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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

Modern Languages

**Perceptions of Holocaust Memory:  
A Comparative study of Public Reactions to Art about the  
Holocaust at the Jewish Museum in New York and the Israel  
Museum in Jerusalem  
(1990s-2000s)**

by

**Diana I. Popescu**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2012



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON  
ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
Modern Languages

Doctor of Philosophy

PERCEPTIONS OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
PUBLIC REACTIONS TO ART EXHIBITIONS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST  
AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM IN NEW YORK AND THE ISRAEL MUSEUM  
IN JERUSALEM  
(1990s-2000s)

by Diana I. Popescu

This thesis investigates the changes in the Israeli and Jewish-American public perception of Holocaust memory in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and offers an elaborate comparative analysis of public reactions to art about the Holocaust. Created by the inheritors of Holocaust memory, second and third-generation Jews in Israel and America, the artworks titled *Your Colouring Book* (1997) and *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (1998), and the group exhibition *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* (2002) were hosted at art institutions emblematic of Jewish culture, namely the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and the Jewish Museum in New York.

Unlike artistic representation by first generation, which tends to adopt an empathetic approach by scrutinizing experiences of Jewish victimhood, these artworks foreground images of the Nazi perpetrators, and thus represent a distancing and defamiliarizing approach which triggered intense media discussions in each case. The public debates triggered by these exhibitions shall constitute the domain for analyzing the emergent counter-positions on Holocaust memory of post-war generations of Jews and for delineating their ideological views and divergent identity stances vis-à-vis Holocaust memory.

This thesis proposes a critical discourse analysis of public debates carried out by leading Jewish intellectuals, politicians and public figures in Israel and in America. It suggests that younger generations developed a global discourse which challenges a dominant meta-narrative of Jewish identity that holds victimization and a sacred dimension of the Holocaust as its fundamental tenets.

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Diana I. Popescu declare that the thesis entitled

*Perceptions of Holocaust Memory: A Comparative study of Public Reactions to Art about the Holocaust at the Jewish Museum in New York and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (1990s-2000s)*

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- ☐ this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- ☐ where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- ☐ where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- ☐ where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- ☐ I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- ☐ where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- ☐ parts of this work have been published as:  
Article: 'Teach the Holocaust to the Children. The educational and performative dimension of *Your Colouring Book* – A wandering installation', in *PaRDes, Journal of the Association of Jewish Studies*, 16 (Potsdam: University of Potsdam, 2010), pp. 134-153.

Signed: .....

Date:.....

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## Introduction

In January 1997, the Israel Museum showcased Ram Katzir's audience-participatory installation, *Your Colouring Book*, under the provisional title *Within the Line*.<sup>1</sup> Roe Rosen's installation *Live and Die as Eva Braun* followed in November 1997. In March 2002, the Jewish Museum in New York opened *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, a group exhibition which gathered together works of art of Jewish and non-Jewish artists. Rather than depicting scenes of Jewish victimization, these works of art allude to the world of the Nazi perpetrators. Even before their opening, *Your Colouring Book* and *Live and Die as Eva Braun* turned into subjects of public debate in Israel. The artists, representatives of the Israel Museum, politicians and Holocaust survivors engaged in public discussions that received considerable media coverage. In the case of *Mirroring Evil* exhibition, the debates included the participation of leading members of the Jewish communities, survivors of the Holocaust, art critics and scholars. The fact that the public debates occurred in Israel and in the United States is not a coincidence. These geographical spaces are homes to the largest Jewish communities and, more prominently, they bear witness to important socio-cultural and religious changes in contemporary Jewish life. The Holocaust has been integrated within the countries' national narratives and it has been offered a pivotal role in defining Jewish secular identities.

In the course of this thesis, I shall be guided by the following research questions: 1) How do the public debates about the exhibitions contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust's role in shaping the identity of younger generations of Jews? 2) What are the views and standpoints of the members of debate in regard to Holocaust memory? 3) How do the Jewish museums position themselves vis-à-vis the emerging

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<sup>1</sup> For the exhibition at the Israel Museum, Katzir decided to change the title of his art installation from the more generic *Your Colouring Book* to *Within the Line*. Nevertheless, the Israeli media employed the generic title to refer to the exhibition. In this thesis, I shall also use the generic title *Your Colouring Book*.

discourses about the Holocaust? 4) What are the differences and the similarities in the perception of the Holocaust of younger generations of Jews in Israel and in America?

Despite the increased scholarly attention given to Holocaust representation in the visual arts,<sup>2</sup> studies generally do not focus on the significant changes in the curatorial interpretation of visual art about the Holocaust, nor is there research which looks at how the general public has responded to these changes. My close analysis of public debates prompted by the art exhibitions at the Jewish Museum in New York, and at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem aims to fill a gap in this area of research.

This endeavour to investigate responses to art about the Holocaust from a comparative angle represents a novelty for Jewish art studies. Despite the similarities in the public reactions triggered by the exhibitions, there has been no scholarly interest in exploring what the comparison tells us about the nature of the Jewish relationship with the memory of the Holocaust.

The public's reaction to *Mirroring Evil* exhibition has drawn the attention of scholars such as Reesa Greenberg and Laura S. Levitt.<sup>3</sup> Greenberg, for instance, outlined the negative responses of the New York art critics and of the Holocaust survivors. She suggested that the exhibition posed cogent questions, but they did not capture the

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<sup>2</sup> A few representative examples include Ziva Amishai Maisel's *Depiction and Interpretation. The Influence of the Holocaust in the Visual arts*, (Oxford: Pergamon, 1993), and Matthew Baigell's and Milly Heyd's *Complex identities: Jewish consciousness and modern art*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Reesa Greenberg, 'Mirroring Evil, Evil Mirrored, Timing, Trauma and Temporary Exhibitions', in Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans (eds.), *Museums after modernism: strategies of engagement*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 98-112. Laura S. Levitt's review 'Refracted Visions. A critique of *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*', in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 6 (2) (2005), pp.199-126. This review, explains Levitt, asks 'questions about how the controversy surrounding this show shaped the way it was seen. It uses the notion of refraction to help explain why it remains so difficult for Americans and Jews alike to visualize evil in our own midst, especially after September 11, 2001. Entering into the space of the exhibition, it then demonstrates how particular works of contemporary art can make both visual and visceral the traces of Nazi aesthetics in contemporary culture', p. 199.

interest of the Holocaust survivors, who could not relate to them as they continued to be marked by trauma. Furthermore, Greenberg wondered whether the timing of the exhibition, six months after the attack on the World Trade Centre buildings, could explain the outburst of criticism from an already traumatised American audience. More recent references to *Mirroring Evil* have been made by Carolyn J. Dean in *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (2005) and by Matthew Boswell, in his study *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Museum and Film* (2012).<sup>4</sup> None of these scholars aimed to place the exhibition within a comparative context of Jewish Holocaust memorialization in Israel and in the Diaspora. Nor, for that matter, have they attempted to examine what the ensuing public debate revealed about Jewish perceptions of the Holocaust. With the exception of Ariella Azoulay and Tami Katz-Freiman,<sup>5</sup> critics in Israel remained silent about the significance of the Israeli public's reaction to the art exhibitions at the Israel Museum.

By mapping out the similarities but also the differences between the American and the Israeli reactions, I aim to place them within a global context of the Jewish changing relationship with the memory of the Holocaust. Through its comparative approach to Holocaust memory, this study echoes Daniel Levy's and Natan Sznajder's *The Holocaust and memory in the global age* (2006).<sup>6</sup> Unlike the latter, this thesis undertakes case study analyses as a way of exploring the emergence of a

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in literature, popular music and film*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6. Drawing on Gillian Rose's concept of 'Holocaust piety', Boswell coined the term 'Holocaust impiety' to describe representations of the Holocaust that transgress certain limits, as is the case of *Mirroring Evil* exhibition. Carolyn J. Dean in *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), refers to the exhibition in the context of a discussion about the 'pornography' of images representing the Holocaust. She assembles a wide range of examples, identifying charges of 'pornography' voiced by critics of *Mirroring Evil*. Dean, however, does not dwell on *Mirroring Evil*. Instead, she chooses to focus on this term, arguing that it has been used imprecisely, and that its popularity is explained by its vagueness.

<sup>5</sup> Ariella Azoulay, 'The Return of the Repressed', in Silberstein J. Laurence, Shelley Hornstein, Laura Levitt (eds.), *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 89-120, and Tami Katz-Freiman's "'Don't Touch My Holocaust': Analyzing the Barometer of Responses: Israeli Artists Challenging the Holocaust Taboo', in *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*, pp. 120-137.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and memory in the global age*, Assenka Oksiloff (trans.), (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

specifically Jewish perception of Holocaust memory shared by younger generations of Jews in Israel and in America.

The absence of Europe in this study needs to be explained. Art production on the topic of the Holocaust was significant in the European context, especially in countries such as Germany, Poland and Britain. On various occasions, the European publics reacted promptly to Holocaust-related artistic representations. One could mention here the works by young Polish artists Piotr Uklański and Rafał Betlejewski that prompted public reactions in Poland<sup>7</sup> and in Britain.<sup>8</sup> Germany witnessed an intense artistic preoccupation with the subject. Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer<sup>9</sup> assumed a leading position as the most prominent artists dealing with the theme of coming to terms with Germany's past. Kiefer's work, *Occupations* from the 1960s in which the artist, impersonating Hitler, photographed himself in various European locations that were occupied by the Nazis was seen as controversial, and triggered considerable public discussion. More recently, the group exhibition *Wonderyears. New Reflections on Nazism and the Shoah in Israel* (April 2003) also attracted some media attention.<sup>10</sup> The exhibition took place at an art gallery known for its thought-provoking exhibitions, *The New Society for the Visual Arts* (NKBG) in Kreuzberg, Berlin. An Israeli-German co-production, the exhibition showcased works by young

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<sup>7</sup> Rafał Betlejewski's public art projects *I miss you, Jew* and *The Burning Barn* (2010) prompted discussion about the nostalgia felt by some members of Polish society for the lost Jewish life and heritage. See Dominika Maslikowska, 'Poles pay tribute to "missing" Jews', retrieved from <http://www.vosizneias.com/47666/2010/01/23/warsaw-poland-poles-pay-tribute-to-missing-jews/> (accessed on 20.8. 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Piotr Uklański's exhibition 'The Nazis' hosted at the Photographer's Gallery in London, August 1996, displayed 160 film stills of Hollywood actors dressed in Nazi uniforms. The exhibition received negative reviews. In order to preempt further criticism the Gallery decided to display another exhibition on photographs by Robert Capa, a Jewish war photographer, and a refugee from the Nazis. The Gallery appears to have carefully planned for the two exhibitions to coincide, attempting to show the stark contrast between the horror of the war and the glamour of war as depicted in film.

<sup>9</sup> See Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and art after Auschwitz*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Several articles appeared in the German press among which Jens Muhling's 'Pastrama for all. Wonderyears, Third Generation Israelis, A Berlin Talk', retrieved from <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/art772,2246074>, and Oliver Heilwagen's 'Let me be a Hitler', retrieved from <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/art772,2246051>, (accessed on 12.11. 2011).

Israeli artists who attempted to reflect upon the role of Nazism and the Shoah in Israel.

Sweden would be an interesting case study, too. Graffiti artist Dan Park, for instance, was especially preoccupied with the public's reactions to the display of Hitler-related images in the public space. Indeed, many Swedes left their responses scribbled on Park's graffiti images, which were photographed by Park and displayed on his personal webpage.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the abovementioned artworks received some media coverage, they did not lead to public debates. Despite the lack of public discourse in the European context, one cannot ignore that many artists contributing to *Mirroring Evil* exhibition are European as is the case of Polish artists Zbigniew Libera and Piotr Ukleński. Indeed, the latter has presented the exhibition *The Nazis* in many European countries. Despite the numerous opportunities offered by the 'travelling art', the European public appears to have been reluctant to engage in public discussions. In stark contrast, the United States and Israel bore witness to wide-ranging public debates which involved many Jews. Their 'discourses' about Holocaust memory shall be discussed at length in this thesis.

From a historical point of view, the late 1990s and early 2000s – the period I am focusing on – witnessed the coming of age of the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. The public debates prompted by the exhibitions therefore also included voices of this youngest generation and, more importantly, made apparent how Holocaust memory continues to impact on their identities.

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<sup>11</sup> See detailed studies about Dan Park by art historian Tanja Schult in Swedish: 'Enfant Terrible gatukonstnären Dan Park' in Eva Kingsepp (ed.) *Nazityskland, andra världskriget och Förintelsen i svensk populärkultur*, (Carlsson Verlag, forthcoming 2012), my translation: 'Enfant Terrible Street Artist Dan Park' in *Nazi Germany, the World War II and the Holocaust in Swedish popular culture*.

The methodological approach I chose, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of public statements, editorials and op-eds authored by political figures and the intellectual elite of the Jewish communities in America and in Israel is particularly novel in the field of Holocaust studies. Whilst Ruth Wodak has employed CDA to interrogate national identity narratives in the Austrian public sphere,<sup>12</sup> to my knowledge no researcher has yet utilised this analytical tool to examine Holocaust memory and identity narratives within a Jewish-Diaspora and an Israeli context. My analysis of the public debates is based on theory about discourse proposed by Michel Foucault, and on principles of CDA outlined by sociolinguists Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak. The latter defines this methodology as a way ‘to uncover manipulative manoeuvres in the media and politics, to heighten awareness of the rhetorical strategies used to impose certain beliefs, values and goals’.<sup>13</sup>

The term ‘discourse’ originates in the field of linguistics, more specifically in John L. Austin’s theory of ‘speech acts’.<sup>14</sup> Austin argues that the function of language is not only descriptive, but also performative. To utter a sentence means not only to say something, but to perform a certain kind of action. Hence, language is not only a tool used to describe reality, but a practice by means of which one constructs it. In the 1970s Foucault also referred to the performative function of language which he termed ‘discourse’. He proposed the study of ‘discourse’ as a way to understand the power relations that govern and structure society. Foucault linked discourse with power and described it as a relation between people, which is negotiated in each interaction and is never fixed or stable.<sup>15</sup> Its function is to shape society’s ways of talking, thinking and acting. In other words, discourse refers to specific ways of talking and writing which reflect certain ways of thinking.

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<sup>12</sup> Ruth Wodak, *The discursive construction of national identity*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> John L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

<sup>15</sup> See introduction by Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace in their study *A Foucault primer: discourse, power and the subject*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 1-14.



Drawing on Foucault's suggestion that specific ways of talking and writing reflect certain ways of thinking and contribute to the constitution of a meta-narrative and ideology, I am undertaking a detailed analysis of the viewpoints on the Holocaust promoted by participants in the public discussions. The media, the forum where these discussions have taken place, offered particular points of view which shaped the public's understanding of the art exhibitions, and contributed to the formation of public opinion. The media will be viewed as a pre-eminent institution of the Israeli and Jewish-American public sphere, which influenced the public opinion of younger generations.

Last but not the least, this study represents the direct result of a close investigation of archival materials held at the Archives of the Jewish Museum and of the Israel Museum, and at the University of Southampton Parkes Library. My examination of the public debates is inspired by a range of sources including newspaper articles, transcriptions of radio and television programmes, museum reports and statements. Chapter three, for example, contains excerpts from articles and transcriptions of discussions on the Israeli radio and television that have been translated by me from Hebrew.

The analysis also incorporates semi-structured interviews which I conducted with several participants of the public debates including curators Norman Kleeblatt in New York, Suzanne Landau and Yudit Caplan in Jerusalem, artists Ram Katzir and Roece Rosen, and Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, director of The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership also known as *CLAL*. Their first-hand accounts enabled me to shed light upon certain aspects of the organisation of the exhibitions and of the development of the debates that were hardly mentioned in the media.

## Chapter Outline

**Chapter One** introduces the reader to the art exhibitions at the Israel Museum and at the Jewish Museum and situates them within a historical development of artistic engagement with the Holocaust. I argue that a dichotomy between a ‘historical’ and an ‘imaginative’ approach to the study of the Holocaust has been constructed in response to Theodor W. Adorno’s ‘dictum’ that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.<sup>16</sup> Adorno’s reflections on the possibility of art after ‘Auschwitz’ have been employed in academic discussions both to discredit and to validate art’s potential to reveal aspects of the Holocaust which might be overlooked by the historical approach.

If during and immediately after the Holocaust art was seen as contributing to historical evidence of the persecution of the Jews, art created by the children of survivors belongs to the imaginative approach, and is perceived as a means of commemoration of the victims. This chapter illustrates – with examples of art exhibitions from the USA and Israel – how, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a shift took place in the manner in which art curators engaged with the Holocaust as a subject. This period witnessed the departure from a focus on the victim in the representation of the Holocaust to which viewers were invited to respond in an emotional empathetic manner. This was replaced by a more detached representational approach which uses devices such as defamiliarization by focusing on images of the Nazi perpetrators. I argue that whereas the victim-centred approach was used as a form of commemorating the historical event, the defamiliarizing approach is designed to reflect upon how the Holocaust is being commemorated.

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<sup>16</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, Samuel and Shierry Weber (trans.), (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), p. 34.

**Chapter Two** includes an explanation of the theoretical underpinning of this project, and a historical overview of the development of the roles of the media and the museum and their impact on people's perception of past events and of their personal connection to them. The theoretical approach centres on the concept of the 'public sphere' as developed by Jürgen Habermas. Of central interest is how the media (including press and TV) and the museum shape the public's perceptions of a particular historical event. I contend that both institutions have, as a common denominator – performativity. A concept introduced by Judith Butler in her discussion of gendered identity,<sup>17</sup> and developed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her reflection on museums as agents of display,<sup>18</sup> performativity will inform my analysis of the debates at the Jewish museums.

In this chapter, I suggest that engagement in public discussion plays an important role in the formation of the identity of the participants. The concept of performativity provides us with an understanding of various aspects of the museums' curatorial practices, including strategies of display. By displaying art exhibitions, the Jewish museums encourage a kind of 'performance', as it is through their display that the exhibitions gain meaning. The Israeli and the American-Jewish participants in public debates present their views and opinions and, therefore, publicly 'perform' their Jewish identities in relation to memory of the Holocaust.

I begin my analysis of the public debates with an **Interlude** to chapters three and four, which introduces the concept of 'generation' and places it within a historical-cultural context. More precisely, this section outlines the Israeli and American perceptions of the children of Holocaust survivors, the so-called second generation. It is worth remembering that the survivors have shaped post-war Jewish identities in Israel as well as in America and their lives and experiences before and after the

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<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler, 'Language, Power and the Strategies of Displacement' in *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 33-45.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 3-4.

Holocaust have been extensively researched by scholars.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, there is a considerable body of literature which focuses on the children of Jewish Holocaust survivors. From scholarly works that deal with the individual, social and political implications of the transmission of trauma and traumatic memory, to literary and creative works that reflect the experiences of growing up carrying the burden of the parents' trauma, much has been written on how children of survivors relate to their parents' experiences.<sup>20</sup> Less consideration, however, has been given to the distinct roles that the second and, especially, the third generation have played in shaping Israeli and American-Jewish post-Holocaust identities. How do the descendants of survivors in Israel and in the USA differ in the ways in which they formulate their own public image as a generation? What are the experiences, memories and worldviews that inform their Jewish identities in these geographical contexts?

**Chapters Three and Four** are meant to address these questions through a critical discourse analysis of the public debates in Israel and in America, respectively. Each chapter starts with an outline of the debates; identifies recurring themes, and distinguishes between arguments brought in favour, and those against the defamiliarizing approach adopted by the artists and endorsed by the two museums.

Assuming the role of mediator among the dissenting voices of the members of the debate, I address two distinctive perspectives on Jewish identities that have become dominant in the aftermath of the Holocaust: Jewish identities shaped by the belief in the sacred nature of the Holocaust and the sense that being a Jew is intrinsically connected to being a victim. As moderator of a discussion between generations, I

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Idith Zertal's *From Catastrophe to Power. Holocaust Survivors and the emergence of Israel*, (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998) and William Helmreich's *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Scholarship within the field of Holocaust memory transmission and second-generation identity includes the works of Marianne Hirsch, Dora Apel and Eva Fogelman in America, and of Dina Wardi and of Dan Bar-On in Israel. I shall address the concept of second generation in my analysis chapters, drawing on studies by Fogelman, Wardi and Bar-On.

endeavour to let the members of the debate have their own say about their relation to the Holocaust. In addition to being a mediator, I shall also assume the position of equidistant critic. In this role, I attempt to make apparent the multifaceted aspects that inform these individuals' understanding of what it means to be an inheritor of Holocaust memory; and to show that whilst younger generations of Jews are committed to remembering the past not all members concur on how the traumatizing past should be discussed, or on how the Holocaust continues to define their identities. The exhibitions received different levels of media coverage. The difference in the amount of source materials available on each of the exhibitions is reflected in the space allocated to the analysis of the public debates. The reader shall, thus, note that chapters three and four somewhat differ in length.

The **Third Chapter** examines the opinions and views of the Israeli members of the public debates. In Israel, the radio proved to be the main platform for the development of the public debate. This chapter looks at the roles played by political and governmental leaders in disseminating an identity discourse based on the notion of victimisation. A distinct ideological clash between a collective/national and an individual perception of the role of the Holocaust will be made apparent in my analysis of the public debates.

A significant part of **Chapter Four** is devoted to the critical observation of the different ideological positions vis-à-vis the Holocaust among American Jews. This chapter reviews the public image that members of the second generation have constructed for themselves. It goes on to suggest that the conception of Jewish identity centred on Holocaust victimization, though predominant in the Jewish-American sphere, is not necessarily unchallenged. Furthermore, it includes critical discourse analyses of articles of leading figures who opposed the exhibition: Elie Wiesel and Menachem Rosensaft, and of key supporters of *Mirroring Evil* such as Michael Berenbaum and Rabbi Brad Hirschfield.

My **Fifth Chapter** discusses the differences and the similarities in the curatorial approaches of each museum, and reflects upon the role of the museums in the development of new ways of dealing with Holocaust memory. Furthermore, it places the public debates within a global understanding of Jewish life in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and underlines the distinct identities of younger generations of Jews in Israel and in America and their shared or divergent attitudes to the Holocaust.

## Chapter 1

### Visual Art after the Holocaust in Israel and in the United States

#### I

#### Theodor W. Adorno's 'dictum' and the Changes in the Academic Understanding of Art engagement with the Holocaust

It has become a tradition in academic practice to initiate discussions on art engagement with the Holocaust by invoking Theodor W. Adorno's statement 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'. The sentence is part of Adorno's concluding remark in his essay on 'Cultural Criticism and Society' written in 1949. The context in which it appears is as follows: 'Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today'.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the essay does not tackle the issue of the Holocaust, proposing instead a critical reflection upon the meaning of culture in the aftermath of the Second World War, 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' was given the status of a 'dictum', and became a frequent quote in academic discussions on the limits of Holocaust representation. It is important to note that, on the basis of this dictum, an opposition was constructed within academic discourse, between a historical and an imaginative approach to the study of the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> Adorno's statement was used to both reinforce and to deconstruct this dichotomy. The ways in which Adorno's dictum has been instrumentalised shall be discussed in further detail in what follows.

In the early post-war decades, Adorno's statement was employed to denounce poetry and by extension any artistic representation as a barbaric practice. Representing the

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, Samuel and Shierry Weber (trans.), (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Langer in *Using and abusing the Holocaust*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), and Ernst Van Alphen in *Caught by history: Holocaust effects in contemporary art, literature, and theory*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997) also comment on this opposition.

Holocaust in an artistic way posed ethical questions, since artists or writers were thought to produce, using trivializing imaginative techniques such as stylistic and rhetorical conventions, a distorted image of the Holocaust, which distracted from historical understanding of the event.<sup>3</sup> The objections to an imaginative approach relied on the notion that art and literature represented forms of enjoyment and distracted from the real world, yielding an aesthetic pleasure that could not constitute an appropriate way of responding to the Holocaust. 'This explains why literary representations are especially valued if they make people think of literature as little as possible. The writing must be bare and realistic. Fictionalizing is taboo, while ego-documents, personal testimonies modelled on journalistic or documentary accounts, are considered to be the most appropriate genre for representing the Holocaust', remarks art historian Ernst Van Alphen. Another objection to artistic representations of the Holocaust stems from a widespread assumption that any form of art has a redemptive function. According to this reasoning, Holocaust art is deemed improper as it 'leads us away from the historical reality that must be imprinted on the memory in all its horror'.<sup>4</sup>

Both objections are based on Adorno's dictum, and have paved the way for a general suspicion against the engagement with the Holocaust in the visual arts that is replicated in the lack of academic interest in the topic. Despite the considerable number of artistic representations, it was only in the 1980s that academic writings dealing specifically with the Holocaust started to appear. Among the first assessments of visual representation of the Holocaust is Mary S. Constanza's study *The Living Witness. Art in the Concentration Camps and Ghettos* (1982), which showcases the works of Holocaust survivors, who have documented, in visual form, their experiences as inmates of Terezin concentration camp. Other publications focus on individual artists, such as *David Olère. A painter in the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz* (1989) and *Alfred*

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<sup>3</sup> See Berel Lang, *Holocaust representation: art within the limits of history and ethics*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Van Alphen, pp. 18-20.



*Kantor. An Artist's Journal of the Holocaust* (1987).<sup>5</sup> Representations of the Holocaust created in the camps served as historical evidence and as a form of bearing witness to the catastrophe. The Holocaust survivor and artist Karol Konieczny suggested that these artworks are 'a living and shocking document of a world of horror and torment'.<sup>6</sup> Until the 1980s, the works of survivors were viewed as testimonies that contribute to the historical understanding of the Holocaust, and not as examples of an artistic commitment to represent the Holocaust.

By the late 1970s a new generation of artists had grown up and thus the 1980s bear witness to an increasing number of visual artworks created by the sons and daughters of the Holocaust survivors, who chose visual art as a means to respond to the effects of an event they have not personally experienced. For the post-war generation, the Holocaust can only be remembered through the stories that the parents have passed down to them in the form of diaries or memoirs, or through the countless novels, poems of the Holocaust, photographs, or video testimonies. James Young introduced the term 'vicarious past'<sup>7</sup> to explain this generation's mediated connection to the event, and argues that there is a distinct boundary between the works of the survivors and those created by the next generation. While the survivors' 'language' testified to their experiences of the Holocaust, their children's art testifies to their 'mediated experience' of the event. Thus, their artistic representations could no longer be regarded as historical testimony. Instead, American art historians Mathew Baigell and Stephen C. Feinstein suggest that second-generation visual art is 'an appropriate entry

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<sup>5</sup> Mary S. Costanza, *The living witness: art in the concentration camps and ghettos*, (New York: Free Press, 1982), Serge Klarsfeld, *David Olère, 1902-1985: un peintre au Sonderkommando à Auschwitz: l'œil du témoin*, (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1989), John Wykert, *The book of Alfred Kantor: an artist's journal of the Holocaust*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton, *Art of the Holocaust*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1981), p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> James E. Young, 'Introduction', in *At Memory's Edge. After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 1-11.

for answering questions of memory, absence, presence and identity' and a 'means of commemorating and suggesting new insights into human suffering'.<sup>8</sup>

With the coming of age of the second generation, the function of visual art shifted from art as historical evidence of the reality of 'Auschwitz', to art as an imaginative form of commemoration of loss. This shift in the perception of visual art, as part of an imaginative approach to the Holocaust, was directly influenced by the debates on the limits of the textual representation of the Holocaust taking place in the academic discussions of the late 1980s.

The opposition between the imaginative and the historical approach was questioned by an increasing number of scholars such as Hayden White, Berel Lang and Saul Friedländer. In his essay 'The representation of Evil: Ethical content as literary form',<sup>9</sup> Lang pits literature against the historical approach of documentary realism. He emphasizes how the historical approach, notwithstanding its fidelity to 'factuality' uses figurative language including metaphor, to explain situations that cannot be expressed literally. Lang suggests that with reference to the Holocaust, figurative expression is necessary as part of a cognitive endeavour to make sense of something which transgresses the limits of human comprehension.

Hayden White, too, draws attention to how narrative and stylistic devices are employed in historical writing including that of the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup> White challenges the truth claims of traditional historical writings and argues that our versions of historical reality are in part determined by narrative construction. A good example is Art

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen C. Feinstein, 'Art after Auschwitz', in Harry James Cargas (ed.), *Problems unique to the Holocaust*, (Lexington Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), pp. 160-166.

<sup>9</sup> Berel Lang, 'The representation of Evil: Ethical content as literary form' in *Act and Idea in the Nazi genocide*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 117-165.

<sup>10</sup> See Hayden White, *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), and 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', in Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the limits of representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 37-53.

Spiegelman who tells the story of his father's experience as a Holocaust victim in *Maus, A Survivor's Tale* by using the rather unconventional device of the comic strip. White uses this example to illustrate the erroneous opposition between the historical and imaginative approach to Holocaust representation. The scholar praises this work as a 'masterpiece of stylization, figuration and allegorization', conveying a 'particularly ironic and bewildered view of the Holocaust, but it is at the same time one of the most moving narrative accounts of it that I know'.<sup>11</sup>

In his introduction to *Probing the limits of representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (1992) Saul Friedländer confirms the need for a 'new discourse' of Holocaust representation and looks at literature and art for suggestions.<sup>12</sup> Even though Friedländer reminds us of the necessity to distinguish between fiction and history when extreme events such as the Holocaust are concerned, he agrees with Hayden White's suggestion that the search for the truth of the Holocaust should not 'kill the possibility of art – on the contrary, it requires it for its transmission, for its realization in our consciousness as witnesses'.<sup>13</sup>

Following this line of reasoning, Van Alphen also condemns the fact that the 'imaginative discourse' had been robbed of its power to transmit knowledge, which had previously been allocated to a historical discourse of the Holocaust. Van Alphen argues that the hierarchical opposition between history and imagination was replaced by another opposition, that between 'objective cognitive remembrance versus aesthetic pleasure', and stresses that this opposition was 'not justified or legitimised by Adorno's reasoning'.<sup>14</sup> The art historian therefore proposes a new interpretation of Adorno's 'dictum', so as to emphasize the centrality of the 'imaginative' approach including art engagement as a valid form of Holocaust commemoration. Instead of

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<sup>11</sup> White, in *Probing the limits of representation*, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> Friedländer, 'Introduction' in *Probing the limits of representation*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> White, *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> Van Alphen, p. 18.

being conceptualised as polar opposites, the ‘imaginative’ and the historical approach should be recognised as mutually supportive forms of Holocaust remembrance.

Another notable attempt to reinterpret the ‘dictum’ and to place it within the context of Adorno’s critique is the subject of the essay by the German critic Klaus Hoffman, ‘Poetry after Auschwitz. Adorno’s Dictum’ (2005).<sup>15</sup> Hoffman reminds us that Adorno revisited the thesis of the ‘impossibility’ of writing poetry after Auschwitz on several occasions. In his essay ‘Engagement’ (1965) Adorno emphasised the dialectical nature of his proposition arguing in favour of art, while at the same time declaring its inadmissibility. The philosopher objected to the possibility to derive aesthetic pleasure from artistic representations of the Holocaust, but did not deny the possibility of representation itself:

When the Holocaust is turned into an image [...] for all its harshness and discordance, it is as though the embarrassment one feels before the victims were being violated. The victims are turned into works of art, tossed up to be gobbled up by the world that did them in. The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. [...] The aesthetic stylistic principle, and even the chorus’ solemn prayer, make the unthinkable appear to have some meaning, it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed.

According to Adorno, an injustice is done to the victims when one attempts to render the unthinkable in artistic form, however he stressed that ‘no art that avoided the victims could stand up to the demands of justice’, since ‘even the sound of desperation pays tribute to a heinous affirmation. Works of a lesser status than the highest are readily accepted, part of a process of working through the past’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Klaus Hoffman, ‘Poetry after Auschwitz – Adorno’s Dictum’, in *German Life and Letters*, 58 (2 April, 2005), pp. 182-94.

<sup>16</sup> Theodor Adorno, ‘Engagement’, in Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), Shierry Weber Nicholsen (trans.), *Notes to Literature*, (2) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991-92), p. 88.

In *Negative Dialectics* (1966) Adorno dispelled the doubts about the impossibility of artistic representation, acknowledging the importance of art to keep the Holocaust from being forgotten. He thus refuted his former dictum: 'Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems'.<sup>17</sup> Alphen and Hoffman's reinterpretation of Adorno's 'dictum' reinforces the shift in the understanding of art engagement with the Holocaust. Initially seen as historical evidence of the concentration camp, it became a form of commemoration employed by the younger generation that had grown up in the shadow of the Holocaust.

The encyclopaedic study, *Depiction and Interpretation. The Influence of the Holocaust in the Visual arts* (1993) of the Israeli art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels constitutes a first academic endeavour to analyse the visual creations of both survivors and their offspring as a form of bearing witness to the catastrophe. Maisels looked at themes, style and imagery, and established an iconography of Jewish suffering identifying the images which give emphatic meaning to the works of art. Among the recurrent images, the art historian counts the barbed wire, the tattooed number, the crematorium chimney, the smoke, symbols of destruction and devastation, such as relics or remains, and crucifixion to suggest Jewish agony. One of the strategies employed to convey a sense of loss is the use of empty clothing or objects that represent relics of the victims. Maisels offers the example of painter Bedrich Fritta, a survivor of Theresienstadt, who depicted suitcases and bundles near a barbed-wire fence to convey the disappearance of the owners of these objects, while the Auschwitz survivor Elza Pollak constructed ceramic sculptures consisting of a pile of casts of old shoes of men, women and children, and named the work *All that remained*.

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<sup>17</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E.B. Ashton (trans.), (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 362.

Maisels' analysis of works spanning nearly forty decades, from the 1940s until the mid-1980s reveals the pervasiveness of a form of artistic representation that foregrounds the suffering of the Jewish people and calls for the viewer's empathy. This representational approach focuses on the experiences of Holocaust victims and promotes empathy as a form of commemoration of their endurance and suffering. The primary function of this artistic approach is to commemorate the Holocaust. For example, commemoration is present through the feeling of nostalgia and compassion for the missing Jews rendered by second generation artist Shimon Attie, in *Writings on the Wall* (1993). The artist projects onto the empty walls of the former Jewish quarter in Berlin photographs depicting the erstwhile Jewish residents in various situations of their daily lives. Natan Nuchi, on the other hand, contemplates the absence of Jews in his series of life-size works, *Untitled* (1994), by painting ethereal figures floating in space.

The effect that this approach exerts on the audience was investigated by art historian Dora Apel. Visual art, Apel explains, affects its viewers 'in ways that are non-narrative, and non-cognitive, in other words, in affective and emotional ways that are unexpected, sometimes uncomfortable, raising contradictory and unresolved feelings'. Its aim is to drive the spectators towards forms of 're-enactment' of traumas they have never experienced. Apel draws attention to the possibility that this representational mode, which relies on images of victimhood, runs the risk of turning into 'simple repetition-compulsion, in an endless and unproductive identification with the victims' and asks how this mode makes sense for the future generations.<sup>18</sup> I will further reflect upon Apel's observation by investigating the developments in the artistic engagement with the Holocaust in the two geographical locations of significance for Jewish history: Israel, the reclaimed homeland of the Jewish people,

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<sup>18</sup> Dora Apel, *Memory Effects, The Holocaust and the art of secondary witnessing*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 3-4.

and the United States that has emerged as an important centre of Jewish Diasporic life.

## II

### **The Shift from an Empathetic to a Detached artistic representation of the Holocaust in Israel and in America**

It is common knowledge that Holocaust commemoration is a well-established practice in Israel and the United States. The opening of Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, in 1953 as the national institution for retelling the story of the Jewish persecution, or as Dalia Ofer claims, as an 'agent of memory',<sup>19</sup> and the institutionalisation of the Holocaust Memorial Day have contributed to the forging of a Holocaust consciousness among Israel's post-Holocaust generations. Likewise, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, opened in 1993, is suggestive of the centrality of the Holocaust in America. Moreover, the burgeoning of popular cultural products, especially films, about the Holocaust illustrates what critic Hilene Flanzbaum has called the 'Americanization of the Holocaust', referring to the appropriation of this event as part of the American cultural consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Academic interest, in both Israel and the United States has been geared mainly towards the study of textual or cinematic cultural representations. It is a less-known fact that since the 1990s these geographical spaces have witnessed an increasing number of visual art engagements with the Holocaust.

In this chapter I endorse the view that visual art has made apparent a departure from a victim-centred representational approach to an alternative mode of engaging with the Holocaust which requires less emotional involvement on the part of the audience. The new mode has a defamiliarizing effect and is representative of a younger

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<sup>19</sup> Dalia Ofer, 'The Past That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory', in *Israel Studies*, 14 (1) (Spring, 2009), pp. 1-35.

<sup>20</sup> See Hilene Flanzbaum, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and Alan L. Mintz, *Popular culture and the shaping of Holocaust memory in America*, (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001).

generation's approach to the Holocaust. I further suggest that the institutionalisation of Holocaust memory in Israel and the prevalence of the Holocaust in American popular culture have led to the emergence of a critical approach to Holocaust representation and memorialisation, whose presence is also felt in the visual arts.

To illustrate the move to a more detached artistic engagement with the Holocaust, I will review key exhibitions and artworks displayed in America and in Israel. I also attempt to draw some parallels between the Israeli and American interest in visual art after the Holocaust by looking at art projects hosted by central institutions of Jewish and Israeli culture, the Jewish Museum in New York and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

By the 1980s the memory of the Holocaust was well institutionalized in Israel, not only as a topic of public discourse and academic research, but also as a subject of artistic expression. The effects of an event far removed both in terms of place and time from Israel, but which, nevertheless shaped its collective imagination had been especially poignant in literature and film.<sup>21</sup> The literary representations of the children of Holocaust survivors played a major part in bringing to the public fore the experiences of their parents. However, writers such as Yoram Kaniuk, or David Grossman, with no direct connection with the Holocaust, have also shown awareness of the impact of the Holocaust on themselves. As a child growing up in Jerusalem, Grossman encountered many survivors. Momik, the child protagonist of his novel *See Under: Love* (1986) becomes gradually aware of the world of the 'over there' in which his parents are imprisoned. The trauma of the survivors and their children was also dealt with in film, mainly in documentaries. Examples are: *Hugo* (1989) by Yair Lev, *Because of that War* (1988) by Orna Ben Dor, or the feature fiction film, *The*

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<sup>21</sup> Iris Milner, 'A Testimony to "The War After": Remembrance and Discontent in Second Generation Literature', in *Israel Studies*, 8 (3) (2003), pp. 194-208.



*Summer of Aviya* by Eli Cohen (1988).<sup>22</sup> With a few exceptions, however, the Holocaust had not come across as a prominent subject of art exhibitions in Israel. The official institution dealing with Holocaust memory, Yad Vashem, avoided displaying second-generation Holocaust art, since the museum's objective was to collect art by Holocaust survivors as historical proof of Jewish persecution. In March 1983, for the first time, Yad Vashem included the works of second-generation artists Hana Shir and Honu Hameagel in the exhibition *To Feel Again*. In the catalogue, the works are described as originating from 'a collective national trauma, based on fragments of stories heard and absorbed'.<sup>23</sup> Yad Vashem did not approach the subject of the Holocaust in visual art again, until 2006.<sup>24</sup>

Among art projects that address the Holocaust is *Postscripts, 'End'. Representations in Contemporary Israeli Art*, curated by Tami-Katz Freiman at the Genia Schreiber University Gallery of Art (1992) in Tel Aviv, showcasing works by artists including Pinchas Cohen Gan, Moshe Gershuni, Haim Maor and Simcha Shirman. The project, however, was designed to focus on a more universal theme, 'the dread of total annihilation, the terror of the end, or the possibility of destruction of humanity'.<sup>25</sup> The Holocaust does not stand out as a main theme of the exhibition, even though the majority of the artworks allude to it. *Postscripts* deals primarily with issues of anxiety and identity, opting to refer to the Holocaust only as an element of secondary

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<sup>22</sup> Films discussed by Yosefa Loshitzky in *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2002), pp. 15-32.

<sup>23</sup> Irit Salmon-Livne in the art catalogue, *To Feel Again*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, Adar-Nissan, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> A study case in itself the exhibition, *Etched Voices* comprises a collection of 130 artworks, presenting the evolving portrayal of the Holocaust since the end of World War II. The exhibition is presented as follows: 'These works portray an ongoing discourse on the Shoah in Israeli art through the years. Beginning with artists who experienced the Holocaust or lived during that period, to leading and avant-garde artists in Israel and abroad whose viewpoint offers a broader perspective, the exhibition provides a basis for a comprehensive philosophical discussion on the nature of art, its function in society and the connection between art and history', description retrieved from Yad Vashem website, [http://www1.yadvashem.org/about\\_yad/magazine/magazine\\_38/data\\_38/Etched\\_Voices.html](http://www1.yadvashem.org/about_yad/magazine/magazine_38/data_38/Etched_Voices.html), (accessed on 15.1.2010).

<sup>25</sup> From foreword in *Postscripts, 'End'. Representations in Contemporary Israeli*, (Tel Aviv: Genia Schreiber University Gallery of Art, 1992).

relevance. The exhibition organisers observe that, if in the case of the survivors ‘the Holocaust constitutes an inseparable part of their experience’, for the generations that followed, it is less clear how this event had impacted on their lives, and they acknowledge that:

The influences of the Holocaust upon the historical processes which dictate the fate of the Jewish people have not yet been adequately investigated, but it is clear that any attempt, direct or indirect, to understand the magnitude of the horror passes again and again through the apocalyptic valley in which the world emptied itself of any sign of life, and death came to take what it sought.<sup>26</sup>

A project similar to *Postscripts* is *Anxiety*, a group exhibition at the Museum of Israeli Art in Ramat Gan (1994) curated by Miriam Tovia-Boneh and Ilana Tenenbaum. The curators present anxiety as a state of mind which characterizes Jewish identity. A syndrome of the post-traumatic disorder, anxiety becomes a referent of the Holocaust experience. Accordingly, the artworks were selected based on the assumption that they describe an Israeli mindset characterized by anxiety and which has been shaped by various events such as ‘the Intifada, the Arab-Israeli Wars, and the ongoing daily struggle to survive’.<sup>27</sup> The Holocaust surfaces in an uncanny manner in the artworks gathered under the title *Anxiety*. Indeed, the allusive presence of the Holocaust is confirmed by critic Sarit Shapira who argues that the Holocaust has ‘infiltrated’ Israeli art:

Infiltrated because, in most cases the Holocaust tends to appear in the guise of something that encourages associations with that tragedy, while avoiding any straightforward depiction of it or metaphor of it. The Holocaust is not so much revealed in material images, as it is sensed in their very texture and forms. Many Israeli artists express their feelings of being trapped by the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Miriam Tovia Boneh in the art catalogue, *Anxiety*, (Ramat Gan: Museum of Israeli Art, 1994), p. 92.

Holocaust, by forcing Holocaust associations on their public, even when their works' narrative or iconographies have nothing to do with that subject. The Holocaust is raised as a fixation that cannot be spelled out, yet which surreptitiously invades the entire work causing its decomposition. The Holocaust appears in Israeli art as a cultural uncanny, something that must be hinted at, but cannot be said, a deep-seated, all invasive taboo.<sup>28</sup>

Second-generation artists that 'hinted' at the suffering of the Jewish people include Aviva Uri (*The victim*, 1985), Osias Hofstatter (*Grief*, 1974), Yoheved Weinfeld (*Visual images*, 1979), and Simcha Shirman (*Someone Else's Mother, or a Hug of a Woman that I don't know*, 1994).<sup>29</sup> These artists deal with themes such as the identification with death, with the victim or with the aggressor, the lack of sexual identity and self-esteem which, according to psychotherapist Dina Wardi, characterize the identity of the children of Holocaust survivors.<sup>30</sup>

Several solo exhibitions took place since the late-1970s at the Israel Museum. Situated on the hill of Givat Ram neighbourhood, alongside Israel's most representative institutions, such as the Knesset (Parliament), the Israeli Supreme Court, and the Hebrew University, the Israel Museum is part of Israel's national topography. The museum opened in 1965 and replaced the Bezalel National Museum, a branch of the Bezalel School of Art and Crafts founded by Boris Schatz in 1906 as the first Hebrew cultural institution. An initiative of Jerusalem's mayor Teddy Kollek, the Israel Museum carries the unofficial title of Israel's leading national institution of art. One of the museum's aims is to preserve Jewish history and to celebrate its fine arts, another,

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<sup>28</sup> Sarit Shapira, 'The suppressed syndrome: Holocaust imagery as a Taboo in Israeli art', in the *Israel Museum Journal*, xvi (Summer, 1998), p. 45. Contributions to the discussion about the absence of the Holocaust as a theme in Israeli art are made by Dalia Manor in 'From Rejection to Recognition: Israeli art and the Holocaust', in Stephen C. Feinstein (ed.), *Absence/Presence: critical essays on the artistic memory of the Holocaust*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), pp. 194-219.

<sup>29</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of stylistic devices, themes and symbols in the art of second-generation Israeli artists see PhD thesis by Batya Brutin, *The Inheritance: Responses to the Holocaust by Second Generation Israeli artists*, (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Dina Wardi, 'Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust', in *Studio*, 17 (December, 1990), p. 17.

to educate the Jewish people to become aware of their biblical connection to the land of Israel and to its developing Hebrew culture.

The Israel Museum is not an institution of Holocaust commemoration, despite its interest in documenting Jewish history and culture. Nevertheless, the topic of the Holocaust has 'infiltrated' the museum's exhibition spaces. One example is the solo exhibition in 1979, of Yocheved Weinfeld, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, and one of the first to deal with the female body, sexual politics and the status of women in the concentration camps.<sup>31</sup> In a series of photographs Weinfeld engages with the identification with both the victim and the aggressor, by interposing images showing herself with a shaved head with the text: 'in the concentration camps where all the Jews were dirty and hungry, there were also beautiful women who the Germans loved. So the women would beat Jews and get food. Now they are being punished. Their heads are shaved'.<sup>32</sup> Despite the explicit references to the trauma of the Holocaust emerging in the text which accompanies the photographs, it appears that this aspect of Weinfeld's work is overlooked in the exhibition's art catalogue. Curator Stephanie Rachum argues that the actual subject of the exhibition is 'the process of image information, the complex operation in which visual images take shape and exist in the artist's mind'.<sup>33</sup>

Haim Maor's 1988 exhibition *The Face of Race and Memory* makes apparent an obvious change in the Israel Museum's position towards the Holocaust. The artist engages with the relationship between the victim and the victimizer by juxtaposing images of his own face and those of his parents, with images of a German friend and her parents, as well as of other German and Israeli people, in such a way that it is impossible to distinguish between the faces of the victims and those of the perpetrator. In Maor's case, curator Ygal Zalmona acknowledges the artist's

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion of the artist's work, see Gannit Ankori, 'Yocheved Weinfeld's Portrait of the Self', in *Woman's Art Journal*, 10 (1) (Spring-Summer, 1989), pp. 22-7.

<sup>32</sup> Yocheved Weinfeld cited by Ziva Amishai Maisels, *Depiction and interpretation: the influence of the Holocaust on the visual arts*, pp. 362-3.

<sup>33</sup> Stephanie Rachum in the art catalogue *Yocheved Weinfeld*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1979).

‘preoccupation with family and myth and with the world of fears endured by the son of Holocaust survivors’. Zalmona explains the reasons why it is important to show Maor’s work, noticing that ‘a number of young Israeli artists have recently dealt with the Holocaust, but Maor is virtually alone in the consistency with which he treats this difficult subject. Maor presents racism as a component of humanity and sees the rationalistic approach together with an awareness of the given tragic complexity of the human “I” – as saving solutions’.<sup>34</sup>

Moshe Gershuni marks the key turning point in the Israeli visual approach to the Holocaust. A prominent figure in Israeli conceptual art, Gershuni presented his work *Justice Shall Walk Before Him*, an installation consisting of four old dishes on which he inscribed images and texts, at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 1988. He painted the image of the swastika on two of the dishes, while on the remaining ones he wrote the Hebrew words *Tzēdek le-fanav yehalech*, (Justice shall walk before him). This expression, originally from Psalms 85:14, became part of a prayer recited during Jewish funeral processions. The startling juxtaposition implies a connection between the idea of justice, and the notion of absolute evil. The faith in God’s acts of justice is thus questioned in view of the Holocaust. Even though it was not presented at the Israel Museum, Gershuni’s work emphasizes the change in the Israeli artistic approach to the Holocaust. Instead of focusing on Jewish suffering, Gershuni employs the image of the swastika, a single abstract sign to make a statement about the experience of the Holocaust. Hence, the works of Gershuni and, to some extent, of Weinfeld and Maor announce the emergence of a distinct Israeli mode of Holocaust representation which questions the opposition between victim and victimizer, and proposes to consider notions of Jewish guilt, racism and evil. Gershuni’s works in particular present a detached reflection on the Holocaust. The artist employed symbols as reservoirs of meaning, and in this manner he appealed to the viewer’s analytic rather than emotional self.

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<sup>34</sup> Ygal Zalmona, in the preface to the art catalogue, *The Face of Race and Memory*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, February-March, 1988).

One can ask whether a similar transition took place in the American space. If so, what are the characteristics of the engagement with art about the Holocaust in America, and how does it differ from the Israeli one.

An edifying example constitutes the exhibition policy of the Jewish Museum in New York. A major cultural institution of the American-Jewish Diaspora, the Jewish Museum aims to maintain a sense of collective Jewish consciousness by showing works by Jewish artists, who were victims of the Nazi persecution. The 1985 display of German-Jewish artist Felix Nussbaum's work was followed, one and a half decade later, by an exhibition of the pictorial diary of Charlotte Salomon, *Life? Or Theatre?*<sup>35</sup> (2000) that depicts the stages of her alienation, escape and torment spanning the two and a half decades, between 1917 and 1943. The exhibition *The Art of Memory* in 1994 approached the theme of commemoration, as it examined how and why public memory of the Holocaust is shaped by museums and monuments, and included works that focused on various sites or buildings of Holocaust memory, and contemporary projects which challenged the very notion of Holocaust monument.

The American commitment to show art after Auschwitz is, however, more strongly made apparent with the national art project initiated by the Jewish-American art historian Stephen C. Feinstein at the Minnesota Museum of American Art in 1995, entitled *Witness and Legacy: Contemporary Art about the Holocaust*. The exhibition travelled for two years to museums and college galleries in various states such as Florida, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Georgia, New York and Massachusetts. It represented, as co-curator Paul Spencer claimed, the emergence of a 'contemporary movement' promoted by American artists who by means of various strategies, attempt to 'bring the Holocaust into the American cultural dialogue'. *Witness and Legacy* explored the role of

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<sup>35</sup> Details on the content of this exhibition can be retrieved from <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/CharlotteSalomon>, (accessed on 15.1. 2010).

art as a means to convey ‘some insights and venues of entry for people to think about the repercussions of the historical event on the Jewish self-perceptions’.<sup>36</sup> In this respect it marked an important milestone in the American public’s involvement with art about the Holocaust.

The exhibition proposed visual art as a means for coping with the trauma of the Holocaust and, above all, as a form of healing.<sup>37</sup> It featured paintings and installations created by twenty artists, children of survivors as well as artists who have been less directly affected by the genocide. References to victimhood and loss were made apparent in a variety of ways in the majority of the artworks. The daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Debbie Teicholz, alluded to the Holocaust by juxtaposing photographs of cut trees that appear as bones, railways and open fields. Whereas Pearl Hirshfield enabled the viewers to empathise more directly with the survivors by constructing a walk-through installation which consisted of a wall of mirrors onto which there were engraved Holocaust survivors’ numbers. The numbers would then be reflected onto the viewers as they faced the mirrors. The exhibition marked, as Matthew Baigell contends, a departure from the universalizing approach of the 1950s and 1960s, which used myth and biblical imagery to refer to the genocide. Thereafter art employing the empathetic approach made direct references to the persecution of the Jews. The change of focus accompanied the emergence of a secular identity of those American Jews for whom remembering the Holocaust became a ‘substitute for some distinctive everyday practice’.<sup>38</sup> The Holocaust, conceptualised as a form of martyrdom, further grounded Jewish perception of a collective secular identity within a narrative of victimization.

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Spencer in the art catalogue *Witness and Legacy, Contemporary Art about the Holocaust*, (Minnesota: Minnesota Museum of Contemporary Art, January-May, 1995), pp. 6, 45.

<sup>37</sup> See Bruno Bettelheim’s references to the psychological function of art in *Surviving and Other essays*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Baigell, ‘The persistence of Holocaust imagery in American art’, in the art catalogue *Witness and Legacy*, p. 28.

According to Baigell these artworks do not only memorialize the tragic event, but they ‘help forge a modern Jewish identity’.<sup>39</sup> The American public’s interest in *Witness and Legacy* was revealed in the coverage of the event by the local press. The *Los Angeles Jewish Times* described the show as ‘a reflection of responsibility, the suffering and ultimately the victory to be found in remembering’,<sup>40</sup> while the *Chicago Sunday Times* acknowledged the project as a meaningful attempt to ‘face the past showing how people are still coping with the burdens of memory’.<sup>41</sup>

The exhibition titled *Burnt Whole: Contemporary artists reflect upon the Holocaust* curated by Karen Holtzman at the Washington Projects for Arts in 1994 stood out as a unique project. *Burnt Whole* presented some thematic affinities with *Witness and Legacy* as it unfolded, in structurally similar ways, a visual-art narrative of the Holocaust told by the second generation. Nonetheless, it set itself within a very different discourse, as it did not primarily attempt to commemorate the Holocaust but to draw attention to the elusive character of memory and to the difficulties in the practice of commemoration.

In this respect, *Burnt Whole* evinces a departure from the understanding of art’s engaging with the Holocaust as a commemorative activity, to the perception of art as a tool of critical reflection on memory – as a construct shaped by events happening in the present. Instead of portraying the experience of Jewish victims, this exhibition raised the more universal question of how one can effectively deal with the burdens of remembering and of guilt. The exhibition’s objective, as stated by the organisers, was to delve into the question of remembrance from the point of view of both victim and perpetrator. The interest in the victimizers’ world constitutes a characteristic of this project which opens the doors to a new artistic

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Statement quoted by Marry Abbe in ‘Holocaust Art Exhibition still on the road’, in *The Star Tribune*, (16 February, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Marlene Gelfond, ‘Facing the Past’, in *The Chicago Sunday Times*, (24 January, 1997).



engagement with the Holocaust. The changes in the curatorial display of art about the Holocaust were made apparent in the mixed responses that *Burnt Whole* received in the American media. Several journalists pointed out the novelty of the artistic approach after which they proceeded to express their criticism. For example, one of the critics' main arguments was that the project was not effective since it was too intellectual and did not engage the viewer in an act of empathy.

*The Boston Globe* attested to the fact that the 'Holocaust enters art of another generation' that addresses the subject in ways that are neither 'emotional' nor 'direct'.<sup>42</sup> In an article entitled 'Holocaust leaves Viewer Cold' Natasha Wimmer criticizes that 'although there are some direct responses to the Holocaust itself, many of the works displayed are responses to responses, depictions of second-hand guilt'. The exhibition's stated aim – to tackle the 'fear that the Holocaust may be forgotten' was according to this reviewer, badly achieved as it 'did not come closer to an emotional understanding of the Holocaust'.<sup>43</sup> The American-Jewish *Forward* argued in a similar critical tone that:

Most of the works of the thirty-one artists represented are minor *memento mori* that marked the occasion of the Holocaust without signifying any special feeling for or insight into it. They turn the Holocaust into a static concept because of their simplistic conceptualism. No doubt, time has made us more detached about the Holocaust, but the detachment and intellectualization shown here, seems to betray it.<sup>44</sup>

In a *Washington Post* review the exhibition was described as 'a filter of cultural memory whose governing aesthetic is opaque and indirect'. The reviewer admitted to the fact that 'victim art, as we all know, is in vogue, and there is much on view'. The detached unsentimental nature of modern art and its 'mishandling' of the

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<sup>42</sup> Christine Temin, 'Hell is in the details', in *The Boston Globe*, (25 January, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> Natasha Wimmer, 'ICA Holocaust leaves Viewer Cold', (9 February, 1995), retrieved from <http://www.dector-dupuy.com/presse/wimmer-nathasha-burnt-whole.pdf>, (accessed on 15.1.2010).

<sup>44</sup> David Kuspit, 'Reducing the Holocaust to artistic one-timers', in *The Forward*, (3 February, 1995).

Holocaust were criticized by the reviewer who stated that, 'whereas the most effective works were those evoking the 1940s the weakest ones were stuck in the 1990s'.<sup>45</sup>

The rather negative media response indicates the journalists' distrust in the perceived changes in the representation of the Holocaust and whose effects were not yet clear. What was clear, as stated in a *Boston Globe* article is that 'it is unlikely that many visitors will cry at *Burnt Whole*. Shiver in horror, maybe, but the show is more intellectual than emotional, conceptual rather than gut-wrenching, black and white rather than raging red'.<sup>46</sup> The exhibition's critics claimed that dealing with the topic of the Holocaust in a detached intellectual manner was not acceptable as it did not encourage empathy, a feeling that had commonly been associated with previous artistic attempts to commemorate the Holocaust.

*Burnt Whole* contrasts both with the Israeli group exhibitions and with the American *Witness and Legacy* through its departure from empathetic representation. The question arising from this is whether the more recent artworks necessarily commemorate the Holocaust. The more widespread public view is that the artists' moral imperative should be to commemorate the victims. However, with *Burnt Whole*, one notices a change in the artists' engagement with the Holocaust. Since the mid 1990s artists increasingly make reference to the Holocaust in order to criticise aspects of contemporary society. Responding to the continued presence of the Holocaust as a subject of public discussion in Israel and in the United States, artists ask how one can still deal with the atrocities of the Third Reich in a meaningful manner. Their works are meant to be critical commentaries on the manner in which the Holocaust is being represented, rather than a commemoration of the Holocaust.

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Richard, 'The Holocaust Obliquely: Artists' Reflections in a WPA exhibition', in *The Washington Post*, (30 October, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Christine Temin, 'Hell is in the details'.

Several American-Jewish artists attempted to deal with the Holocaust in a novel manner. Debbie Teicholz, for instance, supports the idea that the public 'has become immune to historical images, and doesn't even really look at them anymore'. Her aim is not to 'make people remember the gruesomeness of the Holocaust', but to distance the viewer from these images.<sup>47</sup>

Sidney Chafez, the son of a Holocaust survivor, took a critical stance towards artworks employing the empathetic approach. In order to speak to a new generation for whom the Holocaust is not a personal experience, the artist chose to focus on the images of the perpetrators. The questions posed by Chafez are worth bearing in mind: 'Why did I do the perpetrators and not the victims? Why did I deal with the images of the leaders of the Third Reich and not the horror of the victims?' His reason lay in his son's statement which had shocked the artist that 'the World War II and what happened to the Jews is ancient history, and had no relevance to his [the son's] life'.<sup>48</sup> His work entitled *The Perpetrators* (1990) consists of portraits of Nazi officers who played an essential role in the extermination of European Jewry. Chafez employed 'estrangement' as a conceptual strategy to challenge assumed conceptions about what is appropriate or not when dealing with this subject.

To 'estrangle' or 'to defamiliarize' means to turn something that can easily be read or understood into something that is less transparent and which resists interpretation. It also means to antagonize by creating an ambiguous situation which reveals itself to the ones who witness it, as uncommon, unfamiliar, producing confusion and uneasiness. Indeed, analogies can be constructed with the Freudian concept of *unheimlich*,<sup>49</sup> particularly with reference to the state of intellectual uncertainty and

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<sup>47</sup> Debbie Teicholz cited in article 'Artists cope with the Holocaust through their creations', in *The Beacon News – Aurora*, (11 March, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> Sidney Chafez, 'Choices Artists make', in *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, David McLintock (trans.), (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

ambiguity that this term entails. A trait of all art, defamiliarization<sup>50</sup> means to ‘make objects unfamiliar, to increase the difficulty and length of perception, since the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged’.<sup>51</sup> Inspired by the Russian Formalists’ notion of ‘making strange’, German playwright Bertolt Brecht developed in his plays the concept *Verfremdungseffekt*<sup>52</sup> – ‘distancing’ or ‘alienation effect’, with the aim to ‘prevent the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer’.<sup>53</sup> It encourages the audience to observe rather than identify with the characters on stage. The playwright endeavoured to make the audience reach a level of intellectual understanding of the characters’ dilemmas and to critically position them within a larger social-cultural context.

By forcing the viewer into a critical and analytical mindset the play executes a didactic function: it makes the viewers question what they witness as part of an artistic act. The underlying lesson is to enable the viewers to become aware of the highly constructed and contingent manner in which artistic representations function. By making the viewer doubt the nature of what he or she sees, in other words, by turning a representation that had gained some familiarity into something strangely unfamiliar and uncanny, the artist gives the artwork a didactic slant, and the audience an active role in constructing its meaning. In a similar manner the visual artist who adopts defamiliarization attempts to engage the audience in the search for meaning. The art-viewer, similarly to the theatre-goer is encouraged to interpret the work of art in a novel way – as defamiliarization lends the experience of viewing a sense of

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<sup>50</sup> Term coined by structuralist critic Victor Shklovsky, also employed by Roman Jakobson and Mikhail Bakhtin to explain their approaches to poetical language.

<sup>51</sup> Victor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, in Michael Ryan (ed.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Several translations of this rather controversial term are: defamiliarization effect, estrangement effect, distantiating, alienation effect, or the distancing effect.

<sup>53</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on theatre: the development of an aesthetic*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 91.

novelty. Van Alphen has acknowledged this idea of defamiliarization and claims that in the Holocaust art of the 1990s, it stems from ‘the need to explore and develop manners and means of representation that preserve contact with the extreme history, means that continue to transmit knowledge of it, that simultaneously prevent forgetting and making familiar’.<sup>54</sup>

The group exhibition *Burnt Whole* together with artworks such as Sidney Chafez’s *Perpetrators*, and the solo exhibitions hosted by the Israel Museum, including Moshe Gershuni’s installation at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, indicate the shift in the representation of the Holocaust, both in Israel and in the United States. The victim-oriented approach was effective as long as it appealed to the viewers’ ability to empathize. Recent academic studies on the politics of Holocaust memory<sup>55</sup> suggest that this is no longer the case. Ernst van Alphen, for instance, criticizes the overuse of the identification with the victims as a main strategy of teaching about the Holocaust, which he argues leads to exhaustion and boredom with the subject of the Holocaust.<sup>56</sup> The function of the defamiliarizing approach appears to be critical rather than commemorative. Its impact on the Israeli and American audience represents my main research interest.

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<sup>54</sup> Van Alphen, pp. 10-15.

<sup>55</sup> On the legacy of Holocaust memory in Israel see Tom Segev, *The seventh million: the Israelis and the Holocaust*, Haim Watzman (trans.), (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), and Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the politics of nationhood*, Chaya Galai (trans.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Van Alphen, p. 15.

### III

An Overview of temporary art exhibitions  
*Your Colouring Book* (1997) and *Live and Die as Eva Braun*  
(1998) at the Israel Museum and *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent*  
*Art* (2002) at the Jewish Museum

The function of the exhibition space is not merely to bring into the public's view objects of art, but to situate them within an appropriate discursive context, by telling a story that cannot otherwise be told. Exhibitions, suggests Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 'are fundamentally theatrical, for they show how museums perform the knowledge they create'. The scholar reminds us of the performative function fulfilled by museums, since they possess an 'agency of display'. Hence, the display of a work of art within the museum context, does not only 'show and speak, it also *does*'.<sup>57</sup> The Israel Museum in Jerusalem in the late 1990s and the Jewish Museum in New York in the early 2000s presented to their audiences several exhibitions that propose a new mode of engagement with the Holocaust. There is no doubt that, by showing these exhibitions, the Israel Museum and the Jewish Museum – both institutions of central significance to the construction of Israeli and American-Jewish collective identity – became agents of display, enabling the constitution of a particular 'knowledge' of or perspective on the memory of the Holocaust.

The installation *Your Colouring Book* created by Ram Katzir, a member of the third generation, opened at the Israel Museum in January 1997. At the end of the same year, second-generation artist Roe Rosen presented the installation *Live and Die as Eva Braun*. In March 2002 the chief curator of the Jewish Museum in New York, Norman Kleeblatt organised a group exhibition entitled *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*. All works displayed propose a detached and unsentimental point of view, by foregrounding images that depict or allude to the world of the perpetrators. These artworks can be situated within the category of the

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<sup>57</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 'Introduction', in *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums and heritage*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 3, 6. My emphasis.

defamiliarizing mode. The exhibitions distinguished themselves among others hosted by the museums through the strong media response they triggered, which developed into public debates that engaged various members of the Israeli and the American public sphere, including the public opinion leaders.

In what follows, I will give a description and critical interpretation of the artworks, and will concentrate on the strategies used by the artists to engage the audience with the subject of their works. I will also attempt to sketch some lines of comparison between the Israeli and the American planning and organization of the exhibitions with the aim of bringing to the fore similarities and/or differences in the presentation and in the ensuing public reception.

Katzir's and Rosen's installations occupied a central position in the annual report written by director James Snyder in the Israel Museum's annual publication in 1998. He described the Holocaust as a subject of 'great sensitivity worldwide and especially in Israel', and emphasized the museum's 'ongoing commitment to enable contemporary artists to continue to deal with the increasingly remote but nonetheless difficult and essential subject'. Snyder remarked that the exhibitions had drawn 'positive and negative comments' and reinforced the museum's 'commitment to keep a serious dialogue alive on this important subject'. His brief and rather evasive description did not include the reasons why the exhibitions triggered such reactions, nor did it offer details in regard to the criticism or praise garnered by these exhibitions. Snyder wrote succinctly that Ram Katzir's installation consisted of 'pictures adapted from promotional photographs of one of history's darkest periods, which revealed their sinister content only after participating visitors had finished colouring the seemingly innocent images'. The only information given about Roece Rosen referred to his biography as the son of a Holocaust survivor, who attempted

to memorialise the Holocaust through his installation'.<sup>58</sup> Curator Meira Perry-Lehmann reiterated Snyder's observation stating that:

For the Israel Museum, the opportunity to show Rosen's work exemplifies the Museum's continuing commitment to allow younger artists in Israel to grapple with the difficult subject of the Holocaust – particularly as their contemporary experience becomes increasingly remote from the actual experience of the Holocaust itself. Exhibitions such as these reflect the Museum's recognition of the importance of presenting contemporary Israeli art in all its shades, and of the sensitivity and difficulty of many of the subject matters which Israeli artists feel they must address.<sup>59</sup>

The Israel Museum emphasized its aim to memorialize the Holocaust and maintain it as a subject in the Israeli public discourse, by means of promoting relevant artworks by younger generations. It did not reflect upon the characteristics of this art engagement, or distinguish it from previous art.

In stark contrast, Joan Rosenbaum, director of the Jewish Museum in New York, announced the emergence of a new mode of dealing with the Holocaust, describing *Mirroring Evil* as a 'radical departure from previous art about the Holocaust, which has centred on tragic images of the victims. The artists dare to invite the viewer into the world of the perpetrators'.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Norman Kleeblatt, the exhibition's main curator, pointed to the existence of 'a new generation of artists who look at the events in radically different and disturbing ways', by creating works by means of which 'the viewers encounter the perpetrators face to face in scenarios in which ethical and moral issues cannot be easily resolved'.<sup>61</sup> Whereas the Israel Museum refrained from referring to any of the strategies used by their artists, the Jewish

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<sup>58</sup> James Snyder, 'Director's Report', in *The Israel Museum Journal*, xvi (Summer, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Meira Perry-Lehmann, 'Foreword', in the art catalogue *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> Joan Rosenberg, 'The Director's preface', in the art catalogue *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2002), p. vii.

<sup>61</sup> Norman Kleeblatt, 'Acknowledgements', in the art catalogue *Mirroring Evil*, p. ix.



Museum made the artistic approaches the central focus of their report on the art exhibition.

Kleeblatt also decided to explain how the exhibition's concept gradually developed, so as to underline the care with which it had been organised. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue he emphasized his awareness of the academic debates about the memory of the Holocaust explaining how this exhibition took shape after participating in various academic conferences such as 'Icon, Image and the Text in Moderns Jewish Culture' (March 1999, Princeton University) or 'Representing the Holocaust' (May 2000, Lehigh University), and 'Images, Identities and Intersections' (November 2000, State University of New York). The planning of the exhibition took more than three years. Kleeblatt informs his readers that: 'each and every department of the museum participated in the planning or implementation [...] throughout the planning stages, the curatorial team worked much more closely with the education, public programming, and public relations departments of the museum than for past exhibitions'. The process he describes was highly dialogic as 'the project evolved and transformed, changing and improving time and again'.<sup>62</sup>

The Jewish Museum organised a series of educational gatherings whose participants included members of the museum staff, educators, lay leaders from the Jewish community, artists, and scholars involved in the study of the Holocaust. Scholars James Young, Reesa Greenberg, Ellen Handler Spitz, Lisa Saltzman, Ernst Van Alphen, Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi were invited on to the discussion panels and in turn supported the museum in its belief that the works of art possessed the potential to reveal issues which had been in most cases overlooked in cultural discussions about the Holocaust. Greenberg, for instance, recalls her role in the organisation of the exhibition, revealing the Museum's concern with regard to the public's reactions: 'I was hired as a consultant to advise on strategies the museum could utilize to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

minimize the inevitable discomfort and controversies the exhibition would provoke in Holocaust survivor communities'.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast to the detailed planning undertaken by Kleeblatt, the Israel Museum's decision to display the installations by Katzir and Rosen was, according to Suzanne Landau, the curator of Katzir's show, rather the result of a spontaneous initiative to give younger Israeli artists the opportunity to present their approach to the memory of the Holocaust. The Israeli curators of Katzir's and Rosen's work, Landau and Yudit Caplan respectively, with the consent of chief curators Ygal Zalmona and Meira Perry-Lehmann, and director James Snyder, allegedly took the decision to exhibit *Your Colouring Book* and *Live and Die As Eva Braun* after the artists themselves had offered their works to them.<sup>64</sup>

While the Israel Museum did not frame the exhibitions within any particular conceptual or scholarly context, at the Jewish Museum a significant effort was made to explain the artworks and the artists' approaches. Whereas in Jerusalem the commitment to commemorate the Holocaust was the museum's stated objective, in New York the organisers spoke primarily about the novelty of the proposed artistic approach. The museums' distinct approaches which are manifest in the presentation of the art exhibitions will be further investigated in the course of this research. For now I shall devote the next section to a presentation in considerable detail of the story, the concept and the themes that characterize each exhibition.

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<sup>63</sup> Reesa Greenberg, 'Mirroring Evil, Evil Mirrored, Timing, Trauma and Temporary Exhibitions', p. 98.

<sup>64</sup> Information acquired by the author during interviews with the artists Roee Rosen in Tel Aviv, August 2009 and Ram Katzir in Amsterdam, October 2009 respectively.

## **Ram Katzir's *Your Colouring Book***

*Your Colouring Book* had originally been conceived for a different exhibition. In 1995, Katzir, a graduate of the Rietveld Academy of Art in Amsterdam, was invited to the Casco Project Space in Utrecht. Located on the same street as the former offices of the Dutch Nazi party, during 1942-1945 the building housed the printers of the Dutch Nazi newspaper. Intrigued by the fact that this space did not betray any signs of this past, the artist felt compelled to create a work of art that would reveal its dark history. Katzir designed a children's colouring book as the central piece of an installation destined to become, in the words of its author, a 'wandering' project.<sup>65</sup>

The installation subsequently travelled for two years, 1996 to 1998, to 'places where people would rather not see the book',<sup>66</sup> namely to cities with a specific historical relation to the Holocaust: Amsterdam, Kraków, Vilnius, Berlin and Jerusalem. In each location the exhibition caused a gamut of emotional reactions which led, in most cases, to public discussions. The visitors, the media and the local governments expressed divergent views touching upon issues as sensitive as the collaboration with the Nazis, or more universal concerns regarding Holocaust remembrance and education. The project concluded in Amsterdam's Museum of Contemporary Art with an exhibition documenting responses from participants of all previous exhibitions.

From the very outset Ram Katzir linked art and education, hinting at the built-in assumption that art acts to inform us, develop our faculties, and deliver us from ignorance. The artist designed an exhibition space occupied by school desks on which there were placed colouring books and a bundle of crayons. The cover of the book

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<sup>65</sup> This sub-title, coined by Katzir, appears in the exhibition's art catalogue *Your Colouring Book, a Wandering Installation*, (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Katzir quoted by Bianca Stigter, 'I want to go to places where people do not want to see the book', in *NRC Handelsblad*, (21 February, 1997).

showed the same drawing as the first page inside it: A field with flowers, trees and blue skies frame the image of a fawn sniffing the fist of a man wearing tall boots,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 1 Cover page of art catalogue<sup>67</sup>*

Although there were no guidelines with regard to how one should approach the colouring book, most visitors took a seat and opened the book. Once opened, the book revealed thirteen simple, among them idyllic, drawings depicting the following scenes: a group of pupils saluting their teacher with hands raised upwards,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 2 Drawing no 4 from art catalogue*

a crowd of young boys and girls queuing in front of what looks like train carts,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 3 Drawing no 5 from art catalogue*

a group of youngsters singing, their hands protruding vigorously as if reaching outside the frame of the drawing, towards the visitor,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 4 Drawing no 8 from art catalogue*

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<sup>67</sup> All illustrations in this chapter have been removed due to copyright restrictions. They can be viewed in a separate appendix file submitted alongside this thesis.

a solitary bench in a park,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 5 Drawing no 9 from art catalogue*

a young girl offering what could be flowers and facing a man whose identity is hidden,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 6 Drawing no 6 from art catalogue*

airplanes in flying formation,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 7 Drawing no 12 from art catalogue*

And, a fatherly figure reading to children from what appears to be a fairytale book.

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 8 Drawing no 13 from art catalogue*

The visitors started colouring the sketchy images, which seemed harmless at first glance, but as they turned the pages of the book, doubt about the pictures' provenance would be raised. At closer inspection, one drawing revealed a small Star of David attached to the coat of a child waiting in line in front of a train cart (fig. 3), the fact that the airplanes were arranged in the shape of a swastika (fig. 7), and that the children's salute looked very similar to the Nazi *Heil Hitler* (fig. 2). However, only on the last page of the book, could the drawings be identified positively as reproductions of historical photographs depicting scenes from Nazi propaganda and

persecution of the Jews. What initially seemed to create an innocent fairytale setting, in due course, revealed a darker story. The man on the cover of the colouring book could be identified in the historical source as Adolf Hitler,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 9 Source no 1 in the art catalogue*

The father reading bedtime stories turned into Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich's propaganda minister, reading to his daughters Helga and Heide,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 10 Source no 13 in the art catalogue*

The cheerful crowd was welcoming Hitler to the Bückeberg Erntedankfest (Harvest Festival) rally in Germany,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 11 Source no 8 in the art catalogue*

The pupils were saluting their teacher with the *Heil Hitler*,

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 12 Source no 4 in the art catalogue*

The children were queuing in front of a train that would deport them from Łódź Ghetto to a concentration camp.

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 13 Source no 5 in the art catalogue*

Katzir worked with images portraying National Socialist propaganda that were collected in an especially designed book entitled *Deutschland Erwacht: Werden, Kampf und Sieg der NSDAP*<sup>68</sup> which consisted of actual photographs printed on cigarette cards by Cigaretten Bilderdienst over a period of seven years. He used archival material depicting images of Jewish selection and persecution from the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem. The resemblance between the original photographs and their reproduction in Katzir's drawings was not very close. The artist deliberately withheld vital visual information, luring the visitors into working on a scene whose meaning they could not fully understand. His aim was to raise attention to how seemingly naive images can hide criminal intentions. The photographs were selected for their iconic value but also because 'they had the same kind of Walt Disney allure. They looked very sweet and attractive, but actually what was behind them was different,' clarifies the artist.<sup>69</sup>

Those visitors who did not check the evidence on the last page of the book might have experienced a feeling of having been duped into doing something they would never knowingly had done. At the same time, those few, but noticeable references to the Holocaust make us doubt whether the visitors could, in fact, overlook what they disclosed about the content of the images. Art historian Gary Schwartz argues on this account that:

By the time visitors have sat down and begun to colour, it is clear that each one has traversed an inner barrier between not knowing and knowing, between innocence and guilty knowledge. [Since], it is hard to get that far in the project without sensing that there is a shameful secret attached to it.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Title in English, *Germany awakes: Rise, Battle and Victory of the NSDAP*, (Berlin: Cigaretten Bilderdienst, 1933-1940).

<sup>69</sup> Statement made by Katzir during interview in Amsterdam, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Gary Schwartz, 'Teach it to the Children' in *Your Colouring Book* art catalogue, p. 36.

After having gained full knowledge of the images, the visitors either stayed and took responsibility for the images they had given colour to, rebelled and challenged the very idea of the project, or responded by writing their views on the book itself, or on the visitor books placed at the entrance of the exhibition halls. Many became involved with the project, leaving behind thousands of coloured books now stored securely in the artist's personal archive in Amsterdam. Among their visual reflections the following are only a few. One visitor from Vilnius added the following text to the drawing portraying children being led to train carts: 'Children Stop! Don't enter this train! It will bring you to gas chambers, to death!'

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 14 Image coloured by visitor in Vilnius<sup>71</sup>*

A visitor from Berlin expressed his or her sorrow by asking 'where have all the children gone?' a word play with the German song 'Sag mir wo die Blumen sind?' composed by Max Colpet. The term 'Nesthäkchen' refers to a series of children's books by German Jewish writer Else Ury who perished in Auschwitz in 1943, hence the date in the illustration.

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 15 Image coloured by visitor in Berlin<sup>72</sup>*

Another participant from Berlin turned a drawing showing a young girl offering flowers to Hitler into a scene of retaliation, and titled it 'a missed opportunity'.

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<sup>71</sup> Image reproduced from art catalogue *Your Colouring Book*, p. 94. The coloured images can constitute the primary sources for an extensive analysis of European public's multifaceted perceptions of Holocaust memory.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 118.



*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 16 Image coloured by visitor in Berlin<sup>73</sup>*

A visitor from Jerusalem depicted children stained with blood, turned into puppets that are being manipulated by their teacher to obey the Fascist doctrine.

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 17 Image coloured by visitor in Jerusalem<sup>74</sup>*

Finally, another visitor from Israel gave a familiar interpretation of the Holocaust, which attested to the historical concept of ‘from destruction to redemption’ on which the Israeli national consciousness is founded. On the image representing Goebbels the participant drew small figures of Holocaust survivors carrying flags of their Diaspora home countries. At the top of the image one can see a man waving the Israeli flag triumphantly in the air.

*Image removed due to copyright reasons*

*Figure 18 Image coloured by visitor in Jerusalem<sup>75</sup>*

The coloured images showing these multifarious interpretations point to the fact that Katzir’s project transgressed the borders of the gallery space, intruding into the lives of the visitors, who were no longer passive witnesses to the effect of art, but directly responsible for giving a different meaning to historical images that have, so far,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

entered their lives by means of formal education, or via products of popular culture and the media.

The control over pictures that belong to the realm of the documentary was, in this case, passed on to the participants in the installation. They were enabled to change the meaning of the historical image, and to bring their own perspective and individuality onto the drawing. In this way, Katzir entrusted the visitors with a moral responsibility of changing the significance of historical images, giving them the opportunity to question their connection to the historical event, and to represent their own perceptions of it.

### **Roe Rosen's *Live and Die as Eva Braun***

The installation comprised a series of images and texts arranged in the exhibition space in the shape of a walking route with ten stations. The text presents itself as an 'advertisement brochure' being written in the second person, it claims to offer the viewer an unusual entertainment experience, to become, by means of an act of imagination, Hitler's mistress. There are ten stops or scenes bearing the following titles: *The Waiting Period*, *Arrival*, *Control*, *The Bed*, *The Dream*, *Tears*, *The Gunshot*, *Angel's Wings*, *Wax*, and *The Gift*, each accompanied by a text describing a particular stage of the experience proposed by Rosen. The scenario outlined by the texts invites the viewer to transform her/himself into Eva Braun, and experience romantic moments with the dictator before committing suicide, and then take a short trip to Hell. The act of identification with Eva Braun works differently for male and female visitors. The artist appears to resolve this conceptual conundrum by writing an introductory text which suggests that the visitor's gendered identity should not be seen as an impediment. The visitor is addressed with the neutral 'customer' and invited to 'put

on the state-of-the-art-head-gear, body-suit and electronic sensors',<sup>76</sup> and to enter a virtual-reality world and perform, for the duration of the visit, the role of Hitler's mistress. The visitors are therefore asked to renounce their gendered identities in order to turn into Eva Braun.

Whereas the text follows a simple narrative pattern, constructing a story which develops in linear fashion, the paintings portray a bewildering array of images which draw upon a variety of sources: illustrations from German children's books such as Wilhelm Busch's *Max and Moritz*, the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood*, erotic depictions from Japanese pornography, Nazi art and emblems by Arno Brecker, esoteric Christian imagery, family portraits of the artist as a child wearing a Hitler moustache, and intricate decorative designs. These elements, art critic Ariella Azoulay remarked, 'are interwoven into one another in an interchangeable manner so that the images look like a long and twisting dance of black snakes, constantly assuming and changing shapes'.<sup>77</sup> The project aimed to address the memory of the Holocaust, in 'a bizarre, even obscene manner', argued critic Roger Rothman.<sup>78</sup> The idea behind the exhibition, explains Rosen, was that of a voyeuristic adventure into what could be considered to be the ultimate forbidden ground, the identification with the perpetrator.<sup>79</sup> Together, text and pictures were meant to give the impression that the viewer was entering a virtual reality space.

The first image depicts a mirror sustained by two monkeys. The opening text invites the viewer to assume the identity of Eva Braun, while she is waiting for Hitler to

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<sup>76</sup> Excerpt from introductory text to installation by Roee Rosen. All excerpts cited in this chapter can be found in the art catalogue *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1997).

<sup>77</sup> Ariella Azoulay, 'The Return of the Repressed', in Shelley Hornstein, Laura L. Levitt (eds.), *Impossible Images: Contemporary art after the Holocaust*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 89.

<sup>78</sup> Roger Rothman, 'Morning and Mania', in *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Paraphrase from interview with Rosen by Chitra L. Menon, in PhD thesis *Holocaust Themes in Israeli Art*, (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999), p. 307.

arrive. The text describes the surroundings in which the viewer finds him/herself being guided into the mindset of Hitler's mistress:

Dear Customer: As soon as you put on the state-of-the-art-head-gear, body-suit and electronic sensors, you find yourself in the bunker's living room. Late April, 1945. [...]. Your lover is about to arrive. You look in the mirror, leaning forward, and your own image is revealed to you for the first time. You are blond; your face is still young, your complexion pinkish-pure, and your bosom ample. You seem truly good-natured [...]. Why, you read German! In fact, you read it even if you don't understand a word – after all, it's your mother's tongue, since you are Eva Braun.

The remaining pictures accompanying this text show a cross-section of the labyrinthine bunker whose tunnels look like interlocking swastikas.

The next scene entitled *The Arrival* depicts Hitler entering the bunker, where Eva/the viewer rises to greet and embrace him. In the accompanying text, the narrator makes explicit references to Hitler's moustache:

When he opens the door you gasp at the sight of his small moustache. Because you are not only Eva Braun it seems menacing, almost monstrous. But everything around the moustache is so congenial. He comes towards you with such warmth, his smile tired, his arms open to embrace you. Remember – you are Eva.

The text of the third scene entitled *Control*, introduces Hitler shouting over the phone to his commanders. It describes how Eva Braun/the visitor perceives her lover, whose voice and gestures become awe-inspiring, conveying a sense of power and control over the world outside.

But never mind the words. They are clearly secondary to his power, his might, his conviction and anger. The world outside the bunker slavishly listening to your lover is meekly shrinking. His power is perturbing, petrifying, and nothing is an emblem of that power than the magisterial veins along his neck.

To reinforce the notion of control, the paintings accompanying the text show control features, such as stop, or play buttons and a pair of hands protruding from a pitch-dark background. The theatricality of Hitler's performance such as the rehearsing of gestures is echoed in one of the images showing similar movements of the hands and facial expressions played by a child.

The scenes *The Bed* and *The Dream* describe the repulsion and the attraction towards Hitler experienced by Eva/the viewer. The narrator proceeds to give a detailed description of Hitler's back as he lies down on the bed. His body takes on the characteristics of a painted canvas or a living landscape. The narrator informs how the sleeping body suddenly turns, dispelling the apparent calm of the scene, the arm reaches towards Eva Braun/the viewer. The involuntary movement provokes, explains the narrator, repulsion and excitement, and becomes the pretext for the development of a pornographic dream sequence.

The next scenes focus on images of death. The text describes the feelings Eva Braun goes through at the thought of her imminent suicide. A mixture of bitterness and resentment seems to combine with a vague sense of fear. Eva Braun detaches herself from her body, and wakes up in a wax museum in Italy where she sees a wax representation of herself and Hitler on their death bed.

Then you face the tableau vivant you were brought here for. It is a depiction of you and Adolf, committing suicide. The bunker looks like a deserted depot, its only decoration a red swastika flag made of shiny acrylic. [...] you languish on the floor, on your stomach, limbs outstretched, your hair covering your face entirely... Adolf himself is still holding the gun. His face is hidden as well, sunk between his arms on the desk on which he collapsed. [...] You understand that anyone in his right mind would burst out laughing at the freakish sight.

The final scene shows the descent into Hell. The descriptions of torture are reminiscent of scenes of martyrdom, and hint at the idea of Hell as a projection of subconscious fears and anxieties. The Korean masseur that appears in the concluding text of the installation's narrative sequence represents a final absurd twist; it testifies to the virtual character of the experience and re-establishes the viewer in his or her initial role as visitor of the exhibition.

A door opens. It's Hirrohisho, the huge Korean masseur. Lie back, close your eyes, enjoy his wonderful fingers on your back, empty your mind, feel the pleasant sensations, relax. Hell is fake, Hirrohisho is real. No harm was meant. You are you. Please come again.<sup>80</sup>

The sense of duality, the tension between life and death, sexuality and violence, reason and absurdity, control and compliance dominate the narrative and the accompanying images. The project called for a multi-layered response on the part of the audience. On the one hand, the viewer was asked to identify with the character Eva Braun, on the other hand the experiment required the viewer to retain his or her identity in order to maintain the sense of the strangeness of the world into which he or she was asked to enter.

*Live and Die as Eva Braun* was also part of *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* exhibition at the Jewish Museum, exhibited there with the works of twelve other artists of both Jewish and non-Jewish descent.

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<sup>80</sup> Excerpts from *Live and Die as Eva Braun* art catalogue.

*Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*

Ellen Handler Spitz reminds us in her essay ‘Childhood, Art, and Evil’ that even if the artists of *Mirroring Evil* are too young to remember the World War II, they continue to ask and try to find answers. ‘They make art that continues to grapple with their, and our, unassimilable past. In their art they “act out” and attempt to “work through” this past, which remains present, and they attempt to take us with them. We must try to go there’.<sup>81</sup>

The majority of the works exhibited in *Mirroring Evil* invite the audience into a world of images, whose main protagonist is the Nazi perpetrator. The preoccupation and obsession with Hitler’s character is the subject of Boaz Arad’s video-works. The figure of Hitler steps into the forefront in *The Hebrew Lesson*, *Safam*, and *Marcel Marcel*. For the Israeli artist, Hitler is a cinematic image whose defining traits are the moustache and the voice. Arad attempts to break down the fear associated with this image, by trivializing it through the play with the moustache, or through the distortion of the voice. In *Hebrew Lesson*, for example, the artist selected short film clips from propaganda speeches and joined together segments of film and sound bites to produce a montage in which Hitler utters in broken Hebrew: *Shalom Yerushalayim, ani mitnatzel* (Greetings/Peace Jerusalem I am deeply sorry). Arad spent countless hours listening to Hitler’s speeches from which he extracted syllables which, combined, and created the Hebrew words. In *Safam* and *Marcel Marcel* the artist used the same principle of editing; only this time it was Hitler’s appearance that Arad distorted. Thus, in *Marcel Marcel*, he transformed Hitler into a ridiculous cartoon character. Hitler’s recognizable facial trait appears as a thin line along his upper lip, which starts to thicken and curl at the sides, then it grows larger and larger until it bursts the boundaries of the face; thereafter, the tips of the moustache curl downward, joining over the chin and swiftly grow into a beard of large proportions.

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<sup>81</sup> Ellen Handler Spitz, ‘Childhood, Art, and Evil’, in the art catalogue *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2002), p. 40.

The fascination with Hitler surfaces in Christine Borland's *L'homme Double: Keeping one's Hands Clean: Six Commissioned Portraits of a Perpetrator* which also alludes to the notion of collaboration in the act of reconstructing and thus bringing to life the portrait of the Nazi, as it showcases six plaster busts of Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele, each created by different forensic sculptors, who based their works on blurry photographs and descriptions given by the artist.

Alan Schechner's exhibit *It's the Real Thing: Self-Portrait at Buchenwald* and Tom Sachs' *Giftgas Giftset*, speak of how the Holocaust is perceived from the point of view of an increasingly consumerist worldwide society. Schechner reminds the viewers of the unassailable gap between the survivor's experience of the concentration camp and the younger generation's futile attempts to empathize with it. *It's the Real Thing* contains the portrait of the artist inserted into Margaret Bourke-White's canonical photographs of the liberation of the camps. Jewish-American photographer Bourke-White was the first female war correspondent to face the atrocities committed by the Nazis at Buchenwald concentration camp. There she took photographs among which that of a group of survivors in barrack 56, published in the *New York Times* in May 1946 with the title 'Crowded bunks in the prison camps at Buchenwald'.<sup>82</sup> In Schechner's version, we can see the artist standing in front of the Jewish inmates, dressed as them but looking well and healthy, and holding a can of Diet Coke – the only element in colour placed in the centre of the image.

Zbigniew Libera's *Correcting Device: LEGO Concentration Camp Set* consists of seven boxes showing photographs of models of concentration camps reconstituted by the artists by using Lego pieces taken from various Lego kits: the Nazi doctors were taken from the medical kit, the guards and soldiers were part of the police and military kits, skeletons were found in the pirate series, while body parts were

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<sup>82</sup> See image retrieved from <http://wordpress.com/2010/03/25/famous-photo-of-buchenwald-survivors-revisited/> (accessed on 20.1. 2010).



available in other Lego games. Libera's aim was to remind his viewers that what produced the Holocaust is still present in our world, informing it in various ways.

Other artists show interest in the presence of images of Nazism in popular culture, drawing attention to their potential to captivate us. Piotr Uklański, for instance, collected 166 images of movie stars including Dirk Bogarde, Clint Eastwood, and Ralph Fiennes, dressed for roles in which they impersonate a Nazi. The artist linked barbarism to Hollywood glamour, as he suggested that post-war society attributed an erotic dimension to the Nazi figure.<sup>83</sup> He invoked the idea of complicity ensuing from the viewers' fascination with the masculine beauty of the actors impersonating the Nazis.

In his preface to the art catalogue, James Young contrasts what he calls 'traditional art that creates an empathetic nexus between viewers and concentration camp victims' with the more recent art which 'brings us face to face with the killers themselves'. Young points to the confrontational aspect of the new art production, stressing the effect it has on the audience. Unlike artworks which allow an easy escape from responsibility, through the identification with the victims, the works of *Mirroring Evil* confront us with 'our own role in the depiction of the evildoers and their deeds and the ways we cover our eyes and peep through our fingers at the same time'.<sup>84</sup> The scholar alludes to the audience's complicity with the depiction of Nazism, and also, to some extent, to the moral complicity with their deeds.

In his essay *Reflection of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (1984) Saul Friedländer speaks of the obsessive interest in Nazism which dominates the 'contemporary imagination' and proposes several explanations. 'Nazism has disappeared', Friedländer writes, 'but the obsession it represents for the contemporary imagination – as well as the birth of a new discourse that ceaselessly elaborates and

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<sup>83</sup> See Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *New York Review of Books*, (6 February, 1975).

<sup>84</sup> James Young, *Mirroring Evil*, p. xv.

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?”<sup>85</sup>

The artworks participating in *Mirroring Evil* do not claim to answer these questions. Instead, they invite the visitors to engage in a reflection upon their own allure with Nazism and their moral responsibility towards the Holocaust. The effect of this artistic strategy was soon felt in the responses of the audience, but also of the media. In fact, the exhibition was met with a plethora of public reactions, some laudatory, but most of them negative.

Despite the Museum’s endeavours to create an educative frame for the exhibition and situate it within scholarly analysis, by offering an overwhelming amount of explanations as to why the Jewish Museum should be the host, and how the works of art in the exhibition shed light upon the overuse, or abuse of the Holocaust in popular culture and the arts, the responses of the mass media were predominantly critical. Mainstream newspapers that contributed to the debate included: *The New York Times*, *The New York Observer*, *The Los Angeles Times*; and art publications such as *Art in America*, *Artforum*, but also the Jewish press *The Forward*, and *The Jewish Week*. The articles published in these journals offer an overview of how the controversy developed, documenting the survivors’ reactions, the organizers’ responses, the artists’ perspectives, and generally registering the collective responses of the American public.

In Israel the controversy started, as in *Mirroring Evil*’s case, before *Your Colouring Book* and *Live and Die as Eva Braun* even opened. Local newspapers *Kol Ha-Yir*, *Yediot*

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<sup>85</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An essay on Kitsch and Death*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 19.

*Abaronot*, or *Ha-Aretz* all covered the exhibitions by giving misinformed descriptions of their content, and alleging that both artists attempted to convey a sympathetic attitude towards Nazism. Soon, Israeli politicians intervened, declaring their disappointment with the decision of the Israel Museum to present such work. The politicians' declarations were followed by an avalanche of responses from members of the Museum, artists, the Minister of Education, Holocaust survivors, and Israeli scholars. Their exchange of opinions was subsequently broadcast by Israeli television and radio. Holocaust survivors expressed their anger and revulsion at the thought that *Your Colouring Book* was dealing with their painful memories in a light-hearted and playful manner. In their view, the Israel Museum was not the appropriate venue to display such work. There were also positive responses such as Holocaust survivor Anna Levin's, who characterized Katzir's artistic endeavour as 'contributing with a very important viewpoint to one of the underlying features of Nazi Germany'.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, the debate surrounding Rosen's exhibition was defined by a polarization of opinions. On the one hand, it was commended as a 'boundary marker', 'a turning point', or 'the crossing of a border'. The enthusiasts described it as 'an excellent, stimulating exhibition', 'one of the most moving exhibitions ever seen in Israel'. On the other hand, the detractors viewed it as 'an important document in the annals of sensationalism', 'a profane transgression', or as 'a pornographic exploitation of the Holocaust'.<sup>87</sup> The artists appeared at local radio and television shows and explained the meaning of their artworks and the reasons underlying their approach. They also gave guided tours of the exhibitions, offering clarifications of the issues invoked by their works.

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<sup>86</sup> Anna Levin cited by Bianca Stigter, 'I go to places where people do not want to see the book', in *NRC Handelsblad*, (21 February, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Descriptions of the Rosen's work cited by Ariella Azoulay in *Death's Showcase, the power of image in contemporary democracy*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), p. 65.

My next chapter suggests that, with these exhibitions, the Jewish museums in New York and in Jerusalem turned into social arenas where a broad set of social, historical, and political issues regarding the memory of the Holocaust were intensely debated. Moreover, I explain how, from a historical point of view, the museum, including the art museum, has come to attain the position of central constituent of the 'public sphere' and has obtained the role of agent of display and shaper of public discussion.

My theoretical exploration of the function of the museum as representative of the 'public sphere' – a concept which I present at length – shall provide an appropriate context for a discussion about the roles acquired by the Jewish museums as mediators and enhancers of a new understanding of the role of the Holocaust in the shaping of Israeli and Jewish-American identities.

## Chapter 2

### **A Theoretical Frame to the Development of the Public Debates about Holocaust Memory at the Jewish museums in Israel and America**

This chapter outlines the theoretical tenets which underpin my analysis of the public debates triggered by the exhibitions described in the previous chapter. Furthermore, it shall introduce the reader to the methodological approach that makes this analysis possible.

Jürgen Habermas' model of the bourgeoisie 'public sphere' is introduced for the purpose of a better understanding of the mechanisms by which members of the Israeli society and of the American-Jewish communities engage in public debates about the memory of the Holocaust. Although it constitutes a turning point in our understanding of the 'social body',<sup>1</sup> Habermas' bourgeoisie public sphere has been challenged by a number of critics, notably by left-wing sociologists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, in *Public Sphere and Experience* (1972), and more recently by post-structuralists Nancy Fraser, in *Rethinking the Public Sphere* (1990), and Gerard Hauser in *Vernacular Voices, The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (1999). Their explanations of the contemporary public sphere will prove to be relevant for understanding the performative and discursive nature of the Jewish public spheres revealed during the debates at the Jewish museums.

The second section of this chapter examines the link between the museum and the public sphere. Drawing on museum studies such as Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum*, and Eilean Hooper-Greenblatt's *Museum and Education. Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, I firstly explore how the role and function of the museum have changed over time. Both the Jewish Museum and the Israel Museum – as prominent constituents of a Jewish public sphere, present ambivalent positions as institutions that are representative of the American-Jewish and Israeli culture

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<sup>1</sup> Term employed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 207.

and identity respectively, and as art museums that reach out to a wider non-Jewish audience. In order to better understand this situation, an examination of how the art museum differs from the national museum, in terms of vision and practice, seems necessary.

The third section of this chapter looks at the public sphere, including the museum and the media as open sites that give their participants the opportunity to 'perform' their identity, by voicing their feelings and opinions. Through the introduction of the concept of 'performativity', Judith Butler has explained the birth of 'gendered identity', arguing that identity is a cultural construct, which one needs to 'perform'. I shall show how the performative dimension permeates different aspects of Jewish museums' practice. In the Jewish Museum in New York and in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, albeit to different degrees, the meaning of the art exhibition and of the work of art is realised through an increased reliance on interaction with the audience, therefore the work of art *per se* presents a performative aspect.

As a way of concluding this theoretical account, I shall outline the principles of critical discourse analysis which constitutes my main methodological tool for a detailed analysis of the public debates.

## I The 'Public Sphere' and its Developments

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962)<sup>2</sup> Habermas develops his understanding of the 'public sphere' as a foundation for a critique of society, built on democratic tenets. The printing press and the more recent media, such as radio and television have played a major part in the 'public sphere' as conceptualised by Habermas. He grounds the 'public sphere' in the West European societies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and draws attention to the conditions which favoured the emergence of a new social class, the 'bourgeoisie' which is distinct both from the aristocracy and the working class. He sets out to establish what the category of 'the public' meant in bourgeois society and how its meaning and ways to function were transformed during the centuries after its constitution. With the disintegration of feudal power, the decline of the 'carriers of representative publicness' (church, royalty and nobility), and the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism, elements of a new social order took shape. The bourgeoisie evolved, thus, as a result of the changing social situation, and due to increasing literacy, accessibility to literature and the arts, and the liberalisation of commerce. Lacking an official position within the state's institutions, the bourgeoisie was composed of 'private people' who gathered in public locations to discuss matters of 'public concern' and of 'common interest'. Henceforth, the societies of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century developed a new form of 'sociability', as a 'genuine domain of private autonomy that stood opposed to the state'. Habermas names it, 'the bourgeois public sphere' and described it as follows:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public, they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (trans.), (London: Polity, 1989).

and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason.<sup>3</sup>

Habermas pinpoints the initial phases of the bourgeois public sphere in the 'world of letters', which used to be a component of the prince's court, but which gradually detached itself from the court and became its 'counterpoise' in the town. The first institutions of the public sphere identified as forming the town's civil society, according to Habermas, were the coffee houses in Britain, the *salons* in France and the German *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies).

Despite the difference in size and composition of these early institutions of the public sphere, Habermas finds similarities in 'the style of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientations, they all organised discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing'.<sup>4</sup> They represented semi-public spaces where debate could take shape, and discourses could be formulated, independent of the social status of those who uttered them. Here, private individuals could engage in a reasoned argument over key issues of mutual interest and concern, creating a space in which new ideas could be shared and rational public debate cultivated.

Habermas emphasizes that reason enabled the interlocutors of the public sphere to find consensus based on the most acceptable and logical argument, stating that: 'public debate was supposed to transform *voluntas* into a *ratio*, that in the public competition, private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the ideal of the public sphere relies on the principle of social integration based on rational and critical discourse.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the patrons of the coffee houses were already so numerous and the circles of their frequenters so wide that contact among all of

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<sup>3</sup> Habermas, pp. 12, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 83.



them could only be maintained through journals. In Britain, journals of public opinion were founded, which linked the circles in London with those throughout the country, and ‘replicated in their contents the style of convivial exchange’. Habermas stresses that ‘the periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee house, but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion’.<sup>6</sup>

The press represents, in his view, the preeminent institution of the public sphere. In the chapter ‘The transformation of the public sphere’s political function’, Habermas outlines the evolution of the printing press, from its function as a means of expressing the ideas of ‘private men of letters’ to a form of advertisement in capitalist societies. According to Habermas, the press developed from a business in ‘pure news reporting’ to one that disseminated viewpoints and ideologies. This was captured by scholar of journalism Karl Bücher whom Habermas quotes as follows:

From mere institutions for the publication of news, the papers became also carriers and leaders of public opinion, and instruments in the arsenal of party politics. For the internal organization of the newspaper enterprise this had the consequence that a new function was inserted between the gathering and the publication of news: the editorial function. For the newspaper’s publisher, however, this meant that he changed from being a merchant to being a dealer in public opinion.<sup>7</sup>

The press was no longer viewed as merely a ‘vehicle for the transportation of information’, but came to be seen as ‘a medium for the transportation of consumption’,<sup>8</sup> even though it remained an institution of the public sphere. Habermas points out that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a number of newspaper enterprises were already organised as stock companies.

At the turn of the century, the invention of the telegraph revolutionised the organisation of the news network. As a direct consequence, the newspaper

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Bücher quoted by Habermas on p. 182.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, p. 183.

developed into a capitalist undertaking, and became enmeshed in a web of interests which sought to exercise influence on it.<sup>9</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the newspaper publishing industry was supplanted by the new media of film, radio, and television. Due to its scope and influence, the new media was placed under government control, which contributed to the decline of the liberal public sphere, viewed as the domain of private people outside of the influence of the authorities.

The historical development, thus, is from a more or less autonomous bourgeois public sphere in which rational-critical debate was protected against the interference of the authorities to a more constrained public sphere.

Habermas underlines the transition from the 'liberal' public sphere of the Enlightenment to a media-dominated public sphere in the era of what he calls 'welfare-state capitalism and mass democracy'. With the development of competitive economies, the public sphere structured and dominated by the media, turned into a kind of battleground, not only for influence on public opinion, but also for control of the flow of communication. While in the bourgeois public sphere, opinion was shaped in open debates that attempted to reach a consensus with regard to general interests, in capitalism, public opinion is dominated by elites and represents, for the most part, their particular private interests.

The earlier phase of the printing press within the bourgeois public sphere, contrasts thus with the new media that serves a culture of consumption. Habermas suggests that, as a result of the altered function of the printing press, the model of the public sphere is no longer useful, since, it was based on a clear separation of society and state. With the emergence of mass democracy, society and the state became intertwined. The public sphere, subjected to state interests, lost its critical function. Habermas concludes that a new public sphere is needed based on critical-rationality as a basic principle of democracy. Beyond doubt, Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* constitutes a major scholarly contribution to the establishment of the concept of public sphere. However, since its publication it has

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<sup>9</sup> This idea is articulated by Habermas on p. 185.

also been criticised. An impressive number of critical studies undertaken especially in Germany have taken issue with what could be paraphrased as Habermas' idealization of the public sphere.<sup>10</sup>

One recent example is Hans Kleinsteuber's 'Habermas and the Public Sphere: From a German to a European Perspective' (2007).<sup>11</sup> Kleinsteuber recognizes Habermas as the author of a normative approach, who has enabled the construction of a 'paradigmatic' or 'teutonic version of the public sphere', but has 'not bothered about details' since he showed 'little sensitivity concerning the cultural differences in Europe, not informing what the public sphere means in the history of different European culture'.<sup>12</sup> Countries such as the Netherlands, where the first modern bourgeois society was established, or Scandinavia, known for its practical attitude towards reform, are notable examples given by Kleinsteuber to support his critique of Habermas. One may add here that a reflection on the role played by Jews in the emergence of the public sphere is also missing from Habermas' normative representation.

In his discussion of the German table societies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Habermas does not mention Berlin's Jewish literary salons mediated by Jewish women, the *salonières* such as Rahel Levin Varnhagen or Henriette Herz.<sup>13</sup> The salon gathered together both Jewish and German intellectuals, politicians, and authors to discuss, among various topics, the emancipation of the Jews. Neither does Habermas refer to the development of a Jewish press.

Since its late-18<sup>th</sup>-century origins, the Jewish press, according to Derek Penslar, represented 'a microcosm of the Jewish public sphere, and heralded the onset of a Jewish modernity'. The press also reflected the development of a 'middle-class

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<sup>10</sup> One such example is Peter Uwe Hohendahl (ed.), *Öffentlichkeit – Geschichte eines kritischen Begriffs*, (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Hans Kleinsteuber, 'Habermas and the Public Sphere: From a German to a European Perspective', in *Razon Y Palabra*, 55 (February-March, 2007), retrieved from <http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/anteriores/n55/hkleinstuber.html>, (accessed on 20.5. 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See Hannah Arendt's monograph, *Rahel Varnhagen: the life of a Jewess*, Richard and Clara Winston (trans.), (London: East and West Library, 1957).

Jewish political, cultural and economic sensibility'. Moreover, the late-19<sup>th</sup> century in Russia and America, witnessed the growth of the 'mass-circulation' Jewish press, which 'even though it could not be seen as representative of broad social groups, remained invaluable as a site of representation of the sensibility of the Jewish activist elite and the cultural matrix in which it was formed'.<sup>14</sup>

Penslar informs that periodicals such as *Ha-Melitz* (the Interpreter) established in Odessa in 1860, or the Hebrew newspaper, *Ha-Maggid* (the Preacher), published in East Prussia, have constituted a platform for debate of issues of collective Jewish concern, a means to educate the Jews, and to 'subject them to a process of moral improvement so as to render them worthy of emancipation and capable of integration into the middle-class society'.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States witnessed the burgeoning of Yiddish press, including *Po'alei Tsyion*, or *Forverts*. The public sphere, remarks Penslar, was 'forged by mass-circulation Yiddish journalism', and became a 'primary component of American Jewish ethnic identity'.<sup>16</sup> However, this situation did not last since many Jewish immigrants in America stopped reading Yiddish periodicals, and rarely passed on Yiddish literacy to their children. A question to be raised at a later stage, is to what extent the Jewish press in the 1990s offers a platform for the constitution of a Jewish public sphere, in both the US and Israel. Did the public debates sparked by the art exhibitions enable the manifestation of a particular Jewish-American and Israeli public sphere, each showing their own approach to the memory of the Holocaust?

The Jewish salons and the press undoubtedly played a role in the constitution of a European bourgeois public sphere. They have not been acknowledged by Habermas, despite his view of the public sphere as an inclusive space which offers equal opportunities to all members of society to publicly express their

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<sup>14</sup> Derek Penslar, 'Introduction: The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere', in *Jewish History*, 14 (1) (January, 2000), pp. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

opinions. Habermas' omissions have prompted his critics to question to what extent the public sphere can hold society together, and represent the voice and the needs of all its members.

A possible model for a Jewish public sphere is hinted at by Negt and Kluge, who emphasize the existence of various public spheres, differentiated by social class, or ethnicity, which they name 'counter-publics'. As an example, they point to the working class which, they argue, occupied a position of subordination. According to them the bourgeois public sphere 'was not unified at all, but rather the aggregate of individual spheres that were only abstractly related'.<sup>17</sup> In their opinion, television, the press, interest groups and political parties, public education, the churches, parliament, or industry can only be seemingly fused into a general concept of the public sphere. This overriding concept is 'nothing but a mere illusion behind which one could come in direct contact with capitalist interests'. Moreover, Negt and Kluge stress the ambiguous nature of the concept of the public sphere, which they define as denoting, on the one hand, specific institutions, agencies and practices (e.g. those connected with law enforcement, the press, public opinion, the public, streets and public squares), on the other, an abstract concept – which they call 'a general social horizon of experience in which everything that is actually or ostensibly relevant to all members of society is integrated'. In this sense, the public sphere is 'illusory' since it refers to 'something that concerns everyone and that realizes itself only in people's minds, in a dimension of their consciousness'.<sup>18</sup>

Nancy Fraser, too, posits a plurality of public spheres. Whereas Negt and Kluge point to the proletarian public sphere as an example of counter-public, Fraser focuses on the feminist public sphere, which, she argues, has been excluded from Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. Her claim is that the coffee house was

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<sup>17</sup> Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public sphere and experience: toward an analysis of the bourgeois and proletarian public sphere*, Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (trans.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xlviii. The book was originally published in 1972 under the title *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. xlviii, 2.

‘anything but accessible to anyone’. Instead, it acted as ‘an arena, or the training ground and the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men who were coming to see themselves as a universal class, preparing to assert their fitness to govern’.<sup>19</sup>

Seemingly drawing on Negt and Kluge’s terminology, Fraser uses ‘subaltern counter-publics’ to refer to those members of subordinated social groups whose voice was marginalised in the public sphere, but which organised themselves and formed ‘parallel discursive arenas’ where they could ‘invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs’. Since they have emerged in response to exclusions from the dominant public, their role is to expand the discursive space which leads to a widening of discursive contestation. Fraser alludes to Judith Butler’s concept of ‘performativity’, by linking public discourse with the construction of social identity, stating that ‘public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion; they are also arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities’.<sup>20</sup> Being active in the public sphere means being able to construct and express one’s cultural identity in a performative manner, through idiom and style.

Rather than endorsing Fraser’s perception of social tension that has developed between members of the dominant public sphere, who exclude the discourses of members of a subaltern public sphere, Gerard A. Hauser proposes the term ‘multiple discursive arenas’ to describe the public spheres as ‘non-competitive neutral spaces in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group’. The significance of these multiple discursive arenas does not stem from their institutional character, but from their ‘rhetoricity’. Hauser highlights here the act of communication itself, which consists of rhetorical exchanges established between members of the public sphere. In his view, the rhetorical exchanges create ‘the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of actually existing democracy’ in *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990), p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organisation of society'.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Hauser argues that members of pluralistic societies belong to several, over-lapping discursive arenas, in which they experience: 'a polyphony of concurrent conversations, as vernacular languages that rub against one another, instigating dialogues [...] on questions raised by their intersections and leading us to consider possibilities that might encompass their political, social, cultural and linguistic differences'.<sup>22</sup> Hauser distinguishes a multitude of public spheres including, black or feminist public spheres, professional, global, the intimate public sphere, or the electronic public sphere as discourse communities.

In his conception, the public sphere is 'a discursive space which encourages and nurtures a multi-logue across their respective borders, and aims at reaching a balance among diverging opinions, through informed deliberation'.<sup>23</sup> Public opinion thus transcends the opinion of the individual and reflects the opinion of a collective. Public opinion emerges from debates, and it evolves as the debates develop. Unlike Habermas, Hauser doubts that the construction of a public debate can be based only on rational critical argument. Instead, he argues that when forming their judgements the members of a public sphere rely on their emotional connection to the subject of debate. Contrary to Habermas' principle of disinterest, public discussions necessarily involve emotions. People become engaged in a debate because it touches their lives.

Some issues of public debate involve a wider audience than others. The more controversial the subject of debate, the more powerful is the emotional involvement of the participants. A controversial subject can prompt contradictory opinions and cause disagreement among the members of the public sphere. There is no doubt that it challenges an established social structure

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<sup>21</sup> Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular voices: the rhetoric of publics and public spheres*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 64.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

in which subjects deemed taboo are seldom the topic of public debate. However, when they become manifest in the public sphere, controversial subjects can either trigger social tension and even conflict, or they can open up a forum for discussion and lead to new insights.

The role of controversy in the public sphere will be investigated in my analysis of public debates about Holocaust art. Next, I will draw attention to the role of museums, such as the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and the Jewish Museum in New York, as constituents of the public sphere.



## II

### The Museum: From Gatekeeper of knowledge to Mediator of public discussion

In his essay 'Of Other spaces' Michel Foucault defines the museum as a 'heterotopia of indefinitely accumulating time', and its function as that of collecting and preserving history and culture:

Accumulating everything, or establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time, and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organising in this a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place.<sup>24</sup>

To this day, the museum has preserved this symbolic position as a repository of civilization and humanity, but has also proven to be, contrary to Foucault's observation, an institution that is well-grounded in a specific social and historical time and space.

In the period of absolutism, informs Tony Bennett, all major forms of display of collections served to construct the 'representative publicness' of the prince. If, in the monarchical system, art collections enhanced the prince's power, with the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, art started to be viewed as part of an emerging social and political structure through which to criticize the authorities. Hence, the museum and the art gallery allowed the bourgeois public to express their own opinions.<sup>25</sup>

Bennett reminds us, however, that the museum of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century hardly functioned on the principles of social inclusion, since: 'the construction of the public sphere as of polite and rational discourse, required the construction of a negatively coded other sphere that comprised the places of popular assembly, from which it might be differentiated'. Bennett refers to the 'rough and raucous

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Diacritics*, 16 (1) (Spring, 1986), p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-17.

general populace', from which the bourgeoisie endeavoured to distinguish itself. Especially in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the museum was conceptualised as a 'governmental instrument of public instruction', or an 'exemplary space in which the rough and raucous might learn to civilise themselves by modelling their conduct on the middle-class codes of behaviour to which museum attendance would expose them'.<sup>26</sup>

According to this new conception, however imperfectly it may have been realised in practice, the working class were able to enter the museum space, where they were exposed to the taste of the middle class. The museum of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was thus refashioned as a 'social space', in contrast to the restrictive and socially exclusive space of the monarch's private collections. It emerged through the transformation of the semi-private institutions restricted to the ruling and professional classes into institutions of the state dedicated to the instruction and edification of the general public.

Museums became thus 'major vehicles for the fulfilment of the state's new educative and moral role in relation to the population as a whole'. They provided a 'performative environment in which new forms of conduct and behaviour could be shaped and practiced'. The performative dimension results from the museum's ability to provide its visitors with a 'set of resources through which they can actively insert themselves within a particular vision of history by fashioning themselves to contribute to its development'.<sup>27</sup>

Bennett sees the museum as functioning on the principles of public sphere such as the 'principle of public rights' sustaining the demand that museums should be equally open and accessible to all, and 'the principle of representational adequacy', according to which museums should adequately represent the cultures and values of different sections of the public.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 33, 47.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

However, what Bennett has not mentioned is that the applicability of these principles has already been questioned by a number of critics within museum studies. Harold Innis, for example, wrote in the 1950s that the museum possesses the ‘monopoly of power’ and represents ‘a centralised structure situated in an imposing city building, controlling the preservation of historical knowledge and identity of the dominant culture, and also the world knowledge seen through the lens of the dominant culture’.<sup>29</sup> This argument was taken up by Marxist cultural theorists Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault who viewed museums as ‘hegemonic’ institutions, which reinforce the cultural ideologies of the ruling class. Through its classification of knowledge, choice of themes and subjects of display, the museum is seen as a shaper and keeper of a people’s history and culture. It turns into an educative and civilizing agency, which also plays an important role in the formation of the modern nation state.<sup>30</sup>

These critics have failed to acknowledge that as a result of the civil rights movements in Europe and America in the late 1960s, museums tended to move away from telling national stories that cater for a sense of national identity. Instead, they attempted to develop narratives that speak of the history and culture of ethnic minorities. Histories that had been hidden away were brought to light, and master narratives were being challenged by counter-narratives.

This is the case especially in the United States where, as Timothy Luke observes, more than seven thousand museums of various types opened during the 1980s and 1990s to cater for the multicultural and multiethnic structure of the American society.<sup>31</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which opened in 1993, is a representative example of a national enterprise to incorporate the traumatic history of a minority culture into American identity.

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<sup>29</sup> Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> For a more extensive discussion about the role of the museum as instrument of power, see Rhiannon Mason, ‘Cultural Theory and Museum Studies’, in Sharon MacDonald (ed.), *A companion to Museum Studies*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), pp. 17-33; and Susan Ashley, ‘State Authority and the Public Sphere’, in Sheila Waston (ed.), *Museums and their Communities*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 485- 489.

<sup>31</sup> Timothy W. Luke, *Museum politics: power plays at the exhibition*, (Minneapolis, Minn., London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xv.

In Israel a similar development can be observed. Since *Likud* came to power in 1977, Israeli society has moved away from perceiving itself as a unitary Zionist body. Instead, it has come to see itself as a multi-ethnic society with a variety of cultural and historical legacies. For example, the previously marginalised Sephardi communities started to gain public representation. In the 1980s, the Israeli society has come to be characterized by the rise of multi-ethnic identities and the emphasis on individual self-realisation. This conflicted with the collective ethos of building a unified national identity, which has weakened since then. Jackie Feldman points out that, during this period, ‘the old mythical figures – the pioneer and the soldier – lost much of their attraction, and identity began to coalesce around smaller units – my ethnic group, my economic group, myself’.<sup>32</sup>

With reference to this, Israeli art historian, Ariella Azoulay speaks of the ‘de-monopolization of the past’, observing that since the rise of *Likud* to power, marginal groups have begun to actively shape and represent the country’s past. Azoulay states that in the following ten years, in the 1990s, eighty museums were rapidly established, many being founded by communities or individual entrepreneurs who felt excluded from the common heritage. With the founding of ‘their’ museum, groups such as the Sephardic or Mizrachi Jews, who were previously excluded, have gained visibility. The decision of the Ministry of Education to found the Centre for Integration of the Heritage of Eastern Jewry is a notable example of an attempt to preserve the Sephardi heritage as part of the history of Israel. Likewise, the Jewish Diaspora Museum illustrated the inclusion of the Jews of Mizrachi origin, such as the Yemenite Jews, within the Israeli national body.<sup>33</sup>

Museum theorist Eilean Hopper-Greenhill too stresses the changes occurring in museum practice after the 1960s, but at a more general level. She argues that, ‘a

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<sup>32</sup> Jackie Feldman, ‘Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective through the Poland “Experience”’, in *Israel Studies*, 7 (2) (Summer, 2002), p. 92.

<sup>33</sup> Ariella Azoulay, ‘With Open Doors: Museums and Historical Narratives in Israel’s Public Space’, in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum culture: histories, discourses, spectacles*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 99, 104, 105.

vast, revisionary will in the Western world, unsettling/resetting, canons, procedures, beliefs',<sup>34</sup> also characterizes the museums. Other critics, too, have noticed that the emphasis has shifted from exhibiting the past which focused on disciplinary-based knowledge, and presented authoritative views on the subject matter, to thematically focused, inter-disciplinary exhibitions, which aim to problematise and critique received wisdom in a given domain.<sup>35</sup>

The museum has thus undergone a process of revision, and reassessment as a result of which it has become more sensitive to competing narratives and to local circumstances, and more aware of the needs of diverse social groups. Hooper-Greenhill uses the term 'post-museum' to encapsulate these changes and argues that museums have become more conscious of those to whom they are speaking. Furthermore, Hooper-Greenhill attests to the performative character of the 'post-museum', as she envisions it based on a 'more dynamic approach to the encounter between the visitor and the museum narratives', and argues that the knowledge that visitors bring with them is now actively being considered by curators when they choose their approach to exhibitions. The post-museum is a 'process or an experience' rather than a repository of values such as objectivity, rationality, order and distance, 'it negotiates responsiveness, encourages mutually nurturing partnerships and celebrates diversity'.<sup>36</sup>

Barbara Franco also points out the current move in museum practice towards an expanded 'public service role'.<sup>37</sup> She remarks that an obvious shift is taking place, especially in museum education. Learning transforms what we are and what we can do. Learning is not just an accumulation of skills and facts, but a process of becoming. Learning, too, entails a performative function, as it works to shape self-identity. She reminds us that, in considering museums as educational sites,

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<sup>34</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> Mark O'Neill, 'Museums and their Communities', in Gail Dexter Lord and Barry Lord (eds.), *The Manual of Museum Planning*, (London: The Stationary Office, 1999), pp. 21-38.

<sup>36</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, pp. 142, 148, 153.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Franco, *Patterns in Practice, Selections from the Journal of Museum Education, Evolution in the Field: Historical Context*, (Washington, D.C.: Museum Education Roundtable, 1992), p. 9.

the relationships between the cultural perspectives that museums produce and the identities of learners must not be neglected. Franco stresses the permanent and dual mission of the museum, that of preservation and education, and views the changes that have occurred and continue to occur in museum practice, as a movement back and forth between the 'roles of expert, keeper, authority at one end of the spectrum, and public servant, communicator, community participant at the other'.<sup>38</sup>

However, what describes the museum of today is the move towards the function of the public servant. Formal tours are giving way to informal programs, cognitive learning objectives are being replaced by affective learning, and school tours are being complemented by programmes for families and the adult general public. Museum education staff is increasingly involved in the exhibition planning, since, according to Franco, 'exhibits become learning environments with greater opportunities for self-directed, affective learning that includes visitor participation'.<sup>39</sup>

The fundamental relations between museums and their visitors are thus in flux, enabling more dynamic encounters with the exhibits, and encouraging more diverse interpretations of them. The Jewish museums have been influenced to a great extent by these more general developments of the museum as an institution of the public sphere. The roles assumed by the Jewish museums shall be discussed at length in chapters three and four in this thesis. For now, I would like to focus on how Hooper-Greenhill's argument – that much of the recent development in the museums' educational programmes has been supported through government funds<sup>40</sup> – is a valid statement in the case of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and of the Jewish Museum in New York.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and education: purpose, pedagogy, performance*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 15-17.

In Israel, in addition to their reliance on governmental funds, museums have developed the practice of founding their activities on financial resources obtained from private sources. This is especially the case with regard to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The Israel Museum stresses the importance of an ever-growing network of international friends, who support its activities. The museum benefits from the financial assistance of its American, Canadian and Mexican Friends, on the American continent, and the British, German, French, or Swiss Friends in Europe.

Whereas the American Friends (AFIM) ‘gather support in the United States for a great part of the Museum’s facilities and collections’ the British Friends of the Art Museums in Israel (BFAMI) ‘aids the Museum in acquisitions and the financing of special projects’.<sup>41</sup> The British Friends’ role in the financing of Ram Katzir’s *Your Colouring Book* will be discussed at a later stage of my study.

The financing of the Israel Museum rests on a variety of sources: members, who contribute with smaller amounts, patrons, guardians, donors, sponsors, and finally benefactors and founders, whose support is the most substantial.<sup>42</sup> The Jewish Museum in New York has secured its existence and growth in a similar manner. The museum informs us on its webpage that its coming into being in 1905 was made possible through the private donation to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America of twenty-six objects of Jewish ceremonial art, by Judge Mayer Sulzberger. Nowadays the Jewish Museum benefits from the financial generosity of the ‘1109 Society’ formed of both individual donors and foundations which support its restoration and renovation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See

[http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/International\\_Friends\\_Organizations.aspx?c0=13425&bsp=12839](http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/International_Friends_Organizations.aspx?c0=13425&bsp=12839), (accessed on 14.5. 2010).

<sup>42</sup> See

[http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/Friends\\_of\\_the\\_Israel\\_Museum.aspx?c0=13407&bsp=12839](http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/Friends_of_the_Israel_Museum.aspx?c0=13407&bsp=12839) (accessed on 13.5. 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Their financial support ranges from 100,000 to 5 million dollars. See webpage <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/JoinSupport>, (accessed on 13.5. 2010).

Based on these examples, one can safely state that a specific characteristic of Jewish museums appears to be their reliance on private sources to secure their collections and activities. Several questions emerge from here: How does the Jewish museums' reliance on private sources of funding influence their activities? Do they fashion their programmes and exhibitions in accordance to the interests of individuals whose agenda, even though different from that of state authorities, calls for caution on the part of Museum curators? What happens when a public institution such as the Jewish Museum proposes to its audience a subject which might raise an issue that is sensitive to a particular group of people? Is there a consensus between the Jewish museums and their funding bodies in regard to how they construct their image and present it to the public? There is no doubt that these questions will be of relevance in my discussion of public debates triggered by art exhibitions at Jewish museums in Israel and in the United States.

For now we can conclude that Michel Foucault's view on the museum as primarily based on the 'idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time' is at odds with the recent development of the museum, which as Mark O'Neill has suggested, seeks to become part of 'a living culture, capable of responsiveness, growth and evolution'<sup>44</sup> and shows an increased commitment to social inclusion. Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans go even further in arguing that the core function of the museum is that of establishing a 'place of discursive thinking', and they ask:

In what sense can the museum become a public space, responsible for stimulating and housing critical thinking in and about art and society? How can a museum provoke and host public debate about issues of major relevance? Can we recast the museum as a critical site of public debate distinct from the museum as privileged manager or administrator of cultural heritage, authorising selective stories and formalised pasts?<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mark O'Neill, 'The good enough visitor', in Richard Sandell (ed.), *Museums, society, inequality*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans (eds.), *Museums after modernism: strategies of engagement*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), p. xx.



Pollock stresses the symbiotic connection between museum and society, reminding us that ‘art and thought are active and necessary processes, not isolated in the museum, but opened into the world. The museum/gallery is an opened space that can become their stage, where they are investigated and performed’.<sup>46</sup>

Hence, the conceptualisation of the museum as an agent of ‘symbolic power’<sup>47</sup> has progressed to that of the museum as arena for social integration and debate. The museum has made obvious its transition from the role of keeper of selective tradition to the position of mediator, that of an open forum which allows a multiplicity of voices and opinions to be heard. Has the art museum shown a similar trajectory? How does the art museum differ from the generic museum in regard to its operating principles, such as accessibility to the general public, the role given to education, and the relationship with its audience?

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Term employed by Pierre Bourdieu in ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’, in *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1) (Spring, 1989), pp. 14-25.

## II. 1. Defining the Art Museum

Carol Duncan refers to three views on art museums invoked by museum studies. The aesthetic view, according to which, the aesthetic contemplation of a work of art has an inspirational power which needs no other justification. The educational view, which claims that art museums should be part of the process of educating people, aesthetically, socially and historically. The political view, which looks at the art museum as a social institution that carries out an ideological function, and reinforces the distribution of power within society.<sup>48</sup>

It appears that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the educational and instructive potential of the art museum gained prominence. William H. Flower contends that considerable emphasis was placed on instruction based on order and identification:

Correct classification, good labelling, isolation of each object from its neighbours, the provision of a suitable background, and above all a position in which it can be readily and distinctly seen are absolute requisites in art museums.<sup>49</sup>

The public art museum developed forms of exhibitions that ‘involved an instruction in history and cultures, periods and schools that in both order and combination was fundamentally pedagogic’.<sup>50</sup> This was accomplished through asking the visitor to undertake, or better to perform a kind of itinerary. Fisher states that when:

We walk through a museum, walk past the art, we recapitulate in our act the motion of art history itself, its restlessness, its forward motion, its power to link. Far from being a fact that shows the public’s ignorance of what art is about, the rapid stroll through a museum is an act in deep

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<sup>48</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-7.

<sup>49</sup> William Henry Flower, *Essays on Museums and other subjects connected to natural history*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> Philip Fisher, *Making and effacing art: Modern American art in a culture of museums*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 7.

harmony with the nature of art, that is, art history and the museum itself.<sup>51</sup>

In his critique Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the ideological view on art museums. He refers to the fact ‘that only those with the appropriate kind of cultural capital can both *see* the paintings on display and *see through* them to perceive the hidden order of art’.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, restrictions are expressed through norms which regulate the behaviour of the audience. Bennett notices that exhibitions became ‘textbooks in civil society’ as they provide the space where the ‘middle class learnt that the restraint of emotion was the outward expression of the respect for quality’.<sup>53</sup>

The art museum also endeavours to establish a relationship with its audience based on the principles of rationality, by presenting the exhibits in a certain order which would prompt the visitor to engage in an act of contemplation. Even more than this, the work of art must stop the visitor in her or his tracks and convey a sense of the uniqueness, argues Stephen Greenblatt. He also contends that, the exhibits of the art museum aim ‘to dazzle’ the viewer.<sup>54</sup> This function is especially apparent in the temporary exhibition, to which I will now turn.

According to critic Michael Belcher, the temporary exhibition aims to be innovative and daring, and has the capacity to be topical and controversial, and to respond to current events. The temporary exhibition should therefore assemble items to illustrate a particular facet or to tell a specific story. If the visitor leaves the exhibition with a new sense of wonder, understanding or useful purpose, that exhibition can be said to have been a success.<sup>55</sup> But what are the elements that contribute to this success? How can the temporary exhibition convey a sense of wonder?

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Love of Art: European art museums and their public*, (London: Cambridge Polity Press, 1991), p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Bennett, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Towards A Poetics of Culture’, in *Southern Review*, 20 (1) (March, 1987), p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Belcher, *Exhibitions in museums*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), p. 48.

It is well-known that an exhibition is created by a curator or a curatorial team responsible for its concept and content. They utilise basic elements to tell the story of an exhibition: objects, texts in the form of labels, wall panels, headlines, or banners, lighting, sound, or the media of film, and printed material such as handouts, brochures, guidebooks or exhibition catalogues. What is less known to the public is that before deciding on an exhibition narrative, the organisers engage in a process of negotiation about various aspects concerning the exhibition, with the artist, curators, educators, the press and executive staff. Questions are asked about the choice of objects and media, the manner of display in the exhibition gallery, the presentation in the art catalogues, and in the press release. Hence, elements of design, layout, and selection of content contribute to the overall impact of an exhibition and communicate the museum's agenda.

One should not overlook the role of the textual support in the transmission of the 'meaning' of an exhibition. Louisa J. Ravelli informs us that this represents a central component of the museum's communication tool-kit. The stronger the reliance on text, the more obvious is the educational purpose assigned to the exhibition. Museums of today make use of other strategies, such as employing a lecturer, arranging artist-led tours, or compiling web-based resources. In addition to the use of text, the story of the exhibition is told through the organization of the exhibits. Organization is defined as 'the art or science of arranging the visual, spatial and material environment into a composition that visitors move through and it can have a significant impact on visitor behaviour'.<sup>56</sup>

The process of 'moving through' the exhibition is important as it plays a role in the construction of the meaning of the exhibition, and it undoubtedly constitutes a part of the museum experience. The exhibition space is divided into sections connected by pathways that draw visitors towards an object. By arranging displays in a particular order, the museum curators encourage a particular

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<sup>56</sup> Louise J. Ravelli, *Museum texts: communication frameworks*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 123.

‘reading’ of them. Both the pathways and the positions of the objects are seen as formal devices that transmit what is important, what story is being told, and what the place of the visitors should be vis-à-vis the display. The extent to which a pathway is prescribed has a direct influence on how the meaning of the exhibition is shaped, states Ravelli.<sup>57</sup> She also points to how pathways can be created or reinforced by the use of framing devices; among them she lists physical devices such as walls, doorways, archways that signal the separation of spaces. A shift in design such as change of colour, or the use of lighting is also suggestive of a strong framing. Reesa Greenberg, for instance, has remarked that the curator of *Mirroring Evil* exhibition employed framing devices found in the Holocaust museum such as ‘liminal introductory space, change in light and floor covering to shift mood and sensory perceptions, protective devices, use of extensive text, and carefully plotted routes’ all of which are common in Holocaust Museums such as the one in Washington DC.<sup>58</sup>

An equally important element in assigning meaning to the exhibition is the degree of interaction called for between the exhibition and the visitor. What does the exhibition say about the museum itself? What roles does it enable or require the visitor to assume? How does it make the visitor feel? One common museum practice is to place the exhibits in glass cases. This positions the visitors passively in relation to the ‘knowledge’ displayed, encouraging them to absorb knowledge without questioning it. On the other hand, by arranging various activities for the visitors, such as asking them to fill in questionnaires, write down their reflection, listen to sounds, or replicate certain objects, the museum enables the visitor to interact with the object of display. In both instances the visitor must be ‘involved’ for the production of meaning to occur; however the nature of involvement varies. According to Ravelli the roles and relationships of the art museum and its visitors have changed dramatically, from merely contemplating

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<sup>57</sup> Ravelli, pp. 123-4.

<sup>58</sup> Reesa Greenberg, ‘Mirroring Evil, Evil Mirrored, Timing, Trauma and Temporary Exhibitions’, p. 112.

to actually co-creating.<sup>59</sup> Contemporary exhibitions in museums encourage a higher degree of interaction with their audiences. Andrea Witcomb stresses that this ‘interactivity’ ‘is not a feature confined to technically interactive displays, but is an aspect of meaning which permeates all displays and exhibitions, making its presence felt in different ways’.<sup>60</sup> This is where the concept of ‘performativity’ becomes a useful tool.

### III Performativity

‘Performativity’ has cropped up at various places in this discussion. In the remaining section of this chapter I will briefly outline the concept’s historical development and the way in which it will inform my analysis.

In the early 1960s, the British philosopher J. L. Austin introduced the concept of ‘performativity’ in his book *How to do things with words* (1962). Since then it has gained influence in contemporary theories of culture, language, and identity. Austin explains how utterances can be performative, arguing that words do something in the world, which is not just a matter of generating consequences, like persuading, amusing or alarming an audience. Words are actions that ‘take place’ like any other worldly event, and they can change the world. Performance theorist S. Jackson explains Austin’s idea as follows: ‘Austin argued that words are not purely reflective [...] linguistic acts do not simply reflect a world but [...] speech actually has the power to make a world’.<sup>61</sup> S. Cavell reinforces the fact that ‘talking together is acting together [...], the activities we engage in by talking are intricate and intricately related to one another’.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ravelli, p. 124.

<sup>60</sup> Andrea Witcomb, *Re-imagining the museum, beyond the mausoleum*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> S. Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> S. Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 33-4.

The best-known theorist of ‘performativity’, American Judith Butler argues that our identities are not given by nature. Instead, they are culturally shaped. In her view, culture is a process, and we are what is made and remade through that process. Our activities and practices are not expressions of some prior identity, but the very means by which we come to be what we are. The identity that we describe through the term of gender is constituted through a set of acts that serve us to construct ourselves as gendered subjects. Our gendered acts, the way we hold ourselves, the way we speak, the spaces we occupy and how we occupy them, serve to create or bring about a multi-layered self. In being performed, these acts create gendered identity.

I will apply this view to the concept of the public sphere, in order to stress that the very act of debating is performative, as it shapes the identities of the individuals who engage in it. In the performative act of speaking we enact our identities. Moreover, the identity of a speaker is (re)constructed by means of language and in interaction with other speakers.

The public debates at the Jewish Museum and at the Israel Museum not only entail an exchange of viewpoints based on rational-critical discourse, and are suggestive of emotional attachments, but also contribute to the construction of identities of the people involved in it. It is important to stress that debating represents an act, or a process with an indefinite outcome. What is of interest in the public debates triggered by the art exhibitions is not the result of the debates but mainly their (trans)formative power.

Performativity also permeates the functions fulfilled by the museum. In *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses the role of museums as agents of display. Gimblett argues that, when displaying objects of art, the museum uses rhetorical devices, or theatrical strategies which enable these objects to acquire a new meaning. Hence, the act of display represents a form of ‘staging’ through which the object displayed becomes a part of a larger story. Through being situated within a theatrical

context, or a mis-en-scène created by the museum space, objects assume a performative function.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, through inviting the audience to become engaged, the museum initiates and enhances public discussion. As Griselda Pollock has suggested, the museum represents a space which encourages ‘discursive thinking’. Its mission is to create a ‘living point of exchange and performance’,<sup>64</sup> in which all participants, from the director to the public, performatively create a space of exchange through speech and other activities.

So far, I have suggested that there is a performative dimension which can be reiterated at the level of the public sphere and its construction of public debate, but also at the level of the museum – as a pre-eminent institution of the public sphere. ‘Performativity’ is a concept that fittingly describes not only the social interaction, taking place in the museum, but also the interaction between a visitor and a work of art. In the following, I want to focus on how the work of art itself can fulfil a performative function and how, as a result, it becomes charged with meaning.

Since the 1960s, visual art has embraced theatricality and performance as part of a new artistic expression. Art theorists Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson examine how ‘performativity’ in contemporary art offers new challenges for its interpretation. They claim that there is no stable aesthetic meaning, that interpretation of an artwork should therefore be recognized as being dynamic and contingent on the subject and the context. Interpretation does not reveal itself ‘naturally’, at the moment of contact with the artwork. Instead, it is worked out as an ‘ongoing, open performance between artists and spectators, with meaning circulating fluidly in the complex web of connections between artists, patrons, collectors, and between both specialised and non-specialised viewers within the arena of encounter’. Jones and Stephenson offer a new perspective on

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, pp. 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Museums after Modernism: strategies of engagement*, p. 34.



both the artist and the viewer/interpreter. They suggest that interpretation of a work of art constitutes an ongoing process of negotiation between different perspectives and positions, and call it a 'negotiated domain in flux and contingent on social and personal investments and contexts'.<sup>65</sup>

The prerogative of this process of negotiation is the ability of the work of art to draw the audience in through different strategies of engagement. The most commonly employed strategy is 'dynamic identification', by means of which the artist provokes the spectator to identify with the artwork. Due to this identification, the spectator can enter in a 'dialogical space' with the artwork, which becomes a means by which the visitor can discuss racial, sexual, and gender, class, or ideological issues.<sup>66</sup>

More generally, all forms of artistic expression favour the construction of 'dialogical spaces' in which meaning is negotiated between the art producers (artists, and museum staff) and the public. Nevertheless, according to some critics, it is installation art where this process is best realised.<sup>67</sup> 'These days installation art seems to be everybody's favourite medium', wrote the American critic Roberta Smith somewhat contemptuously in 1993.<sup>68</sup> Since then installation art came to be described by art theorist Hal Foster as 'debate specific', a form of art that is not defined in terms of a traditional medium, but in terms of the message it conveys by any kind of means. This new artistic expression is suggestive of 'a shift from objective critique towards a new subjectivity which emphasizes uncertainty and brings both artist and viewer together in a discursive environment',<sup>69</sup> argues De Oliveira.

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<sup>65</sup> Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (eds.), *Performing the Body, Performing the Text*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry (eds.), *Installation art in the new millennium: the empire of the senses*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Roberta Smith cited by Nicolas de Oliveira on p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> De Oliveira, p. 32.

If the art museum is likened to a stage, the question that arises is how the spectator participates in the artwork. American curator, Robert Storr, remarks in his article 'No stage, No Actors, but It is Theatre and Art' (1999) that installations have become 'complete immersion environments'. In other words, the installation is the stage that offers the audience the possibility to become an integral part of the work. Storr insists that the theatrical aspect of a work of art which was once seen as a weakness, since it relied only on entertaining the audience, has recently been re-valued.<sup>70</sup> Hence, art which encourages audience interaction, has gained a favourable position within the art world. There are several reasons which explain this trend. De Oliveira stressed the interconnectedness between the interactive character of the new forms of art expression and the construction of a museum's image, stating that 'interaction is not only an opportunity to ensure the audience's participation, but instead suggests a creative engagement with the content of the artwork which directly impacts on the evaluation of the museum itself'.<sup>71</sup> Hence, the work of art turns, as French art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud has suggested, into a 'space of exchange' and interactivity.<sup>72</sup> In his view, artworks and exhibitions can act as catalysts which generate 'communicative processes', and make possible 'a state of encounter'.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that art exhibitions, due to their theatrical and performative aspect, become open arenas where meanings are permanently negotiated between artists, viewers and the institutions that house them. The exhibitions at the Jewish Museum in New York and at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem have both fulfilled, by means of the public debates they triggered, a performative function. The issues emerging from the dialogues or debates they

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Storr cited by De Oliveira on p. 32.

<sup>71</sup> De Oliveira, p. 46.

<sup>72</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), retrieved from <http://www.creativityandcognition.com/blogs/legart/wp-content/uploads/2006/07/Borriaud.pdf> pp. 6-10, (accessed on 14.5. 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

prompted shall constitute the subject of analysis of chapters three and four of this thesis.

#### IV Outline of Methodology

The art exhibitions at the Jewish museums will be viewed as occurrences or ‘events’ whose representation in the media has led to the construction of perspectives and points of view about the memory of the Holocaust. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) constitutes an appropriate methodological means by which one can study the public responses to these art events. In the following, I will outline a methodological framework for the analysis of the public debates, drawing mainly on Norman Fairclough’s studies about media discourse and Ruth Wodak’s analysis of the ‘discursive’ construction of national identities.

Foucault’s reflection on ‘discourse’ has been influential in the conceptualisation of critical discourse analysis. His understanding of discourse as a ‘domain of all statements’ which have some effects in the real world<sup>74</sup> has been adopted by Fairclough who included within this ‘domain’, ‘texts’ and ‘utterances’ which contributed to the establishment of, what he calls, specific ‘ways of representing aspects of the world’.<sup>75</sup> Fairclough further emphasised the idea that discourse is language in use. In addition to its fundamental descriptive role, in the form of discourse language also contains the potential for action. Therefore, language has a performative function as it can reinforce difference and social inequality. He explains that:

Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships in which they stand to other people.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Sheridan Smith (trans.), (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 124.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

In my analysis, I will be looking at how discourses shape and construct memory of the Holocaust, and will dwell upon the differences in discourses about the art exhibitions and observe whether they are associated with groups of people that occupy different public positions. Furthermore, I will examine whether the exchange of statements between different members of the public sphere in Israel and the Diaspora reveals a hierarchy of Holocaust discourses. I shall ask whether there is a 'hegemonic' discourse or master narrative about the memory of the Holocaust which overrules alternative ones, or, on the contrary, whether the exchange of statements shows the co-existence of competing discourses. In other words, my aim is to assess to what extent these exchanges ascertain the existence of dominant discourses and/or signal the emergence of alternative discourses about Holocaust memory.

#### **IV. 1. Critical Discourse Analysis**

The relationship between discourse and ideology is a central focus of CDA – an approach originating in the field of linguistics which looks at how language in use reveals the ways in which social and political domination work. CDA draws on social and post-structuralist theories to examine ideologies and power relations in discourse. It looks at 'texts' – any type of written, verbal or visual texts – as a 'social practice'<sup>77</sup> and it is based on the principle that the 'situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourse, and that in turn, discourses influence social and political reality'.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, it is grounded in the belief that there is an inherent link between the use of language and the ways in which society is structured according to power relations.

The main unit of analysis in CDA is the text, which has a 'social effect' since it both represents and constitutes the world. To assess the effects of 'texts' on society, one needs to situate the textual analysis within a historical, socio-cultural

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<sup>77</sup> Fairclough, p. 124.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

context; to link the ‘micro’ analysis of texts to the ‘macro’ analysis of how power relations work across networks of practices and structures. Even though there is no single method of critical discourse analysis, one can argue that generally it looks at particular features of a text, selected because they provide a way of linking the ‘micro’ level of textual/semantic analysis to the ‘macro’ level of the society, whose overarching values are reproduced in the text.<sup>79</sup>

CDA analysts take into account ‘the most relevant textual and contextual factors, including historical ones that contribute to the production and interpretation of a given text’.<sup>80</sup> For example, the manner in which language is used to describe or explain an event that is relevant to race, gender or ethnicity, is suggestive of a relation of power established between different social categories, or members of different race, gender, or ethnic groups.

Fairclough further argues that ‘part of the (cultural) hegemony of a dominant class or group is hegemony within the order of discourse – control over the internal and external economies of discourse types’.<sup>81</sup> His opinion is reinforced by Wodak who corroborates that:

Discursive practices may influence the formation of groups and serve to establish or conceal relations of power and dominance between interactants, between national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political, cultural and sub-cultural majorities and minorities.<sup>82</sup>

Wodak also points out the double task assumed by CDA: ‘to reveal the relationships between linguistic means, forms and structures, and concrete linguistic practice’(1), and to ‘make transparent the reciprocal relationships between discursive action and political and institutional structures’ (2). CDA’s more general aim is to ‘unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of

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<sup>79</sup> This distinction is developed by Fairclough on pp. 1-25.

<sup>80</sup> Fairclough, p. 70.

<sup>81</sup> Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 78.

<sup>82</sup> Ruth Wodak, *The discursive construction of national identity*, p. 8.

discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use'.<sup>83</sup> Whilst Fairclough focused on the study of linguistic practice, looking at how structures of language shape perspectives and points of view, Wodak has put more emphasis on discourse analysis at the 'macro-level', observing how institutions or institutionalised practices shape identity.<sup>84</sup>

My analysis of the public debates will draw, on a practical level, on Fairclough's explanations and will focus on the language in use of the members of discussion. Whereas on a conceptual level, I will invoke Wodak's 'macro-level' analysis as I shall ground the public debates within a historical Jewish Diaspora and Israeli context. In my analysis I pay particular attention to the language in use of various leading public figures. I shall view their attitudes towards the Holocaust as contributing to the institutionalisation of a particular Holocaust memory discourse. The 'institutionalisation' of Holocaust memory refers to the process in which a certain discourse on Holocaust memory becomes dominant.

'Institutionalisation' as a concept needs to be explained in more detail. Foucault's contribution to the understanding of this concept is noteworthy for it provides the theoretical frame for my use of this term in the context of discourse about the Holocaust. Foucault examined how specific discourses created by institutions such as asylums, governments, prisons and schools have contributed to the construction of individual identity. He argued that the function of these discourses is in fact to classify and to regulate peoples' identities. Foucault doubted that there are human subjects, individual agents and social realities independent of their dynamic historical construction in social and cultural discourses. He explains that institutional discourses make up a dense fabric of spoken, written and symbolic texts.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> In her study Wodak illustrates how discursive practises, present at various levels of the Austrian public space, in national commemorative events, in the media, and in the discourses of individuals, shape Austrian national identities.

<sup>85</sup> See Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), and *Power and Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon, 1980). Also consult Allan Luke's article 'Introduction into Theory and Practice in Critical Discourse Analysis' published on

In Foucault's understanding, institutionalisation denotes a degree of silencing and repression of the individual's true self. Under the influence of institutions, a particular memory narrative gains dominance and acceptance while others are marginalised. A characteristic of institutionalisation is its regulatory character which dictates what is appropriate and what is worth discussing. A discourse becomes legitimate and is institutionalised once it has been endorsed by some members of society or institutions that exert a degree of influence over public opinion.

## IV.2. The Media Discourse

It is necessary to acknowledge that the American/Jewish and Israeli media provided the means for an exchange of public statements, and prompted members of various groups to take part in the debates. In order to observe how the exhibitions have been represented by different social categories I take as my main primary sources newspaper articles and transcriptions of discussions at radio and television.

The media has an indelible impact on the formation of public opinion. Its role is twofold: it informs and it influences its readers and viewers. Stuart Hall explains that:

Institutions like the media are particularly central since they are by definition, part of the dominant means of ideological production. They produce representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, the discourse that the media produces is regarded by Fairclough as 'the site of complex and often contradictory processes, including ideological

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<http://gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/ed270/Luke/SAHA6.html> (accessed on 16.8. 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The whites of their eyes', in Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (eds.), *The Discourse Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 398.

processes.’ He draws attention to the tensions between the various functions of the media texts, which he sums up as follows:

Media texts do indeed function ideologically in social control and social reproduction, but they also operate as cultural commodities in a competitive market [...], are part of the business of entertaining people, are designed to keep people politically and socially informed, are cultural artefacts in their own right, informed by particular aesthetics, and they are [...] reflecting [...] the shifting cultural values and identities.<sup>87</sup>

This explanation enables us to understand how journalists and editors make decisions about what events are worth being given media attention, what is ‘newsworthy’ and what is not. Among these decisions Fairclough counts: ‘how the articles should be presented in terms of the space allocated to them, the section of press under which the news should be categorized, about how the news should be framed, described, interpreted, and delivered’.<sup>88</sup> The decisions about the selection, position and representation of an event gives an insight into the style or ‘rhetoric’ that the newspaper is promoting and which soon comes to define that newspaper.

Roger Fowler further explains that an event is transformed into a news item due to a process of ‘coding’. The style of coding is what gives the paper its identity. Hence, ‘just as each newspaper, [...] has a particular organizational framework, sense of news and readership, so each will also develop a regular and characteristic mode of address’.<sup>89</sup>

For example, the oldest and one of the most influential newspapers in Israel, *Ha-Aretz*, has a ‘coding’ style which has given this newspaper a liberal left-wing orientation. Whereas *Ha-Aretz* addresses larger segments of Israeli society, *Yated Neeman* is a religious daily based in Bnei Brak which aims at the ultra-orthodox segment of the Israeli society. One can assume that *Yated Neeman*’s coverage of

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<sup>87</sup> Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, p. 47.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Roger Fowler, *Language in the New, Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 48.



the exhibitions at the Israel Museum differs from *Ha-Aretz*'s treatment of the exhibitions in several ways: in terms of where the news is located in the newspaper, the vocabulary chosen to describe the exhibitions and the selection of public statements. The 'discourses' adopted by these newspapers do not only mirror reality but constitute versions of that reality.<sup>90</sup> Their choices about what to include in or to exclude from their account of the exhibitions, what to make explicit or implicit when they describe the exhibitions are crucial, as they offer a certain interpretation that impacts on the public opinion.

My CDA analysis shall refer to 'framing devices'<sup>91</sup> namely those features of the reporters' discourse which influence the public's interpretation of the news. More specifically, I shall observe how statements from public figures are framed within the newspaper, whether they appear on the front-page, in editorials or op-eds, and how these statements are woven together to construct a particular picture of the art exhibitions. Questions that will guide my analysis are: Which voices are represented, and how much space is given to each of them? How do certain voices frame others, or more importantly, how are voices hierarchized?

One of the main aims of the analysis is to highlight the hierarchization of discourses about the Holocaust, and to observe how power relations are created in the discourses about the Holocaust of prominent public figures. The overall analysis will take into account the fact that what we read in the media is not a simple and transparent representation of the world, but a constructed one, subjected to a variety of practices and agendas.

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<sup>90</sup> Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, p. 103.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

## Interlude

### A Discussion about the Concept of 'Generation'

Societies are subject to change and so are national memories. Generational shifts play a major role in triggering change. Every generation's coming of age is an opportunity of social and cultural renewal, as the members of the younger generation develop new perceptions and ways of looking at their society's current or past dilemmas, mentalities and class structures.

In the United States, the home of the largest Jewish community outside of Israel, Holocaust survivors have come to be viewed as a homogenous group, having contributed to a large extent, to the formation of contemporary Jewish self-perceptions. The prominence of the Holocaust in the construction of Jewish-American identity can be regarded as a phenomenon largely dependent on generational change.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s, American society witnessed the civil rights movement which would lead to fundamental social reorganisation and to the social empowerment of minority groups such as the African-American communities that hitherto had been subject to racism and discrimination. Jewish communities in America led by the influential Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel proved to be very supportive of the African-American civil rights campaign. Among them were young Jewish activists who were strongly involved in the struggle for civil rights.<sup>2</sup>

Jewish support of the civil rights movements was also an opportunity for young Jews themselves to develop a new Jewish identity which allowed them to be more assertive and more engaged in American social affairs. This coincided with the

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<sup>1</sup> Discussions about identity and generational change in America emerge in studies such as Michael E. Staub's (ed.), *The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook*, (New England: Brandeis University Press, 2004), and Deborah Dash Moore's, *GI Jews: How World War II changed a Generation*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Norman H. Finkelstein, *Heeding the Call: Jewish Voices in America's Civil Rights Struggle*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998).

Eichmann trial in 1961 in Jerusalem which had a strong influence on bringing the Holocaust to the centre of Jewish-American consciousness. The changes in the Jewish-American self-perception were due to a series of factors, among which two gained prominence: the interest in Israel and the Holocaust, and the coming of age of the post-war generation of Jews.<sup>3</sup> The concept of generation emerges thus as an important aspect of the Jewish experience in America.

‘Generation’ is even more prominently present in Israel. Similarly to the United States, the incorporation of Holocaust memory in the Zionist national narrative was due to a generational change. But, unlike the American Jews for whom Israel has constituted a pillar of Jewish identity, for Israeli Jews, it was mainly the Holocaust which united them as a nation.<sup>4</sup> At the core of Israel’s constitution as a nation lies the cultural, religious and historical heritage brought by different Jewish immigrants from Diaspora countries. Since Israel’s foundation, the idea of generation has gained a special significance. Unlike other societies, Israel has incorporated the experiences of generations of Jews born in the Diaspora, among them the Holocaust survivors. Despite their diversity, the survivors have been perceived by the Israeli public as a homogeneous group united by a set of traumatic experiences that continue to affect their lives and define them as a ‘generation’.

‘Generation’ as a subject of historical study is not novel. The term emerged in the French and German scholarly tradition of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and ever since, its definition has been contested. In an article from 1985 German historian Hans Jaeger established a historical understanding of the term and of its semantic evolution, which originates in the biological-genealogical meaning of generation that is

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion about the role of Israel and of the Holocaust in shaping Jewish-American identities see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), and Bernard Susser and Charles S. Liebman, *Choosing Survival. Strategies for a Jewish Future*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> This argument appears in Tom Segev’s, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Haim Watzman (trans.), (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

intricately associated with the passing of time. It takes on average thirty years for the descendants of a common ancestor to reach maturity, marry and have children.<sup>5</sup>

The historical notion of generation, explains Jaeger, includes the biological and genealogical aspect, with an additional assumption – namely ‘that there exists a connection between the continuing process of the succession between fathers and sons and the discontinuous process of social and cultural changes’, ‘that there is an arithmetic bridge which links the biological rhythm of individual lives with the chronology of collective history’.<sup>6</sup> What is controversial, though, is the claim that generational changes are biologically determined and cannot be explained through external factors. The seeds of the new ‘generation’ are planted during the individual’s formative years, his or her childhood and adolescence. This theory came to be known as ‘the imprint hypothesis’ put forward by Wilhelm Dilthey who discussed the phenomenon of generation in an essay written in 1866.<sup>7</sup>

Sociologist Karl Mannheim developed Dilthey’s idea further in the 1920s. On the grounds of the imprint hypothesis, Mannheim assumed that noteworthy historical moments and their social outcomes tend to lead to specific formative experiences that are common to a group of people and which can lead, in turn, to the idea of a generational community. Essential here is that Mannheim does not stress the idea that the community members must be part of the same age group. Even though adolescence is the formative period that Mannheim refers to, he does not exclude difference of age as a qualitative variable. Therefore, individuals of different ages can be part of the same generational collective, as the important thing is the external factors that shape the group as a historical generation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Jaeger, ‘Generations in History: Reflections on a Controversial Concept’, in *History and Theory*, 24 (3) (October, 1985), pp. 274-275.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> See Jaeger’s comments on W. Dilthey on pp. 275-292.

<sup>8</sup> Jaeger’s outline of Mannheim’s theory on p. 278.

In the late 1960s in the United States, Alan B. Spitzer analysed 'generation' as a phenomenon of short duration dependent on social and historical change.<sup>9</sup> What, according to Spitzer defines a 'new' generation are the radical and different views that its members hold in contrast to the previous generation. Jaeger observes that 'generational contrasts are not – like class contrasts – expressions of a deep-reaching cleavage in society'. Rather they refer to 'a difference in opinion on the basis of existing circumstances'. These contrasts, according to him, are 'likely to find expression in areas of little social consequence, as in fashion or the arts'.<sup>10</sup>

Jaeger stresses that new developments in intellectual history and in art tend to be represented by young age cohorts. Unlike 'generational contrasts' which do not affect the entire society, 'generational breaks' have a deep impact on society and are likely to occur after decisive historical events; and Jaegers here counts wars, revolutions, and economic crises of great proportions. Genocide is not on his list, although one would assume that Jaeger included it in the general category of war.

The concept of generation as a historical category is helpful in the particular context of Israeli historiography. Generation as a historical concept can be discussed against the background of the land of Israel. The term generation has been frequently used in historical and literary writings on Israel, and it became a thematic landmark, by means of which one could understand the nature of ideological and cultural change in Israeli society.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 280. See Spitzer, 'The Historical Problem of Generations', in *American Historical Review*, 78 (December, 1973), pp. 1353-1385.

<sup>10</sup> Jaeger, p. 290.

<sup>11</sup> A literary account of the pioneering generation is offered by writer Meir Shalev, *The Blue Mountain*, Hillel Halkin (trans.), (UK: Canongate Books, 2010), first published in 1991. See Gershon Winer's book for a detailed study on the founding fathers: *The Founding Fathers of Israel*, (New York: Bloch Pub Co., 1971); Israeli historian Oz Almog examines the concept of Israel's first generation in *The Sabra: the creation of the new Jew*, Haim Watzman (trans.), (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000).

The term 'generation' is first employed to describe the inhabitants of the *Yishuv* in the pre-state period, those Jewish immigrants who contributed to the establishment of *Medinat Yisrael*; they are known as the generation of pioneers and settlers. This is also the generation of 'the founding fathers' which included political leaders such as David Ben-Gurion who came to define the very idea of Israeli statehood (*mamlachiut*). Their children are known as the first generation or the *Sabra* generation – a term used to describe a specific form of socialisation practiced by those raised in the land of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Even though biologically belonging to the pioneers' generation, the Holocaust survivors were not included in it. Instead, they were viewed as being at the margins of the Israeli nation. This is in spite of the fact that by the end of the 1950s, survivors formed one quarter of the Israeli population when, in the 1950s, 400,000 survivors joined the 70,000 survivors who arrived during 1945-1947.<sup>13</sup> Until 1961, they were perceived as a separate group. It was none other than Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion who depicted them in radical contrast to what the first generation of *Sabras* represented: 'a mob and human dust, without language, without education, without roots and without being absorbed in tradition and the nation's vision'.<sup>14</sup>

The capture of Adolf Eichmann and his trial in Israel, reported by the international press and broadcast live by the Israeli radio, played a decisive role in bringing the survivors' stories into public limelight. Together with the publicity came the collective awareness that every Jew had been destined for Auschwitz. Thereafter, the victim's identity came to be publicly recognised as central to national identity, and the survivors themselves were increasingly viewed as a homogeneous group in the

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<sup>12</sup> See Oz Almog.

<sup>13</sup> Hanna Yablonka, 'The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Katsner and Eichmann Trial', in *Israel Studies*, 8 (3) (Autumn, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ben-Gurion quoted by Gulie Ne-eman Arad, 'Israel and the Shoah: A tale of Multifarious Taboos', in *New German Critique*, 90 (Autumn, 2003), p. 8.

Israeli collective consciousness. An iconic figure is writer and survivor Yehiel De-Nur, also known as Ka-Tzetnik. De-Nur's testimony at the Eichmann Trial about the world 'over there' remained deeply etched in the consciousness of many Israelis. Historian Tom Segev recognises De-Nur's influence in the prologue titled 'Ka-Tzetnik's Trip' to his book, *The Seventh Million*, published in 1993.<sup>15</sup>

The survivors played a crucial role in enabling the public acknowledgement of Holocaust experience as a central and integral part of the Israeli national ethos. However, the role of their offspring, who came to be known as the second and third generation, is less clear. One cannot overlook the degree of fuzziness which surrounds these terms. Even though both terms are widely used to refer to the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, little is known about whether they indeed, view themselves as a group sharing a set of views and experiences. Given the large number of survivors in Israel, their descendants make up an equally large section of Israeli society. However, it remains unclear to what extent the descendants have defined themselves as a homogeneous group. And, even more so, whether one can speak of a generational 'creed', in the shape of a shared set of views and beliefs that can influence a collective. Several questions emerge: To what extent have the descendants made their connection to the Holocaust public? How have they appropriated Holocaust memory, and, what are their predominant means of expression and commemoration? Have they viewed themselves as a group, by forming associations and by sharing feelings and experiences in public? In short: How does the Holocaust make them a 'generation'?

In what follows, different situations focusing on the second-generation phenomenon shall be outlined with the aim to answer these questions. The examples will shed some light upon the most well-known perceptions and public representations of the second generation in Israel.

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<sup>15</sup> See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million*, pp. 3-14.

It is commonly agreed among scholars that the silence of the Holocaust survivors has also characterized their children. Despite their prominence in Israeli society, the majority of the children of survivors have not been able to assert themselves as a group, nor have they constituted a subject of historical study. Psychotherapist Dina Wardi was the first to write about the traumas of 'the children of the Holocaust'.

Her book, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust*<sup>16</sup> appeared in Hebrew in 1990 and is a reflective account of the lives and conflicts of a generation, defined by its biological relation to the survivors. Wardi tries to suggest ways of working through the difficult relationship between survivors and their children. Her study is the product of years of working with children of survivors in individual and group therapy sessions. Wardi admits that in her interactions with her patients, there was a high degree of suspicion on the part of the adult children of Holocaust survivors that would manifest itself in the 'alliances' that they formed against her. The following is Wardi's reflection about one of the members of the group, Hava. There are many others like Hava, Wardi suggests. In fact, the therapy group behaves in some situations as one unit:

Many years have passed since the Holocaust, but in her world of feeling and fantasy Hava is still living the dangers that threatened her mother's life, and she uses the same defence tactics her mother used, she is still unable to distinguish between herself and her mother in her consciousness. [...] In therapy groups with many children of survivors it's often possible to discern the formation of a sort of alliance among them, based on the similar feelings they identify in one another. This alliance serves as a group defence system that prevents the expression of any type of strong feeling.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust*, Naomi Goldblum (trans.), (London; New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-147.



In the semi-private sphere of the therapy group meeting, members of the second generation formed a 'secret alliance', that, in this context, is only recognized by the outsider – the therapist. It is, however, questionable to what extent the group members themselves recognised this 'alliance'. It appears that for the children of survivors, 'alliance' represents an unacknowledged aspect of their common attempt to come to terms with an inherited trauma.

A second example comes from the sphere of popular culture, and sums up the general public perception of the second generation. The satiric group the *Chamber Quintet* (Hamishia Kameri) gained considerable popularity in the 1990s due to their humorous if biting criticism of Israeli society. Among the *Chamber Quintet's* satiric sketches is the monologue of a man, who after drinking tea, tells the story of his encounter with a British television crew. They came to his house to say that they had decided to make a film about him and his art. After he had confessed that he was not an artist but a post office clerk, the reporter asked: 'But you are second generation, how come you are not an artist? How do you deal with the pain? How do you reach catharsis?' 'I don't know', he apologises. 'I was never drawn to art. I always wanted to work in the post office'. After they tell him that he is probably repressing his feelings, he agrees. 'Ok then, film me repressed.' 'But repression does not film well', they answer. Finally they agree that the BBC crew will wait until the man finds an appropriate means of expression. In the end he confesses: 'I tried it all: to play the violin, to paint, to write poems. But it does not work, I am too repressed'.<sup>18</sup>

This sketch highlights the popular belief in the artistic potential of the second generation. This perception is debunked by the satirical group with the aim to show to the audience that the second generation's occupations are actually quite diverse,

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<sup>18</sup> This passage is quoted by Eyal Zandberg in 'Critical laughter: humor, popular culture, and Israeli Holocaust commemoration', in *Media Culture and Society*, 28 (561) (July, 2006), p. 570.

and that they can be just like anyone else. The sketch works on the basis that the second generation is known to Israeli society by means of two attributes, namely, silence and repressed feelings.

Carol A. Kidron's study based on interviews with members of the second generation confirms that this segment of the Israel society continues to be characterised by a reluctance to express themselves as a group. Whereas second generation is aware of their 'generational identity', argues Kidron, 'as the descendants trace their selfhood as emerging from and constituted by their common descent from the Holocaust', they 'did not wish to share knowledge of their survivor parents' past, or private Holocaust-related childhood experiences with others in the public domain, nor did they wish to act as future carrier witnesses contributing to collective projects of commemoration'.<sup>19</sup>

However, there are certain external factors that can prompt strong public reactions on the part of second-generation Israelis, and that can lead them to intervene in the Israeli public sphere. And, it is not by chance that the context is political, since the Holocaust has been an important component in Israeli political discourse. My final example that comes from the sphere of politics sheds light upon when and how the sense of a collective emerges. As part of his election campaign from 1997 Ehud Barak, Chairman of the Labor Party, asked the Mizrachim (Jews of Middle Eastern descent) for 'their forgiveness' for what the Labor party had done to them in the 1950s – the years of their immigration to Israel. His statement triggered strong reactions in the Israeli media. Criticism also came from the children of survivors. 'The generally silent Shoah victims and their children reacted with unprecedented anger mixed with sarcasm', argued historian Gulié Ne-eman Arad. A child of survivors responded:

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<sup>19</sup> Carol A. Kidron, 'Introduction' in PhD Thesis *Children of Twilight. Deconstructing the Passage from Silence to Voice of Second and Third Generation Holocaust Descendants within the Private and Public Spheres in Israel*, (Jerusalem: University of Jerusalem, 2005).

My parents too were sprayed with DDT, they too were packed off to a development town [...] I also want to ask them [Mizrachim] to apologize in the name of my parents, the 'Ashke-Nazis' (an epithet coined by a Mizrahi), survivors of the Auschwitz and Treblinka death camps. They lost their families and their souls, they fought in a country that labelled them with the egregious epithet 'like sheep to the slaughter', their reparation payments were expropriated to lay the groundwork for millions of refugees. Therefore, I demand an apology from all Sephardi Jews.<sup>20</sup>

This converges with Wardi's observation about the identification of the children with their parents' plight and trauma, and their trouble in finding their own identities. In most cases, individual identity is shaped by means of rebellion and detachment from parents. This is not the case of the children of survivors. They act as 'memorial candles', ultimate symbols of their parents' survival.<sup>21</sup> The second generation become their parents' advocates when they remind the Israeli public of their parents' victimization in the Nazi concentration camps. They also respond to the politicization of the victim status in Israel. Moreover, children of survivors have spoken in the name of their parents as in the public discussions about German financial reparations. Both survivors and their children were concerned about the ethical stance of Israel's decision to accept reparations. There were a few who categorically refused compensation.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, forced by external circumstances, most often of a political character, the second generation articulates their opinions, and presents themselves, in this case, as a homogenous group.

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Alex Weingrod, 'Ehud Barak's Apology: Letters from the Israeli Press', in *Israel Studies*, 3 (2) (Autumn, 1998), p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> Term coined by Dina Wardi.

<sup>22</sup> The issue of compensation is discussed by Tom Segev in *The Seventh Million* on pp. 189-255.

But, who are and what defines the members of the second generation in America? Arlene Stein's study of the second-generation phenomenon<sup>23</sup> is useful in answering these questions. It defines this generation as individuals whose identity, much like the identity of the children of survivors in Israel, was shaped in the shadow of their parents' stories of persecution or their overbearing silence. But more importantly, and unlike their Israeli counterparts, Stein argues that second-generation members saw themselves as a group which, much like other racial, ideological or gender groups in America, was in search of an 'identity'. She speaks of the 250,000 children of Holocaust survivors who reached adulthood in the 1970s and formed a 'movement' which 'would break the silence about their familial legacy and make story-telling a vehicle for self-transformation, collective identification and social action'.<sup>24</sup> This was especially the case in the 1980s when they encouraged their parents 'to share their stories with them, by lobbying for early efforts to memorialize the Holocaust in local communities, and by taking leadership roles in national Holocaust commemorative efforts'.<sup>25</sup>

The involvement of second-generation members in Holocaust commemoration activities and their commitment to remember assured them a growing visibility as a collective in the American public sphere. An influential voice of this generation is Helen Epstein's, the daughter of survivors, and journalist whose book, *Children of the Holocaust* (1979), Stein calls 'the bible of the second-generation movement'.<sup>26</sup> She goes on to argue that 'once they had found their voices, often through their involvement in second-generation groups, many descendants went on to write memoirs, make films, and take trips to their parents' countries of origin. They also became involved in institutionalised Holocaust commemorative efforts, and served

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<sup>23</sup> Arlene Stein, 'Feminism, Therapeutic Culture, and the Holocaust in the United States: The Second Generation Phenomenon', in *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, 16 (1) (Fall, 2009), pp. 27-53.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

as bridges between their parents' generation and that of their children.<sup>27</sup> These activities came to increasingly define their collective identity as 'second generation'. It was members of the second generation, who assumed an active public role during the debates at the Jewish Museum in New York, and whose opinions shall be interrogated in chapter four of this study.

Starting with Hans Jaeger's definition of 'generational contrast' that emerges within an intellectual context and mainly within the sphere of arts and culture, my next chapter will discuss how the concept of generation became relevant in the public discussions about art exhibited at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

## Chapter 3

### Memory Debates at the Israel Museum: A Battleground between State and Individual Perceptions of the Holocaust

#### I

#### The Context

This analysis of the discussions about *Your Colouring Book* (1997) and *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (1998) shall be placed against the backdrop of research about the presence of Holocaust consciousness in Israel. Since the 1980s the presence of Holocaust memory in Israeli public discourse has been subject to critical interrogation. Prominent in the development of this critique were Post-Zionist historians and intellectuals who emerged in the Israeli academia during the mid-1980s. Their common methodological and critical approach to history, and the fact that they belong to the same age group are basic conditions, in terms of Jaeger's understanding, that define this group as a generation. Post-Zionist thinkers interrogated Israeli society from a viewpoint outside of the Zionist ideological framework,<sup>1</sup> and promoted new readings of Israel's history. They reexamined, for instance, the relation between Israelis and Palestinians, Zionist perceptions of Jewish experience in Diaspora, and the memorialization of the Holocaust. Historian Idith Zertal, for example, pitted against the idea that the return to Israel leads to the redemption of the Jewish people, or the notion that Israel is the symbol of Jewish revival and heroism while Diaspora means the destruction of Jewish life. She argued that the beliefs and practices of Zionism which had contributed to the creation of a strong Israeli nationhood were inadequate responses to the new challenges that the state was confronted with during the mid-1980s and the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An influential historical study that interrogates Zionist ideology and narrative in Israel is Benny Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee problem*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Argument developed by Idith Zertal in *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

New Historian Ilan Pappé also disagreed with the idea that the experience of war strengthens national solidarity. Instead, he spoke of a sense of instability, disillusionment and uncertainty generated by Israeli wars. The invasion in Lebanon (1982) followed by the Palestinian First Intifada (1987), Pappé argued, had shaken the very foundations of the state of Israel and intensified the feeling of anxiety and self-doubt. He described this period as being a witness to ‘an identity crisis of a society that stands on the threshold of a period of peace, in which the national consensus, previously built upon threats to survival and security problems, clears a space for a debate across the society and its culture’.<sup>3</sup>

Another historian of the post-Zionist generation, Daniel Gutwein approaches the subject of Holocaust memory in Israel.<sup>4</sup> He argues that far from being fixed, the memory of the Holocaust has gone through different phases. If in the early decades of Ben-Gurion’s rule, memory was ‘divided’, from the Eichmann trial onwards until the mid-1980s the construction of a ‘nationalised memory’ has come to predominate. Only in the 1990s was this ‘nationalised memory’ challenged, when new forms of commemoration led to the privatisation of memory. Gutwein holds that post-Zionism played an essential role in ‘privatizing Holocaust memory, by depicting Zionist ideology and Israeli politics that portrayed the nationalised memory as oppressive’. By privatizing Holocaust memory, continues Gutwein, ‘post-Zionism reaffirmed its nature as the meta-ideology of the Israeli privatization revolution and dismantling of the welfare state’.<sup>5</sup> It is within this ideological frame that the descendants of the survivors began to articulate their individual identities.

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<sup>3</sup> Ilan Pappé, ‘The New History of Zionism: The Academic and Public Confrontation’ in *Kivvunim: A Journal of Zionism and Judaism*, 8 (June, 1995), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Gutwein, ‘The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics’, in *Israel Studies*, 14 (1) (Spring, 2009), pp. 36-67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

In the period after the Lebanon War, the Israeli public sphere witnessed how an increasing number of public figures expressed their doubts about the social-psychological consequences of a nationalised narrative of Holocaust memory.

A representative example is historian and Auschwitz survivor, Yehuda Elkana. His article in *Ha-Aretz*, 'The need to Forget' from 2 March 1988 triggered a host of public responses. Published at the onset of the first Intifada, Elkana's article aimed to raise awareness of how 'victimhood consciousness' nurtured by Holocaust memory has led to a collective belief that 'the whole world is against us'. This conviction, in Elkana's view, has also dominated Israel's attitude towards the Palestinians. Elkana warned that 'any philosophy of life predicated solely or mostly on the Holocaust would have disastrous consequences'. In order to prevent this, Elkana argued that 'the past is not and must not be allowed to become the dominant element determining the future of society and the destiny of people'. Hence, he declared: 'there is no greater threat to the future of the state of Israel than the fact that the Holocaust systematically and forcefully penetrated the consciousness of the Israeli public.' Elkana's alternative to the nationalisation of Holocaust memory was a call for 'the need to forget'. His demand was to privatise Holocaust memory, adopting 'forgetting' as its aim. Elkana concluded:

We must learn to forget! Today I see no more important political and educational task for the leaders of this nation than to take their stand on the side of life, to dedicate themselves to creating our future, and not to be preoccupied from morning to night with symbols, ceremonies, and lessons of the Holocaust. They must uproot the domination of that historical 'remember' over our lives.<sup>6</sup>

Holocaust memory provides the focus that bound Israelis together as a collective. But, Elkana shows that Holocaust memory can act as a vehicle by means of which individuals adopt critical standpoints vis-à-vis the role memory plays in the collective

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<sup>6</sup> Yeduda Elkana 'The need to forget', in *Ha-Aretz*, (2 March, 1988).



perception. This line of argument was also a part of the post-Zionist discourse which encouraged an individual stance to Holocaust memory that was critical of the nationalised approach. A critical approach, as will be shown, also emerged in the debates about the art exhibitions.

Visual art needs to be displayed within a public space. It requires a kind of dialogue which does not take place privately, but publicly – within an art gallery, museum or on the street, or to employ Habermas's term, within the public sphere. As explained in Chapter Two, art holds a performative dimension as it calls for a direct interaction between viewer and the artwork, and increasingly the artist and the museum.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the art exhibitions, which are the subject of my analysis, the public could read about them in the local and national print media, and follow discussions on the radio and on television. Specific to the discussions is the fact that these media became, what Gerard Hauser called, 'multiple discursive arenas' and provided the space for a public confrontation between two very different identity stances: the national and the individual. The exhibitions acted as catalysts, bringing into public view a range of issues. Two, in particular, gained prominence: the state's continued stronghold on Holocaust memory and the rise of dissenting voices among second and third-generation Jews.

A brief survey of the events shows that, in the case of Ram Katzir's art installation *Your Colouring Book* and Roe Rosen's *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, the debates were initiated in the print media even before the exhibitions had opened. The article that triggered the debate about *Your Colouring Book* was titled: 'What's wrong with this picture?', and it appeared in *Yediot Abaronot*, on 17 January 1997. In an interview I conducted with Katzir at his studio in Amsterdam, he told me how the article came about. The journalist Yehuda Koren approached Katzir for information about the artwork. They decided that one page from *Yediot Abaronot* would be reserved for a

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<sup>7</sup> See Claire Doherty (ed.), *Contemporary art: from studio to situation*, (London: Black Dog, 2004)

drawing from Katzir's colouring book. Katzir had hoped that this article would help his work reach a broader audience who would colour the published drawing in the paper, and thus engage with his ideas. However, the journalist, argued Katzir, breached the agreement, by showing the colouring book to a number of Holocaust survivors and claiming that it could be bought as a souvenir from the Museum shop. To this news the survivors reacted negatively. Their anger constituted the main topic of Koren's article. Koren employed as a framing device the following subheading: 'an apparently innocent colouring book is arousing the ire of Holocaust survivor's organizations'. He stated that: "Cruelty", "distortion", "shameful impudence" are only a few epithets the survivors are flinging at the Israel Museum'. Koren did not refrain from cataloguing the exhibition as a 'hoax', and from presenting Katzir as someone 'who is not afraid of scandals'.<sup>8</sup> In the light of the survivors' criticism, Koren's question to the readers 'what's wrong with this picture?' further instigates criticism. Given that the survivors' responses were prompted by the journalist's misleading statements, one can safely conclude that the article was meant to manipulate the public and to provoke a scandal.

Rosen's exhibition in November the same year was similarly overshadowed by a scandal. The Jerusalem newspaper *Kol Ha-Yir* argued in an article titled 'Who wants to be Hitler's Mistress?' on 24 October 1997 that Rosen is inviting the public to identify and empathise with Eva Braun and Adolf Hitler.<sup>9</sup> Both these accusations in *Yediot Aharonot* and *Kol Ha-Yir* respectively caused a public stir, even though they were contested by the artists and the Israel Museum.

Out of circa fifty articles in the Israeli mainstream media, reporting on both exhibitions, the overwhelming majority of those who opposed them came from Israeli statesmen and politicians. In the case of Katzir's exhibition, politician Anat Maor, Cabinet Secretary Dani Naveh, and Minister of Education and Culture,

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<sup>8</sup> Yehuda Koren, 'What's wrong with this picture', in *Yediot Aharonot*, (17 January, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> 'Who wants to be Hitler's Mistress' in *Kol Ha-Yir*, (24 October, 1997).

Zebulum Hammer were the most prominent contestants. In the discussion about Rosen's exhibition the most outspoken opponents were Shmuel Shkedi, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, and Yoseph (Tommy) Lapid member of *Shinui* (Change) political party. Criticism also came from representatives of Yad Vashem and from Haim Dasberg, founder of *Amcha* – an organisation that gives psychological support to Holocaust survivors and their descendants. The respondents in each case were the artists and the Israel Museum represented by curators Martin Weyl and Ygal Zalmona.

It is no coincidence that radio and television were the most active institutions of the public sphere in covering the events and in creating space for public dialogue. Radio's involvement in transmitting Jewish culture in Israel has been well-documented by historian Derek J. Penslar.<sup>10</sup> The Zionist movement and David Ben-Gurion 'saw in radio an important tool for the nationalization of the masses'.<sup>11</sup> Hebrew culture was broadcast in the Hebrew language with the aim to educate the population and create a sense of 'Israeliness'. Until the establishment of the semi-autonomous Israel Broadcasting Authority in 1965, Israel's first national radio station, *Kol Yisrael* (the Voice of Israel) was under the control of the state. Ben-Gurion would refer to this radio as the 'voice of the state' (*shofar ha-medinah*). Its main station *Reshet Alef* (Network one) broadcast mainly news items, whereas *Reshet Bet* (Network two) was, until 1960, devoted to programmes for immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

*Galei Tsahal*, the army's radio station, was set up in 1950 by Ben-Gurion. Its initial role was to support the army in the defence of the country. *Galei Tsahal* had no parallel within the Israeli broadcasting tradition, as it not only broadcast to soldiers on base and at home, but also to the nation and found popularity especially among the youthful segments of the Israeli population. Hence, its second task was to

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<sup>10</sup> Derek J. Penslar, 'Transmitting Jewish Culture: Radio in Israel', in *Jewish Social Studies*, 10 (1) (Fall, 2003), pp.1-19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

educate and mould the nation, or 'to comprise a melting pot for all the exiles of Israel and their transformation into a single fighting nation'.<sup>13</sup>

Several changes occurred in the 1970s when *Kol Yisrael* introduced a new station, *Reshet Ghimel* (Network three) devoted exclusively to entertainment and western pop music. *Reshet Ghimel's* focus on entertainment came as a response to the increasing popularity of western youth culture among Israelis. Hence, radio reflected the changes in Israeli culture, but it also played a role in promoting them. Israeli historical consciousness was moulded by radio, too. The transmission of the Eichmann Trial had a great impact on the nation, with 60 per cent of all listeners above the age of 14 listening to one of the first two sessions of the trial.<sup>14</sup>

Radio has continued to have an impact on the nation, and, as Penslar remarks, until well into the 1990s, radio was broadcast on all public transport subjecting passengers to the voice of the nation. 'It was common for drivers of public buses to turn the volume up for hourly news bulletins, during which the passengers would listen in rapt attention. In the silence of those moments a sense of common fate would fill the air'.<sup>15</sup> The sentiment of togetherness is reinforced by the spoken word. 'When words are being broadcast, there is very little possibility for reflection. When spoken words fade, the sense of community, established while listening to radio, prevails', argued Penslar. Radio also became a main protagonist in the course of the public debates prompted by the exhibitions at the Israel Museum.

Together with radio, television promotes a sense of national community by offering 'heterogeneous national audiences a unique site for communal public life',<sup>16</sup> contends Michal Hamo. The 1990s mark the establishment of commercial television and 'its emergence as a dominant cultural force, which plays a role in negotiating

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<sup>13</sup> A transcript from Israel Defence Forces Collections quoted by Penslar on p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Penslar, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

cultural symbols, values and meanings'.<sup>17</sup> An increasingly popular discussion programme on both the radio and the television is the talk show programme. It is not surprising then that, in the public debates surrounding Katzir's and Rosen's art, talk shows played a prominent role.

Out of the many dozens of media reports, circa eighty per cent constitute talk shows on both radio and television, to which the artists, Israel Museum representatives, public figures and politicians were invited. It is worthy to note that there were no substantial differences in the manner in which different Israeli radio or television stations covered the news of the exhibitions, or approached the members of discussions. Differences appeared mostly in the time of broadcast. Whereas *Galei Tsahal* transmitted in the morning, *Arutz 1* ran programmes in the evening. Hence, the programmes were targeted at different audiences. Nevertheless, they followed a similar conversational pattern by allowing both the complaints of the accusers, and the defence of the accused to be heard to an equal extent. A common characteristic of these programmes, the majority of them talk shows, is the use of a particular type of speech which has come to be known as *dugri*<sup>18</sup> and its specific conversational style.

Michal Hamo defines the talk show as a genre that 'incorporates discursive patterns of everyday interpersonal talk as resources in the construction of authenticity, sincerity, intimacy, ordinariness, and liveliness, thus drawing on and promoting the Western ideal of conversation as a natural and spontaneous social arena that gives voice to authentic identity and experience'.<sup>19</sup> However, in Israel, the rules of a talk show conversation are different from those in other countries. Israeli ways of speaking present specific characteristics that reflect the nation's social and cultural

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<sup>17</sup> Michal Hamo, "'The Nation's Living Room': Negotiating solidarity on an Israeli talk show in the 1990s', in *The Journal of Israeli History*, 29 (2) (September, 2010), p. 176.

<sup>18</sup> Tamar Katriel discusses *dugri* speech at length in *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Hamo, p. 176.

mind-set. Hamo perceives *dugri* – a speech characterised by directness, bluntness, informality, and avoidance of politeness, as a central major symbolic vehicle for the affirmation of Sabra identity. The ubiquity of *dugri* speech presupposes a high degree of social cohesion, which ‘does not require constant maintenance through linguistic lubrication’. Indeed, in Israeli culture, argument and adversariality are not considered detrimental to social harmony, but are rather the preferred and highly valued modes of inquiry and sociability.<sup>20</sup> A characteristic of *dugri* is its conversational style with ‘the rapid pace of speech, the highly dynamic turn-taking and high tolerance to inter-speaker overlaps which reflects the idea that the conversational floor is collectively shared’.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the conversational space was collectively shared by the participants in the public debates about Holocaust memory at the Israel Museum, the ideas and opinions they were proposing were not. Through analysis of their speeches one can identify important narratives that shape social relations. CDA sheds light onto relations of power governing society<sup>22</sup> which are also manifest in public debates about Holocaust memory.

In what follows, I shall pay special attention to issues such as ‘ownership’ of Holocaust memory, power relations, and the growing tensions building between collective and individual practices of Holocaust remembrance. The media has proven to be instrumental in disseminating the ideas and opinions of the agents of power, the ruling political parties representing the state and of leading public figures. In my discussion of the public debates I shall ask: what is the prevalent perception of Holocaust memory in Israel? Who supports it and who opposes it? How do the artists perceive of themselves in relation to it? Finally, what are the prevailing views and criticisms regarding Holocaust memory held by members of the public debates?

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>22</sup> See Ruth Wodak, *The discursive construction of national identity*, and Norman Fairclough, ‘Discourse and Power’, in his study *Language and power*, (Harlow: Longman 2001), pp. 36-63.

## II

### The National Narrative versus the Individual Counter-narrative

In Israel, the Holocaust has been a central subject in school history curricula, the foremost historical event to be memorialised by the nation, and one of the benchmarks of Jewish collective consciousness. Inevitably, the Holocaust as a subject of public discussion has not escaped politics. Among the many examples which attest to the politicised nature of Holocaust memory is Amos Oz's article 'Hitler is Dead, Mr President' printed in the national daily, *Yediot Aharanot* on 21 June, 1982. Oz draws attention to the overuse of Holocaust references by the Israeli president Menachem Begin stating that parallels between Hitler and leaders of Palestinians can only lead to further conflict. Begin allegedly once said to his critics: 'If Adolf Hitler were hiding out in a building along with twenty innocent civilians, wouldn't you bomb the building?' Oz responds: 'No, sir. Your parable is invalid, and the very idea of such a comparison shows a serious emotional distortion'.<sup>23</sup> Oz's comments touched upon a sensitive issue which becomes relevant in the context of the discussions about the exhibitions.

For politicians, history plays an important role in shaping national narratives of remembrance.<sup>24</sup> French philosopher Louis Althusser's theory of 'ideological state apparatuses' that govern society's consciousness, and define its collective identity is worth considering here.<sup>25</sup> Althusser refers to various forms of social control: these include education as the most prominent, but also religion, law, politics, media and the family. I shall focus both on education and the role of politics, represented in the context of my analysis, by state institutions, their representatives, and other public bodies. The politicians' interventions in the Israeli public sphere have been

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<sup>23</sup> The article was republished in Amos Oz, *The Slopes of Lebanon*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Argument supported by Ruth Wodak in *The discursive construction of national identity*, pp. 70-106.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1989), pp. 170-86. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>, (accessed on 12.7.2011).

unequivocally critical of the exhibitions. Why was there this uniform opposition to the exhibitions? What does this reveal about Holocaust memory discourse in the Israeli public sphere?

**a) The Debate about *Your Colouring Book* (1997)**

*Your Colouring Book* opened on 21 January 1997, and it quickly became newsworthy and a subject of numerous public interventions. These interventions can be divided in state/institutional interventions, the supporters' explanations, and the survivors' reactions. The main opponents to the exhibition were Knesset member from *Meretz* party Anat Maor, and Prime Minister's Cabinet Secretary, Dani Naveh. A detailed analysis of their speeches shows a certain protectiveness, even possessiveness with reference to Holocaust memory. Heralds of the state and guardians of national memory, these politicians attest to the institutionalization of Holocaust memory.

On 20 January *Yediot Abaronot* published the article titled: 'Member of Knesset, Anat Maor wants cancellation of Ram Katzir's exhibition'. Maor calls on the Minister of Education, Zebulum Hammer to persuade the Israel Museum not to go ahead with the exhibition. Maor's plea is in direct response to Koren's previously mentioned article 'What's wrong with this picture?'. She saw a 'serious education flaw in the exhibition which invites visitors, among them children, to colour drawings based on authentic Nazi pictures of Hitler feeding a fawn or of Goebbels telling stories to his daughters'. Her argument centred on the idea that: 'in the name of artistic freedom and openness, the exhibition loses all ethical considerations'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Anat Maor quoted by Yehuda Koren in article 'MK Maor: Ram Katzir's exhibition must be cancelled', in *Yediot Abaronot*, (20 January, 1997). This is my translation of the original statement in Hebrew.



In an interview on one of Israel's most popular stations, *Reshet Bet* conducted by Karmit Gia, on 20 January, Maor reiterates the main points of her argument – that by presenting images of Hitler at the Israel Museum, the museum confers legitimacy on the murderers, and 'this is a great injustice to the Holocaust survivors'. Despite Gia's attempts to explain the exhibition's true intention, Maor goes on to stress the educational initiative of the Israel Museum, and reminds the public that 'we demand from the world to fight against Nazism, racism, and against any form of incitement or propaganda, that is why it would be a mistake if the Museum does not withdraw the exhibition'. The following excerpt captures the tone of the discussion. On the one hand, the stance adopted by Gia in response to Maor's complaint, on the other, Maor's endeavour to convince the audience of the validity of her interpretation of the exhibition:

Gia: Your accusation that the members of Israel Museum legitimize crime, it seems to me is very exaggerated, as, Zalmona [curator] declared that the intention was to show how by means of 'innocence' one can pass on monstrous messages.

Maor: I only say that the exhibition makes monstrous figures appear humane, and by doing this, one does great injustice, and touches upon issues of morality. I think that the Israel Museum made a mistake in their judgment. In my opinion, what is important is whether the outcome of this exhibition takes into account ethics and morality, and not only the intention of the artist. That is why, I have told the Museum to consider carefully their decision, and cancel the exhibition immediately. In my position as a lobbyist for children's rights, I also ask the Minister of Education and Culture to intervene.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Maor interviewed by Karmit Gia on *Reshet Bet*, (20 January, 1997). This is a translation from Hebrew of transcription of radio discussion accessed at the Israel Museum Archives, August 2009, Jerusalem. NB: All subsequent quotations from Israeli radio and television are translations from Hebrew language and belong to the author.

Maor's intervention is radical. Her commanding tone is revealed by the use of the imperative 'cancel'. She labels the exhibition as a threat to national ethics and morality and demands that immediate measures be taken leading to the cancellation of the exhibition. Moreover, her speech denotes a tension in regard to the power hierarchy between herself as a representative of the state and the Museum. Firstly, Maor positions herself as a 'lobbyist for children's rights' that is, she sees herself on the side of what is right, whereas the Israel Museum, in her judgement, is the wrong doer. Maor further states her influence on the Ministry of Education's process of decision-making. Her speech points out the regulatory function of the Israeli state as the nation's guarantor of social justice and morality. Maor uses the personal pronoun 'I' in her role as a member of a political party and representative of the nation. In this role, she also speaks in the name of the survivors, even though there is no mention whether she has discussed this issue with them beforehand. This leads us to question to what extent the survivors as a group actually felt represented by the state's officials, and what their position is in these public debates.

Another politician who engaged in the public discussion was Chairman of the Forum for Tracing anti-Semitism and Cabinet Secretary, Dani Naveh. On 21 January, the day of the opening of the exhibition, Naveh gave an interview on *Reshet Bet*. In this function, Naveh expresses concern about the 'anticipated insult to the feelings of many Jews' that Katzir's exhibition allegedly provokes. Naveh proceeds to inform the radio listeners that he has already expressed his reservations to the Museum's director, James Snyder. Even though he contends that the exhibition should not open at all, Naveh admits that 'the decision on such matters belongs exclusively to the Museum'.<sup>28</sup> He can only recommend that the Museum does everything possible to show their awareness of the public's sensitivity to the topic, and make sure they allow the public to state their views.

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<sup>28</sup> Dani Naveh interviewed by Meir Einstein on *Reshet Bet*, (21 January, 1997).

In a different interview conducted by Ori Bernstein for *Galei Tsahal*, Naveh's critique appears to be even more pronounced. Naveh's statements are framed by Bernstein's comment, which sets the context of the interview. Bernstein reminds listeners of the wave of criticism of the Israeli politics expressed by representatives of Israeli popular culture. He refers to rock musician Aviv Geffen who voiced, by means of music, his discontent with Israeli politics regarding the Palestinians. By use of this framing device, Bernstein situates the exhibition within a critical discourse directed against the political establishment: 'And, we do not move too far away from Netanyahu's office, and the public storm against the Israel Museum continues and arrives at the prime-minister's offices'.<sup>29</sup> The radio host introduces Naveh as someone who 'strongly opposed the exhibition'. This is confirmed by Naveh who states that: 'I will not visit this exhibition'. Naveh anticipates the public's reaction to be negative. One wonders, however, to what extent Naveh hopes to adversely influence the public's opinions about an exhibition that they had not yet had the chance to view themselves. In a similar manner to Maor, Naveh claims to speak for a large segment of the Israeli population as he recommends that the exhibition should not open at the Israel Museum:

It must be understood that we are talking about an exhibition which presents a booklet with what appear as innocent drawings, but quickly we discover that all the illustrations from the booklet are based on photographs of Hitler, Goebbels and the Third Reich soldiers. I told the Museum's director my doubts about the exhibit, and I emphasized the great hurt that it causes to many Jews.<sup>30</sup>

In response to Naveh, Bernstein quotes Katzir who argued that there were many misunderstandings regarding his work, and who invited his opponents to visit the exhibition before they criticize it. Far from neutral, Bernstein's position is sympathetic to Katzir's line of defence, as he indirectly suggests to Naveh that he should also visit the exhibition.

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<sup>29</sup> Ori Bernstein on *Galei Tsahal*, (22 January, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Naveh interviewed by Bernstein on *Galei Tsahal*.

What was arguably unknown to both Naveh and Bernstein was that a committee from the Ministry of Education had already convened to discuss the exhibition. A notice to the press was made on 21 January stating the Ministry of Education and Culture's position. Spokesperson Emmanuel Zisman, and a member of *Ha-Derech Ha-Shlishit* (Third Way Party), informed the press about his visit to the Museum, and his discussion with the artist. The notice rejected the accusations that the exhibition was designed for children and that it promoted Nazi propaganda.

The press release reflected the Knesset's official position and stated the following:

The artist explained to Zisman that the exhibition is addressing adults [...]. Zisman was impressed with the exhibition, and is convinced that there is no Nazi propaganda, and that the artist's intention was to transmit an educational message. Even so, said Zisman, the public's sensitivity to all subjects about the Holocaust is very big, and there is worry about the artist's good intention, and that the educational message could be overlooked by the public. He has asked the artist to add an explanatory note about the purpose of the exhibition. [...] Member of Knesset, Zeev Boym advised the use of other means, such as films about the Nazi propaganda, that could be placed in a different exhibition room, and which would clarify the message of the exhibition and the artist's intention.<sup>31</sup>

The Ministry of Education's intervention and assessment of an art exhibition which ignited negative reactions on the part of some members of the Israeli society poses important questions in regard to the presence of artistic expression vis-à-vis art about the Holocaust in Israel, and to the degree of autonomy of the Israel Museum. Beyond doubt, the ministry's involvement confirms that the Museum is regarded as a body of the state and a representative of national culture. Hence, it is not a surprise that the news of the opening of an exhibition about the Holocaust at the Israel Museum became a matter of national interest.

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<sup>31</sup> Press Release from the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) issued on 21 January, 1997.

Nevertheless, one needs to further ask: Why did state politicians and the government deem it necessary to intervene in the Israel Museum's decision? Could an exhibition be viewed as a threat to the nation? Does the Israeli public's sensitivity to the artistic representation of this event legitimize the government's intervention in the Israel Museum's affairs? Where does one draw the line between art's freedom of expression and state control?

The anxiety of the Israeli leaders can be explained by the fact that the exhibition was thought to encourage Holocaust denial. In fact, Katzir was accused by Anat Maor of being a Holocaust denier.<sup>32</sup> However, given that the identity of the artist as the grandchild of Holocaust survivors was already made public, one wonders what motivated Maor's rhetoric. Can the irrationality of an event such as the Holocaust justify the irrationality of the responses of the inheritors of its memory? Or, does this rhetoric in fact reflect a competition for ideological domination, in which context, the memory of the Holocaust appears to be in question? The public statements by both Naveh and Maor in their position as agents of state power are authoritative, and include a degree of censorship as they unanimously denounce the exhibition and demand its cancellation.

Yad Vashem's official statement is another example of the state's attempted intervention in the public discussion. The 'world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust',<sup>33</sup> Yad Vashem is recognised as the country's national institution of remembrance, and it is intimately integrated in the country's national landscape forming a cohesive and suggestive narrative alongside the national cemetery Mount Herzl. A symbol of the failure of Jewish life in the Diaspora, Yad Vashem's sitting on one of the many hills of Jerusalem makes the Zionist message of Jewish redemption in the land of Israel

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<sup>32</sup> Maor quoted by Gia Melamed in article 'I only drew the lines', in the *Dutch Jewish Weekly*, (19 June, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Statement by Yad Vashem, retrieved from <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/index.asp> (accessed on 23.7. 2011).

palpable.<sup>34</sup> Its importance as the guardian of Holocaust memory and guarantor of its transmission through commemorative practice, learning and research is undeniable, and so is its dominance in the Israeli commemorative landscape.<sup>35</sup> In its role as the official promoter and transmitter of Holocaust memory Yad Vashem made a statement in response to Katzir's exhibition at the Israel Museum. It appeared on 27 January 1997, in *Yated Neeman*:

The exhibition uses photographs and materials from Nazi times with the intention to show the dangers of the destructive and distorting potential of manipulation. We would like to note that the use of such materials and the interpretation given to them requires a thorough knowledge and responsibility on the Israel Museum's part. [...] It is regretful that these considerations are not properly followed by the parties involved in the exhibition. For, any study dealing with these issues needs a thorough examination and consideration of inherent meanings and of the sensitivity of the Israeli public, and especially of the Holocaust survivors in this country.<sup>36</sup>

As unique possessor of knowledge, the institution draws attention to the lack of knowledge and responsibility apparently shown by the Israel Museum. It remains unclear how exactly Yad Vashem would measure this lack of knowledge, as no evidence is given in support of this argument. The relation of power, though, is clear. Whereas Yad Vashem claims to possess the knowledge and responsibility; the Israel Museum is accused of failing to meet these criteria. The implication is that the Museum lacks sensitivity to the survivors' needs, whereas Yad Vashem takes them into account. Thus, relations of power and dominance are surfacing in this context.

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<sup>34</sup> Jackie Feldman, 'Between Yad Vashem and Mount Herzl: Changing Inscriptions of Sacrifice on Jerusalem's "Mountain of Memory"', in *Anthropological Quarterly*, 80 (4) (Fall, 2007), pp. 1147- 1174.

<sup>35</sup> Beyond doubt, Yad Vashem overshadows in public importance other institutions of commemoration such as *Bait Lohamei Ha-Ghetaot*, The Ghetto Fighters' House by far the oldest Holocaust Museum in the world and the first of its kind to be founded by Holocaust survivors in 1949.

<sup>36</sup> Article titled 'Exhibition at the Israel Museum uses Nazi material', in *Yated Neeman*, (27 January, 1997).

As outlined above, the idea that survivors form a unified group has been deeply internalised in Israeli public consciousness. Due to their common trauma, the individuality of survivors has often been obfuscated by the overarching national narrative of Jewish victimhood. The survivors have been turned into symbols of Jewish suffering. The details which made their stories different, and their opinions varied have been omitted in the national narrative, in order to make way for the Israeli nation's collective identification with the survival experience.<sup>37</sup>

A prominent speaker of the survivors in response to Katzir was Professor Haim Dasberg, a founder of *Amcha* – an organization founded in 1987 by a group of Holocaust survivors and mental health professionals. Its aim is to provide psychiatric support and counselling to survivors and their offspring. Dasberg intervened in the public discussion on *Amcha's* behalf and expressed strong disagreement with the Museum's decision. His principal argument was that the exhibition re-victimizes the survivors, by bringing back memories of persecution, which would hamper their continuing fight against post-traumatic disorders. Furthermore, Dasberg condemned the Israel Museum for failing to see the inappropriateness of displaying images of Nazi propaganda.

In a talk show on TV channel *Arutzei' Zahav*, Dasberg is invited by the programme host Dubi Givon, together with Katzir and Martin Weyl to express his opinions. The presenter, Zohar Saden introduced the discussion in the form of the following news item: 'A new exhibition at the Israel Museum stirs a storm, mostly among Holocaust survivors. Not all of us understand why Ram Katzir's exhibition must make use of images of Hitler, Goebbels and Nazi youth as part of a seemingly innocent colouring booklet'.<sup>38</sup> The ensuing conversation between Dasberg and Katzir is characterised by a seemingly aggressive tone. This is made apparent in

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<sup>37</sup> See Gutwein's argument outlined 'The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics', in *Israel Studies*, 14 (1) (Spring, 2009), pp. 36-67.

<sup>38</sup> Excerpt from transcription of TV talk show 'The new exhibition at the Israel Museum' moderated by Dubi Givon on *Arutzei' Zahav*, (23 January, 1997).

Dasberg's swift responses to Katzir. Following Katzir's explanation of his intention to deal with Holocaust memory in his position as a grandchild of a Holocaust survivor, Dasberg's comment does not hide his irritation: 'I do not want to speak about Ram Katzir. His motivations do not interest me. What concerns me is that, at the Israel Museum, one can find a booklet with Nazi propaganda'. Dasberg continues: 'there are 300,000 people in this country that are hurt very badly, they suffer from post-traumatic disorders. If this exhibition were about the soldiers who fought in Lebanon, and are still affected by the terror, it would not impress them [the soldiers]'.<sup>39</sup> Dasberg raises the question of trauma and of timing, suggesting that survivors are not in the position to understand the artist's endeavour, since they have not yet overcome the horrific experience of the camps. Moreover, his comments must be placed against the background of the Israeli press's misguided interpretation of Katzir's installation. Arguably, Dasberg himself has been influenced by, for example, Yehuda Koren's negative portrayal of the exhibition. The remaining part of the talk show attests to the fact that not all survivors agreed with Dasberg.

The programme moderator directs the audience's attention to a new participant in the discussion – Martin Weyl. Asked by Givon: 'as a Holocaust survivor did the exhibition affect you?', Weyl – former director of the Israel Museum – refers to the diversity of opinions and points of view held by survivors. He states: 'I don't understand the connection with the Holocaust survivors. Survivors are not a unified group. There are a few who can be provoked by certain statements, and there are others that can have very different opinions'. It is at this point that Weyl gears the public discussion towards a different topic – the connection of the younger generations to the Holocaust. He suggests that, in fact, the exhibition addresses the descendants of the survivors:

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<sup>39</sup> Statement by Dasberg made during talk show on *Arutzei Zahav*.



I am very interested in what the young generation thinks about the Shoah, how they understand it and how they use the language of the Shoah. Sometimes, it is not easy to observe the way the young generation speaks. It can be inconvenient. Those who are afraid to approach the exhibition should not come to visit.<sup>40</sup>

At this point, a person called Uri whose voice had not hitherto been heard enters the discussion. Uri clearly states his identity as a member of the second generation and claims that ‘the majority of the population here is second generation’. In this role, he argues that: ‘[this exhibition] only helps, it does not harm’.<sup>41</sup> Both Weyl and Uri present an argumentative line that converges with Katzir’s public defence. Katzir points to his identity as a member of the younger generation and to his artistic initiative to approach questions that were left unanswered by his grandparents:

I had many questions about the Second World War period. I posed many questions to my grandfather and grandmother about what had happened over there. My grandfather would always say: Ramtzik, people of your age should not know about this. Sadly, both have died, and I have still got many questions to ask. My questions do not concern the villains like Hitler and Goebbels, but their childhood, and their sisters’ childhood, or the childhood of those children raising their hands for *heil hitler*. I cannot understand where does the hatred come from?<sup>42</sup>

The silence of the survivors prompted the descendants’ interest and thirst for knowledge. Momik, the protagonist of David Grossman’s *See under: Love* (1986) and a possible fictional alter ego of Katzir’s, also attempts to penetrate, by means of imagination, the silence of the survivors’ generation. As is the case with Momik, the image of the perpetrator captures the imagination of Katzir, too. The dissatisfaction

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<sup>40</sup> Weyl on *Arutzei’ Zahav*.

<sup>41</sup> Uri on *Arutzei’ Zahav*.

<sup>42</sup> Katzir on *Arutzei’ Zahav*.

with the silence of his grandfather together with the prescience of the trauma in his family's everyday life, and the awareness of the failure to understand what his grandparents had gone through leads Katzir to search for answers by means of artistic expression.

In other media statements, Katzir continues to identify with 'the third generation'. In an interview with *Galei Tsahal* on 22 January, he expresses his regret about the survivors' strong reactions against his exhibition, stressing his personal connection, as a grandchild of a survivor: 'I feel bad [about the reaction of a furious couple of survivors]. My grandfather was a Holocaust survivor. Eleven people from my family died there. He [the visitor] thinks that I glorify the Reich, but it is the opposite of what I am trying to do'.<sup>43</sup>

Katzir's affirmation of his third-generation identity is supported by the Israel Museum, most prominently by Yigal Zalmona, critic, historian and the museum's chief curator with thirty years of experience in the field. His statements point to the commemorative function of the exhibition and the role of the Museum to document, by means of art, the ways in which the younger generation endeavour to remember. The following declaration appeared on *Reshet Bet*, on 20 January:

What is important to us is to show a young artist, from the third generation, a grandchild of survivors, who, reacts in his own way. I think that, if we do not see the reactions of the third generation, we let the forgetting of the Shoah take place. The Israel Museum is required to remember and memorialize the Shoah by all means.<sup>44</sup>

In his assessment of the concept of 'generation', Jaeger refers to art as the domain where the voice of the new generation is made heard most clearly. In the context of the debate at the Israel Museum, it is the art of the third generation that is intended as

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<sup>43</sup> Katzir on *Galei Tsahal*, (22 January, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Zalmona on *Reshet Bet*, (20 January, 1997).

a testimony to this generation's commitment to remembrance. It signals that the Holocaust is not forgotten by the youngest generation, who continue to act as 'memorial candles'. In a talk show on the TV channel *Arutz 1* on 21 January, Zalmona stresses that: 'the Israel Museum's responsibility is to document the way in which culture meets the Shoah [...] it is important that we [Israel Museum] present a young artist – third generation after the Holocaust, and how he understands and perceives these matters'.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, the recurrence of terms such as 'young artists' and 'the third generation' in many of the Museum's statements, indicate its objective to publicize the idea that the younger generation maintains an interest in this subject, and that it is their individuality which is being expressed in the selection of the subject matter. It appears that the Museum's intention is two-fold, to ensure the transmission of Holocaust memory by allowing the expression of the perceptions of the younger generation, despite the possibility that they might upset some segments of the Israeli society. Unlike Yad Vashem's aim to protect the knowledge and memory of the Holocaust, the Israel Museum attempts to document the developments in the perception of that memory, and provide unrestricted access to the younger generations' artistic endeavours to preserve Holocaust memory.

One further wonders how Katzir's project fits the more general mission of the Israel Museum. A digression seems necessary in order to provide a historical context of the Museum's interest in *Your Colouring Book* exhibition.

An interesting source that reveals the mission of the Israel Museum is the correspondence of the British Friends of the Art Museums in Israel (BFAMI). The year of BFAMI's foundation as a charity organisation, 1947, coincided with Israel's war of independence which led to Israel's birth as the state of the Jewish people.

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<sup>45</sup> Zalmona on *Arutz 1*, (21 January, 1997).

From its very beginnings the British Friends has shown a relentless commitment to support Israel's Zionist ethos by fundraising for Israel's oldest art museum, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, and, since 1965, for the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The British Friends' correspondence with the Israel Museum spans several decades, covering more prominently the 1980s and 1990s. It offers a Diasporic perspective on Israel's main national art institution and an insight into the ways in which the Israel Museum has presented its institutional identity to this foreign supporter. In the context of my study, documents archived by the British Friends are an important source of information about the mission and activities of the Israel Museum, and reveal the centrality of the Museum's relationship with the Diaspora. Deemed by this Diaspora friend to be 'the largest cultural institution in Israel', the Museum's mission is outlined as follows: 'commitment to provide a window to world culture and art, ancient and modern, to collect, preserve, study, research and display the cultural treasures of *Eretz Israel*, the Jewish people and to foster education'.<sup>46</sup> The Israel Museum, viewed through the lens of its correspondence with BFAMI, represents not only an institution of Israeli art and culture, but also an international body that maintains close contacts with its Friends in Diaspora.

Whereas the Israel Museum benefits from the support of numerous international friends in Europe, the American Friends have occupied an essential function. They offer the largest financial support to the Museum. An example that reinforces the Museum's strong connection with Diaspora and, specifically, the United States is James Snyder's election as director of the Israel Museum. An article from the *Jerusalem Post*, titled 'The Man who fell to Earth' (1996) criticizes the decision to replace the former director Martin Weyl, with someone who 'comes from abroad (New York) with an impressive professional record but knows nothing about this

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<sup>46</sup> University of Southampton Library MS 364/4/1/34. Letter from BFAMI to the British Museum, (5 October, 1994).

country or its art. It is not at all insignificant that a New York Jew of 44 has never been sufficiently moved to make a visit here in the past'.<sup>47</sup>

Another well-recognised trait of the Israel Museum is its commitment to education. This is revealed in a letter by the BFAMI to the Israel Museum. In recent years, the British Friend's mission has been to sponsor educational programs. Their objective – to provide access to both Jewish and worldwide artworks for the Israelis and to support education by means of art – is stressed by chairwoman Mariana Griessmann in her speech from 1988:

In today's world art classes and museum visiting begin early, so that children can learn to become receptive to the arts and enjoy culture at a young age.

This plays an even more important role in a country where many of its youth originate from different and often underprivileged backgrounds. In Israel art education adds an important dimension to the quality of life, the cost of this work is considerable.<sup>48</sup>

With the BFAMI's support, the Museum planned an art project aimed at both Jewish and Palestinian children and their families. Titled 'When Grandma and Grandpa were children' (1993) and hosted in the Ruth Youth Wing, the event gathered 23,000 Israeli and Arab children including 5000 from East and West Jerusalem, who worked together to find an understanding through the medium of art that would bridge the gap between their parents' generations.<sup>49</sup>

The BFAMI acknowledges the crucial role of the museum 'not only as ambassador of national pride but also as a vital unifying factor within Israel itself [...]. The Israel

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<sup>47</sup> Meir Ronnen, 'The Man who fell to Earth', in the *Jerusalem Post*, (13 September, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> University of Southampton Library MS 364/4/1/34. Statement made in the publication, BFAMI at the Natural History Museum, issued in celebration of Israel's 40th anniversary at the National History Museum, (6 October, 1988).

<sup>49</sup> University of Southampton Library MS 364/4/1/34. Letter from Meir Meyer to Mrs. Pat Mendelson on Youth Wing Exhibition (July, 1992).

Museum is one of the world leaders in youth art education'.<sup>50</sup> The British Friends argue that, especially during difficult times such as the Gulf War, 'the Museum had an equally important role to play in helping the thousands of new immigrants; both Russian and Ethiopian integrate successfully into the Israeli society'.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, in a letter of invitation to one of its fundraising events, a gala dinner, auction and art fair at Christie's in 1995, chairwoman Lady Lily Sieff states that: 'by the rediscovery of their heritage and culture, and equally through the extensive youth educational programmes, they introduce the appreciation of art into the lives of thousands of young Israelis, thereby greatly enriching them'.<sup>52</sup> Alexander Margulies, treasurer and one of the original members of BFAMI is cited by the *Jewish Chronicle* stating that: 'the museums in Israel [including the Israel Museum], apart from their artistic value, were also fulfilling a great educational need, particularly for school children, for whom special exhibitions were frequently organized'.<sup>53</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Ruth Youth Wing of the Israel Museum is entirely dedicated to art education run by teachers, instructors and lecturers, who: 'share a common vision: to serve as a centre for study and creation, which stimulates artistic and cultural dialogue and endeavour, inspired by the original works housed in the Israel Museum'. Among visitors to the Israel Museum, children appear to be a very important category. The country's future generation, children often pay visits to the Ruth Youth Wing as part of organised school trips, or as part of family visits – and the programs offered by the Museum are extensive, ranging from guided tours to hand-on activities.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> University of Southampton Library MS 364/4/1/34. Letter from BFAMI to the Israel Museum about the Annual Dinner at Madame Tussaud's, (December 16, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> University of Southampton Library MS 364/4/1/34. Letter from BFAMI by chairwoman Lady Lily Sieff to the Israel Museum about the Gala Dinner, Auction and Art Fair at Christie's, (1995).

<sup>53</sup> Statement by Mr Margulies in article 'Friends of Israel Museums Expanding activities', in the *Jewish Chronicle*, (19 February, 1954), p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> See Israel Museum's webpage

[http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page\\_1193.aspx?c0=14626&bsp=14292](http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page_1193.aspx?c0=14626&bsp=14292) (accessed on 14.7. 2011).

It is on the basis of its educational potential that the British Friends sponsored Ram Katzir's *Your Colouring Book*.<sup>55</sup> In the public discussion about Katzir's exhibition, education emerges as an important issue. Katzir's concept of a children's colouring book intrigued politician Anat Maor who jumped to the erroneous conclusion that Katzir's project promotes Nazi propaganda and is aimed primarily at children.

On many occasions, Katzir pleads in his defence stating that, whereas the exhibition is not aimed at children exclusively, it does not exclude them either. Moreover, the exhibition was located not within the educational framework of the Ruth Youth Wing, but in the Billy Rose art gallery. Nevertheless, Katzir plays with the spectator's expectations, as he does not deny that education is, indeed, a central theme in this artwork. References to education are found in the exhibition setting, a classroom with old school desks, on which the visitors are invited to sit down. Many drawings are based on real images of children performing the Nazi Salute in front of their teacher, or welcoming Hitler at a rally.

Katzir reflects upon the impact of Nazism on a child's system of beliefs and identity. He warns about the manipulative character of education in shaping a child's but also a nation's identity. Furthermore, he urges visitors to think about the possibility of education to manipulate people into accepting racism and even more so, of allowing violence against a group as an acceptable way of dealing with problems. The message of the exhibition is captured in a brief synopsis issued by the Israel Museum: 'Colouring books are mainly created for children by adults. In making one for grown-ups, Katzir demonstrates how the porridge we feed our children today may result in the monsters of tomorrow'.<sup>56</sup> Indirectly, Katzir urges the Israeli public to consider how the education they have received at school might have had an impact on their self-perceptions and on their perceptions of other groups. Indeed,

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<sup>55</sup> Information acquired by the author during interview with Michelle Hyman, executive director of BFAMI, October 2010, London.

<sup>56</sup> Statement issued by the Israel Museum, (13 January, 1997).

references to the Palestinian issue appear in the discussion, albeit only briefly. Yet Katzir insists that the questions he poses are universal ones and are not addressing any group in particular. In his article titled 'Who refuses to look?' Katzir refutes a press statement he is alleged to have made: 'a child is not born hating Jews or Arabs'. He argues instead that: 'the comparison between the Shoah and the military occupation arouses horror, and did not belong to me'. Moreover, Katzir explains that the exhibition poses many questions about 'the state of Holocaust memory [...]' and it warns against racism which derives from education'.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, education, as a concept, is tightly bound to the concept of ideology. It is this particular relation that becomes prevalent in the writing on education as a part of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) discussed by Althusser. His claim is that school ensures the perpetuation of an ideology that is necessary for the reproduction of a particular social system. He states: 'each mass ejected en route is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society'. Whereas there are other ISAs contributing to the replication of the dominant ideology, 'no other Ideological State Apparatus has the obligatory (and not least, free) audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven'. Althusser argues that ideology transmitted by means of education is one of the most dominant and pervasive. So pervasive is this ideology that 'those teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history and learning they "teach" against the ideology, the system and the practices in which they are trapped, are a kind of hero'.<sup>58</sup>

Katzir himself was educated in Israeli schools where he also learnt about the Holocaust. However, he completed his formal education elsewhere, mainly in Amsterdam and in New York, as a result of which he acquired a comparative

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<sup>57</sup> Ram Katzir, 'Who refuses to Look', in *Kol Ha-Yir*, (24 January, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Althusser, *Lenin*, pp. 105-6. Retrieved from <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/althusserISAs.html>, (accessed on 16.7. 2011).



perspective which enabled him to look retrospectively with a critical eye at the education that he had received in Israel. The Holocaust permeates the Israeli collective consciousness especially as a subject in the school curricula.<sup>59</sup> One consequence of this reality is the over-abundance of images portraying Jews as victims. Katzir, for instance, noticed the ‘over-familiarity with Nazi and anti-Nazi propaganda’ in the Israeli schools he attended where even the most shocking images were ‘flattened’ through repetition. In response to that education, Katzir endeavoured to ‘give a sense of novelty’ to images that have become so familiar that their power to move has been robbed away.<sup>60</sup> His intention was to find a way to ‘revitalise’ them, to bring the real meaning of the images to a new recognition or as Gary Schwartz suggests to ‘re-animate the situation, to shake off a process in danger of becoming ossified into a set of institutions, rituals and conventions’.<sup>61</sup> Journalist Helen Motro supports the artist’s endeavour, arguing that:

Young Israelis’ connection to the Holocaust seems to be evermore distanced. [...] The exhibit exists for all the others, Jewish or not, to whom the Holocaust is becoming a remote historical icon, divorced of emotional content. Thus, the argument that an exhibit may be ‘shocking’ or ‘upsetting’ to survivors is a ludicrous justification for stifling it.<sup>62</sup>

There is an element of manipulation present in the Israeli educational system, which should be critically scrutinized. The impact of the state in shaping of educational curricula for history subject is well-known. Historian Adam A. Porat explains that because the educational system is centralised, ‘periodically the ministry publishes a National Curriculum that dictates to both teachers and text-book writers the primary

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<sup>59</sup> See Avner Ben Amos and Ilana Bet El, ‘Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools: Ceremonies, Education and History’, in *Israel Studies*, 4 (1) (Spring, 1999), pp. 258-284.

<sup>60</sup> Statement made by Katzir during interview with the author.

<sup>61</sup> Gary Schwartz, ‘Teach it to the Children’, in *Your Colouring Book*, p. 41.

<sup>62</sup> Helen Motro, ‘Shock Art’, in the *Jerusalem Post*, (26 January, 1997).

aims of teaching history and the exact topics to be taught'.<sup>63</sup> The regulatory function of the state is also made apparent in the context of the debate about Katzir's exhibition, in the intervention of the Ministry of Education in the Israel Museum's affairs, and in its decision to vote with regard to the opening of the exhibition. Surely, Katzir's references to manipulation and its relation to education raise important questions about the educational system in Israel, which, according to Porat, is highly dependent on the politics of the state government.

Historian Moshe Zuckerman claims that in Israel the central Holocaust lesson is that the Jewish people must prevent, at all cost, something like the Holocaust from happening again to *Jews*. Zuckerman calls this a 'particular lesson'. Whereas this 'particular lesson' has gained prominence, being validated by the state's national curriculum, the 'universal lesson' stating that that Jews should make sure that *no one* will suffer from the Holocaust again has been marginalised.<sup>64</sup> Porat agrees with Zuckerman's argument, concluding his examination of the teaching of the Holocaust in Israeli schools, with the following remarks: 'Paradoxically, the Holocaust, an event that, more than any other, demonstrates the perils of nationalism, served in Israel, not to advance humanistic values, but to promote national identification'.<sup>65</sup>

The public debate prompted by Katzir's installation proved that there are limits and restrictions with regard to what is appropriate or not, what stories can be told, and from whose point of view. What is more, these restrictions are imposed by the

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<sup>63</sup> Adam A. Porat, 'From the Scandal to the Holocaust in Israeli Education', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39 (4) (October, 2004), pp. 619- 636.

<sup>64</sup> See Moshe Zuckerman, *The Holocaust in a Sealed Room* (in Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Hotzaat HaMehaber, 1993).

<sup>65</sup> Adam Porat, p. 636. Porat expands this idea stating that: 'Despite the extreme diversity in the representation of the Holocaust – from a marginal memory to a defining memory – over these fifty years one consideration dominated the ministry of education's policy of Holocaust representation: how can the representation of the Holocaust promote greater identification with the State? While in the 1950s the good of the nation demanded that the memory of the Holocaust be suppressed, as it symbolised a national humiliation, in the 1980s the good of the nation demanded stressing the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a means of reinforcing Jewish identity', p. 636.

Israeli government which also dictates the content of Holocaust education in schools, and consequently, the lessons to be learnt by the nation.

**b) The Debate about *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (1998)**

The decision of the Israel Museum to showcase another work of a second-generation artist and son of a Holocaust survivor only a few months after the opening of Katzir's exhibition demonstrates that there is a certain continuity and determination with regard to the Museum's commitment to show that, indeed, younger generations of artists remember the Holocaust. This issue is worth presenting in detail.

In his 1998 annual report, the Museum's director James Snyder refers specifically to the two exhibitions stating that they are part of the Museum's 'on-going commitment to enable artists to continue to deal with this increasingly remote, but nonetheless, difficult and essential subject [i.e. the Holocaust]'. The same report refers to Rosen as follows: 'Another young artist, Roece Rosen, himself son of a survivor, memorialized the Holocaust through an installation of text and works on paper, entitled *Live and Die as Eva Braun*'.<sup>66</sup> The continuity in the Museum's commitment to present how young artists deal with the Holocaust is manifest in the fact that the Museum appointed Ygal Zalmona as the main public speaker and defender of both Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions.

In an interview prior to the opening of Rosen's exhibition, when the public controversy was already under way, Zalmona appears in a talk show transmitted by radio *Reshet Bet* to defend the Museum's decision. His statement in support of Rosen's exhibition attests to the fact that both Rosen's and Katzir's exhibitions were approached by the Museum in very similar ways. In response to the critics, Zalmona

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<sup>66</sup> 'Director's Annual Report' in the *Israel Museum Journal*, xvi (Summer, 1998).

reminds the public that Katzir's exhibition took place only a few months before, and that in both cases, the duty of the Israel Museum has been the same, namely:

The responsibility of the Israel Museum is not to forget the Shoah but to deal with it. It is important to us to show how the young generation, the young generation of artists, the young generation of Israeli people, not only has not forgotten, but they make the Shoah a part of their everyday lives, and [...] this is exactly what happens in Rosen's case.<sup>67</sup>

The question that emerges at this point is whether this is the only occasion when the Israel Museum has publicly declared its commitment to Holocaust memory. Art historian Dalia Manor's research shows that although the Holocaust had been present in the Israeli cultural agenda, the visual arts were slow to engage with it. She explains that this is due to the developing scholarly debate on the impossibility of representing the Holocaust, and to the Israeli society's understanding of the role of art. Art's original function in the emerging state was to build the Zionist Israeli self by reinforcing the connection with the land and its biblical past. 'The Canaanite art appraised the bright colors and peaceful landscapes of the newly-found homeland', explained Manor.<sup>68</sup> Any reference to the traumatic experiences in the Diaspora was to be avoided at all cost as it was deemed alien to the Zionist ideological framework. Artists who adopted the Holocaust as a theme were disregarded as not being 'modern' enough, claimed Manor. The Holocaust stood for something old and out of date, something that did not belong to recent Jewish history.

The younger generation of *Sabra* artists who came of age in the 1970s were viewed by art critics as concerned with Israeliness, collective identity, but not with the Holocaust. A case in point is the daughter of survivors and artist Yocheved Weinfeld. In the catalogue to her 1979 solo exhibition at the Israel Museum, there was no mention of the Holocaust, despite the fact that her works dealt with memories of

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<sup>67</sup> Zalmona on radio *Reshet Bet*, (2 November, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> Dalia Manor, 'From Rejection to Recognition: Israeli art and the Holocaust', in Dan Urian and Efraim Karsh (eds.), *In search for identity: Jewish aspects in Israeli culture*, (London: Frank Cass, 1999), p. 272.

childhood in Poland where she was born in 1947. The Holocaust was not a topic which could be conveniently incorporated into the concept of identity as understood by the Israeli art critics of the 1970s. For many Israeli artists, the term 'Shoah artist' entailed a negative connotation of 'kitsch, sentimentality and anachronism, and above all, of exclusion from the boundaries of acceptability in Israeli art', argued Manor.<sup>69</sup>

By the second half of the 1990s, however, Holocaust representation in the visual arts appears to have gained public approval. This is certified by the Israel Museum's choice of temporary exhibitions among the most prominent of which are installations by second-generation French artist Christian Boltanski, and the abstract works by Israeli artists Moshe Kumpferman, and Moshe Gershuni. Yet, the Museum's commitment to show how Israeli artists deal with the theme of the Holocaust emerged more prominently on the occasion of Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions in 1997 and 1998, respectively. Also, it was not a coincidence that art critic Sarit Shapira's article 'The suppressed syndrome: Holocaust Imagery as a Taboo in Israeli Art' appeared in the *Israel Museum Journal* in 1998, the same publication which informs about Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions. Shapira brings to the public's attention the fact that the Holocaust has been viewed as a taboo subject by Israeli artists, and argues that this is no longer the case in the more recent artworks of the younger generations.<sup>70</sup> It appears that Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions have indeed contributed to the de-tabooization of the subject in Israeli art. The Israel Museum endorsed the representations of these younger artists, and promoted their individual and private approach to Holocaust memory. It has shown that, indeed, younger generations continue to remember the past in their specific ways.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Sarit Shapira, 'The suppressed syndrome: Holocaust Imagery as a Taboo in Israeli Art', in the *Israel Museum Journal*, xvi (Summer, 1998), pp. 35-47.

Given the media's negative publicity of Katzir's exhibition, however, one wonders why the Israel Museum did not take measures to prevent a similar situation from happening again. Interviews with curators reveal that Rosen's exhibition was thought to be too intellectual and intricate to capture the media's attention and cause public debate.<sup>71</sup> It is also worth mentioning that public debates are very common in the Israeli context. As Michal Hammo explains, aggressive debate is embedded in the Israeli culture. A level of directness is made apparent in the presence of many interruptions and swift turn-taking in the spoken interactions between artists and politicians. These interruptions slow down the flow of the conversation and hamper on the development of the discussion, leading to an aggressive conversational style in which the opinions of the participants cannot be fully outlined.<sup>72</sup>

Aggressiveness, however, seems to be a characteristic of the Israeli conversational style on radio and television, and more importantly, it represents the way public dialogue is maintained in Israel. Given this situation, one can suggest that the Israel Museum did not take measures to prevent the debate, but actually encouraged it. To some extent this is recognised in the following statement of the Museum's annual report: 'Each project drew positive and negative comments, reinforcing our commitment to keep a serious dialogue alive on this important subject'.<sup>73</sup> The debate that promptly developed confirms the Museum's declaration of intent. The most intense opposition to Rosen's exhibition came from representatives of government who attempted to foreground the idea that Holocaust memory belongs to the collective. A prominent opponent was Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Shumel Shkedi who threatened that, unless the exhibition closed, he would attempt to block the municipal funding received by the Museum.

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<sup>71</sup> Mira Lapidot, assistant curator at the Israel Museum interviewed by the author, August 2009, Jerusalem.

<sup>72</sup> The interruptions could be observed in transcriptions of radio and television talk shows by the presence of gaps or punctuation marks.

<sup>73</sup> 'Director's Annual Report', in *The Israel Museum Journal*.

An interview with Shkedi on radio *Radius*, on 4 November 1997, the day the exhibition opened, illustrates the growing tension between individual expressions of commemoration and institutional perceptions of Holocaust memory. Giora Tzor introduces the news of the opening of the exhibition pointing to the artist's biography: 'The creator of this exhibition is Roee Rosen, artist and son of a Holocaust survivor'. When asked to present his opinions about the exhibition, Shkedi chooses to disregard Rosen's second-generation identity. Instead, he comments on the stopping of funds and states that: 'I intend to fight against [this exhibition] and I call on all Israeli people to stop visiting the Israel Museum until this exhibition closes down. This exhibition promotes a very threatening idea which involves a positive feeling and a sympathetic view towards Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress'.<sup>74</sup> Soon after Shkedi's intervention, another member of the Israeli government entered the public discussion. Minister of Education, Zebulum Hammer requested that the Museum reconsider its decision to host the exhibition. On the second day of the exhibition *Reshet Bet's* news correspondent, Yael Ben Yehuda transmits the following bulletin:

Minister of Education noted that it is not in the Ministry's habit to interfere with artistic programs. After having received a petition from Israeli citizens, who think that the exhibition portrays Hitler in a positive light, he asked the Museum's director to consider removing a part of the exhibition; he reminded the Museum of the historical and moral obligation to respect those who perished in the Holocaust, and their descendants.<sup>75</sup>

The same news item was broadcast several times on the more popular *Galei Tsahal*.<sup>76</sup> In response to these interventions the Israel Museum's answer was invariable: 'The Museum did not intend to hurt the survivors or insult the memory of the Shoah'.<sup>77</sup> Its representative, Meira Perry-Lehmann explained that the criticism must have come from people who had not visited the exhibition. She declared that: 'it is inconceivable

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<sup>74</sup> Shmuel Shkedi on *Radius*, programme *Rak Shnia*, (4 November, 1997).

<sup>75</sup> Yael Ben Yehuda on *Reshet Bet*, programme *Hadashot Kol Israel*, (6 November, 1997).

<sup>76</sup> Radio *Galei Tsahal*, programmes *Hadashot Galei Tsahal*, (6 November, 1997), *Bilui Ha-yom*, (6 November, 1997), and *Mivzak*, (7 November, 1997).

<sup>77</sup> Statement by Israel Museum on *Reshet Bet*, (6 November, 1997).

that Nazism is depicted in a positive light [...] and, the Minister of Education did not ask the Museum to close down the show'. In fact, she explained, in a letter to the Museum the Minister had expressed his respect for the Museum's ability to judge fairly and with professionalism, but had asked the Museum to verify once again if there are elements in the exhibition that are likely to cause hurt.<sup>78</sup>

Whereas Hammer's intervention was more measured than Shkedi's, it, nevertheless, shows the role assumed by politicians as guardians of national memory, and their responsibility to supervise and intervene when the memory of the Shoah is brought into disrespect. The critical comments by Joseph (Tommy) Lapid are also telling. A talk show on *Arutz 1* broadcast in the evening at 10.50 pm and hosted by Ram Evron brings together Rosen and Lapid in a discussion which appears to be a confrontation. Both Lapid and Rosen are given equal amount of time to explain their points of view. By means of direct questions e.g.: 'What is the main thing that bothers you about the exhibition?' addressed to Lapid, or by reading only responses to Rosen's exhibition that are critical – Evron provokes both participants to explain and defend their views. Lapid's stance in regard to the exhibition is unequivocal: not only does he claim to represent the taxpayer but he also claims to speak on behalf of the survivors. He states: 'I come here, *on the side of the Shoah*, beyond any artistic issue, for the Holocaust survivors in Israel this is an unbearable work'.<sup>79</sup>

Lapid, a Hungarian Jew, survived the Nazi persecution and immigrated with this mother to Israel in 1949. In this situation Lapid, however, does not speak in his name alone, invoking his own personal connection to the Holocaust. He insists on representing the survivor community, and it is in their name that Lapid welcomes representations of the Holocaust such as 'the artworks by children in the Terezin ghetto, the films of Steven Spielberg, and the paintings of Samuel Bak', while at the

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<sup>78</sup> Perry-Lehmann on *Reshet Bet*, programme *Hatsaga Yomit*, (6 November, 1997), and on radio *Galei Tsahal*, programme *Bilui Naim*, (7 November, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Lapid on *Arutz 1*, programme *Be-guf Rishon* hosted by Ram Evron, (28 December, 1997). My emphasis.



same time, he views Rosen's artwork as a 'manipulation' of the Shoah'.<sup>80</sup> The negative reactions to his exhibition led Rosen to wonder whether the polemic is not in reality about 'who has the right to speak on matters of the Holocaust and how one must speak'. Lapid's statements reflect the prominence of institutional memory narratives and the claimed monopoly of the state over the public representation of the Holocaust. In his response to Lapid, Rosen defends his attempt to challenge representational conventions which, in his view, hide moral corruption:

The example of Spielberg is an excellent one – there the discussion about the Shoah turns into spectacle, a part of the Hollywood entertainment. The moral corruption comes from the moment when Spielberg receives the Oscar award and is grateful to the committee, in the name of the six million victims. One of the most terrible characteristics of the majority of the attempts to deal with the Shoah is the manner in which we turn the victims and the survivors into a flock, and find in *us* the strength to speak in *their* name.

In answer to Lapid's comment about identification with the victims, Rosen responds: 'Tommy Lapid said that I speak in the name of the Shoah. This is exactly what I tried *not* to do'.<sup>81</sup> The radio host Ram Evron, who, until then, had attempted to speak from a neutral standpoint, intervenes in the discussion to reinforce Rosen's statement: 'I think that Lapid spoke in the name of the victims'.<sup>82</sup>

The final section of the talk show is focused on Rosen's artistic approaches and his identity as an artist and as a member of the second generation. Asked by Evron about the meaning of one of the pictures in the exhibition – of the artist's portrait as a young boy wearing a Hitler moustache and scissors placed menacingly above his head, Rosen stated that: 'my intention was not to create a cynical or nihilistic work of art, while having a detached attitude, but to create something which has to do with myself

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Roe Rosen as guest speaker on *Arutz 1*, programme *Be-guf Rishon*, (28 December, 1997). My emphasis.

<sup>82</sup> Evron on *Arutz 1*.

– my identity at all its levels and stages’. The self and self-questioning become principal topics of discussion. In the course of his speech, Rosen exchanges the personal pronoun ‘I’ and the possessive ‘my’ with ‘us’ and ‘our’, as he poses questions about his identity and claims that his and other people’s inability to find it is attributed to the Holocaust: ‘one of the central aims of the exhibition is to indicate that we cannot connect with the most elementary things – most important to us, such as identity, feeling, truth [...] Our shifting nature, our doubts, our development begins from this limit – the Shoah’.<sup>83</sup>

Asked what is the purpose of representing Eva Braun, Rosen explains that this constitutes a way to ‘deal with the trauma that still affects us, the trauma of the Shoah – as a historical event, and Shoah and its place in our lives, and in our consciousness’. Furthermore, he clarifies: ‘it is important to make clear to the visitor that I have no interest in the historical figures of Eva Braun or Hitler, but that I am interested in the place that those figures hold in our consciousness now’.<sup>84</sup> Rosen implies that his personal confrontations with identity issues are similar to other people. Nevertheless, the artist shies away from speaking in the name of a specific community. Only in response to public accusations of Holocaust denial had Rosen revealed his identity:

At one point I was speaking live on a radio with someone, about the show and he called me a Holocaust denier. I said: how can I be a denier? My father is a Holocaust survivor. [...] Not because it was a strong argument, but that something about the discourse became grotesque, hyperbolic. I had to state this clearly, in order there to be no mistake, that this work is not produced out of cynicism, out of some light-hearted approach, but rather from a place that is painful, emotional, and deeply implicated.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Rosen on *Arutz 1*.

<sup>84</sup> Rosen interviewed by Dan Toren on *Radius*, programme *Kan Dan*, (27 October, 1997).

<sup>85</sup> Statement by Rosen during interview with the author, August 2009, Tel Aviv.

The reasons underlying Rosen's original intention not to disclose his identity as a descendant of survivors have to do with a moral stance that Rosen has appropriated for himself. He saw silence as a way of keeping his distance from the institutional and politicized nature of Holocaust memory. Once he had to break his silence in response to false accusations, Rosen's statements read as a critique of the instrumentalization of Holocaust memory. Rosen states:

I always insisted that the fact that I am the son of a Holocaust survivor would not be mentioned. In general, in Israel there was something very obscene, and morally corrupt about the fact that one has a connection, a direct connection to the disaster. It gave one a certain privilege. A privilege to speak or, a right to speak, which means, by proxy, that other people do not. [...]

So I thought that regardless of the origin, regardless of private histories, the entire country is immersed in the memory of the Holocaust, not direct memory of the actual events, but rather the way in which those memories are being narrated, ritualized, and inseeded in our consciousness through Yom Ha-Shoah, [Holocaust Memorial Day], but also through a multitude of television programmes, literature, titles in newspaper. So I thought that it is important not to collaborate with this division between people who have a sort of moral right to speak because they were somehow direct victims of the Holocaust and those who may not have that right.<sup>86</sup>

Rosen endorses a point of view that is not necessarily novel in the Israeli public sphere. Israeli popular culture has started to deal with these issues. A representative case is the already mentioned satirical group the *Chamber Quintet* who, according to Eyal Zandberg 'exemplifies the constantly changing character of collective memory. It illuminates [...]

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

the new critical point of view of a [younger] “third generation”, and [constitutes] an example of how new versions of memory are superimposed over older versions’.<sup>87</sup> The sketch titled ‘Olympiad’ portrays an Israeli athlete competing in a running race in Germany. Just before the start signal, two people step into the running track and approach the referee presenting themselves as the ‘Israeli delegation’. Their request of the referee is whether the Israeli athlete can start the race a few metres ahead of the others. In response to the referee’s refusal, the delegates retort: ‘All you want is to humiliate us. Haven’t the Jewish people suffered enough? Didn’t you watch *Shindler’s List*?’ After carefully considering the matter, the referee grants the Israeli runner permission to start ahead of the others. The sketch alludes to how victimization can be turned into a winning argument, or a tool used to gain an advantage. Rosen also refers to this, calling it ‘moral corruption’. In a statement to the *Jerusalem Post*, journalist Larry Derfner sums up the artist’s views:

He believes that the many depictions of the Holocaust which ask viewers to identify with the victims end up allowing us to speak in the name of the victims and that was immoral too. Finally, so much expression about the Holocaust is filled with clichés which deaden people to the actuality of the Holocaust. This, too, he contends is immoral.<sup>88</sup>

Rosen’s criticism of the instrumentalization of the ‘victim’s identity’ for moral gain or, in other words, the politicization of memory is not unique. It is, in fact, grounded in a post-Zionist intellectual discourse. Central to this discourse is an attempt to write history from a pluralist point of view, and to uncover post-nationalist historical narratives. Rosen does not formally identify with this intellectual current that has gained prominence in Israel since the 1980s. Nevertheless, he recognizes that the ‘same intuitions that I had as a child were constituted in the consciousness of many people who then became post-Zionists, sociologists, historians’. Moreover, ‘they belong more

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<sup>87</sup> Yael Zandberg, p. 561.

<sup>88</sup> Larry Derfner, ‘The Holocaust according to Eva Braun’ in the *Jerusalem Post*, (14 November, 1997), p. 16.

or less to my generation, [...] and certainly a connection can be drawn between *Live and Die as Eva Braun* and certain post-Zionist texts that appeared in the same year such as the writings of Moshe Zuckerman'.<sup>89</sup> It becomes evident that Rosen's critical interrogation of Holocaust memory is part of a broader intellectual discourse shared by a group of people of the same age.

In Jaeger's view, a 'generation' is formed by people sharing ideas that position them in contrast to other social or age groups. Rosen himself is a member of a group whose critique of the politicization of Holocaust memory in Israel defines them as a generation. His reflection upon identity becomes relevant as part of a discourse that came to characterize a younger generation of Israelis. Whereas in Rosen's case identification with the second generation is enforced by external factors and comes as a consequence of his critique of what he views as the public abuse of Holocaust memory, in Katzir's situation identification with the third generation is not concealed by the artist. Indeed, research conducted by Israeli sociologist Dan Bar-On confirms the fact that the third generation has been more outspoken in regard to their connection to the Holocaust than the members of the second generation.<sup>90</sup> Presumably, this is a consequence of the distance in time gained from the traumas suffered by the survivor generation. The third generation's relationship with the Holocaust is worth discussing in further detail.

Scholarship reveals that third-generation Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora have initiated a successful dialogue with their grandparents. Psychologist Eva Fogelman stresses the interest they show in what happened to their grandparents. During the Demjanjuk Trial in 1985, informs Fogelman, 'teenagers flocked to the Court House, and lined up at dawn to get a seat to watch the Trial. At the same time, Claude Lanzman's *Shoah* was screened, and youngsters saw survivors on the screen being

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Rosen, August 2009, Tel Aviv.

<sup>90</sup> Dan Bar-On, *Fear and Hope. Three Generations of the Holocaust*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995)

interviewed about their lives in concentration camps, in ghettos, in hiding, and escaping by disguising themselves as non-Jews'. Fogelman reminds us that third-generation Jews studied the Holocaust at school 'imbibing a language in which to talk to their grandparents'. Indeed, 'a phenomenon of intergenerational dialogue' surfaced in Israel and became 'a national sensation and was recorded in documentaries and television discussion programs'.<sup>91</sup>

The phenomenon of intergenerational dialogue is analysed at length by Dan Bar-On whose argument is that survivors find it easier to communicate with their grandchildren than with their immediate offspring. With regard to the relevance of the Holocaust to the third generation in Israel, Bar-On has explored the plurality of significances. He coined the term 'paradoxical relevance' to describe the relationship with the Holocaust of some members of the third generation in Israel. These individuals react either with emotion, even though they have no detailed knowledge of their grandparents' experiences or, on the contrary, possess sufficient knowledge but have no emotional responses whatsoever. At the very opposite end is the phenomenon of 'over generalisation' which refers to the fact that the third generation perceives events in their lives predominantly through the prism of the Holocaust. A more measured reaction and allegedly the most dominant one, comes from those for whom the Holocaust has 'partial relevance'.<sup>92</sup>

Following Bar-On's investigation, Tal Litvak Hirsch and Julia Chaitin conclude that young adults 'appear to be coming to terms with their families' traumatic past in a healthy manner'.<sup>93</sup> Fogelman too, confirms that the third generation 'did not grow up

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<sup>91</sup> Eva Fogelman, 'Psychological Dynamics in the Lives of Third-Generation Holocaust Survivors', in *The Hidden Child*, xvi, published by the Hidden Child Foundation, retrieved from [http://www.drevafoelman.com/\\_psychological\\_dynamics\\_in\\_the\\_lives\\_of\\_third\\_generation\\_holocaust\\_survivors\\_94110.htm](http://www.drevafoelman.com/_psychological_dynamics_in_the_lives_of_third_generation_holocaust_survivors_94110.htm) (accessed on 15.8. 2011).

<sup>92</sup> Bar-On, pp. 1-15.

<sup>93</sup> Litvak Hirsch and Julia Chaitin's "'The Shoah runs through our veins': The relevance of the

with the concept of Jews who went to the slaughter like sheep', which characterised the identity of the second generation. She also contends that the majority of grandchildren lack fears, such as that of anti-Semitism, which are more pervasive in the lives of survivors and their children.<sup>94</sup> Studies focusing on the behaviour of teenagers during excursions to Auschwitz hint at the teenagers' increasing resistance to narratives which place them in the victims' shoes.<sup>95</sup>

A recent critical inquiry by Israeli journalist and filmmaker Yoav Shamir into the ideological dimension of Israeli educational programmes which foreground victimisation of the Jews resulted in his praised as well as criticised documentary film *Defamation* (2009).<sup>96</sup> Shamir offers an interesting portrayal of Israeli younger generation's relationship with the Holocaust, worthy of presenting in some detail. As part of the documentary, Shamir accompanies a group of Israeli teenagers and their teachers to Poland closely observing their behaviour and emotional responses to what they learn about the concentration camps. Throughout their visit to Poland, teenagers are confronted with stories of victimization which compel them to react emotionally. Nevertheless, some of them find it difficult to respond in this manner and feel guilty about this.

A pertinent example is given by two teenagers who, after their visit to Majdanek camp, state the following: 'We are disappointed with ourselves. We can't comprehend. We feel guilty for not having any feelings or emotions'.<sup>97</sup> The teenagers' sense of guilt for not being able to be emotional seems to be a response to the external pressure put on

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Holocaust for Jewish-Israeli Young Adults', in *Idea*, 14 (1) (May, 2010), online publication, <http://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?id=49> (accessed on 19.8. 2010).

<sup>94</sup> See Fogelman.

<sup>95</sup> Articles dealing with these issues include Jackie Feldman's 'Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective through the Poland "Experience"', in *Israel Studies*, 7 (2) (Summer, 2002), pp. 84-114; Lazar Alon, Julia Chaitin, Tamar Gross and Dan Bar-On, 'Jewish Israeli Teenagers, National Identity, and the Lessons of the Holocaust', in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18 (2) (Fall, 2002), pp. 188-204.

<sup>96</sup> See review retrieved from <http://www.screendaily.com/defamation/4043007.article> (accessed on 15.8. 2011).

<sup>97</sup> Statement by teenagers in Yoav Shamir's *Defamation*, (in Hebrew *Hashmatsa*), 2009.

them by their teachers. Shamir shows how during their preparation for their visits to Auschwitz and Majdanek, the teenagers are made to believe that the external environment is hostile towards them. Moreover, they are told by the secret service officer who accompanies them that it would be dangerous for them to leave the group. As a response to this preparation, the teenagers misinterpret comments made by Polish individuals as being anti-Semitic.

However, the teachers' efforts seem to pay off as many teenagers do react in a very emotional manner when they finally get to visit Auschwitz. They are touched by what they experience and admit that the visit permanently changed the way they view themselves as Jews. During their visits, the teenagers are made to feel that the victimization of European Jews can happen again, and that they must act to prevent becoming victims again. Faced with the suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust, some teenagers become desensitised to other people's suffering. One teenager admits that the destruction of Palestinians' homes which they view on Israeli television pales in comparison with the victimisation that Jews had been subjected to.<sup>98</sup>

Shamir's film is a document attesting to how the 'victim identity' of the European Jews becomes a central part of Israeli national ideology and continues to shape the youngest generation's mentality. Given this, the inevitable question that arises is what it means to develop a 'normal' relationship with the past. Shamir concludes with the statement: 'maybe it is about time to live in the present and look to the future'.<sup>99</sup> The notion of normalisation, which Shamir alludes to at the end of his film, is defined by Litvak Hirsch and Julia Chaitin as 'the balance between the need to connect to the trauma and the fear of being overwhelmed by it, and the need to keep the significance of the Holocaust alive, without creating a new generation of victims'.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Statement made by teenager in *Defamation*.

<sup>99</sup> Shamir in *Defamation*.

<sup>100</sup> Litvak Hirsch and Julia Chaitin, in 'The Shoah runs through our veins'.



Whereas Rosen discusses the trauma which lies at the core of his identity as second generation, Katzir embraces the third-generation identity as a fact of life. Katzir's inquiry into the subject of the Holocaust is driven by the need to understand what happened to his grandparents, rather than – as in Rosen's case – by the need to come to terms with the trauma. A point shared by both Rosen and Katzir is indeed their commitment to deal with the subject of the Holocaust.

One can conclude by stressing that the public debates prompted by both exhibitions have shown that the rift between the national and the private perception of Holocaust memory in relation to Israeli identity is deepening. The public confrontation with nationalised and institutionalised memory is made apparent in Rosen's comments and critical reflection upon his individual identity. In Katzir's case, opposition to nationalised versions of Holocaust memory emerges in his critique of the Israeli educational system. Both *Your Colouring Book* and *Live and Die as Eva Braun* show that individualised forms of commemoration by second and third generation artists are indeed gaining prominence in the Israeli public sphere, and together with them, the individual identities of the descendants of Holocaust survivors.

**c) ‘Tearing apart the sacred cow’<sup>101</sup> versus National Mythifications<sup>102</sup> of Holocaust memory**

‘In Israel, the moment when Hitler’s name is pronounced it is as if a pot of black ink has spilt, everything becomes hard to read’ – this was Katzir’s response to the public’s reaction to his exhibition.<sup>103</sup> He points out the oversensitivity and the irrationality that surrounds public discourse about the Holocaust in Israel – where the word ‘Hitler’ is a euphemism for the world’s inhumanity towards the Jews. I would like to discuss the negative public reactions to Rosen’s and Katzir’s exhibitions in connection to what I call the entrenchment of a nationalised version of Holocaust memory in the Israeli public consciousness.

In this section of the chapter, I shall have a closer look at the narratives that fashion the institutionalised or nationalised approach to Holocaust memory in Israel. I would like to stress the presence of two prevailing sub-narratives which have gained prominence in the context of the public debates, namely, the sacralisation of the Holocaust, and the symbolic analogy between the Palestinian ‘other’ and ‘Hitler’ – as a metonym for the destruction of the Jews. I will underline the fact that both artists have challenged the relevance of these sub-narratives, and, moreover, they have proposed alternatives to it. The length of their critique differs, however. The sources on which I have based my analysis – transcriptions of conversations on radio and television, and the press – show that Katzir has engaged less with these topics than Rosen. Consequently, this section shall be devoted, to a greater degree, to an analysis of Rosen’s comments.

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<sup>101</sup> A phrase used by Katzir in interview with the author, October 2009, Amsterdam.

<sup>102</sup> Term coined by Adi Ophir in essay ‘On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise’, in *Tikkun*, 2 (1) (1987), republished in S. Hornstein, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein (eds.), *Impossible Images Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp.195-204.

<sup>103</sup> Katzir in interview with the author, October 2009.

For the sake of clarification, one needs to point to the peril of misinterpretation which informs the analogy between the Holocaust and the term myth. ‘Myth’ in the context of the Holocaust remains a subject of controversy, since it has been frequently exploited by Holocaust deniers to negate the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews. The deniers attempted to manipulate the public into believing that the Holocaust could never have happened. In order to achieve this objective they employed the term ‘myth’ to mean the opposite of historical truth.<sup>104</sup> Characterised by Pierre Vidal-Naquet as ‘assassins of memory’,<sup>105</sup> deniers are an affront to humanity and should be combated by all members of society. The trial of David Irving is a telling example of a successful way of fighting against the deniers’ assault on truth and memory, as Deborah E. Lipstadt has argued.<sup>106</sup>

It will be shown that, in contrast to the deniers, the scholars mentioned in this study employ ‘myth’ in the context of the Holocaust drawing on a scholarly understanding of this term as a narrative situated at the core of human self-understanding. My own references to this concept shall be adequately explained to the reader.

National myths have a sacred quality as they are rarely disputed but serve as foundational narratives on which a country builds its values. ‘The pragmatic function of myth’, Ernst Cassirer explains in his *Essay on Man*, ‘is to promote social solidarity as well as solidarity with nature as a whole in times of social crises. Mythical thought is especially concerned to deny and negate the fact of death and to affirm the unbroken unity and continuity of life’.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See the manipulation of this term in the Holocaust denial literature of Wilhelm Stäglich, *The Auschwitz myth: a judge looks at the evidence*, (S.I.: Institute for Historical Review, 1986).

<sup>105</sup> Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of memory: essays on the denial of the Holocaust*, Jeffrey Mehlman (trans.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>106</sup> Deborah E. Lipstadt, in *Denying the Holocaust: the growing assault on truth and memory*, (London: Penguin, 1994). See the case ‘Irving versus Penguin Publishing House and Professor Lipstadt’ discussed by Nigel Jackson in *The case of David Irving*, (Cranbrook, W.A: Veritas, 1994) and by Richard J. Evans in *Lying about Hitler: history, Holocaust, and the David Irving trial*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

<sup>107</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 84.

In the Israeli context, an increasing number of historians and critics, among them philosopher Adi Ophir and cultural historian Moshe Zuckerman, have scrutinized the use of the Holocaust as a central foundational myth of the Israeli nation. Ophir identifies a strong tendency towards Holocaust mythification in Israeli society, which he views as a part of a process of 'sanctification which adds an important layer of religiosity to the lives of [the Israeli people] as free thinking and secular as [they] may be'. He poses a prescient question: 'Why is our Holocaust myth so dangerous?' and he lists the following reasons:

Because it blurs the humanness of the Holocaust; because it erases degrees and continuums and puts in their place an infinite distance between one type of atrocity and all other types of human atrocities; because it encourages the memory as an excuse for one more nation-unifying ritual and not as a tool for historical understanding; because it makes it difficult to understand the Holocaust as a product of a human, material and ideological system; because it directs us almost exclusively to the past, to the immortalization of that which is beyond change, instead of pointing primarily to the future, to the prevention of a Holocaust, like the one which was, or another, more horrible – which is more possible today than ever before but is still in the realm of that which is crooked and can still be made straight.<sup>108</sup>

Ophir encourages a 'break away from the myth in a responsible way' which, he argues, is indeed possible. Since mythification can lead to self-destructiveness, Ophir proposes a universalization of the Holocaust which, according to him, is 'an essential component in the consciousness of the Jews, one generation after Auschwitz, and a necessary condition for our moral existence'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Adi Ophir, 'On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise', in *Impossible Images*, p. 199.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions attest to the prescience of Ophir's observations, as narratives of Holocaust sacralisation emerge prominently in the discourses of politicians and representatives of the Israeli government. The language used by their opponents points to the collective belief, institutionalised by the nation's governing structures that anything that challenges the sacredness of Holocaust memory falls under the realm of the profane. Indeed, both exhibitions were perceived by their critics as profanatory. Their main opponents Yoseph (Tommy) Lapid and Shmuel Shkedi frequently used references to 'sacredness' and 'profanity' in their comments about the exhibitions. Their discourses also abounded in references to the sacred nature of Holocaust memory in connection to the sacred landscape of Jerusalem and of the Israel Museum.

In an editorial article in the daily newspaper *Maariv*, Lapid calls the Israel Museum's decision to show *Your Colouring Book* as 'stupidity'. Moreover, he accuses the Museum of having committed an incriminatory act which, one can describe as touching on Holocaust desecration. The epithet 'eternal' in connection to the capital of Israel also indicates a mythical connotation. The following statement contains a degree of sarcasm intended to criticize the Museum. Lapid supposedly congratulates the Museum in its attempt to show that Jewish people have escaped the traumas of the Holocaust. He notes: 'The national museum in the eternal capital of the Jewish people should encourage many exhibitions attesting that we are indeed liberated from the traumas of the past'.<sup>110</sup> The apparent praise swiftly turns into rebuke, as the phrase that follows is the harshest comment expressed during the public discussion: 'If the Israel Museum could get hold of the bones of Holocaust victims, they could invite kindergarten children to build castles. Perhaps the Israel Museum should also import hair from Auschwitz to hang on it postmodern works'.<sup>111</sup> Lapid implies that what the Museum has done represents a gross desecration, showing no respect or sensitivity to the plight of the victims. This statement can be defined, as

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<sup>110</sup> Yoseph Lapid, 'A Museum's Stupidity', in *Maariv*, (19 January, 1997).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Tami Katz-Freiman suggests, as: ‘a sarcastic and radical response [...] [that] reflects the problematic nature, the hyper-sensitivity, and the intricacy of the current Holocaust discourse in Israel’.<sup>112</sup>

The comments that Lapid makes on the occasion of Rosen’s exhibition are also worth mentioning. Lapid was certainly the fiercest opponent of Rosen’s exhibition. His speech maintains a highly sarcastic tone as he shares his views about *Live and Die as Eva Braun* in an interview on 7 November 1997. Firstly, Lapid presents the exhibition in a tone that is evidently highly subjective. Very doubtful of his artistic potential, Lapid introduces Rosen as ‘someone who calls himself an artist’. He goes on to stress that the Israel Museum invites viewers, and here he quotes the Museum’s statement, to ‘experience intimate moments with the dictator’, concluding that the Israel Museum is in fact committing a brutal desecration since, in its role as a national museum, sanctions something that ‘invites visitors to have sexual intercourse with Hitler’. From this point onwards, Lapid’s discourse is interspersed with terms that allude to the alleged desecrating character of the exhibition, which he defines as ‘a pornographic abuse of the Shoah’. Other epithets used by Lapid to describe it are ‘filthy’ and ‘sinful’. Finally, Lapid argues that the exhibition ‘must be closed’ and that the person responsible for it must be sacked, and, more importantly, he stresses that ‘one must disinfect the Israel Museum from defilement and sin’.<sup>113</sup>

The discourse takes on a religious dimension, as it suggests that the Israel Museum – must be purified, an analogy with Jewish women’s ritual purification in the *mikva* after each menstruation, but also with the purity and sacredness of the temple. According to this critic, the Museum is thence feminised and made weak through contact with an exhibition that allegedly desecrates the Holocaust. Reflecting on Lapid’s claims, one finds them both insensitive and unrealistic in relationship to the

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<sup>112</sup> Tami Katz-Freiman, in “‘Don’t touch my Holocaust’”. Analyzing the Barometer of Responses: Israeli Artists challenge the Holocaust taboo’, in *Impossible Images*, p. 129.

<sup>113</sup> Statements by Yoseph Lapid on *Reshet Bet*, (7 November, 1997).

Museum's endeavours. They denote the author's anger and resentment rather than his critical insight. Indeed, Lapid discredits himself through his accusation showing lack of reason.

Shmuel Shkedi, like Lapid, uses a range of expressions to convey the idea that the Israel Museum has been 'polluted' by the exhibitions and needs to be cleansed/disinfected. In a comment broadcast by *Reshet Alef* on 4 November 1997, Shkedi labels as a desecration the exhibition that does not encourage identification with the victims of the Shoah. According to him, *Live and Die as Eva Braun* should be stopped because it 'touches upon all that we hold sacred'.<sup>114</sup> Reiterating Lapid's point, Shkedi goes on to suggest that Jerusalem as the sacred capital of the Jewish people has been tainted by the exhibition. He states: 'one cannot allow that they [the Israel Museum] display all that we have sacred, all the victims, the six million as a masquerade'. The 'sacred memory of the six million' should be guarded by the Israel Museum and not defamed. Not only does Shkedi speak in the name of the six million, but he claims that he has been invested by them with the authority to represent their views about Rosen's exhibition.

In Israel, sacralisation of Holocaust memory emerges, thus, in the discourses of representatives of the state's governing structures. Adi Ophir's statement that: 'a religious consciousness is built around the Holocaust that may become the central aspect of a new religion' appears to be confirmed by Lapid's and Shkedi's contributions.<sup>115</sup> Sacred Holocaust memory within the sacred space of Jerusalem gains a mythological dimension deeply etched into Israeli public consciousness. The politicians' statements reflect a nationalised discourse of Holocaust memory which becomes 'immortalized'<sup>116</sup> in the Israeli collective psyche. Immortalization is

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<sup>114</sup> Shmuel Shkedi on *Reshet Alef*, (4 November, 1997).

<sup>115</sup> Ophir, p. 195.

<sup>116</sup> Term used by Ophir on p. 199.

dangerous, because it prevents historical understanding. Instead, it encourages a fixation with the subject and together with it, inhibits attempts to move forward. In addition to sacralisation narratives, the meta-narrative of the Holocaust as Israel's foundational myth represents another story line which has to do with the presence of 'Hitler' as a metonym for Israel's potential destroyers. Indeed, Hitler has a major role to play in the mythical story of Israel's foundation. Drawing on Carl Jung's study of the role of mythology in contemporary societies, I shall claim that Hitler emerges as an archetypal 'shadow' or the ultimate 'other' of Israel's foundational myth. In the Israeli national political discourse, Hitler's persona has been associated with a different 'other' of the Israeli society – the Palestinian. In the case of both Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions the presence of Hitler imagery has led to a discussion about the role of the 'other' in the Israeli society.

From a Jungian perspective, explains British scholar Stephen F. Walker 'myths are essentially culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recesses of the human psyche, the world of the archetypes'. Myths represent 'the unconscious archetypal instinctual structures of the mind, not in an historical and cultural vacuum, but rather as they are culturally elaborated and expressed in terms of the world view of a particular age and culture'.<sup>117</sup> For Jung, according to Walker:

Society is essentially the individual psyche writ large. Just as the individual's conscious mind needs to be brought into greater harmony and balance with the countervailing tendencies of the unconscious, so a particular culture needs to readjust its collective perspectives through the agency of myth and symbol.<sup>118</sup>

Whereas there are universal archetypes that structure the human mind, their representations in myths are varied and dependent on particular cultures and times. According to Jung, they are 'manifestations of what we properly call instincts,

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<sup>117</sup> Stephen F. Walker, *Jung and the Jungians on Myth: an Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



psychological urges that are perceived by the senses. But, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence by symbolic images'.<sup>119</sup>

Archetypes manifest themselves through images. There is a multitude of archetypal images in the world, which correspond to the variety of human situations.

Archetypes are not only present in the individual's unconscious, but are part of the society's collective unconscious too. Jung's theory on archetypes includes an investigation of the psyche of the collective – also structured by archetypes. Leading archetypes discussed by Jung include the *mother*, the *father*, the *child*, *anima* and *persona*, and the *shadow*. 'Everyone carries a shadow' wrote Jung, 'and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is'.<sup>120</sup> It represents the repressed weakness, an instinct, or a shortcoming forming a part of the unconscious mind. When applied to society, Jung suggests that the more the *shadow* is repressed, the larger an impact it has on the collective. The *shadow* archetype can take many forms and emanations.

In the Israeli context, I shall suggest that Hitler's historical persona was turned into a mythological one and been given the function of archetypal *shadow*. The figure of Adolf Hitler has been represented, and rightly so, as the embodiment of the ultimate evil.<sup>121</sup> Not only is Hitler the ultimate evil, but also the most extreme 'other' – that aspect of a collective unconscious that has been repressed, but which continues to influence people's daily lives. To many critics Hitler's persona is intriguing. Susan Sontag is a good example. In her essay 'Fascinating Fascism' (6 February 1975), she points to the aesthetic adopted by Nazism that continues to fascinate to this day.<sup>122</sup> In the Israeli consciousness, too, Hitler holds an intriguing position. Drawing on Jungian theory, one can suggest that just as Theodor Herzl became Israel's founding

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<sup>119</sup> Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, (New York: Dell Laurel Editions, 1968), p. 58.

<sup>120</sup> Jung, 'Psychology and Religion', in *CW 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East*, (1938), p.13.

<sup>121</sup> Ron Rosenbaum refers to the use of this expression by Jewish theologians in his exhaustive exploration of Adolf Hitler, *Explaining Hitler. The search for the Origins of his Evil*, (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 1-35.

<sup>122</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in the *New York Review of Books*, (6 February 1975).

father and the visionary, Adolf Hitler came to be seen as his reverse, the destroyer of the Jewish people in Europe, the *shadow* which lurks underneath Israel's story of national creation and continuity, and a negative version of the positive figure of Herzl who embodied the archetype of the *father*.

In this respect, it is unsurprising that references to Hitler are present in the political discourse about Israel's enemies. During the 1967 War, Egypt's president, Gamal Nasser was rhetorically associated with Hitler in politicians' discourses. Zertal argues that 'this nexus was already used in 1956 at the annual conference of the *Herut* movement led by Menachem Begin: the delegates passed a resolution stating that 'the Egyptian tyrant, Nasser, planned to annihilate Israel and that he was the greatest danger to the existence of Israel since Hitler'.<sup>123</sup> Hitler-references are also made in connection with the Palestinians. Tom Segev informs us that in June 1981, Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin compared Yassir Arafat to Hitler, referring to him as a 'two-legged beast', a phrase he had used years earlier to describe Hitler. On the eve of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, in June 1982, Begin told his cabinet: 'You know what I have done and what we have all done to prevent war and loss of life. But such is our fate in Israel. There is no way other than to fight selflessly. Believe me, the alternative is Treblinka, and we have decided that there will be no more Treblinkas'.<sup>124</sup>

The presence of references to Hitler in the context of the Palestinian conflict has led to the strengthening of those 'particular' lessons of the Holocaust invoked by Zuckerman. In his opinion, it is the prominence of the 'Jewish' as opposed to the 'universal' lessons of the Holocaust that has led to historical tension between Jews and Arabs. Moshe Zuckerman argues that 'a precondition to Holocaust memory with universal meaning is the liberation from the elements of suppression and

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<sup>123</sup> Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, p. 187.

<sup>124</sup> Examples quoted by Tom Segev, in *The Seventh Million* on p. 399.

occupation'.<sup>125</sup> Hence, turning the lessons of the Holocaust into 'particular' lessons leads to the obstruction of 'universal' lessons which include Israeli victimization of Palestinians. Unlike the politicians' references to Hitler, the artists' references to Nazism do not justify military actions. Instead, they fulfil an educational and a critical function. Katzir uses Nazi propaganda material to show how manipulation works, while Rosen attempts to deal with the trauma in the proximity of Hitler, seen through the eyes of Eva Braun. The public responses to their art, reinforces the belief that Hitler is the archetypal shadow figure that continues to haunt Israeli collective consciousness.

Both artists and their proponents have challenged the analogy between Hitler and the Palestinians. They have attempted to convey a new perspective on the Palestinian 'other' and position it within a Holocaust memory narrative that foregrounds universal rather than particular lessons. The question of difference, whether ethnic, cultural, or religious, remains at the core of Israeli-Jewish collective identity. Suggestive is Katzir's comment about the issue of 'difference'. He argues that, unlike adults, children are not prone to discriminatory acts: 'I think that children are not born feeling hatred towards foreigners or towards those who are different from them'.<sup>126</sup> The issue of 'difference' embodied by the 'other' emerges even more prominently in the discussion about Rosen's exhibition. There are several contexts in which the term 'other' was used. I shall claim that the participants' use of euphemistic expressions to refer to the Palestinian 'other' is a sign that public responsibility for the Palestinian problem is still taboo in the Israeli public sphere.

In a discussion with Rosen on *Radius* the moderator Dan Toren asks the artist about his interest in Eva Braun. In response, Rosen explains that he sees Braun as a metonym of the 'other', and that the main challenge in the attempt to create a

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<sup>125</sup> Statement by Moshe Zuckerman in Or Kashti's article 'Derive a Universal Lesson Too', in *Ha-Aretz*, (28 November, 1995).

<sup>126</sup> Katzir, 'Who refuses to look?', in *Kol Ha-Yir*, (24 January, 1997).

dialogue by means of art is identification with the 'other'.<sup>127</sup> Rosen's exercise of identification with the 'other', his attempt to re-create the perpetrator's point of view constitutes an approach that is radically different from that which places the victim at the centre. Moving away from the familiar victimhood narrative, Rosen endeavoured to bring forward a new point of view. Miriam Tuvia-Boneh, curator of Rosen's exhibition at the Israel Museum, defended Rosen's attempt to deal with the 'other'. In a discussion on *Reshet Alef* with moderator Yael Tzadok, Tuvia-Boneh draws attention to the phenomenon of so-called 'Shoah fatigue' and 'Shoah pornography' that emerge due to 'the public's prolonged exposure to images that portray the victims and due to the activities undertaken by institutions to immortalize the Shoah'.<sup>128</sup>

In her opinion, this approach can only lead to an inability to develop a personal opinion. She argues, 'dealing with the Shoah by looking at the victims has been already done'. 'Rosen has found another way, daring and therefore risky, and this is the way of the perpetrator'. At a different moment in the discussion, Tuvia-Boneh suggests that Rosen's choice to portray Hitler as the ultimate 'other' is actually a form of departure from a national narrative that encourages a victim's identity. She proceeds to make a statement that alludes to the current political situation regarding the Palestinians: 'I need to ask myself how we, in Israel, see ourselves. [...] We are in the position of the conqueror, and not of the conquered'. Tuvia-Boneh recognises the sensitivity of the Israeli public vis-à-vis this subject: 'there are a lot of questions that might outrage a lot of people in Israel, but I ask of you to scrutinise this matter with care, and indeed, Roe Rosen has the courage to do so, and I think that we should appreciate this kind of endeavour'.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Rosen on radio *Radius*, (27 October, 1997).

<sup>128</sup> Tuvia-Boneh on *Reshet Alef*, (4 December, 1997).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Both Rosen and Tuvia-Boneh suggest that, by means of the defamiliarizing effect obtained through the perpetrator perspective, one can open a discussion about the Palestinian 'other'. Although these statements encourage the public to think of the Palestinian situation, it is significant that the term 'Palestinian' or 'Arab' remain absent. Boneh comes closest to its recognition stating that: 'We are in the position of the conqueror, and not of the conquered'.

However, references to the Palestinian 'other' remain allusive throughout the public conversations. The members of discussion prefer to use the term 'other' to indirectly refer to the Palestinian, which shows that there is a degree of taboo surrounding the idea that Palestinians, too, are victims. The notion that Israelis themselves, as inheritors of the Holocaust victim status, can occupy the position of victimisers in connection to Palestinians is deeply repressed from the Israeli collective consciousness. Israel's current 'other' is no longer the Nazi, but the Palestinian. The allusive language used by Rosen and Boneh reveal that this topic continues to remain highly sensitive. Nevertheless, the fact that this issue emerges, albeit euphemistically, in the Israeli public sphere, suggests that national approaches to Holocaust memory that foreground a victim status find a critical counter-part in the artistic representations of the younger generation of Israelis.

## Chapter 4

### The Holocaust Memory Debate at the Jewish Museum: Contesting American-Jewish Holocaust Identity Narratives

#### I

##### A Timeline of the Public Debate about *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* exhibition (2002)

Begin with art, because art tries to take us outside ourselves. It is a matter of trying to create an atmosphere and context so conversation can flow back and forth and we can be influenced by each other.

W.E.B. DuBois  
Civil Rights Activist<sup>1</sup>

This section offers a chronological overview of the debate about *Mirroring Evil* at the Jewish Museum in New York. It will include an outline of the press coverage, together with details about the most notable participants in the public discussion and their viewpoints. The aim is to establish the scope and characteristics of the media responses before and after the opening of the exhibition on 17 March, 2002.

Initially, controversy was not about *Mirroring Evil* exhibition *per se*, but about the way it was represented in the art catalogue released by the Museum in January 2002. James Young, one of the leading contributors to the catalogue, observed that: ‘a meticulously prepared exhibition on Nazi imagery in recent art officially was deemed “controversial” – months before anyone even had a chance to see it’.<sup>2</sup> The debate about *Mirroring Evil* started on 10 January, 2002. Young goes on to explain that the seeds of the controversy were planted by journalist Lisa

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. DuBois paraphrased by scholar Cornel West in Peter Applebome’s article ‘Can Harvard’s Powerhouse alter the Course of Black Studies?’, in the *New York Times*, (3 November, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> James Young, ‘Looking into the Mirrors of Evil’, in *Reading on*, 1 (1) (2006), See <http://readingon.library.emory.edu/issue1/articles/Young/RO%20-%202006%20-%20Young.pdf> (accessed on 15.11. 2010).

Gubernick who wrote an article for the *Wall Street Journal*, in which she described *Mirroring Evil* to be the ‘next art-world *Sensation*’.<sup>3</sup>

This seems a reference to the opening of *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* that had been presented at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1999 and drawn criticism from NY’s catholic community including Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. Cause for discontent were artworks such as British artist Chris Offili’s *Holy Virgin Mary* – a painting in oil depicting a black Mary plastered with elephant dung – which reflected the artist’s Nigerian cultural heritage. A public discussion was triggered by Giuliani’s retort that the public funding the Brooklyn Museum received from the City Hall should not be spend on works that are blasphemous, and his request for the show to be put down. Other politicians, notably Hillary Clinton, defended the museum, declaring that ‘it is not appropriate to penalize and punish an institution such as the Brooklyn Museum that has served this community with distinction over many years’.<sup>4</sup> A heated discussion ensued which drew opinions from political leaders of both conservative and progressive circles, on issues such as censorship and freedom of artistic expression, and the interference of politicians in the curatorial decisions made by art museums. Given the debate about common values also known as the ‘culture wars’ emerging in America during the 1990s, the discussions surrounding *Sensation* become a telling example of the deep ideological fissures within American society.<sup>5</sup>

By framing *Mirroring Evil* within the context of the dispute caused by *Sensation*, Gubernick set the scene for another polarised discussion, this time, ignited by the art exhibition at the Jewish Museum. James Young himself played an essential

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa Gubernick, ‘Coming Show with Nazi Theme Stirs New York’s Art World’, in the *Wall Street Journal*, (10 January, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Statement by Hillary Clinton retrieved from [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec99/art\\_10-8.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec99/art_10-8.html), (accessed on 15.11. 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed discussion about the increasingly polarised American society divided between conservative and progressive-liberal attitudes towards subjects of general public concern, such as education see Davison Hunter’s *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

role in the development of the public discussion, as he took issue with Gubernick for portraying *Mirroring Evil* as ‘a Holocaust or Nazi sensation’.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Gubernick’s juxtaposition of *Sensation* with *Mirroring Evil* was already made apparent in the opening paragraph of her article:

That 1999 exhibition at Brooklyn Museum of Art featured a painting of Virgin Mary splattered in dung, causing fire from Catholics including from Rudolph Giuliani, among others. This show’s exhibit [i.e. *Mirroring Evil*] includes a Lego concentration camp, swastika-bedecked kitten figure and sculpture of notorious Mengele.<sup>7</sup>

Gubernick used terms such as ‘unsettling and very disturbing’ to describe the content of the exhibition. On the basis of her interviews with curator Norman Kleeblatt and director Joan Rosenbaum, she wrote the following:

The Jewish Museum is mounting the show, says Kleeblatt, because, over the last 20 years, the Holocaust and the Nazis have become one of the major ideas of popular culture. A new generation of artists born long after WWII has started using images of Nazi villains, not victims in art. [...] Some people will be upset; grants Joan Rosenbaum. But we feel art begs for discussion and we feel it is in our purview to show the work and provide that discussion.<sup>8</sup>

These statements were juxtaposed by Gubernick with disapproving comments from scholars and Holocaust survivors. One of them, Deborah Lipstadt,<sup>9</sup> historian of the Holocaust, called the exhibition ‘out of bounds’ and Ernst Michel, executive Vice President Emeritus of the United Jewish Appeal Federation of NY, ‘repugnant’. Gubernick’s article set the tone for a discussion in the New York mass media and led to a polarised representation of opinions. Young criticised the language used by this journalist recognising that, ‘with a little push’ from the *Wall Street Journal*, the exhibition became a ‘journalistic sensation,

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<sup>6</sup> Young, ‘Looking into the Mirrors of Evil’.

<sup>7</sup> Gubernick, ‘Coming Show with Nazi Theme Stirs New York’s Art World’.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> American-Jewish historian, author of *Denying the Holocaust: history of the revisionist assault on truth and memory*, (New York: Free Press, 1993).



as reporters from across New York City began showing a handful of the show's more provocative images to survivors and their children for reactions'.<sup>10</sup>

During the week following the publication of Gubernick's article a series of reports about the exhibition were broadcast on TV channels: Fox 5, WB11 and Channel 2, and Radio stations WINS, WCBS and NY1. Major American newspapers, among them the *Daily News*, *New York Post*, *Newsday*, *New York Times*, but also the Jewish press including the *Jewish Week*, and the *Forward* carried reports. An example is Marsha Kranes' 'news' report for the *New York Post* on 11 January. Kranes states that 'a controversial art exhibit that makes daring and disturbing use of Nazi images is coming to the Jewish Museum of New York – and generating heated debate'.<sup>11</sup> None of the features of *Mirroring Evil* escaped the press's criticism. Its title was deemed too provocative; the concept of the exhibition – to portray the perpetrators and not the victims – was rebuked as inappropriate for the Jewish Museum. Its director, Joan Rosenbaum was chastised even for her intention to mount such an exhibition.

Menachem Rosensaft, the founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust survivors and a member of the USHMM Council, proved to be one of the most outspoken opponents of the exhibition. Rosensaft's criticism appeared in a number of articles in both Jewish and American newspapers, including the *Daily News*, the *New York Post*, and in the Jewish daily, the *Forward*. He was seconded by Dov Hikind, Democratic New York State Assemblyman and representative of the largest group of Orthodox Jews in America, Brooklyn's Assembly District 48, which includes Borough Park.

The public outcry reached a high point in February 2002, when Rosensaft, supported by Hikind, called for a boycott of the exhibition on moral grounds, thereby starting a new stage in the debate about an exhibition still *in absentia*.

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<sup>10</sup> Young, 'Looking into the Mirrors of Evil'.

<sup>11</sup> Marsha Kranes, 'Jewish Museum in Holocaust-art Flap', in the *New York Post*, (11 January, 2002).

Under the influence of the boycott, members of the Jewish federation of the Greater Monmouth County in New Jersey advised students of the Jewish theological schools not to visit the Museum during the tenure of the exhibition. Another group that joined the boycott was the Catholic League. Their support surprised some Jews whereas others took it as a proof for the influence of the press, since a good number of ‘news’ journalists, following Gubernick, had repeatedly compared *Mirroring Evil* with *Sensation*, triggering the Catholics’ revolt.<sup>12</sup> At the end of February, a committee representing the rights of the survivors headed by Hikind was formed to enter into negotiations with the Jewish Museum, which resulted in several concessions. For instance, the curatorial team decided to include warning signs about the potentially disturbing content of some artworks, and they agreed to install a second exit half-way through the display.<sup>13</sup> These adjustments, however, did not appease the critics. In the run-up to the exhibition’s opening, the most heated discussions were about the Jewish Museum’s failure to represent Jewish-American concerns about the memory of the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup>

Until the eventual opening, news items about the exhibition were complemented by editorials and, most importantly, op-eds debating the relevance of the exhibition for American Jews. Art Spiegelman’s editorial cartoon published on 25 March in the *New Yorker* and titled ‘Duchamp is our Misfortune’ was critical of the works of art. Spiegelman created a set of cartoons among which a skinhead – a male thug wearing a sleeveless, black undershirt with a skull on the shirt – painting a red swastika on a stone wall. The final image shows the swastika wall exhibited as art on the white walls of *Mirroring Evil*, with artists and admirers looking at it. Spiegelman’s reaction is surprising, given his own controversial

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<sup>12</sup> See Lisa Gubernick’s article in the *Wall Street Journal*, (10 January, 2002), and Michael Kimmel’s ‘Jewish Museum Show looks Nazis in the face and creates a Fuss’, in the *New York Times*, (29 January, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> This is clearly noticed if one compares the initial floor plan of the gallery space with the one modified by the organizers after the meeting with Hikind. For instance, a second exit was installed before the gallery room which contained works by artists Tom Sachs and Zbigniew Libera.

<sup>14</sup> See op-eds by Menachem Rosensaft, Michael Berenbaum and Brad Hirschfield in the *Jewish Week* to be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Holocaust art. Art historian Reesa Greenberg classifies his criticism as too swift: 'Spiegelman's rabid response to the exhibition is, in my opinion, too rapid and is linked to another aspect of timing and trauma'.<sup>15</sup> The argument of timing is reiterated by Rosensaft. In his view; the exhibition came too early because survivors were still alive. He accused the Museum of not respecting the survivors, by unnecessarily opening the wounds of trauma and inflicting additional pain.<sup>16</sup> Another argument brought to bear was that the exhibits trivialized the Holocaust. For this reason, Rosensaft called for organizations of survivors to stay away from the Jewish Museum.<sup>17</sup>

The Museum's director, Joan Rosenbaum did her best to defend the exhibition and explained that, despite the challenges exhibitions such as *Mirroring Evil* presented to the audiences, 'they are an important part of understanding how Jewish identity and art are evolving. We deal with Jewish issues that are on people's minds. And we provide the contemporary interpretation of that history'. Rosenbaum insisted that Holocaust survivors did not have a unanimously negative perception of the exhibition, and pointed out that, in fact, the survivors had been active in the shaping of its meaning:

We've incorporated the responses of the survivors all the way along. Survivors are not a monolithic group, they have a variety of opinions, and, so, many choose not to come, knowing that there's Nazi imagery.<sup>18</sup>

In support of Rosenbaum came Rabbi Brad Hirschfeld, co-director of the think-tank The Centre of Jewish Learning and Leadership (henceforth *CLAL*). Hirschfeld sympathized with the survivors' anger. However, he felt that the questions posed by the exhibition did not concern the generation of the survivors directly, but were aimed at their descendants. He proposed:

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<sup>15</sup> Reesa Greenberg, 'Mirroring Evil: Timing, Trauma and Temporary Exhibitions', retrieved from [http://www.yorku.ca/reerden/Projects/mirroring\\_evil.html](http://www.yorku.ca/reerden/Projects/mirroring_evil.html) (accessed on 15.11. 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Rosensaft paraphrased by Steve Lipman in article 'Museum Boycott Threatened' in the *Jewish Week*, (15 February, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> This information appears in Daniel Belasco's article 'The Jewish Museum's "Nazi Art" Fracas: Survivor Groups consider protests of "Lego Auschwitz"', in the *Jewish Week*, (18 January, 2002),

<sup>18</sup> Rosenbaum quoted by Yigall Schleifer in article 'Who owns the Show?', in the *Jerusalem Post*, (25 February, 2002).

Shouldn't we be upset when we look at images of the Holocaust? How have we become inured to images of bulldozed bodies? Odd, transgressive art may be provoking feelings of pain and nausea we should feel anyway when confronting images of the Holocaust.<sup>19</sup>

In his defense of the exhibition, Michael Berenbaum, former director of USHMM, suggested that 'not every portrayal of the Holocaust can be a memorial to its victims'. Instead, what was important was the 'forum' offered by the Jewish Museum to 'an intergenerational dialogue' between the artists and the survivors. He did not agree with some of the artworks, but thought that the issues they raised were 'valuable'.<sup>20</sup>

On the opening day of *Mirroring Evil* approximately one hundred protesters, including survivors, demonstrated at the entrance of the museum, some armed with banners and shouting angry slogans, such as 'shame on you' or 'don't go in'. Oscar Ilan, a Holocaust survivor shared his experience with the press:

I survived the camps. I was in Birkenau Auschwitz. I was in a ghetto. I was for five and a half years inside. I have kept telling the stories, before Passover, telling my children and grandchildren stories about survival. But now I have to start telling them about what happened inside the museum. They are putting up pictures of Gestapo, of Mengele [...].<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the survivors who expressed their pain and discontent, there were survivors who deemed the exhibition worth viewing. One such example is Nechama Tec who attempted to make sense of the artists' approach in the following manner: 'this is a younger generation, and they are trying to come to grips with their own reaction to the Holocaust, and how it impacts their society around them'.<sup>22</sup> Despite the protests, the Museum registered a number of 1,500 visitors on the opening day. The Museum's spokesperson Anne Scher explained

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<sup>19</sup> Hirschfield quoted by Daniel Belasco, in the *Jewish Week*.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Berenbaum, 'Must Facing Evil itself be Offensive?', in the *Jewish Week*, (8 March, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Statement by Oscar Ilan, retrieved from Associated Press Archive, <http://www.aparchive.com/Search.aspx?remem=x&st=k&kw=Mirroring+Evil>, (17 March, 2002), (accessed on 16.11. 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Nechama Tec cited by Nacha Cattán, 'Supporters Turn their Back on Museum over Nazi exhibit', in the *Forward*, (22 March, 2002).

that while this was a smaller number than the record of 2,400 visitors to *Marc Chagall. Early Works from Russian Collections* (2001) it was not untypical for a contemporary art exhibition.<sup>23</sup>

During the months that followed the opening, the debate about the exhibition diminished, the tone and style of the media reporting also changed. Articles on *Mirroring Evil* gradually moved from the newspapers' front pages or opinion sections, to the art or culture rubrics. Moreover, the news reports documenting the opinions of opposing sides decreased. Criticism was now directed mainly at the 'mediocre' art and at the interpretative materials provided by the Museum. Art critics and art historians joined the debate in the media, and replaced most of the spokespersons of the survivor groups. They moved to other aspects of the exhibition such as: what was deemed to be the 'overblown rhetoric and choice of trivial art', as art critic Estelle Gilson claimed in *Congress Monthly* (May/June 2002).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Steven C. Munsen wrote a critical review in *Commentary*, describing *Mirroring Evil* as an event that 'seeks to distort the moral meaning and to have us participate in the distortion, which is petty and soulless'.<sup>25</sup> The interpretative material supplied, and the activities organised, by the Museum were viewed as causing the exhibition to be overly-contextualized. Michael Kimmelman, art critic for the *NY Times*, deemed the artworks 'infantile', or simply 'valueless'.<sup>26</sup> Polish artist Zbigniew Libera's *Lego Concentration Camp*, Tom Sachs' *Giftset Giftgas*, and Alan Schechner's *Self-Portrait at Buchenwald* raised most concerns among the reviewers. Although approximately eighty per cent of the reviewers, writing for the art sections of the NY broadsheets endorsed Kimmelman's abovementioned view, there were some dissenting voices, especially from art critics writing for art magazines. Linda Nochlin, an art historian from the *Artforum* was one of them: she saw *Mirroring Evil* as 'an uncommonly thoughtful, if profoundly disturbing show, [...] [that] demand[ed]

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<sup>23</sup> Anne Scher quoted by Daniel Belasco's 'Nazi art/Mediocre Draw', in the *Jewish Week*, (12 April, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Estelle Gilson, 'Art and Evil', in *Congress Monthly*, (May/June, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Steven C. Munsen, 'Nazis, Jews and Mirroring Evil', in *Commentary*, (May, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Kimmelman, 'The art of Banality' in the *New York Times*, (22 March, 2002).

careful and respectful looking and meditation'.<sup>27</sup> It is noteworthy that none of these critics reported on the responses of the visitors to the exhibition and on the public programmes and partnerships organized by the Museum with Facing History and Ourselves,<sup>28</sup> *CLAL* and with Vera List Center for Art and Politics. These are well-documented in the final report written by the Jewish Museum to its funding body, the Americans for the Arts, which I shall briefly outline in what follows.

The Museum offered three types of public programs: panels, public forums and daily dialogues. The panels consisted of speakers' presentations that were followed by questions from the audience. Panel discussions took place on 14 March – 'Encountering Evil: An artists' roundtable', and on 21 March – 'The roots of all evil'. The latter included extracts of the films *Night Porter* and *The Damned*, and speeches by scholar in Jewish Studies Susannah Heschel and critic in visual arts Laura Frost. Unlike the panels, the forums were purposefully designed to give the audience the chance to lead the discussion; with speakers acting as facilitators. The fact that there were no audience-participation panels at the start of the exhibition suggests that the Museum felt that the audience had to be educated before it could participate. The public forum on 28 May, 'Moral Ambiguity in the Representation of Evil' was facilitated by art historians Ellen Handler Spitz, and Roly Matalon. This was followed by another forum introduced by Eleanor Heartney and Reesa Greenberg. In the final report on the exhibition, the Museum stressed that the facilitators were asked to speak only if needed, so that to allow the audience to determine the direction of the conversation.<sup>29</sup> A third kind of public program offered by the Museum was the 'daily dialogue'.<sup>30</sup> The 67 one-hour-long dialogues were mediated by Mohini Shapero. They drew approximately 475 visitors, with groups ranging in size from

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<sup>27</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art', in *Artforum*, (1 July, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> An international organization which helps educators to improve their effectiveness in teaching history in the classroom. The organisation's stated aim is to combat bigotry and nurture democracy, see <http://www.facing.org/aboutus>, (accessed on 16.11. 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Jewish Museum's final report dated August 2002 was accessed by the author at the Jewish Museum Archives, September 2010, New York.

<sup>30</sup> Term employed by the Jewish Museum in the final report to the Americans for the Arts.

1 to 30 participants. The visitors could write their views on index cards, which were attached to the Museum's final report. The daily dialogues were aimed at all visitors. Their objective was to encourage them, through dialogue and discussion, to think about how the Holocaust can be communicated to the younger generations. In addition to the daily dialogues, the museum 'docents', educators specially trained by the museum, conducted guided tours of the exhibition for individuals and groups. Facing History and Ourselves organised workshops for teachers, who, in their turn, encouraged students to visit the exhibition. 15 student groups totalling 294 students and 84 adult groups with 1,029 participants visited the exhibition. *CLAL* arranged three public meetings with Jewish community leaders, philanthropists, and religious leaders from different denominations.

A multiplicity of viewpoints were recorded in the Museum's report, such as Brad Hirschfield's, who took on the role of 'mediator between the exhibition and the museum and various segments of the Jewish community', and stressed that 'the exhibition raised profoundly important ethical questions that hit vital nerves in Jewish communities, and that highlighted deep generational and ideological divides'. Sondra Farganis, director of Vera List Center of Art and Politics, stated that the collaboration with the Museum 'was an extraordinary opportunity to dramatize and delineate our concerns on the interface of art and politics [...] there was living proof that arts allow us to look at political issues in a meaningful way that reaches a wide range of people'. Charlotte Schwartz, a docent, shared her impressions of the dialogues noting that 'the public became involved in the themes rather than the art' and that there were 'two impressive aspects of the kind of visitors in my group: first many more young people than usual, and many non-Jews, secondly, a good number of Holocaust survivors who came and willingly, some eagerly shared their experiences'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> These statements by Brad Hirschfield, Sondra Farganis and Charlotte Schwartz were included in the Jewish Museum's report.

In the report, the Museum reassured readers that ‘dialogue programs’ were a central component of *Mirroring Evil*. The media’s failure to take note of the Museum’s programs leads one to argue that, indeed, reporters did not take part in any of the events organized by the Museum. Therefore, the visitors’ opinions were not reported by the media, in spite of their contribution to the development of the public discussion. Indeed, the visitors played a central role in advancing the discussion initiated in the print media. This is manifest in the wide-ranging responses entered in the museum gallery books, which included comments about the exhibits themselves, but also reactions to statements about the exhibition proliferated in the press, which shall be addressed at a later stage in this chapter. In conclusion, there were no connections between the debate about *Mirroring Evil* initiated and developed within the sphere of the media, the discussions taking place during the ‘daily dialogue’ programs, and those recorded in the gallery books.

One cannot overlook the importance of the print media’s involvement in the development of the debate. A quantitative analysis shows that approximately two hundred media reports appeared in the American press between 10 January and 17 March. Circa 15 per cent of the news items circulated in more than one media outlet. Articles written by *Associated Press*, a New York-based news agency that claims to be ‘the essential global news network, delivering fast, unbiased news from every corner of the world to all media platforms and formats’,<sup>32</sup> were published in an impressive number of media outlets, both printed and online.<sup>33</sup> A ranking according to the number of reports about *Mirroring Evil* puts the *New York Times* and the *Jewish Week*, each with eleven articles, in top position. The

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<sup>32</sup> Statement retrieved from <http://www.ap.org/pages/about/about.html>, (accessed on 17.11.2010).

<sup>33</sup> Two such examples are: Tara Burghart’s reports ‘Holocaust Survivors call for boycott of Jewish Museum during Nazi-era art exhibit’, in *The AP Worldstream*, (February 18, 2002), and ‘The Jewish Museum will post warning sign to separate controversial art in the Holocaust exhibit’, in *The AP WorldStream*, (March 2, 2002) about the changes to the exhibition announced by the Museum which ran in forty-five media outlets and Karen Matthew’s article, ‘Nazi Images Exhibit opens in New York Jewish Museum, draws protesters shouting ‘Don’t go in!’’, in *The AP Worldstream*, (March 17, 2002), covering the exhibition’s opening day which was distributed in eighty-four outlets.



*New York Post* and the *Daily News* each printed seven news items; the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* and the *Forward* each had four articles.<sup>34</sup> The *Daily News* and *Newsday* were more interested in writing reviews or editorials about the exhibition, totalling a number of eight items each. Periodicals such as *Tikkun*, *Midstream*, *Commentary* or *Congress Monthly* contributed reviews, and feature articles, and Jewish newspapers across the United States including *Atlanta Jewish Times*, *Long Island Jewish World*, the *Jewish Press*, the *Cleveland Jewish News* or the *New Jersey Jewish Standard* published editorials and op-eds during April and May. While before the exhibition's opening, news items constituted circa 70 per cent of the media coverage, thereafter editorials, op-eds, reviews and feature articles predominated, totalling 57 items in circa 73 newspapers. It was this segment of the press which proved most influential in shaping the public's opinion.

It is important to acknowledge the differences between a news item and an op-ed because of the degree of influence each has in shaping the readers' opinions. Danuta Reah defines 'news' as 'information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group'.<sup>35</sup> *Mirroring Evil*, as shown by the amount of news items, has been undoubtedly viewed by reporters as a subject of great interest to a large segment of the American public. The Jewish Museum's director of communication, Anne Scher acknowledges this in her contribution to the Museum's report: 'the controversy in itself became the substance of *Mirroring Evil* for many news outlets that ordinarily do not cover the art exhibition or art museums [...] reported on it as a news story rather than as an art story'.<sup>36</sup> Danuta Reah also uses the term 'news story' to stress the constructed nature of the news report, as an account of past events which 'may, to some extent, relate to a factual account, but carry the implication of interpretation, elaboration and creation of a

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<sup>34</sup> In addition to these, numerous other papers including *Newsday*, *Washington Post*, the *New York Observer*, or the *Village Voice*, but also *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*, the *Jerusalem Post* and the *Jerusalem Report* devoted one to three articles to *Mirroring Evil*.

<sup>35</sup> Danuta Reah, *The Language of Newspapers*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Scher's statement in the final report to the Americans for the Arts.

narrative'.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the writer has control over how the story is presented, but also decides on what to include, or exclude from it. Unlike news stories, editorials do not only present the facts but allow the editor to comment and draw conclusions from the events. Editorials also give readers the opportunity to respond via 'letters to the editors'. *Mirroring Evil* drew a large number of editorials, especially in broadsheets such as the *New York Times*, but surprisingly they triggered a mere eight letters to the editor. Similar to editorials are the 'op-eds', an abbreviation referring to the page that is opposite the editorial page.

Different from the editorial page, the op-ed expresses the views and opinions of a public figure that is unaffiliated with the newspaper's editorial board. The op-ed was actually created in New York. Its inventor Herbert Bayard Swope, editor of the *New York Evening World*, explains its origin as:

It occurred to me that nothing is more interesting than opinion when opinion is interesting, so I devised a method of cleaning off the page opposite the editorial, which became the most important in America [...] and thereon, I decided to print opinions, ignoring facts.<sup>38</sup>

Among all these kinds of newspaper texts, the op-eds are the most relevant for the constitution of public opinion. Authors of op-eds are well-known public figures whose opinions are expected to influence a newspaper's readership. The op-ed is generally perceived as being: 'a powerful way to educate a large number of people about issues and to influence policymakers'.<sup>39</sup> Other definitions of the op-ed suggest that it 'is not just an opinion, but that it consists of facts put into a well-informed context', and that it usually has the function of providing a new perspective on an event or of questioning common perceptions of the event.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Reah, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> H.B. Swope quoted in K. Meyer, *Pundits, poets, and wits*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xxxvii.

<sup>39</sup> Statement retrieved from [www.americanhiking.org/...Day/Writing\\_Publishing\\_OpEd.pdf?](http://www.americanhiking.org/...Day/Writing_Publishing_OpEd.pdf?), (accessed on 18.11. 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Statement found on webpage [www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/pressroom/media.../OpEdGuide.doc](http://www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/pressroom/media.../OpEdGuide.doc). (accessed on 18.11. 2010).

Thus, the op-eds written by such influential representatives of the Jewish community in America as Elie Wiesel and Michael Berenbaum, and leaders of the Jewish community Rabbi Brad Hirschfield and Menachem Rosensaft will constitute the main subject of my analysis.

## II

### **The Jewish Museum in Historical Context**

A recognizably Jewish institution is neither religious, nor secular, and thus transcends the ideologies, sects and dogmas, that otherwise segregate Jews into factional ghettos. Ruth S. Seldin <sup>41</sup>

The Jewish Museum was founded by the Jewish Theological Seminary (henceforth, JTS) in 1904; an institution that saw itself as ‘an academic and spiritual centre of Conservative Judaism’, and whose long-standing objective was to train ‘religious, educational, academic, and lay leaders for the Jewish community and beyond’.<sup>42</sup> JTS’s library housed the Jewish Museum until 1944 when Frieda Schiff Warburg – widow of the prominent businessman, philanthropist and Seminarian trustee Felix Warburg – donated the family mansion at 1109 Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street to the JTS to use for the Jewish Museum. The twenty-six objects of fine and ceremonial art offered by Judge Mayer Sulzberger in 1904 were the cultural foundation upon which the Jewish Museum developed its permanent collection which nowadays contains more than 26,000 items including paintings, sculptures, ethnographic and archaeological artifacts, numismatics, ceremonial objects, and broadcast media materials.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ruth S. Seldin, ‘American Jewish Museums Trends and Issues’, in the *American Jewish Yearbook*, 91 (1991), pp. 71-113, retrieved from [www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/17744.pdf](http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/17744.pdf), (accessed on 19.11. 2010).

<sup>42</sup> From JTS website, [http://www.jtsa.edu/About\\_JTS.xml](http://www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS.xml), (accessed on 19.11. 2010).

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/History>, (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

More than 800 works of art selected from the Museum's holdings form the permanent exhibition titled *Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey*, by means of which the Museum constructs a story of Jewish identity and culture in the USA. Among the questions the Museum tries to answer are: 'How have the Jewish people been able to thrive for thousands of years, often in difficult and even tragic circumstances?', and 'What constitutes the essence of Jewish identity?'<sup>44</sup> The Museum suggests to its visitors that there are no simple answers to these timeless questions. More important than the answers themselves is the Jewish Museum's realization that Jewish life and identity cannot be subsumed under simple categories but, rather, that its specificity derives from its multi-faceted character, and the ability of the Jewish people to move forward, by alternating openness with resistance to external cultures and the change they might bring.

From its inception, the Jewish Museum's mission has been, as stated on their website, 'to preserve, study and interpret Jewish cultural history through the use of authentic art and artifacts, linking both Jews and non-Jews to a rich body of values and traditions'.<sup>45</sup> Whereas the core values endorsed by the institution are reflected within its permanent collection, the temporary exhibitions organised annually, demonstrate the museum's broad range of cultural and social interests. It is within this area that the Museum has reflected its potential for transformation, the ability to define and re-define its goals and finally, its mission.

The Museum's choice of temporary exhibitions illustrates what I deem to be important phases in its evolution. Firstly, it is essential to acknowledge that the Jewish Museum has gone through different phases, which, over the decades, have been subject to both public praise and criticism. In the 1960s, the Museum showed a preference for displaying contemporary abstract art rather than *Judaica*. While the Jewish Museum attracted some critical acclaim for its promotion of avant-garde art, it drew little on this support from its parent institution, the JTS.

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<sup>44</sup> From Museum webpage, <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/Directorsmessage> (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Statement retrieved from <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/History> (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

This is suggested by Ruth S. Seldin in her comprehensive survey ‘American Jewish Museums: Trends and Issues’. Seldin states that ‘the administration of the Jewish Theological Seminary – the museum’s sponsor – was largely paralyzed by an attitude of ambivalence’. She goes on to classify the 1960s as a ‘decade in which the Jewish aspect of the museum was downgraded and the museum made a name for itself with shows of pop and Dada [art], and hard-edged abstractions’.<sup>46</sup> This is defined by art historian Maya Balakirsky Katz – as suggestive of the Museum’s ‘unorthodox’ background.<sup>47</sup> It is during the 1960s that questions regarding the subjects of Jewish art were increasingly being asked by the Museum’s critics. A certain amount of criticism was at the same time directed against the museum’s curatorial decisions. Art critic Karl Rosenberg commenced his speech delivered at the Jewish Museum in 1966 with the now famous joke: ‘first they build the Jewish Museum and then they ask: is there a Jewish art?’ Nevertheless, Rosenberg also explained that ‘whereas there is no Jewish art product, the freedom experienced by Jews in America to exercise their creativity gives rise to a diverse Jewish creative process’.<sup>48</sup>

Katz justifies the Museum’s display of exhibitions of avant-garde art, ‘as a Jewish experience despite the fact that art made no pretence of a Jewish content and some of the artists were not even Jewish’.<sup>49</sup> The Museum’s focus on abstract art, eventually led art critic Abraham Kampf to seriously question whether the Jewish Museum does represent Jewishness, and he cast the museum as an ‘institution adrift’.<sup>50</sup> In 1968 Kampf foresaw difficult times for the newly appointed director Carl Katz who would have to maintain a ‘more subtle balance between contemporary and Jewish programs’.<sup>51</sup> Kampf’s prophesy seemed to come real in the 1970s when the Museum moved from its former policy of devoting much

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<sup>46</sup> Seldin, ‘American Jewish Museums Trends and Issues’.

<sup>47</sup> Term employed by Maya B. Katz in paper ‘Salons des Refusés: Jewish Museums during the Soviet Refusenik Movement’, presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress in Jewish Studies, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Karl Rosenberg paraphrased by Katz.

<sup>49</sup> Katz in paper ‘Salons des Refusés: Jewish Museums during the Soviet Refusenik Movement’.

<sup>50</sup> Abraham Kampf, ‘The Jewish Museum: An Institution Adrift’, in *Judaism*, (Summer, 1968), p. 283.

<sup>51</sup> Kampf quoted by Katz.

exhibition space to contemporary art to exploring its unique relationship to Jewish issues and defining its role within the New York Jewish community. Kampf himself would curate, in the mid-1970s, a major exhibition entitled *The Jewish Experience in the Art of the 20th Century*, which could be viewed as an example of the Museum's newly acquired preference for exhibitions that dealt with specifically Jewish topics. The exhibition included works by artists of Soviet-Jewish origin, who were less known in the contemporary art scene of the West. This signaled the birth of 'a newly socially conscious museum', argued Kampf.<sup>52</sup>

Starting with the 1970s the Museum entered what can be defined as a more traditional phase as 'an institution devoted to defining Jewish culture for audiences'.<sup>53</sup> Beyond doubt, the Museum's turn towards Jewish subjects did not develop in a cultural vacuum, but was the outcome of a broader cultural and socio-political focus in America on issues specific to minority cultures, which started with the civil rights movement of 1968 and continued with the 1980s' preoccupation with identity politics.<sup>54</sup> This led to an increase in public interest in politically and socially under-represented racial and ethnic groups, such as native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics, and the Jews. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that the Museum insisted that by speaking about Jewish experience it touches upon issues of interest to other minority groups in America, but also to the American society at large.

This view surfaces in Elie Wiesel's review of the 1988 *Dreyfus Affair* exhibition, in which he stated that 'we are silent no more', and added that 'since the Dreyfus Affair people realized that the struggle for mankind always comes down to a struggle for a single individual'.<sup>55</sup> This opinion was endorsed by the Jewish Museum in a statement made by its then director Joan Rosenbaum, who argued that Alfred Dreyfus's life – 'the Jew and captain of the French army' – was

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Expression employed by Katz.

<sup>54</sup> Deborah Dash Moore discusses this issue in *American Jewish Identity Politics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Elie Wiesel's review in the art catalogue *The Dreyfus Affair*, (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1988).

representative of a 'human drama'. Rosenbaum took the opportunity to stress that:

In many ways this project epitomizes the goals of the Jewish Museum's programming during the 1980s. It makes use of fine art and popular artefacts and it uses a particular historic event to address aspects of art history as well as broad humanist themes.<sup>56</sup>

Already with the *Dreyfus Affair*, the Museum showed a sense of daring as it was the first time that it displayed a large collection of anti-Semita, prompting questions from the Jewish community about the effect such exhibits might have on the younger generations.<sup>57</sup> The Museum's interest in themes deemed challenging to some members of the community continued to develop, especially during the 1990s, and ignited criticism from art historians. Among them, Tom Freudenheim maintained that 'a major problem facing the Jewish museums is that they are probably not certain what kind of museums they are trying to be'.<sup>58</sup> Arguably, in response to this allegation, the Museum adopted an approach which favored an examination of Jewish identity, through the prism of the Jews' relationship to other minority groups. One such initiative constituted the 1992 exhibition *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews*, which asks the viewers to re-consider the relationship between these communities. The exhibition's curator Jack Salzman posed challenging and self-critical questions such as: 'what happened to the grand alliance between American Jewish and African Americans? Indeed, one had to wonder, did such an alliance ever really exist?'<sup>59</sup>

A more famous example of tackling issues that concern Jewish self-representation and that pertain to an inner Jewish discourse was the exhibition in 1996 *Too Jewish? Challenging traditional identities* curated by Norman Kleeblatt. In her statement about the exhibition, the museum's director, Rosenbaum, claimed

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<sup>56</sup> Joan Rosenbaum, 'Director's Preface', in *The Dreyfus Affair* art catalogue.

<sup>57</sup> This is mentioned in Maya Katz's paper 'Salons des Refuses: Jewish Museums during the Soviet Refusenik Movement'.

<sup>58</sup> Tom Freudenheim, 'Thank You, Wendy Leibowitz', in the *Moment*, (October, 1989), p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Jack Salzman, 'Introduction', in *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1992), p. 15.

that Jewish identity is ‘taking many forms’ and reassured her readers that the artists presented in the exhibition were all of Jewish origin, even though different in their approaches, and debated ‘their identification with Jewishness’.<sup>60</sup> Kleeblatt corroborated describing the project as a ‘critical self-examination’ that ‘served more as a means of asking questions and beginning a dialogue, of shedding prejudices, not about others, but also about ourselves’.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the exhibition trod a thin line as it tackled the notion of ‘too Jewish’ – often used by assimilated secular Jews to describe their fear of appearing ‘too Jewish’, and their contempt towards what they see as the ‘pronounced’ Jewish features of Hasidic Jews.<sup>62</sup> This was expressed by Linda Nochlin in her foreword to the exhibition catalogue as follows: ‘in my secular but Jewish-identified community, it was clear, if almost always left unstated, that some people, some looks, some modes of behavior were less than desirable – shrugging, loudness, dirty fingernails, sidecurls, – well, these were just ‘too Jewish’.<sup>63</sup> *Too Jewish?* also tackled the notion of Jewish self-hatred, and stereotypes, both physical and cultural, that non-Jews and Jews alike attribute to Jews. Carol Ockman from *Artforum* had nothing but praise:

Indeed, one of the major contributions of *Too Jewish?* is its exploration of the mired relationship between identity and stereotype. Its organizers [...] along with the museum’s director Joan Rosenbaum had the courage to confront stereotypes at full tilt.<sup>64</sup>

A stern response, on the other hand, came from Ellis Horowitz, who saw the exhibition as a cultural product of New York’s American Jews, as he asked whether Jewish artists interrogating Jewish identities could have appeared

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<sup>60</sup> Joan Rosenbaum, ‘Director’s Statement’, in *Too Jewish? Challenging traditional identities*, (New York: Jewish Museum, 1996).

<sup>61</sup> Norman Kleeblatt, ‘Preface’, in *Too Jewish? Challenging traditional identities*.

<sup>62</sup> See discussion about the growth of Hasidic communities after 1945 in America, in Charles S. Lieberman and Bernard Susser, *Choosing Survival. Strategies for a Jewish Future*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 39-61.

<sup>63</sup> Linda Nochlin, ‘Foreword: The Couturier and the Hasid’, in *Too Jewish? Challenging traditional identities*.

<sup>64</sup> Carol Ockman, ‘Too Jewish at the Jewish Museum’, in *Artforum*, (September, 1996).



anywhere else than in New York.<sup>65</sup> Philip Roth's critical description of New York's Jews is invoked by Horowitz to reinforce his negative opinion of *Too Jewish?* as a distinct cultural product designating a kind of *chutzpah* characteristic of New York's Jews: 'New York is replete with Jews without shame. Complaining Jews who get under your skin. Brash Jews who eat with their elbows on the table. Unaccommodating Jews full of anger, insult, argument, and impudence.'<sup>66</sup> One can as well argue that far from *chutzpah*, the Museum proved its commitment to bring to their audiences' attention subjects that have been marginalized thus far. With *Too Jewish?*, an exhibition that discusses contradictory opinions about what is or is not Jewish, Norman Kleeblatt endeavored to show that Jewish identity includes, rather than excludes, the diversity of Jewish experiences in America.

The Jewish Museum's location on the Upper West Side of Manhattan is significant for the identity discourses of different Jewish communities in New York. Within any cityscape, the location of a museum is a significant factor that contributes to the creation of that museum's image. 'All museums occupy symbolic spaces', argue Caryn Aviv and David Shneer in their acclaimed book *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. Moreover, they 'have become central places where American Jews constitute their identity, and publicly display themselves to broad audiences'.<sup>67</sup> In New York, the Jewish Museum occupies a symbolic place in the city's topography. It is positioned in the area of upper Fifth Avenue also known as 'the museum mile' which gives the Museum a high public 'visibility', as it represents a major touristic attraction of New York.

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<sup>65</sup> Ellis Horowitz, 'Too Jewish and other Jewish Questions, A Review Essay', in *Modern Judaism*, 19 (1999), p. 202.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Roth, *Deception*, (New York, 1990) quoted by Ellis Horowitz on p. 202. The exhibition also deals with Jewish identity discourses which invokes Ivan Kalmar's discussion on the relationship between Jewish culture and a social neurosis he called 'EJI' an acronym for 'Embarrassed Jewish Individuals' in *The Troskys, Freuds and Woody Allens. A Portrait of a Culture*, (Toronto: Penguin, 1994).

<sup>67</sup> Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, (New York: New York University, 2005), p. 72.

Aviv and Shneer describe the Upper West Side as ‘that part of New York that much of America now seems to recognize as a “Jewish town”’. ‘In the multicultural tumult of New York City, the Upper West Side, for all its diversity, feels distinctively and undeniably Jewish’.<sup>68</sup> The *Forward*, in a recent article by Josh Nathan-Kazis also presents the neighborhood as ‘liberal, precocious, and very Jewish’. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Upper West Side was perceived as ‘a left-wing Jewish bastion’.<sup>69</sup> For the second generation of German-Jewish immigrants, such as Paula Hyman, professor of History at Yale University, Jewishness was central to the identity of the neighborhood, as she stated: ‘The Upper West Side is to my generation, what the Lower East Side was to the immigrant generation. It was the kind of place where you could be Jewish just by walking down the street’.<sup>70</sup> The Upper West Side, however, represents only one dimension of the Jewish experience in America. This area has been linked to the middle-class, assimilated, and liberal American Jews, those who predominantly, but not exclusively, demonstrate their Jewishness by means of cultural heritage and liberalism rather than religious practice. Unlike the Upper West Side, the Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens are homes to large communities of Orthodox Jews.

The Jewish Museum’s *Mirroring Evil* exhibition triggered the reactions of both secular and orthodox Jews. It is arguable that the public discussion surrounding *Mirroring Evil* grew out of a conflict of views between Jewish leaders that represented different Jewish communities which can be geographically located either on the Upper West Side or in Brooklyn. This is not to suggest that all Jews in Brooklyn held the same views about the Museum’s exhibition, or that liberal Jews at the Upper West Side were unanimously in favor of it. However, there is a tendency among Hasidic Jews, to view the Jewish Museum as an institution that

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 138, 164.

<sup>69</sup> Josh Nathan-Kazis, ‘Kagan’s “Hood: Liberal, Precocious, Very Jewish”’, in the *Forward*, (12 May, 2010), retrieved from <http://www.forward.com/articles/127976/>, (accessed on 20.11.2010).

<sup>70</sup> Paula Hyman quoted by Josh Nathan-Kazis.

does not represent them, which could also be due to the geographical distance between them and the Museum.

One must also acknowledge that clashes of views regarding particular topics are not uncommon among the diverse Jewish communities that inhabit New York. After all, Aviv and Shneer point out that ‘New York is home to countless Jewish institutions, communities, and individuals representing almost every imaginable version of what it means to be Jewish’.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, it is quite unsurprising that topics regarding Jewish memory and identity are debated and contested, and an institution such as the Jewish Museum has to cater for this diverse community. Like synagogues, according to Aviv and Shneer, museums serve ‘not just as a place to display artifacts, but also as cultural, culinary and community centers’.<sup>72</sup> Ruth S. Seldin, too, sees Jewish museums as spaces which accommodate the needs of all Jewish audiences:

Within the variegated mosaic that is the American Jewish community, the exhibition galleries of a Jewish museum are probably the only place where one can see Hassidic and Orthodox Jews, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and ‘just Jews’, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, liberals and conservatives, recent arrivals and longtime Americans mingling freely, viewing and appreciating art and objects that transcend differences in belief and life-style.<sup>73</sup>

It appears that in this diverse community some Jews felt unrepresented, or their values violated by the Jewish Museum’s decision to show *Mirroring Evil*. Many of the statements that will be discussed in the remaining part of this chapter expressed incomprehension about how ‘our’ Jewish Museum could present such artworks. The Museum’s response to this is mainly contained in its report to the Americans for the Arts, to which I shall now turn. I shall suggest that *Mirroring Evil* led to an institutional self-evaluation, which ultimately resulted in the re-definition of the Museum’s self-positioning within American society.

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<sup>71</sup> Aviv and Shneer, p. 138.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>73</sup> Ruth S. Seldin, p. 113.

The Museum's report outlined the stages and aspects of the project with the intent to offer a comprehensive explanation for the development and the issues this raised. It addressed the Americans for the Arts, Institute for Community Development and the Arts (AfA), 'the nation's leading non-profit organization for advancing the arts in America', whose main goal is to create opportunities for individuals and communities to 'participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts'.<sup>74</sup> The report provided a justification to the Americans for the Arts of the use of funding it had granted the Museum. AfA had included the Jewish Museum in its four-year program, Animating Democracy Initiative (ADI), which was supported financially by the Ford Foundation. ADI was based on the premise that: 'art is vital to society. Civil dialogue is vital to democracy. Both create unique opportunities for understanding and exchange'.<sup>75</sup> Its objective was to enable cultural institutions to create projects which enhance civic dialogue and reach 'new and diverse participants; and stimulate public dialogue about civic issues and inspire action to make change'.<sup>76</sup> It is no coincidence that the narrative constructed in the Museum's report is geared towards emphasizing the educational activities and the public programs that accompanied *Mirroring Evil*. It commences with a self-reflective account on how this exhibition affected the institution's self-image.

The report is worded in a manner that demonstrates the extent to which *Mirroring Evil* had an influence on the institution's mission. It includes adjectives such as 'new', 'different'; and adverbs and conjunctions such as 'while...' 'whereas...', and 'unlike...' signaling a departure from the Museum's previous practice. An emphasis is placed on the sense of novelty that *Mirroring Evil* brings to the Jewish Museum. The report stresses that responsibilities and functions of Museum staff shifted during the course of the project. Members of different

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<sup>74</sup> Statement retrieved from Americans for the Arts webpage [http://www.artsusa.org/about\\_us/](http://www.artsusa.org/about_us/) (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Pam Korza, Andrea Assaf, Barbara Schaffer Bacon, 'Inroads. The intersection of art and civil dialogue', retrieved from <http://www.clarku.edu/dd/docs/INROADS.pdf> (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Statement retrieved from the webpage, <http://www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/about/> (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

departments, including the curatorial, educational, public relations and programming, the director's office and the fine arts' department participated in the implementation of the project. Furthermore, it states that: 'the intensity of the project's mission and the sensitivity of its subject required both individuals [curators] and [museum] departments to find new ways of collaborating and working together'.<sup>77</sup>

The sense of departure is further emphasized in the following statement: 'different from other exhibitions, the education department collaborated with the curatorial department to interpret the issues and ideas of the works of art and the exhibition as a whole'.<sup>78</sup> Another difference from previous exhibitions emerges at the level of the Museum's Trustee Board. Here, too, *Mirroring Evil* allegedly generated a change in approach: 'while the board of directors normally agreed with the Museum's projects' this time, the trustees, 'put extra effort to understand the exhibition, to trust the organizers, and to endorse the project'.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, these differences in approach led to the recognition that 'an institutional shift occurred in regards to the ways in which the Museum views itself and the ways others perceive the Museum'. Other remarks point out how *Mirroring Evil* drew in new audiences:

*Mirroring Evil* brought different and varied audiences than standard Jewish Museum exhibitions. The visitor profile transformed into a younger generation, multi-racial audiences, and a new group of national and international contemporary art audience.<sup>80</sup>

These comments position the Jewish Museum on a more clearly defined institutional pathway that speaks more prominently than before of the Museum's mission to deal with topics that address a broader audience, including a younger generation. It seems that this view already started to develop in the late 1980s, when the Museum's director Joan Rosenbaum spoke about the Museum's 'possibility of taking a very broad view, [as] a museum that can consider the

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<sup>77</sup> From Jewish Museum's report to the Americans for the Arts, August 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

political, art historical, and social aspects all at once. By looking at everything, you make Jewish culture more interesting to a wide audience'.<sup>81</sup> This suggests a sense of continuity in the Museum's mission, but also of change, since, with *Mirroring Evil*, the Museum became more conscious of its role in the American civic society. Consequently, the Jewish Museum has extended its links with a younger, broader and multi-ethnic public, and with an audience that had hitherto been associated exclusively with contemporary art museums.

The way *Mirroring Evil* was publicized testifies to the fact that the Museum has come to view itself primarily as a multi-faceted cultural institution that, without losing its Jewish identity, deals with issues which involve a broader non-Jewish public. Its original title *After Maus* – a reference to Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus – a Survivor's Tale* (1997) was changed to *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*. While the original title generates associations with the Jewish experience of victimhood, the new one suggests the theme of universal, rather than of exclusively Jewish, concern with evil. In both the exhibition catalogue and in the interpretative material, *Mirroring Evil* was presented as an exhibition that 'does not deal with the topic of the Holocaust', but rather speaks of the presence of 'evil', personified here by Hitler and Nazism, in the American society.<sup>82</sup> The exhibition, opening six months after 9/11 is relevant in the context of America's increasingly present political discourse about evil. With *Mirroring Evil*, members of the Jewish Museum made a few significant steps towards convincing their audience of the Museum's commitment to become a forum where dialogue on issues and subjects that concern Jews and non-Jews alike, is made possible. In her contribution to the report, Rosenbaum refers to the high 'level of dialogue and collaboration' prompted within and outside the institution's walls, and encourages similar initiatives that can 'engage everyone in the extended Museum family, and allow for broad outreach'. She also admits that the exhibition gave the museum a 'new visibility as a Museum showing

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<sup>81</sup> Rosenbaum quoted by Grace Glueck, 'The Jewish Museum Reaches Out', in the *New York Times*, (4 April, 1989).

<sup>82</sup> See introductory statements by Joan Rosenbaum and Norman Kleeblatt, in *Mirroring Evil* art catalogue, pp. v-xiii.

contemporary art'.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, *Mirroring Evil* has given the Jewish Museum a 'new visibility', not least as a Museum that is not afraid of tackling sensitive topics. This is also stressed in the report to AfA in which the exhibition is described as a 'risky' project. But, it is also viewed as a 'model' for future exhibitions: 'If in fact, the Jewish Museum continues to organize "risky" projects, the planning and implementation of *Mirroring Evil* will certainly act as a role model'.<sup>84</sup>

An important point to make here is that the public exchange of views about *Mirroring Evil* has invariably included comments about the role of the Jewish Museum as an institution that represents Jewish experience. A major part of the public debate was concerned with whether *Mirroring Evil* belongs in a Jewish Museum. Yigal Scheleifer, in an article entitled 'Who owns the show?' noticed that many of the critics expressed 'almost a sense of betrayal, asking why it is a Jewish institution that is putting on such a show'.<sup>85</sup> Dov Hikind's statement is emblematic in this respect: 'What is offensive and what causes anguish is that they [the artworks] are displayed at the Jewish Museum'.<sup>86</sup> An even more significant accusation comes from Menachem Rosensaft, whose statement in the *Jewish Week* constitutes one of the central arguments of the public debate:

The Jewish Museum is not just another museum. As a prominent institution under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, it exudes the authority of the communal Jewish cultural and religious establishment. By mounting *Mirroring Evil*, the Museum is conferring a singular legitimacy on all subsequent desecrations of the Holocaust.<sup>87</sup>

These allegations were countered by Brad Hirschfield, who declared in an op-ed for the *Jewish Week* that: 'what moves me about the Jewish Museum being the host of this exhibition is that it simply embraces the uniqueness of Jewish history

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<sup>83</sup> The Jewish Museum's final report.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Yigal Scheleifer, 'Who owns the show?', in the *Jerusalem Post*, (25 February, 2002).

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Belasco, 'Show down at the Jewish Museum', in the *Jewish Week*, (1 March, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Menachem Rosensaft, 'The case against *Mirroring Evil*', in the *Jewish Week*, (8 March, 2002).

and the universality of human evil'.<sup>88</sup> Art historian Reesa Greenberg conceded that while 'visitors may feel deeply threatened, outraged, or betrayed, it is safer to explore the implications of the continuing fascination with the Nazi era within the confines of a Jewish Museum than outside of it'.<sup>89</sup>

In the early 1970s, a committee appointed by the JTS to determine the Museum's future also included Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was regarded to be one of the most knowledgeable and sympathetic advocates of the Museum. In his speech addressing the committee, Heschel saw a great future for the Museum as 'an inspiration to people all over America. It could be an instrument for saving our youth. It could show the beauty and meaning of Jewish life. People would come to understand that the Jewish Museum makes a real contribution to their existence'.<sup>90</sup>

Three decades later, the Jewish Museum showed not only the beauty and meaning of Jewish life, but also, proved that it can address more sensitive and problematic aspects concerning Jewish-American life and its relationship with Holocaust memory, that can no longer be ignored.

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<sup>88</sup> Brad Hirschfield, 'The case for Mirroring Evil', in the *Jewish Week*, (22 February, 2002).

<sup>89</sup> Reesa Greenberg, 'Playing it Safe? The Display of transgressive art in the Museum', in *Mirroring Evil*, p. 94-5.

<sup>90</sup> Heschel quoted by Ruth S. Seldin on p. 84.



### III

#### A Discussion of Major Aspects of the Holocaust Memory Narrative in America raised by *Mirroring Evil* exhibition

##### 1) 'Don't Touch My Holocaust':<sup>91</sup> Holocaust Sanctification and Trivialization

By freeing up our representations of the Holocaust we will secure, overall, a greater, more nuanced, and more useful understanding of it. This means expressing the Holocaust [...] – through comedies, westerns, thrillers, romances, science fictions, fables, whatnot – in addition to the more usual factual treatments. It means playing the many forms and degrees of irony. Our fear of trivialising the Holocaust will end and our understanding of it increase once we introduce a degree of relativity to its representations.

Yann Martel <sup>92</sup>

British historian Tim Cole argues that the Holocaust in the American context has come to be perceived as an a-historical event, as it has been detached from the European historical context and turned into an 'American myth', where 'myth has become more important than reality'.<sup>93</sup> The term 'myth', derived from the ancient Greek word 'muthos' refers to an 'utterance' or a 'tale' about gods and heroes that conveys a moral lesson, and is perceived as a true story. Another understanding of myth comes from Roland Barthes, who argues, in his pivotal study *Mythologies*, that myth 'abolishes the complexity of human acts [and] gives

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<sup>91</sup> Title of an Israeli documentary film (1996) by Asher Tlalim based on the Akko Theater Centre's award-winning performance *Arbeit Macht Frei* dealing with the transmission of Holocaust memory to third generation and to non-Jewish groups. According to Omer Bartov, this is a film about ownership which asks: 'Whom does the Holocaust belong to and what are the implications of owning it?', see Omer Bartov, *The 'Jew' in cinema : from The golem to Don't touch my Holocaust*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 290-306.

<sup>92</sup> Yann Martel, 'Let's take artistic license with the Holocaust', in *The Times*, (22 May, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: from Auschwitz to Schindler: how history is bought, packaged, and sold*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 186.

them the simplicity of essences'.<sup>94</sup> Through myth, the world is organised upon well-defined principles which are difficult to challenge or overthrow. Myths also encourage a unifying perspective of the world. Consequently, Barthes defines myth as 'the language of the oppressor',<sup>95</sup> with the effect of abolishing counter-narratives that are deemed to be ontologically impossible. The appropriation of the Holocaust as 'myth' – as a fixed and 'sacred' narrative that cannot be challenged – has encouraged the proliferation of a hegemonic discourse about the Holocaust.

At this point, it is worth noting that, in their own defence, Holocaust deniers have criticised what they also regard as a hegemonic historical narrative of the Holocaust.<sup>96</sup> This represents another means of deception employed by deniers to gain public credibility, and must by no means be confused with the critical observations of Peter Novick in America and of Adi Ophir in Israel about the existence of a sacred narrative of the Holocaust. Indeed, there has been a considerable degree of confusion among some scholars,<sup>97</sup> who failed to distinguish among a scholarly viewpoint about the state of Holocaust memorialisation and Holocaust denial.

In the following, I will address the discourse about the Holocaust representation initiated by Elie Wiesel, and will inquire to what extent his opinions have shaped Jewish-American perception of the Holocaust, and, consequently, have also played a role in determining the public's reception of *Mirroring Evil* exhibition. Wiesel's principal contention is that 'the dead are in the possession of a secret that we, the living, are neither worthy of, or capable of recovering... The Holocaust [is] the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery never to be

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<sup>94</sup> Ronald Barthes, *Mythologies*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 143.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>96</sup> This is extensively discussed by Deborah Lipstadt and Pierre Vidal-Naquet mentioned in chapter three.

<sup>97</sup> An example of a study that promotes confusion between Holocaust deniers and scholars that are critical of narratives of Holocaust memorialisation in Israel is Elhanan Yakira's *Post-Zionism, post-Holocaust: three essays on denial, forgetting, and the delegitimation of Israel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

comprehended or transmitted'.<sup>98</sup> Statements like these have prompted American historian Peter Novick to view Wiesel as 'not only the emblematic survivor but the most influential interpreter of the Holocaust as a sacred mystery'.<sup>99</sup> References to the Holocaust as a 'quasi-sacred event' and a 'mystery' are used by Novick to explain Wiesel's belief in the un-comprehensibility and un-representability of the Holocaust, and his strong opposition to the depiction of the Holocaust in popular culture.

In this context, one must remember that the notion of the impossibility of understanding the Holocaust or of 'making sense of the senseless' as Robert Fine puts it, is discussed in the works of many philosophers of the Holocaust.<sup>100</sup> Hannah Arendt, for instance, refers to the Holocaust as marking a 'rupture with civilization'. She writes: 'Not only are all our political concepts and definitions insufficient for an understanding of totalitarian phenomena but also all our categories of thought and standards of judgement seem to explode in our hands the instant we try to apply them'.<sup>101</sup> Arendt's perspective has inspired other reflections on the Holocaust that underlined the non-representability and ineffability of the Holocaust. British philosopher Gillian Rose was one of the first to challenge this perspective. Rose coined the phrase 'Holocaust piety' to refer to the argument of the non-representability of the Holocaust. She pitted against this tradition of thought, stating that:

To argue for silence, prayer, the banishment equally of poetry and knowledge, in short, the witness of ineffability, that is, non-representability is *to mystify something we dare not understand*, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human [...] what is it that we do not want to

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<sup>98</sup> Wiesel quoted in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), p. 274.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Fine, 'Hannah Arendt: Politics and Understanding after the Holocaust', in Robert Fine and Charles Turner (eds.), *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 19-47. One such example is Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: phrases in dispute*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

<sup>101</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), p. 302.

understand? What is it that Holocaust piety [...] protects us from understanding?<sup>102</sup>

One can argue that the Jewish Museum endeavoured to pose a similar question, asking the American public to reflect upon the presence of Nazism and of fascism in their midst. Furthermore, the argument put forward that *Mirroring Evil* trivialises the Holocaust can be viewed as an example of ‘Holocaust piety’. Indeed, one of the most prominent criticism brought by critics such as Wiesel, is that the exhibition promoted art that ‘trivializes’ the Holocaust and which causes pain to the Holocaust survivors.

In the course of this chapter, I suggest that the accusation of ‘Holocaust trivialization’ originates in the monolithic culture of representation of the Holocaust as an event whose ‘sacredness’ cannot be ‘touched’. Furthermore, I argue that this exhibition came under attack because it proposed an alternative to the discourse of Holocaust sanctification.

Etymologically, the Latin word *trivialis* stands for ‘appropriate to the street corner, commonplace, and vulgar’.<sup>103</sup> To trivialize an idea means to rob it of its integrity, respectability, and ultimately its meaning. Trivialization includes a degree of irony and satire, as it questions the significance of an idea, by belittling it, often by means of parody. In the context of Holocaust historiography, for example, this term appeared in the *Historikerstreit* in Germany during the 1980s, which raised questions about the perils of ‘normalizing’ German history, by comparing the Nazi genocide with the Soviet Gulag. It was suggested that by ‘normalizing’ German history, one runs the risk of trivializing the tragedy of European Jewry.<sup>104</sup> More often, however, the verdict of ‘trivialization’ crops up in the context of public discussions about the limits of representation of the Holocaust. Marvin Chomsky’s miniseries *Holocaust* broadcast by NBC in 1978 in

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<sup>102</sup> Gillian Rose, *Mourning becomes the law*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1996), p. 43. Rose’s emphasis.

<sup>103</sup> Definition retrieved from <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=trivial&searchmode=none>, (accessed on 20.11.2010).

<sup>104</sup> Jüger Habermas’s contributions to the Historian’s Debate (1986). See volume of essays ‘Special Issue on Historikerstreit’ in the *New German Critique*, 44 (Spring-Summer, 1988).

the USA, and later in Europe, was important in raising the American public's awareness of the Jewish suffering.<sup>105</sup> The series also prompted public discussions about the trivialization of the Holocaust.

This is epitomised in Wiesel's response to the film in the *New York Times*: 'Trivializing the Holocaust. Semi-fact and semi-fiction' (1978), which marks the debut of an ongoing public discussion, in the United States, about the 'trivializing' potential of art. The argument that Wiesel brings to criticize the docu-drama has to do with the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. He writes: 'But the Holocaust is unique, not just another event, [...] Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized. [...] The Holocaust transcends history'. Wiesel concludes his essay by stressing the mystery surrounding this event as: 'Only those who were there know what it was; the others will never know'.<sup>106</sup> It is no coincidence that the bulk of the discussion about Holocaust trivialization was carried out in the *New York Times*. According to critic Laurel Leff the *New York Times* 'has long been considered a Jewish newspaper'; 'the most important newspaper in the city with more Jews than any other in the world. It has a devoted Jewish audience, who has made the *Times* their "American Bible"'.<sup>107</sup>

Trivialisation of the Holocaust, according to Wiesel, stems from the mixing of fact with fiction in an attempt to capture what cannot even be imagined. If the Holocaust is a 'mystery' – in the theological sense of the word, referring to a

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<sup>105</sup> In the United States, 65 million saw the first series, and overall, more than 100 million watched the four series. Especially in Germany, the mini-series sparked intense and difficult discussions about the Holocaust, enabling the German nation, for the first time, to publicly confront its history of national guilt. Since then, there has been a flourishing in public activities of Holocaust commemoration, and a debate about Germany's 'coming to terms with the past'. The series were also broadcast in France and Austria. For a discussion about its reception in France see Annette Wieviorka's *The Era of the Witness*, Jared Stark (trans.), (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 96-145.

<sup>106</sup> Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust. Semi-fact and semi-fiction', in the *New York Times*, (16 April, 1978), p. 75.

<sup>107</sup> For a more detailed discussion about the Jewish character of the *New York Times* see L. Leff, 'A tragic Fight in the Family': the *New York Times*, Reform Judaism and the Holocaust', in *American Jewish History*, 88 (1) (March, 2000), pp. 5-8.

religious truth obtained via divine revelation<sup>108</sup> which cannot be penetrated by human understanding – one could ask: is it not one of the functions of art to reach, by means of the artist's imagination, beyond the limits of human comprehension and convey this sense of 'mystery'?

Wiesel and his supporters seem to overlook that art can enable the viewer to transcend reality and catch a glimpse of what lies beyond the comprehensible. Despite this, Wiesel's views about trivializing the Holocaust in popular culture and in the media have, since the 1980s, earned increasing public acclaim. The discussion prompted by Roberto Benigni's film *Life is Beautiful* (1997), nearly two decades later, is a telling example of the enduring impact that Wiesel's views have on the American public. In his article, 'Life is Beautiful revisited', Michael McGonigle discredits the film as Holocaust trivialization by invoking Wiesel's comments about *Holocaust*.<sup>109</sup>

We need to distinguish here between the discussion about the limits of Holocaust representation undertaken in the academy,<sup>110</sup> prompted by Adorno's dictum, 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric',<sup>111</sup> and the engagement with this issue in the 'opinion' sections of American newspapers. In comparison with scholarly publications, the opinions of public figures expressed in the print media reach a much larger audience, and, therefore, have a much greater impact. Wiesel's interventions are a case in point. He warns about the effects increased interest in the Holocaust could have upon the American-Jewish community, arguing that it would lead to saturation and apathy.

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<sup>108</sup> See definition retrieved from <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=mystery&searchmode=none> (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

<sup>109</sup> Michael McGonigle, 'Life is Beautiful revisited', retrieved from <http://www.filmbuffonline.com/Features/WorldWarIIOscar/LifeIsBeautiful.htm> (accessed on 21.11. 2010).

<sup>110</sup> Saul Friedländer's volume *Probing the limits of representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) is a representative example.

<sup>111</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, p. 34.

Once again, he invokes the argument of ‘trivialization’ in 1989, in an article entitled ‘Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory’ in the *New York Times*.<sup>112</sup> Here, he suggests that, indeed, any artistic representation risks trivialising the Holocaust. Wiesel, thus, purposefully creates the category of ‘the trivial’ to criticize artistic representations of the Holocaust. He employs terms such as ‘exploit’, ‘cheap’, and ‘vulgar’ to refer to art’s ‘trivialising’ of memory. Wiesel identifies the phenomenon of Holocaust exploitation, stating that since ‘the Holocaust has become a fashionable subject, film and theatre producers and television networks have set out to exploit it, often in the most vulgar sense of the word’. He again mentions *Holocaust* (1979) and *Sophie’s Choice* (1982) as examples of ‘cheap and simplistic melodramas’. Moreover, he employs religious language to reinforce his point. Terms such as ‘blasphemy’ and ‘profanation’ are coupled with statements such as: ‘an act that strikes at all that is sacred’ and the observation: ‘we are, in fact, living through a period of general de-sanctification of the Holocaust’.<sup>113</sup> Yet, Wiesel’s banishing of art as a ‘form of insulting the dead’ is only secondary to the central argument of his article – that of the uniqueness and the un-representability of the Holocaust, which can only be approached with silence. According to him, ‘Auschwitz is something else, always something else. It is a universe outside the universe, a creation that exists parallel to creation. Auschwitz lies on the other side of life and on the other side of death’. Moreover, ‘the Holocaust is not a subject like all the others. It imposes limits’.<sup>114</sup>

Wiesel’s calls for restrictions on representations of the Holocaust have been questioned. Critics have argued that attaching a mystical-religious dimension to the Holocaust turns the discourse about it into a dogma – an authoritative idea which can not be disputed. The general indictment of representation becomes thus a core principle of the increasingly common view which sees the Holocaust

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<sup>112</sup> Elie Wiesel, ‘Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory’, in the *New York Times*, (11 June, 1989).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

as possessing a religious dimension.<sup>115</sup> The essayist Philip Lopate, in 'Resistance to the Holocaust' (1989) in *Tikkun* hints at this issue when he refers to Wiesel as the creator of the idea that 'you can't make art out of the Holocaust', and that 'art and Auschwitz are antithetical'.<sup>116</sup> Lopate points to 'a whole body of splendid art about the tragedy of the Jews under the Nazis', such as 'Primo Levi's books, the poems of Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, Tadeusz Kantor's theatrical pieces, films like Resnais's *Night and Fog*, Ophuls's *The Sorrow and Pity* and *Hotel Terminus*, Losey's *Mr. Klein*, Corti's trilogy *Where To and Back...*'.<sup>117</sup> Art, including its traditional mimetic representations, Lopate stresses, is indeed capable of representing the Holocaust. With regard to the notion of 'desecration' he adds:

I would not like to think that every stage piece about the Holocaust must perforce follow the stripped, ritualized strategies of Grotowski's or Kantor's theatrical works – effective as these may be by themselves – out of some deluded idea that a straight naturalistic approach would desecrate the 6 million dead.<sup>118</sup>

This idea is more openly expressed in Peter Novick's pivotal study *The Holocaust in American Life*. Novick argues that Holocaust sanctification gained acclaim in the United States:

The Holocaust was a holy event that resisted profane representation that it was uniquely inaccessible to explanation or understanding, that survivors had privileged interpretative authority – all these themes continue to resonate [...] That the Holocaust was in some undefined way, sacred and mandated some sort of special rules for its representation was a proposition to which a great many people paid lip service.<sup>119</sup>

Questions about who 'owns' the memory of the Holocaust and for what purposes one invokes it became increasingly debated in the American public

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<sup>115</sup> This idea is supported by Peter Novick and critically discussed by Philip Lopate in 'Resistance to the Holocaust' in *Tikkun*, (May-June, 1989). Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir refers to it in his essay 'On sanctifying the Holocaust: an Anti-Theological Treatise' that appeared in Shelley Hornstein, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein (eds.), *Impossible Images. Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 195-207.

<sup>116</sup> Philip Lopate, 'Resistance to the Holocaust' in *Tikkun*, (May-June, 1989).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, pp. 211-212.



sphere. This is also the context within which the response to *Mirroring Evil* has to be seen. In the discussion about the exhibition, objections similar to those brought by Wiesel two decades earlier were voiced. In the report in the New York tabloid, the *Record*, James Ahearn reports the protesters' slogans: 'This is not art. This is profanity and desecration',<sup>120</sup> and a *New York Times* editorial calls it 'The Art of Banality'.<sup>121</sup> The repetition of terms alluding to the supposedly trivializing dimension of artistic representation of the Holocaust confirms the influence Wiesel's discourse continued to exercise on the American media. They demonstrate the degree of entrenchment of the discourse of Holocaust sanctification in the American society. It was *Mirroring Evil* that brought this discourse more prominently to the public's attention.

Elie Wiesel divulges his opinions about *Mirroring Evil* exhibition in an article in *Newsday* on 1 February 2002. It is no surprise that his op-ed 'Holocaust exhibit betrays History' appeared in a New-York broadsheet whose target readership is the general American public. This testifies to the role Wiesel had acquired as the speaker of the Holocaust as a unique event, whose implications are universal. In the title of his article Wiesel refers to a 'Holocaust exhibit'. This is telling of the manner in which the exhibition has been perceived, and is at odds with the Museum's own objective: to create an exhibition that poses questions about how images of Hitler and Nazism have penetrated popular culture and the media, and how the evil they represent is of current relevance to all members of American society.<sup>122</sup>

In his article, Wiesel endeavours to remain factual by relying on historical references and examples that illustrate each of his points. Undoubtedly, this approach gives value and credibility to his comments. The argument put forward in this op-ed is, if not identical, then very similar to the one he had advanced in his 1989 article. Wiesel shows caution and restraint in how he frames his

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<sup>120</sup> James Ahrean, 'Hyping Nazism in a Jewish Museum, in the *Record*, (20 March, 2002).

<sup>121</sup> 'The art of Banality', in the *New York Times*, (22 March, 2002).

<sup>122</sup> See statements by Joan Rosenbaum and Norman Kleeblatt in the preface of *Mirroring Evil* art catalogue.

opinions, and reassures his readers, from the very beginning, that he is not qualified to speak about art: 'Not being an art critic, it is difficult for me to comment on the exhibit *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*. Difficult and painful'.<sup>123</sup> He, thus, claims to only speak as a Holocaust survivor. It is from this position that he draws his authority. Wiesel sees the exhibits as a threat to the history and memory of the Holocaust. He does not make any distinction between the historical narration of the events and this representation by artists. According to him, an artwork depicting aspects of the Holocaust is also a historical testimony. This is the basis for the moral thrust of his criticism. Wiesel neglects to see that whereas this might have been valid in the case of survivors who chose art as a form of testimony, it is no longer the case for the generations that followed. Their connection to the event, as James Young has remarked, is 'vicarious' and 'mediated'.<sup>124</sup> Wiesel attempts to convince his readers of the contrary, claiming that the post-war generations are in fact re-writing history by means of art. Moreover, he suggests that art itself has caused the trivialization of the Holocaust, claiming: 'what a number of survivors have feared has happened. With its appearance in the art world, the kitsch and vulgarization of the Holocaust has taken a big step forward – or backward, depending on your point of view'.<sup>125</sup>

In order to convince his readers of the legitimacy of his claim, Wiesel briefly recounts the development of literary and filmic representations of the Holocaust in America, as an 'attempt to break the silence' that was common during the post-war years. Initially, Wiesel positions visual art as peripheral to trivialization, which was mainly present in 'novels, plays and serial docudramas', stating: 'art, however, took its time to jump on the band-wagon'. He implies that pictorial art has not endeavoured to represent the Holocaust because of 'the fear of violating, by depicting it, an event that by its scope and ontological nature touched upon mystery and sacredness'. In the following paragraph he dismisses the artists'

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<sup>123</sup> Elie Wiesel, 'Holocaust Exhibit Betrays History', in the *Newsday*, (1 February, 2002).

<sup>124</sup> See 'Introduction' by James Young, *At memory's edge: after-images of the Holocaust in contemporary art and architecture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 1-12.

<sup>125</sup> Elie Wiesel, 'Holocaust Exhibit betrays History'.

good faith, claiming that in fact '[art] may justify its sovereignty precisely through a lack of respect towards all authority'.<sup>126</sup> *Mirroring Evil*, he argues, illustrates this, since 'all it takes is a glance at the catalogue to realize that some of the works have exceeded the limit not of morality – a work of art is in and of itself neither moral nor immoral – but of simple decency'.<sup>127</sup> The portrayal of Nazi perpetrators represents, according to Wiesel, the glorification of the victimiser, which is deeply offensive to Holocaust survivors and their families:

Perhaps some will say that for an artist to show the perverse countenance of the killer, after we have viewed the haunting face of the victims, is also serving memory. Others claim it to be a way to express outrage and anger. But did anyone think of the survivors and their families, for whom this approach constitutes an injury, an offence, and a humiliation of their past and their dead?

Wiesel demonstrates how different, from the Jewish Museum's intention, his interpretation of the exhibition really is. The historical truth of the Holocaust, he argues, is threatened by the artists. He asks:

But what if they [the artists] distort the truth and the suffering that several generations had to face? Therein lies the trap. Having the right to do something is one thing, but abusing that right is another. To turn a tragedy unparalleled in history into a grotesque caricature is not only to rob it of its meaning, but also to turn it into a lie. I call it a betrayal.<sup>128</sup>

One notices here that Wiesel's discourse appeals to the reader's emotions. Also, there is a tendency to generalize the experiences of the survivors. Instead of presenting the survivors as individuals, Wiesel refers to them as a group that shares a common history. He uses expressions such as 'the truth and the suffering', or 'the tragedy unparalleled in history' to turn the many-sidedness of the Holocaust into a unifying and inherently sacred story. Wiesel collapses the varied truth(s) and suffering(s) of those who survived Nazism into one single and

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

unique ‘truth’ of the Holocaust, and assumes that all survivors’ responses to the exhibition would be the same. His article ends by reiterating the essence of his argument – the ‘unparalleled’ and unique tragedy of the Jewish people, and the trivial and the distorting character of artistic representations, which, according to Wiesel, deny history rather than reinforce it.

Wiesel judges art only on the grounds of its mimetic practice, namely, art as a means to represent reality. He neglects to inform his readers about, what curator Norman Kleeblatt explains as the conceptual and non-mimetic dimension of the artworks, and about the non-commemorative aims of *Mirroring Evil*.

His concluding sentence: ‘I call it a betrayal’ has a performative dimension, as Wiesel ‘names’ *Mirroring Evil* a ‘betrayal’. The pronoun ‘it’ makes Wiesel’s comment slightly ambiguous, as we do not know whether he refers to the exhibition, its hosting by the Jewish Museum, or to both. John Austin has argued that naming is a performative act that has real consequences, since it can change the way we perceive reality.<sup>129</sup> Undoubtedly, Wiesel’s views had considerable repercussions. Not only did they intensify the criticism of some members of the Jewish community, but they were also uncritically adopted by non-Jewish critics of the exhibit. One example is Hilton Kramer, journalist of the *New York Observer*, who echoed Wiesel’s views about the ‘cheapening’ of Holocaust memory as follows:

Traditionally, the principal province of this trivializing process, which effectively trashes the moral gravity of history by turning fact into meretricious fiction, was to be found in movies, television, comic strips and other forms of pop culture.<sup>130</sup>

It is fair to say that Wiesel’s article also triggered a number of counterstatements. One comes from a prominent member of the Jewish community, Michael Berenbaum, who explains: ‘the offense is not trivialization of the dead, or the

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<sup>129</sup> See John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

<sup>130</sup> Hilton Kramer, ‘Jewish Museum Show, Full of Vile Crap, Not to be Forgiven’, in the *New York Observer*, (1 April, 2002).

means by which they were killed, but a confrontation with their killers'.<sup>131</sup> Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, too, commends the Museum: 'far from trivialization, such works heighten our ethical awareness and sharpen our sense of social responsibility'.<sup>132</sup> Hirschfield addresses the Jewish community and the American society by using the plural 'we'. He explains what 'social responsibility' should include: 'We share a sense of obligation to ask: who are we in the unfolding of human evil and the attempts to stop it, and what should be demanded of the society in which we live?' With regard to the claimed sacredness of the Holocaust, Hirschfield puts forward the following, 'after all', he reminds the American-Jewish community, 'among our proudest traditions as Jews, is our readiness to question the sacred truths of each era in which we live'.<sup>133</sup> The Holocaust, as the sacred truth of the Jewish people's modern European history, should be challenged. Hirschfield is not the only supporter of this idea.

Arguments against the claim of trivialization are also brought by Saul Scheidlinger, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry and reader of the *Jewish Week*. In a letter to the editors, dated 22 March 2002 and entitled 'Let ideas flow', he characterises *Mirroring Evil* as a 'satirization of the Nazi perpetrators', much like Art Spiegelman's book *Maus*. And, he argues that the exhibition should be viewed as: 'a constructive, paradoxical means of broadening the current generation's consciousness about the multifaceted aspects of this monumental human horror'.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, this comes very close to the objective of the Jewish Museum.

The leader of the camp that claims the sacrosanct nature of Holocaust memory and the im(possibility) of Holocaust representation is Menachem Rosensaft, founding Chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Survivors in America. His op-ed 'Demystifying Nazism, or Trivializing Its

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<sup>131</sup> Michael Berenbaum, 'Must Facing Evil itself be offensive?', in the *Jewish Week*, (18 February, 2002).

<sup>132</sup> Brad Hirschfield, 'The Case for Mirroring Evil', in the *Jewish Week*, (8 March, 2002).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Saul Scheidlinger, 'Letters to the Editor', 'Let Ideas Flow', in the *Jewish Week*, (22 March, 2002).

Victims? A Debate: How Pseudo-Artists Desecrate the Holocaust'<sup>135</sup> epitomizes a point of view radically different from the one proposed by James Young in his direct response to Rosensaft entitled: 'Demystifying Nazism, or Trivializing Its Victims? A Debate: Museum Show Truthfully Probes Society's Fascination with Evil' from 18 January 2002.<sup>136</sup> The clash of views revealed in their op-eds will be the subject of the next section.

In his article, Rosensaft faithfully reiterated Wiesel's observations about the trivial nature of art. We recognize Wiesel's comment about the tendency of filmic representations to encourage a 'reductionist' approach, by 'shrinking personalities to stereotypes and dialogues to clichés'.<sup>137</sup> References to art's potential to ridicule the experiences of the survivors are also found in Rosensaft's article. After having outlined his genealogical links to the survivors, from which he derives the authority which, in his view, confers on him the right to speak in their name, Rosensaft confesses: 'I deeply resent any satirizing of their death or desecration of their memory'.<sup>138</sup>

In contrast to Wiesel's more measured attempt to convince his readers that representation *per se* is trivializing the survivors' experience, which, as he explains, is *ipso facto* 'unnamable' and 'uncommunicable',<sup>139</sup> Rosensaft's response is direct and categorical as he asserts that:

Any desecration or trivialization of the Holocaust is abhorrent. For me, this is an absolute article of faith [...] Rather, I am distressed that the organizers and curators of this exhibition do not appear to grasp that the objects they have selected for inclusion are not merely sensationalist, but morally repugnant.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Menachem Rosensaft, 'Demystifying Nazism, or Trivializing Its Victims? A Debate: How Pseudo-Artists Desecrate the Holocaust', in the *Forward*, (18 January, 2002).

<sup>136</sup> James Young, 'Demystifying Nazism, or Trivializing Its Victims? A Debate: Museum Show Truthfully Probes Society's Fascination with Evil', in the *Forward*, (18 January, 2002).

<sup>137</sup> Wiesel, 'Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory'.

<sup>138</sup> Rosensaft, 'Demystifying Nazism, or Trivializing Its Victims?'

<sup>139</sup> Elie Wiesel, 'Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory'.

<sup>140</sup> Rosensaft.

He proceeds to compare the exhibition with the 9/11 attacks, to convince the readers of ‘the crude desecration of the Holocaust inherent in the display’. This comparison is meant to further antagonize the readers, and cause discontent. Furthermore, Rosensaft associates *Mirroring Evil* with a ‘form of anti-Semitism’ fit to be ‘sponsored by the Holocaust-denying Institute for Historical Review’. He claims to raise awareness of the gravity of the act perpetrated by the Jewish Museum, whose decision to endorse the exhibition is viewed as an extreme act of betrayal of Jewishness itself. Its display at the Jewish Museum is as injurious as the presentation of:

Arab art vilifying Israel, or paintings by a talented Klansman glorifying cross-burnings and the lynching of African Americans [...] a LEGO model of the ravaged World Trade Center, surrounded by severed plastic heads with tiny NYPD and FDNY caps, alongside a benign ‘Disney-like’ depiction of Osama bin Laden.<sup>141</sup>

Given the exhibition’s proximity to the 9/11 attacks and the vulnerability of a horror-stricken American society, Rosensaft’s comments were sure to touch a sensitive chord, not only among the Jews, but also in American society as a whole.

In response to Rosensaft’s accusations, James Young draws attention to the theme of the exhibition. It is no coincidence that the word Holocaust is absent from the title of his article in the *Forward*. Since the exhibition did not aim to address the Holocaust as such, but to interrogate evil – embodied by Nazism – and the way current society reacts to it. In his address Young attempts to convince Rosensaft of the well-meaning intentions of the Jewish Museum and of the aims of what he views as ‘a sober-minded show’. In his position as advisor to the curatorial team, and contributor to the exhibition’s catalogue, Young explains what the show never aimed to do, namely:

To offend visitors with viscerally charged images of Nazis and their victims. Rather, [it was meant] to explore very critically the manner in

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

which a new generation of artists has begun to integrate the images of the killers into their work, much of it conceptual and installation art.<sup>142</sup>

Young moves away from the issue of ‘trivialization’ as he raises the question of the emergence of an intergenerational discourse. To reinforce the relevance of this discourse, a section of his article is devoted to what he calls ‘the new phenomenon’. The defining characteristic of this new discourse is an interrogation of the meaning of evil, and of its place in Jewish collective memory. Young reminds his Jewish readers that the ‘blotting out’ of Nazi images from their consciousness leads to strengthening the victim status, and the perpetuation of the Nazi perpetrators’ influence upon Jewish identity. He states: ‘of course, such blotting out was never about merely forgetting the Jews’ tormentors. For by ritually condemning our enemies to oblivion, we repeat an unending Jewish curse that actually helps us remember them’.<sup>143</sup>

In response to Rosensaft’s allegation that *Mirroring Evil* shocked the viewers, Young argues that ‘the only thing more shocking than the images of the suffering victims is the depravity of the human beings who caused such suffering’. The intention of the new generation of artists is to devise a new angle to look at the Nazi genocide, and ‘confront the faces of evil’, which will enable them to arrive at a ‘deeper understanding of these events, and a deeper understanding of the human condition’.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the message transmitted by Young is that, indeed, a young generation of artists – the majority being Jewish – are posing questions about the universal nature of evil which no longer concerns Jews alone, but has become an inherent part of a broader American discourse. Young admits that the questions posed by the exhibition are ‘offensive’ but argues that, despite this, they must be raised.

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<sup>142</sup> James Young, ‘Demystifying Nazism, or Trivializing Its Victims? A Debate: Museum Show Truthfully Probes Society’s Fascination with Evil’.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



Unlike Rosensaft who labels the entire exhibition a ‘vulgar banalization’ of the memory of Holocaust survivors, Young claims that the artists are, in fact, raising the question of banalization, and not moving away from it. Even though the questions posed by the exhibition are difficult, they must be addressed:

What does it mean for Calvin Klein to sell contemporary perfumes and colognes in the Brekerian images of the Aryan ideal? And if this is possible, is it also possible to imagine oneself as an artist drinking a Diet Coke amidst emaciated survivors at Buchenwald? Indeed, just where are the limits of taste and irony here? And what should they be? [...] Can such art mirror evil and remain free of evil’s stench?<sup>145</sup>

Young responds to Rosensaft’s view that the artworks of *Mirroring Evil* de-sacralise and ridicule the suffering of the Holocaust survivors, by arguing for the validity of art. He takes Zbigniew Libera’s *Lego Concentration Camp* as an example, reminding Rosensaft that this artwork has been accredited by the New Jersey State Holocaust Education Committee which co-sponsored its display in an exhibition. In contrast to Rosensaft, Young confers a sense of legitimacy on Libera’s work, associating it with a different piece of art, now highly acclaimed in America, but which at the time of its launch also triggered discussion, Art Spiegelman’s comic *Maus. A survivor’s Tale* (1997). The similarities lie in the use of a similar concept, since, argues Young, ‘both have taken a seemingly “low form” of art and used it to address the artist’s own tortured relationship to a place and events he can’t know directly’. Young stresses that instead of ‘trivializing’ the memory of the Holocaust, the artist attempts to understand his own mediated connection with the event, and, more importantly, to provoke ‘thoughtful reflections on just how Auschwitz can be imagined by [anyone],<sup>146</sup> born after the terrible fact’.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>147</sup> Young.

Young allocated the act of remembering not only to the descendants of the survivors, but to anyone possessing the will to remember and the ability to imagine. Their genealogical origins do not make survivors the owners or keepers of Holocaust memory. Instead, the responsibility of remembering must be shared by all members of society. In its conclusion, Young's response centres on the generational issue, and puts forward the idea, also endorsed by the Jewish Museum that 'a new generation of artists' have emerged to confront an issue that concerns everyone – the presence of evil in society.<sup>148</sup> It is not surprising that such a take on the Holocaust appeared in the aftermath of 9/11. In the wake of the attacks at the World Trade Center, the discourse about evil proposed by *Mirroring Evil* favoured the construction of a new analogy in the American public consciousness between the Nazi evil, perpetrated against the Jews and the Arab evil directed against American society. It is debatable to what extent these narratives about evil have intertwined and have been absorbed in the American consciousness. What is clear, however, is that these remarks are not devoid of political implications.

According to Novick, for instance, Hitler and National Socialism were commonly associated in the American public sphere with 'ultimate evil', leading to the emergence of an American discourse about evil, which placed the Holocaust at the top of the pyramid of atrocities, diverting attention from the atrocities committed in the American land.<sup>149</sup> Similarly to the Holocaust, the events of 9/11 have gained a mythical status in the American public consciousness.

It is a well-known fact that foundational myths forge the basis of national consciousness and constitute the premises for the creation of any national identity. A question to be posed is to what degree has 9/11 penetrated and

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<sup>148</sup> Statements by curator Norman Kleeblatt and director Joan Rosenbaum, in *Mirroring Evil. Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* art catalogue.

<sup>149</sup> Novick, in *The Holocaust in American Life* suggested that the Holocaust has been appropriated in the American culture as a symbol of all evil, and has been manipulated to divert attention from the 'evil' committed against the Native Americans, pp. 189, 192, 197.

altered the American national story, and what is its connection, if any, with the Holocaust. Certainly the temporal proximity to the event of 9/11 has given *Mirroring Evil* a broader relevance. The discussion it prompted showed that questions regarding evil cannot be relegated to historiography, but should be addressed as a prescient subject that concerns the American society in the present.

The *Forward*, the oldest and most acclaimed Jewish journal in America, provided the platform for the discussion between Young and Rosensaft. It assured its readers of the Jewish character of this debate – as an internal discourse which addresses primarily the Jews in America. Young and Rosensaft appeal to different sectors of the Jewish community; the latter is a renowned speaker of the second generation, while the former is an eminent scholar of Holocaust studies and contributor to public debates on Holocaust memory.<sup>150</sup> The contention stemmed from the inherent difference in the perception of Holocaust memory and its representation. Rosensaft, drawing on Elie Wiesel rejects the ‘trivial’ art of *Mirroring Evil*. In contrast, Young, who has probed the limits of representation of the Holocaust, validates the questions posed by the artists, whom he defines as representatives of a ‘new generation’.

Both Rosensaft’s and Wiesel’s responses prompted questions about the boundaries of what constitutes a legitimate discourse about the Holocaust. They argued that there are moral reasons for restrictions on representation, since representation is, in fact, a distortion of the Holocaust’s historical truth. The call for limits in the context of Holocaust representation is not new. In his essay ‘The Representation of Limits’ (1992) scholar Berel Lang also interrogates the question of limits within the artistic and pictorial, rather than historical representation of the Holocaust. Lang invokes Leonardo Da Vinci’s idea in his *Treatise on Painting* that artistic representation, like the artist’s imagination, is

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<sup>150</sup> I refer here to James Young’s public involvement in the public discussion about Holocaust commemoration, occasioned by the decision to construct the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin Germany. He was appointed a member of the *Findungskommission*, by the Berlin Senate.

limitless. The question that derives from this, argues Lang, is: 'not what can or cannot be imagined, but whether limits apply to the forms that imagined representations do take'.<sup>151</sup> Lang identifies denial of the Holocaust as the moral limit and its trespassing by literary or filmic representation as unacceptable. He further argues that artistic representations are legitimate and moral as long as they inform about the Holocaust. Lang rejects the argument of the 'unspeakability' invoked by Wiesel and George Steiner, stating that even those so-called 'misrepresentations of the "Final Solution" – that seek the effects of melodrama, or sentimentality, or prurience', should be acceptable, because they 'serve a purpose in calling attention to the historical occurrence itself'. Because of this, silence is not desirable. Moreover, he concludes: 'it seems harsh enough, after all, to say of any particular representation that, in comparison to its voice, silence would have been more accurate or truthful'.<sup>152</sup>

The discussion about *Mirroring Evil* reinforced the idea that the arguments about limits of artistic representation were, in fact, arbitrarily imposed by those who claimed public authority over the subject of the Holocaust. And, by those who possessed a knowledge derived either from direct experience of the concentration camps, or from being related to those who survived the camps. The function of the argument of 'limits' is to delineate between those who are entitled to speak about the event and those who are not. The responses of the Jewish-American public in the print media and in the gallery books show that they were ready to challenge the restrictions imposed on Holocaust representation.

In his editorial in the *New York Times Magazine*, journalist Jack Hitt asserted that *Mirroring Evil* prompted a critical reflection about the ways in which the American people have become accustomed with what he calls 'slogans' that have no real meaning, since, due to their entrenchment in the American public

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<sup>151</sup> Berel Lang, 'The Representation of Limits', in Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 314.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

consciousness, they have become empty signifiers. He argues: 'So America's icons calcify into soothing monuments with simple slogans: Martin Luther King, the Virgin, and the gaunt survivor: "I have a dream", "Bless the children", and "Never Again"'. In a similar manner the debate about Holocaust sanctification has become stultified and prevented real questions. Hitt argues that the questions posed by *Mirroring Evil*, in fact, challenge those very 'icons' that have been uncritically adopted by the American people. He also suggests that these 'icons' have come to replace reflections or debates about how the lesson of 'never again' can be applied to the present. Instead, what remains unchallenged are conventions of Holocaust memorialisation deeply seated in the American society.<sup>153</sup>

Young's and Rosensaft's op-eds highlight the existence of two distinct approaches to the Holocaust within the second generation. The first argues that the Holocaust is a singular event which bears no comparison with anything else. A distinct feature of this view is the objection to Holocaust representation which is seen as threatening its historical uniqueness. The other approach reflects the emergence of criticism in regard to the restrictions imposed on representation. These restrictions are criticised as a form of control over the memory of the Holocaust, and simultaneously, a means by which the flow of discussion is being suppressed. If one looks at the visitors' comments in the exhibition's gallery books, one notices that these did not play by these restrictions. Their comments, discussed at a later point in this chapter, demonstrate a belief that art is capable of breaking the silence about the supposed 'unspeakable' nature of the Holocaust, and that those who participate in the 'breaking of the silence' are not only the survivors and their successors, but also members of a younger generation, and the American society as a whole.

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<sup>153</sup> Jack Hitt, 'America's Problem with Modern Art', in 'Ideas and Trends' in the *New York Times Magazine*, (17 March, 2002).

## 2) Victimization and the Jewish-American Identity Politics

I felt a pull of kitsch emotion myself on my only visit to Auschwitz in 1990. [...] I am not the child of Holocaust survivors. My mother was not Jewish, she lived in England and no immediate relations were killed by the Nazis. And yet even I couldn't escape the momentary feeling of vicarious virtue, especially when I came across tourists from Germany. They were the villains, I the potential victim.

Ian Buruma<sup>154</sup>

The Jewish Museum was sharply criticised for causing pain to the Holocaust survivors. The main critic Menachem Rosensaft accused the Museum of 're-victimizing' Jewish survivors by showing works which ignored their experiences of victimization and survival. His statements together with quotes from angry survivors were among the most frequently cited by the press. I shall argue that Rosensaft's and his supporters' opposition to the exhibition shows the resistance of some members of the American-Jewish public to discourses about the Holocaust that do not view the Jew as a victim. Furthermore, their opposition is indicative of a hierarchization of identity narratives, where the narrative of Jewish victimhood occupies the most prominent position in the collective consciousness of the Jewish-American public.

Though prevalent, the narrative of a Jewish identity based on the concept of victimization is far from being the only one. A stronger competing narrative is emerging within some sectors of the Jewish community spearheaded by the Jewish Museum and groups such as *CLAL*. The characteristics of this counter-narrative will be revealed in my analysis of the statements of the former USHMM director, Michael Berenbaum, and the representative of American-Jewish progressive thought, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield.

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<sup>154</sup> Ian Buruma, 'The Joys and Perils of Victimhood', in the *New York Review of Books*, 46 (6) (April, 1999).

Discourses of victimization are not uncommon in the United States, where, as Young has put it ‘the Holocaust – once it became its own archetype and entered the public imagination as an independent icon – also became a figure for subsequent pain, suffering and destruction’.<sup>155</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, too, suggests that the Holocaust has increasingly come to occupy a central place in the identity-politics of American Jews, in particular for the children of the ‘Jewish greatest generation that fought in WWII’. For them, the author suggests, ‘what one thought of the Holocaust, what lessons one derived from it, how one commemorated it mattered a great deal’.<sup>156</sup>

Paula E. Hyman’s article: ‘New Debate on the Holocaust. Has the popularization of this tragedy diluted its meaning and diminished other aspects of Judaism’, in the *New York Times Magazine* (14 September, 1980), inaugurated a scholarly discourse critical of the Holocaust’s presence in the American public sphere. Hyman addresses the generation born after the Holocaust, who studied the Holocaust at school, and she inquires about the risks involved in appropriating the Holocaust as a central signifier of Jewish identity. Located within a trans-national framework, Paula Hyman’s views are not singular. The eminent French-Jewish intellectual Alain Finkielkraut, in his collection of essays, *Le Juif Imaginaire* published in France in 1980 pointed out how the sense of identity of the post-Holocaust generation is intricately connected with the sense of victimhood. In the introduction to his book, Finkielkraut underlines how the suffering inherited from his parents became the core of his post-Holocaust Jewish identity:

The Judaism I had received was the most beautiful present a post-genocidal child could imagine. I inherited a suffering to which I had not been subjected, for without having to endure oppression, the identity of the victim was mine. [...] Without exposure to real danger, I had heroic

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<sup>155</sup> James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, narrative and the consequences of interpretation*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 118.

<sup>156</sup> Deborah Dash Moore (ed.), *American Jewish Identity Politics*, (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2008), p. 12.

stature – to be Jewish was enough to escape the anonymity of an identity indistinguishable from others, and the dullness of an uneventful life.<sup>157</sup>

Hyman reiterates Finkelkraut's argument as she draws attention to the emphasis that is placed on identification with Holocaust victims and survivors at summer camps, organised for Jewish teenagers, which: 'promote role playing and advertise the Holocaust experience as an integral part of their camp programs'.<sup>158</sup>

Young people are inclined to absorb the opinions of the adult generation. Their identity, still in formation, is more likely to be influenced by narratives which foreground the notion of victimhood. Hyman informs her readers that American-Jewish educators and scholars have warned of the dangers these youngsters are exposed to through excessive identification with the victims. She cites Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, director of Hillel-Centre for Jewish life at Yale University, and Jacob Neusner, Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University, as examples. While the former 'deplores the mentality that takes the Holocaust as the model for Jewish destiny', the latter claims that the adoption of the Holocaust as 'the central myth by which American Jews seek to make sense of themselves is inappropriate [and reflects] the vicariousness with which American Jews construct their identity'.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, Neusner argues that 'the turning of the murder of European Jewry into a paramount symbol of what it means to be a Jew, presents altogether too simple and too repulsive an account of reality'.<sup>160</sup>

According to Hyman, these critics mark the beginning of an interrogation of the cultural appropriation of Holocaust memory, as they 'question the place of the Holocaust in secular and Jewish education, as well as in the American public life'. Furthermore, contends Hyman, 'critics worry about its impact upon the image and self-image of Jews, and upon Jewish-gentile relations'. She argues that: 'the

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<sup>157</sup> Alain Finkelkraut, *The Imaginary Jew*, (Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> Paula Hyman, 'New Debate on the Holocaust', in the *New York Times Magazine*, (14 September, 1980).

<sup>159</sup> Arnold Wolf and Jacob Neusner quoted by Paula Hyman, in 'New Debate on the Holocaust'.

<sup>160</sup> Hyman.



Holocaust must be commemorated and its lessons taught, but, it should serve neither as the organising myth of the Jewish community in America, nor as the rationale of Jewish survival'.<sup>161</sup>

The issues highlighted by Hyman in the early 1980s, constitute the subject of a more pronounced academic debate in the late 1990s. Again, it was Peter Novick's book that invoked them. The Holocaust and the victimization of the Jewish people – as main tropes of Jewish identity – occupy the centre of Novick's analysis of the role of the Holocaust in Jewish-American life. Novick's book gained a significant amount of publicity, and garnered both intense criticism and praise. One of the critical responses came from historian Severin Hochberg, who doubted Novick's judgement about the causes for the impact of the Holocaust on American society. He claimed that '[Novick] relie[d] far too heavily on the supposed influence of Jewish mass media moguls to explain popular American interest in the subject' thereby disregarding other factors. Among these, he counts the American involvement in World War II, perceived as the 'only unambiguously good war in the nation's history', the perception of Hitler as the 'Absolute Evil', and most importantly, the 'embodiment of everything that was 'un-American''.<sup>162</sup>

Historian Laurence Baron, on the other hand, approved of Novick's study stating that: 'His analysis of Holocaust commemoration should not be misconstrued as a form of Holocaust denial, but rather as a warning against reducing the Holocaust to trite lessons that enhance Jewish identity or advance a variety of contemporary causes'.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, Novick's book marked a turning point in the scholarly approach to the Holocaust, proposing a critical review on how Holocaust memory has been integrated within the Jewish-American

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Severin Hochberg, 'Review', in *The Journal of American History*, 87 (3) (December, 2000), p. 1101.

<sup>163</sup> Lawrence Baron, 'Experiencing, Explaining, and Exploiting the Holocaust', in *Judaism*, (Spring, 2001), retrieved from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0411/is\\_2\\_50/ai\\_76026453/pg\\_5/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0411/is_2_50/ai_76026453/pg_5/), (accessed on 20.11. 2010).

consciousness.<sup>164</sup> In conclusion to his discussion, Novick makes the following remarks, which, as I shall suggest, are also central to the debate about *Mirroring Evil*:

There is a sense in which Emil Fackenheim was right to say that for Jews to forget Hitler's victims would be to grant him a 'posthumous victory'. But it would be an even greater posthumous victory for Hitler were we to tacitly endorse his definition of ourselves as despised pariahs, by making the Holocaust the emblematic Jewish experience.<sup>165</sup>

Novick draws attention to how the Holocaust, as the most emblematic form of Jewish suffering, can easily turn into an obsession and warns about the possible consequences that this position would ensue for the Jews. The debate surrounding *Mirroring Evil* included a similar argument. The emotional response of second-generation Jews headed by Menachem Rosensaft and Dov Hikind is grounded in the belief in victimhood which, as Novick pointed out, came to dominate American-Jewish identity.

Rosensaft is one prominent figure of the second generation. His role as promoter of Holocaust commemoration has been recognised by the World Jewish Congress, which appointed him General Counsel: 'The son of two survivors of the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, he has long been a leader in Holocaust remembrance activities.'<sup>166</sup> His affiliation to the second-generation movement together with his take on the mission of the second-generation Jews in America is enunciated in his essay 'I was born in Bergen-Belsen':

More than two thousand Jewish children were born in the displaced person camps of Bergen-Belsen in Germany between 1945 and 1950. [...] Most of us have never met, but we know one another intimately.

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<sup>164</sup> A highly-disputed study published during the same time period was Norman Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, (New York: Verso, 2000) in which Finkelstein claims that Jews obtained financial gains out of the Holocaust. The book antagonised the Jewish-American academia. Novick argued against Finkelstein's book.

<sup>165</sup> Novick, p. 281.

<sup>166</sup> Statement retrieved from <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/8438> (accessed on 22.11. 2010).

Together with all the other Jews of our generation, whose parents experienced Hitler's Europe, we belong to a special group: We are the children of the survivors of the Holocaust. [...] We were given life and placed on this world with a solemn obligation. Our task is to remind the world of the Holocaust to prevent its recurrence.<sup>167</sup>

By using the plural 'we', Rosensaft speaks in the name of an entire group. One cannot help but wonder to what extent the second generation should be viewed as a unitary group whose collective identity is founded exclusively upon victimhood. Is identification with the Holocaust victim status the single defining trait of the second generation? Or, 'is there more to the children of survivors than being children of survivors?' ponders Arlene Stein.<sup>168</sup>

Since the 1960s, voices among the second generation have publicly challenged the victim status. One such example is given by journalist Jeannette Friedman, who rejects the 'brooding over one's losses' and is in favour of 'seizing the possibility for radical change in the present'.<sup>169</sup> These convictions gained broader publicity in the 1990s, when, as Arlene Stein points out, 'a number of critics came to wonder whether the politicization of what was once personal and private had gone too far'.<sup>170</sup> Among these critics is sociologist Frank Furedi who bemoaned the ways the second-generation, in contrast to their parents' generation, have publicised their victim-identity by acting out their emotions in public. Furedi calls attention to the following:

Many of the direct survivors of the death camps talked very little in public about their terrible experience. Their dignified, self-contained response stands in sharp contrast to the behaviour of their children and grandchildren today: the so-called second and third-generation survivors. In recent years, some of the promoters of second-generation groups have

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<sup>167</sup> Menachem Z. Rosensaft, 'I Was Born in Bergen-Belsen', in Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger (eds.), *Second Generations Voices. Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p. 198.

<sup>168</sup> Arlene Stein, 'Feminism, Therapeutic Culture, and the Holocaust in the United States: The Second Generation Phenomenon', in *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, 16 (1) (Fall, 2009), p. 48.

<sup>169</sup> Friedman quoted by Stein on p. 47.

<sup>170</sup> Stein, p. 46.

criticized their parents for bottling up their emotions and refusing to embrace a victim identity.<sup>171</sup>

What worries Furedi appears to be the gratuitous appropriation of a victim-identity, and the perpetuation of what he terms, 'a language of emotionalism' when speaking about recent Jewish history. Unlike others, Furedi declares that even though his family perished in the Holocaust, he does not consider himself a second-generation victim. Written in January 2002, Furedi's article coincides with the emerging debate about *Mirroring Evil* at the Jewish Museum in New York.

In this debate, Rosensaft too, appeals to the emotions and 'emotionalism' by frequently using words such as 'painful', 'offensive to the Holocaust survivors', 'causing pain',<sup>172</sup> 'distressful', 'demeaning of the suffering of the victims'.<sup>173</sup> Rosensaft has shown fierce determination to defend and keep the memory of Jewish persecution alive for generations to come. He proclaims his 'commitment to human rights, his readiness to apply the lessons of the Holocaust to contemporary issues while at all times emphasizing its Jewish particularity'.<sup>174</sup> His role as an advocate of Holocaust commemoration, but also his views on the role of second and third-generation Jews are clearly outlined in a speech given at Bergen Belsen, in 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the camp's liberation:

Our parents and grandparents survived to bear witness. We in turn must ensure that their memories, which we have absorbed into ours, will remain as a permanent warning to humanity.[...] Our place must be at the forefront of the struggle against every form of racial, religious or ethnic hatred. Together with others of the post-Holocaust generations, we must raise our collective voices on behalf of all, Jews and non-Jews alike, who are subjected to discrimination and persecution, or who are threatened by

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<sup>171</sup> Frank Furedi, 'The second generation of Holocaust survivors' in *Spiked*, (24 January, 2002) Retrieved from <http://www.spiked-online.com/articles/00000000545B.htm>, (accessed on 22.11.2010).

<sup>172</sup> 'Pain', 'painful' appears in numerous articles in the Jewish press such as in the article 'Constructing a Controversy: Exhibit toes a fine line between art and memory' in the *Jewish Exponent*, (14 March, 2002).

<sup>173</sup> Statement by Rosensaft cited by Alan Cooperman, 'Museum Seeks to ease anger over Holocaust art', in the *Washington Post*, (2 March, 2002).

<sup>174</sup> Rosensaft, 'I Was Born in Bergen-Belsen', p. 198.

annihilation, anywhere in the world. We may not be passive, or allow others to be passive, in the face of oppression, for we know only too well that the ultimate consequence of apathy and silence was embodied forever in the flames of Auschwitz and the mass-graves of Bergen Belsen.<sup>175</sup>

Rosensaft's intervention in the debate about *Mirroring Evil* should be thus viewed in light of his commitment to speak out against anything that might threaten the memory and experiences of the survivors.

Even though less outspoken, other figures of the second generation joined Rosensaft, among them the novelist Thane Rosenbaum who stated in *Tikkun* that the artists and the museum 'are wilfully wounding people who have already experienced unimaginable injury', and that their 'suffering is being mocked'.<sup>176</sup> The same sentiment was expressed in yet more drastic terms by Rabbi Gershon Tannenbaum, director of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, who posed the following rhetorical question: 'How can a Jewish house of treasures hurt Jews, stab Jews, pierce their hearts and defame the memory of the Holocaust? This is something that we cannot believe, we cannot abide – and we will not stand by silently.'<sup>177</sup>

Not all second-generation Jews agreed with these views. Journalist Alexander Rose, for instance, pointed out that 'there happen to be Holocaust victims in my family too, and yet, I find the ideas put forth by the show to be, if not illuminating, certainly relevant to my own experience'.<sup>178</sup> Michael Berenbaum too, approved of the exhibition as it created a space where an 'inter-generational discourse' was made possible. His statement that 'not every portrayal of the Holocaust can be a memorial to its victims' made in the *Jewish Week*, in the op-ed

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<sup>175</sup> Rosensaft, 'Sixty years after liberation, Jews must lead fight against ethnic hatred', in *JTA News Bulletin*, (17 April, 2005).

<sup>176</sup> Thane Rosenbaum, 'Mirroring Evil', in *Tikkun*, (May/June, 2002).

<sup>177</sup> Tannenbaum quoted in article 'Joe Bob's American: Nazi Schmazi Art', in the *United Press International*, (25 March, 2002).

<sup>178</sup> Alexander Rose, 'In defense of Mirroring Evil', in the *Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, (1 March, 2002).

‘Must Facing Evil be offensive?’,<sup>179</sup> is a direct response to Rosensaft’s main accusation, that *Mirroring Evil* causes offense to Holocaust survivors.

The editors of the *Jewish Week* placed the abovementioned op-ed by Michael Berenbaum and Menachem Rosensaft’s response on the facing page, breaking an editorial rule which states that an op-ed stands for opposite the editorial article. Relinquishing the space normally reserved to the editor, the *Jewish Week* testifies to the importance of the discussions prompted by *Mirroring Evil*. In this manner, the editors refrained from comment and sought instead to give each side space to voice their views. Significant is also the title of Rosensaft’s article ‘The case *against Mirroring Evil*’ – a direct response to a previously published op-ed ‘The case *for*<sup>180</sup> *Mirroring Evil*’ (22 February) by Rabbi Brad Hirschfeld.

CDA has been developed as a useful methodological tool to examine the authorial and the subordinate positions adopted by the participants of public discussions. Using it for my analysis will enable me to observe how the abovementioned contributors to the debate positioned themselves in relation to the survivors and to the Holocaust. An examination of the language employed by Rosensaft, Berenbaum and Hirschfeld will reveal specific attitudes and beliefs towards the legacy of the Holocaust. Wodak reminds us of how different groups employ different ‘discursive practices’ to establish ‘relations of power and dominance’.<sup>181</sup> In the context of the present analysis, one must be mindful of the fact that relations of power are likely to emerge among members of the same minority group – such as the Jewish communities in America. The aims of my analysis are twofold: to reveal the differences in the ‘discursive practices’ of the members of the debate, and to identify the common ideas that ensure the perpetuation of an ideological system of Holocaust commemoration which centres on Jewish identification with victimhood.

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<sup>179</sup> Michael Berenbaum, ‘Must Facing Evil be Offensive?’, in the *Jewish Week*, (8 March, 2002).

<sup>180</sup> The author’s emphasis.

<sup>181</sup> Ruth Wodak, *The discursive construction of national identity*, p. 8.

In Menachem Rosensaft's case, we can see that his use of language when speaking about *Mirroring Evil* is suggestive of a hierarchical system. Rosensaft discursively asserts his authority as someone who is knowledgeable about the Holocaust. This is discernible in the way that he structures his contributions, by framing them within the story of his mother's experience of Auschwitz. In order to give impetus to his opposition to *Mirroring Evil*, Rosensaft defines himself as the heir to his mother's experience of victimhood, and implicitly to her knowledge of the Holocaust:

I know all about Mengele. My late mother saw him frequently at Birkenau, where she was an inmate for more than 15 months. He beat her on two occasions, when something she had done displeased him. He also personally sent my mother's sister to her death.<sup>182</sup>

In other statements, Rosensaft makes reference to his allegiance with a broader community which opposes the exhibition, implying that his disagreement with the Jewish Museum's exhibition is shared by a larger group of people – especially by the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, which he quotes as follows: 'the association is calling on all synagogues, churches, schools, Jewish and civic organisations and individuals to cancel visits and tours to the museum'. The idea of shared views and opinions about *Mirroring Evil* is further emphasised by the multiple use of the plural pronouns 'we' and 'our', the collective noun 'community', and also by Rosensaft's own definition of the community which he belongs to:

As a community, we have the obligation to the survivors to express our understanding of and revulsion at the anguish that the museum is causing them. We can now stand with them, or we can abandon them. That is why we must unambiguously repudiate *Mirroring Evil* by staying away from the Jewish Museum while this noxious exhibition will be on display.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Menachem Rosensaft, 'The Case against *Mirroring Evil*', in the *Jewish Week*, (8 March, 2002).

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

Michael Berenbaum's article 'Must facing evil itself be offensive?' constitutes a direct response to the issues outlined by Rosensaft. Berenbaum, too, is a prominent public voice of the descendants of Holocaust survivors, and, in his position as project director and director of the Holocaust Research Institute at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, played a leading role in managing commemorative and research activities. Moreover, Berenbaum has shown significant commitment and dedication to preserving the memory of the Holocaust survivors, having played a crucial part in designing the Museum's permanent exhibition. In much the same manner as Rosensaft, Berenbaum opens his discussion by establishing his position in relation to the subject matter. He employs the personal pronoun 'I' as a way of identifying himself, in this case, as someone who has actually seen the exhibition, and has been invited by the Museum to discussions with survivors. Berenbaum stresses that, it is from viewing the artworks that he derives his authority to speak, whereas Rosensaft derives his role as a spokesperson for the survivors from his family connection to the Holocaust. Berenbaum begins by stating: 'I have seen each of the works planned for the Jewish Museum exhibition', and continues to explain: 'while not every piece is to my liking, every work in the show has a point'. Thereafter, Berenbaum switches to the plural 'we' and 'our' to speak in the name of the Jewish community, refuting Rosensaft's emotional reaction.

Several of Berenbaum's points I consider crucial in establishing the parameters of the debate about the victim-status in the consciousness of American Jews. In opposition to Rosensaft, Berenbaum argues that a clear line should be drawn between the victims' experiences and that of their descendants. According to Berenbaum, the descendants 'have learned to respect the experience of survivors', and 'listen to those who were there', but, at the same time, he insists, they must acknowledge, that 'our place is somehow misplaced, as the artwork so clearly demonstrates'.<sup>184</sup> Closely connected to this position is his following remark: 'the exhibition deals not with how we understand victimisation, but with

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<sup>184</sup> Michael Berenbaum, 'Must Facing Evil Itself be Offensive?', in the *Jewish Week*, (8 March, 2002).



how we approach the perpetrators. [...] not every portrayal of the Holocaust can be a memorial to its victims'. Berenbaum argues that the Jewish Museum, through its exhibition, offers Jews from different generations, the opportunity to debate generational changes. He pleads: 'let the survivors speak with the artists, let the artists speak in the presence of the survivors'. He perceives the Jewish Museum as a forum where:

Generations talk to one another deferentially, openly, seriously [...] perhaps we have reached a moment when the intergenerational transition is well under way. Better such a discussion should occur in the presence of those who were there, with their overwhelming moral stature, than when it is too late to receive their searing criticism – and respond.<sup>185</sup>

The points made by Berenbaum about distinguishing between the survivors' trauma and victimhood, and the descendants' 'inherited' victimhood are reiterated in Rabbi Brad Hirschfield's article, 'The case for *Mirroring Evil*'.<sup>186</sup> Even though he uses a similar reconciliatory tone, Hirschfield's plea to the Jews – to let go of the victim-status is more strongly expressed than by Berenbaum. Hirschfield's opinions are also representative of the goals and ideals of *CLAL*, the organisation which he leads together with Rabbi Irwin Kula.

*CLAL*'s objective as a leadership training institute and resource centre for Jews finds a succinct expression in its acronym which in Hebrew means 'inclusive'. The organisation's main goal is to unite Jews in America by 'building bridges' across the different Jewish communities and by 'encouraging pluralism and openness'. Moreover, 'it promotes dynamic, inclusive Jewish communities in which all voices are heard, and enhances Jewish participation in American civic and spiritual life'.<sup>187</sup> This is also recognised by Nathaniel Popper, journalist from the *Forward* who describes *CLAL* a 'leading national voice for religious

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Brad Hirschfield, 'The case for *Mirroring Evil*', in the *Jewish Week*, (22 February, 2002).

<sup>187</sup> Statement retrieved from <http://www.clal.org/cms/about-clal>, (accessed on 25.11. 2010).

pluralism'.<sup>188</sup> It is no wonder then that Hirschfield's article about *Mirroring Evil* is in support of the Museum's objectives. His opening statement is indicative of this inclusive approach, as he recognizes the diversity of reactions that these artworks elicit, which include 'anger, confusion, pain and anxiety'. Having acknowledged the reactions provoked by the exhibition, Hirschfield proceeds to address its critics, stating that he 'fully appreciated the position of those who oppose the exhibit', but, at the same time, wonders why it is the exhibition that should be viewed as controversial since 'these are the very emotions that one should feel when confronting real evil'.<sup>189</sup>

He warns of further antagonizing the participants in the debate, and instead suggests that an 'inclusive' space be created where all different opinions are acknowledged. The use of pronouns 'we' and 'us' becomes relevant, as Hirschfield points out something that concerns everyone, namely – how to deal with the historical distance that separates 'us' – the post-Holocaust generations, from 'them' – the survivors.

How many of us have become inured to the images of stripped prisoners and bulldozed bodies, having seen them so many times before? [...] especially for those of us with no direct link to the victims of the horror, such images start to feel very distant from our lives.

Unlike Rosensaft or Berenbaum who used the plural pronoun to refer to their own groups, Hirschfield employs 'we' to refer to all Jews, across the divides and ideological differences regarding the role of Holocaust memory for Jewish identity. He calls for a discourse that foregrounds reconciliation when he argues that what unites the opposing sides is their shared intention to keep memory alive: 'the entire controversy is played out between two groups that share a common ideal. Those who must oppose the exhibition and those represented in it are both profoundly committed to not allowing our memory and experiences of evil go away'. Hirschfield's 'our' here extends to the American society as a

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<sup>188</sup> Nathaniel Popper, 'Rabbi Cool and Rock Opera Draw Stars, Upscale Spiritualists', in the *Forward*, (28 November, 2003).

<sup>189</sup> Hirschfield, 'The Case for Mirroring Evil'.

whole since, he argues, the questions posed by *Mirroring Evil* are relevant to all members of society:

For me, the Shoah, in particular, and evil, in general, are much too big, to be Jewish or generation problems. They are eternal human questions, and that means that all people of all ages must be informed and be free to respond in their own ways.

Hirschfield urges American Jews to reconsider their relationship with the memory of the Holocaust, not only as an event that is uniquely Jewish, but one which is part of a universal human experience.

When any group's identity is built on the particularity of its own suffering, then ultimately, we are all that much less able to prevent any human suffering. [...] Of course, that does not mean that those who disagree with this work should be silent – it simply means that they ought not to silence others.<sup>190</sup>

Hirschfield concludes his plea for *Mirroring Evil* by pointing out that all opinions about the role of the Holocaust in the lives of post-Holocaust generations must be heard, and that no one opinion should gain privilege over another.

The opinions of leading American-Jewish figures outlined above are suggestive of two tendencies prevalent in the American-Jewish community; the first, enunciated by Rosensaft, shows a highly protective attitude towards Holocaust memory, as a strictly Jewish memory that perpetuates a Jewish identity based on trauma and victimhood. The second, represented by Berenbaum and Hirschfield, speaks of a more progressive approach, arguing for a break with collective identification with victimhood.

Hirschfield is still a prominent voice in this debate, as he declared in a recent interview, that one must 'remember forward' – in a way that is more accepting of 'new narratives'<sup>191</sup> and less protective of older ones. The challenging questions

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Rabbi Brad Hirschfield conducted by the author at CLAL office, September 2010, New York.

posed by *Mirroring Evil* are, according to Hirschfield, suggestive of such new narratives of memorialisation. They question older positions by asking the visitors to enter the ‘unfamiliar’ and ‘de-familiarizing’ territories of identification with the perpetrators that would enable them to see differently, and after having been shocked, emerge with a new realization of the universal issues that the Holocaust raised.

But how new really are these ‘new narratives’? Can we pinpoint their first appearance on the American public scene? Unfortunately, this task cannot be thoroughly pursued in the space of this chapter. It is important to note, however, that the institutional commitment to memorialisation in the American commemorative landscape – which includes the Holocaust Memorial Museum in America’s capital that opened in 1993, together with other institutions such as the Simon Wiesenthal Center in LA, and the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York that opened in 1997 – have prompted some critics to ask prescient questions that are relevant to this day.

An example is Yossi Klein Halevi, who in his article in the *Jerusalem Report*’s tenth Anniversary Issue in 2000, asks ‘Who owns the Memory?’, and acknowledges that ‘as the intensity of memory is peaking, new questions are being raised about our Holocaust obsession’. He distinguishes between two groups that propose somewhat different approaches, as, ‘on the one hand, there are those who call for a sober reappraisal; on the other, there are those striving to keep the wound raw’.<sup>192</sup> The above responses to *Mirroring Evil* attest to the presence and co-existence of two separate modes of Holocaust remembrance. Whereas some members of discussion have viewed *Mirroring Evil* as an opportunity for a ‘sober reappraisal’ – a detached examination of the role of images of Nazism in current society, and the promotion of an intergenerational dialogue among Jews, others have perceived it as a chance to invoke how the Jewish people were ‘victimized’. The experience of ‘victimisation’ was no longer uniquely the Holocaust

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<sup>192</sup> Yossi Klein Halevi, ‘Who own Memory’, in the *Jerusalem Report*, (23 October, 2000).

survivors', but came to represent the identity of their American-Jewish offspring, too.

Anne Rothe suggests in her study, *Popular Trauma Culture. Selling the Pain of Others*, that 'embracing the Holocaust as a marker of American-Jewish identity is based on the notion of so-called vicarious Holocaust victimhood'. She further explains how the appropriation of the Holocaust as a marker of American-Jewish identity 'transforms the status of ultimate righteousness, ascribed to Holocaust victims via the Christian idea that suffering purifies the soul, into a hereditary trait of Jewish identity'.<sup>193</sup> Different expressions have been used to describe the 'wound' that the Jewish Museum inflicted on members of the Jewish community.

Rosensaft, in his role as the 'voice' of the Holocaust survivors, refers to their 'wound' on more than one occasion. This begs the question of whether the second generation have identified with the victim status more than the survivors themselves. Of considerable importance here is the fact that the children of survivors played a major role in bringing their parents' traumatic experiences into the American public space. It was as a result of their endeavours that the survivors were 'thrust on centre stage as the authentic voice of Holocaust memory', argues Arlene Stein.<sup>194</sup>

Even though some voices among the Holocaust survivors have gained public prominence over others, it is crucial to acknowledge that they cannot equally represent all survivors. The countless video testimonies that have been archived by USHMM and by the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University show that experiences of victimhood were varied and singular, and that the survivors themselves do not form a monolithic group.<sup>195</sup> Also varied are the ways in which they view practices of Holocaust commemoration. This is in opposition to the perception, advanced by Wiesel, of survivors as a unitary

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<sup>193</sup> Anne Rothe, *Popular Trauma Culture. Selling the Pain of Others*, (Unpublished Manuscript, 2010), p. 9.

<sup>194</sup> Arlene Stein, p. 45.

<sup>195</sup> This is revealed in several survival testimonies retrieved from <http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts/index.html> (accessed on 26.11. 2010).

group, whose views regarding memorialisation also converge. Like the USHMM video testimonies, responses to *Mirroring Evil* show that the survivors' opinions are not always in agreement. On the contrary, their reactions to the exhibition were mixed.

One must bear in mind that much of the survivors' opposition to the exhibition was either a response to the media's labelling it as 'painful', 'offensive' or 'provocative', or to the endeavours of second-generation leaders to boycott it. Of course, there were survivors who, after having visited the exhibition, expressed their shock and disappointment. Rene Slotkin, cited in an article in the *Forward* from 22 March, commented that, even after having read the texts accompanying the artworks, there was 'nothing to be gained. They are trying to face the truth with fantasy. How can they do that? Even with real pictures you cannot represent the truth'.<sup>196</sup> This is reminiscent of a broader contention regarding the limits of artistic representation of the Holocaust, previously discussed in this chapter.

That this is but one survivor's view among many different ones can be seen from the entries into the museum's gallery books. An anonymous survivor visiting the exhibition expresses an opinion similar to Slotkin's: 'the exhibition is lacking in so many ways. Let the true facts be shown so that generations should be aware of what really happened. Redo the exhibition and give it its due justice'. The following statement by another survivor, however, seems to be a counter-statement: 'As a Holocaust survivor I was fascinated and informed by this exhibition. [...] I believe it should travel to other cities. Very enlightening'. Another survivor reinforces this idea stating that *Mirroring Evil* is 'an excellent representation of a younger generation's relationship with tragedies of the past. Our older generation must not be silent. Teach us'.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Cattan Nacha, 'Supporters turn back on museum over Nazi exhibit', in the *Forward*, (22 March, 2002).

<sup>197</sup> Examples from Gallery Book I accessed by the author at the Jewish Museum Archives, September 2010, New York.

However, the survivors are not the main audience that *Mirroring Evil* is addressing. We are told in the Museum's report to Americans for the Arts that the exhibition predominantly drew in a 'younger generation, [and a] multi-racial audience'.<sup>198</sup> This is reflected also in the questions posed by the Museum to their public. A central question was: 'Who can speak for the Holocaust?'<sup>199</sup> Reesa Greenberg ponders over this, and states that it is, indeed, 'frightening to those who believe that no one but survivors can say anything meaningful about what happened'.<sup>200</sup> This question is becoming increasingly urgent, as the survivors are growing older, and their voices will soon have disappeared. It leads to the even more pressing questions: are children of survivors the only group entitled to speak for the survivors? And, whose voice is legitimate?

In contrast to the print media, the gallery books brought to the fore a gamut of public reactions, to which I will devote the closing section of this chapter. It is within this forum that the anonymous voices of the public became prominent. One needs to ask whether it was a coincidence that the print media neglected the existence of the gallery books and the viewpoints expressed between their covers. Only Richard McBee, a journalist at the *Jewish Press* wrote an article, when the exhibition was nearing its closing on 30 June, about the gallery books as reflecting 'a widely democratic, random and yet nuanced reading of how the Jewish Museum's public, those who actually saw the exhibition, were affected'.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, the tenet expressed in these books is that the exhibition was out of the ordinary. The comments range from praise for the Jewish Museum's courage to show the exhibition, disappointment with the Museum's initiative and threats to cancel the membership, to reflections about the need for art to raise questions and educate against violations of human rights.

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<sup>198</sup> Jewish Museum's final report to the Americans for the Arts, August 2002.

<sup>199</sup> This question is part of the exhibition's interpretative material; it appears in the art catalogue and in many reports about *Mirroring Evil* in the print media.

<sup>200</sup> Reesa Greenberg, 'Mirroring Evil: Timing, Trauma and Temporary', retrieved from [http://www.yorku.ca/reerden/Projects/mirroring\\_evil.html](http://www.yorku.ca/reerden/Projects/mirroring_evil.html) (accessed on 27.11. 2010).

<sup>201</sup> Richard McBee, 'Mirroring Evil at the Jewish Museum. Sacred, or Profane Art?', in the *Jewish Press*, (21 June, 2002) retrieved from <http://www.jewishpress.com/pageroute.do/13875> (accessed on 26.11. 2010).

Among the more than five hundred entries there are comments which address the issue of Holocaust trivialization invoked by Wiesel. They range from: ‘this exhibition in no way trivializes the Holocaust. Rather it can, if understood properly, serve to intensify our horror at what was and what will still exist today on many levels’,<sup>202</sup> to agreement with Wiesel: ‘a complete trivialization of the actual reality of what happened’.<sup>203</sup> There are visitors who respond directly to Wiesel’s article ‘Holocaust exhibit betrays History’. An anonymous visitor states: ‘Contrary to Elie Wiesel, I think that the exhibit denounces the kitsch and vulgarization we see in much of today’s art’.<sup>204</sup> Another visitor comments on the issue of sanctification: ‘Nothing is sacrosanct. It’s never an “error” to re-examine evil’.<sup>205</sup> Yet, another viewer explains “we all have a tendency to “fossilise” the Shoah. This exhibition shows that one can have another outlook on this unique event in mankind without “desacralizing” it’.<sup>206</sup> The majority of visitors address the ability of art to convey the meaning of the Holocaust, and they also agree with this viewer’s comment: ‘it’s time to break the silence. Art can do it’.<sup>207</sup> Another visitor argued against the limits imposed on artistic representation: ‘if art can provide a monument that, otherwise, disconnected generations can identify and thus sympathise with, then it should be embraced or at the very least left unrejected’.<sup>208</sup>

While the majority of comments in the gallery books were positive responses, about twenty per cent of the entries were explicitly complimentary comments about the exhibition and the Jewish Museum, such as: ‘a very thought-provoking exhibition. Anything that can make us discuss the Holocaust is a good thing’;<sup>209</sup> ‘this is a courageous show. I very much commend the Museum for having the

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<sup>202</sup> Comment quoted from Gallery Book II accessed by the author at the Jewish Museum Archives, September 2010, New York.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. Date unknown.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., Comment dated 21.3. 2002.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 20.3. 2002.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. Date unknown.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 16.3. 2002.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 17.3. 2002.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. Date unknown.



courage to overcome self-censorship. We live in the present and have to watch the dangers inherent in the present'.<sup>210</sup>

There were several visitors who argued that the discussions were more meaningful than the art itself, since they engaged a broad audience and especially the younger generation. One visitor commented: 'This exhibition provides a space for the expression and the continuing dialogue of what the Holocaust means for people, especially for those who do not have a first hand or personal experience of the Holocaust'.<sup>211</sup>

Unlike the print media, the gallery books registered the voices of the third generation. It is worth remembering that unlike third-generation Jews in Israel, in America they 'have only recently started to become a visible group, but not with the same intensity as the second generation',<sup>212</sup> argues psychologist Eva Fogelman. She sees the third generation as having 'no collective voice that distinguishes them from others in their generation'.<sup>213</sup> The grandchildren lack a distinct community feeling. Nonetheless, research conducted by psychologist Flora Hogman has shown that, similar to their Israeli counterparts, third-generation Jews in America have started to develop an intergenerational dialogue with their grandparents, which gives them 'a sense of pride in, and awe of the survivors'.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, Fogelman insists that 'this awareness of the suffering that grandparents endured is part of the fabric of their lives, but it is channelled

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Eva Fogelman, 'Psychological Dynamics in the Life of Third Generation Holocaust survivors', *The Hidden Child*, xvi (2008), pp. 10-12. Retrieved from [http://www.drevafoogelman.com/\\_psychological\\_dynamics\\_in\\_the\\_lives\\_of\\_third\\_generation\\_holocaust\\_survivors\\_\\_94110.htm](http://www.drevafoogelman.com/_psychological_dynamics_in_the_lives_of_third_generation_holocaust_survivors__94110.htm), (accessed on 2.12. 2010).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Flora Hogman quoted by Fogelman. Also see Mark Yoslow's PhD study *The Pride and Price of Remembrance: An Empirical View of Trans-generational Post-Holocaust Trauma and Associated Transpersonal Elements in the Third Generation*. He argues that 'the third generation takes great pride in being the scion for the family that survived the Holocaust', cited by Fogelman.

into empathy, political activism, greater consciousness of others' suffering, and a reluctance to intermarry'.<sup>215</sup>

Fogelman identifies as a major characteristic of the third generation, in both Israel and the USA, the presence of an intergenerational dialogue.<sup>216</sup> A pertinent example is given by Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated*, published in 2002 and adapted into a film in 2005, which brings into public view the story of a grandchild of a survivor whose obsession with documenting the past as an antidote to forgetting brings him on a journey to far-off European lands, in a search for knowledge of his grandfather's past which culminates in a discovery of his own identity. Remembering plays an important part in the lives of other third-generation American Jews for example for Aaron Biterman, creator of an online network for the third generation, whose aim is to raise consciousness about present-day racism, human-rights violations, and genocides; also for Dan Sieradski, initiator of Jewish communities project which explores Jewish tradition.<sup>217</sup>

*Mirroring Evil* provided an opportunity for young people to enter a dialogue with the older generation's plight. Some visitors' choice to write down their age on the visitors' books is not coincidental and represents a statement in itself. A twenty-year-old shares his impressions of the exhibition, admitting that: 'it had left an impact on me to see the Holocaust portrayed in a much different way than I am used to seeing it'.<sup>218</sup> Another visitor, aged 26, deemed the exhibition 'a milestone in the course of healing [and] a reflective critical moment when pure unadulterated mourning gives way to more intellectual questions concerning "why"'.<sup>219</sup> A statement is made by a 19-year-old visitor who speaks not only for himself but in the name of all third-generation Jews, acknowledging the difficulty his generation has in trying to relate to 'the Holocaust, which took place in [his]

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<sup>215</sup> Fogelman.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Comment from Gallery Book I. Date unknown.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. Date unknown.

grandfather's generation'. He sees *Mirroring Evil* as being successful in bridging the generational gap, commenting that 'this exhibit brings the Holocaust to life in a new and disturbing way'. He shows sensitivity to the distance separating his generation from that of his grandfather's, stating that: 'while I think that this exhibit is a great idea for people of my generation, I believe it may be too racy and inappropriate for older generations'.<sup>220</sup>

These comments shed some light on how the youngest generation, whose voice was underrepresented in the media reports about the exhibition, responded to the discussion about the exhibition. By means of the gallery books the visitors were able to express views and opinions that differed from those of Rosensaft's. The exhibition has made possible for a 'younger generation to interact with memories of the Holocaust' argues one visitor, whereas another views it as being 'as powerful as a survivor's story', and suggests that 'it is important for the younger generations to see and interpret this (our) history'.<sup>221</sup> After having read these comments, I agree with Richard McBee's conclusion that: 'simply reading a small selection of these comments reveals how much *Mirroring Evil* has in fact connected and engaged its audience in a meaningful dialogue'.<sup>222</sup> Indeed, many visitors express gratitude to the Museum for permitting these dialogues to take place. The following are examples of dialogues.

One visitor is positively impressed by the exhibition and comments: 'for the first time in my life, I am trying to understand what the Jewish people went through in the Holocaust. We will never forget'.<sup>223</sup> As a direct reply to this, another corroborates: 'We must never forget. This exhibit keeps the dialogue of the Holocaust alive'. This visitor underlines the word 'anything', as a way of reinforcing the importance of any kind of art representation of the Holocaust. He or she states: 'anything that keeps the Holocaust from being just a faint memory is worth exploring. Anything. Let people make up their own minds

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Richard McBee, 'Mirroring Evil at the Jewish Museum. Sacred, or Profane Art?'.  
<sup>223</sup> Comment from the Gallery Book I. Date Unknown.

about what art “is” and “is not”.”<sup>224</sup> Another visitor agrees with the previous visitors’ comments: ‘I agree that we must never forget, and one way of overcoming evil is to understand not only its horror, but its seductiveness, art must bear witness to these events’.<sup>225</sup>

While these comments reinforce one another the following is an example of disagreement. It refers to the Museum’s use of interpretative material. A visitor complains about the over-abundance of interpretation, stating: ‘please, we don’t need so many didactics, I can experience this myself – don’t need all the explanations and questions’. The entry that immediately follows is a counter-statement: ‘In contrast to the omniscient visitor above, who did not need any of your explanations, I found the artists’ words about their works to be enormously revealing in navigating this difficult to view but important exhibition’.<sup>226</sup>

The following exchanges of views bring into close focus the notion of ‘self-hating Jew’, with which I shall conclude my discussion. My first example is reminiscent of the language of ‘emotionalism’ employed by Rosensaft. This viewer expresses his discontent and disappointment with the exhibition and the Museum as follows: ‘Very disturbing, disgusting. [...] Shame on the Jewish Museum. I’ll cancel my membership. Self-hating Jews wake up’.<sup>227</sup> An anonymous visitor responds in a measured way, and attempts to convince the angry visitor of the validity of art and the museum’s good intentions. This visitor initially agrees: ‘Yes. Very disturbing’, only to proceed to depart from this apparent agreement: ‘But I am glad to see it’. The manner in which this viewer discloses, in turn, first his Jewishness and finally his affiliation to the artists’ clan and the American identity is significant. Each of these self-identifications is meant to place him in a position of authority in regard to the subject matter. He states:

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., Comment dated 8.3. 2002.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., Date unknown.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

As a Jewish person who has been frequently called a self-hating Jew, in recent times, because I dare to criticize the policies of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians, as an artist aware of the power of imagery, and as an American born in the era of endless advertising, I am glad to see it. Very moving, provocative and yes, disturbing. When we make certain things, events, images, so sacred ... [this] removes them from reality, from dialogues, and leaves people powerless, I am glad that the Jewish Museum had the courage to put this on.<sup>228</sup>

This visitor's response brings together lines of arguments that surface, to an equal extent, in the debate about Wiesel's claim that art 'trivializes' the sacred character of the Holocaust, and about the second-generation Jews' inheritance of the victim-status. The visitor regards the Jewish Museum as the generator of a discussion about the Holocaust, which empowers people by giving them the possibility of self-expression. He or she also recognizes that once the discourse, which views the Holocaust as sacred, gains monopoly in the American public sphere it can obliterate a real dialogue about the Holocaust. The accusation 'self-hating Jew' is suggestive of this obliteration. Hikind, opponent of the exhibition, employs it to discredit the leaders of the Jewish Museum for internalising hatred towards the Jews, by presenting an exhibition that is critical of Jewish discourses about the Holocaust. In his view, this makes the Museum disloyal to the Jewish community.<sup>229</sup> The function of 'self-hating Jew' in the context of *Mirroring Evil* is to silence an emerging discourse liable to undermine the legitimacy of the existing one. It indicates the resistance of a minority in the American public sphere to narratives that go beyond the conventional boundaries of Holocaust discourse delineated by Wiesel and endorsed by some second-generation Jews.

In his seminal study, *Jewish self-hatred. Anti-Semitism and the hidden language of the Jews* (1986), Sander Gilman points out that 'when applied to the American Jewish experience', 'self-hating Jew' – a concept which originated in the context of the assimilated German-Jewish communities of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – 'provided a

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Daniel Belasco, 'Survivors: Museum Compromise', in the *Jewish Week*, (1 March, 2002).

working label for the signification of specific modes of divergence'.<sup>230</sup> It is no wonder that, in the context of the exhibition at the Jewish Museum, 'self-hating Jew' is used to signal a discrepancy and a departure from existing narratives. Moreover, it is meant to act as a silencer of discussion.

Writer Antony Lerman's contextualization of this 'time-worn accusation' in his essay 'Jewish self-hatred. Myth and Reality',<sup>231</sup> becomes relevant for the debate about *Mirroring Evil* exhibition. According to him, this accusation is deployed 'as a "killer fact": to be called a self-hating Jew explains everything. No more needs to be said.' Used especially in a political context, Lerman points out that the concept is 'entirely bogus, and it serves no other purpose than to marginalise and demonise political opponents'.<sup>232</sup> This is also applicable to the discussion in the gallery books at the Jewish Museum, even though its participants represent ideological, rather than political, views pertaining to a certain political group. There is no doubt that the use of this term reinforces ideological divisions, while obstructing the possibility of a dialogue. It serves only to further antagonize the participants in the debate. The term 'self-hating Jew' primarily poses questions about the 'right kind' of Jewish identity, and, in the context of *Mirroring Evil*, it addresses the connection existing between Holocaust memory and the Jewish-American identity-politics. This accusation foregrounds the fractures and divisions, and, more importantly, the inherently multifarious nature of the identities of the American Jews.

In America, suggests Novick, two major elements played a central role for the definition of Jewish identity: the Holocaust and Israel.<sup>233</sup> While 'self-hating Jew' has been employed predominantly to discredit critics of Israel, we notice that it can be equally employed in discussions about the Holocaust.

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<sup>230</sup> Sander Gilman, *Jewish self-hatred. Anti-Semitism and the hidden language of the Jews*, (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 308.

<sup>231</sup> Antony Lerman, 'Jewish self-hatred. Myth and Reality', in the *Jewish Quarterly*, (Summer, 2008), pp. 46-51.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>233</sup> See Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*.

Lerman insists that accusations of self-hatred are usually reserved for those labelled 'left-wing', 'progressive' or 'left-liberal'. Ultimately, they 'strengthen a narrow and ethnocentric view of the Jewish people, [...] promote a definition of Jewish identity which relies on the notion of an eternal enemy [...], and posit an essentialist notion of Jewish identity'.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, this allegation shows a sign of desperation on the part of the accusers, and their unwillingness to allow a dialogue to take place. Because, argues Lerman, it is easier to 'dismiss arguments by levelling the charge of Jewish self-hatred than by engaging with them'. Lerman stresses that 'self-hatred accusers' have neglected an important aspect: that 'criticising an aspect of one's identity does not automatically imply criticism of that identity *per se*'. Hence, concludes Lerman, 'this concept is fundamentally weak because it fails to allow that self-criticism can be searching and very deep without becoming self-hatred'.<sup>235</sup> The 'search' on the part of critical groups at the Jewish Museum and within the American-Jewish community undoubtedly includes the possibility of finding a constructive and positive discourse about the memory of the Holocaust, which can appeal to the younger generation.

Both the large number of articles in the print media and the visitors' comments in the gallery books show that, contrary to what was expected, the incrimination 'self-hating Jew' did not silence the public discussion but rather proved to be an incentive. The debates prompted by *Mirroring Evil* succeeded in exposing the perpetuation of public discourses of Holocaust sanctification, and of victimhood. To an equal extent, they also revealed the ways in which it is possible to depart from these narratives, and to make room for a critical 'intergenerational discourse' which moves away from the notion of Jewish 'victimhood' without having to abandon the responsibility of remembering the Holocaust and its victims.

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<sup>234</sup> Lerman, p. 51.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 5

### **A Comparative Perspective on Holocaust Memory Debates at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (1997-8) and at the Jewish Museum in New York (2002)**

The Holocaust revealed the global dimension of Jewish identities as despite their national identification as German, Austrian, French and other, Jews could not escape Nazi persecution and death. This was reinforced by Eichmann Trial in 1961 which led to Jewish collective identification with Holocaust victims and survivors, and which subsequently contributed to the construction of Holocaust-centred identity narratives. Sander Gilman points to this fact, arguing that, following the Holocaust, there was a clear shift in Jewish identity narratives, as the Holocaust came to occupy a central position in Jewish global consciousness, and led to a new way of understanding of what it means to be Jewish.<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, Zionist narratives which looked at Israel as the centre were overthrown, whilst the Holocaust emerged as a common denominator of both Jewish-American and Israeli identities.<sup>2</sup>

This final chapter offers a comparative perspective on the public debates prompted by the art exhibitions discussed in the previous two chapters. The aim of this comparison is to underline how the newest discourses on Holocaust memory that have emerged in the field of the visual arts, point to the presence of a global dimension of contemporary Jewish identities. For my purposes, 'global'<sup>3</sup> refers to the interconnectedness of Jewish lives in Israel and Diaspora made apparent by the way in which ideas and trends that surface in Israel are swiftly appropriated by the Jewish Diaspora, and vice-versa. The argument I would like to develop is that, far

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<sup>1</sup> Sander Gilman, *Jewish frontiers: essays on bodies, histories, and identities*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 220-243.

<sup>2</sup> This argument is reinforced by Jacob Neusner, 'Implications of the Holocaust' in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, (New York: Garland, 1993), and by Michael Berenbaum in *After tragedy and triumph: essays in modern Jewish thought and the American experience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> For a thorough examination of this concept see Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a critical introduction*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).



from static, Jewish identity discourses built around the memory of the Holocaust are re-evaluated and re-defined as part of an ongoing process of generational change. Despite the different cultural and social contexts in which they live, younger generations of Jews share a global perception of the Holocaust which has come to define their identities as global Jews. Nonetheless, the term 'global' does not minimise differences, or, for that matter, similarities that exist in regard to conceptions of Holocaust memory.

This chapter endeavours to map those similarities and differences that characterise the Jewish Museums' approaches to art exhibitions dealing with Holocaust memory. Furthermore, my comparison of the public debates focuses on the perceptions of Holocaust memory by second and third generation Jews in Israel and in America, and points to the institutionalised character of Holocaust sacralisation narratives. Despite certain contextual differences, a counter-discourse that is critical of those institutionalised memory narratives, which focus on 'victim identity' and on the sacred nature of the Holocaust, emerges on a global level and is endorsed by a younger generation of Jews in Israel as well as in the Diaspora.

# I

## **The Jewish Museum in New York, and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem: Between Caution and Nonchalance**

Each of the two Jewish Museums holds a central position in the Israeli and the American-Jewish public consciousness respectively as institutions that represent the diversity and uniqueness of Jewish life, culture and identity. Despite these common goals which confer them a global institutional identity, there are a significant number of differences in the manner in which each Museum approaches exhibitions and presents them to the public. Among them, the following shall be discussed in more detail: 1. The use of interpretative materials. 2. The Museums' attitudes towards public criticism. 3. The target audiences of the art exhibitions. 4. The message with regard to the Holocaust that the Museums have transmitted to the public.

1. The interpretative materials provided by the Jewish Museum were extensive while the Israel Museum's explanations were rather modest. In contrast to the Jewish Museum's numerous educational activities and public dialogues designed to explain the project to the public, the Israel Museum only organised guided tours of the exhibitions.

The detailed descriptions of the artworks coupled with the explanations of the purpose of the exhibition that leading members of the Jewish community and Holocaust survivors were asked to provide suggest that the Jewish Museum acted, to the best of its capacity, in order to pre-empt a negative public reaction. Moreover, these efforts point to the Museum's cautious treatment of the subject of Holocaust memory. Quite exceptional in the history of the Jewish Museum were the educational events and the large number of educators employed to guide the visitors through the exhibition and to explain its purpose. These measures suggest that the Jewish Museum was aware of the public's sensitivity to interpretations of Holocaust memory that deviate from familiar representational norms. The carefully designed

and extensive interpretative apparatus points to the Museum's intention to call attention to what they deemed were important changes in the perception of Holocaust memory.

The Israel Museum, on the other hand, made available little information about the exhibitions to its visitors. The brief descriptions of the exhibitions released to the Israeli press were meant to attract the audience rather than to pre-empt their negative responses. The Museum reacted to the press's critical responses by installing, within the exhibition spaces, several panels that warned the public about the potential upsetting nature of the displays. The organisers' decision to provide guided tours led by the artists was a measure only taken after several Israeli politicians, and other members of the Israeli public sphere criticised the exhibitions. In other words, the explanatory measures that the Museum undertook came in response to external factors, and had little to do with the Museum's initial intentions.

2. The Museums' different positions with regard to public debates are suggestive of the distinct cultural contexts in which they operate. While an aggressive conversational style is typical of the Israeli cultural sphere, in America, public discussion follows conversational rules which encourage a less confrontational approach and the adoption of a more measured exchange of points of view. The care with which the Jewish Museum presented the exhibition to its public should also be understood in relation to the role of the Holocaust in America's public conscience, namely as the most prominent identity marker for the majority of American Jews. Hence, any discussion which touches upon this subject is inevitably treated with great attention. Moreover, the fact that the exhibitions at the Israel Museum preceded *Mirroring Evil* is not insignificant. Due to the close relations Jewish cultural institutions worldwide maintain, the intense criticism with which Katzir's and Rosen's exhibitions were received by the Israeli press must have had an

impact on the manner in which the Jewish Museum in New York prepared its own exhibition.

The fact that the Israel Museum did not pre-empt the negative responses, may have been due to its lack of experience in dealing with this subject matter. Even though the Israel Museum had presented exhibitions on the Holocaust before, none of them had focused on the subject from a defamiliarizing point of view. However, a different explanation is offered by Yudit Caplan, one of the curators of Roece Rosen's exhibition, who stressed that the role of the Museum is to make available the newest developments in art to their public, and not to design their exhibitions according to the reactions that the public might have.<sup>4</sup> It is fair to state that the Museum did not see it appropriate to anticipate the reaction of the Israeli press, nor of the public.

3. Whereas in Israel the exhibitions were aimed at a Jewish public, in the United States, *Mirroring Evil*, sponsored by the national organisation the Americans for the Arts, intended to reach out to the non-Jewish majority of American society as well. While the Israel Museum maintained a particular approach, foregrounding how young Jewish artists deal with traumatic memory, the Jewish Museum adopted a broader perspective as they presented the memory-work of a young generation of artists, Jews and non-Jews alike. These distinct approaches are also suggestive of the two countries' differing attitudes towards the Holocaust. The universal approach to Holocaust memory prevails in the American context,<sup>5</sup> and came to be known as the 'Americanisation of the Holocaust', explained by Natan Sznajder as an 'event that has come to this world as a crime against humanity, the worst of all crimes'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Information obtained by the author during interview with Yudit Caplan at the Israel Museum, August 2009, Jerusalem.

<sup>5</sup> This argument surfaces more prominently in Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust memory in the global age*, Assenka Oksiloff (trans.), (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Natan Sznajder, 'The Americanization of Memory: The case of the Holocaust', in *Global America?: The cultural consequences of globalization*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), p. 181.

On the other hand, Israel maintains a predominantly particular view, as it sees the Holocaust as a crime against Jews.<sup>7</sup> These approaches become especially apparent in the planning of the art exhibitions, and, subsequently, in the public debates they prompted. The Museums reveal the persistence of two diametrically-opposed ways of looking at Holocaust memory: namely the universal and the particular.

Despite the increasing multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character of the state of Israel, the public debates about the exhibitions were carried out by Jews and more importantly dealt with topics relevant to Jews only. It is noteworthy that references to the Palestinians remained allusive in the discussions. The Palestinians were mentioned only by means of euphemisms in public statements made by Museum representatives and by the artists. Their recourse to euphemism suggests the taboo nature in Israeli society during the 1990s of the Palestinians' victimization by Jews. The particular lesson of the Holocaust excludes the Palestinians and continues to refer only to Jewish plight. The public debates in Israel concentrate exclusively on the particularistic lessons of the Holocaust rather than looking at how the Holocaust can become a means to educate Israeli society about victimised groups within Israel.

In the American context, on the other hand, a universal approach to Holocaust memory remains the predominant one, in which the Holocaust is of relevance to all minority groups. Under close inspection, however, the American-Jewish adoption of the universal lesson of the Holocaust did not exclude views about the particular relevance of the Holocaust to Jewish life. The public debate in America has shown that, in spite of the universal message of *Mirroring Evil* exhibition, it was the Jewish segment of American society which contributed most to the public discussions. Moreover, the prevailing topics of debate were concerned with the Jewish aspect of Holocaust memory rather than with its general significance.

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<sup>7</sup> See Moshe Zuckerman's interpretation discussed in the previous chapter.

4. The Jewish Museum aimed at foregrounding the criticism voiced by the younger generations of artists of how the Holocaust is represented in America. By contrast, the Israel Museum stressed the commemorative endeavours of the young generation of artists who continue to remember the Holocaust albeit in their own way.

The Israel Museum's decision to host two exhibitions by young artists within a relatively short period of time suggests a certain commitment to Holocaust remembrance. These commemorative endeavours took place at the Israel Museum during the 1990s, at a time when institutional forms of commemoration began to be criticised for their alleged lack of educational impact. In the 1990s, individualism as a philosophical stance began to have a stronger grasp on the lives of young Israelis raised on television and the internet.<sup>8</sup> Post-Zionism can be regarded as the result of a generational movement, determined by a young generation of scholars whose historical inquiries offered a critical outlook on the role of the Holocaust as part of a Zionist narrative. Post-Zionism, as an overarching critical approach, encouraged multiple and alternative readings of key concepts such as history, identity, society, and also has led to criticism of the Israeli national discourses on Holocaust memory. Within this context, the Israel Museum's intention to show that young artists are preoccupied with Holocaust memory and that they have developed individual ways to commemorate the Holocaust should be viewed as part of a post-Zionist mode of thinking. By insisting on their interest in memory, the Israel Museum disproves the growing public concern about the emotional detachment from the past and its traumas among younger Israelis.

In contrast, the Jewish Museum in New York presented its exhibition as a confirmation of the critical approaches to the Holocaust endorsed by the younger generation. More importantly, the Museum foregrounded a critique of Holocaust representation in America. The artists were critical of the nuanced and varied ways

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<sup>8</sup> Aviv and Shneer refer to this in the introduction to *New Jews. The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, (New York: New York University, 2005), pp. 1-25.

in which Fascist aesthetics permeates popular culture. The exhibition as a whole drew attention to how Nazism continues to be part of American society and has maintained a certain allure for the American public. Rather than adopting a Holocaust commemorative stance, the works selected for *Mirroring Evil* questioned the social and commercial contexts in which the Holocaust is mentioned. The artists' motivation, as suggested by the Museum organisers, was not fuelled by the need to commemorate, but rather, it comes from their disappointment with popular culture's misuse of the Holocaust. The artists' critical viewpoint was explained by the Museum as being the result of a generational shift. Indeed, the art catalogue that accompanied the exhibition stressed the idea that its criticality is the defining characteristic of the younger generation.

Despite considerable differences in regard to the message that the Museums transmitted to the public, they shared the insistence on the emergence of a novel generational discourse. Indeed, certain relations between the two Museums need to be expressed more clearly, as they underline the interconnectedness of the two main centres of Jewish life and point to the 'global' dimension of Jewish life.

Given the intimate character of the relations between Jewish art institutions worldwide, and in light of the support offered by Friends of the Israel Museum in Europe and in America,<sup>9</sup> it is no wonder that the exhibitions at the Israel Museum constituted a point of departure for Norman Kleeblatt's *Mirroring Evil*. Knowing that the exhibitions at the Israel Museum had triggered intense public criticism, one can rightly assume that the Jewish Museum did not want to face a similar experience. Moreover, the curator at the Jewish Museum followed the public debates in Israel, being well-aware of the sensitive nature of the topics raised by the participants in the debates in Israel.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See British Friends' correspondence with the Israel Museum. The University of Southampton Library MS 364/4/1/34.

<sup>10</sup> This is revealed during my interview with curator Tami Katz-Freiman, August 2009, Tel Aviv.

In fact, the *Mirroring Evil* catalogue can be regarded as a response to the public debates at the Israel Museum. The idea that there is a young generation that deals with the memory of the Holocaust in its own distinct ways becomes a central argument of the art catalogue that accompanies *Mirroring Evil*. More precisely, this line of argument which was confirmed by representatives of the Israel Museum during the public debate, is further explored and continued by Norman Kleeblatt in his introductory statement to the art exhibition. Kleeblatt argues similarly to the Israeli curators Ygal Zalmona and Martin Weyl at the Israel Museum that a new discourse shaped by a young generation of artists is underway. But, unlike the Israeli curators who stress the commemorative intentions of the young generation, Kleeblatt's statements seem to point to how this young generation has adopted a critical stance in regard to how the Holocaust had traditionally been represented. His argument is supported by well-known scholars of Holocaust studies including James Young and Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi. Whilst these scholars investigate particular works that offer a nuanced critique of a broader cultural phenomenon of Holocaust representation they also support Kleeblatt's observations.

The generational discourse on Holocaust memory initiated by artists and discussed for the first time during the public debates in Israel was continued and consolidated by *Mirroring Evil* at the Jewish Museum in New York. The exceptional interpretative support including the numerous public programs organised by the Museum suggest that this exhibition, unlike any other art project at this Museum, aimed not only to present works of art by young artists, but more importantly wanted to foreground a new discourse about Holocaust memory. The public events were designed to consolidate the new approach in American and Jewish public consciousness. This generational discourse suggests the emergence of a shared understanding of Holocaust memory in Israel and the USA, and the affirmation of a global Jewish identity.



**4.1.** Visual art promoted by Jewish art institutions contributes to the development of a global perception of Jewish identities. The following discussion aims to highlight the demise of the Zionist narrative and of the Diaspora-Israel dichotomy, and to emphasize that younger generations of artists play an important role in the development of a non-hierarchical global understanding of Jewish identities.

The Zionist national narrative argues that Israel is situated at the centre of Jewish collective consciousness, whereas the Diaspora is placed at the margin. The model of Israel as centre and Diaspora as periphery has been criticized by scholars in Jewish studies both in Israel and in the Diaspora. A pertinent example is offered by Sander Gilman, who not only challenges this dichotomy but proposes the model of ‘the frontier’ as an alternative reading of Jewish history in which both centre and periphery have little relevance.<sup>11</sup> This model suggests that the same degree of relevance is given to Jewish identities either developed in Israel or in the Diaspora. However, one cannot overlook the fact that, whether criticized or lauded, Israel continues to occupy a central position in Diasporic collective imagination.

The importance given to Israel by many Jews in the Diaspora is evident in the fact that events occurring in Israel constitute timely topics of discussion in the Jewish mass media around the world. Furthermore, many Jews living in the Diaspora feel concerned with internal decisions taken by Israeli Jews.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Israeli Jews returning to Israel after years of living in America bring with them traditions characteristic of American-Jewish life. Scholars Caryn Aviv and David Shneer explain this phenomenon stating that Israeli returnees ‘demonstrate their

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<sup>11</sup> See Sander Gilman’s description of the model of the ‘frontier’ in *Jewish frontiers: essays on bodies, histories, and identities*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1-35.

<sup>12</sup> Annual survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee about the level of identification of Jews with Israel in 2010. The survey suggests a slight increase (30 per cent) in level of closeness to Israel from previous years 2008 and 2009, (28 per cent), retrieved from <http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Identification%20level%20of%20Diaspora%20Jews%20with%20Israel.pdf> (accessed on 9. 8. 2011).

*Americanness* by participating in rituals that American Jews have developed around Israel, such as holding Bar or Bat Mitzvahs at the Western Wall in Jerusalem'.<sup>13</sup>

In post-Zionist Israeli society perceptions of the Diaspora are changing too. Living in the Diaspora is becoming as legitimate as living in Israel.<sup>14</sup> Cultural trends that define Diaspora life are frequently espoused by Israeli Jews, too. In the global village, life in Israel and in the Diaspora is connected more tightly through common lifestyles, consumerism and means of communication.<sup>15</sup> Aviv and Shneer claim that the younger generations hold a central role in dismantling the concept of Diaspora as the periphery to Jewish self-understanding. They give the example of *Kol Dor* (Voice of a generation), an international network of Jewish leaders in their twenties and thirties, who met at the first conference of the network, in May 2004. Aviv and Shneer stress the fact that 'one of the group's first resolutions states that participants refuse to use any kind of "Israel-Diaspora" discourse, and instead speak in terms of a "global Jewish discourse"'.<sup>16</sup>

From an Israeli point of view, the decisions of young Israeli artists to leave Israel in order to start a career in the Diaspora has gained public acceptance. 'Diasporism', a concept used to refer to the Jews' return to the Diaspora in Europe<sup>17</sup> constitutes in the 2000s a real phenomenon among Israel's younger generation. Precursors of Diasporism emerge especially in the domain of the arts. Prominent figures include third-generation artists Ronen Eidelman and Amit Epstein who have chosen Diaspora life, by settling in Berlin, where they have become well-known as prominent leaders of a growing Israeli community of artists in Germany.

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<sup>13</sup> Aviv and Shneer, *New Jews. The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Article by Leora Eren Frucht, 'The Demise of Ideology', in the *Jerusalem Post*, (April, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> See Uri Ram, *The Globalization of Israel: McWorld in Tel-Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Aviv and Shneer, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Diasporism as a literary concept is discussed in Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi's *Booking passage: exile and homecoming in the modern Jewish imagination*, (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 221-234.

In her *Jerusalem Post* article ‘The Demise of Ideology’ Leora Eren Frucht talks about the changes in the Israeli perception of emigration. Those who leave Israel are no longer perceived by Israeli society as *yordim*, a derogatory term used to refer to deserters or traitors, but simply as ‘Israelis living abroad’. She quotes Oz Almog, sociologist at Haifa University who argues that ‘there is no longer any badge of shame for *yordim*. [...] On the contrary, in the era of globalization, success means international success. So an Israeli who makes it big abroad is not “going down” but “going up” in prestige’.<sup>18</sup>

The change in the perception of Diaspora, which no longer represents the destruction of Jewish life but becomes a space of Jewish cultural revival, is part of a broader cultural phenomenon which emerged in Israel in the 1990s. Aviv and Shneer argue that ‘since the 1980s and 1990s, some Jews have searched for alternatives to Zionism and Israel as the bases of secular Jewish identity’.<sup>19</sup>

The scholars identify the positive connotations given to Diaspora life as one such alternative. In their view this interpretation is endorsed by some groups in Israel that have adopted a leftist political stance. They remind us that: ‘rootlessness and wandering are valorised; diaspora nationalism is studied, Jews in far-flung lands in as many languages as possible are mapped, as the embrace of diaspora becomes the leftist critique of a positivist Jewish history that ends in the establishment of Israel’.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Aviv and Shneer clearly disagree with the use of the term ‘Diaspora’ as ‘a mode of explaining postmodern collective identity’; they argue that this category is no longer meaningful to contemporary Jewish life. Rather than refer to Jews as ‘in Israel’, or ‘in (the) diaspora’, the scholars prefer to refer to ‘new’ Jews as “global” and break down the inherent dichotomy that the Israel/diaspora metaphor maintains’.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Leora Eren Frucht, ‘The Demise of Ideology’.

<sup>19</sup> Aviv and Shneer, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

This global dimension is especially manifest at the level of cultural exchange. The domain of visual art is a case in point. It is not uncommon that Israeli artists gain a reputation in Israel, after having presented their works in exhibitions in Europe or in America. A pertinent example is Yael Bartana, an Israeli video artist, known for works such as *Trembling Time* (2001), *Mary Koszmary* (2007), or *Wall and Tower* (2009). After she was invited to exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York and at several art galleries in Poland, Bartana's works became a topic of discussion in Israel too.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, many Israeli artists choose to complete their education at American art schools. This was the case with Ram Katzir who studied at Cooper Union in New York and with Roe Rosen, who is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York. After having spent their formative years away from Israel, both artists returned to Israel to present work that deals with Israel-related topics. Through his teaching at renowned art schools in Israel, such as the Bezalel Academy of Art and the Beit Berl College School of Art, Rosen also contributes to the development of the next generation of Israeli artists. The knowledge and experience he acquired in the Diaspora informs Rosen's teaching of young Israelis, which consequently shapes their views and approaches. The strong cultural connection between Israeli and American Jews, manifest in the sphere of art, validates the claim of a 'global' dimension of Jewish life. This aspect is further supported by the close relationship developed between the Jewish Museum in New York and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and by the striking similarity of the counter-narratives about Holocaust memory emerging during the public debates in Israel and America which I am now turning to.

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<sup>22</sup> See Jewish Museum website page <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/bartana09>, (accessed on 9. 8. 2011).

## II

### The 'Victim-Identity' Narrative and the Sacralisation of the Holocaust among the Descendants of Holocaust Survivors in America and in Israel

Victimization of the Jewish people as a central topic of historical writing predates the Holocaust. It gained prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish intellectual discourse promoted by the Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz. Already in 1928 American-Jewish historian Salo W. Baron criticized what he termed Graetz's 'lachrymose conception of Jewish history', in which, argued Baron, the focus is placed on Jewish persecution by other nations rather than on Jewish emancipation.<sup>23</sup> Baron's bid for a departure from writings of Jewish history which emphasize victimisation seemed, however, to lose ground in the face of the Jewish genocide in Europe. The Eichmann Trial broadcast worldwide, prompted empathy and identification with the Holocaust victim on the part of the Israeli and Jewish-American public. Henceforth, the Holocaust victim has contributed to a sense of Jewish collective identity.

In the main *espaces vécus*<sup>24</sup> of Jewish life, America and Israel, the notion of victimisation became a part of a politicized discourse. Since the 1960s minority groups in America such as Indian Americans, Blacks, as well as Jews have started to construct identity narratives based on their historical victimization. Their victimization narratives subsequently led to a competition for public attention to those who have suffered the most. Well-known are the tensions between Jewish and Black communities in America which continue to exist till this day.<sup>25</sup> A representative example comes from New York's neighbourhood, Crown Heights, in August 1991. Riots were triggered when a car from the Grand Rebbe's entourage struck two black children, killing one of them, Gavin Gato, and seriously injuring his

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<sup>23</sup> Salo W. Baron, 'Ghetto and Emancipation', in Leo Schwarz (ed.), *The Menorah Treasury. Harvest of a Half a Century*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), pp. 50-63, and 'World Dimensions of Jewish History' in *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture*, 5 (New York, 1962), pp. 1-26.

<sup>24</sup> Term employed by Henri Lefebvre in *The production of space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> See Jonathan Kaufman's *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times between Blacks and Jews in America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

cousin Angela. During the three days of riots, Jankel Rosenbaum, an Australian Jewish scholar, and two Hassidic men were murdered. The assaults were followed by anti-Semitic harassment.<sup>26</sup>

A more general example is the public debate, regarding which ethnic and racial group have been victimised the most during the Holocaust, which overshadowed the opening of America's first commemorative institution, the USHMM. Whereas in the USA the status of victims is assigned to many minority groups, including Jews; in Israel 'victim identity' has been adopted by the entire Israeli society, and victimization narratives became an inherent part of Israeli national discourse. Identification with the victims of the Holocaust came to constitute the driving force behind the country's military culture, and it now supports the development of a heroic collective identity.

Victimization as central theme in the political discourse in Israel and in America has led to what Peter Novick referred to as 'the culture of victimisation'.<sup>27</sup> In light of Novick's observation, one further asks what the consequences of the culture of victimisation are. Furthermore, little is known about the effects of the internalization of 'victim identity' by post-Holocaust generations, those who '[created] an alternate Jewishness out of a legacy of suffering' as Efraim Sicher explains.<sup>28</sup> The debates prompted by the art exhibitions at the Jewish Museum in New York and at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem offered unique historical opportunities for a public dialogue and reflection upon the younger generations' perceptions of 'victim identity'.

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<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the subject see Michael André Bernstein, *Forgone Conclusions, Against Apocalyptic History*, (California: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 85-86.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 189.

<sup>28</sup> Sicher, Efraim. 'The Future of the Past: Counteremory and Postmemory in Contemporary American Post-Holocaust Narratives', in *History and Memory*, 12 (2) (2001), pp. 61-3.

Prior to these debates, scholarly research into the public image of second-generation Jews in Israel and America was informed by the following facts: a) The children of survivors in Israel were known to have been affected by their parents' experiences of victimization. They were regarded as a silent group, whose coming to terms with their 'victim identity' took place mainly by means of therapy. Psychotherapist Dina Wardi suggests that individual forms of dealing with the trauma prevailed in Israel. b) Occasionally, members of the second generation articulated their opinions publicly, but only as a consequence of having been forced by external circumstances. They unequivocally assumed the role of 'memorial candles'. c) Second-generation Israelis did not make a political stance, nor did they create institutions that would represent them. It is notable that *Amcha*, an institution that looks after the well-being of survivors and their descendants, was primarily concerned with offering psychiatric counselling to those directly affected by the Holocaust, and only secondarily, to their offspring. Despite the passing away of many survivors, *Amcha's* goals have not changed.<sup>29</sup>

d) Unlike Jews in Israel, second-generation Jews in America have come to be known as a 'movement' whose main objective has been to break the silence of their parents' generation and to tell the American public, the stories of their parents' victimisation. Similarly, they have endeavoured to show that 'victim identity' also defined them as a collective. A series of conferences and public gatherings organised in America during the 1970s aimed at constituting them as a collective.<sup>30</sup> These activities enabled second-generation American Jews to gain significant public visibility and influence. e) They became known for their leadership positions in public efforts to

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<sup>29</sup> *Amcha's* mission statement retrieved from <http://www.amcha.org/aboutus/IntroductionEn.asp> (accessed on 15. 8. 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Eva Fogelman informs about the participation at international conferences of second generation scholars including Helen Epstein, in article 'Third Generation Descendants of Holocaust Survivors and the Future of Remembering', in *Jewcy*, (1 May, 2008), retrieved from [http://www.jewcy.com/religion-and-beliefs/third\\_generation\\_descendants\\_holocaust\\_survivors\\_and\\_future\\_remembering](http://www.jewcy.com/religion-and-beliefs/third_generation_descendants_holocaust_survivors_and_future_remembering) (accessed on 20. 8. 2011).

commemorate the Holocaust. Their involvement in national Holocaust remembrance has given them a sense of shared purpose. In conclusion, it appears that for Jews in the United States, Holocaust memory has constituted a way of articulating identity as a collective. In Israel, on the other hand, Holocaust memory enabled the second generation to articulate their identity as individuals.

My analysis of the public debates offers new insight into second-generation identities in America and in Israel. It shows that the perception of second-generation Jews in America as a collective unified by shared feelings of victimisation and strengthened by the involvement in commemorative activities is waning. The debate about *Mirroring Evil* highlighted significant ideological divisions emerging in the memory discourses of second-generation Jews. It gave prominent members of the Jewish-American public sphere, such as Michael Berenbaum and Brad Hirschfeld, the opportunity to engage in a counter-discourse which departed from conceptions of Jewish identity based on 'victim identity'.

While people like Menachem Rosensaft continued to defend an American Jewish identity based on victimization, his opponents claimed that Holocaust memory can be kept alive without having to maintain a 'victim identity'. The Jewish Museum, too, contributed to this counter-narrative which proposes liberation from a collective self, defined by victimhood, and consequently, from a 'lachrymose' Jewish historical narrative which centres on Jewish persecution and marginalization as markers of Jewish identity.

The debate at the Jewish Museum shows the recent polarization in the American-Jewish discourse. It also demonstrates that the image of second-generation Jews united by shared views and values is no longer true for the American-Jewish community. The question that arises at this point is whether the ideological divisions that have emerged among members of the second generation would lead to the



disintegration of the American Jewish collective, or rather to a strengthening of communal feeling. Whereas scholars such as Charles S. Liebman claim that ideological divisions have led to a weakening of Jewish identity,<sup>31</sup> I argue that this debate is suggestive of the transition towards new forms of self-definition. The tendency towards a renewal of the communal, religious, or social image among Jewish-American communities must necessarily include renewal of a conceptualisation of the Holocaust. The public debate triggered by *Mirroring Evil* offered a telling example of an attempt to redefine Jewish-American understanding of the Holocaust.

In a similar manner, second-generation identities in Israel have undergone changes. Israeli public perception of the children of Holocaust survivors as silent ‘memorial candles’ was challenged in the course of the public debates about the exhibitions by Ram Katzir and Roe Rosen. Rosen, for example, revealed an attitude which departed from this perception. He endorsed a counter-narrative which argued that a ‘victim identity’ that had been imposed through public commemoration of the Holocaust must be scrutinised and interrogated. Rosen is not alone in calling for a critical perspective on the national appropriation of ‘victim-identity’ narratives. He has garnered the support of the Israel Museum and of other members of the intellectual elite in Israel. Rosen’s views are suggestive of the diversification of Israeli public approaches to Holocaust memory in the 1990s. Rather than endorsing the view that state institutions should speak in the name of the victims, Rosen and his supporters call for the survivors to speak out themselves.

The public debate surrounding his artwork shows that ‘victim-identity’ narratives were appropriated by politicians and made part of an institutionalised discourse about Holocaust memory. It is only as a consequence of this reality that Rosen makes public his identity as a member of the second generation. Unlike in America,

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<sup>31</sup> Charles S. Liebman, *Choosing survival. Strategies for a Jewish future*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 135-169.

in Israel individual expressions of second-generation identity thus emerge as a reaction to the nationalisation of Holocaust memory that places 'victim identity' at its core. The public debate about *Live and Die as Eva Braun* shows that the survivors' descendants can indeed speak out against what they perceive as a non-productive approach to Holocaust memory.

While in the United States Berenbaum's and Hirschfeld's reaffirmation of Jewish identity includes a renunciation of the victimization narrative, in Israel 'victim identity' is not necessarily rejected by Rosen or Katzir. However, what is vehemently repudiated is the facile adoption and employment of the 'victim identity' narrative within a political discourse that dictates how one should approach Holocaust memory and commemoration.

Even though both in Israel and in America the public debates were conducted predominantly by members of the second generation, one cannot overlook the critical input of the third generation. Their contribution, though of smaller proportion, allows further insights into the changing discourses about Holocaust memory. Not only do they endorse counter-narratives proposed by members of the second generation, but they also disclose their own particular self-perceptions.

In America, *Mirroring Evil* has promptly drawn the interest of the third generation. Their remarks written in the visitor books indicate that, far from appropriating a 'victim identity', the younger generation's position in relation to the Holocaust is nuanced and multifaceted. Their engagement in the public debates shows a continued interest in the subject of the Holocaust and, more importantly, their need to know what has happened to their grandparents. Curator Kleeblatt stressed that the public programme that accompanied the exhibition brought together grandparents, their children and grandchildren, and enabled them to engage in a

dialogue.<sup>32</sup> It thus constituted an opportunity for the extended family to share their different views about the subject of the exhibition, and it represented a chance for the grandparents to retell their stories of trauma and survival. Finally, it offered them all an opportunity to acknowledge that, in the aftermath of the catastrophe, Jewish life continues to thrive.

Representative of the third-generation in Israel, artist Ram Katzir explains that *Your Colouring Book* was driven by the need to know and to understand what had happened to his grandfather.<sup>33</sup> Katzir initiates a dialogue by means of an artistic project, which for him becomes a substitute for a real discussion with his grandfather who by then was no longer alive.

An important point which distinguishes the attitudes of members of the third-generation from their parents is a sense of balance that the former achieve between their rational attitudes and their emotional involvement with the subject of the Holocaust. The youngest generation's involvement in the public debates in America confirms the interest they continue to have in the Holocaust. In contrast to their parents though, the third generation rejects a Jewish identity constructed on the basis of victimhood. The responses of the younger generation to *Mirroring Evil* and to various public statements by leading Jewish figures made during the public debates show a measured approach which tends to be critical of a Jewish identity politics that revolves around victimisation. More importantly, the debate shows that forgetting the Holocaust does not represent a concern for these young members of the discussion.

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<sup>32</sup> From interview with Norman Kleeblatt conducted by the author, September 2010, New York.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Katzir conducted by the author, October 2009, Amsterdam.

The sacredness of the Holocaust constituted a recurrent theme in the discourses of influential leaders of the Jewish communities in America and of Israeli Jews. In the American public sphere, Rosensaft's and Wiesel's responses to the exhibition were adopted uncritically and internalized by their supporters. While the Israeli public debates reveal that state and government institutions endorse a discourse of Holocaust sacralisation.

The exceptional function of the Museums in Israel and in the United States lies in the fact that knowingly – as in the case of the Jewish Museum, which organized a wide range of public dialogues, and unknowingly – as in the case of the Israel Museum which did not assume a role of mediator of discussions – they promoted a public interrogation of the role and function of a perspective that encourages the sacralisation of Holocaust memory.

The public debates showed that the belief that 'victim identity' is central to the Jewish experience and that Holocaust memory is sacred, is endorsed by leading members of the Jewish communities in America and by state institutions in Israel. These are influential segments of the Israeli and American-Jewish public sphere which have an impact on public opinion. Their opinions are prone to dominate the public sphere, and shape individual and collective viewpoints. In other words, their views become institutionalised. Particularly in the case of secular Jews in America and in Israel, Holocaust commemoration and the combat of anti-Semitism have become central practices that reinforce Jewish identity and ground it in a 'victim-identity' discourse. They have been adopted by Holocaust commemoration institutions and by organisations which fight anti-Semitism such as the Anti-Defamation League. Whilst these practices and the narratives that they promote have gained dominance, other narratives have been marginalised. These counter-narratives take issue with the centrality given to 'victim identity' and to Holocaust sacralisation.

The public debates scrutinised in this thesis highlighted that institutionalised Holocaust memory is a phenomenon common to both Israel and the United States, and that its function is to ensure that memory narratives which centre on 'victim identity' and on the sacralisation of the Holocaust remain central to Jewish collective consciousness. The counter-discourses on Holocaust memory emerging among some American and Israeli Jews also present common characteristics and they suggest that Jewish identities in relation to Holocaust memory are changing. The fact that there are members of the public debates who criticize, in similar ways, Holocaust memory narratives suggests that a Jewish generational discourse which has a global character is under way. It remains to be seen if the new discourse can have a real influence on the broader Jewish-American and Israeli public.

The location of these exhibitions at Jewish museums whose role is to represent Jewish culture and shape the cultural identities of future generations, and the fact that both institutions managed to trigger intense public discussions, are telling of the fact that the questions posed by the younger generation of artists were recognised as being of considerable importance by both American and Israeli Jews.

Perhaps, it is worth remembering that in the social structures, artists are oftentimes deemed to be thinkers who are ahead of their times. Their role throughout history has been to advance ideas, thoughts and beliefs that are already permeating society. The counter-narratives which emerged as a result of the public debates discussed here, bestow a degree of legitimacy on the artists' vision, showing how common it is for art to trigger discussion among members of society, and become the conveyer of a certain 'spirit of the time'. The late 1990s and early 2000s was a particularly rich period for the articulation of a counter-discourse which opposes memory narratives that locate the Holocaust at the heart of contemporary Jewish understanding. The

visual arts are one among other forms of cultural production which promote similar counter-discourses.<sup>34</sup>

The suffering endured by European Jews during the Holocaust has been acknowledged as one of the saddest chapters in Jewish history, with fundamental repercussions on Jewish self-understanding. Nonetheless, this has not prevented some important members of the Jewish communities in America and of the cultural elite in Israel to raise attention to what they see as a problematic adoption of the Holocaust as the principal identity marker of late-20<sup>th</sup> and early-21<sup>st</sup>-century Jewry.

The public debates have confirmed and reinforced Salo Baron's argument that there is more than a 'lachrymose' connotation to Jewish identities. 'Suffering is part of the destiny of the Jews', Baron said in an interview in 1975, 'but so is repeated joy as well as ultimate redemption'.<sup>35</sup> The similarities resulting in the opinions of the members of debate in Israel as well as in the USA, suggest that their understanding of the Holocaust has taken a convergent rather than a divergent trajectory. Furthermore their critical interrogations of memory narratives that advocate 'victim identity' and sacralisation of the Holocaust have reached out to broader segments of the American-Jewish and of the Israeli public sphere.

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<sup>34</sup> Several examples of important works emerging in the 1990s and in the 2000s are the Israeli satirical group, *Hamishia Camerit*, and the comic book for children *Kofiko in Auschwitz* by Dudu Geva. In the American context, a prominent example remains Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus. A survivor's tale* (1997) and Tova Reich's satiric novel *My Holocaust* (2007).

<sup>35</sup> Statement made by Baron, retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/26/obituaries/salo-w-baron-94-scholar-of-jewish-history-dies.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>, (accessed on 29.8. 2011).

## Conclusion

As a way of concluding this thesis, I would like to point to the global dimension of the counter-discourses made apparent by the public debates discussed in chapters three and four. Despite the differences that distinguish the memory narratives about the Holocaust in Israel from the ones in America, especially the universalization of the Holocaust in the American context and the particularist take on Holocaust memory in Israel, my analysis suggests that there are also significant similarities in the younger generations' perception of the relevance of the Holocaust in formulating contemporary Jewish identities. The congruent opinions of some members of the second and third-generation suggest that there is a common understanding of the influence that the Holocaust continues to exert on Jewish life and of its impact on shaping Jewish identities that is shared by Jewish people globally. The counter positions taken by some members of the debate surface with prominence in both Israel and in America, and point to the interconnected nature of Jewish life, and to the demise of the Diaspora-Israel dichotomy as a main distinguishing characteristic of Jewish identities.

The public debates revealed that the legacy of the Holocaust that had for a long time been endorsed by American as well as Israeli Jews as a fundamental trait of post-Holocaust Jewish experience, is now increasingly the subject of critical interrogation by a younger generation of Jews whose objective is, as my analysis has shown, to depart from a Jewish self-understanding based on victimization. The defamiliarizing approach to the representation of the Holocaust proposed by the art exhibited in the Jewish museums has, undoubtedly, contributed to this novel interpretation of the Holocaust. Although influential representatives of Jewish communities frowned upon it, they failed to notice the commitment of younger generations to think critically about the effects of the Holocaust upon their own lives.

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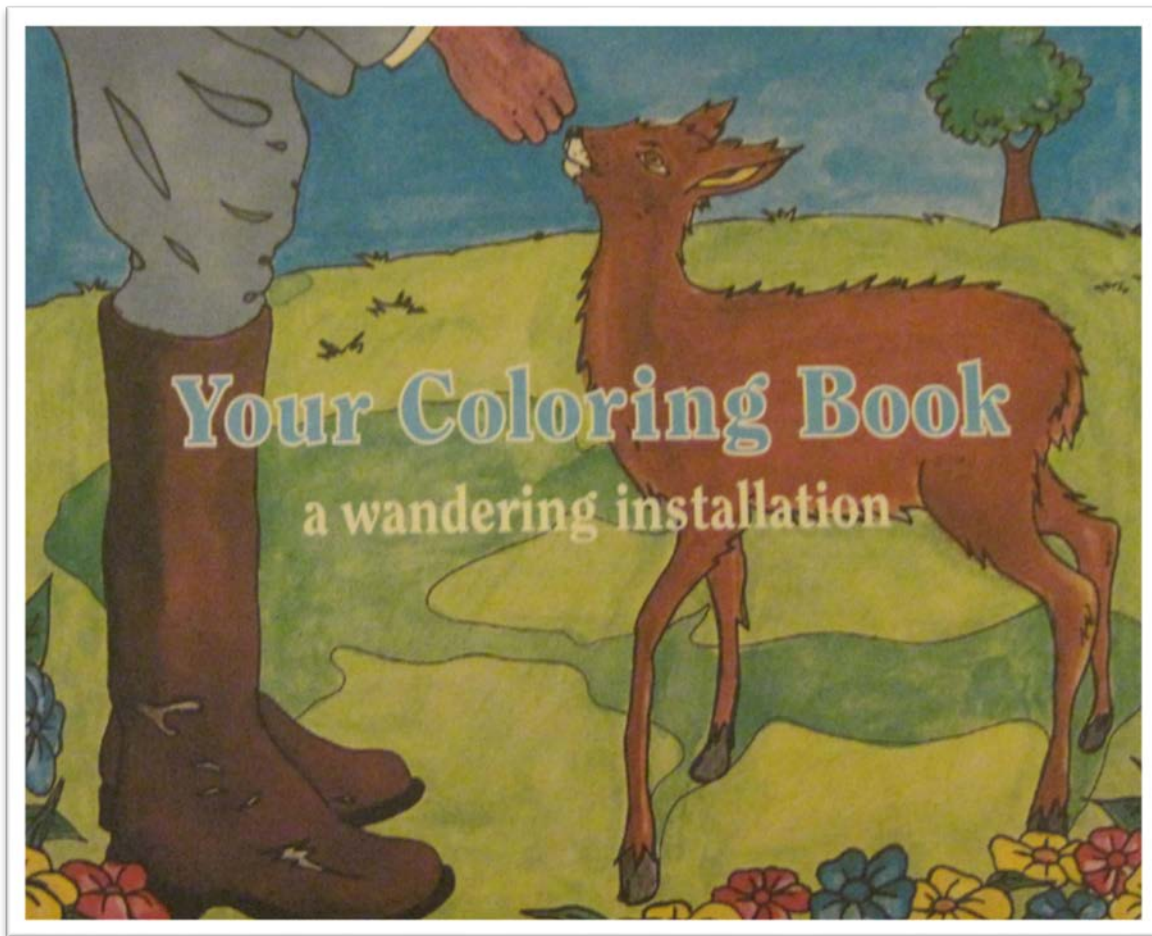
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## Appendix

### Illustrations

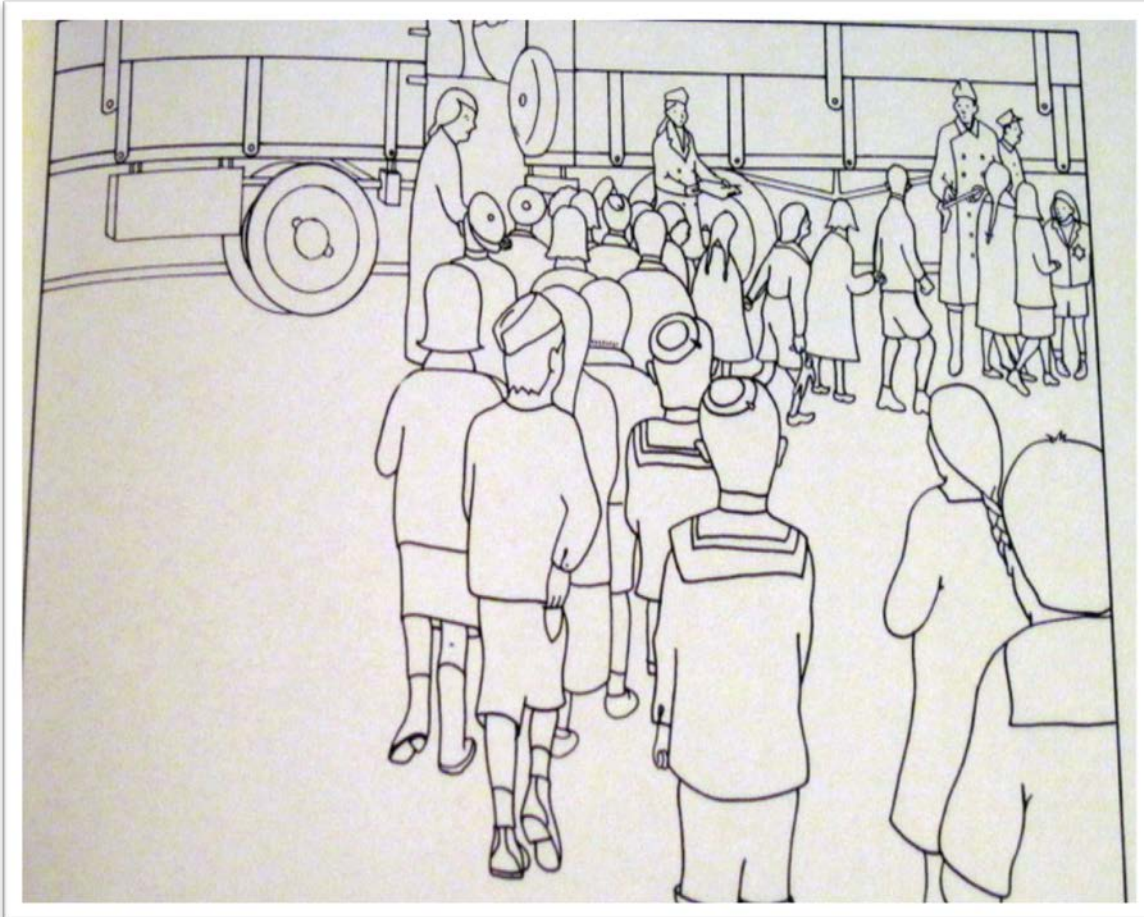


*Figure 1 Cover page of art catalogue*



*Figure 2 Drawing no 4 from art catalogue*



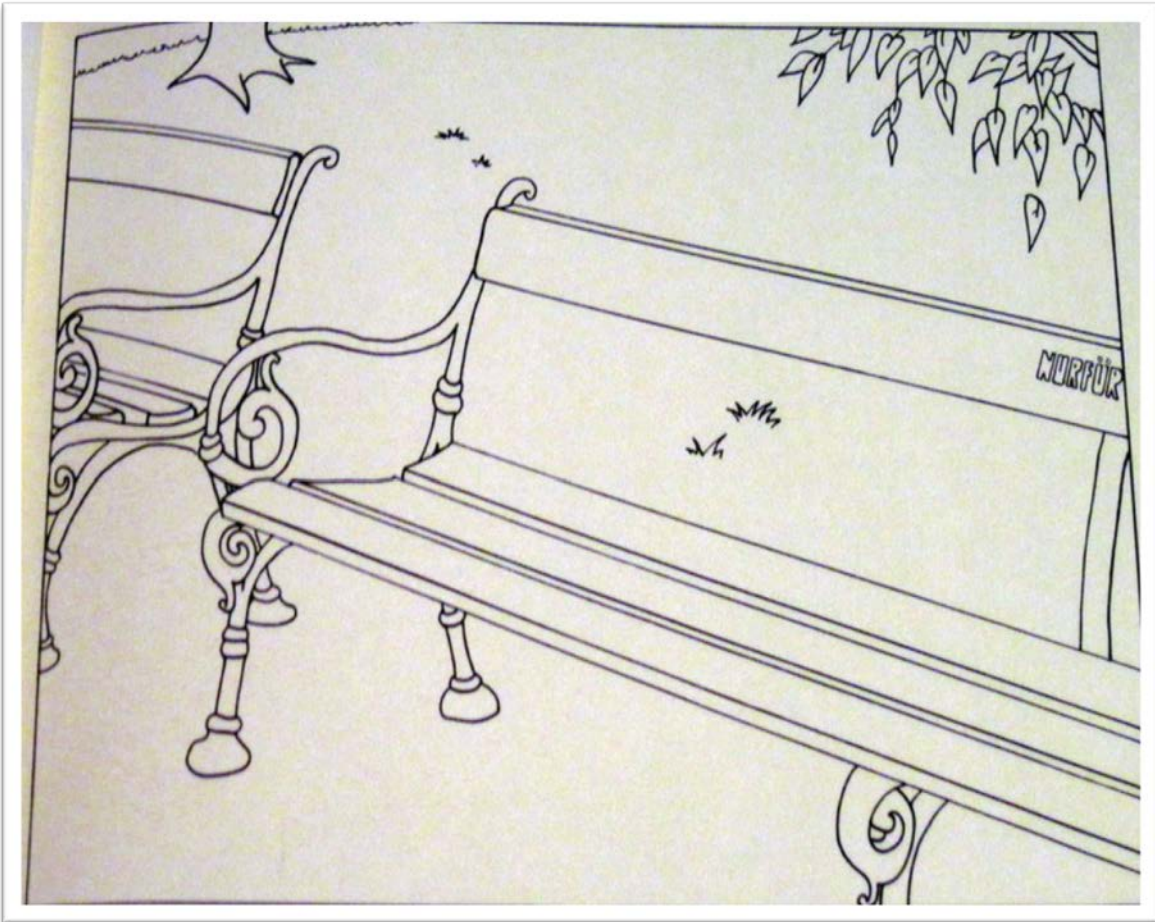


*Figure 3 Drawing no 5 from art catalogue*

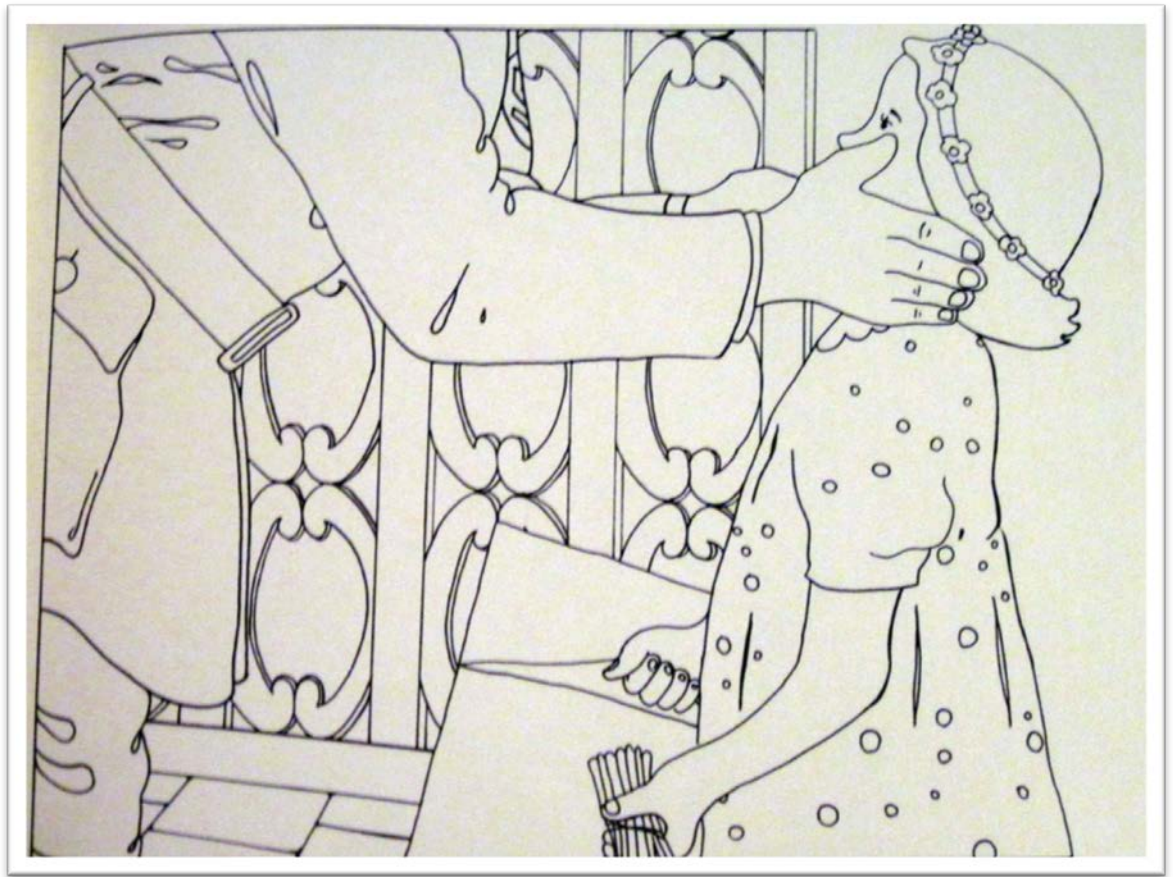


*Figure 4 Drawing no 8 from art catalogue*

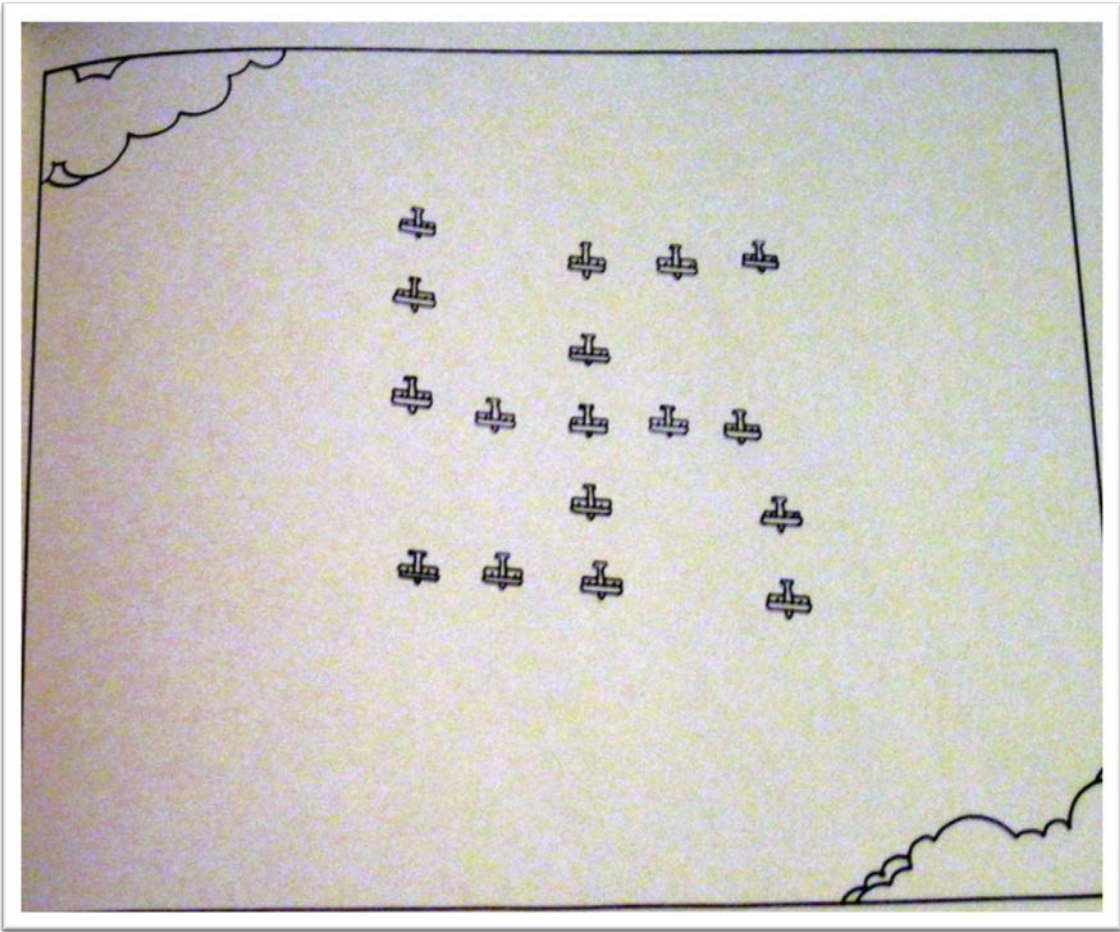




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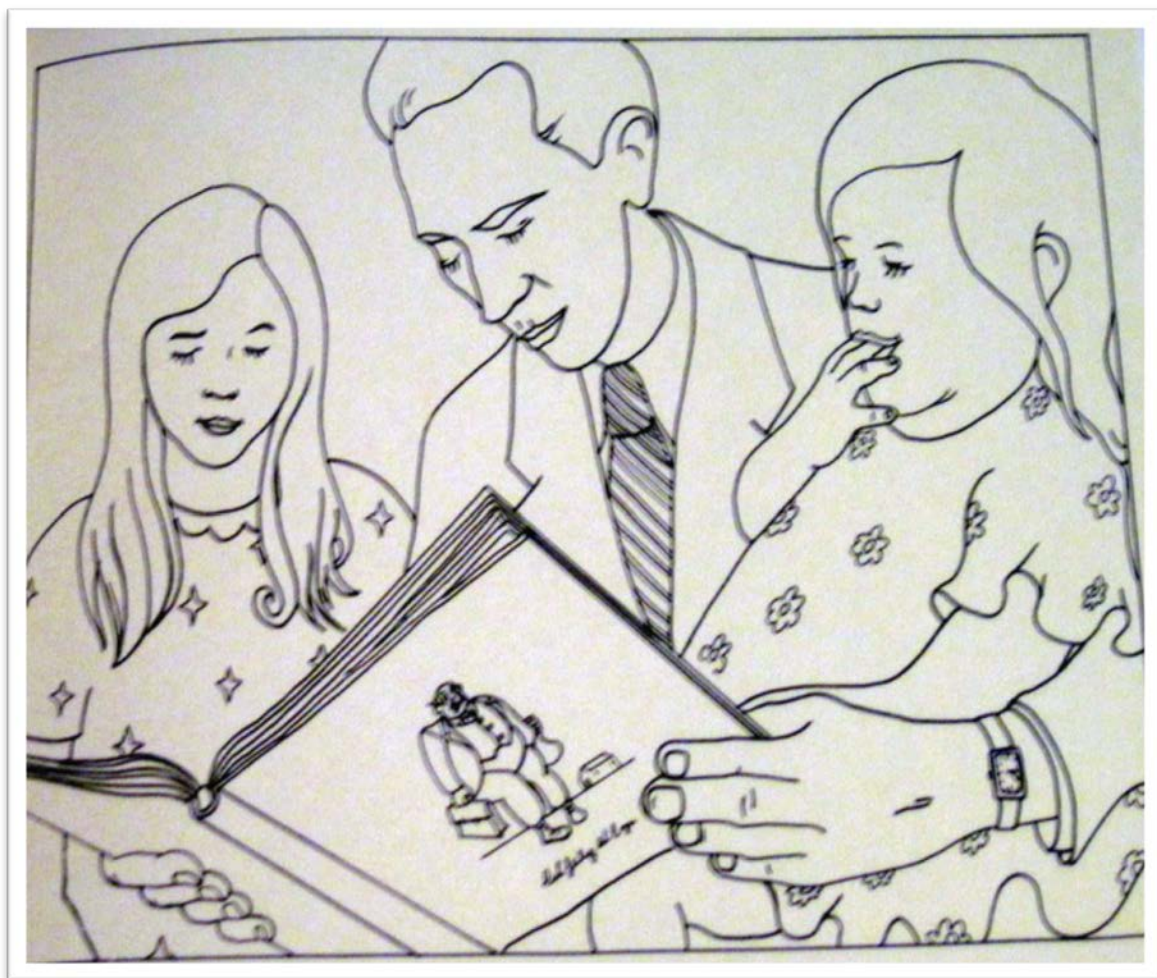


*Figure 6 Drawing no 6 from art catalogue*



*Figure 7 Drawing no 12 from art catalogue*





*Figure 8 Drawing no 13 from art catalogue*



*Figure 9 Source no 1 in the art catalogue*



Third Reich Propaganda Minister  
Joseph Goebbels with his  
daughters Helga and Heide.<sup>3</sup>

*Figure 10 Source no 13 in the art catalogue*





Crowd welcoming Hitler to the  
Bürkeberg rally, Germany, 1935.<sup>1</sup>

*Figure 11 Source no 8 in the art catalogue*



School children saluting their  
teacher, Berlin, 1940.<sup>3</sup>

*Figure 12 Source no 4 in the art catalogue*





Deportation of Jewish children  
from Łódź Ghetto, Poland.<sup>4</sup>

*Figure 13 Source no 5 in the art catalogue*

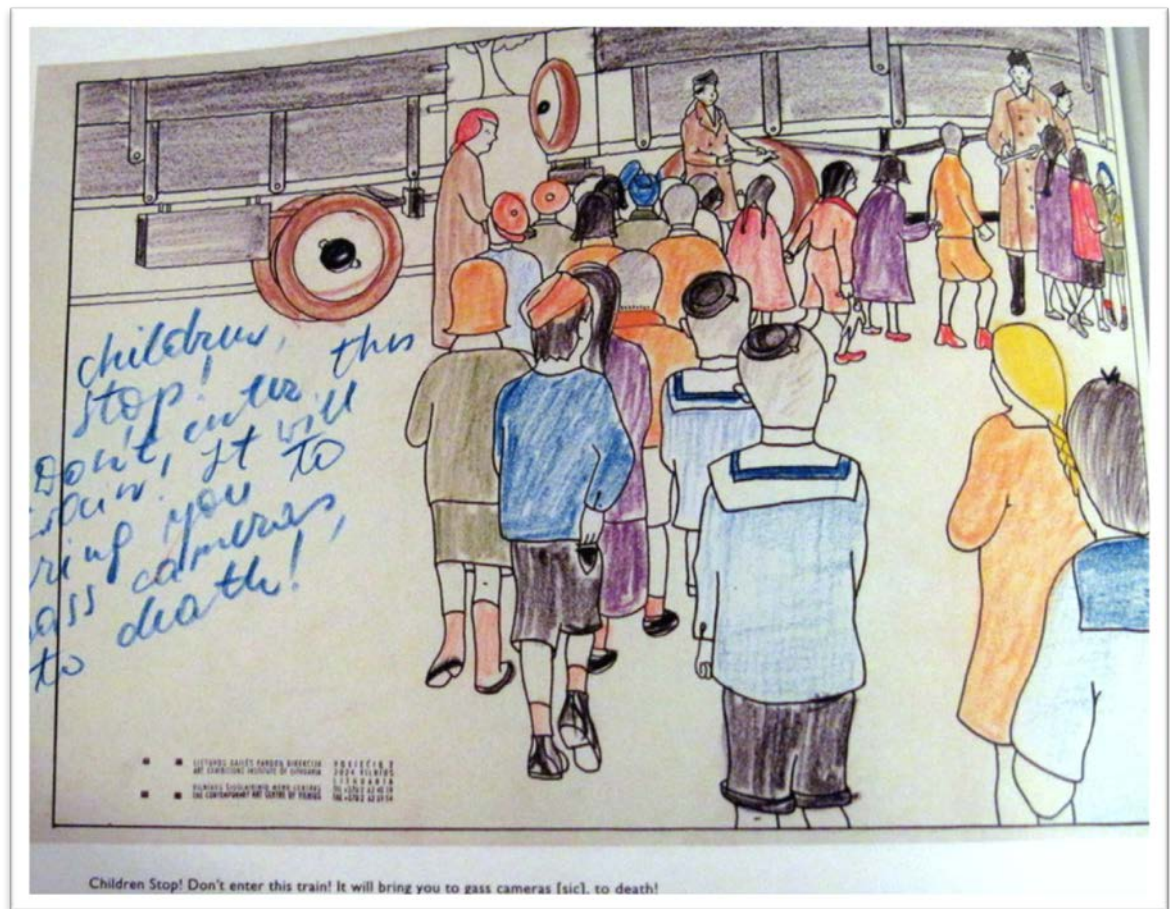


Figure 14 Image coloured by visitor in Vilnius

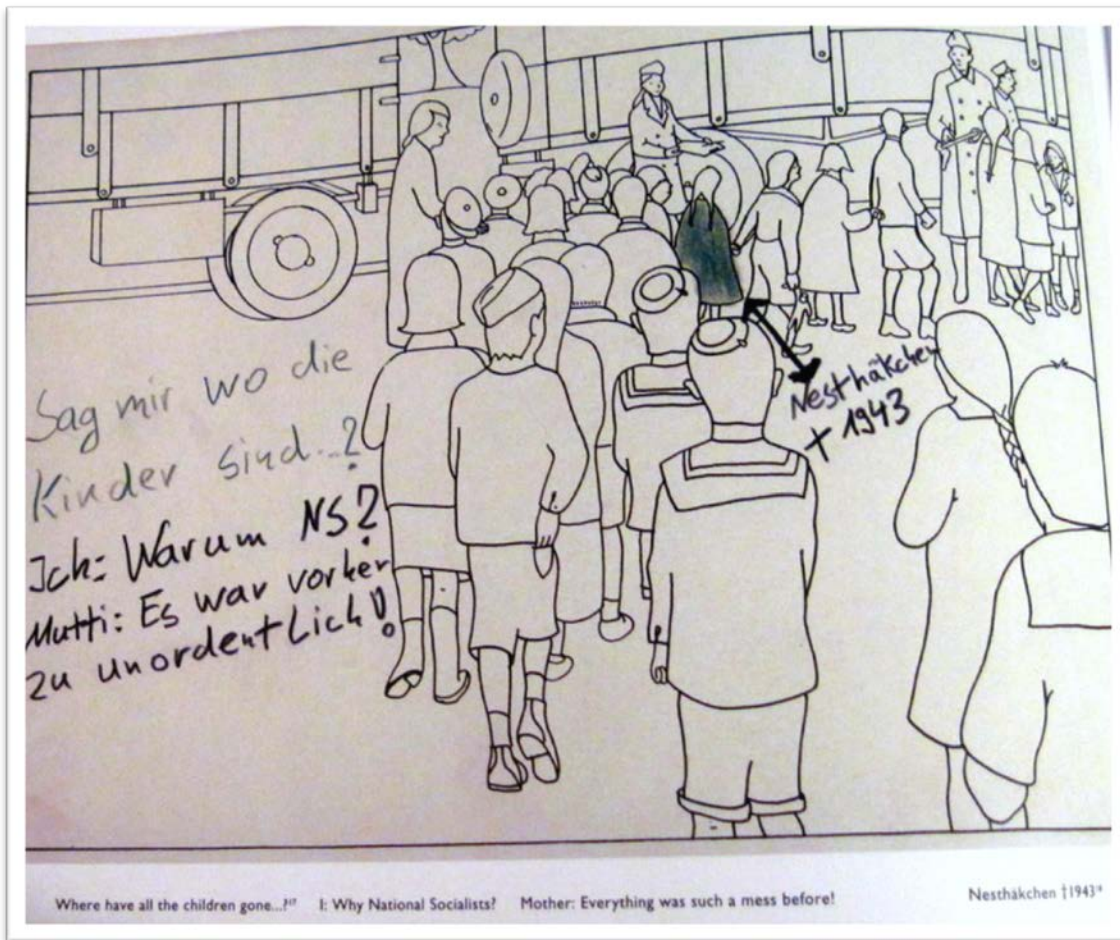
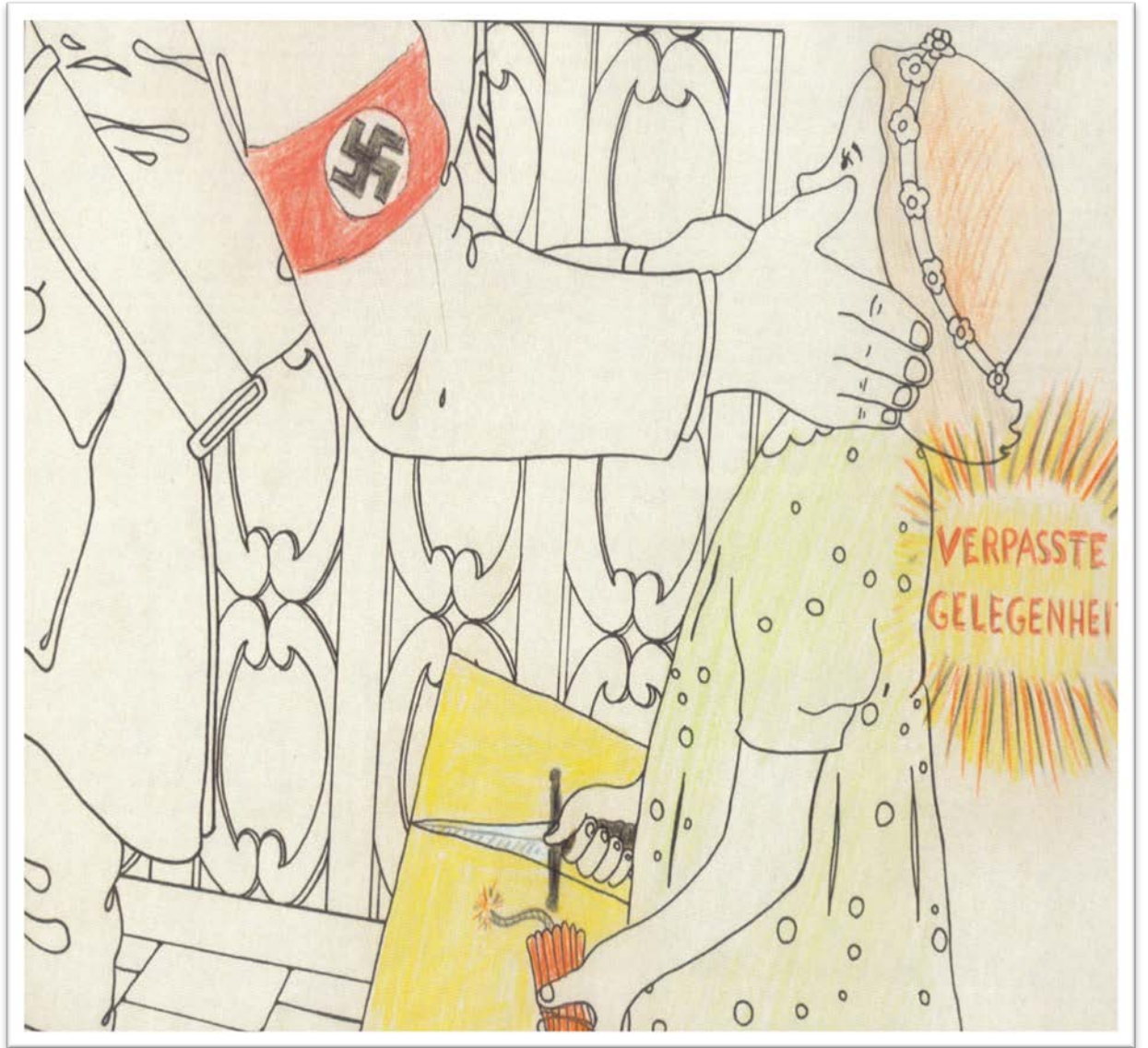


Figure 15 Image coloured by visitor in Berlin

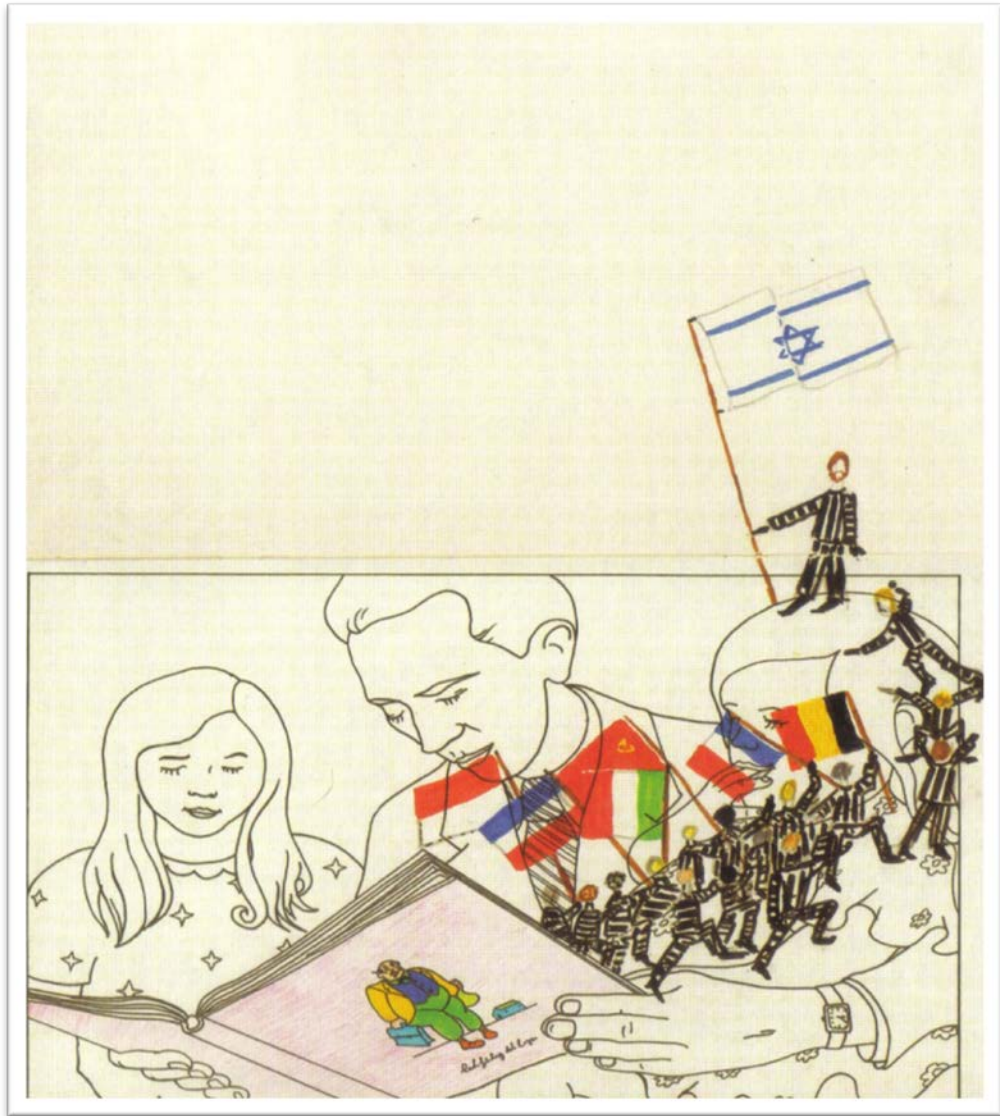




*Figure 16 Image coloured by visitor in Berlin*



*Figure 17 Image coloured by visitor in Jerusalem*



*Figure 18 Image coloured by visitor in Jerusalem*