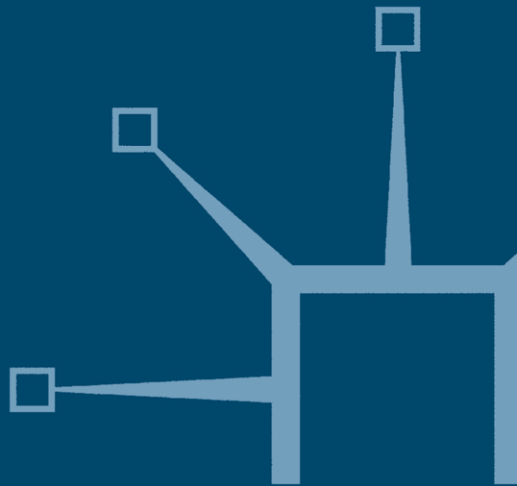


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How the Holocaust Looks Now

International Perspectives

Martin L. Davies and Claus-Christian
W. Szejnmann



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*This book is dedicated to Audrey Burton whose
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List of the most common abbreviations

CDU = Christian Democratic Party
FDP = Free Democratic Party
FRG = Federal Republic of Germany
PDS = Party of Democratic Socialism
SED = Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SPD = German Social Democratic Party

Foreword

The passage of time since the final liberation of the surviving Jews from the concentration camps of Europe affects the way in which the murder of the others is remembered and taught. When testimony fades and there are no longer any survivors left to bear personal witness then personal memory must be replaced by other forms of remembrance including the remembrance created by teaching. The biblical command to 'Remember what was done' can only be effective if the succeeding generations are made aware of what happened. And it is for such purposes that there exist such institutions as the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies and their purpose can only be maintained if they seek actively not only to promote research into the events and repercussions of the horrific barbarities convulsing Europe in the middle of the twentieth century but also to bring that research to the attention of a wider audience.

It was for those reasons that Chris Szejnmann and Martin Davies, the joint Directors of the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies in the University of Leicester convened a conference of scholars of international status to examine the question of the Holocaust from a position sixty years after its conclusion, two full generations, allowing for the issues which it created to be discussed from a contemporary perspective and in the context of a general audience of non-specialists. This volume is the result of that gathering, and it is to be hoped that the ideas which were discussed here will bear fruit in further volumes to be produced by the Centre.

In the meantime thanks are due to Martin Davies and Chris Szejnmann, and to their many helpers, including students of the University, for having made possible the discussions which have taken place during and after the meetings held in the spring of 2005, and which have resulted in this volume.

Aubrey Newman
Professor Emeritus of History, University of Leicester,
Founding Director of the Stanley Burton Centre

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Notes on Contributors

Wolfgang Benz was born in 1941, and studied history, political science, and the history of art in Frankfurt am Main, Kiel, and Munich. Between 1969 and 1990 he was staff member of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich. He is co-founder and co-editor of the periodical *Dachauer Hefte*, and editor of several other series. Since 1990 he is Professor at the Technical University Berlin, and head of the Center for Research on Antisemitism. In 1992 he was awarded the Geschwister-Scholl-Preis. He is Chairman of the Gesellschaft für Exilforschung, and co-editor of the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*. His numerous publications on German history of the twentieth century include (since 2000): *Das Dritte Reich* (Munich, 2000); *Flucht aus Deutschland. Zum Exil im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2001); (ed), *Lexikon des Holocaust* (Munich, 2002); (ed), *Überleben im Dritten Reich. Juden im Untergrund und ihre Helfer* (2003); *Was ist Antisemitismus?* (Munich, 2004); (ed), *Der 20 Juli 1944 und der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Erfurt, 2004); (ed), *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 1 (2005); (ed), *Umgang mit Flüchtlingen* (Munich, 2006).

Boaz Cohen received his PhD from the Department of Jewish History in Bar Ilan University for a thesis on 'Holocaust Research in Israel 1945–1980: Characteristics, Trends, Developments'. His work focuses on Holocaust Historiography and its context in Jewish and Israeli Society. He is currently a researcher in Bar Ilan University. Recent publications include 'Holocaust Survivors and the Genesis of Holocaust Research', in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge, Weber-Newth Inge (eds), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour. Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution* (Osnabrück, 2005), 290–300; 'The Birth Pangs of Academic Holocaust Research', *Yad Vashem Studies* 33 (Jerusalem 2005), 203–243.

Martin L. Davies is reader in History in the School of Historical Studies, University of Leicester. His current research interest focuses on the social and political uses of knowledge, particularly historical knowledge. Besides numerous articles on German-Jewish culture, the history of ideas, and German literature, he has recently published *Historics. Why History Dominates Contemporary Society* (Routledge, 2006); 'On Two Types of Knowledge in the Human Sciences', in K.F. Hilliard, R. Ockenden and N.F. Palmer (eds), *Bejahende Erkenntnis. Festschrift für T.J. Reed zu seiner Emeritierung am 30. September 2004*, (Tübingen, 2004), 1–16; *Breaking the Disciplines: Reconceptions in Knowledge, Art and Culture*, (co-edited with Marsha Meskimmon) (London, 2003); Sabbatja Joseph Wolff, *Maimoniana*

oder Rhapsodien zur Charakteristik Salomon Maimons, (co-edited with C. Schulte), *Jüdische Geistesgeschichte*, Bd. 4 (Berlin, 2003); 'Historismus oder kognitive Wissenschaft? Zur Kulturpolitik des Geschmacksbegriffs bei J.G. Herder und Marcus Herz', in C. Schulte (ed), *Hebräische Poesie und jüdischer Volksgeist. Die Wirkungsgeschichte von Johann Gottfried Herder im Judentum Mittel- und Osteuropas*, Reihe Haskala 28 (Hildesheim, 2003), 125–150.

Johan Dietsch was born in Umeå (Sweden), and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Department of History at Lund University. He has specialised in Contemporary East European history in general and Ukrainian history in particular. Among his publications in English are (Johan Öhman), 'Holodomor and the Ukrainian Identity of Suffering: The 1932–1933 Ukrainian Famine in Historical Culture', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 37 (3) (2003), 27–44; 'From Famine to Forgotten Holocaust. The 1932–1933 Famine in Ukrainian Historical Cultures', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund, 2003), 223–254.

Maria Ecker was born in 1976 in Ried, Austria. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Salzburg working on a dissertation about Holocaust testimonies in the United States (to be completed in 2006). Her research focuses on various forms of autobiographical narratives (written, oral and audiovisual) and individual and collective memory. Ecker's teaching credentials include courses on oral history and Holocaust remembrance. Her most recent publication is: 'The Shaping of Memory and Identity. Women Survivors in Israel and the US' (with Helga Embacher) in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (eds), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour. Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution* (Osnabrück, 2005).

Jochen Fuchs, born in Stuttgart, is currently Professor at the Fachhochschule Magdeburg. His most important recent publications are: *Nicaragua: Demokratischer Anspruch und gesellschaftliche Realität – Geschichte des Landes im Lichte der Auseinandersetzung um Verfassungsrecht und Wahlentscheidung von der Unabhängigkeit bis zur liberalen Ära* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004); *Auschwitz in den Augen seiner Besucher – Eine Untersuchung von Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmern an Exkursionen nach Auschwitz in den Jahren zwischen 1994 und 2002 und zum Beitrag von Gedenkstättenbesuchen zur politischen (Bewusstseins-) Bildung nebst Vorschlägen zur Optimierung solcher Veranstaltungen* (Magdeburg 2003); 'La jornada electoral: orden público, garantías, prohibiciones', in D. Nohlen, S. Picado and D. Zovatto (eds), *Tratado de derecho electoral comparado de América Latina* (Mexico 1998), 492–518; *Costa Rica* (Berlin 1997); *Die bundesdeutschen UNESCO-Projekt-Schulen und ihre internationalen Kontakte und Aktivitäten* (Berlin 1995).

Kristian Gerner is professor of history in the Department of History at Lund University. He is currently working on the project 'The Holocaust in

European Historical Cultures'. This resulted in his article 'Ambivalence, Bivalence and Polyvalence. Historical Culture in the German-Polish Borderlands', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust* (Lund, 2003). Related to this approach are other studies on history and identity. Examples are ' "The Jew", the "Zionist" and the Construction of Swedish National Identity', in Michal Bron Jr. (ed.), *Jews and Christians in Dialogue II: Identity – Tolerance – Understanding* (Stockholm, 2001); 'Europe, Globalization and the Grand Historical Choices of the 21st Century. A New Historical Perspective', in Herman Bünz and Antoni Kuklinski, (ed.), *Globalization. Experiences and Prospects* (Warsaw, 2001).

Rabbi Prof. Dr. Eveline Goodman-Thau born in Vienna 1934, fled to Holland 1938, where she survived the war in hiding, since 1956 in Jerusalem, married with 5 children and 15 grandchildren, is currently Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. Since 1990 she has held Visiting Professorships at the Universities of Kassel, Oldenburg, Halle in Germany. From 1998–2000 she was Visiting Professor at Harvard Divinity School. She is also Director of the Hermann-Cohen-Akademie for European Jewish Studies, Buchen / Odenwald, Germany, which she founded in 1998. In 2000 she was ordained as an orthodox Rabbi in Jerusalem and from 2001 to 2002 she officiated as Rabbi at the liberal community Or Chadash, Vienna. 2005–06 Visiting Fellow at the Kolleg Friedrich-Nietzsche, Weimar. She has a long list of publications on a wide range of topics in cultural philosophy from the Sources of Judaism, feminist thought, feminist theology, women in Judaism, Holocaust Studies. Besides having edited numerous collections of essays on these issues she has recently published: *Arche der Unschuld. Versuch einer Kulturkritik nach Auschwitz* (Vienna, 2006); *Liebe und Erlösung. Das Buch Ruth* (SCHIBBOLETH – Forum Jüdische Kulturphilosophie. Studien zu Religion und Moderne vol 4) (Vienna, 2006); *Das Jüdische Erbe Europas. Krise der Kultur im Spannungsfeld von Tradition, Geschichte und Identität* (co-edited with Fania Oz-Salzberger) (Berlin, 2005); *Illa Meisels, Erinnerung der Herzen Mit einem Nachwort versehen und herausgegeben von Eveline Goodman-Thau*, (Wien: Czernin-Verlag, 2004).

Peter Graves is senior lecturer and head of German at the University of Leicester. His research and teaching concentrate on German literature since the Second World War, and he has written extensively on German authors from both East and West. A particular focus has been the work of Christa Wolf, on whom he has published numerous articles. His current research interests are directed to the German novel since unification. He is a regular reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, with more than fifty contributions principally on contemporary German fiction to date.

Matthias Hass was born in Eckernförde, Germany. He is the director of the U.S. program of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace in Philadelphia.

He studied political science at the Free University of Berlin and specialised in the field of historical foundations of politics and the politics of memory. Among his publications are: *Gestaltetes Gedenken. Yad Vashem, das U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum und die Stiftung Topographie des Terrors* (Frankfurt/Main, New York, 2002) and 'The Politics of Memory in Germany, Israel and the United States of America', *Working Paper Series of The Canadian Centre for German and European Studies* No.9, www.ccae.umontreal.ca/en/index.htm, Toronto, Montréal, June 2004.

Esther Hertzog is a social anthropologist, senior lecturer, Head of the Social Science Department and of the Anthropology studies programme at Beit Berl College, Israel. Among her spheres of research are: bureaucracy, the welfare state, and gender issues. She is a feminist activist since 1989 and has a bi-weekly column in Ma'ariv-daily. Her publications include: *Israel: A Local Anthropology, Studies in the Anthropology of Israel* (co-editor) (Tel Aviv, 1998) (Hebrew); *Immigrants and Bureaucrats, Ethiopians in an Israeli Absorption Center* (Oxford, 1999); *Feminist Social Justice in Israel – Opinion Columns in Maariv-Daily* (co-editor) (Tel Aviv, 2005) (Hebrew); *Israel: Local Anthropology* (co-editor) (forthcoming by Wayne State University Press).

Olaf Jensen was born in Hamburg, Germany. He is a lecturer in Holocaust Studies at the School of Historical Studies, University of Leicester, and Deputy Director of the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies. From 2001 to 2005 he was research fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary Memory Research at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in Essen, and worked on different interdisciplinary research projects on autobiographical memory and historical consciousness. His research has focused on National Socialism and the Holocaust, especially on the impact of memory on contemporary German society, and on how the past is transmitted from one generation to the next. See especially his monograph *Geschichte machen. Strukturmerkmale des intergenerationellen Sprechens über die NS-Vergangenheit in deutschen Familien* (Tübingen, 2004).

Klas-Göran Karlsson is Professor of History at Lund University, Sweden, and leader of the research project 'The Holocaust and European Historical Cultures'. Among his latest publications are *Terror och tystnad. Sovjetregimens krig mot den egna befolkningen* (Terror and Silence. The Soviet Regime's War against Its Own Population) (Stockholm, 2003); *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (co-edited, with Ulf Zander) (Lund, 2003); *Holocaust Heritage. Inquiries into European Historical Cultures* (co-edited with Ulf Zander) (Malmö, 2004); *Folkmordens historia. Det moderna samhällets skuggsida* (History of Genocide. The Dark Side of Modern Society) (co-edited with Kristian Gerner) (Stockholm 2005).

Simone Lässig was born in Altenburg, Germany. She is currently a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC and *Privatdozentin*

at the University of Dresden. Her main fields of interests are social and cultural History – eighteenth to the mid-20th Century, Jewish history, philanthropy and patronage, and teaching and representing history. Her most recent project is ‘The Arnholds – A Banking Family between Germany, Europe and America.’ Among her publications are: *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum. Kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2004); *Wahlrechtskampf und Wahlreformen in Sachsen, 1895–1909* (Weimar, 1996); *Modernisierung und Region. Studien zu Wahlen, Wahlrecht und Politischer Kultur im Wilhelminischen Deutschland*, (co-edited with K. Pohl and J. Retallack) 2nd edition (Bielefeld, 1998); ‘Bürgerlichkeit, Patronage, and Communal Liberalism in Germany, 1871–1914’, in T. Adam (ed.), *Philanthropy, Patronage, and Civil Society. Experiences from Germany, Great Britain, and North America* (Bloomington, In 2004), 198–218.

Karolin Machtans was born in Lübeck, and is currently a visiting scholar and lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania while completing her PhD thesis in the Department of Languages, Literature, & Media (Modern German Literature) at the University of Hamburg. Her main research interests focus on the aesthetic representation of the Holocaust, interdisciplinary concepts of memory and autobiography, the theory of translation as well as on the representation of the German reunification in literature and film.

Isabella Matauschk (1970), is a lecturer in Intercultural Communication and Cultural Studies at the Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria, and Fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary Memory Research, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Essen. She completed a PhD in history and civilisation in 2002.

Aubrey Newman is Emeritus Professor of History and founding director of the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies at the University of Leicester. He has written extensively in the field of Anglo-Jewish history and particularly in the history of Provincial Jewry since the middle of the eighteenth century. He has recently co-edited (together with Barbara Butler), *A Sacred Memory. Lectures in Honour of Elchanan and Miriam Elkes* (Leicester, 2003), and published *The Holocaust. We Must Never Forget, Nor Allow It to Happen Again* (London, 2002). He has set up proposals for the Kindertransport and Bergen-Belsen projects, and is currently also engaged in a South African Jewish migration project – an analysis of the Eastern European Jews who went to South Africa between 1890 and 1914, and in research on Provincial Jewry Britain between 1740 and 1914.

Karl Heinrich Pohl was born in Schweidnitz (Silesia), since 1995 professor of History and Historical Didactics at the University of Kiel and Director of the Institute for Contemporary and Regional History (IZRG), Schleswig. His current research interests cover didactic practices in museums, liberalism in Germany, and Gustav Stresemann. His publications include: *Die Münchner*

Arbeiterbewegung (Munich, 1992); Adolf Müller (Cologne, 1995). He has also edited the following: *Historiker in der DDR* (Göttingen 1997); *Wehrmacht und Vernichtungskrieg* (Göttingen 1999); *Politiker und Bürger. Gustav Stresemann und seine Zeit* (Göttingen, 2002).

Rainer Schulze was born in Bremen, Germany. He received his PhD from the University of Göttingen. He currently teaches Modern European History at the University of Essex (also Head of Department), and is a member of the International Experts' Commission for the Redevelopment of the *Gedenkstätte* Bergen-Belsen. He has specialised in twentieth-century German history, the history of Bergen-Belsen, and the history of forced migration movements after the Second World War. In 1998–99 he designed an exhibition on the influx of German refugees and expellees from the East into rural districts in Western Germany which has been shown at a number of museums. He has published extensively, and among his most recent publications in English are '“Keeping very clear of any ‘Kuh-Handel’ ”: The British Foreign Office and the Rescue of Jews from Bergen-Belsen', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 19 (2005) 226–251; 'The Politics of Memory: Flight and Expulsion of German Populations after the Second World War and German Collective Memory', *National Identities*, 8 (2006) forthcoming. He is currently completing the monograph *Belsen: History and Memory of a Nazi 'Horror Camp'* (working title), which is expected to be published in 2007, and has been commissioned to write a monograph on the *The Second World War and Forced Migration in Europe*.

Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann was born in Munich, studied in London, and is currently reader in Modern European History, as well as Director of the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies at the University of Leicester. His research interests lie in Nazism, the Holocaust, the GDR, unified Germany, identities in Germany, regionalism, biography, fascism and the extreme right. His major publications are *Vom Traum zum Alptraum. Sachsen während der Weimarer Republik* (Leipzig, 2000), and *Nazism in Central Germany: The Brownshirts in 'Red' Saxony* (Oxford, 1999). He is currently writing *Contesting the Rise of the Nazis* (Oxford, 2007); and *Nazism in Germany: A Comparative Regional History* (Oxford, 2009).

Barbara Törnquist Plewa was born in Szydlowiec in Poland. She has been living in Sweden since 1981. She is professor of East and Central European Studies, and director of the Centre for European Studies at Lund University. Her research focuses on the role of symbols, myths and collective memory in the construction of national identities and national ideologies. Among her publications in English are *The Wheel of Polish Fortune* (Lund 1992); 'Contrasting Ethnonationalisms: Eastern Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic)', in S. Barbour and C. Carmichael (eds), *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford, 2000); 'The Complex of the Unwanted

Child. Meanings of Europe in Polish National Discourse', in B. Stråth and M. Malmberg (eds), *Meanings of Europe in National Discourses* (London 2002); 'The Union between Russia and Belarus in the Context of Belarusian Nation-building', in E. Rindzeviciute (ed.), *Contemporary Change in Belarus*, Södertörn, Baltic and East European Studies, 2 (2004).

Tatiana Weiser is currently completing her PhD at the Institute of Advanced Humanities Research (Russian State Humanitarian University, Moscow). She is also teaching postgraduate students at the Institute of European Cultures (Russian State Humanitarian University). Her most important publications are: 'The Double Bottom of Metaphysics: Simone Weil, Testifying on Herself', *New Literary Review* (Moscow), 64 (6) 2003; 'The Century of the Camps? The End of History or History without the End', *New Literary Review* (Moscow), 67 (3) (2004); 'S. Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others (along with the translation of a fragment)', *Index* (Moscow), 22, 2005.

Mirjam Wenzel was born in Frankfurt/Main, research assistant at the Institute for German Literature at Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, and Freelance Curator. She is currently working on the edition of Siegfried Kracauer's writings (at Suhrkamp Verlag Publishing House) and on her PhD in Comparative Literature. Her publications concentrate on questions of representation, critical theory and on German-Jewish relations; see for instance Mirjam Wenzel *Wonderyears: New Reflections on the Shoah and Nazism in Israel* (co-edited with Tsafari Cohen and Avi Pitchon) (Berlin, 2003); 'Siegfried Kracauer', *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Jerusalem 2006 (forthcoming); 'Trained Bodies, Suspended Being and the Performance of Emptiness', in Angelika Middendorf (ed.), *Treadmills: Looping Space* (Frankfurt/Main, 2005), 42–43; 'Of the Many Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was: The Discovery of Reality in Cultural Studies and Art in the 1990s', in Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (ed.), *Urban Collisions: Civilizational Conflicts in the Medium of Video* (Berlin, 2002), 12–15.

René Wolf was born of German parents in Japan, where he lived up to the age of 12. The following seven years he spent in Germany, and since 1978 has lived in the United Kingdom. Before embarking on academic study he ran a Jazz club in London for ten years. He is now a history PhD student at Royal Holloway University of London under the supervision of Professor Dan Stone, researching ideological radio broadcasting in 1960s Germany. He is also teaching Modern European History at Royal Holloway and Kingston University. A longer version of 'The Undivided Sky – The Auschwitz Trial on East and West German Radio' will appear in the spring 2007 edition of the *Journal of Contemporary History*.

Ulf Zander is a Research Associate at Lund University and a University lecturer at Jönköping University. Besides his PhD on debates and on uses of Swedish history in the twentieth century (Lund, 2001), he has written

numerous articles on monuments, the historiography of the Baltic Sea region, and the relationship between film and history. Among his latest publications are *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (co-edited with Klas-Göran Karlsson) (Lund, 2003); *Holocaust Heritage. Inquiries into European Historical Cultures* (co-edited Klas-Göran Karlsson) (Malmö, 2004); (Ulf Zander and Max Liljefors) 'Schweden. Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die schwedische Utopie', in Monika Flacke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen* (Berlin, 2004).

Veronika Zangl was born in Edlitz, Austria. In 2004, she completed her doctorate in German Literature at the University of Vienna. The title of her thesis is 'Poetics After the Holocaust. On Testimonies by Survivors of National Socialist Policies of Extermination'. She is currently working on a research project concerning the relationship between facts and narratives. She has specialised in the poetics of literary testimonies about the Holocaust, furthermore in aesthetics, and gender studies. Among her publications in English are 'Recollections of the Self in Testimonies of Survivors of the Nazi Persecution' in Johannes-Dieter, Steinert and Inge, Weber-Newth (eds), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour. Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution. Proceedings of the First International Multidisciplinary Conference, London, 29–31 January 2003* (Osnabrück, 2005), 320–328; 'Holocaust Testimonies and Cultural Memory', in Nancy, Pedri (ed.), *Travelling Concepts III. Memory, Narrative, Image* (Amsterdam, 2003), 43–57.

Introduction: How the Holocaust Looks Now

Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Martin L. Davies

The Holocaust: varieties and meanings

On 27 January 2005 the German magazine *Stern* printed the famous image of the train entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp complex on its cover and underneath raised the following query: 'Sixty years after the liberation of Auschwitz. The crime of the millennium and the question: Do we still have to feel guilty today?'¹ German historians, politicians, and those working in the cultural sphere seemed in that issue to agree that most of their citizens, because they were born during or after the Holocaust, should not feel any *guilt* but must bear a *responsibility* to engage with this 'unique and monstrous' part of Germany's history. On that same day, right-wing representatives of the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) walked out of the Saxon Parliament in protest during a minute of silence for all victims of the Nazi dictatorship.

Meanwhile in Britain, *The Independent* newspaper headed a major article about Auschwitz with the words 'This factory of death is not just part of the past – it is part of the present', and asked various intellectuals about the legacies of the Holocaust.² For Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks it was a reminder that the danger of anti-Semitism 'is still alive and endangering lives'; whilst the political theorist Bernard Crick argued: 'It is a terrible reminder of the constantly recurring possibilities of man's inhumanity to man when driven by comprehensive and false ideologies – racism in that case. The lesson is that outside powers have to move in time to prevent massacres and other genocidal events, using force when necessary'; and the former Labour cabinet minister and anti-Iraq-war campaigner Tony Benn stated: 'The most important lesson of the Holocaust is that fear provides a power structure for political leaders. Hitler portrayed the Jews as the enemy and used it to instil fear and gain power. George Bush evokes the fear of terrorism and becomes a more powerful leader.' Finally, Ariel Sharon, Israel's then Prime Minister, argued in the Knesset: 'The Allies knew of the annihilation of the Jews and did nothing. Israel learnt that we can trust no one but ourselves ... Legitimate

steps of self-defence which Israel takes in its war against Palestinian terror ... are presented by those who hate Israel as aggressive, Nazi-like steps.'

In recent years we have seen 'the centrality of the past for the politics of the present and the major role played by the politics of memory in moulding current national identities'.³ These include debates in Israel how the Holocaust is used politically in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, debates over the memorials in Berlin and Paris to the Jews murdered in the Holocaust, and debates in Poland that the memory of German occupation has, until recently, focused exclusively on non-Jewish Poles as victims of Nazism.⁴ Each country has a different take on the Holocaust. 'Perpetrator' Germany and Austria (where in February 2006 in Vienna David Irving started a three-year prison sentence for denying the Holocaust and the gas chambers of Auschwitz) differs from 'victim' Israel; each in turn differs from 'Vichy France' or the 'liberal imagination' (Kushner)⁵ of Britain or the United States, and so on. Yad Vashem in Jerusalem has a different purpose and meaning from the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, and the new Holocaust Memorial in Berlin is 'informed by different cultural and political imperatives than similar constructions elsewhere' (Hass).⁶ Within each country different groups and individuals have different understandings and interpretations. Moishe Postone and Eric Santer recently summed up:

Responses to the Holocaust are ... always framed by specific contexts of production and reception which inform and inflict them, colour them with the needs, desires, and concerns of the 'local' constellation of their emergence ... these constellations have undergone numerous shifts and transformations since 1945.⁷

Indeed, experts who analyse the way how nations remember, interpret, and discuss the Holocaust and other crimes against the humanity have concluded that 'these discussions have hardly anything to do with the past itself, but are mainly related to current problems: financial and symbolic acts of compensation, political and economic interests and power influence or conflicts between generations and migration'.⁸ Anyone who has ever thought about the relationship between the past and the present is perfectly aware that 'all history is viewed through prisms imposed after the fact'⁹ – and of course historians themselves have played a crucial part in the instrumentalisation of Holocaust memory.¹⁰

The 'prisms through which we as a society now view the murder of the Jews are legion'.¹¹ The Holocaust has become a universal signifier with endless connotations. These varieties in perception and understanding – in the present as well as the past – need emphasising and make the Holocaust and its legacies such an intractable topic. Two experts recently argued that 'breaking down monolithic "explanations" like Goldhagen's is as important as breaking down the monolithic concept of the Holocaust', and

stressed that the Holocaust itself 'was experienced differently by men and women, children and adults, the religious and the secular, eastern and western European Jews, rich and poor, intellectuals and non-intellectuals and so on'.¹²

One thing that is certain, however, is that the Holocaust, whilst it took place more than three generations ago, plays an increasingly important role 'to a vast and varied number of individuals and communities',¹³ especially in Europe, the United States, and of course Israel. In these societies the Holocaust has assumed an 'iconic dimension', and has become 'a paradigm for the human condition, a matrix which symbolises the perpetual threat to humanity'.¹⁴ This has major implications. It makes the topic one of the most prominent, charged, and sensitive issues in local, regional, national and international politics. In fact, it frequently leads to conflict with communities that do not share these beliefs and values. The sharpest reminders of the different perceptions and instrumentalisation of the Holocaust, and also the most dangerous ones, however, are linked in part to current international political conflicts (Middle East conflict and 'September 11') and equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. In the West, this has led to the infiltration of Islamic anti-Semitism into Moslem communities. Furthermore, Islamist anti-Semitism ties the phenomenon to the problems associated with Muslim immigrant minorities.¹⁵ Or, very recently, there are Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's proclamations, that Israel should be wiped from the map, and that the Holocaust is a myth. Jason Burke commented in *The Observer* newspaper that it would be dangerous to dismiss Ahmadinejad as 'a loony tune':

Ahmadinejad is a man who says the truth as it is perceived by tens of millions of people in Iran and hundreds of millions more in the Islamic world. When he spouts vile anti-Semitism or Holocaust denial, he is merely saying what governments elsewhere in the region have been saying privately, or allowing state-owned media to say domestically, for decades.¹⁶

Europe's official policy, compared to this, seems to evolve on a different planet. One of the most significant recent events has been the 'International Forum on the Holocaust' in Stockholm in 2000, which institutionalised in the EU a process of coming to terms with and confronting the Holocaust. This has come as a result of dramatic historical changes at the end of the twentieth century: 'The demise of Soviet socialism in Europe and, above all, the unification of the two Germanies have ... created a radically new geopolitical context for the construction of national histories and identities, for the ways in which the crimes of the Nazi period come to be integrated into the history of Germany and modern Europe more generally.'¹⁷ Klas-Göran Karlsson explains: 'After the ending of the Cold War, there was a need to celebrate the new European unity by attributing the moral zero point to the

past. In this context, the Holocaust became a useful concept to tie the absolute evil of history together with a good, united Europe of the future.¹⁸ The Forum in Stockholm led to the introduction of Holocaust Memorial Days (commemorating every year the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January) and educational efforts to establish an intensive treatment of the Holocaust in numerous member states. Two British historians recently elaborated:

The Holocaust, like Nazism, has become ubiquitous, and not just within a mass media that appears obsessed with the subject. Besides the vast and growing body of academic scholarship, a large number of introductory texts of varying standards is available to feed the demand in the proliferating university courses focusing on the period. As for school education, in Britain study of the Holocaust is now on the national curriculum, an educational imperative complemented by the establishment of a national museum exhibition and 'Holocaust memorial day', and by deployment of the subject in the Labour government's 'citizenship initiative'.¹⁹

Ronit Lentin, in an attempt to illuminate the reasons for this further, has recently argued:

In the plethora of narratives competing for our attention in the interpretation and re-interpretation of contemporary events, the Nazi extermination, more than any other modern historical event, has been internalized as, perhaps, the only 'unique, epoch-making' metaphor. The recourse to it is irretrievably, and continually, testing our trust in human nature, but also 'probing the limits of representation' (Friedländer). More specifically, because in Auschwitz, as argued, among others, by Habermas, 'something happened, that up to now nobody considered as even possible ...' and since 'Auschwitz has changed the basis for the continuity of the conditions of life within history', Auschwitz ... has become a euphemism, a metaphor, a code.²⁰

We would like to expand on this: 'The Holocaust proved the practical and intellectual incapacity of European cultures to ensure that society does not lapse into exclusive prejudice and apocalyptic ideology, that a state maintains truly democratic politics, that culture promotes an ethics of tolerance and human rights. To study the Holocaust is to confront issues of society, politics, and knowledge that threaten the foundations of ordinary human existence because, negating one of the key foundations of Western reality, Judaic monotheism, they coalesce around barbarity and nihilism. The Holocaust, more than any other genocide, has deeply affected modern consciousness, becoming "the axial event", and allowing us to learn universal lessons. It encourages reflection on civil rights and ethical duties as well as

on the uses and abuses of human knowledge and rationality. It warns us that any society, however modern, where these standards slip and disappear, can become criminal. It proves that racism and anti-Semitism can lead to atrocities on an unimaginable scale. It reminds us that each individual has choices and is responsible for his or her own conscience and action. The concerns of the Holocaust thus underpin general social interests and the educational institutions that are meant to foster them.²¹

To be clear, however, this interpretation does not go unchallenged, and the introduction of Holocaust Memorial Days in particular, whilst uniting some communities, has clearly alienated others. In Britain in early 2006, the Sikh broadcaster Hardeep Singh Kholi questioned in a Channel 4 documentary whether it is appropriate or necessary for Britain to have a national day to commemorate the Holocaust when, as a nation, we do not have national days to commemorate other historical tragedies or the millions who died as a result of the slave trade. On that programme, poet, novelist and playwright Benjamin Zephaniah stated that when he hears the term 'holocaust' he thinks of the holocaust committed on Black people and that he regards the existing Holocaust Memorial Day as exclusionist.²² A BBC radio programme also tackled 'the moral ambiguities of Holocaust Day' and introduced the topic as follows:

Tomorrow is Holocaust Memorial Day ... It's been controversial ever since it was established six years ago. Once again, the Muslim Council of Britain ... will be boycotting the event. They roundly deny being anti-Semitic. Their objection is that Holocaust Memorial Day is too exclusive; that other victims of other genocides should be remembered too; that some races are more equal than others, even in their victim-hood. The day's supporters say the Holocaust was uniquely evil in its nature, its scale and its purpose, an industrialised genocide by a supposedly civilised European society. It embraces other groups, killed alongside the Jews, because Nazis regarded them too as degenerate. And they say it's a message of warning to all mankind for all mankind. It's the most sensitive and moral issue, which, although it focuses on the darkness of the past, inflames feelings now in a world where many see discrimination and racism on the rise. Who is right? Is it morally justifiable to focus this official memorial exclusively on the victims of the Holocaust? [The programme's website added: 'At a time when the coat of European civilisation is a thin one, and when both Muslims and Jews talk up both real and imagined discriminations, where lies the moral high ground for the two communities?'] Our moral maze tonight.²³

There were two particularly interesting moments in the programme. First, the opening statement by Claire Fox, director of the Institute of Ideas:

I don't like official memorial days per se, and I fear that the Holocaust, which I think was a unique and terrible crime of the 20th century, has been turned into something of a political football, something of a moral posture, a great moral lesson to us all by the government ... I think that the Holocaust is too important to be turned into an unseemly scrap and fight between different identities. And if anything, this present row seems to me the outcome of identity politics, something I am also nervous about.

Her fears seemed justified. Later on in the programme, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony, drew attention to racism against Muslims and stated: 'We know that Islamophobia does exist, and I claim that Islamophobia has taken over from genocide against Jews in Europe today.' Claire Fox was clearly irritated:

Are you seriously telling me that Islamophobia in Europe is on a par with the anti-Semitism that informed the German state ... that is an absolute nonsense. There is absolutely not pogroms against Muslims, you are over-exaggerating and overstating the case in order to get in on the Holocaust.

Research into the Holocaust

It has recently been said that 'the study of the Shoah has produced more scholarly works, survivor testimony projects, commemorative projects, and works of fiction and art than any of the other "spectacular episodes" of modernity', and continues to be 'one of the most rapidly expanding areas of historical enquiry'.²⁴ The editors of two recent books on the topic spoke of 'an avalanche of scholarly publications', and 'recent explosive interest in Holocaust interpretations and representations'.²⁵ Historical scholarship on modern Germany, to take a prominent example, has recently focused on three major issues: 'First, the study of the Holocaust and other aspects of Nazi Germany's policies of mass murder'; second, 'the relationship between the German military and the regime's policies of occupation, subjugation, "ethnic cleansing", and genocide'; and third, 'the impact of World War II and genocide on the formation of postwar identity and the politics of memory'.²⁶ The study of the Holocaust, however, has highlighted the apparent paradox, that amassing research and making sources available to the public has not only improved our understanding of the topic, but continues to present seemingly impenetrable limitations to grasping its enormous complexities, origins and experiences.

It is true, our factual understanding of the Holocaust continues to make immense progress. Since the fall of the iron curtain access to eastern European archives 'has shed much new light specifically on the development on the "final solution of the Jewish question"'.²⁷ We have a much better

understanding of the crucial effect of war on the Holocaust (strengthening the national community, entrenching the perception of Germany's enemies, escalating Nazi Jewish policy from 1939 and again 1941), the ensuing 'occupation of the newly conquered lands, and the cultural associations entrenched in the German psyche about "the east"'.²⁸ Furthermore, since Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* and the debates surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* and the exhibition 'War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941–1944' have challenged comparatively rigid interpretations on perpetrators,²⁹ we possess more differentiated and comprehensive studies. In fact, according to one expert, the time has nearly come to take stock and to attempt a synthesis.³⁰

There are, however, still enormous factual gaps, remaining questions and sharp disagreements in interpretations. For instance, we still have insufficient knowledge of the history of the system of prisons of war and the fate of various groups of prisoners of war, the complex web of some concentration camps, and how Jewish property was 'aryanised' at the local and regional level. Furthermore, there are still no answers to questions such as why the Lodz ghetto existed much longer compared to all other ghettos, or to what extent '*Volksdeutsche*' benefited from the Holocaust.³¹ Gerhard Paul's recent formulation of unresolved questions on perpetrators illuminates how comparatively little we still know – and, after all, this is a key subject that has attracted considerable attention:

Were those who behave proactively at all levels 'normal' representatives of German society or a radicalized minority? Were all involved 'normal' representatives of Western industrial societies, individuals whom extraordinary circumstances and pressures had turned into perpetrators? Among the majority of killers a direct causal relation cannot be established between fanatical anti-Semitism and actually murdering Jews. What made the difference for those who withdrew or even resisted? Would more comparative analysis, removed from the emotional minefield of Holocaust studies, be a more productive venue for the pursuit of such questions?³²

Experts also fiercely disagree about pedagogical approaches at memorial sites, the precise role of the centre and the periphery for initiating mass murder, and the question whether the Holocaust was something unique and if it can be compared to other genocides that happened before and after.³³ And finally, whilst there seems to be a consensus that research on the Holocaust has to be pursued on various levels and in relation to other aspects, such as the war, the war economy, and policies of food, labour and settlement,³⁴ no-one seems to have found a way how to do this.

It comes as no surprise then, when two scholars recently concluded that the sheer complexity of the topic – 'the multi-layered nature of the

decision-making process', the multifold experiences and voices of the victims, and the remaining 'gaps and biases' – 'may ultimately prove an impossible task to produce a cohesive narrative of the Holocaust that does justice both to its chronology and to its players'.³⁵ Indeed, the more the focus zooms in on the key issues of the Holocaust – the motivation of the perpetrators, the experience of the victims, and the question of how to represent what happened – the more experts struggle to respond in a meaningful way. The 'limits of representation' (Friedländer) seem insurmountable. Giorgio Agamben argues that we can enumerate and describe the horrors of the Shoah, 'but they remain singularly opaque when we truly seek to understand them':

The discrepancy in question concerns the very structure of testimony. On the one hand, what happened in the camps appears to the survivors as the only true thing and, as such, absolutely unforgettable; on the other hand, this truth is to the same degree unimaginable, that is, irreducible to the real elements that constitute it. Facts so real that, by comparison, nothing is truer; a reality that necessarily exceeds its factual elements – such is the aporia of Auschwitz ... The aporia of Auschwitz is, indeed, the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension.³⁶

Moreover, some of the main thinkers on the subject have argued that 'representation of the past brings about the erasure of the past from our memory, rather than its commemoration'.³⁷ Saul Friedländer, reflecting on the representation of the Shoah in the early 1990s, argued that 'for almost fifty years now, despite so much additional factual knowledge, we have faced surplus meaning of blankness with little interpretive or representational advance'.³⁸

The difficulty of comprehending and representing is not, however, something peculiar to the Holocaust. Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner recently reminded us that 'historians of the huge traumas of the modern age – whether in the form of genocide, war, slavery, imperialism (or a combination of these forms) – have still to find the appropriate voice to communicate the horror of these experiences'.³⁹ With regards to the Holocaust, Saul Friedländer stated: 'We are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an "event at the limits" [the most racial form of genocide encountered in history ... a monstrous manifestation of human "potentialities"].'⁴⁰

Whilst the Holocaust is 'firmly established as the most remembered and engaged-with act of genocide or persecution in history',⁴¹ the topic is increasingly treated within a framework of comparative analysis. Moishe Postone and Eric Santer recently argued:

The debates on the Holocaust have far-reaching implications for understanding other horrific crimes and, more generally, for grappling with the

historical emergence of such crimes, which have become all too common in the recent past. The eruption of genocidal passions and projects in such places as Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo has contributed to the sense that possibilities unleashed in the Holocaust have continued, in some fashion, to circulate in the life of nations.⁴²

The Holocaust has led to numerous conferences and seminar series on the origins and forms of other genocides with the aim of preventing crimes against humanity in the future. And, of course: 'Considering the Shoah as an exceptional event or as belonging to a wider historical category does not affect the possibility of drawing from it a universally valid significance.'⁴³

Sixty years after the Holocaust, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the debates and focus on the subject seems to have moved on and broadened. Whilst some cling on to a notion of guilt and shame for not having 'reached bottom' and conclude from this an 'inadequacy of all attempts to remember',⁴⁴ others attempt 'to get past the notion that the Holocaust is an "event" that defies representation'.⁴⁵

Sixty years on: international perspectives and common themes

The product of a conference organised by the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies at the University of Leicester in April 2005, *How the Holocaust Looks Now* offers a representative sample of current tendencies in Holocaust research. The task of academics is, amongst other things, to monitor the movements of political and cultural representations in the social imagination: the academic has a social-managerial function; society is an imaginary construct.⁴⁶ The chapters in this book show how academic interests influence, as much as respond to how Holocaust knowledge circulates socially. They confirm it is utterly penetrative. That it does penetrate into almost every area of contemporary life, particularly into memory, culture, education, and the imagination, is reflected in the book's structure.

Two essays frame the entire discussion. They bring out the ramifications of the issues the Holocaust raises. As Wolfgang Benz demonstrates, racial prejudice, anti-Semitism in particular, ideologically driven as it frequently is, is still integral to international political conflict. That it surfaces, deliberately, calculatedly, in the post-Holocaust world sharpens its already sharp sting. Eveline Goodman-Thau confronts the disintegration of knowledge, history, memory, and experience the Holocaust has caused. She advocates a 'political hermeneutics of culture' to enable one to 'step out of experience', to doubt, if not resist the normative values and standards that in the post-Holocaust, proto-federal Europe are perfect for breeding the social conformism totalitarianism requires.⁴⁷

Part II, *Memories of the Holocaust: Public and Private Discourses*, reveals that Holocaust knowledge is not just deeply embedded, but also fatefully perpetuated in collective memory. It shows that this knowledge bequeaths an ambivalent legacy. Received as memory by successive generations of survivors', bystanders' or perpetrators' families, its attendant evasiveness, resentments, grievances, repressions, and taboos are inevitably received along with it to wreak their own private havoc in awkward moments of grudging embarrassment.

Part III, *The Holocaust and European Historical Culture*, explores the ways in which the Holocaust figures in post-Holocaust historical consciousness, particularly in Eastern Europe where the confrontation with the discomfiting past was deferred until the end of the Cold War. The post-Holocaust historical consciousness is truly an unhappy consciousness. In it the Holocaust functions as a 'central history-cultural phenomenon'. Being phenomenal, it assumes uncanny, spectral forms, that are not least troubling when it is resoundingly absent from official histories or when it spooks public discussion as soon as it is repressed. It manifests itself as a universal entity absorbing the troubles, obsessions, and aspirations of contemporary historical consciousness and in return emitting a multi-coloured brilliance that pulsates and mutates with corresponding intensity.

The pervasiveness of knowledge about the Holocaust, paradoxically enough, makes the public representation of it more, not less, problematic. Broadly diffused as it is in a totally historicised world the very concepts 'historical culture' or 'history culture' evoke, how can it be represented for what it specifically was?⁴⁸ How can the Holocaust as a historical event that, in an irretrievably historicised world, is in some form or other always already known, be commemorated in its own appropriate form? But what representational form could ever 'appropriately' represent such hitherto inconceivable destruction? Therefore, Part IV, *Representing the Holocaust: Memorials*, addresses the politics, economics, ethics, and aesthetics of memorial sites and museums. It demonstrates that public symbols of grief and grievance as well as public information projects, can be ideologically appropriated, embroiled in administrative equivocation, placed under political taboo, or even provoke an ambivalent reaction from their visitors.

Part V, *Representing the Holocaust: Writing, Art, Education*, takes the issue of representation and meaning further. Rather than attempt to assimilate the Holocaust to an already existing history culture, the chapters explore how attempts to represent the extreme Holocaust experience and its ineradicable, traumatic memory produce new, often ironic forms of expression that extend the human cognitive capacity and encourage political vigilance.

In the end, though, reflecting on how the Holocaust looks now, sixty years on, induces a specifically historical apprehension.⁴⁹ Historical accounts keep the Holocaust ever present in the mind by symbolically re-enacting it again and again. Additionally, its egregious character stretches historical

representation to its limits. If the Holocaust is an enormity beyond representation, the very idea of representation becomes questionable (as the issues raised by Machtans, Weiser, Wenzel, and Zangl confirm).

This apprehension is familiar enough. But, sixty years on, it has a further historical cause: the Holocaust, as still living memory, will soon pass totally into history. But why should this induce apprehension? After all, historians have created a sophisticated historical culture around the Holocaust (as Karlsson, Dietsch, Zander, and Machtans point out). Why shouldn't the Holocaust be entrusted totally to history? Society does trust history with its past: history is its natural custodian. History will keep faith with the facts, particularly of the Holocaust, as much despite postmodernist 'relativism' as despite Holocaust denial.⁵⁰ But apprehension lingers. Its symptom is the historically self-conscious culture, the 'historical culture', enveloping Holocaust Studies, as the contributions to this volume show. Survivors' memories raise so many issues of interpretation that a full-scale history of their testimony is a crucial desideratum (as Ecker recommends). Holocaust memorials prove so politically and socially contentious that a history of Holocaust memorialization is indispensable (as Cohen, Hass, and Törnquist Plewa suggest). This historical hyperconsciousness comes from the discipline of Holocaust Studies inevitably historicising itself, partly through its own development as a historical discipline, partly through attempting to achieve a comprehensive representation of its traumatic object.

Apprehension lingers because memory is *ipso facto* living, while history, immersed in the past, deals with what is dead. It forbodes real loss, not just the loss of the survivors, but also the demise of being even tenuously contemporaneous with the Holocaust itself. The apprehension it generates acknowledges the ultimate passing of the Second World War era. Reflected in the chapters in this volume, this situation exposes less what historical research says about the Holocaust, than what the Holocaust, in its various historical, literary, media representations, says about historical research. *How the Holocaust Looks Now* reveals that, far from being a safe repository of truth, history itself is subject to fierce political contestation and instrumentalization (as Benz, Cohen, Davies, Hertzog, and Wolf show). National interests as much as widespread social and political preconceptions dictate how memorials are used (as the chapters by Dietsch, Fuchs, Gerner, Hass, Schulze, and Törnquist Plewa argue): whatever truth academic scholarship achieves, is susceptible to political appropriation.

The history of reactions to the Holocaust reveals a basic reality: that history, though it keeps the past present, manages a world that is constantly changing. It is a basic truth: the human world is by definition temporal, hence transient. The 'truly stated' facts history preserves are – to use classical, Aristotelian terminology – accidents in time as a process of degeneration.⁵¹ The reluctance to commit still living memory to history is

understandable. History will, naturally, preserve these traumatic facts. However, particularly in this postmodern, technologically driven, accident-prone society, these true facts are bound to be submerged by an accumulating sediment of further true facts concerning further unprecedented, horrendous 'accidents'.⁵²

The lingering apprehension comes, therefore, from history's innate propensity to keep on historicising itself and so re-evaluating its objects – even genocide, but perhaps also especially genocide – in the light of its subsequent knowledge, as much as from its immediate political and cultural instrumentalisation. As Hannah Arendt argues, in a totally historicised world, such as the very concept 'history culture' (Karlsson) implies, there is nothing that will not be historical; there is no action that will not become a historical fact: 'the assumption which underlies consistent action can be as mad as it pleases; it will always end in producing facts which are then "objectively" true. What was originally nothing but a hypothesis, to be proved or disproved by actual facts, will in the course of consistent action always turn into a fact, never to be disproved.'⁵³ Furthermore, in a historicised world, with its endemic historical culture, the sheer volume of knowledge available about the Holocaust, let alone the manifold perspectives that engender it, diffuses rather than fixes its numinous presence. After sixty years of historical scholarship and its multifarious media spin-offs, the Holocaust offers something for everyone: a cultural 'pick and mix' in all its ethical, political, psychological, and other, varieties. As the chapters in this book show, historians are not only aware of this indeterminacy but also legitimise it: responding to and promoting debates around issues is construed as history's proper task. But this is really only making virtue out of necessity. As Edward Said points out in relation to Vico's theory of history and his recognition of the 'indefinite nature of the human mind', 'there is always something radically incomplete, insufficient, provisional, disputable' in the knowledge human beings make that gives it its constitutive 'tragic flaw'.⁵⁴

The only way of keeping the Holocaust special, therefore, is by somehow suspending historical change, which helps explain why Holocaust scholarship is committed to preserving Holocaust memory. Being still just within living memory, the Holocaust imposes itself as a special accident (in the Aristotelian sense), a special fact, to be specially remembered so it cannot simply add to history's indiscriminate, accumulating pile. But this intention still does not reduce apprehension. Memory is preserved by historians gathering the testimony of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders particularly in relation to their families' history (as Ecker's, Graves', Jensen's, and Mataushek's chapters demonstrate). This testimony is valuable not just for underpinning future historical accounts, but also for supplementing the histories that currently exist, a means of comprehensively mapping the ramifications of Holocaust experience.

However, memory is not history. Moreover, if the Holocaust has tested the limits of representation, it has also made memory itself insecure.⁵⁵ There is a 'psychic economy' of Holocaust memorialisation (as the essays by Dietsch, Fuchs, Hass, Schulze, Törnquist Plewa, and Zander show). On the one hand, the history of Holocaust memorials reveals that memorial sites become expressive of more meaning than they can represent. They are designed to be received as texts dense with significance, yet open to visitors to read according to their personal purposes such as remembrance, grieving, or historical interest. Consequently (as Fuchs and Zander in different ways show), there is legitimate anxiety about their effectiveness since significant quanta of historical meaning always go unrecognised or are misappropriated. On the other, the museum space, exhibits, and their layout do not just represent the event, but function as prosthetic surrogates of Holocaust experience: (as Lässig and Pohl's chapter on the Washington Holocaust Museum or Schulze's chapter on the Bergen-Belsen memorial site make clear) the visitor is supposed to get a feel of what it would be like.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that Holocaust memory can be preserved as a historical surrogate – as Maurice Halbwachs, the influential French sociologist who perished in Buchenwald, argues in his seminal, but unfinished essay, *Collective Memory*. Apprehensive of the turn of historical events in the 1930s, Halbwachs reworked his previous theory of memory, *The Social Framework of Memory [Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire]* (1925), to emphasise that memory is organically embedded in the individual through his or her attachment to specific social groups (i.e. the family, colleagues, social circles, organizations, clubs, etc.) each with its own specific time-consciousness. Historical time, by contrast, is just an abstract, coercive scheme because it is not the vital memory of any particular group, merely an impersonal, technical receptacle for inter-personal patterns of recollected experiences. Historical or national memory does not exist; history, he says, 'resembles a cemetery where one has to keep finding space for more graves'.⁵⁷ Accordingly it is not possible to preserve a memory for those who have no immediate, organic link to the experiences it refers to, such as – where the Holocaust is concerned – the generations born in the last sixty years, or the generations to come.

It is essential, therefore, to distinguish between 'remembering' and 'being reminded'. Testimony, framed by its schematic historical context, can help those who directly experienced the time in which the Holocaust took place to remember it. Testimony, for those who have learned about the Holocaust, for example, in history lessons or for its implications for contemporary culture, functions as a vital reminder that it happened. Conversely, the former can never forget it; while the latter, having more immediately dreadful, accidental facts to deal with, cannot help being distracted. In fact, they need to be distracted if they are to contend with the actual political situation confronting them at any given moment. Where

a history culture transforms historical events into a self-replicating multiplicity of diffuse phenomena, practical reason demands one thinks anew in each new situation. For this reason, memorials, be they monuments or museums, which both serve the purpose of remembrance and act as reminders, turn to aesthetics, specifically imagination (as is shown in Graves, Lässig and Pohl, Schulze, Törnquist Plewa, Weiser, Wenzel, and Zangl), to hold on to the Holocaust as a special accident. (This is hardly surprising; memory and imagination have long been regarded as allied faculties.⁵⁸)

In fact, the divergence between its historical and aesthetic representation brings out the unsettling, unresolved – probably unresolvable – image of the Holocaust in contemporary culture. A history culture and its attendant historical consciousness may well proffer traditions, continuities and contexts. Aesthetic reflection goes back to the basics of sense and meaning: how can one describe, narrate, and inform oneself about extreme events and experiences that defy the conventional, historically received forms of representation (Zangl)? The aesthetic dimension works, controversial or shocking though it may be (as Weiser and Wenzel recognize), because, in making things special, it is in its own right an always authentic, always actual experience that produces immediate memories of itself, allusive still to the primal event, the Holocaust, they refer to.⁵⁹ Moreover, rather than consigning the Holocaust to memory, it incorporates its traumatic legacy into new aesthetic practices – unprecedented, ‘factological’ syntactical articulations, ironic reversals in representation (such as coercing Hitler into ‘speaking’ Hebrew), a suspicious vigilance towards the going social trends and their academic and pedagogical affirmation (Weiser, Wenzel, Davies).

Sixty years on, debating the technics of Holocaust representation may seem to divert attention from the stark fact that some 6,000, 000 Jews were brutally murdered.⁶⁰ Why put the aesthetics of memorials before the fact of annihilation? The point is: human life in its humanity is affirmed in human beings’ capacity to elaborate symbolic forms and aesthetic designs as their only means of substantiating their humanity and thereby coming to know themselves. This thesis, elaborated in the work of Ernst Cassirer, represents both a philosophical generalisation drawn from the culture of a people whose identity and humanity are sustained by the symbolic forms of religious scripture, textual study and commentary, and a specifically German-Jewish way of thinking that the Holocaust negated.⁶¹ But this aesthetic capability is what the culture of humanity and humanistic knowledge relies on. This, if it means anything, is what civilization means. From this perspective the Holocaust shows the risk humanity incurs with its precedent for the industrialisation of death. It implements essentially a form of bio-politics stripping human beings of all their human attributes to show that there is basically nothing human about being human. Its result and mute emblem are those minimal humanoid entities, the ‘walking corpses’, the so-called

Muselmänner.⁶² In the midst of civilisation Nazi terror legitimately forced people to 'give up being persons', to 'become objects', 'empty shells', 'walking shadows' who behaved 'as if they were not thinking, not feeling, unable to act or respond'.⁶³ Precisely here, history – the latter-day *magistra vitae* – presuming to teach us so much, could still learn from another symbolic form of human experience – mythology. It is worth recalling here that, according to Classical Legend, Prometheus defied the Gods because, taking pity on a sub-human humanity in its abjection, he brought it not extermination (as ordered), but civilisation: 'In those days they had eyes, but sight was meaningless; / Heard sounds, but could not listen; all their length of life/They passed like shapes in dreams, confused and purposeless.'⁶⁴ The semantic symmetry between these two quotations that span the entire breadth of European history stresses the one, fundamental ontological issue.⁶⁵ That is where, sixty years on, the Holocaust's potential to intimidate comes from and why it still induces apprehension. Whether as memory or as history, it is a stark reminder that sophisticated, technological civilisation, as the material basis of a 'history culture', is always just a step away from wrecking itself and history with it.

Notes

1. For this and the following see *Stern*, 5, 27 January 2005, 3, 44–58.
2. For this and the following quotations see *The Independent*, 5 (703), 27 January 2005, Holocaust supplement, 8.
3. Omer Bartov, 'Introduction', in O. Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust. Disputed Histories* (London, 2003), ix–xxi, here xv.
4. For publications on the Holocaust Monument in Berlin, see <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2005-2-218>>; Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989* (Oxford, 2005); Bartov, 'Introduction', xv.
5. Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994).
6. Moishe Postone and Eric Santer, 'Introduction: Catastrophe and Meaning', in M. Postone and E. Santer (eds), *Catastrophe and Meaning. The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century* (London, 2003), 1–14, here 2.
7. Postone and Santer, 'Introduction', 3.
8. 'Ank: Umgang mit Menschenrechtsverbrechen in globaler Perspektive – Dortmund 11/05', in <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/termine/id=4605>>.
9. Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust. Critical Historical Approaches* (Manchester, 2005), 2.
10. Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust. From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York, 1999); Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London, 2000).
11. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 3.
12. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 4, 212.
13. Bartov, 'Introduction', xv.

14. Ronit Lentin on Moshe Zuckermann, *Shoah Bacheder Ha'atum* (Shoah in the Sealed Room: The 'Holocaust' in Israeli Press during the Gulf War) (Tel Aviv, 1993). See R. Lentin, 'Postmemory, Unsayability and the Return of the Auschwitz Code', in R. Lentin (ed.), *Re-Presenting the Shoah for the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2004), 1–24, here 11f.
15. Ulrich Bielefeld, 'Der gegenwärtige Antisemitismus. Tendenzen und Interpretationen', *Mittelweg* 36, 2 (14) (2005), 36–52.
16. Jason Burke, 'Profile: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Meet the West's Worst Nightmare', *The Observer*, 15 January 2006.
17. Postone and Santer, 'Introduction', 2.
18. Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture. Theoretical and Analytical Challenges', in K-G. Karlsson and U. Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund, 2003), 9–57, here 18.
19. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 1f.
20. Lentin, 'Postmemory', 5. Saul Friedländer, 'Introduction', in S. Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 1–21; Jürgen Habermas, *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1987), 163.
21. Mission Statement, Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust Studies, University of Leicester. See <<http://www.le.ac.uk/hi/centres/burton/>>.
22. See 'Why Do We Need Holocaust Memorial Day?', Channel 4, 20 January 2006, 19:35–20:00; see <<http://www.channel4.com/news/microsites/T/30minutes/kholi.html>>.
23. 'The Moral Maze', BBC Radio Four, 25 January 2006, 8:00–8:45; see <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/religion/moralmaze.shtml>>.
24. Lentin, 'Postmemory', 4; Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 1.
25. Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, 'Introduction', in J. M. Diefendorf (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies. Volume VI. New Currents in Holocaust Research* (Evanston, IL, 2004), xv–xxxiv, here xv; Karlsson, 'Problem of Historical Culture', 36.
26. Bartov, 'Introduction', ix.
27. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 1.
28. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 215. Also see Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (London, 2004).
29. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992); Geoff Eley (ed.), *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism. Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2000); Hans-Günther Tiehle (eds), *Die Wehrmachts-Ausstellung. Dokumentation einer Kontroverse* (Bremen, 1997).
30. See Stefan Laube's review of Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Die Täter der Shoah. Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen, 2002), in <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de>, 20.8.2003>. Other recent studies on perpetrators include Harald Welzer, *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder wurden* (Frankfurt/Main, 2005); Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul (eds), *Karrieren der Gewalt. Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt, 2004); James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford, 2002).
31. 'Tagber: Die Judenvernichtung in den in das Dritte Reich eingegliederten polnischen Gebieten während des Zweiten Weltkriegs', in <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=929>>.

32. See George C. Browder's discussion of Gerhard Paul ('Von Psychopathen, Technokraten des Terrors und "ganz gewöhnlichen" Deutschen: Die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel der Forschung', in Paul, *Täter der Shoah*, 13–90) in 'Perpetrator Character and Motivation: An Emerging Consensus?', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 17 (3) (Winter 2003), 480–497, here 481.
33. For a critique of the debate surrounding the uniqueness of the Holocaust, see Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 9f, 216.
34. 'Tagber: Die Judenvernichtung in den in das Dritte Reich eingegliederten polnischen Gebieten während des Zweiten Weltkriegs', in <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=929>>.
35. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 212.
36. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive* (New York, 1999), 12.
37. Lentin, 'Postmemory', 12.
38. Quoted in Lentin, 'Postmemory', 19. Saul Friedländer, 'Trauma, Transference and "working through" in Writing the History of the Shoah', *History and Memory*, 4 (Spring–Summer 1992), 39–59, here 51.
39. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 5.
40. Friedländer, 'Introduction', 2f.
41. Bloxham and Kushner, *Holocaust*, 4.
42. Postone and Santer, 'Introduction', 7.
43. Lentin, 'Postmemory', 20.
44. Lentin, 'Postmemory', 20.
45. Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, 'Introduction: Representations of the Holocaust and the End of Memory', in M. Bernard-Donals and R. Glejzer (eds), *Witnessing the Disaster. Essays on Representation and the Holocaust* (Madison, WI, 2003), 3–19, here 10.
46. The axiomatic work is: Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris, 1975).
47. See also topically Giorgio Agamben, ' "Kontrolliert wie nie" ', *Der Spiegel*, 9 (2006), 168–169.
48. On the concept of a 'historicized world' see Martin L. Davies, *Historics. Why History Dominates Contemporary Society* (Abingdon, 2006), 1–4.
49. On apprehension in history see Davies, *Historics*, 91ff., 175ff., 236ff.
50. For example, as in both the dismissal of Holocaust Studies for not being dominated by historians and the triumphal affirmation of historical rationality see: Richard Evans, *Telling Lies About Hitler. The Holocaust, History and the David Irving Trial* (London, 2002), 267, 272.
51. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics Books I–IV*, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1996), 394ff. (IV, xii; 220a25ff.); Aristotle, *Metaphysics Books I–IX*, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1996), 288–291, 299ff (V, xxx; 1025a15; VI, ii; 1026a25ff).
52. For a contemporary re-working of the Aristotelian concept of temporal accidents, see Paul Virilio, *L'Accident originel* (Paris, 2005), 47ff.
53. Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History Ancient and Modern', in H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1993), 41–90, here 87–89.
54. Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (Basingstoke, 2004), 11f.
55. Martin L. Davies, 'Orpheus or Clio? Reflections on the Use of History', *Journal of European Studies*, 17 (1987), 179–214, here 194.
56. On the prosthetic function of history, see Davies, *Historics*, 175ff.

57. Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*. Édition critique établie par Gérard Namer & Marie Jaisson (Paris, 1997), 52ff., 63, 100, 127–130, 133, 137, 156ff., 166, 171.
58. Aristotle, *On Memory and Recollection*, in *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, and On Breath*, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1964), 285–313, here 290ff. (449b30ff.)
59. On aesthetics as ‘making special’, see Helen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus. Where Art Comes From and Why?* (London, 1995), 53ff.
60. Though, regarding all ethnicities through Europe, it appears ‘Hitler had about 17,000,000 human beings put to death’: cf. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 1995), 10f.
61. See for example, Ernst Cassirer, *Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, (London, 1967), a summary of his impressive *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923–1929).
62. Giorgio Agamben, *Ce qui reste d’Auschwitz*. Traduit de l’italien par Pierre Alfieri (Paris, 2003), 92–93, 146–147.
63. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart* (Harmondsworth, 1986), 152.
64. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, in *Prometheus Bound and Other Plays*. Translated with an Introduction by Philip Vellacott (London, 1961), 19–52, here 34 (ll. 447–449).
65. See Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘Anthropogonie chez Eschyle et autocréation de l’homme chez Sophocle’, in *Figures du pensable. Les carrefours du labyrinthe VI* (Paris, 1999), 13–34, here 18f, for this ontological interpretation of Aeschylus’ drama.

Part I

The Ark of Innocence – Morality and Memory after Auschwitz

1

The Ark of Innocence – Morality and Memory after Auschwitz*

Eveline Goodman-Thau

As we look back on the end of the Jewish world in Europe, especially in what was the Jewish space called *Ashkenaz* – united by the common use of the German language in all its cultural ramifications – we are no longer using the same discourse as before, neither from a religious nor from a secular perspective: we are living in a time of man-made disasters and apocalyptic myth come true in the tumbling towers of Manhattan for all to see in real-time over and over again by the power of technology and the global media. The Golem – as a *deus ex machina* – has taken a terrible revenge on its master and we are groping for words and images to describe the unimaginable, to bring our world-view and self-image into focus.¹

Thus the problem of Holocaust representation touches not only on the question of the Biblical prohibition of making a graven image of the divine, as that which should not be seen but only heard, but also enlarges the horizon of our consciousness in a new way, enabling us to comprehend this prohibition from a human, that is a *moral, point of view*, crossing the boundaries between aesthetics and ethics.² Although one would not deny the extraordinary character of the Holocaust as an *historical* event, there exists a considerable debate concerning the uses and misuses of memory regarding its moral implications, its ‘moral space of figurative discourse’, including its more radical one: silence.³

The problem is however not only inherent in the context of Holocaust writing, but even more so in reading Holocaust narrative. So when dealing with the relationship between ‘how narratives are told (their aesthetics) and how they mean (their hermeneutics)’, Daniel Schwartz notes, ‘I see telling as a crucial act, all the more crucial because of the trauma of the originating cause. Because we can never trust memory fully, in narrative effects (how a teller presents himself or herself) sometimes *precede cause* (the explanation for why a narrator is the person he or she is)’.⁴

The very act of telling the story thus creates a discontinuity with the historical past: the narrator chooses to place him- or herself in the situation of those who did not live to tell their story to us, as survivors burdened with the task of creating continuity in time.⁵

The question posed by memory and morality after Auschwitz is therefore: what are the ethical implications of breaking the silence of Auschwitz, of speaking not only the unspeakable but speaking the language of those whose voices were not heard then and which cannot be recaptured to-day? 'The disaster always takes place after having taken place', Maurice Blanchot remarked. The remarkable fact of the Holocaust representation confronts us in the first place with our own lives, with the way we look, directly and indirectly, through the very blurred vision of consciousness, trying at all costs to recapture something of the recognition of origin, of its originality, to try and fill the gap caused by a general feeling of 'world-loss', to avoid falling into the abyss of meaninglessness.

Being part of human history and yet outside of human experience, used as we are to imagining un-lived events, the Holocaust directs us to face the 'Unavoidable', a point of no return, where the Real breaks the boundaries of the Imaginary, shattering our hopes and illusions, the very foundations of human culture and civilization. 'Perhaps we should say that Holocaust narratives have become a genre with its own archetypes and its own cultural continuity.'⁶ It means starting at the very beginning: questioning language.

The question of language has come back again. You thought it seemed as if you had solved it; and you discover that, where language is concerned, you are in exile again.

Not that you lack a language, rather the question of your mother tongue, the German language, is back again.

*Are you able to speak in this language or was it extinguished in Auschwitz?*⁷

Re-visiting the *Ark of Innocence* means entering into the literary representation of the human construct of the world as the concrete world of immediate experience.

The world of literature is human in shape, a world where the sun rises in the east and sets in the west over the edge of a flat earth in three dimensions, where the primary realities are not atoms or electrons but bodies and the primary forces not energy or gravitation, but love and death and passion and joy.⁸

In the world of literature and imagination anything can be imagined: 'the limit of imagination is a totally human world'.⁹ In *The Ark of Innocence* experience and imagination are seeking each other: broken apart by the stark reality of death and destruction, devoid of memory, as all traces of life have been erased, no bridge to our world, the world of the living, seems possible: where the train-tracks end, life ends.

'Where is the train going?' the little girl asks her mother.

'It's going to ... it's taking us to Lodz. It's a long, long journey. Patience my child, you'll have to be patient. Lodz is a long way away; the city is beyond our

*reach. We'll only know what it is like by the journey it takes us to get there, where we are going – a journey that has no end. The rails take us on further to where they end, through the gateway, through the gateway to heaven that is always open, but leads to death, the end of the railway line, that's where life ends.'*¹⁰

Here, the imagination does not go beyond the point of death, there is no Heaven and Hell, no story of a lost Paradise: an abyss opens up between us as readers of the conversation between mother and child, with the child asking and the mother, from experience, answering. There is no memory of this conversation, no written account to verify its truth, it is only by identifying ourselves with the questions and the answers that we overcome the dichotomy of fact and fiction, but more so between fact and value.¹¹

The text *Arche der Unschuld* (*The Ark of Innocence*) was born out of a visit to Auschwitz of almost ten years ago with my non-Jewish students at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, where I established and, between 1992 and 1998, built up the first Department for Jewish Studies in the East after the reunification of Germany. It was a first visit to Auschwitz for me and for my students – a group of about 15 young people including the eight-year old daughter of one of them – taken by train from Halle to Krakow, a long train-ride eastward, which brought back to me images of memory of the train-ride which I did not take – I was lucky to survive the war in hiding with my family in Holland – but was a last journey for so many others.

The time of our journey was most significant: it was 50 years after the liberation and the fifth anniversary of the Seminar for Jewish Studies. After five years of hard work, it would finally become firmly established with a permanent chair, but, as it turned out, the students and I did not succeed in conveying the originally conceived aim of the department: to tackle, through the teaching of Jewish-European Studies, the issue of a renewal of the Humanities in Germany after the Holocaust.

As the author of *The Ark of Innocence*, I realised only much later, in fact five years later, when reading the transcribed version of my notebook, that I was the child – having survived the war in hiding with my family in Holland, and surely pondered on the meaning of 'trains and transports', Deportation – also the mother. My parents were with us during the period of hiding, but there was however a silence about the unspeakable: what would happen, if, God forbid, we would be called up for deportation. There is in fact in my memory a scene of my father coming home with five knapsacks after having followed the orders of the *Judenrat* – Jewish Council – to prepare a knapsack for each member of the family with the bare essentials for a journey of a few days, and of my mother standing at the top of the stairs in our house in Hilversum, shouting at him not to dare enter with these bags: 'If we prepare ourselves, we are, in fact, already with one foot on the train. No, if we are called, we will in the emergency get ourselves ready, but we will not prepare ourselves to be deported.' This was not, what we would call a classical case of 'denial', of not wanting to see reality as it is, but rather an

amazing insight on the part of my mother into the strategy of the Gestapo: first, Jews were separated from the rest of the population by special ordinances, then they had to register (the official reason given was the fact that workers were needed in 'work-camps', since the German work-force was doing its duty as soldiers at the front). If you didn't register for the 'work-camp' you were punished and sent to a concentration camp, which was the euphemism for the death camps. My mother could see a 'logic' behind the ordinances: once you had registered and once you had psychologically entered into that realm of experience, the much dreaded day of the call-up for deportation would seamlessly fit into the scenario of the imaginable. Only what was to follow lay outside the imaginable, outside the speakable, exactly because of the break between human experience and imagination: the mind cannot find the original of such an event, a picture that can adequately fit reality.¹²

Stepping out of experience is in itself an act of defiance, of questioning the 'logic' of the authorities, of accepted opinion. It meant in the first place questioning the order of things, of a reality that had replaced normality where knapsacks are used for happy occasions, for an outing to the mountains or the seaside. Out of this realisation came my mother's act of resistance, her enacting of a will of her own and her insistence that she, and the members of her family, would not bow to the will of the executioners and would take their fate into their own hands. It was this questioning of the ordinances and of the law that eventually saved our lives during the period of hiding and that has stayed with me until this very day as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in my own scholarly work.

We can encounter the convergence of memory and 'morality' here, when we recognize the Nazi perversion of values in the name of a 'higher order' which demanded a human 'sacrifice' on the part of the German nation, moving towards its intended destiny, its *Heilsgeschichte*, an issue we will deal with later on in this essay.

As the author of *The Ark of Innocence*, I realised that I was the child and the mother in conversation in real time *in the past*, but also the grandmother in conversation in *real time* – this time as a listener to their conversation – being with mother and daughter on the train. It meant breaking not only with the aesthetic conventions of Western tradition but also seeking to bridge the gap between art and knowledge, touching upon the question of concern versus indifference when dealing with detachment and objectivity as scholarly virtues. The search for truth discovered that the solid ground for knowledge had become fractured, revealing the deep fissures caused by the very fact that Auschwitz really happened. Remembering this historical fact thus poses a moral burden, which is normally hidden from the eye when dealing with historical knowledge.

In an essay on the goal of humanities and the morality of scholarship, Northrop Frye notes:

The scholarly virtue of detachment, we said, is a moral virtue and not merely an intellectual one: what is intellectual about it is its context. It

turns into the vice of indifference as soon as its context becomes social instead of intellectual. Indifference to what? Indifference, let us say, to what we may call, with the existentialists, concern. *By concern, I mean something, which includes the sense of importance of preserving the integrity of the total human community.* Detachment becomes indifference when the scholar ceases to think of himself as participating in the life of society, and of his scholarship as possessing a social context. We see this clearly when we turn from the subject itself to the social use made of it. Psychology is a science, and must be studied with detachment, but it is not a matter of indifference whether it is used for a healing art, or for 'motivational research' designed to force people to buy what they neither want nor need, or for propaganda in a police state.¹³

In *The Ark of Innocence* I have tried to find this language of concern. I have tried to give it a voice in the midst of silence, making the invisible visible. There are a number of these conversations in *The Ark of Innocence*:

'Where has the train come from and where is it going to?

Where has it come from? From Paradise. Where is it going to? It is going to Hell. And the only way, the only way human beings come to know about paradise was when the trees were still blooming, when the flowers were there still for picking, when children were still playing and laughing,

When lovers were still in love.

*Only after escaping from Hell, from the flames, you get to know this, my child, of humankind.'*¹⁴

Here the dialogue turns into a trialogue: a vantage point becomes visible from which beginning and end can be perceived. Paradise and hell, a short distance, a train-ride away from each other. The child and the mother can speculate about this, but you have to escape from the flames to know, to know as a grandmother knows *her* child, and the child of her child. But, too few grandmothers survived to bear witness and to live on the threshold of Life and Death, on the dividing line, the *Rakia* (Hebr. horizon)¹⁵ between experience and perception, trying to bridge the gap between history, memory and reality.

For the first time, I dared to break the barriers of amnesia in myself, confronting history with memory, questioning historical evidence with life: my life as child, mother and grandmother and thus the lives of so many other children, who would now have a similar story to tell, but whose voices remained unheard. It was not sufficient for me to live vicariously through the stories of others, to rely on their images. I had to break through to the original story, *my story*. To break time by my presence in history, describing the present, not in the light of a projected future, but of a transformed past. A past, which according to historic logic, cannot be changed, but which can

be transformed by memory, expressed in a language of concern, which does not bring the dead back into life, but which opens the 'Way to Life' for us.¹⁶ By *displacing* oneself, it is indeed possible to unmask the disguises of detachment and the trappings in society, to gain the solid ground of morality steeped in the knowledge of having touched, however slightly, the veil of human freedom and truth.

In *The Ark of Innocence* I experienced displacement, in an existential manner – it made me understand many of the decisions of my life, but more important the thrust of my scholarship.

'Where is the train going?'

*'It is heading for the void, my child, bound for the beginning. For you and for me, my child. But for the others, for those who'll survive, where is the train taking them? Perhaps on holiday, as it used to, to the mountains, to the lakes, to the seaside, to the islands, or into the city. I don't know, my child, I don't know what life with Auschwitz will look like. I just don't know.'*¹⁷

'I don't know what life with Auschwitz will look like' is the challenge that we – nolens volens – face 60 years after: Auschwitz is not a different planet; it is here on earth, a place one hour from Krakow. In the winter ice-cold – as this past 27 January 2005 when we stood in the snow at 16 degrees below zero listening to the speeches of the Kings and Queens, Presidents and Ministers, Rabbis and Pastors from all parts of Europe, watching them as they lit memorial-candles at the sound of drums in the summer burning hot, as I visited the camp for the first time with my East German students ten years ago.

Auschwitz is sheer experience. This is so, because the only way of knowing about it, is through experience, through encountering one's real original after having forgotten the imagined original – the re-presentation of what Auschwitz 'looks like' in memory.¹⁸ The point of amnesia allows the encounter with reality itself that from this moment onward affects all reality.

The bond between perception, imagination and reality has been broken and must be mended in order to see. This 'mending of the world' (Emil Fackenheim)¹⁹ is at the heart of our concern for history and memory 60 years after Auschwitz.²⁰

It raises the question of what Emmanuel Levinas named the *Conditio Judaica* – the Jewish Destiny:

When temples are standing, the flags flying atop the palaces, and the magistrates donning their sashes, the tempests raging in individuals' heads do not pose the threat of shipwrecks. They are perhaps but the waves stirred by the winds of the world around well-anchored souls within their harbors. The true inner life is not a pious or revolutionary thought that comes to us in a stable world, but the obligation to lodge the

whole of humankind in the shelter – exposed to all the winds – of conscience ... But the fact that settled, established humanity can at any moment be exposed to the dangerous situation of its morality residing entirely in its ‘heart of hearts’, its dignity completely at the mercy of a subjective voice, no longer reflected or confirmed by any objective order – that is the risk upon which the honor of humankind depends. *But it may be this risk that is signified by the very fact that the Jewish condition is constituted within humanity.* Judaism is humanity on the brink of morality without institutions.²¹

Levinas reflects then on the price that the Jewish people have paid for this ‘exposure’ and concludes:

But that condition, in which human morality returns after so many centuries as to its womb, attests, with a very old testament, its origin on the hither side of civilizations. Civilizations made possible, called for, brought about, hailed and blessed by that morality – which can, however, in its part, only know and justify itself in the fragility of the conscience [...].²²

Conscience is, in fact, fragile, because knowledge breaks down in the face of each individual and becomes relevant where the ‘personal’ meets the ‘general’, the ‘religious’ meets the ‘profane’. Our debate on the future of Judaism on the brink of morality without institutions, therefore, cannot avoid the question of the nexus between power and memory.²³ Dealing with the Jewish Question after Auschwitz is thus not only a political issue, a form of restitution or reparation, but rather about the intellectual survival of society as a whole and about the necessary consideration of the renewed role of the Humanities in countries experiencing the late consequences of a rupture of civilisation, especially in those countries where Jews are no longer a present force to help carry the burden of values. It means addressing the question of the relevance of traditional texts – be they religious or secular – which, to paraphrase William James, reveals the impact of the *varieties of historical experience*, and offering an opportunity to study and research the tradition-founding elements in the various traditions, that have shaped European identities and their cultural connection with Judaism.²⁴ This would be a common task for all, to make a new beginning out of destruction, to confront the historic hour and, therefore, history. It would allow us to delve into the *Archives of Memory* rather than *History* to extract the deep layers of amnesia and strategies of denial inherent in human nature, to free the spirit from the burdens of forgetting, as an act of resistance to any form of totalitarianism, as ‘The struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.’²⁵

It means coming to terms, not merely with the historical fact of the annihilation of European Jewry, the conscious killing of six million innocent men, women and children under the cloak of war, but also with the way we

look at life and history, judge our actions and those of others, practice political activism and social critique. In short, it poses the question of the *politics of history and memory*, and urges us to reflect on the means and ways to move towards, what I would call a *political hermeneutics of culture*. Before we consider this, we must return once more to the *Ark* for one more – this time the last – conversation between mother and child on the train, breaking into the intimacy of this encounter, where the mother finally reveals the truth to her child and opens the end for a beginning: for human freedom.

*'Where is the train going to? It is going to annihilation, my child. It is best for you to know that now, straightaway. Perhaps that will comfort you, be a way of accepting the end more easily. Close your eyes, open your lungs and take a deep breath, it will happen more quickly that way, you will lose consciousness immediately and angels will immediately be able to carry you up to heaven. Survival will be much, much worse. Not because life was so terrible, but because survival will be impossible. The world will have changed beyond all recognition, people will not recognize each other, because they have been there, in that place, from which no-one returns alive, with a mind that feels alive, with hope, faith, and love. All that, my child, will be gone. Un-recoverable, lost for ever and ever, going up in the smoke of the crematoria, in the smell of the bodies, in children's screams. And so it's better to wish for death than life. 'I put before you life and death and you choose death.' (Deuteronomy 30:10) No, you choose death, because, until we get there, death is still bound up with life. Afterwards, after Auschwitz, there will no longer be any life that is a choice between death and life. You choose death now, you choose death now freely, in dignity, in freedom, in order to save life, your own life.'*²⁶

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard critiques the aestheticising of death in Western tradition:

Auschwitz is the forbiddance of the beautiful death [...]. Sacrifice is not available to the deportee, nor for that reason accession to an immortal collective name. One's death is legitimate because one's life is illegitimate. The individual name must be killed (whence the use of serial numbers), and the collective name (Jew) must also be killed in such way that no one bearing this name might remain which could take the deportee's death into itself and eternalize it. This death must therefore be killed, and that is what is worse than death. For, if death can be exterminated, it is because there is nothing to kill. Not even the name Jew.²⁷

Choosing death means re-affirming the choice between life and death, saving the legitimisation of the individual and thus of humanity.

Thus Giorgio Agamben writes on the *homo sacer*, that obscure figure in Roman law, who *'may be killed and yet not sacrificed'*, as a paradigm in modernity

of those who are excluded from society by the logic of sovereignty as outlaws: '[...] his entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by the virtue that anyone can kill him without committing homicide [...] yet he is in a continuous relationship with the power that banishes him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditional threat of death.'²⁸

When considering memory and morality after Auschwitz, the question of European Jewry after the Enlightenment becomes particularly important: Jews were murdered in the 'Third Reich', not because they were criminals or deviants – not even solely for their riches in Germany and other parts of Europe – but for the simple reason that they were *Jews*: Europe had to be made 'judenrein' for the establishment of the Third Reich – *Das Heilige Roemische Reich Deutscher Nation* – on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

In *The Ark of Innocence*, that imaginary refuge after the Great Man-Made Flood, I describe this event and its meaning for us in the following way:

How easy it is to picture all this to yourself, to dream that everything was just a dreadful nightmare, a demonic plan. 'What the hell were they thinking of?' They were not thinking of anything, they just could not summon up the will to stop the operation.

It had to be proven at all costs that the decision had been the right one, otherwise why all the sacrifice, why all the effort and commitment? A logical, rational reason had to be found to validate for generations to come the recording, the need for image and film documentation, so that it would be known for ever and ever how much their forefathers, the heroes of Auschwitz, had done for the 'Vaterland'. What acts of cruelty they had to commit, so that the Aryan could live for ever and ever on Jew-free European soil. It was worth all the deprivation to ensure they remained heroes for ever and ever.

Precisely this cruelty, this descent into the abysmal depths of humanity, was their heroic act. Where in the whole of human history was there an annihilation process that was planned in such detail and carried out by so many people? Where else had there been such commitment to tracking down even the last Jewish child in the smallest of villages? – No-one was to remain, so that we may live ...

Sometimes you do not recognize the world any more. You would have expected the peoples of Europe to have learnt something from an operation such as that. To be obliged from now on to examine every procedure for its humanitarianism, to see if it works in a humane way, to check it doesn't put the system, democracy, in jeopardy, e.g. through too many 'special ordinances'. But after an age of 'special units', 'special treatment', 'Sonderweg', one surely just can't carry on as normal. How can you go over seamlessly into a democracy if you do not have this chasm for ever and ever before your eyes? If with every signature, with every official stamp, you do not see a human face in front of you? To write down the names of the 'victims' is just a substitute, a replacement for your own name,

that is inscribed in every one of those that died. The grace that is gained from being born late or the innocence that is earned by being born early are of no use. You are never born too early or too late: you live only at the right time, then as now, today you live for yesterday and tomorrow, stretched on a wire, between heaven and earth.²⁹ This hour is my hour, as Paul Celan says: 'The hour stood before the clock and commanded it to keep the right time.'³⁰

My hour, in which I by my own decision, since this hour is given to me, inscribe myself and my time onto eternity. For good and for bad. As hero or as victim. Why do we always speak of others, why do we not speak about ourselves. About our hopes, anxieties, rage, grieving, helplessness. They then, victims as well as victimizers, they did have the same feelings ... or did they not? Was it a heroic deed, to do all this for 'Fuehrer und Vaterland' without feeling anything, to harden yourself? To show weakness, is, after all, to show mercy, to take the children's crying seriously. You also were a child once, weren't you? You also once sought warmth and comfort in the dark, didn't you? Was all this forgotten? Had it become impossible? Was death in the end a way of being saved from a life that had become impossible? But if it had been your own death at least, everything would not have been so terrible. But it was by killing others, not your acquaintance in the house next door, no, an unknown other, strangers, people who strike me as strange, now that I have become a stranger to myself.³¹

So, beyond the question of good and evil, representation finds its answer in the reflection not on the premises of legal and philosophical concepts or pseudo-conventions such as 'etiquette' and 'political correctness', nor in an attempt to hide behind learned discussions concerning the correct facts and figures, nor even in the use of language borrowed from the lexicon of religious canon, such as 'martyrdom', 'victim' or 'suffering'. (It is for this reason that I find the word *Holocaust* – Greek: burnt-offering – so problematic since Jews were not given a choice in Auschwitz to die for *Kiddush Haschem*, the Sanctification of God's name: they were murdered in the name of duty for 'Fuehrer und Vaterland'.³²) But representation entails a serious reflection on accepting the onus to rethink not only the Shoah,³³ but the very project of the *Humanities as a discipline, in the light of history, language and the self*,³⁴ directed towards finding a critical cultural paradigm which breaks down our preconceived notions of reason, reality, and normality, and critiques our *normative* values and standards: 'The universe of dying that was Auschwitz yearns for a language purified of the taint of normality,'³⁵ writes Lawrence Langer, but was it a 'universe of dying' and can this universe 'yearn for a language purified of the taint of normality'? Can a universe yearn at all, when those who were murdered cannot speak, but still move *our* lips? Our mourning and yearning for them is much stronger than any act of memory that can possibly heal the universe by way of language: 'Manchmal freilich stirbt der Himmel unseren Scherben voraus' (Paul Celan).³⁶ Looking up to Heaven thus makes no sense and is to no avail and we are left to gather the pieces which have rained

down on us from the broken sky: the flight into an outdated metaphysics – or theology – is no longer possible.

So when assuming the moral responsibility of becoming a witness to the *Shoah*, we are indeed, each one of us, telling our own story, showing who we are, and adding not only a missing link to our biography, but to history itself, which is the sum total of the actions of mankind.³⁷

Acting in the world involves and construes my identity continuously, and my identity is a narrative. In the very same sense in which telling my narrative is a speech act, my actions, my involvement with the world, are an act of speech, a building up of a continuous story. 'Ich wünschte, ich wäre eine Beethovensche Symphonie oder sonst etwas, was geschrieben ist,' said the young Rosenzweig in one of his letters,³⁸ 'das Geschriebenwerden tut weh'.³⁹

Where history and biography cross is the place where true historiography, the painful process of *writing history* and *being written by history*, begins: the historian becomes a witness to history not only by relating mere facts and collecting relevant documents, but by asking pertinent and probing questions in regard to their meaning *for the present*. The ethical demand inherent in this task cannot be overestimated, since it touches the very core of the search for meaning after Auschwitz, picking up the thread of life after destruction, creating historical continuity.

Notes

* The essay is part of a longer study that will appear in the wake of the publication of my book *Arche der Unschuld. Versuch einer Kulturkritik nach Auschwitz* (Vienna, 2006).

1. 'World-view and self-image are indissolubly intertwined with each other. The way man sees the world is the way he sees himself; the way he conceives himself is the way he conceives the world. Alterations in his view of the world lead to alteration in his view of himself and vice versa', in Christoph Wulf, 'The Temporality of World-views and Self-images', in D. Kemper and C. Wulf (eds), *Looking Back on the End of the World*, trans. D. Amtal (New York, 1989).
2. See Robert Eaglestone, 'From the Bars of Quotation Marks: Emmanuel Levinas's (Non)-Representation of the Holocaust', in A. Leak and G. Paizis (eds), *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London, 2000), 97–109.
3. Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago, 1990), 160–161.
4. Daniel R. Schwartz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York, 1999), 35.
5. Compare the Biblical injunction to remember the Exodus from Egypt: "*Vehigadeta lebincha bayom hahu lemor* – And you shall tell your son on that day, saying" (*Exodus* 13:8).
6. Schwartz, *Imagining the Holocaust*, 35.
7. All passages taken from my book, *Arche der Unschuld. Versuch einer Kulturkritik nach Auschwitz* (Vienna, 2006), are set in italics throughout this essay. They are cited from the (unpublished) English version, *The Ark of Innocence. A Critique of Reason after Auschwitz*, trans. M.L. Davies. *The Ark of Innocence*, P. 5.

8. Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington, MD, 1964), 28.
9. Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, 29.
10. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 8.
11. Hillary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).
12. Cf. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 5–6.
13. Northrop Frye, 'The Knowledge of Good and Evil', in M. Black (ed.), *The Morality of Scholarship* (Ithaca, NY, 1967), 9–10 [italics are mine].
14. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 9.
15. *Gen.* 1:6, where *Rakia* denotes the dividing line between heaven and earth.
16. cf. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, part 3: A Shipwreck with no Spectators.
17. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 11–12.
18. Cf. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 5–6.
19. Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (New York, 1982).
20. Eveline Goodman-Thau and Fania Oz-Salzberger (eds), *Das Jüdische Erbe Europas. Krise der Kultur im Spannungsfeld von Tradition, Geschichte und Identität* (Berlin, 2005), 13–39 and Eveline Goodman-Thau, *Erbe und Erneuerung. Kulturphilosophie aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Vienna, 2004).
21. Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. M.B. Smith (London, 1996), 122.
22. Levinas, *Proper Names*, 123.
23. Cf. Jan-Werner Mueller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe. Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, 2002).
24. Jürgen Habermas, 'Die verkleidete Tora. Rede zum 80. Geburtstag von Gershom Scholem', in Jürgen Habermas, *Politik, Kunst, Religion* (Stuttgart, 1978), 133; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature* (London, 1921).
25. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (New York, 1980).
26. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 34.
27. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 100–101.
28. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA, 1998), 183. Compare the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, when the agonising cry of Cain, that anyone may now kill him as he is banished as a murderer, is heard by God, who grants him a sign on his forehead as a reminder, that he is indeed not to be killed (*Genesis* 4).
29. Cf. *Job*, 26, 7: 'He stretcheth out the North over an empty place, /And hangeth the Earth upon nothing.'
30. Paul Celan, 'Gegenlicht', in: Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5 vols (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), III, 163.
31. Goodman-Thau, *The Ark of Innocence*, 35–37.
32. Cf. Heinrich Himmler's famous 1943 Posen speech to the upper-level SS-officers revealing the importance and function of the annihilation of the Jews in shaping the German psyche: '[...] In our history, this is an unwritten, never-to-be-written page of glory [...] All in all, we may say that we have accomplished the most difficult task out of love for our people. And we have not sustained any damage to our inner self, our soul and our character,' in Lucy Dawidowicz (ed.), *A Holocaust Reader* (West Orange, NJ, 1976), 132–133.
33. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (London, 2002).
34. Eveline Goodman-Thau, *Aufstand der Wasser. Jüdische Hermeneutik zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Vienna, 2002), 9–10, 15–31.
35. Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York, 1995), 93.

36. 'Surely, Heaven sometimes dies ahead of our shards.'
37. In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt shows how through *acting* and *speaking* men reveal their unique personal identities, 'who' they are in the web of human relationships, retaining their agent-revealing capacity even in objective matters of the world of things. Turning to the question of history, she observes, that the condition of history is the fact that each and every individual human life is a story, with history being the storybook of mankind, 'with many actors and speakers and yet, without any authors', since 'both are the outcome of action'. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), 184.
38. 'I would wish I were a Beethoven symphony or anything that is written': Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, ed. E. Rosenzweig (Berlin, 1935), 19.
39. 'Being written is painful' in Amos Funkenstein, 'History, Counterhistory and Narrative', in S. Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the Final Solution* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 66–67.

Part II

Memories of the Holocaust: Public and Private Discourses

2

‘One goes left to the Russians, the other goes right to the Americans’ – Family Recollections of the Holocaust in Europe

Olaf Jensen

The public and private discourse about the Holocaust in contemporary Germany is contradictory. On the one hand, the majority of Germans are aware of their problematic past and no longer deny that Nazi Germany was responsible for the Second World War, the war of extermination in the East, and the Holocaust on the European Jews. This constitutes a dramatic change compared to the situation at the end of the war and the following two decades.¹ We will argue, however, that whilst Germans *know* and *consume* a lot about the ‘Third Reich’ and the Holocaust, the second and third generation remain convinced that *their* ancestors did not do anything bad during that awful period of time. The third generation, specially the grandchildren, distinguish in a ‘black-and-white’ fashion between their grandparents – who were always the ‘good guys’ – and the ‘Nazis’ – who were always ‘the others’ and bad. Furthermore, admitting the crimes of Nazi Germany reflects the desire to swap the burdensome image of the perpetrators with that of the victims. In other words, the more the third generation learns about National Socialism and the Holocaust, the more it distances itself from it.

At the end of the 1990s one can observe a turning point in how the public has dealt with the Nazi past. The novelist Martin Walser insisted on his ‘right’ to ‘look away’ from the Holocaust and referred to Auschwitz as a ‘moral stick’ (*Moralkeule*) that was often ‘exploited for present aims’.² It is interesting that everything Walser said in his controversial speech about the Holocaust was about *himself*: *his* feelings, *his* lack of comfort and *his* suffering due to the topic. This mirrors the same attitude we have found in qualitative studies and can be summarised as follows: talking about the Holocaust in Germany does not mean talking about the Holocaust’s *victims* – it usually

means how Germans *themselves* feel about dealing with the *guilt* and – at the same time – about how they *themselves* suffered during National Socialism and the Second World War. This phenomenon becomes evident in books, TV and journal series about the flight of the Germans from the East in 1944–45 and the Allied bombing as well as books from members of the second generation about the suffering of their parents.³ Contrary to Germany's official discourse on the Holocaust – for instance, the widely shown and visited exhibition 'War of Annihilation. Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941–1944' showed that many fathers or grandfathers who had served in the German army might have been involved in the Holocaust – German families speak mainly about their own suffering and victimisation and explicitly deny any personal responsibilities for what happened. The empirical material presented here stems from a number of related research projects that were conducted in East and West Germany between 1997 and 2000.⁴ All projects used an interdisciplinary approach that drew on theoretical and methodological concepts in social and cultural psychology, research into life stories as well as oral history. This study is based on a sample of 40 three-generational families, in particular: 48 so-called 'contemporary witnesses' (31 female, 17 male), born between 1906 and 1933; 50 members of the 'second generation' (25 female, 25 male), born between 1933 and 1967; and 44 members of the 'third generation' (19 female, 25 male), born between 1954 and 1986. The sample is located in an above-average educational standard because most are 'white collar' employees (40%), students or in professional training (18%), freelancers (10%), and only 11 per cent are workers.⁵

The unique feature of this particular research project is that all three generations of each family were interviewed separately, resulting in a total of 142 face-to-face interviews. The idea was to get the family's history of the 'Third Reich' from all three generations to be able to compare the different 'versions' of the story. Each family was then brought together for a group discussion ('family-session') to talk about personal experiences as well as the history of the 'Third Reich' in general or other related topics. This session was introduced by a ten-minute videotape based on 13 movie-sequences which covered a wide range of topics and were made by amateurs or Nazi officials.⁶ Interview guidelines were kept to a minimum so that the flow of ordinary conversation was not disrupted.⁷

The grandparents were asked to recount their lived experiences from the 'Third Reich' whilst their children and grandchildren were questioned about what they knew about the lives of their ancestors during this period and what was narrated or discussed at home. This allowed an analysis of what Germans remembered about Nazism and the Holocaust as well as finding out how various generations selected the material they chose to hand down from one generation to the next. We were not concerned whether the interviewees were telling us things that were empirically 'true' or not.

The interviews were analysed in a 'two step' technique that combined hermeneutic case studies and content analysis. To start off, the research group pursued hermeneutic case studies with three contradicting families to generate theoretical categories for the entire body of empirical data.⁸ The case studies generated nine units with phenomena such as the transmitted stories, the impact of the media, patterns of interpretation, the different pasts in East and West Germany or the dialogical patterns of transmission (structure-types). Our main focus will be on the latter.

The structure-types demonstrate the main family convictions transmitted by sampled family. The 182 interviews yielded five broad types of communication labelled 'Distancing/Dissociation', 'Fascination', 'Heroisation', 'Justification' and 'Victimisation'.⁹ These types illustrate the manner in which families frame the main discourse about the Nazi past and what kind of evaluation is handed down from generation to generation. Table 2.1 shows the frequencies of these five structure-types of the intergenerational communication within the 40 families.

The table demonstrates that 1,130 text segments examined were coded as 'Victimisation', followed by 'Justification' with 605 segments, 'Distance/Dissociation' from Nazism ranked third with 484 segments, 'Fascination' about different aspects of this period is found in 374 text segments and, finally, 'Heroisation' ranked last with 306 segments. The table divides the segments between the sessions with different generations and those with the entire family, here labelled as family-sessions.¹⁰ Examining the 'generations' columns and the 'family-sessions' columns yields that the 'Victimisation' type was mostly found in the interviews within the first generation (404), but, for example, the type 'Justification' is discussed mostly when the family members are together (265). 'Distance' from the 'Third Reich' is again most present in the interviews with the contemporary witnesses, as is 'Heroisation' with the highest percentage of segments in their interviews.

Table 2.1 Frequencies of five structure-types of the intergenerational communication within the 40 families

Structure-type	Number of Text segments	Segments in interviews of: contemp. witnesses	Second generation	Third generation	Family- sessions
Victimisation	1130 (100 %)	404 (36 %)	248 (22 %)	114 (10 %)	364 (32 %)
Justification	605 (100 %)	188 (31 %)	96 (16 %)	56 (9 %)	265 (44 %)
Distance	484 (100 %)	211 (44 %)	58 (12 %)	30 (6 %)	185 (38 %)
Fascination	374 (100 %)	159 (42 %)	55 (15 %)	36 (10 %)	124 (33 %)
Heroisation	306 (100 %)	142 (46 %)	51 (17 %)	30 (10 %)	83 (27 %)
Text segments	2899 (100 %)	1104 (38 %)	508 (18 %)	266 (9 %)	1021 (35 %)
Total					

The labels give fairly accurate descriptions of all five types. It makes sense, however, to define a little further the strongest one, 'Victimisation', as it will be used as an example further below. 'Victimisation' does not refer to persecuted groups such as Communists, Social Democrats, Jews or Sinti and Roma. Instead, it refers to how the communication of the three generations focuses on the German *Volksgenossen* (ethnic Germans) as victims of the time leading up to 1933 (Weimar Republic), the 'Third Reich', the Second World War and throughout the 'hard times' (*schlechte Zeit*) after 1945. The narratives of contemporary witnesses are dominated by story lines about how poor they were before 1933 and how they were later literally forced to join NS-organisations – the SS, the *Wehrmacht* and others. Apparently, any resistance would have been extremely dangerous. They also emphasise that their situation deteriorated at the end of the war, especially during the Allied bombing and after 1945. This kind of positioning is also present in the interviews of the second and third generation who had listened to these stories at home at the supper table or at Christmas.

The following example of 'victimisation' within the family shows what is referred to as 'changed frames', that is, the grandchildren turning the experience of Jews being victimised into the experience of their grandparents. In this process the younger generation takes all the knowledge that they have acquired about the Holocaust and transposes the victimisation of the Jews into the stories that they have heard from their grandparents. Stefanie Roth,¹¹ born in 1966, granddaughter and seamstress with a university-entrance diploma, recounts what she knows about her grandfather and his way into war captivity:

What he has also told back then, uhm, when they were in Russia, that somehow really stuck in my mind, because I thought, that must/ really, that was a poker game ... the Russians and the Americans, they practically separated the prisoners of war [POW] between each other and that meant suddenly: One goes left to the Russians and the other goes right to the Americans. And he was lucky that he came to the Americans and thus home. All the others, who were assigned to the Russians ended up in Siberia in a labour camp.¹²

We do not know if the Allied separated POW like this, but it seems improbable. Important, however, is the manner in which she repeats her grandfather's story and what kind of meaning she gives to it. First of all, it seems obvious to Stefanie that the Russian soldiers are the 'bad guys' whilst the US soldiers are the 'good guys'. 'Siberia' stands for an evil place and does not need further questions and explanations. We have found these types of topoi in almost every interview, including families from East Germany. For Stefanie, it seems to be clear that this is the worse thing that can happen to a prisoner – and that there was nothing comparable in an American war prison. Furthermore,

the 'lucky' escape of her grandfather reminds us of the 'selection' on the ramp of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other death-camps run by the Germans. The emphasis is on the arbitrariness of the manner in which the POW were separated in a 'poker game', as Stefanie calls it, where only sheer fate decides between the two extremes of being sent to 'Siberia' or being sent home. Unfortunately, her grandfather did not tell this story in his face-to-face interview. In Stefanie's next sentence, however, it becomes clear that she has composed this narrative more or less by herself, that is she has made 'sense' of what she has heard on her own:

And the way he recounted it, it actually sounded relatively factual, and I thought: 'My God it could have/ uh, it really was such a lottery', you know, he could have not got the lucky ticket, but could have ended up in Siberia. That's what, uh, what I remember so clearly.¹³

Stefanie is pointing out that she was surprised that her grandfather was telling this story without emotion – and she started to *think* about the plot on her own. She might have even added the metaphors 'lottery' (*Glückspiel*), 'lucky ticket' (*glückliches Los*) and might have used the 'frame' from narratives about the 'selections' in the death-camps. But she obviously *understood* the story in that way due to the foundations provided by her cultural knowledge which prompts her to *repeat* the story in this particular way. The result is that she highlights that her grandfather was in real danger and that there was nothing he could have done about it. He was a helpless victim caught between good and evil, between life and death.

Another example how German families emphasise their victimisation and the way how the younger generation attempts to make sense of it emerges in the narrative of the grandchild Bernd, born in 1972. Almost at the end of the family-session with his mother Hiltrud (born in 1943) and his grandmother Hilde (born in 1912) he articulates his doubts about what his grandma (and the other people in Germany) could have known or could not have known about the Holocaust. This is how the interview went on:

Interviewer: 'But you can't really believe it when the older people say: "We did not know anything!"?'

Bernd F.: 'Yes, that's hard to imagine, isn't it? Therefore I mean, if one really wasn't somehow in the [NSDAP] party or something, then it might be possible # that one didn't know anything.'

Here (#) his grandmother Hilde Brack steps in:

Hilde B.: 'That/ that these killings there, also in Poland, that they/ we didn't know this either. But that was/ there was a soldier and he was on holiday. And he was an acquaintance of my

husband. And he had/ he showed pictures, I was not allowed to see them. There the Jews had/. he took a snapshot of that. The Jews had to dig their grave there.'

Interviewer: 'Ah, yes.'

Hilde B.: 'Completely full. And there they were put in. They shot them and in it.'

Interviewer: 'And to whom did he show them?'

Hilde B.: 'He showed them to my husband, but at that time he wasn't a soldier yet.'

Interviewer: 'But then you knew something after all!'

Hilde B.: 'Yes, we knew that.'

Interviewer: 'Yes.'

Hilde B.: 'But what shall we do then, what should you do if you were told something like that?'

Interviewer: 'No idea.'

Hilde B.: 'They would have also hunged us immediately.'¹⁴

This interview has many significant layers. First of all, there is a doubtful grandson who does not really know what to think about the Germans and the mass killings committed by Germans. Then there is the grandmother who first insists that she and her husband could not have known anything about the Holocaust, but then gives an example that proves that she knew about it. Then, when visibly upset and pointing out that she also saw the pictures and 'knew' about the killings, Hilde B. resorts to the common justification discourse: what should we have done, what would *you* have done? She points out that talking about the photographs would have cost them their lives.

Bernd, the grandson, after having provoked this story about the photographs, remains silent throughout the remainder of the interview. His mother, previously talkative, is quiet and only steps in a few minutes later when her mother talks again about how the *family* suffered during the war ('if you have eight children, that's tough') – there were no further questions or comments about the story Hilde Brack had just told. Only the face-to-face interview with Bernd provides a follow-up to this story. It is then that Bernd explains that he does not really want to ask his grandmother anymore questions because she is now getting old and he fears that he could give her a hard time by making her recall all these old memories. The interviewer asks Bernd if he had known this story about the pictures of the shootings in Poland. Bernd answers:

Bernd F.: 'No, I haven't heard that one before.'

Interviewer: 'Hhm. Because that's somehow something that stands out, isn't it, that someone caught something about the shootings and things like that in pictures.'

Bernd F.: 'Hhm. Oh, well, no, I didn't know that, because there/ I mean there/. but one can also see that these people didn't take it easily, no, I mean, he also took a big risk himself when he took pictures of something like that and took them to Hanover.'¹⁵

The interviewer is still dwelling on what he had heard in the family-session about the photograph and of Hilde Brack's knowledge about the killing in Poland. For Bernd, however, other things are more important. He somewhat admits that this is something special, but what comes to his mind is that the people who knew something about the killings 'didn't take it easily' and that the individual who took the pictures and brought them home had taken a 'risk' in doing so.¹⁶

Neither his grandmother – who, contrary to all her original claims, knew quite a lot about the Holocaust – is foremost on his mind, nor the killed Jews from the pictures. All this is ignored as if it had not been mentioned at all. Instead, the 'victimisation' of the Germans is again the centre of his attention. His questioning of the Germans' knowledge of the Holocaust that evoked the entire story in the family-session is totally forgotten and not brought up again.

These two examples show how members of the third generation make sense of what they have heard from their family members in the context of the Nazi past: they simply 'clear' the inconsistency between their knowledge and their doubts and the stories they listened to. Even if there are presumptions and doubts about the relative's role during the 'Third Reich', however, many members of the younger generation are not facing up to the fact that their family members had something to do with National Socialism and the Holocaust. In other words, grandma and grandpa were not 'Nazis'; the 'Nazis' were always somebody or somewhere else. There are other examples of stories being 're-framed' as they are passed down from generation to generation and in the process turning anti-Semites into resistance fighters and Gestapo officers becoming brave people who protected Jews. When contemporaries recounted murders they committed or shootings they witnessed ('Let's go and watch! Some people are being shot'), their grandchildren re-tell these incidents in a complete different way.¹⁷

We are currently examining family narratives in Serbia, Croatia, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland to assess what kind of (family) memories and stories are handed down in other European countries, how stories are being told and what kind of 'master narratives' there are compared to Germany. Whilst the data collection is not finished yet, it is possible to mention some preliminary findings, in particular about the group-discussions in the Netherlands.¹⁸ In addition, to have a closer look if there is a difference between the discourse between family members and people from groups like sports-clubs or university seminars, we are conducting group discussions with four different age groups – born 1975 and younger (grandchildren I), 1955–74 (grandchildren II), 1935–57 (second generation) and 1934 and earlier (eye-witnesses) – and from non-family contexts.

What follows is an example from a group discussion conducted in May 2004 with seven female students from the Netherlands, born between 1975 and 1981. It demonstrates that the phenomenon of 'making sense' of a family story also exists in other countries and contexts. Close to the end of the session, after talking a lot about stories told at home, the interviewer asks:

Interviewer: 'Have some of you heard something about/ parents or grandparents having told something about Jews, persecution of Jews, or ...'

Some: 'No'.

Alies W.: 'No, only about *submergers* [*Untertaucher*] or something'.

Marlies W.: 'Yes, *submergers*, that's right'.

Interviewer: 'Jewish *submergers*?'

Sofie B.: 'Yes. Yes, also resistance/ uh people'.

Marlies W.: 'Yes, at grandma's home, she was at that time, well I think 15 or so, she still lived at her parents' house. And, uhm, they had a farm, and in my opinion they had a Jewish family or something, if I ever heard of that, but ... and that they also/ were taken from there, or they stayed there for a couple of years, I think, but more, uh ...'

Interviewer: 'No/no/'

Marlies W.: 'No details, no'.

Interviewer: 'No details'.

Marlies W.: 'No'.

Interviewer: 'No names'.

Marlies W.: 'No names, nothing at all, well, no'.¹⁹

The statement of Marlies W. is very interesting and we have found similar stories in the German material.²⁰ Stories about 'submergers' – people or refugees who tried to hide – are very common in the Dutch context. Two participants mention 'submergers', even though they had previously denied that they had heard anything about Jews or the 'persecution of Jews'. After the interviewer asks if the submergers were Jewish, Sofie answers in the affirmative and adds that there were also people from the resistance. Then Marlies recounts what she knows about her grandmother. The story is quite vague: Marlies claims that a Jewish family was in hiding at her grandmother's farm house, but then she is not sure about that anymore ('in my opinion', 'a Jewish family or so'). She begins to say 'submergers' again ('sub/') but interrupts herself, pointing out that she had heard of a Jewish family being hidden on the farm, before once again becoming unsure: she *thinks* this hidden family was taken away by somebody *or* that they stayed there for a couple of years. The final staccato dialogue with the interviewer demonstrates that she does not actually know anything specific about this narrated story, apart from the fact that there was a 'submerged' family at her grandmother's home.

In the Netherlands, as in Germany, people 'make history': they actively create 'meaning' in listening to stories and by re-telling them in every day life conversations.²¹ The younger generations, similar to the children's game 'broken telephone', have to reconstruct the knowledge they have acquired from school or university about the Nazi era with the life story of their relatives at home.²² According to Maurice Halbwachs and Erving Goffman, a biographical narrative is always constructed within a society's discourse about the past.²³ The public discourses about remembering and forgetting the National Socialist past in Germany are loaded with strategies of dealing with the 'guilt' and the burden of the past. One of the results of this is that the private narratives are (mostly subconsciously) constructed in a way that they emphasise the family members' suffering to such an extent it might be impossible for the younger generations to understand that their ancestors could have been an active part of the Nazism at all. Despite being suspicious or having doubts, as seen by the example with Bernd and the photographs, there is the psychological need of many people to turn the family members (even a friend of the family) into the 'good guys'.

The findings seem paradoxical because the grandchildren have learned about the past at school and elsewhere. Germans are aware that Nazism was a criminal system. This, however, generates an urge to position one's own grandmother and grandfather as people who either had nothing to do with this horrific regime all or, better still, as people who were doing everything they could to alleviate suffering. This behaviour is also found amongst youngsters who are particularly well informed. From a social psychological point of view, there is a clash between knowledge of history and the obligations of loyalty that families instil in their members. The image of one's grandfather or grandmother, whom one usually knows as a lovable, caring and harmless individual, is projected onto the grandparent's entire life – hence they must have always been the way the third generation knows them now. This goes beyond revisionist attempts or right-wing concerns. Instead, the younger generations are filling the gap in the stories they have heard in a 'positive' way: they are obviously not comfortable with the history and most of them do not want to have Nazi grandparents. They are just using the ambiguity in the narrated stories or fragments to clarify the story line and the 'moral plot' in a specific way. Many members of the second and third generation in Germany – even if they are doubtful and suspicious – follow the narrated footsteps of their ancestors. They accept and absorb the idea that their ancestors were first suffering under economic circumstances and then from a dictatorship and the war (Victimisation). Furthermore, *almost* everything they did had good reasons – to join the Nazi party or to kill somebody (Justification) – but mostly they were not involved in anything at all because they were living in the 'countryside' or were part of an 'inner' resistance (Distance/Dissociation) and so on. Additionally, there is another reason why the murder of the European Jews and others is not necessarily a

part of family memory and of the conversation at the homes of non-Jewish families: Jews were simply not a part of the families of the dominant non-Jewish majority in Germany. Hence, the main discourse in many German families revolves around their own suffering: that is what most family members have experienced, at least at the end of the war, and that is what they are transmitting to the next generations.

Whereas the justification or denial of the first generation is to be expected, it is alarming that the public discourse fails to counteract that denial in the later generations. Official knowledge is simply not integrated. There is the stark contrast between, on the one hand, the image of the 'Third Reich' and the Holocaust that is transmitted in families and, on the other hand, the one that is taught in schools. Family memories mainly revolve around how one's own family had to suffer and these themes are passed on, not as historical knowledge, but as personal *truth*. It seems that other countries have similar types of communication and that there are also gaps between the public and private discourse. This should have consequences for educational concepts in school, university, exhibitions and memorials.

Notes

1. Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1996); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (London, 2001).
2. Martin Walser, 'Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede' (11.10.1998), in Frank Schirmacher (eds), *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt/Main, 1999), 7–17, here 12.
3. See for example, the TV series 'Die große Flucht' by Guido Knopp (ZDF, 2002); Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* (Munich, 2002); Harald Welzer, 'Schön unscharf. Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane', *Mittelweg*, 36 (13) (2004), 53–64.
4. Harald Welzer et al. (eds), *Opa war kein Nazi. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002); Olaf Jensen, *Geschichte machen. Strukturmerkmale des intergenerationellen Sprechens über die NS-Vergangenheit in deutschen Familien* (Tübingen, 2004); Sabine Moller, *Vielfache Vergangenheit. Öffentliche Erinnerungskulturen und Familienerinnerungen an die NS-Zeit in Ostdeutschland* (Tübingen, 2003).
5. However, a more representative survey has confirmed the qualitative results presented here. See Jensen, *Geschichte*, 41ff.
6. Jensen, *Geschichte*, 408.
7. Olaf Jensen and Harald Welzer, 'Ein Wort gibt das andere, oder: Selbstreflexivität als Methode', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Online Journal), 4 (2) (2003); <<http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-03/2-03jensenwelzer-d.htm>>.
8. Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (London, 1990).
9. For a pilot study see Harald Welzer et al. (eds), *"Was wir für böse Menschen sind!"* (Tübingen, 1997).

10. This serves only as a rough orientation because the numbers of interviewees in the three generations are not equal (48, 50, 44).
11. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
12. Interview granddaughter, family no. 12, line 92–99 (F12E, 92–99). Free standing dots mark a pause between one second (.) to three seconds (...). If the pause is longer, it is displayed in squared brackets [7 sec.]. Other remarks or hints are also written in squared brackets [laughter], and if it lasts longer, the end is marked with a [+]. Interruptions are marked by a slash (/), and if somebody steps in while somebody else is speaking it is marked with a double-cross (#).
13. Interview granddaughter, family no. 12, line 100–104 (F12E, 100–104).
14. Group discussion, family no. 5, line 680–706 (F05G, 680–706).
15. Interview grandson, family no. 5, line 58–66 (F05E, 58–66).
16. Thousands of pictures like these were taken by German soldiers and even sent home by regular mail. See Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (Hamburg, 1995).
17. Welzer, *Opa*, 44ff., 56ff.; Jensen, *Geschichte*, 152ff.
18. See also the essay by Isabella Mataushek in this volume.
19. Group discussion, Netherlands, no. 1, line 1078–1094 (GD NL 1, 1078–1094).
20. Welzer, *Opa*, 61ff.; Jensen, *Geschichte*, 310ff.
21. Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, 1990).
22. Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering. A Study in Experimental And Social Psychology* (Cambridge, 1995).
23. Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire: The Social Framework of Memory* (New York, 1976); Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York, 1974).

3

Bringing the Holocaust Home. Danish and Dutch Third Generation's Struggle to Make Sense of the Holocaust

Isabella Matauschk

In both Denmark and the Netherlands a unified picture of the heroic national struggle against the German occupation was forged during the immediate post-war years and has retained immense influence until today. Since the 1960s, however, the Holocaust has increasingly entered public awareness via the media, films, and ultimately the educational system. As Denmark and the Netherlands vary greatly in relation to the respective history of the Jewish persecution during the German occupation a comparison of how the Holocaust is remembered and dealt with seems especially rewarding. An important, albeit neglected source for the historical consciousness of individuals is the respective family tradition. Narrations within families in both countries emphasise the suffering of family members and remain vague on the topic of the Jewish persecution. It is thus left to the generations born after the war to accommodate their knowledge of the Holocaust into the images they form of the past. This piece draws on interviews with families and groups and attempts to sketch the way in which young people in Denmark and the Netherlands relate to the Holocaust based on different, often even conflicting sources, ranging from family stories to education and local, national as well as international traditions and the media.

Recent research has emphasised the paramount importance of family narratives on the development of notions held about the past. These family stories are invested with high emotional meaning and can remain unrelated to more cognitive knowledge. Research into German families' memories about the Nazi era has found that there is a gulf dividing official public memory from family traditions. The more especially young people knew about Nazi crimes the greater was their tendency to exclude family members and

relatives from any association with those crimes. The Nazis were, to summarise it bluntly, always the others, whilst one's own family was characterised by consistent moral behaviour.¹ The German example is, in many respects, unique compared to the experience of German occupied Western Europe. However, similar patterns surface when the relationship between actual choices taken during the occupation and the post-war contention of universal heroic resistance collide. Family memories are strongly interrelated with nationalised representations and discourses and can influence and shape official representations of the past. In both the Danish and the Dutch post-war societies references to the Second World War and the German occupation continue to play a central role in negotiating national identities and values. The basic narrative of the five years of occupation was built upon the idea of a resistance movement supported by every 'real' Dane and Dutch person. The post-war narrative thus turned everyone with very few exceptions into a hero.² In Denmark the government surrendered to the German ultimatum and opted for a policy referred to as 'samarbejdspolitik', that is, collaboration with the occupational forces. Resistance was officially discouraged and was scarce. The resistance movement only gained wider popular support from summer 1943 onwards. The persecution of Danish Jews started in autumn 1943. As there had been prior warnings about a round-up in the night of 1 October, most of the potential victims had been able to escape their arrest. The king, politicians, the Danish church, trade unions, universities and other institutions were united in their severe public condemnation of the round-up. After Sweden had agreed to accept Jewish refugees from Denmark, a unique rescue campaign started: within 14 days 7,056 Danish Jews and 686 of their non-Jewish relatives were sailed over the Øresund to Sweden. This number corresponds to 95 per cent of the Danish Jewish population. Those who were arrested were deported to the concentration camp Theresienstadt. The overwhelming success of this effort was helped by the fact of the *Wehrmacht's* passivity. The greatest threat for those attempting the flight apart from the *Gestapo* came in fact from Danish National Socialists and informers.

The post-war commemoration of the Second World War in Denmark is characterised by the reconciliation of collaboration on the level of government as well as the state bureaucracy with the resistance movement. Every layer of society had done his or her best for the country. By collaborating with the German occupation the state had assured a relatively high level of domestic sovereignty, it had ensured that the Danish population enjoyed comparatively good living conditions throughout the war, and had saved Danish lives by abstaining from fighting the superior German military force. The population at large had, so the post-war construction insinuated, showed the occupiers the cold shoulder and had thus demonstrated passive resistance. This view of the past allowed the majority of Danes to place themselves in the camp of resisters, who had – though in the overwhelming majority not actively – resisted the Germans.

For a long time the rescue of the Danish Jews to Sweden has merely been a footnote to the history of the German occupation. Only from the 1980s onwards has scholarly interest in the rescue started in Denmark itself.³ During the last decade, however, the rescue of the Danish Jews has led to wide discussions that reverberated forcefully through the Danish public: the fact that some fishermen taking refugees to Sweden had asked a price for their services resulted in a heated public debate.⁴ This emotional discussion touches directly upon the conception and self-image of a highly moral nation. Personal gain is, in this context, not only perceived as dissonant but it is conceived to be a scandalous behaviour putting shame on the entire nation.⁵

The German attack on the Netherlands on 10 May 1940 was first met with military resistance. The Dutch army then capitulated to the superior German military force after a few days of fighting. The Dutch government and Queen Wilhelmina fled to London and set up an official Dutch government in exile. The most traumatic aspect of the short warfare was the German bombing of Rotterdam, which destroyed the city on 14 May. In contrast to Denmark, the German occupational regime attempted to Nazify the country with the help of the Dutch National Socialist Party, the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (NSB). The discrimination against and repression of the Jewish population, who made up about 1.5 per cent of the Dutch population, reinforced popular resistance against the German occupation. Hundreds of thousands of people followed the call for a strike of solidarity with the Jewish population, the so-called February strike in 1941, after 425 Amsterdam Jews had been deported to the concentration camp Mauthausen. However, although the harsh anti-Jewish measurements were met with disdain by the majority of the population, the mass deportation of the Dutch Jews from summer 1942 onwards encountered little to no popular resistance. The Dutch Jews simply disappeared – first they disappeared from the public space and subsequently they disappeared from people's minds. The collaboration of the Dutch authorities ensured the registration of almost all 140,000 Jews living in the Netherlands and their subsequent deportation. About 107,000 Dutch Jews were deported to extermination camps and only 5,000 of them survived.⁶ Resistance to the German occupation only increased towards the end of the war and was met by brutal German repression against the Dutch civilian population. From 1944 onwards forced labour conscription with round-ups of men drove many young Dutchmen into hiding. Although only a small fraction of those hiding were Jewish (around 25,000 of 300,000), the typical *onderduiker* (person in hiding) in the public imagination today has turned, on the model of Anne Frank, into a Jew. Pieter Lagrou has described the formation of a patriotic national memory in the post-war period.⁷ This included almost everyone in the group of both victim and heroic resister. Only a few were excluded from the national context by being called 'wrong Dutchmen' (*foute Nederlander*). Post-war politics strove at not letting any

group stick out from the national community of victims. The small number of Jewish survivors who returned to the Netherlands at the end of the war were thus simply subsumed in the number of national victims.

The official commemoration of the Second World War both in Denmark and the Netherlands stresses national unity: small democratic nations had undergone a severe trial in dark times, and had emerged from this ordeal in moral purity. The five years of occupation are separated from ordinary life and history by what the Norwegian ethnologist Anne Eriksen termed a dark parenthesis, bestowing upon those five years a mythical a-historical quality. The German occupation turned into national history and was separated from the history of the Second World War, thus serving the function of a foundational myth that demonstrates and explains who the Danes or Dutch are.⁸

In comparison to Denmark, the changes within Dutch commemoration of the German occupation have been more accentuated. During the last decades more and more groups have claimed recognition as victims and have thus subverted the notion of universal national victimhood. This process started when from the late 1960s onwards the Jewish tragedy and Dutch compliance in it entered the public debate. On a scholarly level this analysis was initiated by Dutch Jewish authors whose writing was inspired by international studies of the Holocaust.⁹ This debate is still ongoing and has led to an intensive search for the reasons behind the fact that in the Netherlands the highest percentage of a Jewish population in Western Europe was deported and ultimately murdered. Especially difficult is the transition from a self-image emphasising the role of innocent victims to bystanders and sometimes even active collaborators in the destruction of Dutch Jewry.

When Danish families talk about the German occupation the rescue to Sweden or the Holocaust is not a prominent topic.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is the interviewer who normally has to prompt the topic of the Holocaust and the fate of the Jews. Only 23 of the hundreds of stories told within the families feature someone Jewish, but even then they are often not related to our investigation. The National Socialist persecution of European Jewry and the rescue of the Danish Jews to Sweden only play a peripheral part of the Danish family tradition. Only four families tell a story about the rescue to Sweden. Not surprisingly, these are families living in and around Copenhagen, where the majority of Danish Jews lived and continue to live. Of those four families, two have a Jewish background and they tell about the flight of family members.

Julie Ranum, a 17-year-old high school student who lives with her parents in Copenhagen, is from one of these families. Julie talks about her grandparents' experiences during the occupation as well as about the story of a Jewish woman who visited her school and told her class about her experience of fleeing to Sweden. Julie combines her knowledge from school and the media with a story she heard at home about an uncle that had been one of

the fishermen ferrying people to Sweden:

Then we wrote the second year's high school essay. [...] And so I wrote about the flight over the Øresund and ... the people that were saved over and the fishermen who helped them over and the fishing cutters and a little about the Gestapo and ... Gilleleje, where they were caught/or hidden in church attics and such things. About this I also wrote a little, that was also very exciting (yes) ... Also because my/ well this is totally wild far fetched, my great grandmother's little sister's husband was part of those sailing some Jews over in a boat that was called Maren. Thus this was very exciting/ so this was also a little family related, even if it is far fetched. So this was also very exciting, so I wrote a little about it, because there I also got to know some facts from my grandmother and grandfather about how he was and why he did it and if he got money for it.¹¹

The heroic narration about Julie's family's involvement in the rescue of the Danish Jews is disturbed by the problematic association of the fishermen's profiting from the affliction of those they ferried over to Sweden. Her own kin, however, is exempted from the suspicion of having made a lot of money this way. The issue of taking advantage of the Jewish victims' situation poses a moral problem she is unable to solve:

Julie: Of course there were many who paid money. Those fishermen, they earned a lot. But they/on the other hand they risked their life.

Interviewer: So you can well understand that they took money for that?

Julie: Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: Did it surprise you? That they took money?

Julie: Yes. A bit, a bit in the beginning. When we had it about that, where that ... she the Jew talked about, that her family had to give everything they had. Then I thought: 'No, how very hard, that the fishermen take money for that. Totally infuriating. It is their life, they should save.' And a life can't cost a 1000 kr. If I should pay 1000 kr in order to save my life, I would say that I was worth more (yes) ... And so also ... also, so help them! One should not put a price on everything. But on the other hand I can well understand that, because their own life was also at stake (yes). That are also their forces, and there is their time and gasoline and ... the sailing thing. So ... yes, I can well understand this a little. But I can also not understand that so well. Well [laughs] I can see both sides of it. But naturally, I would also pay everything I had and more (just to get away?) Yes. That is evident.¹²

When Birthe Ranum, Julie's mother, tells the story, her uncle becomes even more heroic, not only risking his life but also his health as he 'was very ill and nevertheless he did ship Jews over'.¹³ Members of the third generation have learned about the Holocaust mainly from the media and education and not from family tradition:

Interviewer: Have you been told something about the persecution of Jews?

Sussi Jones: That is from my grandparents?

Interviewer: Or on the whole, or from your own mother or father?

Sussi Jones: Eh, well I have learned about that in school. And then again, *Matador* [a Danish drama series], isn't there (yes). Ehm, there is also another film, I actually think that it is mostly the film, that made an impression (yes)

Interviewer: Can you remember what film this is? Just for the record (in English).

Sussi Jones: Aj ... for heaven that is that really horrible. One ... eh no, I can just not remember it. I can just not remember it. But well this family that is split up, you must have seen these families, where the women come to one side and the children to the other and/

Interviewer: Yes, that classical scenes there.

Sussi Jones: Aj, I would just throw up and throw up and throw up, so afraid would I be, well (yes)¹⁴

The Danish drama series *Matador* is quoted by 80 per cent of the interviewed families as an important source for their view about the past. Additionally, a few other films such as *Sophie's Choice* (referred to by Sussi Jones in the interview above) and *Schindler's List* are mentioned in several interviews and have made a deep impression on their viewers. Images from films are ascribed with a status close to factual evidence: the interviewer responds to Sussi's description of a film scene depicting the selection process in Auschwitz and calls it a classic image. The most frequent reference to international media, however, is to Anne Frank. References to Anne Frank's Diary and the various film versions as well as the play can be found in 63 per cent of the families interviewed. It is mostly the grandchildren and children generation who refer to Anne Frank. The Holocaust has entered Danish public debate relatively late. The popular Danish drama series *Matador*, broadcast between 1978 and 1981, only featured one Jew: a German communist refugee who fought in the Spanish civil war, emphasising his Communist and not his Jewish identity.

It is striking how much young people in Denmark and the Netherlands identify with the Jewish victims. Sometimes this identification blurs the line between the victims of persecution and themselves or their parents and

grandparents. When 21-year-old Amalie Fredriksen is asked during the family talk what she is interested in with regard to the German occupation, she stresses that in contrast to her grandfather and father her interest lies with everyday life and things she can identify with:

The things one can take and feel. And so of course also something with concentration camps and with cowards and traitors and the like. The things one can relate to. Where one thinks how would that be if we couldn't get coffee or how would that be if my father came into a concentration camp. This is difficult to relate to, but such things. And not so much things about bunkers or railroads and the like.¹⁵

In Denmark the commemoration in the immediate post-war years had emphasised the brave deeds of the resistance, especially the railroad sabotage and the bunkers along the west coast are recurrent reminders of the German occupation in the North of Jutland from where Amalie comes. Topics that are of paramount interest to Amalie's grandfather and father do not interest her. What we can see in the sequence quoted above is the alliance of stories about material deprivation (no coffee, rationing) and the experience of persecution symbolised by the concentration camp. Amalie brings these two traditions of war experience together via empathetic identification.

One can draw many parallels between the Dutch and Danish narrations concerning the German occupation. There exist, however, also marked differences: the most frequent persona appearing in Dutch interviews is the figure of a person gone into hiding, the so-called *onderduiker*. Every family interviewed refers to this. The younger generation, however, finds it difficult to relate to the typical person that went into hiding to avoid forced labour for the Germans. There is a tendency among young people to model these hiders on Jews or resistance fighters. The same holds true for the round-up, which is frequently mentioned. Whereas contemporary witnesses normally refer to the round-ups directed at men trying to avoid working for the Germans, the second and third generation tend to interpret these stories in the light of the persecution of Dutch Jews and the resistance. One grandson, 20-year-old student Marijke Groen, even recounts, that he thought his grandfather, a farmer from the Dutch German border region, was Jewish because he went underground:

Interviewer: How, how did you get this idea?

Marijke Groen: Well, because he had to go underground and I thought why do you have to, why do you have to go underground if you are not, if you are no Jew (yes), why does this then have to be (yes). But yes, like/ I think that, I think that that was just because he didn't want to join the army (yes).

Interviewer: But did you then ask that, something like were you Jewish?

Marijke Groen: Yes indeed (she laughs) but the eh, yes the answer was then no (...) ¹⁶

The difference between the generations is not absolute though. Some contemporary witnesses also draw on the imagery of the persecution of Jews in order to relate their experiences. The Holocaust and the persecution of Dutch Jewry remain vague within the family tradition. Very few stories that were handed down within families deal with the experience of the Jewish persecution. The few stories told deal with Jewish hidens. The word 'Holocaust', for example, is only used in three interviews and each time in connection with media references. Members of the Dutch third generation, like their Danish counterparts, have a propensity to identify and empathise with victims of German persecution. A striking example of this can be found in the interview with 16-year-old high school student Gemma Zelden from Western Holland:

Gemma Zelden: (...) I am glad/glad that I did not have to go through a War.

Interviewer: You are still young [laughs].

Gemma Zelden: Yes, but now I did luckily not have to go through that. (no) Because imagine, that all your friends they die, that your whole family dies, and eh, then you remain all alone.

Interviewer: Rather not.

Gemma Zelden: No, just so. That seems like nothing to me. But yes, if there now would break out a War, that would be very bad for me too, because now I would have to go into a concentration camp/camp.

Interviewer: That's right.

Gemma Zelden: Because from twelve years on you have to I think, or so. Yes.

Interviewer: But yes, everyone under twelve was gassed, so probably you would be lucky [laughs].

Gemma Zelden: Yes? Oh, I didn't know that. Yes, but yes, otherwise you were shot dead. (yes) They were all gassed, oh, this I really did not know. This I really didn't know. Now, phff ...

Interviewer: You have in eh, in the war museum in Israel, you have a little flame in a room with mirrors everywhere, that seems like a million candles, that is very beautiful, and that stands for all the children, who were gassed in the War, and then you hear a tape with all the children's names, and that tape takes three years before it starts over again.

Gemma Zelden: Yes? (hmm) That's terrible. So many children gone, dead. And that is simply from, from in the Netherlands or is this/

Interviewer: No, the whole/Europe. ¹⁷

Gemma strongly identifies with the victims and constructs, with the active help of the interviewer, a scenario of personal victimisation. Whereas the interviewer initially laughs at Gemma's compassion and tells her that she is too young for wartime experiences, she then actively participates in this construction. The interviewer tells Gemma about the children's monument at Yad Vashem. According to Dutch customs he translates it as a war museum and slips into the role of Holocaust educator. Most striking, however, is the fact that the Jewish victims disappear in this sequence and in Gemma's rendering the star turns into a little cross people had to wear.

Anne Frank constitutes the most frequently referred to media reference in the Netherlands. About 63 per cent of the families interviewed mention Anne Frank, her diary, a visit to the Anne Frank house or films and plays based upon her diary. What makes Anne Frank so interesting here is that she is a Dutch symbol of the Holocaust and at the same time an international icon. Only after Anne Frank's diary became popular in the United States did it receive similar attention in the Netherlands. Gemma Zelden talks in her interview in some detail about Anne Frank. When the interviewer asks her if she had seen the film, Gemma affirms to the positive. 'The Dutch or the English?' the interviewer asks. Gemma replies that she saw the Dutch version. 'Stays the best, doesn't it?' the interviewer replies laughingly.

How firmly Anne Frank is anchored in Dutch historical consciousness becomes evident in the following passage taken from an interview with 29-year-old Jeroen Bannink who lives close to the German border. When Jeroen is asked what he thinks during the two minutes of silence during the commemoration for the dead on 4 May, he mentions Anne Frank:

Interviewer: And during the two minutes of silence do you then really think about/

Jeroen Bannink: Yes, I am there well eh ... yes, you probably don't think about it all the time but yes/yes/yes, exactly. There're always then, you don't two minutes eh, eh, really to think back about ... about ... Anne Frank, or a concentration camp, or the Germans or what do I know, or the War in general. But there are always moments within the two minutes again, that you then realise, that you then stand in silence that has happened and that this may never happen again. (hmm)¹⁸

Whilst Jeroen is conversant with international icons of the Holocaust, he admits with embarrassment that he is unable to narrate the story of the shooting of Dutch civilians by the German occupational forces that took place in the neighbourhood of his grandfather's farm. He has never visited the local monument dedicated to the men shot by the Germans, but he has visited Yad Vashem. Whereas for Jeroen's grandfather and father the local

experience of the occupation is paramount, Jeroen, like most members of his generation, is more interested in the past as he has encountered it via the media and education. But this does not mean that there is no tradition of family stories. What changes mainly is the framework. The Holocaust provides a forceful frame by which the stories of the grandparents and parents are interpreted and made meaningful for the present.

It is a curious but telling coincidence that exactly the same number of families in Denmark and in the Netherlands refer to Anne Frank. Anne Frank is a universal symbol of the Holocaust both in and outside the Netherlands. The sources for young people's knowledge of the Holocaust in both countries are the media, especially films, and to a lesser degree education. To some extent this knowledge stands at odds with the family tradition. The stories that are handed down within families emphasise the suffering of family members and some brave acts of resistance. At the same time, they remain vague on the topic of the Jewish persecution in the Netherlands and the rescue of the Jews from Denmark to Sweden. Though there are instances within our material where the grandchildren de-authorise their grandparent's narrations on the ground that they, in their opinion, did not really experience the war and can therefore not tell anything relevant about this period, these instances constitute a minority. Most members of the third generation draw both on their respective family tradition and other sources, ranging from films, books and video games to history education at school, when they construct their image of the past. Our interviews indicate that most members of the third generation use their knowledge of the Holocaust in order to interpret the family stories they grew up with. Anne Frank thus provides a framework for the interpretation of their parent's and grandparent's stories. The farmer's son hiding on the neighbouring farm takes on features of the persecuted Jew in hiding and the repression of the German occupation against Dutch and Danish civilians is interpreted in the light of the respective Jewish population's experience. The iconography of the Holocaust is thus integrated into the family tradition by the third generation. The Holocaust in turn is made meaningful by bringing it home and turning it into a potential family story.

Notes

1. Harald Welzer *et al.* (eds), *Opa war kein Nazi. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002).
2. Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation. Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge, 2000); Claus Bryld and Anette Warring, *Besættelsestiden som kollektiv erindring historie- og traditionsforvaltning af krig og besættelse 1945–1997* (Fredriksberg, 1998).
3. Lene Sofie Bak, *Forfølgelsen af de danske jøder. Forestillinger om oktober 1943 i forskning og offentlighed* (Copenhagen, 2001). Also see Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*. (Philadelphia, 1969). The Danish translation appeared in 1967, one year after the original publication in Hebrew.

4. Similar scandals concerned the maltreatment of German refugees and the so-called 'German girls', that is, women who had sexual relationships with German soldiers.
5. Also see A. Buckser, 'Rescue and Cultural Context During the Holocaust: Grundtvigian Nationalism and the Rescue of the Danish Jews', *Shofar*, 19 (2) (2001), 7–29.
6. See Bob Moore, *Victims and Survivors. The Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (London, 1997).
7. Lagrou, *Legacy*, 59–77.
8. Anne Eriksen, *Det var noe annet under krigen. 2. verdenskrig i norsk kollektivtradisjon* (Oslo, 1995); Bryld and Warring: *Besættelsestiden*, 53–72.
9. Conny Kristel, *Geschiedschrijving als opdracht: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser en Loe de Jong over de jodenvervolging* (Amsterdam, 1998).
10. The research on Danish and Dutch family memory forms part of a larger research project that investigates family traditions in six European countries and Israel. In both countries 20 families consisting of 3 generations were interviewed with the help of qualitative interviews between 2002 and 2005. One family member per generation was individually interviewed and this was supplemented by a family group interview with each family, where all family members were interviewed together. Additionally group interviews with members of four age cohorts (born before 1934, 1934–57, 1958–70 and younger than 1975) were conducted to gain further insight in generational specific ways of generating and negotiating meaning.
11. Interview with Julie Ranum (*1985), 16.06.2003; paragraph 66. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms. For details of interview transcription, see the paper by Olaf Jensen, footnote 12.
12. *Ibid.*, paragraphs 69–73.
13. An interesting twist to the problem of taking undue amounts of money is added by 29-year-old Anna Stein. Referring to an older narrative that accused returning Jews of not having paid back their debts to people who had kept up their flats, she emphasises that her paternal grandfather had been honest. Upon his return from Sweden he repaid the fishermen.
14. Sussi Jones (*1972), interviewed in spring 2005; paragraphs 149–157.
15. Amalie Fredriksen (*1981), 11.11.2002; paragraph 80.
16. Marijke Groen (*1980), 25.04.2003; paragraphs 147–150.
17. Gemma Zelden (*1987), 24.06.2003; lines 181–200.
18. Jeroen Bannink (*1974), 18.05.2003; lines 268–277.

4

Verbalising the Holocaust. Oral/Audiovisual Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors in the United States

*Maria Ecker**

New York, 2004. Two men stand on trial for murder. One is the head of a Neo-Nazi record label, the other one a former Nazi concentration camp guard, who has been living untroubled as a US citizen for decades. Their victim: an elderly woman, a Holocaust survivor, who immigrated to America after the war. The prosecutor's key 'witness': the victim's videotaped testimony that she gave for the Shoah Foundation, which is supposed to prove the identity of the former concentration camp guard. The trial reaches its emotional climax when at the very end excerpts of the tape are played in the courtroom. Viewers watch an old woman, who – in tears, and struggling to keep her composure – remembers and narrates her Holocaust experiences and 'identifies' the former guard.

This is the plot of an episode of the popular series 'Law & Order', which is seen by well over ten million American households on prime-time television every week.¹ It illustrates how much the Holocaust, and in particular the Holocaust survivors and their testimonies, have become part of American 'everyday' culture: one encounters them in museums, in classrooms, in movie theatres and on television. These testimonies will have a huge impact on how we and future generations remember the Holocaust.

Recent years have seen an increasing output of research that focuses on the analysis of single Holocaust narratives that deals with certain aspects such as trauma, memory, gender, and so on. However, a comprehensive study on the history of (oral/audiovisual) Holocaust testimony and a statistical look at the collected interviews is so far missing. There has been much

emphasis on the improvement of interview projects, techniques and analysis, but less attention has been paid to the format itself: the fact that being interviewed on audio- or videotape, for example, requires not only the willingness but also the ability to verbalise ones' experiences. Holocaust testimonies are more exclusive than their vast number might suggest. After giving a brief overview on the rise of Holocaust testimonies in American culture, I will further highlight this 'exclusiveness' by breaking down the gender percentage of the collected interviews with Holocaust survivors.

Holocaust testimonies that are discussed here are defined as interviews with Holocaust survivors that have been collected in the course of various testimony or interview projects. These interviews were recorded on audio- or videotapes and/or transcribed, and are as such *publicly accessible* to whoever wants to consult them. These tapes are used in archives, museums, documentaries and classrooms. They will therefore have a large influence on shaping the future of public Holocaust memory. It is with good reason that interviewers usually make sure each person interviewed understands that their testimony will be a '*public act of witness* open to all'.² The fact that survivors regularly ask to turn off the recorder at certain points of their stories, and the reluctance of many witnesses to provide testimony shows an awareness on their side that their stories go from the private to the public sphere.³

Ironically, in the first decades after the war, Holocaust survivors did not need to worry much about whether or not they wanted to talk publicly, as historian Peter Novick poignantly put it: 'Earlier, they were told that even if they wanted to speak of the Holocaust, they shouldn't – it was bad for them.' He continues: 'Later they were told that even if they didn't want to speak of it, they must – it was good for them.'⁴

According to my calculations, around 40,000 interviews with Holocaust survivors living in the United States have been audio- and videotaped as part of 69 testimony projects since 1945.⁵

Figure 4.1 shows, however, that it took until the late 1970s to encourage survivors on a larger scale to record their experiences on tape. The two bars on the left refer to two exceptional early interview projects: the 109 interviews with displaced persons conducted by Chicago-based psychologist David Boder in 1946, and a mid-1950s joint effort by 'The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research' and Yad Vashem resulting in 278 interviews with Holocaust survivors living in the United States.⁶ These early projects are highly intriguing from today's point of view. However, they fell on deaf ears at that time and also show how much the perception of the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors has changed since then. From the 1970s on, the interview projects increased, and in 1979 these efforts suddenly rose dramatically. Why? Partly the reasons are to be found in changes in survivors themselves. By the late 1970s, most survivors were well adjusted to their post-war lives and had successfully integrated into American society.⁷ They were more eager to talk, leaving a record not only for their children and grandchildren, but also to

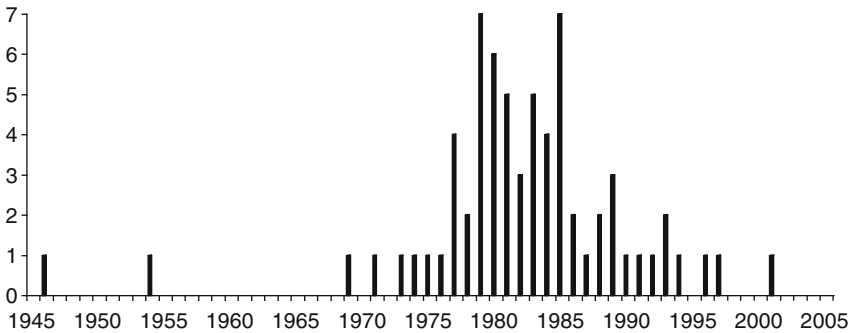


Figure 4.1 Holocaust testimony projects in the United States, year of establishment

'the world'. Furthermore, they probably also felt an increasing obligation to give testimony.⁸ These internal factors, however, are certainly not sufficient in explaining the rise of Holocaust testimonies. This change also has to be accounted for by more general political and cultural developments. The atmosphere of disillusionment, disappointment and scepticism as a result of the Vietnam War and the Watergate affair had produced a society more ready to listen to the Holocaust survivors' stories. The year 1976 with its bicentennial anniversary marked a welcome opportunity to remind Americans of one of the country's virtues: immigration.⁹ Quite appropriately therefore, two of the Holocaust testimony projects conducted in the mid-1970s focused on the (successful) immigration experience rather than the Holocaust experience, eager to prove how well survivors had adjusted to their new lives and how grateful they felt towards their new homeland.¹⁰ Apart from political and cultural changes, the rise of oral history as a scientific method is a further reason why the collection of interviews with Holocaust survivors increased; improved technical equipment, and a changed attitude towards history in general made a difference. As a result, historians were looking more for the experiences of the so-called 'ordinary' people.¹¹

With Americans ready to listen, survivors ready to talk, and scholars ready to record, it only took a few specific events to trigger ultimately the 'testimony boom'. Among them is the constitutional controversy over the right of American Nazis to conduct a march in Skokie (Illinois) in 1978, a town that was home to many Holocaust survivors. The most important watershed-event, however, undoubtedly was the broadcast of the mini-series 'Holocaust' in 1978, which also led to discussions about the danger of trivialising the Holocaust and survivors' fears of being misrepresented. As a result, no less than fourteen interview projects were established in the years 1978 and 1979 alone.¹² The process peaked – although this year seems negligible according to Figure 4.1 – in 1994 with the establishment of the

Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, resulting in the collection of nearly twenty thousand testimonies with Holocaust survivors in the United States, and more than fifty thousand worldwide. Approximately 13 per cent of Holocaust testimonies have been collected before 1978, compared to 87 per cent after 1978.¹³

Although there is no specific data available, it is safe to assume that the testimony boom more than thirty years after the end of the Second World War came too late for thousands of Holocaust survivors, who never got the opportunity to preserve their experiences on tape. Also, by the time most survivors gave testimony, they were at least in their 60s, if not older.

The Figures 4.2–4.4 show the shifting age of the interviewees by three specific examples.

One wonders how far the fact that most survivors were in their 60s, 70s, and 80s will affect our and future generations' perception of Holocaust survivors. During a trip to the archives of the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC in March 2004, I had the opportunity to listen to one interview which was conducted by psychologist David Boder in 1946. This experience was indeed eye-opening (or rather ear-opening), and continues to have an impact on my own reception of oral and audiovisual Holocaust

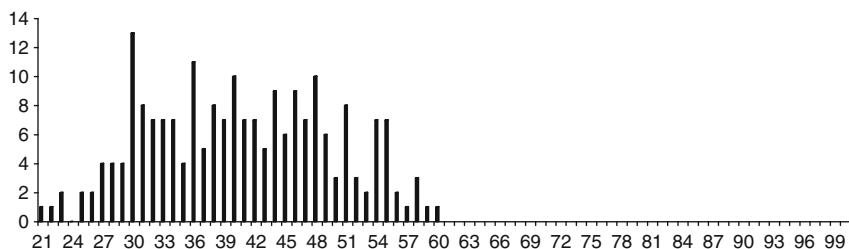


Figure 4.2 YIVO project 1953–55. Number of interviews versus age of interviewee (interview year 1954), 278 interviews

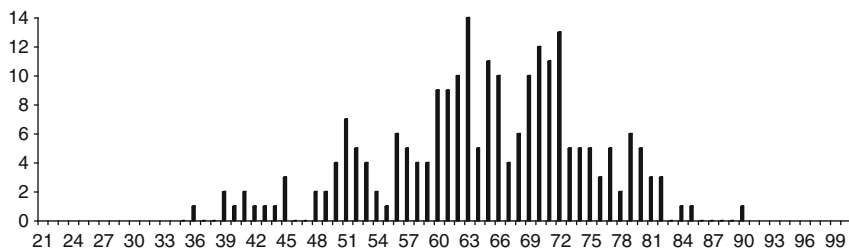


Figure 4.3 Research Foundation 1971–80. Number of interviews versus age of interviewee, 275 interviews

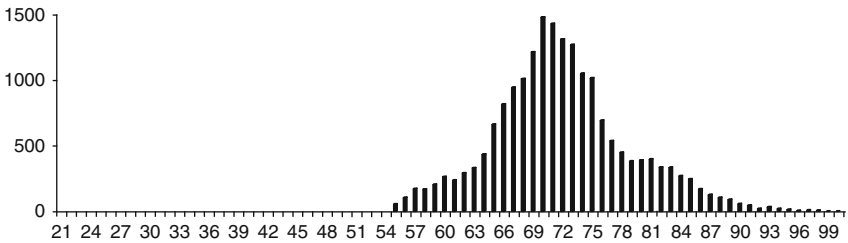






Figure 4.4 Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, 1994–2001. Number of interviews versus age of interviewee (interview year 1994), 19,469 interviews

testimonies. Up to that point, all survivors I had encountered (on TV, in exhibits, or as interviewees) were old, and they were remembering and telling an often-coherent story about their experiences a lifetime ago. Here I was listening for the first time to the voice of an 18-year-old boy talking about his recent experiences in the concentration camps, struggling to find words to describe the horrific events.¹⁴ Since it is likely that future generations will encounter Holocaust survivors predominantly through their videotaped testimonies, as old people who remember and narrate events about their youth, I wonder how this will shape the future perception of Holocaust survivors and the Holocaust.

Although 40,000 testimonies have been recorded on audio- and videotape since 1945, this number only represents a small fraction of survivors and their experiences. Apart from biological determinants there are many further categories that may have influenced who provided testimony and who did not – one of them being gender. Little attention has been paid to the question of whether men and women were equally likely to come forward to talk publicly. At first sight, women seem to outnumber their male counterparts as witnesses: a look at the total number of testimonies shows that 51.5 per cent were given by women and 48.5 per cent by men.¹⁵ However, a closer look at specific time periods reveals an interesting shift that has taken place since 1945.

Figure 4.5 shows that particularly in the first period (1945–72) the percentage of testimonies given by men was much higher compared to women. Women began to outnumber their male counterparts from the 1980s on, and increasingly so in those interviews conducted in the 1990s. Reasons for this shift can be found in the longer life span of women, an increasing willingness of women survivors to come forward, and the impact of feminist studies, with the result that women were more purposely sought after as interviewees compared to earlier projects.¹⁶ However, it would be premature to conclude that women survivors – compared to men – are nowadays generally more likely to give testimony. A survey conducted in 2000–01

Testimonies/ Period	1945–72	1973–80	1981–90 ^a	1990–2005
Male	432 (71,6%)	723 (51,71%)	2968 (49,07%)	9009 (47,2%)
Female	171 (28,4%)	675 (48,28%)	3081 (50,93%)	10077 (52,8%)
Total	603 (100%)	1398 (100%)	6049 (100%)	19086 (100%)
Black =				
Men				
White =				
Women				

Note: (a) Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz *et al.* (eds), *United Jewish Communities Report on the National Jewish Population Survey, 2000–01: Nazi Victims Residing in the United States* (New York, 2004), 8. The report also states that compared to the survivor percentage, the female percentage of the Jewish population of non-victims is lower (54 per cent).

Figure 4.5 Gender Holocaust testimonies

estimates the survivor population as being disproportionately female, comprising of 62 per cent.¹⁷ A look at one specific testimony project, the ‘Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation’, that was undertaken around the same time, shows that compared to the actual survivor population, women are less likely to come forward to give testimony than men. According to its online testimony catalogue, the Shoah Foundation gathered 9,971 interviews with Jewish women survivors (or a percentage of ‘only’ 52.8 per cent) and 8,917 interviews with Jewish men survivors (47.2 per cent) living in the United States.

While the numbers suggest that women survivors felt less entitled to speak about their experiences, the reasons for this discrepancy are not easy to pin down. One reason, however, might be found in the above-mentioned public aspect of Holocaust testimonies. We live in a society that still often assigns women the role of ‘history-makers’ within a private sphere, while in a more public, official sphere this task is usually fulfilled by men.¹⁸ Accordingly, as many studies have shown, more men feel comfortable speaking in large groups, to people they don’t know well (‘public speaking’), while women feel more comfortable (or talk more) in social situations with friends, on the phone and at home (‘private speaking’).¹⁹ Although interviews often take place at home, I have argued above that giving testimony is a public form of witnessing – which might be one reason why statistically speaking, this format was (and continues to be) more attractive to men. Interview transcripts of a project conducted in the 1970s show, for example, that women

survivors frequently act as 'facilitators' to their spouses' narrative (they are present, in the background, interrupt, correct ...), but are not separately interviewed.²⁰ To examine the issue more thoroughly, further factors (like social background, profession, etc.) would have to be taken into consideration to answer the questions who gives testimony, and if and why women are less likely to do so. However, this example of gender differences points to the public aspect of Holocaust testimonies and its impact on the potential witnesses.

To sum up, since the late 1970s, corresponding with a general rise of 'Holocaust awareness', survivors have been increasingly encouraged to come forward to preserve their experiences on tape. Holocaust testimonies have become an integral part of exhibits, curricula and even TV programmes. The excerpts of testimonies that I have encountered so far have featured highly compelling, 'media-friendly' storytellers, which makes me wonder what will happen to testimonies that were given by less articulate survivors.

The number of 40,000 interviews that have been conducted since 1945 in the United States seems impressive. It is easy to forget, however, that this still only represents a small fraction of Holocaust survivors and their experiences. Ironically, the format that encouraged thousands of survivors (who might never have felt entitled to write about their experiences) to record their story on tape is more exclusive than it appears – in various ways. It did not evolve fully until many of the survivors already had died. Furthermore, we know little about the factors that motivate(d) Holocaust survivors to give testimony and even less what stop(p)s(ed) them from doing so. More research needs to be done on whose voices are preserved and perhaps even more importantly, whose are not. While gender is one influential category, many further aspects have to be taken into consideration: persecution experience, post-war experiences, prior interview or witness experience, profession, social, educational and cultural background, and others. Thereby we can not only gain valuable insights for other interview projects, but also for the future use of Holocaust testimonies. Given the indisputably powerful impact of audio- and videotaped interviews, what will happen to the experiences of those groups and people, who – for different reasons – felt less encouraged to verbalise their experiences on audio- or videotape? It will be one of the major challenges for historians and educators to make sure that these voices will not be overlooked.

Notes

* This chapter is based on the research for my doctoral dissertation '“Tales of Edification and Redemption?” Holocaust Testimonies and American Holocaust Culture Since 1945' (working title). I am grateful to Laura E. Leone for her critical insights regarding this essay.

1. There are an estimated 105.5 million television households in the United States. See <<http://tv.yahoo.com/nielsen/>>, 19.01.2005. The Law & Order Series I am referring to is 'Evil Breeds', Season 14, first broadcast on 24 March 2004, NBC.

2. Geoffrey Hartman, 'Tele-Suffering and Testimony in the Dot Com Era', in Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2001), 111–126, here 116. My emphasis.
3. Marcelo Pakman, 'The Epistemology of Witnessing: Memory, Testimony, and Ethics in Family Therapy', *Family Process*, 43 (2) (2004), 265–274, here 268f.
4. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, MA, 1999), 84f.
5. Precise number: 38,297. This number is mainly drawn from Joan Ringelheim (ed.), *A Catalogue of Audio and Video Collections of Holocaust Testimony* (New York, 1992); William Shulman (ed.), *Directory 2005. Association of Holocaust Organizations* (New York, 2005). Since interviewing is still ongoing, the number is expected to rise slightly. Furthermore, although I tried to compile a comprehensive list of Holocaust testimony projects, there might be more that were not included in this study.
6. 70 of the Boder interviews are available as transcripts (some of them even as audiofile) online. The YIVO interviews are housed at the Centre for Jewish History in New York City.
7. William Helmreich, *Against All Odds. Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives they Made in America* (New York, 1992).
8. David Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust. Critical Approaches* (Manchester, 2004), 29.
9. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations, The United States, 1945–1974* (Oxford, 1996), particularly chapters 20–25.
10. The 'Wiener Library Project' collected 206 interviews with Holocaust survivors between 1973 and 1975 which are now housed at the New York Public Library. 'The Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration' collected 275 interviews with Holocaust survivors between 1971 and 1980. See Herbert A. Strauss (ed.), *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA. Guide to the Oral History Collection of the Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration* (London, 1982).
11. The importance of oral history in American culture became obvious again in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. While the catastrophe was still unfolding, scholars already began to plan several oral history projects to record the experiences of the 'refugees'.
12. Among them the 'Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies' at Yale, which started as a grassroots effort as a response to the mini-series 'Holocaust'.
13. Of a total of 38,297 testimonies, 4,976 were collected before 1978 and 33,321 after 1978.
14. Adolph Heisler interviewed by David Boder in August 1946. In: Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
15. Based on a sample of 27,136 testimonies, which represents 70.85 per cent of the total sample of Holocaust testimonies (38,297). The rest of the projects did not provide gender data. Total number of testimonies considered for overall percentage: 28,416 (13,791 by male survivors and 14,625 by female survivors).
16. Christopher Browning, *Collected Memories. Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (London, 2003), 46. In the course of interviewing female survivors for my master's thesis my interviewees frequently reported they had only started to talk about their experiences after the deaths of their partner.
17. Phil Langer, *Schreiben Gegen die Erinnerung? Autobiographien von Überlebenden der Shoah* (Hamburg, 2002), 49.
18. This figure includes the interviews conducted by the 'Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies' at Yale, where interviewing began in 1979 and continues

until today. Sample of Yale interviews: 2,426 interviews that were conducted in the United States.

19. Deborah Tannen, 'Women and Men Talking: An Interactional Sociolinguistic Approach', in Mary R. Walsh (ed.), *Women, Men, and Gender. Ongoing Debates* (London, 1997), 82–90, here 87f.
20. See the 'Wiener Library Project'.

5

Christa Wolf's *Patterns of Childhood*. An East German Confrontation with the Nazi Past

Peter J. Graves

Despite the country's post-war division into two separate states, the overwhelming focus of interest in Germany's confrontation with its past has been upon the West.¹ The reason for this one-sidedness is apparent. Whilst the Federal Republic acknowledged the reality of German guilt and, however guardedly and subject to the political exigencies of the time, accepted a measure of responsibility for making some sort of restitution, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) draped itself in the mantle of antifascism, claiming that the establishment of a socialist state created an entirely new order untainted by complicity in Nazi atrocities. Socialism, in the words of the GDR's official history of East German literature, was both a qualitatively new social form and the 'only [...] alternative to the imperialist past of Germany and the imperialist present of the Federal Republic'.² With a neat continuity thus established between the Hitler regime and the government in Bonn, responsibility for Nazi crimes could be directed conveniently westwards. For Germans east of the Elbe, by contrast, 1945 really was to be a Year Zero.

Jeffrey Herf states that '[t]he first East German breaks with official antifascism came during the 1980s from political dissidents'.³ That is not in fact true. They came nearly ten years earlier in a remarkable work of literature by the GDR's most distinguished writer, Christa Wolf. In *Kindheitsmuster* (*Patterns of Childhood*),⁴ a text that is part novel part autobiography, she addresses precisely the problem those later dissidents were to highlight when, in early 1985, they stated that among ordinary East Germans National Socialist ideas had remained largely 'intact and though unworked'. Their assertion, for instance, that the change in political structure had not brought with it 'a genuine confrontation with one's own guilt-ridden past',⁵

is pre-echoed almost directly in the provocative opening lines of *Kindheitsmuster*: 'What is past is not dead; it is not even past. We cut ourselves off from it; we pretend to be strangers' (PC, 3).⁶

It should not come as a surprise that what later became political currency had found its first expression within a literary text. German writers and intellectuals since Goethe have in general been far more socially engaged, and also listened to far more attentively, than is usually the case in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and in both Germanies it was writers who were in the forefront of the battle against post-war amnesia. Almost the only voices breaking the silence of the Adenauer years in the West, for instance, were those of Paul Celan with his poem 'Todesfuge' ('Death Fugue', 1948), or Albrecht Goes with his short story *Das Brandopfer* (*The Burnt Offering*, 1954), or – supremely – Günter Grass and *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, 1959). In a centrally regulated Marxist state like the GDR, on the other hand, literature like all other media was tightly controlled, and writers had to be much more subtle in challenging taboos, at least if they wished to be published. Their room for manoeuvre was also heavily dependent on the political temperature of the time, or indeed on the whim of the regime. In 1960 Heinrich Böll in the West, in an essay entitled 'Hierzulande' ('In this country'), wrote of receiving a visit from a German Jew, returning to Germany for the first time since emigrating in 1937, who asked, ' "Are there still Nazis in this country?" My answer: "Of course. Did you expect that a mere date, 8th May 1945, would have changed people?" ' ⁷ Speaking in an interview in 1973 Christa Wolf expressed an identical sentiment: even though someone from her generation would have grown up under the Nazis and then undergone the radical change of the post-war period, she made the point that it was 'still one and the same person who experienced it all – but is he still the same? At all events there was never a Year Zero turning him into somebody else'.⁸ It may have taken nearly a decade and a half longer than in the West for an East German to voice such a sentiment, but in a state where the break with the past had been so radical and absolute, it was audacious even to suggest that citizens of the new Republic might have been so deeply affected by life under Hitler that not even a profession of faith in Marxism would have eradicated its effects.

And the force of this declaration is greatly intensified by the fact that the past which the work then goes on to evoke is that of the author herself. For the period which the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* is recalling are the years from 1932 to 1946 when, between the ages of 3 and 17, her own 'patterns of childhood' were formed. So we see the grocer's daughter in the East Brandenburg town of Landsberg an der Warthe growing up under the ever-increasing influence of Hitler. Although she never actually sets eyes on him, by the age of five the very thought of the *Führer* is enough to produce a knot in her stomach and a lump in her throat. Her father joins the Party, and she progresses as a matter of course through the various Nazi youth

organisations, rising to a position of leadership in the local *Jungmädelsgruppe*.⁹ In school she learns of racial purity and the Jewish threat, and so when the local synagogue burns, she feels no sense of pity, only fear of this alien race. There are no voices of objection raised, not even at the euthanasia programme that in July 1940 costs the family their simple-minded aunt Jette.¹⁰ Four years later indeed, after the attempt on Hitler's life, the girl is still more than eager to wear her Hitler Youth uniform to school as a gesture of solidarity with the *Führer*.

Her father is conscripted into the army in the autumn of 1939 (and survives the war as a prisoner of the Russians), but otherwise the conflict itself leaves the family relatively unscathed, at least outwardly. In January 1945, however, they join the refugee columns fleeing westward before the advancing Red Army, the girl still believing in final victory even as enemy aircraft fly constantly overhead. But after Hitler's death and the end of hostilities it is an encounter with a former concentration camp inmate, imprisoned for being a communist, that finally begins to challenge her defiance: shocked at the professed ignorance over the fate of such as him, he quietly asks, 'Where on earth have you all been living?' (*PC*, 39). At the end of their trek the family eventually comes to rest in a little village in Mecklenburg, occupied first by the Americans, transitionally by the British in the form of a lone soldier on a bicycle, and finally by the Russians. And we leave the girl in 1946 recovering from tuberculosis and trying to come to terms with the shattering of all the foundations on which her childhood had been built.

It is a compelling account, not least for its depiction of the ease with which so many basically decent Germans, like the girl's father, succumbed to the lure of the Nazis. He had been a Social Democrat before joining the Nazi Party in 1933, a step taken more out of conformity than conviction, and in his naïveté he continued to advance credit to the wives of known communists until rebuked by a bullying official. But then he too joined the passive majority and, through fear or wilful ignorance, kept silent. And yet, as the narrator stresses, the facts were known: Hitler's programme had been published, the establishment of concentration camps had been announced in the newspapers, *Kristallnacht* was hardly a secret, and in the town of Hadamar in Hessen, where one of the euthanasia asylums was located, even the children would run after the buses shouting, 'There goes another load about to be gassed!' (*PC*, 197). At the local level the father knew that his army unit had been executing hostages during the Polish campaign, and later in the war the family was well aware that Russian prisoners in the nearby camp were 'dying like flies' (*PC*, 68), another phrase that had embedded itself in the narrator's consciousness. In the light of this evidence, and more, the question from the concentration camp inmate takes on new force, and this is underlined by its repetition near the end of the book (*PC*, 332), a device which also establishes the episode as an implicit frame, and a retrospective impetus, for the whole enterprise. Haunted by its challenge the narrator

muses on what she calls 'the ghastly secret of human beings in this century', the ability to 'be there and not be there at the same time' (PC, 39), the only explanation she can offer being that they had simply 'sent their minds on a vacation' (PC, 391), in effect that they had bolstered total war with total amnesia (PC, 39). Yet faced by the universal dehumanisation to which even this family fell prey, no answer seems adequate, and in the end the book is less about seeking explanations than highlighting the issue of individual responsibility, not just then but – even more critically – now.

For the main thrust of *Kindheitsmuster* is not back to the past but emphatically into the present, and this is reflected in the text through an interwoven account describing a two-day visit made in July 1971 by the narrator, along with her husband and daughter, back to Landsberg, her former home town. For her, though, the past – to adapt L.P. Hartley's famous line – is now literally a foreign country, as Landsberg an der Warthe has become the Polish town of Gorzów Wielkopolski. In an interview while she was working on the book Christa Wolf described the subject of a Nazi childhood, in the contemporary political atmosphere of the GDR, as still 'radioactive',¹¹ and this return to her roots is therefore no sentimental journey. It is rather the search for an answer to a further question, this one bearing directly upon the present: 'How did we become what we are today?' (PC, 209, 322, 369).¹² It is also an attempt, through the presence of the daughter (here fictionalised as Lenka), to show a contemporary teenager how these things came about. The confrontation of two epochs in the form of mother and daughter is one of the book's most effective structuring principles: not only does it demonstrate the organic and emotional ties that link past and present, but it also shows the delusion of putting a neat full-stop after 1945 in the fond hope that the blame, and all the emotional repercussions, could be channelled conveniently westwards. But disturbing to the narrator is the apparent failure of the next generation to engage seriously with the immediate German past. In the course of their trip Lenka discusses with her mother Thomas Mann's famous short story, *Mario und der Zauberer* (*Mario and the Magician*, 1929), where a hypnotist's performance during an Italian holiday in the 1920s, when Mussolini was already prime minister, is presented as a metaphor for the power of fascism to mesmerise the gullible and subdue the defiant. Lenka is firmly convinced that she would never fall victim to such enticements, although she is not quite so sure about some of her contemporaries. But her mother notes that even to her daughter a map of concentration camps in a schoolbook carries no more resonance than any other historical document, and in similar vein she recalls seeing lines of schoolchildren trooping through Buchenwald casually eating their sandwiches and playing portable radios. The same naïveté is apparent later when the best student in Lenka's class innocently suggests a solution to world hunger which, for the narrator, carries terrible echoes, since it would involve 'selecting the old and the sick for preferential death by starvation' (PC, 394). But even more concerning,

perhaps, than the detachment of the younger generation are the attitudes of adults, the taxi-driver, for instance, taking the narrator to Schönefeld airport outside East Berlin, who refuses to recognise the enormity of war-crimes committed by Germans ('that's not in our nature' [PC, 361]), or the German tourists on holiday in Czechoslovakia whom Lenka had witnessed loudly singing old Nazi songs. 'Were those really our people [i.e. from the GDR]?' the mother asks. 'Well, who else?', her daughter replies (PC, 286).

In the face of such accounts it is not necessary for the text to labour the flawed nature of East German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (overcoming the past), since the point is obvious. The closest the narrator comes is in a question-and-answer session, described near the end of the book, after a public reading of some of the earlier sections: 'Question from the audience: And do you believe it's possible to come to grips with the events that you write about? Answer: No. (The deaths of six million Jews, twenty million Russians, six million Poles.)' (PC, 334). The response on this occasion is a negative one located in the nature of the atrocities themselves, but the implicit assumption throughout has been that, although the process of political renewal in the GDR may have been radical structurally, it was deficient personally: hand in hand with the delegation of responsibility to the Federal Republic had gone a refusal to acknowledge the possibility that, for those GDR citizens who had lived 12 years of their lives under Hitler, the vast majority in other words, there might be some lingering emotional residue of the experience that would need to be confronted.

It would be wrong, however, to attribute this posture to cynicism on the part of the East German regime, or even simply to pragmatism in the desire to create an absolute caesura between the new state and its immediate predecessor. It lay rather in the nature of a Marxist ideology which proclaimed that, once the exploitation of capitalism had been replaced by an economic system based on justice and mutuality, a new human being would emerge: freed from the self-alienation of the past, men and women would be liberated into a full humanity, one in which man himself, in Marx's own words, would be 'the highest being for man'.¹³ With the establishment of socialist structures in the GDR having eradicated the old order and created conditions, at least in theory, for the new beginning to take place, this doctrine of the New Man ('der neue Mensch') became a crucial part of the state's early self-understanding. A celebrated poster from the 1950s quoted Marx's words on the subject and described East Germany's ruling Socialist Unity Party as the 'Kampforganisation der neuen Menschen' (fighting organisation of new men).¹⁴ Writers and artists, famously described by Stalin as 'engineers of the human soul', were duly called upon to play their part in the propagation of this doctrine, Walter Ulbricht declaring at the 1952 SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) party conference that the figure of the new man should be 'at the centre of artistic creation'.¹⁵ In what is probably her most famous novel, *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968), Christa Wolf had addressed the issue

through her central character, an East German citizen in the 1950s who is committed to the state but already beginning to have doubts as to the depth of the personal emancipation it was enabling: as a result she begins 'to ask herself what change means. The new words? The new house? Machines, bigger fields? The new man, she heard people say; and she began to look inside herself'.¹⁶ In this instance the misgivings bear upon the suppression of individuality by an overpowering collective. In *Kindheitsmuster* the questioning goes to the roots of this founding myth. As Christa Wolf said in a public discussion on the subject in 1975, 'If childhood really is an important time in a person's life, we shouldn't act as if those of us who were sixteen when fascism came to an end could now become "new people" ["neue Menschen"], as if a childhood spent like that wouldn't have an effect'.¹⁷ The idea of the New Man, then, may have been intended to give the GDR a distinct and revolutionary identity, but it had the damaging side-effect of also fracturing the continuum between past and present. As a result it enabled the avoidance of any confrontation with personal guilt on the part of all the minor perpetrators and bystanders who later found themselves in the Republic east of the Elbe. Indeed it actually legitimised this avoidance, no less effectively than Nuremberg had done in a different way for those in the West. *Kindheitsmuster* was an uncomfortable reminder of this unfinished business: as well as a plea to remember and learn from the past, it was (it still is) an insistent appeal for vigilance in the present.

Expressed in these terms it might appear as if the stance adopted by Christa Wolf is accusatory, even self-righteous. The truth is very different, for there is a third plane to this multi-layered work, one which moves it far beyond the level of mere investigation. On top of the dual perspective already considered we are presented with a detailed and soul-searching account of the actual process of writing, with an interwoven real-time chronology, reflections on the problems of narrative form, and expressions of the writer's own misgivings before the task she has set herself. Here she explains why, instead of presenting her childhood in the first person, she adopts the role of an external narrator and creates a separate, distinct character to represent her childhood self, giving this girl the name of Nelly Jordan. For *Kindheitsmuster* is no confident autobiography from a position of adult assurance. This was already indicated in the poem by Pablo Neruda which Wolf sets at the beginning of the text, where the poet asks, 'Where is the child I used to be,/still within, or far away?/[...] Why when we grew up together/did we later grow apart?' (*PC*, 1). So in the text we encounter a doubting, equivocal writer approaching a figure who seems so distant that she cannot bring herself to accept the identity that the first person would represent. This might sound like some self-indulgent literary diversion, as if the author was simply playing with problems of referentiality, but it is quite the reverse. *Kindheitsmuster* is the quintessence of a literature that sees itself not as a field for literary games or even primarily for social reporting but as

a forum for the exploration of ethical issues within a fictional context, an environment where, in the memorable phrase of Wolf Lepenies, aesthetics can melt into morality.¹⁸ In a postmodern age the notion of literature as a contributor to social or moral renewal is deeply unfashionable, even though it is a position shared with the great post-war writers of West Germany, but Christa Wolf has never laid claim to modishness. Instead we are invited to accompany the narrator on a journey of individual reckoning with individual guilt and responsibility, and the literary structure, far from acting as a distancing medium, is designed to bring that process right into the foreground. Here is none of that inability to mourn which the Mitscherlichs detected in the West Germany of the 1960s. This is a confrontation with the past at its most personal and its most raw.

'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.' These words appeared in Milan Kundera's *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* some two years after the publication of *Kindheitsmuster*,¹⁹ but despite their rather different fictional context they encapsulate a final significant theme in Wolf's novel that also engages the concern of the narrator. 'Years without memory' is how she characterises the post-war period (PC, 387), and in seeking to highlight its centrality here, she considered – so she tells us – actually titling the book 'Recalling' or 'Forgetting' or simply 'Memory' (PC, 34). For as the narrative engages in the act of recall, it quickly becomes clear how problematical it is. Quite apart from the natural fallibility of human memory, there is its tendency to respond to painful associations by falsifying, suppressing, or simply blotting them out. It is this process which, she deduces, must have increasingly taken place in the child Nelly, to whom the links of memory that bind her become paradoxically more fragile as the book proceeds. But it is the fact of post-war forgetfulness, that culpable amnesia she observes in herself no less than in others, that she is anxious above all to challenge. The exercise of memory by the narrator here is therefore not motivated primarily by historical concerns, nor indeed psychological, let alone therapeutic: the strain of the undertaking, we read, lands her in hospital with heart problems. Remembering here is – she uses this term half-apologetically in case it should sound too grandiose – 'a repeated moral act' (PC, 143), and the concept of 'moral memory' is invoked on two further occasions in the text (PC, 36, 394). The past cannot be undone, but it can be remembered: it can be deliberately resurrected through a conscious act of moral recall. That is what is taking place here, with the narrator herself both the subject of the exercise and its principal object. This defuses any sense of a text intending to hector or cajole, although the wider social implications of such a confrontation with the German past are readily apparent. The deeper our memory goes, the narrator says at one point, the greater the space we create 'for the goal of all our hopes: the future' (PC, 153). It is no coincidence that the book is dedicated to Annette and Tinka, Christa Wolf's two daughters.²⁰

Despite its critical impetus, and a spiteful review in one of the GDR's most prestigious literary journals accusing Wolf of a bourgeois self-absorption ('Ich-Faszination'),²¹ *Kindheitsmuster* was in general favourably received within the GDR. One of East Germany's leading critics addressed the disquiet, noted above, over the issue of continuity between past and present by reasserting the official line that politically the GDR was 'historic new ground, the stuff of the future',²² whilst at the same time acknowledging Wolf's procedure as a legitimate contribution to greater self-understanding on a personal level. The book's publication also came at the tail-end of a period of relative cultural liberalisation, and its acceptance was further helped by some of the political references on the level of narrative reflection: when the narrator warns of what she sees as continuing elements of fascism abroad in the contemporary world, these all mirror orthodox communist positions, being aimed principally at the Pinochet coup against Allende's Marxist government in Chile and at the American involvement in Vietnam. Allusions to oppressive structures within the GDR itself, to the remnants of Stalinism in the state's handling of individuals, for instance, are present but discreet, a fact noted critically in the book's otherwise positive reception in the west. Hans Mayer, a friend of Wolf's and her former teacher from student days in Leipzig, wrote that the narrator in *Kindheitsmuster* acted 'as if she derived all her information from *Neues Deutschland* [the Party newspaper] and the Voice of the GDR [East Germany's official broadcaster]'.²³ In a revealing comment in 1971, when she was just starting work on the book, Wolf had written that it was 'impossible to write with the necessary precision and the necessary links to the present and at the same time contemplate publication [...], but I want if at all possible to be able to publish this book. So certain censorship mechanisms are reliably at work in my own head, and every morning I set out consciously to challenge them'.²⁴ That in the event she always erred on the side of caution was one of the accusations levelled against her in the so-called *Literaturstreit* (literary controversy) that broke over her head when the GDR collapsed in 1990. In the case of *Kindheitsmuster*, however, it is also an indication of the Cold War constraints that influenced the treatment of the Nazi era in the east, no less than in the west.

But it remains a courageous book infused with an integrity and breadth of vision that raised it far above the narrow and self-conscious partisanship of much East German literature. Its focus may be on the German home front rather than on the Holocaust as such, but this in itself represented a challenge to the customary GDR portrayal of the period as first and foremost a tale of heroic communist resistance. And although it moves among the German lower middle class rather than among Jews, the crudities of anti-Semitism and the atrocities to which it led permeate the text, a further breach with orthodoxy in a state where anti-Zionism had relegated the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis to the margins of attention.²⁵ However, the breaking of these taboos did not automatically open the way for a spate

of similar works, for immediately after its publication a cultural frost descended on the GDR in the wake of the so-called Biermann affair, and Christa Wolf herself became the target of a Stasi campaign of observation and harassment.²⁶ Nevertheless other novels did eventually follow, notably *Horns Ende* (1985) by Christoph Hein, a writer who in 1988 was also able to state quite openly, in the very journal where *Kindheitsmuster* had been so traduced more than a decade earlier, that there had been no Year Zero and the GDR too had to come to terms with the Nazi past.²⁷

The shift in mood may have been due partly to the gradual political unravelling of the GDR, but it would also be a mistake to underestimate the role played by literature in the Germans' confrontation with their past. Indeed it could be argued that literature, with its ability to evoke the universal in the individual, and with its appeal to the aesthetic and moral imagination, to empathy and emotion, is able to reach parts of a nation's psyche that other branches of enquiry cannot. The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster*, asked in an interview whether she believed in 'the influence of literature', replies that the mechanism by which we absorb and process reality is shaped by literature and that in Nelly Jordan's case 'this mechanism was severely damaged, although she was not aware of it' (PC, 368f). Not least among the merits of Christa Wolf's work is its depiction of how this lack of awareness allowed the abnormal times in which one German schoolgirl grew up to seem quite appallingly normal. But even more compelling is its demonstration of the painful honesty needed in adulthood to acknowledge that reality, and then to accept the moral responsibility of having, albeit unknowingly, lived one's childhood within – to use the narrator's own anguished phrase – 'the shadow of the Auschwitz ovens' (PC, 248).

Notes

1. Notable exceptions are Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1999) and Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (London, 1997).
2. Horst Haase et al. (eds), *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur: Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, (East Berlin, 1977), 328.
3. Herf, *Divided*, 363.
4. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* (East Berlin and Weimar, 1976). It was published in English as *A Model Childhood* (London, 1983), from which quotes are taken. The curious mistranslation of the title was later corrected, and the English version is now known (accurately) as *Patterns of Childhood*. References in the text are therefore abbreviated to PC.
5. These quotes are taken from Herf, *Divided*, 363.
6. Though unacknowledged (and whether or not intentional), this is a variant on William Faulkner's 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' from his 1951 play, *Requiem for a Nun* (Harmondsworth, 1960), 81.
7. Heinrich Böll, *Hierzulande. Aufsätze zur Zeit* (Munich, 1963, 12 edn 1982), 10.

8. 'Subjektive Authentizität. Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann', in Christa Wolf, *Die Dimension des Autors* (East Berlin and Weimar, 1986), 2 vols, II, 317–349, here 336.
9. In her diary account for 27 September 1973, during her work on *Kindheitsmuster*, Wolf wrote that her entry into the *Jungmädelsbund* and its aftermath represented 'the core of the self-analysis', an aspect of the text she was approaching 'apprehensively'. See Christa Wolf, *Ein Tag im Jahr. 1960–2000* (Munich, 2003), 170.
10. In the English translation she is referred to as 'Aunt Dottie'.
11. Wolf, 'Subjektive Authentizität', 329.
12. In the German edition the question also appears as the heading for chapter 9 in the list of contents (omitted in the English translation).
13. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (London, 1975–83), 39 vols, vol. 3, 251.
14. Although translated as 'neue Menschen', Marx's original words, from a speech delivered in English in 1856, actually referred to 'newfangled men'. See Marx/Engels, *Collected Works*, vol.14, 656). The original poster may be viewed at: <<http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/Nachkriegsjahre/EntstehungZweierDeutscherStaaten/blockparteienBody.html>>.
15. Walter Ulbricht, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (East Berlin, 1969), vol. 13. See <http://www.ml-werke.de/andere/ul13_170.htm>.
16. Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.* (London, 1982), 56.
17. Christa Wolf, 'Erfahrungsmuster. Diskussion zu *Kindheitsmuster*', in Wolf, *Dimension*, 350–87, here 370f.
18. Wolf Lepenies, 'The Failure of the Interpreting Class, or Intellectuals in the Two Germanies', *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 911–925, here 916.
19. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London, 1982), 3.
20. The dedication is omitted from the English edition.
21. Annemarie Auer, 'Gegenerinnerung', *Sinn und Form*, 29 (1977), 847–878, here 855. The writer goes further and challenges the whole basis for the book: 'It is a fact that what in the West is still called "overcoming the fascist past" was long since completed in our country' (875).
22. '... historisches Neuland [...] Sache der Zukunft'. See Heinz Plavius, 'Gewissensforschung', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 25 (1) (1977), 139–51, here 149.
23. Hans Mayer, 'Der Mut zur Unaufrichtigkeit', *Der Spiegel*, 11 April 1977, 185–190, here 188.
24. Wolf, *Ein Tag*, 156.
25. Thomas Fox points out, for instance, that 'in the entire 10-year curriculum of East German schools, two hours were reserved for the study of the persecution of the Jews during the Nazi period', *Stated Memory*, 31.
26. She described the experience in her 1990 story *Was bleibt* ('What remains').
27. Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein', *Sinn und Form*, 40 (1988), 342–359, here 354f.

6

The Presence of the Shoah in Daily Discourse in Israel

Esther Hertzog

In this paper I suggest that the Shoah (Holocaust) is heavily represented in the daily discourse in Israel. I shall demonstrate how a terminology that includes names and words like Hitler, Nazis, fascists, extermination and associations of brutality, dehumanization and others, related to the Shoah, is widely employed in daily encounters. The more eminent sphere in which this rhetoric seems to recur is the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, it will be suggested that the Shoah discourse is well rooted in many spheres of life in Israel, public as well as private. It is widely used to express extreme emotions such as anger, contempt, helplessness and frustration, towards authoritarian practices and injustice. Moreover, employing and manipulating the Shoah discourse in public debate, in political and in social struggles, appears to be a broad social phenomenon. One of the most recurrent rhetorical practices, in this context, is the comparison made between the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Nazi regime. However, I shall demonstrate how the Shoah is represented in a much wider range of issues, in inter-personal relationships as well as in the public sphere. My examples will be drawn from various contexts, including politics, personal life, and welfare policies.

Various scholars have elaborated on the instrumentalization of the Shoah representations in the service of political interests. In a recently published anthology, examples are drawn from recent political events in which Shoah metaphors played a significant role in pursuing collective political goals. These include the 1991 Gulf War, the post-September 11 ‘war against terrorism’, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict.¹ Christine Achinger, for example, writes about the Shoah Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in the centre of Berlin: ‘The memorial will be a symbol of Germany’s purgation, a marker of its rupture with the past – and at the same time might be understood as a reminder of the New Germany’s special mission, based on its expertise in genocide.’² Achinger concludes that, more than anything else, the German politics of memory today means that ‘Germany is annexing the voices of its silenced victims in order to give itself a mandate for new self-empowerment.’³

Ronit Lentin suggests that the pervasive use of the Nazi extermination in the 'interpretation and re-interpretation of contemporary events' takes place, probably, because it is perceived as 'the only "unique, epoch-making" metaphor'. Moreover, 'Auschwitz has become "A euphemism, a metaphor, a code"'.⁴ Following Moshe Zuckermann,⁵ Lentin argues: 'The ideological use of memory serves different purposes for different collectives, but everywhere the Shoah is transformed into a political ideology, a code.'⁶ Lentin argues further: 'Telling and re-telling the Shoah has been employed not only in order to construct a particular kind of memory, but also to justify certain acts.'⁷

The claim by Lentin (and others) that comparisons with the Shoah and the 'Auschwitz code' are politically used in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is well established. However, I suggest that all political sides use these comparisons – those who justify the occupation and those who condemn it. In fact, hardly a day passes in Israel without the public being exposed to images, symbols, verbal or visual expressions, that are drawn from the Shoah to serve opposite political goals. Parties on both left and right wing, politicians and activists, use them. Clearly, whenever issues of security, terrorism, and, these days, the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip, are on the public agenda or are foremost in media reporting, the use of these representations is dramatically intensified. I maintain that the media plays an important role in the construction of the Shoah discourse in the public sphere. In competing over coverage and exposure, essential for gaining public attention, for enlarging the networks of followers, as well as for putting pressure on decision makers, political groups must gain the media's attention. Although the media deny having an influence on events and declare their objectivity in reporting and referring to real life, they do, in fact, play a crucial role in constructing the public discourse and in shaping collective images and perspectives. Thus, rating considerations enhance excessive, extreme and sharp representation.

A few recent examples serve to underline this. *Maariv*, a daily Israeli newspaper, writes: 'The police have declared war on the extreme right.'⁸ The article reports that Rabbis who participated in a mass gathering in Jerusalem the previous week and declared that 'Sharon brings a Shoah on us', comparing the settlers in the occupied territories to the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto, will be investigated for incitement. Fliers that were distributed in the gathering compared the disengagement in Gaza to the Shoah. The Left is also creative in using Shoah symbols and representations in its materials. For instance, two photos are used in a Gush-Shalom (a prominent peace movement) one-page advertisement in the daily newspaper *Haaretz*, indicating the direct connection between the Jewish Shoah and the tragedy of the Palestinians.⁹ *Maariv* reported in early 2005 that the head of the news division on the Yediot Acharonot internet-website (www.ynet.co.il) was suspended from serving in the military reserves because he called soldiers of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) 'Judo-Nazis' (a term coined by the late philosopher,

Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz).¹⁰ The term 'Judo-Nazi' also appeared in *Haaretz* in a report about the confrontation that took place between Avraham Foxman, the director of the Anti Defamation League (an American organization that fights anti-Semitism), and Professor Moshe Zimermann from the Hebrew University. The former demanded that the president of the University deal with Zimermann's expressions that compared IDF soldiers to Nazis.¹¹

The Shoah representations were also raised when the Israeli Bar Association Central Committee discussed the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip with the state attorney. One Committee member asked the latter:

As far as I remember, the issue of the eviction of Jews from their homes has not recurred since the time of the German Nazi regime ... My question is: If a person, with whatever rank or role in the Nazi regime, fell into the hands of the Israeli government or the governments of the Allies, one to whom they could point and say that he participated in the eviction of Jews from their homes, whether they were in the concentration camps or other kinds of exile, would he not be considered a war criminal?¹²

Wearing an orange star as a protest against the approaching evacuation from the Katif region was, perhaps, one of the peaks of instrumentalizing the Shoah symbols (Illustration 6.1). Israeli television Channel 10 has exposed



Illustration 6.1 Image of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip (photographer: Ziv Koren).

the fact that the settlers ordered thousands of orange Magen David stars that were about to be distributed at a ceremonial event as a metaphor and strong message of their refusal to be evacuated from their homes. One of the initiators of this action said to a *Maariv* correspondent:

We shall hand out the patch to all inhabitants of the region – children, adults and Shoah survivors who have already expressed their willingness to wear it despite the trauma they have been through. I know that this is shocking but this is exactly the intention. Our blood has become worthless. They want to expel us and now they allow shedding our blood, exactly as it happened with the Jews in the Shoah.¹³

A second-generation survivor, 56-year-old Moshe Freiman, from one of the settlements said that he and his family intend to wear the patch and explained:

We were critical of the Shoah survivors who did not rebel and went like sheep to slaughter. Now they tell us, look what they do to you and you keep quiet. The concept 'remember and do not forget' is not for nothing. We do not intend to remain silent like our parents.¹⁴

The 'Nazi-racial' discourse is also extensively embedded in political debates that focus on socio-economic issues, such as demographic and child allowance policies. One example is the confrontation that took place following the Ministry of Finance's policy on child allowance. On the one hand, Shas, an orthodox party, which predominantly represents Jews from Muslim countries, most of whom have big families with low income, expressed severe criticism over the cutback of the allowances. On the other hand, Yachad, a left wing party, criticized the demographic policy and racial discourse against the Arab population in Israel. Following the publication of statistical data by the Ministry that indicated a significant decline in the birth rate amongst Arab women in 2004, the ministry attributed this 'success' to its allowances policy. Eli Yishai, head of Shas and member of the Israeli Parliament, coming out of a meeting with Binaymin Netanyahu, the then Minister of Finance, reported that the latter explained to him that 'Reducing child allowance helps to reduce the pace of natural growth of the Bedouins in the South.'¹⁵ Yishai claimed that the cutback harms only the Jews, as 'Bedouins make children at the same pace, and they don't care about allowances' because they live in tents and therefore do not have the same expenses as Jewish families.¹⁶ Zehava Galon, head of Yachad and also member of the Israeli Parliament, claimed that the arguments between the parties 'reminds her of discussions which took place in some other places in other states at other times', indirectly associating the rhetoric used in the discussion with the Nazi racist regime. Galon stated: 'Had the intention to reduce the Jewish birth rate been discussed anywhere else in the world, it would be said that

this was born out of racial thinking.¹⁷ Achmad Tibi, the head of Hadash-Taal (an Arab party) and member of the Israeli Parliament wrote in a political journalistic column entitled 'Jewish anti-Semitism':

Imagine that the Austrian Minister of Finance would say that the child allowances must be cut back in order to prevent excessive births among Jews. Or alternatively, have declared that the cutbacks have been successful because less Jews are born? What would you say in the face of such a racist and anti-Semitic statement?¹⁸

Tibi accused Yishai of racism: 'The representatives of the dubious Jewish genius dive deep into the racial mud in trying to take care of the children Achmed, Chamed and Muchamad. In German it would have sounded more authentic.'¹⁹

Indeed, the use of Shoah representations for political action is greatly criticized, mainly in terms such as 'cynical exploitation', 'vulgarization', 'banalization' and 'reduction' of its untouched, sacred status and significance. One example is from Yonatan Geffen, a prominent journalist and writer with left wing, radical views. In his weekend column in *Maariv*, entitled 'The belittling of the Shoah', he strongly criticizes an orthodox Member of Parliament who made a Nazi salute when his opponent spoke in the parliament against the orthodox. Geffen wrote:

Every settler who wears the star of David and puts on a Shoah survivor's uniform to enhance his affairs, does not only cheapen the horrifying slaughter of his people more than 60 years ago, but also validates other peoples' use of symbols that are obscene to us.²⁰

Another example for the emotionally loaded reservations against the use of Shoah terminology appeared in *Maariv*. An article by a teacher from Kiryat Shmona (the north of Israel) was published in response to a settler's open letter to the general secretary of the Kibbutz movement. In the letter the settler suggested the parallel resemblance between the Gaza strip evacuation plan and the destruction of the Jewish communities in the Shoah. Using harsh words the teacher blamed the settler for distorting the truth and serving the propaganda instigators, claiming:

You know, just like me, that the evacuation has nothing to do with extermination. Furnaces will not be burning with the corpses of the holy community of Netzarim and Elei Sinai [two of the settlements to be evacuated], who will be rather substantially compensated. The trains will not leave for Westerbork ... Arik [Sharon] is not Adolf and Yonatan Bassi [the official in charge of the evacuation] is not an expert in transportations, Adolf Eichman.²¹

He concludes his article blaming the settler for denying the Shoah, belittling its memory and even prostituting the word Shoah. According to him, 'this is something that cannot be forgiven'.²²

Nevertheless, this debate seems to have crossed all borders of taboo long ago. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, has already indicated the analytical as well as social potential of actualizing the Shoah from the point of understanding human behaviour and the organizational phenomena in society.²³ However, strong voices are heard in the media by scholars and by organizations related to the Shoah, demanding the prevention of the political use of its representations and sometimes the scholarly debate as well, which seems to open the topic for comparisons and, consequently, threaten its taboo status.

Following the above line of thought I would like to show how my mother, a Shoah survivor whom I interviewed recently, uses her memories and associations from her past experiences to gain some meaning for her present life and to shape her political views. She seems to use the actualization of her past experiences to express her views and emotions regarding things that are happening to her today. The first example refers to objections raised by her granddaughter (my sister's daughter) to serving in the army. Her granddaughter told her that she suffers in the army and wants very badly to quit the service. My mother, who was both disappointed and furious over her only granddaughter's behaviour (she has six grandsons) told me about this incident which happened some six years ago:

How furious I was when Sharona called me one night and said, 'Savta [grandmother] I can't do it, I don't feel good in the army.' She doesn't feel good in the army! I told her 'It's good for everybody else but you ... what's the matter with you – at your age?' And then I asked her, 'Do you know what happened to me when I was your age? I didn't have anyone to turn to. Not only did I not have a grandmother. I didn't have a mother, or a father, no-one.' This really upset me. 'You are here, a young woman in the army, you come crying to me? What is this? I can't stand it.'²⁴

By actualizing the unbearable and unconceivable Shoah experiences and by relating to them through a comparative perspective, my mother incorporates them into her life in the present. This also seems to help her deal with irritating experiences in her life today, since she can thus put things in order and achieve a sense of proportion that helps her regain her emotional equilibrium. This is so because in criticizing her granddaughter for being spoilt (compared to her situation when she was her age) she justifies, in a way, her inability to help her granddaughter. Moreover, it appears that an important way both to endure the harsh memories and to pass them on is through comparing them and actualizing them in terms of every-day life experiences.

When talking about our arrival in Israel as immigrants who came out of refugee camps in Italy and Cyprus, my mother describes the good people from the *Histadrut* (labour union) who helped us. She connects her praises to the criticism she has of those who 'underestimate' this help (referring indirectly to the hostility of people who came from Muslim countries and complain about their discrimination by the Ashkenazi-western ruling elite). She sneers: 'They can all be ashamed of themselves ... it was very difficult for everyone. No one had anything.'²⁵ Her anger and scorn for the ingratitude and complaints of immigrants from Muslim countries is expressed by her in comparative terms. The Shoah is often present in these dialogues. For instance she says:

Believe me, much is said today out of jealousy. We came ... wretched, after the camps, with nothing, and they came, lucky for them, with families, parents, brothers ... is this the same? We came just like that, naked. Come on! If anyone comes to tell me such things today ... I am very angry. What are you talking about? How can it be compared?²⁶

And she continues her angry accusations:

I hear the Moroccans complain [to the Ashkenazi immigrants] about what they have been given. What did we receive? They came with families, so what was more precious than that? You should write about it one day. Have I ever asked why this person has a grandmother or grandfather and I have nothing? Have you ever thought about this? This is similar to saying 'we were robbed'. Perhaps they [the State agencies] were trying to help them?²⁷

And she goes on to talk about German restitution payments to survivors, criticizing the stance adopted by Begin's (who became Israel's prime minister in 1977) right-wing party that condemned the government for negotiating with the Germans and accepting the money. She says:

When the War of Independence started it became very difficult and that's why Ben Gurion [who was the first Israeli prime minister and the head of the Socialist party for over two decades] went to Germany. At that time Begin and his gang created such riots, but they all took the money. All these big shots took the money and they still take until now and I got only a few pennies; they took all the compensation money but still criticized. I still remember how they almost killed Adenauer when he was here, our Nazis, may God forgive them.²⁸

Very surprised at this use of 'Nazis', I asked her: 'Isn't it dreadful to call them Nazis? You say "our Nazis" and compare them to the Nazis?' And she

answers, 'No, no, I have no problem. I don't call any one a Nazi'. I replied 'But just now you called Begin's people Nazis'. She said, 'I just said it as a manner of speaking, only to emphasize what I feel sometimes about what is done here, things that I see and do not like.' My reaction was: 'Well, this is not what the Nazis did', to which she said: 'God forbid, no, it is nothing like what we went through.'²⁹

It seems, therefore, that using the term Nazis, as she explains to me, enables her to express her deep hostility and anger regarding her present experiences and to phrase extreme emotions towards perceived political views she totally despises. However, although she was willing to retract her harsh analogy she goes on using the Shoah context to indirectly make sharp accusations regarding the current government policy. Angry about the bombing of Palestinian cities she says, 'When I hear people talking about bombs dropped on them at night and all kinds of horrible things done to them, don't I think about what was done to me?'³⁰

It follows that my mother's memories are unmistakably interwoven in her present life. She uses them to find some meaning for what happens in her immediate and further surroundings and to construct her moral judgment and political views today. My mother's associative thoughts combine and compare totally different settings, such as the concentration camps, the camps in Cyprus, the American occupation of Iraq and the migrant labor in Israel. She points to the resemblance between the four in relation to oppressive techniques, using individuals from amongst subjugated people to control others. Her description ranges from one instance to the other:

There too [in Cyprus, like in the concentration camps] they had their Jews who came from over [from pre-State Israel] to control the refugees who were expelled by the British as 'illegal' immigrants from there. Now look at Iraq. Whom do they [the Americans] place to rule the Iraqis? An Iraqi! So they kill each other. See how many were killed by mistake, but that's how it works, the master [she uses the word *Paritz* in Hebrew, which has a demeaning connotation] makes his subordinate the bad guy. This is the same with the Germans. They turned some of our women into the bad ones. Why should that be? We did the work for them. This is the whole philosophy in a nutshell. This is what ruling is about. Look at us, we bring migrant workers, we are today the masters [the *Paritzim*]. How come? Why can't we do the work ourselves?³¹

Thus it appears that my mother uses 'her' Shoah as a moral guide, a social judgement and for substantiating her positions in daily life. She thinks about good and bad, right and wrong, through a lens; she criticizes the government policies, she expresses her political and social views, despises people who do not appreciate what they have but prefer to complain, blaming others who are more industrious.

The last context, which I would like to discuss here, is the violent confrontation between parents and the welfare authorities regarding the expropriation of custody of children from their parents by state agencies. Some 10,000 children who were taken from their families by court order, are forcibly placed in welfare institutions. Research of welfare policies indicates that welfare officials often blame parents from weak socio-economic background for endangering their children and for being unfit parents. This claim serves as an excuse to put the children under state custody and into state institutions 'for their protection and well-being'. My work on welfare policies concerning 'children at risk' suggests that the poor population, most of whom are single-parent families headed by poor mothers, is used by the welfare authorities to realize various interests.³² Defining the children as 'needy', 'children at risk' and so on enables the welfare authorities to develop a comprehensive system of 'protecting frameworks' for children, which enhance professional, organizational and other interests of these organizations and people working for them. Most of the poor parents can hardly object to the coercive practices and prevent their outcomes, as they lack economic and social resources to face the powerful state agencies and officials.

Parents whose children are being taken away from them fight against what they perceive as the most awful catastrophe brought on themselves and their children by the state. They always blame the authorities, mainly the social workers and the courts, for being cruel to both them and their children and for using the latter to advance their own interests (to attain position, salary, status, etc.). They accuse the courts for playing a crucial role in permitting this phenomenon. Thus, the term Nazis, in referring to social workers and judges, appears to be a very common expression in the parents' descriptions of their cases. Employing Shoah metaphors and terminology serves to convey the sense of a most unbearable, cruel and unjust action that was inflicted on them and on their children. The use of such terms also implies that these people feel totally helpless and desperate. Using this terminology serves parents to express their outrage when confronting the powerful officials on the one hand and when 'screaming' for help, on the other. In both cases this rhetoric helps to alleviate their perceived weakness.

One example is the case of a grandmother whose grandson was taken away to a shelter for battered children. The eight-year-old child was removed to an unknown place without the single-parent mother being informed of this. Only after a few months was she allowed to meet her son regularly under the strict supervision of the social workers. Although the grandmother was not blamed for hurting the child she, too, was not allowed to see him for some seven months. After a year and a half the boy was sent back home, whilst none of the accusations against his mother was substantiated. In a letter sent by the grandmother to the Minister of Welfare, the President of the High

Court and the director of the National Council for the Child, she recounts the disaster that was inflicted by the authorities on her family. She wrote:

I am the grandmother of an eight-year old grandchild, begging you to please have mercy on my grandson who is being kept away ... against his will. His mother raised him wonderfully, as has been noted by the neighbors and everyone who knows her ... why do we deserve this? I myself am a Shoah survivor. I have been through a lot, but what I'm going through now is taking me back to my childhood, a horrific crisis, just like with the Nazis.³³

To conclude, the Shoah discourse is an inseparable part of our lives in current Israel. Many individuals or institutions would like to delegitimize and control this phenomenon. This, however, appears to be impossible. It is widely encouraged by the media, mainly for reasons of rating, which undoubtedly plays a significant role in enhancing collective representations. This discourse is also deeply woven in interpersonal exchange. The use of Shoah representations in daily life has become a crucial marker of extreme situations, human behaviour and emotions. It has become the main symbol of evil and suffering and an integral part of our lives at present on both the public and the personal levels. Governments are criticized by comparing their practices and rhetoric to the Nazi regime; political rivals are condemned and despised using 'Nazi terminology'; individuals employ Nazi images to convey to others their unbearable experiences as well as to commit themselves to commemorating their relatives who perished in the Shoah. Thus, in a paradoxical way the popularization and instrumentalization of Shoah representations has turned the Shoah into a powerful symbolic concept in the private and public spheres, rather than trivializing its significance, as it is often claimed.

A few scholars have recognized the social and scientific significance of using Shoah representations comparatively. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that the Shoah must be treated as 'A rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society.'³⁴ Michael Shafir argues:

Comparison, to be sure – including comparisons in the social sciences – may be a scientific instrument serving the purpose of widening the perspective of analysis. There is no reason why the Shoah should not be compared with the Gulag, were it only for the fact that they both undeniably belong to the genocide phenomena, and genocide studies, alas, are an emerging discipline in our world.³⁵

Taking this argument further I contend that the use, manipulation and exploitation of Shoah representations contribute to perpetuating the

presence of its memory in numerous ways, right and wrong, vicious and pure, popular and scientific, and to enable some better understanding of it as an ongoing threat to mankind. Thus, I disagree with Lentin's argument that 'the recurrent use of the metaphorical language of the Shoah is part of its erasure'.³⁶ I suggest that it is rather the other way round. The presence of Shoah representations in our private and public lives enables and encourages us to elaborate on it, examine and compare it and make moral judgements in its regard.

Notes

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2. Christine Achinger, 'Evoking and Revoking Auschwitz: Kosovo, Remembrance and German National Identity', in Lentin, *Re-presenting*, 227–252, here 243.
3. Achinger, 'Evoking and Revoking', 246.
4. Lentin, 'Introduction', 5.
5. Moshe Zuckermann, *Shoah in the Sealed Room: The 'Shoah' in the Israeli Press during the Gulf War* (author's publication, 1993) (Hebrew).
6. Lentin, 'Introduction', 11.
7. Lentin, 'Introduction', 12.
8. Uri Yablonka, 'Participants in Inciting Gathering will be Interrogated', *Maariv*, 27 February 2005.
9. *Haaretz*, 11 February 2005.
10. Yaniv Zach, 'Military Censorship', *Maariv*, 28 February 2005.
11. Yair Sheleg, '“The Anti Defamation League” against Prof. Zimmermann for the Hebrew University', *Haaretz*, 10 March 2005.
12. Moshe Goral, 'Expulsion of Jews Did Not Take Place since Nazi Germany', *Maariv*, 23 January 2005.
13. Elli Bohadana, 'The Protest: the Settlers will Wear an Orange Tag', *Maariv*, 21 December 2003.
14. Bohadana, 'The Protest'.
15. Nadav Eyal, 'The Cutback of Allowances Reduced the Rate of birth among the Arabs', *Maariv*, 24 January 2005.
16. Nadav Eyal, 'The Cutback Harms Only Jews', *Maariv*, 23 January 2005.
17. Nadav Eyal, 'The Cut-Down of Children's Allowances Decreased the Birth Rate Among the Arabs', *Maariv*, 24 January 2005.
18. Achmad Tibi, 'Jewish Anti-Semitism', *Maariv*, 24 January 2005.
19. Tibi, 'Jewish Anti-Semitism'.
20. Yonatan Geffen, 'The Belittling of the Shoah', *Maariv*, 21 January 2005, weekend supplement.
21. Yossef Hermoni, 'Prostitutionizing the Holocaust', *Maariv*, 7 March 2005.
22. Hermoni, 'Prostitutionizing'.
23. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989), 12.
24. Recorded on 31 August 2003.
25. Recorded on 15 September 2003.
26. Recorded on 15 September 2003.
27. Recorded on 15 September 2003.

28. Recorded on 1 October 2003.
29. Recorded on 1 October 2003.
30. Recorded on 1 October 2003.
31. Recorded on 15 September 2003.
32. Esther Hertzog, 'Who Wins from the Welfare State?', *Theory and Criticism*, 9 (1996), 81–104. (Hebrew); Esther Hertzog, 'Bureaucratic Violence and Child's Well-being', in Levi Eden *et al.* (eds), *In the Pursuit of Justice: Studies in Crime and Law Enforcement in Israel* (Tel Aviv, 2004), 257–294. (Hebrew).
33. Letter sent to Judge Vigodzki on 23 January 2003.
34. Bauman, *Modernity*, 12.
35. Michael Shafir, 'Denying the Shoah where it Happened: Post-Communist East Central Europe and the Shoah', in Lentin, *Re-presenting*, 195–226, here 221.
36. Lentin, 'Introduction', 15.

Part III

The Holocaust and European Historical Culture

7

The Undivided Sky – The Auschwitz Trial on East and West German Radio

René Wolf

The so-called 'Auschwitz Trial', which took place in Frankfurt/Main, lasted from 20 December 1963 to 18 August 1965. The intentions of its instigators had been to deal effectively with Nazi perpetrators on a scale which was unprecedented. But the historical significance of the trial was far from evident at the time when looking at the waning public interest and the Cold War rhetoric. This paper will argue, however, that it was the reporting on radio, with its direct access and personal involvement, which played a major part in the changing of 'hearts and minds' and the questioning of pre-conceived interpretations, spearheaded by the broadcasts of journalists, writers and intellectuals.

Radio by its very nature is ephemeral and transient. Listening to it can occur on many different levels, from 'the voice of authority' to 'background noise'. Nevertheless, it is considered hugely influential and subsequently highly regulated. After the wartime experience of propaganda and misinformation, German radio audiences initially viewed the radio only as a tool for information from the military authorities and finding loved ones through the Red Cross announcements. The role of ideological companion or foe was only to come later. Almost immediately after 8 May 1945, however, the Allied Military Authorities used the radio stations to deal with the issues of re-education and de-Nazification.¹ Throughout the Nuremberg Trials the radio in the absence or scarcity of newspapers remained the main form for the dissemination of information. The gradual handing over of control of the radio stations occurred throughout the late 1940s, and the topic of the Nazi past started to fade from the airwaves. Only through the ideological offensives generated by the East German SED leadership in the late 1950s did the theme re-emerge in the public sphere, much of it on the radio. The interest generated by the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 appeared to stretch over ideological boundaries. The willingness to engage with the 'un-mastered' past seemed genuine across the two Germanies. Two years later the Auschwitz

Trial was hailed as one of the first 'complex' trials in West German legal history, attempting not only to prosecute a greater number of individuals but also to analyse and expose the National Socialist system of terror to a wider public. Its proceedings and the reporting from it, however, were caught up in the ideological exchanges of the Cold War.

One programme preparing the West German public for the upcoming Auschwitz Trial after the preliminary inquiries had finished and a trial date had been set, was broadcast in March 1963 by the regional broadcasters for the Land Hesse, Hessischer Rundfunk (HR). It was written by Thomas Gnielka, the journalist who originally found the files which made the trial possible. Under the title '*Konzentrationslager Auschwitz*' it was billed as a '*Sondersendung*' (special broadcast) and was transmitted during prime time in the evening.² The programme's format is straightforward: it plots the history of the concentration camp from its planning stages to the partial destruction and evacuation at the close of the Second World War. The emphasis lies on the main culprits (Wilhelm Boger, Josef Klehr, and Oswald Kaduk) and main witnesses (Dr Czeslaw Glowacki, Dr Tadeusz Paczula and Kazimierz Smolen) as well as words from the prosecutor-general of Hesse, Dr Fritz Bauer. Most issues are addressed in this programme: the lateness of the prosecutions, the obstacles to possible earlier prosecutions, the unrelenting views of most of the accused, and the hell of Auschwitz. What has to be remembered when listening to the witnesses' statements in this broadcast is that few details about Auschwitz were known at the time and that this is reflected in the expression of astonishment in the interviewer's voice:

Narrator 1: 'The former prison scribe of the hospital block, Dr. Tadeusz Paczula – today he lives as a surgeon in Katowice – completes the profile of the "injector of Auschwitz", Josef Klehr.

Tadeusz Paczula: 'As far as I know Klehr had been in the Auschwitz camp since 1941, he was known to me as *SS-Unterscharführer* [SS corporal] at the time. He twitched with his eye-lashes, well, it was a nervous symptom, I am sure he has it still, allegedly a carpenter by profession. I had the impression that Klehr was a psychopathic type, half illiterate ... The reason I say this: I know of occasions when Klehr, after having injected many prisoners, came into the hospital office and called for a scribe, and dictated a, well, a bill for "special treatment" [*Sonderbehandlung*], well, eh, there has been, well I cannot recall the exact wording, but it was something like: for special treatment, on such and such a day, on however many prisoners, so many cigarettes, schnapps, food stamps ...'

Interviewer: [interrupting] '... So this means that those SS people who were carrying out the "special treatment" received premiums? ...'

Tadeusz Paczula: '... Yes, received premiums. In my estimate there were between 12 and 13000 ...'

Interviewer: [interrupting]: '... who, on Klehr's account alone ...?'

Tadeusz Paczula: 'On Klehr's account alone'.

Interviewer: 'Over what period of time?'

Tadeusz Paczula: 'From autumn 1942 to the end of 1943'.³

The programme's construction around the issues which were arising from a prosecution of this kind was noticeably careful, taking recent expressions of public opinion into account. The continuing ideological confrontation with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) found little room in Gnielka's programme, with only one reference to the Nazi files in East Berlin's possession.⁴ In the closing sequence of 'Konzentrationslager Auschwitz' two alternating narrators point to the uniqueness of the impending trial, which will not only focus on the crimes of individuals but aims to re-affirm the virtues of a tolerant, liberal and democratic society. Therefore, so the author argues, calls for a general amnesty for crimes committed during the Third Reich are unacceptable:

Narrator 1: 'But could there be an amnesty for murder without shaking the foundations of our criminal law? The prosecutor-general of Hesse, Dr. Bauer, has a different opinion about the meaning of trials like these; an opinion which is worth the closing statement of this programme.'

Fritz Bauer: 'The aim of these proceedings is not just one of looking back [at the past]. It is the task of these criminal proceedings to establish new values. Out of the ash and ruins of Germany grew a new state and a new economy. And a new human[itarian] belief is needed. This has to rise, like Phoenix, from the hell of Auschwitz and has to emerge from our Auschwitz Trial. What we mean is the thought of equality for all humans, lack of prejudice and tolerance towards everybody. I am here not to hate but to love, said the poet. This should be the lesson of this trial.'⁵

The SED leadership also had a 'greater' or 'supra-judicial' aim in mind when it came to the Auschwitz Trial, although not so much on the humanitarian lines of Fritz Bauer. The GDR's judicial publication *Neue Justiz* of 1964 stated that the requirement of the trial was to uncover the roots and to expose the main culprits:

These are people of whom a few are again at the levers of power in West Germany. The Auschwitz Trial must help the West German population to

understand that only by the defeating the might of German monopoly capitalism and only with the complete relinquishing of anti-democratic and anti-humanitarian ideologies will there be a true guarantee that these kinds of crimes will not once again sully the good German name worldwide.⁶

For the East German broadcasters this meant a continuation of their campaign against Dr Hans Maria Globke, director of Chancellor Adenauer's office, who had been exposed as a senior Nazi civil servant. Amongst others, Globke was co-author of the Nuremberg Race Laws and responsible for the legal framework for the deportation of Jews and Gypsies from the occupied Western territories, as well as the de-grading or relinquishing of citizenship and laws regarding the 'germanising' of occupied territories.⁷ Within the context of the Globke debate, after prolonged and fruitless attempts by the SED leadership to 'sharpen the class antagonisms' through 'guiding' trade unions and the left in the FRG, Albert Norden (chief of the East German propaganda section against the West) and Walter Ulbricht (leader of the GDR) decided that a strengthening of agitational material on the radio was needed. Technically this proved to be difficult for the East German radio service as the sophistication of Western stereo broadcasts was out of their reach. Hence the emphasis shifted to contents.⁸ By the latter part of 1963 the East German broadcasters' efforts had switched to the upcoming Auschwitz Trial. In an evening commentary from 13 November journalist Wolfgang Dost spelt out the 'official line'. The trial's presiding judge Hans Hofmeyer, according to Dost, had been a Nazi 'blood judge', having sentenced an entire family, including grandfather and baby, to death for aiding the enemy. Furthermore, the tribunal's original judge, Senate president Dr Forester, had been deemed biased, because, according to the commentary, he had intended to question leading West German industrialists about their involvement in the Auschwitz camp complex.⁹ Neither of these allegations could be verified. Dr Forester had asked to be relieved of his presidency as he feared his own bias, whereas the allegations against Judge Hofmeyer are not corroborated anywhere else, including the *Braunbuch*, the 'brown book' published in East Germany, containing the alleged Nazi pasts of prominent West Germans.

These ideological aspects were not lost on the West German broadcasters, who saw the inclusion of the GDR adjunct prosecutor Dr Karl Friedrich Kaul as somewhat of a challenge to snipe at the East German's performance in the courtroom. At the end of the opening day's proceedings the Frankfurt HR political chief editor, Werner Ernenputsch, filed a report which, rather uncharacteristically for the *HR*, refers to the GDR as 'the zone'¹⁰ and laments the inclusion of Kaul in the proceedings. However, if he had to be there, so Ernenputsch:

In this case it might be a good idea to ask Mr. Kaul to do something for Heinz Brandt, who had been imprisoned by the Nazis for eleven years in

jails and concentration camps. Heinz Brandt, a West German trade union editor appears to have been abducted to East Berlin and in 1962 was sentenced by the Supreme Court of the Eastern Zone, on the grounds of alleged espionage, to 13 years hard labour.¹¹ As is apparent, inhumanity wasn't only at home with the Nazis.¹²

Comments like the above were also common in the courtroom. Chief defence lawyer Dr Hans Laternser took every opportunity to discredit Kaul and witnesses from the GDR. When the GDR industry Minister Erich Markowitsch – himself a former inmate of Auschwitz – was called by the adjunct prosecution, Laternser initiated a line of questioning which, although found to be inadmissible, nevertheless must have made an impact on the jury. Laternser asked Markowitsch whether he, as minister for industry, was responsible for the building industry, and, if this was the case, had he been responsible for the building of the Berlin wall. Also, as cabinet member, had he been present, or participated in the decision to shoot persons attempting to cross the inter-German border and if so, the court should have Markowitsch arrested on the charge of complicity to murder.¹³

Perhaps the most bizarre and intriguing radio programme about the Auschwitz Trial by the *Deutschlandsender* (GDR radio station) was broadcast on 18 January 1965 – while the trial was still in progress. Entitled *Ehrenmänner* (Men of Honour) and presented as a 'feature', it has as its central theme a courtroom confrontation between a survivor witness and the accused Dr Victor Capesius and his lawyers, interwoven into several narratives about the prosecution of Nazi crimes in West Germany, flashbacks to Auschwitz, recordings from prominent politicians and perpetrator statements.¹⁴ The Auschwitz survivor and witness mentioned in the programme is a certain Anna Silberstein, now residing in the GDR. No witness under this name appeared in the Auschwitz Trial. In the course of the programme the actress playing Anna Silberstein even mentions her prisoner number, 7103, a number, according to the Auschwitz Museum in Oświęcim, which does not correspond with the name Silberstein.¹⁵ The programme, which was written by Horst Grothe, uses audio-tape footage from previously aired programmes and explores the relationship between 'Anna Silberstein' and Dr Capesius through the use of a 'flashback'. The story is that the Auschwitz prisoner Silberstein attempts to save some of the children from Zamosć (region in Poland) from a terrible experiment by offering herself (sexually) to Dr Capesius. Capesius, having taken advantage of this, nevertheless submits the children to the experiments, which have been asked for by 'an industrialist to test phosphorous materials'. They suffer and die, and the surviving ones were gassed. Capesius tells Silberstein: 'This is the thanks for your whoring'.¹⁶

The general tone of this production differs through the very deliberate and continuous mixing of fact and fiction as well as using sources that cannot be corroborated. A scene which focuses on matters not often mentioned in the

West German accounts of Auschwitz, namely the trial and execution of the camp's commander Rudolf Höß in Poland in 1947 and subsequent trials in Cracow, is typical of the programme's accusatory undertones. The (alternating) narrators point to the fact that a number of the accused had been sentenced in Poland but were then extradited to the West, where they were released, such as Oswald Kaduk: a fictional Kaduk declares his anti-communism to the pre-trial judge, who subsequently releases him from custody. While some of Kaduk's comments can be corroborated,¹⁷ the whole narrative around the character of Anna Silberstein appears to be fictional, including the supposedly 'real' confrontations in the courtroom. The programme was aired again in December 1965, when the court-room details had become widely known through the popularity of Peter Weiss' play 'The Inquiry' (*Die Ermittlung*), which was based on the trial transcripts.¹⁸ Therefore, an announcer prefaced the transmission with the following: 'In the witnesses' statements, though, events are concentrated – therefore the witnesses [here] are representative of all witnesses, just as some of the accused [here] stand for all others.'¹⁹

The theoretical foundation to present these deviations as a relatively coherent continuity is the Marxist-Leninist distinction between 'objectivity' (*Objektivität*) and 'objectivism' (*Objektivismus*). The journalists of the GDR possess objectivity as they are aware that partiality (adhering to the party line) and objectivity 'form an inseparable unity' in Marxism-Leninism,²⁰ and that the so-called 'objectivity' of the Western capitalist media is merely a deception and a cover-up of bourgeois values, a false 'neutrality' which is termed 'objectivism'.

Within the context of *Ehrenmänner*, any denial of the story by the West, or opposition to GDR 'objectivity' can be seen as further proof of continuity between the Third Reich and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG); a further conspiracy against the truly anti-fascist, cleansed GDR. Second, by adopting the moral high ground, a GDR radio programme can 'intimidate' the (West) German listeners into a shamed complicity with the murderers of Auschwitz, which will diminish critical listening. And third, radio listening can be inconsequential. Whether 'Anna Silberstein' existed or not is unimportant to the listener. The ephemeral experience of listening to the broadcast will leave only an overall impression, possibly of outrage, shame and unease in the West and self-righteous indignation in the East.²¹ *Ehrenmänner* remains one of the most curious programmes broadcast on the Auschwitz Trial.

The programmes on West German radio which dealt with the Auschwitz Trial as it evolved and stretched over the months, were the distinctive and distinguished broadcasts by the Norddeutscher Rundfunk's (NDR; North German Broadcasting Services) Axel Eggebrecht. Most of these have survived (over 35 hours of audio tape) in the archives and form an accurate, fascinating and critical account of the proceedings in Frankfurt. Eggebrecht, a veteran journalist (he covered the Bergen-Belsen Trial in 1945) and prominent radio personality, had been a scriptwriter in the Weimar Republic, was

himself arrested and incarcerated for a period by the Nazis, and became one of the founders of the post-war radio service for north and western Germany, the Nord-west Deutscher Rundfunk, later to become the NDR, in Hamburg.²² His commentaries transmitted first weekly, then monthly, in lengthy 45–90 minutes, intensely analytical programmes, are perhaps the best example of how intelligent public service broadcasting managed to deal with an unpopular but immensely important public issue without alienating the listeners. His calm reflections on the week's or month's courtroom procedures formed the starting point of the sea change in the public perception of the Nazi trials. His main themes were impressions of the defendants and of the lawyers as well as analysing various problems: 'working through the past' rather than just coming to terms with it, objectivity in the light of such gruesome evidence, and finally, the limitations of a court of law to judge and sentence such crimes. It has to be said, however, that his broadcasts went out on NDR 3, which only attracted roughly one-eighth of the total number of listeners. Furthermore, the broadcasts were mainly aired late in the evening, which meant even fewer listeners. Nevertheless it is a tribute to Eggebrecht and the NDR, who, despite the waning interest in the Trial and adverse public opinion, continued with these broadcasts. They even aired additional programmes on the Trial, such as a two-and-a-half hour discussion in July 1964, entitled 'Auschwitz: Singular event or Symptom'.²³ Eggebrecht's broadcasts were the most critical of all West German radio stations' output, and it is perhaps surprising to note that his friend and fellow journalist at the time, the German-Israeli writer Inge Deutschkron writing for an Israeli newspaper, recalls how much Eggebrecht had to restrain himself to make his monthly broadcasts acceptable for an 'unrepentant' public.²⁴

General audience figures also hold some clues. With the exception of the 1980s in the GDR, radio audiences were extremely loyal to their 'preferred' (or local) station: nearly 80 per cent of listeners East and West did not retune their sets when listening to something disagreeable, and valued the familiarity of 'their' radio station above anything else.²⁵ This shows an interesting relationship developing between the broadcasters, or to use Wulf Kansteiner's terminology, 'memory makers', and the listeners, the 'memory users'.²⁶ The continued effort of the radio stations to deal with the past and their partially unwilling listeners appear to become, through the medium of the radio, a role-reversal of the standard psychoanalytical process, turning the 'talking cure' into a 'listening cure'. There exists a doubtless sincerity of engagement by the 'memory makers', despite ideological contortions. It appears, to use Heinz Steinert's dictum (after Adorno), as 'mass deception without deceivers' (*Massenbetrug ohne Betrüger*).²⁷

The prescribed party line of the East German radio stations' output did not necessarily challenge the listener. While there remained the task of setting new ethical standards and new ideological paradigms, agreement was all that was required from the listener. East Germany was a country of resistance

fighters which had 'cleansed' itself of Nazis after the war. While the 'memory user' had to adjust their reminiscences to the new order, no personal reflection was needed for this. Undoubtedly there was a certain level of genuine commitment from journalists and audience, and through this anti-fascist stance, particularly in the 1960s, support for the regime. What also emerges is that East Germans who had lived through the war easily, if somewhat sceptically, accepted this new reality. Challenges only came in the form of gruesome and emotional accounts of wartime atrocities, radio at its most ineffective and out dated. But the listeners' wartime memory was usable again by, to use Eggebrecht's distinction, the past having been 'tamed'.

For the West German broadcasters, this process of 'making memory usable' was by far more complex and had very unpredictable results. At the time of the reportage from the Auschwitz Trial, a precise recollection of events was distinctly unwelcome and an infantile self-idealism and repression were favoured to critical self-examination. The 'talking cure' of continuous critical engagement of the radio journalists and commentators produced a type of therapy the outcome of which was unknown. The known (and conscious) responses at the time were unfavourable. Eggebrecht's pessimism towards his audiences and public responses to the trials are proof of a distinct resistance to this type of therapy. The process of 'working through the past' (rather than coming-to terms with it, or 'taming' it) was aided by a younger generation's curiosity, which, however, often would not, and could not, comprehend their parents' deeds and experiences. Nowhere more so than in West Germany did the student unrest of the late 1960s produce such a clear and wide generation gap, and at the extremes stood the terrorist action of the RAF (*Rote Armee Fraktion*; Red Army Faction) and a resurgence of Neo-Nazism. But even when this process could have been deemed successful, that is to say, if the radio programmes had achieved a meaningful working through the past, the picture which emerges in the newer studies still points to perpetrators for ever being 'the other' and a 'cumulative glorification',²⁸ or, and this has been noted since the 1950s, the 'infantile self-idealism' manifests itself through a conspicuous public chest-beating.²⁹ While both of these manifestations imply a clear acceptance of universal (liberal-democratic) ethical standards, doubts still remain.

Notes

1. Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, 'Einführung', in Ansgar Diller and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus (eds), *Berichterstattung über den Nürnberger Prozess: Tondokumente und Rundfunksendungen* (Potsdam, 1998), 9–15, here 9.
2. *Sondersendung 'Konzentrationslager Auschwitz' vor Beginn des Auschwitz Prozesses*. Hessischer Rundfunk, Frankfurt/Main; Ton und Wort Dokumentation. Archive no.187043/187044, first broadcast 16 March 1963.
3. *Sondersendung*, 14'54" – 16'54".
4. *Sondersendung*, 44'23".

5. *Sondersendung*, 62'50" – 64'00".
6. Annette Rosskopf, 'Anwalt antifaschistischen Offensiven', in Fritz Bauer Institut (ed.), *'Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst'. Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses* (Frankfurt/Main, 2001), 141–162, here 157f, footnote 17.
7. Norbert Podewin (ed.), *Braunbuch – Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik und Berlin (West). Reprint der 1968 Ausgabe* (Berlin, ed. East, 2002), 326f. Also see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (London, 1997), 184.
8. Michael Lemke, 'Kampagnen gegen Bonn', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 41 (April 1993), 153–174, here 154.
9. Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv (DRA) Potsdam-Babelsberg; Signatur: Kommentare 1963; File 207/01/02/06–7.
10. Referring to the GDR as 'the Zone' (SBZ or Soviet Occupied Zone) after the establishing of the GDR in 1949 was often an indication of (usually right-wing) political allegiances in the 1960s FRG.
11. Heinz Brandt, *Ein Traum, der nicht entführbar ist, Mein Weg zwischen Ost und West* (Frankfurt/Main, 1985).
12. *Erster Tag Auschwitz Prozess*. Hessischer Rundfunk, Frankfurt/Main; Ton und Wort Dokumentation. Archive no. 4173737, 6'21" – 6'49".
13. *Der Auschwitz – Prozeß*, DVD-ROM, (Berlin, 2005), 28.829–28.838.
14. *Ehrenmänner*, DRA Potsdam-Babelsberg, Archive no. FEA 3, first broadcast 18 January 1965.
15. See the letter of 16 December 2003 from the museum in Oświęcim to the author. Furthermore, the museum could not confirm that Dr Victor Capesius carried out experiments on children. Their records show that he carried out pharmacological experiments on camp prisoners (males and females) in Auschwitz.
16. *Ehrenmänner*, 29'06".
17. Bernd Naumann, *Auschwitz: A Report on Proceedings against Mulka and Others* (London, 1966), 111.
18. Peter Weiss, *The Investigation* (London, 1966).
19. Note found in reel casing of *Ehrenmänner* by author in June 2003.
20. John Sandford, 'What are the Media for? Philosophies of the Media in the Federal Republic and the GDR', *Contemporary German Studies. Occasional Papers*, No. 5 (University of Strathclyde, 1988), 5–24, here 14.
21. According to audience research in the 1960s, only approximately 2 per cent of West German listeners tuned into GDR broadcasts, and less than 20 per cent of East Germans listened to the West, although it was technically not difficult to do either. Liselotte Mühlberg, 'Hörerforschung des DDR-Rundfunks', in Heide Riedel (ed.), *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit ... 40 Jahre DDR Medien* (Berlin, 1993), 177; Fritz Eberhard, *Der Rundfunkhörer und sein Programm – Ein Beitrag zur empirischen Sozialforschung* (Berlin, 1962), 31.
22. Axel Eggebrecht, *Zwischenbilanz* (Hamburg, 1976).
23. *Mitschnitt der Diskussionsveranstaltung 'Auschwitz – Einzelfall oder Symptom?'*, NDR Ton und Wortdokumentation, Hamburg, Archive no. NDR D N996/1–4, first broadcast 13 July 1964.
24. Letter from Inge Deutschkron to the author, 23 January 2005.
25. Konrad Düssel, 'Vom Radio- zum Fernsehalter. Medienumbrüche in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive', in Axel Schildt et al. (eds), *Dynamische Zeiten* (Hamburg, 2003), 673–694, here 673.
26. Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory*, 41 (May 2002), 179–197, here 197.

27. Heinz Steinert, *Die Entdeckung der Kulturindustrie* (Münster, 2003), 185.
28. Harold Welzer et al. (eds), *Opa war kein Nazi – Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), 54.
29. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich, 1977), 253.

8

The Holocaust as a History-Cultural Phenomenon

*Klas-Göran Karlsson**

Why should we research and teach about the Holocaust? The traditional scholarly answer is that knowledge about the Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews is important because the Holocaust is a boundary-setting event in European and the rest of the world's twentieth-century history. Whilst the Holocaust for some people represents a deviation from Western civilisation, it is for others the core of that same civilisation. One person analyses it as the culmination of a German *Sonderweg*; another as the most extreme consequence of a totalitarian societal structure; a third person as the result of a derailed process of modernisation, which afflicted a marginalised and defenceless minority; and a fourth as the tragic consequence of a state and society exerting itself to realise, literally at all costs, an idea about race-anchored *Gemeinschaft*. The scholarly perspective is traditionally genetic, that is to say directed towards exposing the intentions behind and causes of this genocide from an inner chronological logic. Those with a more functionalistic standpoint search instead through the Holocaust period itself for something that can have transformed this fundamental inner logic and, in connection with a specific occurrence – for example, the German attack against the Soviet Union in 1941 – ‘cumulatively radicalised’ the Nazi Jewish policy and triggered the Holocaust.

Someone might perhaps in their answer incorporate also a genetic effect-perspective, and point out the importance of explaining and understanding the Holocaust's more or less direct connection with the later world in everything from the obvious fact that there were very few Jews in post-war Central and Eastern Europe, thus entailing a Jewry to a great extent reduced to ‘virtual Jewry’,¹ to less straightforward and obvious phenomena, such as the 1948 founding of Israel and the many bloody conflicts thereafter as the result of this state's existence. Despite the fact that such effects sometimes appear only far later in history, the departure point for our analysis of them is still, however, the historical event, *viz.*, the Holocaust process itself. This perspective is also of use when we today discuss heated questions of whether the Allied forces could have done more to save the European Jews, such as for instance relaxing a restrictive immigration policy or bombing the railway lines to

Auschwitz; or, whether the Holocaust stands as a unique historical chain of events; or, indeed, something that can and should be compared with other genocides in modern societies. The answers certainly demand genetic reflection upon and around the Holocaust's contemporaneous preconditions and roots. At the same time it is clear that discussions of this kind are not first and foremost about empirical evidence and historical analysis of that specific era. They must also, and primarily, be understood from a later, modern-day perspective in which questions concerning the surrounding world's guilt and responsibility, and on the relative suffering of victim groups afflicted by genocide, increasingly seem to demand our attention.

We rarely say that the Holocaust is scientifically important because it has a strong presence in our contemporary historical consciousness. This latter term, which is nowadays found in every declared objective of history teaching in schools, has yet to make inroads into academic historical thinking. An important explanation for this is, as far as can be judged, that history as a consciousness phenomenon is in several fundamental ways conceptualised differently to history as a science. Historical consciousness should be understood as a type of mental processor; something we all have within us and which helps us to understand and manage our existence in the light of both direct and indirect historical experiences, and of future expectations, with the overall purpose of orientation in time and investing the past with meaning.² This processor is activated by what people more or less consciously perceive as problems in relation to their individual world of living, needs and interests, which are retrospectively related to interpretations of the past. History becomes an elixir of life.³ This perspective could instead be called genealogical, if one allows the term to mean an orientation towards 'inscribing' an historical event into the social reality, political aims and cultural perceptions of later times. The activation of historical consciousness has normally, therefore, not so much to do with time-honoured thinking around the 'scientifically important', but rather with wholly different and traditionally non-scientific driving forces, connected to 'm-phenomena' such as meaning, metaphor, memory, monument and myth. The German historical theorist Jörn Rüsen has pointed out that it is above all encounters with momentous existential questions – life and death, good and evil, 'We' and 'the Others', power and powerlessness – that get us thinking in different ways than the here-and-now present tense. Historical consciousness is in other words most visible in relation to questions concerning the transitoriness and durability of existence, morality, identity, and community feeling. Rüsen's view is that in our age the Holocaust, more than any other historical phenomenon, generates precisely such questions.⁴

There is certainly no reason to exaggerate the difference between these two perspectives, especially not after the latest decade's linguistic, cultural and memory 'turns', and an accompanying expansion of historical research possessing the kind of constructivist perspectives which see the past as

prefigured in and by discourses, stories, memories and other cultural products. Scholarly history activities also take their starting point in contemporary positions, in regard to theory-building, problems of identity or political expressions. On the contrary, it seems reasonable to imagine a historical consciousness which can and should be influenced by results from historical science, not least in order to, and in the hermeneutic spirit, expand temporal horizons from a purely subjective understanding of the self to a larger historical context.

To some researchers attempting to trace the history of historical consciousness, historical science appears in fact to be a decisive factor behind its development. Others, following more closely Friedrich Nietzsche's footsteps, view, on the contrary, history's professionalisation as the crucial reason for modern development having departed from people 'thinking with history', and instead nowadays 'thinking without history', here referring to Carl Schorske. Using Reinhart Koselleck's terminology, they would rather say that people's 'horizon of expectation' during modernity has disassociated itself from their 'space of experience', which means that history as the *topos historia magistra vitae* lost its attraction on the move toward modern society.⁵ The fact that historical consciousness in history-cultural research has grown since around 1990 to become the absolute key term bears witness to the need for confirming that both perspectives are needed in order to confirm that humans both prospectively are, and retrospectively make, history, that existential and moral questions have become historically urgent, and that the historical dimension has once again become symmetrical with the present and future, and is thereby a bearer of significance.

Another reason for the professional historian allowing both perspectives to act together is purely analytical: in order to understand why people make themselves conscious of 'their' history in a certain way, in a certain time and in a particular society, we need genetically based knowledge in order to put this in relation to specific needs and interests, linguistic discourses and cultural notions. Against this background, the big difference between the two historical perspectives might be better described in the following way: the historical science perspective is unequivocally orientated towards the production of historical knowledge, which is generated in accordance with a reasonably distinct system of professional rules. Focusing upon historical consciousness also involves being interested in questions of how history is communicated, perceived and, in the end, influences our subjective conceptions and directs our actions as both individuals and members of society. It is no coincidence that the scholarly sub-discipline of history of historiography has been very busy establishing its own perspectives on how scientific history is produced, in relation to new ideas and theories. Our historical consciousness is characterised by the following: history as an artefact is part of a larger historical culture, one determined not only by the changing conditions of production, but also of communication and reception. It is created by far

more producers than just historians, is influenced by many more factors than idea-based and theoretical ones, is found in a multiplicity of genres, and has a much greater readership than the traditional scholarly monograph.

Historical consciousness is a completely mental phenomenon that cannot be studied empirically. Its central function is heuristic: to facilitate for us an expansion of the traditional historical sphere's reach, and to displace the perspective on what a historical event *was* to what it *is*. However, imprints remain in a society's historical culture. Thus, we can also in historical culture indirectly study changes and displacements in historical consciousness, which is usually a quite slow-moving thought structure. There are signs, however, indicating that such changes have occurred recently, caused most probably by both dramatic external transformation processes – like the end of the Cold War, European integration, multiculturalism and terrorism, and the explosive expansion of the information society – and also through internal processes of change, observable, for instance, in the increasing preoccupation of people and societies with questions of identity and morality. It is in this context that the Holocaust has evolved into a central history-cultural phenomenon in many parts of the world. In our era, specifically, it seems as if Second World War history in general and Holocaust history in particular help us – history educated or not, Jewish or not – to orientate ourselves in the flow of time and create meaning from the past. The following is an attempt to analyse the main features of the Holocaust's historical culture, as expressed in research that in the main derives from the last ten years only. Historical culture is a relatively new field of research which today is expanding rapidly. A research survey of this kind will therefore, quite naturally, deal not only with completed research, but also the kind we need to see more of.

A history-cultural analysis can, generally speaking, consist of two different emphases. The first, quite rare up to now, is textual, its point of departure being the content, form and import of historical products: from textbooks, scientific monographs, films, and photographs, to debates, monuments, and rituals. The second and more usual history-cultural study is contextual, emphasising different types of conditions which turn these history products in question into 'culture' and 'lessons', *viz.*, representations and interpretations of a history worth remembering for a subsequent world in need of orientation and identity.

In this text, however, historical culture becomes operational in a partly different way: as process, structure, and function. The processual understanding of a historical culture notes continuities and changes over time in our cultural conceptions towards, and strategies around, the Holocaust, and seeks to identify actors, as well as external or internal developments and events which can have influenced this historical culture. Structural analysis, which is not as prominent in this kind of research, is built up synchronically and comparatively, and involves questions about the position of the Holocaust in a broader history-cultural context and the interplay between

different aspects of our interest or disinterest in Holocaust history. A functional history-cultural analysis, lastly, focuses attention on how a Holocaust history appears as a consequence of a historical narrative originating at the time of the genocide or has existed far earlier, and which the Holocaust has subsequently been 'written into'. Functional is also a mobilised and activated memory, or some other kind of a more or less conscious use of history, connected to various individual or collective needs and interests.

In our age the Holocaust occupies an important position in European and North American historical culture. Research has, however, convincingly shown that this is far from having always been the case. It has thereby more generally been ascertained that the effects of history, in a history-cultural sense, are not connected in any mechanical way to the temporal distance of the historical event in question. In actual fact, Holocaust interest was lukewarm for a long time, not only in 'bystander' countries like the United States and Sweden, but also in 'perpetrator' Germany and 'victim' Israel. The historians Tony Kushner and Peter Novick, who without using the history-cultural term have written the paradigmatic works on the Holocaust's place in Western historical culture, are those who have most clearly underlined how poorly the history of the Jewish genocide fitted into the first post-war decades' liberally optimistic and universalist cultural and ideological constructions. The Holocaust became part of a progressive historical narrative, the initial part consisting of a war that included many events of unparalleled brutality, of which the Holocaust was only one, and the second, post-war part – well separated from the first – in which evil had been conquered and safely consigned to history.⁶

Novick describes the Holocaust as a 'dysfunctional symbol' or 'embarrassment' in a time characterised in the West by belief in the future and strong perceptions that evil could only be found on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in Communist Eastern Europe. West Germans, conversely, were allied friends, and in order to preserve this friendship were not to be reminded of the near past. He additionally shows how Jewish-American organisations at this time actively worked to distance Jews from the role of victims. Instead, surviving Jews who had attained success in American society were highlighted.⁷ A similar attitude characterised Israeli historical culture. The Holocaust was for obvious reasons experienced as far closer in Israel than in the United States, but even in Israel, particularly from Zionist quarters, there was an emphasis on, primarily, the Jewish tradition of resistance and rebellion, culminating in the 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising. The diaspora and victim role attributes – passivity and suffering – were toned down.⁸ In Eastern Bloc countries, a 'massive', ideologically determined silence prevailed, to the benefit of a one-sided focus on the Russian and communist victims' suffering and valour.⁹ In still other countries this silence can better be described as relative and 'small', dictated less by ideological conviction than a political-cultural belief or a pragmatic consideration that collaboration with the Nazi

conquerors should best be hidden or forgotten. Henri Rousso's term 'the Vichy syndrome' as a description of the very long French silence about the genocide has a reach far beyond post-war France.¹⁰ In Sweden, as in France, the Holocaust theme was introduced from 'outside', by American scholars.¹¹

Pieter Lagrou has described the gradual change in public attention to the Holocaust in terms of a 'memory reversal': while memories of national resistance groups against Nazism and their suffering stood highest on the history-cultural agenda during the first post-war decades, today it is the Jewish victims of Nazism who are remembered.¹² From the genetically orientated research on the Holocaust's historical culture it is apparent how Western silence from the 1960s passed into whispers, and then shouts. Scholars have drawn attention to the milestones on Holocaust history's road towards the centre of European historical culture: a sequence of war-criminal trials, especially the one against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961; Israel's wars; popular cultural phenomena such as the television series *Holocaust*, transmitted throughout the Western world in 1978–79, and Steven Spielberg's Hollywood film *Schindler's List* (1993); scholarly debates and works, such as the *Historikerstreit* in Germany during the 1980s, Zygmunt Bauman's epoch-making book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), as well as Daniel Goldhagen's provocative *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996); the end of the Cold War; political-educational initiatives like the Levande historia (Living History) project in Sweden, and the legal process which took place in London in 2000 when Holocaust-denier David Irving sued the historian Deborah Lipstadt for slander.¹³ Successively appearing economic-legal questions and issues concerning retribution for the victims and their survivors and the bank assets of Jewish victims have further contributed to put the symbolic word 'Auschwitz' at the core of the debate.

Other researchers, German particularly, have, however, tried to dig beneath the surface of single events. They have instead explained the transition in terms of deeper social and cultural dislocations, and claim that the Holocaust should be viewed from a generational perspective: whilst the survivor generation were fully occupied with survival itself, and the following generation concentrated their energies on reconstruction, the grandchildren generation are often described as those who returned to the war, not through personal, communicative memories but from a historical or cultural memory – one integrated into a complete societal structure and a substantial historical account.¹⁴ For other historians the re-awakened Holocaust interest is seen as the result of a conscious and instrumental political project seeking to gain political, economic, and moral advantages. Some underscore the Holocaust's central role as a foundation of values in the European integrational project, while others, like Novick, tie Holocaust interest to an increased Jewish-American interest in the politics of identity.¹⁵ Most provocative is Norman Finkelstein's thesis that Jewish groups in the United States have instrumentalised the Holocaust with the aim of earning money from a growing 'Holocaust

industry'.¹⁶ A further few researchers believe this level of attention is connected first and foremost to ideological changes, particularly an increasing anti-Semitism, which included a denial of the Holocaust.¹⁷

One more processual history-cultural method that has been tested and found usable is identifying different types of general, 'faceless' cultural strategies in which the Holocaust has a central position, such as historicisation, nationalisation, and normalisation. In the case of nationalisation, or the adaptation of Holocaust history to a nationally viable context of meaning, researchers have particularly focussed on how popular cultural history products related to the Holocaust have been 'Americanised' in their contact with Hollywood. That is to say that they have been supplied with traditional American cultural values such as goodness, freedom of the individual, and a happy ending to the story.¹⁸ When reflecting upon how strong the national framework around historical culture normally is, it would appear difficult to avoid a situation whereby every boundary-transgressing Holocaust account is to some extent nationalised. However, the broad impact of American mass culture across the world means that a strategy of Americanising the Holocaust often in turn brings to the fore other history-cultural processes, among them universalisation and commercialisation, as well as banalisation and trivialisation.¹⁹ A more positive interpretation of the Americanisation process is that it has strongly contributed to putting the Holocaust under debate.

It is clear that demarcated processes such as nationalisation are particularly well suited to comparison on a structural level: what similarities and differences are observable when a Holocaust account of a certain kind, like a book, theatre drama, and the film about Anne Frank, moved into different nationally demarcated history cultures as, for example, reviews from diverse countries? In regard to the main headings and entries for the Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews in different national encyclopaedias, what divides them and what do they have in common? How do the ways of publicly remembering the Holocaust through museum exhibitions and remembrance days and ceremonies differ from one country to another, from one age to another? Such broad or deep comparative approaches to the analysis of structural variations and patterns of influence regarding the place of the Holocaust in different historical cultures are yet few in number. An exception is James Young's epoch-making study of the Holocaust's memory landscape in Germany, Poland, Israel, and the United States.²⁰ There are, however, also a number of limited or embryonic studies of that kind.²¹

Among other structurally comparative perspectives, which are certainly most effective when combined with a perspective of historical development, one can also mention an increasing history-cultural interest in how conceptions about the Holocaust's three fundamental groups of actors and categories – victims, perpetrators, and bystanders – have been dislocated internally and over time. Tony Kushner, for example, thus notes that there

has of late been an increasing tendency to make the concept of 'bystander' as clear-cut, in terms of its value import, as the other two, but he also more generally holds the view that our increased bystander interest

comes out of the rather complacent assumption that few of us will become perpetrators, and an equal optimism that we will not become victims, while at the same time we are aware that in an age of almost instant global communications, we are all co-present witnessing, even if only through the media, the genocides, ethnic cleansing and other manifestations of extreme racism that besmirch the contemporary world.²²

Further structurally orientated history-cultural problems, which in the main still await interpretation, concern how the Holocaust is situated in the history production about the Second World War's tragedies, which has exploded in debate, film, fictional literature, and textbooks during the last ten or so years,²³ and how the other large-scale massacres of modern times, such as the Armenian genocide by the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire of the First World War or the Soviet-Communist genocides, are history-culturally presented and represented by the succeeding world in relation to the Holocaust.²⁴ The difficult question of the Holocaust's factually historical distinctive character has an obvious counterpart in the much simpler question of its historical-cultural uniqueness. The answer to the latter question is an unconditional affirmative, especially when speaking of our own times: Hitler, Nazism, and Auschwitz occupy a history-culturally exceptional position as the symbol of utter evil in our age, an evil far more unequivocal and generally accepted than that in relation to Stalin, Soviet Communism, and the Gulag.

A functional view, finally, stands in a more direct relationship to a genealogical historical understanding and a textual historical culture. Its point of departure is that people and societies seek to satisfy certain contemporaneous needs and interests by narrating, remembering and in other ways using historical perspectives and artifacts, and that the Holocaust's historical culture consequently affects both the individual's every-day life and the societal development. The perspectives of narration and memory have indeed for a long time had their place in the historical culture of the Holocaust, in the form of survivor testimonies, which are used not solely to psychologically deal with the traumas. Nowadays, memories and narratives are far more systematically collected and scientifically processed, in order to simultaneously cast more generally psychocultural or sociopolitical light upon the form and function of historical accounts and memory processes.²⁵ Other scholars apply the memory concept collectively, as a cultural, social, or political entity, which functions together with different types of identity- and

sense-of-community building as well as with cultural and political mobilisation.²⁶

It is only a short step from here to the history-cultural analyses which take their starting point from concrete interpretations, representations and symbols influencing and homogenising people's way of seeing the Holocaust and creating feelings of community – and conflict. This is the research dealing with everything from on-the-spot images of the genocide, such as emblematic photographs from the newly opened concentration camps, via more or less official places of remembrance and monuments, to purely artistic representations of the Holocaust.²⁷ It is, again, a short step from here to research focusing upon the use of history. Clearly, the Holocaust's strong position in contemporary historical culture is connected to its answering a number of different needs and interests, which leads to different active uses of Holocaust history. I have in other contexts deepened this history-cultural analysis of the existential, moral and ideological uses of history carried out by all those affected in one way or another by past terror and genocide, and will here just underscore the great significance the Holocaust is imbued with when history is used politically; that is to say, metaphorically, comparatively, and with the intention of overemphasising similarities, with the overall purpose of awakening political and mass media attention.²⁸ With its strong history-cultural and moral charge, the Holocaust today functions especially well as a comparative link when individuals and groups want to call attention to and criticise diverse injustices, discrimination, and the use of violence, not least when believed to have been inflicted upon ethnic groups. At times this use can be highly controversial, as when it is claimed that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is like the Holocaust. As Michael Marrus has pointed out, this political use – which he calls misuse of history – is not reserved for anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic commentators outside Israel; even within Israeli society, unsophisticated Holocaust comparisons are not infrequently used to serve diverse political purposes.²⁹

Do we not, though, exaggerate the uses of history in our times? Was Nietzsche right in claiming that the past we bear with us often becomes a burden? Do we have too much Holocaust memory?³⁰ This is possible, if not otherwise because history in general and the history of genocide in particular are so easily and so frequently made use of by individuals and collectives whose intention is to harm others. In this context we, as historians, have important tasks before us, though not primarily of judging whether one history is more scientifically 'true' than another – which decidedly does not mean that we need to renounce our professional conviction of the importance of facts, proof, and evidence – but to analyse history's place in society. In those circumstances we can no longer afford to leave historical consciousness outside the realm of scientific thought.

Notes

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1. Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish. Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (London, 2002).
2. See Karl-Ernst Jeismann, 'Historical Consciousness', in Klaus Bergmann *et al.* (eds), *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik* (Düsseldorf, 1985), 40–43, here 40.
3. This term comes from Jörn Rüsen, *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens* (Frankfurt/Main, 1990), 12.
4. Jörn Rüsen, 'Holocaust, Memory and Identity Building: Metahistorical Considerations in the Case of (West) Germany', in Michael Roth and Charles Salas (eds), *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles, CA, 2001), 252–270, here 252–255; and the same author's 'Interpreting the Holocaust: Some Theoretical Issues', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Holocaust Heritage. Inquiries into European Historical Cultures* (Malmö, 2004), 35–62, here 35ff.
5. Carl Schorske, *Thinking with History. Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), and John Lukacs, *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (London, 1994), are among those who judge history scholarship as a genuinely positive factor behind the development of historical consciousness. The opposition normally take their starting point from Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in the same author, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge, 1983, orig. 1874), 196–263. Reinhart Koselleck's ideas can be read in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA, 1985).
6. Jeffrey Alexander, 'On the Social Construction of Moral Universals. The "Holocaust" from War Crime to Trauma Drama', in Jeffrey Alexander *et al.* (eds), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (London, 2004), 196–263, here 196ff., Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination. A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994).
7. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, MA, 1999), chapter 5. Quotations on 85f. See also Franklin Bialystok, *Delayed Impact. The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal, 2000).
8. Dalia Ofer, 'Israel', in David S. Wyman (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore, MD, 1996), 836–923, here 852ff, Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993), chapter 1; Mikael Tossavainen, 'Calendar, Context and Commemoration. Establishing an Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund, 2003), 59–80, here 68–71.
9. William Korey, 'In History's "Memory Hole": The Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust', in Randolph Braham (ed.), *Contemporary Views of the Holocaust* (Boston, MA, 1983), 145–156; Zvi Gitelman, 'Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union', in the same author (ed.), *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington, IN 1997), 14–42; Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust and Russian Historical Culture: A Century-long Perspective', in Karlsson and Zander, *Echoes*, 201–222.

10. Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome. History and Memory in France since 1944* (London, 1991).
11. For France, see Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York, 1972); Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York, 1981); Joan Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust. The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford, CA, 2004). For Sweden, see Steven Koblik, *The Stones Cry Out: Sweden's Response to the Persecution of Jews 1933–1945* (New York, 1988); Paul A. Levine, *From Indifference to Activism: Swedish Diplomacy and the Holocaust, 1938–1944* (Uppsala, 1998).
12. Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation. Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge, 2000), chapter 13.
13. See survey works such as Novick, *American Life* and Wyman, *World Reacts*. For legal-historical special studies see Donald Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial. War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory* (Oxford, 2001); Don D. Guttenplan, *The Holocaust on Trial: History, Justice, and the David Irving Libel Case* (London, 2001).
14. Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999); Moshe Zuckermann, *Zweierlei Holocaust. Der Holocaust in den politischen Kulturen Israels und Deutschlands* (Göttingen, 1998).
15. The significance of the Holocaust as a historical nucleus of common European values is taken up by, among others, Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust as Politics and Use of History', in Kurt Almqvist and Kay Glans (eds), *The Swedish Success Story?* (Stockholm, 2004), 241–251.
16. Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry. Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London, 2000).
17. Białystok, *Delayed Impact*, chapter 4.
18. Alvin Rosenfeld, 'The Americanization of the Holocaust' in the same author (ed.), *Thinking about the Holocaust after Half a Century* (Bloomington, IN, 1997), 119–150; Hilene Flanzbaum (ed.), *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (London, 1999); John K. Roth, *Holocaust Politics* (Louisville, KY, 2001).
19. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1984); Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, 1992); Andreas Huyssen, 'Monuments and Holocaust Memory in a Media Age', in the same author, *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London, 1995), 249–260.
20. James Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London, 1993).
21. See Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (London, 1997); Ulf Zander, 'Holocaust at the Limits. Historical Culture and the Nazi Genocide in the Television Era', in Karlsson and Zander, *Echoes*, 255–292; Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust. From Auschwitz to Schindler. How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York, 1999); Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory. The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1997).
22. Tony Kushner, '“Pissing in the Wind”? The Search for Nuance in the Study of Holocaust “Bystanders”', in David Cesarani and Paul Levine (eds), *'Bystanders' of the Holocaust. A Re-Evaluation* (London, 2002), 57–76, here 60.
23. The situation is better when it comes to scientific history writing; see Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (London, 1981); Richard J.B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz & Hiroshima. History Writing and the Second World War 1945–1990* (London, 1993). For the theme of film and the Holocaust, see

- Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows. Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989); Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust. Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington, IN, 1988). The Holocaust in fictional literature is a subject treated in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (London, 1988).
24. However, Omer Bartov et al. (eds), *Crimes of War. Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2002); David Lorey and William Beezley (eds), *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory. The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, 2002); Kristian Gerner and Klas-Göran Karlsson, *Folkmordens historia. Perspektiv på det moderna samhällets skuggsida* (Stockholm, 2005).
 25. Some examples are Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies. The Ruins of Memory* (London, 1991); Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow. In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York, 2002); Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge. A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (London, 2004).
 26. The literature on this concept of memory and its concrete manifestations, often based on Maurice Halbwach's theories, is today substantial. See for example, John Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (London, 1998); Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe. Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, 2002).
 27. See for example, Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst. The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (Oxford, 1996); Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget. Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (London, 1998); Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobovitz (eds), *Image and Remembrance. Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN, 2003). For sites of memory related to the Holocaust, see Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz – 1270 to the Present* (London, 1996); Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau. The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001* (Cambridge, 2001); Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945–1979* (Athens, 2003).
 28. Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture. Theoretical and Analytical Challenges', in Karlsson and Zander, *Echoes*, 9–57, here 38–43; Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'Public Uses of History in Contemporary Europe', in Harriet Jones et al. (eds), *Contemporary History on Trial* (Manchester, forthcoming).
 29. Michael Marrus, 'The Use and Misuse of the Holocaust', in Peter Hayes (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies. The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World* (Evanston, IL, 1991), 106–119, here 113–115.
 30. Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (London, 1997), 160–162; and the same author's 'A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial', *History & Memory*, 5 (Autumn–Winter 1993), 136–151, here 144f.

9

Between the Holocaust and Trianon – Historical Culture in Hungary

*Kristian Gerner**

‘Trianon’... is a concept that is not only historical, but very much part of modern culture. I often ask Hungarians, who continue to refer to Trianon, what they want. They admit that they do not want the land, but they don’t want people to forget – to forget the evils of Trianon and how the Hungarians suffered.¹

Historical culture is about public memory, that is, representations of the past in the public sphere. It ranges from scholarly works to monuments, novels and movies, to ‘sites of memory’ in Pierre Nora’s sense.² An important part of historical culture is public debate and political discussion. Certainly it is impossible to record all instances of public attention to or commemoration of historical events and personalities in a certain country in a certain period. However, what can be gauged and discussed is the prominence or absence of, in our case, Jewish history in general and the Holocaust in particular in the public sphere in Hungary. The Jewish dimension was absolutely central in the modernisation of Hungary between 1867 and 1914, that is, the historical period that preceded the epoch of the Holocaust.³ The Polish scholar Antonina Kloskowska has suggested the concept of ‘bivalence’ to denote ‘non-conflicting interlinking of elements selected from two cultures, possessed, approximately, in the same degree and accepted as close to one’s value system’.⁴ Kloskowska refers to two ethnic – confessional or linguistic – categories in a state and an (any) individual’s ability to identify with both. Is it possible for a political culture in a state to be bivalent in the sense that it incorporates narrations and sites of memory of two ethnic categories?

In order to grasp the importance and salient place of ‘the Jewish question’ in interwar Hungary, it is necessary to understand the great national trauma, which bears the name ‘Trianon’. In the peace treaty of Trianon on 4 June 1920, Hungary was forced to cede two-thirds of its pre-war territory. The lost lands included Slovakia, the capital of which, Bratislava, had been Hungary’s

capital – under the name Pozsony – from 1571 to 1784, and Transylvania, which had belonged to the Hungarian crown from the Middle Ages and which in the nineteenth century had been elevated in Hungarian historical culture to a symbol of Hungarianness. Practically no politician in Hungary accepted the ‘verdict’ of Trianon. The refutation was captured in the slogan *Nem, nem soha* (‘No, no never’). In *Szabadság Ter* (Freedom Square) in the centre of Budapest – within sight of the parliament – there were four monuments symbolising the loss of Burgenland, Slovakia, Transylvania and the Vojvodina. In the square there was also the Trianon monument with *Turul*.⁵ The Hungarian national flag hangs halfway down the monument’s flagpole. The Trianon monument was a tombstone. The Hungarian declaration of faith, which was adopted after 1920, reads ‘I believe in God, I believe in the Fatherland, I believe in eternal divine justice, I believe in the resurrection of Hungary.’⁶

In an analysis of Hungarian historical myths, Éva Kovács and Gerhard Seewann assert that ‘the obsession with history’ in *contemporary* Hungary, that is, more than eighty years later and after another world war, is founded on ‘the trauma of Trianon’.⁷ Anyhow, it is obvious that a basic factor behind Hungary’s siding with Germany in 1938 was the wish to revise the Trianon boundaries. In a similar way as ‘the Jews’ were held responsible by the Nazis for the Versailles ‘verdict’, ‘the Jews’ were held responsible by the Hungarian political elite for the Trianon peace. The interpretation was that Hungary had been ‘punished’ not only for its defeat in the World War but also because of the existence of Béla Kun’s Soviet republic in 1919, which was perceived at the time as a threat to the new order to be established by the Allied powers in Central Europe. Kun and most of the people’s commissars in his government were of Jewish origin. The historian István Deák has noted that in the interwar period the Hungarian parliament was ‘obsessed with the “Jewish question”’ and that ‘pre-occupation with the Jews was akin to a sickness that afflicted all strata of society, but especially the educated classes’.⁸ In the countryside, Budapest was called Judapest. This refers to a very important divide among the intellectuals in interwar Hungary between urbanists – *urbanisták* – and populists – *népiek*.⁹ ‘Populism’ referred to the countryside, the peasants, the soil and race. ‘Urbanism’ referred to Budapest. The urbanists were modernists and socialists. Many among the latter were emancipated, assimilated Jews in the capital. The political conflict between populists and urbanists acquired an anti-Semitic dimension because the latter were associated with concepts such as cosmopolitanism and internationalism, as opposed to the patriotism of the ‘people’, i.e., the peasantry. The word ‘Judapest’ indicated that the capital was dominated by Jewish capitalists and Jewish left-wing intellectuals, both considered to be un-patriotic. Many leading populists were not anti-Semites. Nevertheless the division between ‘the people’ and ‘the Jews’ in Hungarian society and culture was reinforced by anti-Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941.¹⁰

As a consequence of developments from the mid-nineteenth century, Jews had a prominent position in pre-war Hungarian economy. Whereas the Jews constituted about 6 per cent of the population, in 1930–55 per cent of physicians, 49 per cent of attorneys, 30 per cent of engineers, 59 per cent of bank officials and 46 per cent of salesmen were Jews by religion. Roughly 25 per cent of the Jews were well off and a few families were the major owners of Jewish wealth.¹¹ The proportion of poor people among Jews was considerable. However, among the Gentiles, it was a common perception that ‘the Jews’ were rich and ‘the people’ poor. Gábor Kádár and Zoltan Vági explain that it made both political and economic ‘sense’ to expropriate the Jewish population:

These dynasties, no more than a few dozen, owned a high proportion of total Jewish assets, thereby acquiring a degree of highly concentrated economic influence, coupled, for a certain period, with political influence that was virtually unparalleled in any other country. The economic and politic significance of these numbers becomes clear if we consider that discriminating against 5–6 per cent of the population permitted the redistribution of 20–25 per cent of national wealth. Therefore, given the scale of these assets, the looting of Jewish wealth in Hungary offered much greater profits than anywhere else in Europe.¹²

The adoption of the anti-Jewish laws resulted in the expropriation of the Jews. There followed the deportation of the major part of the Hungarian Jewish population in 1944. The Germans organised the deportations, but obviously this was the logical end of Hungarian politics.

The history of the Jews in Hungary from the emancipation to the first communist years was called to life by the Hungarian director István Szabó in his film *Sunshine* in 1999. Szabó has declared that the film ‘is the story of his family and of all the other Jewish families in Budapest he knows’.¹³ A total of five generations is covered. The story opens with an explosion in the distillery of a rural innkeeper. The whole family is killed except for the son Emmanuel, who takes with him to the capital the recipe of the herbal tonic produced in the distillery and builds a successful enterprise: he is typical of the first generation of Jewish entrepreneurs in late Habsburgian Hungary. In the movie, Emmanuel’s son Ignatz becomes a successful judge. Thereby the general emancipation pattern is followed. The entrepreneur’s son becomes an academic in state service. Especially the fate of the interwar generation is relevant to the discussion of the Holocaust in Hungary. It brings in assimilation in a double sense: change of the family name from Yiddish *Sonnenschein* to Hungarian *Sors* (Fate), and conversion to Catholicism to become ‘Hungarian’. Furthermore there is a conscious refutation of the image of the physically weak Jew. The main protagonist in this part of the story is the fencer Adam Sors (here the ‘model’ was Attila Petschauer, who won an Olympic gold

medal in fencing in Berlin in 1936). Adam Sors becomes a reserve officer in the Hungarian army but is finally tortured to death in a concentration camp, only because he is Jewish by 'race'. His son, who survives the war, becomes a communist security policeman. Finally disillusioned, he ends up recognising his Jewish identity.

Szabó's movie is a historical and sociological study of the fate of Hungarian Jews both in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in interwar Hungary, during the Holocaust and in the communist period. As an item of contemporary Hungarian historical culture, the film is a sample of the tragic history of the Jews in Hungary. Critics of *Sunshine* have been keen to comment on the tragedy of refuted assimilation. Thus, Susan Suleiman observes that '[t]he specificity of Hungarian Jews until the Holocaust [...] is that they felt Hungarian: they were not exiles, Hungary was their home. Furthermore [...] they played an important historical role in the modernization of Hungary and in the creation of modern Hungarian identity.'¹⁴

564,500 Hungarian Jews became victims of the Holocaust. The number includes the territories that were acquired in 1938 and 1940 from Romania and Czechoslovakia, and in 1941 from Yugoslavia. It thus includes all Jews that were murdered in territories under Hungarian jurisdiction during the Holocaust. In 1945, Hungary's Jewish population numbered around 100,000.¹⁵

After 1989, Hungarian society had to cope with the Holocaust and the communist era. However, also other dimensions of pre-war and wartime history came to the fore. This made the treatment of the memory of the Holocaust after 1989 a thorny issue, because all attempts to rehabilitate politicians from the interwar period and from the war years brought forward the fate of the Jews in those days. A good example of the controversy between a Hungarian national and a Hungarian Jewish standpoint is the fate of Admiral Miklós Horthy's terrestrial remnants after his death. Horthy acted as head of state of Hungary in the absence of a king in the period 1919–44. His reign saw governments of different political colours, among them that of the fascist-leaning Gyula Gömbös in the late 1930s and the two anti-Jewish Teleki governments in the beginning and towards the end of the interwar period. In July 1944 Horthy halted the deportations of the Jews, especially those from Budapest. However, 430,000 Jews had already been deported and exterminated between 15 May and 7 July. In history, Horthy remains the person who was Hungary's head of state when 550,000 of the country's Jews were sent to the gas chambers. Horthy is remembered in Hungary also for his attempt to reach a separate peace with the Western powers in the autumn of 1944. The attempt failed. Horthy was forced into exile, and the butchering of the Jews could be resumed under the Szálasi regime. Horthy died in exile in Portugal in 1957 and was buried there. In his will, he asked that his body not be returned to Hungary 'until the last Russian soldier has left'. In 1993 when the last Russian (Soviet) troops had been withdrawn from Hungary,

Horthy's ashes were returned and reburied in his hometown Kenderes.¹⁶ Ministers of the Antall government – the dominant party, Hungarian Democratic Forum, belonged in the populist tradition – attended the reburial. This was met with sharp criticism from the social-democratic and liberal opposition, that is representatives of the urbanist tradition. They interpreted the event as a homage to fascism.¹⁷ Michael Shafir has called attention to the fact that the issue of whether the memory of Admiral Horthy should be honoured in Hungary is not a case of dealing with historical complexity and the weighing of different aspects, but with 'who remembers whom and why' and with 'who remembers what and why'. Furthermore, Shafir argues, when it comes to historical figures, '[p]oliticians and historical figures can be legitimised (or de-legitimised, or re-legitimised) only for the purpose of the present'.¹⁸

Michael Shafir has also reported another issue of the same kind as the Horthy case. It concerned the project of a statue to honour the memory of Pál Teleki, launched by nationalist associations.¹⁹ The statue was unveiled on 3 April 2004, on the anniversary of Teleki's suicide in 1941. The first anti-Jewish *numerus clausus* law in 1920 was adopted under Teleki's first period as premier and the racist anti-Semitic legislation came under his second period 1939–41. However, for most Hungarians Teleki was remembered for the reconquest of northern Transylvania in 1940 and the attempt to keep equal distance between Germany and Britain in foreign affairs. Teleki committed suicide when Hungary was forced by Hitler either to attack Yugoslavia on the German side or to resist a German invasion. Hungary did become Hitler's ally and attacked Yugoslavia, and Teleki became a martyr for the Hungarian case. After protests from the Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Religious Communities (MAZSIHISZ) and the Wiesenthal Centre, the Budapest City Council rescinded its authorisation of the project.²⁰ The event was a clear-cut example of a clash not only about the public space but also, in relation to this, over historical culture. Should the national hero be commemorated or should the anti-Jewish perpetrator remain outside public commemoration? The Teleki and Horthy cases show that the Jewish dimension affects a core element of the country's historical culture, that is the role of national 'heroes'.

Thus, in the Hungarian fight over commemorations in the public space and over what to honour and what to omit from the historical culture, the old populist – urbanist divide from the interwar period re-emerged. As was hinted above, it became linked to the opposite camps in the political arena. The contemporary urbanists are the Social Democrats (the post-Communists) and the liberal young democrats. On the populist side is the Hungarian Democratic Forum, which led the first post-Communist government from 1990 to 1994, and FIDESZ, (The Hungarian Citizens Party) which led the third post-Communist government during 1998–2002. Among the contemporary urbanists have been people of Jewish descent. The modern populists have identified themselves with ethnic Hungarian issues, especially with the

Magyar minorities in Slovakia, Serbia and Romania. Anti-communism has been high on the populist agenda.²¹

The contemporary form of the urbanist – populist divide and the struggle over historical culture found concrete expression concerning two exhibitions on the Holocaust and communist terror in Hungary, respectively. When he became premier in 1998, the FIDESZ leader Viktor Orbán decided to have the Hungarian pavilion in the museum in Auschwitz remade, with Shafir's words, into a 'pro-Horthy apologia designed to sanitize the Nazi era in general and the Hungarian involvement in the Final Solution in particular'.²² The new exhibition would present the image of a happy life for the Jews in Hungary between 1867 and 1944. The whole project was cancelled after protests from MAZSIHISZ. Orbán's special expert on the issue of Auschwitz, Mária Schmidt, argued that the Holocaust had been a 'marginal issue' in the Second World War and moreover, that if the word should be used, it should primarily denote the communist 'genocide' in Hungary.²³ Schmidt held that the social-democrats and liberals in Hungary 'decided on the overexposure of the "Jewish question" ' in order to discredit their bourgeois opponents.²⁴

In 2002, towards the end of the Orbán regime, on the eve of the new elections that would bring the Social Democrats back into power, Mária Schmidt became the director of the new *Terror Háza* (House of Terror) museum.²⁵ It is nominally dedicated to the victims of both Nazi and communist terror, but only 2 of the 24 rooms are dedicated to the former – that is to the Arrow Cross regime in late 1944 – and the rest to the latter. The exhibition is presented at the home page of the museum:

Walking through the halls named after the periods exhibited within them, one can get acquainted, in chronological order, first with the terror of the Hungarian nazi and then the communist regime. The exhibition entitled Double Occupation presents Hungary's two subsequent occupations. In one side of the room, Hungary can be seen under Nazi German occupation, in the other, under Soviet rule. After 1945, when Rákosi and the communists trained in Moscow returned home, the Hungarian Communist Party's membership was minimal, and so a number of the so-called small-time Arrow-cross people of the previous regime also had to be accepted in order to grow. The room also tries to present that all layers of society 'changed their clothes' and entered into a new world. This hall is aimed at presenting the roughest period of communism in Hungary. The monitors show excerpts from 50s news programs. Placing the headphones on our heads, we can hear political speeches from major communist leaders of the era (Farkas, Révai, Gerő.) Behind the fancy curtains, we can find tapping devices from the time.²⁶

The exhibition thus suggested that communist terror had been more important than the Arrow Cross terror. Moreover, because both FIDESZ and the

notorious, openly anti-Semitic Hungarian Life and Justice Party publicly missed few chances to state that some of Hungary's worst communists had been Jewish, according to Shafir, 'the implicit message received by the museum's visitors was that the Jews were responsible for the country's post-war ordeal.'²⁷ István Deák has observed that in contemporary Hungary nationalists blame the Arrow Cross for all atrocities at the end of the war in order to exonerate Admiral Horthy's regime. Concerning the rather innocent words in the House of Terror on the 'major communist leaders of the era', Deák has made clear the context for these words by going into the relevant details, that may be supposed to be well known by all Hungarians with the slightest interest in history:

The reconstruction of Hungary in ruins proceeded at an amazing pace in which Jewish entrepreneurs and engineers played a crucial role. Moreover, because the Jews alone were absolutely reliable and untainted by fascist crimes, the Soviet occupation authorities, and the first democratic coalition governments, entrusted the Jewish survivors with key positions in the police and administration. In 1947–1949, the Communist leaders, returning from Moscow, gradually established a totalitarian dictatorship; the infamous Bolshevik 'Quadriga', consisting of Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, Mihály Farkas and József Révai, were all of Jewish origin, and so was the head, as well as many commanders, of the powerful political police. Thus it came that, following the massacre of most of the Hungarian Jews, individual Jews assumed control, for the first time since 1919, not only of much of the economy but also of politics and the administration.²⁸

The singling out of the names of Jewish communists in the House of Terror, which implies Jewish responsibility for the post-war communist terror in Hungary, can be considered to be a contemporary counterpart to the anti-Semitic discourse in the interwar period, when 'the Jews' were held responsible for the ordeals brought upon Hungary and 'the Magyars' through the peace of Trianon. However, in the special section on the Jewish community in the room in the House of Terror that is devoted to the religious communities, an information text takes care to note that 'a significant number of Party members and leaders of its terrorist organizations (PRO, ÁVO, ÁVH, KATPOL, GRO) were of Jewish origin, who did not only disavow their God, but their country and their roots as well when they became the inhumane communist ideology's toadies'.²⁹ The point is that the individuals were Jews, but they did not act as representatives of the Jews. The question then arises: why mention their Jewishness if it was not relevant, and why present the information on these villains in the hall devoted to the religious communities? As a whole, the exhibitions in the House of Terror reflect the populist interpretation of Hungarian history. Hungary is portrayed as a victim first of Trianon and, as a consequence, of communism after 1945, a project where

Jews were prominent. Mária Schmidt has made clear that the issue is not about 'the Jewish question' but about placing communist terror on equal footing with the Holocaust in Hungarian historical culture and thereby delegitimizing politically the social democrats and liberals, the contemporary urbanists:

As the perpetrators of the Holocaust were held accountable a generation after the crimes were committed, so will the communist criminals. Those, too, will be held liable who hampered the transition, sustained the entire post-communist power and sabotaged any effort to come clean. And they will be asked to justify why they used the anti-Semitic/anti-fascist rhetoric in favour of the post-communist power elite.³⁰

The difference between the urbanist and populist views on what to commemorate is also evident when it comes to remembrance days: in 2000, the 16 April became the day of remembrance of Auschwitz, and in 2001, the 25 February became the day of remembrance of the victims of communism.³¹ Thus, there is one memorial day for each ideological camp.

The innocuous place of Hungary's Jews in the historical culture of the country from 1945 to 2004, when the Holocaust Memorial Centre and Museum was opened, is an indication that the Holocaust has not set its stamp on this culture. It is noteworthy that in the last decade of the Kádár regime, there was a strong interest in Hungary in the fate of the Hungarians in the territories that had been lost at Trianon. This interest was an important factor in Hungarian politics in 1989 and again in the late 1990s. On this issue, Trianon and post-war communist rule became intertwined as two aspects of the Hungarian tragedy in the twentieth century.³² This issue overshadowed the memory of the Holocaust in the political debate. The representatives of the Jewish community in Hungary chose not to accept the status of national minority for the Jews when the minority law was adopted in 1993.³³ The message is that the Jews are an integral part of Hungarian society, and in matters of historical belonging on equal footing with the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries. Not all political currents in Hungary accept this Jewish standpoint. The dilemma of refuted assimilation, which is so eloquently described in Szabó's film *Sunshine*, is still present.

Using the same concepts as the ones concerning certain individuals' orientation in a multicultural environment, one can argue that the historical culture in any bi- or multinational state ideally should be bivalent or polyvalent. In this perspective, historical culture is assumed to function as a means to bring cohesion to a multinational state, to be a vehicle for integration. One cannot say that this has happened in Hungary: the Terror Háza on the Andrásy Street is at the heart of the exuberant late Habsburg cityscape in Pest, whereas the new Holocaust Memorial Centre/Museum, designed by

István Manyi, is tucked away in the old proletarian suburb Ferencváros. The two sites of historical memory are separated.

Notes

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1. Personal letter to the author from John C. Swanson, 8 February 2004. J. C. Swanson is author of *The Remnants of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Shaping of Modern Austria and Hungary 1918–1922* (Colorado, 2001).
2. See Pierre Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French past. Volume 1: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York, 1996), 1–20.
3. See John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900. A Historical Portrait of a City and its Culture* (New York, 1988), 95, 190–192, 201.
4. Antonina Kloskowska, 'National Conversion. A Case Study of Polish-German Neighbourhood', in Richard Grathoff and Antonina Kloskowska (eds), *The Neighbourhood of Cultures* (Warsaw, 1994), 79–101, here 92.
5. Turul is the name of the mythical bird that showed the ancient Magyars under Árpád the way to the country. The monument dedicated to the memory of the Treaty of Trianon thus symbolized the Hungarian foundation myth.
6. Fredrik Böök, *Resa till Ungern* (Stockholm, 1931), 65–92.
7. Éva Kovács and Gerhard Seewann, 'Ungarn. Der Kampf um das Gedächtnis', in Monika Flacke (eds), *Mythen der Nationen. 1945 – Arena der Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 2004), 815–845, here 817.
8. István Deák, 'The Holocaust in Hungary', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 45 (176), (2004), 50–70, here 55.
9. Tamás Fricz, *A népi-urbánus vita tegnap és ma* (Budapest, 1997).
10. François Fejtő, *Hongrois et Juifs. Histoire millénaire d'un couple singulier (1000–1997)* (Paris, 1997), 259–302.
11. Gábor Kádár and Zoltan Vági, 'Rationality or Irrationality? The Annihilation of Hungarian Jews', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 45 (174) (2004), 32–54, here 33f.
12. Kádár and Vági, 37.
13. 'Interview with Istvan Szabo', see <http://www.interfaithfamily.com/article/issue39/interview_with_szabo.phtml>.
14. Susan Suleiman, 'Jewish Assimilation in Hungary, the Holocaust and Epic Film: Reflections on István Szabó's *Sunshine*', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (1) (2001), 233–252, here 245.
15. Israel Gutman et al. (eds), *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*. Vol. 3 (Munich, 1998), 1469.
16. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikl%C3%B3r_Horthy>.
17. Mária Schmidt, 'The Role of "The Fight Against Anti-Semitism" during the Years of Transition', in Mária Schmidt and László Gy. Toth (eds), *Transition with Contradictions. The Case of Hungary 1990–1998* (Budapest, no year), 276–312, here 305.

18. Michael Shafir, 'The Politics of Public Space and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary' (Part 2), *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFL/RL)*, *East European Perspectives*, 6 (11) (26 May 2004), 1–7, here 1.
19. See Michael Shafir, 'The Politics of Public Space and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary' (Part 1), *RFE/RL East European Perspectives*, 6 (10) (12 May 2004), 1–6.
20. Shafir, 'Politics' (Part 1), 2.
21. See Michael Shafir, 'The Politics of Public Space and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary' (Part 3), *RFE/RL East European Perspectives*, 6 (12) (9 June 2004), 1–5.
22. Michael Shafir, 'The Politics of Public Space and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary' (Part 4), *RFE/RL East European Perspectives*, 6 (13) (23 June 2004), 1–8, here 1.
23. Shafir, 'Politics' (Part 4).
24. Schmidt, 'Role', 280.
25. The museum's homepage is at <http://www.museum.hu/index_en.asp>.
26. <http://www.museum.hu/search/permanent_en.asp?IDP=1807&ID=952>.
27. Shafir, 'Politics' (Part 4), 2.
28. Deák, 'Hungary', 66.
29. Felekezetek', information leaflet (2005), in *Terror Háza*, Budapest. The acronyms denoted the security service (one-page leaflet, available in room 112, first floor, Terror Háza, Andrásy út 16, Budapest).
30. Schmidt, 'Role', 306.
31. Kovács and Seewann, 'Ungarn', 833.
32. Kristian Gerner, 'Central Europe and the Empires – Full Circle in History', in Sven Tägil (ed.), *Europe. The Return of History* (Lund, 2001), 348–398, here 385–388.
33. The law recognises the Armenian, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serb, Slovak, Slovenian, and Ukrainian minorities. See Z. Fejös, 'Hungary Facing Internal and External Minority Problems', *Occasional Papers*, No. 5 (Budapest: Teleki László Foundation Institute for Central European Studies 1996. See <<http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/szint/tarsad/politika/hungpol/occ005/occ005.htm>>.

10

The Holocaust in Ukrainian Historical Culture

Johan Dietsch

After the end of the Cold War it seems as there has been a need to celebrate the newly won European unity by attributing the moral touchstone to the past. For nearly fifty years the bi-polar world had consistently located absolute evil in the contemporary, existing on the other side of the Iron Curtain. After the fall of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe the Holocaust became an informative concept with which the absolute evil of the past was tied together with a good united future of Europe.¹ The Holocaust became not only a common symbol of absolute evil, but of Europe itself. 'Auschwitz' turned into a negative image of the imagined future Europe. In turn, this meant that the newly independent states in Eastern Europe, keen on moving 'back to Europe', had to acknowledge the centrality of the Holocaust as a European phenomenon, whilst still preoccupied with producing viable national histories. In the Ukraine the process of elaborating a feasible national history has coexisted with a proclaimed aspiration to integrate the country into Europe, understood as integration into European institutions and its universalistic culture.² In theory such a European dimension should complement the national. However, a study of history textbooks commissioned by the Council of Europe revealed that the central themes of European history presented to pupils in various countries were mainly wars, imperialism, dictatorship and genocide. Encountering Europe and emphasising the European dimension in history textbooks often means negative experiences. The Holocaust, with its perceived inherent character as a 'borderline event', makes understanding and interpretation of it one of the major stumbling blocks in the fostering of a European dimension in the minds of younger generations.³

But the Holocaust is not, nor has it ever been, a stable concept in the sense that there is a generally accepted definition and understanding of it. It has been subject to ongoing discussions, debates and revisions. In a study on the historiography of the destruction of the European Jews, Raul Hilberg concluded that, 'in the beginning there was no Holocaust', it was neither understood by contemporary observers nor by the immediate posterity.⁴ On the

contrary, Jeffrey Alexander has argued that the destruction of the European Jews was understood but came to be narrated inside a framework that offered salvation. There was no need for a 'Holocaust'. Such a 'progressive' narrative proclaimed the trauma to have been overcome by the Allied victory and the punishment at the Nuremberg trials. Nazism and genocide were both situated and historical, and once overcome the traumatic past would be replaced by a bright future.⁵ Understood in this manner the past was brought to an end. Good had triumphed over evil.

Both of these interpretations imply that there was no Holocaust in the beginning since there was neither room nor need for one. In a similar way, it has been argued that the motivations to forget were simply too strong for survivors, perpetrators and bystanders alike. The implications of what had happened if the question was probed were simply too threatening for public analysis.⁶ Post-war redemption simply depended on overcoming the mass murder, moving on, and getting on with the construction of the new world.⁷ Therefore, it can be argued that the destruction of the European Jews proved not to be an event that posterity cultures had difficulties to grasp and interpret, at least not in the immediate post-war world, but rather that there was a prevailing historical narrative of what was already understood and known that could be used to bring order to such a traumatic event. Dramatic national as well as international changes influenced changes in perception and interpretation of the Holocaust. The destruction of the European Jews as a past event did not possess a force in itself. What was needed was historical thinking, putting the past to use and situating it in relevant historical narratives to turn it into a 'trauma' of the scale we are used to regarding it today to turn the destruction of the European Jewry into the 'Holocaust'.

In this perspective the circumstances under which historical thinking takes place and what functions it fulfils become the main focus of investigation. Questions regarding what societal process and situations trigger historical thinking and what contemporary changes prompt changes in understanding of the past become important. Attention is therefore best directed towards the principles of 'sense', understood as the logic of historical interpretation, the poetics and rhetoric of forming a representation, and the possibilities of understanding the past as something relevant and important for a posterity culture. Since events, or more importantly contingent or traumatic events, are brought to order and given sense by appropriating them in a historical narrative, interpretation of the past becomes a process that aims to fit an event into an existing narrative, adjust an existing narrative or produce a new narrative, altogether. The object is to make sense of the past, turning events into history facilitating an interpretation of the passing of time. All practical realisations of the sense-giving process in social communication can be conceptualized as historical culture.⁸

The object here is to outline how the destruction of the European Jews is situated within Ukrainian historical culture. However, it is next to impossible

to take all the practical realisations of history's sense-giving process into account. The chapter will therefore focus on the new history textbooks produced in the Ukraine. Textbooks tend to give an official or authorised version of the past since they are in effect vehicles carrying broader cultural messages and perform a social function, enforcing and reinforcing cultural homogeneity as well as promoting shared attitudes and cultural norms.

Two main political messages were clearly expressed in the official programmes and guidelines regarding education in the wake of newly won independence: the claims of democratisation and nationalisation. Educational content was to be adjusted not only to the contemporary needs of the individual, but to society and to the task and need of building an independent Ukrainian state. Restoration of traditional national spirituality and historical needs were advanced as important guidelines for the new national curriculum.⁹ Despite visions of democratisation in the educational sphere the centralised educational system of Soviet times has remained in place. The state has determined how innovative educational policy should be.¹⁰ A recent study of what Ukrainian tenth and eleventh grade students knew about the Holocaust concluded that most were at least informed about the Holocaust, or rather the destruction of the European Jews. Nearly all students demonstrated sharp and negative attitudes towards the Holocaust, even though the overwhelming majority had a murky idea, at best, about anti-Semitism. Most importantly however, the study concluded that the students had to create an 'independent public discourse'. Since there was no official 'model' ready at hand, students had to create their own.¹¹ This conclusion is misleading however. There is an implicit 'model' or narrative in Ukrainian history textbooks to which students can relate, gain information from, and make sense of the destruction of the European Jews. Seen over a period of time stretching from independence to the present it is in fact possible to discern two different interpretations, or narratives, in the history textbooks.

A major difference, between previous Soviet accounts of the war and contemporary Ukrainian ones is that the war has ceased to be 'patriotic' and is now regarded as 'the Second World War', a war that starts in 1939 and not in 1941. Another major difference is the scattered references to the destruction of the European Jews. In Soviet times the Holocaust was incorporated into the epic suffering of the entire Soviet population, ignoring any uniqueness of the Jewish experiences. As a consequence history textbooks, or for that matter other official publications on the Second World War, contained few or no references to Jews.¹² The first new textbooks published immediately after independence in 1991, as well as following editions, contain various mentions and allusions to both Jews and the Holocaust. These bits and pieces, however, are anchored in a historical narrative focusing on the Ukrainian nation. Consequently German racial policies are described as directed against Ukrainians and Slavs. In this narrative the war starts with the

Molotov – Ribbentrop pact in 1939. Cartoons from the British contemporary press, depicting the pact as a marriage between Hitler and Stalin or them marching side by side wearing similar uniforms, are used to convey a message that puts both dictators on equal footing.¹³ The *raison d'être* of the attack is ascribed to Hitler's aim of colonising the East. 'The new order' in Central European civilisation was supposed to be built on the complete enslavement of locals ('defect people') and the principle of the supremacy of the German 'master race'. The occupiers introduced a 'regime of terror and violence' in Ukraine as well as in other areas of the Soviet Union. However, wide-scale resistance from the population in the occupied territories hindered the occupiers from immediately realising their plans.¹⁴ In other words, Nazi Germany is portrayed as a colonising empire driven by the desire to conquer the agrarian fertile lands in the Ukraine.¹⁵ Coupled with an emphasis on the invaders' striving for political, administrative, and economic domination the interpretation and narrative comes closer to previous Soviet accounts. The driving forces are presented as imperialistic ambitions and battles over natural resources as well as other economic assets. Even though Marxist-Leninist interpretations were officially abandoned in the Ukraine after independence, the causes and driving forces behind the war have remained the same as in the Soviet narratives.

A second common feature is the prominence given to the occupiers' pronounced goal of exterminating the people inhabiting the land to the east. In previous accounts these were always presented as 'Soviet citizens'. The new Ukrainian narrative is both more vague and precise at the same time. To colonise the Ukraine the Nazi – German forces had to rid the area of 'lower races', often explained as Ukrainians, Russians, and Jews. One textbook provides a vivid account of the occupiers' harsh regime in practice: during 'the 103 weeks of the occupation, each Tuesday and Friday military and civilian residents of various ethnic identities were shot at Babi Yar, primarily Jews. Virtually every Ukrainian city had its own Babi Yar. In the first months of the occupation a total of 850,000 Jews fell victim to the Nazis.'¹⁶ In total, the reader is informed, almost four million people perished in Ukraine during the war. A little more than a million of these were civilians. Around 150 concentration camps ('factories of death') and 50 ghettos were built to exterminate the population. Furthermore, at the beginning of the occupation 'special units' (*Einsatzgruppen*) of the SS murdered 800,000 Jews.¹⁷

Unlike previous Soviet treatment of the destruction of civilians the new narrative differentiates between the victims. The targets of the German racial policy are now described as the Slavic population in general or specified as Ukrainians, Russians, and Jews, that is, the three most numerous local ethnic groups at the beginning of the war. Even though this differentiation is a departure from previous accounts, prominence is implicitly given to Ukrainian victims. Jews are only portrayed as targets for destruction at the beginning of the occupation. There is no information given about what

happened to the Jews prior to 1941 in the rest of Europe, anti-Semitic racial policies, or what happened to the Jewish population after the first months of occupation. There is no explanation at all why the Jews were targeted other than that they happened to live in the Ukraine. Furthermore, the Jewish victims are implicitly deemed less important, though not marginal, since the total number of victims is estimated at around four million. The main victims of the Holocaust or the Nazi-German occupation are far from apparent. It is acknowledged that Jews were targeted for destruction and that around 800,000 lost their lives at the beginning of the Nazi-German occupation. It is also acknowledged that out of the four million who perished in the Ukraine during the war one million were 'civilians'. Either the Jews made up a majority of the civilian population who perished or they are not included as civilian casualties at all. It is reasonable to assume that the Jews are treated as a separate category of victims since making them the majority of civilian casualties would diminish the impact of Nazi-German occupational policies directed against Ukrainians.

The narrative of the destruction of the European Jews in history textbooks provides little or no notion why Nazi Germany attacked the Ukraine other than Hitler's imperialistic plans. The meaning or sense of the story can therefore best be described as an absence of the Holocaust, shifting focus towards Ukraine and Ukrainians. Since neither the term 'Holocaust' nor an acknowledgement that Jews were particularly targeted by Nazi-German forces is present, it is perhaps best to talk about a non-use of the Holocaust. That is to say that there seems to be a deliberate and ideological adoption according to which the topic is actively ignored.¹⁸ By making the territory of the Ukraine and Ukrainians the centre of the narrative of the destruction of the European Jews, the Holocaust is implicitly nationalised.¹⁹ This position was clearly expressed by Victor Yushchenko, then prime minister of the Ukraine, who said at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in January 2000:

The hard fate of the Ukrainian nation scattered it throughout the world. Ukrainians have lived through wars and famines as well as Stalin's purges. Various empires seized Ukrainian land. There were times when even the Ukrainian language and culture had been denied. That is why Ukrainians understand the ordeal of the Jews so well ... millions of Ukrainians, passed through all circles of the Holocaust hell.

Whilst nationalising the destruction of the European Jews in Ukrainian historical culture, Yushchenko asserted that the Ukraine was sticking to the provisions of relevant documents by the Council of Europe, which required that the history of the Holocaust be taught in educational establishments of its member states. Furthermore, he acknowledged that the Holocaust had influenced not only Europe but also the world in general and that it could be used to promote ideas of tolerance and mutual respect of 'nations'.²⁰

The Holocaust, in short, is presented as a European trauma. Changes in the interpretation of the destruction of the European Jews are visible in textbooks that were published around the turn of the century. In textbooks on international history, the Second World War in Europe starts with German claims to Gdansk. More attention is paid to the German occupying regime in Europe and anti-Semitism is mentioned and sometimes explained. The destruction of the European Jews is also mentioned and given more attention. The Nazi-German 'New Order', however, is still portrayed as more or less an economic plan. Consequently the function of concentration camps is presented primarily as holding pens for persons who resisted in the occupied areas. However, the camps were also used to implement the Nazi-German racial policies in Europe by exterminating Jews. One textbook provides an insightful account:

The 'New Order' envisaged the accomplishment of a special racial policy. The victims of this policy were the Jews, Gypsies and later the Slavic population of Eastern Europe. In 1942 the German leadership decided to begin the physical extermination of all the Jews in Europe. Throughout its whole territory 'factories of death' and concentration camps began to function; the largest of them were Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka on Polish territory, Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück in Germany, and Mauthausen in Austria. Prisoners of war and participants in the resistance suffered in them. In total there were 18 million people in the concentration camps, 12 million of whom were killed.²¹

In the new narrative it is acknowledged that something called the 'Holocaust' took place and that Jews were specifically targeted. The anti-Semitic background to the 'special racial policy', however, is often confused. In one account it is limited to quotes from Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in which he 'accounts for the Jewish involvement in Russian Bolshevism'.²² The choice of this anti-Semitic quotation seems to suggest that Hitler was actually right in assuming Jewish involvement in Russian Bolshevism. The destruction of the European Jewry is not lamented or mourned and simply referred to as part of the 'New Order' of the Nazis and part of the war.

A drastic change from the previously mentioned narrative of the destruction of the European Jews is the representation of the actors during the war. History textbooks published during the middle of the 1990s were unclear about the positions of the Ukraine and the Soviet Union. The new narrative clearly equates Nazism and Stalinism as two totalitarian ideologies. By strongly condemning both ideologies and removing any identification with the Soviet Union, the Ukraine is removed from the international history of the war altogether. This is consistent with the general tendency to write world history from a civilisational perspective; both Nazi Germany and Soviet Union were alien to the European civilisation, to which the Ukraine is

implied to belong. The destruction of the European Jews as an exclusive and distinct phenomenon during the 1930s and 1940s is conceptualised as a trauma affecting the whole of Europe. Anti-Semitism serves as the main explanation for the Holocaust. One account describes it as 'an ideology and politics aimed at Jews that takes the form of hostile intentions in relations towards the Jewish people', something on which Hitler capitalised. The Holocaust is defined as 'the catastrophe for a large part of the Jewish population in Europe as a result of an organised destruction by the Nazis and compatriots to Germany in their and other conquered territories 1933–1945'. In this interpretation the victims of Nazi-German racial policies and concentration camps are not conflated and interpreted as 'Ukrainians' or 'Soviet citizens' as in previous cases. Focus is exclusively on Jewish victims. Because the horror was not geographically confined to Germany and Poland, but also affected Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other countries, the Holocaust is seen to 'contain lessons for all of humanity that needs to be reaffirmed forever so that such an event can be prevented in the future'.²³

In this account identification with the fate of the European Jews is deepened emotionally and detached at the same time. This was the essential message conveyed at the intergovernmental conference on the Holocaust in Stockholm in January 2000. Through the Holocaust, Europe could imagine itself as a community of shared values contributing to an institutionalisation of a 'collective European memory'.²⁴ The final declaration of the Stockholm Forum illustrates an understanding of the Holocaust as something instrumental. The international community pledged its solemn responsibility to fight ethnic cleansing, genocide and anti-Semitism to ensure that 'future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences'. More important, however, was the 'commitment to plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past ... and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice'.²⁵ Ukrainian pupils are not only required to define the 'Holocaust', but also to position extermination camps geographically, to describe who was the target of Nazi genocidal policy, and to discuss the lasting effects of the war on the history as well as historiography in the twentieth-century.²⁶

The Holocaust is presented as a European phenomenon carrying fundamental values for all of humanity. Basically, it is the history of the destruction of the European Jewry in all European countries, except for the Ukraine. There is no information about the suffering of the Ukrainian Jews. Pupils are taught about the extermination camps in Poland, about anti-Semitism in Germany, and about the rise of the German dictator who capitalised on it. In the Ukraine the lessons learnt from the Holocaust has been employed to make sense of another perceived genocide: the *Holodomor* or the Terror Famine 1932–33. The Famine is presented as directed against the Ukrainian nation and, compared to the Holocaust, receives much more attention in history textbooks as well as in public discourse.²⁷ The lessons to be learnt are

not about the Holocaust in the Ukraine or how Ukrainian Jews suffered in it, but rather about the 'Ukrainian Holocaust'.²⁸

Unlike a recent study that concluded that there was no official model or interpretation of the Holocaust in the Ukraine, we have argued that there were at least two related but somewhat different narratives of the Holocaust. In the first narrative of the destruction of the European Jewry, prevalent in history textbooks dealing with the history of the Ukraine, the meaning or sense of the story can be described as an absence of the Holocaust, shifting focus towards the Ukraine and Ukrainians. Since neither the term 'Holocaust' nor an acknowledgement that Jews were particularly targeted by Nazi-German forces is present in this interpretation, there seems to be a deliberate and ideological adoption according to which the topic is actively ignored. Instead, the territory of the Ukraine and Ukrainians as a group are at the centre of the narrative of the destruction of European Jewry, that is, the Holocaust is implicitly nationalised. In the second narrative, most common in textbooks on world history, the history of the Holocaust is basically a history of the destruction of the European Jews in all European countries, with the exception of the Ukraine. Attention is directed towards the Holocaust in Europe, that is, the countries west of the Ukraine, and not towards the Holocaust as a European phenomenon. The Holocaust took place outside the national boundaries of the Ukraine and is therefore attached less significance. Instead, the Terror Famine of the early 1930s has been assigned greater significance. The simultaneous nationalisation and denationalisation of the destruction of the European Jewry can best be explained by the Ukrainian authorities' explicit emphasis on the restoration of traditional national spirituality and the historical needs of the nation. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the Holocaust sits uneasily in Ukrainian historical culture. Reminiscent of how the Holocaust was nationalised in the epic suffering of Soviet Union, treatment of the same topic in contemporary Ukraine is both a conflated national tragedy and a European phenomenon.

Notes

1. Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund, 2003), 9–58, here 18.
2. Kataryna Wolczuk, 'History, Europe and the "National Idea": The "Official" Narrative of National Identity in Ukraine', *Nationalities Papers*, 28 (4) (2000), 671–694.
3. Falk Pingel, *The European Home: Representations of 20th Century Europe in History Textbooks* (Strasbourg, 2000), 43, 81–83.
4. Raul Hilberg, 'Developments in the Historiography of the Holocaust', in Asher Cohen *et al.* (eds), *Comprehending the Holocaust. Historical and Literary Research* (Frankfurt/Main, 1988), 21–44, here 21.

5. Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'On the Social Construction of Moral Universals. The "Holocaust" from War Crime to Trauma Drama', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (1) (2002), 5–85, here 16–20, 26.
6. Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1997), 7.
7. Alexander, 'Social Construction', 20.
8. Jörn Rüsen, 'Interpreting the Holocaust – Some Theoretical Issues', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Holocaust Heritage. Inquires into European Historical Cultures* (Malmö, 2005), 35–62.
9. See the state national programme on education *Dershavna natsionalna programa "Osvita": Ukraina XXI Stolittia* (Kiev, 1994).
10. Victor Stepanenko, *The Construction of Identity and School Policy in Ukraine (Post-Soviet Policy Perspectives)* (New York, 1999), 100.
11. Elena Ivanova, 'Ukrainian High School Students' Understanding of the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18 (3) (2004), 402–420.
12. Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust and the Russian Historical Culture', in Karlsson and Zander, *Echoes*, 201–222.
13. See for example F.G. Turchenko, *Novitnia istoriia Ukrainy. Chastyna perscha (1917–1945)* (Kiev, 1994), 247.
14. S.V. Kulchytskyi et al., *Istoriia Ukrainy* (Kiev, 1998), 232.
15. See Turchenko, *Novitnia*, 295.
16. Turchenko, *Novitnia*, 295.
17. I. Koliada, et al., *Istoriia Ukrainy (1917–1944)* (Kiev, 1997), 113.
18. Also see Karlsson, 'Historical Culture', 41.
19. Such teleological handling of history has been rigorously criticised by Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak, as being much to centred on the Ukrainian nation. See Yaroslav Hrytsak, 'Iak vykladaty istoriiu Ukrainy pislia 1991 roky', in M. Telus and Iu. Shapoval, *Ukrainska istorychna dydaktyka. Mizhnarodnyi dialog* (Kiev, 2000), 63–76.
20. Victor Yushchenko, 'Speech by the Prime Minister of Ukraine Mr. Viktor Yushchenko at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust', 27 January 2000. See: <<http://www.holocaustforum.gov.se>>.
21. Ia. M. Berdicheskii, *Vsemirnaia istoriia, 1939–1997* (Zaporozhe, 1998), 40f.
22. S.V. Vidnianskyi and V. O. Dribnytsia, *Vsevitnia istoriia. Novitni Istoriia. Chastyna dryga*, (Kiev, 2000), 27–29.
23. Ia. M. Berdichevskii et al., *Vsemirnaia Istoriia* (Zaporozhe, 2000), 50–55.
24. Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider, 'Memory Unbound. The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (1) (2002), 87–106, here 100.
25. 'Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust', see: <<http://www.holocaustforum.gov.se>>.
26. Ia. M. Berdichevskii, *Vsemirnaia Istoriia 11 klass. Sbornik testov, voprosov i zadaniij po 12-balnoi shkale ochenivaniia uchenikh dostizheniij uchaschikhsia* (Zaporozhe, 2001), 3–26.
27. See for example Viktor Mysan, *Opovidannia z istorii ukrainy* (Kiev, 1997).
28. On the Terror-Famine as a 'Ukrainian Holocaust' see Johan Öhman (Johan Dietsch), 'From Famine to Forgotten Holocaust. The 1932–1933 Famine in Ukrainian Historical Cultures', in Karlsson and Zander, *Echoes*, 223–254.

11

A Tale of a Former Shtetl. The Memory of Jews and the Holocaust in Poland

*Barbara Törnquist Plewa**

Michael Steinlauf has convincingly argued that the Poles had 'Polonised' the Holocaust during the post-war years by emphasising their own suffering during the war.¹ Auschwitz became a symbol of Polish martyrdom and until recently the majority of Poles believed that Auschwitz was first and foremost a place where Poles had been killed. Yet another researcher, Jan Gross, even claimed that the victims of the Holocaust had never been mourned in Poland.² Was he right? Unfortunately, we know comparatively little about how the Jews and the Holocaust have been remembered in the multitude of Polish small towns – called 'shtetl' by the Jews – which had lost their Jewish population during the war.³ This chapter attempts to illuminate this issue by analysing the memory of Jews and the Holocaust in Szydłowiec, a former Jewish small town in central Poland. This choice is largely motivated by the fact that I grew up there. This has enabled me to collect and verify considerable material.⁴

How can one reach the memory of a town – or rather that of its inhabitants? According to James Young: 'societies remember ... insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents' memories'.⁵ I have focused on various forms of 'institutionalised' memory, such as cultural preservation (e.g. of buildings), cultural performances (monuments, rituals, etc.) and historical writings.⁶ My aim was to find out how local decision makers organise collective memory, of what they choose to remind people, and what is suppressed. I also used local archives. Yet another way of approaching collective memory is to make use of 'oral history': to discover recurrent patterns and shared representations of the past by asking individuals what they remember of their own experience or of the narratives of others about the past.⁷ In the following the focus will be on the townscape: the physical remains of the past and monuments and how they reflect what people are eager to forget or to remember.⁸

Before the outbreak of the Second World War the Jews constituted the majority in Szydłowiec, about 7,200 of a total of 11,000 inhabitants. In 1940 the Nazis transformed practically the whole town into a so-called 'open

ghetto'. This meant that the Jews of Szydłowiec were allowed to keep in touch with the non-Jewish population inside and outside the town. They were also able to secure special travelling permits by bribery. This limited freedom explained why they did not starve, as was the case in the closed ghettos, a fact which in turn attracted many Jews fleeing other ghettos. Thus in 1942 there were about 16,000 Jews in the town. On 23 September 1942 they were deported to the death camp of Treblinka and killed in the gas chambers. Some also perished in Szydłowiec. The Nazis only allowed around eighty men to stay alive who had to assist in the emptying of Jewish houses of all valuables. These men witnessed a number of murders on Jews who were discovered by German or Ukrainian guards, or by Poles looking for profit from Jewish possessions.⁹ The Nazi authorities were fully aware, however, that there were more Jews in hiding in the district. Therefore a decree was issued on 10 November 1942 stating that all Jews who gave themselves up voluntarily and settled in one of the four new ghettos in the district of Radom would escape the death penalty. One of these ghettos was established in Szydłowiec, but this time it was a 'closed ghetto'. The Nazis gathered there about five thousand Jews who were then transported to the gas chambers in Treblinka on 13 January 1943. About three hundred were killed in Szydłowiec itself. The town remained the scene of executions until the end of the war. These were carried out at the Jewish cemetery. The victims were both Jews and Poles. Their number is uncertain – there may have been a few hundred.¹⁰

It is uncertain how many Szydłowiec Jews survived the war. Some succeeded in hiding on farms, while others tried to join the partisans. There was also a Jewish guerrilla unit created by Szydłowiec Jews, numbering around twenty-three men who marched into Szydłowiec with the Red Army when the latter liberated the town in January 1945. A few months later there were 105 Jews in Szydłowiec. They lived together in the main square of the town and felt unwelcome and insecure.¹¹ Local authorities reported to the district that the attitude towards these Jews was hostile.¹² All the remaining Jews left Szydłowiec in the summer of 1945. Szydłowiec had 4,200 inhabitants in early 1946 – and these were only Poles. One group of people that had lived in the town and had determined its atmosphere were gone.

A town's iconosphere, that is, sites, buildings, street structure, street names, and others, bears witness about the past. It constitutes an 'urban text' filled with signs which may be interpreted by those willing and able to interpret. If one compares the townscape of Szydłowiec today with pre-war maps and pictures one can see that the Jewish past has been suppressed and the text of the town re-written. Before the Second World War the town had three squares which formed the hubs of community life. The centre of the political power was the Main Square. Here was the Town Hall (the seat of the mayor) and the Catholic Church, while the castle was just nearby. The Main Square was called the Catholic Square: attempts had been made to prevent Jews from

settling there since the eighteenth century. However, these attempts had failed and a number of Jews lived there prior to 1942. The official name of the second square, north of the Main Square, was *Rynek Skaleczny* (Rock Square), but everyone called it 'the Jewish square'. It was the centre of economic activity. The inhabitants were solely Jews. Here were the 'Bodens' (Yiddish term for a kind of covered market) with many shops, stalls, and workshops. The names of the streets running from the square were connected with Jewish life: *Rabbi Street* and *Synagogue Street*. The latter was the site of a synagogue built in the eighteenth century and rebuilt a century later. Next to it was one of the largest cemeteries in the district. The Jewish Square was connected via Radomska Street to the third square, called *Rynek Składowy* (Stock Square) or *Slomiany* (Straw Square). Farmers came here with their wagons to sell their produce to the Jewish tradesmen who lived in the square and its vicinity. Most of the buildings in the Jewish Square and the Straw Square were destroyed after the liquidation of the ghetto, as the Germans set fire to the synagogue and to a number of Jewish wooden houses, which were also partly destroyed during looting. The abandoned, half-derelict houses were then gradually pulled apart by the locals who needed building materials or firewood. The war left half of the town destroyed. The new local authorities cleared most of the Jewish Square and renamed it *Maria Konopnicka Square* (after a Polish writer). An office building, the seat of the local authorities, and four blocks of flats were built there in the 1950s. The children who grew up in these blocks had no idea that they lived in what used to be the centre of the Jewish neighbourhood. The street names with Jewish references disappeared and a secondary school was built on the site of the synagogue. The Straw Square continued as market place for some time. The destroyed Jewish area around it was replaced by new high-rise buildings and a bus station.

Many Polish towns had their townscape radically altered after the war. Not much from the past could be rescued. In this case, however, no-one seemed willing to remember anything about the Jewish past. No Jewish names of streets or squares were kept and no commemoration plaque was put on the wall of a building or on the pavement. The walls of the Town Hall hold some plaques to commemorate famous people who have visited the town, but there is not a word about the Jews who constituted the majority of the town council residing in that very building during the interwar years. There are elements in the text of the town, however, which may recall the life of the old shtetl. The main street, *Radomska*, and some of its side streets have remained largely intact. Many of these houses were Jewish. The shapes of the façades, entrance doors and windows indicate that they were built before the war. Here one can also find long narrow back yards, so typical of the shtetl streets. This type of houses can also be found in *Garbarska Street* (Tanner Street) where perhaps the wealthiest man of old Szydłowiec, Ejzenberg, owned a large modern tannery and lodgings. Next to his house he had a synagogue

(called *Shul* in Yiddish) built for the Jewish workers. On the rear of the house there is a porch with turn-of-the-century frescoes. Today only a few people in Szydlowiec know that this is a so-called *sukkah* for eating during the Jewish holiday of *Sukkoth* (The Feast of Tabernacles) and that the paintings allude to this. Hardly anyone knows that the building with the pub in *Garbarska* Street was once a synagogue.

Thus there are traces of Jewish life in the iconosphere, but they are illegible for most inhabitants. Few are able to see the old shtetl under the layer of buildings which subsequently filled the town. The memory of the shtetl that is inscribed in the town's iconosphere has not been transmitted. Therefore, the old Jewish buildings of Szydlowiec cannot function as sites of memory. According to James Young, the sites lack the will to remember. Without a deliberate act of remembrance, buildings, streets or ruins remain just pieces of the townscape:

Memory of a site's past does not emanate from within a place but is more likely the projection of the mind's eye onto a given site. Without the historical consciousness of visitors, these sites remain essentially indifferent to their past, altogether amnesiac, they 'know' only what we know, 'remember' only what we remember.¹³

Memory work ceases when there is hardly anyone left to keep the memory. Until recently the only people who wanted to remember Jewish life in Szydlowiec and who could make the townscape 'talk' about the past were Jewish visitors, Holocaust survivors, and their descendants. One example is a photograph in the *Szydlowiec Memorial Book*. The picture was taken after the war and represents a survivor or a descendant of Szydlowiec Jews standing next to an old water pump which has remained in the former Straw Square until today. It is here where the Szydlowiec Jews were ordered to gather before deportation. The photo bears the caption: 'The final place from where all the Shidlovtsers Jews were deported to Treblinka.' None of the numerous inhabitants I talked to associate this pump and this place with the Holocaust and the events in 1942–43. It is no site of memory for them, not even for those who lived at that time. It is no wonder then that nobody objected when the square was renamed Freedom Square after the war. Jewish visitors and survivors, on the other hand, have found this name indecent considering the part this square played in the history of the Jewish inhabitants.¹⁴

One relic which has challenged this collective oblivion during the post-war years is the Jewish cemetery. Once it was one of the biggest Jewish cemeteries in the Radom district, with beautiful gravestones of *matzevah* type, the oldest ones dating from the eighteenth century. During the war the cemetery became a place of executions. In the post-war years it became

derelict and was partly destroyed. Local authorities turned a blind eye to the disappearance of gravestone after gravestone which were used for building materials. In 1956 the local authorities decided to turn a part of the cemetery into a sports field for schoolchildren. The following year another part was razed to make room for a department store. Those gravestones that were in fairly good condition were placed higgledy-piggledy in the tiny remaining part of the cemetery near *Wschodnia* Street.¹⁵ This became a kind of lapidarium that sank into oblivion. For a long time the old Jewish cemetery was not even considered a historical landmark. It is conspicuously absent from the names of official monuments listed by the local authorities in 1957.¹⁶ The lack of interest from the local population is reflected in other ways too. In 1965 the local school authorities reported that the Jewish cemetery was a hangout for youngsters getting drunk. There is no mention of any attempt to remedy this, not in the least by informing the youngsters about what kind of place they have chosen for their drinking orgies.¹⁷ It was only in the 1980s that the authorities in Szydłowiec began to care a little more about the state of the cemetery. The county authorities carried out some maintenance work as well as an inventory of the gravestones. The local authorities responded to the interest for the history of Jewish culture among Polish intellectual elites in the early 1980s. Unexpectedly, Szydłowiec was noticed by Polish filmmakers looking for Jewish settings. In 1983 a well-known Polish film director, Jerzy Hoffman, came to the town and used the Jewish cemetery for a few scenes in his film *After your Decrees*. Jewish visitors from abroad also became more frequent during this period. Thus it was not the inhabitants of Szydłowiec but strangers who discovered the traces of Jewish life in the iconosphere of the town in the 1980s. When the officially decreed silence concerning the Jews gradually eased in the 1980s, the Jewish cemetery was included in the official list of sites of mass execution in the region. However, this did not lead to any local initiatives for commemoration.

Changes came only gradually after the democratisation of Poland in 1989. The upkeep of the Jewish cemetery improved. November 2004 saw yet another breakthrough when the mayor asked the upper secondary school *Zespół Szkół* to look after the Jewish cemetery. Together with other local monuments of fallen Polish soldiers it is now officially called a *national* memorial.¹⁸ This act was preceded by growing interest among young people in Szydłowiec in the relics of the Jewish past. Encouraged by an enthusiastic history teacher, Slawa Hanusz, pupils began to interview the older inhabitants of Szydłowiec about their memories of Jewish neighbours and to write essays on this subject. A couple of history students from Szydłowiec wrote their master thesis about the Jewish cemetery. Finally, a local initiative led to a historical conference on the history of the Szydłowiec Jews in 1997. The work of memory finally set off.

Monuments constitute important sources for the study of a community's collective memories. One needs to analyse the 'biography' of a monument, that is, the circumstances of its creation, its placement in the landscape, its design, and its effect on visitors – the role of the monument in memory work.¹⁹ In Szydłowiec, there is indeed a monument commemorating the killing of the town's Jews. Most inhabitants, however, do not even know it exists.²⁰ It is placed where most inhabitants never go, namely right in the middle of the Jewish cemetery. The biography of the Szydłowiec monument, erected in 1967, is difficult to reconstruct. The only information about the monument I was able to find in the archives was a short note which mentioned that an organisation created by local authorities to look after memorials 'of struggle and martyrdom' (*Powiatowy Obywatelski Komitet Ochrony Pomników Walk i Męczeństwa*) initiated the construction. A local architect, Stanisław Dworak, designed it and it was erected by the local building committee.²¹ The decision to erect a monument was swift and unexpected. The monument is not mentioned amongst existing and planned monuments listed by the authorities in the 1960s. In 1963 the authorities listed five local memorials to those executed during the Second World War and explicitly stated: 'There are no more memorials planned on sites of executions.'²² This is curious, since the memorials listed were erected to commemorate smaller groups of partisans or hostages that were killed, not comparable in number to the mass graves in the Jewish cemetery of Szydłowiec.

The then head of the building committee responsible for erecting the monument, Jerzy Nikodym, however, claimed in an interview with the author that the decision to build the monument came as an order 'from above', that is, from the county authorities.²³ However, it was supposed to look as if the local committee had taken the initiative. Nikodym speculated that there was a Jew from Łódź behind the decision. He had often visited the cemetery at that time. He might have had connections with high-level communist party members who then acted. Anyway, they were told to build the monument quickly and then to hold a solemn unveiling ceremony. It was said that prominent party representatives would take part, yet the expected guests did not turn up at the ceremony. Nikodym believed that the outbreak of the Six-day War just before that date had turned the attitude of the communist party against the Jews. Hence the local party committee unveiled the monument but did not acknowledge it. In Szydłowiec the monument was not officially mentioned until 1974.

The design of the monument is very simple. It looks like a large square gravestone raised on two concrete steps. It resembles gravestones in Polish cemeteries which commemorate fallen Red Army soldiers, but it is larger and there is a Star of David at its upper edge instead of the Red Army star (Illustration 11.1). There was no artist involved in the design. The monument is made of sandstone and concrete and bears the



Illustration 11.1 Jewish Memorial in Szydłowiec (photographer: Barbara Törnquist Plewa)

following inscription:

On the 24th anniversary of the murder of a group of 150 Jews, the inhabitants of the town and the district of Szydłowiec wish to honour the memory of about 15,000 Polish citizens of Jewish origin from Szydłowiec and its surroundings who were executed and murdered in the death camps by Hitler's criminals during the years 1939–1943. Szydłowiec 21 March 1967.

The 24th anniversary mentioned in the inscription seems to confirm the theory that the monument was erected in a hurry. It would have made more sense to wait for the 25th anniversary, an event usually leading to the erection of such memorials. It is also curious that of all the executions which took place in the Jewish cemetery of Szydłowiec it is the killing of 150 member of the Radom intelligentsia (thus not from Szydłowiec) that is commemorated.²⁴ Furthermore, if the monument had been intended as a site of memory for the inhabitants of the town, it should have been erected at a visible point with easy access, that is, outside the cemetery walls. Instead, it was placed right in the middle of the forgotten and neglected

cemetery among derelict gravestone. For whom does the monument serve as a site of memory? Perhaps for the Jewish visitors who may view it as a gravestone for all the Jewish inhabitants of the town who were killed and never received a gravestone. What does the monument mean for the inhabitants of Szydlowiec? Most of them ignore its existence and cannot relate to it. Other visitors who happen to see the ugly decaying monument with cracking concrete slabs might feel that this is not a site of memory but a site of forgetting.

What explains the long collective oblivion of the history of Jews in Szydlowiec? A crucial factor is the legacy of anti-Semitism connected with a number of political, social and psychological factors. The focus here will be on political factors. During the communist era there was no political will nor any institutions to neutralise anti-Semitism or to overcome the silence at the grass-root level about the fate of the Jews. During the first post-war years the communist regime followed the ideological principles of socialism and launched a campaign against anti-Semitism. However, accusations of anti-Semitism were used as a political weapon to discredit the anti-communist opposition enjoying considerable support in society. The condemnation of anti-Semitism was welcomed by the remaining Jews in Poland. Many Jews based their hopes for a future in Poland on the promises made by the regime of a discrimination-free society based on equal rights. In a country, however, where the stereotype of Jewish communism had been prominent since the 1920s,²⁵ the slightest support given by Jews to the regime nourished anti-Semitism. This is illustrated by the situation in Szydlowiec. When the Red Army chased the Germans away from the town and began setting up new authorities, Abram Finkler, the leader of a small Jewish guerrilla unit and former teacher of religion in Szydlowiec, was appointed head of the local police. One of their tasks was to fight Polish guerrilla units opposing the communist rulers. This in turn upset local Poles who viewed the few Jews who had returned to Szydlowiec as the favourites of the new regime. The assistance they received from the authorities was interpreted as privileges. This contributed to the hostile atmosphere that made the Jews leave the town.²⁶

During the popular protests against the regime in 1956 voices were heard accusing 'the Jews in the government' of the 'anti-Polish policy' of the regime and of Stalinist crimes. These voices were hushed up but the cracks within the governing elites were revealed. Some of the party activists were clearly ready to use Jews as scapegoats to avoid their own responsibilities. Thus the situation of the Jews in Poland was vulnerable in the years between 1956 and 1968. When the monument to the victims of the Holocaust was erected in 1967, however, there were still people in power who cared about that memory. A year later, following an anti-Semitic campaign that had been launched in order to settle accounts within the communist party, those people were gone. March 1968 saw the implementation of the scenario left over from 1956. The Israeli-Arab conflict and student riots at the universities

around the country provided a suitable pretext for communists of Jewish origin to be accused of Zionism, to be expelled from the party, to be harassed and more or less forced to emigrate. The so-called 'Jews in government' were blamed and held responsible for the mistakes and crimes of the regime. Afterwards, the subject of anti-Semitism and Jews generally became a taboo topic for many years and Jewish memorials, including those in Szydłowiec, were ignored.

Then, in the mid-1970s, a democratic underground opposition emerged. Its activists and supporters took up the issue of Jewish–Polish relations and condemned anti-Semitism. The younger Poles, especially those from intelligentsia circles, became interested in the history of Polish Jews. This interest grew even more after the emergence of the democratic mass movement Solidarity in 1980 and continued in spite of the martial law introduced in 1981. The leaders of the democratic opposition believed that tackling the legacy of anti-Semitism was crucial for the aims of Solidarity: the moral renewal of the whole society. In the 1980s the communist regime tacitly accepted the growing interest in Jewish history. Apparently, it did not want to confront the opposition on this point as well. Again, this also influenced the situation in Szydłowiec. In the 1980s the Jewish cemetery was 'discovered' by intellectuals from Warsaw. This interest made the town authorities view the cemetery as a site deserving maintenance. The inventory of the graves was completed and the most urgent repairs carried out in 1987–89. After the fall of communism in 1989 the memory work received support from the new political elite. The local authorities in Szydłowiec received signals from above that it was about time the local communities started to care for the Jewish part of their past. Individuals keen on Jewish memorials, such as the history teacher in Szydłowiec, could now count on some help in their work. What happens in Szydłowiec today indicates that the settling of accounts with the legacy of anti-Semitism, launched by the Polish democratic opposition in the 1970s, is slowly beginning to trickle down to the provinces and the broad strata of society. The Jewish past in Poland, like the Jewish cemetery in Szydłowiec, gradually becomes a part of Polish *national* memory.

Notes

* The article was translated from Swedish by Margareta Faust (PhD).

1. Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead* (New York, 1997), 141.
2. See Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, 'The Jedwabne Killings – A Challenge for Polish Collective Memory', in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund, 2003), 141–176.
3. Two notable exceptions are Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl* (New York, 1987) and Rosa Lehmann, *Symbiosis and Ambivalence* (New York, 2001).

4. The interviews that I have used for my analyses would have been very difficult to carry out for a total outsider because of the inhabitants' considerable suspicion.
5. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (London, 1997), 11.
6. John Eidson, 'From Avoidance to Engagement? Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past in German Home Town', in Frances Pine *et al.* (eds), *Memory, Politics and Religion* (Münster, 2004), 59–92.
7. Besides many informal conversations, I conducted 24 formal in-depth interviews, 3 group interviews with people of different ages and a survey among 215 persons from 3 generations.
8. The other sources will be analysed in see Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds), *The Holocaust – Postwar Battlefields* (Malmö, forthcoming in 2006).
9. Isaac Milstein, 'Chronicle of the Destruction of Szydlowiec', in *Szydlowiec. Memorial Book* (New York, 1989), 93–136, here 121f.
10. For the murder of 117 representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia from Radom, see Sebastian Piatkowski, 'Żydzi w Szydlowcu w latach wojny i okupacji (1939–45)', in Jacek Wijaczka (ed.), *Żydzi Szydlowiccy* ('The Jews of Szydlowiec') (Szydlowiec, 1997), 113–134, here 130.
11. See Archiwum Państwowe w Radomiu (APR): Protokół z konferencji Komitetów Żydowskich województwa kieleckiego (Minutes from the conference of Jewish committees in the county of Kielce), 14 May 1945, Okręgowy Komitet Żydowski, sygn.2.
12. Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach (AP Kielce), Urząd Wojewódzki Kielecki 1944–1950 (UWK II), sygn.1336, k.171, 173, 181. See also Grzegorz Miernik, 'Łosy Żydów i nieruchomości żydowskich w Szydlowcu po II wojnie światowej' ('The fate of Jews and former Jewish real estate in Szydlowiec after World War II'), in Jacek Wijaczka, *Żydzi Szydlowiccy*, 135–214, here 141.
13. James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (London, 2000), 62. See also Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory* (New York, 1996) 15.
14. *Szydlowiec. Memorial Book*, 337.
15. APR Przewodniczący Powiatowej Rady Narodowej (PPRN) sygn 130:14 December 1956; APR MRN, sygn.61: 1962.
16. APR Powiatowa Rada Narodowa (PRN) sygn 316:1957.
17. APR MRN, sygn.32: 1965.
18. *Dom na Skale*, November 2004, a note 'Placówki', 8.
19. Young, *Texture*, 13–15.
20. This transpired clearly from my interviews, surveys, and conversations with the inhabitants.
21. APR, PPRN, vol. 787.
22. APR PPRN Wydział Kultury i Oświaty, sygn.365.
23. Interview conducted in Szydlowiec in 2003.
24. The inscribed number of victims is not quite consistent with the data provided by historians: 150 against 117 executed members of the Radom intelligentsia and 15,000 against 16,000 deported and killed. See Piatkowski, 'Żydzi w Szydlowcu w' 113–134, here 128 and 130.
25. During the Polish–Soviet war 1920–21 the small Polish Communist party gave its support to Soviet Russia. Communists of Jewish origin were visible among the party leaders, a fact used by Polish nationalists to accuse all Jews of being anti-Polish and pro-Communist.
26. AP Kielce, UWK II, sygn. 1336, k.171, 173, 181.

12

Heroic Images. Raoul Wallenberg as a History-Cultural Symbol

Ulf Zander

The Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg is first and foremost associated with his deeds between 1944 and 1945. His efforts, as a volunteer in Hungary, to save tens of thousands of Jews from an almost certain death in the Nazi death camps are no doubt of the greatest importance for his post-war status as a hero and role model. Another crucial aspect is that he was taken into Soviet custody in January 1945. Despite recurrent efforts during a period of 60 years, we do not know for certain what happened to him in the vast Soviet camp and prison-system. Being an opponent to one brutal dictatorship and a victim of another explains the interest in Wallenberg during the Cold War. In this piece I will not present any new research on 'what actually happened' to Wallenberg in Hungary and the Soviet Union. Instead, I will focus on Wallenberg's aftermath with special reference to how the history of his efforts in Budapest has been represented in public art and in television series and films.

In the research on Wallenberg in Budapest, a reappearing purpose is to separate mythical elements in the story from true, and implicit, academic history writing. Most professional historians have traditionally focused on the causes of developments but have been less interested in the reception of events. Klas-Göran Karlsson writes:

While taking great pains in separating motives from structural causes, keeping 'igniting sparks' apart from more profound causal factors and in general distinguishing the vital prime movers leading to historical change from conditions considered less important, the fate of the historical event after its occurrence has often been put at a disadvantage.¹

As a consequence, the history of effects and history as an intellectual construct were for a long time neglected or downplayed by professional historians. One consequence of the ideal of a distance between 'now' and history was a hesitation to accept that the past was not only, and mostly not

even foremost, a distant land, 'but in the here and now'.² Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen concluded that we are both creators of history and created by history.³ Furthermore, the past is of great importance in the formation of identities and upholding of relations. Nevertheless, rarely have discussions reflected in what ways present-day individuals and societies are related to historical development.⁴ Closely related to the traditional concentration on causes is the search for a reality content in written sources and documents on the expense of 'the symbolic categories through which reality is perceived'.⁵

It is hardly possible to analyse symbols of Wallenberg without taking his actions into account. Inversely, the symbolic meanings are hard to avoid even if the purpose is to write about the historic facts. To prepare the ground for a history of effects and symbolic meanings it is necessary to acknowledge the historians' 'double outlook': on the one hand, s/he is looking from the past towards the present, on the other hand s/he is tracing a development with the present time as starting point and working her/his way back through history. It should be stressed that the latter approach, called genetic-developmental or teleologic, is equally important.⁶ A major difficulty with traditional historiography has been the lack of this 'double outlook' and the fact that scholarly work has often been isolated from the rest of society. Additionally, the majority of historiographers have often downplayed aspects of mediation of history. As a consequence, it was taken for granted that history was – and should be – mediated through academic history books or in schools. The majority of professional historians classified alternative presentations of the past in the shape of fiction films, television series or literature, to take a few examples, as being not worthy of their attention. Furthermore, popular uses of history were often stigmatised as abuses of the past, that is, history turned into unreliable memories and myths instead of professional narratives of how it really was.

The tension between a scholarly concentration on history as facts and history as representation has been especially sharp in connection with the Nazi genocide. Some influential debaters have claimed that artists should strive to represent the Holocaust in radically new ways in order to create distance from what happened between 1941 and 1945 rather than confirming an understanding of the catastrophe. Others have protested against various attempts to visualise and/or popularise the Holocaust.⁷ However, there are too many representations of the Holocaust of this kind, and they are too influential and too important to be ignored. They illustrate, among other things, that the Nazi genocide serves as a catalyst to look at a whole range of crucial issues affecting current society, from ethnic relations to views on democracy and foreign policy. The reflective approach is also indispensable when it comes to the study of various representations of cultural, juridical, and political events and processes of which some are directly related to the Holocaust while others are only vaguely associated with the Nazi genocide.

To understand the post-war interest, and sometimes lack of interests, in the Holocaust, it is essential to turn one's attention to legal processes and cultural events. The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem 1961 and the Irving-Lipstadt libel suit in London in 2000 are examples of juridical events that triggered Holocaust interest.⁸ The same goes for various cultural events, reaching from the publication of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* in 1947 and novels of Nobel Prize laureates Elie Wiesel and Imre Kertész, as well as the erecting of Holocaust monuments and other forms of visual representation. Among the most influential of the latter are the broadcasting of the successful television series *Holocaust* (1978), *Wallenberg: A Hero's Story* (1985), as well as Steven Spielberg's and Roberto Benigni's Academy Award winning films *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Life is Beautiful* (1997).

The mediation of history is the core of history-cultural analyses. The starting point is to find out in which contexts the mediations occur and the different meanings attributed to it in various forums. In this sense, history culture – or rather history cultures, since it is likely to find parallel history cultures within and between societies – is a designation for the places in society, especially in public life, in which history is mediated, debated, and used.⁹ By extension, there is a need in history-cultural analysis to study three levels: the history in itself, the terms for the production of history, and the channels available for the mediation of history. The basis for such examinations is that texts, pictures, and images are analysed on their own conditions at the same time as they are put into their societal context. This includes a need for special attention to the channels and media through which history is mediated.

From a history-cultural point of view the construction of historical meaning demands symbols as well as comparisons between different historical events in which both differences and similarities are highlighted. Furthermore, it has been claimed that borderline events like the Holocaust have such an impact on individuals and on societies that they reach 'beyond the level of the subject matter of historical thinking into the core of the mental procedures of historical thinking itself'.¹⁰ Large-scale catastrophes have a devastating impact on historical consciousness. The drastic changes can lead to a failure of imagination because of difficulties in finding similarities with past experiences. In the worst scenario, the connections between interpretations of the past, understanding of the present, and anticipations of the future, cease to exist. Normally this condition is transitory. There is a strong urge to find meaning even from the darkest moments in history. In a mental activity that has been described as an activity of consciousness, we tend to shift the perspective from what a historical phenomenon meant in the past to what it means in our contemporary lives.¹¹ Thus, events that are or seem to be radically different from the past are after a while included and told in familiar narrative patterns. We understand our present situation and attitudes historically. History is therefore of great importance when identities

are constructed or manifested and when we structure the world and our place in it. While telling stories, we make – and understand – history.¹²

In the entry 'Saving of Life' in the 1996 edition of *The Guinness Book of Records*, Raoul Wallenberg is praised as the one man who managed to save '[t]he greatest number of people ... from extinction'.¹³ The historian William D. Rubenstein expresses his surprise to find such an entry 'in the same volume as discussions of the world's heaviest-ever man, the longest snake and the best cricketing innings'.¹⁴ One could discuss whether the Holocaust is a suitable topic for such a book. At the same time, it is clear that the increasing interest in the Holocaust during the last decades has focused on the survivors, or rather the *symbol* of the survivor. As Peter Novick notes, it was 'the survivor as emblematic of Jewish suffering, Jewish memory, and Jewish endurance [...] rather than the highly diverse reality of survivors, that made the greatest contribution to Holocaust commemoration'.¹⁵

Most of the time, survivors demanded saviours. Hence, the interest in survivors has been closely related to an increasing focus on 'the righteous', that is those who risked their own life to save Jews from the Nazi murder machinery, as well as those who survived thanks to these efforts. If there is any aspect of the Holocaust that could be seen in some optimistic light, it is the courage of Oskar Schindler, Giorgio Perlasca, Raoul Wallenberg, and other less known and noticed heroes and those who survived thanks to their rescue actions.¹⁶ The large number of popular culture products on this theme, including *Schindler's List* and the successful films *Perlasca – un eroe italiano* ('Perlasca – an Italian Hero', 2000) and *God afton, herr Wallenberg* ('Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg', 1990), mediate such a message. The above mentioned heroes of the Holocaust also exemplify a pattern that is common in Second World War fiction. To take the thriller *The Eagle has Landed* as an example, a key scene in both the book and the film (1976) is when the main character, a German colonel and hardened war hero, tries to save a Jewish woman. His attempt fails, and he and his men are sent on a suicide mission, trying to kill Winston Churchill in England disguised as Polish paratroopers. The importance of the scene with the Jewish woman, besides giving a reason for the punishment, is that the colonel stands out as a man of principle and courage, not hesitating to oppose the barbaric genocide and to do what is right, even at the expense of his own safety.

In Holocaust stories, similar descriptions – which are not necessarily in discrepancy with historic facts – can be seen as examples of a 'righteous gentile master narrative'. Even more than in *The Eagle has Landed*, it has the function to emphasise that it is the heroes' direct confrontations with the Holocaust that trigger their commitment to save those who otherwise are likely to be murdered. In *Schindler's List*, Schindler becomes a witness to the German extermination of the inhabitants of the Cracow ghetto. Scenes of a similar kind are included early on in *Wallenberg: A Hero's Story* and in *Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg*. Wallenberg, active as businessman travelling

around Europe, sees before his departure to Hungary a railway transportation of Jews, presumably heading for an extermination camp, and how dead people are thrown off the railway cars.

Both Schindler and Wallenberg start out as capitalists, although the latter lacks the economic successes that distinguish so many members of his family. This is of importance in the fictionalised stories of their lives during the Second World War. The audience is able to relate to other well-known fictions of rich and famous persons who are unable to reach true happiness until they stop prioritising business. Wallenberg's greatness becomes even greater since, unlike other members of his family, he is not suspected to have tried to protect German economic interests or entered into business transactions with the Nazi regime during the war.¹⁷ The case is not as clear when it comes to Schindler. David M. Crowe does not exclude that Schindler protected 'his' Jews as a self-protective measure. He was well aware of the fact that the Allies could prosecute him after the end of the war because he was a member of the Nazi Party who had used slave labour during the war. Crowe underlines, however, that this line of thought does not exclude the possibility that Schindler acted as he did because of a true and growing concern for his Jewish workers.¹⁸ Yet it is precisely the flaws in Schindler's personality that have made him such a powerful history-cultural symbol during the last twenty years. His background as a heavy drinker, narcissistic womaniser, and economic gambler makes his metamorphosis into a caring and empathic man even stronger.¹⁹ Furthermore, his and Wallenberg's background as elegant businessmen, experienced in women, wine, and the ways of the world enabled them to uphold contacts with the Germans and their allies.

Doubts have been raised if Wallenberg had regular contacts with Adolf Eichmann. Instead, the SS-colonel Kurt Becher was his main German contact person. Moreover, David Cesarani has emphasised a dilemma in Eichmann's activities in Budapest between 1944 and 1945. Eichmann was commander of a *Sonderkommando* and proved to be extremely efficient. Eichmann's success, writes Cesarani, depended to a large part on the willingness of many Hungarians to assist him when it came to harass, plunder, gather, and deport Jews. This efficiency, however, soon became a problem for Eichmann, since he intended to kill as many Jews as possible. Other influential Nazi politicians demanded that the Jews ought to be used as slave labour, which the Third Reich desperately needed. As a result, Eichmann fell out of favour with Himmler and other high ranking Nazis, lost his power, and was eventually ignored even by his former friends and colleagues.²⁰ However, there is a temptation, especially in popular culture, to hang on to the symbolic contrasts of the immensely powerful and ruthless Adolf Eichmann and his unarmed and courageous main opponent Raoul Wallenberg.

In a number of representations of the Holocaust, Schindler and Wallenberg are skilful when it comes to making and using contacts and information. They do not hesitate to bribe, threat, or bluff in order to save Jewish lives.

And first and foremost: in fictional retrospect they have the capacity and courage to negotiate with dangerous and, especially when it became obvious that Germany was going to lose the war, desperate representatives of totalitarian regimes. In *Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg* the understanding that evil originates from one man is challenged by Wallenberg when he asks his associates what they are to do if there is an Eichmann in every staircase. Still, his moral superiority becomes clear when an older Jew tells his grandchildren how Wallenberg defeated Eichmann in a discussion over dinner. This is even more obvious in *Wallenberg – a Hero's story*. In the television series, Richard Chamberlain plays a Wallenberg who is characterised as a fearless and resourceful man who never misses an opportunity to challenge Eichmann face to face with moral, daring, and even sarcastic arguments.

Schindler's journey from a hardcore capitalist and opportunist to a saviour of Jews is also of history-cultural interest. Not least because of its storytelling, *Schindler's List* was marketed as a 'feel good' film. By way of conclusion, some survivors, their children and grandchildren, are seen living on and prosperous in present-day Israel. It is likely that the happy end contributed to the film's huge success. Because of the great response from critics, politicians, and other moviegoers, *Schindler's List* became 'a symbolic rite of passage introducing the Holocaust into mainstream American culture'²¹ and, we can add, into historical cultures all over the Western world. A recent example is the film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). In it Paul Rusesabagina rejects his career as hotel manager and his contacts with influential Hutus and rich Europeans because of the ongoing slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, as well as the reluctance from Western nations to intervene to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Like Schindler, Rusesabagina feels alienated, deserted, and vulnerable, but finds comfort in the rescue efforts. Not surprisingly, Rusesabagina is called the Rwandan Schindler in the official companion book about *Hotel Rwanda*.²²

There is agreement that Raoul Wallenberg is one of the foremost of the righteous gentiles. However, this does not automatically mean that everybody agrees over the ways in which his heroism is represented. Shortly after the war a monument dedicated to Raoul Wallenberg was erected in Budapest. The 2.8 meter high statue depicts a man killing a snake on a pedestal with an inscription in memory of Wallenberg. Because of Wallenberg's disappearance in the Soviet Union, the communist leaders in Hungary thought that the monument was inappropriate. In 1949 it was removed from Szent István Park. Four years later it was erected outside a medical company in Debrecen. The story behind the sudden disappearance of the Wallenberg statue became known in Hungary during the 1980s. After the fall of the Soviet Union officials in Budapest demanded repeatedly that the monument be moved back to the capital. These demands met resistance from Hungarian right-wing organisations, which argued that there were enough memorials to Wallenberg in Budapest and that his role to



Illustration 12.1 Café in Budapest named after Wallenberg (photographer: Ulf Zander)

save the Jews of Budapest was still unclear. Moreover, as the company in Debrecen was unwilling to let go of the original it became clear that a costly copy of the monument had to be produced. It was not until February 1999 that the Wallenberg monument could be re-inaugurated in Szent István Park.²³

During the 1990s a similar debate started in Sweden, but the arguments and the proposals for monuments were very different compared with those in Hungary. It took a long time before Wallenberg emerged as an unmistakable hero in Sweden. Leading politicians and diplomats in the Swedish foreign ministry had worried about Soviet reactions if persistent inquiries about Wallenberg's whereabouts were put forward. Hence, they were not keen to discuss or promote Wallenberg. Furthermore, it was very unusual that living persons were honoured with a monument and until the late 1980s the official policy as well as the opinion of Wallenberg's relatives was that Wallenberg was still alive somewhere in the Soviet Union. Finally, with the exception of the reactions to the Eichmann trial, the television series *Holocaust*, and a few other events, there had not been a great deal of interest in the Holocaust in Sweden. All this changed with Sweden's integration into the European Community in 1994. Three years later the Holocaust information project *Living History* aimed at fighting contemporary racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism was started.²⁴ At the same time, a suggestion to erect a monument

commemorating Wallenberg in Stockholm was brought forward. This was probably inspired by Gustav Kraitz' monument of Wallenberg, called 'Hope', which was inaugurated outside the United Nations building in New York in 1998. A figurative statue of Wallenberg by the sculptor Willy Gordon was originally suggested. Although it was supported by a large number of Wallenberg's relatives, it was turned down by the Art Council in Stockholm. Instead, the council invited six artists to come up with proposals. All six models that were submitted were non-figurative. Several worked with the Jewish star as a base for the monuments. The winning contribution was a group of twelve oblong objects made in marble. The Danish artist Kirsten Ortved confessed a problem working with the subject: how could one describe Wallenberg and the Jews of Budapest without decaying into sentimentality? Her solution came as figures formed as sphinxes, which were serious and had the potential of leading viewers to reflect upon Raoul Wallenberg's memory and the place where he had saved so many Jews.²⁵ Propagandistic American art from the early days of the Cold War showed the problems involved when historic or contemporary issues are portrayed in a non-figurative and modern form. The viewers had problems with seeing through the message. Thus, the result was the complete opposite of what was aimed for by sculptors from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.²⁶ The Art Council in Stockholm did not take such arguments into consideration. Its members were all supporters of a modernistic art ideal and commissioned Ortved to create a non-figurative monument at Nybroviken in central Stockholm. However, many of the inhabitants of the Swedish capital, including some of Raoul Wallenberg's relatives, had different views. They preferred a traditional monument that visualised a figurative and heroic, larger-than-life representation. They made this argument in many letters to the editors in two of the leading Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. They also claimed that a number of such monuments, mostly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, already existed at Nybroviken. The chairman of the council, the famous author Pär Westberg, however, believed that the days of traditional, heroic manifestations had passed and that it was time to find new forms to pay homage to heroes, including Wallenberg.²⁷

The discussion about Ortved's representation of Wallenberg shows that the past is important to many people. One of the challenges with historical culture is to understand and reflect upon it in terms of collective and social phenomena. This means 'that questions of how history is mediated, perceived and received are at least as important as how history is produced in a historical culture'.²⁸ The recurrent interest in Wallenberg is, among other things, probably related to the fact that heroes still stand strong in historical culture. The art historian John Lash argues that anyone can act heroically, but that the hero embodies something more. He is almost always a man of flesh and blood, but he can, and will, act constantly. Also, his actions are distinguished by that he has *arete*, excellence: 'In excelling and exceeding himself, the hero

becomes a model of higher potential for his clan, his race or nation, even for humanity at large.²⁹ Hence, it is no wonder that the concept of the hero is closely related to rhetoric as well as to narrative structures, meaning that any text, be it scholarly or fictional, demands heroes and their enemies.³⁰ With this in mind and considering the vitality of the black-and-white-descriptions of the Second World War, it is most likely that the fight between desirable heroes like Raoul Wallenberg and ruthless villains like Adolf Eichmann will be a recurrent feature in historical cultures for a long time to come.

Notes

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2. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past. Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998), 63.
3. Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 63.
4. Karlsson, 'Holocaust'.
5. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, 'Introduction', in R. Samuel and P. Thompson (eds), *The Myths We Live By* (London, 1993), 1–22, here 1f.
6. Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'Making Sense of the Holocaust after Sixty Years. An Introduction', in K-G. Karlsson and U. Zander (eds), *Holocaust Heritage. Inquiries into European Historical Cultures* (Malmö, 2004), 9–34, here 23; Jörn Rüsen, 'Interpreting the Holocaust. Some Theoretical Issues', in Karlsson and Zander (eds), *Holocaust Heritage*, 35–62, here 35–37.
7. Ulf Zander, 'Holocaust at the Limits. Historical Culture and the Nazi Genocide in the Television Era', in Karlsson and Zander, *Echoes*, 256–292, here 257–267.
8. Karlsson, 'Making Sense', 15.
9. Jörn Rüsen, *Historische Orientierung. Über die Arbeit des Geschichtsbewusstseins, sich in der Zeit zurechtfinden* (Cologne, 1994), 211–213, 219–225.
10. Jörn Rüsen, 'Holocaust Memory and Identity Building: Metahistorical Considerations in the Case of (West) Germany', in Michael Roth and Charles Salas (eds), *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles, CA, 2001), 252–270, here 252f.
11. Jörn Rüsen, 'Vad är historiekultur? Överväganden kring ett nytt sätt att reflektera över historia', in Jörn Rüsen, *Berättande och förnuft. Historieteoretiska texter* (Gothenburg, 2004), 149–177, here 152.
12. Jürgen Straub, 'Telling Stories, Making History. Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning', in J. Straub (ed.), *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness* (Oxford, 2005), 44–98, here 44–46.
13. 'Saving of life', in Peter Matthews (ed.), *The Guinness Book of Records, 1996* (Enfield 1995), 179.
14. William D. Rubenstein, *The Myth of Rescue. Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (London, 2000), 191.
15. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, MA, 1999), 273.
16. Leon W. Wells, 'The Righteous Gentiles', in Saul S. Friedman (ed.), *Holocaust Literature. A Handbook of Critical, Historical and Literary Writings* (London, 1993), 140–160.

17. Gerard Aalders and Cees Wiebes, *The Art of Cloaking Ownership. The Secret Collaboration and Protection of the German War Industry by the Neutrals: the Case of Sweden* (Amsterdam, 1996), chapters 2 and 12; Eva Schweitzer, *Amerika und der Holocaust. Die verschwiegene Geschichte* (Munich, 2004), 241f.
18. David M. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler. The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the True Story Behind The List* (New York, 2004), 626.
19. Daniel R. Schwarz, 'Keneally's and Spielberg's *Schindler's List*: Realistic Novel into Epic Film', in Daniel R. Schwartz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York 1999), 209–235, here 209–211.
20. David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London, 2004), especially chapter 6.
21. Yosefa Loshitzky, 'Introduction', in Y. Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg's Holocaust. Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington, IN, 1997), 1–17, here 2.
22. Nicola Graydon, 'The Rwandan Schindler', in Terry George (ed.), *Hotel Rwanda. Bringing the True Story of an African Hero to Film* (New York, 2005), 33–45, here 33.
23. Peter R. Meyer's documentary 'Raoul – och de 30 monumenten', shown on Swedish television 24 August 2001.
24. Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'History in Swedish Politics – the "Living History" Project', in Attila Pók et al. (eds), *European History: Challenge for a Common Future* (Hamburg 2002), 145–162.
25. Jan Torsten Ahlstrand (ed.), *Raoul Wallenberg: Minnesmärke i Stockholm. Sex tävlingsförslag av Bernard Kirschbaum, Franco Leidi, Lars Olof Loeld, Kirsten Ortwed, Christian Partos, Jaume Plensa* (Lund, 1999), 10f, here 10f.
26. Robert Bustow, 'The Limits of Modernist Art as a "Weapon of the Cold War": Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner', *Oxford Art Journal*, 20 (1) (1997), 68–80.
27. Meyer, 'Raoul'.
28. Karlsson, 'Making Sense', 23.
29. John Lash, *The Hero. Manhood and Power* (London, 1995), 5.
30. Linas Eriksonas, *National Heroes and National Identities. Scotland, Norway and Lithuania* (Bruxelles, 2004), 23f, 37f.

Part IV

Representing the Holocaust: Memorials

13

Holocaust Survivors and Early Israeli Holocaust Research and Commemoration: A Reappraisal*

Boaz Cohen

Holocaust survivors are often depicted in historical writing and in literature as passive and silent 'others'. Their silence ended, it is claimed, following the Eichmann trial in 1961 or later in the 1970s. This silence is attributed to the deep trauma of their experiences and even to the indifferent reception of absorbing communities. Israeli society and its leaders are notoriously singled out for such treatment of survivors, for, on the one hand, sidelining them and, on the other, manipulating Holocaust memories for Zionist and Israeli state purposes. Current research is challenging this picture of silence and shows survivors as an active force in early Israeli society. Survivors lobbied successfully for Holocaust-related legislation and raised their voices in issues connected to Holocaust commemoration.

Both personally and through organisations, survivor activists made their voices heard on Holocaust-related issues. They lobbied ceaselessly for Holocaust-related legislature, and disputed the reparations agreement and the normalisation of relations with Germany. Pressure from the survivor public contributed to the enactment of the 'Nazi and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law' in 1950. The Organisation of Disabled War Veterans succeeded in bringing about the 'Disabled Veterans of the War against the Nazis Law' in 1954. Concurrently, the Knesset passed the 'Holocaust and Ghetto Rebellion Memorial Day Law' in 1951. This law set the 27th of the Jewish month of Nisan as Holocaust Memorial Day – a compromise date negotiated by a Knesset committee headed by a survivor member of Knesset, Rabbi Mordechai Nurok.¹ Though a date was set, the Knesset did not stipulate how the commemoration and mourning should be handled. The 'Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Act – Yad Vashem' was initiated by the Government in 1953 with legislation followed closely by survivor activists. In 1959, a coalition of 100 survivor organisations petitioned the Knesset for legislation that would enforce public mourning on Holocaust Memorial day. Their proposal, submitted to the Knesset by Rabbi Nurok, called for a total stoppage of work

and the closure of all entertainment facilities during memorial ceremonies. The Knesset accepted a watered-down government counter-proposal, the 'Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Day Law' of 1959. However, by 1961, the time of the Eichmann trial, many of the survivors' proposals were incorporated into the law. But the voice of survivors was not heard only in the Knesset. Survivor organisations organised demonstrations and rallies against the reparations agreement and the normalisation of relations with Germany. One major issue contested by survivors was that of Yad Vashem. The way the Holocaust was depicted in the institution and the research done there drew the attention – and the fire – of the survivors. This essay focuses on the major part played by survivors in altering the way the Holocaust was remembered and researched in Yad Vashem.

Who were the players in the conflict at Yad Vashem? Prof. Ben-Zion Dinur, venerable Israeli historian and Minister of Education (until 1955), headed the institution from its founding in 1953 until 1959, when he resigned under heavy public pressure. His world-view and policies regarding Yad Vashem were contested by the survivor historians working in the institution. Public pressure from outside the institution was organised by survivor organisations that were active and vocal in Israeli society at the time.

Dinur saw Yad Vashem primarily as a research institution: 'the first and foremost mission of Yad Vashem is Holocaust research'.² But what did Dinur mean by 'Holocaust research'? Dinur claimed that the Holocaust was to be understood by the historical model of 'Diasporas and their Destruction' that epitomises Jewish history. 'This chapter, the Holocaust, is not new in our history', he said, 'It's only new in its form, scope, meticulous organisation and massive numbers, but not in its essence.'³ For Dinur, the Holocaust was 'the end of an historical epoch – 1000 years and more of Jewish life centred in Europe'.⁴

Setting the Holocaust in the wider matrix of Jewish history had inherent implications for the research done in Yad Vashem. Dinur wanted long-range projects traversing the whole of Jewish history in Europe and culminating in the Holocaust. This was most obvious in Dinur's flag project: 'Pinkas Ha'kehilot' – the Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities. This was to be a monumental project tracing the history of every Jewish community with more than 100 members from its establishment to its destruction by the Nazis. 'We have to give all the basic geographical and historical facts' on each community, said Dinur, 'but in the centre should stand its unique historical character, its individual face and its contribution to the Jewish people'.⁵ This undertaking was so huge that it consumed much of Yad Vashem's resources and had to be scaled down several times. The first years were devoted to the bibliographical work and to the collection of relevant documentation. Although work was started in 1953, the first volume was published in 1969, and the project is yet to be completed (2005). Another project involved a joint bibliography of books on the Holocaust with Yiddish

Scientific Institute (YIVO) in New York. Dinur entrusted the collection of documentation for the Yad Vashem's archive to the Israeli Historical Society, of which he was one of the founding members.

Dinur's world-view was also evident in the Yad Vashem building programme. The first building, inaugurated in 1957, was the archive and administration building. Until 1961, no commemorative features existed in Yad Vashem, and no monuments or places to hold commemorative events were available. Moreover, there were absolutely no references to Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. These were not priorities for Dinur. The establishment, in 1957, of the joint Hebrew University and Yad Vashem Institute for Research into the Destruction of European Jewry and its History in the Last Generation was another example of this world-view. As the Institute's name suggests, its research scope included modern Jewish history. It was also totally controlled by the University, although Yad Vashem provided all of its funding. Dinur had to override his colleagues in the Yad Vashem directorate as they wanted the Institute to focus on the Holocaust. The Institute, as mandated by Dinur, was a recurrent bone of contention between him and the survivors. They (and others) claimed that research done in the Institute was mostly irrelevant to the Holocaust and that its budget would be better spent on Holocaust-related projects.⁶ Overall, in Dinur's Yad Vashem research into the Holocaust *per se* (i.e. the events of the late 1930s and the destruction of European Jewry) was relegated to later stages of the work.

Dinur staffed the Institute with two distinct groups of academics. First and foremost were Prof. Israel Halpern and his students from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Halpern served as head of the research division and Daniel Cohen was given the position of secretary. Later, Shaul Esch was put in charge of Yad Vashem's publications. The other group was comprised of ex-members of the Polish historical commission and other survivor historians. Amongst them was Josef Kermish, who was Head of Archives, and Rachel Auerbuch, the Head of the Department for the Collection of Testimonies. Nachman Blumental was a researcher and Nathan Eck served as an editor of the *Yad Vashem Bulletin*. Meir Marek Dworzecki was appointed as a member of the Yad Vashem Directorate and was for many years the only survivor there.⁷

But who were the survivor historians? What was their cultural background, and what were their values and beliefs? Since they emerged from East European Jewish intelligentsia, their attitudes towards Holocaust research and commemoration were informed by the East European Jewish tradition of popular participation in historical work. They viewed history not as a detached academic profession but as a national endeavour taken up 'by the people, for the people'. Moreover, the issue at stake, the Holocaust, involved acute personal and psychological aspects. For them, it was not academic subject matter but a gaping wound. They had lost their families and had witnessed the destruction of their communities and people. They

had also seen the breakdown of their fundamental beliefs: European Enlightenment values of humanism and progress and Jewish values, such as the much-vaunted Jewish solidarity. Research was to provide the public with 'answers' – lessons, understanding, and insights that would help to heal the open wounds of the Holocaust.

They also believed they had a mission to fulfil. After escaping from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Aryan side, Rachel Auerbuch, the Polish-Jewish author, stated: 'In giving testimony on the crime, in [writing] the indictment of the murderers I see the only reason for my deliverance.'⁸ This was not only a sacred mission and a calling. It was also an obligation of the living to the dead. They saw themselves as the most competent candidates for this research because of their first-hand experience of the issues involved. Although there was a heavy personal price to pay, they were willing to accept this task. Auerbuch described the harsh reality of the 'lonely, forlorn survivor historian who has lost his loved ones' and who must, through his work, recall 'what he saw then'. 'But he understands', she wrote, 'that this work [...] cannot be postponed because witnesses are dying away and so do the researchers belonging to the generation of the *Hurban* [catastrophe]'.⁹ Israel Kaplan of the Historical Commission in Munich wrote that, for the survivors, the decision to document the Holocaust was tantamount to 'jumping back into the graves'.¹⁰

The work of documentation, and their involvement in it, began during the Holocaust itself. The Oneg Shabat Archives, organised and led by Dr Emanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw Ghetto, are the most famous. However, similar initiatives also existed in other ghettos. Auerbuch was a central member of Ringelblum's team and was influential in unearthing the material he left buried in the Warsaw ghetto. Following liberation, historical work started in the displaced persons (DP) camps and in other concentrations of liberated Jews. Historical commissions were established and staffed by survivors or by repatriates returning from the USSR, where they had spent the war years. Two projects with direct bearing on Yad Vashem were the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, whose activists included Rachel Auerbuch, Josef Kermish, and Nachman Blumental, and the Central Historical Commission of Liberated Jews in the American Zone in Munich, headed by Israel Kaplan and Moshe Figenbaum. The commissions collected thousands of testimonies and documents and published monographs and books on the Holocaust.¹¹ By the late 1940s and early 1950s, many of the commissions' activists had immigrated to Israel. The Munich commission closed down following the dissolution of the DP camps and transferred all of its collections to Yad Vashem. These collections served as the foundation of Yad Vashem's archives. In 1964, more than fifteen years after the collections arrived in Israel, Yad Vashem's archivists reported that they were still cataloguing them.¹²

The survivor historians immigrating to Israel in its early years looked forward to continuing their work of commemoration, but reality was harsh.

The young state was struggling with mass immigration, severe economic problems, and precarious security. The original Yad Vashem, established by the Zionist congress in 1946, all but closed down, and the activists from the Munich commission arriving in Israel in 1949 could not find anywhere to continue their work. They went on to take up their original professions. Israel Kaplan was a teacher and Moshe Figenbaum was an accountant. The members of the Polish commission who arrived in Israel about two years later fared better as the newly established Ghetto Fighters House employed some of them. All of this changed with the Knesset decision in 1953 to establish Yad Vashem as the Holocaust and Heroism Commemoration Authority. Survivor historians followed the deliberations in the Knesset closely, and even attended as spectators the meeting which passed the law. Some of them found a place in the new institution.

What were their expectations of Yad Vashem? They saw it as a place where commemoration and research concerning the Holocaust would go hand in hand. Like Dinur, they saw the importance of research, but they did not agree on its nature. Auerbuch envisaged Yad Vashem as a repository for survivor testimonies and other Jewish historical materials. She envisaged it as a popular project 'by the people and for the people'. Nathan Eck envisaged the 'mission of Holocaust research by Yad Vashem', as providing 'scholarly answers to the still nagging questions raised by the Holocaust'.¹³

Commemoration was another important aspect they wanted Yad Vashem to fulfil. Although this was actually the original *raison d'être* of the project, it was far from accomplished under Dinur. The lack of commemoration was a sore point with the survivor public, and was taken up by survivors in the Yad Vashem council and in survivor conventions. Survivors in the council did not mince their words. 'What is to be [the character of] Yad Vashem?' asked Yehiel Grentestein rhetorically, 'a general Jewish, public and popular institution or a scientific academy, a university history department?' 'We can end this argument once and for all,' he said, 'if we will say it loud and clear to the Yad Vashem directorate: we are interested in a memorial institute in close contact with the public'.¹⁴

Grentestein sat at the Yad Vashem council as a representative of the Organisation of Disabled Veterans of the War against the Nazis. This evokes the third player in the conflict: the survivor organisations. An active force in Israeli society, they were composed largely of ex-fighters, partisans and soldiers who had taken part in resistance and fighting during the Second World War and the Holocaust. They acted as support groups for their members, but were concerned mainly with issues of memory and commemoration. They lobbied the Knesset for legislation on Holocaust-related issues, organised rallies, demonstrations, and petitions, and worked to integrate the story of their fighting into Israeli culture. They were supported by numerous *landsmanschaften*, organisations established by immigrants from East European Jewish communities, that integrated many survivors into their ranks.

They were constantly critical of the lack of commemoration in Yad Vashem, especially that of Jewish heroism.¹⁵

More active and vocal than other groups was the Organisation of Disabled Veterans of the War against the Nazis. It was unrelenting in its criticism of the indifference of Yad Vashem towards Jewish heroism and fighting. It complained that 'this governmental institute which has such great resources not only did nothing to commemorate the war dead but is also ignoring acts of heroism by one and a half million of our brothers in the allied armies and in the underground'. Itzhak Zandman, the organisation's leader, went on to ask: 'Where are the monuments for Jewish fighters and avengers?'¹⁶ On 3 June 1958 they staged a sit-in at Yad Vashem offices. Their demands were two-fold. One set of demands related to the commemoration of Jewish heroism: the establishment of a Department for the Commemoration of Jewish Heroism in Yad Vashem; the preparation of *Yizkor* [memorial] books for fallen fighters; the collection of testimonies from those still alive. But some of their demands related to the wider issues of Holocaust memory in Israeli society and the nature of Holocaust Commemoration day. They demanded that the Holocaust be commemorated as a national day of mourning that would be respected by the state and by the people and require the closure of cinemas and coffee shops, the stoppage of all traffic for a few minutes, and the nation standing in silence.¹⁷ In order to influence the decision-making process, they demanded 'adequate' representation on Yad Vashem's Directorate and Council.

While survivor organisations were pressuring Yad Vashem from the outside, tension was also building up inside. As aforementioned, Dinur's plans for Yad Vashem conflicted directly with those of the survivor historians. Added to this was a total breakdown of relations between them and Dinur's Hebrew University team. There were cultural and personal differences at work. Dinur's people were younger, and they had spent the war years in Palestine and been spared the horrors of the Holocaust. As students in the Hebrew University, they had been reared on the German professional historical tradition that was light years away from the East European Historical tradition of the survivors. Above all, a mutual disrespect of each other's work and abilities existed. Dinur's students claimed that the survivor historians' work was not academic and not fit for publication. The survivor historians, on the other hand, argued that their antagonists had no knowledge of the Holocaust and its documentation, and were also lacking the empathy needed for such research. Dinur's incorporation of Dr Josef Melkman, a Dutch survivor, as Director of the Institute failed to bridge the gap between the two groups.¹⁸

By 1957, the situation inside Yad Vashem had reached boiling point. With no mutual trust between everyone involved, the survivors were ready for an open confrontation with Dinur and his administration. The conflagration was sparked by a negative report on Yad Vashem by the Comptroller-General. It dealt, among other issues, with the dearth of publications and the

channelling of funds to the Israeli Historical Society. This came on top of what the survivors considered to be an 'anti-survivor policy' by the Yad Vashem administration: the firing of Nathan Blumental and Rachel Auerbuch, and the sidelining of Joseph Kermish and Nathan Eck. The 4th International Council of Yad Vashem that subsequently convened in June 1958 was the field on which the battle for Yad Vashem was to be fought.¹⁹

In two anonymous public letters, survivor historians petitioned the members of Yad Vashem's Council to affect a major change in Yad Vashem's policies. 'The bitter truth is', they claimed, 'that Yad Vashem's Directorate brought the Institution to a resounding failure'. They indicted Yad Vashem's Directorate on four significant counts: commemoration, for having done almost nothing; research, for there being no understanding that Holocaust research was not just another facet of the historical profession, but a national-educational undertaking as well as a specific methodology; personnel, for their sidelining of experienced and capable researchers who had proven their worth in public activity; publications, for no publications at all having been produced until the previous year (1957) and then only because of pressure from the public and from the Claims Conference (as the 'Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany' was known) which provided half of Yad Vashem's budget.

Above all, the survivors claimed that 'the people at the head of the Institution (i.e. Dinur), had never worked on Holocaust-related issues'. It is no wonder, therefore, that they used the Institution's resources for Jewish history projects 'that were closer to their hearts'. They asked the Members of the Council to authorise Yad Vashem's budget only after an enquiry by a public commission and not until its recommendations had been accepted.²⁰

The deliberations of the Council were characterised by strong feelings and recriminations. From the first of its three meetings, Dinur found himself facing wide opposition from the survivors and their allies amongst the general public. The survivors were aware of their power in the Council, and they negotiated from an obvious vantage point. The Council accepted their demand for a commission of inquiry to be set up, and withheld authorisation of the budget until after it gave its recommendations. These recommendations mirrored closely the demands of the survivor historians.

In order to influence the Council and exert more pressure on Dinur and the Directorate, the survivors confronted Dinur publicly in the press. The lack of Holocaust commemoration in Yad Vashem had cropped up in the Israeli press throughout the 1950s, but in 1958 the papers were replete with articles on the situation there. These were written by the survivor historians or by allied journalists and publicists, and forcibly presented the survivors' case. While the newspapers did grant space to the positions of Dinur and his supporters, their main line was very critical of his policies.

One such acrimonious article, entitled 'What did you do in Yad Vashem?', written by the noted journalist David Lazar and was the lead article in the

Ma'ariv evening paper supplement. It was a scathing indictment of Yad Vashem's administration under Dinur. Lazar described the Yad Vashem building with its offices and archives but with nowhere 'to light candles'. This contrasted poorly with memorial initiatives in other places with fewer resources, such as the Bergen Belsen Memorial and the CDJC (Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine) in Paris. 'Frankly, what did we want?' Lazar declared: 'We wanted [...] a gigantic *neshama* candle, a mausoleum of sorts, a temple, a place of communion with the dead. A house where every brick in the wall would cry out. At the head of this institution we should have placed the prophet Jeremiah of this generation – if one could be found!' But this was not to be. 'It seems that this immense national tragedy is broken down into files', wrote Lazar. 'Tens of thousands of documents are filed and "dried" just like flowers that are dried up for research and "classification".' There was 'nothing live' in Yad Vashem. The Holocaust had become just another chapter in history with 'no mourning, no pain, no monument, no candle, and no soul'. This 'scientific' policy had not borne fruit, he said, because the 'real experts in Holocaust research' – the survivor historians – were being pushed aside. 'We can't get the prophet Jeremiah to take charge of this house', Lazar lamented, 'but we do have some of the survivors that experienced this national catastrophe and who put all their energy [...] into research and documentation.' He placed the blame squarely at 'Professor's (Dinur's) feet'. 'Is it lack of ability?' he asked of Dinur's administration. 'Are they just not talented enough? or are darker motives at work?' He hinted at the Israeli government's policies towards Germany: 'Do they want to suppress the Holocaust, so as not to feed the hate towards the Germans with thoughts of vengeance – at such "ideal" times of reparations?'²¹

This bitter press coverage took Dinur and his staff by surprise. 'We can't take it any longer', Dinur told the Yad Vashem Directorate, 'they are organising a smear campaign against us in the press'.²² Publicly, Dinur tried to downplay the opposition: in a newspaper interview he claimed that 'private people organised a campaign, there are matters of honour involved [...]'. But the campaign could not be ignored. Dinur's colleagues in the Yad Vashem Directorate were aware of the public standing of the survivor historians. They knew that the Israeli public saw the survivor historians as icons, 'as living monuments of the Holocaust' and their status in public opinion could not be contested. They understood that the survivors' public standing inhibited their manoeuvring: 'we can't fire them, no one would accept this', said Moshe Kol, the representative of the Jewish Agency in the Directorate. That 'would haunt Yad Vashem forever because the public feels deeply about those people'.²³ Dinur found himself isolated, not only in the press, but also in the Council and even in his Directorate. In January 1959, he resigned and went back to his historical work. In his place came Aryeh Kubovy, an East European Jew who had resided in Belgium before the Holocaust. He was an activist of the World Jewish Congress and one of the organisers of the anti-Nazi

boycott of the 1930s. He committed Yad Vashem to a policy of commemoration and remembrance. In so doing, he assuaged the concern of the survivors. The survivor historians were vindicated. Yad Vashem was moving in their direction.

What does all of this teach us about survivors and Israeli society? The depiction of survivors as passive and silent 'others' seems far from accurate. While many survivors did try to silence the voices of the past and forget their traumatic experiences, an active cadre existed that was prepared to re-open the wounds of the past, research them, and learn their lessons. Their willingness to contest the representation of the Holocaust in Israeli memorial culture shows that they believed that they could influence it and generate a change in Israeli culture and institutions. Their success in canvassing the support of the press and affecting a change in Yad Vashem only confirmed this belief. Survivors were not a fringe group in Israeli society. Numbering about 500,000 they constituted one quarter of the Israeli population. Their leaders had a distinct sense of identity that powered their campaigns and was no less empowered by them. Israel's political and cultural establishment was receptive to their demands and accepted their claim to a leading role in shaping Israel's Holocaust memory.

Notes

* This chapter is based on research done for my doctoral thesis: Boaz Cohen, *Holocaust Research in Israel 1945–1980: Characteristics, Trends, Developments* (Hebrew) (PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2004).

1. He had to reconcile the demand of the leftist parties for the 19th of April – the date used throughout the world – with the religious prohibition against mourning in the month of Nisan. The Jewish festival of Pesach (Easter) and the relevant school holidays also had to be taken into account.
2. Yad Vashem Directorate, 18 October 1955 Yad Vashem Archives (YVA) AM2. The minutes of directorate meetings have no file numbers.
3. Ben-zion Dinur, 'Diasporas and their Destruction', *Dorot U'reshumut*, 1978, 175.
4. Ben-zion Dinur, 'On the Proposed "Holocaust and Heroism Commemoration – Yad Vashem" Law', *Zachor*, 1958, 81.
5. Ben-zion Dinur, 'On Pinkas Hakehilot, Plans and Problems', *Zachor*, 117.
6. See Boaz Cohen, 'The Birth Pangs of Holocaust Research in Israel', *Yad Vashem Studies* 33 (2005), 203–243.
7. Yad Vashem's Directorate was composed of representatives of ministries of Education, Foreign affairs and of Religions and also of The Jewish Agency and The World Jewish Congress. The Institute's Director (J. Melkman), its secretary (Palmon) and Dinur did the routine administration
8. Auerbuch, *Nazwali to Wysiedleniem* (Warsaw, 1943). She returned to these words in the forward of her Israeli book, *Be'hutzut Varsha* (Tel-Aviv, 1954).
9. Rahel Auerbuch's testimony to the permanent commission on Yad Vashem, 13 July 1958, YVA P16/77.
10. Israel Kaplan, private archive 19/7/1968.

11. See Boaz Cohen, 'Holocaust Survivors and the Genesis of Holocaust Research,' in J.-D. Steinert and I. Weber-Newth (eds), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour: Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution* (Osnabrück, 2005), 290–300.
12. Joseph Kermish to the Commission of Inquiry on Yad Vashem, 14 February 1965, Central Zionist Archive (CZA) S62/1032.
13. Nathan Eck, 'Testimony before the committee on Yad Vashem 16 July 1958', Hebrew University Archive 1954–58.
14. The third meeting of the fourth international council of Yad Vashem, 9 November 1958, YVA, 15.
15. See: Boaz Cohen, 'Holocaust Heroics – Ghetto Fighters and Partisans in Israeli Society and Historiography,' *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 31, (2) (2003), 197–212.
16. 'Dvar Ha'irgun', 'The organisation's address' in the ceremonial meeting of the 7th convention of the 'Organisation of Disabled Veterans of the War against the Nazis', 15–16 November 1957, YVA P10/44.
17. Y. Melkman (Yad Vashem director) to Marek Dworzecki, 8 June 1958, YVA AM1/364.
18. For an in-depth view of this debate see Boaz Cohen, 'The Birth Pangs of Academic Holocaust Research', *Yad Vashem Studies* 33 (Jerusalem 2005), 203–243.
19. Yad Vashem's International Council was composed of public figures, representatives of public institutions, such as the Hebrew University, of survivor organisations and of international Jewish bodies. It mainly functioned to authorise the Yad Vashem budget.
20. 'To the members of the Yad Vashem council convening today 17 June 1958', YVA AM1/364. The two-page letter is signed by an anonymous group, The Trustees of Yad Vashem, but reflects the issues and wording of the survivor historians.
21. David Lazar, 'What did you do in Yad Vashem?', *Ma'ariv* 9 May 1958, 3, 12.
22. 'Yad Vashem Directorate', 22 May 1958, YVA AM2.
23. 'Yad Vashem Directorate', 22 May 1958, YVA AM2.

14

“Auschwitz in the Museum?”: Holocaust Memory Between History and Moralism

Simone Lässig and Karl Heinrich Pohl

Each society, each nation has its own way of presenting history in museums. Collective memories shape and are shaped by emotions, values, hopes, and conflicts. Historical museums do not just reflect the findings of academic historians, but are always also responses to contemporary social needs. Each generation, each society, each nation influences the content and the form of historical presentation, or rather the way in which history is *worked on*. This certainly has to do with political interests and strategies of legitimation, but also with the geographical and temporal proximity to the events and the degree to which people are personally impacted. So, at first, many contemporary witnesses – victims as well as perpetrators – doubted it would ever be possible to comprehend Auschwitz, let alone present it in a museum.¹ This problem remained unsolved until the mid-1960s.

In West Germany, memory of the mass murder was repressed through fear of accusations of personal responsibility, shame, and a need finally to create a sense of “normality”. The German Democratic Republic (GDR), by contrast, understood itself as the antithesis of the capitalist Germany in the West which, according to East German historians, had produced National Socialism and, therefore, bore sole responsibility for the Holocaust. In Israel, the central concerns were the security and the legitimacy of a defensible Jewish state. This required heroes and martyrs, not defenceless victims. The Jews who had been murdered in the gas chambers were, therefore, excluded for a long time from Zionist memory and survivors found little public scope for expressing themselves. Similarly, in the United States rapid integration was called for and the uncomfortable question that hovered in the background – whether America had done enough to save European Jews – was not conducive to a public debate on the subject. Thus, despite totally different circumstances, contemporary witnesses tended to be reticent about the Holocaust.²

Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation took the stage. In Germany, this generation, while bearing no personal guilt, was still closely linked with the Nazi period through family ties. As was the case in Israel and

the United States, as well as in Germany, external catalysts such as the Eichmann trial and, later, the television series *Holocaust* accelerated a predominantly moral confrontation with industrial mass murder. The significance of factors unique to the various national contexts aside, the greater the temporal and personal distance to the historical event, the stronger the interest and the need to learn more about it apparently becomes – as universities in the United States reveal: in 1969 there were two seminars devoted to the Holocaust in the entire country, by 1979 there were 200, and by 1989 there were 2,000.³

For a long time, historical memory in Germany wavered between self-reproach and personal defensiveness. Later, in the second generation after Auschwitz, this was outweighed by a focus on the victims, with sympathy the dominant emotion. From this a great interest in all things Jewish emerged which did not translate easily into a representation of the horror in a museum context. It was only in the mid-1980s that a critical public really began to be concerned with the gnawing question of the profile of the perpetrators.⁴ Whereas the first generation lived in an era of “silence and exterritoriality”, the second generation could afford more moral detachment.⁵ Thus, while one segment of the population could effectively keep the Holocaust “at a certain distance”; others could politically and historically come to terms with the genocide and compensate for their guilt. “Understanding” and “empathy” were categories that this generation applied above all to the victims.

For the third generation, which sets the tone today, the question of personal or family guilt is no longer so relevant. Instead, this generation seeks to transform an atemporal moral distance into a specific *historical* distance. It stands for “historization” and “appropriation”; it conceives of “understanding” very broadly and no longer demonstrates empathy exclusively for the victims of the Holocaust, but also tries to comprehend the actions of the perpetrators and the “bystanders”.⁶ It also tends to expand the concept of “victim” to include “ordinary Germans” – such as those killed by Allied bombs or Germans expelled from their homes in Eastern Europe at the end of the war.

Norbert Frei has characterized this trend as a “farewell to a sense of the contemporary”.⁷ The protagonists of the Nazi era, whether they were “merely” historical contemporaries or actual victims or perpetrators, have by and large died. With their passing, the Holocaust becomes part of collective memory and truly part of history. Even if the relevance of autobiographical or familial connections declines, the shape of memory acquires a new dimension. Henceforth, what decides what enters collective memory and how, is the *form* the encounter with the Holocaust takes. That means that the concepts which govern the presentation of the Holocaust in the public sphere will gain more influence and meaning than ever before.⁸

The emergence of a new generation is *one* reason for the significant change of perspective. Other factors are: the increasing Europeanization of the

recent past (as full of contradictions as it may be); the “Americanization” of the Holocaust which has accompanied Europeanization; and the global political changes which have occurred since 1990.⁹ The end of the Cold War invalidated long-standing paradigms for interpreting conflicts and defining enemies. But new conflicts were born, such as modern terrorism, which, with its transnational character, sharpens our perception of international interdependence. Thus a tendency to universalize historical experience and memory supports inquiry into global and transnational phenomena even in research on the Holocaust.

Besides impacting academic research, the changes described above have had decisive consequences for education and, especially, for public engagement with the subject of “Auschwitz.” In the following, we will examine the concepts which have heretofore existed for presenting the Holocaust in a museum setting. Then, with reference to several concrete examples, especially from museums and exhibits which have been conceived since the 1990s, we will see how far several central criteria for a reflective historical approach can be applied to the Holocaust and meet the needs of the new “uninvolved” and “distanced” generation.

* * *

Leaving aside the memorials erected on the sites where the mass murders took place – because these sites place unique demands upon any kind of historical didactics one attempts to construct there¹⁰ – five fundamental types of Holocaust museum can be distinguished. First, there are those which see themselves unequivocally as “Holocaust museums,” such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (USHMM). One finds them above all where there is a lack either of “authentic sites” where the killing, suffering, and dying occurred or sites of remembrance and mourning. Spatial and emotional distance is the precondition for a form of museum which not only enables the Holocaust to be presented, or rather, discussed, but also *creates* memorial sites and integrates them into the exhibition. In this type of museum, the Holocaust creates meaning *ex negativo* in two essentially different ways. In the one case, the Holocaust is ascribed a universal meaning in order to legitimize Western, liberal, and democratic values, along with their global discourse of human rights. This interpretation is dominant in the United States. Its content emphasizes the value and dignity of the individual by focusing on the concrete, the visual, and the individual. By contrast, the exhibit presented in Yad Vashem up until 2005 favored a Zionist narrative that embedded the Holocaust in the history of “the Jewish people” as part of a continuous current of anti-Semitism which made an independent Jewish state a necessity. This interpretation makes the collective central.

The second group consists of museums of Jewish history, for example in Berlin, New York, Prague, and Tel-Aviv. Here, too, generational dynamics and

the specific national context influence the paradigms of historical interpretation. In Israel the dominant approach analyzes the history of the Jewish diaspora in reverse, with the Holocaust as the point of departure. The exhibition in Berlin, by contrast, is based on an historical narrative with a fundamental openness in Jewish history for its premise. The Holocaust is certainly presented as a deep historical rupture, but it neither structures nor dominates the entire exhibition.

A third type of museum presents the history of the Holocaust from the perspective of German history, whether at the national or the regional level. Whereas Holocaust museums and museums of Jewish history are in essence “victims’ museums,” museums of German history must also pose substantial questions about the perpetrators of the Holocaust, about who went along with them, who resisted, and who were spectators and bystanders. Examining the mass murder organized and carried out by Germans provokes again and again the difficult question of the origins of the Holocaust, the question: “why did it happen here of all places?”

The fourth category consists of exhibits focusing on questions of the politics of memory and historical culture that concentrate primarily on the *memory* of the Second World War and the Holocaust. An example is the recent “Myths of Nations” exhibition in Berlin. It was less concerned with the various individual, national paths, than with identifying elements common to the cultural memory of multiple European states and illustrating broader regional and political discontinuities.¹¹ From this perspective, informed by cultural history and the politics of memory, the line that divides Europe no longer runs between Germany and the “remainder” of Europe, but rather between, on the one hand, the Western nations (including the old Federal Republic of Germany) and the Central and Eastern European states, on the other.

The fifth type occurs in the USHMM in Washington or the Beit-Hashoa/Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles (MOT).¹² These exhibitions situate the history of the Nazi genocide in an “age of extremes” and interpret it within a general discourse of human rights and democracy.¹³ Here, the Holocaust is only one example – the most horrible, to be sure – of a chain of events that includes dehumanization, “ethnic cleansing,” mass murder, violence, and barbarism.

* * *

Historical museums always face a unique challenge familiar to teachers, but foreign to scholarly researchers: the need to simplify things for didactic purposes. Exhibition curators must present complex events to a very heterogeneous public that does not have a specialist’s education; they must have the courage to leave gaps in their presentation, but never allow themselves to “simplify” history. They, too, must respect the fundamental criteria of scholarly

method and the central premises of the theory of history.¹⁴ This includes, for example, the insight that “history” is always “interpretation,” is always shaped by various interests, and must be open to debate. They must accept that even very influential historical images do not have any trans-historical claim to validity and must be ever open to new questions.

All of this has a range of consequences for both the practical and theoretical work of historical museums. Each museum is accordingly obliged to clarify its own horizon of historical investigation and to strive continually for new, alternative interpretations. Visitors must be able to recognize that “real” history is nowhere to be found, only the presentation of well-constructed models. Each museum should, therefore, illuminate historical events from a number of different perspectives and avoid violating the unwritten rule against emotionally overpowering visitors. If a museum employs emotional manipulation and suggestion, if it deliberately provokes strong emotions to shape understanding, it deprives visitors of the opportunity of independently developing critical reflections and considering counter-narratives. It is only justifiable to charge historical events emotionally and aesthetically if they are then critically discharged, so to speak, and become starting points for a rational, critical encounter with the past.

Yet we must ask whether these general criteria are useful for the representation of the Holocaust? Are they in fact binding? Or does the singularity of the Holocaust call for these criteria to be superseded, and for a form of presentation to be discovered that is rooted in the logic inherent to the event itself – something that resists any “normality” that museum-based educators may try to impose? Is it valid, for example, to insist on the principle that history be presented in a debatable form, without any limitation? Does this not threaten, when it comes to “Auschwitz,” to relativize the Holocaust rather than inspire a rational encounter with the subject? What is it, concretely, that we should perceive “in a more open way” when it comes down to presenting the history of the concentration camps in a museum? Mass murder itself hardly seems to admit any “openness”; it refuses every supposedly “unencumbered” attempt to view it. Indeed, the reality of genocide raises the question of whether “openness” would be at all useful for analyzing it.

The unwritten prohibition against overpowering the public with emotion presents an especially great challenge. Museum visitors should not be given over to the compelling power of feelings in an unreflected way: that would prevent them from extracting themselves emotionally, psychically, and factually from the apparently uniform message of the sources, especially the testimonies of contemporary witnesses. It remains to be examined, however, how this demand can be translated into concrete practice when the subject is the beastly, technocratic murder of millions of people, including countless children – an event that cannot but awaken emotions, especially when it is visualized. How, in such circumstances, can the demand for emotions to be grounded in historical knowledge be fulfilled?

The sheer number of questions above suggests that these and similar problems have hitherto not been the subject of intensive scholarly or pedagogical analysis. We are therefore limited here to preliminary investigation into how existing museums and exhibitions on the Holocaust deal with these issues. The following three examples, illustrating very different models, demonstrate both established and newer forms of representing the Holocaust within the museum.

Let us begin with the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which does not aim to be a Holocaust museum but rather defines itself against being thus designated.¹⁵ Here, German-Jewish history is meant to be presented in all its complexity and not exclusively from the vantage point of its horrible end. The museum's unique, impressive architecture works decidedly against this aim, however. In Daniel Libeskind's building, the destruction of European Jewry is so thoroughly present that, in the eyes of the museum visitors, it becomes precisely what it tries not to be: a Holocaust museum. The decision to construct the exhibition around the building's empty spaces, emphasizing the loss of Jewish life in Berlin, reinforces this impression. Moreover, the path visitors must follow into the building entails a symbolic reference to the time of persecution and destruction as it leads unavoidably downwards, into the basement. In theory, there are alternatives: upon entry, visitors may choose to follow the "axis of continuity" that leads upstairs to the permanent exhibit on Jewish life before the Holocaust – thus temporarily side-stepping the Holocaust. But visitors cannot avoid the route, which leads through the other parts of the museum, through the "garden of exile" or the "axis of destruction" which leads to the "Holocaust tower." Before the visitors come to recognize the lines of continuity in German-Jewish history, their steps have followed these lines automatically, all the way to the "Holocaust tower," an extremely moving space, where darkness, cold, and isolation impart a feeling of being buried alive. In this space, the museum is transformed into a memorial that requires the work of mourning and makes German-Jewry's horrible end into a point of departure for any interpretation. "Auschwitz" is and remains the central point of reference. Thus, the museum ends up strengthening the view that German-Jewish history was a one-way street that necessarily culminated in the Holocaust.¹⁶

Second, there is the exhibition organized by the German Historical Museum in Berlin in 2004 and 2005, entitled "The Myths of Nations in 1945: The Arena of Memories." Sixty years after the end of the Second World War, it sought 'to assemble a history of images and ideas that Europeans, Americans, and Israelis had of the Second World War and the Holocaust' – without, however, making the Holocaust itself the subject.¹⁷ It focused not on "Auschwitz," but on the memory of Auschwitz from the perspective of different national groupings. At the same time, it sought to transcend individual national narratives of the past and to construct a European approach centered on themes such as "liberation," "resistance," and "the critical

appropriation of history". Behind this exhibition lay the thesis that nearly all of the nations involved in the war and the genocide used the National Socialist era to inaugurate and secure their own national-historical myths after 1945, either to repress or mythologize their own national past or to establish and stabilize new political and social orders. According to its curators, this kind of interpretation of the Holocaust served to "pacify" individual societies and thus "enable a new beginning in Europe."¹⁸

The new approach here is that a German exhibition in the German capital did not centre on the Holocaust itself or on the German perspective. Inspired by cultural history, it did not present social realities but their transformation within the communicative and cultural memories of European societies. A presentation of this sort was fascinating for many visitors. Moving beyond the "German discourses" of guilt, responsibility, and mourning, it did not become enmeshed in the usual "moral pitfalls." Nonetheless, this kind of abbreviated, somewhat vague selection of different national "master narratives" appears deficient in many respects. In the final analysis, it involves the construction of national stereotypes, which are then overcome by the desired European perspective. It also ignores the fact that, in each country, there is more than simply the one national master narrative. Museum visitors learn little about this; the curators have not made full use of the opportunities for openness and debate. Furthermore, the historical images promoted by the state and transmitted through journalism or film often say very little about how the population understands history. The exhibition does not document or discuss to what extent the "patterns of memory" established by academics and intellectuals reached, let alone influenced, the general population. The most serious objection to the exhibition is that it places the history of National Socialism within the context of European and global memory without sufficiently and convincingly distinguishing between victims and perpetrators, or between causes and effects. Its structure is also problematic. The numerous quoted statements suggest something like "truth" when taken together and hardly allow for doubt or critique. For the most part, it presents "statements" that reiterate only one view and never reveal contradictions or provoke discussion. In so doing, the very form chosen by the curators fails to heed the call for a multi-perspectival and debatable historical content.

A third example is the USHMM, opened in 1993 on the National Mall in Washington DC, which has since been considered a symbol of the alleged "Americanisation" of the Holocaust.¹⁹ But the historical-cultural patterns represented there – and the kinds of museum practices resulting from them – go far beyond the boundaries of the United States. To start with, we must remember that America is neither a "country of perpetrators" nor a "country of victims," apart from the approximately 140,000 Holocaust survivors who settled there. Because the authentic sites where the crimes occurred are not found there, the museum transports visitors to a *different* historical topography.

Built within view of the central monuments of American history, however, it serves primarily to celebrate democracy and freedom.²⁰ The encounter with the Holocaust is intended to strengthen the universal values of Western civilization and to teach every American that these values are always imperilled. The museum's stated goal is "to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibility as citizens of a democracy."²¹ Certainly, visitors are supposed to learn that the Holocaust is a watershed event in the history of all mankind. But specific historical insights disappear behind moral, ethical, and political messages. These revolve around prejudice, racism, tolerance, pluralism, indifference, apathy, the abuse of power, the responsibility of the individual, the defence of civil rights and human rights, and sensitivity for the ambivalence of technical progress and bureaucratic perfection. These messages are bound up with the hope that this and future generations learn "that it is the responsibility of citizens in a democracy to learn to identify the danger signals, and to know when to react."²²

In this type of museum historical context recedes into the background. The questions that for a long time preoccupied German historians – whether "Auschwitz" was unique and the Holocaust particular to German history and the collective mentality of the Germans – are secondary here, because the Holocaust is so universalized (and thus historically homogenized) that it can be placed within a global history of genocide and ethnic cleansing. This strategy demands the broadest possible understanding of what a victim is. After considerable debate and controversy between representatives of different groups, the curators decided that the museum would not only present the Jewish perspective, but also document the murder of Sinti, Roma, the sick and disabled, homosexuals, political dissidents, and prisoners of war.

Besides the lack of historical contextualization, the question of authenticity and the relationship between historical thought and historical education are also problematic here. Peter Novick, for example, criticizes the museum's tendency to telescope history so that its present-day "application," rather than the historical event itself is of interest. "Holocaust Education" is primarily concerned with manufacturing compatibility between collective identity and collective memory, not with transmitting historical knowledge or provoking debate about the interpretation, the contemporary relevance, or comparability of the historical event.²³ For Novick, the problem with the museum is that it fails to define clearly the boundaries of universalization, to differentiate precisely between what makes Auschwitz unique and what makes it comparable to other mass slaughters and genocides in the twentieth century. This promotes the commercialization of the memory of victims and

the marketing of horror, not to speak of the tendency to use the term "Holocaust" in an inconsistent, trivializing, or even inflammatory way – as extremist opponents of abortion, animal rights activists, as well as neo-Nazis now do.²⁴

Despite these objections, many of the educational and technical aspects of the Washington museum are well worth reflecting upon. The museum's fairly large "Education Department" strives to explain the complexity of events to high-school students and teachers and to present selected events and individual stories within the larger context of German and European history.²⁵ In its pedagogical materials, the museum approaches the historical principles of source-criticism with an openness to debate and a seriousness the exhibition sometimes lacks.²⁶ This can be seen in the presentation of the politics of immigration in America and in the debate over the possibility that Auschwitz might have been bombed by the Allies. In both cases, the exhibition comments critically on the actions of the United States, but without offering alternative explanations or arguments. This sort of "critique" fits perfectly with the central message of the museum: the moral dilemma of the "bystander."²⁷ Because "bystanders" are not only individuals but states as well, it is only a small step to the (fully intended) insight that democratic nations have the legitimate right to intervene when faced with knowledge of severe human rights violations in other countries.

What about the principles of visualization, concretization, and individualization? To make abstract events comprehensible, to foster identification, and to overcome temporal, generational, and geographical distance, the USHMM has developed several new formal elements for its exhibition. The visit starts with everyone receiving an identity card with information about a real victim of the Holocaust, someone who roughly corresponds with the museum visitor in age and sex, in order to create "closeness" and foster empathy.²⁸ The public can follow this real person's fate at various points during the visit and thus "experience" the Holocaust as it happened to this individual. The problems with this approach, which suggests "reality" where it in fact creates illusion, are not, however, discussed or reflected upon in the exhibition itself.

Just as museum curators try to connect with the everyday lives of museum visitors, so they try to meet the needs (real or imagined) of a generation that has grown up with the omnipresence of visual media. To that extent, the aggressive use of technology is an up-to-date, but also problematic museum tool. When countless video monitors continually broadcast testimonies of witnesses (as is the case in Washington, New York, and Jerusalem), when newsreels and contemporary film footage dominate entire exhibition spaces, it not only lowers a visitor's capacity to be receptive to other media, but also damages the most fundamental rules of source-criticism and historiography.²⁹ A reflective historical consciousness cannot develop in this way. In the best

case scenario, it instills a sense of being emotionally impacted, if not emotionally overpowered.

* * *

What does all this reveal about how museums present the Holocaust? Which forms and concepts do they use to shape present and future discussions about Auschwitz? In the first place, we can say without a doubt that each nation will continue to “write” its own Holocaust in the future. Talk of a “bifurcated” Holocaust (as Moshe Zuckermann has called it) will give way to discussion of a “multi-sided Holocaust.”³⁰ Emerging parallel to these national directions is an apparently contradictory, yet in the final analysis, complementary phenomenon: the globalization of memory. In the future, the Holocaust will appear less and less as a *Jewish* catastrophe for which *German* perpetrators bear responsibility, and more and more as a general human catastrophe symbolizing “evil” as such. Understanding this means considering more than the prevalence of moral and anthropological, as opposed to historical, approaches, as well as being willing to discuss the necessity of universal or universalized forms of memory and understanding.³¹ To this end, the following four points are significant:

1. For a long time, exploration of the National Socialist genocide was inseparable from a search for responsibility and guilt. But the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the generation of the perpetrators and the victims do not attend exhibitions on the Holocaust with the feeling of being directly involved, of having looked on or looked away, or of having to judge their own parents accordingly. For that reason, Holocaust memory will become increasingly uncoupled from a discourse of guilt, even in Germany. Enlightenment, rational argumentation, instilling civic virtues through education, empathy with victims: these are the elements that will become more important than a wish to discharge feelings of being emotionally impacted. This means that individual and social “responsibility” will remain a central theme of this discourse.

The more personal ties to the Nazi era increasingly disappear, the more it becomes indispensable to give the Holocaust a concrete “face.” The memory of the young generation is already distanced; it therefore needs less abstraction and more concrete images. For that reason, the individualization paradigm, first developed in the United States, has acquired a stronger universal resonance since the end of the 1990s. Even in Yad Vashem the new exhibition, which nearly all critics have found impressive, is based upon the faces, names, and testimonies of individuals and families. What is even more novel is that, because of this, all victims, not only the heroes, now have a place and a voice in the collective memory of Israel. And in the Berlin “Information Centre,” which was established to

accompany the “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe” that opened in 2005, the main emphasis is on the presentation of individual lives and fates. Here, too, names, portraits, and voices are the central media. On the wall at the end of the foyer, visitors are confronted with six large-scale faces – all of different ages and sexes – representing the six million murdered Jews. In the “Families’ Room,” numerous photographs and personal effects illustrate the stories of 15 European-Jewish families representative of various social, national, cultural, and religious milieus.³²

2. The forms of presentation, concepts, and media in museums across the world increasingly resemble and influence each other. At the same time, it would be a simplification to understand this development as solely the result of generational changes and the new expectations and requirements of contemporary museum visitors. It is also the product of new developments in the scholarly world, where micro-history and the history of everyday life have taken the place of purely structural histories and interest in individuals has grown enormously.
3. The use of recent scholarly concepts and methods as well as new academic fields, such as genocide studies, becomes all the more necessary, given that attempts to employ the Holocaust directly as a moral reference point and draw personal lessons from it founder on its very extraordinary character.³³ Those born later, when directly confronted with an unprecedented example of horror, are unable to imagine themselves as potential perpetrators for that very reason. The only imaginable situation where a Holocaust exhibition might serve as a starting point for genuine personal reflection would be if as many contemporaries as possible – victims *as well as* perpetrators, heroic individuals *as well as* hangers-on – are presented as having a face, a family, a job, and an everyday life. Only then could one really begin to develop answers to the question about what possibilities for action really existed and how were they used, or eventually begin to confront why some individual perpetrators developed the potential for resistance (and why others did not do so), and why some victims became perpetrators and collaborators. This is an historical complex, which requires a great degree of contextualization and didactic reflection.
4. The need to individualize the presentation of the Holocaust increases the importance of oral history. For museum curators, the question has for a long time been not “whether?” but “how?” The central challenge is how to employ oral testimonies in a museum context so that the visitor is not emotionally and technically overpowered and the requirements of scholarly source-criticism are respected and – wherever possible – also disseminated. The need to individualize history makes strengthening historical contextualization more important than ever. The “emotionalization” of history is a problematic tool and will remain such. Certainly, it can help develop a reflective historical consciousness because it awakens interest in the object of study. But emotionalization can also work against historical

thinking if it inhibits a rational encounter with the historical material being presented. This is especially true of the Holocaust, which by itself calls forth powerful feelings with ethical and moral dimensions. The increasing use of technology in museum installations does not guarantee critical thought; indeed, it often torpedoes it.³⁴ Video monitors should, therefore, be increasingly replaced, or at least supplemented, by opportunities for discussion and an active pedagogical program. The danger of trivialization if the Holocaust becomes “edutainment” is real – as Hollywood films and museum shops confirm. At the same time, artistic approaches to Auschwitz such as Roberto Benigni’s film *Life is Beautiful* or Art Spiegelman’s comic *Maus* challenge museum curators to find forms of presentation that address the younger generation’s need for entertainment that simultaneously promote historical thought.³⁵

Evidently, the search for appropriate forms of public engagement with the Holocaust, specifically in museums, will persist since its relevance extends beyond the present moment of generational change, the so-called “passing of contemporary witnesses.”³⁶ Historical scholarship has, in the meantime, approached the Holocaust with new categories of interpretation, from comparative genocide studies to economic history to the history of everyday life, so, in future, it will be easier – not least in Germany – to discuss alternative approaches and controversial interpretations.³⁷ Where the form of museum presentation is concerned, the American examples open many promising new vistas. To go by the speeches made at the openings of the new exhibitions in Berlin and Jerusalem, or the “International Forum on the Holocaust” held in Stockholm in 2000 which discussed questions of education, memory, and research, the future indubitably belongs to the transnational re-interpretation of “Auschwitz,” to its transformation into a general moral metaphor and a medium for a universal discourse of human rights. The only way to prevent this trend, which will not abate, from domesticating the Holocaust and making it a commonplace concept where boundaries are erased and a hierarchy of victims is established, is to continue to insist on genuine *historical* analysis, critical reflection, and the pursuit of enlightenment.³⁸

Notes

1. J. Rüsen, ‘Holocaust, Erinnerung, Identität. Drei Formen generationeller Praktiken des Erinnerns,’ in H. Welzer (ed.), *Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung* (Hamburg, 2001), 243–259.
2. Rüsen, ‘Holocaust, Erinnerung, Identität’, 243–259.
3. M. Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph. Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge, 1990), 61.
4. M. Hass, *Gestaltetes Gedenken: Yad Vashem, das U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum und die Stiftung Topographie des Terrors* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), 149–242. James Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London, 1993), 81–90.

5. Rüsen, Holocaust, *Erinnerung, Identität*, 243–259.
6. Rüsen, Holocaust, *Erinnerung, Identität*, 243–259.
7. N. Frei, 'Abschied von der Zeitgenossenschaft. Der Nationalsozialismus auf dem Weg in die Geschichte,' *Werkstatt Geschichte* 7 (20) (1998), 69–83; Frei, 'Geschichtswissenschaft,' in V. Knigge and N. Frei (eds), *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord* (Munich, 2002), 369–377.
8. C.S. Maier, *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit, Geschichte und die nationale Identität der Deutschen* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1992), 9f.
9. M. Falcke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen 1945. Arena der Erinnerung. Begleitmaterial zur Ausstellung*, (Berlin, 2004), 5; T. Brinkmann, 'Amerika und der Holocaust: Die Debatte über die 'Amerikanisierung des Holocaust' in den USA und ihre Rezeption in Deutschland', *Neue politische Literatur* 48 (2003), 251–270.
10. M. Brumlik, *Aus Katastrophen lernen? Grundlagen zeitgeschichtlicher Bildung in menschenrechtlicher Absicht* (Berlin, 2004), 132.
11. Falcke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen 1945*, 5.
12. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 303–309; T. Brinkmann, 'Amerikanisierung', 255; See also: <http://www.museumoftolerance.com> (29.04.05)
13. E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994).
14. The following ideas are mainly based on: Karl Heinrich Pohl, 'Wann ist ein Museum 'historisch korrekt'? 'Offenes Geschichtsbild,' Kontroversität, Multiperspektivität und 'Überwältigungsverbot' als Grundprinzipien musealer Geschichtspräsentation,' in O. Hartung (ed.), *Museum und Geschichtskultur* (forthcoming Bielefeld, 2006).
15. Cf. Berlin Museum/Märkisches Museum (eds): *Ein Museum für Berlin. Positionen zum Erweiterungsbau des Berliner Museums mit Jüdischem Museum von Daniel Libeskind* (Berlin, 1995).
16. These are conclusions students reached in discussions and written seminar work during a project on 'Jewish History in the Museum' at the universities of Kiel and Dresden during the Summer Semester 2004.
17. Falcke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen 1945*, 4.
18. Falcke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen 1945*, 4.
19. On the USHMM see: E.T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory. The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 2001). M. Hass, *Gestaltetes Gedenken*, 243–356.
20. On the political context of the foundation of the Museum and the controversies involved, see Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*; Hass, *Gestaltetes Gedenken*, 266–304.
21. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (ed.), *Teaching about the Holocaust: A Resource Book for Educators*, (Washington, 2001), III. This handbook is on the USHMM homepage <http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators> (29.04. 2005).
22. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (ed.), *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 2.
23. P. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, (Boston, MA, 1999), 260–263.
24. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 207–265. While exaggerated and, in places, unreliable, see N. Finkelstein's critique, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London, 2000).
25. Younger children should not visit the museum, even though they might be touched by the contemporary eyewitness' stories. They would probably have problems seeing the personal stories in the historical context of European history.
26. *The Resource Book* states (4): 'students need practice in distinguishing between fact, opinion, and fiction; between primary and secondary sources; and between

types of evidence such as court testimonies, oral histories, and other written documents [...] Students should be encouraged to consider why a particular text was written, who wrote it, who the intended audience was, whether there were any biases inherent in the information, whether any gaps occurred in discussion, whether omissions in certain passages were inadvertent or not, and how the information has been used to interpret various events.'

27. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 220.
28. Most of the identity cards show Jewish victims, some show Sinti, Roma, or homosexuals. See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 187–189.
29. See R.G. Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember. The Politics behind New York City's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1996); O. Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst, MA, 2003)
30. M. Zuckermann, *Zweierlei Holocaust: Der Holocaust in den politischen Kulturen Israels und Deutschland* (Göttingen, 1999).
31. Cf. D. Levy and N. Sznajder (eds), *Einnerung im globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust*. (Frankfurt am Main, 2001).
32. Materialien zum Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas (ed.), *Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Berlin, 2005).
33. B. Fechner, "Erziehung nach Auschwitz" in der multikulturellen Gesellschaft: pädagogische und soziologische Annäherungen (Weinheim, 2000).
34. For discussions of recent museum practices in this field, see S. Hornstein and F. Jacobowitz (eds), *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, (Bloomington, IN, 2003); R. Lentin, (ed.), *Representing the Shoah for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2004); S.A. Crane, (ed.), *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, CA, 2000).
35. A. Spiegelman, *MAUS – A Survivor's Tale*, (New York, 1986); A. Spiegelman, *MAUS – a Survivor's Tale, II: and here my troubles began*. (New York, 1991); Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 44–54; M. Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis, MN, 2000), 202–219.
36. N. Frei, 'Abschied von der Zeitgenossenschaft', 69–83.
37. Cf. the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (Oxford, 1996–2005) and the "European Network of Genocide Scholars," founded in 2005: [http:// www.hist.net/ag-genozid/enogs%20foundational%20meeting.htm](http://www.hist.net/ag-genozid/enogs%20foundational%20meeting.htm) (29.04.2005).
38. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 March 2005, Interview with Götz Aly, 13.

15

The Establishment of National Memorials to the Nazi Past: Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Topography of Terror Foundation

Matthias Hass

National memorials to the Nazi past reflect debates on National Socialism in the countries in which they are erected. Memory does not exist beyond the societal context in which remembrance takes place. Far from being abstract, it is inseparable from time, place, and the people who imbue events with specific meanings. Speaking of a single universal memory, therefore, is misleading since it overlooks the context in which memory is formed. Theories of universal memory assume that people imply the same things when they use the same words, a point that will be further elaborated on.

The creation of a national memorial is a highly politicised act. The question of representing various social groups, of exhibition content, and of the context in which historical events are presented depends on the actors involved in establishing these memorials and on their constantly evolving discourses. To understand the political processes that establish national memorials to the Nazi past, it is useful to take a historical and political science approach. By combining politics and history we are able to analyse political problems, their structures, and underlying interests, from a historical perspective. This perspective, in turn, makes it possible to recognise the consequences of former political decisions.

History is never only about the past. Rather it is an image people create based on present reality. This study analyses the political function of interpretations of the past; it examines historical debates and images of the past and attempts to form a collective identity based on history. To ask if there might have been alternatives to the historical past, whether events might have turned out differently, also serves to destroy myths about the past and

about the inevitability of history. In respect to the establishment of national memorials, the institutions under discussion here – Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC, and the Topography of Terror Foundation in Berlin – are results of diverse and controversial developments and far from being the last word on the politics of memory.

From which perspective is history presented? Each society reflects on its own role within the history of National Socialism and these considerations impact on the historical presentation. For example the Topography of Terror exhibition in Germany – the society of the perpetrators – places the perpetrators at the centre of interest. Israel, where many survivors settled and where the establishment of the state was inevitably bound to the Holocaust, clearly addresses the victims, the survivors, and the struggle to resist the Nazis. The United States, however, only indirectly involved in and affected by the historical events, addresses its own experience with the Nazi atrocities: immigration policies, the liberation of the camps, and the degree of aid provided during the war.¹

In order to demonstrate its uniqueness a slightly different focus was applied in the analysis of each institution. The section on Yad Vashem focuses on its internal changes after 1967 and the political use of memory at that time. In the section on the Topography of Terror Foundation, the role that grassroots organisations played in initiating a confrontation with the history of that particular site forms the central interest. Where the Holocaust Museum in Washington is concerned, emphasis is placed on the process of creating the permanent exhibition. This involved defining the term Holocaust, the role of different lobby groups in this process, and the attempts to integrate the museum into American values and culture.

The way in which Israeli society has dealt with the history of the destruction of European Jewry has changed in form, content, and intensity over recent decades. The various attempts to come to terms with that past can be placed in three thematic categories: 'Catastrophe and Heroism', 'Catastrophe and Rebirth' and 'Catastrophe and Redemption'. The catastrophe of destruction is juxtaposed to the heroism of the resistance fighters, the renaissance of the state of Israel, and the clearly religious connotation of hope for redemption.² Many of the discussions and debates around Yad Vashem reflect this ambiguity. Even the official English name of Yad Vashem, 'The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority', suggests this double role.

The memorial itself was founded in 1953 through an act of parliament, in which the objectives of the national memorial are clearly defined. Of the nine articles that clarify who are to be remembered, six address resistance. The consideration of resistance is one of the main tasks of Yad Vashem. And resistance is very broadly defined. Underlying this focus is the assumption

that those who did not resist went – to use a common phrase of that time – ‘like sheep to the slaughter’.

In the beginning the memorial site lacked a clear definition. Several components were seen as crucial: the archive; different commemorative areas; symbolic citizenship for the victims (a component that was ultimately never realized); but there was no consensus on what the institution meant for Israeli society. Yad Vashem was not a memorial museum in our current understanding. It was not clear who its audience was. It was vaguely stated that all material should be published and accessible to the people. Why this would be of interest, what the purpose was, was not explained, but assumed to be self-evident. There were no debates or societal conflicts surrounding the founding of Yad Vashem, because the institution lacked a clear aim. Its duties were: (1) to collect and publish documents of the Holocaust, (2) remembrance and memorialisation, (3) teaching the lessons of the Holocaust, although this last aspect was realised relatively late.

In the first years of its existence Yad Vashem was not the central site of Israeli memorial culture. Remembrance of the Holocaust was not even of much importance, since developing the state and society took priority over the past. The former partisans and resistance fighters were the only ones to use Yad Vashem as a place of remembrance. Until the mid-1960s hardly any connections were made between current events and the history of the Holocaust inside Yad Vashem. The public controversies about compensation from Germany, the Kastner trial, the Eichmann trial, all this happened outside of Yad Vashem. The discourses over ‘catastrophe and heroism’ and ‘catastrophe and rebirth’ had no place. But this would change dramatically after 1967.

The Six Day War had a major impact on the meaning of the Holocaust within both Israeli society and Yad Vashem. After the Six Day War, Yad Vashem became involved in debates on the politics of memory. During the official ceremonies on Holocaust Remembrance Day, speakers drew clear connections to the current political situation, especially to the conflicts with the Arab states and the Palestinians. The number of visitors increased. More and more groups of soldiers came to Yad Vashem (or were brought there). These visits served the purpose of helping the soldiers to identify with past events and giving meaning to their present battle. The history of the Holocaust was used to mobilise society. In these debates the battles against the Nazis converged with the battle for independence and the wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973, to form one single battle for the survival of the Jewish people. Shalmi Barmor, a young Israeli born in the country, who at the time worked in the education department of Yad Vashem and later became that department’s director, expresses this very vividly. He was fighting in the war in 1973 and suddenly was ordered back to Yad Vashem where he was asked to guide a brigade of paratroopers through the memorial. The soldiers had told their general that they were scared. The general responded by asking his

soldiers if they knew anything about the events of the Holocaust and sent them to see Yad Vashem. Barmor recalls the soldiers' visit:

So, they came and they said 'you can talk to us'. They told me what happened. 'You can talk to us, you should know that nothing will change. We are totally humiliated in being here'. And I was so ashamed of this situation, I was so embarrassed by the situation that we actually sat and told war stories. ... What do you want me to do? You want them not to be scared? Why, because we tell them something about the Holocaust? What is this idiocy? But this shows you how the Holocaust was mobilised; sometimes with more tact, sometimes with no tact at all.³

In official speeches in Yad Vashem a direct connection was also made between the National Socialists and the Palestinians. Palestinian groups were described as students of Streicher and Himmler.⁴ The Holocaust served the purpose of forming a national identity. Before we judge the inappropriateness of this, we should consider that it also indicates how alive the memory of the Holocaust still was at this time. The memory was not something abstract and remote – but a precursor to a concrete threat of destruction. History seemed to be repeating itself. This new threat of destruction and the glorification of the fighters meant that the stories of survivors who did not participate in resistance and partisan activities were ignored. Their stories were not understood and the victims were often defamed.

This political use of Holocaust memory was ongoing in the late 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1980s, however, the number of direct references made between the Holocaust and current political affairs has decreased. There are two reasons for this. First, Yad Vashem itself developed an increasingly 'professional' attitude as a museum, an educational institution, and as a memorial fulfilling a specific task. Second, the complexity of the political situation in Israel made using historical events of the Holocaust to elucidate political affairs less feasible and less appropriate. One consequence of mobilising Holocaust memory for Israeli society was that Yad Vashem's importance grew and the memorial was expanded. In 1973 the new central exhibition was opened. The educational work began and plans for new places of remembrance developed and were gradually realised: the memorial for the children; the valley of the destroyed communities; the memorial for Jewish soldiers of various armies. The perspective on the history of the Holocaust broadened. The narrow focus on resistance evolved into a more complete and differentiated presentation of persecution.⁵

Yad Vashem has undergone several changes. What began as an archive and research institute has developed into a place of memory and remembrance, visited by more than two million people annually. An historical museum and a department of education were added to the various sites of remembrance and they define the profile of Yad Vashem today. The importance of the institution within Israeli society has grown considerably since the 1970s.

Until society actively addressed the Holocaust, Yad Vashem lacked a concrete mission. But, with interest in the history of the Holocaust taking off after the Six Day War in 1967, the meaning of Yad Vashem also grew. Since then it has served to define and articulate 'the meaning' of the Holocaust for Israelis. The ways in which Israeli society commemorates the Holocaust were defined here. It is a trusted institution representing a basic consensus among all Israelis.

Importantly, because the interests of state and institution were congruent, there were no debates about the conception and or the ideological positions of Yad Vashem. The use of the Holocaust and Yad Vashem for political purposes did not face any opposition in Yad Vashem itself. Later, the broadening of the perspective – which required making clearer distinctions and reduced opportunities for political use and misuse – along with changes in the museum and the establishment of an educational institution – both met the needs of society and gained official political approval. Yad Vashem now holds an almost sacred status. It is the secular, Zionist sanctuary of Israel.

The USHMM opened in Washington DC in 1993 but its history goes back to the year 1978. A national memorial to the Holocaust seems logical in Israel, but it is less obvious why there should be one in the U.S. This requires explanation.⁶

The first ideas for a museum came from the administration of President Carter. Both internal planning and foreign affairs played a role in these plans. When the United States sold F16 planes to Saudi Arabia and began holding talks with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), its relations with Israel and the American Jewish communities reached a low point. The administration developed plans to create a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in order to alleviate this tension. Although knowledge of existing memorials was limited at that time, plans for a memorial seemed a good starting point for better relations.⁷ Only a short time before, the TV series 'Holocaust' had been broadcast on television in the United States to great acclaim. On 1 May 1978, during an official visit of Israel's Prime Minister, President Carter announced the establishment of a commission to develop a plan for a Holocaust memorial. The commission was made up of 25 people – survivors, historians, representatives of Jewish communities, rabbis. There were also five members of Congress, which suggests that the planning for the museum took place in a highly politicised atmosphere.⁸ Lobby groups were involved from the beginning.

The first important goal was to convey the need for such a museum to the American people. Jewish communities were responsive to the project from the start. The Holocaust was a formative event for them and they had a vested interest in its being incorporated into the value system of the United States – as an example of its negation. Different approaches were pursued to convey the project to the American public and help it to identify with the history. First, stories of American war veterans were told. Second, survivors described how they made their way to the United States after the war. And third, direct references were made to American values. The Holocaust, it was

argued, shows what can happen if fundamental American values are missing. Two quotations engraved at the entrance to the museum made explicit reference to them. One is from George Washington: 'The government of the United States ... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance' and the other is from the Declaration of Independence: 'All men are created equal, ... they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.' This was a way of transferring an event of European history to American society.

Transferring the story of the Holocaust to the American context was effective because various immigrant communities were actively involved in the planning. These immigrants were primarily Jewish, but Polish American, Ukrainian American, and Armenian American communities, amongst others, also participated in the project, which provoked angry political debates. An example of such conflict was the representation of Armenians and the Armenian genocide in the museum. The question was raised as to whether Armenians and their catastrophe should be acknowledged in the museum and if so in what context. Finally a compromise was found: they are mentioned in a quotation from Hitler, in which he asks the provocative question: 'Who today still speaks of the Armenians?'⁹

Behind these angry debates lurked the issue of what would adequately define the Holocaust. In Israel this question is answered in a clear statement: The Holocaust was the murder of six million Jews. In Germany, discussions were broader since Germany is obligated to remember all victims of Nazi atrocities. In the United States the situation was more complex still.¹⁰ How the Holocaust was defined would determine which groups would be honoured with victim status and thus be represented in the museum. It made a considerable difference whether the Holocaust was defined as the murder of six million Jews or of eleven million victims, that is, six million Jews plus five million other victims including three million Poles, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians and many, many others. Or perhaps it could be acknowledged that there were millions of victims with the Jews being granted special victim status because National Socialists planned their total annihilation.¹¹ The issue was argued at length and ultimately it was decided that the focus should be on the persecution and destruction of European Jewry. But in the permanent exhibition there are several sections which make reference to other victim groups: political opponents; homosexuals; Jehovah's Witnesses; the mentally and physically handicapped; different national and ethnic groups; Soviet prisoners of war; and even the Armenians.

In the American context war veterans play a major role. This is illustrated by a comment made by Sybil Milton, the former senior historian of the museum, regarding disputes with Holocaust deniers:

You'll find as many American military vets ... who are extremely hostile to deniers. For one reason it's their personal experience; they were

there. ... The best defence weapon you have against a denier is take a southern liberator from an American unit, preferably not too well educated, and let him loose. You don't have to do anything. He'll defend his own memories and experience.¹²

Milton reminds us that the museum serves to link the history of the Holocaust with personal American experiences and current political debates.

Since opening in 1993, the USHMM has played a major role in current political affairs. Demonstrations for human rights, for the rights of homosexuals and other groups begin at the museum. In 1994, when a number of churches of African American communities in the southern states were attacked, the museum supported the representatives of these communities. This all happens within the framework of the laws that define the tasks of the museum as teaching the lessons of the Holocaust. In the American context, this means teaching the universal lessons of the Holocaust and raising the question of what can happen in the absence of fundamental American values.

The Topography of Terror Foundation is situated in Berlin, in the area where, between 1933 and 1945, the Headquarters of the Secret State Police, Security Service of the Reich leader of the SS Heinrich Himmler, and the Reich Security Main Office were located. These organisations made up the power centre of persecution and administration of mass murder within the German Reich and all over conquered Europe.¹³ After 1945 the site in the middle of the city became empty. For over thirty years its history received little attention, but this began to change in the late 1970s. Grassroots organisations started asking questions about it. The emerging interest in developing the area came from private citizens. Their initiatives encountered strong opposition from the official political side in Berlin, disinclined to having the site and its history addressed. Finally in 1983 a competition to redesign the area was held. The plan called for a memorial site for the victims of Nazi atrocities to be integrated into a recreational park for the neighbourhood residents. Combining these irreconcilable goals was impossible and so the winning design was not carried out.

Despite this, the grassroots organisations continued to pursue their aim and in 1983 founded an association called *Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin* [Active Museum of Fascism and Resistance in Berlin].¹⁴ In 1985, on the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, this association organised a public event called *Nachgraben*. This word in German contains both the idea of looking over something carefully and digging something up. It coincided with the Bitburg affair, when the German Chancellor and the American President shook hands over the graves of SS men. The project to develop the site continued and, since 1986, historical research has been conducted there. In 1987, in connection with Berlin's 750th anniversary, the exhibition 'Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS and Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the "Prinz-Albrecht-Terrain" ' was opened for

a six-month run. At the same time citizens' initiatives organised conferences to discuss future plans for the site. And this is where a dramatic change occurred. The Berlin Senator of Cultural Affairs became involved in the project and from that point on, the official political side became involved. Ideas developed by the citizens were adopted. The initiatives had called for open processes, provisional solutions, and the involvement of citizens and the public. The support of the Berlin administration evolved into domination. The local government took control and determined how the history of the site was to be interpreted. Local citizens, not capable of reacting to these signals from the political side, became inactive.¹⁵ It is important to note that the conflicts between the official political side and the citizens' initiatives were not solely limited to concrete issues on how to deal with the site. They were ideological arguments, discussions about general images of the Nazi past and debates on the politics of memory. Compromise was often out of the question since fundamental ideological differences existed between them.

Finally, in 1989, a commission of experts worked for over a year on a plan for the future of the site which would be acceptable to the various interest groups, the government administration, and the citizens. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the commission also tried to take the new political situation into account. Without the work and commitment of the commission, the project to develop the site probably would not have continued.¹⁶ The commission recommended that a documentation centre be created. The choice of the term 'documentation centre' reveals how the Topography of Terror Foundation understands itself. It sees its task in historical documentation, not as a museum or a memorial site. 'Documentation' means that it presents 'objective' facts, based on documents without interpretation. The post-1945 history should remain visible and the visitors should become personally involved with that history during their visit. These suggestions took into consideration some of the demands of the grassroots organisations. The commission also affirmed the Topography of Terror as a site of regional, national and international significance and eligible for financial support from the federal government.

Despite the very specific suggestions made by the commission, the Berlin administration delayed development for several years. Conflict within the administration did not run along clear-cut party lines. The Senator of Cultural Affairs who took action in the mid- and late 1980s was from the Christian Democrats (CDU), the conservative party. The Senate in power in 1989 and 1990 was made up of a coalition of Social Democrats (SPD) and the Green Party, the parties originally affiliated with the project. But this Senate did little to move the project along. Finally in 1995, despite all the delays and ongoing debates, the Topography of Terror became a foundation under public law. The Senate in power was a coalition of the CDU and SPD.

In 1992 a competition for the design of a new building was held and decided. Since then practically nothing has happened. The levels on which

the discussions are currently held, however, are less political than at the outset. The stagnation now has to do with architectural and financial questions. The Topography of Terror is one of the few cases stopped by the Finance Senator pending a realistic calculation of building costs. Such an act would have been unimaginable for the renovation of the Reichstag or the new Federal Chancellery, but not for a museum addressing Germany's role in the Holocaust. In the spring of 2004 the foundation's research director resigned from his position. This brought some changes. The architect was fired and the staircases already built on the site were demolished. The site now looks as it did in 1995.

It is important to recognise that the Topography of Terror was a project started by citizens' initiatives and grassroots organisations and only later taken over by the official political side. The citizens are still involved in the project; they have a seat on the international council and on the advisory board. But their hands have been tied during the phases of stagnation, so they cannot raise their critical voices in the way that is needed.

In spring of 2005, the federal government began working on plans to establish a national foundation for memorial sites to the Nazi past which will include the House of the Wannsee Conference, the German Resistance Memorial, The Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe, and the Topography of Terror Foundation. With this Germany acknowledges the national responsibility to remember the National Socialist past.

This analysis of the establishment of national memorials to the Nazi past shows clearly that current political debates and discourses have a much more significant impact than the historical events themselves. The 'texture of memory' creates new identities, while memory itself is shaped by the identities that already exist. These are ongoing developments that do not culminate in one, single universal memory. In different societies, different forms of identity underlie changes and development. In an increasingly international debate on the form and function of memory, these changes influence each other, constituting in the respective societies the concrete conditions in which memorials exist and fulfil their specific function.

The question of a national form of memory in Germany came to another peak in the beginning of 2005.¹⁷ In the debate on new institutional structures for four central memorial sites in Berlin, some well-known German historians called for one central exhibition on National Socialism with a clear statement on how this past is to be presented and remembered in Germany. Despite the fact that this ignores the situation in other countries, this demand clearly aims to bring the discussion of the Nazi past to an end and to present to the public a master narrative that leaves little room for controversy, interpretation, and new research. German historians traditionally justified their work in terms of giving national meaning to the past. Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they even try to give meaning to the mass crimes of National Socialism.

Notes

1. Matthias Hass, *Gestaltetes Gedenken. Yad Vashem, die Stiftung Topographie des Terrors und das United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), 17–21.
2. Saul Friedländer, 'Die Shoah als Element in der Konstruktion israelischer Erinnerung', *Babylon Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart*, Heft 2, Frankfurt, Juli 1987, 10–22.
3. Shalmi Barmor, former director of the education department at Yad Vashem, interview on 15 May 1998 in Jerusalem
4. Yad Vashem. Remembrance Day 1969. Remembrance Day 15 April 1969–27 Nissan 5729 [speeches], Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1969, 3., Yad Vashem. Remembrance Day 1973. Addresses delivered on Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day, 29 April 1973–27 Nissan 5733, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1973, 2.
5. Moshe Zuckermann, *Zweierlei Holocaust* (Göttingen, 1998), 26–47.
6. Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1995), 17–51.
7. Memorandum from Ellen Goldstein to Mark Siegel, 21 June 1977, 28 March 1978, Memorandum from Lipshutz and Eizenstat to the President, 25 April 1978, USHMM, Institutional Archives, Acc. No. 1998–074, Box 1.
8. *Report to the President, President's Commission on the Holocaust* (Washington DC 1979), 37.
9. Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know: the History of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Boston, MA, 1993), 62.
10. Alan S. Rosenbaum (ed.), *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, CO, 1996), 2–4.
11. All these definitions can be found in speeches given by the different presidents from Carter to Clinton. See: Jimmy Carter, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington DC, 1978), 1920; Jimmy Carter, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington DC, 1979), 1773; Ronald Reagan, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington DC, 1982), 495; George Bush, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, (Washington DC, 1990), 715; William J. Clinton, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington DC, 1993), 644.
12. Sybil Milton, Senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Research Institute, interview on 14 April 1995 in Washington DC.
13. Reinhard Rürup, *Topographie des Terrors, Gestapo, SS und Reichssicherheitshauptamt auf dem Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände, Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin, 1987), 55–81.
14. Stefanie Endlich, *Denkort Gestapogelände* (Berlin, 1990), 35.
15. Akademie der Künste (ed.), *Diskussion zum Umgang mit dem Gestapo-Gelände*, (Berlin, 1986), 12–15.
16. *Abschlußbericht der Fachkommission zur Erarbeitung von Vorschlägen für die künftige Nutzung des Prinz-Albrecht-Geländes (Gestapo-Geländes) in Berlin Kreuzberg* (March 1990), Berlin, 15–35.
17. Goetz Aly, 'Gut dotierte Verwahrlosung', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 March 2005, 13; Ulrich Herbert, 'Gut gemeint genügt nicht', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 March 2005, 35.

16

Filling the Void: Representing the History of Bergen-Belsen for a New Generation

Rainer Schulze*

For many years, visitors to Bergen-Belsen saw mass graves, testimony to the fact that some 50,000 concentration camp prisoners and 20,000 prisoners-of-war had died there. However, there was virtually no information about the camps which had existed there during the Nazi period, nor about the crimes which had caused the death of so many thousands of people, nor about the fact that in the immediate vicinity a camp was set up for the survivors which existed until 1950. The *Gedenkstätte*, or memorial, established after the war to remember the dead, was not able to fulfil this role and it was initially not even intended to do this. The mass graves remained silent witnesses. The struggle for preserving the memory of Bergen-Belsen in a comprehensive and meaningful way began immediately after the liberation. Only now, more than sixty years later, will a new memorial site and museum finally meet this obligation to those who died and suffered there.¹

The British troops who liberated Bergen-Belsen on 15 April 1945 found more than 40,000 people, many barely alive, cooped up in the main concentration camp. As disease was rampant, the survivors were quickly evacuated to the German *Wehrmacht* barracks, little more than a mile away, and most of the wooden huts were demolished and torched. Although done for good reasons, the obliteration of the prisoners' huts in April and May 1945 contributed to the process of getting rid of the evidence of what had occurred at Bergen-Belsen. This process had already begun shortly before the liberation, when the SS destroyed all papers relating to the camp, including the register of the prisoners. However, in the summer of 1945, there were still some visible remains of the former camp, among them the fences, the watchtowers, and the crematorium. These were dismantled only after the German Provincial government in Hanover was instructed by the British Military Government in October 1945 'to prepare plans for the fencing of the mounds [of the mass graves], for the setting out of a suitable garden to embellish the site, and for the erection of an appropriate memorial'.² When the landscaped garden-cemetery was finally dedicated in November 1952, it no longer bore traces of the crimes committed there, and the original topography of the camp disappeared beneath a completely new layout of circular pathways

superimposed upon it. To an uninformed visitor Bergen-Belsen as the site of a prisoner-of-war and a concentration camp had become all but invisible.³

Furthermore, the actual memorial site comprised only the area of the camp where the concentration camp prisoners had been incarcerated, and where now the mass graves were located. The remaining part of the original camp – the commandant's offices and the SS compound – were separated from the memorial site and initially used to accommodate German refugees and expellees from central, eastern and south-eastern Europe who had come to the area after the Second World War. After these people had been re-housed elsewhere in 1953–54, this section of the former camp became incorporated into the NATO military training ground and remained part of it until the early 1990s.⁴

The survivors protested in vain against the destruction of the structural remains of the concentration camp: they feared that 'a nice well planned garden' would result in removing 'the infamous Belsen camp [...] from the memory of history'.⁵ They demanded a memorial which preserved the memory of what had happened at Bergen-Belsen rather than destroyed or concealed it. Consequently, survivors set up their own memorials. One day after the liberation, (Catholic) Polish survivors already erected on the camp site a provisional cross made from birch wood which was replaced by a permanent, large wooden cross on 2 November 1945, All Souls' Day. Similarly Jewish survivors put up a provisional memorial next to the mass graves on 25 September 1945. On 15 April 1946, the first anniversary of the liberation, a stone memorial was established in its place. Both the wooden cross and the Jewish memorial still stand today and serve as the place of remembrance for these survivors and their relatives and friends.

It was only in 1966 that a small documentation centre was set up at the Bergen-Belsen memorial site to provide visitors with some basic information. It followed the publication of the first scholarly study of the history of the concentration camp, commissioned by the state government of Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen), and it focussed mainly on the fate of the Jews.⁶ In April 1990, on the 45th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp, a new and larger documentation and information centre was opened. For the first time, a small permanent staff was available to welcome visitors, look after survivors and their relatives who came to visit the site, and engage in educational work and academic research. The centre also included an updated exhibition on the history of Bergen-Belsen, based on the limited range of research available at the time.⁷

In 1992 work began on recollecting names and biographical details of those incarcerated at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The first Book of Remembrance [*Gedenkbuch*], published on the 50th anniversary of the liberation, comprised some 25,000 names; the second edition, published ten years later, already included 50,000 names.⁸ This is an impressive achievement, but it is still well short of the c.120,000 prisoners estimated to have been at the concentration camp at some point over the two years of its existence.

The Final Report of the Select Committee on German Unity, passed by the German *Bundestag* in 1998, included a passage on the role of concentration camp memorials in the formation of a cultural memory in the recently unified Germany. It set out the basic tasks which these memorials were expected to fulfil: to maintain and preserve the memory of the victims; to secure traces at the historic sites; to collect sources and carry out research in order to document the history of the sites in exhibitions and other forms; and finally, to engage in educational work.⁹ Bergen-Belsen was identified as one of the concentration camp memorials of international importance on German soil, because it was unique for being a prisoner-of-war camp, a concentration camp, and a reception camp for the death marches from the East.¹⁰ Since 2000 it has received funding from the Federal government to carry out research on the history of the camp(s), to update and expand the permanent exhibition, and to build a new museum and information centre to present the findings and make the newly obtained knowledge available to the general public.

As almost all structural remains of the former prisoner-of-war and concentration camps have been destroyed in the past 60 years, the new permanent exhibition has a key role in helping visitors to understand the site.¹¹ However, the plans for the new *Gedenkstätte* not only involve a new permanent exhibition, but also include a new landscape design for the historic site and a new building to house the exhibition. These three elements are integrally linked, and together they will help to recover lost memory and make the historic site 'speak' again. Visitors are invited to make connections between the documents, the artefacts and the personal testimonies in the historical exhibition, and the historic site. The 'historical passage' through the new Documentation and Information Centre (Figure 16.1) is followed by a 'topographical passage' across the historic site of the former camps.



Illustration 16.1a The new Documentation and Information Centre as it will "float" on to the former camp site: wide view (artist's impression) in the background: the obelisk and the wall of remembrance © KSP Engel und Zimmermann Architekten, Braunschweig



Illustration 16.1b The new Documentation and Information Centre as it will “float” on to the former camp site: close-up (artist’s impression) in the background: the obelisk and the wall of remembrance © KSP Engel und Zimmermann Architekten, Braunschweig

In the early 1990s, the section of the former concentration camp which had been incorporated into the military training ground in the 1950s was finally handed over to the *Gedenkstätte*. Unlike the original memorial site, this section had not undergone systematic clearing and garden-like landscaping. Archaeological digs have shown the existence of structural remains of the former camp closely under the topsoil, such as stone foundations of some of the huts, watchtowers, water reservoirs, the old delousing facilities, and even remains of the main camp road. The task facing the landscape planners was to integrate the two sections of the historic site which had been separated for over 40 years into one coherent and meaningful place without disturbing the mass graves or removing any of the elements set up at the cemetery since liberation, such as the memorials erected by the survivors, the wall of remembrance, and the obelisk.¹² In order to help visitors understand the historic structures of the camps, strategic clearings in the woods on the site of the memorial and in the surrounding forest provide glades and groves to indicate the boundaries and the different areas covered by the prisoner-of-war camp and the concentration camp. The most important orientation is provided by a central corridor which traces the entire length of the former main camp road.

The principal task of the *Gedenkstätte* is to remember those who died and suffered there, and to try and give them back, as much as is still possible, their identity and personal history which the Nazis set out to destroy together with their physical existence. Until now the names of the dead have been missing from the cemetery, and a new 'Place of Names' created in the new central corridor of the memorial site serves as a special place of remembrance for all the people who died at the concentration camp. With their names, the dead will regain at least in death their individuality and their dignity at the very site where some sixty years ago they were deprived of both. The many thousands of dead whose names are not known will be honoured symbolically until such time as their names might be recovered. The redesign of the landscape is a long-term undertaking. As the site is now a (predominantly Jewish) cemetery, the work has to be done with utmost caution and sensitivity and with respect to the dead buried there.

The new Documentation and Information Centre was specifically commissioned to house the new permanent exhibition, the new archive, a reading room, and other facilities such as seminar rooms, a bookshop, and a small cafeteria. The concept of the new building is based on the idea of a sculpture through which the visitors walk on their way to the historic site. In order to take the visitors out of their normal everyday reality, the floor of the building is not level, but ascends slightly as they move along the 'historical path'.

The long, narrow building of fair-faced concrete is set in a break in the now densely wooded forest. The actual building remains outside the site of the former concentration camp and today's cemetery, but an extension of seven metres' length 'floats' freely over the former camp boundary. A large

window at this point of the building allows a view outside and directly on to the former *Appellplatz* of the Star Camp (the exchange camp), which is also the site of one of the mass graves. Looking out of this window, the visitors are confronted by the duality of the historic site: concentration camp and cemetery. The window almost draws the historic site into the building and makes it part of the exhibition. In turn, the exhibition is rigorously focused on what the visitors see but would not understand unless they had the exhibition to provide them with the information which the site itself can no longer do.

Up until 1990, the *Gedenkstätte* did not have any archive and was neither authorised nor equipped to collect and preserve documents and historical artefacts. As a result, there was no systematic collection of sources on the history of Bergen-Belsen at the historic site itself. Instead, records are scattered all over the world and can be found in the national archives of all those countries which were involved with Bergen-Belsen in one form or another, as well as in the more specialist archives which were set up in many countries to document Nazi crimes. Survivors of Bergen-Belsen donated their artefacts, diaries, letters or other personal documents to archives, libraries and museums in the countries where they settled after their liberation, to Yad Vashem in Israel, or to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Some groups, such as the Association of Survivors of Bergen-Belsen in Tel-Aviv (Irgun Sherit Hapletah Bergen-Belsen) set up their own documentation centres. A solid cultural memory of Bergen-Belsen developed from relatively early on, but it developed away from, and quite independently of the *Gedenkstätte*, and for a long time it was more or less unknown or unacknowledged within Germany by those responsible for the site of the former concentration camp.

In order to reverse the process of the destruction of memory at Bergen-Belsen, the first task was, therefore, to trace worldwide the sources and artefacts concerning the history of the prisoner-of-war camp, the concentration camp, and the displaced persons (DP) camp. The next step was to return as many of them as possible to the place from where they originated, even if only in the form of facsimiles, photographs or temporary loans. For that purpose, co-operation agreements were concluded with archives and museums in Israel, the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia and Poland, and close contacts have been formed with survivors' associations and individual survivors and people involved in the rescue and rehabilitation operation.

Through this extensive search, it became possible to document the multi-dimensional history of Bergen-Belsen in a much more detailed and differentiated manner. This applies to Bergen-Belsen's organisational history and role in the broader context of the Nazi system of racial, social and political persecution, as well as to the history of the people incarcerated there. The result is presented to the public in the new permanent exhibition. Its master narrative is determined by the key aim to explain the historic site. Its focus

is throughout on Bergen-Belsen as, first, a place of crime and, later, a place of rehabilitation for the survivors. It covers the period from 1940, the establishment of the first prisoner-of-war camp, to 1950, the closure of the DP camp.

The exhibition is source-driven: the sources carry the narrative and are not just illustrations. This applies equally to all the different kinds of sources available: documents, photographs, film footage, artefacts, and video interviews. The decision about which source to use is solely determined by its suitability documenting and visualising specific aspects of Bergen-Belsen's story. As the actual horror can never be recreated, nor adequately described, the exhibition can aim only to provide the visitors with the available evidence for them to draw their own conclusions and form their own images about the conditions at Bergen-Belsen. Archive and exhibition are closely linked, with the exhibition showcasing the findings held in the archive. In this way, it is intended to encourage visitors to the exhibition to consult the archive for further information.

The history of Bergen-Belsen is told as far as possible from the perspective of those who were imprisoned there, or for whom it became the place of rehabilitation after their liberation. The narrative focuses on the conditions under which human beings existed. This focus includes a number of common themes which accompany the visitors on their 'historical path' through the exhibition and serve as an underlying texture for the exhibition:

- The juxtaposition of the hope of rescue and the prospect of death which ruled over the daily existence of all those who were detained both at the prisoner-of-war camp and the concentration camp, and which continued into the DP period for those who survived the imprisonment.
- The international character of Bergen-Belsen where the prisoners and survivors came from almost all European countries and included members of all political, social, and ethnic groups persecuted by the Nazi régime.
- The strong Jewish impact due to the fact that in contrast to all other concentration camps in the territory of the German *Reich* the largest group of the prisoners and, later, of the survivors of Bergen-Belsen were Jews. (Visitors will thus appreciate why Bergen-Belsen continues to hold an important position in Jewish cultural memory.)
- The singular and often contradictory position which Bergen-Belsen held in the system of Nazi camps of which it was at the same time an integral part.
- The racist ideology of the Nazi state forming the common denominator of what happened at Bergen-Belsen and underpinning the deliberate and systematic violation of human rights and international law and conventions which the SS and *Wehrmacht* committed in collusion with other state and Nazi institutions as well as with a wide range of private firms, organisations, and individuals.

One reason why Bergen-Belsen has become so widely known is due to the photographs and film footage of the British Army Film and Photographic Unit from the first days after the liberation. These images went around the world and have become so deeply ingrained in the pictorial memory that for many people Bergen-Belsen has come to symbolise all the atrocities of Nazi rule.¹³ Most if not all visitors to Bergen-Belsen will have seen some of these images, and will expect to learn more about what they show. Therefore, this footage is documented extensively and set in its historical context. The photographs are shown in the open exhibition but in a form that leaves it to the visitors to decide if they want to view them in detail. In contrast, the historic film footage is shown in what has been provisionally called a 'black tower', an enclosed space at the centre of the building, and thus at the centre of the exhibition. Both are shown as historical sources which do not record the Nazi crimes as such, but the results of the final phase of Bergen-Belsen when it had become a death camp where tens of thousands of prisoners were left to die by starvation, disease, and general neglect.

In a way, these images which document the end of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp form the counterpart to the only existing film clip of the deportation of prisoners from a holding camp to their annihilation in the death camps in Eastern Europe. This film clip is shown at the beginning of the concentration camp exhibition. The train which left the Dutch camp of Westerbork on 19 May 1944 transported 208 Jews and 245 Sinti and Roma in crowded cattle wagons to their death in Auschwitz. However, at the front of this train there were some (third class) passenger coaches, and the 240 prisoners travelling in these were deported to Bergen-Belsen.¹⁴ This innocent-looking act of boarding the train at Westerbork, on the one hand, and the unburied corpses and thousands of survivors barely alive who were uncovered by British troops in April 1945, on the other hand, exemplify the story of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Bergen-Belsen will also be known to many visitors as the place where, shortly before its liberation, Anne Frank died.¹⁵ Her story has become part of the cultural memory of the Holocaust, and the exhibition needs to document how she and her sister Margot came to Bergen-Belsen and what happened to them there. This is done by showing that she was one of many thousands of female concentration camp prisoners who were transported from Auschwitz-Birkenau to Bergen-Belsen in the autumn of 1944 in order to do slave labour and who perished in the final phase of the camp.

The design of the new Documentation and Information Centre accentuates the general tenor of the exhibition. The left-hand side of the long building forms the area of individual and subjective remembrance. The cement wall remains empty apart from video screens which show excerpts from biographical interviews with survivors of Bergen-Belsen. In the past five years, some 230 survivors have recounted on video their lives before and after Bergen-Belsen and the specific experiences of their incarceration there.

These personal testimonies form the audio-visual counterpart to the historical photographs and film footage of the liberated concentration camp in which the individual is hardly recognisable in the anonymous mass of the dead and nearly dead. The sight of survivors as they look some fifty-five to sixty years later on video screens, and the process of listening to what they have to tell about their experiences and their way to Bergen-Belsen, are intended to underline the 'dehumanisation' which the prisoners suffered. It also enables the visitors to relate more easily to the people who went through the 'hell of Belsen' in a different way than only through the historical images.

The right-hand side of the building accommodates the historical exhibition which follows a broadly chronological approach, documenting first the prisoner-of-war camp (1940–45), then the concentration camp (1943–45), and finally the displaced persons camp (1945–50). The three main parts each emphasise specific aspects which are seen as essential within the general conceptual framework outlined above: the mass death of some 14,000 Soviet prisoners-of-war in the winter of 1941–42 in the prisoner-of-war camp; the desperate and mostly illusory hope of rescue of those Jews who were deported to Bergen-Belsen in the initial phase of the concentration camp; the mass death in the final phase of the war when tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners were transported to Bergen-Belsen from Auschwitz and other camps in the east; rescue on 15 April 1945 by British troops from the certain death assigned to them by the Nazi state, even though the dying continued for a long time; the rebirth of Jewish life in the Jewish DP camp from 1945 onwards, and the parallel, from 1945 to 1946, of Polish life in the Polish DP camp. Excerpts of interviews with survivors also feature in the historical documentation, as well as interviews with liberators and those involved in the rescue effort after the liberation.

The exhibition walls and showcases are as minimalistic in their design as possible. Their appearance suggests archival shelves and containers which display what is known about Bergen-Belsen, while indicating that many questions remain unanswered. They are also meant to express a degree of openness. More sources may yet be found in the coming years, in which case they can still be included in the exhibition; other questions might be asked in a few years' time, in which case the exhibition can be rearranged in order to address them.

The exhibition forms an essential part of the pathway to the historic site and, after walking through the exhibition, visitors should see the actual site with different eyes and realise that the peaceful and pleasant-looking landscape covered in heather and interspersed with birch trees and junipers is deceptive. Beneath the soil the dead lie in mass graves. Close to the mass graves stand the memorials which the survivors set up as reminders of their own suffering and the suffering of those who died there. In the distance, on the one side, is the Soviet prisoners-of-war cemetery and, on the other side,

are the barracks where the DP camp was set up. The historic site confronts the visitors again with the themes of rescue and death, and of the singularity of Bergen-Belsen within the Nazi racial state of which it was at the same time an integral part, which they previously encountered in the historic exhibition.

More than sixty years after the liberation of the concentration camp and fifty-five years after the closure of the DP camp, a comprehensive memory of Bergen-Belsen is returning to the historic site. This marks a major change after the long phase of suppression and destruction of the memory. When the first memorial was set up, it was basically about the dead buried in the mass graves. In recent years, its scope has gradually widened to tell the story of the prisoner-of-war camp, concentration camp, and displaced persons camp, and of the people in these camps and their lives before Bergen-Belsen as well as after, in the case of the survivors. At the same time, the political and social context of remembering Nazi crimes and the victims of Nazi persecution and genocide has changed dramatically. On the one hand, the Holocaust has moved from the margins to the centre of historical consciousness; on the other hand, more and more visitors to Bergen-Belsen have no direct connection with its history. This means that the political and educational functions of the *Gedenkstätte* are becoming more important than ever.

The new *Gedenkstätte* has to fulfil two very different tasks. First and foremost, it must be accepted by the survivors and their descendants, and by the relatives and friends of those who perished, as a dignified and truthful place of their own remembrance. All indications are that as a result of its work since the 1990s, the *Gedenkstätte* has succeeded in gaining this kind of trust and credibility. Many survivors have donated personal artefacts, including diaries, letters, drawings, photographs, and items which they wore or used during their imprisonment, or their time at the DP camp. Some of these donated items are extremely rare and set the *Gedenkstätte* apart from other memorial museums. One of the most personal and moving pieces is a pair of mittens which women at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp knitted from their own jumpers for a young girl who had arrived on her own at Bergen-Belsen with one of the transports in November 1944 to help protect her against the winter cold.¹⁶ Bergen-Belsen started out as a detention camp for those Jews who were (temporarily) exempted from deportation to the extermination camps in the east so that they could be exchanged, and these prisoners were allowed to keep some personal belongings. Even though it was strictly forbidden, some of them managed to write a diary, or a diary-like account, of their time in the concentration camp. The archive of the *Gedenkstätte* holds 31 of such diaries, 8 of which are originals.¹⁷

However, in order to preserve the memory of Bergen-Belsen for future generations and sustain its place in historical consciousness, the *Gedenkstätte* must link the past with the future so that the younger generation can relate meaningfully to what happened there. The exhibition is set up to broach questions of racism, stereotyping, and the systematic exclusion of individuals and population-groups and its consequences.

However, even more important in this respect than the exhibition itself will be the educational programme. Since 1990, the *Gedenkstätte* has provided guided tours of the (current) exhibition and the historic site, offered away-days for schools and youth groups, and seminars for teachers and youth workers. It has also run, in collaboration with other organisations, very successful international youth camps.¹⁸ With the newly acquired documents, artefacts, photographs, and video interviews, a new and much better resourced study centre will be able to put this educational work on a much wider footing. The *Gedenkstätte* needs to transform itself into a place which is not only a site of remembrance but at the same time a centre of education, information, and research. For this purpose it will have to reach out to the younger German generation, as it has already begun to do in recent years, and also engage with the second and third generations of survivors.

With fewer and fewer survivors still alive, it becomes increasingly the task of the *Gedenkstätte* to ensure that Bergen-Belsen keeps a place in public memory. It has, therefore, to address not only the question of what to remember at Bergen-Belsen, and how, but also why we, and future generations, should remember.

Notes

* I would like to thank all my colleagues at the *Gedenkstätte* Bergen-Belsen, and in particular Diana Gring, Bernd Horstmann, Klaus Tätzler and Karin Theilen, for their help in writing this chapter.

1. At the time of writing (January 2006), the new Documentation and Information Centre with the new permanent exhibition is scheduled to open in April 2007. Completion of the new landscape design for the memorial site is expected to take at least another three to five years.
2. The National Archives of the UK, Public Record Office, FO 1010/168: CCG (BE), Office of the Chief of Staff (British Zone), to 229 'P' Mil Gov Det Hannover, 10 October 1945. This instruction was passed on to the *Oberpräsident* of Hannover, Hinrich Wilhelm Kopf, on 19 October 1945.
3. See J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, 'The Landscape Design of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp Memorial', in J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (ed.), *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design* (Washington, DC, 2001), 269–300; J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, '1945–1995: Anmerkungen zur landschaftsarchitektonischen Gestaltung der Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen', *Die Gartenbaukunst*, 7 (1995), 325–340; J. Woudstra, 'Landscape: An Expression of History', *Landscape Design: Journal of the Landscape Institute*, 308 (March 2002), 42–49.
4. See R. Schulze, '"Germany's Gayest and Happiest Town"? Bergen-Belsen 1945–1950', *Dachauer Hefte: Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, 19 (2003), 236–237.
5. 'A Garden in Belsen', *Our Voice. Organ of the Liberated Jews in the British Zone*, 12 July 1947; see also 'Über das Belsen-Denkmal im Lager I', *Wochenblatt*, 22 (71) (1949) (Yiddish, German translation by Nicholas Yantian).
6. E. Kolb, *Bergen-Belsen: Geschichte des "Aufenthaltslager" 1943–1945* (Hanover, 1962). The monograph has seen a number of updated and revised editions and was translated into several languages. For the first exhibition at Bergen-Belsen see F. Bischoff

- (ed.), *Das Lager Bergen-Belsen: Dokumente und Bilder mit erläuternden Texten* (Hanover, 1966).
7. Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.), *Bergen-Belsen: Texte und Bilder der Ausstellung in der zentralen Gedenkstätte des Landes Niedersachsen auf dem Gelände des ehemaligen Konzentrations- und Kriegsgefangenenlagers Bergen-Belsen* (Hanover, 1991). There are translations into a number of other languages, including English, French, Russian and Hebrew.
 8. *Gedenkbuch: Häftlinge des Konzentrationslagers Bergen-Belsen* (Bergen-Belsen, 1995); *Gedenkbuch: Häftlinge des Konzentrationslagers Bergen-Belsen*. 2 vols (Bergen-Belsen, 2005). Preface and introduction have an English translation. The data register of prisoners of the concentration camp at the *Gedenkstätte* comprises additional information, which has not been included in the publications.
 9. 'Schlußbericht der Enquete-Kommission "Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit"', in Deutscher Bundestag (ed.), *Die Enquete-Kommission "Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit" im Deutschen Bundestag – Besondere Veranstaltungen* (Baden-Baden, 1999), 142–803, here 616–630.
 10. Deutscher Bundestag, 14. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 14/1569 (27 July 1999): 'Konzeption der künftigen Gedenkstättenförderung des Bundes', Section 2, 4. The other concentration camps thus singled out for their international and national importance are Neuengamme, Dachau and Flossenbürg in former Western Germany, and Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen and Mittelbau-Dora in the former German Democratic Republic.
 11. The following is based on the internal working papers produced in the past two years by the members of the international team of researchers and of the management group for the new permanent exhibition. See also *Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen, Newsletter*, No. 1 (2002) and No. 2 (2003).
 12. See E. Benz-Rababah, S. Burmil, J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *The Bergen-Belsen Design Workshop: Memory, Design and Friendship* (Hanover, 2001).
 13. For a very early example see *Lest We Forget: The Horrors of Nazi Concentration Camps Revealed for All Times in the Most Terrible Photographs Ever Published*. Compiled by The Daily Mail (London, 1945). For a discussion of the images, see H. Craven, 'Horror in Our Time: Images of the Concentration Camps in the British Media, 1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21 (2001), 205–253; Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (eds), *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933* (London, 2005), esp. section 3.
 14. Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid (Netherlands Institute for Vision and Film), Film Westerbork Transport. See also, in their archive, Collectie RVD Filmarchief, Kamp Westerbork (overs) (Acte 1), Archiefnr. 02–1167–01. For further information, see also K. Broersma and G. Rossing, *Kamp Westerbork gefilmd: het verhaal over een unieke film uit 1944* (Assen, 1997).
 15. W. Lindwer, *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank* (New York, 1992).
 16. Archive of the *Gedenkstätte* Bergen-Belsen, BO 76.
 17. T. Rahe, 'Selbstzeugnisse zur Geschichte des KZ Bergen-Belsen und ihre Bedeutung für die historische Forschung'. Unpublished paper given at the symposium in honour of Henry Friedlander's 75th birthday, Celle, 24 September 2005.
 18. See Landesjugendring Niedersachsen e.V. (ed.), *Spuren suchen – Spuren sichern: Die Arbeit der Jugendverbände in Bergen-Belsen* (Hannover, 1995); Landesjugendring Niedersachsen e.V. (ed.), *Spuren suchen, Spuren sichern: Das Projekt – Die Ausstellung – Die Patenschaften* (Hanover, 1997).

17

Visiting Memorials: A Worthwhile Cathartic Experience or 'A Waste of Time and Money'?*

Jochen Fuchs

After reunification with the German Democratic Republic (GDR), houses belonging to foreigners were not the only things set alight in the wider Federal Republic of Germany. In the centre of Magdeburg, on Ascension Day 1994, a manhunt occurred in broad daylight. Individuals were hunted down who did not possess a German passport – or at least those with dark hair were. In one of my seminars, a student pleaded for the death penalty on the grounds that it was cheaper and no outcry came from the other students. Incidentally, our department trains social workers.

Against this backdrop the decision was taken to offer an annual seminar on the history of fascism, together with an excursion to Oswiecim and Cracow. In preparation for the trip each student has to specialise on a topic of particular interest to him or her. This could, for instance, be the study of one of the victimised groups. However, the focus could also lie with the perpetrators, the fascist institutions, or the development of the right during the 'Third Reich'. Moreover, some students concentrate on the process of 'coming to terms with the past' during the period since the liberation. Finally, the results of the respective research studies are presented to the participants during a three-day block seminar.

The eight-day excursion travels via Berlin, to visit the House of the Wannsee Conference, the Jewish Museum, Sachsenhausen or one of the other memorials, before continuing on to Oswiecim. There, the *Internationale Jugendbegegnungstätte* of the group *Aktion Sühnezeichen* (International Youth Meeting Centre of the Action Reconciliation group) with its diverse facilities serves as a 'base camp' for the excursion party. At the heart of the visit are (guided) tours around the main camp in Auschwitz, Birkenau, and the city of Oswiecim. The students are also given the opportunity to work in the archive of the Auschwitz State Museum and to pay individual visits to the so-called 'country exhibitions' at the main camp. Furthermore, a discussion is held with contemporary witnesses and staff of the museum also offer one or two lectures on their own research. The culmination of the excursion is a stay in Cracow, during which there is usually a tour of the city, as well as an event consisting of lectures and discussions at the Centre for Jewish Culture in Kazimierz.

Hitherto it has never been difficult to interest sufficient students in the seminar and excursion. Contrary to original expectations, however, the anti-fascist groups in Magdeburg are under-represented among the ranks of the excursion participants. After some years, not least because of this, the question arose as to what effect the excursions were actually having on the participants. A study was carried out to help answer this question.

There is no shortage of literature on the subject of memorial visits. The majority are reports by individuals who are, in one way or another, responsible for organising such events for different target groups. They are chiefly descriptive and appear to begin with the axiom that visiting memorial sites automatically generates positive effects. The basis for this is that an excursion will have a prophylactic effect against racist, fascist, right-extremist thoughts. Some even believe in the therapeutic effect in confirmed cases of infestation with these ideas. This concept could thus be described as 'vaccination theory' and it is particularly favoured by pedagogues who organise such visits. This is also true of many politicians who may measure their commitment to the fight against fascism by the level of funding they make available for such visits.

Reports about their experiences have also been supplied by staff employed at the memorials. Many of these appear to be rather sceptical of the 'vaccination theory'.¹ However, as a rule, they do not contain empirical studies which would test this theory. Empirical studies are generally rare. In so far as they exist, they focus mainly on visitor research or concentrate on a single memorial. They seek to discover, for example, which visitors have looked at which exhibits, texts, and so on, and for how long. Evaluations of this type endeavour to improve the work or presentation of the memorial or they aim to confirm whether the current arrangement is successful. Studies undertaken in Germany on the effects of visiting memorials are very rare. To date they have been based only on the survey of a small number of visitors at any one time taking part in a one-day event. Thus, this study serves not only to satisfy personal curiosity but may also contribute towards filling a gap in this research area.

The primary question in the study was: what effect does visiting former concentration and termination camps have on visitors? In the example of the one-week memorial visits made by Magdeburg social work students, the effects that the participants themselves described had to be differentiated from the observed consequences of such excursions on their attitudes. As the participation in the trip to the memorials was voluntary, what motivated students to take part and how far they differed from their fellow students as a whole had to be investigated. The inclusion of students from different year groups also made it possible to look at changes over the period 1994–2002.

The study was carried out by means of an anonymous questionnaire. Views were measured on the basis of sets of closed questions developed by

Dresler-Hawke.² The excursion participants answered a supplementary set of questions on their motivations, the Auschwitz memorial, and so on. Some of the participants answered the questions sent to them by post a long time after their visit to the memorials, another group straight after the visit, and other participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires both before and after the visit.

From a total of 133 participants included in the study, 92 per cent answered the questions; the return quotient was, depending on the year group, between 69 and 100 per cent. Furthermore, in total 432 first-year students were questioned in 1995, 1999, 2000 and 2002. As these questionnaires were given out during lectures at the university and collected back in after completion, the return quotient was almost 100 per cent.

The typical participant in the memorial visits is female. She is around 24 years old and grew up in a German family in the area, mainly in Saxony-Anhalt. She has not yet completed her occupational training nor has an institutionalised religious affiliation. She is politically on the left and takes part in elections.

The developments between 1994 and 2002 show that the proportion of women taking part increases, the participants become slightly younger, the number of participants from West Germany/West Berlin drastically sinks, and parallel to this, the number of active church attendees also decreases. With regard to political orientation, a shift towards the centre can be detected. If first-year students are included in the comparison, the number of men taking part in the excursion turns out to be higher than amongst the first years. An explanation for this may be that 'Auschwitz' is associated with politics, and politics is traditionally of greater interest to men. The fact that the excursion participants are on average older than those students beginning their studies can be explained by the fact that the course organisation does not facilitate participation in an excursion in the first year of study.

The proportion of students from West Germany has on the whole decreased. The cause of this is the rather low appeal of studying in the East. The greater than average decrease in excursion participation could be partly due to the fact that in the first half of the 1990s there were quite a lot of 'pioneers', who wanted to get to know the East and not just Magdeburg. Possibly too, those few who still choose to study in the East are rather forced into doing this and are not really seeking closer acquaintance with their fellow students.

The contrary trend, fewer church members on the excursion and a slight increase of the same amongst the first year students, can be partly explained by the drastic decrease in the proportion of the (mainly church-attending) West Germans. The trend towards the church among the first-year students is both the result of more diverse 'missionary efforts' by the church as well as the influence of high unemployment. Churches provide a good deal of employment in the social arena and regularly privilege believers when appointments are made. Those social-work students who wish to have a

competitive advantage over their fellow students will, therefore, become members of a Christian church.

Supporters of political parties which, in the current party spectrum, occupy the right of centre are seldom found amongst the students (CDU, FDP and Republicans support lies between 10 and 20 per cent), these are found even less often amongst the participants in the excursion (CDU, FDP and Republicans support lies between 0 and 15 per cent). This is hardly surprising. Left of centre, the PDS lost its dominant position in 2002. Among the students it had never held this position (the maximum support reached in 1995 was 25.4 per cent). In both cases the SPD has profited from this decline.

There are also very large differences in the level of participation in elections. At most 15 per cent stayed away from the ballot box. Since 1995 a steadily increasing number of the first year students, however, has ceased voting. In 2000 the non-voters in this group formed the strongest party and in 2002 two-fifths of the students failed to go to the polls. There is no reason to suppose that this development could be connected to an increasing acceptance of anarchistic ideas.

The motivation of the participants was ascertained by an open question and, consequently, the motivational positions were rather heterogeneous. The 'bundle of motives' given by the participants was 'packed' together into different groups. In addition to these results, there were other studies on the basis of closed questions.³

Table 17.1 provides an overview of the motivational positions. Some individual entries eluded classification (such as 'to feel something' or, for instance, 'to want to see what my grandparents repressed' – in this latter case they came from near Auschwitz).

In summary, for many of the participants the acquisition of knowledge represents an important motive, while for many others the need for visualisation and in part also emotional motives in the broadest sense of the words (from experiencing feelings to the experience of being part of a group) are the driving force behind a visit to Auschwitz. Alongside these factors 'personal' motives are also in the foreground. In contrast, surprisingly few students are politically motivated or see themselves as actors in social debates. This indicates that very different needs and expectations must be taken into consideration when carrying out memorial visits. Researching into the effects of such visits shows that they certainly cannot be expected to be uniform amongst all participants.

More than half of the participants confirmed that the visit to Auschwitz had had a strong influence on them and their personal development. 30 per cent of all participants indicated that they were undecided. As Table 17.2 reveals, the values fluctuated and, therefore, a particular trend across the years cannot be established.

Table 17.1 Reasons motivating visits to concentration camps

Motive	Designation by the participants (in %)
Topical interest	2
Political interest	2
Interest in Poland (country and people)	3
First-hand experience	4
Determined by study programme	4
Purely general interest	5
General interest alongside other motives	5
Interest in the subject	7
Meeting contemporary witnesses	8
Interest in German history	10
Interest in the Jewish people/consternation over the murder of Jews	10
Group experience	10
As part of anti-fascist engagement	10
Interest in the history of the fascist execution of power	11
Realisation of a previously abstract idea	12
Examination of Auschwitz/fascism	14
Acquisition of 'specialist knowledge' ⁴	23
Need for visualisation ⁵	24

Notes: (4) and (5)

Table 17.2 Impact of the visit to Auschwitz on the visitors

Year	1		2		3		4		5		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1994	1	9	3	27	6	55	1	9	0	0	11
1995	3	21	9	64	2	14	0	0	0	0	14
1996	8	42	8	42	3	16	0	0	0	0	19
1997	6	35	2	12	5	29	4	24	0	0	17
1998	5	36	5	36	2	12	1	6	1	6	14
1999	3	13	7	29	9	38	3	13	2	8	24
2002	3	14	5	23	9	41	5	23	0	0	22
Total	29	24	39	32	36	30	14	12	3	2	121

The 64 participants indicated are 64 out of 68 participants who described themselves as strongly influenced and expressed their views in more detail. 11 participants revealed that they were particularly emotionally influenced in some way and shocked. For some, according to their statements, this was the cause of differences in their impressions or behaviour. For 19 of the students the effect of the visit was mainly to increase their interest in the subject and caused them to reflect. For 12 participants the excursion was the decisive factor in their desire to deepen their historical knowledge (i.e., in German history). In this connection they also thought more about the question of 'shame' or 'guilt'. Four students were encouraged to re-evaluate critically their family background and three further members of the group went on to work specifically with anti-Semitism or the history of the Jews in Europe. Eight participants perceived that their anti-fascist behaviour had been reinforced and that this was as a result of the excursion.⁶ 16 others voiced the opinion that participation in the memorial visit encouraged them to resist or oppose xenophobia, racial hatred and (Neo-) fascism.

Some participants described changes in their impressions or behaviour, or indicated that they had been influenced to become more actively involved through their participation in the excursion. Four of these experienced and described, for example, a greater confidence in discussing relevant subjects and an increase in their political interest or commitment. Three students sensed a greater scepticism towards prejudices or noticed a reduction in the range of prejudices that they themselves had previously harboured. Two participants traced back to the excursion their decisions to become involved in youth work and, in doing so, organise their own memorial visits to Auschwitz and other memorial sites. One female participant saw a broadening of her future potential for action as the result of her visit. Only the comments or descriptions from six of the participants were difficult to fit into the above grid.⁷

A provisional conclusion suggests that, in the majority of cases according to their self-estimation, participation in the excursion had a strong influence on the students. As for the questions concerning their motivation, there was no unified response to what extent the excursion had had an effect. Instead, it produced a relatively broad spectrum of effects.

The aim is now to establish, whether or not any changes in the participants can be observed as a result of the visit. The set of questions developed by Dresler-Hawke on national symbolism served as a measure of commitment to diverse political positions, such as transferral of the responsibility for the persecution of Jews. In order to establish whether short-term effects were recorded in the results, some of the groups were questioned before the excursion and at the end of the visit. The (purely retrospective) questioning of those students in the department who had visited Auschwitz before 1999,

should help to resolve whether long- or medium-term changes are to be expected as a result of memorial visits.

A comparison between the groups who took part in the trip to Auschwitz in different years regarding the popularity of national symbols, collective self-evaluation, the level of feelings of shame and the willingness to take responsibility for the Nazi past, reveals no significant differences. The popularity of national symbols is, like the sense of 'national feeling', rather low in all of the groups. Both the willingness to take on responsibility for the Nazi past and the readiness to confront it, are high. The value indicating feelings of shame lies between these two extremes. Only in the willingness to confront the Nazi past can significant differences be made out: after an almost continuous increase between the years 1994–95 and 1998, after 1999 the figures show a decrease.

Starting from the observation that participation in a memorial visit could affect the disposition of the participants, the members of the 1999 and 2002 year groups were asked to answer the questions both before and after the excursion. There were no significant differences between the results of the questionnaires completed before the trip and after the visit to Auschwitz for either the 1999 group or the 2000 group.⁸ Groups who travelled to Auschwitz before 1999 were first surveyed in 1999. For these students there was, therefore, a time lag of between 18 and 55 months between the end of their excursion and the survey. No significant differences were apparent in their response behaviour compared to the groups from 1999 and 2002. From this we can deduce that the disposition of the participants had also not been influenced by the visit in the long term.

In order to clarify how participants actually assessed the Auschwitz Museum and how they in turn evaluated the effects that a visit has or ought to have, they were requested to read a list of statements and to indicate on a five-point scale whether they considered each statement to be 'absolutely true' (1), 'true' (2), 'false' (4) or 'completely false' (5) or whether they were 'undecided', in which case they should cross the option marked (3).

Almost all of the participants agreed that the historical events were accurately presented. With the exception of two responses, one from a supporter of the Greens from Saxony-Anhalt who did not answer the question, and four from the area (three PDS supporters and one SPD supporter) who chose the 'undecided' option, the corresponding statement was continually described as 'completely true' or 'true'. The respondents also overwhelmingly agreed with the statement: 'Visiting the memorial site at Auschwitz led to a positive engagement with German history'.

In the light of these results it is clear that in the eyes of the participants, as far as the documentation of events is concerned, the Auschwitz Museum completely fulfils its task. At the same time, it is far more than just a museum. It was seen by the majority as a place that facilitates and fosters a

process of engagement with German history and is, therefore, not limited to purely serving the transmission and reception of information.

Furthermore, the position of the participants was completely unambiguous when they were asked afterwards if one of the most important consequences of a visit to Auschwitz was that one is more active in combating fascist and racist tendencies in today's society. Only 3 per cent of the respondents marked this as 'false' and only one-fifth were undecided. In this respect an excursion to Auschwitz is, in the eyes of the vast majority of participants, a tried and tested method of raising the social potential for action in the aforementioned sense.

In conclusion, in view of the various (partial) results of the study, it can be stated that, on the one hand, visiting memorial sites did not produce a measurable 'Damascus effect' on the participants surveyed.⁹ In fact, an evaluation of the attitudes of the participants indicated that the excursion had had no significant impact on the positions that they had occupied before the beginning of the memorial visits.

It is unclear, not least because no survey was carried out before the visits, whether 'conversions' did in fact occur – not in the classical sense 'like a bolt of lightening', but rather triggered by a 'time fuse' or as the result of a more 'evolutionary' process, behind which the excursion was the driving force. Even if such preliminary questioning had taken place and, with their help, fundamental changes in position had been discovered, the cause of any single event revealed by such 'long-term observations', conducted outside of laboratory conditions, would hardly hold water given the multitude of possible 'special' factors an excursion comprises.

Second, it can hardly be stated that the average participant has 'seen the light'. It is true that, by comparing the groups of participants in the excursions with the group of first year students, differences can be observed. However, in order to stay with the analogy, these are hardly as great as the difference between 'heathens' and (converted) Christians, but at most comparable to those between different Christian denominations.¹⁰

What is striking, though, is that according to the self-evaluation of the majority of those surveyed, participation in the excursion had nevertheless influenced them. Furthermore, a quarter of these even characterised this influence as 'strong'. At first glance there appears to be a contradiction in the findings being presented here, which could almost give rise to the suspicion that these activities are a form of 'preaching to the converted'. A possible (re-) solution to this apparent contradiction can be found in the fact that the memorial trips are not attempts to convert, but should be seen rather as having a reinforcing function.¹¹ They approximate to a 'confirmation' which reveals its effect, according to the 'outlook' of the participant, either through deepening of their knowledge or through illustrating hitherto rather theoretically received information. At least in individual cases, the

visits are conducive not towards *educating* missionaries, but towards multiplying their contribution in the broadest sense.¹²

However, there is a contradiction that is not so easy to resolve. On the one hand, the excursion to Auschwitz in the eyes of the vast majority of the participants represents a tried and tested method of encouraging resistance to fascist and racist tendencies in today's society; on the other hand, the accounts by just as great a majority of participants of *their own* activities following the excursion turned out to be rather barren. In this respect the answer to the question, what tangible effects such a visit can engender could read: '(almost) a waste of time'. One explanation for this could be that visits to memorial sites are usually led by institutions whose primary purpose is to educate and teach the participants, not to introduce them to political activities or to encourage them to become activists. The participant groups are rather heterogeneously constituted in terms of educational backgrounds and, therefore, narrow limits are placed on an 'evaluation' of the excursion on the part of the seminar, project or teaching programme. The participants form a group only for the duration of the excursion or the project and are subsequently 'scattered to the winds' again. This offers the theoretical possibility of 'the seeds' being strewn far and wide. In practice, by contrast, there tends to be a thinning out of the participants, so that it is then 'only' possible for them to think about it in state of 'inner emigration' – to use a polemical term. For example a 24-year-old female participant answered the question on the influence of the excursion as follows: 'Once the original shock has been overcome, one begins to grasp and above all to *reflect* [italics in the original J. F.] on what actually happened there and why.' As comfort for those disappointed by such meagre results (at least until 'better times') what remains is perhaps only the more or less proven epigram: 'We don't have a chance, but we must use it all the same.'

The most positively valued points of the programme concerning the implementation of memorial visits were the conversations with contemporary witnesses and the possibility of carrying out independent research in the memorial archive, which also involved use of the library and video collection at the youth meeting centre.¹³ This suggests that in future particular attention should be directed towards these areas, in particular in view of the fact that, over the medium term, it may not be possible to guarantee conversations with contemporary witnesses for all interested groups.

The 'fascination' directed towards eyewitnesses and the perception of their high authenticity was also felt by the participants to radiate from the original reports and documents available in the archive of the memorial. In view of the high value placed by a surprisingly large amount of participants on the archival work, excursion visits will make an increased demand on the archive for the purpose of what could be called 'discovery' or 'research-based learning'. Nevertheless, the current provision of available spaces and staff-capacity is rather limited, so that were this plan to be followed in the near future an

extension to accommodate it would be necessary. For the majority an additional side-effect would be an introduction to working with primary sources. This appears particularly attractive to the group from the academic field, but it may also prompt individual participants, following their memorial visit, to conduct further research on the topic in their local communities.¹⁴ In general there is a need for wide-ranging research: the current 'policies' of memorial sites, contenting themselves purely with visitor research, must be regarded as inadequate.¹⁵

Notes

- * This article was translated by Julie Deeming.
- 1. See H. Hötte, 'Aktualisierte Geschichte – Über die Arbeit mit Jugendlichen im Dokumentenhaus KZ Neuengamme', *Argumente zur museumspädagogischen Praxis* (1982), 1, 1.
- 2. E. Dresler-Hawke, *Reconstructing the Past: Perceptions of the Holocaust and Positioning of German National Identity* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis), (University of Wellington, New Zealand 2000).
- 3. Cf. S. Gareis and M. von Vultejus, *Lernort Dachau? Eine empirische Einstellungsuntersuchung bei Besuchern der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau* (Berlin, 1987), 108ff and S. Müller, 'Besucher/innenforschung in Gedenkstätten – Ein Pilotprojekt in der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen', *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief* (1998), 74, 7ff.
- 4. As a rule this concerned 'experienced' memorial visitors who wanted to broaden their knowledge through use of the archive or through the lectures and discussions.
- 5. This need for a 'picture' was, however, combined with a variety of nuanced motivational positions. In almost a third of cases their brief comments such as 'form my own picture' resisted any further interpretation. A group of similar size wanted to have 'illustrated' that which their 'members' already knew. For just about a quarter the need for visualisation was accompanied by a more or less explicitly stated rejection of the acquisition of knowledge from books or through other media. 20 per cent of those who were interested in 'pictures' believed that the visit could even offer the possibility of being able to 'to see evidence', even to almost 'mutate into witnesses'. Those belonging to this group do not seem to be fully aware that they are visiting a memorial and not, for instance, in transport to a concentration or extermination camp.
- 6. Similar reactions were established by Fischer and Anton in their study of politically interested young people, cf. C. Fischer and H. Anton, *Auswirkungen der Besuche von Gedenkstätten auf Schülerinnen und Schüler (Breitenau – Hadamar – Buchenwald) – Bericht über 40 Explorationen in Hessen und Thüringen (Studie im Auftrag der Landeszentralen für politische Bildung Hessen und Thüringen)* (Wiesbaden, 1992), 125.
- 7. Nonetheless they should not be ignored and will, therefore, be quoted here in full: 'To be able to see the inhumane conditions under which they had to "live" made me question: Why are you able to live in such a carefree way, always having something to eat etc.' and again: 'Before it was also always clear to me that behind the history of fascism stood the fate of humanity. Yet the excursion was for me very moving and has increased my powers of perception. For example through stepping into the memorial, the actual materialisation of the domain of the atrocity; the conversations with eyewitnesses were very moving.' Furthermore: 'Fear of human incorrigibility (Slavs, witches, Apartheid, Jews ...) WHY do so many agree with

this? Why do such systems develop again and again? And anger about the eye-wash over the denazification process, but also understanding of those (...), who after 1945 helped the Nazis come through, resignation, because the split between "high ideals" and real life too often favours personal convenience. Nazis in the trams? Swastikas? I'd rather "overlook it" instead of getting angry. And generally people keep diplomatically quiet rather than speaking out against "normality", even if one does think differently, eventually one also profits from the current system (the First over the Third World, for example).' And again: 'In Auschwitz I took the address of a woman who had had to play in the "girls orchestra". I later spoke to her on the telephone for approximately an hour. Her courage to live and the strength of this woman spurred me on to deal with my own crisis with greater strength. Her strength and her courage infected me.' Also: 'A greater interest in other conflicts in the world (Chile, Togo, former USSR etc).' And: 'Flashbacks, pictures from the Auschwitz excursion, discussions surfacing in my everyday life.'

8. See the survey of 861 school pupils of different types of school carried out by R. Mounajed. The visitors were asked after their trip to complete, amongst other things, a list of sentences, for example 'Foreigners (Jews, West Germans, Arians and so on) are ...'. The author comes to the conclusion that 21 per cent of the pupils had produced 'typically negative, right-wing prejudices' and illustrated this for example with a questionnaire from one Year Eight pupil from Rheinsberg who described foreigners as parasites and gays, Jews as pigs, Aryans as good people and East Germans as 'ok'. (At the top of the table of groups rejected by this 21 per cent of the pupils with distinctive right-wing prejudices were: the West Germans with 70.2 per cent, followed by Poles (67.4 per cent), foreigners (59.7 per cent) and Gypsies (55.2 per cent). At the end of the scale came lesbians (38.1 per cent), communists (29.3 per cent) and the handicapped (17.7 per cent).) See: R. Mounajed, 'In Gedenkstätten Brücken schlagen – Ergebnisse einer Schülerbefragung in der Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück / Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten', in *Zeitgeschichte regional – Mitteilungen aus Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, 5 (2) (2001), 115. A preliminary survey did not occur, so these investigations cannot really show, whether changes in attitudes had taken place. Instead, they only support the opinion that visiting memorials works through a process of 'immunisation' is hardly sustainable. This also confirms the results of the Buchenwald Study of the Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung (Central Institute for Youth Research) in Leipzig from the Autumn of 1989. Cf. W. Schubarth, 'Forschungen zum Geschichtsbewußtsein', in V. W. Friedrich, P. Förster and K. Starke(eds), *Das Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung Leipzig 1966–1990 – Geschichte, Methoden, Erkenntnisse* (Berlin, 1999), 216f.
9. Schubarth also confirms that the effect of a memorial visit on basic convictions showed only 'slight effects'. Cf. W. Schubarth, *Wirkungen eines Gedenkstättenbesuches bei Jugendlichen – Ergebnisse einer Wirkungsanalyse von Besuchen in der Nationalen Gedenkstätte Buchenwald* (Leipzig, 1990), (unpublished manuscript ZIJ 15/90, Universitätsbibliothek Köln, Reg.-Nr. 2573), 36.
10. See also R. Barlog-Scholz, *Historisches Wissen über die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager bei deutschen Jugendlichen – Empirische Grundlagen einer Gedenkstättenpädagogik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 171ff.
11. However, the following position give rise to concern: according to H. Zumpe, 'Tagesveranstaltungen der Gedenkstättenpädagogik – Konzeptionen, Zielsetzungen, Angebotsformen und Nutzergruppen', in *Politisches Lernen* (2003), 1–2, 44 secure evidence regarding changes in attitude collapses because, faced with the taboo nature of the subject, extremely high numbers provide socially

desirable answers. In my opinion, the influence of these factors can be minimised by a strict guarantee of anonymity in completing the survey.

12. See A. Leo and P. Reif-Spirek, ' "Es darf sich dort entsprechend der vorhandenen Hinweisschilder frei bewegt werden" – Eine Analyse von Berichten Thüringer LehrerInnen über Klassenfahrten zur Gedenkstätte Buchenwald', in *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief* (1999), 87, 16.
13. See M. Wittmeier, *Internationale Jugendbegegnungsstätte Auschwitz – zur Pädagogik der Erinnerung in der politischen Bildung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 152 ff. and U. Neirich, *Erinnern heißt wachsam bleiben – Pädagogische Arbeit in und mit Gedenkstätten* (Mühlheim an der Ruhr, 2000), 28f.
14. This does not imply that the archival work would not be attractive to 'non-academics'. See D. Mischon-Vosselmann, 'Archivarbeit in der Gedenkstätte Majdanek – ein Schülerprojekt', in Deutsch-Polnischen Jugendwerk and Knut Dethlefsen (eds), *Erinnern und Gedenken – Zur Bedeutung der historisch-politischen Bildung im deutsch-polnischen Jugendaustausch* (Potsdam and Warschau, 2002), 197 ff. and C. Jungbluth, *Eindrücke des Besuches der Gedenkstätte Breitenau – eine Befragung von Schülerinnen und Schülern* (unpublished essay, Gedenkstätte Breitenau) (Kassel, 2002), 77f.
15. See J. Fuchs, 'Zum Verhältnis der Gedenkstätten und deren Wirkung auf ihre Besucher – Versuch einer (vorläufigen) Bilanz nebst Ausblick', *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief* (2004), 121, 30ff.

Part V

Representing the Holocaust: Writing, Art, Education

18

History and Memory: Saul Friedländer's Historiography of the Shoah

Karolin Machtans

Over the last two decades, the discussion of an integration of personal memories into the historiography of the Holocaust has spread to various academic fields. Saul Friedländer, whose opus magnum *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997) has become one of the standard works of Holocaust research, consistently engages with the problem of what he calls a 'conjunction' of memory and historiography.¹ Friedländer describes the significance of memory for the historiographical process by emphasizing two different components: (1) the integration of personal memories into the historical narrative and (2) the impact of the historian's own personal background on the historical narrative.

First, he distinguishes his position from theorists who state a clear-cut dichotomy between history and memory, such as Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Yosef Haim Yerushalmi.² Friedländer himself does not deny 'that the distinction between public memory and historiography is nonexistent or unwarranted', but rather argues that 'the process involved in the moulding of memory is, theoretically at least, antithetical to that involved in the writing of history'.³ However, the representation of a recent past, Friedländer points out, is to be found somewhere between the two poles of memory and 'dispassionate' historical inquiries – an area that he calls 'historical consciousness'. He argues that,

in the representation of a recent past [...] considered to be of cardinal relevance for the identity of a given group, such an opposition is far from clear-cut. The closer one moves [...] to an attempt at general interpretations of the group's past, the more the two areas – distinct in their extreme forms – become intertwined [...]. This middle ground may be defined as [...] 'historical consciousness'. [...] 'Historical consciousness' is the necessary conjunction of both extremes in any significant attempt at understanding, explicating, and representing the yesterday that affects the shaping of today.⁴

This conjunction of memory and historiography is valid for any recent historical event where the witnesses are still alive.

At least since his dialogue with Martin Broszat and the Historians' Debate, Friedländer has clearly stated that only a conjunction of historiographical facts and the memories of those who lived through the events these facts relate to can generate adequate representations of the Shoah. The conjunction of history and memory aims at integrating the voices of the victims into the historiographical discourse. In addition to the 'rational' description of the historical events, the memories of the victims give insight into the character of the Third Reich by illuminating the effects of the Nazi policies on the daily life of the Jews. As Friedländer writes in his introduction to *Nazi Germany and the Jews*:

In many works the implicit assumptions regarding the victims' generalized hopelessness and passivity, or their inability to change the course of events leading to their extermination, have turned them into a static and abstract element of the historical background. It is too often forgotten that Nazi attitudes and policies cannot be fully assessed without knowledge of the lives and indeed of the feelings of the Jewish men, women, and children themselves. Here, therefore, at each stage in the description of the evolving Nazi policies and the attitudes of German and European societies as they impinge on the evolution of those policies, the fate, the attitudes, and sometimes the initiatives of the victims are given major importance. Indeed, their voices are essential if we are to attain an understanding of this past. For it is their voices that reveal what was known and what *could* be known; theirs were the only voices that conveyed both the clarity of insight and the total blindness of human beings confronted with an entirely new and utterly horrifying reality. The constant presence of the victims [...], while historically essential in itself, is also meant to put the Nazis' actions into full perspective.⁵

The second, and probably most innovative, component of Friedländer's argument is that memory is already interwoven into the genesis of the historiographical process itself. Friedländer stresses the influence of the historian's personal memories on historiographical writing and thereby concurs with Dominick LaCapra who argues:

Whether the historian or analyst is a survivor, a relative of survivors, a former Nazi, a former collaborator, a relative of former Nazis or collaborators, a younger Jew or German distanced from more immediate contact with survival, participation, or collaboration, or a relative 'outsider' to these problems will make a difference even in the meaning of statements that may be formally identical.⁶

These reflections represent a remarkable shift in Friedländer's theoretical work. In his early work, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, he emphasized the role of documents despite complete objectivity being unattainable.⁷ No mention is yet made of the influence of the historian's personal background on his historiographical work. Rather, Friedländer stresses the importance of objectivity: his critical analysis of the role played by Pius XII, 'claims to be nothing more than an analysis of documents' and therefore is subtitled 'A Documentation'.⁸ Friedländer's personal involvement with the role of the Catholic Church and his concealment in different Catholic homes while his parents were murdered in Auschwitz are mentioned only in the dedication of the book: 'To the memory of my parents, killed at Auschwitz'.⁹ In contrast, in his later work the above-mentioned role of the historian's background is of central importance. According to Friedländer, it not only influences the interpretation of the Third Reich but, more importantly, shapes whether or not the 'Final Solution' is accorded a central role in the historiographical representation:

Most historians of my generation, born on the eve of the Nazi era, recognise either explicitly or implicitly that plowing through the events of those years entails not only excavating and interpreting a collective past like any other, but also recovering and confronting decisive elements of our own lives. This recognition does not generate any agreement among us about how to define the Nazi regime, how to interpret its internal dynamics, how to render adequately both its utter criminality and its utter ordinariness, or, for that matter, where and how to place it within a wider historical context.¹⁰

In another context, Friedländer further emphasises the influence of the historian's personal background and makes clear that this is not a question of facts, but of interpretation. He writes: 'Although one may state and restate one's own interpretation of the facts, one is clearly facing a choice not between facts but between interpretations anchored in value judgements not amenable to decisive proof or disproof.'¹¹ This personal involvement is not only valid for those historians who are survivors, but also for those on the side of the perpetrators, as Friedländer has eloquently stated in his dialogue with Martin Broszat: 'You oppose the rational discourse of German historiography to the mythical memory of the victims. [...] [W]hy, in your opinion, would historians belonging to the group of the perpetrators be able to distance themselves from their past, whereas those belonging to the group of the victims would not?'¹² The historian's personal involvement can give insights into the events that otherwise would be inaccessible. However, the historiographical representation of facts that are part of the personal memories of the historian represents an immense challenge. To express the influence of the historian's personal background on the process of his historiographical writing, Friedländer suggests the Freudian term of 'transferential situation':

'the extreme character of the events and the indeterminacy surrounding their historical significance create even for the professional historian a field of projections, of unconscious shapings and reshapings, of an authentic transference situation'.¹³ 'Working through' for the historian means, first, to be aware of the influence of these personal memories on the interpretation of historical events. The impact of the historian's personal memories has to be accessible to a critical reader in the form of a commentary. This commentary can be interwoven into the narrative or be added in a separate section. Second, the historian has to find a balance between his feelings and a distancing 'numbness'. Third, the historian's main task is to find a form of historiographical representation that refuses an all-inclusive narrative and thereby a 'redemptive closure' of those events that cannot be integrated: 'Closure', as Friedländer writes, 'in this case would represent an obvious avoidance of what remains indeterminate, elusive, and opaque'.¹⁴

Both the integration of the victims' memories and the historian's self-reflective commentary aim at interrupting the chronological representation of the historical events, thereby giving room to the competing memories and questioning the existence of a master narrative. According to Friedländer, the 'juxtaposition' of historical analysis and memories avoids the 'temptation of closure': the specific nature of the Shoah leaves the historian with an 'opaqueness', an 'uneasiness' of interpretation that results, among others, from excluding memories of the perpetrators and bystanders on the one hand (the 'normality' of their life) and the victims on the other. The integration of the victims' memories and the historian's commentary aims primarily at refusing to integrate the Nazi era and especially the 'Final Solution' into an overall narrative. Friedländer argues that global interpretations such as fascism, totalitarianism, or economic exploitation do not explain the specificity of the Nazi crimes against the Jews. Although not unrepresentable, the extermination of the Jews of Europe depicts an 'event at the limits'.¹⁵ The 'uneasiness' of the historian results above all from the taboo-breaking nature of the Nazi perpetration and especially the 'Final Solution': 'The very disappearance of these psychological (or sociobiological) barriers concerning the "scientific" mass killing of other human beings represents [...] the first and foremost issue for which our usual categories of interpretation are insufficient'.¹⁶ Moreover, various aspects of National Socialism are contradictory and make it impossible to integrate the events into usual forms of representation. A historiography of the Shoah which aims at avoiding simplification would have to keep the 'non-integratable' parts of the 'Final Solution' and to express them through the structure of the historical narrative. Only a new form of historical representation such as this could imply that a final closure does not exist.

Friedländer's opus magnum, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vol. I: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939*, can be read as a realization of his theoretical concepts. First, the victims' memories alter throughout the historiographical narrative

with the description of the Nazi policies; second, Friedländer's theoretical approach is clearly visible in the introductory chapter. There he explains the necessity of the victims' voices for an understanding of the nature of the 'Final Solution'. He also returns to the influence of the historian's personal background on the interpretation of the facts. This personal involvement by historians of Friedländer's generation gives 'a particular urgency' to their inquiries: 'For my generation, to partake at one and the same time in the memory and the present perceptions of this past may create an unsettling dissonance; it may, however, also nurture insights that would otherwise be inaccessible.'¹⁷

Two examples from the text may shed light on how Friedländer structures his narrative to reach such a juxtaposition of historical facts and memories. Throughout the first volume, the conjunction of history and memory is realized by a permanent shift of perspective: the abstract level of the Nazi policies alters with their influence on the daily life of the victims, which is expressed through extracts of oral memories, letters and journals. One example for such a shift of perspectives is the effect of the 'Aryan paragraph' on the life of Karl Berthold, a Jewish employee of the social benefits office in Chemnitz, whose destiny permeates the narrative as a leitmotif. Another example is the enumeration of the April laws, such as the Law against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Universities, which is followed by, and so contrasted with, personal childhood memories of Jews that illustrate the meaning of these laws for the personal lives of the children. Hilma Geffen-Ludomer, a Jewish child from Berlin Rangsdorf, remembers: 'Suddenly, I didn't have any friends. I had no more girl-friends, and many neighbours were afraid to talk to us. Some of the neighbours that we visited told me: "Don't come anymore because I'm scared. We should not have any contact with Jews".'¹⁸ The juxtaposition of contrasting and excluding perspectives aims at an 'estrangement' which works against the tendency to 'domesticate' the past into well-known patterns of explanation. At the same time, this 'estrangement' best reflects the perception of the Jews during the 1930s facing the persecutions – 'a reality both absurd and ominous, [...] a world altogether grotesque and chilling under the veneer of an even more chilling normality'.¹⁹ Through the technique of shifted narration, Friedländer aims at avoiding a closure in the interpretation of the 'Final Solution'.

Friedländer's *Nazi Germany and the Jews* was awarded the Geschwister-Scholl-Preis in 1998 as well as the MacArthur Foundation Award in 1999. In his laudation for the Geschwister-Scholl-Preis, Jan Philipp Reemtsma emphasizes the innovative character of Friedländer's work. He attributes Friedländer's success to the fact that he does not only explain the nature of National Socialism, but rather *evokes* it through the structure of his historical narrative.²⁰ Through the constant change of perspectives (Nazi policies; their realization through the perpetrators; the reactions of the victims), Friedländer successfully provides insight into the organization of the system of National Socialism, the effects on the personal, daily life of the victims, as

well as its individual influences on the perpetrators. He thereby offsets any picture that stresses only the bureaucratic side of the system.

However, even though the integration of the victims' memories and the historian's commentary into the historiographical representation may lead to a deeper understanding of the Shoah and to an avoidance of 'redemptive closure', this new form of narrative still might not be able to include the deep, unconscious memories of the victims. Like Lawrence Langer, Friedländer differentiates between a 'deep' memory which 'totally centers on the years of the Shoah' and a 'common' memory which, in Langer's words, 'restores the self to the normal pre- and post-camp routines, but also offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then'.²¹ As an example of deep memory, Friedländer quotes a passage from Art Spiegelman's comic *Maus* that illustrates the defeat of re-establishing coherence, due to the recurrence of deep memory: "It is enough stories for today, Richieu", says Art Spiegelman's survivor father, in the very last line of the second book of *Maus*: the dying father is addressing his son Artie with the name of the younger brother, Richieu, who died in the Holocaust some forty-five years before. Deep memory.²² Other examples of adequate artistic representations that refuse 'redemptive closure' through their disintegrating structure are Ida Fink's stories and especially Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. Friedländer discovers 'a common denominator': 'the use of some sort of *allusive or distanced realism*. Reality is there, in its starkness, but perceived through a filter: that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid'.²³

According to Friedländer, such anti-redemptive narratives which reject ultimate closure through their disintegrating structure, are the only way to come close to the nature of Nazism. This holds true for historiography as well as for artistic representation. However, both autobiographical and collective memory *always* aim at (re)constructing a coherent, continuous self or history. Therefore, by their nature they belong to the area of common memory. However, Friedländer still wonders if, at the collective level, it is at all possible to keep a sense of deep memory once all survivors have died.²⁴ The passage of time will definitely lead to an integration of the 'event at the limits'. As Friedländer points out: 'if we make allowance for some sort of ritualized form of commemoration, already in place, we may foresee, in the public domain, a tendency toward closure without resolution, but closure nonetheless'.²⁵ The opaqueness of the victims' deep memory might after all not be integratable into any form of narrative, be it a new form of historical narrative or the most experimental form of artistic representation. Friedländer, therefore, suggests that 'the opaqueness of some "deep memory" would probably not be dispelled. "Working through" may ultimately signify, in Maurice Blanchot's words, "to keep watch over absent meaning"'.²⁶ Language with its 'redemptive', integrating character may very well be an

insufficient instrument to explain the unexplicable and thereby imposes limits to *any* form of narrative. Friedländer cites Jean-François Lyotard's metaphor of 'Auschwitz' as an earthquake that destroyed all instruments of measurement: 'The silence that surrounds the phrase "Auschwitz was the extermination camp" is not a state of mind [*état d'âme*], it is a sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.'²⁷

New discourses may well offer new forms of representation, but also pose new problems, as Friedländer argues in reference to postmodernist approaches to the Nazi past. On the one hand, postmodernism with its rejection of any referential system beyond the self-referentiality of language apparently confirms at the core of 'even the most precise historical renditions of the Shoah [...] an opaqueness [...] which confronts traditional historical narrative'.²⁸ On the other hand, it is precisely the postmodernist rejection of 'truth' based on a system of reference beyond language's self-referentiality as well as the openness towards a multiplicity of concurring perceptions that makes this new discourse problematic. Friedländer recognizes that: 'it is precisely the "Final Solution" which allows postmodernist thinking to question the validity of any totalizing view of history, of any reference to a definable metadiscourse, thus opening the way for a multiplicity of equally valid approaches'. He also realizes that 'this very multiplicity [...] may lead to any aesthetic fantasy and once again runs counter to the need for establishing a stable truth as far as this past is concerned'.²⁹ His insistence on a stable truth that exists beyond language makes the postmodernist's relativism of 'facts' problematic. While recognizing 'the importance one may attach to postmodern attempts at confronting what escapes, at least in part, established historical and artistic categories of representation', he still insists on the need 'to ascertain the distinction between fiction and history when extreme events such as the Shoah are concerned'.³⁰

Even though he provides one of the best examples of a new historiographical approach to the era of National Socialism, Friedländer is clearly aware of the 'double dilemma' of language and narration that confronts any representation of the Shoah. First, language by its nature *always* integrates the new into existing forms and already existing categories. The excess that characterizes the 'Final Solution' thereby dissolves. Second, despite the inadequacy of traditional historiography, there still is the need for a reliable narration of the facts. This 'double dilemma' is best summarized in Friedländer's own words: 'on the one hand, our traditional categories of conceptualization and representation may well be insufficient, our language itself problematic. On the other hand, on the face of these events we feel the need of some stable narration; a boundless field of possible discourses raises the issue of limits with particular stringency.'³¹

Notes

1. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vol. I: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York, 1997).
2. Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1968); Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Vol. I: *La République* (Paris, 1984); Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, WA, 1982).
3. Saul Friedländer, 'Introduction', in S. Friedländer, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, IN, 1993), vii–xiv, here viii.
4. Friedländer, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, viii.
5. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany*, 2.
6. Dominick LaCapra, 'Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historian's Debate', in S. Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 108–127, here 110.
7. Saul Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: A Documentation* (New York, 1966), xv.
8. Friedländer, *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, 236.
9. Steven E. Aschheim, 'On Saul Friedländer', *History and Memory*, 9 (1997), 13.
10. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany*, 1.
11. Saul Friedländer, 'Reflections on the Historicization of National Socialism', in Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits*, 64–84, here 81.
12. Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, 'A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism', *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988), 1–48, here 13.
13. Saul Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', in Friedländer, *Memory, History*, 117–137, here 123.
14. Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 131.
15. Saul Friedländer, 'Introduction', in Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits*, 2–3: 'The extermination of the Jews of Europe is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event. But we are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an "event at the limits". What turns the "Final Solution" into an event at the limits is the very fact that it is the most radical form of genocide encountered in history: the willful, systematic, industrially organized, largely successful attempt totally to exterminate an entire human group within twentieth-century Western society.'
16. Saul Friedländer, 'The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness', in Friedländer, *Memory, History*, 42–63, here 49.
17. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany*, 1.
18. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany*, 38.
19. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany*, 5.
20. Jan-Philipp Reemtsma, 'Laudatio für Saul Friedländer', in S. Friedländer and J. P. Reemtsma, *Gebt der Erinnerung Namen: Zwei Reden* (München, 1999), 9–26, here 18; 16: 'Wenn Saul Friedländer heute der Geschwister-Scholl-Preis für dieses Buch verliehen wird, so wird er ihm für ein Buch verliehen, das zeigt, wie durch eine bestimmte Form der Darstellung Geschichte so geschrieben werden kann, daß in ihr die Dimension der Freiheit, damit der Verantwortung und damit die der Moral nicht verschwindet.'
21. Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 119.
22. Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 119.
23. Saul Friedländer, 'Introduction', in Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits*, 17; Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 121–122.

24. Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 119.
25. Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 133.
26. Friedländer, 'Trauma and Transference', 134.
27. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend : Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis, MN, 1988), 56–57.
28. Friedländer, 'Introduction', 5.
29. Friedländer, 'Introduction', 5.
30. Friedländer, 'Introduction', 20. On Friedländer's "affinity" with postmodernism, see: Aschheim, 'On Saul Friedländer', 11–46.
31. Friedländer, 'Introduction', 5.

19

What Kinds of Narratives Can Present the Unpresentable?

Tatiana Weiser

Testifying to extreme experience (experience of the *extremum*) as a form of cultural self-expression became vital in post-war European culture with its traumatic experience of Holocaust, genocide, and two world wars. With the consistency of the traumatism and the huge number of people affected by it, the experience of the mid-twentieth century, the climax of the “epoch of catastrophes,” exceeds that of all previous epochs. At the same time, how to integrate Holocaust experience into culture, how to make sense of it through representation, remain fundamental problems of the modern human sciences. In the discussion of these issues initiated in the 1990s, some scholars involved in the study of the traumatic experience (e.g. Saul Friedländer, Berel Lang, Martin Jay) raised the question of how the experience of the past as the experience of the *extremum* could be adequately perceived and appropriately transmitted (and without reducing it to the level of classical narration). The traditional means of representation, the categories of thinking typical of modernity were subject to total review owing to the exclusive nature of Holocaust experience and to postmodern theory and aesthetics as a whole.

Since the whole generation that endured the Holocaust is now almost gone, this issue becomes even more vital. Changing over the years, the degree of people’s sensitivity to one and the same event brings the problem of Holocaust out of the “zone of silence” (which lasted up to around the 1980s) and into the sphere of the research interests of historians, psychologists, and sociologists. On the other hand, strangely enough, the attempts to reconstruct Nazism and concentration camp experience in contemporary consciousness appear to be doomed to failure from the start. In the 1980s–1990s reflection on this issue within the discourse of Auschwitz provokes a different mental reaction and a different rhetoric of response: a different psycho-physiological regime of existence increasingly estranges us from the past, makes the memory of it increasingly ritualized, abstract, instrumental, so that a stunning question finally arises: “And did it in fact happen?”¹

For anyone who endured war or imprisonment in their utmost manifestations, it appears problematic, if not impossible, to build this traumatic experience of the past into the routine of real life, into the “past–present–future” categories of linear time, or into the culturally available forms that might encapsulate such experience. Devoid of any historical and social support (of a motherland, or of a family or circle of acquaintance), reduced by the Nazi policy to the degree-zero of self-identification, he does not have at his disposal any adequate form in which to express or communicate the past. This problem of the transmission of past experience raises the further problem of its adequate perception by the next generations, namely whether it condemns it to silence or, as Baudrillard would put it, reconstructs it as a mythical event.² Thus, any testimony of traumatic experience proves to be conditional, partial, non-absolute, diluted by the lacunae of the incomprehensible.

The status of the Holocaust witness has, therefore, changed. The victim is perceived not only as the bearer of historical experience, but also as a breaking point, in the socially conventional sense, formed by the interconnection of the denotative and denoted – as a bearer of the “silence zone,” of the “silence of the memory” in the text of testimony that confers on this kind of cultural source its status as one of the most emblematic in European culture in the latter part of the twentieth century.

This same figure can be found in *What is left after Auschwitz*, the book by G. Agamben that has become emblematic for post-Auschwitz European culture. What is paradoxical about the witness of the Holocaust experience is the fact that the true witnesses are either dead or silent for ever.³ “Witness,” the chapter in which this notion is conceptualized, is built on Biblical connotations. It begins with an epigraph from the Bible referring to the remainder of Israel that was saved owing to God’s grace and the salvation of the whole of Israel through this remainder and ends with the famous reference to St. John’s Gospel: “He was not the light, but he was sent to testify of the light.”⁴ This traditional interpretation was surely regarded as canonical long before post-war European philosophy started to operate with it. The very notions of “witness” and “witnessing” involve primarily the language itself, the Word in the Biblical sense, designating the beginning, the cradle, the source, the sense, the Word that preserves history. Now, for Agamben, the word is what is left after Auschwitz, not only the testimony of the experienced past, but, much more so, the testimony of the trace of absence, of the lacuna in language, of the severance of the word from its own original meaning.

This type of discussion is characteristic of post-war thinking because it introduces the discourse of the “unspeakable” into the cultural sphere by means of semantic resources already existing in the culture. With their help it tries to find new ways of thinking of the “unthinkable” and “incomprehensible” without losing touch with traditional thinking strategies. New forms of thinking can be considered new forms of organization, codification, and transmission

of the experience that research on the traumatic memory of Holocaust and its representation designates as the experience of the “extremum” (also, “extreme experience” or “l’expérience d’extrême”), as “intransmissible experience.”⁵ This discovery of this type of thinking and language lacunae gives rise to a form of cultural reflection involving *metaphors* rather than concepts and ideas. The metaphors do not imply strict scientific definitions but replace traditional narrative strategies and generate new cultural semantic meanings. For instance, the French historian, Régine Robin, in her article on the Berlin Holocaust memorial uses such metaphors as “absolute oblivion” (*oubli absolu*) or “superior oblivion” (*oubli supérieur*), or “virgin memory,” “blank memory,” “initial memory” (*la mémoire vierge, blanche, initialisée*).⁶ The French historian, Nicole Lapiere, in *The Silence of Memory*, marked out four “memory seasons,” the fourth being *oblivion*. According to his conception, *oblivion* represents a kind of memory that can be designated as “the silence of the memory.”⁷ And so on and so forth – examples of this abound.

The figurative character of the constructs of thought and of the means of representing them created that special way of formulating the experience of Auschwitz later apparent in various types of literary narrative. If historical testimony aims to reconstruct “how it happened in reality,” literary testimony both expresses the experience of the past in fiction and attempts to reconstruct for the reader the subjective world of the author applying the figurative techniques. Fiction of this kind (referred to here as testimonies of historical events) represents a way of analysing historical reality from a different standpoint. Hence, it would be inexpedient to apply various methods of historical analysis and then correlate that to the information contained in historical documents. The historical fact constitutes the basis for such literary work but, after being reconsidered, acquires a new status. Literary testimony drawn up not around the facts but rather around the metaphor of the facts and refracted in the traumatized memory of the former prisoner contrasts sharply with historical testimony that in its turn reveals nothing of how a historical event is experienced.⁸

The questions logically arising from this difference are the following: How is it possible to narrate what eludes fixation in the historical documents? What is the literary text as a form of testimony? What is the author who witnesses extreme experience?

In 1947 Robert Antelme wrote about the capacity of realistic “post-Auschwitz” literature (that claims to be a sort of historical testimony) to elaborate adequate cultural forms for similar experience: “We are dealing here with one of those realities that usually force us to acknowledge their superiority over our imagination. But now it becomes evident that only on condition of having the choice or better the ability to fancy and to imagine would we be able to tell something about this kind of reality.”⁹ From the rich palette of post-Auschwitz literature, the texts in question can first be characterized by their lack of direct fact-representation. The texts’ “factualness”

refers not just to the historical reality since, from the start, the author himself admits that his writing is defeated when confronted by the historical experience. These authors all insist that if, during his work on Holocaust material, an author comes out as the victor, he must be lying and cannot be trusted. Second, trauma of the kind represented here is indescribable by means of pre-Auschwitz language and consequently it demands another type of narration. As Kertész remarks in his essay "The Language in Exile": "If a man survives, it takes a lot of time (if it's possible at all) for him to find again and again through suffering his own individual and solely reliable language that would enable him to tell others of his tragedy; and we can't exclude the possibility of his awareness that such tragedy cannot be put into words."¹⁰ With this kind of writing the author attempts not only to tell of the past, but also to place the reader on the boundary between sense and expression, the boundary where the author himself stands. Third, the destruction of time as one of the most widespread techniques in modernist literature, becomes crucial in post-Auschwitz literature because it connects with the irrevocable psychic acts that motivate this writing, such as the imposition of past time-layers in the conscience of the ex-prisoner; the stoppage at or the obsession with the traumatic moment(s); the absence of certain time-spaces from the prisoner's conscience ("hyperamnesia"); the inability to return to the memory of pre-war times; the realization that the future is impossible because the solely post-imprisonment present is the always-here-and-now reactualized past. To speak exclusively of the deformation of linear time in the survivors' experiences emphasizes the fact that the linear structure of classical narrative fitted in best with the linear perception of time.

An interesting example of the latter is *Kadish for the unborn child* (1990), a story written by Imre Kertész (born 1929), a Hungarian writer and Nobel Prize winner who survived Auschwitz. His hero's negation of the mere possibility of continuing the human race through giving birth to a child lies at the heart of the plot and the cyclic, refrain structure of the book. The only thing one can't give up after going through the horrors of Auschwitz, is the urge for living and for writing, "writing and writing again frantically, tirelessly and with utmost diligence, until I get to the truth of it [i.e. life], since after I've got to it – what's the point of writing?"¹¹ Structured around the author endlessly trying to make out his own self, his own memory submerged under the weight of experience, and his reluctance to give birth to another human being who would be condemned to excruciating pains in this post-Auschwitz world, the story contains not a single word about what was going on in the camp itself. Kertész thus exemplifies an absolute, *non-disarchived* memory – a memory that doesn't seek to express itself in the representation of the experience it endured that lies at its heart: "fiasco is the only emotional experience that is still available for us."¹² Thus, the traumatic past, the deep-seated, subjective experience the survivor's individual memory prevents from being transmitted, appears ousted from the testimonial narrative, or rather introduced into it as a silent memory. The work

of individual memory with the chronologically fragmented past is also presented in the book. The individual trauma the hero experienced in his own historical past (Auschwitz) implicitly comprises the emotional experience of childhood trauma, the trauma of the universal historical past as well as of the Jewish cultural past, with his own individual memory as being an inseparable part of it:

‘No!’ – something was yelling and howling inside of me – ‘I can’t let it happen to a child, whoever it is. (...)’ – I told my wife, – ‘I can fancy Auschwitz in the image of my father, since the words “father” and “Auschwitz” produce the same effect upon me. And if it’s true that God was made our Father, then he spoke to me having taken upon himself the image of Auschwitz.’¹³

There is also not a word in the book about what the hero derives from his experience of communication with God.¹⁴

In his book *Paul Celan: Poet. Survivor. Jew*, J. Felstiner calls Paul Celan (1920–70) – the Austrian poet, Jewish by origin, who survived the confinement in the forced labor camp in Tabareshti and whose parents perished in Nazi extermination camps – a poet with a “true-stammered-mouth.” Celan becomes a significant figure for post-war Germany because he testifies about Germany in German (this language being native both to Celan and the murderers) from within Germany itself. How can anyone whose native language is German testify about the concentration camps? For post-war European culture this problem affected the ethics, the poetics, and the memory of the collective calamity, loath as they were from using words maimed, defiled, and desecrated by Nazi propaganda. Nevertheless, Celan’s lyric poetry is considered to have resolved this problem by having proved that the German language could be redeemed by testifying in it to its own ruin. And although Adorno in 1946 proclaimed that it was not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz, Felstiner presumes he couldn’t have yet read Celan.

In 1947 Celan (Paul Anchel, as he was at that time) wrote *Death Fugue* that later came to symbolize post-Auschwitz poetry. The fugue starts with a number of shocking metaphors: black milk, hair ashes, graves dug out in the air, dances for grave diggers. But those are not just metaphors, they are the “simple facts” of everyday life that sustain testimonial poetry otherwise devoid of the factological basis on which testimony so characteristic of any fact representation normally relies, as the first line of the poem, “Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends”: “Black milk of daybreak we drink it evening, / we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night / we drink and we drink.”¹⁵

Scholars quite often assert that *Death Fugue* was written during confinement, but this is not so. The style works to make it seem as if the author is

speaking directly from the concentration camp. It is achieved due to a number of things: (i) the use of real "local" time and writing in the first person. In the majority of his poems, Celan refuses to use concretizing personal pronouns "I," "you," "we," "they," the only personage being the "ashes" of all the depersonalized and sputtered "we." Nobody and nothing: this was the characteristic trait of post-Auschwitz poetry, painting and literature, for example, "O, one, o none, oh, no one, o you" ("O einer, o keiner, o niemand, o du"), or "No one kneads us again out of earth and clay, / No one incants our dust. / No one. / Blessed art thou, No One";¹⁶ (ii) the refrain technique that supports the narrative structure and reproduces the rhythm of everyday action in the camp that is strictly regulated in time; (iii) the circumstances of total depersonalization of Celan's writing bring the bare fact into the forefront of the poem. The author reveals the factological "skeleton" as a literary technique for reconstructing emotions and traumatic experience, which thereby blocks a historical analysis of the literary text's "historical basis." Felstiner calls the "black milk" metaphor scandalous, because it states a factual contradiction for the very purpose of transmitting this fact. It is the extremum, the Impossible in itself. But what if there is no metaphor here at all?, Felstiner asks himself. Maybe the captives were given some liquid for food that they called "black milk" in order to give it a name?¹⁷ In this case the imaginary loses to the reality of the historical past, he answers his own question. But the reality described by Celan is no longer just the reality of the concentration camp, but also the endless, hopeless reality of the captive's memory.

The idea of surviving through writing, through writing oneself out, through writing down one's memoirs as the only way of preserving one's self-identification was very characteristic of the post-war literature. Celan once admitted that writing poems in German during all those long years that followed enabled him to draw reality for himself and of his own self. So too the destroyed word seems to restore the language's original value that was lost or gradually erased as a result of the historical stratification of its various meanings and contexts. In the chapter called "Only Language Through Memory," Felstiner, like Agamben, continues Hannah Arendt's line of thinking, namely that language is the only thing that can be restored after Auschwitz. Celan's language is acknowledged to be sober, sensible, hardened, astringent, completely distrustful of beauty and its claims to the truth. It is characterized by its insistent minimalism and unwillingness to be commonly digestible, by its being free of innocence and speech-resistant.

Reachable, near and not lost, there remained amid the losses this one thing: language, Celan writes. [...] But he had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand

darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no word for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, 'enriched' by all this.¹⁸

Celan himself thought it was not possible adequately to communicate the camp experience. In his poetry memory proves to be the means of preserving the word and the trauma in their primordial form as a pure experience: our common "threads to the past," Celan says, "lead us into the depth down to the centre [...] where bits of them appear in words."¹⁹ And his poetry, the poetry that could emerge only after Auschwitz, gives access to this reserve of memory via the depoeticized word. At the same time, the authenticity of witnessing the Holocaust as well as the meaning of extermination or mere absence, as they simply can't be committed to paper or restored with its help, is introduced here by the *act of witnessing* itself, which, in this particular case, is equivalent to the *act of the birth of meaning*. These two acts are not interconnected chronologically (i.e. it happened – they wrote), but substantively (i.e. happening in the already written). Only the *act of personal response* to the event, meaning that lies inside of me or anyone who experienced it, enables us to express what really happened (i.e. a fact not equivalent to itself).

More than that, witnessing the Holocaust produces the phenomenon of the double attribute of a statement: the one who makes the statement and the one to whom it is addressed (the Other) prove to be equally involved and equally responsible for the meaning that the fact of the past assumes in the witnessing. In this sense, language itself is a form of communication that becomes intentional. It actually introduces into the construction of fact-in-writing the construction of the Other, without which the witnessing would be impossible. It can be committed to paper only for the sake of the Other, in name of the Other, with the Other being narration's utmost reference point.

Finally, the last type of the non-traditional fiction-witnessing illustrates the inability to describe the event in order to prevent it assuming the status of a "real historical fact." This inability would later be used in the post-war literature as a technique for describing the *absence* of a real fact in the witness's autobiography or in the reconstruction of their *memoirs*. *W or Recollections of Childhood* (1975) by George Perec (1936–82) starts with the following confession: "For quite a long time, I haven't had the audacity to take up writing [...]. For a long time I preferred to keep secret everything that I had witnessed." "For a long time I've been in search of my own history traces [...]. "But I could find nothing and there were times when I felt as if I had been dreaming and not going through all that in reality [...]. " [...] I remained the only living witness [...] the only witness to that world."²⁰ "And this very reason, to a greater extent than the others, spurred me to committing to paper everything that had happened to me." And the last thing: "I don't have any recollections of my childhood," the author says.²¹ At the age of 13, he

makes up a story about W, which he later completely forgets. When grown up to an adult, he excavates from the depth of his memory scraps of his childhood fantasy and composes the same story anew. The book represents the assembling of separate, uncoordinated childhood recollections and fragments of the utopia of an Olympic state W, the Spartan everyday life of which reveals itself in the horrifying parallel in the final pages of the book: the numerous islands of the Fire Land where Perec located his imaginary state later on appears to be the deportation camps, while the description of the sports contest in W alludes to the description of the entertaining tortures in the *Concentration World* by David Rousset.²²

As a child Perec loses both his parents. His mother dies in the gas chamber, leaving nothing after her death except for some "information" that, according to Perec, cannot be used even for the good of literature. Even many years' literary writing practice did not save him from the "hopeless and desperate reiteration" with regard to his attempts to write about his family. That's why, according to his own commentary on the novel, he aimed to express – at the interface between the imaginary adventure novel and a kind of *imitation* of autobiographical writing – "what cannot be expressed in both types of novels separately but only in their fragile combination."²³ In other words, through the reshaping and remaking of the classical linear narrative, he wanted to show the reconstruction of the memory of the lost, bygone traces of both the real autobiography and the imaginary story of W. He thus appeals not to the fact of traumatic experience itself, but to the fact of its loss, its absence, the memory of it roaming across the pages of the novel. In this respect, the way of writing is designed to function as the design of recollection. The reader slides, following the author, from autobiography to fiction and back. But besides that, he must deal with the constant switching of the mode of visual perception in the novel. Perec uses three print types: regular, bold, italic, as well as the geometrical transformations of signs. They are disseminated throughout the verbal circuit of the narrative and interchange with each other up to the final blank page with its sheer whiteness bearing the black bold ellipsis – (...) – enclosed in brackets. Thus, we are confronted with the *torn* outline of the autobiographical novel, devised to imitate the torn identity of the writing subject.

The point of the author's subjectivity lies in the conscientious explication of the fact that his writing shows nothing shown and hides nothing. His writing is the speaking-out outside the emptiness. The unexpressed and unsaid that emerges between the words and lines is the mechanism of fastening onto and patching up the torn tissues of memory:

[...] In the reiteration itself I will never find anything except for the higher reflection of the absent word [...] It is not that I write because I have nothing to say. I [...] write because we used to live together. I was one of them, a shadow among their shadows, a body among their bodies;

I write because they left an ineffaceable mark inside of me – the line of my writing is the trace from it: the memory of them dissolves in writing; writing is the recollection of their death and the affirmation of my life [...] The things that I've said are all whiteness, blankness, neutrality, it's the first and the last sign of the first and the last extermination.²⁴

Thus, when traumatic experience is put into classical narrative, the text itself undergoes the following changes: it rejects linear narration, plot, or conflict; its syntax breaks into segments or becomes deformed. These changes replicate the deformation of memory the traumatic experience of the past inflicts on the consciousness of the traumatized victim. The erosion of the classical narrative can be described in the same terms as those used by psycholinguistics for describing the state of traumatized memory in former prisoners, such as breaking-up, obliteration, fixation, shift, clashes of effects, reality dimensions, and the superimposition time layers. The components of the dichotomies "author-text," "author-reader," "reader-text" attain a new level of interaction. The writing subject shrinks, reduced to one point, not fixed in the writing space, giving way to the word, and bringing the reader close to the verge of the unspeakable, to what cannot be expressed with traditional speech patterns and forms. Owing to the author's forced, yet deliberate self-removal from the text, human consciousness reveals that, even if it cannot commit them to paper, it still comprises the forms of thought that negate the human being as it is – as the writing subject, the survivor, the witness. The experience of writing as an experience of living-it-through is introduced into post-war culture as a new subject of scholarly, critical interest, the writing subject and the reader being equally involved in the process of living through the writing. The reader, the implicit interlocutor, ethically responsible for the meaning carried in the act of testifying itself, turns up as a new character in the literary process. The text proves to be organized as a sense-forming process, as a system for reader–author interaction.

In this type of witnessing the writing does not send us back directly to the real historical fact, nor does it conform to any sense-referent on which classical narrative writing is based. It rather indicates a breach with it and in it, and so it confirms Agamben's arguments that make Biblical semantics topical and actual. This very absence, the fixation on traces, makes it possible for witnessing to realize itself and for the witness himself to search for "a word from another language that is born when the word is no more at the beginning, when it breaks away from the beginning with the purpose of just being a Witness."²⁵

Here an unavoidable question arises: what is essential for us to transmit to another generation through such *negative knowledge* that texts of literary evidence contain? With its utmost subjectivity and unconventional

character, this knowledge can hardly claim the status of a social practice in our culture. This very improbability and unexpressibility, this displacement, rupture, or severance, that lack of knowledge itself enters post-war culture as a new object of cultural reflection and writing, as a new form of knowledge. Behind the subjective, singular experience of a witness, his or her single voice stand the mute, disvoiced masses – experience unable to become universal, socialized, and consequently transformed into the totalitarian structure, the structure that has made it the “the experience of the impossible,” ousted from our memory, history, language, and documents.

Notes

1. Жан Бодрийяр, *Прозрачность зла*, (М.: Добросвет, 2000), 136. Compare this statement by Baudrillard with Solzhenitsin's opinion that the key things about the camps can never be told, and Shalomov's admission that they probably shouldn't have revealed all the horrors of the concentration camps to those (contemporaries and descendants) who fortunately escaped it. Unfortunately, this trend of thought found no resonance in Russian culture.
2. Жан Бодрийяр, *Прозрачность зла* / гл. «Некроспектива».
3. Дж. Агамбен, *Что остается от Освенцима* (Синий диван, 2004, вып. 4), 97–198.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz* (Paris, 2000), 48.
5. See also such figures of speech as “l'expérience de l'impossible” (“the experience of the impossible”) in works of M. Foucault, G. Bataille, M. Blanchot, where it designates the mystical experience of the subject that exceeds the narrative of classical post-Cartesian philosophy. The term “the experience of the extremum” or “the extreme experience” here implies not only super-shocking experience, but mainly the experience, the representation, that forces the witness to resort to the notion of “extremum”/“extreme limit” of thought, language, ability to react. This associates it, where the subject is concerned, with the philosophical trend mentioned above.
6. Régine Robin, *Transfert de mémoire. Autour du Mémorial de Berlin*. Available from: <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/PROGRAMS/RAICC/RAICC%20accueil_fichiers/TRANSFER.htm>
7. Nicole Lapiere, *Le silence de la mémoire: à la recherche des juifs de Ploetz* (Paris, 2001).
8. See Georges Perec, *Robert Antelme ou la vérité de la littérature* (Paris, 1992), 87–88.
9. Robert Antelme, *L'espèce humaine* (Paris, 1957), avant propos, cited in Régine Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide. Témoigner pour réapprendre à vivre* (Paris, 2003), 52.
10. Имре Кертес *Язык в изгнании* (Москва, 2004), 163.
11. Имре Кертес, *Кадши по нерожденному ребенку* (Москва, 2003), 81.
12. Кертес, *Кадши по нерожденному ребенку*, 79.
13. Кертес, *Кадши по нерожденному ребенку*, 153, 187.
14. The testimonies of Jews that survived the Shoah often fall into a special category, since they are viewed through the prism of the classical Jewish tradition of testifying. The question is: is it possible to single out some narrative matrix of the Shoah narration after thoroughly analyzing traditional genres of catastrophe stories by Jewish authors? Within the framework of religious tradition, a Jew is for the most part a witness belonging to a primordial nation of witnesses. Above all he testifies to the existence of God and to his connection with Him. The majority of deported Jews, having lost their ancestral culture and inherited lands even

before the war started, on return found themselves in a twofold historical vacuum. Devoid of any historical buttress, whether as foreigners and or as those reduced by the Nazis to the zero degree of self-identification, they had no adequate communicative form of self-expression. "Memory without roots" – as R. Waintrater calls it – derives from the epoch of modernity (that can be equated here to the epoch of catastrophes) and denotes the matrix of the Jewish people's memory, causing new ruptures in it (see Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*).

15. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven, CT, 1995), 31.
16. Felstiner. *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 152, 167.
17. Felstiner. *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 33. Cf. Donald Hall, *The Pleasures of Poetry* (New York, 1971), 14.
18. Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 114–115.
19. Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 122.
20. Compare this with Celan's "No one / witnesses for the / witness," from his poem "Ash Glory" [*Aschenglorie*], cited in Felstiner, John. *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 223.
21. Жорж Перек, *В или воспоминание детства* (Санкт-Петербург, 2002), 11–15.
22. Перек. *В или Воспоминание детства* (СПб: Издательский Дом «Ювента», 2002).
23. Перек, *В или воспоминание детства*, 168.
24. Перек, *В или воспоминание детства*, 49.
25. Агамбен, "Свидетель," "Что остается от Освенцима," *Синий диван* вып. 4), 204.

20

The Possibilities and Problems of Narrating Facts

Veronika Zangl

At first sight the term 'fact' seems rather unproblematic, but difficulties appear as soon as one asks the simple question if this term is related to events or to the experience of events. Maurice Halbwachs was one of the first to distinguish explicitly between event and experience in the process of developing his concept of collective memory. He anticipated core issues that are still of vital importance in connection with questions about the representability of the Holocaust. In the end it is a discussion about the position and the importance of facts within a society. Yet, Halbwachs obviously intended to draw a line between history and collective memory by making a distinction between an event and the consequences of an event.

But is it really the same event, if it is translated by each way of thinking [i.e. the specific thinking of a group] in its own way and in its own language? It concerns groups, which are all located in space. The event takes place in space as well, and it is possible, that all groups perceive it. But the way they interpret the event is of importance, the meaning, they confer on it.¹

As Hannah Arendt argues in her essay 'Truth and Politics', this question, expressed by Halbwachs, contains some awkward implications. But, according to Arendt, the problems historians are confronted with when ascertaining facts 'are no argument against the existence of factual matter, nor can they serve as a justification for blurring the dividing lines between fact, opinion, and interpretation, or as an excuse for the historian to manipulate facts as he pleases'.²

It is precisely this definite differentiation between facts and interpretation Halbwachs calls into question with regard to collective memory. However, the distinction sheds light on the premise, that facts have to be established by society in one way or another, furthermore, that facts are situated in a close relationship with opinion and interpretation. But the difficulties concerning the argument about facts are not so much based on the necessity

that facts have to be posited, but on its intrinsic relationship to truth, political as well as philosophical. But what is one talking about, when talking about facts and beyond that about factual truth? Factual truth, Arendt says,

is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony; [...] It is political by nature. Facts and opinions, though they must be kept apart, are not antagonistic to each other; they belong to the same realm. Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth.³

The transformation of an event into a fact is therefore dependent upon the witnessing of the event, or in other words: by 'saying what is' or what has been, the actions and deeds of individuals are turned into perceptible events, reality is constituted.⁴ The problems concerning facts or factual truth are not *per se* caused by a possible lack of words or an adequate language, they are above all due to the lack of decisive evidence 'for facts have no conclusive reason whatever for being what they are; they could always have been otherwise, and this annoying contingency is literally unlimited'.⁵

This interface of compelling factuality and endless possibilities opens up the space for the formation of opinions and interpretations. As a consequence, one and the same event can be differently experienced and interpreted by different groups.

Modern philosophers encountered the arbitrariness inherent in factual truth by constructing all kinds of necessities, like Kant's hidden 'intention of nature' or Hegel's 'cunning of reason'.⁶ The consequences of these constructions for human affairs are again elucidated by Arendt, as those necessities were apparently invented 'in order to cleanse the last vestiges of that apparently arbitrary "it might have been otherwise" (which is the price of freedom) from the only realm where men are truly free'.⁷ As soon as the conception of a 'higher necessity' is understood not in the sense of a reconstruction of the past, but as a construction in the sense of makeability of the future, this premise obviously conceals the danger of totalitarian systems.

In Arendt's critical comments on the first historical work about the extermination of Europe's Jews *The Black Book*, which was published as early as 1946, she reproaches the authors for paying far too much attention to details. According to Arendt they have not succeeded in understanding and making clear 'the nature of facts they have been confronted with'.⁸ Subsequently, she presents the facts which can be formulated, it appears, very briefly:

The facts are: that six million Jews, six million human beings, were helplessly, and in most cases unsuspectingly, dragged to their deaths. The

method employed was that of accumulated terror. First came calculated neglect, deprivation, and shame, when the weak in body died together with those strong and defiant enough to take their own lives. Second came outright starvation, combined with forced labour, when people died by the thousands but at different intervals of time, according to their stamina. Last came the death-factories – and they all died together, the young and the old, the weak and the strong, the sick and the healthy; not as people, not as men and women, children and adults, boys and girls, not as good and bad, beautiful and ugly – but brought down to the lowest common denominator of organic life itself, plunged into the darkest and deepest abyss of primal equality, like cattle, like matter, like things that had neither body nor soul, nor even a physiognomy upon which death could stamp its seal. It is in this monstrous equality without fraternity or humanity [...] that we see, as though mirrored, the image of hell.⁹

In her description Arendt obviously leaves the sphere of facts and starts to tell a story – by following specific narrative patterns, assuming a certain perspective – even though the mentioned facts are valid point by point.

Imre Kertész also very speedily gets to the bottom of the facts which shaped the twentieth century in his 'Rede über das Jahrhundert' (A Speech about the Century).

As a matter of fact, in this century everything has been unmasked, everything has at least once shown its true face, has revealed itself as what it actually is. The soldier as a professional murderer, politics as criminal wheeler-dealing, capitalism as a large scale enterprise for annihilating people, equipped with cremation ovens, the law as a set of rules for dirty deals, the freedom of the world as a prison of the people, anti-semitism as Auschwitz, national sentiments as genocide. Everywhere, the true intention has broken through, all ideas of our century are soaked with blood from brute reality, from violence and destructiveness.¹⁰

Even though both Kertész' and Arendt's accounts show certain narrative patterns, they represent the most thematic motifs of a story. Therefore, how can those facts, which are brought forward by Kertész and Arendt not without good reason in the framework of an essay and a speech respectively, be transformed into a story?

When exploring narrative representations of the Holocaust, the first question that emerges is one Kertész puts to the 'hero' of the novel. In his *Galeerentagebuch* (*Galley Diary*) he asks: 'How can we undertake a representation from the viewpoint of totalitarianism without making the totalitarian viewpoint into our own point of view?'¹¹ Obviously, Kertész finds a mode of representation for his novel *Fateless*, though this mode is based on a strategy of narration which is not actually based on representation but is, as he

himself states, an event.¹² Paradoxically, the technique Kertész uses in his novel – which exclusively inquires as to the possibility of representing the ‘functional human’ in Auschwitz – contains more correspondences with Aristotelian poetics than for instance the great novels of the nineteenth century. Central to Aristotelian poetics is the representation of actions or rather the linking of actions, which he calls *mythos*. The representation of characters is a secondary factor. Ultimately, characters are simply the means to represent actions. Kertész comes close to this poetical premise in so far as he puts the ‘Structure’ at the centre of representation.

The point of departure is not the character, metaphysics or psychology of the individual, but solely that realm of his life, his existence, which – positively or negatively – is tied up with the Structure, which it had given away or which had been taken from him. [...] Thus, a certain shortcoming will be characteristic of the novel, that is why we will not find the ‘full life’ demanded by aesthetes, a shortcoming that, by the way, perfectly corresponds with the mutilating time.¹³

The ‘Structure’ is not fortuitously written with a capital letter like the name of God, but rather because, according to Kertész, the totalitarian ‘Structure’ reduces characters to thematic motifs. Although the representation of events is of central importance in Kertész’ poetics, the crucial difference to the Aristotelian focus on the representation of events in the sense of actions becomes evident by his emphasis on the ‘Structure’ as essence of the events. In relation to the Holocaust, suffering does not derive from actions, as is the case in most tragedies. On the contrary, action and suffering are ripped out of context to the same extent, as happiness and unhappiness are no longer embedded in the realm of ethics. Therefore, Kertész’ ‘Structure’ turns into the negative image of the Aristotelian definition of *mythos*. In the face of the Holocaust, there is no possibility for the figure of the novel to appear as an agent, instead it is of a completely determined nature.

We need to explore this issue in more depth and look at other narrative strategies elaborated within literary genres to represent a totalitarian structure, besides Kertész’ approach of occurring presence. In her essay ‘Representing Auschwitz’ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi identifies two fundamentally distinct approaches to represent the Holocaust, namely a ‘static and a dynamic appropriation of history and its moral and social legacies’.¹⁴ The precondition of both strategies, the static as well as the dynamic, is, according to DeKoven Ezrahi, the postulation of an entity:

There is a presumption in all the representations of the Holocaust and in all the discussions of the proprieties and limits of its representation that there is an Entity, an Event or a Place, to which the historical, artistic, cinematic or literary reflections do or do not correspond – an epicenter

which is often imagined as a black hole, (re-)entered only at peril to the communicability of the act and the sanity of the actor.¹⁵

Subsequently, DeKoven Ezrahi links those static and dynamic perception of the Holocaust with corresponding techniques of representation. With reference to Michael André Bernstein she differentiates between strategies of 'backshadowing' and 'sideshadowing'. Narratives, according to DeKoven Ezrahi, 'that stress the inevitability of the events to the exclusion of the principle of contingency have their counterpart in the fictional strategy of "sideshadowing"; it is here that categories of "plausibility" and of what-might-have-been could receive full play'.¹⁶ Yet, 'plausibility' and 'what-might-have-been' are the very categories Aristotle uses to distinguish between historiography and poetics. But while DeKoven Ezrahi suggests contingency as a (preferable) strategy of story-telling, Aristotle excludes precisely those accidental occurrences from poetry.

That the distinction between both strategies of representation can sometimes prove complicated is evident from De Koven Ezrahi's description of deterministic approaches: 'What underlies determinism as a principle of representation is the rigid adherence to a mythical structure of memory which does not really admit any life beyond.'¹⁷ Accordingly, deterministic approaches correspond with constructions of an 'everlasting being', with an unlost-lost time, which are for example expressed in the writings of Dori Laub, Lawrence L. Langer or Claude Lanzmann. Even so, this all-embracing and omnipresent 'everlasting being' precludes as a radical negation in the sense of non-being the possibility of 'coming into being', which was for instance given to the Platonic demiurge to create the world.

At the same time it is precisely this 'mythical structure of memory' that functions as the point of departure for the representational technique that DeKoven Ezrahi describes as 'centrifugal' narrative. Although places of extermination mark the starting point of these narratives, they also tend to introduce additional, mobile places of memory: 'Images of the Holocaust or of interrupted lives released from gravitational forces and floating beyond all attempts to ground them in local redemptive cultures are inherently subversive.'¹⁸ Paradoxically, this brings back into discussion precisely those distorted discourses that circle, constantly shifting, round the truth or the Lacanian Real.

In his analysis of literary and artistic representations of the Holocaust Ernst van Alphen emphasizes the importance of adequate narrative frames in order to transform an event into a story:

Narrative frameworks allow for an experience of (life) histories as continuous unities. It is precisely this illusion of continuity and unity that has become fundamentally unrecognizable and unacceptable for many survivors of the Holocaust. The camp experience continues, whereas the

camps only persist in the forms of Holocaust museums and memorials. The most elementary narrative framework, which consists on the continuum of past, present, and future, had disintegrated.¹⁹

The narrative frames van Alphen is referring to in this case are not relating to a concrete story but to a so-called meta-narrative. To be precise, he refers to a particular concept of historiography that ultimately can be traced back to Hegel's philosophy of history. This is inasmuch of importance as the great epics, like the *Odyssey*, were based on fundamental changes or rather emerged from these changes. Discontinuity is immanent to heroic poetry. In a sense the task of the epic is to establish continuity by way of being a 'poem to instruct posterities'.²⁰

Jean-François Lyotard, as one of the protagonists of postmodern theory, finally postulates the end of meta-narratives, since: 'The grand narrative has lost its credibility, whatever mode of unity it is related to: speculative narrative or narrative of emancipation.'²¹ Yet, if the grand narratives have lost their credibility the unrepresentability of the Holocaust did not just result from this particular event. It also has to be considered as a consequence of the narrative vacuum that emerged because of the collapse of philosophical, ethical, and political narratives. Apart from the so-called meta-narratives, there are a great number of narrative patterns available that could serve as a model for narrating the Holocaust. As a matter of fact, there are numerous testimonies that make use of these possibilities, and not just in regard to literary or cultural topoi and motifs. Beyond that, it is striking that there are hardly any genres which have not been employed in Holocaust testimonies and, as a result, have been taken to their limits.

By contrast, the 'storyteller' turns out to be an increasingly negligible factor, according to the extent (literary) texts prove to be constructed or produced. In a way this development mirrors the criticism of traditional concepts of the subject, especially those related to the image of an omnipotent creator. Within this inexhaustible murmuring the 'voice' is obviously becoming lost. Yet, parallel to the growing attention paid to the concepts of performativity and performance, the concept of 'voice' – even if not the 'narrator' – seems to be awakening some interest again in recent publications in the field of Literary Studies and Critical Theory.²² Below I would like to confront this seemingly forgotten concept with two models of the 'storyteller', developed by Walter Benjamin in his critical essays on Nikolai Leskov and Charles Baudelaire.²³

In contrast to the heroic poem which was, as already mentioned, based on fundamental changes within a society, Benjamin entrusts the art of narration definitely to tradition – in a steady and constant world. Consequently, experience and tradition take on a central position in Benjamin's theory of narration: 'Experience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn.'²⁴ Soul, eye, and hand interconnectedly

determine, according to Benjamin, the practice of narration. The relation of the storyteller to his material, which is human life, is craftsmanlike. Therefore the main task of the narrator lies in the specific arrangement of the material. Incidentally, Aristotle ascribes precisely the same task to the poet. Benjamin is entirely aware that this type of 'storyteller' belongs to the past – 'He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant.'²⁵ Benjamin's almost notorious obsession with quotations can be explained as the expression of a consciousness which regards quotations as the only mode of preservation, even if it occurs at the cost of the tradition in which it was embedded.

Yet it is not Nikolai Leskov whom Benjamin portrays as a modernist poet but Charles Baudelaire. Interestingly, Benjamin sketches out in his essay on Baudelaire a poetics of 'shock' – which is essentially based on a complete failure of experience – by applying Freud's theory on trauma to poetical writing. He considers this type of poetics to be represented in Baudelaire's lyrical work. Benjamin's concept refers to a form of poetics which exposes itself to 'shock' and also attacks it. By this means a poetics emerges which paradoxically through its consciousness of 'shock' defends itself against 'shock'.²⁶

In this context, aesthetic concepts referring to different theories on trauma have in recent years become increasingly important in relation to questions regarding the representation of the Holocaust. Examples of these critical explorations include the concepts of performance, performativity, and re-enactment. At first glance these approaches appear to avoid the seemingly deceptive referentiality inherent in representation. To begin with it is striking that all the mentioned concepts focus on the aspect of action. That very aspect penetrates the sphere of art, which – at least in ancient Greek times – was regarded as genuinely political, even if the line between art and politics always proved to be permeable.

In his study *Caught by History* Ernst van Alphen develops the term 'Holocaust-effect' by analysing literary and artistic representations of the Holocaust. This term is based on the concept of reenactment.

He [Boltanski] produces what I call a 'Holocaust-effect' by means of a re-enactment of principles that in a sense define the Holocaust – a radical emptying out of subjectivity as a road leading to the wholesale destruction of a people: genocide. [...] This he does by means of the theoretical mode of synecdoche. It is the conjunction of this use of reenactment (concerning the practices of the perpetrators) with the overwhelming awareness of the total loss it evokes (concerning the victims of Nazism) that I call the 'Holocaust-effect'.²⁷

By consciously re-activating strategies of the perpetrators this mode of representation ultimately shifts the consequences, namely the absolute loss of the self, onto the recipient. Boltanski's point of departure is the

totalitarian structure of National Socialism. In producing what van Alphen calls a Holocaust-effect this structure, mediated by the victims, directly affects the spectators.

The various attempts to (re)present the experience of the Holocaust express, above all, the continuous endeavour to inscribe an undeniable rupture into history or into collective and cultural memory. Two significant lines of argumentation are distinguishable within them. On the one hand, the impossibility of relating the Holocaust is attributed to the event as such, the cause of the unrepresentability is therefore inherent in the event. On the other hand, if we look at socio-theoretical discussions before and after the Second World War, we can see that traditional ways of thinking were increasingly losing their social or social-political legitimacy. Bearing this in mind, I would like to argue that the Holocaust does not just represent a 'black box' of memory as a unique event, but that the narrative vacuum has to be located in the lack of social frameworks. Accordingly, analysis does not simply show that adequate narrative frames have yet to be worked out, but rather that a number of narrative frames have lost their social validity. The resulting narrative void becomes apparent in the profound distrust of attributing meaning to the Holocaust, in any way. Time and again, this is put down to the construction or reconstruction of a (totalitarian) entity that would result.

The key to coming to terms with this narrative vacuum is the power of imagination. Strangely enough, an aspect common to the National Socialist policies of extermination and the experience of the victims comes to light when we take the power of imagination into account. In her report *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Arendt characterizes Eichmann by his complete lack of imagination:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such.²⁸

While the National Socialist policy of mass extermination is based on an absolute lack of imagination, the experience of the victims is based on the absolute annihilation of imagination. The problem or rather impossibility of representing the Holocaust as an event or an experience can be traced back to this, as Lionel Richard formulates, 'un-imagined reality'.²⁹ In his essay 'Ein langer, dunkler Schatten' (A long, dark shadow) Imre Kertész states:

The real problem is fantasy, the power of imagination. To put it more precisely, the question is, to what extent is fantasy able to confront the fact

of the Holocaust, to what extent is it able to absorb this fact, and to what extent has the Holocaust become a part of our ethical everyday life, of our ethical culture, by way of our receptive power of imagination.³⁰

Here Kertész is not talking about the primary or creative power of imagination, but about its aesthetic or receptive power.³¹ Where the Holocaust is concerned, the aesthetic power of imagination has to take over the task, to get hold of facts in their literally 'naked factuality' and to establish them as reality. In this sense Kertész notices in his *Galeerentagebuch*: 'The concentration camp is exclusively imaginable as literature not as reality. (Not even – and possibly even then least of all – if we have experienced it ourselves.)'.³²

With his reference to the receptive power of imagination and the explicit request for the formation of an ethical culture Kertész actually calls for a twofold effort regarding the testimony of the Holocaust. He is locating the testifying witness of the Holocaust within the tension that Benjamin opens up between the two types of narrators that he introduces in his critical essays. With their testimony Holocaust survivors have to shift between the task of exposing themselves to 'shock' (Baudelaire) and taking over the part of lawmaker (Leskov).³³

However varied the strategies of 'memory work' might be, they always result ultimately in a poetics which has to move between two very different worlds, which are distinguished from one another by the fact that they either annihilate reality and along with it the power of imagination (world of victims) or they negate it (world of perpetrators). Both the traditional modes of representation and concepts like re-enactment or performativity constitute attempts to wrest at least a negative image from the reality of the Holocaust. A negative image is doubtlessly incapable of making this reality accessible to the imaginative faculty, but nevertheless it invites reflection and as a result enables projection into the future without expelling the past.

Notes

1. Maurice Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis* (Stuttgart, 1967), 97. The translation is my own.
2. Hannah Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', in H. Arendt (ed.), *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1977), 238.
3. Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', 238.
4. See Arendt's comment on Herodotus, Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', 229.
5. Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', 242.
6. Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', 243.
7. Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', 243.
8. H. Arendt, 'The Image of Hell', in H. Arendt and J. Kohn (eds), *Essays in Understanding. 1930–1954* (New York, 1994), 197.
9. Arendt, 'The Image of Hell', 198.
10. I. Kertész, 'Rede über das Jahrhundert' ['A Speech about the Century'] in I. Kertész, *Eine Gedankenlänge Stille, während das Erschießungskommando neu lädt* [Moments of

- Silence while the Execution Squad reloads*] (Reinbek, 1999), 28. The translation is my own.
11. I. Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch* [*Galley Diary*] (Reinbek, 1999), 21. The translation is my own.
 12. See Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 27.
 13. Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 28.
 14. S. DeKoven Ezrahi, 'Representing Auschwitz', *History and Memory*, 7 (2) (1996), 122.
 15. DeKoven Ezrahi, 'Representing Auschwitz', 121.
 16. DeKoven Ezrahi, 'Representing Auschwitz', 136.
 17. DeKoven Ezrahi, 'Representing Auschwitz', 138.
 18. DeKoven Ezrahi, 'Representing Auschwitz', 143.
 19. E. van Alphen, 'Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma', in M. Bal, J. Crewe and L. Spitzer (eds), *Acts of Memory. Cultural Recall in the Present* (London, 1999), 35.
 20. See Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. G. Chapman (Ware, 2000), VIII, 806, 165.
 21. J.-F. Lyotard, 'Die Delegitimierung', in C. Conrad and M. Kessel (eds), *Geschichte schreiben in der Postmoderne: Beiträge zur aktuellen Diskussion* (Stuttgart, 1994), 71. The translation is my own.
 22. For a critical view, see for example, M. Bal, 'Critique of Voice: The Open Score of Her Face', in N. Pedri (ed.), *Travelling Concepts III. Memory, Narrative, Image* (Amsterdam, 2003), 91–114; see also J. E. Young, 'Zwischen Geschichte und Erinnerung: Über die Wiedereinführung der Stimme der Erinnerung in die historische Erzählung' in H. Welzer (ed.), *Das soziale Gedächtnis: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung* (Hamburg, 2001), 41–61.
 23. See W. Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in W. Benjamin and H. Arendt (eds), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York, 1968), 83–109; W. Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, 155–200.
 24. Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', 84.
 25. Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', 83.
 26. See Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', 162.
 27. E. van Alphen, *Caught by History. Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 99. The artist Christian Boltanski deals with the subject of the Holocaust in a series of installations. Van Alphen analyses among others his works *Chases High School, Canada* and *The Purim Holiday* from 1988 and 1989.
 28. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, rev. and enlarged edn (New York and London, 1994), 49. In the German edition this safeguard is signified as 'complete lack of the power of imagination'.
 29. See L. Richard, 'Auschwitz und kein Ende', in M. Köppen (ed.), *Kunst und Literatur nach Auschwitz* (Berlin, 1993), 27.
 30. I. Kertész, 'Ein langer, dunkler Schatten' [A long, dark shadow] in Kertész, *Eine Gedankenlänge Stille*, 84.
 31. As to the primary power of imagination see for example, C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey (Cambridge, MA, 1987).
 32. Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 253.
 33. See for example, I. Kertész, 'Die Unvergänglichkeit der Lager' [The Everlasting Presence of the Camps] in Kertész, *Eine Gedankenlänge Stille*, 43.

21

Maus, Toys and Him: Contemporary Fine Art as a Reflection on the Reception of History

Mirjam Wenzel

In November 2003, Chris Dercon introduced himself as the new director of the House of Fine Arts, Haus der Kunst, in Munich by encouraging the Canadian collector, Ydessa Hendeles, to mount her first exhibition in Germany. By staying in the background as a curator, Dercon provided a sophisticated answer to the question of how he might come to terms with the building's heritage. Constructed between 1933 and 1937, the former 'Haus der Deutschen Kunst' was not only the first representative building project of the Third Reich, but also hosted several exhibitions that shaped the aesthetics and ideology of National Socialism; most notably, the 'Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung' that took place annually between 1937 and 1944, as well as the 'Entartete Kunst' exhibition that was put on view in the nearby Hofgarten in 1937. As the original architecture has been preserved, the Haus der Kunst stands as a permanent memorial to National Socialist displays of power, and also imposes a specific historical framework on every art exhibition that takes place in it. By inviting Ydessa Hendeles both to present her collection and to curate an exhibition, Chris Dercon managed to satisfy public expectations that the building's history would have to be addressed. His choice for Hendeles gave space for the exhibition *Partners* that aimed at tracing history in contemporary art, in general, and particularly reflected the tradition of Modern art and Avant-Garde that the Third Reich had defined as 'Entartete Kunst'. But it also affirmed the habitual manner of making a connection between art and biography.

The invitations and the catalogue cover showed a picture of a toy: a delicate Minnie Mouse figure, executed in sheet metal, stands between two halves of an open suitcase in which another comic figure, a cat, strains to his utmost against his captivity.

The toy *Minnie Mouse with Felix in Cages*, a product of the La Isla Toy-Company, was on display in a showcase directly behind the entrance to the exhibition. In this privileged position, Minnie Mouse functioned as an unmistakable reference to a seminal work amongst contemporary fine art dealing with the Holocaust, namely Art Spiegelman's comic, *Maus*. This



Illustration 21.1 La Isla Toy-Company: *Minnie Mouse with Felix in Cages* (1926–36); © Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation

comic, a survivor's tale reported and drawn by the son, established a figurative iconology that redefined the inventory of traditional comics – of Mickey Mouse in particular – as allegories for the Nazi perpetrators and their Jewish victims.¹ Due to the influence of *Maus*, visitors perceived the Minnie Mouse figure at the entrance of the *Partners*-exhibition as a metaphor for emigration. This metaphor directed attention to the biography of the curator and collector, Ydessa Hendeles. Born in Germany, a daughter of two Holocaust survivors, Hendeles migrated to Canada and later devoted herself to collecting contemporary art. With its reference to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*-Comic, the toy at the entrance of *Partners* not only proffered Hendeles' biography as an imaginary guideline through the whole exhibition, it also inverted the figurative representation of the relation between fugitive and hunter, or – in the logic of Spiegelman's iconology – between Jewish victim and Nazi perpetrator: Minnie Mouse is represented as a figure that looks forward, whereas the cat is locked up in the prison of a suitcase. The Minnie Mouse toy and its inversion

of the relation between victim and perpetrator therefore encouraged the visitor to believe that Ydessa Hendeles might have come back to Germany in order to expose – in a building that was meant to symbolize the ultimate power of the Third Reich – that which she had carried with her throughout her years of emigration: the domesticated cat or the little Nazi.

Whereas the Minnie Mouse figure functioned as an imaginary guideline through the exhibition *Partners*, the work that drew the most public attention was a piece in the last room on the first floor: Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *Him* (2001). Entering this room, the visitor approached from the rear a small and seemingly fragile kneeling male figure in a grey suit. Whilst walking around the sculpture, he then started to realize that the figure is a miniature of Hitler who – in a pose of Catholic prayer – seems to be focussing on a point somewhere above him.

In looking at the miniature – whose gaze cannot be met – the visitor becomes involved in a process of wondering: Is Hitler praying? What is he



Illustration 21.2 Maurizio Cattelan: *Him* (2001); wax figure; © Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation

begging for? The praying pose thereby seems to suggest an answer: Hitler is asking God for forgiveness.

In his reflections, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Jacques Derrida argues that forgiveness usually operates within the logic of exchange: it is given, if given at all, in return for recognized expressions of remorse – confession, apology, compensation or restitution. In face of the task of dealing with the historical catastrophes of the last century, Derrida stipulates the necessity of an unconditional forgiveness that exceeds the limited, economic circuits of negotiated exchange. Such forgiveness, he argues, implies an unlimited, gracious act that is shaped by the ‘madness of the impossible’.² If one focuses on the praying pose, thereby assuming that the miniature Hitler has undergone a process of transformation that led to an expression of remorse, the sculpture is perceived within the logic of exchange: Hitler might be forgiven if his remorse is genuine. Such an interpretation not only implies wishful thinking and kitsch, it also neglects the gaze of the miniature figure. Since the kneeling Hitler figure does not communicate with anyone that is watching him, one cannot know which psychic process the pose indicates. Forgiving this figure must therefore be an unconditional act and is, as such, beyond human scale – such a gracious, infinite act necessarily aspires to those transcendental spheres that the figure seems to be staring into. ‘Sometimes’, Derrida argues, ‘forgiveness (given by God, or inspired by divine prescription) must be a gracious gift’.³ From the perspective of a forgiveness that is given without justification and without expectation of benefit, Maurizio Cattelan’s sculpture is an offer or, more precisely, a donation. It provides the German audience with an idea that, according to James Young, has always been inherent in the invention and ‘newness’ of modern art and culture in general: redemption.⁴ Therefore the idea that the unforgivable might be forgiven in a gracious divine act is not only a biblical promise. It also refers to the ethical and psychological need to overcome history. But, as Derrida insists, ‘pure forgiveness’ and redemption ‘have no finality’.⁵ They necessarily remain unfulfilled.

Whereas Cattelan’s piece does not reveal the artistic process that transpired as Hitler’s praying pose, another contemporary artwork, Boaz Arad’s video, *Hebrew Lessons* (2000), demonstrates how difficult it is to transform Hitler into a begging figure. Analogous to Cattelan’s sculpture, this video makes Hitler apologize. But instead of relying on fantasy, Arad’s work is based on footage from historical films of the dictator’s speeches, subjected to a lengthy process of digital treatment. As Ariella Azoulay has elaborated, this piece works primarily on the acoustic level. Arad caught and isolated minimal vocal units and reconfigured them to the sentence ‘Shalom Yerushalayim, ani mitnatzel’ [‘Shalom Jerusalem, I am sorry’]:

Arad’s video art takes Hitler’s cinematic portrait, opens its mouth and forces it to speak. Arad doesn’t understand or speak German, and the



Illustration 21.3 Boaz Arad: *Safam* (2000); still from video; © Boaz Arad

German spilling from Hitler's throat sounds to him – as it does to many Israelis – like the soundtrack to the Holocaust. He exiles Hitler from the German – his own – language and immerses him in Hebrew. [...] This, then, is a case of *Hebrew Lessons*. The lessons actually took place in the course of preparing the works between keyboard and mouse, between the PC screen and the loudspeakers in Arad's home, between the written text and the phonetic traces. [...] After months of painstaking effort, Arad succeeded only partially, in coaxing from Hitler only very few Hebrew sentences.⁶

The effort of coaxing a Hebrew sentence and, moreover, an excuse from the mouth of Hitler ends up symptomatically. Whereas Hitler's Hebrew lessons seem to have succeeded in making the dictator express the first part of the sentence – the greeting 'Shalom Yerushalayim' – they fail in the second part, where the dictator is meant to apologize. The sentence 'ani mitnatzel' remains disparate. But it is this specific and symptomatic failure that distances and at the same time attracts the spectator. Being aware of the fact that Hitler is dead, that he neither begged for forgiveness nor apologized and that he will never do so, the spectator keeps on listening to the soundtrack of the video, time after time, and thereby notices his own longing to pull an apology from the mouth of the dictator. Torn between history and imagination, knowledge and wishful thinking, he is engaged in a process that simultaneously facilitates and

defies his desire to rewrite history and give it a redemptive ending. But his longing to grasp the redemptive sentence remains unfulfilled.

In 1984 Saul Friedländer described the development of a paradigm in art referring to Nazism and the Holocaust that he called 'the new artistic discourse'. He tried to characterize the aesthetics of this discourse by the juxtaposition of kitsch and death and an adherence to the heroic gesture. He was occupied by deep unease and scepticism about the interest in Hitler as an object of artistic or semi-scientific imagination and narration, as exemplified by Joachim Fest's biography, *Hitler* (1976),⁷ George Steiner's novel *The Portage to San Christobal of A.H.* (1979) and Hans Jürgen Syberberg's, *Hitler – ein Film aus Deutschland* (1979). Friedländer argued:

Nazism has disappeared, but the obsession it represents for the contemporary imagination – as well as the birth of a new discourse that ceaselessly elaborates and reinterprets it – necessarily confronts us with this ultimate question: Is such attention fixed on the past only a gratuitous reverie, the attraction of spectacle, exorcism, or the result of a need to understand; or is it, again and still, an expression of profound fears and, on the part of some, mute yearnings as well?⁸

Friedländer tried to answer his own speculative question by pointing at the 'voluptuous anguish and ravishing images' of the aforementioned works and unveiling their aesthetic fascination with National Socialist displays of power.⁹ Fifteen years later, in the foreword to a revised edition of his essay, he qualified his own argument by commenting that the 'new artistic discourse' relied on artistic practices that were common at that time and did not indicate a general shift in cultural paradigms. In face of the popular representational code of documentary exhibitions and films, his worries about the implications of 'aesthetical experiments' in the late 1970s seemed to have vanished.

Whereas Friedländer supposes that the era of aesthetic experiments is over, a growing number of contemporary artworks refer to Nazism in a purely aesthetical and superficial way. In contrast to those works that Friedländer once labelled 'the new artistic discourse', contemporary art works – Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *Him* and Boaz Arad's video *Hebrew Lessons*, for instance – do not repeat the aesthetics of heroism, but instead play with fantasies revolving around the Hitler figure. It is precisely this aspect of play that characterizes many contemporary art pieces' references to National Socialism – especially those that put the figure of Hitler back on stage: David Levinthal's photo series, *Mein Kampf* (1993/94), Wolfgang Flatz' photo album, *Hitler – Ein Hundeleben* (1996), Roe Rosen's 'Illustrated Proposal for a Virtual-Reality Scenario' *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (1997), Rudolf Herz' photo-installation *Zugzwang* (1999), Boaz Arad's video pieces, *Marcel Marcel*, *Safam* (both 2000) *Loop* (2001), Tamy Ben-Tor's video series *Hitler – the Horror and the Horrah* (2003) and so on (the list is not exhaustive).



Illustration 21.4 David Levinthal: *Mein Kampf* (1993–94); photograph from the Polaroid series; © David Levinthal

In the tradition of American Pop art, all of these works emphasize and at the same time undermine any differentiation between history and the imaginary. And they demonstrate where the semiotics of such playfulness come from: media-filtered everyday culture. By quoting icons that are connected to Nazism in general and to Hitler in particular – the moustache, for example – these works perform ‘a repetition of motives and motifs that have already entered the cultural domain, and more particularly, the aesthetic domain. In that sense, the issues at stake [...] are ultimately as aesthetic as they are ethical.’¹⁰ Even though most of these works are rooted in the aesthetics of television, children’s games, entertainment shows or magazines, they are not just harmless, superficial or entertaining. They also raise an ethical question – as demonstrated with regard to the idea of redemption – that is posed by the ambivalent emotions they evoke in the spectator. Such ambivalence arises from the fact that they encourage identification not only with a perpetrator,



Illustration 21.5 Tamy Ben-Tor: *Hitler – The Horror and the Horrah* (2003); collage of stills from the video series; © Tamy Ben-Tor

but with the ultimate perpetrator figure himself: Hitler. They portray his daily life (Wolfgang Flatz), turn his face into a mask one can play with (*Loop* by Boaz Arad), insist on a childish fascination with his power or the emptiness of the icon (Tamy Ben-Tor), kindle desire from the perspective of his lover (Roe Rosen) or facilitate a view of historical developments as promulgated by the author of *Mein Kampf* (David Levinthal).

In her book *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman argues that ‘identification is a crucial political tool that can give us access to a whole range of new psychic relations’. ‘But’, she adds, ‘it is crucial that this identification conforms to an externalizing rather than an internalizing logic’.¹¹ According to Silverman the internalized logic makes the other become like the self, whereas the externalizing one affirms the difference between the self and the other and resists attempts at assimilation, even if this includes the risk of temporarily and partially becoming alike. Endorsing Silverman’s terminology, Ernst van Alphen argues with regard to art that plays with a possible identification with the perpetrator: ‘[...] soliciting partial and temporary identification with the perpetrators makes one aware of the ease with which one can slide into a measure of complicity.’¹² Whereas pedagogic scepticism or moral rejections of contemporary works of art playing with the Hitler-figure always declare that Hitler should not be a subject of artistic representations, the pieces themselves encourage another ethic. They do not



Illustration 21.6 Roe Rosen: *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (1997); installation detail, acrylic on hand made paper; © Roe Rosen & Rosenfeld Gallery

refer to the historical figure but rather to the fantasies that are encouraged by the reception of Hitler as an incarnation of ultimate power or evil mightiness. By enabling a non-assimilative identification with such a figure, these artworks do not only provoke ambivalent feelings on the side of the spectator. They also force him to become aware of his own psyche.

The allegorical Minnie Mouse toy at the entrance to the exhibition *Partners* and the aforementioned artworks share a certain iconology and the inversion of the relation between victim and perpetrator. They also ostentatiously adopt a children's perspective and thus once more refer directly to the comic *Maus*, which – in Spiegelman's own words – does 'not [tell] what happened in the past, but rather what the son understands of the father's history'.¹³ *Maus* and the aforementioned works insist on the importance, the

innocence and the meaning of a son's or grandson's understanding. They thereby portray the reality of growing up in western post-war societies and getting to know history as it is mediated by television, cinema, literature, and fine art. Reflecting the fact that the Holocaust has turned into a media event that embraces dozens of films, books, photographs, and paintings, these works focus on the effects of this mass communication. They outline affective reactions as well as pictorial memory and show that the form in which history is represented has achieved its own non-referential validity.

Ram Katzir's installation *Your Coloring Book* (1996) is an outstanding example for this approach: The work is based on a reproduction of children's colouring-books that encourage children to colour the silhouetted figures. However, in contrast to ordinary children books, these black-and-white silhouette drawings formally reproduce historical photographs that were taken at the liberation of the camps.

The exhibition-installation, *Your Coloring Book*, encourages the visitor to sit down, choose a pen and colour in the white spaces, just as he did when he was a child. It thereby persuades him to repeat a childish act. In doing so, it also makes him reproduce pictures that have become part of our collective memory. By supporting a childish approach to the Holocaust, *Your Coloring Book* seeks to activate the visitor's pictorial memory. It also encourages him



Illustration 21.7 Ram Katzir: *Your Coloring Book* (1996); page from the book; © Studio Ram Katzir



Illustration 21.8 Ram Katzir: *Your Coloring Book* (1996); page coloured by a visitor of the installation at the Israel Museum; © Studio Ram Katzir

to redefine historical black-and-white photographs as colourful drawings, thereby enabling a personal rediscovery of history.

Whereas Ram Katzir's book interacts on a personal level with the visitor, Yoav Ben-David's painting *Join the Party* (2002) and Zibigniew Libera's edition, *LEGO Concentration Camp* (1996) involve him in a larger enterprise: first, a picnic-party with characters from an arsenal of children's books that is being watched from each corner by heads in SS-helmets; and second, a new variation on the Lego Company's toys – a construction kit for building miniature concentration camps.

These two works are suggesting that there is something going on that the spectator either can't see or doesn't know. They thereby foreshadow a process that is inherent in the word 'remembrance': insisting on the innocence of the world of childish games and toys, they insinuate the terrific implications of the threshold to the age of adolescence – the threat of becoming aware of who is watching you or what you are playing with. But leaving the playground, finishing the picnic, or storing the Lego-game in a cupboard, does not only mean the loss of innocence. It also implies joining a culture full of references to a monstrous past in which re-mem-bering encompasses becoming a member of a social entity.

As James Young points out in his recent book, *At Memory's Edge*, contemporary art dealing with the Holocaust is based on a specific structure, one that is inscribed in the *Maus*-comic especially: the difference between the



Illustration 21.9 Yoav Ben-David: *Join the Party* (2002); acrylic on canvas; © Yoav Ben David & Tel Aviv Museum



Illustration 21.10 Zibigniew Libera: *LEGO Concentration Camp* (1996); Cardboard box; © Zibigniew Libera & Raster Gallery

father's traumatic experience and the son's understanding of it. Young asks:

How is a post-Holocaust generation of artists supposed to 'remember' events they have never experienced directly? [...] All they remember, all they know of the Holocaust, is what the victims have passed down to them in their memoirs. They remember not actual events but the countless histories, novels, and poems of the Holocaust that they have read, the photographs, movies, and video testimonies they have seen over the years.¹⁴

According to Young, artworks that refer to the Holocaust necessarily reflect the age of the artist himself. If he or she was born after the traumatic events, his or her work will present an after-image. Abandoning Foucault's criticism of the category of the author, Young's considerations pinpoint a tendency that has always been part of the discourse on works of art about the Holocaust: the reference to the biography of an author or – as in the case of the aforementioned works – to the age of an artist. Neglecting other methodological discussions in the humanities, the discourse on Holocaust representations has for quite some time insisted on the importance of a certain normative code – as, for instance, the following proposed by Terrence Des Pres: 'Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason – artistic reasons included.'¹⁵ In order to implement and guarantee this code, it became common to justify the relevance of a work by an affidavit in the form of a subtitle and a signature saying: 'written, taken or drawn by someone who survived the concentration camp or is descended from a Holocaust survivor'. This para-text not only tried to answer Celan's question of 'who bears witness for the witness' and thus guarantee the honesty of the witness's intent; it furthermore became almost as important as the form and content of the work itself.¹⁶ In the wake of the Wilkormirski case, this position within the discourse on Holocaust representations, like the assumption of a clear-cut difference between narratives by victims and their descendants and those by perpetrators and their children, has been increasingly criticized.¹⁷ But if the credibility of a narrative cannot be guaranteed by an extra-textual source, for instance, by the author's biography, why should contemporary art works be regarded as an articulation of the artist's age specific experiences? In other words: why emphasize the importance of a work having been written, drawn, photographed, filmed or composed by someone belonging to the generation of victims and perpetrators or to the generation of their descendants?

The popularity of the term 'generation' in approaching contemporary art, as, for instance, in James Young's recent book, not only upholds the category of the author, it also affirms a widespread contemporary cultural tendency: the rediscovery of family narratives. As Harald Welzer has

observed,

Until very recently it was assumed that the obsessive culture of memory concerned with the twelve years from 1933 to 1945 would subside with the death of the generation that experienced World War II and the Holocaust. Sixty years post festum, precisely the opposite is becoming apparent. The family novel is undergoing a renaissance in nearly all the countries of Europe, quite as if the period of historical clarification concentrating on Auschwitz had now to be followed by one in which 'private', emotionally experienced history once again came into its own.¹⁸

Whereas the family novel processes history in the framework of personal stories, fate, and the generation gap, the aforementioned works of contemporary fine art do not necessarily address the relation of children to their parents. Instead, by presenting a childish approach to the Holocaust, they say something about how Nazism and the Holocaust are conveyed. They thereby take up the tradition of artworks that were never part of the canon of Holocaust representations: the work of the No art! artist and Buchenwald survivor, Boris Lurie, for example. Lurie's *Saturation Paintings* series (1959–64)



Illustration 21.11 Boris Lurie: *Memo to U.S.* (part 1, 1963); Oil and mixed media on canvas; © Boris Lurie & Janos Gat Gallery

combines photographs taken during the liberation of the camps, of pin-up girls and of shouting faces, along with drawings of swastikas. It thereby reflects the voyeurism of the spectator regarding these objects.

This series, which only recently achieved recognition, not only transgresses the boundaries between historical documentation and entertainment, but also demonstrates how quickly pictures, particularly photographs that were once meant to capture the unique horror of what happened, are absorbed and used by consumer culture.

As *Mirroring Evil*, an exhibition that took place in the Jewish Museum, New York, in spring 2002, tried to emphasize, pictorial references to Nazism have gained a certain foothold in today's popular culture. This is due to the transformation of history into a semiotic system in which Nazism, its main protagonists, and the Holocaust have come to signify ultimate evil. How common the simplified semiotics are is demonstrated both by multiple iconographic references to Nazism in popular music and everyday culture, and by the frequency with which comparisons to Hitler and Nazism are used as a means to justify political decisions, as, for instance, in the case of mobilization for so-called pre-emptive wars. Along with this semiotic coverage of history, the categories of victim and perpetrator have nowadays achieved another status. Once guarantees of unbridgeable biographical and ethical differences, they have been incorporated into a system of signification that generates the self-image of societies. Considering the accelerating de-historification of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the meaning of Nazism as a signifier for what has to be prevented, on the other, today's discourse about the historical period is not only part of media and everyday-culture, but also mirrors political power games within western societies as well as between western societies and the rest of the world.

Mirroring Evil took place shortly after 9/11 and presented, among others works, the aforementioned *LEGO Concentration Camp*-edition by Libera, *Hebrew Lessons* by Arad and *Live and Die as Eva Braun* by Rosen. The exhibition caused a scandal. The exhibition, *Wonderyears*, however, which took place at the New Association for Fine Arts in Berlin, in Spring 2003, was generally received positively. Presenting works exclusively by Jewish artists that were brought up in Israel, *Wonderyears* was an exhibition about the form in which the Holocaust is remembered and mediated in Israel – a reflection on its reception, or more precisely: a reaction to the Holocaust's disposition within Jewish-Israeli collective self-understanding. The works on exhibit performed a personal, partially affective attempt at liberation from the inevitable presence of the subject in childhood and youth, in family and school education, in the cultivation of everyday and official memory in Israel. Therefore, the exhibition, *Wonderyears*, a term that represents the period of adolescence, was motivated by the desire to counteract the 'monumentalization' of the topic in Israel and – by selecting Berlin as location – in German society, as well.



Illustration 21.12 Yael Bartana: *Trembling Time* (2001); still from video; © Yael Bartana & Annet Gellink Gallery

Wonderyears embraced, among others, the aforementioned works of Boaz Arad, Roei Rosen, Tamy Ben-Tor and Yoav Ben-David. Whereas some of its more colourful pieces were perceived with a certain irritation, the press honoured one work specifically: Yael Bartana's video installation *Trembling Time* (2001).

As a reflection on Israel's culture of commemoration, Yael Bartana's slow motion video focuses on that moment during the two memorial days in Israel, Yom HaShoah and Yom HaSikaron, when public life seems to stand still. Filmed on a bridge over an Israeli highway it shows how traffic comes to a halt and people leave their cars. It portrays this moment as an individual as well as a public ritual:

The piece *Trembling time* was filmed on Soldiers' Memorial Day, a designated day of remembrance for those who have died fighting for Israel. It depicts a particular moment when a cross-country siren is sounded [...]. A sense of repetition and expectation is created by the 'ghost' images of cars that passed at other times, and by those of people getting in and out of their cars for the designated moment of silence.¹⁹

In focusing on the pause in public life during Yom HaSikaron, the video *Trembling Time* is not itself a commemorative work. Rather, it reflects today's culture of commemoration, thereby conveying its tremendous emotional impact.

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As the aforementioned works and exhibitions demonstrate, contemporary art with reference to Nazism and the Holocaust no longer reflects history. Instead, it mirrors its reception, thereby necessarily repeating the process of signification that this reception implies. It plays, on the one hand, with quotations and, on the other, with the difference between factual knowledge and fantasy. Contemporary art therefore not only points out the political implications of the current culture of commemoration, but also raises psychological and ethical questions for the spectator. It tends to investigate the way in which history is simultaneously mediated, commemorated, and used. And it nevertheless sometimes encourages the spectator to smile.

Notes

1. Due to the influence of *Maus* on contemporary art about the Holocaust the exhibition *Mirroring Evil*, which will be discussed later on, was originally meant to be called 'Art after Maus'.
2. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York, 2004), 45.
3. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 44.
4. See James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. (London, 2000), 5–7.
5. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 45.
6. Ariella Azoulay, 'The Return of the Repressed', in T. Cohen, A. Pitchon and M. Wenzel (eds), *Wonderyears. New Reflections on the Shoah and Nazism in Israel* (Berlin, 2003), 69, 72.
7. Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler. Eine Biographie* (Berlin, 1976).
8. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1984), 19.
9. Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism*, 21.
10. Lisa Saltzman, '“Avantgarde and Kitsch” Revisited. On the Ethics of Representation', in N. L. Kleeblatt (ed.), *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery / Recent Art* (New York, 2002), 62.
11. Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York, 2002), 2.
12. Ernst van Alphen, 'Playing the Holocaust', in Kleeblatt (ed.), *Mirroring Evil*, 77.
13. Art Spiegelman, 'Commix: An Idiosyncratic Historical and Aesthetic Overview', *Print*, November–December 1988, 61.
14. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 1.
15. Terrence des Pres, 'Holocaust Laughter', in B. Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York, 1988), 217.
16. This question is raised at the end of Celan's poem 'Aschenglorie'.
17. In early November 1998, it was discovered that the *Fragments* recalled by Binjamin Wilkormirski of his incarceration, which were generously awarded with honours beforehand, did not square with documents on his early years. A document of survival turned out to be a fake. This case, as well as the Hitler diaries, can be

considered as one of the latest and most outstanding examples that demonstrated that the para-text is not necessarily a guarantee, that authors can slip into the identity of a survivor voluntarily and thereby seek to pretend that their narrative is true in order to receive public audience.

18. Harald Welzer, 'Art as Social Memory', in P. Frieze (ed.), *After Images: Kunst als soziales Gedächtnis* (Bremen, 2004), 97.
19. Yael Bartana, 'Trembling Time', in Cohen *et al.* (eds), *Wonderyears*, 158.

22

‘Education after Auschwitz’ Revisited

Martin L. Davies

Adorno’s essay, ‘Education after Auschwitz’, first appeared as a radio-talk on 18 April 1966. Its immediate historical context makes it look dated. Primarily, the chapter is about the social function of schools in the German Federal Republic in the mid-1960s. Still, it does provoke reflection on contemporary educational practice. However, the word ‘education’ needs glossing. Adorno focusses not on personal development [*Bildung*] (i.e. ‘education’ in a general sense), but on pedagogy or learning [*Erziehung*]. He’s interested in its public function as enlightenment [*Aufklärung*], as an element of society’s intellectual climate.¹ Further, it disregards the role of memory and history in the process of socialization: that might strike contemporary, historically hyperconscious minds as a grave omission. Equally Adorno’s advocacy of a primary ethical intention in schooling seems improbable now ‘institutionalized philistinism’ dictates educational policy and its social agenda.² But, if you do want to think about education post-Holocaust, these qualifications only enhance the essay’s significance.

A categorical imperative confronts education: Auschwitz must never recur.³ Its imprecision is deliberate: it is meant both literally and metonymically. The least quibble leads into an ethical quagmire. Characteristic of Jewish reflection on the Holocaust, particularly from German-Jewish refugees, Adorno’s conviction is visceral. At stake is survival – but not of humanity as an abstract all-too-abstract ideal, the most vulnerable victim of a political system that deliberately manufactured its own self-incriminating emblem, the walking-corpses, a sub-human entity neither living nor dead.⁴ Thinking ethically, humanely, means thinking about people realistically: about the woman at the post-office counter, the slick salesmen discussing their figures at the next café-table, myself reflected in the eyes of the jovial butcher handing me my change. Excluded ‘others’ really don’t need inventing: the ‘other’ is already programmed into consciousness. The ‘other’ is oneself held by the gaze of the person opposite. The displaced person – exile, immigrant, refugee, asylum-seeker – is the human ontological situation in exacerbated form. However, to enact the Auschwitz imperative, education has to

confront a social structure basically unaltered since the era of totalitarianism.⁵ This means revealing to socialized individuals the anti-social tendencies endemic in their social organization.

Its dominant features identify the targets of Adorno's critical sociology: aggressive nationalism; the discontent with a late culture and its claustrophobic social environment, eradicating individuality, fuelling frustration and violence; peoples' incapacity to handle drastic political change and the unanticipated, concomitant social licence; uneven or asynchronous social development (e.g. as between city and country-side); the collective emphasis on sport and competitiveness reinforced by brutal, sadistic behaviour; the cultivation of regressive, collective identities rooted in popular tradition; educational practices inculcating 'toughness' as a remedy for anxiety-inducing social conditions; the 'organization man', reified consciousness personified, a manipulative character manipulating others for the sake of administrative efficiency; the fetishization of technology and technical expertise which rationalizes human relationships; a pervasive social indifference produced by the atomization of the individual in the urban mass. It is contemporary life in all its squalor. But Adorno's essay offers few remedies: the totalitarian disposition derives from 'an exceedingly powerful social tendency'.⁶ Certainly, in a society entranced by its own death-drive, preaching love is ineffective: it merely panders to the prevailing cold. So, apart from recommending the study of sociology to expose the play of social forces, Adorno simply advocates the cultivation of personal autonomy. That fosters the capacity for reflection, for self-determination, for realizing the necessity of not cooperating [*Nicht-Mitmachen*].⁷ That comes from the conviction that the individual can be far more objective than any collective: this represents merely the ideology of its management committees. Personal dissent has far sharper sight than a thousand eyes wearing rose-tinted spectacles that lend everything they see the appearance of general truth. It has a unique capacity for 'exact fantasy' [*exakte Phantasie*].⁸

Remarkably enough, as a remedy for socially endemic inhumanity, Adorno disregards a topic prominent in the post-Auschwitz curriculum: history, – modern European and Jewish history, in general and Holocaust Studies, in particular. But then these issues arose later. As the proliferating memorials show, the Holocaust industry symbolizes the later, historical hyperconsciousness of a later generation. Still, cultivating autonomy, the reserved thoughtfulness that sustains dissent, excludes obligatory remembrance. Adorno apparently breaks the taboo that terrifies Holocaust history, the failure to remember, which makes forgetfulness a sin, since that indicates indifference, which implies passive connivance. Moreover, Holocaust history, terrified by the taboo of non-remembrance, terrifies everyone with its imperious obligation: remember or else – or else Auschwitz will happen again.

This obligation is fraudulent, anyway. Semiotically speaking, the metonym 'Auschwitz' pre-empts verification. If 'Auschwitz' really did happen again,

how would we recognise it, since we have been remembering it so that it cannot recur? Conversely, remembering Auschwitz so that it does not recur, ensures that any future genocide, however horrific, would not be another 'Auschwitz'. 'Auschwitz' thus figures as the perfect alibi for ethical equivocation, both politically and psychologically.

Politically speaking, the obligation to remember 'Auschwitz' ignores a necessary precondition of genocide: the violence endemic in both state and society. The culture of liberalism masks the fact that the libertarian state has 'a monopoly of the means of legitimate violence'. However, it leaves individuals exposed to the non-legitimate violence it unleashes in espousing economic liberalism, such as job insecurity and the terrorism of performativity. Fascist movements 'seek the monopoly of non-legitimate violence', which is why they both need and undermine the legal system, as exemplified by the Nazi's racial laws that excluded Jews from the rule of law. However, because the liberal state relies on the non-legitimate violence implicit in the socio-economic structure, social libertarianism goes with political authoritarianism.⁹ It has a fascistic potential. The result is a culture ethically corrosive: it feeds psychologistic attitudes as it anaesthetizes social conscience. It makes it possible and respectable to remember the past victims of non-legitimate violence while endorsing as normal its present use in current political and ethnic conflict (e.g. the West Bank or Gaza).

Psychologically speaking, the obligation is unfeasible. On the personal level, mistakes you swear never to repeat always recur. Embarrassing parapraxis is endemic in social behaviour. History's catastrophes magnify the para-practical incidents of global political behaviour. In social terms, sustained remembrance is not even realistic: 'It is undoubtedly true that some people who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. But some people who can't remember the past aren't. More disturbingly, many of those who can remember the past are condemned to repeat it anyway. Plenty of people who remembered the past were sent to die in the extermination camps. Their knowledge availed them nothing, because events were out of their control.'¹⁰ Instead, the injunction to remember just shows that psychologistic argument cannot handle the Holocaust's ethical challenge. Actually, psychologism (i.e. the belief that personal attitudes explain historical causality) gives the illusion of handling it only by making it a mental phenomenon, like a phantom pain, for which historical remembrance is a soothing analgesic.

By contrast, Adorno rejects the psychologism remembrance inevitably implies. He does not need it: the barbarity happened. It has irreparably distorted the social structure; it has shifted the reality principle.¹¹ That is what 'after Auschwitz' means: the environment is contaminated. That is what makes contemporary life squalid. The very idea that 'remembrance prevents ...' merely attenuates the barbarity that still happens, since that reflects the fascistic tendencies endemic in the basic structure of contemporary

society that derive from the very 'principle of civility' [*Zivilisationsprinzip*] remembrance claims to endorse.¹² Psychologism just reinforces this false consciousness. It perpetuates a split between subjective personality and objective society, between personal rationalizations and the irrationalism of society, to produce a plausible, affirmative sense to personal behaviour that screens it off from its actual social implications.¹³

Obligatory remembrance is, in any case, incompatible with autonomy. Personal memory derives from a melancholic humour: it is 'an open wound', the psychopathological response to traumatic loss (e.g. the writings of Kertesz and Wiesel).¹⁴ But personal memory is vulnerable in a historicized world where technical-academic history dominates all forms of reflection. A historicized world naturally embraces so many anniversaries. Under a public obligation to remember them, professional historians administer the terrible taboo against forgetfulness. Obligatory remembrance turns personal memory, the decent thing, into public commemoration. It promotes private grief (and private grievance) to a socially compulsive, if not compulsory, reflex of belated recognition. Historicization modulates into sacralization, due to inherent ambiguities in the concept of truth. Holding personal memories sacred, transforms experiential authenticity into an article of faith. In essence, this is how the social-psychological after-shock of deep trauma expresses itself. In the works of poets and philosophers (e.g. Wiesel, Kertesz, Celan, Levinas, Agamben), this figure of thought discloses unprecedented existential insights. In historical works, with their forensic interest in particular, verifiable events, the absolute persuasiveness of their now sacralized form effectively discourages further thought. It enforces passive-reactive social behaviour, a learned, dutiful responsiveness. It leaves you feeling that commiseration is incompatible with freedom, as though you could not thoughtfully reflect as you wanted, as if you could not explore for yourself the contemporary European necropolis dotted with concentration-camp sites.

Obligatory remembrance thus has inhuman implications that ensue directly from the historical scholarship that sustains it. Holocaust Studies use history not just as a technology for knowing the past, but as a means of commemoration and mourning. In its most orthodox form, the discipline binds respect for the victims to familiarity with historical fact. It ensures historical erudition gauges moral commitment: that historical veracity meters personal and public sympathy. For historians this is a self-serving ideology: it ensures that they, as privileged managers of historical resources, automatically become paragons of respectfulness. It also ensures that those who are not experts, the general public, remain as deficient in sympathy as they are in detailed factual knowledge. It puts them in pupillage to historians by intensifying the obligation to remember. It thus effectively neutralizes the only reliable, possibly unlearnable, probably unteachable mitigation of genocide: simple human solidarity based on conscience, the inner voice of thinking that makes it possible to live with ourselves, let alone with others.¹⁵

Autonomy instead involves self-orientation in thinking. To devolve thinking to social custom, convention, or historical precedent both compromises the personal responsibility and discriminating judgement that sustain it. Autonomy proposes a more radical reality. In a world that has no sense apart from the sense that human beings lend to it, human beings are ontologically bound to act, which means acting autonomously, expressly to invest the otherwise blind, unselfconscious processes of nature with a humane purpose. Except that the world in which one is bound to act is a late, historicized world, dominated by the death-drive: its main business is 'mega-death', the product of human self-incrimination that sabotages the sense of the historical production-process itself.¹⁶

Autonomy, therefore, cannot defer to remembrance, the fatal, symbolic reproduction of history's same old thing. As Kant insists, any civic or religious authority, any community, intent on committing itself immutably, forever, to certain symbols or doctrine, is attempting the impossible. Any such contract prejudicing the enlightenment of the human race is null and void. No age is entitled to force the age following it into a situation that prevents it from broadening its knowledge, correcting its faults, and advancing towards enlightenment. Certainly, in some cases such measures might be required temporarily. But for one age, a political or religious institution, or social group to obligate its successors is a 'crime against human nature' [*ein Verbrechen wider die menschliche Natur*] since it blocks their innate tendency for self-development. To impose obligations from the past on our descendants, is simply 'not permissible' [*schlechterdings unerlaubt*]. That would mean 'transgressing the sacred rights of humanity' [*die heiligen Rechte der Menschheit verletzen*].¹⁷ It delivers present existence into the past's tyrannical grip.

The point is: autonomy draws on something different, something other than the world as it has got to be. What characterizes *homo sapiens*, is its ideational capacity to refuse any given reality.¹⁸ Autonomy with its reserved thoughtfulness confronts the apprehensive situation of contemporary consciousness. This is the reason why the value of any thought lies not in its capacity for establishing identities, but in 'its distance from the continuity of what is already known', so that whatever claim it makes, comes from its 'antithetical function, [...] its evident relationship to its opposite, not from its isolated existence'.¹⁹ So where human mortality is exploited for the morbid ends of political domination in this late culture of the death-drive, the more crucial ontological precondition must be stressed: natality, the 'central category of political [...] thought'. Each succeeding generation needs its chance, since only 'the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting'. All human activities draw on this sense of initiative itself sustained by natality.²⁰ Even in 'epochs of petrification and foreordained gloom', like this late, melancholy culture of obligatory memorialization, the 'miracle' of being able to act, to act differently, is ensured with each new generation that brings new people into the world.²¹

Nevertheless, the scope, both ideational and political, for refusing reality and beginning anew is surely dwindling. In the historicized world history becomes totally constricting, which only confirms totalitarianism as its fatal 'subterranean stream' it is drowning in.²² Man-made, historical processes 'only spell ruin to human life', since history ensures that the past has already compromised the future.²³ After all, some 170,000,000 people, 'destroyed by wars and totalitarian genocide' in the last century, cannot be excised from the corpus of humanity without causing traumatic injury to the entire species or, in the concomitant loss of millions of unborn children, curtailing its genetic potential.²⁴ The result is: the 'eidetic recall of traumatic events makes the past ever present'.²⁵ No wonder historical training in obligatory remembrance anaesthetizes expectation. Its obligatory force is psychopathological, a morbid symptom of the trauma the historicized world inflicts. For this reason too, remembrance works against human interests. It erodes the resources in consciousness that sustain the capacity for refusing reality, for autonomous action. In any case, the drive for survival cannot mean just freezing the human species in any particular, contingent historical frame. Instead, it involves cultivating an openness of mind, since consciousness, in refusing reality, works with 'expectation-effects' [*Erwartungseffekte*], such as dreams, wishfulness, anxiety, faith, and hope. That is to say, consciousness is anticipatory, moving tentatively, but instinctively forwards, drawn towards 'the widest and brightest horizon'.²⁶ Remembrance needs instead to be an irritant: to prompt dissent from a self-incriminated, historicized world hell-bent on reproducing the same old thing.

Why, then, should Adorno see education as a remedy for socially endemic inhumanity? After all: 'ideology has become social reality since its overpowering existence has become a surrogate for the social sense it itself has eradicated, so that the option of an ideologically neutral standpoint is as fictitious as constructing abstract utopias'.²⁷ Nevertheless, in 'Taboos on the Teaching Profession' he insists: 'The pathos of schools today, their moral seriousness, is that, in the midst of prevailing conditions [*des Bestehenden*], only they, if they are aware of them, are capable of working directly towards freeing humanity from its barbarousness [*auf die Entbarbarisierung der Menschheit hinarbeiten*]'.²⁸ But his own argument hardly seems to convince him: not much can be expected from enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]. However, enlightenment, albeit inadequate, is better than none at all.²⁹ Education and enlightenment might still deter those subservient to power from inflicting their subservience on others, even if they would not prevent a new generation of 'desk-bound murderers' [*Schreibtischmörder*] from emerging.³⁰ So whence Adorno's conviction that schools define an ideologically uncontaminated social space? It is in his chapter's illocutionary intention: to dissent from received practice, to propose an educational principle antithetical to what's going, so that no educationist can deny an alternative to the usual historical equivocations exists.

The sphere of education is a simulacrum of the society it serves: it enforces the going norms of socialization. The way 'Auschwitz' gets taught particularly illustrates the socially affirmative, anaesthetic character of education. It reveals the commodified form and technical character of the learning exercises, – as in a recent article in *The Guardian* on how to exploit pedagogically the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Its theme – survival – apparently 'offers some help' on how 'to introduce one of the most difficult stories teachers have to tell'.³¹ When students encounter images that 'speak of cruelty without end and horror without relief', they are (it says) 'confused as to what they should be feeling', 'disturbed and unsettled', younger children particularly. But this is where teacher intervenes, providing the 'historical, geographical and moral perspective' they lack, establishing 'a tone for their own comments and an idiom in which to couch their own responses', and having ready a story for them, albeit a 'difficult' one, so emphasizing instead 'the idea of liberation from suffering'. Confronting the abyss of senselessness Auschwitz represents, students (like the rest of us) have both a right to be unsettled and to analyse for themselves their own discomfort. However, teaching procedures require standardizing their response by applying the same old, scholastic frameworks. As Bloch observes, students' thus receiving the issues ready-made from the teacher, enforces in them a purely memory-based, passive behaviour [*das rein gedächtnismäßige, hinnehmende Verhalten*]. The reified forms of comprehension recapitulate society's commodified thinking, itself predicated on passive-reactive consumerism. The commodification of what actually happened turns it into an object in the past, and knowable only in terms of time gone by. The agreed, object-ive facts, lifted out of the historical continuum, are aligned with other, similar object-ive facts (e.g. 'key dates') as reified commodities relate to each other.³² The teacher's attitude to them replicates his or her passive-reactive attitude as a consumer when selecting a purchase – as in the suggestion that, besides 27 January (the liberation of Auschwitz), 'there are other key dates (i.e. Belsen: 15 April; VE Day: May 7) that are *worth* considering'.³³

These reified forms of comprehension produce the standardized activities through which the students learn. They inculcate standardized reflexes, reinforced by the standardized information technology procedures triggering them. Students are asked to '*record* their responses' to pictures of the Holocaust, 'to *compile a bank* of words that come to mind as they look at the pictures, and use these to *inform* the creation of Memorial Day poems', to '*use the internet [...] to research and document* the history' of a survivor, to '*research an individual listed in the database*' at Yad Vashem, to '*compile a fact-file of information* about individual camps' for a class presentation.³⁴ Whatever lessons the Holocaust offers, are subverted by the technical-instrumental behaviour they adopt to learn them, exactly that behaviour which, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, conduces to inhumanity. Holocaust education, like Holocaust Studies generally, reveals

how equivocating historical comprehension is. 'The story of the Holocaust' is alleviated only by 'our determination that such an atrocity must never be repeated'. But the Holocaust 'story', endorses another story that establishes 'a link between the past and the present' and looks 'towards the future' on the basis of 'current political and ethnic conflict'. This aims to 'help students understand that genocide, suffering and persecution are still very much part of the modern world'. Thus the 'determination' of Holocaust education negates itself. In affirming the political normality of state-sponsored, non-legitimate violence, it acknowledges its redundancy. That just leaves resorting to psychologism to compensate for the actual political irrelevance of Holocaust history. The same old forms of comprehension reinforce the melancholy rituals of obligatory remembrance. Students are asked both 'to recall the *memorials* they have come across both locally and in their contact with film and television' and to 'discuss the *purpose and function* of tombs, gravestones, monuments and statues focusing on the way they put viewers in mind of the [...] past'. They also instil conventional passive – reactive attitudes. The teacher has to explain 'the *use* of prisons and hostages in times of war'; students 'brainstorm the *wide range of emotions* they would experience if they were released from a long period of suffering' and to discuss 'what it means to survive a trauma or tragedy'.³⁵

Historical study like this, lacking any differentiating principle, becomes sterile. Holocaust survivors can be assimilated to 'veterans of military campaigns', the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation to VE day: it is all the same. Students can investigate what life was like for Jews pre-Holocaust by looking at socio-economic statistics (in education, housing, family, community, worship and business) before and after the war, in order to understand '*exactly what had been lost* by the time the concentration camps were liberated'. They can 'consider why the testimony of survivors [...] might provide a *valuable* lesson for the modern world', without being told what actually constitutes this value.³⁶ But glaringly absent is any reference to the fundamental, indispensable issue of Judaism. Nowhere are mentioned the attempts to 'redeem' the Holocaust theologically, be it as an issue within contemporary Judaism, or as an incentive to found a new humanism, or to grasp what it means for the Jews to exist '*contra* the norm and logic of history'.³⁷ Nowhere does it invite reflection on the problematics of Jewish identity which suggests that the Jews' claim to 'nearness to the concept of God' comes at 'the suicidal cost of renunciation, of self-ostracism from the earth and its family of nations'.³⁸ That 'Auschwitz' is embedded in a sinister fashion, structurally, in contemporary reality becomes evident whenever, ironically, obligatory remembrance forgets Judaism, its political-theological provocation. 'Auschwitz' always does recur – whenever Judaism gets dropped from the Holocaust story. And it happens by design in the educational process. Holocaust education conventionally derives from nothing but its own commodification. Its same old perspectives and stories, impervious to historical catastrophe,

are encoded as an abstract, totally dominant production process that generates historical significance and commodity value alike.³⁹ Its outcome is a crude, historical balance-sheet that records impersonally 'what is lost', and what – in terms of surviving testimony – is 'valuable'. But that is how teaching works: education needs history as a science of 'commonly accepted measures', because it needs such measures, if it wants the lessons it transmits to be commonly accepted.⁴⁰ 'Auschwitz' reduces pedagogically to an exercise in information-management, a technical audit-procedure.

Auschwitz, says Adorno, is the barbarity against which all education strives. It is no use warning about its possible recurrence. The barbarity happened, it seeps into everything, particularly into educational practice. As a teaching strategy, to define Auschwitz historically, as an event-object in the past that needs to be remembered, already lessens its significance. 'After Auschwitz' is nothing other than the prevailing squalid, political-ontological condition; not a neat inflection that might (or might not) be placed on a technically clean historical time-line. As a caesura in time, it shatters the historicizing frameworks that normally manage knowledge. After Auschwitz 'something has changed: we cannot "do history" as normal'.⁴¹

Auschwitz is thus the symbol of a totally historicized world, the world of a historicized historical consciousness. That is to say: in the historicized world history ceases to signify objectivity and truth or represent human self-realization. Rather it comes as a valuable symbolic resource, accumulated over millenia (like coal, oil, or natural gas), there for the colonizing, exploiting, commodifying, or customizing. When history relied on objective truth, doctoring historical record or denying historical fact caused scandal. Now that historical hyperconscious practice reconfigures the principle of history itself, objectivity is revealed as a purely psychologistic reflex: customizing history has become normal historical fact. This reconfiguration is pursued through violence, both symbolic and real, legitimate and non-legitimate, in their own self-interest by both the classic (Hegelian) agents of history, powerful states, and the institutions of corporate capitalism to which they are allied. Their chief executives know not just that they can make history, but that they can make the history they want. They can customize the principle of history by historicizing – be it symbolically or materially – any already historical predicament that obstructs them.⁴² The Nazis' bid to excise Judaic monotheism from European culture was just such an attempt to re-engineer history by customizing the historical code: the Jews were a strand to be deleted from it as though it had never functioned. The compulsion to historicize promotes, rather than resists, nefarious social tendencies.

'After Auschwitz' represents for humanity a 'second fall'. The loss of Adamic innocence entails a history of human self-incrimination. However, a self-incriminated humanity, struggling with a growing burden of guilt, saw an easier redemption in the extinction of the principle of morality itself, in the death of God. But a state of *a*-morality, an ethical void, was even less

tolerable. Having always been sinful and full of dread, humanity still needed the familiar, self-intimidating vision of Hell, more imaginable and practicable than any dream of paradise. The totalitarian regimes filled this void, usurping absolute moral legitimacy by exterminating the last descendants of God's own chosen living witnesses.⁴³ Its consequence: an ontological demotion of the human species in the Great Chain of Being, a remoter, icier realignment of existence.

But how does this impact on contemporary life? How do you find out when you live a plush, pacified life obligatory remembrance squares with personal conscience? It comes out in the fact that the knowledge deemed socially to be indispensable, historical knowledge, is late knowledge. It is knowledge that naturally comes late, far too late to make any difference. A historicized world, affirmed by its commemorative practices, is predominantly orientated towards the 'remoteness of the preterite tense'.⁴⁴ The process of historicization implies that whatever information is available now about the politics distorting your life will be nothing compared to what historians a century hence will know as they contemplate you in your remoteness from them – except it will avail you directly who need it most, nothing. Similarly, in the last 60 years a vast amount of knowledge about the Holocaust has accumulated. It is needed so that we remember, so that it cannot happen again. But, if this knowledge had been available, for example, in the 1930s, would it have prevented it? That this question is hypothetical, is just as well. The hypothetical answer could be embarrassing, since even the then available information was useless. Late knowledge is essentially knowledge that is not intended to do what knowledge should do – inaugurate action now. Hence it defaults to the minimal mental obligation: remembering. In any case, in a historicized world, a world that has 'passed out of the major order and symmetries of Western civilization', the lessons of history, always arbitrary and ideologically suspect, have themselves become a thing of the past.⁴⁵ That is why 'no matter how much we may be capable of learning from the past, it will not enable us to know the future'.⁴⁶ Consequently, 'the idea that the widespread study of history among its intellectual élite will make a nation-state behave better is a pious wish'.⁴⁷ Remembrance, locked into its own melancholic mental space, sustained by late knowledge, symbolically re-enacting the same old thing, cannot sustain the intellectual autonomy that envisages a different, better future.

How, then, could Adorno suppose that education after Auschwitz should foster autonomy? It seems unrealistic; but that is its awkward point. Schools and universities cannot deter barbarity: 'the controllers of the political and economic public realms can be confident that our graduates [...] will pose no threat to the established social order by reason of anything that they have learned or experienced at a university'.⁴⁸ They serve a society dominated by managerial administration and commodified thinking, its sufficient pre-condition. Still the essay punctures the technocratic facade of social

governance. 'Education', the very concept, if not its practical application, offers a glimmer of reservation. The very questions: why have education? what is education for? – briefly expose the raw reality beneath the social fabric. Certainly, ignorance and fundamentalism, characteristics of the lack of education, make swift conduits towards cruelty. Conversely, the complexity of the world demands knowledge and reflection – requires enlightenment. Somewhere in-between comes the mass of informed, more or less well-educated consumers, pacified by late, historical knowledge, the knowledge that affirms 'how our world got to be the way it is'.⁴⁹ What they thus actually learn is a 'feeling of social powerlessness' [*das Gefühl der gesellschaftlichen Ohnmacht*], a passive-reactive attitude, that in turn affirms the prevailing economic and political dispensation.⁵⁰ However, while scholastic learning implements behavioural conditioning through obligatory remembrance, the principle of autonomy keeps the aims of education in dispute. Education after Auschwitz, though highly politicized, would not ever be political enough.

Notes

1. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*, (Frankfurt/Main, 2003), 677.
2. Frank Furedi, *Where Have All The Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism* (London, 2005), 3.
3. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 674.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz*, trans. P. Alferi (Paris, 2003), 58, 74.
5. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 675.
6. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 675.
7. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 679, 688–689, 690.
8. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt/Main, 1982), 56.
9. Cf. Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law. Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge, 1996), 58ff.
10. Clive James, 'Last Will and Testament', in *The Dreaming Swimmer. Non-Fiction 1987–1992* (London, 1992), 32.
11. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 674.
12. For example, the US / UK campaign to civilize Saddam Hussein's Iraq with 'freedom' and 'democracy' used the Nazi *Blitzkrieg* strategy of 'Shock and Awe' to pulverize the Iraqi people (cf. Gar Smith, 'Shock and Awe: Guernica Revisited', *AlterNet*, at <http://www.alternet.org/story/15027>. Accessed 26.03.2005.)
13. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Zum Verhältnis von Soziologie und Psychologie', in *Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt/Main, 1975), 97, 106, 108.
14. Sigmund Freud, 'Trauer und Melancholie', in *Das Ich und das Es und andere metapsychologische Schriften* (Frankfurt/Main, 1982), 107, 114.
15. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, J. Kohn (ed.) (New York, 2003), 44–45, 96–97.
16. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control. Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 1995), 7ff.
17. Immanuel Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', in Wilhelm Weischedel (ed.), *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie und Pädagogik I* (Frankfurt/Main, 1982), 57–58.

18. Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Berne, 1978), 52ff., 88ff.
19. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt/Main, 1978), 99 (§50).
20. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London, 1974), 8–9, 176ff.
21. Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom?', in *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1993), 168–169.
22. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1986), ix.
23. Cf. Arendt, 'What is Freedom?' 168.
24. Cf. Brzezinski, *Out of Control*, 18.
25. David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998), 74.
26. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1979), 77, 84.
27. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', in *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/Main, 1976), 26.
28. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Tabus über dem Lehrberuf', in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II* (Frankfurt/Main, 2003), 672.
29. Adorno, 'Tabus über dem Lehrberuf', 670; Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 676.
30. Adorno, 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', 690.
31. Lyndsey Turner, 'Carrying the Torch', *Education Guardian*, 25 January 2005, 14–15.
32. Ernst Bloch, 'Edle Bereitung, Humaniora, Sozialerziehung', in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie* (Frankfurt/Main, 1985), 241.
33. My italics.
34. My italics.
35. My italics.
36. My italics.
37. George Steiner, *Errata: An Examined Life* (London, 1997), 49.
38. George Steiner, 'Our Homeland, the Text', in *No Passion Spent. Essays 1978–1996* (London, 1997), 306.
39. Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Le miroir de la production ou l'illusion critique du matérialisme historique* (Paris, 1985), 128, 144–145.
40. Charles Péguy, 'A nos amis, À nos abonnés', in Marcel Péguy (ed.), *Oeuvres en Prose 1909–1914* (Paris, 1961), 19.
41. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Longest Shadow. In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 136.
42. Cf. Thomas Frank, 'Dark Age', in T. Frank and M. Weiland (eds), *Commodify Your Dissent. Salvos from 'The Baffler'* (New York, 1997), 274: 'Our archetypes and ideas and visions and memories, the accumulation of centuries, are yielding as easily to corporate re-engineering as has our landscape, built and torn down and renamed and re-shuffled, everything forgotten instantly and relegated overnight to the quaint land of sepia-tint.'
43. George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle. Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* (London, 1971), 48.
44. Cf. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 330. Living in 'the remoteness of the preterite' [*in der Abgeschiedenheit des Präteritums*] characterizes bourgeois society.
45. Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle. Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture*, 48.
46. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, xxii.
47. James, 'Last Will and Testament', 32.
48. Philip Allott, *The Health of Nations. Society and Law beyond the State* (Cambridge, 2002), 14, 17.
49. David Cannadine, *Making History Now* (London, 1999), 8.
50. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Philosophie und Lehrer', in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*, 493.

Part VI

Anti-Semitism Today

23

Anti-Semitism Today

Wolfgang Benz

Anti-Semitism, animosity towards Jews in the broadest sense, confronts both those directly affected and observers alike with problems of definition and perceiving its manifestations. In terms of definition, we need to distinguish between four basic phenomena: first, extending from the Middle Ages into the modern era, there is a Christian anti-Judaism. A religiously motivated form of resentment against Jews, this phenomenon also includes elements which are culturally, socially and economically determined. Second, there is the racial anti-Semitism that, based on spurious scientific, anthropological and biological arguments, arose in the course of the nineteenth century and ultimately led to the Holocaust.

The third version of the anti-Semitic prejudice is a contemporary phenomenon, an animosity towards Jews after the Holocaust. The assumption that the Holocaust – because the Jews were now recognisable exclusively as pitiable victims – must mean the end of all animosity towards Jews was an illusion from the very beginning. This was proven by the pogrom at Kielce in Poland in 1946 and the resentment directed against Displaced Persons, who lived on German soil in Displaced Persons' camps into the 1950s. Besides traditional animosity towards Jews, as was also articulated outside of Germany, a new form of resentment formed in western post-war Germany, a secondary anti-Semitism. This secondary form is an independent phenomenon that is less obvious in its manifestation, but with a significant latent potential. This third phenomenon of animosity towards Jews feeds on the feelings of shame and defensive reactions towards guilt: resentments against Jews are mobilised not despite but because of Auschwitz and crystallise around compensation and indemnification payments ('for how much longer will we be forced to make amends, whether the innocent generations will still have to pay for the Holocaust': these are examples of the kind of battle cries which rung out; and these were accompanied by the suspicion that 'the Jews' were exploiting the genocide to enrich themselves, because they always take the opportunity to turn everything into a business deal, a claim

that belonged in the arsenal of the defence mechanism and served, inwardly, to soothe a guilt-ridden conscience).

The secondary anti-Semitism is initially a West German phenomenon, for it linked into the restitution payments, which the German Democratic Republic (GDR) did not pay. Instead, another manifestation of anti-Jewish resentment took hold there, namely anti-Zionism, which, as the fourth basic phenomenon, became a decisive component of politics and propaganda in the GDR, and consequently also in the socialisation of its citizens. These four basic phenomena – religious anti-Judaism, racial anti-Semitism, secondary anti-Semitism, and anti-Zionism – form the framework for examining animosity towards Jews. But further differentiation is also required in terms of the intensity of such animosity. When studying its appearance, we distinguish between manifest anti-Semitism, which expresses itself in attacks against persons, damage to property, and propaganda offences, and a latent anti-Semitism, which is evident in everyday discourse at most as a silent agreement about 'the Jews', but remains mainly on the level of attitudes and views, thus above all evident in opinion polls. It is also necessary to focus on the ideological anti-Semitism that appears as a core component of right-wing extremism. This anti-Semitism is to be distinguished from the other forms through its aggressive refusal to accept historical facts, expressing both a defensive motivation ('it should not have happened, therefore we deny what happened') and an offensive one, whereby the Jews are considered to have been responsible for their tragedy (or at least share a complicity in it). Let us call this form the anti-Semitism of denial and look at its manifestation and how it is disseminated. Denying the reality of the Holocaust, not wanting to accept the murder of six million Jews and the continual arguing of points diminishing the scope of National Socialist crimes – this was and remains the domain of a small circle of ideologically committed apologists for the Nazi regime, known as the 'revisionists'. Originally, the efforts to correct history counter to the facts and to establish a neo-Nazi image of history isolated the international revisionist cartel of Holocaust deniers not only from the majority of the population, but also from many right-wing extremists, who wished to avoid being perceived as neo-Nazis. This situation had changed by the 1980s at the latest. Although no serious historian belongs to the revisionist circle and the denial of the National Socialist genocide stands under criminal prohibition in Germany, the 1980s witnessed the first attempts to provide the 'revisionists' with an entry ticket to the community of serious academic historians. Employing vague formulations, Ernst Nolte, for instance, attempted to create the impression that it would be worthwhile to examine the arguments put forward by the revisionists; and, moreover, he even had the presumption to make the fantastic claim that these ideological producers of the 'radical revisionism' active in the United States and France, in Sweden and Belgium, that is the deniers of Auschwitz, were superior to the

'established historians in Germany' in their 'mastery of the source material and especially their critical ability to verify sources'.

The attempt to portray the 'revisionists' as serious historians failed, as the *Historikerstreit* showed. This very public debate amongst historians revolved around the question of whether Auschwitz was merely a reflex to the crimes perpetrated by Stalin and so, with this historical precedent, not singular and less grave. The debate has though left deep scars and created a certain helplessness and disorientation amongst the public, which expressed itself in a growing disinterest for historical problems and issues.

A German writer expressed publicly what many feel, and his views found spontaneous applause and ignited a continuing argument: an aversion to a subject that touches everyone with painful embarrassment, that makes one feel helpless and awkward, and in response to which 'normal ways of behaviour' are not possible. The appeal proclaimed by the writer Martin Walser in the autumn of 1998, calling for the remembrance of the Holocaust to become a private matter, has set off a discussion in which the emotions of many citizens were publicly articulated in such a way that revealed them to be motivated by a desire to reject the need for a collective remembrance of Auschwitz. This was not a denial of what happened, nor a devaluing of guilt. It was though the expression of a wish to have the topic excluded from public discourse and thus to qualify its significance: there are other problems which are currently more important and moving.

More crucial than such external mechanisms qualifying the singularity of the Holocaust – in which the argument of increasing distance to the event also always plays a role – are the other manifestations emerging out of this disinterest and ignorance, such as the erosion of consensus about historical truth and the attempt to construct secondary historical images, an attempt that at the same time seeks to deconstruct a historical culture fostered out of the experience of the National Socialist past. Veiled in the stereotypical regret about crimes perpetrated by a small minority, anti-Jewish resentments are mobilised and linked to topics like the debate about the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, compensation for Holocaust victims, and the suspected Jewish influence in Germany and the world. The construct of Jewish aggression – expressed in the insinuations that Jews are perpetrating the accusation of guilt against Germans and deviously procuring unreasonable compensation and indemnification payments – is so effective because it corresponds to anxieties and resentments which are in no way restricted to extreme right-wing circles. Such emotions and reactions exist rather throughout society and, amongst a minority, stimulate a secondary anti-Semitism that arises out of the defence mechanism against feelings of guilt and shame at the historical genocide of the Jews.

This construct is projected back into history in the often refuted but, for that, just as eagerly reanimated assertion that there had been a 'Jewish

declaration of war' on Germany. Supported by so-called evidence such as the headline proclaimed by the British newspaper the *Daily Express* on 24 March 1933, 'Judea declares war on Germany', and the letter sent by Chaim Weizmann to the British Prime Minister at the end of August 1939, in which he declared that the Jews would contribute to defending democracy, an argument is built up on historical misrepresentations and alleged documentation. This argument has the sole purpose of proving that the National Socialist state was virtually forced into persecuting the Jews out of self-defence. The image of hostile, vindictive and powerful Jews is propagated in order to keep alive traditional prejudices; it is part of a staging that manipulates the historical murder of the Jews and its consequences in the collective memory and consciousness.

This is not a manifestation affecting only German society. An opinion poll conducted in Poland in February 1992 revealed that almost one-third of Poles were of the opinion that Jews had too much power and exerted too much influence in the country. Irrespective of how one may evaluate it, this claim is stringent proof of the thesis that anti-Semitism as a prejudice and political attitude is not only conceivable without Jews, but moreover has a very strong impact in reality. Another poll taken at the start of 2003 showed that 40 per cent of Poles have anti-Semitic attitudes and openly display them. This poll, part of a research study into public opinion in three Eastern European states conducted by the American Jewish Committee, also showed that 28 per cent of respondents in the Czech Republic admitted to having an aversion to Jews, while in Hungary the figure was 17 per cent.

In Poland before the Holocaust, which began with Hitler's attack on the country in 1939, there were some 3.5 million Jews, or every tenth Polish citizen was Jewish. Today there are a maximum of 15,000, and they thus form a small minority that really is without influence, without power, and without a lobby. However, any observer of the 1991 election campaign could have come away with the impression that 'the Jews' were one of the decisive problems facing the nation. Re-emergent Polish nationalism brought with it a revival of its own inherent traditional anti-Semitic components: nationalist splinter parties vied with each other in their discrimination of Jews; but anti-Semitic watchwords and slogans were also evident amongst *Solidarnosc* members; and the same were to be heard in post-communist groups, which had taken the course set down by the official anti-Semitic (or at the very least presented as anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli) campaigns of 1968. The Catholic Church in Poland, traditionally a source of anti-Jewish leanings, was obviously yet to adhere genuinely to the official papal proclamation on conduct towards Jews, set out in the *Nostra Aetate* issued at the Second Vatican Council of 1966; testimony of this were the anti-Semitic pamphlets available in churches and statements made by priests and devoutly religious politicians.

The idea of a Jewish world conspiracy is coming to life again in pamphlets and propaganda speeches; rabble-rousing pamphlets from the era between the

two world wars, supplemented with new introductions, are being republished in high numbers. But not only anti-Semitic traditions are nurtured; new is the spread of 'revisionist' propaganda that plays down the Holocaust or denies the genocide against the Jews altogether, which, after all, mainly took place on Polish soil. One explanation for the phenomenon of anti-Semitism without Jews may lie in the enormous economic difficulties plaguing the country: Poland stands here as only one example for the many countries in which animosity towards Jews is once more being vehemently articulated, in all likelihood as a kind of metaphor for social pressure and the anxieties and frustrations it generates.

In the mid-1990s the role played by Switzerland during the National Socialist genocide of the Jews increasingly became the focus of research, initiating a broad public debate and witnessing numerous instances of indignation. Switzerland fell abruptly out of the state of innocence in which the majority of the population believed itself to be. Until then, anti-Semitism was not considered to be an issue that required scholarly examination, nor was its analysis regarded as a source of broad public interest. In the daily press anti-Jewish resentments were only occasionally linked to government policies towards foreigners; when the topic was broached, it occurred mainly in the context of the new right-wing extremism and the minority of fanatical Hitler supporters in the 1930s and 1940s. There were though reports on the desecration of cemeteries, and in the late 1980s on instances of resentment towards Jews from Eastern Europe in health resorts, for example in Arosa, which recalled the anti-Semitism rife in German spa towns at the turn of the twentieth century. General public awareness admittedly described the situation as one in which 'a ghost is haunting us again', and this has been the general tenor of Swiss press reports on manifestations of anti-Jewish behaviour and attitudes since 1993–94.

The manifest public attitudes expressed by Swiss citizens towards Jews, which reproduce anti-Semitic stereotypes to a great extent, share some basic assumptions with how the image of Jews is defined and explicated in letters to prominent public figures and the media.

First, Jews are aliens. Their loyalty as citizens is fundamentally called into question, and while this gives occasion for the postulate of assimilation and complete integration, entailing the renouncement of unique religious and cultural characteristics, the verdict on their alien nature remains. Second, Jews possess specific immutable characteristics which determine their co-existence with non-Jews: they are greedy, hungry for power, and driven by Old Testament vindictiveness. These clichés are the most frequently expressed and they are employed without thinking as an assignment of blame, considered to be knowledge the majority population possesses about a minority that has been handed down through generations. Third, religious prejudices and reservations against Jews are latent and obviously play a far greater role in argumentation in Switzerland than for example in Germany.

The reproach of killing God (for example, 'Jews will never find peace because they let the innocent Jesus be so cruelly crucified') is just as present in the discussion as is the employment of attributes such as the 'Godless people' or the 'Satanic Zionists'. Fourth, based on the handed-down conspiracy fantasies, Jews are regarded as being organised internationally, as being part of the 'dark powers' which represent a threat to Swiss patriotism. Resentment of the alleged 'world Jewry' is emotionally charged through arbitrary references to the activities of the World Jewish Congress or the politics of the state of Israel. The reservations expressed in relation to this organising on an international scale bolsters, in turn, the resentment directed against the alleged national unreliability of Jews and how they are perceived as being incapable of integration. Fifth, these stereotypes can be arbitrarily combined to construct an image of greedy, powerful and internationally active Jews, who represent a threat to the peace and tranquillity of the country and trigger off anxieties, which are then combated with incantations such as: 'Wherever your money is hidden, in no matter which other country, they will eventually find it. But please do not ruin our small country with so many accusations. It should remain for all co-religionists, also for Jews, an idyll of peace and tranquillity!' Finally, the stereotypical assumptions about the essence of the Jews lead many non-Jews to the conclusion that the Jews are in part responsible for their fate. The suspected Jewish instigation of the worldwide Depression in the late 1920s serves as a sign for such insinuations as well as an indication that 'the Jews' had irritated and provoked 'the Germans' for so long that the latter were forced into defending themselves. These basic assumptions are not constructs circulating amongst the fanatical anti-Semites from the extreme right, but rather – and this must be expressly emphasised – they possess a defining character in the everyday discourse about Jews, precisely because of their inherent function of providing relief for a guilt-ridden conscience and exoneration.

The resentments held by the Swiss are typical for the consciousness of mainstream society throughout Central Europe. In Eastern Europe, in the former Soviet sphere of influence, the phenomenon of anti-Semitism presents itself more directly and quite openly. The re-emergence of openly expressed animosity towards Jews after the collapse of communist rule is one of the astonishing phenomena in present-day Eastern Europe. Sixty years after the Holocaust, over eighty years after the fall of Tsarist rule, anti-Semitism is propagated and exploited in the states and satellites of the former Soviet Union, as if time has simply stood still. From infiltration fantasies and world conspiracy theories, the ascription of stereotypes with roots in religion and folklore tradition and onto myths of ritual murder and blood libel cults – all these are once again components of public discourse in Russia and Poland, in Hungary and in the Baltic states, in the Ukraine and Byelorussia.

The following three questions may well assist us in explaining this phenomenon. The first question is directed at the roots and traditions of

anti-Semitism in the national folklore culture, the religion and the everyday life and public consciousness of the respective country. Second, we must also focus on the specific historical fate of the Jews in the region, their role in society prior to the establishment of communist rule, and the history of their persecution under German aegis. Both the mechanisms for repressing as well as the strategies for coping with the Holocaust are indicators of public awareness and attitudes towards both Jews and the respective national history. In this context, it is perhaps possible, third, to identify anti-Semitism as an instrument employed in the search for identity at a time when, after the end of communist rule, a revitalised nationalism is in the ascendancy.

The secretive forms of anti-Semitism under Stalin's rule (one thinks of the Doctors' Trials in Moscow, the Slansky Trial in Prague, the purges in the GDR at the beginning of the 1950s) have entered into the traditions of Eastern European anti-Semitism; however, they play admittedly no particular role in the current manifestations. And yet, at the same time, one needs to keep in mind that a latent anti-Semitism also existed prior to *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. This suggests in any case the hypothesis that the old traditions, such as those rooted in Tsarist Russia or Polish clerical circles, have been revived and, together with a (weaker) more recent line of tradition stemming from the communist epoch, flow into many current attempts to create meaning and establish orientation. That animosity towards Jews plays a particular role in the process of producing identity in Eastern Europe due to its simple construction of anti-Semitic prejudices and its practically universal applicability seems plausible – as all the concrete examples to be dealt with in the following indicate.

The following considerations raise no claim to provide a systematic explanation or set final conclusions which would exclude further interpretations. What I wish to present here are far more initial attempts to order empirical material with the help of a few categories which have proved their worth in other fields of anti-Semitism research. In the self-definition of national majorities in Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism serves as a *leitmotif*. Acting both as a catalyst for fundamentalist nationalist political trends and ethnic egocentricity as well as functioning as a common denominator for anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, anti-communist and anti-Enlightenment movements, here anti-Jewish prejudice goes far beyond the mainly purely self-referential articulation of antipathy and reservation against a minority.

In Hungary, the political function of anti-Semitism is evident in the search for national identity, still determined by the trauma of the Treaty of Trianon, perhaps even more so than in other Eastern European states. Even if the phenomenon in Hungary is grasped solely as a form of cultural anti-Semitism, as a latent and coded prejudice, the excluding effect it generates, which simultaneously creates a feeling of community, is nonetheless considerable. Anti-Semitism plays a vital role in the attempt to establish a middle class supportive of the state that is Christian and characterised by Magyar national traditions.

The break up of the Soviet Union was accompanied by expectations and anxieties which were crystallised in formulas such as the 'Russian renaissance' and the 'Russo-phobia' of the dark Western powers. With the sudden demise of the communist ideology of unification, which coerced all peoples into a single Soviet folk within an internationally defined Soviet nation, explanations were now required for the rise and demise of the communist imperium. It would have been a wonder if the propagandists for the emerging nationalist cause had not resorted to the arsenal of historical myths, out of which explanations have been deployed ever since Peter the Great opened Russia to the West. Igor Šafarevič, renowned as a scholar and member of the opposition human rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, conjured an image of the dark Western powers as the forces responsible for Russia's historical fate, which he sees as a tragedy. Jewish and Freemason machinations are employed as metaphors for anxiety in the face of perceived threats – 'the Jews' are a mortal danger for Russia, he says in resorting to the irrational constructs of the nineteenth century, a claim betraying a clear parallel to the German self-pity characteristic of the Wilhelminian era.

The mobilisation of the old mechanisms for creating national identity and self-understanding, exploiting the discriminatory exclusion of minorities, are once more observable here; even the argumentation used follows traditional patterns and employs formulations like 'swamped with foreigners' and the 'corrosion of the social fabric'. 'Zionism' serves as a metaphor for a traditional, anti-rational, anti-intellectual and anti-Western model of explanation, whereby the Russian people are cast as a suffering subject that is to redeem itself by reflecting on its irrational vitality. Others even formulate their expectation of redemption, based on a harnessing and exploitation of animosity towards Jews, more drastically and aggressively, going so far as to announce that pogroms are necessary. Anti-Semitism is an essential component of the ideology espoused by the Pamjat' movement. The objectives the Russian-Orthodox popular movement sets, embrace 'the awakening of the national and intellectual self-consciousness of the Russians, the liberation of the homeland from the Judeo-Satanic occupation (judeo-sataninska okkupacija)', and finally the 'rebirth of Russia on the basis of its national and religious traditions'. The cessation of the semi-official discrimination of Jews in the Soviet Union and its satellite states, motivated by the 'anti-Zionist' ideology and executed on the administrative level, has thus not meant the end of anti-Semitism. On the contrary: confronted with economic crises and the loss of familiar structures and means of orientation, in the countries of the former Soviet Union, in Poland and in the Balkans the inherited national folklore anti-Semitism now serves as an instrument of communication for the respective majority to reach a common understanding. The mobilisation of a simplistic prejudice has the function of distracting attention from concrete problems and their causes, providing simple explanations for complex issues.

The anti-Semitism revived in Eastern Europe fulfils a variety of functions. The Jews are denounced as having been the driving force in the communist revolution, but also as agents of capitalism. They are allegedly to blame for the severe economic plight and the deplorable state of society. Antipathy to modernisation, democratisation and liberalisation is projected onto 'the Jews', and traditional atavistic resentments act as a catalyst in the search for a new national self-definition. The uneasiness felt about the Holocaust and the share of responsibility for the genocide plays a special role in some countries. For some time now we are familiar with defence and repression mechanisms, which have guilt and shame as their source. In Latvia and in the Ukraine, in Lithuania and Poland, effective ways of dealing and coping with such horrific elements of history need first to be identified and practised. It is possible that the refusal to face the Jewish fate will remain the norm; what is certain however, is that anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe forms a potential threat, and not just for Jews. One of the most persistent constructs of Islamic anti-Semitism is the notion that Jews possess too great an influence in the world, and that they exploit this influence to gain power over everyone else. The conspiracy fantasies conjuring plans of Jewish world dominion reach back into the Middle Ages, and they are always fashionable, whether it be in their old forms or in new guises.

The classical form of the legend claiming a Jewish world conspiracy is over one hundred years old; translated into numerous languages and readily available worldwide, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is the most widespread anti-Semitic pamphlet. The influence of this text is neither curbed by the fact that its argumentation is extremely irrational, nor by the research that has revealed, down to the very last detail, the construction of the tract to be based on a diverse array of literary sources. Circulated as a 'secret Jewish document' allegedly providing authentic and detailed proof of the conspiracy machinations of the Jews, for decades the courts have recognised and disclosed this text to be nothing other than a forgery, or even more precisely as a mystification; and yet, this is dismissed as being insignificant, or even as further proof for the irrefutable authenticity of the 'document'. We need to address the *Protocols* here because they have played a decisive role in Islamic propaganda for some time now and are available to a broad public through the internet. The *Protocols* are having an enormous impact on Islamic strategies against Israel. With increasing intensity they are being cited, printed and interpreted as 'proof' of a Zionist world conspiracy in Arabic and other media sources in the Islamic world. The *Protocols* are also to be found in the internet in the context of Islamic agitation.

The *Protocols* are aggressively deployed as a propaganda instrument by Radio Islam. Run by the Moroccan-born Ahmed Rami, this radio station located in the greater Stockholm area is not a very professional operation. Rami has lived since 1973 in Sweden, where he enjoys political asylum. According to his own account, he took part as a lieutenant in a putsch against King Hassan II in 1972

and was subsequently sentenced to death by a Moroccan court. As a radio station Radio Islam has at best a local importance; but as an institution espousing right-wing extremist and anti-Israeli propaganda focusing on the denial of the Holocaust and anti-Zionism, Radio Islam is a brand operating on a worldwide scale, continually extending its reach since 1996 as it established a multilingual internet presence. Ahmed Rami maintains close contact with the international neo-Nazi scene and propagates the denial of the Holocaust in connection with world conspiracy fantasies, according to which Israel and the Jews utilise the 'Holocaust lies' to control the world.

The *Protocols* play an important role in the internet presence of Radio Islam. In one article Ahmed Rami claims that 'Israel's politics confirm the authenticity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*', exploiting the traditional stereotypical accusation, the Jewish religion demands the undermining of the morals of non-Jewish societies: 'Again and again in the course of history the great spiritual leaders of humanity have thought about the essence of evil. They came to the conclusion that if the Devil exists, he would appear as depicted above. Many important thinkers also came to the conclusion that the Jewish Torah and the Talmud are the testament of Satan. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are a concrete embodiment of these Satanist writings. They are testimony of a precisely co-ordinated plan for our times.' The *Protocols* experienced an inexplicable renaissance after the Holocaust. In Eastern Europe, in Cairo or in Damascus, the irrational construct was revived as proof of Jewish striving for world dominion, until finally, as witnessed by the Hamas Covenant and the numerous internet presences, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* became a fighting myth for Islamic activists in their struggle against the state of Israel, and so also an all-powerful oath for forging an Islamic identity.

The speech delivered by the then outgoing Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, on 16 October 2003 during the 10th Islamic Summit Conference held at Putrajaya (Malaysia), which was received with great applause, provides an insight into the explosive force of a stereotypical imagination that serves both as an axiomatic conviction as well as an identity-forging guideline for action. The speech follows a skilfully contrived rhetorical scenario, in which incantation, lamentation, accusation, and appeal alternate. The basic tendency of this oratory performance – a standing ovation rewarded the speaker for his efforts – is self-pity and the setting of a signal for Holy War. The imploring opening tuned the audience into the speaker's sense of mission: the whole world is watching the political leaders of Islam, '1.3 billion Muslims, one-sixth of the world's population, are placing their hopes in us'. Mahathir painted the situation of the Islamic world in terms of a dismal and forbidding canvas, populated exclusively with victims, who despite their numerical strength and resources are condemned to remain powerless: 'Muslim *ummah* are treated with contempt and dishonour. Our religion is denigrated. Our holy places desecrated. Our countries are occupied.

Our people starved and killed.' The guilty are made out: 'The Muslims will forever be oppressed and dominated by the Europeans and the Jews.'

The accusation of guilt is then sharpened to focus exclusively on 'the Jews', who are assigned the decisive role of key wire-pullers in conspiracy theory argumentation: 'The Europeans killed six million Jews out of twelve million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them.' The accusation of guilt exploits traditional stereotypes and conspiracy fantasies. 'The Jews invented and successfully promoted Socialism, Communism, human rights and democracy so that persecutions would appear to be wrong, so they may enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have now gained control of the most powerful countries and they, this tiny community, have become a world power.' The speech climaxes in an appeal to the fighting qualities of Islam; Islam must now go on the attack against its oppressors, while simultaneously regenerating and modernising itself through a cultural, scientific, and political renewal. 'We need guns and rockets, bombs and warplanes, tanks and warships for our defence.' That is a call for war, proclaimed as a defence of religious and cultural values, as a means for overcoming an obsessive inferiority complex, all geared towards the goal of annihilating the Jews and the state of Israel. The speech given by the Malaysian Prime Minister exploits conspiracy fantasies for the purpose of a 'Holy War', the *jihad*; this obsessive ideology of *jihad* feeds on irrational patterns purporting to explain the world, appealing to fanatics who understand it as a guerrilla war against Western civilisation that is to be conducted through terror and assassinations.

Islamic anti-Semitism is not restricted to anti-Israeli attitudes and ideas. The prominent spiritual leader Mohamed Sayyid Tantawi, Grand Sheikh at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, exerts great influence as an authority on Sunni Islam that reaches far beyond Egypt. His book, *The Israelites in the Koran and the Sunna*, has attracted widespread readership. This book originates from his dissertation of 1966 and deals with the Palestinian conflict from a religious perspective. The argumentation is nonetheless to a great extent racist, particularly where Tantawi speaks of the immutable characteristics of the Jews, for example their 'greed for life and the earthly of the here and now' and their 'excessive egoism', where he cites Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and where he characterises the Jews as the cause for the destruction of morality, religion, and spiritual values. His claim, whereby he tries to harness the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a reliable source, that the Jews were responsible for the French and Russian Revolutions, is to be found again in the Hamas Covenant. With his bestseller, the spiritual leader Tantawi is one of the mentors of an Islamic terrorism that for some time now is not just concerned with the issue of Palestine, but indeed has absorbed and exploits traditional anti-Semitism of European provenance in the service of a fundamentalist hatred of Jews.

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