

From DPs To *Olim*: Depicting Jewish Refugees In American Films, 1946 – 1949

LAWRENCE BARON

When the victorious Allied troops entered the gates of hastily abandoned German concentration, extermination, and labor camps, they surveyed the human toll of the Third Reich's racial war. The stench and sight of rotting corpses scattered where they had died or stacked before they could be buried or burned overwhelmed the soldiers. The ashes in the crematoria and the instruments once plied in medical experiments and torture sessions testified to the agony of victims who left no remains. The bony bodies and vacant gazes of the survivors made them look like phantoms returned from the netherworld.¹

Documentary films, newsreels, and photographs speedily disseminated these appalling images.² By May of 1945, 84 % of Americans polled believed Germany had slaughtered many civilians in its camps.³ The prosecution at the Nuremberg Trials submitted a compilation of atrocity footage as evidence of German crimes against humanity. The gaunt survivors, crematoria chimneys, barbed-wire fences, gas chambers, mass graves, railway cars, SS insignia, Star of David armbands, striped camp uniforms, swastikas, warehouses full of personal items and human hair, and Zyklon-B canisters became commonly recognized symbols of Nazi inhumanity.⁴

Many scholars maintain that the initial shock over the revelations of the decimation of European Jewry was short-lived. American awareness of the 'Final Solution' allegedly dissipated as Jewish losses were subsumed under the staggering casualty statistics for World War Two as a whole and overshadowed by events like the dropping of Atomic bombs on Japan, the onset of the Cold War, the rehabilitation of West Germany, and domestic issues like the civil rights movement. American Jews supposedly did not fathom the calamity that had befallen European Jewry nor dared to jeopardize their own social integration by championing its cause. Peter Novick has summarized this consensus interpretation by asserting: 'Between the end of the war and the 1960s, [...] the Holocaust made scarcely any appearance in American public discourse, and hardly more in Jewish public discourse – especially discourse directed to gentiles.'⁵

Yet the United States produced more feature length films dealing with Holocaust themes than any other country between 1945 and 1949. These movies cast the United States as the pursuer and prosecutor of Nazi war criminals, the thwarter of postwar Nazi conspiracies to gain power, the protector of displaced persons, or the victim of brutality the Germans meted out to American POWs. As the table and filmography appearing below indicate, six of these motion pictures depicted how the psychological problems afflicting concentration camp survivors were overcome by reuniting them with loved ones or facilitating their immigration to Palestine or the United States.

***Plotlines of American Feature Length Films
with Holocaust Themes, 1946 - 1949***

<i>Plotline</i>	<i>Number of Films</i>
DPs in camps, Israel, or US	6
Hunting Nazi War Criminals	2
Anti-Nazi Resistance	2
American POWs in German Camps	2
Thwarting Neo-Nazi Conspiracies	2
War Crimes Trial	1

Filmography of American DP Films

- 1946 *My Father's House*. Directed by Herbert Kline (Palestine and USA: Jewish National Fund and World View Productions). 84 minutes. Limited distribution in theatres.
- 1947 *The Illegals*. Directed by Meyer Levin (Palestine and USA: Americans for Haganah and Film Documents Inc.). 72 minutes. Limited distribution in theatres.
- 1948 *The Search*. Directed by Fred Zinnemann (Switzerland and USA: Praesens and MGM). 105 minutes. Commercial distribution in theatres.
Tomorrow's a Wonderful Day. Directed by Helmar Lerski (Israel and USA: Children to Palestine and Hadassah). 45 minutes. Distributed to Christian and Jewish groups in the United States.
- 1949 *Answer for Anne*. (USA: Caravel Films and Lutheran World Action Immigration and Refugee Service). 40 minutes. Distributed to churches in the United States.
Sword in the Desert. Directed by George Sherman (USA: Universal International, 1949. 101 minutes). Commercial distribution in theatres.

The prominence of the DP issue in American films reflected the humanitarian crisis the Allies and the United Nations faced in the wake of Germany's defeat. Approximately seven million refugees flocked to the American, British, and French zones in Germany upon its surrender in May of 1945. Jews constituted a minority of this influx that comprised foreign slave laborers sent to wartime Germany, fugitives from Nazi rule, prisoners of war, survivors of German camps, and immigrants fleeing postwar communist rule. Millions of ethnic Germans forcibly expelled from Czechoslovakia and Poland joined this flood of refugees. By September, the Allied Occupation had repatriated nearly six million of the dispossessed.⁶

Most Jewish DPs under Allied or United Nations guardianship refused to return to their native countries where few Gentiles had protested Nazi anti-Semitic policies and some had collaborated in their implementation. Panicked by the outbreak of pogroms in postwar Poland, Polish Jews compounded the overcrowding in the DP camps under American, British, or French control in 1946.⁷ Compared to Gentile refugees, Jews usually had spent longer periods in confinement or hiding, had lost more members of their families, and had suffered greater psychological and physical harm according to the Harrison Commission study issued in September of 1945.⁸ Since many Jewish DPs yearned to go to Palestine, the Commission and President

Truman recommended England permit one hundred thousand to immigrate there. England balked, worried that a large influx of Jews would ignite the volatile tensions between Arabs and Jews in the area.⁹

Between 1945 and 1948, a congruence of American and Zionist interests emerged with the former preferring to channel Jewish DPs towards Palestine and the latter welcoming American pressure on England to admit Jewish refugees into Palestine and relinquish its Mandate there. Hadassah, HIAS, the Jewish National Fund, the Joint, ORT, the UJA, various Zionist organizations, and concerned Christian churches produced numerous shorts and several feature length films establishing the causal relationship between the unrelenting persecution that left Jewish DPs bereft of families and homes and their desire to rebuild their lives in Israel or the United States. A sampling of their titles conveys their message: *Day of Deliverance*, *The Future Can Be Theirs*, *Look Homeward Wanderers*, *Placing the Displaced*, and *They Live Again*.¹⁰

While most of these shorts were traditional documentaries, some utilized fictionalized voiceovers or dramatic reenactments to recount typical experiences DPs endured during and immediately after World War Two. The majority solicited financial donations to fund the immigration and rehabilitation costs for DPs going to Palestine and the United States or mobilized political support for UN approval of the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. In the Hadassah production *Do You Hear Me?*, an anonymous Jewish woman who perished at the hands of the Nazis telephones a Jewish American housewife to recruit her for the Zionist cause of providing a homeland 'for the women whose little ones were murdered and who now are mothers once again.'¹¹

The themes of devastation and redemption were reiterated in longer films subsidized by charitable and political groups. Herbert Kline's *My Father's House* and Helmar Lerski's *Tomorrow's a Wonderful Day* portrayed the painstaking adjustment Jewish orphans who had survived the war either as fugitives or prisoners underwent to feel they belonged to the Jewish state emerging in Palestine. In both movies the lead characters exhibit many symptoms of what has since been diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. They feel at home only after they recognize their historical or religious connection to the land of Israel.

Scripted by novelist Meyer Levin, *My Father's House* dramatizes the futile pursuit of young David Halevi to find his missing family in Palestine. He rebuffs the earnest attempts of various caretakers who offer to serve as substitute parents and siblings. While plowing a field in the Negev, he discovers a stone bearing the inscription Halevi in Hebrew and finally accepts his kinship with the Jews of Palestine.¹²

Tomorrow's a Wonderful Day develops around a similar premise. Its protagonist Benjamin cannot adapt to life in a children's kibbutz. Its fences and work assignments remind him of his onerous confinement and drudgery in a concentration camp. The nurturing he receives, his evolving recognition that the tasks he performs are constructive and not designed to break his body and spirit, and his participation in communal observances of the Sabbath and Hanukkah eventually endow him with a feeling of solidarity with the Jews of the *Yishuv*. Holding torches aloft after lighting the menorah, he and his comrades sing, 'You who have no father are now a son of Israel.'¹³

Meyer Levin also authored and directed *The Illegals*. It traces the sojourn of a Jewish couple from their return to Poland where their home has been reduced to rubble, to their march to Mediterranean ports from which they embark on ships furnished by the Haganah, and finally to their furtive voyage to Palestine.¹⁴ Although *The Illegals* is often classified as a documentary, it actually should be categorized as a docudrama. Levin did accompany a band of Jewish refugees recruited by the Haganah to illegally enter Palestine and captured many of the incidents that occurred along the way on film, including a remarkable scene of British sailors boarding the aptly named steamer *Unafraid* to prevent its passengers from reaching their destination. Yet he cast his fiancée Tereska Torres and Yankel Mikalovitch, whom he found working as an instructor at a Jewish orphanage in France, as the movie's stars. Their temporary separation en route and determination to have their baby born in the Holy Land provide the narrative framework for *The Illegals*. As a journalist in the army press corps, Levin had witnessed the liberation of concentration camps. The shocking revelations of what had transpired there convinced him that a homeland in Palestine 'seemed the least recompense that the world could offer to a people who had lost six millions.'¹⁵

Two commercially released films dealt with the subject of DPs and their *aliyah* to Israel: Fred Zinnemann's *The Search* from 1948 and George Sherman's *Sword in the Desert* from 1949. Both motion pictures received wider distribution than the advocacy films and popularized the image of DPs as wounded souls seeking reunion with family members or collective redemption by joining the struggle for a Jewish state.

The naturalistic look and topical relevance of *The Search* have their roots in Zinnemann's biography as a Jewish émigré who started his career as a filmmaker during the Depression. Growing up in Austria, Zinnemann recalled the pervasive anti-Semitism, hunger, and unemployment that ensued after the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War One. He apprenticed in Berlin and Paris before immigrating to Los Angeles in 1929. In 1934 the Mexican Department of Fine Arts commissioned him to direct a semi-documentary entitled *The Wave* about the grinding poverty and strenuous work of fishermen in a small village. This experience encouraged his predilections to film on site, cast amateurs to play themselves, and tackle socially significant themes. Under contract for MGM, Zinnemann primarily directed shorts and B-films. *The Seventh Cross* (1944) represented a notable exception. It concerned a political prisoner who escapes from a Nazi concentration camp and approaches strangers to help him. Most lack the courage or conviction to do so. The death of Zinnemann's parents in the Holocaust accounts for his postwar attraction to stories about the trauma the Nazis inflicted on their enemies as evidenced not only in *The Search*, but also in *Act of Vengeance* (1949), his film noir tale about a vendetta after the war between a veteran and his commanding officer who had betrayed his subordinates when they were all were captured and interned in a German POW camp.¹⁶

Impressed by *The Seventh Cross* and moved by Thérèse Bonney's photography book *Europe's Children*, Swiss producer Lazar Wechsler approached Zinnemann to direct a movie about the 'unaccompanied' children languishing in DP camps. Wechsler and screenwriter Richard Schweizer had collaborated on *The Last Chance*

(1945), a film about Allied soldiers shepherding refugees to Switzerland. They recruited Bonney as a technical advisor for *The Search*. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) granted Wechsler and Bonney permission to visit DP camps in Germany, conduct interviews, and read the files of DP children. Based on incidents they learned about during their research, they scripted a drama about the adversities these children had encountered. Dissatisfied with the auditions of Swiss youngsters for the parts of the orphaned juveniles, the production team cast children from the camps in all but the leading roles. Zinnemann shot the outdoor scenes in the debris of Munich and Nuremberg to evoke the desolation and displacement which pervades the film.¹⁷

The Search opens with a train screeching to a halt. A narrator describes the plight of DP children fostering the impression that the viewer is watching a documentary. When the door slides open, the sleeping children look like corpses piled upon one another. The UNRRA personnel shine flashlights on the motionless figures, some of whom are still wearing concentration camp garb. The awakening of the dazed boys and girls signals their rebirth. The narrator emphasizes the magnitude of the crisis: 'This is but a handful, a tiny handful, of the millions of orphaned, homeless, bewildered children, children who had a right to better things – a right taken from them by the war.' The youngsters cannot comprehend that the UNRRA shelter is not a concentration camp. They steal bread, obey orders, and expect to be frisked after meals. A faded swastika and German eagle painted on a wall loom as reminders of their persecution under Nazism.

The camera assumes the point of view of the UNRRA caretakers as they debrief the new arrivals. Prior to this scene, the children blend into the group. Only when each is interviewed does the range of their nationalities and tribulations emerge. The children speak in their native languages which are translated by social workers. An orphaned French Catholic youngster discloses he had been interned at Mauthausen. A Polish girl and her brother reveal that their parents died at Bergen-Belsen. A Hungarian named Miriam says her parents were gassed at Dachau where she saw her mother's blouse in clothing she sorted.

A blond boy with an identification number from Auschwitz tattooed on his forearm steps up. At first he remains mute. When he finally replies to questions about his identity, he repeats, 'I don't know' in German. A flashback divulges the boy's repressed secret – that his parents were Czech intellectuals who had been arrested by the Gestapo. Although he never saw his father or sister again, the boy, whose name is Karel, stayed with his mother in a concentration camp until one day he saw her marched away. His amnesia and silence signify his repression of traumatic memories.¹⁸

Zinnemann places Karel and his mother Hannah in settings and situations that symbolize the havoc the Third Reich wrought on personal relationships and public morality. Karel's caseworker decides to transfer him to another center for therapy. An ambulance drives into the camp to pick up Karel and other severely troubled youngsters. To them, the ambulance triggers memories of the German gas vans. Suspecting the worst, the children escape from the vehicle. Karel and a companion leap into a river where Karel conceals himself and his friend drowns. Meanwhile, Hannah treks along an empty autobahn where she passes several collapsed bridges.

She has been looking for her lost son at various DP centers. Approaching the shelter where Karel had been detained, she sees a cemetery. These juxtapositions invert the meanings of objects and places normally associated with connecting and helping people.¹⁹

Karel roams like a wild animal through the wasteland of splintered boards, shattered bricks, and twisted steel. Stevenson, the GI affably played by Montgomery Clift, coaxes the hungry boy out of hiding by tossing him a sandwich. Then he grabs Karel and drives him to his home. He notices that the letter A standing for Auschwitz precedes the numbers of the boy's arm. After repeatedly trying to prevent Karel from escaping, Stevenson unlocks the gate and lets Karel out. Only then does Karel realize that Stevenson is his friend and not his warden. He teaches Karel to speak English. Stevenson shows him a picture of a fawn which Karel dubs Bambi. Postwar audiences knew that Bambi's mother was killed by hunters. Stevenson informs Karel of his plan to adopt him since his mother is presumably dead. Karel compulsively sketches horizontal and vertical grids that look like a fence. He runs away and futilely waits for his mother at the gate of a local factory which is surrounded by a fence.

Although Karel is not Jewish, Zinnemann explicitly refers to the Jewish dimension of the DP crisis. When Hannah inquires whether her son is at the camp, she is led to a choirboy who claims to be Karel. His real name turns out to be Joel Markowsky. Joel pretended to be Catholic and usurped Karel's name because his mother had warned him never to reveal he was Jewish. The chief social worker mentions that most of the DP children at the shelter are Jewish and that many are preparing to go to Palestine. The Zionist youth are depicted as better adjusted and optimistic than their Gentile peers. Towards the end of the movie, a group of children celebrates its departure for Palestine in a scene replete with Hebrew songs, a poster with the death toll of six-million in large bold numbers, and portraits of famous Zionist leaders.²⁰

The climax of *The Search* is as maudlin as it is predictable. Hannah boards a train to resume her quest while Stevenson returns the boy he named Jimmy to the UNRRA shelter until the adoption is finalized. As Stevenson relates how and when he met Jimmy, the social worker realizes that Jimmy is Karel. She rushes to the train station to stop Hannah from departing. In the interim, Hannah has decided to stay to care for an incoming group of orphans. At the shelter, Karel and Hannah have a tearful reunion.

Notwithstanding its happy ending, *The Search* delivers a powerful message about the dislocation, separation, and trauma experienced by DPs. The testimony of the children, their frightened reactions to the routines in the camp, and the intrusion of the past into their present behaviors are unsettling. Zinnemann wrapped a sugar coating around a bitter pill as he readily conceded:

All of us realized, of course, that it would be necessary to soften the truth to a certain extent, because to show things as they really were would have meant that the American audience would have lost any desire to face it, used as they have been through the years to seeing a sentimentalized world.²¹

The Search deserves to be recognized as the first successful American film on a Holocaust related theme. It won the Golden Globe and Oscar for best screenplay as well as the UN Award from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

The National Board of Review chose it as one of the top ten movies of 1948.²² *Life* magazine devoted a four page pictorial spread to it which included a section comparing and contrasting stills from the film to photographs of children still languishing in European DP camps.²³

Unlike *The Search* which garnered critical acclaim, *Sword in the Desert* usually has been dismissed by film historians as 'little more than an American war movie,' and typical of the B movies churned out by director George Sherman.²⁴ The main storyline involves the skirmishes between English soldiers and Zionist activists who have smuggled refugees into Palestine and sabotaged British installations. The action scenes, however, stem from the obligation the Zionists feel they owe to the survivors of the Holocaust. Adrift in longboats, passive DPs wait anxiously as David, the organizer of the flotilla, pleads with the mercenary captain of the freighter to accompany them to shore. His impassioned soliloquy enumerates the concentration and death camps they had passed through to reach this moment of liberation. Some of the DPs still are dressed in their striped camp clothing. A Magen David is emblazoned on the back of a jacket worn by one of them.

Upon landing on the beach, David holds up a child and exclaims, 'We are home now!' A sequence of close-ups of elderly and young families follows. Their faces radiate hope as they gaze at the sun rising in the East. An old man falls on his knees and kisses the sand. His son cannot believe his father is still alive and asks him, 'How long did it take you to get here?' David answers for him, 'Two thousand years.' In *The Search*, the plot centered upon an individual finding his mother; whereas in *Sword in the Desert* the remnant of a dispersed people returns to their Biblical homeland.

During the climactic rescue of Zionists interned by the British, Sherman reminds the audience of his movie that their release is the logical extrapolation of their liberation in Europe by the Allies. He stages a shot of prisoners standing behind a wire fence so it resembles the famous Margaret Bourke-White photograph of dazed inmates peering out from behind the fence at Buchenwald. Yet these Jewish prisoners of the British are not the demoralized survivors of Nazi barbarism. Instead, they are members of a fledgling nation whose freedom is secured by fellow Jews rather than foreign armies. Though the cynical American captain ultimately sympathizes with the Zionists, he does so more out of respect for their courage than out of pity for the DPs he transported.

At a time supposedly devoid of discourse about the Holocaust, American Jewish organizations and a few commercial filmmakers employed images gleaned from the footage of concentration camp survivors and plots 'torn from the headlines' to present an Americanized version of events in which the United States played the benign role of caretaker for Hitler's Jewish victims or supporter of their claim to a country of their own.²⁵ These initial explorations of the repercussions of the Holocaust anticipated the portrayal of similar themes in feature films like *The Juggler* (1953), *The Young Lions* (1958) and *Exodus* (1960). Although such early attempts to popularize the aftermath of what was then called the 'Jewish catastrophe' may strike us as benign and naive given the ways we now understand the event, there are enough of them to contradict the blanket characterization of this period as a time when Americans, Jews and Gentiles alike, remained silent about the Holocaust.²⁶

Notes

- 1 Robert H. Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York, 1985.
- 2 Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust*, New York, 1999, pp. 5-26; Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eyes*, Chicago, 1998, pp. 1-85.
- 3 David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, New York, 1985, p. 326.
- 4 Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust*, New Haven, 2001, pp. 11-37; Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, pp. 86-140.
- 5 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston, 1999, pp. 63-123; Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold*, New York, 1999; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 4-19; Norman C. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, New York, 2000, pp. 11-30; Deborah E. Lipstadt, 'America and the Memory of the Holocaust', *Modern Judaism* 16, no. 3, 1996, pp. 198-208.
- 6 Mark Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*, Philadelphia, 1989.
- 7 Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzell, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, Evanston, 2001, pp. 9-53.
- 8 Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*, New York, 1982, pp. 33-99.
- 9 Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*, New York, 1970; Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, Chapel Hill, 2001; Abram Leon Sachar, *The Redemption of the Unwanted: From the Liberation of the Death camps to the Founding of Israel*, New York, 1983.
- 10 *Day of Deliverance*, Directed by Paul Victor Falkenberg, USA, 1949; *The Future Can Be Theirs*, Directed by Paul Victor Falkenberg, USA, 1947; *Look Homeward Wanderers*, Palestine and USA, 1947; *Placing the Displaced*, Directed by Martin Bursten, USA, 1948, *They Live Again*, USA, 1946. For a complete listing of these films, see Stuart Fox, *Jewish Films in the United States: A Comprehensive Survey and Descriptive Filmography*, Boston, 1976, and the 'Cinematography of the Holocaust', Fritz Bauer Institute, www.cine-holocaust.de/eng. Many of these films can be viewed on 'The Virtual Cinema,' Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, www.spielbergfilmarchive.org.il/kv/index.html. They present a considerably different perception of the DPs than the one often held by GIs and occupation officials. See Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart and Jeneen K. Surrency, 'Documenting the DP Camp,' in Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart (ed.), *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook*, vol 2, Westport, 2004, pp. 95-100. Also see Roberta Newman, 'DP Docudrama: Institutional Propaganda and Post-World War II Jewish Refugees', *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*, 16, no. 1, 1994, pp. 52-56.
- 11 *Do You Hear Me?*, Directed by Stefan L. Sharff, USA, 1946.
- 12 *My Father's House*, Directed by Herbert Kline, Palestine and USA, 1946. Levin expanded his script into a novel. See Meyer Levin, *My Father's House*, New York, 1947. For his recollections of making the film, see Meyer Levin, *In Search: An Autobiography*, New York, 1950, pp. 331-358.
- 13 *Tomorrow's a Wonderful Day* (Israel and USA: Children to Palestine and Hadassah, 1948).
- 14 *The Illegals*, Directed by Meyer Levin (Palestine and USA: 1947).
- 15 Levin, *In Search*, pp. 358-476. Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*, Bloomington, 1988, p. 202; Judith Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd edn., Syracuse, 2002, p. 219. Avisar classifies *The Illegals* as a documentary; Doneson calls it a 'unique filmed document.' The information for the film posted on the Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com, lists its genre as a documentary, but its plot keyword as a docudrama. The film's entry on the Cinematography of the Holocaust website of the Fritz Bauer Institute, www.cine-holocaust.de/eng, considers it fictional.
- 16 Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies: An Autobiography*, New York, 1992, pp. 7-55. Neal Sinyard, *Fred Zinnemann: Films of Character and Conscience*, New York, 1992, pp. 1-30; Wheeler Winston Dixon, 'Act of Violence (1949) and the Early Films of Fred Zinnemann', in Arthur Nalletti (ed.), *The Films of Fred Zinnemann: Critical Perspectives*, Albany, 1999, pp. 37-53.
- 17 Sinyard, *Fred Zinnemann*, pp. 31-32; Zinnemann, *A Life*, pp. 56-73; Thérèse Bonney, *Europe's Children*, New York, 1943.
- 18 Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*, Albany, 1997.
- 19 Claudia Sternberg, 'Real Life References in Four Fred Zinnemann Films', in John Nalletti (ed.), *The Films of Fred Zinnemann*, Albany, 1999, pp. 200-204.
- 20 See the photograph of the filming of this scene in Zinnemann, *A Life*, p. 71.
- 21 Fred Zinnemann, 'A Different Perspective', *Sight and Sound* 17, no. 67, Autumn 1948, p. 113.
- 22 'Awards and Nominations', *The Search*, www.imdb.com.
- 23 'Movie of the Week: *The Search*', *Life* 24, no. 14, April 5, 1948, pp. 75-79.

- 24 Lester Friedman, *The Jewish Image in American Film*, Secaucus, 1987, pp. 145-146; Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, Bloomington, 1984, pp. 180-181; Joel Samberg, *Reel Jewish*, Middle Village, 2000, pp. 107-110.
- 25 See Michele Mart, 'Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel', *Diplomatic History* 20, 3, Summer 1996, pp. 357-380.
- 26 Lawrence Baron, 'The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945-1960', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 17, 1, Spring 2003, pp. 62-88. Also see Hasia R. Diner, *Before 'The Holocaust': American Jews Confront the Catastrophe 1945-1962*, Ann Arbor, 2004.

Bibliography

- Abzug, Robert H., *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York, 1985.
- Avisar, Ilan, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*, Bloomington, 1988.
- Baron, Lawrence, 'The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945-1960', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 17, 1, Spring 2003, pp. 62-88.
- Bauer, Yehuda, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*, New York, 1970.
- Bonney, Thérèse, *Europe's Children*, New York, 1943.
- Cole, Tim, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold*, New York, 1999.
- Dawidowicz, Lucy, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge, 1975.
- Diner, Hasia R., *Before 'The Holocaust': American Jews Confront the Catastrophe 1945-1962*, Ann Arbor, 2004.
- Dinnerstein, Leonard, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*, New York, 1982.
- Dixon, Wheeler Winston, 'Act of Violence (1949) and the Early Films of Fred Zinnemann', in Arthur Nolletti (ed.), *The Films of Fred Zinnemann: Critical Perspectives*, Albany, 1999, pp. 37-53.
- Doneson, Judith, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd edn, Syracuse, 2002.
- Douglas, Lawrence, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust*, New Haven, 2001.
- Erens, Patricia, *The Jew in American Cinema*, Bloomington, 1984.
- Finkelstein, Norman C., *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, New York, 2000.
- Fox, Stuart, *Jewish Films in the United States: A Comprehensive Survey and Descriptive Filmography*, Boston, 1976.
- Friedman, Lester, *The Jewish Image in American Film*, Secaucus, 1987.
- Horowitz, Sara R., *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*, Albany, 1997.
- Kochavi, Arieh J., *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, Chapel Hill, 2001.
- Königseder, Angelika and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, Evanston, 2001.
- Levin, Meyer, *In Search: An Autobiography*, New York, 1950.
- Levin, Meyer, *My Father's House*, New York, 1947.
- Lipstadt, Deborah E., 'America and the Memory of the Holocaust', *Modern Judaism* 16, no. 3, 1996, pp. 198-208.
- Mart, Michele, 'Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel', *Diplomatic History* 20, 3, Summer 1996, pp. 357-380.
- Newman, Roberta, 'DP Docudrama: Institutional Propaganda and Post-World War II Jewish Refugees', *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*, 16, no. 1, 1994, pp. 52-56.
- Novick, Peter, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston, 1999.
- Picart, Caroline Joan (Kay) and Jeneen K. Surrency, 'Documenting the DP Camp', in Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart (ed.), *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook*, vol. 2, Westport, 2004, pp. 95-100.

- Sachar, Abram Leon, *The Redemption of the Unwanted: From the Liberation of the Death camps to the Founding of Israel*, New York, 1983.
- Samberg, Joel, *Reel Jewish*, Middle Village, 2000.
- Shandler, Jeffrey, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust*, New York, 1999.
- Sinyard, Neal, *Fred Zinnemann: Films of Character and Conscience*, New York, 1992.
- Sternberg, Claudia, 'Real Life References in Four Fred Zinnemann Films', in John Nolletti (ed.), *The Films of Fred Zinnemann*, Albany, 1999, pp. 200-204.
- Wyman, David, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941 - 1945*, New York, 1985.
- Wyman, Mark, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945 - 1951*, Philadelphia, 1989.
- Zelizer, Barbie, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eyes*, Chicago, 1998.
- Zinnemann, Fred, 'A Different Perspective', *Sight and Sound* 17, no. 67, Autumn 1948, p. 113.
- Zinnemann, Fred, *A Life in the Movies: An Autobiography*, New York, 1992.

Sarajevo – Trauma Revisited

The Scandal Of The Double Survivor

GARETH JONES

*“If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle,
and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented
a new literature, that of the testimony.”¹*

As film maker and belated doctoral student in Holocaust Film I have watched hours of filmed testimony by Holocaust survivors, and beyond the overwhelming emotional response of the informed viewer, one must consider the entire genre with a certain lucidity. What is the apparent purpose of the testimony for the testifier? Why has s/he remained silent till now? Is it wise to attempt to recover trauma after several decades, or may the emotional cost not outweigh the potential benefit? How far can delayed testimony be viewed as faithful, unclouded by subsequent replay or acting out? What will be understood from these fragments by an uninformed viewer today and by future generations as the Holocaust recedes? How can these personal traumata be pieced together into a coherent account, and indeed should they be? Lastly, and most pressingly: I am forced to ask myself what motivates our latter-day urge to record the tribulations of half a century ago, when the world around us is repeating its old mistakes.

This unease was brought sharply into focus by two little known documentary films I discovered in a city not primarily associated with the Holocaust (though it suffered comparable losses to any under Nazi occupation) namely Sarajevo, where for the last four years I have served as Script Consultant for the film festival’s pan-Balkan screenplay competition Cinelink, which brings together leading film makers from across South East Europe to work together on their next project.

In any one group I have had a Serb working with a Bosnian, or a Croat with Serb and Albanian alike, and it wasn’t long before I realized that most of these writers were attempting to deal with the trauma of the recent Balkan wars and their chaotic aftermath, in tones that varied from social realist docu-fiction to surreal, scrambled autobiography. These were my contemporaries, many of whom were conscripted or volunteered, often on opposite sides, and I was struck by the lack of rancour with which they addressed their shared wounds in this creative forum; equally however, by their silences, which seemed as meaningful as their dialogue, suggesting that much of what might have been told remains inaccessible to the teller or recoverable only in flashes of sudden release, an admittedly normal pattern of recall made problematic by deep-rooted denial and unconsciously willed amnesia.

Without wishing it I found myself in the position of a father confessor or therapist, teasing out lost meaning and occasionally launching a provocative challenge, hoping

to dislodge some psychic block or loosen some deep-rooted resistance. In soliciting this testimony, however, I had constantly to bear in mind the dangers of transference and over-identification, especially given a putative colonial dimension: these were their stories, not mine; the Balkan region has a rich cinematic tradition of its own.

In the process I gradually became aware that I was skating on thin ice in terms of my own subject position. For instance, while I could recite my anti-Vietnam demonstrations and the draft dodgers I had supported, where had I been, what had I been doing, during the Balkan war that ended barely ten years ago? I had been making a film about the Holocaust, or more specifically about the genesis of Christian anti-semitism without which the Holocaust is hard to imagine, and a biopic on the Nazi-resisting theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But I had written nothing about the Balkans, let alone about the siege of Sarajevo which carried all the hallmarks of genocide but which was ignored by large sections of the western public and most certainly by western governments.

Contrariwise, it is perhaps a sign of how recent trauma tends to efface the inner and outer signs of an earlier trauma, that I had inspected the shell-scarred, pock-marked masonry of Sarajevo and toured the city's defences on a guided tour now offered by the former Bosnian Commander-in-Chief (ethnically a Serb, one of the many ironies of that conflict), before coming upon the abandoned, desolate Jewish cemetery and finally enquiring about the Jewish community here and its fate under the Nazis, only to realize that my young colleague who organized the writers workshop was himself Jewish, that his colleagues were Muslim and together with the city's non-fundamentalist Christians they represent an indigenous, integrated culture of the monotheisms of which western Europe remains largely ignorant, in which Muslims protected Jews from Nazi persecution and fifty years later each stood by the other through the longest siege in history.

My discomfort increased when I realized that amongst the victims of the recent siege had been survivors of the earlier horrors. One Auschwitz survivor had been forced to flee her home before the first mortar shells struck and never returned. Another had spent four years under siege in constant fear for her life, four times as long as she had spent in the death camp.

By now my reluctance to think historically, to move beyond the hallowed fence that rings the Holocaust from any previous or subsequent event, was being challenged by the living evidence, namely by the unbearable irony that while the Holocaust was being memorialised, discussed, possessed and even fought over, one of its few surviving victims was being subjected to another assault on her very identity and existence (not as a Jew, but as a Bosnian) without a finger being lifted to save her.

And this brings me to my central preoccupation: How can the Holocaust be understood as 'a transformative event'² that galvanizes and locates, rather than fetishizing and displacing, trauma, in order to use it as a model, a warning, an augury, an omen even, and not just as a source of impotent wondering and despair, and this without indulging in self-perpetuating and potentially self-fulfilling prophecies of doom or unwittingly contributing to or feeding off the 'ghost of the Holocaust'.³ Surely this is a ghost that should never be exorcised but continue to haunt us. The dangers of emulation are outweighed and counterbalanced by a duty of memory.

While fully accepting that the Holocaust occupies a place of unique horror and metaphysical anguish in the modern world, while acknowledging that ‘comparison’ can serve revisionists as a tool for euphemism or even denial, this study takes as its point of departure that ‘unique’ does not necessarily connote ‘unrepeatable’. Unique thus far. But reverence should not leave one blind or complacent to the growing, not diminishing, temptations of radical answers in a world where diplomacy is so easily overtaken by aggression.

It is in this spirit that I hope to extend my enquiry into Balkan genocide by means of two documentary films which emerged from this cauldron, neither of them released in the west, both of which I introduce here with the permission of the film makers:

Rikica, a student graduation film of approximately twenty minutes by Marko Mamuzic which was made entirely in Sarajevo in 1991/92 with the participation of a local television station on the eve of the war in honour of Rikica Slosberg, who was deported from Sarajevo in 1941, spent four years in Nazi concentration camps, was forced from Sarajevo a second time just as the Yugoslav wars were starting and died in Switzerland in 2002.

And: *Greta*, a longer piece of one hour and fifteen minutes shot after the present ceasefire principally in Sarajevo but also in Paris, Auschwitz and Yad Vashem by Haris Pasovic, on Professor Greta Farusic, who was deported from Sarajevo to Auschwitz, liberated in January 1945, graduated in Architecture in Belgrade and taught at the University in Sarajevo, endured the entire four-year siege of that city and still lives there.

In stressing that I have met neither Rikica Slosberg nor Greta Farusic personally, I put myself in a position we will all share as the generation of survivors gradually leaves us, obliging us to rely on recorded testimony rather than on direct oral transmission.

Reflecting on Elie Wiesel’s lapidary statement (above), Shoshana Felman reports of her student group exposed to testimonial films from the Fortunoff Video Archive⁴ that they were first harrowed, then galvanized, and I can corroborate such an experience through my own viewing, but nonetheless I must also ask: to what extent can film testimony convey the reality of actual experience and thereby assist the transmuting of memory into history?

In a single scene shot in the devastated Jewish cemetery of Sarajevo, *Rikica* shows an old lady taking farewell of her home on the eve of the siege, visiting for the last time her father’s grave, where she expresses a feeling known to all Holocaust survivors (and echoed by Greta Farusic) ‘thank God he died before seeing all this’, a grave she can at least identify, while her mother and brother lie in unknown lands, the latter probably in Jasenovac the Nazi Croatian concentration camp. Her words are as jagged and lop-sided as the tombstones, her grief overwhelming, uncomprehended, a trauma from which she has clearly never recovered.

Speaking of her violent arrest, she evokes in vivid detail her first imprisonment, separated by a thin partition from the men in the adjacent cell:

Somebody was playing something... a guitar or violin. I asked who was playing there. I was told “Liechtenstein”. “Do you know how to sing?” he asked me. “I know some.” “Ok, show what you can sing!” So I sang just a bit, just to show

I could. He said: "Fine, I see you know how to sing. I'm composer, I'll write some music and we can sing all together." After three or four days, he said: "I wrote one song for you and tonight we can now sing all together."

This is the only memory she gives us of four years' captivity, and one might deduce that the rest is too appalling to narrate or even that traumatic repression has wiped the slate clean. She either cannot or does not wish to dwell on it, and gives us instead this luminous fragment of restored experience which clearly has sustained her for decades past, though whether she consciously remembered Liechtenstein and his spirited musical resistance during her following four years in the camps, or has retrieved (or even conjured) them more recently, one cannot know. The perversion of music by the Nazis is often dwelled on, so much so that any more positive reference risks seeming sentimental or artificial, but nonetheless Rikica's luminous-because-fragmentary account convinces one that this moment of shared song is indeed first-hand experience, clearly remembered, even if (or rather, especially since) it also serves as a threshold memory, a bourn, a limit, beyond which her mind is not prepared to return, beyond which nothing more in her epic of suffering is recoverable or redeemable.

Some survivors speak of the desire, the absolute imperative, to outlive their persecutors and bring them to justice. What kept Rikica alive, she says, was love of life and of her child:

Every morning I woke up, I opened my eyes and I was thinking of him. I was saying to myself "oh god, how is he, where is he, what does he eat, how does he look?" But I never thought he might not be alive. I always knew he was alive. I knew I had to see him.

The compulsive repetition in her speech patterns conveys the acting-out of a scenario never truly laid to rest, which haunts her even as she speaks so many decades later, contemplating her flight from a second ordeal. 'I believe in love. I don't believe in God,' she says, then stutteringly adds: 'If God wanted... If there was a God, then he would never have done what he did. Then, *but also now*.'

In this simple *also now* we feel the weight of the second trauma about to overtake her, despair at lessons unlearned, at man's compulsive re-infliction of wounds, and one harbours doubts perhaps about her readiness for this testimony she has just given in such formless authenticity: her memories are so partial, so fractured and so painful, that one wonders (with van der Kolk/van der Hart) 'Can the Auschwitz experience and the loss of innumerable family members during the Holocaust really be integrated, be made part of one's autobiography?'⁵ and Saul Friedlander adds, quoting Lawrence Langer: 'The efforts of memory in these testimonies liberate a subtext of loss...chagrin...vexation that coexists with whatever relief (is thus achieved, which may be) less substantial than we have been led to believe.'⁶

Others including Caruth have elaborated on 'the betrayal of trauma' by which the object of trauma is lost, travestied and traduced by its naming, leaving the 'patient', or the 'beneficiary of therapy', with a hollow and often guilty resentment at having been stripped even of her suffering via a testimony that can never adequately convey the experience.⁷ Can trauma ever be recovered, one might ask, or is the very recovery an

act of abandonment? ‘The question arises’, ask van der Kolk/van der Hart ‘whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past?’⁸ However it is worth returning to Shoshana Felman on this:

Psychoanalysis [...] profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of the testimony, by [...] recognizing for the first time in the history of culture that one does not have to *possess*, or *own* the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker.⁹

Even respecting the need to counterbalance this approach with Ruth Leys’ warning that trauma theory is ‘fundamentally unstable’¹⁰, and remembering that psychoanalysis constantly runs the risk of arrogating experience from analysand to analyst with unconscious and sometimes mutual collusion, it is worth listening to the empathetic depth of Cathy Caruth’s approach when she writes in *Unclaimed Experience* of ‘the way in which trauma may lead ... to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound’.¹¹ It was always in this hope that I have offered script consultancy, and that I now attempt the analysis of these two films.

If *Rikica* reveals the suffering of its subject in startlingly unmediated form, in fragments and explosions which reflect the unhealed trauma of the speaker, *Greta* unfolds with majestic self-control of both witness and filmmaker. A single interview in unwavering mid-shot interspersed with very rare close-ups from an identical angle shows us the corner of a comfortable, elegant living room with the subject composed, reflective, dominant even as she recounts the salient moments of her life with the conscious accuracy of a court witness wishing no trace of hyperbole to cloud her credibility. As if to sober up the viewer also, the film starts with several minutes of post-siege Sarajevo unadorned by music or commentary, the snow on mountain bunkers, the graveyards, the burned-out parliament, the ravaged post office, objects which tell their own story in silence finally broken when Greta’s voice picks up almost eerily eloquent where *Rikica* left off so speechless:

We who have survived not just one war but this war too have started to think that the idea of justice is very abstract ... it takes various forms and is interpreted very differently.

As if to warn the viewer against easy identifications, this bitter opening salvo is mitigated by a glimpse of a startlingly youthful, radiant Greta exchanging banter with friends on a street corner, a moment of affectionate levity amongst countless others in this most resilient, witty, sophisticated of cities. Only after cutaways to a pair of crutches amidst the crowds, the silence of the mountains which recently rained down more firepower than was concentrated on Berlin in 1945, and a thoughtful visual disquisition on synagogue, mosque and church, do we rediscover Greta heading home, unaware of the camera watching as she pulls her strap bag more firmly over her shoulder, her face closing in a lonely mask of resistance and (who knows?) repression, denial, suffering – as if the film maker were alerting us to the immense dignity that would stop us in our tracks if we ventured too close. And then the interview starts, Greta immaculate, proud, unflinching, not one syllable

out of place as she tells her story from start to finish, as if determined not to let her persecutors get the better of her composure even for a second, relying on sober good humour to exclude any trace of the shame notoriously ascribed to survivors.¹²

The signals that betray this composure are fractional and easily missed: the merest flutter of her hands immediately suppressed as she speaks of the family's removal to Subotica; the slight clearing of the throat as she mentions the *Schutzpolizei*; the vertical movement of the hand as she demonstrates the red stripe behind the Auschwitz uniform, her fingers immediately stifling the gesture as inappropriate. 'Everything is my personal experience, I don't want to discuss other people's experiences' she says with almost patrician disdain, underlining on the one hand her veracity, her refusal to speculate or demean by vulgar retailing of commonplaces, and on the other her detachment from even her own suffering.

In that confusion the men were separated so I didn't see my father any more. My mother and I walked side by side, I went right, she went left, I stopped and turned at the same time as she stopped and turned, and we looked at each other but they hurried us on. Those who went to the left, we never saw them again.

This moment shared in anguish by thousands upon thousands has been told and retold so often but rarely with such absolute self-control, enabling the viewer a glimpse of the horror, the extreme, suppressed even prohibited emotions precisely through the re-enactment of the same suppression in the telling. The clue lies in the infinite extension of that single moment – surely a few minutes at most – between the losing of her father and the losing of her mother, a double loss she stretches almost to infinity in the recollecting.

Later, when she tells us: 'Other girls saw their mothers decline, I remember my mother as a healthy woman... how much worse it must have been for them' – her compassion asks for no more attention than her suffering, perhaps for fear of self-pity.

And while the rain drums endlessly on block house corrugated roofs in slow pans reminiscent of Claude Lanzmann, one cannot help but consider also the contrasts with that monolithic filmmaker. Wholly absent from the screen, the interviewer/film maker of *Greta* has left no personal trace, clearly considering himself an irrelevance to his narrative. At no point does one sense that Greta has been pushed or pressured, let alone interrogated, and what emerges is arguably, paradoxically more horrific and more real than any evocation Lanzmann achieves with his intrusive questioning, his insistence on the release of long-buried trauma in and through the interview itself.¹³ By the time Greta reports 'there was a very bad smell in the camp' her matter-of-fact tone is becoming nearly unbearable and one realizes it is precisely this factual unbearableness which best represents the original experience. The very factuality betrays the reality of the experience and simultaneously the unresolved trauma of the survivor. One is in the presence. But the presence veils itself, so as not to destroy the beholder, and in the process becomes more visible.

She remembers the faithful Jews, mainly from traditional, uneducated families: 'the worst thing was their belief that the camp was God's punishment for their so-called sins', and notes with the merest glimmer of humour 'it was a sin not to know

Yiddish, that's why we're here'. But despite this apparent rejection of the holy in its usual forms, this is a testimony which shines not just with personal conviction but with a secret perception of meaning, even of transcendence, suggesting that Lanzmann's insistence on 'transmission' unadulterated by 'interpretation', on forced utterance recreating the original event in all its terrible penetration is not the only model for such enquiries. The restraint of Greta's testimony tells us far more than a chaotic unburdening, while leaving the witness arguably more intact, more whole, less traumatized and indeed less victimized, than a compulsive, re-enactive rambling that misses its therapeutic mark.

Of course one asks what she might have left out, forgotten, repressed or occulted. She remembers the screaming of the murdered gypsies, but strangely (or not) it is impending liberation that brings a slight perspiration to her face and scrambles her chronology, her finger movements tense, her head occasionally flicking as she comes to 'one very ugly, difficult picture' of the Soviet 'mercy killings' of incapacitated prisoners whose bodies were allowed to lie where they fell. 'Normally they would have been taken away', she almost tuts, and suddenly with a terrible falling sensation one realizes she is back in the Camp, within all its rules and regulations; after an hour or more of solid concentration she has regressed, 'gone under' in an almost hypnotic sense and with this 'normally' she is still in thrall to the perpetrators who administered this hell, evoking, of course terror and pity but also doubts about the defiant sanity she is trying to project. Through this latency made fleetingly visible, the whole interview, and the very technique of film testimony, is suddenly thrown into question, a courageous 'working out' in danger of reverting to a ghastly 'acting out', a ritual re-enactment and re-infliction of psychic scarring that can never be healed, and certainly not by the simple fresh air of speech.

Not once does she mention 'the Holocaust' as an historical event. She offers no overview and no interpretation, and this raises questions of form and presentation for future generations deprived of frames of reference we take for granted – will the iconic barracks and railway lines still hit the mark once memory fades?

She calmly refuses an apology for having resumed her life immediately afterwards: 'My reasoning was, and it was what others thought too, that it was better to think about the future than to mourn...' and here for the first time her eyes are lowered from camera with a tone of regret, maybe remorse, as if knowing that her mourning had been too short for its complex causes, and that this in itself was a source of shame, though youthful vivacity returns with a hint of vanity as she recalls her triumphs as a student, achieved despite psychic damage inflicted by Auschwitz, particularly the serious impairment of her ability to retain new information, a post-war hangover, perhaps, of that form of self-defence against trauma by which extraneous sensory experience is blocked and denied, a 'closing down' against the physical reality of the camps which in extreme cases was known to lead to total numbing and even psychogenic death (for whose victims the Nazis coined the ineffably offensive pseudonym of *Muselman* or *Muslim*) a condition which Greta clearly avoided or recovered from, though as to how, we are given no clue.

It is a sign of this first time survivor's almost unbelievable resilience that she saw the second ordeal approaching and refused to take the lifeline offered. 'Once in my life already I had been forced to leave my home. So let the fate of the city

and its inhabitants also be my fate.' This almost biblical utterance, this apocalyptic foreshadowing, could scarcely come from another, as if in this second visitation she searches for a reckoning, a chance to confront her ghosts and live down both her past and her persecutors. But the siege rapidly gets much worse than she or anyone else had ever expected, and one wonders whether her initial confidence wasn't based on an assumption we all tacitly share, namely that horrors once experienced to such an overwhelming degree can never be repeated.

From just above her rooftop, artillery bombards the town, week after week, month after month, year after year, 'the Yugoslav so-called people's army, the army we had created ourselves, with our own taxes'; her son cracks up, her grand-children are evacuated, a tank shell crashes through her window without exploding just after she has left the room. 'That day I became superstitious ... it shook me from "my previous balance"', she wouldn't again use the cups or tray she had used that day, nor allow three people to sit in that room. 'Now we use those things again', she reveals with a huge smile (the first of the interview), a smile she suddenly tires of and wipes from her face without warning – a gesture that leaves one worrying that she has underestimated her entire life's trajectory and that even now, in the telling (in the recollection even in tranquillity) it might catch up with her and overwhelm her, as warned by Judith Herman in her diagnosis of PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder:

With the passage of time, as these negative symptoms become the most prominent feature of the post-traumatic disorder, the diagnosis becomes increasingly easy to overlook. Because post-traumatic symptoms are so persistent and so wide-ranging, they may be mistaken for enduring characteristics of the victim's personality. This is a costly error, for the person with unrecognised post-traumatic stress disorder is condemned to a diminished life, tormented by memory and bounded by helplessness and fear.¹⁴

'Everything that happened here was genocide again', Greta says starkly over shots of snow-covered cemeteries 'because the only fault of the Bosniaks was that they were Bosniaks'. She wouldn't go out, she had a dreadful feeling of inferiority. 'Once again I wasn't in control of my own destiny, once again I was an instrument in other peoples' hands.' She speaks again of the shell through the window, repeating 'we were lucky' and suddenly a carefully crafted delivery crumbles before one's eyes with her speech patterns as she remembers: 'For three months I was psychologically unbalanced. Though I wasn't crazy!' she adds with a merry laugh which despite scepticism I take at face value, knowing that it is born of the everyday resilience of siege-bound Sarajevo, which she goes on to mention: the concerts, the education, the fashion events and the founding of the Sarajevo Film Festival amidst the hail of artillery, each of these an act of culture defying the barbarism set to destroy an entire city, a barbarism perpetrated 'by people we lived with and students I had so carefully nurtured', and she continues:

When I look back now on these four years of war, although I cannot say one could compare this with the death camp, nor do I want to, but I can say that this was more difficult for me to bear, than those years 1941 - 45 apart from the camp year. It was more difficult to survive.

The reasons she adduces are her greater age, the constant uncertainty about how it would end, and the fact that all the suffering was concentrated in a small area.

It hurts to know that this part of Europe has suffered such horrors and injustice while everyone else enjoyed peace ... while only one hundred kilometres away as the crow flies people were living normal lives, unaffected and not noticing.

The mingled wit, stoicism, anger and hurt that speak through this testimony leave one in no doubt that if Sarajevo is in some senses a symbol of western shame, of an unacceptable complacency that allowed the unspeakable to recur, Sarajevo is also a place where humanity has asserted itself to its fullest and in some unspecifiable way redeemed the horrors of passivity and reification of the Holocaust, as exemplified in the testimony of this one courageous double survivor who learned to face down one trauma by living through a second.

Even if Greta's testimony is not unclouded by elements of 'acting out', of compulsive repetition which she does so much to censor and to filter, it is possible to understand this very 'acting out' as being (in part at least) a deep-seated, inextinguishable craving for justice and an unconscious effort to retain the necessary evidence (the motivation which saved many survivors being to outlive and confront their persecutors), evidence which would be lost with a fully therapeutic 'working through' whose feasibility or even desirability many doubt, amongst them Dominick LaCapra:

One may maintain that anyone severely traumatized cannot fully transcend trauma but must to some extent act it out or relive it. Moreover, one may insist that any attentive secondary witness to, or acceptable account of, traumatic experiences must in some significant way be marked by trauma or allow trauma to register in its own procedures.¹⁵

The function of testimony for the testifier must be balanced against its purpose for the receiver. It is all very well to respect the victim's privacy, to insist on the therapeutic dialogue and the healing power of association and recovery. It is perfectly admissible to weigh the cost and consequences of secondary witness and second generation trauma. No doubt these are important issues.

But while we are searching for cures, history continues and truth can simply get lost. Diagnosis is needed early, as a matter of urgency. Testimony is vital, and preferably long before the comfortable approach of old age, for the time lag in traumatic absorption can mean that understanding never catches up with experience. Evidence loses presence and legal power. Memory turns to myth – in the reception by others if not in the ever-present experiencing of it by the witness. And in this gap of understanding lies the potential for further traumatizing catastrophe.

The challenge is to match the pace of human absorption of experience with the redoubled speed of that experience. At any one moment in time we are not just living (or avoiding) the present, we are also assimilating (or denying) the past, rendering several periods psychologically contemporaneous, indeed synchronous. History continues unstoppably without us, whether we experience it or not, and this creates a disjunction, a space in which events can be not just repressed but forgotten or entirely suppressed, leaving second or third generation 'survivors' to

deal with the post-traumatic residue, obliged to process the guilt of ancestors they never knew whose experience is now closed to them. The sins of the fathers are indeed visited upon the sons, often in ways they cannot possibly understand or interpret.

The delayed reaction to trauma is something humankind can ill afford, for while one traumatic event is being suppressed, denied or acted out, another is in the preparing or execution: between 1960 and 1979 alone, arguably the heyday of Holocaust suppression, there were at least a dozen genocides or genocidal massacres¹⁶ and the number has accelerated exponentially since then. Genocide is *not* 'an event outside the range of human experience' (the US legal definition of trauma till very recently) any more than rape or child abuse.¹⁷ It happens daily in societies we simply do not scrutinize as closely, and it could recur in our own. Until this question of balance and expectation is redressed in scholarship, until the tone of surprise and grief in scholarship itself is addressed, we will continue to flatter readers into a false sense of security; and this is not to suggest that the academy should abandon aspirations inherited from the Enlightenment and much earlier, nor that commentators should coarsen their expectations and intuitions of human achievement at its highest and most sensitive, merely that our own sensibilities should be tempered with an awareness of the omnipresence of crisis and the resultant attractions of trauma-inflicting behaviour, which one might characterize through Hannah Arendt's much-abused dictum on 'the banality of evil', in other words its everyday availability.

There have recently been efforts made to 'step back from purely loyalist positions'¹⁸ on the Holocaust. Eva Hoffmann for instance addresses 'the task of unfreezing myths and unpacking stereotypes' by combining personal reflections on the burdens inherited by 'second generation' Holocaust survivors with vivid responses to more recent atrocities and genocides in South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia, as well as the Balkans¹⁹, all of them now receding from the public mind. 'Who now remembers the Armenians?' she chillingly quotes Hitler, contemplating his own genocide and its future irrelevance to history.

Noting that for the current cult of memory as an undisputed 'source of value and virtue' the Holocaust is a 'central pillar and paradigm of tragic and exalted memory', she also detects that compassion has become too easy, too self-referential: 'It is easy to mistake keening for ourselves for keening for the Shoah.' Searching for a function, a dynamic perspective for 'the Shoah business', she recounts her meeting at a London garden party with a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, with whom she exchanged 'the balm of recognition', taking consolation in the fact that he could find 'the meditations on memory and trauma emerging from the Holocaust helpful for his own thinking and coming to terms with his catastrophe', concluding:

[...] if the Holocaust has become the sometimes abstract paradigm of all atrocity, it has also served as a template for the study of analogous events and certain fundamental problems.²⁰

While the Holocaust is undoubtedly a unique event in many of its primary features, the possibilities of recurrence (either in modified or, yes, in heightened form) demand and deserve our vigilance. The origin, direction and pseudo-justifications

of genocide are various, but the temptations to impose radical 'solutions' by extreme violence, to solve a 'problem' by effacing it, to dismantle a binary opposition rather than deconstruct it, are ever-present and increasingly seductive in a world confronting new challenges such as population explosion, water shortage, climate change and fuel exhaustion as well as the older ones of religious bigotry and race hatred, any one of which could provide the breeding ground for action which might consign the Holocaust to a footnote in our history.

So let us remember the *mitzvah* of Sarajevo, that our fixation on the Holocaust as the eternal *nec plus ultra* of horror not prove sadly short-lived.

Notes

- 1 Elie Wiesel, quoted by Shoshana Felman, 'Education and Crisis', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma, Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London, 1995, pp. 13-60, here p. 17.
- 2 J.R. Watson quoting Hegel's *Camera Lucida*: 'the transformative event that has yet transformed nothing', in F.C. Decoste and Bernard Schwartz (eds), *The Holocaust's Ghost, Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, Edmonton, 2000, p. xvi.
- 3 'Can one exorcise the ghost of the Holocaust? ... a different (question) from making the world Holocaust-proof?' Decoste and Schwartz, *The Holocaust's Ghost*, p. 9.
- 4 Felman 'Education and Crisis', p. 17.
- 5 Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma, Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London, 1995, pp. 158-182, here p. 178.
- 6 Saul Friedlander, 'Trauma, Memory and Transference', in Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.), *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 252-263.
- 7 'Telling the story of her love affair ... is for the woman a betrayal of the loved one ... a betrayal precisely in the act of telling, in the very transmission of an understanding that erases the specificity of a death. The possibility of knowing history, in this film (Hiroshima Mon Amour), is thus also raised as a deeply ethical dilemma: the unremitting problem of how not to betray the past.' Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore and London, 1996, p. 27.
- 8 Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past', p. 179.
- 9 Felman 'Education and Crisis', p. 24.
- 10 Ruth Leys, Presentation at University of London, 7th June 2006.
- 11 Caruth extends her listening metaphor through Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's narrative of the dream of the burning child who cries out to his sleeping father: 'this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken', Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 9.
- 12 See Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame*, Princeton, 2006; also Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz The Witness and the Archive*, New York, 1999.
- 13 Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah*, Parts 1 & 2, produced by Aleph/Historia France 1985.
- 14 Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery. From domestic abuse to political terror*, New York, 1992, p. 200.
- 15 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ithaca and London, 1998, p. 110.
- 16 Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, London, 1993, p. 6.
- 17 See Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*.
- 18 Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, London, 2004, p. 146.
- 19 'In the recent Yugoslav wars, the less reliable soldiers of mercilessness were plied with vodka or even drugs to deaden whatever inklings of compassion they might still have harboured.' *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio, *Remnants of Auschwitz The Witness and the Archive*, New York, 1999.
- Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore and London, 1996.
- Decoste, F.C. and Bernard Schwartz (eds), *The Holocaust's Ghost, Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, Edmonton, 2000.
- Fein, Helen, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, London, 1993.

- Felman, Shoshana, 'Education and Crisis', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma, Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London, 1995, pp. 13-60.
- Friedlander, Saul, 'Trauma, Memory and Transference', in Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.), *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 252-263.
- Herman, Judith Lewis, *Trauma and Recovery. From domestic abuse to political terror*, New York, 1992.
- Hoffman, Eva, *After Such Knowledge Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, London, 2004.
- LaCapra, Dominick, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ithaca and London, 1998.
- Leys, Ruth, *From Guilt to Shame*, Princeton, 2006.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel A. and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma, Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London, 1995, pp. 158-182.

**The 81st Blow:
Representation Of The Holocaust Survivor
In Israeli Cinema In The Last Decades Of The 20th Century**

YVONNE KOZLOVSKY GOLAN

Concepts and terms commonly used to define the status and condition of the Jews of Europe just before the Nazis took power in 1933 through the end of World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 have never been precise. Expressions such as “refugee”, “*She'erit hapleita*” [“last remnant”], “Holocaust survivor” and “displaced person” are ambiguous. As most Israelis saw it, a “refugee” was a new immigrant from Europe who chose to come to Palestine, or was forced to do so after experiencing the events and terrors of World War II. Historians and scholars of the period who attempt to clarify these categories run into difficulties.

Historians have developed classifications for the various categories of refugees according to their escape route, country of origin, country of deportation, ghetto and type of camp where they were interned, country of departure, countries crossed, and means of transportation to Palestine. Despite the richness of these criteria, what stands out is the paucity of definitions with which to analyze the image of the refugee in Israeli cinema. Many studies have examined the portrayal of the history of the Jews in the Holocaust in Israeli films through the mid 1990s, and have concluded that the image of the Holocaust survivor is uniformly stereotyped.¹ The Holocaust refugee or survivor is usually depicted as someone who suffers from the psychological and physical consequences of their ordeal, wears European style clothing, speaks with a broken Hebrew accent, possesses a number tattooed on the forearm, and still bears the odor of the camps.² The foreignness and alienation of refugees and survivors from Nazi Europe affect them emotionally, politically, socially, and visually.

The refugees' sense of being a stranger is intensified by their lack of a common language, which limits their communication with people around them and prevents them from telling others about their experiences to elicit empathy and understanding of what they have endured. The mistrust between survivors and their new environment fosters an attitude of scorn and rejection towards them. The Israeli feature films suggest that the uprooted survivors are unable to accept the fact that they have been displaced from their homes and must embrace a new land, language, and political and social system that differ radically from their native lands. The survivor's failure to be absorbed into Israeli society is attributed to his or her refusal to accept this new status.

Most scholars have referred to the fact that during the infancy of Israeli cinema, from the 1940s to the mid 1980s, film makers were recruited to serve the Zionist myth and ethos. Championing Zionism meant advancing certain social and political

goals. From the early 1980s, however, when film began to engage in issues of “otherness”, gender and foreignness, the dichotomy between old and new Israelis was replaced by the dichotomy between Right and Left. Scholars of Israeli cinema contend that since the early days of Israeli film, the survivor was delineated in terms of “otherness and difference” to demarcate out the differences between native Israelis and newly arrived Jews. From the first Intifada (December 1987) on, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and domestic divisions over the economy and role of religion have polarized public opinion more sharply divided between Right and Left. Film scholars, originating mostly on the Israeli Left, discerned a parallel between the Holocaust narrative in Israeli film and between Israeli rule in the Territories. It was said that the survivor’s situation resembled that of the Palestinian Arab “other”, and that the Palestinian, like the survivors had not succeeded in finding his or her place in Israeli society.³

There is some truth in this analysis of Israeli film. What it overlooks is how these narrative strategies ignore the plight of the Jews in the Holocaust and the period immediately following it. The absence of these key elements of the Holocaust accounts renders Israeli films inarticulate about the dire circumstances which the refugees and survivors fled during and after the war. Thus, there is a lack of association between the essence of Holocaust remembrance and its mode of representation in Israeli films. The historical research for most of these films has been erroneous or superficial, thereby distorting how survivors are portrayed in them.

Israeli cinema and the Holocaust: Between stereotype and distortion

To a great extent, a relatively small number of cinema schools and university film departments in Israel shape Israeli film. Thus, in order to understand the way the Israeli film industry has been operating, one must become familiar with how film and film history are taught in Israel and the process of selecting films for theatrical release.

Film’s historical dialogue is between the objective historical narrative and the film-maker’s subjective depiction and interpretation of the narrative. Cinematic expression mediates between history and art, as the narrative must be adapted into a screenplay. Since content and expression integrated in film have multiple and varied layers, cultural and social associations from various fields are incorporated into the film from the humanities, social sciences, and, to a certain extent, even the natural sciences. Ignoring any one of these element means leaves out a part of the whole.

Film teaching in Israel has primarily focused on stylistic aspects of film, emphasizing theories of cinematic technique and expression. Subjects such as history, sociology, culture and philosophy are studied sparingly and are usually considered electives. The people who designed the film teaching curricula in Israel’s institutions of higher education have, for the most part, ignored the fact that the average Israeli film major draws inspiration and ideas for his or her creative work from topical issues in Israeli society. The didactic aspects of teaching about film as a means of

representing words and thoughts into visual pathways are not taught adequately. The teaching institutions fail to emphasize that even the treatment of one's own immediate environment involves a process of careful research and study designed to lead to a broader, deeper understanding of the subject of the film the aspiring filmmaker wishes to produce.

Scholars and writers on Israeli films about the Holocaust are usually members of the faculty of the arts, literature, gender and social studies, communication and media and sociology, operating according to methodologies familiar to them from their respective fields. There are very few film scholars from general history or Jewish history departments, and there is still no school of thought made up of historians studying film. Indeed, this explains why scholars who study films with historical subjects quote so little from historians who have studied the same subject.

A slight change occurred in the 1990s when the study of history and film was approved as a joint major offered by the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Arts. The fact that most scholars of the Holocaust and film have reached identical conclusions (except perhaps for Ilan Avissar), and have then repeatedly recycled their mode of film analysis, demonstrates a flaw in the previous system, – namely that teachers from the same school of thought on the arts and cinema shared similar social and political ideas which, in turn, informed their analyses of films.

The screenplay also posed a problem. Most screenwriters exhibited stereotyped thinking due either to their lack of education about the *Shoah* or their growing up in a society that treated survivors' testimony as negligible. To borrow a phrase from Haim Gouri, the damaging impact of how Israeli feature films distorted public perceptions of the Holocaust may be called "the eighty-first blow", from the story of a boy who had survived eighty blows of flogging by the Nazis, but when he arrived in Israel, was met with disbelief – the "eighty-first blow".

The relationship between academe and film-makers who are university graduates seems to be circular: academic institutions have educated a generation of film-makers who have made films based on the knowledge acquired in those institutions. Film scholars analyzed the films based on the assumptions they themselves inculcated in the younger generation. All of these factors working together have misrepresented and stereotyped the Holocaust survivor in Israeli feature films produced between the 1970s and the late 1990s. These films propagated a petty and slightly xenophobic image of the survivors that failed to do justice to their wartime suffering. The survivor appeared as a foreigner who simply was "not one of us". The major source of this lack of empathy for the figure of the survivor lies in the film-makers' education.

Furthermore, Holocaust research in film academic institutions has preferred to focus on the narrative essence implied by the visual text, i.e., they considered the Holocaust survivor and refugee as an *object* to transmit subversive messages and ideas that did not arise from the survivor's experiences but from the film-maker's world-view. These facts must be examined more from a historical perspective than from the Israeli-centric viewpoint of Israeli film scholars.

“Not one of us”

In contrast to their Israeli counterparts, American and European directors who made films about the Holocaust portrayed the refugee as someone who had escaped from his or her homeland and had been victimized before they fled. Their depictions of his or her national origins reflected the film-makers' ethnic origins. Refugees in these films are presented as an integral part of their former country's landscape, the only difference being in the Jew's official documents and armband. Restructuring of the visual issue is reinforced by the American cinematic portrayal of the Jewish protagonist as having respectable professional appearance, and who is usually a physician, public figure, lawyer or culturally or socially influential figure. For example, in Polanski's "The Pianist" (2002) we can see the character of the Polish pianist and his family as fully acculturated into the bourgeois Warsaw life style. Similar to them are the Sors family in Isztvan Szabo's "Sunshine" (Germany/Austria/Canada/Hungary, 1999), whose four generations of judges, physicians and thinkers, played by leading Hollywood actors William Hurt and Ralph Fiennes, are very far from the classical portrayal of the Jew.

There are many examples of movies whose heroes are entirely ordinary, middle-class people, who dress like others, and are surely not pathetic. The personalities lose their human image only in the concentration camp itself, where people lost their human look and became a shadow of their former selves, as documented by the liberators' cameras and the major film by George Stevens, "The Nazi Concentration Camps, 1945" (USA).

What led to these differences in the way in which Holocaust survivors were perceived and portrayed on screen? The Holocaust was, for the most part, perceived as a national disaster that befell the Jewish people, with Palestine and later Israel perceived as the place in which the majority of world Jewry should live. Therefore, it was reasonable to assume that the place where people would cope with the disaster with the most empathy would be within the Jewish state, which strove to be the place of refuge for Jews who survived the Holocaust. This was the Zionist rationale for the necessity of establishing a Jewish state where all persecuted Jews could find a haven.

The Israeli films about Holocaust survivors, however, testify to the difficulty of distinguishing between the survivors' perceptions of themselves and what the Zionist pioneers in Israel thought of them. Bitter as the process was of founding the State of Israel, it certainly cannot be compared to what the survivors had endured in the *Shoah*.

Scholars such as Hanna Yablonka, and others who have documented their first person experiences in the camps have stressed that their accounts of what they had survived and witnessed under Nazi rule were not properly understood. 'Many times it happened that things were taken in on a public level on a much more simplistic and one-dimensional level than the way they were related', Yablonka confesses. Primo Levi wrote about the existing gap, ever widening each year, between what went on 'over there' and things as they were depicted in the general imagination, nourished by books, films and myths close to reality. This split was doomed to deteriorate beyond the simplistic and the stereotypical.

This mentality manifests itself in Israeli films that attempt to deal with the Holocaust. The gap between what they want to accomplish and what they achieve originates in the inaccurate treatment of historical material by the film-makers. Israeli films made prior to the mid-1990s avoided stories about the Holocaust per se. The directors most often selected the point of view of the adolescent, who narrated stories of being refugees and integrating into Israeli society. (“The Wooden Gun”, “Hide and Seek”, “Henry’s Sister”, “Summer of Aviya”, “Under the Domim Tree” and “The New Land”). Using children as narrators enables the film-maker to transform the story’s source into something ahistorical, a childhood memory instead of a verifiable source.

In contrast, the Americans and European film-makers drew their knowledge about the Holocaust from historical literature and survivor memoirs.

In the cinematic representation of the refugee and survivor in American films, the point of view usually locates the action in the present shapes the characters accordingly. Nevertheless, the range of the American cinema and the space it gives to historical discourse is broader than the Israeli perspective. It encompasses three time frames of the past in addition to two types of present time: the present simple and the present progressive.

One time frame is designated for the representation of the Jew and Jewish life in pre-war Europe and the beginning of the war. During this time, the Jews blend in and look like everyone else around them. The second time frame is set in the ghetto and concentration camp, chronological stations in time in which the survivor’s character changes through force of circumstances, and whose appearance is determined by the “survivor formula” created by Stevens’s film of the liberation, “The Nazi Concentration Camps, 1945” (USA, 1945).

The third time frame involves liberation and life following liberation. The circle has been broken, with the refugee seemingly returned to life as a person who is physically free. He returns to the “Family of Man” to live the life that everyone else leads and seeks meaning in life after the Hell he went through, attempting to return to the routine of daily life somewhat successfully.⁴

In contrast, Israeli films engaged solely in two time frames, both located in Israel: life in pre-state Israel during the British Mandate over Palestine and up to the establishment of Israel in 1948; and the arrival of refugees from British internment camps and European DP camps to the new state after 1948.

Israeli feature films did not portray the routine life of the ghettos and what went in the concentration camps. They rarely focused on the survivors’ memory or testimony. Israeli cinema certainly did not deal with the essence of the pain, memory and loss, claiming among other reasons, that this was due to financial and logistical factors. Thus, the stage between description of the pre-war Jews as normal and the post-war Jew as a recovering survivor was omitted from Israeli cinema. Yet how can survivors be depicted without portraying the starvation and the suffering they experienced?

In my opinion, the iconographic “compensation” invented by the Israeli cinema to make up for this omission is to represent the survivor and the refugee through symbolic-stereotypical means marking the refugee/survivor in a schematic way as thin, weak, uprooted and mad. Thus, Israeli film-makers superficially imagined the

survivor someone who came from ‘over there’, from ‘another era’ and ‘another time.’ Film scholars who explained the structuring of this stereotype claim it was designed to create an iconographic visual distinction between the Diaspora Jewish survivor and the Zionist “Sabra” [from the native prickly pear] – the native-born Israeli, the “new Jew”, who was the product of Zionist ideals. Regarding this distinction, it may be said that it itself is stereotypical, tinged with prejudice and ignorance, but it does not explain the fundamental narrative failure of Israeli film-makers to understand the survivors’ essential tragedy as well as an inability to identify with the survivors’ spiritual heritage, which was in fact, the basis of early Zionism that led to the establishment of the Jewish state.

Furthermore, the contention of cinema scholars that the survivor characters are juxtaposed with the Sabras to glorify the native born Israeli has been negated first and foremost by historians and scholars of the period. The latter have raised the reasonable possibility that the Zionist aim of negating the Diaspora was for the most part, a rumor spread by word of mouth⁵ or a concept that existed primarily as a Zionist ideological vision that hoped to create a “new Jew” and social revolution in Eretz Israel.⁶ The dependence on such a sweeping and usually erroneous generalization set the criteria which Israeli film-makers and scholars employed when filming or evaluating movies which had Holocaust themes.

This kind of distorted analysis of the iconography of the survivor in Israeli cinema is exemplified in the scholarship of Nurit Gertz. She states that the survivor is represented as feminine and soft in relation to the native born Israeli, the “Sabra”. However, in this context, it is possible to make a different claim, that the survivor is justifiably weary and worried about his lack of familiarity with his new environment. Drawing the most extreme conclusion regarding the survivor’s weakness, Gertz inadvertently legitimizes the emotional stratum that runs throughout Christian civilization. It has all of the trappings of anti-Semitism and Judaeophobia, which has become the pattern according to which Jews have been described by non-Jews – and, apparently, as seen through Israeli eyes as well. One of the most familiar of these anti-Semitic stereotypes attributed feminine traits, both physical and psychological, to Jewish men. The Third Reich added homosexuality to the image of Jewish men, as in Veit Harlan’s Nazi propaganda film “The Jew Sues” (1940).⁷ In Fritz Lang’s film “M”, the Jewish actor Peter Lorre (born Ladislav Loewenstein), with his high voice and refined, feminine features, was cast as the pedophile serial murderer.

Cultural historian Gary Weissman observes that we learn about the Holocaust through ‘works of art, cinema, fictional stories, history books, museums and survivors’ testimonies’. We are “non-witnesses” who acquire our knowledge largely from what we see on screen, mainly through films and docudramas which enable us to vicariously experience the horrors of the Holocaust. In this connection, we can examine the degree to which Israeli films educate Israeli viewers about the Holocaust and identifying with its victims and survivors.⁸

The process of fostering such identification requires that the storyline based on the historical event has a profound effect on individual and collective consciousness. Thus it is possible to state that the narrative of historical discourse as represented in Israeli film and media is supposed to determine to a large extent, which visual

rituals should be featured by them, to convey the “validity of its coercion” onto the Israeli viewer so he consequently believes that what is seen on-screen contains some historical truth.⁹ The film-maker cannot replace the historian, but formal historical knowledge assists the film-maker in structuring the narrative in ways that are historically credible.¹⁰

American and European films make an opposite distinction. The survivor, no matter how injured he may be as a human being, holds a place of honor due to the ability to return to life from the world of the dead.

Studies by leading Israeli scholars such as Hanna Yablonka, Ruth Fierer, Anita Shapira, Nili Keren and others¹¹ have proven that the stereotypical perception that considers the survivors as “sheep to the slaughter” stands at variance with scholarly findings or the prejudice encountered by survivors when they arrived in Eretz Israel, since survivors took on much of the work of preserving memory, unlike the common assumptions held until now. The fact that survivors did play a significant role in gaining Israel’s independence and building up the country after the war, that Holocaust studies have been an independent part of the curriculum in Israeli schools as initiated by the survivors or their families since the 1950s, way before the trend of academic historical research, *does* prove that their silence, for the most part, arose from the tendency of society to keep them silent. Their mode of rehabilitating themselves, among other ways, was to join the security services to hunt down Nazis and collaborators, and to join the IDF and rise to command and leadership positions. Survivors have also made tremendous contributions to Holocaust research, and have succeeded in changing prejudicial opinions on the ghettos and the tragic Judenrats. Their influence may be seen on the political scene, as well, on Right and on Left, in the state’s foreign relations, attitude to the “New Germany” and to reparations, and even in the official position on music and composers such as Wagner.

If we examine historical evidence in the context of *Shoah* remembrance and the representation of the survivor in Israeli film, we find only a tenuous connection between reality and cinematic fiction. Semiotic analysis by film scholars, headed by cinema scholar Nurit Gertz and historian Moshe Zimmerman, who share common political views,¹² reveals they ignore historical variables, and instead have chosen to analyze the representation of the refugee in Israeli cinema separately from its historical association in multiple dimensions.

Thus, for example, Gertz claims that Israeli films of the 1940s through the 1990s were based on negation of the Diaspora and on the masculine, Zionist hierarchy which ‘determined the place of the “others”: the Arab, the woman survivor, the Diaspora Jew, and the specific embodiment of this Jew – the Holocaust survivor’. As she continues, she seems to do an about-face in principle, and writes that the empty and artificial representation of these identities is intended to

cover up the contradictions in Zionist ideology, and to unify all of its different variations into a homogeneous narrative in which all of the ideals are realized by the perfect masculine character. This imitation, which has the pretension of being the original [the Holocaust survivor character], reveals the original [the Holocaust survivor] himself as a hollow thing, and thus, it essentially subverts the very ideology that it expresses.¹³

There are two reasons for this: the first is placing political, social and gender-based blame on the sub-textuality of the cinematic narrative. The real source of this critique lies in an ideology that opposes the Zionist goal of Israel as a refuge for Jews. This opposition is based on the perception of present-day Palestinians as refugees who were forced to flee their homeland, and the belief that the State of Israel arose solely out of the ashes of the Holocaust. Thus, the role of remembrance as memorial and the command never to forget has been changed for various reasons that show Israeli cinema is more political than artistic. Israeli cinema does not consider Zionism as a legitimate ideology to ensure that Jews would have their own state and sanctuary.¹⁴

The second reason for the distortion by Israeli cinema of the narrative of the Holocaust and the survivors' experiences is rooted in the film-makers' ignorance of history. Being uneducated in history not only cuts them off from accurately depicting the Holocaust, but severs them from faithfulness to the essence of the Holocaust and its horrors. Thus, the research and writing of the screenplay are based on recycled opinions circulating around the institutions where the film-makers were educated. Those who were not humanities and history graduates rely on symbols and narrative strategies that are so poetic as to be convoluted. They seem incapable of articulating the historical narratives of refugees and survivors within a film in ways that make the viewer empathize with the survivors of the Holocaust.¹⁵ What led those film-makers to be drawn into historical tropes about survivors that neglect the realities of the Holocaust?

That is how things were: "Us" and "them"

"Under the Domim Tree" (1995) portrays children of survivors and locals living together in an agricultural boarding school in a youth village. Externally it is impossible to distinguish between the children, since all wear work clothes and are learning how to work the soil. The only thing that separates them is their accent, and their discussions about the Holocaust, which they survived. Depicting them as "normal" children just like everyone else, reinforces the claim that from the moment that their stereotypical Diaspora look was discarded, they looked just like the locals, in the eyes of the viewer. They had become more egalitarian, understanding, and empathic. The perspective is that of the innocent child as innocent. Perhaps this is why they are not portrayed in the same way adult survivors are. When Mira's Holocaust survivor parents appear, the camera focuses on their outward differences. Great care was taken to cast very distinctive physical types to further the plot. Hebrew speaking actor Avraham Avrahami plays the girl's father. The first glimpse of him as an emaciated sickly looking man dressed in worn-out clothing and an old French beret on his head reminds viewers of a Muslim. At second glance, he looks like the stereotypical Eastern European Diaspora Jew, with hooked nose, deep-set eyes, shuffling walk, sparse beard and disheveled hair, all of which symbolize his "racial" origins. Similarly, his wife hails from an Eastern European village.

Pinsker has characterized "Judeophobia" as the non-Jew's fear of the Jew due to the latter's foreign appearance, dressed in black from head to foot, sporting a long

beard, and speaking a foreign language. This description is visually replicated in the film, with the stooped man appearing like Shylock the Jew demanding his pound of flesh. He is supposedly searching for his daughter, but this turns out not to be the case. It is unclear whether Mira has been abducted or adopted on the boat by the couple. Perhaps she is their real daughter who denies they are her parents due to madness resulting from events that happened 'over there'. The court does not deal with the possibility that the traumatized couple may have abducted the little girl to replace their murdered child, because the court ostensibly wishes to act only in Mira's best interests. Mira's friends on the farm believe that the couple acted out of financial motives only and abducted the girl so they could receive reparations from Germany. The father's obstinate insistence that Mira is his daughter is not only a criminal act, but an emotional one, since he considers her as compensation for the loss of his children. The adopted daughter, on the other hand, does not want to be near her adoptive parents due to their physical abuse of her (her scarred back is shown several times in the film). Thus, the father is depicted as the "ugly Jew", the two-faced hypocrite who kidnaps children and tortures them. The plot's subtext warns refugees against coming to Israel. By arriving in Israel, the couple challenges the Zionist myth that Israel constitutes the substitute family for the parents the children have lost in Europe. According to author Gila Almagor, a symbolic, an imaginary father figure is required who is somewhat of a Christian and a freedom fighter, like Aviya's father in her book and film, "Aviya's Summer". He too is a man "from over there". This is an unattainable desire, since with parents like those in the film, the child can only long for the new fatherland where they found a new home.

Historians such as Michael Rothberg, who have studied cinematic representations of the Holocaust, claim that history and genocide require art to present trauma realistically and understandable to the viewers. They are of the opinion that art transforms a traumatic event into an object of knowledge, thereby enabling viewers to acknowledge their association to the post-traumatic culture.¹⁶ And yet, in "Under the Domim Tree" the narrative subverts this process. The Israeli story Almagor attempts to tell resembles a frightening Brothers Grimm fairy tale. Her critique of the shtetl Jews undermines any nostalgia for the "childhood home and its culture", whose memory the survivors worked diligently to preserve. Through a scenario that omits any mention of the historical sources of the survivors' trauma, she tells a tale of lost parents who are trying to reverse time by deception. More than merely repressing the trauma of the Holocaust by negating the Diaspora, she displays her ignorance by negating Judaism through presenting Jews whose visual appearance parallels the traditional antisemitic stereotypes images that the Nazis utilized to justify their genocidal policies. Instead of facilitating dialogue between characters, she creates confrontation. Instead of developing their personalities and rooting them in their historical memories, she reduces them to one-dimensional characters who repeatedly engender guilt and scorn. She justifies her negative attitude towards them in the court scene by demonstrating that they are bereft of any "spirit of conciliation". The tragedy of the parent-abductors does not inspire mercy as would a Greek tragedy¹⁷ since Mira's tragedy is not essentially classic tragedy. The existential right of

Mira's case is distorted in the service of goals that are foreign to tragedy. Not only does the film perpetuate stereotypes, it is xenophobic – even though the “others” are fellow Jews, thus exhibiting self-hatred¹⁸ and ignorance. Statements by arch antisemite of the late nineteenth century, Karl Lueger, mayor of Vienna, resonate through Almagor's words. When Lueger, who had many Jewish friends, was mocked for the ‘lovely society among whom he goes around’, his response was, ‘I decide who is a Jew!’¹⁹

Of course, Almagor and Cohen cannot be accused of anti-Semitism, but it is difficult to ignore their insensitivity as the film's writer and director for failing to present a believable, reasonable portrayal of survivors. The film's narrative failure is more serious, since it is incapable of providing the viewer with any historical insight into the Holocaust and its survivors, the children who have gone mad and behave like a wolf pack in the wild, and the survivor couple who are like Shylock.

Nevertheless, when Eli Cohen had a free hand with his own material, he produced one of the most highly acclaimed films on the subject, “The Quarrel” (Canada, 1991), in English. This sensitive, intelligent film touches on all of the important issues of the Holocaust with great clarity, such as the essential nature of the Holocaust, survival and “survivor's guilt”, and yet it has never been commercially shown in Israel. The attempt to close the gap between the time frames – of being liberated and being refugees – while compressing it into one conceptual framework exposes the soft underbelly of the Israeli film-maker. Needless to say, the book and the film are on the Israeli Ministry of Education recommended list.

All this having been said, the central theme of “Under the Domim Tree” is no different from other Israeli films of the same period: “Berlin - Tel Aviv”, “The Wooden Gun”, “Summer of Aviya”, “Hide and Seek”, “New Land”, and “Henryk's Sister”. In all of these films, the survivors are mad or obsessive, while the Israelis including the recently arrived teen survivors enrolled in the *hachshara*, the agricultural training course, are boldly determined.

It seems to me that the scorn and mockery towards refugees as depicted in Israeli films do not reflect the genuine attitude that was actually shown by old-timers towards the newcomers. In my opinion, it may be that their complex relations were based more on anger and jealousy than on making them “the other” as film scholars have thought.²⁰ Newcomers could be jealous of the *halutzim*, the pioneers who were rebuilding the Land, practicing the “religion of labor”, whose philosophy was summed up in the song, “Who will build, build me a home in Tel Aviv?” This sentiments in this song certainly were not applicable to the protagonist of Tzipi Trope's film, Binyamin the Berlin musicologist, Henryk's sister the whore, or to the new immigrant from North Africa who was a criminal in Ben-Dor Niv's film, “New Land”. It was a song of the residents of the first Hebrew city, and the pioneers settling the Galilee, the center of the country and the south.

Conclusion

Israeli feature films generally have distorted the portrayal of Holocaust survivors by viewing them from the prism of contemporary Israeli-Palestinian politics. Instead

of treating the refugees as human beings who managed to survive a genocidal onslaught, Israeli cinema has chosen to deal with the problems involved in their arrival in "The Land". Instead of portraying how they found their place in Israeli society, Israeli film-makers have depicted survivors and refugees in extreme terms, depicting them as alienated social pariahs. Israeli films have reflected a particular hatred of the Diaspora Jews; characterized by stereotypical Eastern European Jewish clothing and mechanically observing an antiquated and fatalistic religion responsible for the passivity which made Jews go their deaths like sheep to the slaughter. Some film-makers have even portrayed the "surviving remnant" of the Holocaust with such emphasis on their appearance and actions as to dismiss them as the "other".

Thus, the Israeli cinema has created schematic films that were well received by local film scholars. Instead of practical criticism based on historical reality, the film scholars contented themselves with narrative analysis of form and content, instead of analyzing the relationship of the contents to history, and did not touch its essence.

Israeli cinema moves within its own internal circles, remaining within the same artistic-academic dialogue that nourishes the filmmaking, stimulates it and writes the film criticism, Israeli cinema has not made its mark on the Israeli moviegoer, and has even chased Israeli viewers out of the theatres. One of the errors of Israeli cinema is that it has ignored the simple fact that any depiction of the Holocaust affects living witnesses who are capable of responding. Ignoring their presence as a significant part of the narrative is painful, but blind to the totality of the Holocaust experience.

Audiences avoided the movie theatres as a protest action, since what they saw on screen was nothing like their personal experiences with survivors. It is reasonable to assume that this is not what viewers learned and studied about the Holocaust in the classroom in lessons on the "Heroes and martyrs of the Holocaust", nor is it what the reality looked like when the Shoah transpired. Others, members of the "Second Generation" of the Holocaust, or relatives of survivors, did not want to go relive the experiences of their parents or relatives. The survivors asked for no pity and certainly recoiled from their portrayal as poor miserable creatures. They strove to blend into the routine of daily life as much as possible. From the survivors' point of view, their representation in Israeli films is not a realistic picture of how things were, since 'what is essential lies in the success of going beyond the factual evidence of the horror [...] the horror was not the evil', as Jorge Semprun wrote.²¹

Another problem that characterizes Israel cinema is a lack of materials and symbols linking survivors with their past that are enable viewers to identify with the hero's distress and behavior during crisis. Thus, for example, one thing one never sees in Israeli films is the movement of the trains, the "soul of the Jewish collective memory of the Holocaust", which symbolizes the Holocaust in foreign cinema. Some examples are "The Pawnbroker" (1965, dir. Peter Brook), "Life is Beautiful" (1997, dir. Roberto Benigni), and especially in "Amen" by Costa Gavras (2000). In these films, trains serve as a central tool of genocide shipping masses of Jews from all over Europe to their deaths in the camps. Israeli films trace what

happens to survivors as olim [new immigrants] and exploits them as “extras” in a narrative that is about Israel and not Europe. Israeli feature films have mistreated the figure of the survivor, making the survivor into a dummy who seems unaware of its past.

One of the most frequent claims states that Israeli cinema has described “what went on in Israel”. The claim that “that’s how things were” does not fit the historical facts of the first two decades of the State. Neither does it fit additional facts that were made public from the 1970s onward. These facts showed that the knowledge of the Israeli viewer regarding the Holocaust was more intelligent and deeper than a politically manufactured consensus. Proof of this may be found, for example, in sales of memoirs written by survivors from Israel and abroad, like Jorge Semprun, Primo Levi, Imre Kertesz, Viktor Frankl, and by Israeli authors such as Yehiel Dinur (“Ka Tzetnik”), Uri Orlev, David Grossman, Yoram Kaniuk, Aharon Appelfeld, Nava Semel, Ruth Bondi, and many others.

There have also been a great many documentary television programs aired on prime time, such as the BBC’s “World at War”, in the late 1970s, which contain historical footage and survivor testimonies to explain Holocaust and the Jewish resistance. School curricula have focused on the Holocaust as one of the most important events of World War II to the point where some scholars feel the former has eclipsed the latter in importance. Choices made over the last three decades in Israeli cinema demonstrate that the pace of socio-political and historical change and maturing consciousness in Israel and the world over is not the same pace of change taking place in feature films.

Notes

- 1 Nurit Gertz, *Another choir: Holocaust survivors, foreigners and others in Israeli cinema and literature*, Tel Aviv, 2004; Hanna Turk-Yablonka, *Strange brethren: Holocaust survivors in the State of Israel, 1948-1952*, Jerusalem, 1994.
- 2 For example, in the films *Tel Aviv - Berlin* (Tzipi Trope, Israel, 1987); *Wooden Gun – Roveh huliot* (Ian Moshenson, Israel, 1979); *Summer of Aviya Hakayitz shel aviya* (Eli Cohen, Israel, 1981), from the book of the same name by Gila Almagor; *New Land – Eretz hadasha* (Orna Ben-Dov Niv, Israel, 1994); *Under the Domim Tree – Etz hadomim tafus* (Eli Cohen, Israel, 1995).
- 3 Gertz, *Another choir*, pp. 13-15.
- 4 Hillel Klein, ‘The search for identity and meaning among Holocaust survivors’, in *The Nazi Concentration Camps*, Jerusalem, 1984. Cinematic representations of this search may be seen in films such as *Sophie’s Choice* (Alan J. Pakula, USA, 1982); *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, USA, 1964), and others, as well as in world literature.
- 5 Yoel Rappel (ed.), *Brihim shel shtika: She’erit hapleta ve’eretz yisrael*, Tel Aviv, 2001.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 301-317.
- 7 Shlomo Sand, *Cinema as history: Imagining and staging the 20th century* [Heb.: Hakolnoa kehistoria: Ledamyen ulevayem et hame’ah ha’esrim], Tel Aviv, 2002, p. 224.
- 8 Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*, Ithaca NY, 2004, pp. 18-24, 131-139.
- 9 Michel Foucault, *Seder hasiah* [Hebrew translation from *Les mots et les choses*], Tel Aviv, 2005.
- 10 R.A. Rosenstone, ‘History in images/History in words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 93/5, Dec 1988, pp. 1173-1227.
- 11 Rappel, *Brihim shel shtika*, pp. 301-317; Nili Keren, ‘The influence of “she’erit hapleta” on the awareness of the Holocaust in Israeli society’, in Yoel Rappel (ed.), *Brihim shel shtika: She’erit hapleta ve’eretz yisrael*, Tel Aviv, 2001, pp. 319-326; Yoel Rappel, ‘Encounter of expectations: A conversation with Prof. Anita Shapira’, in Yoel Rappel (ed.), *Brihim shel shtika: She’erit hapleta ve’eretz yisrael*, Tel Aviv, 2001, pp. 11-19; Ruth Fierer, *Agents of the lesson*, Tel Aviv, 1989, p. 173.

- 12 Moshe Zimmermann, 'Holocaust and 'other'-ness' or, the extra added value of the film 'Don't touch my Holocaust', in Nurit Gertz, Orly Lubin and Judd Ne'eman (eds), *Fictive aspects of cinema*, Tel Aviv, 1998, pp. 135-160.
- 13 Gertz, *Another choir*, pp. 13-14.
- 14 Ilan Avissar, 'Haredut leumit: siyutim ishiim: Tasbich hashoah bakolnoa haisraeli' [National anxiety: Holocaust complex in Israeli film], in Nurit Gertz, Orly Lubin and Judd Ne'eman (eds), *Fictive aspects of cinema*, Tel Aviv, 1998, pp. 170-174.
- 15 Thomas Doherty, *Projections of war. Hollywood, American culture and World War II*, New York, 1993, p. 3.
- 16 Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic realism: The demands of Holocaust representation*, Minneapolis, 2000, pp. 1-15, 99-106.
- 17 Jean-Gerard Burstein, *Hitler, La Tyrannie et la Psychanalyse, Essai sur la destruction de la civilisation*, Tel Aviv, 2004, p. 15.
- 18 Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Mah yeled yom* [transl. from *Lorsque l'enfant paraît*], Tel Aviv, 2001. In Chapter 7, pp. 144, 147, discussing future antisemitism, Elizabeth Roudinesco states that modern/contemporary coping with antisemitism differs from the past. According to Roudinesco, at present, we are confronting/coping with 'the manifestations of antisemitism which is unconscious, disguised, indirect, that does not belong neither to the law nor to conscious responsibility'.
- 19 Amos Eilon, *Requiem germani: Yehudim b'germania lifnei Hitler, 1743 - 1933* [transl. from *German Requiem: The German-Jewish epoch, 1743 - 1933*], Or Yehuda, 2004, p. 224.
- 20 Rappel, *Brihim shel shtika*.
- 21 Jorge Semprun, *Literature or life*, London, 1997, p. 84

Bibliography

- Avissar, Ilan, 'Haredut leumit: siyutim ishiim: Tasbich hashoah bakolnoa haisraeli' [National anxiety: Holocaust complex in Israeli film], in Nurit Gertz, Orly Lubin and Judd Ne'eman (eds), *Fictive aspects of cinema*, Tel Aviv, 1998, pp. 170-174.
- Burstein, Jean-Gerard, *Hitler, La Tyrannie et la Psychanalyse, Essai sur la destruction de la civilisation*, Tel Aviv, 2004.
- Derrida, Jacques and Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Mah yeled yom* (transl. from *Lorsque l'enfant paraît*), Tel Aviv, 2001.
- Doherty, Thomas, *Projections of war. Hollywood, American culture and World War II*, New York, 1993.
- Eilon, Amos, *Requiem germani: Yehudim b'germania lifnei Hitler, 1743 - 1933* (transl. from *German Requiem: The German-Jewish epoch, 1743 - 1933*) Or Yehuda, 2004.
- Fierer, Ruth, *Agents of the lesson*, Tel Aviv, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel, *Seder hasiah* [Hebrew translation from *Les mots et les choses*], Tel Aviv, 2005.
- Gertz, Nurit, *Another choir: Holocaust survivors, foreigners and others in Israeli cinema and literature*, Tel Aviv, 2004.
- Keren, Nili, 'The influence of "she'erit hapleta" on the awareness of the Holocaust in Israeli society', in Yoel Rappel (ed.), *Brihim shel shtika: She'erit hapleta ve'erezt yisrael*, Tel Aviv, 2001, pp. 319-326.
- Klein, Hillel, 'The search for identity and meaning among Holocaust survivors', in *The Nazi Concentration Camps*, Jerusalem, 1984.
- Rappel, Yoel (ed.), *Brihim shel shtika: She'erit hapleta ve'erezt yisrael*, Tel Aviv, 2001.
- Rosenstone, R. A., 'History in images/History in words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film', *American Historical Review*, vol. 93/5, Dec. 1988, pp. 1173-1227.
- Rothberg, Michael, *Traumatic realism: The demands of Holocaust representation*, Minneapolis, 2000.
- Sand, Shlomo, *Cinema as history: Imagining and staging the 20th century* [Heb.: *Hakolnoa kehistoria: Ledamyen ulevayem et hame'ah ha'esrim*], Tel Aviv, 2002.

- Turk-Yablonka, Hanna, *Strange brethren: Holocaust survivors in the State of Israel, 1948-1952*, Jerusalem, 1994.
- Weissman, Gary, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*, Ithaca NY, 2004.
- Zimmermann, Moshe, 'Holocaust and 'other'-ness' or, the extra added value of the film 'Don't touch my Holocaust', in Nurit Gertz, Orly Lubin and Judd Ne'eman (eds), *Fictive aspects of cinema*, Tel Aviv, 1998, pp. 135-160.

The Liberation Of The Bergen-Belsen Camp As Seen By Some British Official War Artists In 1945

ANTOINE CAPET

It seems that the extensive discussion which is now taking place on the impact, then and now, of the images of Belsen¹, tends to neglect the drawings and paintings made by the Official War Artists, most of which are now in the collections of the Imperial War Museum.² It is not clear why, while a lot of attention is – justifiably – devoted to photographs and films,³ these other visual testimonies are left aside.⁴ One reason might be technical: to reproduce colour art faithfully, with the correct hues and the exact balance, used to be a major difficulty before the introduction of computer-assisted processes. And poorly reproduced pictorial works, which are already hardly acceptable for run-of-the-mill subjects, would become totally inadmissible when the nature of colour is a major component of the emotional impact intended by the artist, as in most of the Belsen drawings and paintings. The old practice of reproducing major paintings in black and white has fortunately never been applied in books on Belsen. Another might be financial: though the gap is narrowing, it is still significantly more expensive (questions of copyright aside) to illustrate a book in full colour than in black and white. This may explain why, for instance, the remarkable collection of essays published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of camp⁵ continues to rely on black and white photographs for its section of illustrations.

But there are also other possible reasons, which take us into the realm of ‘representation’ – and into the substance of the present discussion. The first one bears on the function of art: should it present a ready-to-digest representation of reality? Many great film directors, for instance, were reluctant to adopt Technicolor – and some living ones continue to refuse the ‘colorizing’ of their monochrome pictures made possible by modern technology, even though they know that this will preclude broadcasting their works on ‘popular’ television networks, with the consequent loss of revenue for them. Even if their reasoning is not always easy to follow, it seems that basically they all want to emphasise that their ‘art’ does not consist in approaching reality as closely as possible – suggestion rather than demonstration seeming to be their common motto. Now, for a subject as serious as Belsen, is it possible – is it desirable – to leave anything to suggestion? The more so as the Holocaust deniers are always ready to seize the slightest opportunity to feed their propaganda. It is obvious that drawings and paintings, being ‘works of the mind’, can easily be dismissed as ‘works of the imagination’. The fact that all specialists and historians know that photographs and films are also ‘artificial’ in the etymological sense – ‘artefacts’, i.e. creations of man, not objects found in nature – and therefore submitted to all human distortions of reality (positively deliberate among *bona fide* creators, negatively deliberate among for instance Stalinist photo lab technicians who removed Trotsky

from 1917 group snapshots with Lenin) is of no import here. What counts is that the 'general public' is convinced that 'seeing is believing'⁶ and that 'the camera does not lie'. Thus the creator's awareness of the limits of his art – whatever his medium – is in conflict with the average 'consumer's' firm belief that the cinema 'reflects reality' better than the theatre, or that a photograph will always be more reliable than a drawing or painting as a source of information.⁷

This difficulty over the function of art as a 'faithful' representation of reality is compounded by the widespread perception of the nature of 'art' as a frivolous or at least non-essential pursuit which belongs to a realm which has nothing to do with everyday life and nothing to tell 'ordinary people', what we could call the 'not-for-people-like-us' syndrome. One can therefore understand the reservations of those who are engaged in 'Holocaust education', to take up a phrase used in the title of a respected journal in the field. In their public lectures and publications, they have to face the indifference, or even the scepticism, of generations which have other preoccupations – if they have the opportunity to show slides or to include illustrations, the natural choice will of course go to 'indisputable historical documents' like photographs. In other words: first things first – Holocaust Education cannot be transformed into courses in Art Appreciation to fill the void left by the public educational system. And to 'throw' the drawings and paintings of Belsen, 1945 to an unprepared public would no doubt be totally counter-productive.

For all these reasons, one can suppose that in fact only a limited number of people – even people interested in the subject watching television programmes and buying books on it – are familiar with the works of art left by the Official War Artists in connection with the liberation of Belsen, as opposed to the many for whom 'Belsen' primarily calls to mind what has unfortunately become 'the iconic bulldozer scene',⁸ a phrase which one shudders to use, but a phrase which alas undoubtedly represents the reality of the perception of the camp by the general public – and the photograph does not seem to be disappearing from recent publications.⁹

This raises all sorts of questions, as once again the benefit for Holocaust education – which is now the sole permissible reason why such pictures should be shown – runs the risk of being offset by the apparent disrespect for the dead¹⁰ (disrespect for the Jews?) which it suggests. In 1945 – and this brings us back to the 'then and now' aspect of the discussion – the suggestion may have been that of utter disrespect for the sanctity of the human being, manifest even in these grotesquely maimed shapes which used to be creatures of God (or Nature or whatever higher force), a fact which still made them our brothers and sisters whatever our religious beliefs.

Even though the official caption of the photograph, *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen* (Fig. 1), does not describe the scene in human terms – there is no mention of the driver, as if the bulldozer ran automatically, and the victims have only become dehumanised 'bodies', which could refer equally to animals – the kerchief worn by the soldier to protect his health,¹¹ erecting a literal and metaphorical barrier between their two worlds, further distances him from his fellow creatures. As all modern authors on Belsen and/or the Holocaust indicate, the Jewishness of the majority of these victims was not perceived, or at least not publicised. Today, everyone knows that the corpses being callously bulldozed are



Figure 1. A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen

in fact bodies of Jews, most of them. Hence the danger that the scene could now be misinterpreted as showing contempt for Jewish people as such. Moreover, even if one does not always subscribe to the psychological theories of modern semiologists on the role of the subconscious in the perception of images, there is no denying that the British soldier on his bulldozer suggests macho brute force.¹² The psychological transgression of the age-old taboo – respect for the dead – becomes a physical act of aggression against the Jews which is both a source of torment for the survivors and a source of rejoicing for the worst antisemites of today. Whether one likes it or not, up on his bulldozer, the driver visually represents the ‘Upper Race’, while the bodies on the ground represent the ‘Lower Race’ – and therefore the Nazi relationship between the ‘Master Race’ and the ‘Slave Race’ is most unfortunately replicated in this scene at a subconscious level. Understandably, then, Tony Kushner speaks of the ‘lack of sensitivity in the use of such images’,¹³ while Jo Reilly describes the scene as ‘that of a British soldier bulldozing bodies unceremoniously into a mass grave.’¹⁴ But once again, the danger comes from the excusable unpreparedness of the public (which cannot know all the historical details of the liberation) and the inexcusable mediocrity of the captions or comments offered (‘A British Army bulldozer pushes bodies into a mass grave at Belsen’ or suchlike are obviously cruelly inadequate), since a ‘sensitive’ historian like Jo Reilly explains that the scene was not a routine one, but only took place on two occasions, giving the reasons for resorting to such extreme measures:

Two of the huge piles of bodies to be buried had become very decomposed. Blankets could not be spared and without blankets the bodies could not be handled. As the only solution, pits were dug alongside the bodies and they were then pushed in by the bulldozer.¹⁵

Pursuing the thread of semiology as an interpretive tool, one sees the difficulty of using images like *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen* out of context – or rather in the context of inadequate media. Here, McLuhan's otherwise controversial theories on individual participation in mass communication prove in fact of great help if we follow his well-known reasoning on the effort required by, say, the viewer of a photograph:

There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.' High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, 'high definition.' A cartoon is 'low definition,' simply because very little visual information is provided. [...] And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience.¹⁶

Thus a photograph, as a 'hot' medium which does not leave much 'to be filled in or completed', induces low participation in the viewer. This of course does not mean that a photograph is such a perfect reflection of reality that the viewer has no effort to make to reconstruct that reality – it simply means that the viewer feels satisfied with what he sees, that he imagines that he does not need further contextualisation (historicisation) to 'understand the message'. Therefore, the average viewer will rest content with what he 'sees' on *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen*, at the risk of arriving at the erroneous or at least incomplete conclusions discussed earlier. As a self-standing message, without the additional information provided for instance by Jo Reilly, that photograph may have perverse effects on the viewer. In other words, it would be counter-productive to offer it 'in the raw', outside a carefully written publication – for instance as a brief 'illustration' in a television programme. 'The medium is the message' in the sense that *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen* will not have the same impact depending on the medium on which it is reproduced. Here, we may introduce a further distinction, between the quantitative and the qualitative impact. There is no doubt that this photograph will always have a high quantitative impact, whatever the medium of reproduction, as it cannot fail to create a very strong, long-lasting impression on the viewer who first sees it. But the qualitative impact – the quality of the message conveyed – may be nil or worse in the absence of proper contextual accompaniment, as is generally the case on television, and as may unfortunately be the case in poorly prepared museum exhibitions – hopefully not in history lessons at school.

Narrowing it strictly to that of *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen* and how it would/could be received today, we can transpose the problem raised by Jo Reilly:

In the spring of 1945 the British press was awash with images of the concentration camps. There can be no doubt they made a great psychological impact on almost everyone who saw them. The question, however, of whether these images brought the British people any nearer to an understanding of the Holocaust, in a way that the newspaper reports of the massacres had not, is debatable.¹⁷



Figure 2. *One of the Death Pits, Belsen: SS Guards collecting Bodies*

The answer is probably given by some authors and editors of books on Belsen published recently – it seems clear that they feel that the risk of the publication of such photographs being counter-productive in their laudable objectives of Holocaust education is far too high. But this does not explain why drawings and paintings are left out, because the same criteria of immediacy in the perception do not of course apply to them – in McLuhan's vocabulary, they are 'cool' media.

One can perhaps try to discuss this by comparing and contrasting photographs and paintings which have exactly the same theme, starting with *One of the Death Pits, Belsen: SS Guards collecting Bodies* by Leslie Cole (Fig. 2) and *The Liberation of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, 1945: One of the Mass Graves partially filled with Corpses* by Sergeant Morris (Fig. 3, p. 786).

Cole (1910–1977) had a background in the decorative arts, as a mural decorator and fabric painter. From 1941, when he made independent submissions to the War Artists Advisory Committee, he worked for the Committee, receiving an honorary commission as a Captain in the Royal Marines. After a long period in Malta, he went to record the scenes found during the liberation of Belsen, before going on to Japanese prisoner-of-war camps in Singapore. Until he reached Belsen, it seems, Cole had only depicted what we could call 'classic' scenes of war, like the unloading of ships under enemy attack (*Malta: No Time to lose – Soldier Dockers unloading a Convoy during a Raid*¹⁸), but now he was confronted with the atrocities of war, and gave posterity two of the most powerful testimonies given by artists (the other one being *Belsen Camp: The Compound for Women* (Fig. 4, p. 789), which will be discussed later).

What makes *One of the Death Pits, Belsen: SS Guards collecting Bodies* so powerful even for the dispassionate historian? Probably the gripping visual reconstruction,



Figure 3. One of the Mass Graves partially filled with Corpses

not of reality – as we have argued, this is impossible – but of all the evidence given by witnesses and – yes – by photographers like Sergeant Morris. All historians of the subject have read the grim statements given by liberators and survivors during the Lüneburg trials¹⁹ and they immediately perceive the macabre irony in the scene because they remember the deposition given by Harold O. Le Druillenec, a late British deportee from Jersey:

On his fifth day at the camp and during about four days following, he and others had to drag corpses and put them in large burial pits. This went on from sunrise to dusk and many died in the process. He thought that the operation was intended to clear up the camp before the British arrived. Anybody who faltered was struck.²⁰

Now it was the former SS guards who had to drag the corpses – this is clearly visible on the picture, like the British soldiers with guns who watch them.

This irony is totally absent from Sergeant Morris's photograph for the simple reason that he chose to take his picture at a time when that gruelling activity was suspended – during a meal pause, one may imagine. And imagining this reinforces the (in)human cruelty of it all: how could the SS troopers – human beings whatever their crimes – eat their midday lunch? Even worse, perhaps, how could the soldiers? The absence of all living presence sets our minds thinking, trying to fill the gaps with what we know from other sources. Since the framing of the image leaves out everything not connected with Morris's immediate theme, the death pit, it leaves out the context: the viewer concentrates on the result, not on the process which led to it. The only allusion to that process is in the caption, with the all-important word 'partially': we know that unfortunately Morris concentrated on this corner because

the others were empty, waiting to be filled with more of these horribly distorted shapes which used to be living human beings. The modern commentator is ashamed to be reminded of that very common phrase in today's academic vocabulary, 'work in progress' – and yet this is what Morris actually shows us, this is a 'snapshot' both in the literal and in the figurative meaning.

It seems that no general photographs of the actual filling of the graves were taken – at least there are none in the Imperial War Museum comprehensive collection²¹ – and it is left to Cole to give us both the graphic details and the wider context. Historians familiar with the work of official artists will be reminded of a type of genre scene which we could call 'the beehive', i.e. a large picture of general activity, each individual being busy with a given task. The archetype is possibly *The Landing in Normandy: Arromanches, D-Day plus 20, 26th June 1944*, by Barnett Freedman.²² Here, Cole has adopted a classic composition, with the centre and foreground describing exactly what his title suggests, while the upper part constitutes the literal, physical background. But in a work of such nature, i.e. a work of official historical record, this physical background also provides a contextual background. One can clearly see the rows of barracks – typical of any POW or concentration camp ('contextual' information in the usual sense) – but then in the upper middle of the composition, he gives a 'detail' which forcefully reminds the viewer that this is no 'ordinary' POW or concentration camp: a barely identifiable conglomeration of human shapes in what looks like a garbage container. The identification is left to the mental process of the viewer: they are bodies waiting to be thrown into the pit as graphically described in the foreground. The lorry also featured on the upper middle right helps the viewer to reconstruct the procedure: the bodies come from the barracks – they are carried by lorry near the mass grave, temporarily piled up in the container, then dragged along before being thrown into it on the right, the captive ex-guards returning to the precinct on the left, to go and fetch new bodies. One of the SS troopers (identifiable by his jack boots) is in the pit, carrying one of the thrown bodies to fill the centre.

We have to do with an 'artist's impression' – however inappropriate the expression, considering the other contexts in which it is commonly used – in the sense that Cole has tried to encompass all the grisly elements in the scene. The smoke in the background, probably coming from the huts burning after being emptied of their dead occupants, cannot fail to suggest the crematorium of the camp when it was still in Nazi hands, and beyond that the mass combustion of gassed corpses in Auschwitz. Without going as far as Picasso in 'Guernica', the artist has chosen a colour scheme based on only two series of gloomy hues outside white (infrequent), grey and black: light brown-medium brown-dark brown and light blue/green-medium blue/green-dark blue/green. The skies, which constitute only a small area of the composition, are extremely menacing, and the fumes merge into the clouds, especially on the left. This 'landscape' is bare of grass, bare of trees – except for vaguely threatening dark masses at the back and the gaunt trunks and rickety branches of the three birches on the edge of the pit, whose almost barren shapes in April replicate those of the human beings in the pit. The landscape is de-natured in the etymological sense. Among other inter-textual references in literature and the arts, people familiar with the Authorised Version of the Bible will be reminded of the Valley of the Shadow of Death – not the

version of hope in the Psalms²³ taken up in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* – but the grim description in *Jeremiah* 2-6:

Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?

The most horrid 'detail' is of course the actual throwing of a body – probably a female body because though these poor shapes have become sexless the long hair suggests a woman – into the grave by a former SS guard. To make things even more horrible, Cole has chosen to draw her in a position which suggests somebody diving into a swimming-pool. But of course the swimmer is dead and the reception material will not be water but a sea of corpses. The contrast which springs to mind between the insouciant life of swimming holidays and the conditions of Belsen, April 1945, makes the scene impossible to watch without a sense of guilt – ultimately perhaps, at the time, guilt in having approved of the Appeasement policy which allowed Hitlerism to take firm roots in Germany, or for the modern viewer the guilt of self-introspection leading to the conclusion that he, too, does not like to see his cosy holidays troubled by confrontation with the descendants of Hitler.

But then there is another form of guilt, underlined by Tony Kushner in the very first sentence of *Belsen in History and Memory* – the feeling of voyeurism.²⁴ Now, if initially the word *voyeur* only had sexual connotations, as indicated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which assimilates it to *peeping Tom*,²⁵ its meaning has now been extended to include interest in morbid scenes²⁶ – a curious reverse process since the voyeur of today can satisfy his lust by watching other people both having pleasure and suffering pain. Of course the sane viewer of Cole's painting does not derive pleasure from what he sees, but there is no denying that the picture arouses an unhealthy curiosity in him. How was the 'diving' woman seized by *rigor mortis* in that position? And the most prominent body in the pit, the erect torso and head on the bottom left-hand corner, which almost seems alive? These questions refer us back to the descriptions which we have read of what the liberators discovered in the barracks of Camp 1, and one finds oneself trying to reconstruct the circumstances of their death – which somehow immediately provokes a sense of guilt. Faced with a picture like *One of the Death Pits, Belsen: SS Guards collecting Bodies* or a photograph like *The Liberation of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, 1945: One of the Mass Graves partially filled with Corpses*, the viewer seems to be in a no-win situation: either he only considers the global scene, laying himself open to the accusation of callousness or he starts to consider the individual bodies, trying to imagine their life stories – including of course the circumstances of their death – and then he seems to be voyeuristically intruding into their intimacy as dead human beings who continue to be entitled to their privacy. Such pictures are *obscene* in the first English meaning of the word: 'offensive to the senses' before they are *obscene* in the second, current meaning of 'offensive to modesty'.²⁷

The same feeling of unbearable uneasiness is also produced by looking at Cole's other painting, *Belsen Camp: The Compound for Women*. This time it not so much the presence of an entanglement of corpses in the foreground on the right that



Figure 4. Belsen Camp: *The Compound for Women*

creates this malaise as the appearance of the survivor who occupies the centre of the composition. Her emaciated face and sallow complexion are alas cruelly banal in the context: what immediately strikes the viewer, however, is her gait, with her bent knees suggesting leg muscles too weak to support even her meagre weight,²⁸ indicated by the fleshless wrists and fingers protruding from the sleeves of her internee's shirt. Contrary to most other women shown on the picture, she wears trousers, and the only sign of femininity left in her is her long hair. The three women who follow her seem to have less difficulty walking, and the two women talking near the hut's door on the left almost seem 'normal'. By a deliberately gruesome contrast in the composition, however, the artist shows in the foreground the horribly distorted body of what we may imagine used to a beautiful middle-aged woman, judging from her fine black hair and quietly resting face, which contrast with her skinny arm raised as if calling for help. What distress is expressed by this raised arm? What kind of prolonged starvation can have reduced her poor thighs to such unimaginable thinness? What story is told by *rigor mortis* intervening in such an 'unnatural' position? These are questions which the (older?) woman sitting on the ground behind her may or may not be asking herself. The expression on her face is such that it is impossible to tell whether she is looking at her or staring at the ground, lost in thoughts which we shudder to imagine. The triangular composition of the foreground therefore encompasses a variety of the human cases found outside the huts on April 15th and the following days and described by liberators and survivors: individual dead women, bodies in piles, 'apathetic' survivors, recent internees in reasonable health, able to have normal social relations like talking to others.

The general atmosphere of doom and gloom is reinforced by the uniform tonality, with the same choice of colours as in *One of the Death Pits, Belsen*:



Figure 5. *Belsen: April 1945*

SS Guards collecting Bodies – only there is even less light, and no white at all. The leaden skies, the fumes emanating from the compound, the dark shapes in the tents, the indistinct details in the background – except for the watch towers which remind us that this was a concentration camp – concur to the creation of an effect of Night and Fog which forcefully reminds the viewer that the scene is the result of Nazi barbarity, which still ruled supreme in the camp only a few days before.

What we do not see on the picture, for the obvious reason that they were not visible from the paths of the compound, is the internees between life and death in the huts. All we have is somebody standing on the doorstep of the hut on the left. Now, as horrendous as the scene painted by Cole may be, all contemporary witnesses agree that the situation was even far worse inside the huts. For the inside of the huts, it seems that we have to rely on written records like that of General H.L. Glyn Hughes, but at least one painter, Doris Zinkeisen, has left us a harrowing ‘artist’s impression’ of dead internees seen in close-up, with *Belsen: April 1945* (Fig. 5).

Doris Zinkeisen (1898–1991) had a ‘frivolous’ background which in no way prepared her for becoming an Official Artist, still less a painter of Belsen. She came from a well-to-do family established in Scotland, went to art school and studied at the Royal Academy. She was the costume designer for *Show Boat*, the musical (1936) and also decorated the luxurious Verandah Grill on the *Queen Mary*. In 1938, following her extensive experience in the field, she published *Designing for the Stage*. During the war, she became a nurse for the Red Cross and an Official Artist, which explains her presence in Belsen shortly after its liberation. We know from information given by her son to the Imperial War Museum that psychologically, she never recovered



Figure 6. *The Bodies of Victims*
in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp

from the shock. ‘They are truly heartrending’, he says of the letters she wrote to her husband while she was at Belsen, ‘and reflect the agony she endured while doing her work as a war artist. She always told us that the sight was awful, but the smell she could never forget. She had nightmares for the rest of her life until she died’.

It must be emphasised that *Belsen: April 1945* both reflects this shock in her and produces an effect of shock on the viewer that sees it for the first time. The picture is not on permanent display²⁹ at the Museum – its last appearance was during the *Women and War* exhibition of October 2003 - April 2004, on a small wall of its own, in a deliberately dark corner, which enhanced the *chiaroscuro* nature of the painting. Here again we have a triangular or diagonal composition, with the relatively well lit area – the area with the bodies, the main subject – in the right hand bottom triangle, the remaining surface showing an undetermined background of undetermined colour. All we can say is that the colour is dark, with very small relieving touches of light grey once more suggesting smoke.

The viewer who has never seen close-up photographs of actual Belsen corpses, like for instance *The Bodies of Victims in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp* by Lieutenant Wilson (Fig. 6), cannot make sense of Doris Zinkeisen’s rendering of the two human bodies on the right – the first reaction is to believe that she has not studied anatomy properly. The reason is that the eye expects a protruding, or at least a flat stomach between the thorax and the hip bones. Instead, in the Belsen victims, the abdomen is in fact a huge hollow – it is as if the man on Lieutenant Wilson’s photograph had been disembowelled live, without touching the skin, by some diabolical vacuum process.

One therefore has to surmount one's instinctive incredulity, and the eye has to forget the acquired memory which it has of the familiar shape of the human body, before it becomes possible to comprehend Doris Zinkeisen's composition in all its horror: these are not shapes distorted for some noble artistic purpose as in, say, Bacon's paintings – no, though these distortions are also man-made, they are in fact the deliberate result of human perversity as practised by the Nazis. Anybody at all familiar with the abstract art of the 20th century is thus forced to reconsider his artistic values by this uneasy coexistence between the now usual abstract artist's licence and the ghastly reality of the camp as shown on *Belsen: April 1945*. Moreover, as if to make the interpretation even more complex, Doris Zinkeisen has chosen a deliberate mixture between 'realism' for the men and 'abstraction' for the backdrop: the scene could take place anywhere, and contrary to Cole's pictures, there are absolutely no 'clues' on the canvas indicating that we are in Belsen – we have to take her word for it when she says so in the title. This makes it both 'universal' – a general testimony on the Holocaust – and less effective as a 'document' on Belsen proper. Could that be the reason why it is so little known in spite of its extraordinarily powerful nature? If we bear in mind that, on the contrary, Cole provides his background with the most 'figurative' details that one can imagine, one sees the difficulty for the commentator who tries to show the fundamental unity of purpose, if not of effect, of painters like Leslie Cole and Doris Zinkeisen.

If we now go back to our initial discussion, it seems remarkable that visual testimonies of such importance should continue to be neglected as aids in Holocaust education. Looking back in 1997 on events since 1945, Tony Kushner wrote: 'The newspaper reporters, broadcasters, photographers and camera-crews, as well as the various individuals involved in liberation, would shape the memory of the Nazi concentration camps for generations to come',³⁰ thus rightly implying that the War Artists had been absent from this process. It is obvious that the three paintings examined here, owing to their intended shocking impact, cannot be casually included in the form of poor reproductions in primary school booklets, to take one extreme example. But they seem to suffer from a form of *de facto* ostracism whose roots are not easy to determine. The accusation of callous disrespect for the Jewish victims is not really convincing as an explanation, because it could equally be levelled at *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen*, which has had an enormous diffusion.

A few hypotheses have already been formulated above, and in the final analysis it seems that these works of art are deemed to be too demanding for the educationist – from primary school to degree courses. Of course, one has to be at least reasonably conversant with the facts of Belsen in 1945 (and it appears that it is not yet the case even in respected institutions³¹) to approach them, but this holds good in all other forms of document analysis. One thing is sure: in spite of McLuhan's correct judgement that in 'a cool medium of low definition' like a piece of graphic art, 'so little is given and so much has to be filled in' by the viewer, it cannot be said that paintings intimidate historians of the 20th century, who do not feel adequately equipped to fully exploit their documentary potential – one only has to see how often *Ruby Loftus screwing a Breech-Ring*³² is used to illustrate 'women at war', by people who are obviously not all specialists of the semiology of the image. But then, the work is a

'reassuring' one, on a 'consensual' subject. Now, the paintings of Leslie Cole and Doris Zinkeisen are on possibly the most 'disturbing' subject of 20th century history, and as we have argued they cannot leave even the dispassionate historian emotionally unaffected. It seems therefore that the impact they have had on the few privileged people who have seen them paradoxically prevents them from having a wider impact among the general public.

By neglecting these graphic documents³³ – for whatever reason – historians of the Holocaust and more generally people engaged in Holocaust education seem to be depriving themselves of a major source of visual representation and interpretation of what took place in Belsen in the days following the liberation of the camp. It is to be hoped that our admittedly fragmentary and incomplete attempt to draw attention to the underserved oblivion into which they have largely been relegated will contribute to renewed interest in and analysis of their multi-faceted significance by more competent commentators³⁴, in spite of all the difficulties.³⁵

Notes

- 1 This article was first published in Suzanne Bardgett and David Cesarani (eds), *Belsen 1945: New Historical Perspectives*, London, 2006, pp. 170-185.
- 2 This contribution could not have been written without the unstinting technical assistance of its staff, notably in its Photograph Archive and Department of Art. I would also like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support provided by Suzanne Bardgett and her Personal Assistants, Naomi Blum and Luke Sunderland.
- 3 See Hannah Caven, 'Horror in our Time: Images of the Concentration Camp in the British Media, 1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21, 3 (2001), pp. 205-253.
- 4 We could add contemporary cartoons, notably those of Carl Giles in the *Daily Express*, 1944-1945. See Peter Tory, *Giles at War*, London, 1994, which has many reproductions.
- 5 Jo Reilly et al. (eds), *Belsen in History and Memory*, London, 1997.
- 6 This was in fact the name of a contemporary exhibition of photographs, organised by the *Daily Express*. See Caven, 'Horror in our Time', p. 246.
- 7 Curiously, the cartoonist Giles seemed to subscribe to this belief, according to his biographer Peter Tory: "What could I have drawn," he asks, "that would have told anything more vivid than the dreadful photographs which continue to haunt us?" (Tory, *Giles at War*, p. 150). Still, his cartoon of Kramer as a family man possesses levels of meanings impossible to find in a photograph.
- 8 Tony Kushner speaks of 'the Belsen bulldozer-pit imagery', *Belsen in History and Memory*, p. 187.
- 9 It is not used in *Belsen in History and Memory*, even though as we saw Tony Kushner refers to it in the text. Likewise, though Eberhard Kolb reproduced three extremely gruesome photographs in the 5th enlarged edition of his *Bergen-Belsen: Vom 'Aufenthaltslager' zum Konzentrationslager, 1943-1945*, Göttingen, 1996, pp. 140-141, he chose not to include *A British Army Bulldozer pushes Bodies into a Mass Grave at Belsen*. On the other hand, the photograph is reproduced in Ben Shephard, *After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945*, London, 2005, with a slightly different caption: 'The clear-up begins. A bulldozer pushes bodies into a mass grave, 19 April 1945'. In 1991, the photograph occupied a full page of Paul Kemp's *The Relief of Belsen, April 1945: Eyewitness Accounts*, London, 1991, p. 21. This gave it special prominence, as only one other photograph was given full page treatment.
- 10 See Caven, 'Horror in our Time', for a discussion of the role of the Jewish chaplain, Leslie Hardman, in trying to induce the military 'to show some reverence to the dead' (pp. 214-216).
- 11 And also probably his sense of smell. See Shephard, *After Daybreak*, p. 55: 'The machines tended to split the bodies open and made the smell even worse, so that drivers could not stand the work for long and had frequently to be replaced'.
- 12 See Paul Kemp's caption in *The Relief of Belsen*, p. 21: 'Burial of the dead using a bulldozer. This brutal method was used when it became clear that there were too many bodies to be individually collected'.
- 13 Reilly, *Belsen in History and Memory*, p. 4.
- 14 Jo Reilly, *Belsen: British Responses to the Liberation of a Concentration Camp*, London, 1998, p. 28.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, 1964, pp. 22-23.
- 17 Reilly, *Belsen: British Responses to the Liberation of a Concentration Camp*, p. 55.

- 18 Oil on canvas, 1943 (IWM ART LD 3257 – visible on the Imperial War Museum site).
- 19 Raymond Phillips (ed.), *Trial of Josef Kramer and forty-four Others: The Belsen Trial. Trial held Sept. 17–Nov. 17, 1945 at Lüneburg before a British military court for the trial of war criminals for atrocities committed against Allied nationals in the concentration camps at Belsen and Auschwitz. War Crimes Trials*, vol. 2, London, 1949.
- 20 George Brand (ed.), *United Nations War Crimes Commission. Law-Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, vol. II: *The Belsen Trial of Joseph Kramer and 44 Others*, London, 1947, p. 11.
- 21 Though some show detailed scenes, like *A former Guard carries an emaciated Corpse over his Shoulder toward one of the mass Graves* (BU 4191 – visible on the Imperial War Museum site) or *SS Guards throwing the Bodies into one of mass Graves* (BU 4060 – reproduced in Paul Kemp's *Relief of Belsen*, p. 20)
- 22 Oil on canvas, 1944 (IWM ART LD 5816 – visible on the Imperial War Museum site).
- 23 'Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me'. *Psalms*, 23-4.
- 24 'In a century that has witnessed ever-increasing opportunities for voyeurism, the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp by British forces in April 1945 has special significance'. *Belsen in History and Memory*, p. 3.
- 25 'A person whose sexual desires or sexual activities are stimulated or satisfied by covert observation of the sex organs or sexual activities of others. Cf. *peeping Tom*'. *Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition*, 1991.
- 26 Tony Kushner seems to consider only the former aspect. When he writes 'The pictures of naked women particularly were prone to exploitation as pornography, starting a trend of the female victim as a titillating sexual plaything of the Nazis which is still alive in cultural representations of the Holocaust today' (*Belsen in History and Memory*, p. 192), this does not in any way apply to the dead bodies of *One of the Death Pits, Belsen: SS Guards collecting Bodies* – where we have only a purely morbid version of voyeurism. But this does not invalidate his general point on voyeurism.
- 27 'Obscene' entry. *Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition*, 1991.
- 28 In Leslie Cole's correspondence on his work now at the Imperial War Museum, he indeed writes: 'the woman in the centre of the picture actually collapsed while I was drawing'. See Cole's full comment in Caven, 'Horror in our Time', p. 216.
- 29 The Belsen paintings by Cole and Zinkeisen were frequently displayed in the Imperial War Museum in the 1980s, and indeed almost formed the only reference to the Holocaust in the Museum in those years. For a wider discussion of the past policy of the Museum, see Suzanne Bardgett, 'The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961', *Journal of Israeli History*, 23, 1 (2004), pp. 146-156.
- 30 *Belsen in History and Memory*, p. 184.
- 31 Notably the confusion Belsen/Belzec. See *Belsen: British Responses to the Liberation of a Concentration Camp*, pp. 2-3.
- 32 Oil on canvas, 1943 (IWM ART LD 2850 – visible on the Imperial War Museum site).
- 33 It is remarkable that in his 'Notes on sources held at the Imperial War Museum' Paul Kemp lists those kept at the Department of Photographs, at the Department of Film, at the Department of Documents and at the Department of Sound Records – omitting the drawings and paintings of the Department of Art (p. 32).
- 34 One may think, for instance, of the contributors to Monica Bohm-Duchen (ed.), *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary Art*, Sunderland, 1995.
- 35 The Imperial War Museum also has the following drawings and paintings on Belsen: Edgar Ainsworth: *Belsen 1945* [drawing, IWM ART 16555]. Kessell, Mary. *Notes from Belsen Camp, 1945* [seven drawings, IWM ART LD 5747 a-g; visible on the site]. Taylor, Eric. *Dying from Starvation and Torture at Belsen Concentration Camp* [drawing, IWM ART LD 5584]. *A young Boy from Belsen Concentration Camp* [drawing, IWM ART LD 5585]. *Liberated from Belsen Concentration Camp, 1945* [drawing, IWM ART LD 5586; visible on the site]. *A living Skeleton at Belsen Concentration Camp* [drawing, IWM ART LD 5587]. *Human Wreckage at Belsen Concentration Camp* [drawing, IWM ART LD 5588]. Zinkeisen, Doris. *Human Laundry, Belsen: April 1945* [painting, IWM ART LD 5468; visible on the site]. The British Red Cross Museum and Archives (44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL) have another painting on Belsen by her, *The Burning of Belsen Camp (Huts in Camp 1)* [Ref. LDBRC 0012/4; visible on www.redcross.org.uk/standard.asp?id=51854].

Bibliography

- Bardgett, Suzanne, 'The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961', *Journal of Israeli History*, 23, 1 (2004), pp. 146-156.
- Bardgett, Suzanne and David Cesarani (eds), *Belsen 1945: New Historical Perspectives*, London, 2006.

- Bohm-Duchen, Monica (ed.), *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in contemporary Art*, Sunderland, 1995.
- Caven, Hannah, 'Horror in our Time: Images of the Concentration Camp in the British Media, 1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21, 3 (2001), pp. 205-253.
- Kemp, Paul, *The Relief of Belsen, April 1945: Eyewitness Accounts*, London, 1991.
- Kolb, Eberhard, *Bergen-Belsen: Vom 'Aufenthaltslager' zum Konzentrationslager, 1943-1945*, Göttingen, 1996.
- McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, 1964.
- Phillips, Raymond (ed.), *Trial of Josef Kramer and forty-four Others: The Belsen Trial. Trial held Sept. 17 - Nov. 17, 1945 at Lüneburg before a British military court for the trial of war criminals for atrocities committed against Allied nationals in the concentration camps at Belsen and Auschwitz. War Crimes Trials*, vol. 2, London, 1949.
- Reilly, Jo et al. (eds), *Belsen in History and Memory*, London, 1997.
- Reilly, Jo, *Belsen: British Responses to the Liberation of a Concentration Camp*, London, 1998.
- Shephard, Ben, *After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945*, London, 2005.
- Tory, Peter, *Giles at War*, London, 1994.

Symbolic Representation Of Camp Experiences As Testimony Of Artist Survivors Of The Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp

HANNA K. ULATOWSKA

The current study extends the findings of research into the mental representation of camp experiences of survivors of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Previously, Ulatowska and colleagues¹ identified frequently occurring themes in the oral narratives of camp experiences of the survivors. Among the survivors who gave narratives of their experiences, there were several prominent artists in both literary and visual arts. These artists were selected for continued study to explore how they encoded some of the themes identified in previous studies in their art. This study examines the perspective that survivors who are visual artists use to represent experiences in their testimonial art. It focuses on the symbolic representation of themes in the art and how these themes are entered into collective memory. The artworks included in the study were produced across time, from works produced in the camp up to those produced in the present day. In interviews many artists described an urgent need to engrave and resist erasure of their memories, leading to a general theme of intellectual and philosophical examination of evil. Marian Kołodziej, one of the artists, talks about his mission in creating testimonial art:

These are not pictures. These are words locked in drawings. [...] Please read my designed words, words born also from the yearning for clarity of criteria, from the yearning to understand what separates good from evil, truth from lie, art from appearance. [...] It is a rendering of honour to all those who have vanished in ashes.²

In addition to the artist survivors identified in our previous work³, we included other artists who contributed to the testimonial art associated with Auschwitz-Birkenau in the post-war period. This paper focuses on three themes, selected because of their ability to expose the realities of camp life and their continued development over time: (1) the face of the prisoner, (2) the representation of the prisoner, and (3) the representation of death. These themes are related to each other and form a unified whole, namely of the life and destiny of those who found themselves in the camp.

The Face of the Prisoner

In spite of it being a banned activity, artistic creation was present in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp from its inception in 1940, with portraiture making up 50 of the 400 paintings and drawings that survived the war, thereby making it one of the most prevalent forms of artistic expression in the camp. Within the camp setting, these portraits had a biographical meaning and gave the subject a sense of permanence



Figure 1. Xawery Dunikowski, *Portrait of Alfred Woycicki*, 1944.

From Janina Jaworska, 'Nie wszystkim umrę. Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939 - 1945', Warsaw, 1975.

when actual physical presence was so fragile and tenuous. The portraits often conveyed the plight of prisoners, including the artists themselves through self-portraits. Moreover, the realistic depiction of one's likeness with no symbolification or abstraction can be seen as a cohesive metaphor for the value of individual life over the terror and anonymity of the camp. Xawery Dunikowski, a prominent painter and sculptor, drew many portraits of sick prisoners, such as the *Portrait of Alfred Woycicki*⁴, since much of his time was spent in the camp hospital. The *Portrait of Alfred Woycicki* depicts a resigned prisoner awaiting death and it is difficult to pinpoint the source of the expressive strength of this work, his innate talent or the horror of the camp.

Franciszek Jaźwiecki, a painter and graphic designer from Krakow, is recognized for his more than one hundred deeply moving portraits of prisoners of various nationalities and ages, all with strikingly similar facial expressions. According to the artist, all his portraits, including the *Portrait of Mieczysław Strzelichowski*⁵, have eyes which are awesomely helpless and horrifyingly strange. Moreover, every subject shows a determination to survive. Unlike other artists, Jaźwiecki drew only for himself, so he did not share his portraits with fellow prisoners. He ignored the danger of illegal activity in order to forget and enter another world through his inner creative drive.

In contrast with the cruel realities shown in the portraits of Xawery Dunikowski and Franciszek Jaźwiecki, Zofia Stępień-Bator's portraits of women prisoners bear no traces of the concentration camp experience. Her women, including the *portrait of Zofia Posmysz*⁶, have long hair and tranquil eyes. As the artist herself explained later, "Everything was so ugly, grey, sad, and dirty that I wanted to introduce a little beauty into my drawings."⁷



Figure 2. Franciszek Jaźwiecki,
Portrait of Mieczysław Strzelichowski, 1943.

From Janina Jaworska, 'Nie wszystkim umrę. Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939 - 1945', Warsaw, 1975.



Figure 3. Zofia Stępień-Bator,
Portrait of Zofia Posmysz, 1944.

From Janina Jaworska, 'Nie wszystkim umrę. Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939 - 1945', Warsaw, 1975.

The transformation that the realistic portraits undergo in later years is dramatic and symbolizes the destruction of the identity and inner soul of the prisoners by depicting their forsaken, fearful, and hopeless eyes. You can already see in Pablo Picasso's haunting portrait of a camp picture produced in 1948 the worm like lines that disfigure the face.⁸ This transformation is also seen in the work of Józef Szajna, who produced a painting of a multitude of gaunt, skeletal faces named *The Forsaken*.⁹

Likewise, Marian Kołodziej in his collection of Auschwitz themed works *Klische Pamięci Labirynty* [*Films of Memory – Labyrinths*], states that "In these crowds there were so many big open eyes in extremely emaciated faces."¹⁰ His work *In the Camp Everyone Looked Monstrously Alike*¹¹ exemplifies this representation by showing eyes filled with horror in a swarm of nearly identical faces. The eyes were what continued to haunt Kołodziej after the war. Wiktor Tolkin, another artist in the study, describes Kołodziej's experience in art in the following way:

We were coming back to camp from work and we passed a column of men and women. Enormous fearful eyes. They were all going to gas. Kołodziej depicts it superbly. He expresses what was happening inside a man. No shouts, moaning, kicking. Superb! I tried to memorialize this human tragedy in the monuments which I created which were supposed to be a message for the pilgrim.¹²

Fifty years after the camp experience, Kołodziej produced another compelling image of destruction of human identity by depicting his own face as a mask with his number written on the forehead.¹³



Figure 4. Pablo Picasso,
Prisoner of Concentration Camp, 1948.

From the collections of the
State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau.



Figure 5. Józef Szajna,
The Forsaken, 1986.

From Zbigniew Taranienko, 'Szajna 70 lat',
Warsaw, 1992.

Figure 6. Marian Kołodziej,
*In the Camp Everyone Looked
Monstrously Alike*, 1995.

From Marian Kołodziej, 'Klische Pamięci.
Labirynty', Gdańsk, 2003.



Figure 7. Marian Kołodziej,
*Artist Holding a Mask of Himself
as a Prisoner*, 1995.

From Marian Kołodziej, 'Klische Pamięci.
Labirynty', Gdańsk, 2003.





Figure 8. Władysław Siwek, Men Selected from Roll Call, 1952.

From in Jadwiga Mateja and Antoni Siwek (eds), 'Kiedyś to namaluje', Oświęcim, 2000.

Figure 9. Mieczysław Kościelniak, Return from Work, 1944.

From Jolanta Kupiec, 'Cóż po nas pozostanie Życie i twórczość więźnia obozw Auschwitz Mieczysława Kościelniaka', Oświęcim, 2003.



Representation of the prisoners

In the camp and immediately after the war, many survivor artists produced art to document existence in Auschwitz. Władysław Siwek, who returned to the camp after the war to write chronicles of the world behind the wires, had a photographic memory, which resulted in the meticulous documentation of camp reality for the highest War Crimes Tribunal. Works produced for the War Crimes Tribunal included *Men Selected from Roll Call*.¹⁴

The images of Mieczysław Kościelniak deal directly with dying, and the death of prisoners is even reflected in the titles he gives his works, *Friendly Service*, *He's Fixed*, and the image depicted here, *Return from Work*.¹⁵ The artist discusses the greatness and wretchedness of man, helpless against the evil committed by other people; however, the artist attempts to show what camp friendship meant, to be close to your friend at the time of death and not let him die alone.

In the post-war period, we see a trend towards a departure from realistic representation of the prisoners in the context of daily camp routines and towards representation of the prisoners with a variety of different symbols. For example, Maximilian Kolbe, who volunteered to die for another prisoner, became a martyr and a national icon in collective memory. His image occurs frequently in non-professional art, both in painting and in sculpture. His imprisonment and subsequent death by starvation in a bunker is symbolized here, in a work by Henryk Zachwieja¹⁶, by a barbed wire cage. The representation imbues the viewer with a strong sense of the solidarity, sacrifice, and suffering not only of Maximilian Kolbe, but of all the prisoners.



Figure 10. Henryk Zachwieja,
The Cage, 1986.

From 'Katalog Wystawy. Przeciw Wojnie.'
Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku,
Lublin, 1986.



Figure 11. Bronisław Chromy,
The Death Wall, 1958.

From Jerzy Madeyski, 'Bronisław Chromy',
Kraków, 1994.



Figure 12. Józef Szajna,
Number, 1991.

From Zbigniew Taranienko, 'Szajna 70 lat',
Warsaw, 1992.

Another example of early representation of prisoners in the context of the infamous death wall is presented by prominent sculptor Bronisław Chromy. Although he was never a prisoner at Auschwitz, he produced the Auschwitz Series following a visit to the camp. Chromy created a new representation of prisoners, devoid of flesh, static, and of mystical character, standing in a line, thereby forming a universal and powerful symbol of suffering. In a statement on his inspiration for producing the Auschwitz Series, Chromy states:

The reasons which led me to undertake the theme of martyrology are quite complex and arise from my personal experiences during the war – the loss of my close friends in concentration camps, shock which I experienced looking at the pictures and exhibits in the Auschwitz Museum and the need for human protest against the animal-like Hitler supermen.¹⁷

The final representation of the prisoner comes from Józef Szajna, a painter, sculptor, and stage designer who spent 4 years in Auschwitz and escaped the death sentence several times. Szajna's art is saturated with physical and psychological agony, torment, and destruction. His early post-war works show crippled people, decaying torsos, and blinded puppets, all mutilated, without hands and legs. Namelessness and a lack of individual features reflect not only the prisoner's social situation, but also his psychological state of passivity and submission. *Number*¹⁸, shown here, depicts a prisoner's uniform and number. The objects which form the work serve as a way of remembering camp life in collective memory, thereby making the prisoner's uniform a symbol of planned crime.



Figure 13. Xawery Dunikowski,
Dying Amaryllis, 1944.

From Aleksandra Kondurowa (ed.),
Rzeźby obrazy rysunki, Muzeum Narodowe
w Warszawie, Warsaw, 1975.



Figure 14. Zdzisław Walczak,
Auschwitz Pieta, 1968.

From Aleksander Jackowski,
'Folk Painting in Poland', Warsaw, 1998.

Representation of Death

The most important point of reference to all stages of our burdensome pilgrimage to the end is the awareness of death, which gives human life its true value because in its presence all that counts is what a man can make of his existence [...]. How can we talk about life with full awareness of death [...] art is giving sense to life when your eyes are filled with death.¹⁹

The simple and ever present theme in Auschwitz was death and the will to survive. All the camp artists struggled with this either consciously or instinctively, directly or indirectly, using all artistic forms and themes. Artists such as Mieczysław Kościelniak and many others in the early period of documenting war crimes dealt with death directly. However, there is an enormous diversity of symbols which communicate death without depicting the act of dying.

Xawery Dunikowski, in the work *Dying Amaryllis*²⁰, represents death as a delicate, fragile flower that is mortally wounded, forming a poetic symbol of the suffering and helplessness of dying prisoners. The grey and blue colour of the flowers accentuates this forlorn mood.

The iconographic symbol of the Pieta is used by Zdzisław Walczak, in his painting on glass, *Auschwitz Pieta*²¹. This Pieta represents Maximilian Kolbe in his prisoner's uniform, with his number, as Christ, thereby symbolizing not only Kolbe's sacrifice, but the suffering and death of all the tortured and murdered prisoners.



Figure 15. Bronisław Chromy,
Auschwitz Pieta, 1971.

From Jerzy Madeyski, 'Bronisław Chromy',
Kraków, 1994.

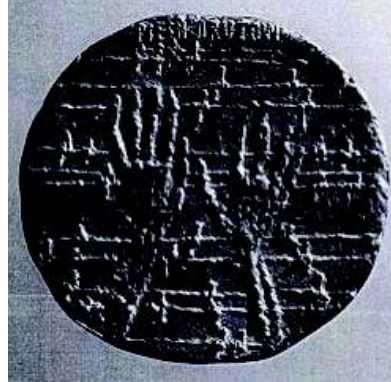


Figure 16. Bronisław Chromy,
The Song of the Wires, 1964.

From Jerzy Madeyski, 'Bronisław Chromy',
Kraków, 1994.

Like Walczak, Bronisław Chromy also created a Pieta, which expresses the dignity of death. His sculpture *Auschwitz Pieta*²², made of heavy metal, shows two prisoners as dehumanized form without flesh, thereby, representing the immensity of human suffering that ended in death. In another representation of death in the camps, Chromy created a medallion, *The Song of the Wires*²³, showing two hands pressed against the wires. This image represents prisoners' deaths by suicide when they would throw themselves against the electrified fence. This representation of death is used by other artists, such as Xawery Dunikowski in his work *The Way to Freedom*.

Józef Szajna employed a similar approach when he symbolized death through camp routines in his work *Our CVs*²⁴. Prisoners are represented by the vertical lines of their uniforms and their faces are replaced by fingerprints to indicate their anonymity. The cuts represent the deaths of the prisoners who did not survive roll call. Szajna also shows the death of prisoners in a very different way in the work *Wall of Shoes*²⁵, in which a pile of shoes is heaped inside the silhouette of a human head. Shoes were often the only remnants of those killed and became an icon in collective memory, which is reinforced to this day in many museum exhibitions. Szajna comments on this symbolization of death by saying, "I believe that these days we can say much more through objects than by showing images of dead people."²⁶

The representation of death in Auschwitz continues to this day. In celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, an international fine arts exhibit entitled *People Doomed People to this Fate* was held. Shown are works by two Polish youths created for this exhibition. The first, a work by Agnieszka Aniszewska, is a triptych²⁷ representing a prisoner before entering the camp, as a prisoner, and with

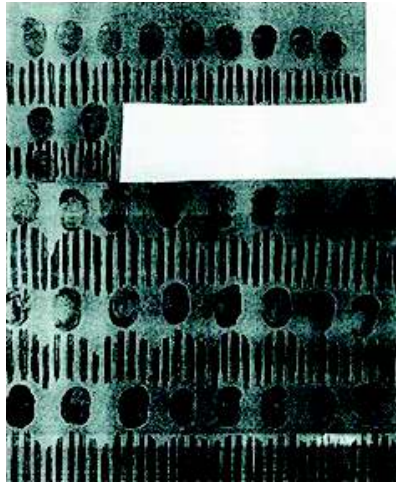


Figure 17. Josef Szajna,
Roll call was very long, 1944.
From the State Museum
of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim.



Figure 18. Józef Szajna,
Wall of Shoes.
From Józef Szajna, 'Szajna – The Gallery:
The Collection Catalogue', Prenov, 1982.

Figure 19. Agnieszka Aniszewska, *Untitled Tryptic*-
From 'People Doomed People to this Fate', International Fine Arts Exhibition
of the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz, Tychy, 2005.





Figure 20. Iwona Gajda, Untitled.

From 'People Doomed People to this Fate', International Fine Arts Exhibition of the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz, Tychy, 2005.



Figure 21. Paweł Warchoń, Fireburnt Block, 2003.

From 'Wystawa Rysunku', Kraków, 2004.

Figure 22. Alicia Scavino, Requiem, 1999.

From the online collection of the Adriana Indik Gallery, www.adrianaindik.com/scavino1.htm.



an obliterated face, representing death. The second, by Iwona Gajda, represents a pieta²⁸, a Polish cultural icon of suffering. It shows two suffering children in prisoner uniforms.

In reflection on testimonial art and its manifestation in modern times, this discussion is ended with the works of two artists. The first, Paweł Warchoł, a Polish artist born after the war, who chose to live and create all his work beside the Auschwitz camp. His art reflects his search for a symbol that synthesizes mass murder to elicit a chain reaction of images. His Auschwitz Series is based on his previous religious art of the Oratorio and the Way of the Cross. *Fireburnt Block*²⁹, shows the type of block with which the Germans would send the ashes of prisoners to their families, and thereby acts as a symbol of death. Another representation of the lasting consequences of WWII and the Nazi Persecution of prisoners in Auschwitz is by Argentinean artist Alicia Scavino. In *Requiem*³⁰, Scavino uses the icon of shoes paired with an ominous looking raven, a universal symbol of death, to represent the deaths of prisoners.

Through artists such as Warchoł and Scavino the testimony of survivors of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp continues through time and space as a universal warning against violence and evil. In this vein, Marian Kołodziej stated, 'You are saved not just to be among the living. Too little time for testimony. But what else can you be giving.'³¹

Notes

- 1 Hanna K. Ulatowska et al., 'Mental Representation of Auschwitz Experiences. The Perspectives of Child and Adult Survivors', in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (eds), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour. Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution. Proceedings of the international conference, London, 29 - 31 January 2003*, Osnabrück, 2005, pp. 664-672.
- 2 Marian Kołodziej, *Klische Pamięci. Labirynty*, Gdańsk, 2002, pages not given, illustrations not numbered.
- 3 Ulatowska et al., 'Mental Representation of Auschwitz Experiences'.
- 4 Janina Jaworska, *Nie wszystek umrę. Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939 - 1945*, Warsaw, 1975, p. 105.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- 6 Jerzy Dalek and Teresa Świąbocka, *Cierpienie i nadzieja. Twórczość plastyczna więźniów obozu oświęcimskiego*, Państwowe Museum w Oświęcimiu, Katowice, 1989.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 8 Pablo Picasso, *Prisoner of Concentration Camp*, Collections of the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, 1948.
- 9 Zbigniew Taranienko, *Szajna 70 lat*, Warsaw, 1992, p. 41.
- 10 Kołodziej, *Klische Pamięci*, pages not given.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pages not given.
- 12 Wiktor Tołkin, Interview with Hanna K. Ulatowska, 20 July 2002.
- 13 Kołodziej, *Klische Pamięci*, pages not given.
- 14 Władysław Siwek, 'Men selected from roll call', in Jadwiga Mateja and Antoni Siwek (eds), *Kiedyś to namaluje*, Oświęcim, 2000, p. 47.
- 15 Jolanta Kupiec, *Cóż po nas pozostanie? Życie i twórczość więźnia obozu Auschwitz Mieczysława Kościelniaka*, Oświęcim, 2003, p. 47.
- 16 Henryk Zachwieja, 'The Cage', in *Katalog Wystawy. Przeciw Wojnie*. Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin, 1986, pages not given.
- 17 Jerzy Madeyski, *Bronisław Chromy*, Kraków, 1994, pages not given.
- 18 Taranienko, *Szajna 70 lat*, p. 86.
- 19 Jerzy Madeyski, interview with Józef Szajna, 1982.
- 20 Xawery Dunikowski, 'Dying Amaryllis', in Aleksandra Kondurowa (ed.), *Rzeźby obrazy rysunki*, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Warsaw, 1975, pages not given, illustration 163.

- 21 Aleksander Jackowski, *Folk Painting in Poland*, Warsaw, 1998, p. 178.
- 22 Madeyski, *Bronisław Chromy*, p. 30.
- 23 Ibid., pages not given, illustration number not given.
- 24 Józef Szajna, *Our CVs*, State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, 1944.
- 25 Józef Szajna, *Szajna – The Gallery*, Prenov, 1982, pages not given, illustration 57.
- 26 Ibid., p. 4.
- 27 Agnieszka Aniszewska, *Untitled*, in *ibid.*, pages not given.
- 28 Iwona Gajda, *Untitled*, in *People Doomed People to this Fate, International Fine Arts Exhibition of the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz*, Tychy, 2005, pages not given.
- 29 Paweł Warchoń, *Fireburnt Block*, Wystawa Rysunku, Kraków, 2004, pages not given.
- 30 Alicia Scavino, *Requiem*, 2005. Online collection of the Adriana Indik Gallery, www.adrianaindik.com/scavino01.htm, accessed October 5, 2005.
- 31 Kołodziej, *Klische Pamięci Labirynty*, pages not given.

Bibliography

- Dalek, Jerzy and Teresa Świębocka, *Cierpienie i nadzieja. Twórczość plastyczna więźniów obozu oświęcimskiego*, Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu, Katowice, 1989.
- Jackowski, Aleksander, *Folk Painting in Poland*, Warszawa, 1998.
- Jaworska, Janina, *Nie wszystkim umrę. Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939-1945*, Warszawa, 1975.
- Kołodziej, Marian, *Klische Pamięci. Labirynty*, Gdańsk, 2003.
- Kondurowa, Aleksandra (ed.), *Rzeźby obrazy rysunki* (Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie), Warszawa, 1975.
- Kupiec, Jolanta, *Cóż po nas pozostanie. Życie i twórczość więźnia obozu Auschwitz Mieczysława Koźcielniaka*, Oświęcim, 2003.
- Mateja, Jadwiga and Antoni Siwek (eds), *Kiedyś to namaluje*, Oświęcim, 2000.
- Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, *Katalog Wystawy. Przeciw Wojnie*, Lublin, 1986.
- People Doomed People to this Fate: International Fine Arts Exhibition of the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz*, Tychy, 2005.
- Szajna, Józef, *Szajna – The Gallery: The Collection Catalogue*, Prenov, 1982.
- Taranienko, Zbigniew, *Szajna 70 lat*, Warszawa, 1992.
- Ulatowska, Hanna K. et al., 'Mental Representation of Auschwitz Experiences. The Perspectives of Child and Adult Survivors', in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (eds), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour. Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution. Proceedings of the international conference, London, 29-31 January 2003*, Osnabrück, 2005, pp. 664-672.