and Yoni, from *Wooden Gun* (Ilan Moshenzon, 1978).

The character of Clara in *Once I Was* (Avi Nesher, 2010) echoes that of Miriyam in *My Father's House*. What connects her to Miriyam is not only the fact that she is a beautiful Holocaust survivor who feels she is an unfit mother (her only son lives in a kibbutz) but also the film's special use of *parapraxis*. Clara lives in downtown Haifa (a harbor city) — a liminal place inhabited by social outcasts: Holocaust survivors with shady businesses, prostitutes and smugglers. This large area in downtown Haifa, which reenacts some of the activities characteristic of the camps, symbolizes the collective unconscious. What takes place there during the time when the film is set (1968) represents the horrific past, which cannot be erased. Uptown Haifa, in contrast, represents those who want to be 'purged' of such memories. Arik, the teenage protagonist of the film, lives with his parents on Mount Carmel. His father, also a Holocaust survivor, expresses his indignation at his son's attempts to learn about the sexual atrocities in the Holocaust.

Clara runs an illegal gambling club in her downtown apartment. She considers herself unfit to be a mother and so has sent her son to live on a kibbutz. He only visits occasionally. After one such visit, she tells Arik that her son is better

off there, because she is ‘incapable of raising a child’. ‘Embarrassment, shame, fear, and especially a desire to hide the events from family members are motives for many victims of rape to remain silent,⁹ or to alienate the nearest and dearest. Ya’akov, a survivor, a matchmaker and a smuggler, is clearly in love with Clara, but he will not dare approach her other than in his capacity of friend, lest it re-open old wounds. Unlike Miriyam’s past in *My Father’s House, Once I Was* is not explicit about Clara’s past, but it does insist that we read certain ‘signs’ (Ya’akov, who teaches Arik all about matchmaking, coaches him on how to ‘read the signs’ of the unattached). When Meir, the chief librarian, needs to boost his self-confidence before Ya’akov introduces him to a possible future wife, Ya’akov takes Meir to Clara, who showers him with compliments on his manhood. At this point the film distinguishes between how the viewer should read Clara’s performance (as an act), as part of the subtext, and how Meir reads it (literally).

Clara’s masquerade – her attire and poise – suggests a sexual experience that involves detaching herself from her sexuality and from any feelings associated with it. Clearly, this is how she managed, and still manages, to endure. When Clara tries to explain to Meir that she does not have feelings for him, she mentions that she had only acted in the way she did for Ya’akov’s sake; whereupon Meir wrongly deduces that Clara is being forced into prostitution by Ya’akov. Determined to bring Ya’akov down, Meir tries to convince Arik to help him. Referring to Ka-tzetnik’s *House of Dolls*,¹⁰ he says: ‘Listen to me carefully, a beautiful woman like her — how do you think she survived? Whoever survived must have done something’. What we have here is a parapraxis (the English translation of Freud’s *Fehlleistung*):

I define parapraxis . . . as a kind of effort, a kind of persistence, usually one with unexpected or unintended results, including among others, reversals or displacements in time and space. For instance, one feature of parapraxis . . . is the way in which it often seems to figure the right thing at the wrong place, the wrong thing at the right time.¹¹

9 Sinnreich, Helene J. (2010). “The rape of Jewish Women during the Holocaust.” In: Hedgepeth, Sonja M. and Saidel, Rochelle G. (eds), *Sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 108–123. See also: Dror, Esther and Linn Ruth. (2010). “The shame is always there.” In: Hedgepeth, Sonja M. and Saidel, Rochelle G. (eds), *Sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 275–291.

10 Ka-tzetnik. (trans. Moshe M. Kohn) (1955). *House of Dolls*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

11 Elsaesser, Thomas. (2008). “Absence as presence, presence as parapraxis”. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol. 49, no. 1, 109.

This parapraxis — the wrong reading (by Meir) of a present situation (Clara's apartment as a brothel), attesting to a right interpretation of her attractiveness, albeit relevant to another time and place — reinforces the effect (and affect) conveyed while viewing Clara managing her club: She always dresses up, her low-cut, tight evening gown revealing her shoulders and accentuating her bosom; and she is very secretive about her business. Driven by jealousy and frustration, Meir causes a big commotion, involving the police. The exposure of Ya'akov's illegal business makes huge headlines, and Clara, terrified, decides to sever her ties with the only friend she has, who really loves her — Ya'akov. Finally, unable to endure the burden of shame and the fear of revealing her past, she commits suicide. The film's use of parapraxis guides us to read many of the stylistic and narrative 'peculiarities' in the coming-of-age retro films, as 'performed failure', 'whose effects together constitute a kind of "mourning work in progress", an ongoing return around something which . . . only now . . . can be read and deciphered differently.'¹² This notion is reinforced by the scenes in which Ya'akov teaches Arik how to read signs.

The same applies to *Intimate Grammar's* (Nir Bergman, 2010) extensive use of *metaphor*. Adapted from a novel by David Grossman, one of several metaphors conveying women's sexualized trauma and its transmission to the second generation is a 'diseased' tree — the more Aharon's father (a Holocaust survivor) tries to cure it, the faster its disease spreads. Up in the tree, the father, accompanied by Aharon (the film's protagonist), tells his son about the Holocaust. Both are enfolded by the branches of the tree, whose diseased parts the father is coating with a white painting. The close-ups reveal an odd image of the tree's wounds — orifices, connoting human/woman's private parts. In her discussion of abject images of Jerusalem in Israeli films, Anat Zanger notes that in *Intimate Grammar* 'there is an incessant engagement with bodily secretions (including vomit, menstrual blood and ear wax), as well as sewage.'¹³ Aharon's mother refers to her daughter's menstruation as repulsive, and she makes a connection between the diseased tree's spreading roots and the sewage flooding the family's apartment, thus establishing an image of woman's damaged sexuality flooding the apartment — another metaphor. Zanger rightly notes that the tree 'connects the neighbors to their desires and fears.'¹⁴ I suggest that some of these fears are connected to sexual maturation in the shadow of women's trauma. Aharon, whose sexual maturation is imbued with the image of woman's sexuality as no different from that of

¹² Ibid., 111.

¹³ Zanger, Anat. (2012). *Place, memory and myth in contemporary Israeli cinema*. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 187.

¹⁴ Ibid.

sewage, seeks to postpone his encounter with woman's sexuality by literally halting his growing-up. This is the film's principal metaphor — unable to move past, or express, the trauma transmitted to him, he resists his sexual maturation, while constantly practicing the English present continuous tense (yet another metaphor).



Fig. 4: From *Intimate Grammar's* (Nir Bergman, 2010).

Aharon's grandmother is insane, and so is the young attractive neighbor, a Holocaust survivor, who expresses her attraction to Aharon's father by forcing him to knock down all the walls in her apartment. This metaphor of demolition expresses the neighbor's inward aggression; the destruction of women's bodily boundaries and the infringement of intimate space; as well as the way in which trauma blurs the boundaries of private/public spheres — the 'radioactive' way it infiltrates the collective memory/experience, described so by Yolanda Gampel.¹⁵ The fact that Aharon's mother is there, 'supervising' the 'work' (sitting with Aharon on a sofa, as if watching a *film*), ensuring that the project does not de-

¹⁵ Gampel, Yolanda. (2005). *Ces parents qui vivent à travers moi*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard.

velop into a sexual affair, is precisely what renders the neighbor's advances, as well as the act of devastation, sexual.

In conclusion, Israeli Holocaust-related films suggest that society's protracted silence or contempt regarding women's sexualized trauma has enhanced the transmission of its post-traumatic symptoms and that its violence has penetrated Israeli society on many levels (such as the military). This notion, vicariously laid out in *Wooden Gun*, has been developed in the 2010s within a coming-of-age paradigm, in films like *Once I Was* and *Intimate Grammar*.

Aliza Auerbach, Photographer and Artist



Fig. 1: Aliza Auerbach: Detail from the *Shoes on the Danube Bank memorial*, Budapest, Hungary

A memory can be something very abstract: a flickering thought . . . or when you hold some object and suddenly something filters through. If the object is meaningful to the individual, this helps them to connect to themselves. I chose to speak about shoes. Actually, I chose to concentrate on the meaning of an object: what is an object? An “object” not in the sense of property or financial value, but in the sense of something we imbue with meaning. Last year there was an exhibition in Budapest for my book *Survivors*. On the bank of the river in Budapest there is a memorial made up of hundreds of pairs of shoes. This is the place where they brought the Jews of Budapest, shot them, and simply let them fall into the water. People who were there at the time claim that the river turned red. I sat there and cried. It was so tangible to see all these pairs of shoes and to imagine what happened there. Out of the hundreds of shoes fixed onto the jetty there, I chose to take this photograph and to focus on what I called “There Once Was a Family.”

Aliza Auerbach

Survivors

A short personal history: In 1933 my father, Georg-Gideon Auerbach, who was born in Cologne, Germany, read Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, and believed every word written there. He understood he had to leave Germany. He had just finished his PhD in chemistry but could not find a job. Since he was not a Zionist but held left-wing views, he decided to try his luck in Russia. He traveled there to prepare the ground for himself and his new bride, my mother, whom he had just married. However, there too – this time on account of his German citizenship – he remained unemployed. He returned to Germany, collected his wife and together they traveled to Turkey. My mother, who was already well advanced in pregnancy, felt out of place there. A Zionist friend who paid them a visit in Istanbul on his way to Palestine, and who saw the poor conditions in which my parents-to-be were living, had a word with them. "You will find conditions just as bad in Palestine," he promised, "but at least you'll be in your own country."

For the birth of their first daughter they returned to Germany. However, three months later, at the end of 1934, the small family arrived in Haifa and started to build a new life there. My father, who began his professional career as an unskilled worker at the Shemen factory, in time became the production manager at the Blueband Margarine factory. The family had three more daughters, and over time thirteen grandchildren and twenty-one great-grandchildren.

My father's repeated attempts to warn his parents and sister of the approaching danger all failed. My grandfather replied that Germany was a safe place and that nothing bad would happen to him there. My father's younger brother, Rudolf, who was an extreme idealist, preferred in 1936 to volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, where death found him. His burial place remains unknown to this day. My aunt managed to emigrate to America with her husband and was saved by the skin of her teeth. My grandparents fled Germany to Holland at the very last moment with just the clothes on their backs. From there they moved to England, where they just about managed to make a living. My grandmother, who had spent her entire life in a very large, affluent house surrounded by many servants, was employed as a day worker in a lace factory in Nottingham. Only later on did they join their daughter in America.

Just very recently I discovered, to my great astonishment, that my grandfather, my father's father, had been imprisoned in Dachau following Kristallnacht.

Note: Preface from: Auerbach, Aliza. (trans. Alan Clayman). (2012). *Survivors*, Gefen Publishing House (original work published 2009).

Somehow, in a manner unknown to me, after seven months he was released. He lost thirty kilograms (sixty-five pounds) in the camp and never returned to his old self again. That is what my grandmother has recounted. It is inconceivable to me that even after this horrible experience, he still refused to see the writing on the wall.

I have been asked more than once what led me to work on such a difficult and complex subject as the Holocaust. After all, I am not what is known in Israel as a first-generation survivor, or even a second or third-generation survivor. I would say there is not one answer. As so often happens, the answer lies in a sequence of events that took place over many years. Without my being aware of it at the time, they became formative events.

The Eichmann trial started in 1961, during my first year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. It took place at the Bet Ha'Am Community Center in Jerusalem (today the Gerard Bechar Center), not far from the small student room I was renting. I must confess it never occurred to me to go to the hall and listen to the testimonies. Only distant echoes of what was happening inside reached me.

One day, while I was walking with my then boyfriend, hugging, next to the Bet Ha'Am, a man suddenly stopped in front of us and shouted, "Aren't you ashamed? There they are talking about atrocities that even the devil himself could not invent, and you are going along as though it is business as usual . . ." I remember the sense of shame and discomfort to this very day.

I met my girlfriend R. a short while afterwards. This was for me a first direct encounter with someone who returned "from there." She was twelve years older than me, from Poland, the only one left from her entire family. I saw the deep scar on her thigh for the first time when we went together to the swimming pool. She told me then that she had been injured when, at the age of fourteen, she jumped from the train that was taking her to one of those hellholes whose name she did not even know. The cattle wagon on the way to hell, in which she traveled, was already full of countless bodies, onto which she and her friend on the voyage clambered, in order to wriggle through the barbed wire that blocked the little window. Together they managed to part the barbed wire, to make an opening that would let a body through. Their hands were bleeding but they felt nothing. The main thing was to get out, to breathe some air.

Her friend, who was her senior, jumped first. Immediately after the jump a shot was heard. R. understood what had happened, yet still jumped after her. She lowered herself down, sticking closely to the wall of the wagon. Death was not frightening. Life with all its tortures was. For some reason, they didn't shoot at her. Maybe the soldiers on the roof didn't notice her. From the intensity of the fall onto a rock or sharp stone, copious blood flowed from her thigh; it wouldn't stop until she put some leaves on it that she found in the field.

Thus began a long voyage in time. We would meet almost every evening in my room, and she would just keep telling more and more stories, into the small hours of the night. Up to then she had been unable to talk to anyone about that period, she said.



Fig. 2: Zev Birger, photographed by Aliza Auerbach, from *Survivors*.

Years later I had a boyfriend who had also survived the Shoah. He was fourteen years old when his mother was murdered before his eyes by a Nazi commander and he saw life dwindling away slowly from his father through hunger and typhoid in the camp. His entire family was exterminated. This was my second intimate meeting with the Other Planet. He too shared with me what happened to him in those terrible times.

There are certain things that sink into one's soul and float to the surface all of a sudden, as though they had waited all that time for just the right moment, to return, to rise up and to be present.

And so, one day, over eight years ago, while I was watching one of the documentaries on Holocaust Memorial Day, I suddenly knew that the survivors with

their families would be the subject of my next book. This work, the third volume of a trilogy, will complete the two books *Rishonim* (Pioneers, 1990) and *Olim* (New Immigrants, 1992; English edition entitled *Aliyah*).

I wanted to create a photo album that would show the survivors as they are today, with the emphasis on hope, on the miracle of rehabilitation, the power of survival, on the unbelievable wonder of continuity, in spite of everything. The human brain is not built to hold and absorb the dimensions of this enormous horror, and it transforms the unacceptable number of six million Jews exterminated into some sort of anonymous information. I thought that the personal stories of several survivors – isolated bits of life and hope in a huge, raging sea of death and loss – would somehow illustrate the enormous loss and transform the inconceivable numbers into people of flesh and blood.

For many years, actually all through my work, I have dealt in one way or another with the cycle of life: with the beginning which is an end, and with the end which is always also a new beginning. This cycle of life into which we entered – perhaps without our consent – never ceases to puzzle me and make me wonder.

I understood that the encounter with the survivors and their stories would not be easy. So I decided at the same time to photograph the sea, a subject that I had always wanted to deal with but had never dared. I thought the sea would soothe me. And so it was indeed at the beginning. As I advanced, the sea drew me to it for nearly two years, and left no room to photograph the survivors. I was probably too scared to be drawn into the hell of the Holocaust and preferred to immerse myself in the comforting depths of the sea. That is how it came about that I started my work on this book over eight years ago, but stopped photographing for a period, during which time things crystallized and ripened within me.

I had to come to several decisions about dealing with the subject: I thought it was right to photograph survivors who were representative of as many as possible of the communities that suffered during World War II. This is why I went looking for survivors from Bulgaria, Libya and Tunis, alongside those from Poland, Germany and Holland. Some of them felt uncomfortable being called “survivors,” because they were just exiled to labor camps, or forced to leave their homes for a limited period of time, and did not experience the Shoah in all its cruelty like the rest of Europe’s Jews.

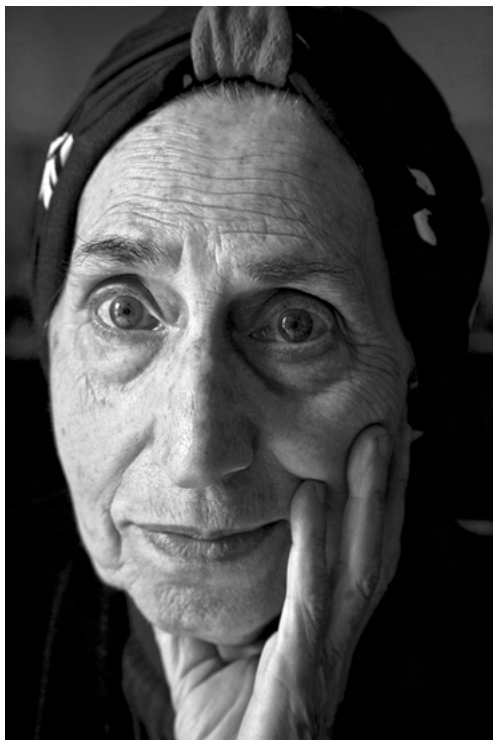


Fig. 3: Sarah Rubin, photographed by Aliza Auerbach, from *Survivors*.

I also decided, after much hesitation, to concentrate on survivors who built their homes in Israel. In no way do I criticize those who chose to build their lives in their countries of origin or in other countries; it was rather a natural continuation to my two books mentioned earlier, *Rishonim* (Pioneers) and *Olim/Aliyah* (New Immigrants), which one way or another focused on the experience of immigration to Israel.

I understood from the very beginning that it was not for me to set criteria for suffering. There were those who survived the extermination camps after their families were murdered in front of their eyes, and those who literally already had the hangman's noose around their necks, and yet they still managed, it would appear, to return to an everyday life, with joy, fully functioning. And there are those who had "only" lost their homes or been sent to labor camps, yet their worlds had been shattered. Nightmares haunt their nights until today, and they pass their days like leaves blowing in the wind. Who can understand the complexity and diversity of the human soul?

So I photographed those who had survived the fiery furnace alongside those who fled their homes and hid. All of them are survivors.

I asked every survivor to write a short text about his or her life. Here and there I wrote down what the survivor said, but only when he made it clear he could not handle it himself. I only edited the texts slightly, in order to keep the personal, individual style. Therefore I did not, as it is called in editing, try to “standardize” the texts. I hoped that way the reader would get a feel for the character of the person, not just through the photograph but also through the way he expressed himself and the details he chose to recount. And perhaps beyond that – through his silence, the words he did not say.

Some of the survivors preferred to speak about themselves in the third person, since still today they are incapable of identifying the adult they have become with the child or young person who went through the valley of the shadow of death. For others, their mechanisms of repression and denial totally erased the horrors, so that today they only remember a fraction and to most of the questions posed, they answered, “I don’t remember,” “Perhaps,” “A long time has gone by,” and similar responses. There were also those who were pleased to be photographed and agreed to tell their stories – but only to me, and not until I promised that what they said would not be written or come out in any other way. So I found myself the keeper of stories that had not yet been told, even to their closest family.

And yet I believe that these stories, each one re-counted in its own way and style, paint a picture of the darkest period in modern times, perhaps even in history, in which, as one of the survivors wrote, “The human lexicon has still not invented the words that can describe it.”

I did not want to include in the book family photographs of dear ones who had been murdered, but rather to photograph objects that remained: from the Shoah period itself, and also from the preceding period, as a testimony to a home that existed and is no more.

It is amazing what power is concealed within an object, the multitude of memories that emerge from it and how terrible are the pictures folded up inside one small, innocent-looking little object.

For example, take the lemon of Ruti Ma’ayan. An entire life story is wrapped up in this brown lemon, hard as stone, shriveled and shrunken, that nevertheless kept its original form. Only sixty years have passed, yet it looks like something found during an archaeological dig from the First Temple period. As though the hell of those days has passed it through thousands of years, using a time machine. The lemon was thrown at the train in which Ruti and her family were sent to the camp in 1943, by the nurses working in the Jewish Hospital in Czernovitz. They knew what the overcrowding was like in the wagons and presumably hoped the smell of the fresh lemon would help bring some relief. Ruti caught the lemon and

kept it with her throughout the exhausting journey. When they reached the camp Ruti's mother hid it in a small niche in the wall of the hut where they lived. Every few days Ruti would check if the lemon was still there. At some point her mother wanted to throw away the dried-up, useless fruit, but Ruti announced that she would be liberated with the lemon. So from its place in the wall, the lemon experienced what happened to Ruti . . . Afterwards it was with her when she came to Israel, at her wedding and the birth of her three children and seven grandchildren, a constant reminder of the hell that had been and a testimony to the conquering spirit of life.

But the story doesn't end there. Years later, during a chance visit to an exhibition of paintings by the late Israeli artist Meir Pichhadze, Ruti suddenly saw a painting on canvas of a girl with two braids holding her lemon. How could it be? How did he know? Ruti fainted on the spot. Apparently, the full horror of that time came back to her when she saw the painting. On her way home by bus, her handbag – with the lemon that always accompanied her as an amulet inside it – was stolen. Ruti would not rest or give up. She put advertisements in the newspapers and addressed the anonymous thief in an emotional radio broadcast, in which she recounted the meaning of the lemon for her. And wonder of wonders – the lemon was returned to her. Today the lemon lies in a small wooden box, on a light-blue woolen mat, knitted by a friend's mother who did not survive the Shoah. The friend asked for these two objects to dwell together in the same little wooden box.

The story of a lemon. An ordinary, meaningless object to the innocent eye.

I have often wondered, why do survivors keep things that retain such difficult echoes of those dark times instead of destroying them? One of the survivors, Sarah Rubin, told me that she always hoped that one day those objects would serve as silent witnesses in the Big Trial that would be held. She also said that on sleepless nights, which were many, she would get up in the dead of night, take out from the drawer the yellow star and the numbers that had been sewn on her clothes and in front of a picture of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren would crumple up the bits of cloth in rage and mumble, "That is my answer to you, may your name be blotted out."

I decided to photograph railway lines as a motif throughout the book. The railway lines long ago became an icon symbolizing the Shoah. I opted to take photographs right here, in Jerusalem. I photographed them on one bitter-cold winter day, when they suddenly looked like they were "there." I wanted to emphasize by doing so that we carry with us this seal wherever we go.

I chose to photograph the families as though I were a family member photographing my family. I didn't want staged, cold, alien studio portraits. I wanted to give the direct warm feeling of an unprofessional photo. So I made do with the

natural conditions I found, with no special lighting. These photos in general raised problems I had not expected at the start. The little ones in the group didn't always have the required patience for a group photo. This is why one can sometimes find them photographed with their eye closed or with some of their faces obscured. Moreover, to get dozens of people together at a given time, on a given day and at a given place was no simple task. Sometimes someone was missing and I didn't manage to photograph the entire family, but I thought that even if some family member were missing, those present would be sufficient to testify to the wonderful miracle of the continuation of the line.

Many of the survivors thought, and still think, that bringing up a marvelous family was the ultimate answer to the attempted annihilation by that demon known as Hitler. The "answers" are many and varied: families of just two children and two grandchildren, next to families with dozens of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Ultra-Orthodox families and secular families, traditional families and those living on kibbutzim, and not a few mixed families, where the religious, secular and ultra-Orthodox live side by side, all children of the same parents!

I had the honor to photograph Shulamit Catane, an eighty-seven-year-old survivor from France, holding on her lap Hallel, then her latest, the 140th great-grandchild, the day after she was born. Shulamit is blessed with ten children and eighty-one grandchildren. Some weeks ago I called Shulamit up to find out how she was doing. She was as clear and joyous as ever and was boasting that she now has 205 great-grandchildren, with six more on the way (that she knows of) – and she remembers the names of all of them! Every evening before going to sleep she blesses each and every one of them in her heart. What a magnificent "answer"! What a vast range of families, but a single, winning answer – the power of life – its limits and borders who can fathom?

Three years have passed since the Hebrew edition of this volume was published, and I am happy to present this new edition for the English-speaking public. I would like to dedicate this English volume, as well, to the survivors, wherever they are, and in this way to express my admiration and appreciation – for their courage, determination, will power and strength. This book is yet another testimony to the power of the human spirit.

Aliza Auerbach, Jerusalem, June 2012



Fig. 4: The lemon that was thrown at the train which sent Ruti to the camp, photographed by Aliza Auerbach, from *Survivors*.



Fig. 5: The Rubin family, photographed by Aliza Auerbach, from *Survivors*.

Dana Freibach-Heifetz, Philosopher and Author

There is a passage from Yoel Hoffmann's *The Christ of Fish* that has been in my mind for quite a few years:¹

At night, Uncle Herbert came like a slow hunter of air bunnies and spoke to me. I told my father, 'isn't uncle Herbert dead, am I dreaming?' And my dead father said, 'he's alive'.

I find this passage very powerful, as it makes the absence of the dead very much present, tangibly so, their absence and the way in which they are still present in the lives of those who love them and continue to relate to them, miss them, grieve their absence.

While this is, of course, painful, the yearning and the sorrow are a bond that one is often not willing to give up, as it continues to make the dead present. I think that people who cling to and have very intensive relationships with those they lost in the Holocaust do not want to give it up; oftentimes, years after having repressed it, they come back to this connection. This is a relationship perpetuated by pain, by longing, and eliminating it means eliminating a part of one's identity, one's very self.

So although Moshe Shamir wrote of his young brother, who fell in the War of Independence, that "Elik was born from the sea",² Elik wasn't really born from the sea. He came from Europe, and portraying him as being born from the sea means making him forever rootless. And even if one grows roots later, they will still feel what Lea Goldberg called "the pain of the two homelands". Perhaps we should realize that such pain – when it's tolerable and not petrifying – is not always a bad thing.

¹ Hoffmann, Yoel (trans. Eddie Levenston) (2006). *The Christ of Fish*. New York: New Directions. (Hebrew: Keter, 1991).

² Shamir, Moshe (1970). *With His Own Hands*. Israel Universities Press (Hebrew: Am Oved, 1972).

Dana Freibach-Heifetz

Ethics of Documentation: Attentiveness as Responsibility and Grace

In memory of Aliza Auerbach

In this paper I wish to examine the way in which one can *listen to the absence and make it heard*, as an act whose meaning is *ethical*. To draw attention to that which enables, even summons, the transferring of memory, maybe of fiction as well: the interpersonal interaction between the listener and the one who's telling the story. In other words, I wish to present some observations about the relations between silence, listening or attentiveness, and the ability to talk, in particular: about trauma, from a perspective of responsibility and grace.

In order to do so I'll focus on the documentary arena, on the works of two artists – Aliza Auerbach's book *Survivors* (Gefen Publishing House, 2012; Hebrew: Yad Ben Zvi, 2010), and Yonatan Haimovich's film *Fugitive Pieces* (*Resisim*, Israel, 2009).¹ In both cases, I shall examine what characterizations of the photographers, and their relation to the people they photographed, enabled the latter to open up and talk about their lives and experiences, at times: even things that they have never told anyone; when it should be emphasized, that the subject matter is stories that are hard to be told as well as to be heard. These characterizations, I shall argue, can formulate an “ethics of documentation”. Against this background, I shall further offer some thoughts regarding the relevance of such ethics to the therapeutic arena as well.

But first I wish to present, in a nutshell, the theoretical perspective from which these interactions shall be examined – the concept of “secular grace”.

(A) Secular Grace

“Secular grace” is a philosophical notion or an ethical ideal that was developed in my book.² Being a secularized concept of religious grace (as a relationship between God and humans) which is placed within the framework of a secular-humanistic worldview as a relation between human beings, this notion refers to two planes of the human existence. First, it means a way of life, which is conceived by the one who chose it as self-actualization by love (in a wide sense, that

1 See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_jGpuMQY54.

2 Freibach-Heifetz, Dana. (trans. Barbara Harshav). (2017). *Secular Grace*. Leiden & Boston: Brill-Rodopi (Hebrew: *Chesed Chiloni*, Resling, 2009).

shall be explained hereinafter) to others. Such an existential choice implies and requires a manifestation in concrete interpersonal interactions characterized as grace-relations – the second plane or sense of secular grace – in which one invites the other to establish such a relation, and the other accepts this invitation. In other words, by “secular grace” I refer to a relation between two individuals, at least one of whom (denoted “the inviter”) chose it as a way of life which is realized in concrete relationships, while the other (“the respondent”) chose at least to maintain the certain grace-relation with the inviter. There is continuity between these two planes – the concrete grace-relation is the realization of the fundamental choice, while that fundamental choice is the criterion for identifying the concrete relation between two individuals as grace.

Within this framework, the *grace-relation* is a personal encounter with another person as an equal, unique personality. It is a dynamic and open encounter, which is realized in various ways since it is anchored in the individuality of both sides as well as in the dialogue between them. The existence of such a relation is dependent on the mutual will of the parties (the inviter’s will to give and the respondent’s will to accept), due to the fact that this relation is conceived of as a mutual gift by both parties; in particular, the very acceptance is conceived of as a gift since it enables the inviter to actualize his existential choice in the way of grace. It should be emphasized that the grace-relation is given beyond duty and justice – the giver is not obliged to be generous towards the one who receives, and the latter has no right for it.

A grace-relation has two aspects: the subjective aspect of feelings, thoughts and desires, and the objective aspect of speech, deeds and non-verbal conduct. In the subjective aspect, grace is love in the broad sense, characterized by generosity, openness, non-judgmental acceptance, empathy and respect towards the other (which is intertwined with self-love and expresses it). In the objective sense, grace is manifested practically through generous behavior and conduct towards the other while focusing on her needs and point of view.

Secular grace-relations may occur through a wide range of human encounters, from a one-time encounter to a long-lasting and profound friendship. In all cases, it is a special combination of self-love and love of others, in which there is no place for oppression of the other nor for self-sacrifice (even if balancing those two loves might be practically complicated).

It is important to mention that secular grace is a demanding relation that involves difficulty and risk, and requires a constant self-overcoming. Since it involves self-exposure and self-transcendence on behalf of the other, it requires trust, and makes the parties (especially the inviter) vulnerable to getting hurt by the other (as a result of rejection or abuse of the generosity because of belligerence, exploitation or alienation), or because of the other (since it hurts us when

someone who is dear to us suffers). Therefore, founding a grace-relation with another requires *courage* as well as *perseverance* in loyalty and devotion to the other, and, no less importantly: *optimism* regarding the very possibility of the foundation and existence of such a relation.

However, despite the risk and the difficulty, a grace-relation may bring a positive existential change in both parties, in several aspects. First, *liberation*: secular grace may increase the degree of freedom that is afforded to the parties. E.g. – liberation from perceiving the other as impersonal, meaningless, threatening and a stranger, allows to perceive him as a unique individual; this leads to openness, as opposed to imperviousness and withdrawal. In addition, liberation from an exclusive point of view on the world opens the parties to the ability to experience, through empathy and identification, another point of view.

Second, secular grace enables the expression and strengthening of the *self*, both through widening our ability to give as a way of self-expression, and through constant self-knowledge and self-enrichment as a result of an acquaintance and comparison with another's distinctiveness.

Third, *love* – this grace could fill life with love, especially in the sense of loving but also in the sense of being loved; in this I mean love in the wide sense of the word, one that includes, as mentioned above, openness, generosity, affection, etc.

Forth, *meaning to life* – like every act of adopting a guiding principle in one's life, secular grace grants meaning to life (at least to the inviter). Aside from those outcomes there may be more: truth (namely: authenticity), pleasure, richness, vividness, joy and serenity, all of which could be given by loving dialogical relations with other people. One can refer to all these outcomes in terms of "secular salvation".

(B) Attentiveness as Grace

In light of this theoretical model of "secular grace", I shall now examine the listening that allows for the transference of memory in the works of Aliza Auerbach and Yonathan Haimovitch.

Aliza Auerbach photographed, for more than forty years, portraits and landscapes. Her book *Survivors* was published in 2009. It presents portraits of Holocaust survivors, when besides each portrait appears a short autobiography, a photograph of an object from the camps or from his or her childhood home, and a photo of the family each one has raised in Israel.

During an encounter of the research group in The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute,³ in May 2013, Aliza talked about the process of creating the book. Thus, her method of working was revealed, especially some prominent characteristics. The first characteristic is that the encounters with the people whom she photographed were very *personal*, not merely for them but first and foremost for Aliza herself.

This aspect stood out from the very beginning, in the early stage of choosing the photographed people – whenever possible, Aliza chose people whose faces spoke to her. In her words: “I don’t have an explanation. There is a person that you see and feel that you can connect to, and there are people that I feel that [. . .] I can photograph but nothing will happen.”

Likewise, at the stage of preparation, Aliza went to the homes of the person being photographed, alone, several times, and conversed with them before she started photographing. The personal characteristic of the encounters was also evident in the way in which she opened herself to absorb the survivors’ stories, and later described those encounters to the Van-Leer group – she did so in detail, in present tense as if those encounters were happening here and now, while disclosing her own reactions to those stories. She said, e.g., “her story and her whole being left a deep unforgettable impression in me,” “the story that was engraved in me very much,” “her story was particularly difficult for me.”

In addition, when coming to photograph the survivors’ families, the sense of immediate intimacy was important to Aliza, and she insisted that “I don’t want to do a studio photoshoot with a neutral background and clean lighting, but as if I am one of the family that photographs a family photo.” Finally, the personal aspect is manifested in Aliza’s feeling (which she chose to express by the imagery of train tracks in Jerusalem, a repeating motif in the book), that “every one of us, even if they aren’t a survivor or a second or third generation, carries it with them.”

A second characteristic that is evident in Aliza’s approach is the attempt to record and give voice, as accurately as possible, to the stories and feelings of *the photographed people themselves*, while minimizing her own involvement. “I tried to express through the photos what I thought the person in front of me felt,” she said; she also insisted that the survivors write the texts accompanying their photos in their own words. This insistence constitutes a deliberate and explicit artistic stand, in the content-related aspect as well as the poetic-technical one.

³ Being a part of the group, I attended this encounter, as well as the one in which Yonathan Haimovitch presented his movie and how he shot it. Their quotations are based on my writing during these encounters.

Another fundamental characteristic can be seen in what constitutes, in my mind, Aliza's 'credo' as a photographer – *the subjective aspect of love and intimacy* to the people being photographed. In her words:

One may say that I'm sentimental, that I'm emotional, but I am not ashamed of those places. I don't put distance between me and those I photograph. And when I photograph people, one can see that I am moved if that is what I feel. And I do believe that even though my camera is an objective tool, as seemingly clicking a button is a technical thing, at the end of the day it is clear that if each one of us had a camera then each one of us would film differently. The place of detachment is perhaps easier, people are afraid to commit, but my stance is very clear, from love to this place with all its problems [. . .] and love for the human being as such.

Finally, it was important to Aliza to emphasize that "I am an incorrigible *optimist* [. . . and] this is an optimistic book about the Holocaust. [. . .] because the ability to continue functioning in the day-to-day, and I am aware that this is a daily struggle, the day-to-day is to survive every day all over again, but [. . .] I am in awe of people who have this type of mental strength."

Aliza's direct and non-evading gaze into the core of the hardship is ingrained in her photographs, especially her gaze into the heart of the person facing the camera; a warm and empathizing gaze, that does not force itself onto the people photographed precisely because of its remarkable involvement. This gaze enables the photographed, humbly and sensitively, to be who they truly are and to touch the viewer's heart. At times, her gaze enables those people to tell things they have never in their lives told anyone. Because of this, Aliza's photos manage to move its viewer, and invite him to a dialogue with the characters she depicts.

Many characteristics of this documenting process, as well as the quality of its results, can be seen in Yonathan Heimovitch's presentation of the process in which he created his movie *Fugitive Pieces* (Israel, 2009). The movie documents the re-encounter with immigrants from former Soviet Union, who live in the Jerusalemite house in which Yonathan lived in his childhood. More than a decade after leaving the house following his father's death – and after the deaths of his mother and grandfather – he returned to it looking for his childhood, "to collect a few last fugitive pieces, a moment before they disappear." Alongside its creator's losses, the movie presents the hardships of the photographed people – their losses and the trauma of immigration they have experienced, trauma that is exacerbated by their loneliness and the aging they are confronting; their world, just as Yonathan's childhood, is "a vanishing world."

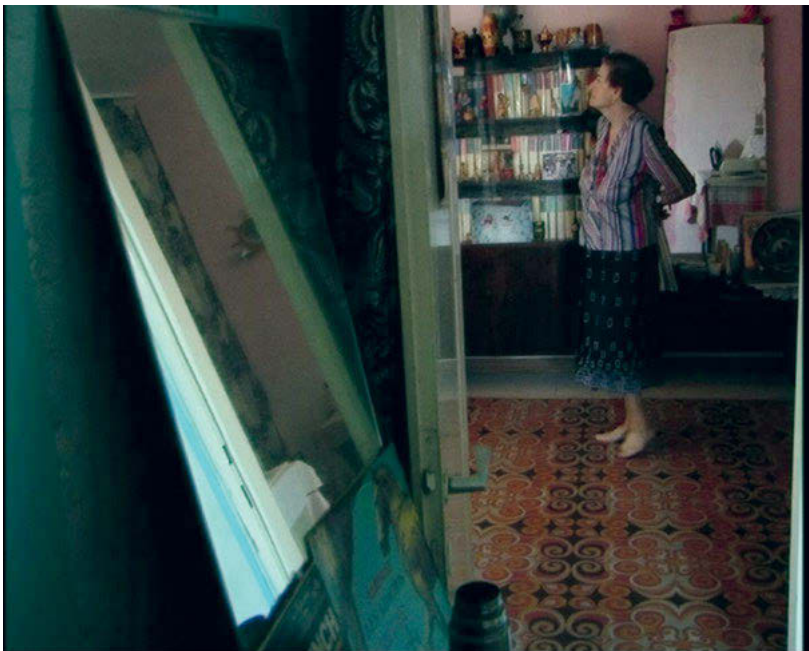


Fig. 1: Two frames from the film *Fugitive Pieces* (Yonathan Heimovitch, 2009).

Like Aliza, Yonathan shot the movie as he came to the house alone. In June 2013, during another encounter at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Yonathan talked about the movie-making process as a journey full of *difficulties* from beginning to end. In its very beginning, when he arrived and felt “*naked and exposed and a stranger in the landscape*,” and had much difficulty crossing the building’s threshold – for two months he stood and simply looked, “not daring to get closer, only to zoom in with the camera, but actually going, stepping with my feet and my body, crossing the threshold, I didn’t dare, I was *terrified*.”⁴

Later on, another difficulty arose due to the lack of knowledge that is structured in the very process of encountering and documenting the filmed subjects. As Yonathan said: “There is no script. [And . . .] *I am completely open* to what I shall meet, to the people, *I have to be extremely attentive*, and I am constantly aware of my wound and am trying to look at it *with modesty*.” Mainly, a significant difficulty emerged from the *existential meaning* of this journey: “I saw death everywhere, [. . .] everything seemed to me like one big cemetery, and I am going into the graves. [. . .] A feeling of a disassembled man, that there is no world and no reality. [. . .] I was like a little Orpheus, passing through a world of shadows and managing to exit from the world of the dead.”

These things show the process’ difficulties and dangers – including the danger of disintegrating and being trapped forever in the world of the dead – as well as what it demands from the photographer/listener: *courage, patience, modesty, attentiveness and constant openness to the other*. But once those are given, the miracle of encounter occurs. In Yonathan’s words:

Slowly, during my waiting outside the threshold, people I knew began exiting, and to my surprise they reacted very warmly to me [. . .] and I was surprised [to discover] that for them I gave *meaning* and they remembered me and I was a point of reference for them just like they were for me. And *it moved me*. And from that moment I crossed the threshold.

Moreover, he said:

I was required to come closer, and from that moment – to be inside, [. . .] *very very close* [. . .] *they accepted me and I them*. And from the moment I arrived everything was *so intimate and familiar*, as if a world was created, one that I didn’t know how much I longed for and how much it was missing from me and in which I *find my deepest roots* [. . .] *the feeling of intimacy so big and deep and touching and giving me a feeling of a home I couldn’t find anywhere else*.

Thus, a mutually significant and emotional encounter was born, as well as a loving intimacy that produced no less than a profound feeling of having a home. By

4 Here – and later – the emphasis is mine [D. F-H].

means of the unique attentiveness of its creator, the movie succeeds in bringing, with much sensitivity, compassion and gentleness, the portraits of immigrants and “a world of fugitive pieces that touches something in the source, in the unity, in what existed before the fracture” – and thereby draws attention to the absence and invites the viewers to experience this absence and to open up to the film’s heroes.



Fig. 2: From the film *Fugitive Pieces* (Yonathan Heimovitch, 2009).

In my mind, one can talk about all these in terms of *ethics of documenting* as ethics of listening or attentiveness, which is a *private case of secular grace-relation*. A relation in which the artist (for whom this might be a way of life), invites the people being photographed into a dialogical and very personal encounter; an encounter in which the former humbly offers the latter his full and empathic attentiveness, which often deeply identifies with them. They, in turn, *respond*, accept this listening attention, and thereby allow the artist into their world and grant his camera the harsh stories of their lives.

In other words, there is a subjective attitude of the artist, namely: the listener and the documenter, which is expressed objectively in the way in which he looks at the photographed people, talks and is simply silently present with them; and

this, in turn, forms a subjective stance of the photographed people, which enables the intimate and sensitive act of filming.

This creates, sensitively and delicately, an interaction that becomes a *gift* for the photographer and the photographed alike. This gift often *liberates* from loneliness and alienation, lessens the burden of suffering, strengthens *self-knowledge* and its power, grants *meaning* to actions and deeds, gives *love* (in its wide sense) to the photographer as well as to the photographed, enriches their world, and can even give them a sense of home. Furthermore, its fruits can also be a gift to the *viewers*, who choose to respond to the invitation within the artistic piece and enter a dialogue with it. When dealing with a documentation of those who have experienced trauma, loss and absence – things which are naturally difficult and sometimes impossible to talk about – this ethics is needed tenfold; without it, filming and documenting of loss and trauma is impossible.

(C) Therapy as Grace

The abovementioned conceptualization of documentation, as an ethical grace-relation of a witness who is documenting a traumatic person's story, can be implemented in the therapeutic arena as well.

Generally speaking, being a therapist means being a witness – the very attentive presence of the therapist, followed by her listening to the patient, already makes the former a witness of the latter. No therapeutic relationship is possible without this “witnessing function” of the therapist, a function that has many names (e.g. “container”); in this terminology, the patient’s “testimony” may be a verbal or a non-verbal (“enactment”) one. In particular, confrontation with trauma requires a witness who is willing to listen to the traumatic narrative, and more often – to its lacunas (“unconscious”); as Dori Laub puts it: self-knowledge of a trauma can only be created by a process of testifying.⁵ Such a confrontation is possible only within a “healing relationship” with others, in Judith Herman’s words;⁶ when a therapist is this other, she is summoned to be morally committed as a witness to a crime. Herman talks of this commitment in terms of solidarity with the victim/patient and defines the trauma in criminal terms, while emphasizing the emotional involvement of the therapist alongside her intellectual one in order to actualize this commitment. Herman also focuses on the dangers of the therapist’s position, known as “a secondary traumatization”: due to the empathy, even the identification, with the traumatic patient, the therapist may share the

5 Felman, Shoshana and Laub, Dori. (eds.). (1992). *Testimony: Cries of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge.

6 Herman, Judith Lewis. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence*. New York: Basic Books.

patient's helplessness, confusion, rage, anxiety and pain as if they were her own, alongside "the guilt of the by-standing witness". Other trauma researchers have also written about the therapist as a witness. Chana Ullman talks of a very *personal* openness to the traumatized patient's world, and goes as far as arguing that as a morally committed witness the therapist has to take a political stand regarding the reality which traumatized the patient, at the risk of blame, shame and even alienation by and from her own community. Furthermore, Ullman adds, being such an involved witness to a traumatic victim is an asymmetric position of being available to the other's needs, which is sometimes bound to threaten the very identity of the witness.⁷

Laub pays special attention to the upheavals of the witness' listening, being the "tabula rasa on which the trauma is being engraved," thus can be reclaimed by the victim as his own story which is a part of his identity. Like Ullman, Laub highlights the required identification of such a witness with the victim, but at the same time he emphasizes that the listener must also be *her own witness* in order to remain a reliable companion of the patient/victim to the unknown land of the trauma – to which one cannot go by oneself. Moreover, in this context Laub explicitly compares the therapeutic process to the documentary one. Given his own personal experience with documenting Holocaust survivors' testimonies as well as with being a therapist of such patients, Laub states that there is an essential similarity between the two: the documentation can be conceived of in terms of a "short term therapy" of the survivor.

Against this background, I argue that one can easily relate to the therapeutic process in general, and of trauma victims in particular, as another particular case of an ethical grace-relation. Within such a conceptual framework, the therapist – for whom this profession can be perceived as a way of life – plays the role of the inviter, who offers her attentive listening as a gift to the patient. This attentiveness needs to be a personal, intimate and sensitive presence of the witnessing therapist, whose subjective aspect may be referred to as a "therapeutic love" which manifests in the objective aspect of the therapist's behavior towards the patient. Such a relation – or therapy – with a traumatic patient is extremely risky for the therapist, since it might involve a brutal attack on her emotions, beliefs, defenses and even her identity, and force her to confront profound existential dilemmas. In this context, the characterizations of what I defined as an "ethics of documentation" can and should be adopted by the therapist in order to enable a therapeutic process worthy of its name.

7 Ullman, Chana. (2006). "Bearing Witness: Across the Barriers in Society and in the Clinic". *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol. 16, no. 2: 181–198.

(D) The Right Tone

In conclusion, in my mind it is fruitful to think of these issues in light of Natan Zach's "The Right Poem", which was written in another context but is relevant to ours as well.

The Right Poem

When the emotion fades, the right poem speaks.
Until then, the emotion, the other poem, has spoken.
Now, the right poem's turn to speak
Has come.

When a person is weary he thinks of tomorrow.
There is power, a great deal of power, in his thinking.
There is courage. A great deal of courage. Interestingly, courage
Is remembered more than tomorrow's terrors.
He is friendly then, and there is also courage in his friendship.

He is not afraid then. The words he said,
He does not seek to annul. Despite them being air.
The deed he broke off thousands of times, he wishes to break no more.
Due to fragility, he knows. He has measured compassion
But he is accurate: he does not easily transfer imagery
From his sorrow to that which is not his sorrow.

He has an acute eagerness to hear. If in this language listening
Means more than hearing, then listening it is. So as not to
Harm the only thing given to him: the ability
To hear. Now even his own blood shall not dare to harm
The one and only thing given to him – at times, as if from
above – hearing.⁸

For the attentiveness that enables this kind memory transference, emotion is important, even essential; Aliza's 'credo' illustrates this well. However, emotion is only the first step. Reading Zach's poem with Aliza's and Jonathan's words in mind, evokes an intricate picture of this attentiveness.

A true attentiveness to a 'memory of a horror' requires, first and foremost, *courage*. Because its essence, as Jonathan said, is its being a journey to the unknown without a map nor a compass, one that sometimes takes place in territories of death and darkness, places that seem almost impossible to return from alive; while the listener has to expose himself to experiences designed to hurt

⁸ I am grateful to Dana G. Peleg for her translation of the poem from Hebrew, in: Zach, Nathan. (1986). *All the Milk and the Honey*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved. 68.

and scorch, knowing how fragile are the participants who share this journey. Indeed, a great deal of courage is needed here.

True attentiveness also requires “accuracy”, in the sense of the delicacy and sensitivity that Aliza talked about, as well as in the sense of “not easily transferring imagery from our own sorrow to that which is not our sorrow”, since usually we listen mostly to ourselves. All these – courage and accuracy in its various aspects – do not come naturally, they require “acute eagerness”, which can also be conceived of in terms of *personal responsibility*. And, of course – and here the analogy to Zach’s poem ends – they cannot be achieved when one is mentally or physically exhausted, as they require continuous effort.

However, and despite all the difficulties, such an attentiveness is possible. Especially when it is done out of *personal responsibility* to hear and listen, because “the ability to do so was given to us”; a feeling that turns the attentiveness into an ethical act. When a person listens to another in this way, the other can tell the story, including those who feel like they “have nothing to say”, finds within themselves many things to say when they are listened to with true attentiveness. And where there is true attentiveness, it is possible to hear the silence which was described by the poet Israel Eliraz as “the complete, ant-like silence / that can only be heard by those / whose ears are attuned to the thread of suffering.”

Such an attentiveness is evident, as I have shown, in what can be called “the personal ethics of documentation” of Aliza and Jonathan; with all the differences between them, there is a striking resemblance in their approaches to the people whom they photographed. One can also think of such an attentiveness in other contexts, such as the therapeutic one, in which the therapist is a witness to her patient in a manner that is strikingly similar to the documentarist’s; thus, the characterizations of this “ethics of documentation” can easily be implemented into an “ethics of therapy” as well.

In my mind, such an attentiveness is a grace, a grace that people can give each other and thereby find a way to transfer memory and make the absence be present – with compassion, generosity and courage. A way that, sometimes, despite all the difficulties, can offer us what can be conceived of as no less than salvation.

Section Seven: **Hitkansut – Shoah Remembrance
Ritual**

Rani Jaeger, an Educator, Co-Founder of 'Beit Tefilah Israeli'



Fig. 1: Kaleb Family, Dec. 1944, Vidin, Bulgaria: Buko-Salomon, Bukitza-Esther, Hertzlina, Matilda and Nina (right to left)

In the photo, my grandfather Buko (Salomon), my grandmother Bukitza (Esther) and their three daughters: the eldest Nina, the middle Matilda, and the youngest – my mother Hertzlina, who is here about two years old. A trivial family photo. But when you think about the context it is all but trivial: where would you find, kilometers to every direction in Europe, a whole Jewish family, smiling in December 1944? The picture tells the story of Bulgarian Jews to which my mother's family was part of.

Bulgaria cooperated with the Nazis and even had a local version of the Nuremberg laws that led to the deportation of Jews in territories occupied by Bulgaria. But when the Nazi and government plan to deport Jewish Bulgarian citizens to the death camps was about to take place an unexpected civil protest started all over the country. A protest that eventually led to the annulment of the death verdict issues against Jews. For me – this is a lesson about the crucial importance of social coalitions. The relentless efforts to prevent the deportation included Bulgarian politicians, intellectuals, churchmen, and ordinary citizens that together opposed it. King Boris' part is subjected to heated debate but he played a major role in those historical moments.

The opposition is not only a history book fact but a very personal family experience: my grandfather owned a business which he was not allowed to keep under racial laws. His partner – a non-Jewish Bulgarian – met him every month at a distant train station and gave him his share of the profits in the business. My aunt Matilda told me that when they were obliged to wear the Jewish yellow star, she didn't want to go to school- being afraid of her peers' reaction. Grandma

told her, “You will go with your head held high,” and she so she went to school. When Matilda entered her classroom, she saw that all students, most of them non-Jews – wore a yellow star as well. Solidarity with oppressed Jews was common.

My mother bears a long name: Hetzlina – given to her only two months before the planned deportation. Her parents, who knew that the baby would not survive the journey to Poland, had already asked a Bulgarian family to take care of her. When she was born, according to the new racist law she had to be given a traditional Jewish name, so my Zionist grandfather defied it and named her Hertzlina . . . There is a crazy paradox here: on the one hand they were going to leave their daughter to their non-Jewish neighbors to hide and on the other hand they give her such a distinct name . . .

When they immigrated to Israel in 1953, they stopped at the border with Romania, turned towards Bulgaria, and sang the Bulgarian national anthem with tears. Everyone cried. They felt that they were leaving their homeland . . . and when they arrived to Israel and saw Haifa, they sang “Hatikva (hope) . . .” crying again. From a homeland to the homeland. encapsulates. I consider this an ethics of memory, or ethical memory. In English I use the term “cine-memory.”

Rani Jaeger

Creating Space Within Time: An Invitation to Ritual

Preface

“ . . . They will silently remember,
Both home and rough terrain,
That ritual alone
Is all that does remain . . . ”
– Yehuda Amichai, “In Our Love.”

This paper deals with ritual. Using his poetic gift, Yehuda Amichai managed to point out the mysterious (and enchanting?) fact, that memories (all that does remain) of space (home and rough terrain) are preserved, of all places, in ritual – in symbolic, temporal human performance. This is an extremely complex move, rife with challenges facing all who seek to construct a ritual.

In order to try and meet those challenges, I wish to further discuss this linkage, and share some thoughts I’ve been having in the wake of the ideological handling of rituals and their performance in the Israeli-Jewish sphere. I rely particularly on my involvement in writing *Hitkansut L’Yom HaShoah* (= Gathering for the Holocaust Memorial Day) and the attempt to instill and disseminate it throughout Israeli society, as well as on my experience as one of the founders and leaders of *Beit Tefilah Israeli* (= Israeli Prayer House) in Tel Aviv.

This reliance on practical experience is particularly crucial in this case, as the many different definitions of ritual serve as ample evidence to the complexity of this unique human phenomenon, which – to a significant extent – does not conform to any single definition or theory.¹ A ritual is a delicate combination of sometimes contradictory ingredients: matter and spirit, individual and collective, leader and public, content and form, etc. a “functioning” ritual may have some definable aspects, susceptible to discussion and criticism; however, to the best of my understanding, such a ritual cannot to be reduced to any one of these ingredients. And yet – this paper is an attempt to extract some experience-derived general observations, to offer them as an ideological whole which interprets the experience, and last but not least: to offer practical guidelines to creators and performers of rituals.

1 For a thorough theory of rituals see: Bell, Catherin. (1992). *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

As the writing of this paper is guided by practice, I feel it is important to say a few words about the spheres of my practical experience, which gave rise to the following thoughts.

Hitkansut L'Yom HaShoah: *Hitkansut* is a circle of experiential, personal memory, performed by active participants. It comprises readings, testimonials, discussion, prayer, and moments of silence. The plurality of voices from the dead and from survivors, as well as from generations of memory from various groups and world views, is evident from every page of *Hitkansut* texts. It is to this plurality that participants add their voices, their memories and their thoughts, as a multi-faceted expression of shared fate and shared responsibility.

The creation of *Hitkansut* was a product of the realization that, even as we hear the voices of the last eyewitnesses, the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust has now become the responsibility of our generation. That is why *Hitkansut* is intended to produce a living memory from the personal involvement of its participants.

Hitkansut was created through intensive work in the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and was given shape by a team of writers: secular, traditionalists, religious and Haredi, education professionals, thinkers, historians and artists. This diverse team was headed by Michal Govrin, who led the creation and writing process.

In 2017, *Hitkansut* was passed on to the Shalom Hartman Institute. The institute undertook to continue development of *Hitkansut* contents, as well as to disseminate it in the school system and the Israeli public. It was my privilege to be one of the *Hitkansut* writing team, as well as a senior partner in its dissemination, as part of my job as director of the Hartman Institute's Ritual Department. Over the last few years, *Hitkansut* was adopted as a major Holocaust Memorial Day function by dozens of high schools, by youth movement counselors and members (including a joint event for all youth movements from left-wing *Hashomer HaTzair* to borderline Haredi *Ezra*, in Jerusalem), synagogues (orthodox and liberal), community centers, workplaces and many private homes around the country.

The experience gleaned from writing and disseminating *Hitkansut* is what I seek to share in this paper. In addition, I will occasionally bring up examples from my activity in *Beit Tefilah Israeli*, founded over fifteen years ago as a way to meet the personal needs of a small group of people. In *Beit Tefilah* we sought to pave a way together for spiritual and community life in Tel Aviv, in a way befitting the time and the place. We felt that this spirit should express, on the one hand, Jewish tradition, while on the other hand it had to reflect a will for renewal, rooted in a firm commitment to Israeli culture. From one experimental *Kabbalat Shabbat* in June 2004, *Beit Tefilah* grew into a congregation and an organization, in the process acquiring a central position in the Jewish Renewal movement in Israel in the previous decade. This central position was achieved, among

other things, through events held in the public sphere, such as summertime *Kabbalat Shabbat* in the Tel Aviv Harbor district, attended by thousands of people, as well as innovations in the ritual sphere, such as the construction of a *Havdalah* ritual between *Yom HaZikaron* (= Memorial Day for fallen soldiers) and *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* (= Independence Day).²

In both these spheres of experience, I have had the privilege of taking part in designing rituals, participating in them, serving as ritual leader, receiving direct verbal feedback from public reactions and, more than once, of conducting a post-facto reflexive discussion with my partners-in-ritual.

All of these are the sources for some thoughts I would like to share here.

1 Jewish Hebrew and Israeli Hebrew – the Challenge of Language

One of the major goals in both these spheres of experience, is creating rituals that merge traditional Jewish Hebrew with modern-day Hebrew. Much has been written about the great revolution of reintroducing Hebrew as a day-to-day language, and about the challenge and tension inherent in the fact that the secular Hebrew language (of the present) and the sacred Hebrew language (of tradition) are intertwined.

The repositioning of Hebrew, from within the Beth Midrash and the synagogue to covering all aspects of life, created not only a practical need for neologisms for day to day speech, but also an inherent tension between the religious underpinnings of received language and the day-to-day use of emerging Israeli Hebrew. Throughout the lengthy process of the revival of Hebrew, artists and political leaders made use of traditional Hebrew for various reasons, a complete survey of which falls outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to mention, for example, *Keren Kayemet*, a term whose original meaning, a reward awaiting individuals in the afterlife, was reimagined as a system for raising funds in this life. In the same way, the weekend supplements of newspapers were given the liturgically-charged name of *Mussaf*. This name was carefully chosen by Berl Katzenelson, editor of *Davar* newspaper – the newspaper of the emerging Labor party – precisely because in that supplement, Berl wished to discuss philosophical and spiritual issues, outside the scope of regular news reportage.

² For more on *Beit Tefilah*, see: Neeman, Rina. (2011). Tel-Avivian Prayer: An Israeli Prayer House in Tel-Aviv." *Israeli Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 2 [Hebrew], 403–431.

The question of the deeper layers of language, and especially the tension between its religious and secular aspects, drew the attention of many cultural luminaries of the Hebrew *Yishuv* (= pre-state Israel), eliciting different – even opposite – reactions. Bialik, for example, pushed for recycled use of traditional language, consciously seeking to push past its layers of meaning. Such a push, he thought, would lend depth to the modern language on one hand, while on the other giving traditional terms a new lease on life in the secular sphere.

The ideal of Hebrew speech must not be secular speech, but sacred one. [. . .] I therefore think that language *qua* language cannot be an ideal. We create and produce within language, uplifting it into sacred speech. This will be achieved if we don't purge the language of all the souls that lived inside it for thousands of years. [. . .] I'm deliberately choosing old terms for new concepts, to indicate that these terms have an eternal sense."³

While on the other pole stands Gershom Scholem's warning about modern Hebrew:

[. . .] but if we pass on to our children the language that was passed on to us, if we – the transitional generation – keep alive within them the language of the old books, to then be revealed to them anew – will not the religious power inherent in them explode, one day, against its speakers? And what form will the generation take, whose own utterances are turned against itself?⁴

Scholem agrees with Bialik as to the power and importance of the layers of traditional Hebrew, and it is precisely because of this that he is concerned that the Zionist project – which was perceived by most of its participants as modern, humanistic and secular – may be swallowed up by sacred Hebrew, to become a messianic-religious trip.

Aware of this challenge of language, we of the *Hitkansut* creative team decided to negotiate our way between Bialik's vision and Scholem's warning, attempting to responsibly edge together traditional and Israeli Hebrew, in order to weave them together into one tapestry. This effort was informed by the understanding that a ritual in which the various layers of Hebrew are (successfully) merged, welds words into worlds. Through such connections, the various fields of Hebrew culture can touch each other, continue each where the other left off, and – not least! – challenge each other.

3 Haim N. Bialik (1935) speaking to the Battalion for the Defense of the Language, "The Sacred and the Secular in Language", *Dvarim SheBeal-Peh*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 128–29.

4 Gershom Scholem, *Bekennntnis über unsere Sprache*, a letter to Franz Rosenzweig, 12-26-1926.

In the context of creating *Hitkansut L'Yom HaShoah*, this merging of Jewish and Israeli Hebrew is particularly apposite, due to unique reasons which will be presented here alongside examples, as an integral part of the discussion.

A. The gravitas and power of Jewish Hebrew in creating Israeli traditions:

Use of traditional Hebrew helps anchor a new ritual in a recognizable cultural-linguistic sphere, one which carries considerable gravitas. It provides inspiration and can provide validity for novel content and ritual moves. As regards our endeavor, bringing traditional Hebrew into *Hitkansut* seemed crucial to us, in our attempt to construct a new, active tradition of Holocaust remembrance in Israeli society. Although we took into account previous layers of Holocaust remembrance rituals, whose origins go back to Jewish refugee camps in Europe, *Hitkansut* is still innovative in some of its texts, as well as in its structure and performance. We were looking to traditional Hebrew for inspiration and validity.

The incorporation of traditional Hebrew is evident, for example, in the basic structure of *Hitkansut*. It was important to us, especially in light of our invitation for active participation, to present audiences with the procedure of the event right from the start. To this end, we incorporated mnemonics to outline the underlying motion of the ritual's progression, describing it as progressing from *Kinnah* to *Kimmah* (literally: from lamenting to getting up.) This is a move from a survey of a life destroyed to the healing phase of re-choosing life, despite the suffering and the loss.

We consciously borrowed the term *kimmah* (literally: getting up) from the final moment of the *shiv'ah* mourning ritual, in which, traditionally, there is a practical and symbolic act of the bereaved being helped to their feet by a non-bereaved person: a mutual lending of hands, that helps a person who had experienced loss to make their way back, despite all hardships, to day-to-day life. We decided to end *Hitkansut* with an actual getting up – a moment when we describe the traditional act, reinterpret it in the context of *Hitkansut* and ask people to lend a hand to the people next to them, so that we all get up together. Quite often, there is some embarrassment to overcome in order to act out this *kimmah*; but it seemed to us, as we were writing the ritual, that this act just might have the to successfully merge action and meaning, as indeed it turned out to have in hundreds of such events.

One meaning we wanted to emphasize was choosing life. This choice was, primarily, Holocaust survivors' stirring determination to rebuild their lives in various ways. We wanted this determination to be projected in all its power, to give it no less space than that afforded to the litany of destruction. The word and deed of *kimmah*, in our view, both touch on the second, historic meaning: the challenge of rebuilding the world, after the earthquake that was the Holocaust. This earth-

quake brought various aspects of human culture crashing down, including its main political, ethical, artistic and religious categories, to name but a few. The process of rebuilding is as yet uncompleted, and is facing new challenges in this period, when memory of the tragedy is fracturing. The recognition of a fracture and of the present need for healing is the emotional, existential moment that we wish to direct participants of *Hitkansut* towards. This recognition is essential in order to give form to a memory which is not merely a locked-up, traumatic chapter in the past, but rather an Impetus for active participation in the shaping of a better human future.

Relying on traditional language within a novel, constructed ritual, helps us to lend support and depth to the construction of such a memory. On the other hand, it lifts traditional *kimmah* out of the personal, ritualistic *peshat* of its traditional practice, and invests it with new meaning in the context of an historical event that sends repercussions into the present.

To return to Bialik – the *kimmah* in *Hitkansut* is an example of one of those “old terms” that lend depth to a contemporary event, while at the same time being invested with new meaning thanks to its very use in a new context.

B. Drawing inspiration and Intent from Jewish tradition into Israeliana:

The contact between Israeli Hebrew and traditional Jewish Hebrew was important to us, because many of those who took part in the writing shared a sense that the challenge of Shoah remembrance in an age with no eyewitnesses on the one hand, and of a future-constructing memory on the other (as discussed in-depth in my article), is what the hour calls for. The reliance on biblical language resonant of Jewish memory, such as parts of the *Haggadah*, seemed fitting not just due to the gravitas it confers on the new ritual, but also because it indicates a values-based call to construct memory in a way that does not leave it locked up in a traumatic past, but rather in a way that processes the formula into acts of responsibility and duty. Moreover, in many cases, the Torah insists on exercising this responsibility towards the stranger – the foreigner who is not part of the people.

“Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”⁵ This verse – and many other instances in traditional Hebrew of the reminder of the duty of remembrance – frames the national story of escape from bondage to liberty, and open it up to a universal horizon. The exodus is, at the same time, both a key component in the identity of the Jewish people and an underpinning of the demand for a sense of duty towards any person outside the group which carries this memory, and is constructed upon it.

5 Exodus 23, 9.

Seen in this light, the use of language from classical sources in *Hitkansut* is required not only to confer gravitas on the new ritual, but also – perhaps even more so – as inspiration for the construction of Shoah remembrance in our times.

C. Drawing Inspiration and intent from Israeliana into Jewish tradition:

At this point, I would like to briefly discuss an example from my experience in Beit Tefilah Israeli, in order to demonstrate yet another principle: During the Shabbat *Arvit* prayer, it is our custom to recite, before the *Barchu*, the third poem from Israeli poet Leah Goldberg's *Songs of the End of the Road* cycle, which begins with the words: "Teach me, my god, blessing and prayer."

Reading and referring to this poem is fairly commonplace in educational contexts where prayer is discussed, as well as in ritualistic contexts in liberal congregations and religious/secular shared schools. Attaching this poem to the *Barchu* as part of the ritual act imparts, I believe, another special significance. First, it emphasizes the philosophical and linguistic resonance between the two texts (Bless Adonay; Teach me, my god, blessing), thus creating a continuum which, in itself, imparts substantial significance on the very ritual and projects a message of continuity from the siddur into modern Hebrew poetry.

Secondly, the very demonstration of continuity sheds light on some important differences. Despite the above mentioned linguistic and philosophical likeness between the two texts, Goldberg's poem introduces dimensions of contemporary Israeliana into the prayer. One such dimension is a direct, dialogical form for people to address god, in a general-yet-personal way: My God (rather than Adonay or the KBH, the Almighty, which are popular forms of address in religious circles); another dimension is a modern existential language (liberty, failure), and, in particular, the voice of a female speaker, which is (almost entirely) absent from the traditional Siddur and must, as far as we are concerned, be given its due place in the service.

Attaching the poem to the prayer during the ritual, allows the language of modern texts to enrich traditional Hebrew. It inspires the ritual and directs it towards our own horizon – we, who enact the ritual and pray, in the present.

Despite all this, it is very important to mention that attempts at merging traditional Jewish and Israeli culture are far from uniformly successful. The more emotionally charged the moment, the more complicated and delicate the process of merging voices without distorting them. Naturally, the very definition of success in such attempts is often entirely subjective, yet I feel it is important to note that failures are often an inherent byproduct of trying.⁶ This observation brings us to the other matter.

⁶ For many years now, the words of Nili – one of the veterans of Beit Tefilah and a former kibbutz member – resonate with me. When the time came to redact a Beit Tefilah *machzor* for Yom

2 “We Will Do and Inquire” – a Space for Exploration

One of the crucial requirements for creating a ritual is not to accept tradition as a locked-up given – not even the tradition that we seek to create. It is clear, however, that negotiating with tradition cannot take place during the actual ritual, both because this would mean unceasing pauses in the ritual, and because the negotiations themselves will then become the focus of the event, replacing the issue on hand, or the commemorative occasion that the ritual seeks to invest with meaning.

We create space for questioning in the discussion that follows the ritual, which includes both participants and leaders. We have named this space, which allows for both ritual and questioning, “We Will Do and Inquire.”⁷ This space is comfortable enough to experience the ritual together, to give oneself up, without cynicism, to a particular move and to (temporarily) suspend criticism, so that one is able to truly be in the living experience. At the same time, it is a space where one can, from the very truth of experience, ask any question about the preceding ritual, including about explicit and implicit messages, music, or any other relevant aspect. All this is done so that we don’t end up with a bad, purposeless performance on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, to avoid the other, equally bad alternative: a good performance which communicates problematic messages.

As a result of such “We Will Do and Inquire” discussions, *Hitkansut* underwent changes in both its basic text and its performance, and we hope for further such changes, as this is an indication of the ritual’s vitality. The “We Will Do and Inquire” is also the place for important discussions about the ideological backbone of *Hitkansut*, raising such issues as: Is what we are doing a secularization of the sacred or a sacralization of the secular? How does the language of *Hitkansut* operate within the present Israeli public sphere – particularly in light the controversy about publicly enforced religious ordinances and speech? What are the political significance and aspirations of our action – not in the sense of party-politics, but in the deepest sense of the memory of the Holocaust in Israeli culture?

Kippur, we also faced the same challenge I mention above. Looking for the proper combination, we decide to follow Kol Nidre with the poem Selichot (=penitences) by poet Leah Goldberg, sung to the well-known tune by musician Yehudit Ravitz. At the end of the service, Nili approached me to say, delicately but with great assurance: “Rani, I understand exactly why you introduced Selichot. The name of the song is appropriate to the occasion, the melody is in the right atmosphere, and it is overall a great poem. But what can I say? What’s the connection, really? As I was tearfully standing after *Kol Nidre*, with my ancestors forming an intergenerational chain, you dropped me into Goldberg’s personal love affair, and the landing was rough.”

7 The term was coined by my partner at *Beit Teflah Israeli*, Rabbi Esteban Gottfried.

Seen from this point, the “inquisitiveness” after the “doing” is necessary not only in order to ensure a successful performance of the ritual, but also in recognition of the value and power of rituals as conveyers of powerful messages, many of them uninterpreted. This power requires us to assume responsibility.

3 Ritual – Community – Ritual

Recognition of the linkage between ritual and community is almost as old as modern sociology. Rituals reflect a community’s values, the hierarchies within it and its boundaries. This understanding, drawn from research literature, has direct implications on familiar, everyday reality. Thus, a school ceremony redraws the boundaries of its relevant community, which is why it’s important to ask: who takes part in the ritual and who doesn’t? Why shouldn’t the chief caretaker, or one of the janitorial staff, take part in a school ceremony (such as *Hitkansut*)?

Of course, constructing a community does not rely simply on ritualistic moments, and yet, their power should not be underestimated. Throughout the years of bringing *Hitkansut* to the Israeli public, it was not rare for us to witness intensely significant moments unfold when a staff member, or someone who is usually out of the limelight at a particular workplace, enters into the heart of the circle, sharing a testimony or a private message. Beyond the huge importance of an eyewitness account, the moment unveils the speaker, who earns presence and voice beyond their daily function in the workplace. The moment also redefines a unique community of memory-keepers, which in turn throws a different light on the workplace hierarchy. The linkage between ritual and community also holds true in the wider social sphere, with important questions about how rituals redraw boundaries and contexts.⁸

In *Hitkansut* we took special care to include voices that express diverse experiences and various communities, seeking to allow the memory of the Holocaust to become a unifying force, rather than a wedge issue. It is, in my opinion, entirely uncoincidental that, upon going online with *Hitkansut*, the first question we were asked was about the Mizrahi voice in Holocaust remembrance. That we were able to immediately point to Mizrahi, Haredi and LGBTQ voices, alongside reactions from warriors, parents and children, as well as a complex discussion

⁸ For example: what song can most Israelis sing together? The national anthem is not such a song, for obvious reasons (as justified as many may find them). This question is seemingly very far removed from the complex of social, economic and religious problems, which define relations between various Israeli groups. Still, I insist, symbolically and essentially: One shared song!

about manifestations of evil during the Holocaust, indicates the importance we attached, from the beginning, to the creation of *Hitkansut* as a mirror in which the various faces of Israeli society, of the Jewish people and of human existence, could be reflected.

It is no coincidence that the group of people who authored former president Rivlin's "Tribes of Israel" document pointed out the need for sociologists to create rituals that will serve as a social backbone to the new accord between the tribes of Israel. The American holiday of Thanksgiving is an outstanding example of a ritual that did just that, lending itself to a large social move.

The document's authors were right to point out the need, but were entirely erroneous in their choice of addressees: sociologists do not create rituals, they write *about* rituals. The correct addressees are artists, writers, musicians, and most importantly: educators.

4 Personal Intimacy and the Ritualistic Space

One of our most pressing concerns, as authors of *Hitkansut*, was to allow space for personal expression, even during the very ritual. Such rituals are usually seen, certainly in the context of the usual Israeli experience at school, youth movements and the military, as a public experience in which the audience are subjected to a performance of the ritual as mere passive participants. This is no criticism if the effectiveness of this form of ritual – it could be commonplace, banal or even infuriating and alienating, or it could be stirring, thought provoking and a vehicle for closeness between participants. In all cases, however, it provides an experience for an audience, not for active participants.

It must be noted that there is nothing inherently contrary to the notion of ritual in involving willing participants in the performance, even involving the intimately. The question is whether the authors/leaders of such a ritual are interested in such involvement, and in what way do they open up the shared experience for individuals to express themselves within. This is the same challenge faced annually by leaders of the Passover *Seder*: the instruction "to see oneself as if coming out of Egypt" directly influences the shaping the *Seder* as a ritual which allows for individual participation of everybody present. Emphasizing individual voices helps create an intimacy and, just as importantly, it helps demonstrate the thin line between public and throng, between a community made up of several voices and a collective moving in a single direction.

As authors of *Hitkansut*, it was important to us to create a ritualistic space with room for personal expression by participants. Such expressions seem to us

to be crucial for an engaging memory-shaping process, as well as for overcoming the emotional distance from an issue whose very importance and magnitude make it difficult to approach on a personal level. Personal involvement is also, as mentioned before, a redrawing of the community that is present at *Hitkansut*, and is an excellent way of locating different voices within it.

It must be made clear that this involvement is entirely different than the “We Will Do and Inquire” discussion at the conclusion of the ritual’s arc. The invitation extended to participants is to add their personal voice to the texture of the ritual, re-created during every enactment of *Hitkansut*. This is done at three main junctions:

- personal introduction of participants, including a mention of the diaspora community they are descended from (while emphasizing that each community, from east or west, from Europe or from the Islamic world, is relevant and important).
- In reciting the names of Holocaust victims, survivors or righteous gentiles, who are personally close to participants and their families, or who have left an indelible mark on them through a personal act of rebellion against oblivion and dehumanization.
- Finally – in a freeform group discussion on the significance and meaning gleaned by participants, regarding the future of the Holocaust remembrance, and regarding individual modes of action according to the light shed by memory on the present: “to remember responsibly.”

5 Respect for Structure

Creating a new ritual, as well as rethinking a traditional ritual (including, of course, longstanding Israeli rituals), usually gives precedence to questions of content. It is these questions which motivate the new creation: what could be said? What must be re-said? What cannot be said anymore, with changing times, mores and worldviews?

These are eminently important discussions, but at this point, I would like to emphasize the crucial importance of the skeleton on which the readings and music are “hung.” It is, to the best of my understanding, the greatest challenge facing the creation of a “working” ritual. Good literary reading, excellent songs, emotional phrases and prayers – all these are abundant. The great challenge is not just to select from among them the components that would make up a coherent whole that occupies a desired duration, but mainly the construction of an

ideological and emotional framework – a rhythm for the various segments to move to. The structure, usually “invisible” to participants and unannounced by the ritual’s leaders, is crucial for the success of the ritual.

This crucial importance compels us, ritual renovators, not only to carefully reconsider new structures, but also to respect successful ritualistic structures, structures whose “mileage” testifies to their soundness. Good content is indeed plentiful, but good structures are relatively few, and command our respect for arriving to us pre-tried and approved by cultural natural selection. Giving them weighty consideration is required not (just) for reasons of authority (“It’s tradition!”). In fact, quite the opposite is true: **the ritual does not “work” because it is part of tradition, it has become part of tradition because it “works,” and we must consider carefully whether to change it.**

To give one example: one of the most obvious instances of a structure which passed the cultural natural selection is that of *Kaballat Shabbat* – six psalms (representing the days of the week) and *Lekha Dodi* to welcome in the Shabbat. This structure weaves together, in a seemingly simple manner, complex layers of meaning: mythical time (the creation), collective time (the working week, which ends on the Shabbat), and personal time (my own week). It is the very simplicity and stability of the traditional structure that allows us, at *Beit Tefilah Israeli*, to replace one of the psalms with a contemporary Israeli song, or testimonials by some participants about their own experiences that week.

6 The Challenge of “Performance”

Turning a ritual into a “performance,” with clear demarcation between active participants (leaders) and passive participants (audience), is “sin lieth at the door” for ritual innovators. This is a well-known challenge at home rituals (the *Seder*, for example), as well as at community and public rituals. Paradoxically, the challenge only becomes fiercer during renovation, because renovated ritual leaders have at their disposal much knowledge that participants (as yet) do not possess. Leaders thus acquire extra significance in instructing participants about structure and content. In such cases, the leader is liable to become the focal point for the ritual in a way which overshadows both audience and individual voices within it, even more so than in traditional rituals.

In my view, it is crucial for leaders to be aware of this challenge and to hone their self-awareness as public-functionaries, rather than performers. Seen this way, *Hitkansut* leaders’ success is measured by their confidence in leading the

ritual, as well as by the care they take to ensure audience participation in readings and singing, and in creating freeform periods for participants to express themselves. Part of the leaders' self-restraint is expressed in measured speech, and often in the patience and courage to wait silently for the voices of participants sharing a personal experience to be heard. Such a facilitating approach from leaders often encourages participants to say for the first time in public things that have been hidden away for years, or silenced.

7 The Inner Voice of the Heart

Within all the avenues of thought laid forth here, I would like to emphasize, as we approach the end of this essay, the importance of readers' attention to their own personal intuitions: many of us recognize a content or structure shift that needs to be made in a given ritual, yet for various reasons we daren't carry it out. Often, this comes from inner doubts about the move we are contemplating. Indeed, there is no guarantee of success; yet, as we all are woven together into the texture of contemporary culture, it is safe to assume that, alongside all due care and self-criticism, we have sufficient knowledge to dare and do. This daring is important not only to us as individuals – it is, in fact, one of the most important cultural life-forces.

It would be correct to say that *Hitkansut* itself is a product of such daring. Without it, I do not believe we would have found the inner strength to tackle the emotionally-charged, difficult and painful issue of the Holocaust remembrance, let alone come up with a structured proposal on how to address it. The inner voice of the heart became a ritual, which can now be handed on and supervised in a complex process of “We Will Do and Inquire.”

8 Test-case: The *Yizkor* for Righteous Gentiles

Remember, People of Israel, the Righteous Gentiles, who have placed their own lives in danger for the sake of our persecuted and tortured brothers and sisters during the Shoah, 1939–1945, and who were as shining stars in the overwhelming darkness of evil.

Those who spoke out at a time of silence,

Those who offered sanctuary and a lease on life in the eye of the murderous storm,

Those who upheld those who were falling and extended a helping hand, food and clothing.

Who answered the cry of men, women and children:

Men and women, workers of the land and city-dwellers

Of humble standing and of high rank,
 People of faith and conscience.

In the very valley of the shadow of death, these men and women stood by our people, and from the fiery inferno they saved the few and the many. They kept the beacon of humanity alight when all around them humanity dimmed.

Remember, People of Israel, their grandness of spirit, their heroism and their pure hearts. May God bind their souls in the bundle of life, and may it come to pass as it was written: "As the whirlwind passes, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation" (Proverbs 10, 25)

Translation: Yaron Ben-Ami (2016)

The *Yizkor* for Righteous Gentiles is integrated into *Hitkansut*. I would like to take the opportunity to describe it and the process of its creation. In retrospect, it must be said, I can see how many of the issues I outlined in this essay manifested themselves in this short ritual.

The impetus for writing the *Yizkor* is rooted in my personal biography. My mother was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1943. Trains were at the ready at the terminals in all of Bulgaria's big cities, waiting to transport the country's 50,000 Jews to the death camps. The deportation order was already issued by the Bulgarian government – a fascist government, in league with the Nazis. In the midst of this terrible reality, an unusual coalition of intellectuals, politicians and clergymen, including the head of the Sofia church, Metropolitan Stefan I, took advantage of widespread un-cooperation among the Bulgarian public, and managed at the last moment to overturn the tragic fate intended for Bulgarian Jews – the same fate that befell Jewish communities in neighboring countries (including Bulgarian-ruled Macedonia) and all over Europe.

I feel a sense of personal debt to the people who got up and risked their life to physically save my mother, her family and the rest of Bulgarian Jewry. Simply put, I feel that, had it not been for them, I wouldn't be here.

A few years ago I asked my mother to tell the story at *Beit Tefilah Israeli*. As usual, we sought to wrap up the testimony within a Jewish-Israeli ritual, including *Kaddish* and *Yizkor*. It seemed appropriate, particularly in light of this personal story, to say *Yizkor* for the righteous gentiles.

I searched, made inquiries, asked around, and to my surprise found out that there are testimonials, philosophical essays and literary works, but there is no such *Yizkor*. I determined to dare and write one myself, approaching the task with a *siddur*, the bible, some Hebrew poetry and help from some friends. I was led by several observations:

1. Our duty towards righteous gentiles: *Yizkor* is a powerful reminder, made in intimate Jewish language, of the duty of the *Yizkor* sayers and those hearing

them, to carry in their minds a memory with of living significance, reaching out to future generations.

2. Our internal duty: saying *Yizkor* for the righteous gentiles introduces this heroic chapter into the memory of the Holocaust in ceremonies all over Israel. These rituals, as mentioned before, are too narrow to accommodate the vastness of questions and meanings raised by the Holocaust. Still, their very existence demonstrates the need for them, precisely because they bring with them, if only for a fleeting moment, a sense of unity of time, place and meaning. Through these rituals we conceptualize, for ourselves and our children, a succinct version of the messages gleaned from the Holocaust at a given moment. That is why it is so important to leave a place, within this encapsulated message, for people who risked themselves to do good in the midst of an impossibly evil reality.

Furthermore, many *Yizkors* devoted to the Holocaust mention not only the victims, but also the perpetrators (“collaborators of all nations,” etc.). It is vital to mention in this context also the righteous gentiles. It is duty of the highest order – morally, pedagogically and culturally – to keep in our minds not only victims and murderers, but also those precious few who came to the aid of the persecuted.

3. At the end of the suggested *Yizkor*, there is a quote from Proverbs: “..but the righteous is an everlasting foundation” (Proverbs 10, 25). The very actions of the righteous gentiles are their great memorial. However, in addition to those individuals saved at their hands, their actions offer an opportunity for further healing. Against the great fracture caused by the Holocaust in all fields of human endeavor – religion, politics, philosophy, art and the very notion of civilization – those individuals who set out to aid the persecuted offer a window of hope that, despite everything, individuals and groups can bring down the walls of evil by doing good. *Yizkor* for the righteous gentiles expresses the demand to remember this option and the various personal duties that derive from it.

It is my hope that whenever this *Yizkor* is recited, these people and their deeds will once again become part of our lives. This answers some of the call of our duty towards them, while broadcasting their example from the past into the present and the future.

9 End, and Beginning

When Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote his famous book, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, he was criticized for reframing the essence from the Jewish space (the Land of Israel and, in the context of the book's writing, the state of Israel and Zionism) to Jewish time. Without stepping into that fray, it seems to me that, at this point in time, the Israeli experience has become so powerful, that spatiality (Israel) has come to hugely influence the world of Israeli-Jews.

In the compound of Israeli Judaism, spatiality is significant and dominant, and is a fundamental component of belonging. It is possible now – indeed, it seems to me a necessity – to ask about temporality and how it is framed. I wish to offer the following thought, which will be phrased as a personal realization (but perhaps may find resonance with readers; own terms):

I am an Israeli Jew – Israeli in spatiality, Jewish in temporality. I think many of us Israeli Jews are “*Time Related Jews*.” That is, while Israeli space is a given constant in our lives (raising huge questions in itself), much of our contact with the world of Jewish tradition occurs at significant temporal junctures. This is not to say that the Jewish component is temporary, but that its main charging points are rooted in time – in the Jewish calendar, whether weekly (Shabbat), annual (holidays) or lifecycle rituals. All these, writes Heschel, are “sanctuaries in time.”

To return to the title of this essay – which ties together space and time – I hope the thoughts expressed above are not merely a midway summary but, more importantly, are meaningful suggestions for creating new/renewed space and time continuums in Israeli culture, that offer all who step into them a sense of meaning, belonging and growing commitment. Just as importantly, these could be continuums that allow people to conceptualize time, that fleeting element of life, and to hold on to it – if only for a few moments.

[. . .] As the desert of time is rolled from under our feet
 At top speed
 The truly outstanding acrobats are those
 Who manage always and for always to keep
 A piece of time under their feet . . .⁹

As Israelis, we are very much used to view defense of space as ensuring our existence. The land, its size and borders preoccupy us constantly. It seems to me that a conceptualization of time, of which rituals are an important part, is a great cultural challenge and an equally important way to ensure the meaning, value and morality of the Israeli Jewish experience.

9 Avidan, David (1978). *Broadcasts from A Spy Satellite*, Tel Aviv: Levin Epstein, 125.

Michal Govrin

The Responsibility to Remember – Remember Responsibly: *Hitkansut*, A Ritual Gathering for Yom HaShoah

My memories of the Second World War—and I hope this won't surprise you—are associated for me with much love. Infinite love. Anyone who was in the ghetto saw how mothers protect their children, how parents, mothers, do not eat and only worry about feeding their young ones, how teenagers stayed with their parents so that they wouldn't be left alone and protected them to the last moment. [. . .] If I ask myself where the strength to write comes from, it is not from the scenes of horror but rather from the displays of love that existed everywhere there. [. . .] My world was not left with the image of the hangman; my world was not left with the sight of endless, irreparable evil. I was left with people, and I loved them.¹

Memorial ceremonies for the Shoah were already held in the ghettos in Europe and in North Africa during the Shoah itself. They were held in the displaced persons' camps after the war, later became part of Israeli and Jewish public identity, and in Israel and elsewhere gained the status of official ceremonies. Such ceremonies usually combine historical descriptions, testimonies, song, and prayer. As time passes and the generation of survivors, perpetrators, or standers-by dwindles, the function of memorial ceremonies changes as the place and time of the events become more remote. The transmission of memory influences and is influenced by the changing social and political circumstances in each location. As Saul Friedländer noted, "The transmission of the collective trauma . . . depends entirely on the social function it fulfills."²

1 From a conversation with Aharon. Appelfeld, appears in "It Was All Death, But There Was a Lot of Love" in this book.

2 In "Some Reflections on Transmitting the Memory of the Shoah," a public lecture at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute on October 10, 2013 (as a guest of the Transmitted Memory and Fiction research group); published in *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, Volume 37 Issue 1. "There is a fundamental difference between the transmission of individual trauma and that of collective trauma. Personal experience, and my many encounters with Holocaust survivors, suggest that a traumatized individual has little control over the multiple ways in which his or her experience is transmitted . . . Whereas the transmission of individual trauma usually takes place within a relatively closed emotional field, mainly that of parent and child, the transmission of collective trauma responds to a very different dynamic, which depends entirely on the *social function* it fulfills."

The collective shaping of the memory of the Holocaust, which began immediately after the war ended, was harnessed to the changing ideological needs of the societies that shaped it in specific times and places. This was true, too, of every state involved in the Holocaust, starting with those where the horrors took place and ending with the current obsession with Holocaust denial proffered as a national myth by Iran's leaders.

Most forms of Shoah remembrance focus on trauma—exposing, describing, and documenting the trauma, and transmitting it to the next generations. Collective memory focuses mainly on preserving an open wound—stoking the memory of destruction and creating the means to transmit it. This sort of memory teaches moral lessons by exposing participants to the trauma and helping them experience it anew. However, as the field of trauma care has repeatedly shown, reenacting a trauma merely destabilizes the fragile recovery process and serves only to return the victim to the paralyzing experience.³

How can we change the way memory is transmitted? Can we help Israeli society to recover from the ongoing impact of the wound of the Shoah, fed by the preservation and transmission of the trauma? Can we transform the trauma from “a negative and incomprehensible occurrence to a positive and empowering principle of action for the community”?⁴ Can we invest the memory of the Shoah in Israel and the world, with a humanist content, echoing the survivors' resilience and choice of life?

The work of the Transmitted Memory and Fiction research group encouraged us to shape a different kind of ceremony for transmitting the memory of the Shoah. The members of the group emphasized the struggle for human dignity even in the midst of despair and devastation. The intimate character of our discussions clarified the capacity of supportive listening from the community to help the individual to encounter his or her personal memories, as a precondition for identification with the collective and as a significant part of the process of translating the memory of the past into ongoing responsibility for the present.

In this chapter I will discuss briefly the guiding principles behind the *Hitkansut* (ritual gathering) for Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel (Yom HaShoah), including the cultural sources that inspired the components of the ceremony. I will begin by describing some of the characteristics of the memory of the Shoah as it has developed in the Western world on a Christian cultural foundation. I will contrast these to the shaping of Jewish memory, drawing on the example of the mem-

³ For more details see Eli Vakil's chapter in this book, “Remembrance and Forgetfulness: Induction from Individual to Social Processes and Implications for Remembering the Holocaust.”

⁴ See note 2 above.

ory of the Exodus from Egypt as reflected in the Passover Seder. After providing this background, I will describe the format of the *Hitkansut*, closing with some comments on its public implementation.

Christian-Western versus Jewish Remembrance

Too little attention has been paid to the way Western and Christian consciousness have deeply shaped our memory of the Shoah—beginning with the term “Holocaust” itself, an expression from the Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible meaning “a whole-burnt sacrifice.”⁵ This term reveals a fundamental difference between Christianity and Judaism. Very briefly, Judaism emphasizes the biblical story of the binding of Isaac, wherein Abraham ultimately refuses to sacrifice his son and instead offers a ram.⁶ The impulse to sacrifice was blocked, and in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 89b) Abraham’s very attempt to offer his son is described as an act of Satan. In Judaism, unlike early Christianity, martyrology never became an accepted norm.

Christianity is based on the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, wherein God sacrifices his son. Jesus’s suffering and death bear witness to holiness (the word “martyr” is derived from the Greek word for “witness”) and atone for the sins of believers. Tertullian, one of the Church Fathers, said: “The blood of the martyrs constitutes the seeds of the Church.” An extreme example of this meaning of the term Holocaust can be found in the comments of the Bishop of Lyon, who claimed that the death of one and a half million Jewish children during the Shoah purifies the prayers of the believers. This is also the foundation for the postwar martyrological appropriation of the murdered Jews, as for example in the sanctification of Edith Stein, murdered as a Jew and sanctified as a Christian, and the posthumous baptism by the Mormon Church of hundreds of thousands of Jews slain in the Shoah.

Shoah remembrance ceremonies, including those held in Israel, continue to burn this traumatic Shoah memory into each new generation. Based as they are on

5 The term “Holocaust” was first used in our context by François Mauriac, the Catholic writer, in his introduction to the French version of Elie Wiesel’s *Night*. Years later, Claude Lanzmann, the director of the film *Shoah*, waged a passionate battle to replace the term Holocaust with Shoah.

6 Govrin, Michal. (2003) “Martyrs or Survivors? Thoughts on the Mythical Dimension of the Story War,” *Partisan Review*, vol. 2. Also in: https://michal.govrin.com/en/m_essays/the-implications-of-the-sacrifice-resonate-in-much-of-post-world-war-ii-western-culture-as-well-as-in-jewish-and-israeli-culture-which-is-molded-by-dialogue-with-and-dependence-on-the-west/.

exposing and reenacting trauma, such commemorations display the torture and sanctify victimhood. Yet most of the Jews trapped in the Nazi extermination apparatus adopted profoundly different mythical and cultural models. During the Shoah, Jews did not see themselves as martyrs—as holy sacrifices. Nor did they regard their suffering as bearing witness to holiness. Death was not given a halo. In the face of evil and divine hiddenness—in the face of destruction—they fought for their spirit and their lives. In the words of Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum, who was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto, “*This is a time for sanctifying life, not for sanctifying God by dying. In the past, our enemies demanded the soul, and the Jew sacrificed his body for the sanctification of God’s name. Now the bitter enemy demands the Jewish body, and it is incumbent upon the Jew to protect it and preserve his life.*”⁷

Staring destruction in the face, many Jews fought for their spirit and their lives—in all their manifestations of humanity, in their despair, and in their preservation of human uniqueness. Praying the *Shema*, or singing the *Internationale* were all forms of claiming the power to choose one’s identity until the last moment. This light breaks through the heart of the Shoah’s evil darkness, inspiring awe for the human spirit. To me, this represents the heart of Shoah remembrance.

And yet most Shoah memorial sites foreground the Nazi extermination apparatus and the suffering of the victims. The museum at Auschwitz emphasizes the details of the industrial slaughter rather than the prisoners’ fight against physical and spiritual erasure.⁸ Remembering in this manner empowers and perpetuates the horrors, grants Nazism and its crimes superhuman dimensions, and transforms them into objects of instinctive fascination. Today, the memory of the Shoah, focusing as it does on the graphic presentation of the ways victims were tortured, constitutes a perverse source of inspiration.

The subjugation of the memory of the Shoah to Christian mythological constructs has also had political ramifications, since this myth is deeply embedded in cultural and is stronger than any reality. Whether consciously or otherwise, its mechanisms operate violently to describe reality in their own terms. In Christian mythology, the role of the victim is reserved for Jesus, not for the Jews. The latter play the role of unbelievers who betray the victim Jesus to his crucifiers. The shock of the initial guilt in the Christian world led to the initial allocation (or rather imposition) of the role of the victim on the Jewish dead, and this in turn

7 Cited in Esh, Shaul. (1973). *Studies in the Holocaust and Contemporary Jewry*, Jerusalem: Center for Contemporary Jewry, Yad Vashem/ Leo Baeck Institute [Hebrew]. I am grateful to Ron Margolin for the reference.

8 Govrin, Michal. (2010) “Facing Evil: Thoughts on a Visit to Auschwitz, in: Hold on To The Sun,” *The Feminist Press*, 213–232.

inspired sympathy for the young State of Israel. As time passed, however, sympathy for the Jewish victim, which clashed with the traditional Christian mythological construct, shifted to the Palestinian victim.⁹ The Jew—reincarnated as the Israeli—returned to the traditional role of victimizer (without belittling the gravity of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the dimensions of the suffering it has entailed, which require their own appropriate terms). Within the strict mythological formula, the Israeli-Jew again became the object of hatred and faced new antisemitism. And at the same time, the “competition” for the role of the sacrificial offering has led some Europeans to expropriate the place of the victim¹⁰ and has favored the oppressed and the victim in an identity culture.

Israeli society, too, as already mentioned, has harnessed the memory of the Holocaust to its own needs. At memorial gatherings, starting with those held in the displaced persons camps and to this day, the memory of the Shoah has been shaped according to the needs of the moment. In each sector and context—secular, Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox; in Israel or in the Diaspora; in times of war and in times of peace—the memory of the Holocaust is yoked to a different mythological structure.

The memory of the Shoah as a sacrificial offering has also permeated Israeli-Jewish memory. In the years immediately after the Shoah, and against the background of the struggle to establish and consolidate the State of Israel, memory focused on “Shoah and revival” or “Shoah and heroism” (although the initial focus was almost exclusively confined to the heroism of the armed combatants in the ghettos). During this period, the Holocaust theme was used to appeal to the conscience of the Western-Christian world in order to secure diplomatic, military, and economic support for Israel. Later, however, the emphasis on victimhood became prominent in many manifestations of the memory of the Shoah and was recruited to justify domestic Israeli and external political and diplomatic moves.

The rising importance of victimhood within Shoah remembrance leads to the contemporary struggle over who is “more of a victim” and has dire consequences. Even in Israeli society it has contributed to a deepening rift over who does or does not “belong.” Shoah remembrance began to divide Jews rather than unite them. Yet the Shoah threatened to annihilate communities from both east and west—to destroy any Jew simply because they were a Jew—including the Jewish *Yishuv* in the Land of Israel, the Jews of the Arab world who were displaced in the Shoah’s wake, as well as Jews living in the countries of the Allied powers and

9 Regarding the stages of this process leading to its emergence as a dominant ideology, see the article in note 6.

10 An example of this are the repeated comments by Polish President Andrzej Duda concerning Polish victims and Jewish “offenders.”

in the Soviet Union. This struggle over who is “more of a victim” has catalyzed the shift of value from the victorious to the oppressed. Thus the application of the Shoah narrative to various other calamities continues to play a role in modern identity and victimhood politics.

The Jewish Model for Transmitting Memory

The Jewish tradition offers a different model of remembrance, as exemplified in the Passover Seder, which preserves and transmits the memory of slavery in Egypt. I shall briefly outline some features of the Seder’s memory structure.¹¹

As noted above, most forms of Shoah remembrance practiced today—ceremonies, marches, film screenings, lectures, live testimony—render the individual a passive, nameless member of the audience. In contrast, at the Passover Seder, all those dining at the table, young and old alike, play an active part. In every place, in every generation, every Jew is commanded “to see themselves as if they had left Egypt.”

The slavery in Egypt and the decree that “every boy born should be cast into the Nile” brought the Jews to the brink of destruction. Yet the Seder transmits the memory of Egypt not as a trauma but as an ongoing struggle against slavery and subjugation. Here, evil does not become a source of fascination. The Passover Seder does not attempt to reconstruct the horrors of slavery or the dread of annihilation. Instead, the command to “remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt” establishes the social laws that will govern future generations, mandating the protection of weak and marginalized members of society.

This same dynamic comes to the fore in the constant back-and-forth between the two principles of the Sabbath—“remember” (*zakhor*) and “keep” (*shamor*)—dialectically bound “in a single utterance.” Every Shabbat, everyone—the slave and the maidservant, the stranger in your gates, even the work animals—is entitled to rest free from the yoke of work as a “memory of the Exodus from Egypt.”

Similarly, the Passover Seder unfolds in a continuous time of struggle, as slavery was not eradicated from the world: “Now. This year, we are slaves.” The Haggadah opens by reminding us that only “next year,” after the struggle against slavery—both socioeconomic and internal-existential—will we be “free.” During the Passover Seder, we are commanded not only to tell of the exodus from Egypt but to leave, right now, from subjugation to redemption.

11 For more details, see my essay, “Jewish Sacred Theater,” *Conservative Judaism*, Spring 1983.

This form of memory does not present or recreate a past event such as the incarnation or resurrection of Christ. The Passover Seder does not make evil a source of fascination as the memory of the suffering is merely symbolized by bitter herbs and crumbs of *hametz*. Jewish memory does not reconstruct the past; it contemplates the past in order to act in the present. Its goal is not re-presentation but transformation.

The Passover Haggadah model for transmitting the memory of the Exodus from Egypt offers a promising form for transmitting the memory of the Shoah. This model would grant all the ritual's participants a shared destiny and would shape Shoah remembrance as the rehabilitation of trauma and as a continuing obligation to repair humanity and society. This ritual would foreground not the Nazi evil but rather the human struggle, even to the brink of death. It would focus not on the sanctity of victimhood but on the great revelation of the humanity of the victims, the survivors, and the righteous non-Jews. This kind of Shoah memory would recall the humanity that shines out from the depths of inhumanity, that rare flame that flickers to life under the most extreme conditions. It would create an active memory and Tikkun, a means of both changing the world and undergoing transformation—remembrance that moves from “remember” to “keep.”

Memory and Responsibility: Designing the Yom HaShoah *Hitkansut*

Based on the conclusions of the Transmitted Memory and Fiction research group, I subsequently led another team in designing the *Hitkansut* Haggadah for ritually transmitting Shoah memory. This time I invited philosophers and historians, artists and especially community leaders, religious and secular people, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews to join the writing team.¹² As team leader, I brought to the process my own authorial experience, my research into ritual, and my work directing the

¹² This group included Rabbi Tamar Elad-Appelbaum, the founder of Kehilat Zion in Jerusalem; Rani Jaeger, founder of Beit Tefilah Israeli in Tel Aviv and one of the creators of the modern-day Havdalah ritual; comparative religion scholar Ron Margolin; historian Mali Eisenberg; Yiddish artist Mendy Cahan; Rabbi Aharon Stern; the anthropologist Lior Chen; and group facilitator Miriam Ben David. We also received input and advice from Israeli poet Shva Salhoov, curator Yehudit Kol-Inbar, multidisciplinary artist Etty BenZaken, and composer Eitan Steinberg.

ater-based forms of Jewish ritual.¹³ Our team worked through a collaborative writing process, one that likely resembled the process the authors of the Passover Haggadah pursued as “they were reclining in Bnei Brak and telling of the Exodus from Egypt the entire night.”¹⁴

The result was a “Haggadah” that serves a Yom HaShoah Seder and weaves together written passages, testimonies, conversation, prayer, group song, and moments of silence, thus integrating the diverse voices of Shoah memory into a powerful and transformative whole. When participants in the *Hitkansut* “bear witness,” they add their voices to those of survivors and thus transmit the memory of the Shoah from one generation to the next.

We designed the *Hitkansut* Haggadah as a multivocal work with paratextual, Talmud-style pages—the words of victims and survivors, fighters and children, prayers and journal entries from all testimonies and viewpoints, including those of Righteous Among the Nations—all sit next to each other on the page. This style creates a sense of invitation to the participants of the *Hitkansut* to choose from among these voices, or to contribute their own voice and those of others. We believed that expanding the definition of the Shoah—from a threat to annihilate every Jew to a threat against any person for being different—can transcend rifts within Israeli society (including Bedouin, Druze, and Arab participants), transforming the memory of the Shoah into a force that can bridge between different generations, sectors, backgrounds, and faiths.

Like every ritual, the *Hitkansut* follows a “plot.”¹⁵ In the first half of the gathering, The Responsibility to Remember, participants take it upon themselves “to remember even if we were not there. We did not go through it, we did not experience it,” even “if we do not feel any sense of belonging to it.” The destruction forced upon the Jews becomes a common destiny and memory. The Elegy opens with the memory of vibrant life before the calamity and then the memory of the destruction, as participants share memories of life and evoke the names of the dead. We then face evil, past and present. In the section entitled: *In a place where there is no humanity, strive to be human*, we honor the many modes of human

13 We drew on a long tradition of remembering the Shoah in Haggadah or Megilla forms, including E. E. Auerbach’s Haggadah composed during the war; Yitzhak Halevi’s *Megillat Ha-milchama Ve-Israel*, composed in Casablanca in 1946; David Roskies’ theatrical *Night Words: A Midrash about the Holocaust* (1971, Hebrew adaptation 2007); Rabbi Avi Weiss’s remarkable *Haggadah for the Yom HaShoah Seder*; and Avigdor Shinan’s *Megillat HaShoah*.

14 Passover Haggadah.

15 A full *Hitkansut* Haggadah (in Hebrew, French, and Russian) can be viewed at: <https://hebrew.hartman.org.il/program/hitkansut/>.

resistance to evil, the righteous among the nations, and the bravery of the survivors and the uprooted to rise up from their loss and choose life.

The second half of the *Hitkansut*, Remembering Responsibly, begins with a section entitled Remember that You Were a Slave which looks toward the present and the future. Breaking into pairs, participants raise the challenges that Shoah remembrance poses here and now for the individual and society, for the State of Israel, and for the family of nations. Emerging from the ritual of memory, they assume the responsibility to turn the memory of the Shoah into an obligation to act. At the conclusion of the *Hitkansut*, as at the conclusion of the Jewish mourning rite of *shiva*, the participants rise up together from their lamentation.



Fig. 1: A *Hitkansut* circle at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem, Yom HaShoah 2015.

The Yom HaShoah *Hitkansut* is shaped as an experiential circle of memory led by active participants. The *Hitkansut* invites everyone to play a part in creating living memory, to tell their story and the story of the family, to light a candle in memory of those who died, and to assume responsibility to struggle against the elimination of the human and of humanity.

Inculcating the *Hitkansut*

In 2015 ten experimental circles of the Yom HaShoah *Hitkansut* were led by the authors of the Haggadah. Since, the *Hitkansut* Haggadah was developed at The Ritual department at Shalom Hartman Institute as well as a special version designed for use in schools. Diverse groups of Israelis—women and men, secular and religious, from all ethnic backgrounds and around the country—were exposed to the *Hitkansut*. Teachers held *Hitkansut* circles with their students, who added their own voices to the widening circle. Gatherings were held in synagogues and community centers, during visits to Poland, on campuses and in pre-military preparatory programs, in workplaces, and in private homes around the family table. Every year the Hartman Institute holds *Hitkansut* circles for the general public in which strangers become partners in a shared fate. Youth movements in Jerusalem from across the spectrum of political views and sectors—from Ezra to Hashomer Hatzair—hold joint circles emphasizing their choice of partnership and calling for responsible memory. The experience proved particularly moving for many participants who had previously felt excluded from the circle of those connected to the Shoah. For the first time, they shared insights concerning their own communities prior to the destruction and uprooting. They, too, lit candles in memory of their relatives from North Africa, Iraq, and Iran, from around the Mediterranean or from Ethiopia; the children of Soviet war veterans and the grandchildren of soldiers in the US military. Thus the memory of the Shoah became a force for uniting generations, sectors, communities, and faiths. Trial *Hitkansut* circles with delegations from Germany—from young people to members of the Bundestag—and with teachers from France and Greece naturally led to shifts in emphasis, but confirmed the potential to shape a circle of personal memory and commitment that transcends borders, despite the vast difference in the participants' historical baggage.

The translation and publication of the *Hitkansut* Haggadah into English and its dissemination by SHINA raised challenges and drew in significant additional circles.¹⁶ In the same way the translation of the *Hitkansut* Haggadah into French and Russian¹⁷ focuses in each case on the specific contexts and meanings of the Shoah for the participants.

¹⁶ See: Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield, in this book, and: "Hitkansut: A New Ritual of Memory for the Shoah," *The Times of Israel*, April 28, 2022: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hitkansut-a-new-ritual-of-memory-for-the-shoah/>.

¹⁷ The collective translation of *Hitkansut* to English was led by Rachel Jacobi-Rosenfield at the SHI NA; The Translation to French by Valerie Zenatti was led by Adath Shalom, their president Aline Benaim, and the compilation of texts was made by Sophie Bigot-Goldblum with Catherine

Thousands of participants in Israel, North America, and around the world take part annually in transforming the memory of the Shoah in the past into an obligation to the present and a hope for the future. By integrating “the responsibility to remember” with “remembering responsibly,” we can hope to join the struggle—in the here and now—against present-day incarnations of fascism and evil. In moments of personal or public distress, remembering the Shoah can offer a compass that guides and empowers us toward human dignity.

The essence of memory is captured not in books but in the human consciousness—each person in his or her own way, each generation in its world. The Yom HaShoah *Hitkansut* and the Haggadah have created a new ceremony that invites every person to take part in shaping the living memory of the Shoah.



Fig. 2: A *Hitkansut* circle at the Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Yom HaShoah 2017.

Chalier and Philippe Boukara. The translation to Russian was made by Nekoda Singer, led and compiled by Lana Zilberman. All the translations are available at: hitkansut@shi.org.il.

Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield, CEO of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America

I Remember Them.

In the 1930s and 40s my Grandpa, Morris Goldberg, who worked as a food salesman, would send money to family in Eastern Europe and would receive letters of thanks. And then, one month, the letters stopped coming. This is all I know. I don't know their names, who they were, how they lived.

I wonder which of my features, likes and dislikes, gifts and challenges I might have inherited from them. I am grateful for them for being part of the chain of inheritance that produced my own children. Despite not knowing them, I feel indebted to them. I remember them.

Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield

A Note about Adapting *Hitkansut* to English

When our colleagues at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel approached us about creating an English/North American version of *Hitkansut* I was intrigued. I understood that this would not merely be a translation of the Hebrew original into English, but an adaptation of a ritual designed for Israelis into one that resonated with North American Jews. This was a peoplehood project, an opportunity to create a new and shared ritual framework for the memory of the Shoah that, as its title suggests, gathers us together.

Hitkansut is translated literally as “convergence.” The challenges of translating the ritual are embodied in its Hebrew name – the English does not easily capture the layered elegance of the Hebrew. The Hebrew root KNS (כנס) is shared by more familiar words like Beit Keneset (Synagogue) and the verb le-hikanes (“to enter”). The *Hitkansut* ritual invites us to enter a space of sacred community. But it is a verb in the reflexive form, beckoning us to gather not only with one another but into ourselves, our own memories, family histories, and epigenetic inheritances. In our translation, we settled on the use of both the Hebrew *Hitkansut* and the word “gathering” in English, and we use them both side by side and interchangeably. We hope that the word *Hitkansut* will, in time, enter the Jewish lexicon as a word as familiar as seder.

The *Hitkansut* Haggadah and ritual, like the Passover seder, follows a prescribed order that takes us on a journey from kinah to kimah, from sitting in grief to rising up to insist on human dignity. And much like a seder, the ritual only comes to life when the communities that perform it add their own voices, memories, songs, artifacts, and texts. *Hitkansut* may also be compared to a play. There is a “plot,” a narrative that takes us from the responsibility to remember to the commitment to remember responsibly. Much like a script, *Hitkansut* only comes alive in the hands of the players, those who participate in the ritual and bring their own memories and voices to the performance. Whichever metaphor resonates most, communities can adapt the ritual as a way of both remembering and shaping memory for generations to come. With fewer and fewer Shoah survivors in our midst to share their own stories, the responsibility to remember is becoming a collective endeavor. Through this ritual, we are remembering together in a personal, participatory, and transformative way – listening to the voices of the past while drawing on our own memories, associations, and understandings in the present.

The translation and adaptation of the ritual was not merely a scholarly endeavor but a ritual act in and of itself. We immersed ourselves in “the plot” of *Hitkansut*

in Hebrew and discovering the resonances, dissonances and gaps we strove to fill. We brought together a formidable group of thinkers and artists, including author Dara Horn and Yiddish singer and Rabbi Avram Mlotek to excavate the ritual and consider how to make it a powerful and authentic expression of Shoah memory for North America Jews. We then gathered during a precious 24 hours before new COVID restrictions were implemented and enacted the ritual as a working group, each adding insight to the section they studied and suggestions as to how we might best adapt it to English. We added Yiddish songs, a text about a US soldier liberating a camp and a yizkor candle lighting. We also wrote original texts: one by the voice of a grandchild of a survivor, another about not knowing the names of family who were killed and yet feeling bound to them and their memory.

Through the process of translation and adaptation we could almost feel the ritual breathing, expanding to include the stories and perspectives of American Jews and contracting to lay bare the essential truths about how the Shoah has shaped Jewish memory and the collective identity of our people. As Michal Govrin and I worked on the final details of the Haggadah before it went to press, Russia had just invaded Ukraine and we knew we had to write a text about the ways that memory of the Shoah calls upon us and obligate us today. Michal wrote a poem “The Call,” included in the “Remembering Responsibly” section of the Haggadah. And as I write this piece, in January 2024, we are exploring further adapting *Hitkansut* as a vehicle for relating to the grief and trauma of the Black Shabbat of October 7.

The English version of *Hitkansut* has been embraced by the North American Jewish community with tremendous enthusiasm. Rabbis and educators are facilitating the ritual in their synagogues and schools and some are using the “plot” as a template for a year-long educational curriculum.

Hitkansut is powerful because it enables us to find our voices, our personal connection to the Shoah, whether direct, part of known family story, or unknown but deeply felt as an experience of Jewish peoplehood. For me, the adaptation of this ritual reminded me of my own grandfather and stories my mother told me about how he supported his family during the war for many months until the letters stopped coming. I included a brief text about this in the ritual as a nod to the fact that so many of us don’t know who we lost, and we grieve nonetheless.

The gathering brings us solace, the plot gives us direction, the texts and songs give us expression, the ritual grounds us so we can stand with dignity and act with integrity.

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This book reflects a work in progress, and accordingly the acknowledgments can encompass only some of the many partnerships and voices that enabled and enriched the discourse in its various stages. I shared the idea of establishing a group to research the shaping of Shoah remembrance with Galili Shahar, who became a partner on a joint journey, and with my late husband, Haïm Brezis and the editor Giora Rosen, who offered beneficial insights. Researchers and artists joined the group, adding voices that are represented in the book. Others participated in some of the events, among them Yohanna Gottsfeld, Meital Gambasho, Leah Zahavi, Yonatan Chaimovich, the late Amalia Margolin, Haviva Pedaya, Daniel Feldman, Michal Rovner, Naama Shik, and the late Hava Pinhas-Cohen; Hava dedicated a session at the Kisufim Conference to the shaping of Shoah remembrance, with the participation of Jewish poets and writers from around the world. I am grateful to each and every one of the above for their formative partnership in the cultural and personal journey to shape Shoah remembrance.

The multidisciplinary research group Transmitted Memory and Fiction operated for three and a half years at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute; this incubator for fresh thought hothouse permitted the maturation of a new approach to shaping Shoah remembrance. I am grateful for the trust and encouragement of the director of the Institute at the time, Gabi Motzkin, to his successor Shai Lavi, and to the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute COO Shimon Alon for his supportive involvement. Thanks, too, to the Deputy Director of the Institute and head of the Advanced Studies Unit, Yochi Fisher, who became a member of the research group, and to Adam Klin-Oron. Thanks to Noa Kaspin and Miriam Ben-David, who coordinated the activities of the group, and to the entire staff of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, who accompanied the research group throughout its years of activity.

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Eisenberg, Tamar Elad-Appelbaum, Miriam Ben-David, Lior Chen, Rani Jaeger, Mendy Cahan, Ron Margolin, and Aharon Stern.

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Personal and collective memories are shaped over time by society as a whole. The shaping of the memory of the Shoah will continue to accompany us, and diverse new voices will be added to those represented in this book. All those involved in the present book thank these new voices in a spirit of shared fate, responsibility, and hope.

Michal Govrin

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Aharon Appelfeld (1932–2018) Writer, winner of the Israel Prize for Literature. The author of more than forty books, which have been translated into many languages and have won him awards in Israel and abroad. In his autobiography, *A Story of a Life*, he defined himself as follows:

“In the late 1950s, I abandoned my ambition to become an Israeli writer and tried to be what I really am: an immigrant, a refugee, a person who carries within him the child of the war, who has difficulty speaking and tries to tell with a minimum of words.”

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Aliza Auerbach (1940–2016) was born in Israel and studied philosophy and Bible at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She began taking still photographs for international movie productions, then turned to photojournalism. Her work had been published in *Haaretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *New York Times*, and the *Times of London*, among others. In 1989 she turned to art photography. Her prize-winning photographs can be found in the collections of Israel Museum, Tel Aviv Museum, Ein Harod Museum, The Museum of Israeli Art, the Museum on the Seam, Tel Chai Photography Museum and in private collections all over the world. Aliza’s books include *The Poems of Jerusalem*, with Yehuda Amichai (1987), *Mothers on Earth* (1997), *Women at Work* (2003), and *The Song of the Sea* (2007). The album *Nitzolim (Survivors)*, 2010 is the third part of a trilogy that included *Rishonim* (Pioneers, 1990) and *Olim* (New Immigrants, 1992). Aliza lived in Jerusalem with her husband Gideon Ofrat, an art historian. Their daughter Eden Auerbach Ofrat is a video-artist. Aliza died in March 29th 2016. A few months later, a retrospective of her work was shown at Ein Harod Museum, accompanied by a retrospective album called *Aliza Auerbach: Chaim (life)*.

Michal Ben-Naftali is a writer, translator, essayist, and literary editor. She teaches creative writing at Ben-Gurion University. Her translations from French to Hebrew include works by Jacques Derrida, André Breton, Maurice Blanchot, Julia Kristeva, Esther Orner, Annie Ernaux, Didier Eribon and Michelle Debords. Among her books: *The Teacher* (2015), *A Dress of Fire* (2019), *The Group* (2021) and *The Anarchists* (forthcoming).

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Mendy Cahan, actor, lecturer and Yiddish cultural activist. Founding director since 1993 of YUNG YiDiSH, a volunteer based Yiddish library and cultural center. Appeared in award-winning films and on stages worldwide, both as actor and as Yiddish expert. Recipient of the Life Achievement Award by the President of Israel in 2023.

Rina Duda is a researcher of literature and a member of the Interdisciplinary Group at the Tel Aviv Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis. Her work focuses on patterns of poetic testimonies to extreme traumatic experiences, in the interface of literature, film and psychoanalysis. Her book *Tongue of Fire: Poetic Testimony to the Holocaust* was published in 2021 in Hebrew, and will be published in English in 2024 by Routledge.

Mali Eisenberg Historian and educator who dealing with the memory of the Holocaust in the ultra-Orthodox society. Lecturer at teaching colleges and at Bar Ilan University, and Director of the School of Holocaust Studies at Massuah – International Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Dana Freibach-Heifetz A philosopher, bibliotherapist and a writer. Published papers in philosophy, law, literature and therapy, and the philosophical book *Secular Grace* (Brill-Rodopi, 2017, translated by Barbara Harshav; Hebrew: Resling, 2009). Alongside her research wrote two collections of short stories – *Dolphins in Kiryat Gat* (Safra & Hakibutz Ha'meuchad, 2015) and *Another Effort* (Pardes, 2019) – the collection of fragments *In the Desert of Things* (2021, Also with an artistic version with photographs of Yoram Kupermintz), and the novel *The Blue House* (Pardes, forthcoming).

Yochi Fischer is the deputy director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, the director of the Sacredness, Religion and Secularization cluster and head of the Intellectual Journeys program at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. Her research interests include religion, secularization, and secularism today and in comparative and historical contexts; memory and history; and the connection between research and creativity. Her book *Leo* will be published in April 2023.

Saul Friedländer Is a historian. A world authority on the Holocaust, he was awarded the Israel Prize for history. His numerous books and essays are landmarks in research on WWII. The uniqueness of his approach is fully expressed in his masterpiece, a two-volume history of the persecution and extermination of all European Jews, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (volume 1 was published in 1997; volume 2 in 2007). Based on a vast array of documents and memoirs, together they offer the first overall and

detailed history of the Holocaust. For *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945*, the second volume, Saul Friedländer won the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction in 2008.

Yolanda Gampel Psychoanalyst, Prof. Emerita at the Department of Psychology and Program of Advanced Psychotherapy, Sackler Medical School, Tel-Aviv University. She is the author of *Ces parents qui vivent à travers moi* (2010). Yolanda Gampel won the Hayman International Prize for Published Work Pertaining to Holocaust Traumatized Children and Adults (2001), and the Mary S. Sigourney Award for her contribution to psychoanalysis (2016). She served as past president (1989–1991) of the Israel Psychoanalytic Society.

Gary Goldstein Visual Artist. Exhibits his drawings, objects and Artist's books, both in Israel and abroad. His art works, which reflect his experience as a child of Holocaust Survivors, combine the influences of Pop Art and Comics. His work is represented in many museum collections including Tel Aviv Museum of Art, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate Gallery, London, and Museum of Modern Art, New York. He is a Lecturer in Art at Holon Institute of Technology, Holon.

Michal Govrin is a writer, poet, theater director, and university professor. Among her literary books widely translated are the novels *The Name*, *Snapshots*, and *Love on the Shore*; the non-fiction *Body of Prayer* with Jacques Derrida and David Shapiro, and *The Passion of Jerusalem: Journey to the Myth*. Govrin has directed in all the main repertory theaters in Israel, and is among the creators of the experimental Jewish Sacred Theater. From 2012 to 2015, she founded and led the multidisciplinary research group “Transmitted Memory and Fiction” at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, which published “*But There Was Love*”: *Shaping the Memory of the Shoah*. The *Hitkansut* (Gathering) – a ritual for a participatory remembrance, which she initiated – is developed, translated, and disseminated internationally by the Shalom Hartman Institute. Govrin's work was decorated in Israel and abroad, among others, by the Prime Minister's Prize for Writers, the Kugel Prize, the Akum Prize, the Margalit Prize for Theater, and the Koret prize. The Salon du livres de Paris distinguished her as “one of thirty writers who left a mark on world literature,” and she is decorated by the French *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*.

Rachel Jacoby Rosenfield is the Chief Executive Officer at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, where she leads the staff, shapes the vision, strategy, and growth, develops the culture, and oversees programs and operations. Rachel has served in the field of Jewish education and social justice for more than two decades as an entrepreneur, executive leader and educator. Rachel graduated summa cum laude from Washington University and earned her M.A. in Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley.

Rani Jaeger, scholar and cultural agent in Israel. Head of the New Ritual Center at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, co-writer of the *Hitkansut* – Gathering for the Holocaust Memorial Day. Co-founder and Rabbi at Beit Tefilah Israeli congregation in Tel Aviv. His Ph.D. shed light on the issues of faith, holiness and secularization in the writings of the poet Avraham Shlonsky.

Odeya Kohen Raz is a senior lecturer in the School of Audio & Visual Arts, Sapir Academic College. She also teaches in the Steve Tisch School for Film and Television at Tel Aviv University, and is a teaching coordinator in the Department of Literature, Art & Linguistics, at the Open University of Israel. She has published articles in refereed journals on questions of ethics in Israeli cinema and

Holocaust representations, and reflexivity in films, as well as psychoanalysis and narrative film. She is co-author (with Sandra Meiri) of the book *Traversing the Fantasy: The Dialectic of Desire/Fantasy and the Ethics of Narrative Cinema* 2020 in Bloomsbury Academic.

Yehudit Kol-Inbar was director of the Museums Division, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. She has curated several exhibitions and authored numerous articles about the Holocaust and museology.

Otto Dov Kulka (1933–2021) Was a historian and served as a Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Kulka has published dozens of books and essays on modern anti-Semitism, Jewish thought in Europe – and Jews in European thought – from the 16th to the 20th century, Jewish-Christian relations in modern Europe, the history of the Jews in Germany, and the study of the Holocaust. Kulka's last book, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death. Reflections on Memory and Imagination*, was published worldwide and won the Wiznitzer Prize for best book published in Jewish studies (1998), awarded by the Hebrew University's Institute of Jewish Studies.

Orit Livne is a painter who lives and works in Jerusalem. She has had numerous solo and group exhibitions. The large-scale works, painted in a meticulous technique, deal with the abstraction of realistic elements: sky, clouds, treetops and folds of fabrics, all with the ability to constantly change. An atmosphere of foreignness is evident in them.

Ron Margolin is Professor at Tel Aviv University's Department of Jewish Philosophy and a senior researcher at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He is the author of many studies on Hasidism, modern Jewish thought, secular Judaism and comparative religion. He is author of *Inner Religion in Jewish Sources: A Phenomenology of Inner Religious Life and its Manifestation from the Bible to Hasidic Texts* (Boston 2021) and *The Human Temple, Religious Interiorization and the Structuring of Inner Life in Early Hasidism* (Magnes Press 2004). This book will soon be published in English by De Gruyter.

Sandra Meiri is senior lecturer emerita in film studies, the Open University of Israel. She has published essays and books on film theory; ethics and aesthetics in film; and on Israeli cinema, especially on transgenerational post-trauma in narrative and documentary Holocaust-related films. Her latest book, co-authored with Odeya Kohen Raz, is *Traversing the Fantasy: The Dialectic of Desire/Fantasy and the Ethics of Narrative Cinema* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

Raya Morag is Professor of Cinema Studies in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel. Her publications deal with post-traumatic cinema, perpetratorhood, and ethics; cinema, war, and masculinity; perpetrator trauma; documentary cinema; and corporeal-feminist film critique. Morag was the first to frame the “perpetrator trauma” paradigm in cinema trauma studies and helped pioneer a new discourse in trauma studies, which situates the perpetrator at its center. She is the author of *Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War* (Peter Lang, 2009), *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), *Perpetrator Cinema: Confronting Genocide in Cambodian Documentary* (Columbia University Press, 2020), and *World Cinema: Reflections on Unwatchable Movies* (Resling, 2022, in Hebrew), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. For the last 15 years Morag has written a cinema column in Israel's prestigious newspaper *Haaretz*, and has served as an artistic director of one of Israel's major cinema funds.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan is a theorist of literature. She is Professor Emerita in the Departments of English and Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She published three books of literary theory and edited two more. She has also published many essays in the field of narratology, engaging theoretical concepts with English and American novels of the twentieth century. Shlomith is the recipient of the distinguished Wayne Booth Award for Lifetime Achievement, given by the Society for the Study of Narrative (2019).

Eitan Steinberg Composer, the recipient of the ACUM Prize for Lifetime Achievement (2014), Israel Prime Minister Composers Award (2007, 2018) and Landau Prize for the Arts (2010). His works are frequently performed in Israel, Europe and the USA, by renowned orchestras, ensembles and soloists. He is also a conductor of contemporary music and a full professor in the Department of Music at the University of Haifa, Israel.

Eli Vakil Professor Emeritus and former departmental chairman in the Department of Psychology and the head of the Memory and Amnesia lab at the Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center at Bar-Ilan University. He is also director of the Rehabilitation Center for veterans with traumatic brain injuries. Prof. Vakil has published extensively in the area of memory and memory disorders in various populations, such as individuals with traumatic brain injury and the elderly.

